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# The war within: The soldiers' resistance movement during the Vietnam era

Marcus K. Adams

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The War Within:  
The Soldiers' Resistance Movement during the Vietnam Era

by

Marcus Karl Adams

Thesis

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Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTERS OF LIBERAL STUDIES

in

Social Science and American Culture

Thesis Committee:

Jo Ellen Vinyard, PhD, Chair

Heather Neff, PhD

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## Preface

Although I didn't know it at the time, the seed for this thesis was planted thirty-three years ago.

It was during the summer of 1975 when I was a Private E2 serving in the U.S. Army in Germany that I became involved in the Hanau Soldiers Committee (HSC). Although the Committee personnel tended to be few and transient, the one constant and the one who planted that first seed was Sp/5 Craig Muma. Craig was a medic assigned to the 45<sup>th</sup> Medical Battalion, which was located across the street from my unit. Like me, Craig had some college. In addition, he spoke very good German and was the self-described working-class son of a public utility employee from Buffalo, New York. Craig often used Communist terminology, describing the world in terms of a class struggle, and also introduced me to the concept of soldiers as workers.

Craig introduced me to H. Christopher Coates, the civilian lawyer from the Lawyers Military Defense Committee (LMDC). Chris and Judy's home and the LMDC office was in Heidelberg. Occasionally we and other HSC members would spend the weekend receiving legal advice from Chris. We frequently dined with Chris and his wife Judy, who was the big sister everyone wished they had. In our Army-issue sleeping bags, we slept on the floor of the LMDC office after enjoying the wonders of the city.

During one of those visits in early 1976 I read a copy of David Cortright's *Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance during the Vietnam War* in the LMDC office and casually began flipping through the pages. Cortright's work helped me to understand that soldiers were more than the pawns of the military-industrial complex. I considered *Soldiers in Revolt* as the Bible of the Soldiers' Resistance Movement and still consider it a great work of protest literature.

Craig was discharged from the Army in the spring of 1976 and enrolled in the University of Heidelberg. We kept in touch but after I was discharged that fall, I never saw him again. However,

by introducing me to the notion of soldiers as workers who had the right to be political, Craig not only offered me an alternative to the usual barracks madness but a chance to do something about it. Thanks, Craig. We did some revolutionary work and you are the soul of this thesis.

I was in Heidelberg at the LMDC office when I was introduced to Max Watts, a journalist who provided refuge for U.S. military deserters. Max offered me a historical and international perspective of the resistance movement.

In May 2006, I read an article in *The Nation* about active duty soldiers speaking out against the Iraq War. The article led me to write to David Cortright, whose book had been so influential to me thirty years before. David responded with gracious words of encouragement and asked me to keep in touch.

A few weeks later I received a phone call from Australia. The caller said that he got my name and phone number from David Cortright. He told me his name was Max Watts. Miraculously, this was the same Max I'd known in Heidelberg thirty years before. Max has provided not only a humorous perspective but both practical and spiritual support for this thesis. Thank you, Max.

My association with Dr. Jo Ellen Vinyard from the Department of History and Philosophy began in spring 2002 and continues to this day. Dr. Vinyard has taught me that a social movement leads to every historical event and that one should look for it. I believe that the Vietnam War will always be remembered more for its social symbolism than for its military significance. Dr. Vinyard has taught me a lot and I sincerely thank her for sponsoring this project.

I would especially like to thank Dr. Heather Neff from the Department of English Language and Literature for serving as the second reader of this thesis and for her encouragement and support in the completion of this project.

## Abstract

The Soldiers' Resistance Movement (SRM) during the Vietnam Era is arguably the most important social movement in the history of the American military. Responding to a highly unpopular war, the soldiers of Vietnam began to question their role in what many considered to be a conflict built on lies. While the government expected some resistance, the soldiers' unity of purpose eventually forced the military to respond. This paper examines the soldiers' revolt as it grew throughout the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, culminating in a protest movement that helped to end the war.

While providing a chronicle of the parallels between the growth of the SRM and America's involvement in Southeast Asia, this paper also seeks to illustrate the institutional deficiencies of the military. Occurring in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement, the growing radicalism of many African American soldiers, along with the support of thousands of civilians and the public media, eventually brought about both an end to the draft and the close of the Vietnam War.

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## Introduction

It was early one morning in February 1974 when I happened to see a small article buried in the national news section of the *Detroit Free Press*. The story said that effective January 1, 1975, the post-WWII G.I. Bill, which offered veterans a free college education, would be replaced by the Montgomery G.I. Bill, which required an economic contribution from the soldier. I was at home because I was unemployed, another victim of the October 1973 oil embargo. Between July 1972 and April 1973 I had been a full-time, yet unfocused college student at a large university. After that, I experienced a series of layoffs from working the line at Ford Motor Company to installing windows for a small window and door manufacturer. I was taking two night classes at the community college and living off of \$50 per week unemployment from the State of Michigan. By the spring of 1974 I would have been grateful for any job.

Although I was only nineteen, I already understood that my life was going nowhere. I had no marketable skills, but I wasn't particularly motivated to complete a college degree. Having read that *Free Press* article, I knew that if I was even thinking about joining the military, I needed to do it before the end of the year. Thus, like so many young men of my generation, I joined the Army as a result of "economic draft."

I had always wanted to be a soldier. My father was a World War II veteran, as were all of my uncles. In fact, almost every man I knew growing up was a veteran, if not of World War II, then of the Korean War. I grew up watching the military drill teams, with their chrome helmets and twirling rifles, in the Thanksgiving Day parade. Going with my dad to the Army surplus store and holding the actual equipment while my dad explained its purpose filled me with an indescribable excitement.

I was one of the boys of the 1950s who constantly fantasized about World War II. I watched the John Wayne movies. I spent summer vacations at the Inkster Public Library reading about the Normandy invasion and other decisive battles. Christmas and birthdays served to

replenish my supply of war toys. Of course, I had my plastic Army men, with the Americans molded in green, the “Krauts” gray, and the “Japs” yellow. Hollywood always portrayed American soldiers as noble and heroic and I dreamed of joining their ranks.<sup>1</sup>

Even in war, the Americans always displayed a sense of fair play. Enemy prisoners were never mistreated, nor were civilians ever harmed. American soldiers always had chocolate bars in their pockets for starving children and a pair of nylon stockings for their mothers. Each side wore a uniform and there were rules, just like a football game.

In school, occasionally we had to go to the basement to participate in air raid drills. I didn’t know what Communists were, but if my country said they were bad, then that was all I needed to know. We already beaten the “Krauts” and the “Japs.” If the “Commies” were next up, so be it. It didn’t matter if the cause was righteous, for to question America would have been utter blasphemy. Every generation has its war and I’d be damned if I’d be cheated out of mine.<sup>2</sup>

The fact is that I could have gone to Vietnam but I didn’t try hard enough. In high school, all the boys had to take aptitude tests for the military and I attained high scores. Unfortunately, one had to be seventeen to enlist with a parent’s signature and that wasn’t going to happen. My mom was a teacher and my dad was a cop. I was my parent’s first born and only son, and they planned to send me to college. In 1970, although I was only fifteen, my lacrosse coach — who was a Marine Corp captain at the recruiting headquarters in Detroit — said that if I wanted to go to Vietnam, I should let him know and he could get me in. Of course, I didn’t dare to try.

The celebration of military culture central to many World War II movies and enacted in childhood games undoubtedly played an important role in shaping a glorified view of war among so many young boys of the Vietnam generation. But John Wayne’s overheated patriotism was rarely the decisive factor that moved people to enlist. The fact that working-class boys were far more likely to fight in Vietnam is not an indication that they, above all others, were seduced by Hollywood

war stories. The fundamental factors for them entering the military were economic and institutional.<sup>3</sup>

Like the thousands of black men who served before me, I too struggled with Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness" — the inner conflict of defending a nation that freely lynched black veterans in uniform, and where "equality" often seemed to be a hollow word. I was a middle-class black male from Inkster, Michigan, who, out of protest against American racism, intentionally failed to register for the draft on my eighteenth birthday. On the strong advice from my police-officer father, I eventually did register, received a draft card with a lottery number of nine, and then spent the next six months appealing my classification. I was truly torn about whether I wanted to serve in the American military at that time.<sup>4</sup>

Like many young Americans, I had become racially and politically aware in the 1960s. For some, this decade was defined by the gain (or loss) of civil rights. Others may remember it for the changes in music, technology, or the greater acceptance of the use of illegal drugs. Every generation experiences a decade that, while perhaps not being defined by it, cannot deny its imprint, either. The 1960s will probably be best remembered as the decade of radicalized social and institutional change.

The 1960s challenged existing systems of authority, both public and private. In one form or another, this challenge manifested itself in changes the family, the university, business, public and private associations, politics, the government bureaucracy and the military. Because of these changes, many people no longer felt the same compulsion to obey those whom they had previously considered to be superior to themselves in age, rank, status, expertise, character, or talent. Within most organizations, discipline eased and differences in status became blurred. Each group claimed its right to participate equally — and perhaps more than equally — in the decisions which affected it.<sup>5</sup>

The changing attitudes toward authority in the 1960s are particularly important because *authority* is the foundation of military service. When I joined the Army in 1974, the military was reeling from the effects of the decade before, largely resulting from the far-reaching consequences of the Soldiers' Resistance Movement. My military experience was, in many ways, affected by the acts of many nameless men and women who fought a war within a war and quite possibly determined the outcome of the American involvement in the war in Vietnam.

