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The View from New York

The image I form from the files of Safe Return during my absence from New York is of a busy workshop of motivated activists at the height of their collaborative and creative powers. My own brush touches only lightly on this record, but the team members Tod was surrounded by have all left their marks. There's an alternating current in the narrative where voices rise and fade; when one or two are on the road, the others are office-bound, dutifully fulfilling requests for information, and in constant correspondence with collaborators and resister families. You can also witness in the files for these months the emergence of a core of FORA participants mobilizing in their own communities for public and organizational work on amnesty.

Impressions aside, there is a long memorandum that Tod composed sometime in August, and, in his mock-covert manner labeled, "Internal Document-Limited Circulation," that offers a detailed sketch of our enterprise and its five in-house collaborators during that summer of 1974. It begins with a section called "Who We Are." I am profiled first, the Vietnam veteran former PhD candidate who protested American war crimes, and helped organize the Citizens Commission of Inquiry as a forum for other war veterans to do the same. Along with Tod I had "transformed CCI into Safe Return with the winding down of US combat in Indochina." Tod next describes himself, emphasizing his activism in the civil rights and antiwar movements, as well as his role in establishing CCI. As a lawyer, he has served as counsel to the resisters whose politicized surrenders to military control have been orchestrated by Safe Return.

George Carrano's resistance as a draft resister and his five year exile in Sweden are given as his principal credentials, extending to his work with radical GI projects in Germany and the

co-founding of Up From Exile to lead efforts on amnesty among exiles. At Safe Return, George was now to concentrate on building FORA, while also contributing to our new publication, *Amnesty Report*. The distinguishing item on John McGarrity's brief vitae is his service with the Merchant Marine in Vietnam as a very young man. He is only 24 at this time, and has already logged four years in the antiwar movement throughout the Pacific Northwest, mostly in VVAW. Lastly is Eddie Sowders "who came to work with us in a more round-about fashion," followed by details of his highly publicized public surrender at the Abzug Hearings. Eddie, along with Lora, his mom, will also now help coordinate the work of FORA. There is no task in particular assigned to Sailor John, but he too was to be part of the FORA traveling team, giving us in total five full time organizers capable of considerable regional coverage around this initiative.

Over the next several pages Tod outlines Safe Return's major actions and achievements since its founding in the Fall of 1971, then moves on to an uncensored account headed, "Income History and Analysis," on how our activities were being funded. If I am not mistaken this "confidential" document had as its intended recipient a Boston-based financial planner named Bob Zevin, a pioneer in the field of socially responsible investments who I had been courting that summer on our behalf. We were hoping Zevin could help convince certain established Left foundations and major donors that Safe Return merited their support.

Zevin was also a member of RESIST, a funding collective in Cambridge that included some prominent academics active in the Movement, and was created to distribute small grants to a broad range of activist groups. We were not among them because several key members of RESIST were cool, if not downright hostile, to Safe Return, having accepted second hand the sectarian slanders from our detractors. We hoped that a more worldly and pragmatic progressive,

like Zevin, could plead our case and offer an objective appraisal of our work. This may explain the candor and detail of Tod's report on Safe Return's financials.

Tod added up the expenditures for the first eight months of 1973, totaling $43,594[1], and, at that pace, projected an income total for the year of just over sixty-five thousand dollars. With our expenses ever expanding, not least in the area of staff subsistence, Tod suggested that a figure totaling $75,000 would more accurately reflect our needs for the remainder of that year. This was based on full time pay of $100 weekly for two staffers with the other two at half-pay, and without reference to the fact that I was still drawing no salary thanks to my monthly check from the VA. "Office rent, phones, and other expenses are maintained at minimal levels," Tod explained. With our average monthly outlays of $5,500 we were providing a lot of bang for the buck for the amnesty issue, and we expected a sober money man like Zevin to see that.

The accounting gets really interesting when Tod breaks down the several sources of our income. He estimates that 60% of our revenues already come from direct mail, with large-gift donors "providing most of the balance," and the remainder something of a miscellany combining cocktail parties and speaking gigs. Two things are clear in revisiting this analysis: Safe Return had early established through direct mail what would remain our principal source of contributions; and Tod finds no reason to detail how this funding mechanism actually worked.

It was irrelevant to his overview whether or not Bob Zevin understood the intricacies of direct mail. First, that the initial drop combined names culled from selected lists acquired through rental or exchange, and was called "prospecting," seeking at a minimum to recover the costs of the mailing. The returns then identified actual donors who believed in the cause for which the funds were being solicited, and who therefore might be encouraged to contribute

again. With these donor names now transferred to a growing Safe Return "house" list, they would be asked repeatedly to do so.

As an adjunct to our mailing strategy we had already established a system of telephone follow-up, and were paying a fund raiser named Howard Gressey 25% of whatever he could raise separately through personal contact over the phone with donors in the higher giving ranges. Direct mail wasn't just a matter of writing a good letter and putting a stamp on an envelope. Moreover, it was seldom a source of operating funds, which were generated through subsequent "house" mailings, and telephone follow-up. As a reliable base for funding direct mail required considerable revolving capital and constant administrative tending. It's what kept us in business, and would only increase as a proportion of our income in the years ahead.

