

A Question of Black and

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

When the officers of the Philippine Constabulary under the command of Major Temestocles De Leon arrested Doug Sorensen, they confiscated his lawyer's attache case and inventoried its contents. They noted it contained among other things: "Voir Dire Questions—Special Court Martial of Sgt. Ronald F. Grosser, dated 30 Sep 72—10 pages; four small pieces of bond paper containing written notes entitled 'defense Case'; one small can shoe polish—Lion Brand; one small box rubber bands—Fuji brand."

"I was on my way to talk to the 11 blacks from the oiler Hassayampa who were in the brig because of the trouble on the ship when I was arrested. They had requested civilian counsel," says Sorensen, a 28-year-old Stanford law graduate, who was born in Scottsbluff, Neb., and would still be manning the National Lawyers Guild Military Law Office near our Subic Bay Naval Base if he hadn't been busted for being on the street at the same time Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos was invoking martial law and arresting all his political opponents.

It appears, however, that Doug Sorensen was not a political opponent, but that his arrest was requested and arranged by the United States Navy. At least that is what Marcos' press secretary seems to have said—the facts are hard to get at this distance. Sorensen says that "a couple of Naval Investigative Office agents were actually present when my house was being ransacked." He adds that all his files were taken and that he has

two witnesses who later saw the same Navy personnel photographing their contents.

Since all of Sorensen's clients were airmen from Clark Field or sailors from Subic Bay up for court martial this is no small breach of the confidentiality of the lawyer-client relationship by the armed forces. In the light of the racial conflict that has broken out in the Navy recently, it may be more than coincidental that more than half of Sorensen's case load was black.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Elmo Zumwalt has been honest in saying that the Navy's racial practices have been disastrous; but if Doug Sorensen is right, the admiral doesn't know the half of it: "The whole scene is segregated there. All the bars and brothels are segregated. The black vice section is known as

White in the Navy

the 'jungle.' I never saw a court martial that wasn't all white. White judges, white prosecutors, white juries—all white."

Most of the time, however, the prisoners were black. Sorensen only spent two months in the Philippines as a white civilian lawyer defending black sailors, but his very distinct impression is that blacks are court-martialed for offenses that whites aren't, and that, when convicted, they're given tougher sentences.

He's convinced, for instance, that many a black serviceman gets in trouble because of the "dab." The dab is the name for that fancy, almost endless handshake a number of younger blacks like to use. At one time the dab, which is supposed to have ancient African origins, had mildly militant connotations; now it merely ex-

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presses the feeling of brotherhood and solidarity, but that's apparently enough to drive a certain kind of white officer out of his tree.

In the matter of sentences Sorensen cites the case of a white sailor cutting the lock on a ship's reduction gear, a mechanism indispensable for any kind of locomotion. As a result of this act, the sailor's ship was hung up, unable to go anywhere for two or three days, but the culprit was fined \$100. Compare that case of sabotage to the black sailor convicted of stealing a tape recorder from a PX. He got five months in jail and forfeiture of two-thirds of his pay while he served his sentence. Both cases were heard by the same judge.

The other day in discussing the Navy's racial debacle, Zumwalt said, "We have tended to fail wherever a 'real' change from hallowed routine was required." This is supported by Sorensen who reports that the Navy has finally gotten rid of its all-black corps of mess boys by substituting Filipinos in the same old white coats. "The blacks," he says, "see that and have more identification with the Asians than with the Navy. That's what frightens the brass and Adm. Zumwalt's memos can't change that."

That crisis isn't going to be resolved when the Navy does get a white man working to help the blacks and then they have a foreign government arrest him. At the minimum his black sailor-clients have had every dark suspicion reinforced by Sorensen's removal. He is gone forever from Subic because, as he says, "If we'd stayed we would have been tried by a military tribunal. They told us that would have been a choice between electrocution and musketry."