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One of the least known but most important chapters in the history of America's encounter with Vietnam was the internal rebellion that wracked the U.S. military. From the Long Binh jail in Vietnam, to Travis Air Force Base in California, to aircraft carriers in the South China Sea, the armed forces faced widespread resistance and unrest. Throughout the military morale and discipline sank to record lows. Antiwar committee and underground newspapers appeared everywhere.[1] Unauthorized absence rates reached unprecedented levels: in the Army in 1971 there were seventeen AWOLs and seven desertions for every one hundred soldiers.[2] Harsher forms of rebellion also occurred—drug abuse, violent uprisings, refusal of orders, even attacks against superiors. The cumulative result of this resistance within the ranks was a severe breakdown in military effectiveness and combat capability. By 1969 the Army had ceased to function as an effective fighting force and was rapidly disintegrating. The armed forces had to be withdrawn from Indochina for their very survival.

The strongest and most militant resisters were black GIs. Of all the soldiers of the Vietnam era, black and other minority GIs were consistently the most active in their opposition to the war and military injustice. Blacks faced greater oppression that whites, and they fought back with greater determination and anger. The rebellions that shook American cities like Watts, Newark, and Detroit erupted at major military installations just a few years later. The result was a military torn by racial rebellion.

The militancy of black GIs was a reaction to the pervasiveness of racial discrimination within the military. Racism has always existed in the American military as it has in the larger civilian society. In some respects the military is better than civilian life: in 1948, the armed forces were desegregated before many civilian agencies, and military service is one of the few avenues of potential advancement available for blacks. In other respects, though, the military is worse: the arbitrary nature of command authority can mean a miserable existence for those who serve under prejudiced commanders. Studies conducted during the Vietnam era confirm that institutionalized discrimination was widespread, especially in the military justice system. One of the most thorough studies was the Department of defense's own four-volume *Report of the Task Force on the Administration of Military Justice*, issued in December

1972. According to the Pentagon report, "No command or installation... is entirely free from the effects of systematic discrimination against minority servicemen."[3] The Congressional Black Caucus also conducted a study of discrimination within the military in 1972 and came up with similar findings. The Caucus' report concluded that "racism has become institutionalized at all levels of the military."[4]

Job assignment is a primary concern for black GIs, and the Pentagon and Black Caucus reports confirmed what the soldiers already knew: they were disproportionately assigned to low-skill and dead-end positions, especially in combat and service jobs. In 1971, according to the Black Caucus study, black servicemen represented 12.1 percent of all enlisted people, but they constituted 16.3 percent of those in combat, and 19.6 percent of those in service and supply positions.[5] By contrast they held only 4.9 percent of jobs in electronics specialties. In an Army study of dissenters in 1971, 31% of blacks interviewed were assigned to combat, compared to only 18% of the whites.[6] Blacks were also discriminated against in military promotions. Blacks were disproportionately assigned to the lowest ranks and were underrepresented at the highest grades. This pattern was most pronounced in the Officer Corps. In 1974, blacks constituted 16 percent of all military personnel, but only 2.8 percent of officers.[7]

The system of military justice is notoriously discriminatory. The Department of Defense Task Force found that "a greater number of black enlisted men received non-judicial punishment [25 percent] than their proportionate number [12 percent]."[8] Likewise in General and Special courts-martial studied by the Task Force, 23.4 percent of blacks and only 16.9 percent of whites received a punitive discharge as part of their sentence.[9] The incidence of less-than-honorable discharges shows the same pattern. In 1971 less-than-honorable discharges were issued to one of every seven black GIs, compared to only one of every fourteen whites.[10] Blacks were twice as likely as whites to receive a bad discharge.

While the struggle against racism and injustice was a major concern for black GIs, they, like most other soldiers, were also motivated by opposition to the war. The Army study of dissenters noted above confirms that ending the war was the number one priority for the majority of GI resisters. When asked to give the reason for their participation in dissent activities, the soldiers interviewed cited the "Vietnam War" 58 percent of the time. The other major reason, "The Way the Army Treats the Individual," was cited 38 percent of the time.[11] For black and other minority GIs, opposition to the war had a special meaning. Many blacks asked why they should risk death to defend freedom in Vietnam when they were denied basic rights back home. Why should they fight Asians in a distant land when they could be struggling against discrimination and racism in their own society? Such critical thinking received encouragement from the example of Cassius Clay [Muhammed Ali] and other draft resisters, and the antiwar speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. A popular documentary movie of the time was

titled *No Vietnamese Ever Called Me Nigger*. The teachings of Malcolm X and his radical critique of the war also had influence at several major bases. Andrew Pulley, a leader of GIs United Against the War at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, reports that he and other soldiers were initiated into the GI movement by listening to tapes of Malcolm X in the barracks.[12]

