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A Conflict of Cultures Marks Veterans' Trial

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GAINESVILLE, Fla., Aug. 26—The blue van with New Jersey plates pulls up to the steps of the Federal Building shortly before 9:30 in the morning and out springs an astonishing number of lawyers, defendants and legal assistants carrying file cases and cardboard boxes filled with papers.

Thus begins another day in the bizarre, four-week-old trial of seven antiwar veterans and a supporter charged with having plotted an assault on the 1972 Republican National Convention.

In the courtroom, the prosecutor, Jack Carrouth, plunks down an attaché case so full he sometimes has trouble snapping it shut. Claude Meadow, the Federal Bureau of Investigation agent on the case, sits at the prosecution table, scanning the typed transcripts of the Government witnesses' expected testimony.

Across the aisle, the defendants settle in, a mélange of long hair in ponytails, beards of Biblical proportions, dungarees and old military shirts. Two of the defendants, Scott Camil and Donald Perdue, have taken to whiling away the hours in court by playing chess on a board set under the edge of their table.

It is another in the series of conspiracy trials against radicals and dissenters brought by the Justice Department's Internal Security Division. And once again it offers a study in the clash of cultures between the Government and its critics.

As in many of the conspiracy trials, the defense is in strange territory, far from home. Three of the lawyers — Morton Stavis, Doris Peterson and Nancy Stearns—and several of the law students acting as research assistants are from the New York area, affiliated with the Center for Constitutional Rights. Two, Brady Coleman and Cameron Cunningham, are from Texas. Only Larry Turner, who was once assistant county prosecutor, lives here.

Movement lawyers, they are defending the case without real fees. The lawyers, their assistants, the defendants and their supporters, including a small group of fellow members of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, are living hand-to-mouth on a trickle of contributions and worrying about their telephone bills, typewriter rentals and transcript costs.

The lawyers live and work —rotating the cooking or going out for pizzas—practically on top of one another in a student apartment complex behind the University of Florida. They will soon have to move out when school begins.

Sometimes at night Mr. Cunningham, a huge, shaggy bearded man raises his voice in song, accompanied on the guitar by his fellow Texan, favorites being Baptist hymns or hillbilly tunes, mainly one about how "God didn't make honky-tonk angels."

Most of the defendants and their friends live in a soon-to-be-demolished ramshackle frame house a few miles away set under a jungle-like growth of trees one defendant, John Kniffin, was with his wife, Cathy, in a converted school bus parked outside, equipped among other things with the Encyclopedia Britannica. It is their normal home.

In court, two well-dressed lawyers from established local firms, appointed over the protests of the defense

as back-up lawyers for the three defendants acting as their own lawyers, sit with the marshals several feet from the defense table. They dutifully troop into the frequent conferences in the judge's chambers, but it is extremely rarely that anyone speaks to them.

What particularly galls the defense about their presence is that the court is paying each of them \$30 an hour.

Evidence was introduced last week in the form of 55 boxes of wrist-rocket slingshots the F.B.I. said it confiscated from the Wang Dang Doodle, a now-defunct hippie boutique and waterbed emporium that was managed by one of the defendants, John K. Briggs.

The F.B.I. and the forensic sciences division of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology have conducted ballistics tests on the slingshots, using a 100-pound pig, a rabbit and "a block of gelatinous material simulating human flesh."

From a distance of six to eight feet, the tests found a ball bearing penetrated the shaved stomach of the rabbit, but all other projectiles "rebounded from their targets."

"All the projectiles fired at the gelatin rebounded, including heat-treated and crazed marble which rebounded in one piece, but then fragmented upon striking the floor," the report said. One of the weapons mentioned in the indictment is "fried" marbles, heated and then cooled so they will supposedly shatter on impact.

The report concluded that "if used against fully clothed adults it would appear that serious injury is unlikely," unless one was struck in the jugular vein, eye, ear canal or open mouth.

The tests brought a sharp letter of rebuke from the Humane Society over the use of the rabbit and pig.

For most of the trial the jury has been sequestered, guarded by marshals who monitor their telephone calls and visits at the Flagler Inn. Once they were taken to Disney World under escort.

The jurors have not been happy with the procedure, and when they were released for the weekend on Friday there was a joyous whoop from one of the women.

Under the sequestration order, the jurors are limited to two cocktails, two highballs or two bottles of beer an evening, at their own expense. Some, however, have been sublimating their frustrations by putting away several Government-paid dinners at a sitting.

"This one guy, said a waitress at Art's, one of Gainesville's most expensive eateries, "he ate four shrimp dinners."