



PROGRESSIVE LABOR MAGAZINE
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*The Hidden History of
 the U.S. Imperialist
 War in Vietnam*

When Black and White GIs United and Fraggged Their Officers

Do you want to find out what the war in Vietnam was really like? Want to find how close the U.S. Army came to facing an open, mass rebellion? Want to hear about the experiment that united North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese deserters in building an island whose community ran without any money?

This issue of PL Magazine starts a series of excerpts from a dynamite book, *Flower of the Dragon* by Richard Boyle (published by Ramparts Press). Boyle was a reporter in Vietnam who, working for the Overseas Press, told the "grunts" side of the war. His book makes gripping reading - especially for anyone organizing among soldiers and sailors.

Fraggings

After the disastrous battle of Hamburger Hill, GIs in the 101st Airborne put out an underground newspaper offering a \$10,000 reward for the assassination of the officer who gave the order to attack. Hamburger Hill was a big story in the press, but the reward wasn't, nor were the fraggings that began to occur in increasing numbers in '69. Later the Army was to admit that there had been more than two hundred known fraggings in 1969. In 1970 there were 363 reported cases. Who knows how many more officers were shot by their own men in combat?

Although many of us in the Saigon press corps had heard rumors of fraggings - attacks by enlisted men on officers with a fragmentation grenade, usually slipped under the floor of the officer's hooch [tent] - it wasn't being reported to the people back home.

The *Overseas Weekly* was the first paper to report on fraggings, probably because most of our stories came from the GIs themselves. On stories the

Army didn't want us to know about - and there were many - we usually had to sneak on base to get the story at all.

One day in August Ann Bryan got a call from some troops at Cu Chi, headquarters of the 25th Division, who said they had a story for us. She made arrangements for me to meet them secretly on the base.

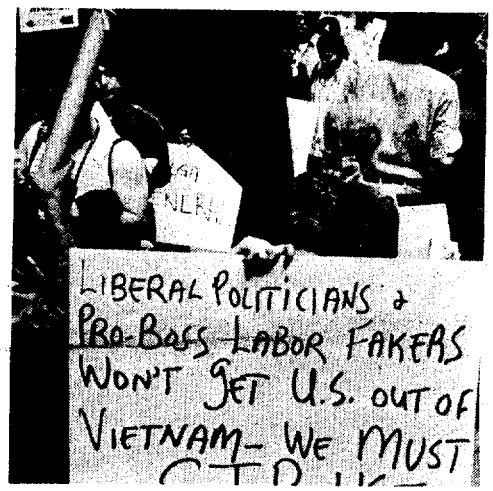
Doc Hampton

They took me to a small hooch. About eight GIs, half of them black and half of them white, were sitting on the floor when we entered. While they took turns watching for lifers outside, the GIs slowly began to tell me the story of two men.

"I guess I'll start by telling you about Doc - Sp4 (Specialist 4 - a grade in the army) Enoch 'Doc' Hampton," said a sandy-haired soldier, Sp4 W.C. Benn. "Doc was our friend; everybody liked Doc. He was a real good medic."

"Yeah, he never bothered nobody," said another soldier. "He treated people like you would want to be treated."

They talked about Doc for a while, then they told me about the other man, Sfc. [sergeant first class] Clarence Lowder, whom they called "Top." Things started to get bad, they said, when Top came into the unit as the new "first-shirt," or top sergeant. Top didn't think much of the new "Action Army." It was too soft. "He wished he was back in the old army," said Pfc. [private first class] Rich Hanusey, a clerk in the orderly room. In the old days, Top would tell his men, he could straighten out a soldier "without going through a bunch of legal mumbo-jumbo." Top was a big, powerful man and many GIs were afraid of him. "Top would threaten to hit people or send them to Jackson," said Hanusey.



Demonstration aduring late '60s against U.S. imperialist war in Vietnam.

Firebase Jackson was like a death sentence. Some of the GIs doubted Top had enough power to send a man there, but nobody wanted to test him.

"He treated us like machines," said one GI. "I'm not a robot, I'm a human being." Instead of loading supplies on a truck Top would make the man walk and carry the stuff all the way. He liked to belittle men in front of others. "He had no respect for people," Benn said.

"He was disappointed being here," said Hanusey, who had worked with Top and knew him better than most of the enlisted men. "He would have been a great first sergeant in training, the kind they use to scare trainees. But over here he was creating a fiasco."

Top once ordered a private to dig a six-foot ditch. The soldier dug a six-foot peace symbol in the ground. "That really blew Top's mind," said Hanusey. After that Top worked on the Pfc almost constantly for six weeks. The Pfc got stoned every night and dreamed about killing Top. "That man isn't going to live through the day," he would shout. Finally, the Pfc cracked and was shipped out.

One non-commissioned officer (NCO) in the unit used to shake and drink heavily after his encounters with Top. "One night Top almost made him cry," said one of the GIs. Another time the NCO threatened to kill Top and had to be restrained.

After his second week in the unit, Top got a warning from his men - a CS gas grenade under his hooch. "When they put gas on you, yeah, you know they mean you no good," said one of the men with a smile.

Benn, the Sp4 who had started the story, began to be afraid that someone might kill Top. "He didn't deserve to die. We just wanted him out." So Benn went to the battery commander, but the commander refused to believe any soldier would go that far. Then



Winning soldiers to turn their guns against the warmakers is key to make a communist revolution.

Organizing Soldiers— A Must

The Sept. 17-18 International Communist Conference, held by PLP in New York City was totally anti-revisionist, anti-capitalist-imperialist and was not only inspiring, but also productive. We have sentenced the bosses and their servants, the revisionists, to death, and we are exposing them and organizing for communism and distributing *Challenge* among workers and youth.

The bosses, who think they have succeeded in drugging and diverting all youth, have just taken a punch in their noses as more than 50 youth came to participate in the workshop on Organizing in the Armed Forces. This workshop, multi-racially integrated by youth from Delano to Brooklyn, and Chicago to Oaxaca, Mexico, was very lively and there was wide participation. It was inspiring to see that most everyone had something to say, ask or suggest. Their love, interest, and confidence in the Party was expressed as many defended or explained the line of the Party.

When we talked about the importance of selling *Challenge* in public and to our friends, some expressed their reservations about selling it. We took on the struggle that we should not be embarrassed to sell a paper such as *Challenge* which has no equal, since it's the only paper we know that tells the truth about the bosses, racism, repression, etc. But *Challenge* also goes beyond, teaching us how to fight back and how to organize to change the whole society and fight for equality-communism.