For black GIs, opposition to military authority was often expressed in cultural symbols. Throughout the military blacks gathered in informal study groups and cultural clubs to listen to music, to study and rap together, and to promote black pride and consciousness. Many of these groups became centers of resistance activity as the connections between the war and racism spurred growing numbers of GIs into action. Often they would join together in collective defiance of the military. I remember from my own experience at Fort Bliss, Texas, for example, that "the brothers" roomed together in the same part of the barracks and engaged in behavior that blatantly challenged regulations. Many of the troops had huge Afro haircuts that far exceeded allowable standards. A group of ten or more of the brothers adorned with beads or African jewelry would strut conspicuously across the quad between the barracks carrying "power sticks" (African walking sticks with a carved fist at the top). Their Army caps perched atop oversized Afros, many wearing sneakers rather than combat boots, most with their shirts unbloused and unbuttoned, they were an affront to the military dress code. But the brothers were left alone. The company sergeants and commanders already had more than enough trouble dealing with the current level of dissent, and they did not want to cause more trouble by challenging the blacks.

One controversial cultural expression of the time was the "dap" or "power greeting"—an elaborate series of hand slapping and finger popping that could sometimes take a minute or more to perform.[13] An innocuous enough greeting by itself, it sometimes became the center of conflict when prejudiced commanders or NCOs took offense and issued instructions banning it. In response, some blacks would develop an even more elaborate and time-consuming form of the dap, which they invariably chose to perform in mess hall lines, where it would cause the greatest disruption. Such manifestations of solidarity occurred frequently throughout the military and were an important assertion of social identity for black GIs.

To better appreciate the extent of the GI resistance movement, let us consult again the Army study of dissent. Conducted in 1970 and 1971 by the Research Analysis Corporation, a Virginia-based think tank that frequently served Army needs, the two volume report depicts a GI movement even more widespread than those of us involved at the time thought possible. The Army's researchers interviewed hundreds of soldiers at major Army bases in the continental United States to determine the extent of participation in resistance activities and GI attitudes toward the military. The survey found that one out of every four

enlisted soldiers had participated in "dissident" activities, defined as attendance at a coffee house, publication of a GI newspaper, participation in a demonstration, etc. The study found that an equal percentage of soldiers engaged in acts of "disobedience," which was defined as insubordination, refusing orders, sabotaging equipment, etc. This distinction between dissent and disobedience is helpful for understanding the full range of GI resistance activities. By combining these two categories of opposition, the Research Analysis Corporation found that a startling 47 percent of the soldiers interviewed engaged in some form of dissent or disobedience, with 32 percent involved in such activities more than once. If frequent drug use is added as another form of resistance, the combined percentage of soldiers involved in rebellious behavior comes to an incredible 55 percent. The Army's own study thus shows that half of its soldiers during the 1970-1971 period were engaged in resistance activity—a truly astounding level of disaffection within the ranks.[14]

The development of the GI movement followed the evolution of the war itself. Soldier resistance appeared first in the Army and Marine Corps, which bore the brunt of the fighting in the early years of the war. As the Army and Marine Corps were withdrawn and the burden of continuing the war fell to the Navy and Air Force, the GI movement took hold in these services, and by 1970 the locus of revolt had shifted more to the Navy and Air Force.

During the first phase of the GI movement, black Marines and soldiers staged numerous rebellions at stateside bases. These were usually prison uprisings sparked by mistreatment and oppressive conditions. At Fort Bragg, on July 23, 1968, black and white GIs seized control of the stockade to protest the beating of a black inmate. The rebels held the stockade for forty-eight hours before surrendering to armed troops from the 82nd Airborne.[15] Similar rebellions occurred at several Army bases in 1969—on May 13 at Fort Carson, on June 5 at Fort Dix, and on three separate occasions at Fort Riley. Nonviolent protests and boycotts were also led by blacks that year at Fort Ord and Fort Jackson.