On his last page Tod outlined exactly how over the next four months we planned to spend the increase in monies we were seeking. A second set of ad hoc Congressional hearings "focused on the human cost of resistance by those with less-than-honorable discharges" was already on our planning calendar for the coming fall. Having finally grasped that nearly half of the 600,000 bad discharges since 1965 were given to soldiers of color, we were now projecting this issue as racially charged, and Tod pointed to two recent race riots on the Naval carriers Kitty Hawk and constellation as evidence of on-going resistance to racism in the military's rank and file. As a line item for the hearings, which would be totally subsidized by Safe Return, Tod projected expenses of $3,000. He confided moreover that we were "actively considering possibilities for another "Safe Return" by an underground or exiled war resister," for which we estimated costs of an additional $4,000. Another $7,500 was needed to support our FORA organizing efforts, and $9,000 to cover salaries and operations. In the end Tod concluded that to

remain effective in the short run we would have to increase our yearly budget by almost thirty thousand dollars.

And finally, on a separate sheet also boldly marked "Confidential," Tod laid all our cards on the table, providing the "names of wealthy individuals who, dating back three years to CCI, had sent us contributions of $100 or more." Topping the list was Katherine "Kit" Tremaine, a Santa Barbara philanthropist and proud member of Richard Nixon's Enemies List, who had given us over $3,000 in seven installments. Stanley Sheinbaum had donated $1,000 in four separate gifts. Seven others had donated in the $400 to $500 range, including the artist Alexander Calder. For foundation support, however, Tod could only list D.J. Bernstein with a whopping total of $14,500 in seven grants, and which, despite having cut us off at one point with a "terminal grant," was funding us once again; and the Kaplan Fund, which finally came in that June for half the $5,000 we had requested. There is no mention of our "secret" conduit through Mal Burnstein and his Oakland law firm of the several thousands in anonymous checks written on the Bank of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao, our source of Moscow gold as we imagined it.

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Eddie Sowders left a well-documented trail of his travels through Michigan not long after being sprung from the stockade, riding the dog on an Ameripass, landing first in Detroit for home stay, them moving like an itinerant preacher from one town to another spreading the word on amnesty. His assessment of the issue's urgency was much colored by the circumstances faced by resisters like himself wishing to openly rejoin a post-war America, but facing bleak prospects for a penalty-free repatriation, and very low odds of gaining anything close to Eddie's rapid transit to freedom. But Eddie too had tasted a dose of the military's repressive treatment. And in a statement written for our first issue of Amnesty Report, then in preparation, Eddie would

describe the Ft. Meade stockade as being run like a "Gulag." And he warned that "there's no indication that the military is pursuing a policy of "benign neglect" toward deserters... many returning GIs from Sweden have received stiff prison terms, in one case five years at hard labor." Without amnesty, Eddie declaimed, "no resister would receive justice from a case by case decision."

In taking this message to Michigan Eddie, ironically, wae working Tod's old stomping grounds as well as his own, although the two men had come from opposite sides of the track. Still, the places Eddie traveled were the places Tod had lived in or knew well, undergraduate school in East Lansing, law school in Detroit, and Ann Arbor where his older sister and her family lived. It was as if Eddie was somehow serving as Tod's surrogate, and understandably he felt pressure to produce results similar to those Tod might have achieved under the same circumstances. Eddie's itinerary was drawn mostly from a list of potential FORA members who had contacted us directly, or whose names had been passed along by other interested parties, his own stockade mates in a number of cases..

Safe Return's networking around FORA was inevitably limited in scope. We served as catalysts for educating amnesty supporters among resister families, ideally drawing them into the campaign as subjects for the media, or vocal constituents seeking action from Congress. We never commanded the resources to sustain, much less control, a family solidarity drive remotely resembling the government's efforts on behalf of the POWs. We could model that concept, but not its impact on public opinion. This was not a reality that agitator/propagandists like us cared to dwell upon, since we doggedly self-identified as organizers. Eddie was particularly eager, now that he was free to do so, to assume that identity for himself. This explain perhaps the

underlying tone of frustration and self-doubt that winds through the text of his detailed, seven page report.

In addition to relatives of resisters, Eddie was meeting with church types and antiwar academics. One such encounter in East Lansing with a group calling itself CAR - the Committee for Amnesty and Reconciliation - was especially discouraging. CAR downplayed its affiliation with the United Church of Christ because, according to Eddie, the UCC was viewed as "too radical" given that some members of CAR still "favored a conditional amnesty." It disturbed Eddie, moreover, that the head of CAR questioned him closely on his plans while "in the Lansing area," like someone guarding his turf against an unwelcome outsider, all the more evident in the man's repeated emphasis to others at the meeting about FORA's close relationship to Safe Return, clearly suspect for its radicalism.

Eddie's most successful encounters in both human and political terms were with Blacks, whether from the same impoverished client class as himself, or, in one case, with an African American academic and his wife in Ann Arbor who, while not activists, embraced the general radical viewpoint and supported amnesty. Most of Eddie's leads in the Black community were family members of fellow prisoners he'd met while in the Ft. Meade stockade. These folks understood that racism often inflamed the environment for Blacks in the military, and that a racist act was a greater evil than, say, the act - likely verbal - of defiance or disrespect it might have engendered. At Safe Return we called that resistance, whereas in the preferred nomenclature of the military it was "disaffection." And if the "disaffected" soldier happened to be Black, as the bad discharge ratio demonstrated, the punishment could be uncompromisingly severe.

Not surprisingly, a number of the Black folks Eddie Sowders met with in various parts of Michigan that July, having lived the consequences of racism in the draft-age military, sought relief along multiple paths, and amnesty provided another topical vehicle to express that on-going struggle for racial justice. And while the Black community overall tended to oppose the Vietnam War, it was by no means an activist antiwar constituency, but one, as we would ultimately demonstrate with our Bad Discharge hearings, which could be mobilized to personify this war-related issue. Had Tod and I possessed greater foresight, not to mention vastly greater resources, we could not have done much better than supporting Eddie Sowders to develop into a full time community organizer. In the absence of that support, and compounded by how he later mishandled the baggage from his own background, Eddie's organizing ambitions would eventually founder. What he possessed in an unassuming and sincere personality, and a quick intelligence, qualities well adapted to grassroots leadership, he squandered in his battle with poor self-esteem.