The workshop warmed up even more when two youth explained that they were joining the armed forces to organize for the Party, and explained why they were doing it. A young man who was also planning to join to learn a skill said that joining the army to organize was not a good idea because you might get in a lot of trouble. Calmly and collectively we explained how not following orders from the officials was better since those orders can often times kill.

The truth is that around the Party there are a lot of young people who we have been talking to about the military work. Within some of them there's a certain fear of being repressed for organizing for communism. It was just then when ex-soldiers who had joined the Army spoke about their past experiences organizing in the Army. In the Army the soldiers are mistreated, overworked and discriminated against,



Austin, Minn. — In 1986, PLP members in the National Guard marched in support of Hormel strikers.

sometimes treated worse than dogs. This makes the soldiers both fear and hate their superior officers. At the same time it creates a lot of unity among the soldiers, in this way creating two opposing sides: the officers and the soldiers. When an organizer fights for the rights and interests of the rest of the soldiers, he wins their respect and confidence. In reality, the officers try to intimidate the recruits because they are afraid of them, they know that it is the soldiers who are armed, that's why they try to discipline and control them. So why should we be afraid—it is they who have cause to be more afraid of us; we have the power on our side, we know how to organize using *Challenge*, and we can win the majority of soldiers to our side. One youth summed it up this way, "They can't use the army to repress you, because you are the army."

Organizing the Party in the army is very important and we can't underestimate it. The bosses use their army to fight imperialist wars and to attack workers' revolutions all over the world. History teaches us that to win revolution, we have to win soldiers to the side of the workers, to turn their guns around. This work isn't easy, but it is very possible. This was shown by the Bolsheviks when more than two thirds of the Tzarist army joined them in defeating capitalism in Russia. Why should soldiers join PLP?

Because:

- The great majority of soldiers are the children of workers, and part of the working class
- They hate the brass for the way they are treated
- They are in the service because they can't find a job, not mainly because they are patriotic
- The bosses' wars are not in their interest and they don't want to participate in them
- The conditions during war are horrible, especially if you are risking your life for the bosses' profits
- People get very demoralized fighting for a cause which is unjust
- Because we communists represent their interests and if we are with them, we will show them in life and in our literature that this is true. As we win soldiers to our side, we will become more powerful and prepared to defeat the bosses.

All of these points were emphasized during the discussion. At the end of the discussion there was more confidence in organizing in the army and the number of youth who said they would join the military to organize rose to four. We concluded by welcoming three new members to the Party, and agreeing to write and send literature to our friends in the Armed Forces and increase the sale of *C-D*.

The Hidden History of the Vietnam War

(Continued from p. 13)

Benn went to the inspector general. "I just got a patronizing look," he said. "Lifers are still battering down drawbridges. They haven't entered the twentieth century."

Benn even went to the chaplain, who told him things weren't "as bad as all that" and advised him to go back through the chain of command.

A few weeks later one non-com urged Top to go to the enlisted men's club and have a few beers with the men. Top refused. When the NCO warned Top he was pushing his men too hard and might get zapped, Top reportedly fired back, "Not one of them have the guts."

They didn't hate Top, the men in the hooch told me; they thought he was a victim of the system, just like them. He just didn't know what was going on in Vietnam, or he wouldn't have said, "Not one of them would have the guts." He hadn't been in Vietnam long enough, he didn't know that in some parts of Vietnam war existed between the grunts and the lifers.

It was just about the time that the black GIs in Top's units were beginning to think about the war, beginning to tell themselves that if they had to die they wanted to die for a cause of their own choice. To many of them the lifer sergeant was more of an enemy than the Asian peasant soldiers outside the wire. There was also a different kind of white soldier in the unit, like the private who dug the six-foot peace symbol. Young white soldiers smoked grass, wore beads, and flashed the peace sign as a standard greeting. In the evenings, black and white troops would get together, blow grass, and rap. The heads and the blacks, the men in the hooch told me, were beginning to get it together. I remember what one of the dooper GIs had told me at Nha Trang: "The lifers are more

afraid of what's in this camp than what's outside it."

After about two months with the unit, Top started harassing Doc Hampton about his Afro haircut, telling him to get it cut. Doc's hair was no longer than an inch and a half—within Army regulations—but Top kept pushing him to trim it.

At the mess hall one morning, Doc said that Top had "his thing," the book and the law, and that he, Doc, had his—an M-16 rifle. Doc said he was going to the orderly room to see the first sergeant, "Either I'll come out alone," he said, "or neither of us is coming out."

Hanusey, the clerk, was working in the orderly room when Doc came through the doorway. "His face was cold, stone cold," Hanusey said. "He looked like a man in the movies who was about to kill."

The barrel of Doc's M-16 was pointed downward, his feet planted firmly apart. Slowly he raised the barrel and fired a full clip into Top. The sergeant's back exploded as pieces of flesh and blood splattered all over the orderly room. Then Doc walked out.

Hanusey couldn't believe it, almost thinking Doc was firing blanks until he heard the empty shell casings hit the floor. It just didn't seem real. Then the captain screamed, "Stop him." Hanusey just looked down at Top, heard him groan and saw him move his head slightly, and then Top was dead.

Benn was outside when he saw Doc running for a bunker, "like a deer being chased." Suddenly there were about forty MPs and other men with shotguns and submachine guns running after Doc, shouting, "Get him, kill him."

"The chase after Doc was like a hunt, he didn't have a chance," said another GI.

The lifers cornered Doc in an empty bunker. But Doc was armed; nobody wanted to go in after him. It

was a standoff. Taking up positions around the bunker, the lifers ordered him to surrender.

"I wasn't going to let it happen," said Ben Denson, a black soldier who hadn't spoken before. "If they shot Doc, there was going to be a slaughter, a bloodletting. There would have been a war." When black troops in the unit started going for their weapons, they saw that there were many whites with them.

As white and black troops started running out of their huts and bunkers towards Doc, they were blocked by armed MPs. "They wanted to gun him down and didn't want anyone to stop it," said Denson. Both sides were lining up for a confrontation and when the black and white troops trying to save Doc looked around, there were more of them than there were lifers.

Then a single shot sounded in Doc's bunker. One lifer started to make a move for the bunker, but was stopped by black troops. Two black soldiers went in. Doc Hampton was dead.

