

I'm Not Going Back

Liberation News Service

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NOTE: Several troopers recently were court martialed at Quan Loi, South Viet Nam, headquarters of the 1st Air Cavalry Division's 3rd Brigade, for refusing to fight. During the last four and a half months of 1969, a total of 109 men in the 1st Cav faced trial for the same offense.

Division spokesmen point out that men who decide to drop out are a small minority. But some observers feel the number is growing throughout Vietnam as anti-war feeling mounts back home and the U.S. government makes clear its intention to pull out the majority of fighting troops.

Why, ask some, should we be among the last killed in a war that has clearly been lost. More and more black soldiers say they now believe it isn't their war, that their struggle is back home fighting for the rights of people.

Overseas Weekly (OW), a paper for GIs, went to Quan Loi and Firebase Ellen to talk with men who say they don't want to fight any more. It should be emphasized that the 1st Air Cav Div is not being singled out as a division where the problem is more severe than in other units.

"I'm Not Going Back"

QUAN LOI, South Vietnam (LNS) — "I've had it. I'm not going back. They'll have to send me to jail because I'm not going back to the field."

Pvt. Ephram Nailor, a black draftee with Alfa Company, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, meant what he said. And today he's serving a three-month sentence in Long Binh Jail (LBJ) because he wouldn't go back to the bush as an infantryman.

With him behind bars is Pvt. Leo Booker, Jr., 22, from the same outfit, who's serving a two-month term for the same reason.

Both men hold Purple Hearts for wounds they suffered in combat last September. They went back to Alfa Company when they got out of the hospital, but after several weeks of humping decided they'd had enough.

"I was left by myself in the middle of Indian country once and when I finally got back, after a slight contact with the enemy, the CO laughed," said Booker. "I had a hernia and I knew, when he laughed, that the Army didn't really care a damn about me, whether I lived or died."

Booker and Nailor chose barbed-wire city rather than rejoin their unit in the field.

They and several other GIs at Firecamp Ellen say they and other men aren't going to go back.

"A lot of us are tired of dying for nothing," said one soldier.

"I had to sleep next to two dead bodies one night," recalled another A Co. grunt, "and I don't ever want to do that again. No one has the right to do that to my mind."

Disgruntled black troopers charge that their color gets them a raw deal. "My officers refer to the NVA and the VC as gooks and dinks. What do you think they call me?" asked one black trooper.

Fed-up troopers aren't all black. "White guys don't want to go back either but they have different ways of getting out of it," said one brother.

"Most Negroes who are fed up," he continued, "would rather go to jail than back out to the brush. Most white guys who really want to get out, re-up (re-enlist)." Several white troopers who heard the comment nodded in agreement.

A re-enlistment NCO with the 1st of the 8th estimated about 20 percent of the men who sign up with him to do it get rear area jobs. He admitted he got a lot of business "after recent heavy contact."

"Losing 12 close friends, all draftees, in combat was more than enough to show me I wasn't suited for war," said a white trooper, Pfc. Charles E. Brown, 19, from Carmel, California.

OW returned to Firebase Ellen a few days after Alfa Company went back to humping the brush. Most troopers went along despite the talk of refusing.

A soldier from Delta Company, which moved into Firebase Ellen about the same time, said he'd heard rumors that some Alfa Company men planned a revolt.

"I don't know why they went back," said the soldier, Pfc. George Swan, 22, who added, "I'm not going to." Swan, a Negro, has been in the field six months and was wounded in his left side by an AK round.

Swan charges that his white officers don't put his welfare first. "I had ingrown toenails so bad I could hardly walk, but do you think they'd let me come back to the LZ to have a medic cut them? Hell no," he said, "I ended up having the field medic try to cut it with a razor blade.

"If I don't get a rear job this time," added Swan, "they'll have to put me in jail."

When OW asked to talk with other men of Delta Company, two captains and battalion Sgt Maj Henry Ricci' were sent to accompany the reporter and take names of men with whom he talked.

Pfc. Jonny Daughtry, a black draftee, said he had been a point-man for seven months. "Despite my requests for a change, I'm still walking points," he said. Daughtry, who spent 31 days in the hospital recovering-from a mortar wound, said that he would give it one more month.

"If they don't give me a rear job by then," he said, looking at the reporter's escorts, "I will have no choice but to refuse to go back. If they send us to jail there won't be anyone left to fight their war for them."

Duty in the rear, according to most grunts, is precious. "But it is more than just a rear job," said Ephram Nailor. "Many of us, especially but not only the soul brothers, are morally unable to fight this war. It's not our war. We get discriminated against both in the states and over here."

"Even in the field," he continued, "but it is more subtle there. Negroes don't get rank or rear jobs too quickly."

Another man, Pfc. Garnett Johnson, who decided to stop fighting, explained his refusal this way:

"In the field, we fought hard. I've seen a lot of good people, both black and white, go. We fought and didn't question." "Well now," he concluded, "we are tired of dying for nothing. We are beginning to question."

Sidebar

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