The symptoms are evident in this report. "If I'm going into too much detail in my letters, please let me know. One of the reasons I'm doing so is that I know someone there [at Safe Return] can offer advice if I'm doing something wrong. (Is my defensiveness showing?)." Eddie was another stray who needed a degree of approval that Tod and I were unable to provide him, and eventually had to be let go when he started drinking heavily, and became an erratic presence at the office. But for the next year or so, Eddie remained a valued comrade and a frequent companion in the haunts and taverns of the East Village. I was never a deep-into-the-night kind of guy, down by midnight most days. Maybe I'd run into Ed at the Grass Roots on St. Mark's Place, have a couple of beers and go home, my head undoubtedly filled with the next day's agenda. Eddie would stay and drink himself into a stupor of self-pity.

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Sailor John McGarrity was Tod's protégé, and I never really got close to him. There was no overt friction in our relationship, but not much other content either. I can't remember ever actually hanging out with Sailor, the way I did with the others. East Coast/West Coast heads and polar opposites, I guess. We just weren't a match, and I think he felt the same. I formed the impression that Sailor would be more comfortable in the actual workforce - I think he had some printer skills - than serve as a spare part in the inventory at Ensign-Uhl, Inc. I do think our high voltage style, and Tod's and my aggressive personalities, overwhelmed him. He didn't leave much in the record, a number of transmittal letters, and one in particular which reveals his gentle manner in dealing with a FORA member, Marge Swartz who had testified at the Abzug hearing at the time of Eddie's surrender.

Sailor began his note politely, inquiring about Marge's recent visit with her son Larry, the military resister living in Canada, and next thanked her again for her own "compelling testimony" at the hearings. The main purpose of the letter, though, was to encourage Marge to organize other members of FORA in the Bay Area where she lived, and the names and contact information for six families were included. "Could you write and encourage these families to get signatures and addresses on the FORA petition?" Sailor suggested.

This same task was being asked of other resister family members like Marge throughout the country that summer when FORA's campaign targeting Congress was steadily pursued by the whole team. To fill out his letter, Sailor gave Marge newsy capsules on the movements of each Safe Return staffer, beginning with a few details on Eddie's trip to Michigan, then on my stay in Cambridge. George, he noted, would be "traveling off and on this summer in the mid-Atlantic," although I can find no evidence that George actually traveled anywhere on behalf of

FORA that summer. As for Tod, he was "covering both offices," perpetuating the illusion that Tod's apartment actually functioned as FORA's separate office; wearing both hats would have been more accurate. Sailor himself was due to leave for a tour of the South that would take him from Atlanta to Austin, and then to the West Coast by autumn. "New York very hot and muggy, the South is worse. Nice to be out West," Sailor wistfully expressed, his true sentiments no doubt.

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George Carrano adapted that summer to the routine in our office, briefly contributing to Safe Return's administration and on-going stream of action-oriented output. For all our energetic hustle the atmosphere around the office was Sixties-collectivist guided by respect for experienced leadership in lieu of any formal hierarchical pecking order. Each "coordinator" would attend to his own piece of a larger project, getting out the next newsletter, or gearing up to find witnesses for the upcoming Discharge Hearings, or preparing an itinerary for his regional organizing swing. Consultation occurred naturally. But each of us also took shifts as needed with office busy work like answering the mail. Along with all the others I find George's signature on cover letters in order to dispatch whatever was at hand, news clippings and resister brochures - and later that summer bulk orders of Amnesty Report #1 - along with a steady trade in resister bracelets, and stacks of petitions framing our demands that were destined for members of Congress or officials at the Pentagon.

Around these more mechanical tasks we tended to practice a loose form of "get-the-term-paper-written-but re-negotiate-the turn-in date" level of productivity, over some more efficient, but less democratic, division of labor based on narrowly designated job descriptions. In consequence our attention to non-urgent categories of correspondence and lower priority

information requests had a tendency to lag behind - especially if we were traveling or immersed in action - though seldom by more than a week or two. I find a repeated pattern throughout these records where whoever among us eventually responded to a delayed request, he had typically included an apology within a personal note.

Our mailings, apart from what was strictly intended for fund raising, were now aimed beyond the Movement activist culture in fulfilling requests for material and information from emerging peace and church groups taking up the cause in communities all over the country. We also now conducted serious if limited public mail-in campaigns through the continued placement of free ads in sympathetic magazines like *The Progressive* and *Ramparts* - even *The New Republic* in the days before that magazine migrated from liberal to neocon. There's ample evidence in the Safe Return files that hundreds of these ad coupons and signed petitions found their targets in D.C.[2]

George Carrano lent a hand in these mundane office tasks, but he was also focused on two immediate priorities of his own. The first of these Tod described to me in a letter. He wrote that George was seriously interested in improving the organizational structure of Up From Exile's which he continued to help steer long distance from New York. By mid-summer George was working diligently on a funding proposal. The proposal was modestly budgeted at just over five thousand dollars. In what George termed a "developmental phase" over the next eight months, there was to be $75 a week to subsist a part time staffer for guiding the group's interests day to day, and sufficient funds to assemble and print a brochure that would communicate unambiguously to the public and amnesty advocates alike the views and needs of the exiles themselves. It isn't clear if, beyond that eight month period, George foresaw much of a future for his group.

