GIs Get Down

Liberation News Service

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Marines Rebel

IWAKUNI, Japan (LNS) — A series of actions has rocked the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station at lwakuni Over the last few months.

On Apr. 5, more than 200 anti-war and radical Japanese citizens demonstrated outside the base. Added to the old demands for an end to the war and removal of the base were some significant new slogans: "Solidarity with the anti-war GI's," "Oppose Riot Training on the base."

These slogans were no empty words. For months now, the base has been in a state of near rebellion. Rising discontent has been met with increased repression. The new mood was shown in the GI-response to the civilian demonstrators. Where, ten years ago they would have given the finger, they were now flashing the V-sign.

The Marine Air Station at Iwakuni is a base of increasing importance in U.S.- Japanese military strategy. It is the headquarters of the First Marine Air Wing, most of which is in Vietnam. As Nixon's "withdrawal" program proceeds, units are being shifted from Vietnam to Iwakuni, and the base is growing.

"Withdrawal," it turns out, is not quite the same as sending the troops home: Iwakuni has been redeveloped into a major strategic center facing China and—most important for the 1970s—Korea.

Between Oct. 22 and Nov. 22, 1969, the air station was kept on a state of perpetual riot alert. Significantly, this was precisely the period when Japan was in a condition of near-rebellion on the occasion of Prime Minister Sato's visit to the United States.

Following this, the Pentagon sent a special inspection team to Iwakuni to look into the condition of disorder. The Squadrons then began to receive intensive riot training, apparently for use against both GI and Japanese rebellions.

On Jan. 5, a black rebellion erupted at Iwakuni. There were several arrests and many injuries. At least one man was hospitalized. Following this outburst—which was the first on the base—the command began to really crack down. Barracks patrols were set up and black Marines walking in groups of threes and fours were ordered to break up.

In an attempt to ease the pressure, the command set up a "Human Relations Committee." On Feb. 5, the new base commander, Brig. Gen. William C. Johnson, arranged a meeting in which he personally heard complaints from GIs. Fifty black and ten white Marines attended; one of them smuggled in a tape recorder with which he taped the entire proceedings.

When the command learned that the meeting had been taped, a search was initiated, and suspects were questioned and harassed. The tape was never found, for it had been turned over to Beheiren, the largest Japanese organization, which made its contents public at a press conference.

The transcript of the tape is a truly fascinating record of our times. The general worked hard to come on as a friend of the GIs. He proceeded to break up the problems brought up into piece-meal reform measures

that could be dealt with by the system: new books in the library, a change in civilian dress regulations, an order not to call black Marines "boy" or "nigger", etc.

The blacks, however, were not impressed, and sought to raise the discussion to a different level:

"When we fight and when we express ourselves in the only way we know how, we get the shaft...That's what America stands for. It doesn't represent the land of the free and the home of the brave, it doesn't stand for that. You stand for fighting and you stand for violence and you stand for bloodshed and when we start doing this, this is when you react."

The resistance movement at Iwakuni has reached a state of open rebellion. As at all bases in Japan, cooperation between rebellious soldiers and Japanese peace groups is on the sharp increase. A new branch of "Radio Camp-Must-Go" has been opened at Iwakuni. The GIs' own underground paper, "Semper Fi," is distributed with the help of Japanese.

This new alliance between resisting GIs and Japanese radicals is something to watch. Its implications for the growing revolutionary movements in both Japan and the U.S. are of greatest importance.

Closer to a Freak Army

WASHINGTON—The Army has let down its hair—literally. It now says that reasonable sideburns, mustaches and even wigs are in and excessively short hair is out.

Not since Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside—for whom sideburns take their name—sported his facial growth during the Civil War has such a shocker hit the Army.

"Some old-time commanders in the field will think we are going out of our minds," said an Army briefing officer in explaining the new regulations.

The new rules sent to all Army installations around the world last week aren't expected to spawn any shoulder-length hair.

Henceforth, states the new regulations, personnel sporting sideburns are to keep them neatly trimmed, with straight lines and no flair to the hair on the side of the head and not extend downward past an imaginary line drawn through the center of the ear canal.

Neatly trimmed mustaches also are permitted, provided they do not have "a bristly or ragged appearance, extend beyond the ends of the upper lip and not cover any part of the upper lip."

Goatees and beards remain banned.

Hair on top of the head can now be allowed to reach three inches in length.

The new rules also outlaw the skinhead or balk look common among Army recruits a few years ago. Now, hair is not to be cut less than one inch without the individual soldier's permission.

In its message. the Army calls demands for shaving of soldiers' heads or for excessively short haircuts "degrading or depersonalizing."

Black soldiers for some time have been allowed to wear a limited version of the Afro haircut. The new regulations would permit them to continue this practice. The Marine Corps last year, acting to cool racial friction, authorized Negro marines permission to wear Afro style haircuts.

Army Riot

POCHON, South Korea (LNS) Some $50,000 damage was done to a U.S. army barracks by about 50 black soldiers who were angrily responding to discrimination within the army.

The incident occurred in an army unit—one of the hundreds of U.S. Army outposts throughout South Korea—located in Pochon, in South Korea's Kyonggi Province. Several black soldiers were arbitrarily denied passes by the brass, which led the black soldiers to call a meeting.

After the meeting, five buildings in the barracks were set afire, according to a dispatch from the Korean Central News Agency.

Stapp Honored

NEW YORK (LNS)—An important victory was won May 14 in a test case involving the Army's right to victimize servicemen who have been active in antiwar and other activities by giving them less-than-honorable discharges.

Federal Judge Charles A. Tenney ordered the Army to change Andrew D. Stapp's April 19, 1968, "dishonorable discharge" to "honorable." Stapp is a leader of the American Servicemen's Union (ASU).

Judge Tenney ruled that "since Stapp is charged with associations and beliefs and is not charged with any military misconduct or matters affecting his military record the allegations fail to state a basis for issuance of a less-than-honorable discharge."

Tenney ruled further that "it is impermissible for the military to punish an admittedly competent soldier merely because it disapproves of the company he keeps."

The victory in the Stapp case sets an important precedent for many other GIs who have been similarly victimized by the brass for anti-war views.

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