Denson had a theory about why Doc Hampton shot himself. "It was his last protest. He didn't want to be killed by his oppressors."

Hampton and Lowder became statistics in the new war, but to the GIs in his unit, Doc was a hero, martyr to the cause of freedom. "I will remember Doc all my life and I will dedicate myself to keeping his memory," said Benn.

Of everything that was said to me by Doc's friends at Cu Chi, something one of them said at the end of the evening stuck in my mind. He said it in a very matter-of-fact way, not as a boast or a threat but almost calmly:

"If they fuck with us they are going to die."
To be continued

The Hidden History of the U.S. War in Vietnam

When GIs Refused to Fight for U.S. Imperialism

Do you want to find out what the war in Vietnam was really like? Want to find how close the U.S. Army came to facing an open, mass rebellion? Want to hear about the experiment that united North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese deserters in building an island whose community ran without any money?

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Our Party grew during the Vietnam War and gave a great deal of leadership by organizing in the Army, but you can't read *Flower of the Dragon* and not realize how much more a communist movement that had prepared beforehand could have achieved. You can't read *Flower of the Dragon* without seeing how urgent it is to start working among the troops today in order to be ready when war breaks out tomorrow.

The Revolt of Alpha Company

Doc Hampton (a black soldier who killed his sergeant, and then committed suicide, see last week's *PL Magazine*) not alone. All over Vietnam, GIs were fragging (attacks by enlisted men on officers with a fragmentation grenade, usually slipped under the floor of the officer's hooch, tent) their officers and their lifer noncoms (noncommissioned officers). On some patrols, if a lifer was too "gung ho," he was shot in the back by his men, who would report he was killed in combat. More often, a unit ordered to go on patrol would simply go a few hundred yards beyond the wire and then sit down and smoke dope. I had been on once such patrol but for obvious reasons hadn't reported it.

In many units, the men had virtual control, either by intimidation or by having non-lifers in command. In some places it was more like open warfare, with the heads and black troops on one side and the lifers on the other.

Rumors of troops quitting in combat was everywhere, but until September 1969, nothing could be verified — newsmen never happened to be in the right place at the right time. Then, during the Battle of Khe Sanh, came the revolt of Alpha Company.

The Battle for Khe Sanh started when the North Vietnamese Army launched a powerful offensive against the American Division guarding the northern coastal region of South Vietnam. The battle was a meatgrinder, with each side pouring in its best battalions to be chewed up. Alpha Company had been in the worst of it, the fight for AK Valley.

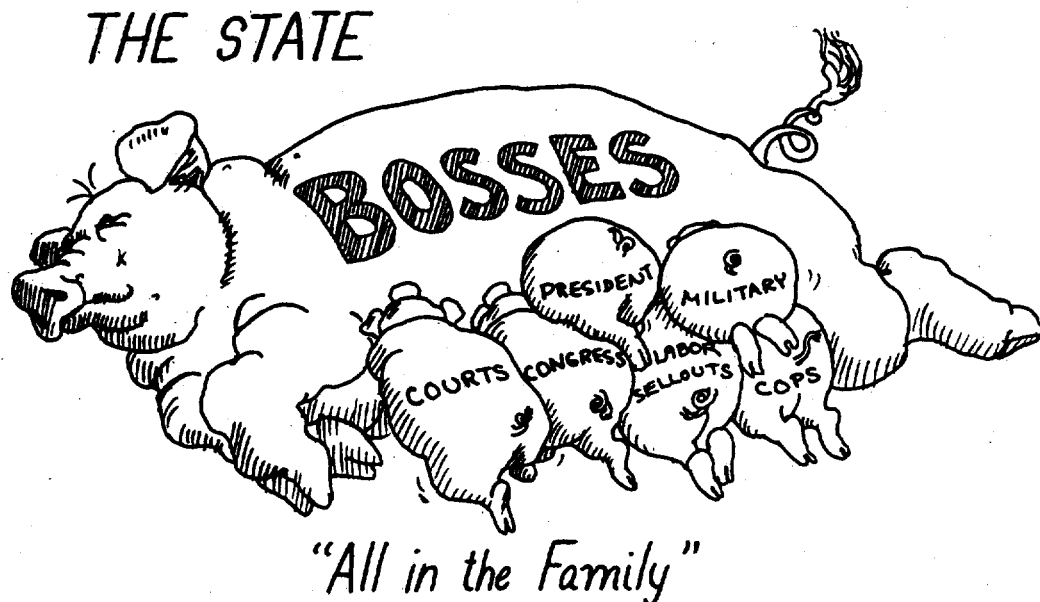
For four days Alpha Company had assaulted the same North Vietnamese bunker system, and each time they suffered high casualties. Then the commander of the battalion and Ollie Noonan of *Associated Press* (AP), with whom I had flown into Ben Het, were shot down in a helicopter over the AK Valley and Alpha Company was ordered in to find their bodies.

Then next day Lieutenant Colonel Robert C. Bacon, the new battalion commander, ordered the company again to storm the North Vietnamese bunkers. Two newsmen, Peter Arnett and Horst Fass of AP, were with Bacon at his battalion headquarters at Landing Zone Center when a call came in. A nervous voice crackled over the radio receiver: it was Lt. Eugene Schurtz, Jr., the commander of Alpha Company:

"I'm sorry, sir, but the men refuse to go... We cannot move out." Bacon turned pale and fired back into his radio phone. "Repeat please. Have you told them what it means to disobey orders under fire?"

"I think they understand," said the lieutenant, "But some of them have simply had enough, they are broken. There are boys here who have only ninety days left in Vietnam. They want to go home in one piece. The situation is psychic here."

Bacon ordered his executive officer, Major Richard Waite, and Sergeant Okey Blankenship to "go out there and give them a pep talk and a kick in the ass." When they got there, Schurtz was crying, and the men poured out details of their five terror-filled days.



Blankenship told the men that another company, down to only fifteen men ("I lied to them," he admitted later), was still on the move. An Alpha troop asked why, and the sarge sneered in contempt: "Maybe they got something a little more than you've got." With fists raised, the enraged soldier charged, shouting, "Don't call us cowards, we are not cowards."

Somehow Waite and Blankenship managed to convince Alpha Company that the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] had already left the bunkers (apparently this was true), and the men moved out.

