

GIs Talk About the Army

Liberation News Service

1970

Editors' Note: The following is a Liberation News Service interview with two anti-war GIs recorded at the Ft. Dix Coffee House.

"People don't realize why soldiers march," says Staff Sergeant Rick Williams, a husky, quiet-spoken soldier of Southern poor-white origin.

"It's because when you march you don't have a mind of your own. You can't think about a right face before you get the order, or you'll do it before it's time. Once you get a soldier to march, you can get him to do just about anything you tell him."

Williams, whose father was a Marine Sergeant, has been in the Army for seven years, and commanded a combat platoon in Vietnam. He was a guard at the notorious Long Binh Army stockade.

"The idea of Basic Training is to tear you completely and suddenly away from everything that is part of your identity. They shave your head, take away your clothes, make you send home all your belongings, give you all the same clothes—everything to tell you that you're no longer an individual—you're a company, and your conscience happens to be the company commander."

"When I was a guard in the Long Binh stockade, there were 23 guys there for killing their commanding officers, and 17 more on trial," says Rick Williams. "They weren't all very political guys, but they knew they were pissed off."

"My most unbelievable experience—where I really learned what communism was all about—was when I got to talk to some North Vietnamese prisoners."

"The only way I could get to talk to them was to guard them. They were in the prison hospital. There were five of them—four men and a woman. The woman had had her vagina cut out by some of Theiu's South Vietnamese soldiers. She was in unbelievable pain. One of the five spoke English and told me what happened to her."

"I expected them to hate Americans. But she wasn't bitter—she smiled and talked to me. That's when I got my first feeling for what revolution is all about—love. They said they had no hatred for GIs—they weren't going to fall into that bag of hating."

"I asked them what I could do. They said 'demonstrate, tell people what's happening here. Continue the struggle at home.'"

"I got sucked in—I was one of their puppets," says Dave Rossi. Rossi is a Military Police Sergeant E-5, a big, clean-cut guy, a Vietnam veteran, and, until he started speaking out against stockade atrocities, a stockade guard in both Nam and in the U.S.

"EVERYBODY smokes grass over there, but mostly it's a bad kind of smoking, not like sometimes when you learn stuff. Over there the more I smoked the more I just ran away from my thoughts."

"When I got home, I was desperate for some decent reasons for things in my own mind. I got home and I realized that these people that were marching were going out of their way to bring me home."

"The hardest part is learning about how the Vietcong are really right—how they've got the support of their people. It really hurts you when you find that out—you feel really fucked up—like I killed gooks. I didn't really want to do it. It was pretty lousy, I guess."

“The first thing I noticed over there was the corruption. All the U.S. officers getting rich on the black market—and the way the South Vietnamese national and military police were just a bunch of goons, beating the shit out of their own people—these were people we were supposed to be defending.

“But I still kept saying, ‘It’s O.K., it’s O.K., they can do it’—only after a while it’s not O.K. anymore.

“One thing that helped was good ole marijuana. The first time I smoked it was in Nam. I couldn’t understand why it was illegal—this wasn’t anything wrong. Grass helped me become aware of things I had pushed aside. Grass helps you realize what’s important and what’s not. It lets you pull yourself out of a situation and look down at it and say, ‘What is this shit?’ And then you come down again and you object.

“I think it would have happened anyway, but it helped me to see us being in Nam for what was nothing but a money making mother fucker.”

Related

See *Fifth Estate's* Vietnam Resource Page.

fifth Estate

Liberation News Service
GIs Talk About the Army
1970

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/98-february-4-18-1970/gis-talk-about-the-army>
Fifth Estate #98, February 4-18, 1970

[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/98-february-4-18-1970/gis-talk-about-the-army)