Major rebellions also occurred in the Marine Corps. The oppressive brig at Camp Pendleton, California—described in an influential article as "Andersonville by the Sea"—was the site of several violent incidents.[16] After a series of protests during 1969, the prison exploded in bitterness and frustration. On the night of September 14, hundreds of prisoners broke out of their barracks, setting fires and smashing nearly everything in sight. When the rebellion was finally suppressed by tear gas-firing Military Police (MPs), the entire prison was a shambles.[17] An even more severe and tragic uprising occurred on July 20, 1969, at Camp Lejeune. A dispute over a racial incident at an enlisted men's club turned into a huge brawl that spread over the 1st Battalion, 6th Marines barracks area. The fighting left fourteen injured and one Marine dead.[18]

GI resistance was even more widespread among the more than 200,000 American soldiers stationed in West Germany. Black GIs organized study groups and rap clubs at nearly every major U.S. base in Germany. Among the more active groups were Unsatisfied Black Soldiers from the Mannheim-Heidelberg area, the Black Action Group in the Stuttgart region, and the Black Dissent Group from Smiley barracks at Karlsruhe. In 1970 these groups joined together at a remarkable "Call for Justice" assembly at the University of Heidelberg. Nearly 1,000 active duty soldiers, most of them black, gathered on July 4 to issue their own declaration of independence, demanding an end to the war, a withdrawal of U.S. interests from southern Africa, the elimination of discriminatory practices in military justice and a guarantee to equal opportunity for black and other minority GIs.[19]

While black and white GI groups often worked in isolation from one another, black-white unity sometimes emerged with potent effect. An example occurred at Nellingen, West Germany, in the summer and fall of 1970. The arrival of a zealous new commander and an increase in complaints about harassment and racial discrimination created a virtual war within the base. A Molotov cocktail was exploded outside the company orderly room, several fire bombings occurred on the base, and there were increasing incidents of sabotage. As the harassment of the troops and the number of racial incidents increased, the soldiers threatened to blow up the base. On the evening of September 21, approximately one hundred black and white GIs broke a curfew and marched through the base shouting "Revolution!" and "Join us!" to fellow GIs. The men returned to their barracks, but only after the Provost Marshal pledged that no reprisals would be carried out. Similar acts of defiance occurred at numerous bases, not just in Germany but throughout the military.[20]

The cumulative result of this mounting wave of resistance was a severe crisis for U.S. ground forces. Already reeling from the heavy combat losses and huge manpower commitments of the Vietnam war, the Army faced a "terrible nightmare," in the words of author Shelby Stanton.[21] Practically every unit in the Army had been stripped of manpower for Vietnam and faced severe internal turmoil. Stanton writes:

> By that year [1968] in Europe only 39 percent of the 465 reporting units had a personnel readiness equal to their deliberately diminished assigned capability.... Even more chilling was the secret December 31, 1968 pronouncement by the United State Army in Europe that none of its major units had met their operational training readiness conditions for the second straight year.[22]

Within the United States the situation was even worse:

In June of 1968 the Joint Chiefs of Staff were forced to flunk every division and brigade on the continent with the lowest grading possible in all categories—including personnel training and logistics, with the exception of the 82nd Airborne Division which had a brigade in Vietnam.[23]

Within Vietnam the morale and disciplinary crisis was the most severe of all and sapped the Army's ability to fight. The most extreme and tragic manifestation of the collapse of the Army was fragging, an attack against a sergeant or commander with a fragmentation grenade. According to the Army's own statistics there were 551 fragging incidents in the years 1969-1972, resulting in 86 deaths and over 700 injuries. Eighty percent of the victims in these incidents were officers and NCOs.[24] These statistics do not tell the full story of the internal rebellion within the Army, since they do not include shootings with firearms, which were also common. By 1969 the Army was at war with itself. Gung-ho officers eager to push their men into battle were an endangered species and often became the victims of assault by their own men. Shelby Stanton confirms what had been a widely circulated rumor at the time: following the bloody ten day battle for Hamburger Hill in May 1969, soldiers put a notice in an underground newspaper offering a $10,000 reward for fragging the officers in charge.[25]