George certainly envisioned that if UP were to upgrade in the short run into a reliable, well-run project, and thus exercise more influence in the public discussion around amnesty, all the remaining exiles in Sweden, who he described as living a "debilitating experience... in a cold and alien country," might benefit. Playing to an audience of America donors, George's choice of words is not sparing of the feelings of his former Swedish hosts, except to acknowledge that the country had provided "a relatively secure refuge for exiles... [most laudably for] those who had learned the truth about Vietnam while in uniform and were forced to choose the alternative of desertion." Those reformist Social Democrats ruling Sweden were at least good for that much! That George, as his second and highest priority that summer was committed to the welfare of one exile in particular, is also self-evident.

On occasion a supporter would return a resister bracelet asking for another, customized with a different name. But the price of individual engravings was prohibitive, and we could only afford bracelets, a minor novelty in our public outreach, that had been engraved in bulk with two or three individuals' names at a time. The names on the bracelets available that summer, at three dollars each, were Eddie Sowders and, if I am not mistaken, that of our intermittent correspondent in Stockholm, Lew Simon.

AWhy don't you write?" Tod abruptly began in his mid-June note seeming to express, not only obvious frustration - by now a refrain in dealing with Lew - but pained bewilderment. Otherwise Tod's tone was upbeat and friendly, reporting our goings-on, highlighting the success of the Abzug hearings with the enthusiastic participation of Lew's family, and closing with three exclamation points after a sentence on news of Eddie's rapid release.

It wasn't just George. All of us were determined to keep Lew in the Safe Return loop, as a trusted collaborator as well as a potential test case. We acted in the spirit of solidarity from a

shared ideological perspective, while no doubt being mindful of the political dividends. Moreover, Lew's family lived in nearby Queens. We were on friendly terms with his dad, who had a label printing shop near our office, and we had drawn Lew's younger brother Harris, still at home, into an active role in FORA on Lew's behalf.

Our success with FORA gave Safe Return cover with the press in the face of criticisms raised by stuffy competitors like Henry Schwarzschild or Louise Ransom about our bona fides, while permitting us to engage sympathizers among opinion makers and the general public; whereas an alliance with UP insured us a presence in Movement activities from which Safe Return wished to exclude itself, or might otherwise be excluded. Too radical for the liberals, we weren't radical enough for the far left. Lew was an important part of this calculus in contending with both fronts.

I myself didn't get a personal letter off to "Brother Lew" until late July. Though delayed, it was nonetheless inspired by his earlier exchange with Jack Colhoun of Amex, which "I, along with the brothers in New York, thought was excellent, coherent and, hopefully, effective." There was also well deserved praise for Eddie's "fantastic job," a true assessment at that time, shared I'm sure by Tod and the others as well. Beyond such comradely strokes, these letters of mine are like the *etudes* of a self-instructed neophyte seeking to master the Leninist keyboard, in this case another arch polemic aimed at pacifists like the American Friends Service Committee for their indifference to the class struggle, and unreliability as allies, over the long haul, to toe the correct line in the amnesty struggle.

It seems I was never more of a true believer in the ideals of revolutionary purity than during that summer in Cambridge when I had too much time on my hands, and these long analytical briefs, churned out one upon another, made me imagine I was becoming a Left

intellectual in my own right. What rendered these abstract exercises concrete and purposeful was the degree they sought to illuminate the state of the amnesty debate and that of the public's involvement, which I cautiously described to Lewis as "somewhat dormant."

It was summer after all. Concerted action among leftists always declined dramatically in the summer, producing less fodder for mass opinion to feed on. Amnesty was no longer a topic du jour, unlike Nixon's mortal battle to survive the Watergate monster of his own creation, which soaked up much of the popular media's attention. Provoking Nixon on amnesty would have been laughable alongside the spectacle of the man many Americans loved to hate collapsing before their eyes, and soon compelled to utter his unctuous disclaimer, the pitiful humiliating epitaph, "I am not a crook."[3]

Naturally, our internal talks that summer focused insistently on what could next be done at Safe Return's initiative to get the amnesty issue back in the news, and, of equal emphasis, to shed additional light on a Pentagon otherwise routinely sheltered from public scrutiny whose enlisted base was in a state of utter disintegration. That we were actively planning another "Safe Return" appears evident by August, when Tod budgeted a line item in his memo on our financials to underwrite a fourth dramatized challenge to the nation's indifference to the demands of the resisters for an accounting of the Vietnam War's criminality from behind amnesty's broad shield.

All of us at SR shared this passion for moral judgment on the war. And we saw in Lew Simon, whose desertion was an unambiguous act of conscience, a personification of that same moral judgment. Lew was the prime candidate at that point for our next test case, but no decision had been made on either side. In the meantime George Carrano was intent on choreographing the best possible outcome on his friend's behalf. George corresponded privately

with Lewis on a regular basis, and whether Lewis took the time to answer just as regularly I cannot say. There was one instance in mid-August, however, when George seemed to have deliberately left a copy of a letter to Lewis in the office correspondence file.

In it he makes several flattering references to something I had written earlier to Lew. "Please read Michael's letter before this," George urges, "as my purpose here is only to emphasize a couple of his already fine points." George does not seem to be citing the letter to Lew I have just summarized above, but a piece of correspondence I do not find in the record, or he is simply taking license and synthesizing my late July letter's general mood and content, distilling certain specifics he chooses to communicate to Lew on the record.

Addressing a possible "return" in the abstract, George emphasizes our standing dogma: that the action's relative "visibility" is of "considerable importance" to the surrendering resister's chances of "getting off light." George then goes on to weave a fantasy about how a film, a project Tod and I were seriously hoping to undertake, but that never progressed beyond the idea stage, would serve as a powerful vehicle for his friend's surrender. George refers to a "film length special" for airing on "network" television.

