

Armed Farces Day

Liberation News Service

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MONTEREY, Calif. (LNS) — In over a dozen actions at military bases across the country on May 16, thousands of anti-war soldiers and civilians marched and rallied against the traditional celebration of Armed Forces Day.

Armed Forces Day ceremonies on May 16 were canceled at Fort Ord, California—and 22 other bases—because the Army couldn't face the prospect of people going on post to discuss the war with GIs. Not even parents could visit the soldiers, most of whom were assigned to their barracks, riot-control training or make-work details.

Huge barricades had been erected near the main gate, and General Philip Davidson, the post commander, had taken personal charge of the enormous guard force.

Trenches were dug along the edge of the post fronting on Route 1, and miles of sharpened concertina wire had been rolled out in case the marchers charged. Men in jeeps with walkie-talkies patrolled the perimeter; helicopters circled overhead; machine-gun positions were manned inside the post, and armed snipers were on the rooftops.

In other words, the Army showed the same cowardice at Fort Ord that it shows in Vietnam—where the policy is to retreat and call for Air strikes rather than engage a numerically weaker force in close combat. As in Vietnam, the brass showed that their only response to the challenge of ideas is equipment. They showed that their intelligence network is worthless: not one of their spies or bugging devices clued them in that the organizers of the march were firmly against any confrontation. (Their intelligence must be even worse in Vietnam, where they have a language problem.)

Finally, they showed that they have lost whatever sense of diplomacy they once had. By sealing off this base and others they gave dramatic proof to the world that this Army is totally isolated from the people in whose name it fights.

The “Armed Farces Day” program at Ord was organized by the local chapter of the Movement For a Democratic Military (MDM) with help from the United Front Coffeehouse staff. Although the closing of the base had effectively canceled a planned mass rap session, some 4,000 people showed up for a march to the main gate.

The slogan on the lead banner said, simply, “Free the Fort Ord 40,000.”

The chant that drew the biggest rise from the GIs pulling guard duty was, “Only lifers like the war.”

Inside the fort, 23,000 men were in a heavy resistance mood. Some disobeyed orders at will; some cursed at officers; others played cat-and-mouse with the NCOs, sneaking off to get a glimpse of the march and raise a fist in support of it.

General Davidson had shipped three busloads of potential troublemakers to Hunter-Liggett, a remote post 80 miles away. He had also issued an order banning the V-sign and the fist. MDM has learned that six GIs were charged with disobeying this order on Armed Forces Day, and they are considering a suit to challenge its legality.

Despite the attempts by the brass to focus resentment against MDM and the marchers, the Fort Ord 40,000 knew exactly who had restricted them. In the end, General Davidson had to bolster morale by promising the troops an extra day off Memorial Day weekend. “He’s the best organizer we have,” an MDM man joked at the end of the day.

The march culminated at a beach-side rally in Marina, a small military town just north of Fort Ord (because the enlightened city of Monterey had withheld permits for a march and rally). A statement prepared by the MDM brothers inside the fort concluded:

“Brothers and sisters, we, like all the movement, are increasing our strength and numbers every day. Soon we will be able to reach new levels of struggle, and we see the need for the support that you have shown us by being here today.

“Today is clearly a victory for us. They have closed the base completely. They have shown the brothers in the military, and you, that they are so unsure of their support that they cannot allow us to come together, even to rap. To keep us from being here with you they have put guards by the locked doors. And still we are with you—ever growing and ever stronger.”

Actions at other bases included:

Ft. Hood, Tex.: 600 GIs marched through the streets of Killeen chanting “U.S. out of Asia” and “Avenge Augusta, Jackson and Kent.”

Ft. Dix, N.J.: 1,500 civilians demonstrated at a rally called by the American Serviceman’s Union. Police used tear gas on the crowd to clear them off the road leading to the base.

Ft. Bragg, N.C.: 3,000 persons rallied off-base and listened to speeches by Jane Fonda and Rennie Davis. Davis was arrested by Fayetteville police for using the word “motherfucker” in his speech.

Ft. Benning, Ga.: 500 people, including 150 GIs held a mock trial of the Army.

Ft. Meade, Md.: 400 civilians, plus 100 GIs marched 2 miles to an off-base rally where they listened to local GIs, Panthers and Abbie Hoffman.

Ft. McClellan, Ala.: 200 civilians and 50 GIs held the first public protest in the base’s history.

Camp Pendleton, Cal.: 5,000 persons including 200 GIs heard Tom Hayden and Panther speakers.

Charleston Naval Base, S.C.: 200 soldiers joined 800 civilians in the first rally ever held there.

Grissom Air Force Base, Ind.: A rally was broken up by local right-wingers.

Ft. Reilly, Kan.: Conspiracy 8 member John Froines spoke to a rally of 1,300 including 400 GIs.

In addition, anti-war actions were held at Ft. Jackson, S.C.; Ft. Lewis, Wash.; Grand Forks, AFB, N.D.; Great Lakes Naval Center, Ill. and elsewhere.

ATTENTION GIs: If any anti-war activity happens on your base or in your unit be sure to let us know.

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