

Interview of Bruce Hartford
by Jerry West on 31 March and
3 April 1975, in Oakland, California

BH: Bruce Hartford is my name and I was born in Los Angeles to a working-class family. I'm 31, and I was a civil right worker first in Los Angeles, and then for two years in Mississippi and Alabama, working with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the group that Martin Kind was head of. I did that for a couple years and was active in the anti-war movement. I helped organize in 1967 the two big, first really giant anti-war demonstrations. One in New York on April 15, and then one at the Pentagon in the fall. After that I went to college at San Francisco State, and was active in Students for a Democratic Society. There was a big student strike at the State College, which I was involved in. While I was going to school I worked as a longshoreman, and that was how I supported myself. After I finished at State, I didn't graduate, but after I stopped going there, I continued to work as a longshoreman and continued to do anti-war activity among longshoremen and stuff like that. I became involved with the struggle on the Coral Sea, the Stop Our Ship movement it was called, SOS. I became active in that and through that became active in a group called Support Our Soldiers which was a general GI movement support group. After working with that for a while I went to Asia to work at Iwakuni.

JW: You went to Iwakuni then with PCS?

BH: Right.

JW: When did you arrive in Iwakuni?

BH: August of '72.

JW: Did you have any contact with the Beheiren people?

BH: Well, I don't know if it was like this when you were there but there was a chapter of Beheiren at Iwakuni. There were a lot of local chapters of Beheiren all through Japan and this chapter of Beheiren was basically people who had come from other parts of Japan to work with the GI movement in Iwakuni. Iwakuni is in Yamaguchi prefecture. Yamaguchi is pretty conservative as prefectures go, sort of described as the "Alabama of Japan." You know, Hiroshima and Yamaguchi and

that area. There wasn't really a local Beheiren except in Hiroshima, the Beheiren in Iwakuni was mostly ex-students, student-aged type people who had gotten involved in Beheiren while they were students or young workers and had volunteered to come to Iwakuni and to do GI work. Of course we worked with them very closely. Occasionally the honchos from Tokyo would come by and we'd see them but basically we didn't have much of a working relation ship with them.

JW: Did you know the Rev. Iwai?

BH: Yeah.

JW: What kind of a relationship did the GI's have with Iwai and his church at this time?

BH: Not much.

JW: Did you ever meet Rev. McWilliams?

BH: Yeah.

JW: Can you say anything about him.

BH: Well, he's a nice guy, but a little screwy. He was never clear about what he was driving at. Or if he was clear it didn't seem to make much sense or relate to what was going on. But he was a real nice guy.

JW: He was a real pacifist.

BH: Yeah...but I think that things were different when we were there from when you were there because we had a center. There was a much more organized project. Were there civilians there when you were there?

JW: Just Jan and Annie and Sid and then Barbara Bye.

BH: And they were all living in Iwakuni?

JW: Well they were there at different times. Sid was in Tokyo, and he came down and saw us a couple of times.

BH: And Jan and Annie lived in Nishi Iwakuni up the river by the park?

JW: I don't know where they lived. We got a house downtown for Barbara Bye in RTO, and we had a house with the Japanese out in Kintai by the park for the Semper Fi staff. We didn't live there, but it was kind of like a flop place.

BH: Well, after they put the Hobbitt off-limits we rented a house right near the main gate.

JW: Can we put a date on it. After they put the Hobbit off-limits when?

BH: The Hobbit went off-limits in, I think it was July of '72, maybe it was June; June or July of '72, so we rented a house near the main gate in that off-base housing tract area, and that became the Semper Fi house which was used as the movement center. I lived there. The house was rented a little bit before I got there. The civilian staff of PCS lived there and that was where the library was and where the meetings were and where the Fi was put together and all that kind of stuff. Some of the Beheiren people lived there too.

JW: What kind of a relationship did you have with McWilliams, if any.

BH: Nothing really beyond saying hello on the street and occasionally if we ever had a movie, which was practically never, we would borrow his projector. We just saw him around, not much of a relationship at all. He came over once or twice. They have this Serendipity center which is kind of a religious place, and we went over there a couple of times. They were afraid to have us come over there because they had a relationship with the base chaplain and they were afraid if it was known that Semper Fi people came to the Serendipity they would lose their accreditation with the base.

JW: He was back in good with the base at this time?

BH: Well, his wife was running it and he was off doing something else, he was hardly ever around there.

JW: He was banned from the base in '70.

