

Partial Victory at Ft. Jackson

Fifth Estate Collective

1969

FT. JACKSON, S.C.—The Army has dropped charges against some GIs affiliated with the group GIs United Against the War in Vietnam at Ft. Jackson, S.C., and will discharge others without ever bringing them to trial.



Of the nine soldiers originally arrested following an anti-war meeting on the base March 20, only three now face charges.

Pvt. Tommie Woodfin, 19, of Brooklyn N.Y. will be brought before a special court martial on charges of breach of the peace, disrespect and participating in an illegal demonstration.

The anti-war soldier has already won one court martial. On March 18 he was acquitted of charges of circulating GIs United's petition asking for an on-base meeting to discuss the war.

Two GIs are still in the Ft. Jackson stockade and face possible general court martial, pending the decision of the preliminary Article 32 hearings held April 22–25.

Pvt. Joseph Cole, 24, of Decatur, Ga., faces charges of breach of the peace, disrespect, and participating in an illegal demonstration; Pvt. Jose Rudder, 20, of Washington, D.C., faces the same charges and in addition is charged with disobeying a direct order.

Six of the original Ft. Jackson Nine will not be prosecuted. One, a certain John Huffman, was revealed to be an Army informer acting "on behalf of command," from the beginning of GIs United.

Edilberto Chaparro, who had been placed in the stockade on March 21, was discharged from the Army on May 1.

The Army announced on May 2 that it had dropped all charges relating to the March 20 meeting against two GIs who had spent a month confined to quarters and threatened with court martial. The two were Dominick Dud-die of New York and Curtis E. Mays, 23, of Kansas City.

Mays still faces a summary court martial for an alleged violation on March 22 of restrictions imposed before the anti-war meeting.

Delmar Thomas, 22, and Andrew Pulley, 17, both of Cleveland and both confined to the stockade together with Pvt. Cole and Rudder, will receive administrative discharges under less than honorable conditions.

By dropping charges against two GIs and giving administrative discharges without trial to another three, the Army is confessing that it has no case against the anti-war soldiers—a fact which was apparent during the full review of evidence at the Article 32 hearings, according to defense attorneys.

The Army had previously responded to efforts to secure the release of the defendants from pre-trial confinement, with the argument that the seriousness of the offenses necessitated strict confinement. It is now apparent, however, that the alleged offenses were not serious enough—or perhaps even real enough to be brought into court.

The Army's latest moves reveal their desire to get rid of soldiers who have expressed dissident views of the Vietnam war but who cannot be convicted even in a court conducted by the Army itself.

The Army's retreat substantiates the argument of defense attorneys and civilian supporters of Ft. Jackson GIs that all of the accused were and are innocent of any crime and have been prosecuted and confined solely to prevent them from continuing to carry on constitutionally-protected activities.

Men whose only "offense" has been the exercise of their free speech rights have found themselves compelled to take less than honorable discharges.

Five weeks of illegal confinement under maximum security conditions, with every remedy—civil and military blocked by the Army, forced them to seek this means of release.

The GI Civil Liberties Defense Committee has hailed the recent developments as a victory for GIs United and for their supporters around the country.

In Detroit, a chapter of the GI Civil Liberties Defense Committee has been formed to give local support to the Ft. Jackson soldiers and other GIs who have had their rights abridged.

Maurice Geary, formerly a Catholic priest, is chairman of the group. Local supporters include Councilman Mel Ravitz, Dr. Henry Hitt Crane, Atty. James Lafferty and Prof. David Herreshoff.

Edith Gbur is Detroit secretary and contributions to the defense effort may be sent care of her at 15916 Lauder, Detroit, Michigan.

Also, a Detroit attorney, Michael Smith is one of the team of five lawyers headed by attorney Leonard Boudin, defending the men.

In a related development, the Army is attempting to discharge Pvt. Stephen Dash, a member of GIs United and a plaintiff in an injunction suit against the Secretary of the Army.

The Army wants to give Dash an undesirable discharge on the grounds that his continued presence in the Army is "not in the interests of national security." They have made four charges, for which they will present evidence at a field board hearing scheduled for May 19th at Ft. Jackson.

The allegations are: 1) that Dash is a member of the Young Socialist Alliance and the Socialist Workers Party; 2) that he "advocates the violent overthrow of the U.S. government (for which the sole witness is the Army agent-

provocateur-informer, John Huffman); 3) that he attempted to present GIs United petitions to the base commander on March 3; and 4) that he received *The Militant*, a socialist weekly newspaper.

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