

Defend the Right of GI's to Free Speech

Support the Pfc. Howard Petrick



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Pfc. Howard Petrick is a 21-year-old soldier stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, who faces a threatened court-martial for the sole "crime" of expressing his antiwar views to his fellow GIs.

Petrick had been active in the Minneapolis antiwar and socialist movements prior to being drafted last July. Since his induction he has continued to exercise his rights as a citizen, expressing his views in opposition to the Vietnam war, and on the general political issues of the day.

There is no issue of infraction of army rules or refusing to obey any order involved in his case. Since induction, Petrick has had an excellent service record and there has never been a single disciplinary action of any kind against him. He is well liked by his fellow GIs and regarded as a good soldier by his immediate superiors.

However, on April 1 he was interrogated and assigned an Army lawyer who advised him that there was a definite prospect he would be court-martialed.

He told Petrick that the charges in such a court-martial would probably include "subversion," creating "disaffection" within the armed forces and making "disloyal statements." The lawyer said each count under these charges carries a maximum penalty of three years in prison.

The distinguished constitutional attorneys, Leonard Boudin and Victor Rabinowitz, are acting as civilian counsel to Petrick. They were retained for him by the Emergency Civil Lib-

erties Committee which regards Petrick's case as involving vital constitutional issues. These revolve around whether or not a citizen surrenders his constitutional rights to freely express his political beliefs on entering the armed forces.

Petrick's socialist, antiwar beliefs were well known to Army authorities at the time of his induction. In the summer of 1965 he had become active in the Minnesota Committee to End the War in Vietnam. His opposition to the Vietnam war led him to socialist convictions and he became a member of the Minneapolis Young Socialist Alliance and Socialist Workers Party.

At the time he was first called up for induction, Petrick refused to sign the standard "loyalty" questionnaire. Petrick refused to sign on the constitutional ground that such an oath violated his First Amendment right of free political association.

He was later visited by two men from Army Intelligence who sought to interrogate him about his political beliefs and associations. He declined to answer their questions on the same grounds.

On June 25, 1966, Petrick was arrested while participating in a street sale of the antiwar publication, the *Bring the Troops Home Now Newsletter*, on a charge of not having a peddler's license.

Three weeks later, on July 13, he was inducted into the Army. He again refused to sign the so-called loyalty oath on constitutional grounds. Asked by an Army officer at the induction center why he was refusing to sign, Petrick explained that he did not intend to yield

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any of his constitutional rights while in the service and intended to continue to express his beliefs. The officer assured him that his constitutional right to do so would not be infringed upon in any way.

After his induction, the case against Petrick in Minneapolis for selling the *Newsletter* came up and the Army interceded and the charges against him were dropped.

Petrick went through basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., and was then assigned to the Second Armored Division at Fort Hood. He has served there as a cook.

Since his induction, Petrick has continued to subscribe to *The Militant*, the *Young Socialist*, and various antiwar publications. He has maintained a personal library of Marxist and other works to continue his own political education. At the same time he has openly circulated antiwar, black power and socialist literature.

Many GIs showed serious interest in this material and in discussing the ideas in them. A number have expressed sympathy with Petrick's stand against the war and some also with his socialist viewpoint.

The most popular pieces of literature distributed by Petrick were the YSA pamphlet, *War and Revolution in Vietnam* by Doug Jenness; a Documented Fact Sheet on Vietnam, published by University of Michigan students; the YSA pamphlet, *GIs and the Fight Against War* by Mary-Alice Waters; and *The Fort Hood Three*, the story of the three GIs who refused to go to Vietnam. Various of Malcolm X's speeches were also read with interest by black GIs.

Last month Petrick heard from a buddy with whom he had gone through basic training that he had been questioned by Army Intelligence about Petrick's political beliefs. Similar word came to him from members of his own outfit.

On March 20 Petrick was given a pass for a ten-day leave and during this period attended the convention of the Young Socialist Alliance held in Detroit, March 24-26.

On his return to Fort Hood he found that his locker had been searched and literature removed. He also learned that fellow GIs had been questioned about him and that some of their lockers had been searched.

That evening he was called in and questioned. A series of 70 questions were directed to him regarding his political beliefs and associations, his possessions of antiwar literature and statements he had made while in the army. Petrick declined to answer these questions at that time.

He was then assigned an Army attorney who advised him of the prospective court-martial. Since then he has been assigned to a new unit. His regular activities are not restricted but his files are being held in a special category. He has not drawn his pay, and cannot obtain a furlough.

An Appeal From Pfc. Howard Petrick to you

[*The following appeal for aid was made by Pfc. Howard Petrick on April 7.*]

I appeal for support from all Americans who agree that GIs are citizens who are entitled to the right of free speech guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. Although I have never disobeyed an order, and have fulfilled all my duties as a soldier, by constitutional rights are now being threatened. All my literature on the Vietnam war, socialism, and other topics (all publicly available in libraries or bookstores) has been confiscated by United States Army Intelligence, my friends and I have been questioned, and I have been assigned an army attorney who informs me of a possible court-martial on charges of disloyal statements or subversion.

Soldiers are also citizens, and should have the same constitutional rights as civilians to hold and express any opinions, including opposition to the Vietnam war. Your support to me at this time can help convince the army to halt any further infringements of my rights, and can help insure these constitutional rights to all GIs.

Please send protest letters to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and send copies of such letters and statements of support for my case to the Provisional Committee to Aid Pfc. Howard Petrick.

Pfc. Howard Petrick

Provisional Committee to Aid Pfc. Howard Petrick

22 East 17th Street, Room 535

New York, New York 10003

- Please add my name to your mailing list and keep me informed of future developments.
- Please add my name as a sponsor of the defense effort
- I would like to form a committee to aid Pfc. Petrick
- Enclosed is \$ to help defray the legal costs of this case

Name
(please print)

Address

City

State Zip