The ultimate impact of the spreading internal breakdown was that soldiers increasingly refused to fight. By 1969 combat refusals and mutinies occurred with shocking frequency. One example during 1969 involved A Company of the First Battalion/506th Regiment at Camp Evans near the A Shau Valley. After a night of racial tensions that almost resulted in a shoot-out between black and white soldiers, fifteen black soldiers refused to report for combat patrol the next day.[26] Numerous such incidents occurred throughout Vietnam. During research for *Soldier's Revolt*, we were able to identify ten major incidents of combat refusal. Stanton's study, drawing upon official Army unit archives, shows that the "ugly stain of combat disobedience" had reached epidemic proportions. In the elite First Cavalry Division alone, according to Stanton, there were thirty-five incidents of refusal to fight during 1970, some involving entire units.[27]

One of the most severe rebellions of the Vietnam era occurred in 1968 among black inmates at the Long Binh jail, known to the troops as LBJ. As was common throughout the military at the time, LBJ was oppressive and overcrowded, and many of the prisoners were black. Tensions and violence within the jail steadily rose until it exploded at the end of August in a rebellion that left much of the stockade destroyed and resulted in injuries to 63 soldiers, including 23 who required hospitalization. One GI, Pvt. Edward Haskett of St. Petersburg, Florida, was killed in the uprising. Afterwards, nearly 200 blacks banded together and staged a work strike. A small group barricaded themselves within the stockade and continued to hold out for more than a month.[28]

A similar rebellion occurred two weeks earlier at the Marine brig in Da Nang. The prisoners seized control of the central compound area and held out against armed guards for twenty hours. When commanders tried to remove some of the inmates a few days later, violence erupted again and a force of 120 riot-equipped MPs was required to restore order. Eight soldiers were injured in the incident, and the cell block was heavily damaged by fire.[29]

As elsewhere in the military, blacks in Vietnam formed solidarity groups and rap clubs that often became the centers of political resistance. One such group, the so-called "Black Liberation Front of the Armed Forces," was lead by Eddie Burney, a Black Panther Party supporter stationed at the 4th Transportation Command in Long Binh. In the spring of 1971, Burney and other blacks staged a demonstration at Long Minh to commemorate the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. Chanting "Free Angela Davis!" and "Free the Brothers in LBJ!" forty GIs participated in the action.[30] Similar groups appeared at other camps in Vietnam, as black GIs banded together to oppose the war and defend themselves against harassment and discrimination. Their resistance activities had an enormous impact on the American military and played a crucial role in speeding the end of the war.

As noted earlier, the GI movement spread from the Army and Marine Corps to the Air Force and Navy as the latter services assumed the principal burden of continuing the American war effort. The rebellion that nearly crippled the Army and Marine Corps began to disrupt operations in the Air Force and Navy as well. By 1972, resistance had reached the point where B-52 crews were refusing to fly and the Navy's aircraft carriers were crippled by sabotage and internal rebellion.

As in the Army and Marine Corps, black servicemen played a leading role in the GI movement within the Air Force. Faced with the usual injustices—unequal job assignment, a disproportionate number of disciplinary punishments, slow promotions—black airmen joined together to defend their interests. As elsewhere in the military, they formed discussion groups or cultural organizations. At the end of 1970, *Air Force Times* admitted the existence of twenty-five such groups, many of them actively engaged in local struggles against injustice.[31] One such group, affiliated with the American Servicemen's Union, was the Black Discussion Group, active during 1971 at Plattsburgh Air Force Base in New York. Another was Concerned Black Airmen, centered at Chanute Air Force Base in Illinois. In 1971, the Chanute group held an on-base service on Armed Forces Day, May 17, dedicated to the memory of Malcolm X. In August, after months of worsening racial tensions on the base and growing black frustration, Chanute erupted into violence. During a three-day period, the base exchange, theater, and gas station were damaged and several airmen were injured. A few weeks later eighty men participated in a demonstration and picket line outside a high level meeting of the Air Training Command, to press home their demands for equal treatment.[32]

There were other uprisings and militant actions at air bases during the war, but the largest and most dramatic occurred at Travis Air Force Base in May, 1971. Travis was a crucial center for the American war effort, and the primary embarkation point for flights to Indochina. From May 22 through May 25, this important California base was crippled by perhaps the largest mass rebellion in the history of the Air Force. The roots of the conflict lay in command repression, rampant discrimination against black airmen, and a general crisis in morale resulting from the increasing unpopularity of the war. The rebellion began with a fracas at the local enlisted men's club, and quickly broadened into a generalized uprising throughout the base. Fighting apparently began on Saturday afternoon between black enlistees and the base security police. Following the incident, the minority barracks area was cordoned off and a number of black airmen were arrested. Anger and resentment continued to mount and on Monday evening the base erupted in violence as more than two hundred enlisted people, some whites included, attempted to free the imprisoned blacks and were met by a force of three hundred MPs and nearly eighty civilian officers called in from surrounding communities. A major brawl ensued that involved some six hundred airmen. The officers' club was burned, several dozen people were injured, and 135 GIs (most of them black) were arrested. Fighting continued into the next day; armed guards patrolled the base and all incoming traffic was searched at the gate.[33] For a few days, Travis was in a virtual state of siege, with base activities disrupted and nearly all attention devoted to restoring order.