BH: I think he may have still been banned and it was just that his wife wasn't or something, or that they had base chaplains working with the Serendipity or something like that. I never went into it too deeply because I kind of felt that they didn't want us to.

JW: I guess Iwai and the rest of the Kyodan were tied in with that more than they were with you.

BH: Well, yeah, but they worked fairly closely with the Beheiren. But because we had our own center and our own printing facilities and stuff, there was much less of a role for them than in earlier years. They still had a hand in, though, and we still cooperated on different projects when something came up.

JW: What kind of projects?

BH: Oh well, like on the '72 Hiroshima Day a delegation of GI's went there against base orders. I mean everyone was confined to base, but people still went with signs. That was partly sponsored by and supported by the Beheiren and local people in Iwakuni and in Hiroshima and we went as a group. Another time later on we went on a tour of Peace Park as a special thing, and then they organized a tour of all the military bases both Japanese and American in the Hiroshima area which we supported and then they had some demonstrations which we supported and a couple of other things like that, like maybe a speaker would come co-sponsored. We had some rock concerts and a barbeque, sort of a joint enterprise kind of thing. But day to day there wasn't a thing.

JW: That's with the church.

BH: With any of the churches and several other ministers and missionaries who were active. You see, after they put the Hobbit off-limits, naturally the number of GI's dropped who started going there and also about that time the Beheiren people were beginning to make in-roads among the Iwakuni people and so they increased the amount of programs and activity that they were doing with the people of

Iwakuni. Of course Iwai and the other ministers then did a lot of work around that aspect so they had a much closer relationship with the Hobbit than they did with the GI movement.

JW: The Hobbit then became a Japanese center after it was put off-limits more or less.

BH: Well, there was still a lot of interconnection. My partner lived at the Hobbit and our printing facilities were at the Hobbit. We would have meetings between us and Beheiren there. Also some of the Beheiren people lived at the GI house because we wanted to keep ties. That was deliberately done for that reason. The cadre GI's, that is the GI activists, they went to the Hobbit a lot, and then of course there was collaboration on the Hobbit cases. The Hobbit people helped to pass out the Fi and put up posters; there was an interchange but the main thrust of their activities shifted more and more toward the Japanese community.

JW: When you say Hobbit people you mean Beheiren.

BH: Yeah. We never called them Beheiren particularly; we called them JATEC or the Hobbit people or something like that.

JW: You said the printing stuff was at the Hobbit at that time. It was still Beheiren's mimeocutter and their mimeo machine?

BH: Well, it was our mimeo machine.

JW: It was your mimeo machine? You had purchased one by then. I know that when I was there we were doing the printing at Hiroshima University.

BH: Right. It was used by both groups but it was our machine, not that it really makes any difference. They used it as much as we did, but it wasn't the machine at Hiroshima, it was a different machine, and we had a cutter too.

JW: How often were you putting out the Fi?

BH: Every payday, twice a month, like clockwork.

JW: Were you still putting out the folded sheet or had you gone to the stapled?

BH: The stapled. The full sheet, about the size of the Daily News in New York or something like that, but not folded over.

JW: What was the reasoning behind that. Was it easier labor-wise or what?

BH: Less margins, you got more words to the page because you didn't have all those margins. Actually it was much harder to read the full sheet, but you know, you couldn't get it all in, so we went that route.

JW: We went the other way because it was easier to handle, and we didn't have to staple anything.

BH: By this time there were so many people involved that on Fi nights there would be 15, maybe 20 people collating, stapling, folding and doing all that kind of thing. It would be a big party, a big operation, it took us a couple of hours to put it together after printing.

JW: What was your distribution?

BH: Well, we printed about 800-1,000 of which about 500 got onto the base, and another 75-200 were subscriptions to mostly Marines in 'Nam or Thailand or the Philippine Islands along with a few sailors. Roughly 100-150 went to other peace organizations and to exchanges with other newspapers and then Behieren also took a number of them, a lot, and spread them around to different sources and places.

JW: Beheiren was spreading them around Japan.

BH: Right.

JW: Were they helping you distribute them on the streets in Iwakuni?

BH: Well, yes. Shortly after I arrived we were able to force a thing where GI's were able to distribute the papers off base which lasted for about a year, for about three or four months after I left. Once that happened the number of Beheiren people that helped distribute went down although there were always some, two or three

there. We felt it was better to have as many GI's passing it out as possible because that increased their involvement in the movement. They felt more like it was their paper. You know, if we had seven or eight GI's passing it out on Four Corners and on the strip, it wouldn't make any sense to have another four or five Beheiren people.