The revolt of an American unit was being reported all over America, and it was big news. Even the *Stars and Stripes* reported the story; it would have looked bad for the Army to ignore it. Every GI in Vietnam who had ever considered opting out of the war must have been waiting anxiously for what followed. Would the Army throw the men of Alpha in Long Binh Jail [LBJ] — or would they let them get away with it? Or did they have something else in mind, something worse than LBJ or Leavenworth?

I heard about the revolt while covering the battle of Khe Sanh with the Marines, who were coming to the aid of the bloodied American Division. Jumping on an Army two-seat observation chopper, I got a ride to battalion headquarters at Landing Zone Center.

When I arrived, Lt. Col. Bacon, standing with his hands on his hips, was talking to the forty GIs of Alpha Company:

"Men, you have done a good job," he said.

A black GI, also with his hands on his hips was facing Bacon. Behind him, forty more men stared at the officer.

One of the men was Pvt. (private) John Broskoff, one of the veterans of the company — a veteran of two months. Broskoff was the last man left from the squad he had joined two months ago. He had just come out of hell. When I talked to him later, he told me he had been so hungry he had eaten the bark off trees; his thirst was so bad he licked the sweat off his own body. At AK Valley the North Vietnamese had so many .51 caliber anti-aircraft guns the helicopters couldn't bring in supplies. One C-ration carton might have to be shared by two men for a day. Humping through a spiderweb of jungle with forty- or fifty-pound loads, the men of Alpha Company were near exhaustion. The North Vietnamese troops seemed to be everywhere, Broskoff said. They would pop out of holes, cut down a squad, then duck back in. Alpha Company never saw an NVA troop until it was too late. After five days, Alpha Company existed only on paper.

The company had forty-nine men left, little more than a platoon. They weren't even a platoon, Broskoff told me, just forty-nine men trying to stay alive one day at a time. Most of them had raw, oozing scabs that festered in the rotting jungle. Some had heat rash that spread in red, crusty blotches all over the body. Nearly all had crotch rot (bacteria caused infection of

the groin).

Then came Bacon's order to attack the bunkers again.

Now Lt. Col. Bacon was talking to the men of Alpha Company. But something strange was happening. Instead of threatening them with prison, Bacon was praising them. He continued talking in a dull monotone. A light rain had begun to fall and the thunder of artillery fire sounded in the distance — toward AK Valley, where a fierce battle was raging. There was something worse than jail, and the men of Alpha Company could hear it: AK Valley. Delta Company was in trouble and somebody was going to be sent in to take those NVA bunkers.

"... and you men are going to get a three-day standdown," concluded Bacon.

Something strange was happening. Instead of being sent back into AK Valley, or to jail, Alpha Company was getting three days of rest, food and sleep. Three more days of life.

Bacon dismissed the men. Overhead I could hear a flight of jets coming in for an airstrike in AK Valley. Bacon told me Delta Company was pinned down and he was going to send in Bravo Company to relieve the pressure.

In about an hour a helicopter landed and about a dozen lifers ran over to the small pad to meet it. Out stepped Major General Lloyd Ramsey, commander of the American Division, sporting a green baseball cap with two stars on it. Ramsey quickly went into a huddle with Bacon and a captain who had replaced Schurtz. Bacon seemed very nervous. After a few moments I went over and asked the general for a statement on the revolt of Alpha Company.

"It was a slight ripple on the water — it was settled in a few moments. The whole thing was blown out of proportion. Ask me if I want to go into combat and I'll answer no. But I damn well will go. You tell a soldier something and he may not want to go — but by God, he will go, and he'll do the finest job in the world."

Ramsey compared the whole thing to a football game. "A fullback may try to hit the center of the line and be clobbered. Back in the huddle he will tell the quarterback, 'I can't hit there again, I'll be killed.' But the quarterback doesn't go running to the coach, he simply calls time out to discuss the problem."

The GIs in Vietnam, Ramsey went on, were the "best soldiers we ever had. I fought in World War II for three and a half years, but I'll take these men. They are real red-blooded Americans, and I'm proud as hell; right down through the ranks, they did a magnificent job." Morale, he said, was "great, amazing."

The Beginning of a Tidal Wave

Was Alpha's revolt really a "slight ripple on the water," or was it the beginning of a tidal wave? I

(Continued on next page)

When GIs Refused to Fight for U.S. Imperialism

Next Week

In our next issue, *PL* Magazine will continue the series on the Revolt of the Black Sea, by French soldiers sent right after World War I to invade Russia to try to crush the Bolshevik Revolution.



1985 PLP protest against imperialist warmakers in front of the White House.

(Continued from previous page)

wanted to find out for myself, so I asked Bacon for permission to go with Bravo Company into AK Valley, Bacon refused. His exec, Waiter, took me aside and said, "I'm sorry, but we can't let you go down there."

"Is there something you don't want me to see?"

"It's very bad down there. If you go, you are asking to get yourself killed."

I asked to call brigade to get permission. About fifteen minutes before the man of Bravo Company boarded the helicopters to begin their mission, I got word that I could go with them.

The men were tense and nervous as the helicopter neared the landing zone. "Please let it be cold," whispered a man in my chopper. It was a cold landing - there was no enemy fire.

That evening we climbed down the side of a mountain, beginning the descent into AK valley. We could go only halfway down before it became too dark to move any further, so we camped. Next morning we got the word to move back up the ridge. The men grumbled as they trudged back up the mountain, cursing the lifers and asking why they were being moved around like pawns on a chess board.

Back up on top of the ridge, Captain Ron Cooper gathered his company and told them the bad news. Bravo Company was going to lead the assault on the main Communist bunker. Alpha Company, which had been promised a three-day rest, was going back into combat after only two days. Alpha would support Bravo in the attack.

The men of Bravo Company passed around a news clipping about the revolt of Alpha Company. They talked a lot about the revolt. As helicopters flew in bringing Alpha Company, the men of Bravo flashed the two-finger peace symbol, an almost-universal enlisted man's salute in Vietnam. The chopper gunners flashed the sign back as they dropped down. Even Captain Cooper held up two fingers as the Cobra thrashed overhead.

The men of Alpha company looked bitter as they trudged past the men of Bravo. "I wouldn't say anything to those guys if I were you, I'll bet they sure are pissed off about being back out here," muttered the Bravo radio man, Sp4 [specialist 4 - a grade in the Army] Robert Munson. The two ranks of men stared at each other as Alpha Company filed past.