In the wake of the 1971 Travis revolt, the Pentagon hurriedly dispatched special race relations advisors to the base in an attempt to prevent further violence. Throughout the Air Force (and in other services as well), racial harmony programs were established, including "human relations" councils and so-called equal opportunity officers, as a means of stemming the growing black rebellion. The new policies had little impact on the actual conditions of service and were designed mainly to channel grievances into controllable outlets. These programs did nothing to alter the systemic discrimination and injustice within the military, and they did not even address the problem of the continuing war in Indochina.

The GI movement in the Air Force continued to grow right up until the end of direct U.S. involvement in the war in 1973. By 1972, there were more than thirty active GI organizing projects and underground newspapers within the Air Force, not counting the substantial number of black discussion groups. With each new wave of bombing by the Nixon administration, protests and demonstrations erupted at bases throughout the world. During the massive escalation of bombing in response to the 1972 Easter offensive, demonstrations and rallies occurred at dozens of air bases throughout the world—including Westover, Mountain Home, Kirtland, McGuire, Offutt, Travis and March Air Force Bases in the United States, and Yokota, Misawa, and Clark Air Force Bases in Asia.[34]

The rising tide of antiwar resistance ultimately began to disrupt bombing operations and reached even the predominantly white officer pilots. Morale among airmen and crew members at the combat bases in Thailand and Guam steadily plummeted in 1972, as evidenced by rising heroin use and increasing incidents of "fodding" or "foreign object damage"—a phrase used to describe the unknown source of damage to aircraft. In December, two pilots stationed in Thailand (Captains Dwight D. Evans and Michael Heck) refused to fly further combat missions.[35] In the spring of 1973, four B-52 crewmen stationed at Guam joined in a federal court suit filed in New York by Congresswoman Elizabeth Holtzman, challenging the constitutionality of the continued bombing.[36] Shortly thereafter the Pentagon cut back on bombing missions, and a few months later Congress finally cut off funding and brought to an end the most intensive bombing campaign in the history of warfare.

Black resistance in the Navy also increased dramatically as its giant aircraft carrier task groups assumed increased responsibility for carrying on the air war. The Navy had traditionally been the most racist of the military services. It was the last to desegregate, and it has had a long tradition of exploiting Filipinos as servants and cooks. In 1971, fewer than five percent of the Navy's sailors were black, and the percentage of blacks among officers was less than one percent. The expanding manpower needs of the Vietnam war, though, forced the Navy to open its doors to an increasing number of black recruits. While the number of blacks grew, the discriminatory traditions of the past remained. The result was widespread resistance and political dissent, with black sailors playing a leading role in the GI movement within the Navy.

By 1970 underground newspapers and protest actions began to appear at major naval bases and even aboard ships. One of the earliest manifestations of this development was the Movement for a Democratic Military (MDM), a network of loosely connected radical groups that appeared at San Diego, Long Beach, and Alameda in California, and at the Navy's Great Lakes Naval Training Center near Chicago. The Great Lakes MDM chapter included a considerable number of black sailors, and in July, 1970, blacks and whites staged a series of protest marches and demonstrations in an attempt to free four WAVEs they felt were unjustly imprisoned in the base brig.[37]

As the pace of Naval air operations off the Indochina coast intensified in 1971 and 1972, the level of antiwar opposition also grew. As aircraft carriers left their California ports for combat missions in the South China Sea, they were greeted not by the traditional cheering crowds, but with protest demonstrations and political opposition. In October, 1971, sailors and antiwar civilians in San Diego organized an informal election to decide whether the *U.S.S. Constitution* should sail for Vietnam. Fifty-four thousand San Diegans voted in an unofficial referendum, including 6,900 active duty servicemen and women. Eighty-two percent of the civilians and 73 percent of the servicepeople voted to keep the *Connie* home.[38] The ship eventually departed for Indochina, but

it sailed under a cloud of dissent. A similar movement, initiated entirely by active duty sailors, emerged at the same time aboard the carrier *U.S.S. Coral Sea* at Alameda. Twelve hundred sailors—one fourth of the entire crew—signed a petition opposing the war in Indochina and urging that the ship stay home.[39] A similar below decks movement emerged in opposition to the sailing of the *U.S.S. Kitty Hawk* a few months later. When each of these ships sailed, a small group of black and white sailors on board declared that they could not in conscience participate in the war and publicly refused to go.