## Introduction: The Beginning of U.S. Involvement in Southeast Asia

### Franco-American relations in Vietnam

The United States has been militarily involved in Southeast Asia since at least March 1945, when it provided military aid to Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh in their fight against the Japanese. It should be noted that although they were Communist, Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh were primarily interested in gaining independence from China for their nation.<sup>1</sup>

After World War Two, with the use of military aid the U.S. continued its involvement in Vietnam with France as its proxy. In September 1951, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, accompanied by General de Lattre, came to Washington for meetings with the Foreign Ministers of the U.S., France, and Britain. In addition, Gen. de Lattre met with U.S. officials, including President Truman, who assured him that the United States “would not let Indochina fall into enemy hands.”<sup>2</sup>

At a press conference on April 7, 1954, in response to a reporters’ question regarding the importance of Indochina to the free world, President Eisenhower responded with the following statement:

“Finally, you have broader considerations that might follow what you would call the ‘falling domino’ principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.”<sup>3</sup>

The United States' military aid to France continued to increase, so that by the spring of 1954, American taxpayers were subsidizing seventy-five percent of the costs. For example, aircraft, trucks, tanks, ships, automatic weapons, small arms, ammunition, radios and medical supplies, in addition to cash, supported the French war effort. Between 1950 and 1954, the U.S. investment in the war in Indochina reached a total of approximately three billion dollars.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the strongest supporters of the French war in Indochina belonged to the American Friends of Vietnam (AFV), one of the earliest and perhaps the first of the private associations concerned with the conflict in Southeast Asia. Founded in 1955, the AFV could trace its roots to 1950, when some of its founding members met Ngo Dinh Diem, a Vietnamese nationalist. Diem claimed that Vietnam needed America's help not only in freeing itself from French colonial rule but in preventing a communist-led independence movement from winning power.<sup>5</sup>

The rapid decline of French fortunes after their defeat at Dien Bien Phu by the Chinese set the stage for Diem's rise to power as France's Vietnamese protégés took steps to ensure their survival against the victorious Vietminh. On June 4, 1954, the Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai signed an agreement that gave his State of Vietnam (SVN) virtual independence from French control. In light of the French disaster at Dien Bien Phu, and realizing that his French allies were not reliable, Dai sought closer ties with the Americans. Sensing that Diem had Washington's support, Dai appointed him as SVN's prime minister. Diem accepted, but only after having received full civil and military powers.<sup>6</sup>

Diem's inability to govern effectively became increasingly clear as reports of mounting unrest in South Vietnam multiplied by the late 1950s. After his rise to power in 1954, Diem built a family dictatorship and managed to alienate virtually every segment of the population. Economic and social problems were not addressed and resentment against Diem was particularly

strong in the countryside, where his officials abused and exploited the peasants. For example, Diem angered more than a million tenant farmers by implementing an inefficient land reform program that failed to give them control of the land. Vietminh cadres in South Vietnam profited from the farmers' discontent by launching a guerrilla campaign against Diem in 1957. North Vietnam quickly began sending supplies and agents to the Vietminh cadres in the south, many of whom themselves were Southerners. The Vietminhs' rebellion was not only able to withstand Diem's heavy-handed attempts to suppress it but by 1960 was making rapid gains throughout South Vietnam.<sup>7</sup>

In support of his "Domino Theory" and the Vietminh's increasing expansion, Eisenhower increased military support to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) beyond money and goods. In 1957, the U.S. Army sent its Special Forces commando-advisors to Vietnam as the vanguard of American front-line military assistance.<sup>8</sup>

### The Tonkin Gulf Resolution

Given America's history in Vietnam, if one could attach a beginning to the Vietnam War, it would be August 2, 1964. It was on that date that, contrary to the information given to Congress by the administration of President Johnson, the U.S. destroyer *Maddox*, allegedly on a daytime intelligence gathering mission near the island of Hon Me in the Gulf of Tonkin, attacked several North Vietnamese torpedo boats. The U.S. claimed that the *Maddox* was in international waters. The North Vietnamese asserted that they were not. What is clear is that the *Maddox* fired first.<sup>9</sup>

Some believe that the attack was triggered by a phenomenon called “Tonkin Gulf Ghosts” or “Tonkin Spooks,” which was a radar anomaly seen in the Gulf of Tonkin and other limited areas. The phenomenon generated radar images that were much smaller and more clearly defined than those normally caused by weather conditions. The average length of these images was about four minutes but sometimes much longer. Although they tended to occur during conditions of high humidity and temperature inversion, it’s not clear that “Tonkin Spooks” were the result of weather. Another hypothesis offered by the U.S. Navy was that flocks of seabirds could generate a “ghost” on the radar. In addition, not even the most experienced radar operator could simply look at a “Tonkin Spook” on a radar screen and realize that it did not represent an actual surface vessel.<sup>10</sup>

President Johnson ordered a second U.S. destroyer, the *USS C. Turner Joy*, to join the *Maddox*, in which both ships sailed back up the Gulf of Tonkin. On the night of August 4, both ships thought they had come under attack again and sent messages reporting enemy contacts and torpedoes in the water, while directing a good deal of fire at their supposed adversary. Following this second challenge to “innocent passage,” President Johnson ordered retaliatory bombing against North Vietnam. But the certainty of the “second attack” would never be as clear as the first. The initial battle took place in daylight. There were photographs of the North Vietnamese torpedo boats engaged in a fire-fight with the *Maddox*. However, there was no physical evidence at all to support the August 4 attack claims. The Navy reported that it had sunk two attacking torpedo boats, but there was no wreckage nor bodies of dead sailors. No photographs or other physical evidence was produced. Radar and sonar sightings provided an exceedingly confusing set of data at best.<sup>11</sup>

Confusing data or not, these events gave the President the justification he needed, and on August 7, Johnson obtained easy passage through both the Senate and House of Representatives

for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. The crucial passage read: “Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression...The United States is...prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.”<sup>12</sup>

## I. The Soldiers' Revolt

### The Soldiers' Resistance Movement

The Soldiers' Resistance Movement (SRM) was not born of a single event. Unlike the Civil Rights Movement, there was no Martin Luther King Jr. figure around when the SRM could galvanize. As Larry Waterhouse and Mariann Wizard write in their book, Turning the Guns Around: Notes on the GI Movement, it would be difficult to pinpoint a date and place of birth of the SRM. Like other movements for social change, the SRM emerged in a piecemeal and disorderly fashion. Different people in different places, either as individuals or in small groups, decided that they could no longer remain silent on the Vietnam War.<sup>1</sup>

The Vietnam War had challenged many soldiers' sense of duty as to why they were fighting. Soldiers had been socialized to believe that the Soviet Union was an "aggressive, godless empire intent on destroying freedom and subjugating the people of the world." The military had been called on to "pay any price, bear any burden and meet any hardship" in the defense of freedom.<sup>2</sup>

Hollywood had prepared these GIs for a lifetime of pop culture combat, which only existed on celluloid and in print. A generation had been fed a constant diet of war images, giving symbolic form to a number of ideas that achieved the status of everyday knowledge. Soldiers had internalized such broad ideological outlines, in part through their education and by their consumption of war comics and movies. Many GIs arrived in Vietnam believing that their war would be no different from the one fought by their fathers in WWII. Unfortunately, they quickly discovered that they were not viewed as liberators, but as an occupation army to be resisted by any means necessary.<sup>3</sup>

Who were the young men being sent to Vietnam? James Hayes defines the draft as a “deprivation exchange system.” According to Hayes, if one had been relatively deprived in civilian society, the likelihood of experiencing the deprivation occasioned by the military was maximized. Generally, those at the polar extremes of the social class continuum were deferred. Those with economic privilege escaped military service mainly through student deferments and, to a lesser extent, deferred occupations. Those at the very bottom of the socio-economic pool were often excluded for failing to meet specified mental and physical standards, although that would change with Project One Hundred Thousand, which I will discuss below.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to deferments while in school, college graduates not enrolled in graduate school frequently obtained occupational deferments. In the period between December 1965 and February 1966, only 2.1 percent of Army inductees had a college degree. In addition, it should be emphasized that the opportunities for going to college were not open to everyone. Despite the availability of scholarships, loans, and jobs, men from upper income families were more likely to go to college than men from lower income families. According to the 1960 Census, only nineteen percent of persons aged sixteen through twenty-four in families with incomes under \$5,000 annually reported college attendance. Thirty-three percent of persons in the \$5,000 to \$7,500 annual household income reported college attendance, while forty-nine percent of those in the \$7,500 to \$10,000 annual income level reported college enrollment.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, working-class youth who did go to college were far more likely to attend part-time. This is an important distinction because deferments were only offered to full-time students, making part-time students eligible for the draft. Also, students with poor grades were also subject to the draft; however, that was determined by local draft boards.<sup>12</sup>

## The Beginnings of the Movement

The first known GI to demonstrate resistance and the first response from the army occurred just six months after President Johnson introduced combat troops in Vietnam. In November 1965, Lieutenant Henry Howe, stationed at Fort Bliss, Texas, participated in a small peace march in nearby El Paso. He carried a sign that read “End Johnson’s Fascist Aggression.” Although Howe was not in uniform when he marched, his superiors later found out. The Army reacted quickly and forcefully: in a courts-martial Howe was charged with behavior insulting to his commander-in-chief. He was quickly convicted and sentenced to two years’ hard labor. Howe’s action and trial did not gain the attention of the public media.<sup>4</sup>

The first soldier to have his opposition to the Vietnam War nationally reported was a ten-year Special Forces Master Sergeant named Donald Duncan, who had served eighteen months in Vietnam. Protesting what he had experienced as a member of the Special Forces, Duncan quit the Army in September 1965 and wrote an article detailing his experiences entitled “The Whole Thing Was a Lie!” Published in the February 1966 edition of *Ramparts*, Duncan describes the hostility of the Vietnamese to the U.S., using examples such as the hundreds of nightclubs with American-style names such as “Playboy,” which were nonetheless covered with grenade-proof screening. Duncan also writes about the corruption of Vietnamese government officials, the cowardice and criminality of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), and the unanimous contempt the Americans held for them all.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, Duncan compares the actions of the pro-democracy forces to those of the Communists. In passing through a village, the Viet Cong (VC) might sleep in the houses, whereas the ARVN would ransack them. More often than not, the VC helped plant and harvest the crops; but invariably ARVN troops in the area razed them. Rape was severely punished

among the VC but was so common by ARVN that it was seldom reported for fear of worse atrocities. Duncan states that the entire war effort was useless. In his eyes the American forces weren't preserving freedom in South Vietnam because there was no freedom to preserve. In response to Eisenhower's "Domino Theory," Duncan wondered whether "Communism was spreading in spite of [American] involvement or because of it?"<sup>6</sup>

The first major case involving resistance by active duty soldiers involved the so-called "Fort Hood Three." Ordered to report to the Oakland Army Terminal no later than July 13, 1966, to be deployed to Vietnam, James Johnson, Dennis Mora, and David Samas, who were stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, refused to go.<sup>7</sup>

The Fort Hood Three not only stunned the Army on June 30 by publicly announcing their intention to refuse their orders but filed suit against the government, challenging the legality of the undeclared war and requesting an injunction from being sent to Vietnam. Although media coverage was scant, a few newspapers did report their defiance. Pentagon lawyers responded by stating that members of the armed forces who refused orders to Vietnam might be committing treason and could be sentenced to death.<sup>8</sup>

The trial of the Fort Hood Three marked the beginning of the GI resistance movement. By publicly challenging the Army, the Fort Hood Three drew support from civilian antiwar organizations. In response, the Army began by threatening the renegade soldiers. When that failed, the Army then offered bribes, such as telling Sama's parents that their son would receive an honorable discharge if he dropped the case. The soldiers rejected such offers. Finally, in September the Army held courts-martial, found the men guilty and sentenced them to three years' imprisonment. The Fort Hood Three appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which refused to hear the case. Upon completion of their sentence, James Johnson, Dennis Mora, and David Samas received dishonorable discharges.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the military's repressive stance on personnel who protested the war, there were continued individual acts of resistance. In an article published in *Radical America*, Matthew Rinaldi describes other acts of resistance. For example, Ronald Lockman refused orders to Vietnam with the slogan, "I follow the Fort Hood Three. Who will follow me?" Capt. Howard Levy refused to teach medicine to Green Berets and Capt. Dale Noyd refused to give flying lessons to prospective bombing pilots. This period also saw the beginning of a kind of "morality-based" resistance.

