

“Unforgettable”

Amid the tumultuous reactions to the war, I was drafted, greetings from Richard Nixon, by the Army while in law school in Philadelphia. After a conscientious objector application, citing an illegal war, was turned down I was inducted in June of 1969 and entered with ambiguous feelings: strong love of country, but ardent opposition to the war. After basic training at Ft. Bragg, I was assigned to stay at Bragg as a clerk at the training center, the largest in the country.

Soon after basic at a seminar on racism within the military I was recruited by several members of GI's United Against the War and subsequently attended meetings of the group that were housed at a Quaker House in Fayetteville. I helped organizer anti war marches and joined the editorial board of their newsletter the Bragg Briefs, which had been subject of a Federal Law Suit for which the US Courts protected the publication under First Amendment principles. I continued my daily duties in a position that was stabilized, immune from being sent to Vietnam. However, soon after the brass discovered my name appear on the editorial board of the newsletter, stabilization was lifted and I was ordered to Vietnam. I re-filed for conscientious objector status on the grounds that the war was illegal, and hired a lawyer, specializing in constitutional law who himself was against the war and was helping other GI's with legal matters.

My activity with the GI's United intensified, the association with like-minded people being both inspirational and educational. On weekends I traveled to various cities to meet with nationwide organizers of mass protests for the war including the planning of a Counter Armed Forces Day protest at many bases throughout the country including Ft. Bragg where Jane Fonda, Mark Lane, Rennie Davis of the Chicago 7 and SDS were featured speakers. The rally on May 16, 1970 came just two weeks after the tragic Kent State shootings, and the national tension was at a boiling point. 5,000 people attended the rally in Rowan St. Park in Fayetteville, NC giving the movement steam and credibility. My observation was that by mid 1970, many in the military were opposed to the war. My commanding officer, a Major O'Neill, a lifetime soldier,

veteran of several battles, basically confessed to me on the day after Kent State that he was ashamed at some of the actions he participated in during excursions in Central America. Thinking he was going to punish me for not wearing my uniform that day, he commiserated with my anti-war feelings and even got me out of trouble with my commanding officer who wasn't going to allow me to attend the May 16 rally, having restrained me to the barracks for missing a formation by two seconds. O'Neill told the officer that I was a damn good third baseman and needed in base softball game, and since I was okay to play in the game, I could also attend the rally.

The rally and the aftermath are still fresh in my mind. The crowd. The tension. The arrest of Fonda and Lane. The momentum gained for the movement, which included many officers who had returned from Nam. I lost my request for CO status, as well as an appeal to the US District Court. The brass attempted to ship me to Nam when they heard the decision, but my lawyer told me to "hold tight." Well, knowing they would ship me I was able to stay away for a day, and my friends hid my files needed for shipping me. A friend found me and told me my lawyer wanted me to call him. From a payphone in downtown Spring Lake, NC I was informed by my lawyer that the U.S. Court of Appeals agreed to hear the case and issued a restraining order prohibiting the Army from moving me from Ft. Bragg. The Quaker sponsored group assiduously worked on renovating a downtown Fayetteville property into an anti war coffeehouse that opened in July of 1970 and became a hub for citizens and soldiers to share ideas about the war. Fonda, Elliot Gould, Donald Sutherland, and Peter Boyle came to the grand opening. To say the least the coffeehouses's presence in a military town like Fayetteville, NC was controversial and I remember being nervous walking the streets to this bastion of sanity.

Eventually, my lawsuit became moot, as I was discharged honorably in June 1971, finishing out working as a legal clerk for a commanding officer who became my best friend in the Army. Many of the events of that period are vivid in my mind. The people. The roiling tensions. The rally (my first public speech). The meetings with nationwide protest leaders. Even

now while writing this I take a deep breath and sigh, wondering if we're about to go through something similar.

—*Al, Scotia*