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**Antiwar Veterans on Trial Say
Disillusionment Set In on Return**

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By United Press International

GAINESVILLE, Fla., Aug. 5— In another time, another war, they might have been greeted as returned heroes. Scattered among the seven young men are 57 campaign medals, citations and decorations.

Now, deeply troubled by their service in Vietnam, they sit around a defense table, all but one wearing long hair bound in pony tails and in faded jungle fatigue jackets or uniform shirts. Charged along with them is a quiet young man who wants to own a small self-sustaining farm and used to work in a local hippie boutique called the Wang Dang Doodle Shop.

They are on trial here, accused by the Government of plotting an assault on the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach in 1972 with automatic weapons, crossbows and slingshots.

At a park out by the airport, some 200 other members and supporters of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War have been encamped to protest the trial. Most were pulling out today.

1,000 at Rally

They drew around 1,000 people for a rally yesterday at the University of Florida with Tom Hayden and Anthony Russo, defendants in other conspiracy trials. But their demonstrations have been small, quiet affairs, almost a shadow of earlier days, with a few hundred marchers parading each night in front of the courthouse with candles. Nobody much wants to hear about Vietnam any more.

Most members of the antiwar group are combat veterans. Many were in elite units—marines, paratroopers or the dangerous long-range reconnaissance patrol called "lurps." Many were sergeants or squad leaders.

For most, the disillusionment came later, after they had returned home.

"It takes you six months to two years to figure out why your head is so messed up," said one Texas-born defendant, John W. Kniffin. "They call it post-Vietnam syndrome."

Small and thin, he served 32 months in Vietnam as a tank commander and wears the three stripes and crossed rifles of a marine staff sergeant on his uniform shirt. He will not talk about his decorations.

"They gave you R and R [rest and recreation leave] based on body counts," he remembers. "You became mercenaries, fighting for R and R, killing to get a trip to Kuala Lumpur. Killing just so you can get out of Nam for a while."

Perhaps the most troubled of the defendants over his war experiences is 25-year-old William J. Peterson, who won a Distinguished Flying Cross, the nation's second highest award, while a helicopter door gunner and later served as a "lurp."

When First Lieut. William L. Calley Jr. was convicted for his role in the massacre of civilians, Mr. Peterson went to the provost marshal's office at Fort Bliss, Tex., and attempted to turn himself in for committing war crimes. He was ignored.

Recalling missions flown in free-fire zones near the Cambodian border, he said:

"Anything destroyable was destroyed. One time there were three people fishing with fish nets in their hands, and they were all killed. Another time it was an old man riding his bicycle down the road. He was killed, too.

"I watched defoliation, burning of crops and dwellings. We used to shoot flares horizontally into their dwellings at Cu Chi. They were star clusters and they would burst right in the hooch.

"It was a way to combat boredom. When we were flying, we killed anything that moved in the free-fire zones. Pigs, chickens, dogs, anything. We used to shoot flares down into the grass roofs of their homes to burn them."

The man the Government is portraying as the ringleader of the scheme at Miami Beach is former Sgt. Scott Camil, whose mother used to belong to the John Birch Society and who joined the Marines three days out of high school.

He talked about the people he had killed when he testified at a "winter soldier investigation" by the antiwar group of alleged war crimes—beginning, he recalled in a later interview, almost in a spirit of bragging.

He later became the Florida coordinator of the organization. He is bushy-bearded and intense. He appears well liked by local policemen and the courtroom marshals.

Trainees Deserted

As an Army lieutenant, Peter P. Mahoney was an adviser to the South Vietnamese and trained self-defense forces in hamlets. Two weeks after the graduation ceremonies for a group of 13-to-17-year-old trainees, he learned that all 29 of his new militiamen had gone off to join the Vietcong.

Alton Foss, 27, was wounded while serving as a Navy hospital corpsman attached to the Marines. His left leg became crippled while he was in a hospital, ending his plans for a junior college basketball scholarship, and the sedation led to a drug habit that he says he has only recently "kicked."

The only one of the veterans who still wears his hair short is Donald Perdue, a former Marine corporal. Rather than fatigues, he wears neat, open-necked sport shirts and polished loafers to court. Mr. Perdue, a junior college student, is on the board of directors of a federally supported artificial reef project near Miami that aims to restore underwater ecology by replacing reefs destroyed by pollution.

Stanley K. Michelson spent 20 months in Vietnam with an Army psychological warfare unit attached to the Marines. He worked as a mailman when he came home until his hair became so long he was dismissed. He joined the antiwar Vietnam veterans after veterans threw their medals on the steps of the capital in Washington.

The only nonveteran among the defendants is John K. Briggs, 22, a lanky young man with hair to his shoulders. The Government charges that he ordered powerful slingshots for the alleged plot. The other day, Mr. Patterson announced in court that Mr. Briggs had been made a member of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War.