

The Further Adventures of Tom Sincavitch

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Editors' Note: Marc Kadish is Mid-West organizer for the National Lawyer's Guild and is active in Detroit with the National Organizing Committee (NOC).

Fort Riley is a sprawling Army base located between Manhattan and Junction City, Kansas about 200 miles from Kansas City.

Included among the 15,000 GIs on the base are approximately 3,000 soldiers who are being "rehabilitated" at the Correctional Training Facilities. If they don't get rehabilitated they get shipped to the Army Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth.

Tom Sincavitch is neither at Camp Funston where the Correctional Training Facilities are located nor is he at Fort Leavenworth.

Except for a three-hour period when he was with his new unit Tom has been spending all his time in the Post Stockade. He ended up in the Stockade after he was dragged by FBI agents from his sanctuary at St. Joseph's Episcopal Church in Detroit, Michigan. Tom took sanctuary March 11-13 when he was activated after resigning from the Army Reserves last May because of the racism inherent in its riot control training.

Soon after his arrival at Fort Riley he was given a special court-martial for failure to report for active duty. He was given a six-month sentence which was immediately suspended; allegedly because the Army felt that Tom could be rehabilitated (despite all his protestations to the contrary), but actually there was no room at the Stockade.

I later found out that all first time six-month sentences are handled in this way because of the overcrowded conditions at the stockade.

The Army knew that Tom was not going to follow any orders but they transferred him to his new unit anyhow. Within three hours after being thrown out of the stockade Tom was thrown back into the stockade for disobeying one Army regulation and two direct orders.

He now sits in the Stockade awaiting his general court-martial and a possible seven and a half year sentence.

Being the only political prisoner on a base with some 15,000 soldiers carries some awesome responsibilities. It means you stay up all night rapping with your fellow prisoners in Administrative Segregation (where all the "dangerous" prisoners are kept) on racism, the war and getting some anti-war stuff started on the base.

It means that you get hassled by the NCO's in the stockade "for having a funny looking civilian lawyer with long hair and funny glasses." But most importantly it means that you use your case as means of organizing GIs on the base and people in the surrounding towns to support the GIs.

Prior to Tom's arrival little organizing had been done on the base. Some local SDS people at Kansas State University were trying to open a coffee house. The American Serviceman's Union had some members on the base. After Tom's arrival things began to pull together.

A demonstration supporting Tom was held outside the front gates of the base. (Actually there are no gates to the base because the entrance is located on a public road which runs through the base. This should be kept in mind for the time when the court-martial will be held).

An underground paper entitled AWOL—"American Way of Life"—was started. Already two issues have been distributed at the base.

Tom's legal defense promises to be the first political court-martial held at Fort Riley. The Article 32 hearing, which must be held prior to the convening of a general court-martial, was political from beginning to end.

When SDS members from Kansas State showed up at the hearing I made certain the trial transcript reflected their presence by introducing them to the Hearing Officer and Trial Counsel.

When the Hearing Officer asked if Tom wanted any evidence of mitigation, matters of aggravation were introduced—Tom's letters of resignation from the service.

The hearing was also a good way of testing the success of the initial organizing efforts at the base. All three GI witnesses questioned that day admitted that they had heard of Tom before he arrived at their unit. They also admitted that a number of GIs at the post knew of Tom and were talking about his case.

They all said they had heard of the demonstration that had been held outside the entrance to the base. Two of them even admitted that they had seen copies of the AWOL, though they denied reading it.

The importance of organizing Fort Riley can not be over-emphasized.

It is one of the larger Army bases in the Mid-west. The existence of the Correctional Training Facilities at Camp Funston presents an organizer with the opportunity to organize 3,000 of the most alienated soldiers in the armed forces.

Camp Funston is the only "rehabilitation" facility the Army has.

Rehabilitation consists of constant reminders to the men that unless they stay cool they will be shipped to Fort Leavenworth. What at first sounded like a typical liberal effort at rehabilitation turns out in the final analysis to be a means of purging a base stockade of all "troublemakers."

Any soldier in the Army who is given a six-month sentence or less, and who, in the opinion of their commander can be rehabilitated (read "is a troublemaker") can be sent to Camp Funston.

However, the standards are apparently loose enough to permit soldiers who have not even received a court-martial to end up at Correctional Training. Apparently there are soldiers at Camp Funston who committed the crime of asking to see the base psychiatrist. Obviously the Army takes this to mean that the soldier desires to be rehabilitated.

I got a firsthand view of the Correctional Training Facilities when I went to interview three soldiers who had written the New York Draft and Military Panel for assistance. Rumors had drifted back to Detroit that a riot had taken place at the Special Processing Barracks within Camp Funston.

I asked my civilian taxi driver a general question about the Correctional Training Facilities hoping that he would talk about the rumored riot. He led into it right away:

"Why, do you know what one of those crazy bastards did last week!"

"No, what did they do?"

"Hang on. I'll show you. See how all the windows are boarded up in their barracks. Well they smash them as soon as the Army puts new ones in. The Army doesn't even like to take them out in buses because they scare all the other drivers on the road by giving the V-sign and that "Black Power Fist."

"Wait, here we are, look at that fence! Crazy bastards took an Armored Car Personnel Carrier and ran it into the fence. Then those other nuts all came out of their barracks."

"That's cool, did they try to escape?"

"No, they're too smart for that. Knew the MPs would shoot them. They just waited until the MPs came along and then just knocked the shit out of them with rocks."

"Wow, that's great. Why if..."

"What's the excitement for, kid? Happens every week down here...really can't blame 'em, its a fuckin' shitty place."

Talking to the three working class GIs made me feel like I was back in Detroit with NOC.

One of the guys left school in the eleventh grade, was arrested sixteen times from 1965 through 1968, had to get married to his girlfriend, and was wrongfully inducted into the Army because his draft board told him he needed three children before he was eligible for a fatherhood deferment.

He has completed only two weeks of basic training since his induction. He's gone AWOL some five or six times, spent time in jail for passing bad checks while he was AWOL, and even tried to escape from Camp Funston.

The threat of transfer to Fort Leavenworth is currently aiding his rehabilitation progress. He asked me if there was anything I could do for him.

"Sure here's the number of some people to contact, contact some local people interested in organizing on the base, and do some organizing yourself," I said.

"But you really don't need a lawyer. You need a revolution."

Tom Sincavitch would appreciate mail at Post Stockade, 49 Custer Ave., Ft. Riley, Kansas.

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