The first clear instance of such resistance occurred at Fort Jackson, South Carolina where in April 1967 five GIs staged a pray-in for peace on the army base. Two of these GIs refused a direct order to cease praying and were subsequently court-martialed. While this form of demonstration was never copied, it was the forerunner of numerous other acts of resistance based on religious and moral grounds.<sup>13</sup>

The majority of these early acts of resistance were actually acts of refusal: refusal to deploy to Vietnam, to carry out training, to obey orders. Each of these demonstrations of civil disobedience helped to challenge the milieu of subservience to authority that characterized the military. By focusing on individual responsibility they were a mirror of the resistance that had become common in civilian life — but transferred to the military environment. Unsurprisingly, the military was quite willing to deal with the small number of GIs who were willing to take such risks. Real change in the military would require a far greater and more generalized rebellion.<sup>14</sup>

Such a rebellion began with the acts of Private Andrew Stapp. According to Small and Hoover, Stapp was a college student who was active in the antiwar movement, and who in 1967 had burned his draft card. The Army drafted Stapp and stationed him at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where he enraged his superiors by receiving antiwar literature and discussing his ideas with other

soldiers. In May, Stapp's platoon leader, a lieutenant, appeared in the barracks and demanded his antiwar material. Stapp agreed to show — but not surrender the material without a guarantee that it would be returned. The lieutenant refused, left the barracks, and later returned with a sergeant who broke into Stapp's locker with a pickax and confiscated the materials. The Army then charged Stapp with refusing to obey a direct order and with having a broken locker. Stapp could have agreed to a minor disciplinary action but instead insisted on a court-martial in order to publicize his views and mobilize antiwar support.<sup>15</sup>

The Army claimed that Stapp had refused an order to hand over his antiwar literature. Stapp and his lawyer countered that the order was illegal because it infringed upon his First Amendment rights. The military judges ignored the defense and quickly declared Stapp guilty and restricted him to Fort Sill. Stapp violated his restriction and another court-martial ensued. Like the Fort Hood Three, Stapp's trial received national media coverage — but he also garnered wide civilian support. Admitting the charge against Stapp was weak, the case was dismissed by the Army prosecutor. Although in April 1968 Stapp was given an dishonorable discharge, his trial had two immediate results: first, Stapp and his civilian supporters organized the first national GI union, the American Servicemen's Union (ASU), and began publishing the first underground paper for GIs, *The Bond*; second, the trials resulted in the first of many legal defense organizations for dissident servicemen, the Committee for GI Rights.<sup>16</sup>

### The Movement Grows

The Soldiers' Resistance Movement, like its civilian antiwar counterpart, expanded rapidly after the January 1968 Tet Offensive. As a response to the military's censorship of its own media such as the *Stars and Stripes*, GI underground newspapers began to proliferate. For example,

according to the Defense Department, in 1967 there were only three GI underground papers, but 245 had been published by March 1972 and issues of *Fatigue Press* (Fort Hood, Texas) and *Bragg Briefs* (Fort Bragg, North Carolina) had circulations of 5,000. The American Servicemen's Union (ASU), which was founded in 1967, was the first GI movement organization. By 1971 there were at least fourteen other such organizations, including two for officers. Service academy graduates organized Concerned Graduates of the U.S. Military, Naval, and Air Force Academies and boasted a membership of approximately one hundred members.<sup>17</sup>

In a personal interview with noted anti-war scholar and activist David Cortright, I asked about the role of civilian organizations in the Soldiers' Resistance Movement. Cortright said that the United States Servicemen's Fund (USSF) was the primary source of funding for GI newspapers and coffeehouses worldwide. In addition, the Pacific Counseling Service provided legal assistance and played an important role in developing the Soldiers' Resistance Movement on the west coast. Cortright added that there were other groups, such as the American Servicemen's Union and the Young Socialist Alliance, that also provided organizing and legal support; however, many soldiers were turned off by their Marxist-Leninist rhetoric. Cortright said that it is important to note that the GI Movement was separate from the civilian antiwar movement and that with few exceptions, they operated independently of each other.<sup>18</sup>

An expanding number of civilian antiwar activists supported the GI movement, such as the Chicago Area Military Project, the GI Office, the Pacific Counseling Service, and Vietnam Veterans Against the War. The USSF supplied information, organization skills, equipment, and money. For example, in 1970 the USSF raised more than \$150,000 to help finance GI movement activities. The GI movement also had the support of antiwar politicians and actors. Donald Sutherland and Jane Fonda staged FTA (Fuck the Army) Shows off-base to counter the on-base Bob Hope Shows, which were generally pro-war. The National Lawyers Guild, American Civil

Liberties Union, and other antiwar legal organizations donated free advice and defended GI dissidents in court. Churches also played a role by granting sanctuary to deserters and AWOL servicemen.<sup>19</sup>

### Military Reaction to the Resistance Movement

The 1968 Tet Offensive removed any lingering doubts held by some soldiers about the popular support for the National Liberation Front and the weakness of the Saigon government. The massive attacks on dozens of fronts could not be kept secret from American forces without the knowledge and consent of the Vietnamese people. Tet helped legitimize the ideas of the growing GI and veterans' movements for peace and discredited ideas of soldiering, such as the belief that the fighter sought complete dominance of the enemy.<sup>20</sup>

The military responded to the growing resistance by determining that any act of defiance was a direct and dangerous threat to its authority. Commanding officers had difficulty finding the proper balance between the needs of military discipline and the increasing demands of servicemen to engage in civilian-styled free speech and other constitutional rights. Resistance in the Army, labeled RITA by the Department of Defense, led to widespread military surveillance of servicemen and civilians. In 1970, a major national outcry erupted when the public discovered the existence of hundreds of thousands of military dossiers on Americans who publically opposed the war.<sup>21</sup>

Outside of Vietnam, the military increased its repression of dissent by focusing on GI coffeehouses, underground newspapers, and leafleting. In Japan, six Marine members of the Vietnam Veterans against the War were arrested for leafleting and charged with "conduct of a

nature to bring discredit upon the armed forces.” Their handouts were titled “July 4, Declaration of Independence.” Other servicemen were prosecuted for failing to stand for the national anthem, picketing against the war during off-duty hours, making “disloyal statements” in servicemen’s newspapers, presenting an anti-war petition to a United States embassy, and distributing Congressional Record excerpts of speeches by anti-war senators. Many soldiers received less than honorable discharges and some were sent to prison. One soldier received a less than honorable discharge for sending home a Christmas card that was sharply critical of the war.<sup>22</sup>

### Resistance in the Field

It was only a matter of time before open acts of resistance began to have a powerful — and dangerous — effect on soldiers in the battlefields of Vietnam. One of the most extreme yet effective forms of resistance was “fragging.” In an article aptly entitled “The Demoralization of an Army: Fragging and other Withdrawal Symptoms” published in the *Saturday Review*, Eugene Linden describes fragging as a “macabre ritual in which American soldiers attempt[ed] to murder their superiors.” According to Linden, fragging was primarily carried out with hand grenades, a weapon popular with enlisted men because the evidence was destroyed with the consummation of the crime. Fragging was threatening to the point that virtually all officers and NCOs had to consider the possibility of being fragged before giving an order to the men they commanded.<sup>23</sup>

Between 1969 and 1971 the Army reported more than six hundred incidents of fragging, resulting in 82 deaths and 651 injuries. In an incident outside Hue, two dozen soldiers threw stones and gas pellets at an officers’ club. The plan was to kill the escaping officers with

grenades, a step the attackers did not carry out. However, news of the plot had a chilling effect — especially on junior officers.<sup>24</sup>

Vietnam veteran Steve Vargo from Columbus, Ohio, provides his own account of a fragging incident. Vargo describes himself as a Hungarian, working-class white male. In 1965 Vargo voluntarily joined the Army for a three-year enlistment. Trained in the airborne infantry, in 1967 at the rank of E4, Vargo received orders to deploy to Vietnam. Assigned to the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade in the mountains of the Central Highlands, Vargo received a battlefield promotion to Sergeant E5, the lowest ranking NCO, and was a fire team leader of three to four soldiers. Vargo writes:

“In 1967 the resistance movement among GIs had not formally hit in-country. We never even heard about the underground papers and coffeehouses, etc. We resisted incompetent leaders, be they NCOs or officers who would endanger us by piss poor leadership or orders. Also, NCOs or officer’s [sic] who fucked with us were dealt with. We fragged em.’ No warning shots, no grenades left with pins in at first as a warning. Fragging is lobbing a live grenade at someone. This was the true start of the GI resistance movement. You came to realize, the reasons for the war were all bullshit and Americans were dying for nothing. In that time, you only had letters and the Stars & Stripes (the Army’s official newspaper) for news and did not have a real understanding of what was going on in the world (USA). Of course we were aware of the protesters against the war and really had no comment or opinion on them. We were focused on staying alive day-to-day.”<sup>25</sup>

Other forms of rebellion began to occur, moving toward the stage of formal mutiny. For example, “search and avoid missions” frequently became a soldier’s improvised means of shirking a despised mission. Many simply refused to engage in combat. “Mutiny” is a potent and evocative word, but it accurately describes what in fact frequently took place among American soldiers.<sup>26</sup>

In the October 23, 1970, issue of *Life*, veteran Vietnam correspondent John Saar published an illuminating article about a combat unit on patrol near the Cambodian border. The article portrays the success of a young company commander, Capt. Brian Utermahlen (West

Point 1968), who enjoys the confidence of his men precisely because he accepts their loathing for the war and with the knowledge of his superior officers, manages to avoid combat. Capt. Utermahlen of Alpha Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, 1<sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry Airmobile brags to the 118 men under his command that eight times he nearly came close to quitting West Point. Capt. Utermahlen talks of honesty, independence, and the resistance to authority that gives him an instinctive rapport with his men. “The colonel wants to make contact with the enemy and so do I,” says Utermahlen, “but the men flat don’t. It’s frustrating, but I understand how they feel.”<sup>27</sup>