Looking down in the valley, the men of Alpha Company could see what they were about to face. They could hear the North Vietnamese .51-caliber

machine guns dueling with the Cobra gunships. Alpha Company's mission was to take a hill honeycombed with NVA bunkers.

As they waited for the order to move in, the men of Bravo stopped their joking and wisecracks. "The only way I'm going to ever leave this place is in a plastic bag," said Munson, who was only eighteen.

After the last Alpha Company troop walked past, Bravo got the word to move in. The closer the men got to the steady thuds of artillery bursts, the more bitter they became. They took a last look at the battalion officers watching the battle from a ridgeline higher up the mountain. "Those patriots are trying to get us all killed," sneered Pfc. (private first class) Paul Snodgrass. "Tell the people back in the world to keep up their protests. Tell them we all support them."

The hot sun beat down on their backs and beads of sweat dripped off their faces. A young machine gunner, belts of ammo crisscrossed over his chest,

vowed he would quit then and there if not for the fear of going to Long Binh Jail. "I wouldn't even mind doing two years, but they would probably send me right back here after doing time." He expressed the thought that has kept others from rebelling - time in Army jail is not counted as time in the service, and the Army can send a man right back into combat after he gets out.

"Men, you ain't getting enough body count," said a staff sergeant sarcastically.

"Yeah, that's all the bastards are after, body count," said one of the GIs.

Many of the men in the company wore peace symbols, and nearly all had something written on their helmets. "Re-up [reenlist], I'd rather throw up," read one.

to be continued



PLP is building a movement of workers, soldiers and students to crush the imperialist warmakers.

The Hidden History of the Vietnam War

Why GIs Mutinied Against Their Officers

This is the third in the series on the Vietnam War taken from *The Flower of the Dragon*, a book published by Rampart Press.

This week's episode is dynamic. It blows apart the slick propaganda of movies like *Platoon*. They claim to tell it like it was. And they do... almost. But they always seem to leave out one single fact! The fact that, in the end, the grunts (the ordinary infantry soldiers) had power and had begun to realize it.

What an important fact to know! Even when millions all over the world took to the streets in protest, the U.S. bosses could continue the war. But when the grunts started to take power into their own hands, the bosses' war finally collapsed - of course, the biggest cause of this collapse was the people from Southeast Asia who were fighting the powerful war machinery of U.S. imperialism, and whose heroism this episode from the book ignores. In fact, the U.S. Army became an unreliable army because of the heroism and bravery of the Vietnamese combined with the civilian opposition to the war. The fact that GIs rebelled against their officers shows once again that soldiers can be won to actively fight against an imperialist war.

This lesson must be applied today as the imperialists prepare for World War III: soldiers can be won to fight the imperialist warmongers instead of fighting for them. Finally, the truth is that it is not the generals and presidents who make history, it the multi-racial, united working class... the masses!

Mutiny

From the air, Firebase Pace looked like an ugly square brown scar carved out of the thick green forest.

It sat astride Route 22, a muddy unpaved road, and was surrounded by several sections of barbed wire, rocket screens, and an outer trench system three sandbags deep. Even with this protection, the one hundred artillerymen manning the two eight-inch and two 175-mm guns had suffered nearly 35% casualties in the first two weeks of the North Vietnamese offensive.

Inside Pace, rats and men battled for control. The rats were winning.

There are probably no bigger or meaner rats than rats in Vietnam. They have to be big and mean just to survive, and war-zone rats are even meaner than their city cousins. They are afraid of nothing. At Ben Het I saw rats eat the dead. Kick them in the head and they'd leap for your leg, biting at your boots, scores of them scurrying all around, furry and black.

Thirty years of war had done something for these rats - made them tougher, better able to compete with man. Watching the war-zone rats, it seemed to me that the rats would eventually claim this planet after the devastation of war and garbage got to be too



GIs during Vietnam War - many fragged their officers and refused to fight the "enemy."

much. If Vietnam is a harbinger [omen] of the future, as many Vietnamese believe, their sorrow is just the beginning of a world apocalypse and we should watch the rats. The grunts put it in another way: "We got a lot of bad karma after what we did here."

"Keep the door shut," said the cook, "so the rats won't get in."

Each day it seemed there were more and more rats. They thrived on war. The grunts tried to kill the rats, setting peanut butter booby traps, but for every rat KIA [killed in action], two more came to take its place.

From the cook's hooch I could see some of the troops of Bravo Company passing a pipe. They were sitting on a pile of sandbags, and as I watched them I wondered if they were any different from the men I had seen at the battle of Queson, when Alpha Company refused to go back into AK valley. Then the entire division was close to revolt, but that was 1969, and it was the Americal, not the First Cav, (Cavalry) the pride of the U.S. Army.

History of the Cavalry

The one hundred American grunts guarding Pace were cavalrymen, descendants of the fabled horse soldiers who rode with Crook against the

Apaches, charged with Teddy Roosevelt at San Juan Hill, and ravaged southern cities with Sheridan. It was the cavalrymen too who, with Custer, made that fatal charge in 1876 on a riverbank in the Black Hills. The First Cav fought with great honors in the Pacific during the Second World War, and when the Vietnam war began the First Cav was to be a showcase division. With between four and six hundred of its own helicopters, it was the most modern fighting force in the world, a new concept in mobile warfare. The first Cav was worth three Russian divisions, its officers bragged in 1965. It was thrown into the toughest fights in Vietnam: It had been sent in to save the Marines at Khe Sanh. One of its members heralded the division with the song *First Cav, First Team, Always Number One*.

"The mess hall doesn't have any sandbags on it," said the cook.

"What?" I said.

"It's hard to prepare hot meals when there's no protection. Nobody wants to work in the mess hall - one direct hit and we'll get it, bleweee."

"It must be rough."

"Sure is. I don't know how they expect me to do it."

While he talked, I could still see the men from Bravo sitting on the sandbags, passing the weed. Some wore flak jackets and helmets, but most wore only fatigue pants. They were laughing.

"Excuse me," I said to the cook. "I'm going for a walk."

I walked over to the grunts sitting on the sandbags, and one of them quickly hid the bowl behind his back.

"Can I have a hit?"

He hesitated for a minute, then broke into a grin and handed me the bowl.

"What are you, man - CID [Criminal Investigation Division]?"

"No, I'm a reporter."

"No shit."

