

SFChronicle

War Resister's Bitter Story

SEP 17 1974

By Maitland Zane

"Unconditional amnesty is the only way, man. If Nixon gets it, why can't me and my brothers get it?"

"It's punishment just being away. You have to change your life, learn a new language. I was only 18 when I split from Germany, I had a lot of hard times, nobody to depend on but myself. I did my time."

Those words came from David Zonars, a 21-year old truck driver who may be the only man in San Francisco who spent three years in Sweden as an Army deserter.

Yesterday he lay in a ward at San Francisco General Hospital talking bitterly about President Ford's offer of "conditional" clemency for thousands of Vietnam War deserters and draft dodgers. Zonars thinks it's unjust that Mr. Nixon should have been given an unconditional pardon when men like himself would have to spend

up to two years earning their pardon. "I think Nixon should have been put in jail," he said.

"It just burned my stomach to see a scumbag like him get away with it."

Zonars has been in a cast since April 16, when he took a "little spill" off a friend's motorcycle and splintered his right leg in four spots.

He is from Ohio and has had his share of bad luck. His mother died when he was young, he spent time in reform school, and his father "hassled" him to enlist in the Army.

He detested the service and went AWOL several times, in the United States and in Germany.

When his company commander suggested sending him to Vietnam, Zonars did what at least 450 other young Americans did and went to Sweden.

"I saw my chance and ran," he said. "I don't be-

lieve in killing. I believe strongly that if I'd been sent to 'Nam I'd've gone over to the other side. I'm a non-violent person. I just didn't belong there."

The Swedish government treated him well, sending him to language school where he learned to speak Swedish and Norwegian. The only trouble he encountered was for dealing marijuana. He paid a small fine.

He worked as a forklift driver in a steel mill. He found himself a Swedish woman friend and they have a daughter.

"I was homesick as hell," he said. "So last September I turned myself in to the American Embassy and told them I wanted to come back."

The Army chose not to send him to prison; instead, he received an undesirable discharge as absent without leave rather than as a deserter.



DAVID ZONARS
A bleak outlook

"I'm scarred for life," he said. "I can't get a government job or GI benefits. I used to want to be a cop but I can't do that with my record." He also wishes the FBI would stop talking to his landlord, and tailing him and his friends who are active in the Vietnam Veterans Against the War organization.

"Maybe I ----- up to a certain extent," he said, "but I don't want to do it again."