The article popularized a new phrase, “working it out,” to describe the emergence of battlefield democracy. Commanders frequently had to conform their orders to the wishes of their men, usually by avoiding situations likely to produce casualties. The practice was unobtrusive and subtle, but by all accounts it was widespread, particularly during the latter stages of the war. Reporters for *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, *Saturday Review*, and other publications all filed stories of combat refusals and infantry platoons intentionally evading enemy engagements.<sup>28</sup>

Often search and avoid missions took place with the tacit approval and active participation of officers. In early 1969 Pete Zastrow, then a captain of the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry Division, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> of the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion led his troops into a search and avoid situation. Zastrow said,

“My feeling was that most of the Vietnamese we were fighting against...didn’t want to shoot us anymore than we wanted to shoot them. They had their job, which was to carry supplies, and we had our job, which was to stop them. But if we stayed out of their way, they sure wouldn’t come looking for us. So we stayed out of their way. We did a very good job of avoiding the bad guys. As a matter of fact, we religiously avoided the bad guys. We worked hard on what we called search and avoid.”<sup>29</sup>

Moser explains that on some occasions combat avoidance was mutual. In an interview with Gary Payton describing an encounter in 1968, Moser writes:

“They didn’t come after me....We were walking in this high grass and we saw the grass moving so you knew somebody else was in the grass. We got to a clearing, it was Vietcong, they had weapons....They looked at us, we looked at them; they went that way, we went this way. That was the end of that. There was identification, man. Oppression is a universal kind of thing.”<sup>30</sup>

### Mass Mutiny as a Form of Resistance

Sometimes, search and avoid tactics were not sufficient and fragging was impractical. Sometimes the men on the field had reached the limits of their endurance. On August 25, 1969, Horst Faas and Peter Arnett of The Associated Press were in battalion headquarters in the Songchange Valley, South Vietnam, when they heard Lieutenant Eugene Shurtz Jr.’s report to his battalion commander amplified over a loudspeaker: “I am sorry, sir, but my men refused to go — we cannot move out.” The following day the *The New York Times* headline shared the story with the world: “Told to Move Again On 6<sup>th</sup> Deathly Day, Company A Refuses.” While there had always been rumors of mutinous behavior on the front, Faas and Arnett just witnessed the first reported mass mutiny of the Vietnam War.

These men were not cowards. As *The New York Times* reported, Company A of the 196<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade had been ordered to move down the jungled rocky slope of Nuilon Mountain into a labyrinth of North Vietnamese bunkers and trench lines. For five days Company A had been ordered to make this push and each time they had been pushed back by invisible enemy forces that waited through bombs and artillery attacks for the Americans to come close, and then killed them.

In addition, a few days earlier the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Eli P. Howard, and seven others were killed in a helicopter crash. The new battalion commander, Lt. Col. Robert

Bacon, wanted the bodies recovered and had been trying to get to the wreckage. Bacon was leading three of his companies in the assault and was waiting impatiently for Company A to move out. Faas and Arnett reported that Bacon paled as Lt. Shurtz told him that the soldiers of Company A would not follow orders:

Bacon: Repeat that please. Have you told them what it means to disobey orders under fire?

Shurtz: I think they understand, but some of them simply had enough-they are broken. There are boys here who have only ninety days left in Vietnam. They want to go home in one piece. The situation is psychic here.

Bacon: Are you talking about enlisted men, or are the NCOs also involved?

Shurtz: That's the difficulty here. We've got a leadership problem. Most of our squad and platoon leaders have been killed or wounded. [At that point Company A was down to sixty men, half of its assigned combat strength.]

Bacon: Go talk to them again and tell them that to the best of our knowledge the bunkers are now empty-the enemy has withdrawn. The mission for A Company today is to recover their dead. They have no reason to be afraid. Please take a hand count of how many really do not want to go.

*Several minutes pass*

Shurtz: They won't go, colonel, and I did not ask for the hand count because I am afraid that they all stick together even though some might prefer to go.

Bacon: Leave these men on the hill and take your command post element and move to the objective.

Bacon then told his executive officers, Maj. Richard Waite and Sgt. Okey Blankenship, to fly from the battalion base across the valley to talk to Company A. Col. Bacon told them to "Give them a pep talk and a kick in the butt."

Faas and Arnett reported that what Maj. Waite and Sgt. Blankenship found were exhausted men with ripped uniforms caked with dirt. One was weeping. The soldiers said that they were sick of battling in torrid heat, the constant danger of firefights by day and that the basic needs of ammunition, food, and water came at a tremendous risk of heavy enemy ground fire. Most of the soldiers were nineteen- and twenty-year-old draftees. Eventually, the men of Company A were convinced to move out.

A similar article appeared on page one of *The New York Times* on March 23, 1971. Entitled "General Won't Punish G.I.'s for Refusing Orders," the article describes an incident that

took place in Khesanh, South Vietnam. A commanding general reported that he did not plan to take disciplinary action against 53 of his men who refused an order to move forward to secure a damaged helicopter and their commanding officer's armored vehicle. "I suppose if I went by the book, we could take them out and shoot them for refusing an order in the face of the enemy," said Brigadier General John G. Hill, Jr., "but they're back in the field, doing their duty. I don't think it should be blown out of proportion."

The commander of the reluctant armored cavalry troop, Captain Carlos A. Poveda, was relieved of his command. Gen. Hill, commander of the First Brigade, Fifth Infantry Division (Mechanized) said the captain had "made an error in tactics" that resulted in his losing control of his unit when he became separated from it. The men who refused to carry out the order were members of two platoons of Troop B, First Squadron, First Cavalry, Americal Division. They were temporarily assigned to Gen. Hill's division in the northwest corner of South Vietnam, supporting the South Vietnamese invasion of Laos.

A similar incident occurred in the Americal Division in August 1969 when an infantry company refused to go forward after five days of heavy casualties on a mountain held by the North Vietnamese. In a story published on page one of the March 23, 1971, edition of the *New York Times*, Gen. Hill gave this account:

The armored unit had tried for several hours to move forward and dislodge an enemy ambush force on Route 9 between Langvel and the Laotian border nearby. Three times the two platoons of Troop B moved up, ran into heavy resistance and pulled back to wait for their heavy weapons and air support to weaken the enemy. On the third move forward, the troop commander's armored personnel carrier hit a mine as the unit was pulling back, and the platoons became separated and disorganized. Just before dark, two other armored personnel carriers moved up the highway and picked up the troop commander and his crew, including one wounded man. Shortly afterward, a helicopter made a forced landing behind the abandoned command vehicle, but the crew of the helicopter moved out safely.

At about 8:30 P.M., Troop B was ordered to move forward again to obtain the helicopter and the command vehicle, but the men refused to go. Gen. Hill was informed and sent the squadron commander, Lt. Col. Gene L. Breeding

to talk to them. The colonel spoke with the men of the two platoons, but 53 of them--not including their officers or platoon sergeants--still refused to go forward. Col. Breeding decided not to take action at the time. Another armored unit [had been] sent out [the] morning [before] and it secured the armored personnel carrier and the helicopter. Troop B remained in the field...but Gen. Hill replaced Capt. Poveda with one of his own officers.

Troop B later was pulled back and attached to a unit of the Fifth Division. The rest of Col. Breeding's squadron from the Americal Division was pulled back for refitting to give the colonel a chance to strengthen his control over the unit. He [had taken] over the squadron 12 days [before]. One of the men who refused the order to move forward was Specialist 4 Randy Thompson of Evansville, Indiana, who had volunteered for the earlier mission to rescue the captain and crew from the disabled armored personnel carrier. He said he refused to go back because "the reason given wasn't a very good one."

"It was a piece of machinery that could have been replaced," he said. "I didn't see any sense in risking any more lives."

As 1971 drew to a close, the troops knew that the military was reducing its ground operations and transferring more responsibility to ARVN. No one wanted to be the last American to die in Vietnam, so the number of combat refusals increased.

October 1971, journalist Richard Boyle saw a combat refusal in which six men from Bravo Company, because of its futility, refused to go on nighttime patrol. This act received both brief national media coverage and the promise of a senate investigation, which never materialized. The following is his personal account of the refusal to engage the enemy by several unidentified soldiers of Bravo Company, Firebase Pace, a field artillery unit located near Cambodia:

*RB: Have you guys fired today?*

No.

*RB: Why?*

Won't mess with them [Viet Cong] if they don't mess with us.

*RB: So they haven't fired at this bunker all day, and you haven't fired at them.*

That's right. We're not going to do it, either. You get the feeling sometimes that they don't really want to fool around with us that much, unless we fire back. They want us out of here, that's for sure. Let's go (laughter). Couldn't take these guns out. I don't think they want these big eight-inchers [field artillery pieces] out of here. VC want them out and the lifers wants them in, so we gotta stay here.

*RB: Didn't the petition drive start after they tried to single out six guys for court-martial?*

That's right.

*RB: How do you feel about that, picking out six guys for court-martial?*

It's rotten. They're trying to separate us, trying to keep it from being unified. They know if we're unified they can't do anything. They can't court-martial the whole company.

Just isn't six people that don't want to go out there, they're just trying to blame it on six people. There's no way you can court-martial the whole company and keep it out of the papers and out of national attention. You can do it with six guys, and no one'll ever hear about it 'cept the *Stars and Stripes*. But if you court-martial the whole company it's bound to get out. Now we got the petition.

RB: *Somebody want to read that, man?*

Here, John, read it.

RB: *Read it for the tape.*

Okay, this is the letter we're sending to Senator [Edward] Kennedy:

We the undersigned of Bravo Company, First Battalion, Twelfth Cav, First Cav Division, feel compelled to write you because of your influence on public opinion and on decisions made in the Senate.

We're in the peculiar position of being the last remaining ground troops that the US has in a combat role and we suffer from problems that are peculiar only to us. We are ground troops who are supposedly in a defensive role (according to the Nixon administration) but who constantly find ourselves faced with the same combat role we were in ten months ago. At this writing we are under siege on Firebase Pace near the city of Tay Ninh. We are surrounded on three sides by Cambodia and on all sides by NVA. We are faced daily with the decision of whether to take a court-martial or participate in an offensive role. We have already had six persons refuse to go on a night ambush (which is suicidal as well as offensive), and may be court-martialed. With morale as low as it is there probably will be more before this siege of Pace is over.

Our concern in writing you is not only to bring your full weight of influence in the Senate, but also to enlighten public opinion on the fact that we ground troops still exist. In the event of mass prosecution of our unit, our only hope would be public opinion and your voice.

