

Presidio Mutiny Trial Ends

Fred Gardner

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FLASH—As we go to press we have learned that 12 of the Presidio GI's have been found guilty of mutiny and two of disobedience. The verdict came after the five-member board deliberated six hours at the end of the 35 day trial. Sentences have not yet been passed.

FORT ORD, Calif. (LNS)—The defense has rested in the climactic phase of the Presidio Mutiny case.

Over the past month, Terry Hallinan, representing 14 out of the 27 prisoners who staged a non-violent demonstration at the Presidio Stockade, Oct. 14, called all of the defendants, 14 psychiatrists, and a number of guards and ex-prisoners to the stand.

They painted a picture of a hell-hole in which any redress of grievances—let alone rehabilitation—was impossible. The “mutiny” seemed to offer the only hope of bringing public attention to the shotgun killing of prisoner Richard Bunch and to stockade conditions.

A number of sympathizers had asked Hallinan—in view of the fact that he frequently described his clients as heroes—why he elicited all the testimony to the effect that they were swept into mass hysteria. The answer is manifold.

First, it enabled him to introduce testimony, even hearsay, as to the Bunch killing and stockade conditions (on the grounds that these factors affected the prisoners' state of mind).

Second, it offered the best hope of an acquittal.

Third, it seemed increasingly true; that is, as psychiatrist after psychiatrist testified, it became evident that the men had been swept into a mass panic by the Bunch murder.

Fourth, the psychiatrists dramatically placed the blame for the defendants' maladjustment on the army and the society at large.

Whereas an army psychiatrist, Major Chamberlain, had testified at an earlier trial that Larry Reidel and Louis Oszepinski were “incapable of loving,” Dr. Price Cobbs testified that Richard Gentile had “never been the object of concern or care.”

Dr. Maurice Spottswood testified that Patrick Wright was obviously delusional because he thought that the demonstration would make the army change.

Cobbs, a specialist in group phenomena who maintains a private practice and teaches at the University of California School of Social Welfare, gave a brilliant summary of the defendants' state of mind.

Noting that all 14 were in the stockade as AWOLS, he said, “In the past they always fled when anxiety threatened. The killing of Richard Bunch, another AWOL with whom they identified strongly, meant that this course of escape was no longer open.”

Cobbs, a black man and co-author of “Black Rage,” also postulated that the defendants, all white, had been “niggerized.”

He testified: “They knew they were oppressed, and suddenly responded as black people. They sang We Shall Overcome, which they hardly knew, but had seen on television. They sang it as a reflex...”

Cobbs commented extensively on the similarities in the defendants' lives. Thirteen of the fourteen are high school dropouts; twelve come from families that moved almost yearly in search of work and stability; nine come from broken homes; over half had alcoholic parents; twelve had enlisted in the Army, most of them having been promised that they would learn a trade; most wound up in the infantry.

It became increasingly evident that the defendants are maladjusted. By Army standards, Osczepinski, after anguishing over Chamberlain's testimony for a month, wrote from Leavenworth:

"I don't feel so bad about it anymore. What does it mean to be well-adjusted in this society anyway?"

Lindy Blake, an escaped mutineer now in Canada, says, "Almost all of us were street people. Some of us had been together in the Haight, we were all alike."

Blake smuggled a poem to Ricky Stevens, now on trial:

Look in me
and you will see
the shadow of a man
look in you
through and through
and you will understand
that you are me
and I am thee
and we are hand in hand
as we touch
we are so much
yet we are just a man.

The prosecution rebuttal should take a week and a verdict is expected at any time

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