

Ft. Dix Erupts

Mike Kaufman

FORT DIX, N.J. Oct 12—Thousands of demonstrators, marching under the banners of many anti-war and militant groups, were turned back by tear gas as they marched onto the mammoth military reservation.

More than 1,000 military policemen, most of them with bayonets fixed on their rifles, were called on to repel the 4,000 demonstrators, but no injuries or arrests were reported.

The march, organized by an amalgam of such disparate groups as the Black Panthers and the Catholic Peace Fellowship, began with a rally at a Wrightstown coffee-house that has served as a center for radical activities on the base.

Marching eight abreast in a cordon that stretched for a quarter of a mile, the mostly young people swarmed over State Highway 68 toward the Army training depot.

A half mile out of town, and a half mile from the front gate, the lead of the column, made up of a contingent of helmeted young women, suddenly veered across an empty field on the base.

Their objective, the women had explained earlier, was to move toward the stockade. Inhumane conditions in the detention area and the Army's prosecution of 38 men who reportedly took part in a riot there last June were rallying cries for the demonstration.

The women, some of whom carried rolled-up rugs to place over concertinas of barbed wire, advanced 300 yards across the field unchecked. Then the provost marshal, Col. Herman Carr, in charge of police operations on the base, approached the chanting marchers with a bull horn.

"This is to advise you that you are in violation of Federal law and if you persist you will be arrested," he said.

He was ignored and the entire column pressed onto the military post.

Colonel Carr radioed instructions to a command post, and within seconds three troop carriers arrived with 100 men. With gas masks on and bayonets fixed on rifles, the detachment took up positions two feet apart on the rim of a ditch flanking the marchers.

Three Army helicopters circled the meadow.

Several marchers approached the growing line of soldiers.

"We are with you," they shouted. "The brass lives high and G.I.s die. Where are your generals while they send you out to fight girls and boys?"

The soldiers stood their ground, their eyes impassive behind black masks.

The marchers made a short-lived attempt to outflank the soldiers, but within minutes they were encircled. They stopped to try again to talk with individual soldiers and to shout "Free the Fort Dix 38" and "Power to the people."

At 3:10 PM, with the chanting growing and the marchers uncertain where to go, three blasts of tear gas were fired into the center of the line from the nozzle of a back-pack dispenser.

There were several additional spurts of gas and the crowd bolted, half running to the left and half to the right.

"Walk, don't run," shouted demonstration marshals who wore green armbands. "The gas is drifting their way," said one man, and indeed the small clouds of gas were blown away from marchers.

Several more blasts were fired by the advancing soldiers and spasms of coughing replaced the chants as the protesters withdrew toward the highway.

Medical teams with the demonstrators said later that no one had had to be hospitalized because of the gas, although 40 persons with bronchial asthma required more than rudimentary treatment.

The marchers, many of whom were crying and wheezing, regrouped on the highway. Herb Dryer, a staff member of the Wrightstown coffee-house, walked through the crowd of more than 4,000 and urged them to move on toward the main gate.

“We have made our point,” he shouted through a bullhorn. “We have scored victories.”

Dryer told the marchers that he had learned from servicemen that fear of the demonstration had led officials at Ft. Dix to “release 365 prisoners from the stockade.” -Amid cheers he went on to say that “the brass didn’t even trust its own M.P.s and units had to be brought from elsewhere.”

The third victory, he said, was that a detachment of men, many of whom had gone absent without leave and who were awaiting disciplinary proceedings, were given passes for the first time.

A busload of men in uniform passed the line. Through open windows they held victory signs and raised fists.

As the line moved past the front gate, the marchers turned off the highway and boarded the 100 busses that had brought them there.

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