[Signed by SP/4 Albert Grana and 64 other men]

With the petition and tape recording, Boyle took a helicopter to Saigon. Knowing the story would be suppressed by the American media, he gave the tape to a reporter for Agence France Presse. The story became world-wide news, although many U.S. newspapers refused to mention it.<sup>31</sup>

On Wednesday, October 13, 1971, one national media outlet that did cover the Firebase Pace story was the ABC Evening News. The following is an abstract of their report, which lasted for nearly three broadcast minutes:

(Studio) Enemy destroys two American copters and damages three near Saigon, South Vietnam. Rocket attacks near Cambodian border continue, including Firebase Pace. Infantry Company there transferred due to five members objecting to going out on patrol. Report on patrol at new location. REPORTER: Harry Reasoner.

(Firebase Timbucktu, South Vietnam) 110 men of B Company left Firebase Pace early for the good of morale. Five men, who said they might refuse patrol, said unnecessary risk involved. Patrol canceled. Letter sent to Senator Edward M.

Kennedy with 75 signatures. [SP/4 Albert Grana-talks about lies military releases re: Cambodia.] [Sgt. Walter Werny-says guys not cowards.] [SP/4 Joe Riegler-says things not changed over here.] Military says men involved in defensive tactics. Soldiers say they're in active combat and can be killed or wounded. REPORTER: Ron Miller.<sup>32</sup>

However, an October 25 issue of *Time* magazine presented what could be described as the military's point of view:

The U.S. command has tried with only limited success to protect Pace and similar bases strung along the Cambodian border by means of B-52 raids and assaults by helicopter gunships. As a result, despite orders to keep casualties down, U.S. officers have been compelled to send Americans out on patrol to protect some bases themselves. Few G.I.s in Vietnam these days are unaffected by the "I don't want to be the last man shot" syndrome. Thus, when such a patrol was ordered at Firebase Pace last week, five 1<sup>st</sup> Air Cav G.I.s took advantage of the presence of a visiting freelance newsman, Richard Boyle, to announce that they did not intend to go. They did not actually disobey a direct order, however, and when they were given such a direct command next day they did go on patrol.<sup>33</sup>

According to Boyle, once the story broke he was in danger of being arrested by Thieu's (the President of South Vietnam) secret police. Fortunately for Boyle, other newsmen were able to quickly pull some strings and get him on a plane for the U.S. Upon arriving in San Francisco, Boyle learned that the story had gotten bigger than he imagined and summarizes:

"Senator Kennedy had publicly called for an investigation at Pace. The Army then pulled out all the men of Bravo Company, sending in Delta Company to replace them. The men of Bravo were sent to Firebase Timbuktu, to the rear, and were now out of danger. None of the men would be court-martialed. The Army had backed down. A few days later, the men of Delta Company heard about the refusal of Bravo Company. When a Delta patrol was ordered out, twenty men refused to go. Then the Army pulled out Delta Company, along with along with the entire company of artillery supporting the South Vietnamese in Cambodia. The monster guns which fired shells as big as tree trunks over a distance of thirty miles were left at Firebase Pace, spiked so that they would be of no use to the NVA. The U.S. Army was in retreat. The grunts had won."<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, the soldiers' resistance had changed the direction of the war.

## II. Black Soldiers

### A History of Mistrust

In the years before the colonial War of Independence, workers in Boston, Massachusetts, deeply resented a British government policy that permitted soldiers to take jobs with private employers during their off-duty hours. Fights between civilian workmen and British soldiers were frequent and often bloody. On Monday, March 5, 1770, following a weekend of sporadic fistfights, a detachment of soldiers converged on a crowd of unarmed workers led by Crispus Attucks, a runaway slave. Harsh words and threats were exchanged. Several of the soldiers panicked and fired their muskets into the group of civilians. Attucks fell dead, followed by James Caldwell and Samuel Gray. Two other men later died from their wounds. John Adams would write of the incident: “On that night, the foundation of American independence was laid.”<sup>1</sup> What Adams did not note was that the first man to die for that independence was black.

In the Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17, 1775, regular troops of the British army fought against ragtag elements of the Massachusetts militia. Sensing victory, the British commander, Major John Pitcairn, leapt atop a wall shouting, “The day is ours!” A black freedman named Peter Salem raised his rifle to his shoulder and fired a single shot, mortally wounding the major and decisively turning the tide of battle. That same day, another freedman, Salem Poor, received a special commendation for leadership and courage.<sup>2</sup>

South Carolina Senator Edward Rutledge, in the summer of 1775, proposed to the Second Continental Congress that all blacks, whether they be slave or free, currently serving in the army be summarily dismissed. Less than a month after Salem and Poor were honored at

Bunker Hill, General George Washington issued an order forbidding recruiting officers from accepting any “stroller, Negro or vagabond” into the ranks of the Continental Army.<sup>3</sup>

Since its founding, the United States has had a unique discomfort with the notion of arming black men. In France during World War I, the American Army tried to restrict contacts between black soldiers and the French population as much as possible. Like blacks, many white Americans believed that the French were relatively color-blind and feared that African Americans in France would grow accustomed to being treated as equals and would expect the same treatment when they returned home.<sup>4</sup>

In order to prevent this expectation, in August 1918 the Army issued guidelines to explain to the French how they should treat black soldiers. Called “Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops,” this document instructed French military and civilian officials in the finer points of American race relations. The document noted that while many French were inclined to be friendly toward blacks, in America it was imperative to maintain strict racial separation in order to prevent “mongrelization,” and that white Americans saw such friendliness as offensive. Implicit was the threat that American aid might be withheld if the French did not learn the proper way of dealing with blacks. In particular, the document warned against intimacies between blacks and Frenchwomen.<sup>5</sup>

The situation for black soldiers had not progressed by the time of the Second World War. The refusal of the United States government and the armed forces to end official segregation in the military was the primary issue that disturbed blacks. The hypocrisy of setting up a segregated army to fight an enemy with a master-race ideology was apparent to black troops. In 1941, a group of young blacks in Chicago formed an organization called the “Conscientious Objectors Against Jim Crow” and urged others to resist the draft because of the segregation in the armed forces. The armed forces tenaciously maintained segregation and often had to go to great lengths

— and even greater expense — to coordinate the efforts of two separate armies, one black and the other white. For many blacks, this arrangement suggested that the maintenance of segregation was more important to the military and America as a whole than victory over the Axis.<sup>6</sup>

In 1948, President Harry Truman issued an executive order calling for the full integration of the armed forces. By the time the Korean War began in 1950, military integration was the universal policy, even though limited in practice. Under the new policy, all racial quotas were abolished and blacks could be assigned to any unit as their qualifications merited. Yet in 1951, three years after Truman's order, there were still 200,000 blacks serving in 385 all-black units. As the war progressed, the military, concerned over the poor performance and low morale of segregated units, deactivated all-black units and assigned blacks to previously all-white units. The results were dramatic: black soldiers clearly performed better when not restricted to segregated units and the effectiveness of the military was considerably enhanced by integration.<sup>7</sup>

### Project One Hundred Thousand

The experience of African Americans in Vietnam in many ways mirrored the swiftly changing social consciousness of American culture. David Cortright has written that of all the troops in Vietnam, the most rebellious were black. In all branches of the armed forces, black GIs were often the militant leaders of resistance. Cortright asserts that despite efforts to recruit black soldiers through Project One Hundred Thousand in the mid-1960s, by 1970 radicalism had seriously affected the ideas and actions of many soldiers, in turn impacting the fighting capability

of the American military. According to Cortright, black soldiers were seldom trusted in combat for fear they might turn their guns on their white countrymen.<sup>8</sup>

The history of black enlistment during the Vietnam War was a complex mirror of cultural and socio-economic factors. In the early days of the war, recruiters enticed black men into the military using what was known as the “manhood hustle” — the promise of generous veterans’ benefits, the opportunity to gain marketable skills and the chance for personal growth in a homosocial world. The thought was that when compared to civilian life, with the potential for higher income and the prestige of the military, many African American soldiers were offered a unique opportunity to live like “real” men. In reality, as the artillery officer noted in above, black soldiers were frequently assigned to low-status jobs in the armed forces that corresponded to those they previously held in civilian life. In short, racial inequality remained largely unchanged.<sup>9</sup>

As the Vietnam War progressed, the African American community became increasingly disturbed over the disproportionate burden that the Vietnam War placed on black men. The deferments offered by American draft laws favored middle-class white males, meaning that black men were drafted at disproportionately high rates. Because African Americans were overrepresented in the infantry, they also suffered disproportionately high numbers of casualties.<sup>10</sup>

The drafting of large numbers of black men was in fact deliberately intended to alleviate chronic unemployment caused by job discrimination in the civilian world. On September 30, 1963, President Kennedy established a Task Force on Manpower Conservation consisting of the directors of the Selective Service System, the Secretaries of Defense, Housing, Education and Welfare, and Labor. Kennedy’s directive stated that

in view of the ever rising education and training standards required for employment, and the ever rising rate of youth unemployment...to consider what

greater use might be made of the opportunity and information the Selective Service System provides.

The task force report, *One-Third of a Nation*, was submitted to President Johnson on January 1, 1964. Johnson accepted the principal recommendation that as soon as possible all youths turning 18, who were out of school and otherwise available for service, should be examined for their readiness for military service. Those who would be rejected would be referred to manpower conservation units in the U.S. Employment Service, “to draw on the full spectrum of available services...such as manpower development and training, vocational education, and vocational rehabilitation.”<sup>11</sup> In addition, the task force report was important in shaping Johnson’s poverty program and was incorporated into the Youth Employment Act, which emerged as the Title I programs of Job Corps and Neighborhood Youth Corps.<sup>11</sup>

Traditionally, the armed forces have been an immensely potent instrument for education and occupational mobility. In an article entitled “Who Gets in the Army?” published in the November 5, 1966, issue of *The New Republic*, Daniel P. Moynihan explained the rationale for Project One Hundred Thousand — a program intended to increase the number of black men eligible for the armed services — by noting that 67.5 percent of Negroes failed the Selective Service Mental Group IV tests. Moynihan noted this failure rate had systematically excluded the least educated, least mobile young men. In order to provide education and employment opportunities to previously disqualified applicants, the task force also requested that the armed forces lower its entrance requirements.<sup>12</sup>

In October 1966, the Department of Defense initiated Project One Hundred Thousand, a program designed to accept men who were being disqualified for military service under previous mental and physical standards. According to the Department of Defense, there were three principal reasons for initiating Project One Hundred Thousand:

1. To broaden the opportunities for enlistment and equalize the obligations for military service.
2. To use the training establishment of the Armed Forces to help these men become productive citizens when they return to civilian life.
3. To prepare for future military planning.

