

Military Veterans Target US Drone Strikes in TV Ads

By Robert D. Dávila in the Sacramento Bee on April 9, 2015

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A group of military veterans is taking aim at U.S. drone strikes overseas with graphic TV ads directly asking [Air Force](#) pilots to stop flying the unmanned aircraft, calling the operations immoral and illegal.

The ads are the first commercials opposing U.S. drone operations ever shown on American TV, according to sponsors, which include the Veterans Democratic Club of Sacramento County and the Sacramento chapter of Veterans for Peace. The campaign is spearheaded by an activist website, KnowDrones.com.

The commercials are airing this month on Comcast in Northern California communities near [Beale Air Force Base](#), which is home to Golden Hawk reconnaissance drones. Pilots at Beale remotely fly the spy drones over areas believed to be controlled by terrorists in foreign countries and pinpoint human targets for attack by armed [Predator](#) and [Reaper](#) drones.

The two 15-second spots show images from a drone operations video screen, an explosion and civilians searching through rubble after a drone attack. On-screen messages read "Drone killings violate law and morality" and "Drone pilots. Please refuse to fly. No one has to obey an immoral law."

One of the ads, which includes images of dead and mutilated children, is being run only after 10 p.m., while the other spot airs from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily. Both are posted on YouTube.

The commercials cost about \$6,000, said Cres Vellucci, president of the Veterans Democratic Club of Sacramento County. The spots are running during popular shows on major cable channels, including AMC, CNN, Comedy Central, ESPN, Fox News, HGTV and a Comcast Bay Area sports channel.

"If you're a fan of 'Mad Men,' Giants games or Fox News, there's a good chance you'll see it," Vellucci said.

Drones are a controversial weapon in the U.S. war against terrorism in foreign countries, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. Military officials defend using the aircraft to combat enemies and say that every effort is made to limit civilian casualties. Opponents contend the unmanned strikes result in the deaths of countless innocent people, including children.

Activists plan to run the anti-drone spots near operation centers throughout the United States. The campaign began last month in the Las Vegas TV market near [Creech Air Force Base](#), which is home to Predator drones.

Nick Mottern, coordinator of KnowDrones.com, said this week that the ads are aimed directly at drone pilots, support workers and their families. He criticized President Barack Obama and Congress for supporting drone attacks and likened the ad campaign to Catholic Archbishop Oscar Romero's call to Salvadoran soldiers in 1980 to lay down their arms during that country's civil war.

"I think pilots and other people in these positions are under intense pressure to do this work," said Mottern, a [Navy](#) veteran who served in the Vietnam War. "Our ads challenge them to stop compartmentalizing their work and to engage their consciences."

In an email statement this week, Col. Douglas Lee of the 9th Reconnaissance Wing at Beale expressed support for the First Amendment rights of drone opponents "to freely express their opinions." He added that using unarmed drones saves lives.

"The intelligence we collect provides national leaders strategic information and knowledge resulting in decision advantage, which (helps) ensure our national security," Lee said.

Vellucci, who was an [Army](#) information specialist in the Vietnam War, said most Americans don't hear "the whole story" about drone attacks.

"We want to get the word out," he said. "You hear that they are saving American lives, but you don't really hear about the innocent women and children being targeted on the ground."

Vellucci said the ads are scheduled to air on Comcast through April on base at Beale as well as in Yuba City, Marysville, Wheatland, Linda, Live Oak, Colusa and Olivehurst. Supporters hope to raise \$4,000 to expand the ads to the Sacramento TV market, he said, and another \$8,000 to \$10,000 is being budgeted to buy spots within the next 30 days at two other drone operations centers in New York and New Mexico.
