

Back-of-the-Book

The Presidio 27

THE UNLAWFUL CONCERT: AN ACCOUNT OF THE PRESIDIO MUTINY CASE. By Fred Gardner. Viking, \$5.95.

UNTIL A FEW MONTHS AGO I belonged to an Army Reserve unit which met for drills at San Francisco's Presidio, the large, evergreen-forested Army base that borders the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco Bay. I found that this country's class divisions split the Army, too: my fellow Reservists were mostly college students or young lawyers, businessmen and stockbrokers. Our headquarters was located 100 yards from the Presidio's stockade. Occasionally we saw signs that something was going on there: military policemen with riot helmets, floodlights on late at night, a roadblock, a new fence topped with barbed wire. But mostly, the stockade was another world—a world of men who hadn't had enough pull to dodge the draft and Vietnam the way we had—and we knew little of it.

ON OCTOBER 12, 1968, I went on an anti-war march through downtown San Francisco. Two days later, 27 prisoners from the Presidio Stockade stepped out from the morning roll call formation, sat down on the grass, and sang "We Shall Overcome," whose words they knew only from watching television. They presented a list of grievances; they were charged with mutiny.

For the 27, that sit-down was not a take-it-or-leave-it decision like the peace march. The stockade had three times as many prisoners as it was built for, there were bugs in the food, stopped-up plumbing spread human excrement on shower floors, a drunken guard sergeant had recently broken an inmate's finger, and three days earlier a mentally ill prisoner had been shot and killed when he tried to run away from a work gang. The prisoners had no choice

but to do something.

Another member of my Army Reserve unit was Fred Gardner, a writer and editor who put his Army experience to use as the founder of the imaginative G.I. coffee house movement. His *The Unlawful Concert* is an account of the Presidio Mutiny. It is a good book: compact, swiftly paced, and full of carefully noted details (such as the Confederate flag tattoo on one mutineer's arm) which put the events before your eyes and also tell you something about the world the 27 came from. It is not written in the pseudo-fictional style of so many volumes about dramatic news events but in a low-keyed, inobtrusively documented way that is more honest and ultimately more moving. In all the plethora of print about the rebellious youth of the '60s, this is one of the few books to deal with the underside of that generation—those who turned radical not by listening to Joan Baez or reading Frantz Fanon, but by an urgent, life-and-death necessity you don't face on a college campus. And it is the only book I know of about any aspect of the simmering discontent within the American military.

THERE HAS BEEN NO Dreyfus or Sacco-Vanzetti case in our day, but a number of trials—Howard Levy, the Chicago Conspiracy, the Oakland Seven, the Presidio Mutiny—have helped polarize American public opinion about the war. Gardner's book focuses not on this polarization, but on the mutiny itself: its causes, and its effects on the men involved.

The Presidio Mutiny was a genuine insurgency. The peace movement became concerned about stockade conditions only after the Mutiny, not before. Not one of the 27 had been politically active before joining the Army. It was the overcrowding and brutality of the stockade that made them so, but only after they tried plenty of other things before the Mutiny: widespread use of any drugs men could get their hands on;

prisoners trying to give each other hepatitis so they would be sent to the hospital; and dozens of suicide attempts, feigned and real, by every means, from hanging and wrist-slashing to drinking lye and metal polish.

Frustrations came to a climax when prisoner Richard Bunch, unarmed and deranged, was shot in the back and killed when he tried to run away. (Earlier, prisoners had seen Bunch try to walk through walls, and had heard him talk about suicide and ask a guard "Would you shoot me if I ran?") After the killing, there was an outburst of window-breaking and smashing of stockade furniture. Then came protest meetings to plan the sit-down. Most prisoners had a pathetic faith that if only they could express their grievances to the authorities, something would be done. The day of the killing, Richard Duncan, an inmate who later joined the Mutiny, took off his uniform and refused orders to put it back on. "I just couldn't wear it any more because it represented killing." He had never heard of conscientious objection.

IT IS DISMAYING THAT Viking Press waited nearly a year after the end of the Mutiny trials to publish this book, thus turning it from a weapon into a piece of history. My other main criticism of *The Unlawful Concert* is that it is sometimes hard to keep all the characters straight: the many different prosecution and defense lawyers at several trials, and the mutineers themselves. Nevertheless, Gardner has a real feeling for the background the prisoners came from, and a collective portrait of the 27 does emerge. Most were white working-class, half were from broken homes, only five had finished high school. Their average age was 19. Many had joined the Army as the only possible escape from poverty, having been misled by dishonest recruiters who promised them Army training they never got. Two were Vietnam veterans; several were from military families.

The book's most moving chapter is

about the last of the several Mutiny trials, that of the 17 prisoners defended by radical attorney Terence Hallinan. "A striking solidarity existed among the men on trial. When one opened a new pack of cigarettes, he'd put it away with only ten left. Everything was shared. Each man who had a crucifix or a St. Christopher medal gave it away. Hayes made a wooden cross for Rupert; Rupert gave him a silver medallion with the assurance that it was 'very, very strong.' For many it was the first time in their lives they had had real, deep friendships." One prisoner who had escaped to Canada sent back a poem to another. Most important, the trial turned many of these children of the "silent majority" into radicals. Several began studying Marxism when they were finally sent to the Army prison at Ft. Leavenworth. And as they sat through the long trial, their families changed, too: The mother of one mutineer worked for the Air Force; at the beginning of the trial, she didn't even want to be seen with the "peace people" who helped the defense. But by the end she was writing letters defending Terence Hallinan to her former Air Force colleagues.