We sat on the sandbags, looking out across no-man's land, toward that ominous treeline, passing the bowl. We knew the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] was watching us too, but you can't spend all the time in the bunkers with the rats, you've got to come up for air sometimes.

The first round hit about thirty feet away.

"Incoming!" one of them shouted as we scrambled for machine-gun bunker five.

"Shit man, that was close."

"Too close."

We felt safe in bunker five; at least we were protected from shrapnel.

"Asshole dinks, tryin' to do us when we're doin' a



GIs during Vietnam War.

(Continued on next page)

GIs Mutinied

(Continued from previous page)

bowl," grunted one of the men as he grabbed a LAW (light assault weapon, which fires a 4 mm projectile) and fired two rounds at the North Vietnamese rocket gunner in the treeline about three hundred meters away.

"Sit down, man," said another grunt. "You wanna draw fire?"

It was a very personal war there at bunker five. Only a short distance separated us from them; after a while we felt we knew each other.

"Incoming."

We dropped to the floor, crouching next to the safety of the bunker wall. The round hit closer than the last.

Only 21 Days Short

Nobody saw Hooker get it. He didn't say anything. The blood pumped out of his temple in quick spurts and then flowed down his face, dripping on his shirt. It's amazing how much blood a man has in him.

Hooker slowly touched his temple with a jerky movement and looked at the blood on his fingers. Then he looked at us. "I'm only 21 days short. I don't want to die."

At first no one moved. We just watched the blood squirting out of Hooker's temple. It was like a bad dream in which something is happening but you can't move.

"You're not going to die, Hook," one of them said as he gently laid Hooker down. Then some medics carried him to the medical bunker.

We dove into a safer underground bunker as more shells hit all around us. A candle flickered as about eight of us stretched out on air mattresses, hoping the bunker wouldn't take a direct hit from a rocket. Three sandbags may stop a mortar round, but a rocket can cut through a bunker with ease.

Al Grana was Hooker's buddy. Everybody liked Hooker, he always made everyone feel good. "It's the shits, man, Hook getting it," said Al.

We all hoped Hooker would live, but nobody talked about it. We didn't even know how badly he was wounded. Hooker had talked about going home. "Whoooooe, I'm just 21 days short today," he had said. Hooker, like all the other grunts, counted off each day left in Nam. Some carved notches on the bunker, others wrote it on their helmets: every man knew how many days short he was. The grunts are scared most when they arrive and when they're short. The shorter they get the worse it is. They see too many of their buddies get it just before going home. "Charley ain't lettin' you go, man," they'd say.

After about an hour they got bad news: they couldn't get a Medevac for Hooker because the ceiling was too low for a chopper to land.

"They've picked up mass movements of dinks on the radar, said the sergeant. "Maybe up to four thousand, who knows."

"Whaddya think they're goin' to do?" one of the grunts asked.

"Who knows, but it don't look good."

Then they got the worst news. "Cronin's sending fifteen men from the Third out at 2100 [military time for 9 pm] on a night ambush."

"You gotta be shittin' me, man," said one of the men to the sergeant.

"No shit, they're getting ready now."

Suicide Mission

After the sergeant left, the men talked about the mission.

"They gotta be insane to send fifteen guys out beyond the burr [perimeter]. Fifteen guys against a whole regiment of dinks."

"If they get hit there'll be no Medevac."

"Sure as fuck the ARVN [Pro-U.S. South Vietnamese Army] won't try to help them."

"Most of them guys are newbies, man, they won't know what in the fuck to do if they're hit."

At first Al Grana didn't speak. He just listened. Then he turned to me.

"Do you really think anyone gives a shit about us?"

"I don't know," I said. "The politicians say they do, but I don't know."

Grana had a Zapata-type mustache, longer than Army regulations. He had been a student in Los

Angeles before becoming a grunt. He was a veteran, and he knew the situation at Pace. He knew they were surrounded, and he knew the South Vietnamese wouldn't help them if they got into trouble. He also knew there would be no American help either, and with the low ceiling there would be no Medevacs or close air support if the patrol got into trouble. Fifteen men going out against odds like that was suicide. There were at least five hundred North Vietnamese regulars [soldiers] out there; if the radar was accurate, there could be thousands, the entire 208th Regiment.

Grana looked at me again. "This is insanity. The whole thing is just insane."

None of the others spoke. Grana continued, speaking softly. "Do you think, if anyone back in the world really knew what was goin' on here, they'd let this madness continue?"

"I don't know, Al," I said. "I don't think they want to know, not really. It's better for their conscience."

"There must be somebody who'll listen. They can't cover it up forever."

"They've done very well so far," I said.

We talked for about an hour. I told Grana and the others that I had become too cynical to believe anything could be done.

"I'm sorry, Al, I said. "I just don't know what it'll take to end this war. I hear the vote is coming up in Congress and it'll be close, but I don't know. I don't have much faith left."

Somebody asked the time. The patrol would be going out in a few hours.

"First Hook got it. Next it'll be those fifteen guys from the Third Platoon. Tomorrow it'll probably be us. How many more will it take?" Grana asked me. I couldn't answer.

He looked at me again. "Somebody's got to do something to stop this shit."

'I Ain't Going'

Later in the evening when the shelling stopped we crawled out of the bunker and walked over to machine-gun bunker five. One grunt's mother had sent him a jar of pickled pigs' feet and he was passing them around.

"Fucking asshole Cronin," snorted out one of the grunts as he speared a pig's foot with his knife.

"Somebody oughta give Cronin a pickled pig's

foot."

Everybody laughed. In the Americal Division Cronin probably would have gotten a grunt's calling card that night - a CS grenade, maybe even a frag. [See previous articles in PL Magazine about how U.S. soldiers 'fragged' their officers with a fragmentation grenade].

The sergeant who had spoken to us before came over to our bunker in a hurry.

"They ain't goin' " he said.

"What?" asked Al.

"When Schuler was giving instructions, Chris said, 'Go fuck yourself; I ain't going.' "

"No shit," said another grunt. "That crazy Greek fucker - he's got balls."

"What did Schuler do?" asked another.

"What could he do?" said the sergeant. "Then five of the other guys said pretty much the same thing."

"Whoooooee!" shouted one of the grunts, giving the clenched-fist salute. Some of them slapped skin palm to palm.

"What do you think they're going to do to them?" one of the men asked the sergeant.

"I dunno. Probably a court-martial."