The Nixon administration's response to the Easter offensive in 1972 placed even greater pressures on an already heavily committed Navy. During the rest of that year as many as four carrier task groups (out of a total of fourteen) were on combat station in the Gulf of Tonkin. Normal fleet operations were completely disrupted, as practically the entire Pacific fleet was thrown into the fray. For the already overworked crew members involved, the escalation created great hardships. With opposition to the war spreading rapidly, morale plummeted. While many sailors expressed their opposition through acts of political dissent, many others resorted to more extreme measures of disobedience and obstruction.

Perhaps the most shocking manifestation of the disintegration of morale within the Navy in 1972 was the growing prevalence of internal sabotage. In its 1973 report on Navy disciplinary problems, the House Armed Services Committee disclosed what it termed "an alarming frequency of successful acts of sabotage and apparent sabotage on a wide variety of ships and stations." [40] The Committee reported "literally hundreds of instances of damage to Naval property wherein sabotage is suspected."[41] The most dramatic and important of these internal acts of disruption occurred in July, 1972, when within the space of just three weeks, two of the Navy's aircraft carriers were put out of commission by attacks from within. On July 10, 1972, a massive fire broke out aboard the *U.S.S. Forrestal* in Norfolk. The blaze caused seven million dollars in damage and was described as the largest single act of sabotage in Naval history. The carrier's deployment was delayed by more than two months.[42] Three weeks later another act of sabotage crippled the carrier *U.S.S. Ranger* as it was about to depart from Alameda for Indochina. A paint scraper and two twelve-inch bolts were inserted into the ship's reduction gears, causing nearly one million dollars in damage and forcing a three-and-a-half month delay in operations for extensive repairs.[43]

The sabotaging of the *Ranger* and *Forrestal* set the stage for one of the most violent internal uprisings in the history of the Navy—the rebellion aboard the *U.S.S. Kitty Hawk*. In October, 1972, after a grueling eight months at sea and constant bombing missions in the Gulf of Tonkin, the huge ship pulled into Subic Bay in the Philippines for a rest stop before a scheduled return home. Unexpectedly, the crew was informed that rather than sailing home, they had to return to combat

operations in the South China Sea. According to the report on the incident by the House Armed Services Committee, "this rescheduling apparently was due to the incidents of sabotage aboard her sister ships *U.S.S. Ranger* and *U.S.S. Forrestal.*"[44] With two of the Navy's principal carriers out of commission due to sabotage, the *Kitty Hawk* was forced to cancel its return home. With tensions already high among crew members due to declining morale and rising racial tensions, the order to return to Vietnam was the spark that touched off violence. On the night before the ship's departure, serious fighting erupted at the Subic Bay enlisted men's club. On the evening of October 12, as the ship arrived at Yankee Station off the coast of Indochina, the ship's intelligence investigator exacerbated tensions by calling in only black sailors for questioning about the brawl at Subic. Outraged at what they considered unfair treatment, over one hundred blacks gathered for a meeting on the ship's aft mess deck at approximately 8pm. The armed Marine detachment aboard the carrier was summoned to suppress the meeting, and an explosive situation quickly developed. The Executive Officer (XO), Commander Benjamin Cloud (a black man), entered the area and attempted to restore calm by ordering the blacks and Marines to separate ends of the ship. Moments later, however, Captain Marland Townsends, the Commanding Officer (CO), arrived and issued conflicting orders. As confusion spread, the blacks and armed Marines encountered each other unexpectedly on the hanger deck and a bitter clash erupted. The fighting spread rapidly throughout the ship, with bands of blacks and whites marauding through the decks and attacking each other with fists, chains, wrenches, and pipes. For hours the ship seethed with violent conflict and confusion. At one point the XO believed that the CO had been injured or killed, and made an announcement over the public address system ordering the rebels and armed Marines to separate locations. The Commander, still on the hanger deck and distressed at the XO's announcement, gave different orders over the address system. Finally, at about 2:30am at a meeting in the forecastle, the black sailors agreed to lay down their chains and other weapons and disperse. A total of forty-seven men, most of them black, were treated for injuries that night. Three had to be evacuated to shore hospitals. All twenty-five sailors arrested for the incident were black.[45]

