

# Fort Dix Honors Soldier Who Is Opposed to the War

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FORT DIX, N. J.—Specialist 5 Richard W. Weidman, a conscientious objector to the war in Vietnam who once submitted to arrest rather than accept induction into the Army, was honored as Soldier of the Month here in August.

According to 24-year-old Specialist Weidman, the award "blew their minds at G-2" (Army Intelligence) because he has spent much of his time in the service opposing the war even though he gave in to his family's pleas to enter the Army.

But according to a number of officers and enlisted men here, as startling as the award might have been to old-line commanders, its larger importance was its implication that critics of both the war and the Army could live together.

Maj. Gen. Howard H. Cooksey, who arrived from Vietnam early this year and assumed command here gave the award to Specialist Weidman, apparently unaware of his background and at his antiwar activity while in the Army.

But even that would not have made any difference. "It's a gamble I'd take again," General Cooksey remarked in an interview here. "Even if I knew all about Weidman's background, that wouldn't have ruled out his award. He was doing his job and to decide otherwise would have been unfair to him."

## Friendly Dissuasion

First Lieut. Ben G. Clay of San Diego, the commanding officer of the medical holding company that nominated Specialist Weidman for the August award, told his subordinate last summer.

"Please Rick, don't go in there and call the old man a fascist pig. He simply isn't. Cooksey's really aware. He's hip. He knows what's going on around here."

Lieutenant Clay said Specialist Weidman, his company clerk, "has been an outstanding trooper," and added: "I don't give a damn about a

man's political views so long as he's a good soldier."

Of an antiwar poster prominently displayed on the wall of Specialist Weidman's room, Lieutenant Clay said: "I don't see anything very threatening in posters."

## Wouldn't Change Mind

The Army Intelligence attempted to dissuade Lieutenant Clay from nominating Specialist Weidman to be the first medic at Fort Dix to be named Soldier of the Month since 1962. However, the lieutenant refused to go along.

"This guy worked hard for me and that's all I want to know," he said.

As for Specialist Weidman himself — a tall, articulate man with deep-set hazel eyes and short dark blond hair — he feels that his award showed that a man can honestly oppose the war with all his conviction and at the same time avoid a running conflict with the Army.

Specialist Weidman attended Francis Lewis High School in Queens and graduated in 1967 from Colgate University, where he was president of the student body. He majored in philosophy and religion, played freshman football, ran cross-country and acted and directed in the school theater.

As a small boy, he was an Army brat: his father was an Army investigator who resigned as a captain in 1954 and now is president of a limousine service at New York City airports.

As a college student, Specialist Weidman supported American policy in Vietnam. It was not until he attended a National Student Association conference in 1967 that he finally turned against the war.

## Eligible for Draft

In November, 1967, Specialist Weidman said, he applied for and was granted an unusual 2-A draft deferment on the grounds that "the war was not in the national interest; and since I was working against the war my work was essential to the national interest."

"When I got the deferment, nobody would believe it. They

were astounded, incredulous."

Specialist Weidman had met Representative Allard K. Lowenstein, Democrat of Nassau, at an N.S.A. meeting, and in 1968 he joined Mr. Lowenstein's campaign for Congress, ultimately running his headquarters in Valley Stream.

However, after Mr. Lowenstein was elected in the fall of 1968, Specialist Weidman felt that his deferment was "dishonest." That he was "simply playing their game." So he turned it in and was promptly reclassified 1-A and called up for duty.

On Jan. 28, 1969, he was ordered to be inducted at the Army's Whitehall Street offices in Manhattan. "When I told my parents that I wasn't going to go, my mother broke down," he recalled.

After informing Army officials that he would refuse to step forward, Specialist Weidman was arrested by Federal Bureau of Investigation agents, who took him into a room, ordered him to strip for a search and then took him in handcuffs to the Federal House of Detention.

"One of the agents told me," he said, "that they particularly wanted to get me because I was one of the 150 former or present body presidents who had written to Nixon vowing that 'We wouldn't go.'"

Specialist Weidman was held on a \$5,000 bond on a charge that usually called for the accused to be released on his own recognizance.

The next day, Specialist Weidman's mother suffered a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized. That night, his father visited him in jail and told him that his decision to face prison rather than military service might kill her. "He was right on the edge of the knife," he said.

"The Feds told me to do

what my father wanted and I looked at them and looked at my father and told him: 'Just look at the people you've sided with. Look what they're doing to me and yourself.'

"But I couldn't help myself and I told them I'd go. They let me out, I was inducted and I was sent to Fort Jackson in South Carolina."

Specialist Weidman later was transferred to Fort Sam Houston in Texas. There he was designated an official conscientious objector and assigned to medical training.

## Antiwar Activity

In August, 1969, he spent his leave helping to organize the antiwar moratorium in Washington.

That fall, he was sent to Vietnam where he served as a noncombatant medic in the Americal Division. Nevertheless, his antiwar activity continued with undiminished fervor.





Specialist 5 Richard W. Weidman next to peace poster



John A. Leone

Maj. Gen. Howard H. Cooksey, post commander, in office