I suspect that George's faith that Safe Return could help motivate the creation of such a film was based on several factual occurrences. He had likely known that Marcel Ophuls, legendary director or *The Sorrow and the Pity*, had spent hours in Safe Return's office interviewing Tod and I about our work with CCI while shooting his troubled four and a half hour film, *Memory of Justice,* which would focus on the application of the Nuremberg Tribunal's principles to Vietnam.[4] George had also seen how close we had come to making a deal for a film with the celebrated Indy documentarians, the brothers Maysles. And for our latest film scheme, Tod had a new girlfriend who'd written for New York Magazine, and somehow talk emerged

about her going to Sweden with backing from local television to produce a documentary on deserters in exile - with Lew in a featured role. But that was even less likely than the overreach involving the Maysles. Nor could we have predicted at that moment that the film Bert Schneider and Peter Davis were still working on that had included a live shoot on Eddie's surrender would have the pubic impact it eventually achieved.

And, of course, having now heard all this talk, George had perhaps mistaken our hopes and enthusiasm - coupled it is true with some valiant effort - for an outcome that would actually deliver such a film as a vehicle for Lewis. Projecting this scenario as reality in his letter to Lewis, George argues that this *film* will pressure "the Army... to put its best foot forward... to give the impression of leniency." Add to this Safe Return's along with FORA and amnesty activists' ability to mobilize support among members of Congress, the resulting publicity would, by George's calculation, ensure Lew's return "the highest degree of success of all surrenders thus far."

If George was exaggerating the available means for publicizing Lewis' case, it was because he genuinely believed this offer of sponsorship was perishable. George sought to communicate "with all possible frankness" the political climate that "Michael covers with concise thoroughness... If amnesty doesn't burgeon this fall and winter into a real movement, then this may be the last chance for a safe return." George concludes that he understands that Lew and Fia "will want to have time to talk and think it over." But he cautions his friend in a tone of subdued urgency to "please Lew, let us know when you have reached a conclusion, even tentative."

Except for his misplaced faith in the film project, I am certain that George's general assessment of the need to stimulate the amnesty debate through action in the form of a fourth

public surrender was in every sense the collective view at Safe Return, and not in any sense George's private undertaking. As for whether there was also consensus among us that "this may be the last chance for a return," I have no basis for confirming, though it is by no means implausible, and certainly that view would have been entertained. But I find no precise evidence in the record that this viewpoint had reflected the collective wisdom conclusively. It is more likely that George, owing to his intimate friendship with Lewis, promoted this urgent schedule for action most strongly in our councils for personal reasons that would become clear only in the months ahead.

There were several other meaningful activities on Safe Return's agenda and planning board that summer beyond our preoccupation with Lew's possible surrender. As always, we patrolled our flanks within the Movement itself. A letter to his friend Burt of CAMP News illustrates Tod's diplomacy to keep communications open despite the airing of a serious grievance. "Was there any significance to the fact that we weren't mentioned in the directory of Amnesty contacts in your latest issue? We were happy to see the article on Eddie's statement, but disappointed to not be included in the index... people should be able to decide what and who they want to relate to for themselves." Tod had already mentioned Eddie's release, and, in closing, referred to a national political flap that came as very surprising news, and which rapidly galvanized the attention of antiwar veterans and cadres in the GI resistance. In fact CAMP News was exercising leadership around this late breaking wrinkle in the saga of the American POWs, home now for many months.

An account of this completely unanticipated development, excerpted below, appeared in the July 1973 edition of the VVAW newspaper, *Winter Soldier*:

> Colonel Ted Guy, a former POW, has charged 8 other former POW's with aiding the "enemy," i.e. making anti-war statements, disrespect toward a "superior,' (Colonel Guy) and asking for political asylum in a socialist country. All those who were charged were enlisted men. They were the ground troops; the infantrymen who fought a dirty war, who saw who they killed, whose homes they burned, who slept on the ground and who ate out of cans.
>
> Colonel Guy and the others in the Navy and Air Force were pilots who ran milk-runs, who killed from thousands of feet up, who destroyed with their bombs but never got their hands dirty. They are up there and they don't hear anything. All they see is a little flash. They don't see the destruction or hear the screams. At night they went back to their bases to eat steak and sleep between sheets.
>
> There were no charges brought against any officer, even though many officers made statements against U.S. involvement. It is interesting that the charges come at this time when the government is having charges brought against itself for Watergate, and when there is a growing movement for amnesty for all war resisters. They come at a time when people are questioning who are the real persons responsible for prolonging the Indochinese conflict?

Needless to say Col. Guy's ill-advised action was a PR disaster for the Pentagon, one that even rankled politicians and government officials who, against the tide of public opinion, still remained unrepentantly hawkish on the Vietnam War. This was the wrong wound to scratch. Moreover it was a bit late in the game for the brass to cry about the need to enforce the Code of Conduct[5] on young soldiers - those who actually did the fighting as the VVAW article makes clear - and who had for multiple years now been living among the most unenviable lives

imaginable as prisoners of war. These enlisted POWs, known in their camp as the Peace Committee, had simply soured on the war from experience like so many other veterans, and now had substantial sympathy and moral support from a large block of the American public, of whatever opinion on the war. Col. Guy seems to have been quickly cued on what the rest of the country had a lot less trouble grasping than he did. The charges on these men were soon dropped for "insufficient evidence," but not before one of the defendants, a ninth man, was said to have committed suicide.[6] Court martialing an antiwar deserter was one thing, an antiwar POW something else.