A few weeks later, another major rebellion—this time nonviolent—occurred aboard the aircraft carrier *U.S.S. Constellation* in San Diego. Described by the *New York Times* as "the first mass mutiny in the history of the U.S. Navy,"[46] the rebellion aboard the *Constellation* grew out of the efforts of an onboard organization known as The Black Fraction to resist repression and discrimination against black crew members. Throughout October, 1972, the black sailors organized committees among themselves, elected representatives and demanded investigations into the ship's records of non-judicial punishment. As the organization grew in strength, the ship's commanders singled out fifteen members as agitators and ordered that six of them be given immediate less-than-honorable

discharges. Rumors began to circulate that as many as two hundred blacks would receive bad discharges. In response, more than one hundred sailors—mostly black, but including a few whites—staged a sit-in in the aft mess deck on November 3, 1972. The sailors continued their protest action throughout the day and into the next morning, refusing a direct order to report for muster. To avert violence and another *Kitty Hawk* incident, the ship's captain decided to return to North Island in San Diego and put the dissident group ashore as a "beach detachment." More than 130 men, most of them black, went ashore. A few days later, on November 8th, the commander ordered the men to return to the *Constellation.* The sailors refused and instead mustered in their own formation on the pier, in effect staging a dockside strike. A total of 122 crewmen were involved in the action. Despite their direct refusal of an order, the rebels received light treatment. Commanders were apparently eager to prevent, at all costs, further violence or uprisings. A number of the rebels were quietly discharged, but most were simply reassigned to shore duty.[47]

In the wake of the *Kitty Hawk* and the *Constellation* incidents, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, Chief of Naval Operations, called together eighty leading admirals and Marine Corps generals for an emergency meeting at the Pentagon in order to address the problem of race relations. The assembled commanders were urged to be more sensitive to the growing number of blacks within the military and to give greater attention to the human relations councils and other reforms recently introduced by the Pentagon.[48] In some places commanders sponsored educational programs on black history and culture, and sensitivity sessions and discussion groups were allowed. As noted earlier, these attempts at reform did nothing to redress the structural injustices and systematic discrimination encountered by blacks within the military. Moreover, as long as the war in Vietnam continued and American troops remained in Indochina, the GI movement and the black rebellion within the military continued. Only in 1973, as the direct U.S. combat role finally came to an end, did tensions within the ranks begin to ease and military life slowly return to normal.

As American forces completed their withdrawal from Indochina and the military shifted to the all-volunteer force, hundreds of thousands of Vietnam-era GIs were discharged *en masse.* Manpower levels in the military dropped sharply from a high of 3.5 million in 1968 to 2.3 million in 1972. In some cases, an "early out" release program allowed enlisted people to return home months ahead of schedule. Many of the black resisters in the Navy were released under this program in 1972; the same strategy was used to rid the Army of soldier activists the year before. The longest and most divisive war in American history was at last over, and the GIs who resisted it were sent home. Military commanders breathed a collective sigh of relief and began the arduous task of rebuilding their shattered services and creating a new all-volunteer force.

Although little known or understood, the GI resistance movement

in which blacks played a leading role was an important part of the Vietnam war experience. Never before in modern history had the American armed forced faced such widespread internal revolt. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers, marines, airmen and sailors dissented and disobeyed military commanders, often at grave personal risk, to speak out for peace and justice. Their struggle had a major impact in forcing the American military to finally end the war in Vietnam.

[1] See David Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt* (New York: Anchor/Doubleday) 1975: 283-302. Cortright identified approximately 250 such groups.

[2] Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Manpower and Reserve Affairs; cited in Cortright, *op. cit.:* 11-14.

[3] Department of Defense, *Report of the Task Force on the Administration of Military Justice, Vol. I* (Washington, D.C.) 30 November 1972: 19-20.

[4] The Congressional Black Caucus, *Racism in the Military: A New System for Rewards and Punishment* (Washington, D.C.) 15 May 1972; reprinted in the *Congressional Record* (14 October 1972): E 8674-88.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] R. William Rae, Stephen B. Forman and Howard C. Olson, *Future Impact of Dissident Elements Within the Army on the Enforcement of Discipline, Law and Order,* Technical Paper RAC-TP-441 (McClean, VA: Research Analysis Corp.) January 1972: 41.

