

The Gainesville Trial

THE TRIAL IN FLORIDA of the Gainesville Eight resulted, as it should have, in a swift acquittal. The jury in the case of the seven Vietnam veterans and a hippie shopkeeper who were charged with conspiring to disrupt the 1972 Republican national convention didn't even want to deliberate last week, when it was sent out to find its verdict. It was that sure in its mind for the defendants.

This ill - starred prosecution was distinctly not the Justice Department's finest hour. It was a case resting on the testimony of informers hired and paid, most of them, by the government; it never brought out convincing proof that the defendants did anything but talk about their plan, and, as their attorney argued, "you can't convict someone for talking."

Further, seven of the Gainesville Eight were members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War — they had been in Vietnam, they knew of their own knowledge what they were against, and accordingly they retained more credibility than the government's agents who infiltrated them. The jury didn't think much of the latter.

ALL THAT SAID AND CONCEDED, however, can the government attorneys and FBI men be wholly blamed for bringing the Gainesville Eight before a grand jury in July, 1972, for indictment, a month before the Republican convention even got under way?

Their desire to "cause havoc" in the GOP was attested by a newsletter mentioning a plan to lay on devices called wrist rocket sling shots, to be used "defensively" if necessary against the police. It is hardly far - fetched to believe that these ex - soldiers, trained as killers, were capable of making trouble for an administration that had had many occasions to exhibit its fear of militant demonstrators.

SO THE GAINESVILLE CASE seems to us to emerge as a preventive arrest and indictment on well - founded suspicions but flimsy proofs. We don't approve of preventive arrests in this country, but in public events where the President is to appear they do happen. In its post - election, post - Watergate mood the public was undoubtedly on the defendants' side. They stand vindicated, but certainly at a heavy personal cost over the past 14 months in both freedom and legal fees.