That night the men of Hooker's platoon decided to hold a meeting in the morning and keep in contact with the other platoons. "We got to stick together," one of them said. "They can't fuck with us all."

To be continued.



PLP

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The Hidden History of the U.S. Imperialist War in Vietnam

U.S. Army Feared a Mutiny by Its Soldiers

This is the fourth in the series on the Vietnam War taken from *The Flower of the Dragon*, a book published by Rampart Press.

This week's article shows quite clearly the hatred felt by the "grunts" (GIs) towards their officers and "lifers," and towards the war U.S. imperialism was waging in Vietnam. But the author of the book shows too much faith in liberal senators like Ted Kennedy, as if the Democrats weren't imperialist warmongers. The fact is that President J.F.K., Ted's brother, began to send large numbers of U.S. troops to Vietnam, and Democrat LBJ and Republican Nixon escalated the war.

The only ones who really opposed the imperialist war, besides the Vietnamese people fighting U.S. imperialism, were the millions of anti-war protestors in the U.S. and all over the world. Our Party, PLP, played a key role in radicalizing many of those anti-war protestors in the U.S.

But, in spite of its weaknesses, the book does show how important it is to win soldiers to fight the warmakers.

More GIs Refuse to Fight

Next morning we heard in the chow line that Cronin was drawing up court-martial papers for each of the six men who had refused to go on the night ambush. Refusal of a direct order usually got a grunt (GI) five years at Leavenworth, and the men of Hooker's (a GI injured during cross fire with North Vietnamese) platoon were talking about it.

Hooker still hadn't been evacuated, although everybody now knew he would be all right. He came over to say goodbye after breakfast - the traditional Army standby: eggs, bacon, and the mushy brown porridge the grunts call "shit on the shingles."

"Hey, man, you're goin' home. Fucking bastard," said one of Hooker's buddies, glad he was okay.

"I couldn't sleep, it hurt too much," he said. "But I feel all right now."

After breakfast Al Grana came over and asked me whether I'd worked for Robert Kennedy in the '68 election; I told him I'd helped put out campaign newspapers in the Irish sections of San Francisco. He then asked if I knew Ted Kennedy. (I had met Ted Kennedy several times in the campaign, and was with him when Robert was killed, but I doubted he'd remember).

"Why?" I asked.

"I've got an idea," he replied.

Grana then noticed a photographer taking pictures of us talking. I'd run across him the night before; he was standing over my knapsack with a flashlight.

"Who is that guy - do you know him?"

"Some L.A. Times guy," I replied. But somehow he didn't look like a news photographer: for one thing, he had only one lens, and I have never seen a professional war cameraman use only one lens.

Later in the morning Grana and I walked over to the Third Platoon's bunkers and talked with the platoon leader.

"What happened last night?" I asked.

"Oh, not much."

"I know about it, Lieutenant. Did you want to go yourself?"

He didn't say anything, but it appeared he had not been too eager to go on the mission. It was obvious he didn't want to talk about it, so I spoke with the other men of the platoon.

The six that had refused were scared. From the day a GI takes the oath until he is discharged, he is a cog in the green machine. The lifers run his life, and they keep power by letting the GI know that no matter what he does the Army will always have the last word. He is the Army's prisoner, GI - government issue.

The lifers knew they couldn't have an army in which the men decide when and if they want to fight. The only way they could keep discipline - and the six men knew it - was to come down hard and make an example of offenders. In the Army's book of crimes, refusing to go into combat is one of the worst. If the brass let the grunts get away with refusing to fight, the entire system would face collapse. As soon as other units learned that grunts had told their lieutenant to go fuck himself, they too would refuse orders. The grunts were afraid of dying short, and now most of them were beginning to suspect that the war was short. No one wanted to be the last man to die in the war.

Chris was scared the most.

"Cronin said he wanted to see me," he said.

"Good luck," I told him.

Cronin and the artillery major took Chris aside. Chris scratched his neck nervously as they took turns firing questions at him. I wanted to get a shot of them threatening the court-martial, since I knew from experience how the Army could change the facts around, but I didn't want them to see me. I pretended to shoot an airstrike, then suddenly swung my camera.

About thirty grunts were standing around talking when I got back to bunker five. Something about them was different. They were the same men I had seen the day before, but somehow they were different.

"Hi, Al, what's up?"

"We just had a meeting with some of the guys in other platoons. We ain't goin' to let the lifers do it to Chris and the others."

"What are you going to do?"

"First of all, we ain't going to go out beyond the burr. We were ordered to go out on a patrol by Cronin, but nobody's going. And we had a vote. We ain't lettin' the lifers fuck over those guys."

"Right on," said a couple of other grunts.

"Remember when we talked last night?" Grana said. "Do you think we could get just one senator back in the world to really listen to us?"

"Ah man, they don't give a shit about us," said one of his buddies.

Illusions About Kennedy

"Do you think Robert or John Kennedy would have listened?" Grana asked.

"I would have hoped so," I said.

"You know," Grana said, "before last night I didn't have any faith in anything working, you know, through the system. But you said there's a key vote coming up in the House, and that a switch of 25 votes could end the war. You gave me some hope, man." He paused for a moment. "Well, some of us have been talking about it, and we got an idea."

What, he said, if the men of Bravo wrote a peti-



San Diego, 1972 - 132 sailors, mostly black, refused to reboard the Constellation aircraft carrier because of racist practices on the ship. tion to a top U.S. senator telling him what was really happening at Pace? Would it do any good? Would anybody listen?

There was a lot I didn't have the heart to tell them. Every senator has a huge staff of aides, as many as forty, some of whom do nothing but screen mail. The odds of a powerful senator ever even seeing their petition would be one in a thousand. If reports of My Lai (a village where the U.S. Army committed mass murder) could sit on liberal senators' desks for weeks, what chance would this petition have of ever getting any attention?

The men of Bravo had another problem. Officially they didn't exist. They weren't even allowed to send out mail: if the American people knew U.S. troops were being ordered into the Cambodian border area, the brass could face a storm of protest both from Congress and the people. So the grunts could be overrun by the North Vietnamese or court-martialed before their petition even got out.

"Who are you going to write it to?" I asked Grana.

"We talked about that, too. Do you think Ted Kennedy would listen to us? Do you think he'd care?"

"Yeah, I think so." I couldn't say no. "You know, man" - I hesitated for a second, because I knew Grana was thinking the same thing - "the lifers will never let that petition out of here. Rebellin' grunts, facing death, sending a petition to Ted Kennedy - that's a scenario the Army brass wouldn't like to see. They're going to come down on you real hard."