[7] Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Manpower and Reserve Affairs, 1974.

[8] Department of Defense, *Report of the Task Force on the Administration of Military Justice:* 27-28.

[9] *Ibid.:* 30-31.

[10] Department of Defense, *Report of the Task Force on the Administration of Military Justice, Vol. 4,:* 160, Table S-2.

[11] Rae, Forman and Olson: 38.

[12] Fred Halstead, *GIs Speak Out Against the War* (New York: Pathfinder) 1970: 31-32.

[13] For a discussion of dapping, see Department of Defense, *Report of the Task Force on the Administration of Military Justice, Vol. 1:* 60-61.

[14] Rae, Forman and Olson: 21-32.

[15] Larry G. Waterhouse and Mariann G. Wizard, *Turning the Guns Around: Notes on the GI Movement* (New York: Praeger) 1971: 116-118.

[16] Robert Sherrill, "Andersonville-by-the-Sea: Pendleton Brig," *The Nation* 209. (15 September 1969): 239-42.

[17] *New York Times* (16 September 1969): 95. See also Peter Barnes, *Pawns: The Plight of the Citizen-Soldier* (New York: Knopf 1972: 235-37.

[18] *New York Times* (10 August 1969): 1; Flora Lewis, "The Rumble at Camp Lejeune," *Atlantic* (January 1970): 35-41.

[19] Max Watts, letter to David Cortright, October 1973. See also the GI newspaper *The Next Step* 1.2 (19 July 1970): 1.

[20] *Overseas Weekly* (6 September 1970; 4 October 1970).

[21] Shelby L. Stanton, *The Rise and Fall of an American Army: U.S. Ground Forces in Vietnam, 1965-1973* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press) 1985: 366.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] *Ibid.:* 367.

[24] *New York Times,* (5 September 1971): 36. *Hearings before the Defense*

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[25] Stanton: 301.

[26] *Newsweek* (9 June 1970): 50.

[27] Stanton: 349.

[28] *New York Times* (1 October 1968): 3; *New York Times* (8 January 1969): 12; *Report of the Special Civilian Commission for the Study of the U.S. Army Confinement System* (Washington, DC) 15 May 1970: 46.

[29] *New York Times* (19 August 1968): 5.

[30] *Civil Liberties* (American Civil Liberties Union) .293 (February 1973): 1.

[31] *Air Force Times* (6 December 1970): 9.

[32] *Camp News* (Chicago Area Military Project) 2.7 (15 August 1971): 30.

[33] *Chicago Daily News* (25 May 1971): 13; see also *The Bond* (American Servicemen's Union) 5.6 (30 June 1971): 1, 8.

[34] See Cortright: 133-134.

[35] *Washington Post* (20 January 1973): 4.

[36] *New York Times* (28 November 1972): 18; *New York Times* (8 December 1972): 18.

[37] George Schmidt (Chicago Area Military Project), letter to David Cortright (24 January 1974).

[38] Cortright: 133-34.

[39] *Up Against the Bulkhead,* San Francisco, .10 (November 1971): 7; *Camp News,* 2.9 (15 November 1971): 3.

[40] *Report by the Special Subcommittee on Disciplinary Problems in the U.S. Navy of the Committee on Armed Services,* House of Representatives, 92nd Congress, 2nd Session, HASC No. 92-81 (2 January 1973): 17,670.

[41] *Ibid.:* 17,684.

[42] *New York Times* (28 November 1972): 18; *New York Times* (8 December 1972): 18.

[43] *New York Times* (13 June 1973): 5; *Village Voice* (1 February 1973): 16.

[44] *Report by the Special Subcommittee on Disciplinary Problems:* 17,674.

[45] *Ibid.:* 17,674-17,676; see also *New York Times* (29 November 1972): 24; *New York Times* (26 December 1972): 1.

[46] Henry Leifermann, "A Sort of Mutiny: The Constellation Incident," *New York Times Magazine* (18 February 1973): 17.

[47] *Report of the Special Subcommittee on Disciplinary Problems:* 17,677-17,679; *New York Times* (25 November 1972): 20; Elmo Zumwalt, *On Watch: A Memoir* (New York: Quadrangle/Times) 1976: 222-233.

[48] *New York Times* (11 November 1972): 1.