

Did GIs Really Defect?

Marshall Bloom

1967

WASHINGTON — (Liberation News Service) At least two, and perhaps three, American military men in the line of troops at the Pentagon took off their helmets, laid down their guns, and joined the demonstrators sitting in on the Pentagon steps, Saturday, October 21.

The fate of the demonstrators is unknown, since the Pentagon denies their existence. "There were no defectors. We have no AWOL's; no one is missing," stated a Defense Department press spokesman.

One of the defectors, responding to the demonstrators' appeal to "Join Us. Join Us! Join Us!" was quickly apprehended by MPs and marshals, was passed through the military line and disappeared into the sea of helmets moments before a paddy wagon was seen to drive off.

The Defense Department cannot create a non-event, however, even if every defector was apprehended. The recollection of witnesses is too vivid.

A witness to one defection, Denise Oliver of Hollis, New York, stated: "Suddenly, one MP put down his gun and leaped into the crowd and was absorbed immediately."

"He was given clothing and a hat to disguise him from the people who were searching for him with floodlights," she added.

"He was completely hidden from view and I don't know what happened to him afterwards." Bob Zanger, a student at CCNY, and a witness to a different defection at a different part of the line, stated:

"I was sitting in the front line in the center mall. Right next to me was a line of MPs. We heard a shout. I stood up and I saw a cat running towards us from the first line of paratroopers. I saw a helmet and rifle on the ground.

"Just before he reached us, he was grabbed on his side and back by U.S. marshals, and from the front was prevented from joining us by MPs." Zanger, Mike Spiegel of the SDS National office in Chicago, Mike Barton, Editor of the Boston College Heights, and this reporter witnessed a helmetless soldier being marched to the paddy wagon behind the troops' front line.

The defections were part of what developed, ad hoc, into the major political thrust of the demonstrators at the Mobilization's October 21 Confrontation' with the Warmakers. The lack of clarity involved in notions of charging the Pentagon was soon established.

But, the effort of winning the troops is seen as a way of ending the war at its most vulnerable point, conscripted manpower. The national resistance activities, in which over 1,000 men returned their draft cards, and European and American programs designed to assist deserters work toward the same end.

Perhaps the Pentagon agreed that the defections were more threatening to them than the "assault" on the building. For it was two hours after the defections were announced, that the well-organized "military riot" began thrusting through the demonstrators with swinging clubs, gun butts and boots.

The impact of the demonstrators was seen in quiet, less definite ways. Attempts were continually made to talk to the soldiers.

Alexander Wilkinson, of St. Paul, Minnesota, witnessed the following scene after the announcement of the defectors: "A girl who was sitting directly in front of me stood up and approached an MP. Assuring the soldier that

she intended no harm, she kissed the fingers of her hand, then touched the fingers to the soldier's cheek. As soon as she did this, at least four MPs who were standing near the one who had been kissed, grabbed the girl and dragged her forcibly across the line.

She was surrounded by soldiers who handled her with extreme and unnecessary roughness as they dragged her off to the paddywagon.

The kissed MP was overheard whispering to his fellow soldiers that, "she only kissed me."

Sidebar

(A statement by Chuck Crouse; news director of WPOP radio, Hartford, Conn.)

"Soldiers as individuals did disobey the orders of their officers. The appeals were successful in part—three soldiers did throw down their weapons and join the demonstrators. Three out of maybe ten thousand! At least one of the defecting soldiers was seized and dragged into the building by MPs soon afterward.

—from the *Washington Free Press*.

Related

- *Fifth Estate's* Vietnam Resource Page.
- Antiwar Battle at the Pentagon, FE #41, November 1–15, 1967

fifth Estate

Marshall Bloom
Did GIs Really Defect?
1967

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/42-november-15-30-1967/did-gis-really-defect>
Fifth Estate #42, November 15-30, 1967

[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheestate.org)