

See also KPFA News, 23 Jun 71, this file.

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Seizure of Antiwar Mail to G.I.'s Ordered in Vietnam

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WASHINGTON, March 30—

A confidential Army directive obtained from Vietnam shows that Army commanders have been ordered to intercept and confiscate personal, first-class mail containing antiwar or other dissident publications sent to soldiers there.

The teletyped message from the Army headquarters in Longbinh to all Army commanders in South Vietnam instructs that "such mail will not be distributed to members of the unit."

A spokesman for the Army here confirmed the authenticity of the message. He said the policy was authorized under a regulation for the Army in Vietnam that "encourages" soldiers to report the receipt of mail that is "inflammatory" or "critical of the military effort in Vietnam."

A spokesman for the United States Postal Service, however, said the Government had no authority to seize first-class mail without a court order.

All Mail the Same

The courts, the postal spokesman said, usually permit interception of mail only when the contents are judged to constitute a "clear and present danger" to the security of the United States.

He said that no distinction was made between mail addressed to civilians and that addressed to military personnel.

A department of the Army letter entitled "Guidance on Dissent," sent to all commands in May, 1969, said that "a commander may not prevent distribution of a publication simply because he does not like its contents."

The letter further said: "A commander must have cogent reasons, with supporting evidence, for any denial of distribution privileges. The fact that a publication is critical—even unfairly critical—of Government policies is not in itself a grounds for denials."

An Army regulation dated March 20, 1970 prohibits the dissemination of dissident literature only when the Secretary of the Army considers that it "presents a clear danger to the loyalty, discipline, or morale of troops."

The mail in question was sent from the offices of the G.I. Press Service here. It calls itself The Associated Press of G. I. Underground Papers and is published by the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam.

The letters, according to the Army message dated May 22, 1970, contained an appeal asking soldiers in Vietnam to contribute all or part of a recent pay rise to the peace movement. The mail also contained lists of 55 antiwar newspapers and 12 antiwar groups.

Robert Wilkinson, editor of the G. I. Press Service, said the letters had been addressed to soldiers whose names had

been taken from a mailing list compiled by his organization. He said that about 3,000 letters had gone out in that particular mailing and that several more mailings had been sent earlier and one since then.

The Army dispatch said that the return address on the envelope, which was used to identify the letters, gave the name of Allen Myers, former editor of the G. I. Press Service, and the street address of the press service office here. Mr. Wilkinson confirmed that.

The Army became aware of the mailings, according to the message, when the 525th Military Intelligence Group intercepted an envelope bearing Mr. Myer's return address and from which the mailing label had slipped off. Mr. Myers was known to military intelligence in Vietnam, having been barred from entering the country by the South Vietnamese police in January, 1970.

That resulted in the teletyped

directive, which said the intercepted letter "serves to emphasize that anti-Vietnam war groups are striving to mail dissident and subversive literature to unit mail clerks" in Vietnam.

The message continued: "Copies of the Apr. 70 issue, Veterans Stars and Stripes for Peace, an antimilitary newspaper dedicated to ending the war in Vietnam, have also been received by USARV [United States Army Vietnam] personnel."

"Among its features is an ad by the G.I. Press Service requesting soldiers sign and circulate a petition for immediate withdrawal of troops from Vietnam."

The directive concluded: "Personal mail received, addressed unit mail clerk, will be treated as being addressed to C.O. (commanding officer) and delivered to the unit commander for disposition I.A.W. [in accordance with] USARV

Regulation 380-8. Such mail will not be distributed to members of the unit."

A spokesman for the Army here, which queried the headquarters in Vietnam about the message, said that regulation 380-8 "encourages personnel to report to their commanding officers the receipt of matter which appears to be of inflammatory nature, or adverse to or critical of the military effort in Vietnam, or a matter of intelligence interest."

He said the directive to intercept G.I. Press Service mail had been sent out because the command in Vietnam evidently considered the contents to fall within the description of the regulation.

He said the mail that included "unit mail clerk" in the address was treated as if it had been addressed to "occupant" or "resident" in civilian life in the United States. But the headquarters in Saigon did not deny that the mail was personally addressed.