CAMP News, and by no means alone throughout the Movement, had quickly moved to build a legal defense for this novel group of GI resisters, who indeed had been vocal opponents of the Vietnam War during their incarceration, and were therefore, indisputably, our comrades. To support CAMP's effort, Tod had written to Burt that Safe Return "will do whatever we can." That marker was mooted when the charges were suddenly dropped. The antiwar POWs received honorable discharges, and were now free to more about the country. In the spirit of our pledge to CAMP, we invited one of them, Robert Chenoweth of Portland, Oregon to join us in New York for a joint press conference at the Statler Hilton. The press release read, Antiwar POW to Detail Harassment by Military and Declare Support for Unconditional Amnesty for Resisters.

This was the occasion for my mid-July return to New York, to fill the "combat veteran" slot in the roster Safe Return would present before the press, headlined by Bob Chenoweth, with two FORA moms already seasoned to media contact also in supporting roles, Kay Israel and Ursula Diliberto. Press interest was moderate, but one of Long Island's two principal papers, the *Press*, showed up to play the local angle featuring two Long Island towns, with Ursula residing in Massapequa and me "a pro-amnesty activist" identified as a native of Babylon. In my

statement, I had played the Watergate card, which the paper picked up on: "People will see government officials admitting to real criminal actions, while most war resisters would not have broken the law were it not for an unconstitutional war."

The other, and more prominent, Long Island daily, *Newsday*, devoted its coverage to Chenoweth's "defense" of his antiwar activities, and his differences with Col. Guy. "I only met the man one time," Chenoweth said, when the then lieutenant colonel came to where the enlisted prisoners were kept separately from the officers, and announced they were about to be released. As for Guy's charges, "they were fabricated way out of proportion." They arose, Chenoweth said, because he and his mates "weren't trying to hide the fact that we were opposed to the war and tried to convince other Americans of their views in the hopes of shortening the war." The charges that he had "divulged a prisoner communications system" while in the POW camp, or encouraged "GIs in the field to desert," were false Chenoweth insisted. And while he and the others had "discussed in a casual manner" the options for seeking political asylum in North Vietnam, "there was never any action taken on our part."

Chenoweth's anger and alienation ran deep. He spoke openly and boldly on all of these matters, which, in the culture of World War II would have led to serious punitive consequences, if not a firing squad, and heaped lifelong infamy upon him. In the culture of the Vietnam War, however, these antiwar POWs were operating in a crowd, in the same energetic antiwar effort as veterans like myself who'd been to Nam, and GI's in US bases all over the world who had joined the antiwar resistance. In his endorsement of amnesty, moreover, Chenoweth was unstinting in comparing his fellow resisters to anti-Nazi Germans. "History doesn't condemn them," he said, "it condemns the Nazis, not the people who opposed them."[7]

I can almost visualize Tod sitting at the typewriter toward the end of July, while candidly spilling his true feelings to Linda Alband of Portland, Oregon about the stressful political culture in which we operated. Where I would often bury my disgust in analysis, Tod was usually more direct, and, in compensation, appended a caution on the need for security: "Please treat this letter as CONFIDENTIAL - for your eyes only." Otherwise the letter is Tod's genre equivalent of my letter from Cambridge summing up the politics of the amnesty players in and around Boston.

Tod first dispensed with several newsy items, starting with our successful collaboration with Bob Chenoweth, which we owed in part to Linda's initial contact with the former POW, her fellow Portland resident. But there had been some minor fallout from our press conference. "Evidently Cora Weiss felt more than a little competitive about our working with Bob." Cora Weiss was our most persistent nemesis among the latter day shakers and movers of the Old Left royalty in and around New York. And, in his letter to Linda, Tod complained that Weiss "has been engaged in a series of attempts... to degrade our committee for a long time. Frankly," Tod explained, " I'm not certain just what all the elements in her attack are, but she has been consistently hostile to us for several years." There's a side bar to this story that justifies a digression.

Weiss had been the face and, I suspect, a prime mover behind a group called Committee of Liaison, which, with the cooperation of the North Vietnamese government, organized contact between American antiwar personalities and U.S. prisoners in Hanoi. This stirred great controversy in the U.S. government and media, with many accusations that Weiss was "coercing" the prisoners - presumably in exchange for better treatment - to publically adopt antiwar positions, the institutional view incapable of contemplating, much less acknowledging, that many of these men had formed such opinions on their own in the time they now had to

reflect upon and become better informed about the war.[8] Weiss' privileged access to the authorities in North Vietnam, who would facilitate the work of the Committee of Liaison, was based on a combination of items on her resume.

Weiss operated within the orbit of the Old Left still dominated by the political culture of the Communist Party USA, of which the North Vietnamese counterpart was a fraternal organization. The U.S. Party, much reduced in membership having been shattered during the McCarthy era, still commanded the loyalty of scores, if not hundreds, of its former members and co-thinkers, the so-called "fellow travelers." Many CP members had come to see support of the autocratic Soviet Union as an error, but they never recanted their movement's deeper humanist values. Now many of these ex-comrades had become comfortable, even affluent, and they remained activists on peace and disarmament issues in cities and towns scattered throughout the country. They might retain a sentimental attachment to the CP - and their own romantic youthful revolutionary idealism - but they were not controlled by it. As individuals they typically served as support networks for the younger activists of the New Left, contributing money, organizing local forums for our work, and even providing a bed for the night on our many road trips. We were much indebted to this Old Left rank and file activist base, even as certain big wigs who called - and enforced - the Party's political shots nationally sought constantly to limit and undermine our activities.