The third reason is important because a priority of the military service was to maintain the capability to quickly and effectively train all of the new men required to meet force structure requirements. The men being accepted under Project One Hundred Thousand might be called upon during critical periods requiring additional manpower. In other words, Project One Hundred Thousand was particularly focused on bringing black men who had little chance of employment in civilian society into the U.S. military.<sup>13</sup>

An October 16, 1966, article in the *New York Times* explained that the mental ability of anyone entering military service was measured by the Armed Forces Qualification Test, a written examination that attempted to determine both the aptitude and educational level of the soldier. Those who scored between 10 and 30 were placed in Mental Group IV — the lowest category. A score of 10 was considered the equivalent of a fifth-grade education. The Army lowered its intelligence standards for recruitment and set a 25 percent quota for the number of Mental Group IV men that each service could accept.

To compensate for the low intelligence requirements of those recruited through the program, Project One Hundred Thousand offered the military the opportunity to improve the selection, training, assignment, and utilization techniques for men who scored low on entrance tests.<sup>14</sup> This part of the plan, however, did not materialize. The *New York Times* article went on to report that despite an August speech in which Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara

promised such training, the armed services received no supplemental funds to create the necessary training programs or to enlarge their training cadres.

Although on paper its goals appeared to be noble, that Pentagon officials acknowledged in the *New York Times* article that the primary motive of Project One Hundred Thousand was aimed at increasing the number of soldiers eligible for enlistment. As a result, the lowering of mental standards increased the growth of the number of blacks in combat units in Vietnam. Of all Army enlisted men killed in Vietnam during 1965, 23.5 percent were black. At that time, the percentage of blacks in the population of the United States as a whole was 11 percent.

#### Black Attitudes about the War

Despite their disproportionate combat deaths, in the mid-1960s most young black men and their families still held a positive view of the military because it offered steady employment when few jobs were available. During this same time period, like the black community as a whole, individual black soldiers generally were positive about their military experience. Those soldiers in noncombat specialties believed that they could acquire valuable skills that would increase their opportunities in the civilian job market. Uncertain about finding work in the private sector, the steady pay and opportunities for advancement enticed significant numbers of black soldiers to reenlist after their first tour of duty at a rate twice that of whites for much of the war.<sup>14</sup>

A personal interview I had with Larry Gates, a black Vietnam veteran, provided me with a personal narrative of serving in Vietnam. Larry Gates is currently the Director of Dining Services at Eastern Michigan University. Born in segregated Mississippi before the Civil Rights

era, Gates received his draft notice from the Army in 1966. Growing up in Mississippi, Gates said that he was conditioned to follow orders. He did not even consider applying for Conscientious Objector status because going to Vietnam was preferable to remaining in Mississippi.

Trained as a maintenance clerk, Gates arrived in Cam Ram Bay, Vietnam, where he waited for his assignment. Gates recalled how he sat in a room with between fifteen and twenty other soldiers. Occasionally a man would come into the room, point at some soldiers and say: “You, you, and you, follow me.” The process was repeated until Gates was the only one left. The man initially told Gates that someone would come for him, but changed his mind and told Gates to follow him. Gates was assigned to the 63<sup>rd</sup> Transportation Unit to be a truck driver. The men chosen before him were assigned to combat units.

Gates said that he was an ammunition driver, primarily carrying field artillery rounds, and held the rank of Corporal (E4). He said that his convoy was hit a few times and exchanged fire, but for the most part, he experienced very little combat activity. In another example of chance and circumstance, he describes being in a convoy carrying artillery rounds when they were attacked and the truck in front of him exploded, but he was unhurt. Shortly afterwards Gates became a supply clerk.

Although they were on duty twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, Gates described his unit as one where the sergeants made life as easy as possible. There were none of the racial conflicts that became prevalent later in the war. As Gates said, “War makes you equal.”<sup>15</sup>

African American reenlistment rates should not be interpreted so much as a vindication for military service as an indictment on American society for making the military the only viable choice for black men. The antiwar rhetoric by black activists not only discouraged participation in the Vietnam War, but by castigating it as “the white man’s war,” questioned the morality of the

nation's cause. Black activists, speaking to the anxieties in the black community over the disproportionate number of deaths of black soldiers, circulated rumors that the government was simultaneously waging a genocidal war against the black man.<sup>16</sup>

### Vietnam as a Mirror of Social Unrest

Third World consciousness evolved alongside Black Nationalism as African Americans observed the striking similarities between the subjugation of the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America and their own oppression at home. This feeling of solidarity led many African Americans to recognize the peoples of the developing world as their brothers in the fight against white supremacy.<sup>17</sup>

By 1968, all of the elements needed to trigger racial violence in the armed forces were present. A distinct and, in some instances, complete racial polarization existed at most military installations. As a response to their alienation at being made to feel like outsiders in a white-dominated institution, blacks developed a subculture based on racial pride and solidarity. Many whites were also willing to engage in racial warfare. Southerners in particular were likely to provoke fights with blacks, especially if they believed blacks were getting too “uppity” or infringing on traditionally white prerogatives.<sup>18</sup>

Black unrest in Vietnam exploded in August 1968 with two of the largest prison rebellions of the Vietnam War. Beginning on August 16, soldiers in the Da Nang Marine brig rioted over a period of several days in a dispute over prison regulations. This resulted in eight injuries and the burning of an entire cell block before 120 riot-equipped Military Police (MP) were able to restore order. Due to the oppressive conditions, two weeks later, perhaps the

bloodiest and most savage military rebellion occurred at the Army's Long Binh Jail (LBJ). LBJ was overcrowded, with 719 men in a space designed for 502. It had no interior plumbing and was staffed by inexperienced and overworked guards. Hundreds of prisoners fought with MPs for several hours, resulting in sixty-three injuries and one death. Many buildings were destroyed by fire. In addition, nearly two hundred blacks staged a no-work strike and another group barricaded themselves within the stockade and for more than a month and refused to surrender.<sup>19</sup>

There were incidents when African Americans did engage in or benefit from forms of reverse discrimination. For example, whites complained of "preferential treatment" when a 1969 Marine Corps directive required at least one black or Puerto Rican to sit on a court-martial panel if a minority was involved. However, the Department of Defense's Task Force on the Administration of Military Justice determined that the majority of reverse discrimination cases were unfounded and were caused by the failure of whites to understand the problems blacks faced in the military. In addition, despite the obvious discrimination in denying blacks and other minorities the opportunity to serve in the Army Reserves and National Guard, in 1971 Representative Dan Daniel (D-Virginia) and several members of his Subcommittee on Recruiting and Retention of the House Armed Services Committee opposed a Department of Defense policy that would give preference to minorities, claiming that it was a form of reverse discrimination.<sup>20</sup>

The callousness of many whites over the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, 1968, was the cause of increased racial antagonism. After hearing the news, many whites openly celebrated King's murder and a Confederate flag was flown above the Naval Headquarters Building at Cam Ranh Bay. Although some whites were sympathetic, most were apathetic. However, for blacks, the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., changed everything. Most blacks felt bitter, disillusioned, and angry. While there was some interracial fighting, most

blacks were simply in shock. Serious violence over King's death was averted because black NCOs convinced officers to "back off" for a few days in order to give men time to work through their anger and frustration.<sup>21</sup>

A major cause of racial unrest was the military itself. The primary method of meeting these manpower requirements was the draft; many of the enlisted men were unwilling inductees. The military's policy regarding Vietnam service also contributed to the problem. Based on the experience of both world wars and the Korean conflict, the military decided very early in the Vietnam War to limit enlisted men's service to one-year tours of duty. After their initial deployment, entire units were seldom rotated in or out of the country. Instead, new soldiers were continuously sent in to replace those killed, wounded, or whose year was up. This policy further disrupted unit stability and cohesion, making it very difficult for men to bond and trust one another.<sup>22</sup>

The rapid turnover of officers exacerbated the personnel situation. The military wanted officers with a variety of experience in both command and administrative positions. In order to expose as many officers as possible to command situations, an officer's combat command was usually limited to tours ranging from six to eight months. This made it difficult for commanders to effectively deal with growing racial unrest, because by the time they fully understood the situation and the concerns of the men involved, the officers were gone. In addition, often the officers were not much older and wiser than the troops they commanded. All of these factors contributed to a military population composed of transient men, or those on temporary assignment with little familiarity or trust, not only between blacks and whites, but also officers and enlisted.<sup>23</sup>

The roots of military racism lie not only in the prejudices of the larger, civilian society, but in discernible conditions within the armed forces--what Cortright refers to as "institutional

biases.” Cortright describes a Department of Defense Task Force that identified two types of racial discrimination: “intentional” and “systemic.” Systemic discrimination was defined as “policies or practices which appear to be neutral in their effect on minority individuals or groups but have the effect of disproportionately impacting upon them in harmful or negative ways.” Much of what could be considered intentional discrimination, or deliberate bias, also can be traced to the structure of the military. Cortright notes that individual officers have an extraordinary discretionary authority. By allowing commanders virtually arbitrary power over judicial and disciplinary proceedings, the military invites widespread abuse and, in effect, sanctions discriminatory practices.<sup>24</sup>

An important yet seldom acknowledged factor underlying racism in the ranks, and which lies at the heart of the military establishment, is the predominance of white Southerners in the service. Throughout the twentieth century, the proportion of general officers born and raised in the South has averaged near forty-five percent. In addition to their ascendancy within the top circles of the Pentagon, white Southerners had enjoyed a virtual fiefdom over the Congressional military establishment. Consider that most major military installations are located in the South, and then the picture of significant Southern domination of the military establishment becomes clear.<sup>25</sup>

Although the Civil Rights Movement was contemporary to the Vietnam War, the suggestion is not that racial prejudice was restricted to the South. But Cortright explains that the disproportionate influence of the traditional South within the armed forces cannot be dismissed as an important factor in military racism. As a result of cumulative injustices, black servicemen often left the military in worse condition than when they first entered. Cortright concludes that far from being a model of successful integration, the armed forces were thoroughly racist in nature and in fact, often sharpened racial divisions.<sup>26</sup>

## The Unrest Becomes Violent

The Vietnam War was plagued by incidents with racial overtones. In addition to the rebellion at Long Binh Jail in Vietnam and Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, there were four days of rioting in May 1971 at Travis Air Force Base, California. During this incident 110 blacks and 25 whites were arrested and more than 30 Air Force personnel were treated for riot-related injuries. There were also serious racial clashes at Kaneohe Naval Air Station, Honolulu, Hawaii, in August 1969. In the fall of 1972, racial incidents also occurred aboard the naval aircraft carriers *Kitty Hawk* and *Constellation*, the assault ship *Sumpter*, and the oiler *Hassayampa*.<sup>27</sup>

