

# Thoughts While in the Occoquan Detention Camp in Virginia

by NORMAN STRAX

I was arrested twice at the Pentagon last weekend, and I was kicked, and I was beaten, and I was dragged across the ground with my shirt torn and my skin scraping on the concrete.

It was an education. I think I now have some inkling of how it is to be a Black man in America, and live under the threat of the billy club all one's life; and I think I now have some remote inkling of how it is to be a peasant in Vietnam, and be beaten, and burned, and exterminated year after year by a sophisticated war machine from 8000 miles away.

The veneer of American democracy was lifted briefly at the Pentagon last weekend, and I had a chance to see the ugly dehumanized machine of war; that lies behind the veneer. But I also had a chance to see our remarkable younger generation in action. I saw young people who loved each other, and shared with each other, and called each other "brother" — and had the courage to face a beating without flinching, and the self-control to let themselves be beaten without doing violence in return. And in the confrontation between the War Machine and the people, I think the War Machine showed its hollowness, and I think the young people, and Love, showed their strength.

There was something surrealistic and almost unreal about the confrontation. That huge, imposing, floodlit Pentagon building, the soldiers on the roof, the civil servants peeking out of the windows; the row of soldiers 100 feet in front of the entrance, with their helmets, and their rifles, and their tear gas guns, and their bayonets, and their billy clubs, and their gas grenades, and their gas masks, and their big heavy kicking boots; the squad cars constantly driving up, the Big Brass stepping out, the salutes, the intense hurried conferences; the sergeants scurrying around with walkie-talkies, the captains walking behind the soldiers and whispering in their ears — such tenseness and such robot-like efficiency!

Confronting this dehumanized machine were several hundred unarmed people, sitting on the concrete, inches from the soldiers, boots; sandwiches, water, apples and cigarettes were passed from person to person and mouth to mouth (somehow nobody was worried about germs). We sang songs: "America the Beautiful," "We Shall Overcome," "Hell No, We won't Go," "Ain't Gonna Study War No More", and then back to "America the Beautiful" again. Draft cards — that symbol of conscription for an unjust war — were burned by the dozens. We talked to the soldiers; Gary Raydor, a former Green Beret, told them how he had quit in disgust when he realized that the army had changed him from a man into a brute; Stu Albert reminded them of how incensed we were when Japan bombed Pearl Harbour without a declaration of war, just as Mr. Johnson has bombed Vietnam; "General Hershey Bar" told them of the Secret Weapon called Love; and, finally, a 15-year-old pregnant girl told them that she wished to have many babies in her life — and that she wanted her babies to grow up in a world free from war. One girl even kissed one of the soldiers.

Several soldiers were observed to have tears in their eyes; one soldier shook hands with a demonstrator; one soldier in the back ranks was taken away under guard; and I am told that two soldiers actually took off their helmets, and dropped their guns, and joined the ranks of the demonstrators. The captains walking behind the soldiers were heard to be whispering in their ears, "Don't talk to the demonstrators". The guard was changed at very frequent intervals.

The War Machine simply did not know how to cope with such an unwarlike enemy, and on Saturday night they finally reacted in the only way they did understand; they marched forward and used brute force. I was about two feet from the line of soldiers when they began their advance. The soldiers kicked us hard, and they were followed by U.S. marshalls who used billy

clubs and dragged people away to be arrested. we all simply went limp, and made it necessary for them to carry us away; we did not fight back.

I vividly remember the advance of the soldiers, and the kicking, and the man next to me who broke and ran away, and the very pretty, very petite, red-headed girl who came and sat in the space vacated by the man — her name was Sandy, and she was from Chicago — and I shall never forget the way that girl was kicked around by the soldiers!

So here I am in the Occoquan detention camp, in hut No. 7. With me are Father Berrigan, the Jesuit priest and poet from Cornell University; and Gary Raydor, the former Green Beret; and Ira Rosenberg, the high school teacher who was fired because he favors withdrawal from Vietnam; and Hamp Howell and Sandy Eaton, co-directors of the Dorchester, Massachusetts Community Action Center; and Françoise, the Belgian hippie who lives for \$15 per month at the "Yellow Submarine" in New York City; and Robert Wilson, the garbage collector from Salt Lake City, Utah, who gave all his money to the Mobilization and hitch-hiked from Utah to the Pentagon; and "John Doe", a member of the famous communal farm at Voluntown, Connecticut, sponsored by the New England Committee for Nonviolent Action; and Jerry Rubin, the director of the whole October 21 confrontation project.

When I talk to these people, and when I look into my own heart, I become more and more confident that we shall win in the end. The young people of today will win a new world, without war, and without exploitation, and without racism — and you men of power, with your computers, and your missiles, and your stocks, and your bonds, and your armies, and your prostituted science, and your respectability, and your habit of averting your eyes — you men who are old in spirit; please get out of the way!

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LAW BALL	Lord Beaverbrook Hotel	NOV. 3
COFFEE HOUSE	Jones House	NOV. 4
BUSINESS WEEK		NOV. 6-11
S.R.C. MOVIE	Chemistry Auditorium	NOV. 8
BUSINESS BALL	McConnell Hall	NOV. 10
UNB DRAMA SOCIETY	Fredericton Playhouse	NOV. 10-11-13
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