Moreover Weiss possessed enormous leverage as a funding source within the Movement, based largely on the fact she was an heiress to the Faberge perfume fortune, and chair of the Samuel Rubin Foundation named for her industrialist, leftist father. Thus her *noblesse oblige* extended beyond whatever standing she enjoyed among the inner ranks of New York's Old Communist Left. Weiss' foundation was a major contributor to such high profile leftwing

entities as the Institute for Policy Studies and the Center for Constitutional Rights, within both of which her husband Peter Weiss exercised principal roles. Through Women Strike for Peace, another group heavily influenced by the CP, Cora was also a power behind the creation or NCUUA. Unlike the other activists in the NCUUA /ACLU circles who bedeviled us, however, Cora Weiss had a lot more clout. "We've made every effort to overlook her constant attacks on our integrity," Tod piously concludes, "but we prefer to let our work reflect the real balance of political impact."

The matter about Weiss is then dropped, and Tod offers no example of Cora's "consistent hostility' toward us, nor any detail on how she expressed her displeasure around our work with Chenoweth. My own recollection, for which I find no immediate source from the record, is that Cora operated mostly behind the scenes to discourage other Left foundations and large donors from supporting us. We had little personal contact with the woman, but we were always hearing about how she bad mouthed us in whatever New York activist circle on which she had inflicted herself. Her slanders and maneuvers caused Safe Return much more material harm than all the verbal slanders emanating from our amnesty activist competitors. And so we held Weiss in particular contempt, and, whenever we had occasion to do so, returned her brickbats by painting her as an overbearing Stalinist commissar whose orders we refused to follow.

There is a funny sequel to this digression involving Cora's husband Peter that occurred around this same time. Peter had written us to cease and desist in the use of his name on Safe Return's list of sponsors. We were delighted to reply that the Peter Weiss among our sponsors, was the then well-known German playwright of the same name, and not the lawyer from the Center for Constitutional Rights who had recently taken command of the defense of VVAW's

Gainesville 8, and, as Tod passed on to Linda Alband, was urging them to plead guilty to the commission of war crimes as a tactic at their pre-trial hearing.[9]

Tod did to give some background context for the animosity toward Mr. "Cora" Weiss – a contempt for his "liberal line" which dated back to the CCI days, but neglects to mention what a pompous ass Weiss was on several occasions when we had met with him. Tod turns instead to offer a few choice observations about Henry Schwarzschild, like denigrating Henry's "practice... of issuing statements," and accomplishing nothing more than "writing a pamphlet which (lucky for him) was attacked by Bill Buckley about a week ago." To which he adds, "Oh I forgot... his conference... spending $18,000 (approx.) in a movement gathering of the clan which got virtually no attention even in the so-called underground press." Of course we had no real idea of what Henry spent for his conference, except that is must have been a great deal, which sets up Tod's parting shot by scoring Henry's choice for conference "keynoter, Ramsey Clark, because Clark had foolishly stated "that amnesty is not related to the war in Vietnam." Tod then leaves to Linda's imagination how Ramsey's narrow legalism must have played in the resister and activist communities.[10]

Up next to take his licks is Dee Knight, and the latest issue of AMEX featuring "a cover photo of Roger Williams," author of a book on exile life, and one of the more visible draft resisters of this generation. "From what I'm told," Tod reports, "it goes on to attack him [Williams] for taking the "easy way out," making a deal with the District Atty." The article "has a lot of people upset here; it may be that it'll have serious repercussions for the future" for Knight and AMEX. By this time, of course, we were glad of any opportunity to stir discord among the "outsiders" in the NCUUA fold, who were saddled to the "insiders'" orientation, as Tod characterized it here, of "begging the legislative and executive arms of the government" for

a just amnesty while we went about "working in a mass context with people who have a real (not an assumed or guilt-motivated) nexus to the issue..."

It was not only from Lew Simon that we had news of the exile community that summer. There a promotional mailing from AMEX with news from France, soliciting subscriptions for "Zero, the new-born newsletter of the Paris American Exile Community." It's not clear who was behind the newsletter, as no names are given, but Joe Heflin probably had a hand in it. The AMEX note reports that there are still "between 125 and 240 American exiles living in France..., the only country in Europe or North America in which U.S. war resisters can still find refuge." While the second part of that sentence was undoubtedly true, whoever remained was not there because the government of France supported these men as resisters. Given the prevailing antiwar and anti-America attitudes of its citizens, it would have been politically untenable for French authorities - reluctant to appear as kowtowing to Uncle Sam - to deport or extradite a deserter or draft resister who had not committed a crime. But official France would not lift a hand to make it easy for them to survive there. A subscription for *Zero* cost $5, and in the upper margin of the AMEX sheet someone at Safe Return had written, "sub taken 8/23."

Later that month we received a letter from Gerry Condon, now apparently well-settled in Vancouver, his exile project humming along in an office shared with a Anon-sectarian radical book co-op." Gerry offered praise for our first edition of Amnesty Report, and wanted us to ship him "a bundle." "There are many tidbits... in the newsletter," he noted favorably, "and most of them right out of the mouths of family members!" Gerry thought Amnesty Report would be a useful tool for instilling other resister family members with "the courage to come out." He also mentioned that his partner Sandy would be in New York in early September - probably to attend a meeting of NCUUA - and most surprisingly added that, "It'd be good if we could see you

people up here whenever you're in the Northwest." This has the appearance of an olive branch from a guy who always seemed to blow hot and cold simultaneously on whatever initiative Tod and I were embarked upon.