The Navy had the smallest percentage of blacks of any branch of the military. Blacks comprised 6.9 percent of the enlisted men, four percent of NCOs, and 0.9 percent of officers. Two of the navy's most serious racial incidents during the Vietnam War took place in the same week in October 1972. On the aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk*, fights between black and white sailors lasted for fifteen hours and resulted in the hospitalization of forty whites and six blacks. Four days later, racial turmoil on the aircraft carrier *Constellation* forced the cancellation of a training exercise and forced the ship to return to port. Upon arrival, 122 black sailors and eight whites in a show of unity staged a dockside strike. With clenched fist salutes, the men refused to re-board the carrier.<sup>28</sup>

Within a month, fights between black and white sailors were reported aboard the assault ships *Sumpter* and the *Hassayampa* in the Philippines. Major racial incidents took place on Midway Island and in Norfolk, Virginia. In all, 196 men, almost all black, were arrested. Of those, 147 received non-judicial punishment and the charges against fifteen others were dropped, or the defendants were acquitted. These clashes were the result of blacks' unwillingness to accept racist insults, and their protests against the discrimination in assignments and promotions in the Navy.<sup>29</sup>

While some of the military's racial tension was inherited from civilian society, the military itself was to blame for much of its problems. The authoritarian nature of the military placed a white and heavily southern command structure over a young and substantially black enlisted population. This situation served only to aggravate racial hostilities and hinder official efforts to overcome discrimination at a time when Black Nationalists Movements were gaining popularity among blacks. Blacks found a sense of community not in the service, but among themselves. The intense racial consciousness of young blacks was hard for white officers and NCOs to understand. Consequently, or as a justification, black consciousness fed white racism, creating an atmosphere of mutual fear and distrust. Racial conflict was particularly severe in Vietnam, and by 1970 black unrest had begun to hinder military operations.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike their fathers, who tended to suppress their hostility towards a white-dominated military establishment, black soldiers of the 1960s were openly resentful, aggressive, and conscious of their alienation.<sup>31</sup>

The resentment black soldiers had felt towards their white commanders often provoked harsh and shortsighted responses, which aggravated racial conflict. For example, many commanders tried to enforce discipline by banning symbolic acts of racial identity such as "dapping." Dapping was a complex handshake between blacks that ended in a clenched fist salute. Another source of tension was the military justice system, which many blacks saw as the embodiment of white racist justice. Other common resentments from black soldiers included offensive language, prejudice in assignments, harassment by military police, and the inability to buy black-oriented products in military PXs. For those stationed in Germany, housing discrimination and a hostile social climate also fueled black resentment.<sup>32</sup>

James Westheider's dissertation acknowledges that some of the discrimination in Germany was due to local prejudice and superstition. For example, some landlords in Germany

refused accommodations to African Americans because they were afraid the “color would rub off” on their bed linens. However, in virtually in all cases, discrimination was practiced to satisfy the white military clientele. In Germany, South Korea and Vietnam, white soldiers often enforced a “whites only” policy in many drinking establishments.<sup>33</sup>

For all the hostility and racism black military personnel experienced off-base, on base they were confronted with official ambivalence to their needs and desires. This lack of cultural recognition stemmed partly from the military’s own equal opportunity policies and the increasingly prevalent viewpoint of the command structure that a soldier was a soldier, regardless of race. However, this attempt to view all personnel as the same meant that black cultural needs were usually ignored in favor of white cultural needs. Even though the military prided itself on being officially color-blind, white cultural values were considered the norm. Despite the fact that the services were officially integrated, the military was essentially a white controlled and dominated institution which invariably reflected white society and culture.<sup>34</sup>

The Vietnam War had, and is still having, a profound effect on African Americans. They were among the war’s greatest heroes and victims. Young black men in disproportionate numbers fought and died, or returned to the United States with the physical and emotional scars of combat. Even today, black veterans continue to live in the shadow of the war. Vietnam alienated and further radicalized large numbers of blacks in the 1960s and continues to color African American politics and thought. The Vietnam War contributed to the dissipation of the Civil Rights Movement and the unraveling of liberalism in the 1960s.<sup>35</sup>

The Vietnam War squandered an opportunity to reform America, to create a Great Society; it sparked a resurgence of conservatism that undercut black efforts to achieve equality. Indeed, contrary to the expectations of Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Project 100,000, Vietnam did not make a bad situation better. For many African Americans, life only worsened. Despite

the fact that blacks played a central role in the fight in Southeast Asia and in the protest at home, they have received little attention in either historical or commercial works on the Vietnam War.<sup>36</sup>

The typical antiwar activist is still seen as a young white college student and the characteristic soldier and veteran, a Southern white or a man of the working class. We need to recognize the role that blacks played in the war and the long-term impact that it has had on their communities, politics, and thought. Failure to do so is not only ethically wrong but will condemn us to misunderstand the nature of the problems that confront the black community today.<sup>37</sup>

### III. The Military's Response

#### Questioning the Draft

Marine Corps Colonel Robert D. Heinl, Jr., shocked the military establishment and the Nixon administration with an article published in the June 7, 1971, edition of the *Armed Forces Journal*. In an article titled "The Collapse of the Armed Forces," Heinl wrote the following:

By every conceivable indicator, our army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding, or having refused combat, murdering their officers and noncommissioned officers, drug-ridden, and dispirited where not near mutinous. Elsewhere than Vietnam, the situation is nearly as serious. Intolerably clobbered and buffeted from without and within by social turbulence, pandemic drug addiction, race war, sedition, civilian scapegoats, draftee recalcitrance and malevolence, barracks theft and common crime, unsupported in their travail by the general government, in Congress as well as the executive branch, distrusted, disliked, and often reviled by the public, the uniform services today are places of agony for the loyal, silent professions who doggedly hang on and try to keep the ship afloat.<sup>1</sup>

Heinl's article was shocking not only for its frankness but that it came from a senior career officer and, in a sense, confirmed what the soldiers had been saying for years. In the article, Heinl lists numerous causes for the armed forces dilemma, but does not discount the role of the draft in the military's problem.<sup>2</sup>

The draft was never popular in America, but Vietnam sparked the largest eruption of public outrage since the Civil War, nearly crippling the Selective Service System and creating widespread social upheaval.<sup>3</sup> As direct American involvement in Vietnam increased after 1965, opponents of the war and draft quickly noted that the casualty rate among draftees rose more rapidly than among volunteers. Volunteers frequently could choose their assignments, and many opted for technical specialties that involved long-term training and career commitments. Draftees were more likely to be shunted to combat assignments. In 1965, approximately twenty-

eight percent of Army combat deaths in Vietnam were draftees. In 1966, that figure rose to thirty-four percent and was fifty-seven percent by 1967.<sup>4</sup>

The induction authority of the Selective Service Act was due to expire in June 1967, and President Johnson supported moderate draft reforms. He based his judgments on the report of the National Advisory Commission on Selective Service, also known as the Marshall Commission because it was headed by Burke Marshall, a former assistant attorney general for civil rights. Johnson called for an end to most draft deferments, calling up the youngest eligible men first, and considered a national lottery. Unfortunately, both the House and Senate rejected the opportunity to reform or even consider alternatives to the draft. The Senate Armed Services committee put forth a bill that provided for a lottery draft on a trial basis but retained most deferments. The House Armed Services Committee opposed even a trial lottery and refused to consider authorizing funds to study an all-volunteer system, thus preserving the status quo.<sup>5</sup>

In January 1969, shortly after taking office, President Nixon commissioned another study of alternatives to the draft, the fifth such effort since 1964. Thomas S. Gates chaired the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force, which was directed to develop a comprehensive plan for eliminating conscription. In addition, using the recommendations of the Marshall Commission, Nixon took steps to reform the draft by asking Congress to place the draft on a random lottery basis and induct soldiers by age, drafting the youngest first. In February 1970 the Gates Commission reported favorably on the feasibility of an all-volunteer force, and the Department of Defense began exploring ways to reduce its reliance on draftees.<sup>6</sup>

## Fear of Dissent

The military in general, and the Army in particular, were well aware of the dissent within its ranks. In an attempt to categorize the types and determine the causes of the dissent, the Army commissioned several studies. The first report was released in March 1971; the Army provided an interchangeable definition of *dissent*:

Deliberate, willful activities by members of the Army representing disagreement with Army missions/practices/government policy that could to some degree, however slight, adversely affect the ability of the Army to accomplish its mission.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to defining *dissent*, the Army identified nineteen separate categories of dissenting activities, which are listed below:

- Participation in a strike on post;
- Possession dissident literature;
- Being a member of the American Servicemen's Union (ASU);
- Preparing material for publication;
- Being a member protest group;
- Signing a petition;
- Demonstrating against government policies;
- Seeking sanctuary;
- Organizing dissident activities;
- Demonstrating against Vietnam War;
- Desertion;
- Demonstrating against Army conditions;
- Distributing dissident literature;
- Demonstrating in uniform;
- Refusing orders;
- Being a member of a Communist-affiliated organization;
- Applying for Conscientious Objector status;
- Frequenting coffeehouses;
- Qualifying the loyalty oath.<sup>8</sup>

Having defined and categorized dissident behavior, a second report entitled Determination of the Potential for Dissidence in the U.S. Army Vol. II was released in May 1971.

The report focused on indicators that might have been useful in helping commanders become aware of potential dissident behavior and suggested feasible changes in military procedures and practices that could reduce dissidence.<sup>9</sup>

The report identified five major areas of possible procedures and practices that could reduce the potential for dissidence as:

1. Physical comfort and convenience, which includes living conditions, housing, privacy, clothing, equipment and food.
2. Economic factors relates to pay and allowances, bonuses, retirement benefits, health care, education and related benefits.
3. Work factors include factors such as job classification, satisfaction, assignment, recognition, responsibility, promotional opportunities.
4. Military life include a number of items such as leave and pass privileges, ordered living and regimentation, customs and traditions, social pressures, travel and military justice.
5. Human values concern those aspects which relate to the individuals value system and state of mental health. Listed include personal identity, personal growth and maturity, confidence in superiors, identification with the mission of the Army and national goals.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, volume two reduced and clarified the potential indicators of dissent from nineteen to thirteen:

1. Holding membership in a primarily service-oriented dissent organization, such as the ASU.
2. Disseminating dissident material, which includes writing dissenting letters to prominent persons in public life or to the news media.
3. Being derelict in the performance of duties, the essence being designed to avoid performance of any duty, work, or service which may properly or normally be expected of one in the military.
4. Signing dissident petitions in which the theme is anti-war, anti-draft, anti-military, or anti-government.
5. Repeatedly being Absent With Out Leave (AWOL).