MORE THAN ONE GREAT empire has foundered upon an unwilling soldiery. Others have come close: over 100,000 French soldiers mutinied in 1917, refusing to enter the trenches, occupying villages and forests, and even stealing railway trains and trying to drive them from the front back to Paris. Marshal Pétain quashed the uprising with the classic carrot-and-stick: some soldiers were arbitrarily picked from the rebel regiments and shot; the whole French Army immediately got better food, better medical care and longer leaves. The men went back to war and the insane, useless slaughter continued.

In the U.S. Army today the carrots are already there: Rest and Recreation leaves in Australia or Hawaii, beer and marijuana, juke boxes and pool tables even at jungle outposts, and above all the fact that a soldier has to be in Vietnam only one year. The Presidio Mutiny trials were one of the first mass applications of the stick. There may be more. No realist, however, can hope for a revolt as big as the French one.

But even without another 1917,

something important is happening to many U.S. soldiers today. Like the Presidio mutineers, they are coming out of the military changed men, as bitterly disillusioned about the United States as the members of their generation who grew up in the anti-war movement at home. *The Unlawful Concert* is a study of this. It is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand the workings of the most effective creator of revolutionaries this country has—the United States Army.

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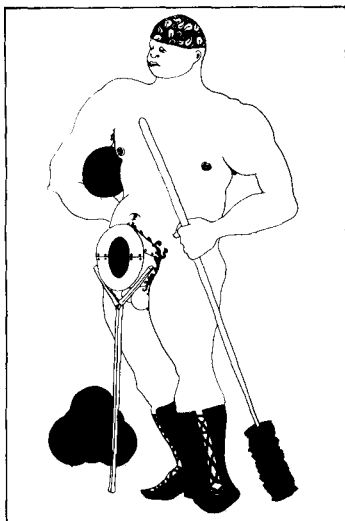
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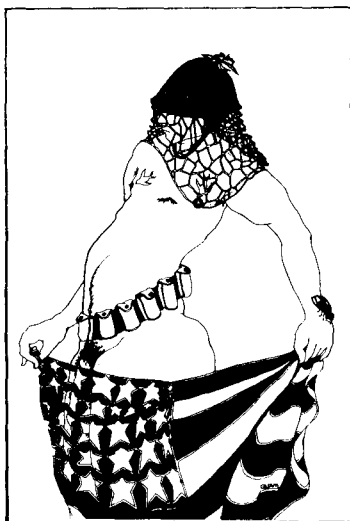
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The Liberation Music Orchestra

CHARLIE HADEN—LIBERATION MUSIC ORCHESTRA. *Impulse Recording AS 9183*

JAZZ MUSIC MAY HAVE put the sin in syncopation, as an early '20s magazine article announced. It may also once have represented artistic anarchy, a threat to spinster piano teachers and a haven for free-spirited instrumentalists. But whatever consternation jazz has caused within the music establishment over the years, it has had significantly little connection with any other kind of revolutionary spirit.

While black and white folk songs of the Depression era made frequent comment on the bad times, on the New Deal, on social progress and injustice, jazz instrumentalists were seldom involved in such commentary, or in any other. As a matter of fact, it was not until the Black Revolution of the past decade began to reclaim the Afro-American roots in blues and rhythmic freedom that jazz became even vaguely associated with goals other than artistic accomplishment, popular acceptance, and ultimately financial reward. In this light, the recent recording by the Liberation Music Orchestra led by bassist Charlie Haden is not only unusual and musically fascinating, but it also happens to stand alone in its field.

THE LIBERATION MUSIC Orchestra is a 13-piece ensemble, most of whose members are fairly well known to the avant-garde of jazz—

performers like trombonist Roswell Rudd, cornetist Don Cherry, percussionists Paul Motian and Andrew Cyrille, and pianist-composer Carla Bley. In the context of the Orchestra these players and their colleagues are primarily strong ensemble voices, not soloists. Although the scoring of Haden and Miss Bley is rich and broad, the oldest of jazz traditions—ensemble improvisation—is the dominant sound on this recording.

Not only are the musical forms on this album "liberated," they are also based upon political revolutionary themes. All of side one is a grand and elegant tribute to the spirit of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade of American volunteers in the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s. Carla Bley has contributed brief introductory and closing themes for the four basic songs, and has arranged the material. Her writing has a distinctly complacent, American, smooth "swing" feeling at beginning and end—a perfect framework within which the gutty, desperate, revolutionary themes from the Spanish struggle can be displayed.

Because it is in every aspect a composition of the whole, not a collection—either of soloists or of a few casually joined pieces—the first side of this recording has not been understood or appreciated by most of the "jazz" writers and listeners. The disc's second side is spiritually just as tight, musically even more radical than the Spanish-tinged material. It is a provocative combination of three basic compositions joined loosely by a Bley interlude and climaxed by a dirge-like "We Shall Overcome" featuring full-ensemble improvisation, à la New Orleans funeral bands.

Haden's bass is the dominant line in his "Song for Che," which is in part an