

Doin' the Selfridge Squelch

Jerry Lindquist

1970

As a result of a pre-Christmas anti-war march the brass at Selfridge Air Force Base are trying to bring down a cloak of repression on GI activists.

The Detroit Coalition to End the War Now sponsored a candle light march on the evening of Dec. 23 in support of anti-war GIs and for an end to the war. Approximately 1,200 persons joined the parade in a driving snow storm that soon left almost all the participants with extinguished candles.

The march which began at the foot of Woodward and ended at Central Methodist Church was greeted enthusiastically by last-minute Christmas shoppers.

"This is the best reception from bystanders I have ever seen," said one veteran anti-war activist. Several shoppers joined the march and others responded to chants of "Peace Now" by holding up the V sign.

A short rally was held at the end of the march with representatives of the clergy, labor, and anti-war movement speakers. Two black airmen, Charles Harris and Doug Byers also gave short impromptu talks about the black liberation struggle, that their fight for freedom is here and not in Vietnam.

The next day the airmen were interviewed by the Air Force secret police (OSI) and by the Secret Service who claimed that the two had threatened Nixon's life.

The alleged threat was similar to one that David Hilliard of the Black Panther Party was arrested for making in a recent speech. Within the context of political rhetoric, Hilliard and the airmen said they would do whatever is necessary to free their people.

The airmen said if they had to take up arms and march on the White House they would do it; just as Hilliard said, "We will kill Richard Nixon. We will kill any motherfucker that stands in our way." Neither of these utterances were meant as direct threats, but rather as statements of their political seriousness.

Also, Selfridge Base Commander Lund read a summary of Air Force regulations and recent court-martial decisions to all post officers. Several of the officers and Airmen Harris and Byers contacted James Lafferty, who is chairman of the coalition and a movement lawyer. He stressed that the Coalition and his firm is ready to defend any serviceman who has his rights abridged by the brass.

Lafferty said it appears that Lund's purpose in holding the officer's meeting and the interrogation of Harris and Byers was to intimidate and discourage dissent on the base.

"No one has more of a right to speak out against the war than the GI, especially the black GI," Lafferty said. "As a lawyer I can say that nothing was said that they did not have a lawful right to say. We would welcome court action. It is ominous that the Air Force feels its security at stake when men are allowed to speak their mind."

Other support has come from Rev. John Forsythe, Chairman of the Detroit Council of Churches and one of the rally speakers. He called Commander Lund because, in his words, "It is essential that we let the brass know that the community is aware of his actions."

We are and stand ready to defend the rights of all GIs.

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