

**[Bonus] AFD Ep 373 Links and Notes - Military Resistance to the Vietnam War
[Bill/Rachel] - Recording May 11**

- On this week's bonus episode we're talking about a 2005 documentary called "Sir! No Sir!" that I watched in April 2018 and which Rachel watched this week. We had never done an episode on it, but I do talk about it fairly frequently outside of this show. This is a documentary directed by David Zeiger about US military personnel who resisted the Vietnam War from the inside. Zeiger himself had organized "dissident GIs" during the war. The documentary was generally received quite positively despite or perhaps because of its release a couple years into the Iraq War, especially because it was regarded as being a story of courage, not so much a tale of despair.
- Some notes to highlight:
 - There's a long interesting section of this documentary on the public memory, myth, and erasure (in the 1980s to present) of the vociferous anti-war movement inside the US military and veterans, even though it had been widely covered in the media at the time it happened.
 - **By the Pentagon's own admission there were over 500,000 "incidents of desertion" during the Vietnam War.**
 - Apparently they had army doctors teaching dermatology to special forces so they could provide skin treatments to the South Vietnamese population for "hearts & minds." One of the young docs thought it was unethical to bomb them and then treat them so he stopped teaching and received 3 years in prison.
 - A number of troops from various branches deserted publicly in San Francisco, called the press, and chained themselves together and to clergy members in a church. The military jailed them in the Presidio stockade. Sign reading: "Obedience to the Law is Freedom."
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidio_mutiny
 - [Rachel] A Navy nurse (Susan Schnall) heard the US was dropping leaflets across Vietnam urging people to defect to South Vietnam's cause so she organized a small plane to fly over US military bases & drop leaflets urging active GIs to join the protests against the war. It worked. She was court-martialed. She also argued that if General Westmoreland was allowed to make speeches in uniform in favor of the war, she could make a speech in uniform against the war. The Navy said at the court-martial this was making a political statement in uniform.
 - Unsurprisingly there's a lot of really gruesome stories from combat in the documentary because a lot of the resistance guys had their conversion experience after brutal close-quarters. One guy said he wanted the sacrifice of the North Vietnam troop he defensively killed to matter
 - Guys started coming back from tours of duty and telling the new guys preparing to ship out of the US about what the missions actually were: Go out on early morning ambush patrols and kill 50 people, count the bodies until you have enough, oh look it's all women and children.
 - Some of the groups resisting the Vietnam War within the US military: American Serviceman's Union, Movement for a Democratic Military, Black Liberation Front of the Armed Forces, Black Brothers Union, Concerned Officers Movement, GIs United Against the War
 - [Rachel] GI coffeehouses located in towns near military bases became centers for organizing GIs. This is where the above mentioned storytelling to new recruits happened, as well as distribution of anti-war newspapers.

- Reactionary pro-war mobs began attacking and firebombing buildings and centers of the resistance at night. Police would conduct raids and flip out over iconography that was anti-patriotic or pro-black.
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G.I._Coffeehouses#Covered_Wagon
 - *The Covered Wagon coffeehouse opened in early 1971 in a converted theater in Mountain Home, Idaho, near the [Mountain Home Air Force Base](#). GIs from the base began publishing an underground newspaper called *The Helping Hand*. The rural Idaho town's pro-military establishment was hostile to the idea of GIs organizing against the war and waged a campaign against the coffeehouse. The local newspaper published letters urging physical attacks on the Wagon and its members and on November 21, 1971 the coffeehouse was burned to the ground by unknown arsonists. This attack generated national media coverage, including an appeal for support published in [The New York Review of Books](#) and signed by a number of prominent people, but the cause of the fire was never investigated by the town's authorities. While the coffeehouse was open, it helped GIs organize demonstrations, pass out leaflets and put out the newspaper, and it hosted speeches by many well-known antiwar activists, including the [FTA show](#), [Howard Zinn](#), [Dick Gregory](#) and [Country Joe McDonald](#). The *Helping Hand* ceased publication and the coffeehouse closed in late 1974*
- Resistance guys started using military resources on lots of bases to print underground newspapers against the war. The pro-war officers would flip out so hard that everyone would start reading it just to piss off the officers.
- [Rachel] Jane Fonda is interviewed in this documentary, both in new clips and clips from the time during the war, speaking at the time very eloquently on US foreign policy and underscoring that she was just there to represent the already anti-war troops, not to change their minds. She participated in the FTA (Free/Fuck the Army) tour, which was a play on the military's slogan of "Fun. Travel. Adventure". It was a counter to Bob Hope's pro-war USO tours.
- One guy began refusing minor orders in Vietnam at the front, not even knowing there was a broader resistance movement. A major said he was facing 20-to-life and sent him to the company psychologist who promptly showed him a full page New York Times ad of 100+ resisters' names against the war!
- there's a section in the documentary on localized Black power/liberation ideologies from all over the US mixing and meeting among the drafted Black troops in the ranks, who heavily resisted the war.
 - Some Black troops became adamantly opposed to the Vietnam War after seeing (in person or on film) US troops in the same uniforms being deployed in American cities against civilian Black protesters in 1968 because it further underscored their commonality with the Vietnamese people
- The Army sent troops from Fort Hood to Chicago to help with riot control at the Democratic National Convention but decided not to send them into the streets at the last minute, fearing that they might switch sides and back the protesters.
- After Nixon's "Vietnamization" policy began, the US 1st insisted it was no longer sending US troops into offensive combat situations on the ground in South Vietnam, but it was a lie and US front-line troops began broadcasting pirate radio and sending out a petition demanding evac
- Watching this, I wondered about the final count of assassinations of officers by low-level troops. The film discusses fragging incidents & the leadership's concern