"I know," he said. "It was just an idea."

Grana knew the Army would try to make examples of the six who refused to go, and if the other men in the company joined their revolt the Army would be faced with a growing mutiny. If they couldn't stop it at the platoon level, they would have to crush the rebellion at company level. If whole companies refused to fight, the U.S. military could face open mutiny in the ranks. He also knew the Army would do every-

(Continued on next page)

Mutiny by GIs

(Continued from previous page)

thing it could try to keep the story covered up so they could deal with the men of Bravo without anyone in the outside world knowing about it. A petition to Kennedy – if it ever got to him – might save them. But time was running out. They were facing two enemies – the lifers and Giap's [Marshall Giap, head of the North Vietnamese military forces] 208th Regiment outside. There was only one way to be sure Kennedy would get the grunt's petition, and that was for someone to take it to him in person. I was the only one at Pace who could do it, and we both knew it.

But I didn't want to. Once the lifers knew I had the petition, they would probably try to keep me at Pace until they decided what to do. They had all the helicopters; it would be a long walk to Tay Ninh. Even if I did get through, I could be picked up on the way to Saigon. My press card had run out and I was now in the country illegally. They could arrest me and there was nothing anybody could do about it. I also knew the Army might try to trump something up, maybe say I engineered the refusal. Maybe, I thought, that was why that *L.A. Times* photographer kept snapping my picture talking with Grana and the others.

"The chance of you guys pulling this off aren't very good." I finally said.

"I know. But somebody's got to try," he said looking at me.

"Anyway, my chances of ever getting your petition to Kennedy are slim. The Army may try to cover up the story, the press will call me an ego-tripper, and I doubt if I'll ever get past Kennedy's palace guards."

Grana said nothing.

"Okay," I said, "I'll try it."

I'll never forget their look of hope when the men of Grana's platoon started passing around the petition. It passed quickly to other platoons.

"I wonder when the lifers'll find out," said one of the men in machine-gun bunker five.

"I think they already know – here comes that arty colonel, McAfee or whatever it is."

There were about seven men in the bunker, stretched out. McAfee stuck his head in the bunker, and one of the grunts said, "Here comes the scumbaga-ag." McAfee pretended not to hear.

Brass Lose Control of Bravo

None of them jumped up and saluted; in fact they ignored him. They didn't really hate him, it seemed he was just an intruder.

McAfee seemed to feel uncomfortable. He looked at me and said it was very dangerous for me in the bunker. "You know, they have rocket positions in the treeline over there," he said. "A direct hit would blow this place up."

Nobody said anything. Then one of the grunts said to me, "You don't have to go man." Another cleared the bolt of his M-16 with a loud clank.

"I'd better move along," said McAfee. Then he walked outside. The men watched sullenly as he pretended to inspect one of the bunkers, lifting a tarp canopy. "It looks okay," he said to his aide, who stuck out his chest.

"What a fucking idiot," said one grunt audibly. "No wonder we're in such a mess, with shitheads like that running this place."

After McAfee left, one of the grunts from the Frist Platoon came over to bunker five and said there were already forty-six signatures on the petition. He also told us the lifers were warning the men not to sign it. "A lot of the grunts are scared," he said.

They had to get a majority of the hundred men in the company to sign the petition if they wanted to save Chris and the others from court-martial.

"We'll get the signatures," Grana said. "I know we will."

There was now a sense of camaraderie in Bravo Company. They were all in it together and felt a growing solidarity. Maybe two years before they would have fragged McAfee; now they didn't have to. They didn't even hate him. "I just feel sorry for the lifers," one of the grunts said. "They just don't know where it's at."

They have only contempt for McAfee and the other lifers. McAfee was playing the movie colonel, but nobody wanted to play his spear carrier, and McAfee knew it. As the hours passed and the men got

more signatures on their petition, McAfee and the other lifers were losing more control of the unit.

They had to regain that control, and soon. McAfee sent Cronin to bunker five. When Cronin entered the bunker, the men turned away, ignoring him. "I want you all to get shaves and clean up," he demanded in a military voice. Still the men ignored him. Then he grabbed a rifle and opened the bolt. "This thing is filthy," he said.

"Oh shit, who needs this," said one of the grunts, and walked out. The rest gradually left, one by one, until Cronin was alone with one man, trying to inspect his rifle.

After Cronin left, the men returned. "We ought to do something about that asshole," one said.

"He's not worth it," said another. "We've got more important things to worry about."

GIs Declare Ceasefire

"Yeah – like what about the VC?"

From bunker five we could see out over the tops of the bunkers across the several hundred meters of no-man's-land to the forbidding treeline where they were waiting. They hadn't fired all morning, but every man knew they were watching.

"I wish we could let them know we had nothing against them," one of the grunts remarked, looking out over his M-60 machine gun. "We just want to get out of here."

"Hey, maybe they know what's goin' on. They haven't fired today."

"Bullshit," said another grunt. "How could they

know?"

"I don't know. But they can see us and they can see we ain't doing anything to them. Maybe they'll lay off."

"Yeah," said another. "If we lay off them, maybe they'll lay off us."

The men agreed, and passed the word to the other platoons: nobody fires unless fired upon. As of about 1100 hours on October 10, 1971, the men of Bravo Company, 1/12, First Cav [Cavalry] Division, declared their own private ceasefire with the North Vietnamese. For the first time since they got to Pace, it was all quiet on the Cambodian front.

Now there was no longer two sides of Pace, there were four – the lifers, the South Vietnamese, who seemed almost to be spectators; the North Vietnamese, possibly massing for a final attack; and the grunts, who, like the ARVN, were opting out. To the grunts, it wasn't the North Vietnamese who were the enemy, it was the lifers. McAfee knew, when he heard the grunt's bolt click, that the grunts had power. They had the machine guns, the light assault weapons. The grunts outgunned the lifers by about 30 to 1. After taking 30% casualties, even the artillerymen who manned the big guns had low morale. If it came down to it, most of them might join the Bravo Company rather than side with the lifers.

Grana came back from the meeting with the other platoons and reported that they now had over 50% of the company.

To be continued.



Cartoon about World War I

Russian Officer: "Why these fortifications, your majesty? Surely the Germans will not get this far!"
The Czar: "But when our own army returns...?"