From Toronto there's a copy of a letter Dee Knight had sent to a staff attorney from the Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts who was looking to contact our Boston-area FORA chapter. At the bottom, Knight appended a civil P.S. addressed to Tod, Mike, George, Eddie, John - saying he'd referred her to us in New York. Another olive branch from the rival camp, but, unlike Condon - who was sincere - merely a tactical move for Knight who wanted to buy an ad for AMEX in our next issue of Amnesty Report, as well as to request the photo of Bob Chenoweth that accompanied an article on the antiwar POW in our first edition. Since all the space in our six paneled, doubled sided newsletter was devoted to articles and editorial copy, there was no room for the placement of ads. Amnesty Report was circulated gratis on our lists or in reply to requests, not by subscription like AMEX. It is unlikely, moreover, given our political differences, not to mention our acute distaste for the man personally, that we would have given Knight access to the audience who received our mailings even if our policy on ads had been otherwise. As for the photo, I'm certain we would not have denied him that.

One of the more off-tempo finds among the August mail is a copy of a column on amnesty written by the father of our sometimes collaborator James Reston, Jr. The senior Reston was caught in "the philosophical and legal tangles" of an issue that weighed the liability facing "the draft dodgers in the war... [against] the truth dodgers in the White House." Reston pere, still hopeful that Nixon would be exonerated, was less forgiving about the actions of Vietnam era deserters, unable to "sort out the idealists from the cowards and revolutionaries in the armed services." The very fact that Scotty Reston would have characterized the radicalized military

resisters as "revolutionaries" demonstrated how difficult it was for his World War II generation to confront and comprehend the extent of its children's generation's alienation toward authority during the Vietnam era.[11]

With Ed about to return at month's end, and Sailor to depart around the same time the outgoing mail was almost exclusively Tod's correspondence. I can't determine from the record, but George's absence in the files suggests he was perhaps appearing only intermittently at the office. Tod always took the business side very seriously, and much of his output throughout August is devoted to soliciting donations from targeted individuals, as well from those who'd written with requests for information or materials. His replies always contained a postage-free return envelope for their convenience. There is something about human psychology that increased the odds of a person writing out a check for a few bucks when they knew they were going to save a few cents on postage when they mailed it. Thus the BRE - the business reply envelope - became for us an essential and relatively low cost means for fund raising.

But Tod had also diverted a good deal of his attention by late summer to the case of an indicted draft evader named David Renne, who had been caught returning to Spain from North Africa with a conspicuous amount of hashish. David's parents, Grace and Waldo, in Fairbanks, Alaska, were frantic about their son's upcoming trial, and had retained Tod, essentially pro-bono, to visit with their son where he was being held in Madrid, and consult with the American Council to determine what interest the U.S. government might express locally on David's behalf. Tod and Pamela Booth - reunited once more - planned to incorporate this legal consultation into a brief European vacation in September, and, in fact, Tod had asked for $200 from Grace and Waldo to help defray the cost of his flight.

In a letter Tod wrote David's parents on the last day of August, one readily sees what a bargain he had given them. In preparation for his trip, he had spent "a couple of days in Washington" making inquiries about the case, both on Capitol Hill with members of the Alaska delegation, and with an officer on the Spanish Desk in the State Department. He had even written a letter explaining the case to Secretary of State William Rogers, seeking David's extradition following his trial and likely conviction. No one Tod consulted, unfortunately, was optimistic about David's chances. But you could tell that Tod was into his role as attorney on an international "drug" case with echoes of the popular film Midnight Express, which portrays the horrors faced by a young American man convicted of a drug-related offense in a Turkish prisonI think Tod might have fancied an adventure in an exotic area of the law as long as he didn't have to do it for a living. For him a law degree was little more than a very useful political tool. Another query from a resister trapped in Salzburg, Austria seeking support from Safe Return that summer for his own case, received the following reply from Tod: "We are primarily a political action committee; we regard legal defense a tactic in the battle for amnesty." On the eve of his departure for an organizing tour in the South, sweating out another urban heat wave with temps in the 90s, Sailor wrote Linda Alband in Oregon that, "Mike and Ann are moving back to New York on Tuesday, " apparently the 4th of September. Tod would delay his own departure for Spain another week, and in the typical tag team style we practiced, I now took my turn as duty officer at Safe Return for the next few weeks.

1 Adjusted for inflation this is equivalent to over $226,000 in 2012 dollars; Tod's projected yearly budget of $75,000, in this calculation, total almost $400,000.

2 Some of the FORA members or supporters were well-organized enough to send us Xeroxes of sheets of filled-in petitions or ad coupons, along with a copies of correspondence that had received from the Defense Department or their senator or representative in Congress. Such materials, demonstrable of Safe Return's degree of adversarial engagement with various institutions of our government, were received steadily at our office during the summer of 1973.

3 "Nixon Tells Editors, "I'm Not a Crook," Carroll Kilpatrick. *The Washington Post*, November 18, 1973.

4 The film had a very limited distribution, and I have never seen it. If a segment featuring Tod or I had made the final cut, however, I'm sure we would have heard.

5 [TK Code of Conduct, Manchurian Candidate.

6 TK verify this.

7 "An Accused Ex-POW Defends Himself," by Martin G. Berck, *Newsday* July 12, 1973; "Watergate overflow; Boost for amnesty?", *Long Island Press*, July 12, 1973.

8 Die hard hawks would claim the Peace Committee GIs were brainwashed with the enemy's propaganda versions of the war. When in fact the truth about Vietnam was the same no matter where you learned it.

9 Echoes of Mark Lane.

10 Tod, in later years, would work closely with Ramsey Clark around a variety of issues involving the interests of GIs and veterans; and we had already collaborated with him around the trial of Tom Michaud, where the judge refused to hear his testimony. It may have been that Clark was speaking as a lawyer at Henry Schwarzschild's conference, and no thinking in broader political terms.

11 "Shall we extend amnesty to Nixon?" by James Reston. *The New York Times*, August 21, 1973.