6. Frequenting participating in dissident activities such as demonstrations, marches, rallies or meetings (including coffeehouses) where the issue concerns government policies or actions or Army life.
7. Behaving with disrespect or contempt to a superior officer.
8. Deserting, which includes soliciting or advising another to desert and seeking sanctuary as in a church.
9. Organizing dissent activities, such as inducing others to participate in demonstrations, publish dissident underground newspapers, operate or assist in the operation of a coffeehouse, and recruit members for dissident or subversive organization.
10. Willfully disobeying orders, such as refuse to train, participate in a sit-down strike, or refuse to wear the uniform.
11. Holding membership in a radical political organization such as the Communist Party USA, Weathermen, and the Black Panther Party.
12. Applying for Conscientious Objector status to avoid military service.
13. Displaying questionable loyalty, such as showing disrespect for the flag, qualify loyalty oath, or make disloyal statements.<sup>11</sup>

In January 1972, the Army released a report in which racial discrimination was considered as a possible cause of dissident acts as well as a manifestation of dissidence in itself. Despite the official policy, the report found that racial discrimination was widely encountered in the Army. For those who personally encountered discrimination, the report listed those in the lower ranks of E1 through E4; for blacks, the percentage was thirty-five versus nineteen percent for whites. In the NCO ranks of E5 through E9, forty-five percent of blacks personally encountered discrimination versus twenty-two percent of whites. For company grade officers with the rank of lieutenant and captain, sixty-two percent of blacks reported that they experienced discrimination, versus twenty-two percent of whites. For field grade officers with the rank of major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel, the percentage of blacks who personally experienced discrimination was eighty-three versus twenty percent for whites.<sup>12</sup>

The report also noted that a substantial number of white soldiers, from a high of eighty-three percent of E1 to E4s, to fifty-five percent of field grade officers, reported occurrences of discriminatory practices. This discrimination was said to take one of the following forms:

1. Black NCOs were giving the worst duties to whites and/or easiest duties to blacks.
2. White NCOs, afraid of any appearance of prejudice, giving favored treatment to blacks.
3. Black E1-E4s banding together in the barracks and at recreational facilities to harass and exclude whites.<sup>13</sup>

### Healing Race Relations

Long in denial that a problem existed within the ranks, as the 1960s drew to a close James Westheider wrote in Fighting on two fronts: African Americans and the Vietnam War that the military reluctantly was forced to concede that it had not fully eliminated institutional racism from the armed forces, and that racial violence was now a crisis of the highest priority. Determined to keep pace with advances in civil rights in the civilian sector and anxious to restore their once favorable image in this area, military officials launched four separate but interrelated reforms.<sup>14</sup>

First, the military wanted to better enforce existing directives on discrimination and equal opportunity. Second, the military sought to eradicate all vestiges of institutional racism, particularly in the areas of testing, promotions, and the administering of military justice. Third, the military wanted to suppress and eliminate the racial violence that seemed endemic in the armed forces. Although the military saw the need for constructive reform, it was also convinced

that many of its racial problems were caused by a small number of radicals and dissidents. Hence, the fourth goal of the military was to identify and eliminate African Americans who commanders considered to be militants and troublemakers.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, according to Westheider, two of the most important innovations developed by the military in the late 1960s and early 1970s were the creation of race relations classes and the training and placement of equal opportunity officers. By 1972, all four branches of the armed services and the Department of Defense would establish race relations institutes or councils.<sup>16</sup>

While stationed in Hanau, West Germany, I was myself ordered to attend a three-day session led by a certified race relations facilitator. I remember that one of the ground rules was that everyone was to respect each other and that no rank was allowed. I also remember that the facilitator, who was a Sergeant First Class, had the authority to report and expel violators of the rules. As expected, some of the sessions became pretty heated, but unexpectedly, those arguments were not about race, but rather about military rank — as in officers versus enlisted men. Black and white soldiers actually had similar feelings about the service. What I remember most, besides the pleasure of being excused from duty for three days, were my individual conversations with “Captain Crunch” (not his real name), the Commander of Charlie Battery. He was perceived as a regular guy and, unlike most career soldiers in the battalion, had a reputation for being a fair and capable man and I enjoyed our conversations.

In addition to the race relation classes, the military tried other methods of reform. In January 1971 the Army began Project VOLAR at four Army installations in the U.S. and selected posts in Germany. The purpose of VOLAR was to test methods of increasing enlistments and reenlistments in the combat arms, those branches of the Army that research showed were critical to the eventual success or failure of the volunteer effort. Part of VOLAR was to eliminate the irritants of military life that were noted in a previous Army report.<sup>17</sup>

VOLAR also allowed for a more liberal haircut and greater personal privacy. For example, at Fort Benning, Georgia, barracks were rehabilitated and the Army purchased furniture, decorations, and other items of a personal nature so that soldiers could individualize their new 12 by 16 foot rooms. A “fast food” line was added to the meal options and beer could be purchased with the meal or consumed in the barracks. Training and other work was based on a five-day, forty-hour week although one brigade commander noted that soldiers willingly worked longer hours during the week, knowing that their weekend was guaranteed to be free. Officers at Fort Benning favored most of the changes and, contrary to expectations, reported that discipline and job performance improved.<sup>18</sup>

The VOLAR soldiers surveyed between January and June 1971, over eighty-one percent of those who responded “Yes” when questioned on their reenlistment intentions, did in fact reenlist by the end of February 1972, and thirty-seven percent of those who replied “Not Sure” actually reenlisted. Also revealed in the survey was that the longer a soldier remained in the Army the more likely he was to reenlist; married soldiers with families reenlisted more than single soldiers; blacks reenlisted at slightly higher rates than whites; the higher a soldier’s rank at the time of eligibility for first reenlistment, the more likely he was to reenlist. In addition, soldiers who completed high school were more likely to reenlist than high school dropouts or college graduates. Not surprisingly, draftees and draft-motivated volunteers normally did not reenlist.<sup>19</sup>

Another product of VOLAR was the creation of an ombudsman. For example, in the U.S. Army’s 4<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Division at Fort Carson, Colorado, Sp/4 David Gyongyos in his second year in the Army enjoyed an office across the hall from the division commander. In addition, Gyongyos had a full-time secretary, a staff car and a full-time driver, and the home phone numbers of the general and chief of staff, which he didn’t hesitate to use. Gyongyos was chairman of the division’s Enlisted Men’s Council, a system of elected privates and Sp/4s (NCOs

are not allowed), which had a representative at every unit down to the company level. Gyongyos represented 17,000 men at Fort Carson. During this period, most major units of the Army, Navy, and Air Force had some form of enlisted men's councils, as well as junior officer councils. In fact, even trainee companies at Fort Ord, California, had councils comprised of recruits who could bypass their Drill Instructor and speak directly to their commanders. Only the Marines failed to create an enlisted men's or junior officers' council.<sup>20</sup>

By contrast, during Vietnam, the armed forces had difficulty in applying "positive leadership." The corps of lieutenants, captains, and low-ranking sergeants who were responsible for the daily activities of the troops was severely strained. Consequently, the responsibility for the intense morale and disciplinary crisis in the ranks fell on young and inexperienced captains and lieutenants. For example, captains and lieutenants were trained and given commands within eighteen to twenty-four months of entering service. Many were not college graduates, and few, if any, had ever been in leadership positions. As a result, twenty- or twenty-one-year-olds were put in charge of forty-man platoons or one-hundred-fifty-man companies.<sup>21</sup>

The sergeants who assisted them were often just as inexperienced. Enlisted men who showed leadership potential were quickly sent to NCO school, made buck sergeant (E5), and promptly put in charge of eight- to ten-man squads. Barely out of high school, the sergeants frequently lacked the military savvy and the experience that were so vitally important. The Army's rotation policy made matters worse. Commissioned officers, NCOs, and enlisted men did not stay together long enough to establish a relationship of trust so necessary for effective leadership. Officers and NCOs were frequently shifted from one unit to another every few months. Career officers saw Vietnam as a way of "getting their ticket punched," or acquiring the combat credentials necessary for future advancement. While some officers volunteered to stay in combat zones, most were no less eager to go home than the men they commanded.<sup>22</sup>

Concerned with its experience in Vietnam, the Army attempted to correct this leadership problem in a program known as the Army of Excellence. In the late 1970s, the Army developed a robust leadership and training program. Its purpose was to provide leaders a progressive and sequential educational system in three phases. The first phase was tactical, followed by an operational phase, and, ultimately, the strategic level of responsibility, with the focus being on “how” to think as opposed to “what” to think.<sup>23</sup>

#### IV. Epilogue: Lessons Learned

Officially, it was the 1971 Nixon Doctrine that provided the political and military cover for the removal of U.S. ground forces from Vietnam. In an article published in the *Journal of Military History* titled “An Inward Looking Time: The United States Army, 1973-1976,” Richard Lock-Pullan writes that the Nixon Doctrine, also known as “Vietnamization,” was an admission that U.S. strategy had to change. As Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird made clear before the Senate Armed Services committee:

“Vietnamization is both a means to an end and a beginning: a means to end the American involvement in Vietnam and a means to make a credible beginning on our new policy for peace and increased self-reliance in Asia. Moreover, success of the Nixon Doctrine can help remove the need for similar American ground combat involvement in future Asian wars, an important objective of our new strategy.”<sup>1</sup>

Vietnamization, when added to the end of the draft in June 1973, essentially ended the conflict for most Americans. President Nixon brought the troops home not only to satisfy domestic opinion, but to save the armed forces from internal ruin.<sup>2</sup>

What is rarely if ever mentioned was the key role that the lower ranking enlisted personnel played in ending the Vietnam War. This is understandable, for as Frederick the Great said, “If my soldiers were to begin to think, not one would remain in the ranks.” The soldiers’ and veterans’ protests had a direct effect upon the power of the U.S. military and ruling elite. The political and military dimensions of this resistance were remarkable and historically unprecedented. A significant minority of soldiers, occasionally led by anti-war officers, took the execution of the war into their own hands by declaring a grunts’ ceasefire. Passive resistance, shamming, search-and-avoid missions, combat refusals, and fraggings were powerful forms of grassroots democratic diplomacy. In June 1971, a GI newspaper called *People’s Press* ran an article

claiming that NLF and NVA units were ordered not to open fire on U.S. troops displaying red bandannas or peace signs unless fired on first.<sup>3</sup>

In Vietnam, an American army that was supported by the most lavish firepower in military history, that never lost a battle, nonetheless lost the war. Vietnam confirmed that military and technological power alone can never assure victory if the cause is unjust and lacks popular support. The American war effort in Vietnam was doomed from the beginning because it faced the impossible task of attempting to reverse a deeply entrenched, popularly supported national revolution. The war never had the understanding and necessary political support of the American people. Ultimately, it lost the support and cooperation of its own troops. America had to withdraw its military from Vietnam in order to save it. It was the resistance and dissent of ordinary GIs that made the Vietnam War unwinnable and changed the course of history.<sup>4</sup>

## Notes to Introduction

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