

Onetime protest adversaries reunite

► PROTEST

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in the best tradition of Henry David Thoreau."

The march from Concord through Lincoln to Lexington brought national attention to the region — and intense debate over Lexington's decision to enforce a town ban on overnight camping on the Battle Green.

"We were elected to represent and protect the town," said Cataldo, then chairman of the Board of Selectmen, who characterized the board's decision as based on upholding town rules.

"We gave [the vets] the opportunity to use the Battle Green as a forum within the town's rules and regulations," he said. "This was a highly charged issue. I went to Concord the night before and saw what was going on: drugs, liquor, the whole bit. Anything could have happened. We had the guts to stand up for what we thought was right for the town."

Busa, also a selectman, agreed. "We made a decision, obtained a court order. Everything was done properly, orderly. I wasn't completely in favor of the war, but our leaders, starting with Kennedy, put us there."

Busa described the veterans' march matter-of-factly. "They expressed their opinion. They did their job and we did our job. They wouldn't go, so we had no choice."

While Busa does not believe any good came out of the protests, he is philosophical about the criticism he received from antiwar activists. "You can't let it get you down," he said.

Despite the peaceful manner of the arrests, then-selectman Allan Kenney recalled that "all of a sudden this huge national division descended on Lexington and hit us pretty hard."

Nancy Earsy and her husband, Bob, were among those taken in school buses to a makeshift jail in the town Department of Public Works barn, then to Concord District Court, where they were fined \$5 and released. The protest march then continued to Charles-town and Boston Common.

Two decades later, Earsy's view about the incident shifted when she listened to a taped interview with Cataldo on why he opposed the vets' request, including his feelings about loyalty and duty to the soldiers still fighting and his



People leaving the Battle Green after clashes on Memorial Day weekend 30 years ago.

service as a front-line soldier. Earsy said she saw "a point of view that I could respect, even though I disagreed with it."

For many suburban residents, the arrests were a wake-up call, Earsy said.

"When protest comes to your backyard you have to pay attention. People did pay attention, then it was almost impossible to be neutral," she said.

Cram, the filmmaker who now lives in Newton, was 25 when he left the military and later became coordinator of the New England branch of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. When it came to this war, he said, "it was our patriotic duty to call our leaders' decisions into question. . . . We came of age. We lost our innocence."

Before the march, Cram received threatening phone calls, including one that promised "bullets to greet you." He alerted the FBI.

"We have to remember that during this period there was an underlying fear of anarchy if protests spiraled out of control," Cram said.

Another Lexington resident, Jacqueline B. Davison, said the march created long-lasting effects. "The events of that weekend crystallized the differences among residents in our suburbs," said Davison, now chairman of the town's Council on Aging. One newspaper headline at the time read, "Lexington: a town divided".

In Lexington, the political landscape shifted. One selectman at the time, Fred C. Bailey, recalled a barrage of obscene calls. "We told the kids to keep away from the phone," he said.

A year later, Cataldo lost a reelection bid after an opposition campaign that emphasized his role in the arrests. The town ushered in a more liberal tone.

Thomas Vallely, director of the Vietnam program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, said that while the suburbs had been spared many of the casualties of the war, sentiment among suburban residents had begun to

turn against the conflict by the time of the march.

He noted that the arrests followed a highly publicized Washington demonstration by the vets, as well as Kerry's emotional testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in which he asked who would be the last American to die in this conflict.

Eugenia Kaledin, one of those arrested, was dismayed when the town played down the incident with just a brief mention in its 1971 year-end summary.

Kaledin, a retired Northeastern University American Studies instructor, founded the Lexington Oral History Project in an attempt "to restore to history the things that are missing." She said she believes that Bay State historians should place the Lexington arrests alongside the Boston Tea Party and Shay's Rebellion "because of its size, the fact that it was a community gesture of civil disobedience and yet remained peaceful."