

Those who Refused

Fifth Estate Collective

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On July 7, three American GI's were arrested in New York City as they prepared to speak at an antiwar rally. Pvt. Dennis Mora, PFC James Johnson, and Pvt. David Samas, had, on June 30 held a news conference to announce that they had begun action in court to prohibit the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of the Army from ordering them to Vietnam. With the belief that the war is "unjust, immoral and illegal" they stated that they would report to the Oakland Army Terminal in California on July 13 as ordered but they would refuse to board a ship for transfer to Vietnam.

Johnson, 20, is a Negro from East Harlem. Prior to being drafted he attended Bronx Community College for a year. Mora, 25, is a Puerto Rican from Spanish Harlem. He graduated from CCNY with a BA in history and was, prior to his draft, employed as a case worker for the New York City Department of Welfare. Twenty-year-old Samas was born in Chicago and attended Modesto Junior College in Modesto, California. He is of Italian-Lithuanian descent, and was married this past June. Each was drafted into the army last December and received their training at Fort Hood, Texas and at Fort Gordon, Georgia. There they met and found that they had somewhat mutual feelings regarding opposition to the present war. As they asserted in their joint statement, "...we are not the only GI's who feel as we do. Large numbers of men in the service either do not understand this war or are against it." "However," they explain, "once it becomes a fact of life that the soldier must fight the Vietcong, he must reassure himself. 'Somebody's got to do it,' 'you've got to stop them someplace' and similar statements help to reassure the soldiers and encourage them to accept their part in the war."

Johnson, Samas, and Mora became quite concerned, and when Vietnam became a certainty for them they decided, as they explained, "It was time for us to quit talking and decide. Go to Vietnam and ignore the truth, or stand and fight for what we know is right." They chose the latter.

Following their initial news conference, and prior to their arrest, the three men were followed constantly by what they believe to be federal agents. Their families, who are backing up the beliefs of the three, have all been approached in various ways. The local police in Pvt. Samas' hometown of Modesto, California coaxed his heretofore secret address from his parents, convincing them that their son was being used as a "tool of the Communists" and was in serious danger. Samas states that "They (the Modesto police) had told my father that if I would retract my statement and withdraw completely from the civil action now in progress that I would receive a discharge from the Army and no serious repercussions would result." Thus, seeking to protect their son, his New York address was released.

Thus far the three men have been unshaken in their convictions. They maintain that they are not pacifists—not non-violent and, if necessary, will fight back to defend their convictions. They deem it vital that they make known their predicament and their concern. Their views are best expressed in an excerpt from the text of David Samas' speech, read by his wife, Marlene, at the anti-war rally after the triple arrest: "As a civilian I was interested and extremely concerned (about the war) but I neglected to show my concern. In a great way I too am responsible for the boys who are now in Vietnam... to me the peace movement always looked like concerned students and citizens trying to protect their country from war and nuclear devastation. To a soldier the movement appears very differently. It often seems that the peace groups are united against the soldiers, and that forces the soldiers to cling together and ignore the real issues made public by the peace movement. The GI should be reached somehow. He doesn't want to fight. He has no reasons to risk his life. Yet he doesn't realize that the peace movement is dedicated to his safety. Give the GI something to believe in and he will fight for that belief. Let them know in Vietnam that you want them home, let them know that you are concerned about: their lives also."

The three soldiers all released separate statements, each containing their individual thoughts. Pvt. Mora expressed a wish to see a portion of the money now being invested in the war effort put to use aiding our own people. He states, "The billions for slaughter must be invested in the reconstruction of our country's ghettos and the meeting of our social and educational needs." PFC Johnson cites the Negroes' role in the war. "The Negro in Vietnam is being called upon to defend a freedom which in many parts of this country does not exist for him...The Negro has a much more important war to be waged at home, that is the war for equality, the civil rights struggle."

Numerous anti-war and civil rights groups have rallied to their support, including SNCC, CORE, and the Fifth Avenue Vietnam Peace Parade Committee. A new organization, known as the Fort Hood Three Defense Committee has been 'created to aid the soldiers. As Master Sergeant Donald Duncan, who refused a commission and quit the army after eighteen months in Vietnam, feeling that the war was wrong, aptly told the Fort Hood Three, "Your actions, if properly motivated, take a strength greater than that required to go to Vietnam." Johnson, Mora, and Samas are presently imprisoned in the Fort Dix Stockade awaiting court martial. Thus they have put their bodies on the line.

Contributions for the three men or requests for information should be sent to the Defense Committee, 5 Beekman St., New York, N.Y. Support in the Detroit area is being coordinated by the Detroit Committee to End the War in Vietnam, 1101 W. Warren, phone 832-5700.

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- *Fifth Estate's* Vietnam Resource Page.
- Fort Hood 3 Found Guilty, FE #14, September 15, 1966

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