with the growing number of murders and attempted murders at the front (especially after grunts were ordered on suicide missions).

- [Rachel]
https://displacedfilms.com/sir-no-sir-archive/archives_and_resources/library/articles/aboutface_09.html *About Face Vol. 2, No. 2*
 - *On March 15, 1971, a fragmentation grenade exploded in an officers' barracks in an Army artillery unit in Vietnam, killing two lieutenants and wounding a third. Capt. Rigby and 1st Sgt. Willie, who were to have slept in those barracks, arrived on the scene and decided they were the real intended victims. Billy Dean Smith, a black private from Watts, Calif., has been charged with the fraggings (murders) and attempted murders of Rigby and Willie, and is being held in solitary confinement at Fort Ord, California.*
- <https://www.historynet.com/murder-in-vietnam.htm>
 - *Due to the racial overtones, the case received international attention, and the trial was moved from Vietnam to Fort Ord, Calif. The prosecution produced a grenade pin it said was found in Smith's pocket shortly after the attack, though the defense argued the pin had been planted on Smith by investigators. The only reason Smith had been fingered, the defense argued, was that he had made antiwar statements before the murders. Black Scholar magazine suggested he'd been deemed the "logical guilty party" because he was "a black GI with a bad attitude." In the end a court-martial panel of seven officers found him not guilty.*
- The Air Force had electronic eavesdropping planes flying over North Vietnam with counterintelligence guys listening in on NVA radio assessments of damage from the US bombing raids. These guys thus knew the targets were civilian & US was lying, so they started leaking reports.
- On one Navy ship 1200 service members signed a petition demanding that their ship not be deployed to Vietnam. Other antiwar organizer troops (including navy officers) began organizing plebiscites with stay or go ballots for ships and then expanded voting participation to the wider public in San Diego.
<https://exhibits.stanford.edu/fitch/browse/the-connie-vote-the-uss-constellation-and-the-peace-movement-in-san-diego-1971>
- A great quote from near the end of the movie from one of the resisters: "And then you think about it. And you think 'God damn. Did I do that?'"
- See also: <https://twitter.com/BillHumphreyMA/status/973066739805294592> I found out about this documentary after discussing some stories I read a few years back in an anarchist book published at least 30 years ago that was about workplace sabotage, large and small, and there was a section on military sabotage.
<http://libcom.org/files/Sabotage-2.pdf>
 - In one incident highlighted by the Resistance Inside the Army (RITA) newsletter, 1.8 million gallons of airplane fuel at a supply base in Vietnam blew up. The military officially said this was an act of enemy sabotage resulting from careless and drug-addled sentries not keeping watch. There were zero US casualties in the incident and zero reported contact with the enemy before or after the explosion. RITA attributed it to internal sabotage.
 - Jean-Paul Sartre operated a PO box in Paris specifically designated to receive smuggled letters from Resistance Inside the Army members in Vietnam to their comrades stationed in Paris:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resistance_Inside_the_Army
 - Some other anecdotes from the book:

- 1. On routine sabotage of equipment and munitions and disobedience of orders: <https://twitter.com/BillHumphreyMA/status/973068958466265089>
- 2. And communist politics: <https://twitter.com/BillHumphreyMA/status/973071439434788865>