

San Francisco GIs March

Fifth Estate Collective

1968

from LNS and the *Guardian*

SAN FRANCISCO, Oct. 12 — Over 10,000 marchers turned out on a drizzly, overcast morning to show their solidarity with the largest anti-war march ever organized by active-duty GIs and veterans.

There were at least 500 soldiers and sailors present wearing white caps lettered "GIs for Peace." Several attended in uniform. The soldiers came despite weeks of intimidation from military officials. Military brass tried to ship Lt. Hugh Smith (USAF), one of the chief organizers, to Taiwan on Sept. 30 in hopes of quashing the demonstration. Two other march organizers, A1-C Michael Locks and A1-C John Bright, got orders to ship out to Utah, but the brass backed down after the two sought a court injunction prohibiting the move.

Area officials also attempted to keep men from participating in the demonstration by telling the men that participation in such events was illegal. Several servicemen tried to stop this interference with the march by filing a suit in federal court. They argued that such moves constituted an infringement on their rights of free speech and assembly. However, Judge Albert C. Wollenberg denied their suit on the grounds that the matter is "within the sphere of legitimate military concerns."

On the day of the march authorities on many bases tried to keep men from going to the demonstration by special assignment and other devices. At the Special Processing Barracks at The Presidio in San Francisco, known as a hotbed of anti-war sentiment, was assigned to inspection and the men restricted to the base until it was over. However, the inspection took place at 11 a.m., and over 300 of the men—the largest group of soldiers at the demonstration—made it to the rally.

The 91st Army Band in Sausalito, a reserve unit, had planned to play for the march, but were assigned to riot-training for the day. Sausalito, a wealthy, nearly all white artsy-craftsy area, has no riot problem.

Mass leafletting was done among GIs to announce the demonstration. Civilians were detained by military authorities for several hours and one girl was charged with assaulting a sailor.

The most spectacular technique used to spread the word was an airdrop of leaflets on military installations in the area. Lt. Susan Schnall, of the Oak-knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland, Cal, faces court-martial on grounds that she wore her uniform in the demonstration and that she and her husband participated in dropping leaflets from an airplane. A1-C Locks has been restricted to Hamilton Air Force Base pending a court martial for disobeying an order, presumably that he wore his uniform to the demonstration.

The rally following the march was conventional. The crowd cheered as greetings were read from men and women representing all branches of the armed forces. Entertainment was provided by veteran folk singer Pete Seeger.

Featured speakers were former Green Beret M. Sgt, Donald Duncan and Brig. Gen. Hugh B. Hester. Duncan received his greatest applause from the GIs in the crowd when he demanded that the ROTC system must be ended on campuses.

Another speaker, a GI recently returned from Vietnam, gave the most moving presentation when he described the death of an Army buddy last year—a youth who, as he lay wounded from an NLF mortar shell, repeated over and over, “Goddamn that bastard, Johnson.” Several soldiers at the rally wept.

Anti-war activists, both inside and outside the armed forces, viewed the demonstration as the beginning of an alliance that will grow in the months to come. It was aimed at bridging the gap between the largely civilian anti-war movement and the men who must do the actual fighting if the war is to continue. Both groups are united in their determination to bring them home alive!

Letters from GIs protesting the court martials of the two march leaders would be particularly effective. Send telegrams to the Commanding Officer of the Oak-Knoll Naval Hospital, Oakland, Calif. on behalf of Lt. Schnall and to the Commanding Officer of Hamilton Air Force Base, California 94934 on behalf of Airman Locks.

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