

# Letter From a Prison Cell

David Samas

1966

Although I am being held in solitary confinement, the prisoners and guards find occasion to speak with me. I was ordered to remove the name tags from my uniforms and from above my cage door. I now exist as the man without a country or a name; this plus instructions for no one to speak with me entices the prisoners and guards to find out my story.

Naturally and eagerly, I am always explaining who I am and why I am opposed to the war in Vietnam. My beliefs as to the illegality and immorality of the war are accepted and (no surprise to me) almost always agreed with. It is simple, indeed, to show the wrongness of American intervention in Vietnam. I call their attention to the facts and figures, the dates, the names, the places. I explain how we came to be involved and point to our steps in the escalation of the war and our build-up of troops in other southeast Asian countries. The facts are easy to deal with and easily understood.

I find that after explaining why I feel the war is wrong, people still don't understand why I refused to go. They ask some very simple questions that are much more difficult to answer: Which is easier, one year in Vietnam or five years in prison? Why didn't you just go AWOL and get thrown out of the army? Why didn't you refuse the draft? Why did you make it a public issue? And, finally, their most basic question—What is in it for you?

In black and white, judged according to present-day standards, my actions were foolish. One year is easier! AWOL is simpler! Refusing the draft would have been easier! Relative silence would have been easier, and materially I did not gain a thing! In fact, long lists can be drawn showing why I have lost, and I cannot balance this with a numbered list of my gains, no more than I can trace the outline of my soul or tell you where my conscience lies.

After much consideration, I chose to take the hardest possible path because it was, to my belief, the most honorable one. Nothing is hidden and there is nothing that I have meant to hide. The world can listen to and watch Jimmy, Dennis and me or ignore us; truthfully, it matters little to me what anyone else might think. My conscience is a very selfish thing, judging and guiding only my actions. All the vague people, dwelling outside in freedom, may stand by me or desert me, as they see fit; but my beliefs, my mind, my conscience will always be immutably my own. I cannot, I will not violate my convictions.

Conscience is a costly thing, and I am paying dearly for the rights to my mind. Five years, a cement wall and cold iron bars, five years in a very horrible, empty, limbo is the price I am paying for real freedom. If it must be this



American heroes, the Fort Hood Three: (l. to rt.) Mora, Samas, Johnson

way, I accept it gladly, knowing that the satisfaction, the pride and the honor I am feeling because of my actions will bring me through, whatever punishment my masters hand down to me.

I laugh at my masters but I pity them. I have no contempt for them, but hatred for a system which they are caught up in. The system may hamper my body but it cannot bind my mind. I still think and believe as I know is right. My body is theirs but the being inside their body is my own; and they cannot take from me the freedom that I hold within my mind.

Judge Learned Hand had a much quoted saying—"Liberty lies in the hearts of men; when it dies there, no law, no jury, no judge can save it;" I have taken this and changed it somewhat to help me to endure my prison life. Liberty lies in the hearts of men; when it exists there, no law, no jury, no judge can destroy it!

David A. Samas

P.S. (I guess)

I didn't know how long (or short) this was supposed to be but I hope this is alright. With my punctuation, grammar and spelling I deserve to be in jail but whether this makes sense or not I do mean it.

I hope the rally is a success. You are all doing such a damn fine job and a harder one than I. All I do is hang out here—just—gond just blah—good luck and I do thank you all.

I love you like my own family.

Dave

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