

Railroaded

Liberation News Service

1970

FORT DIX, N.J. (LNS)—Pfc. William Brakefield has been found guilty of rioting at the stockade here last June and sentenced to three years at hard labor.

Newsmen and spectators looked at each other with surprise when the verdict came in. Having failed to come up with any substantial evidence that Brakefield had taken part in the rebellion in which 150 GIs tore up their cell blocks, throwing footlockers through the windows and setting mattresses aflame, the prosecutor claimed that given the stockade conditions it was “unbelievable” that Brakefield would not have rebelled.

This is exactly what anyone who knew of the oppressive conditions in the stockade would agree, but still there was no direct evidence to link Brakefield as being one of the “ringleaders” of the revolt.

The verdict and sentence were a shock to almost everyone present. One of the MP guards just shook his head.

“I just can’t see this at all—how can you put a man away on evidence like that?” said a young military court officer.

Of the 65 GIs in Brakefield’s cell block, the Army was only able to get two witnesses to testify against him. And all they could definitely say was that the accused had suggested that they take part in the riot. No witness actually testified to having seen Brakefield do anything.

In the course of the four related trials of the “ringleaders,” 11 witnesses (nine of them “government witnesses”) have testified that the Army tried to either threaten or bribe them into making statements against the “ringleaders.”

“They said I’d never get out if I didn’t make a statement against one of the ‘trouble-makers,’” one prisoner had told the court in an earlier trial.

“CID (Criminal Investigation Division) and I just made a business deal. They said they’d give me two years off my sentence if I implicated the guys they said they were after,” another one had said.

It took courage for the GI-prisoners to stand up under this pressure. A prosecution “star witness” who told the prosecutor, “I forgot what you told me to say to that question,” at an earlier trial, is being threatened with perjury charges for not cooperating with the government. They threaten to put him away for five years.

“They’ve shown me the charges but they haven’t read them to me officially yet,” he explains, “The idea is, if I still testify against the other guys, they’ll drop the charges—fuck ‘em.”

It was this kind of solidarity among the stockade inmates that led to the acquittal of Terry Klug and the light sentence (dishonorable discharge) of Thomas Catlow.

The Army’s strategy had been to make examples of four of the more politically vocal GIs, and bribe and threaten the rest to be witnesses against them. The fact that the Army had to let two of their four “examples” go is an impressive victory for the stockade GIs who refused to be intimidated, and a bitter defeat for the Army.

Particularly upsetting for the Army is the acquittal of Klug, to whom the stockade commander Major Casey admitted having said, “I’m gonna come to your court martial and laugh and laugh.”

Conditions in the stockade are no accident—they are symptoms of the Army’s larger problem.

“The stockade has to seem worse than Vietnam (which is impossible),” says a Vietnam veteran, “otherwise no one would risk their life for that fucking war.”

When 10,000 demonstrators invaded the Fort itself in support of the Fort Dix 38, the brass had to bring in troops from Fort Meade to try to defend the Fort.

“They knew they couldn’t count on us not to join the demonstration. Fuck the Army!” says a Fort Dix MP.

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