JW: Well then I guess at this time the GI movement was growing considerably, and the corresponding Beheiren involvement was decreasing.

BH: Right. Also, the fact that the Hobbit was off-limits made it difficult for Beheiren. They were tied to the Hobbit because they had to run their programs and also function as a restaurant which meant they were tied to cooking and cleaning and stuff like that. They weren't free to do a lot of stuff, so that cut down their ability to participate. Also, we were concentrating more on GI's, and the language problem was certainly an obstacle. For example, when there was a meeting of GI's and the flow of discussion was going very good, which was good for helping organize the GI's, it meant that there was difficulty for the Beheiren people in following it because people were talking and interrupting each other. There was a lot of excitement and energy being generated, and if we had said, "Wait a minute everybody, we've got to stop and translate this, or speak slower," that would have inhibited people from getting their feelings out. So, naturally we felt that we should put as our first priority working with the GI's and in those cases generally we tended not to try to slow down or stop the conversation. If there was a formal meeting between Beheiren and us, naturally we would make sure everything was translated, but I'm talking about general rap sessions and bullshit sessions and things like that.

JW: What kind of Beheiren activities did you support.

BH: Well, they had mostly demonstrations against the base, which we marched in a couple of times. Usually our support was getting GI's out to give them the fist and cheer and say "right on" and stuff. It was too dangerous for the GI's to actually participate in those

demonstrations as demonstrators. We would stand on the sidelines and wave and cheer and clap and talk to other GI's who were seeing it and yell at the riot patrol and stuff like that.

JW: Were they letting the GI's out on the street during the demonstrations?

BH: Well not during the big ones, but the Beheiren ones were only 15 or 20 people. Beheiren at Iwakuni wasn't very big, it was a conservative area. When the big demonstrations came up which happened four or five times during the year, they would try to restrict the GI's to the base but if we knew about it in advance, all the GI activists would just not be on base. When the restriction came down they would just leave a day earlier and not return or leave in the morning before they locked the gates.

JW: Were the Beheiren demonstrations more or less spontaneous in that they weren't publicized in advance or were they publicized demonstrations?

BH: Well, they were regular, it was like every third Friday or something like that.

JW: It was such a routine then that the base knew they were coming.

BH: Oh yeah. Well they had to get a permit you know. The base always knew when there was a demonstration coming. They always had to get a permit. This was just kind of a regular thing, it was more to maintain a Beheiren presence and more oriented to the Iwakuni people than the base.

JW: Were you there when they were flying the kites?

BH: Well, they did that once while I was there but the conditions were not very good and it didn't work out very well. Apparently the earlier time they had done it, it had been much more successful. The weather was wrong that day, it just wasn't a good day.

JW: Were they still operating Radio Camp Must Go while you were there, the taped broadcast across the fence.

BH: Not very much. They did it generally if there was a big demonstration or for some of their demonstrations they would do that, but it wasn't a regular thing. I think it wasn't a regular thing because the GI's had said, look most of the time nobody can understand what anybody is saying over that thing anyway because the sound system was so blurry. To get it high enough so that people could hear it from where they were, which was not near the fence, made it so blurry that nobody could understand what was being said.

JW: Were you there for Armed Forces Day?

BH: Yeah.

JW: It was '73, right?

BH: Yeah.

JW: What happened then, did anything happen on Armed Forces Day?

BH: Well, let's see. They had the open house. In fact they didn't have Armed Forces Day. They had Open House Day. It wasn't called Armed Forces Day.

JW: It was opened to everybody?

BH: Yeah. Except to demonstrations. Beheiren had a demonstration. Some of us went on base, I went on base. I'd gotten about thirty feet from the gate when this dude comes up to me and says, "Coming to see the base, Mr. Hartford?" And I says, "Yeah, I thought I'd come to see Open House Day, who are you?" And he says, "Oh, I'm Inspector Shithead of the Naval Intelligence Department." I forget what his name was, anyway he was the Lord High Poobah of Naval Intelligence, and so he says, "Well, I'd be happy to give you a guided tour." I says, "Oh that's not necessary." He says, "I insist." So I says, "Alright." He gave me a whole tour of the base. He was trying to find out what I was up to and I was trying to find out what he was up to, and we kind of fenced around. There was all these cops and pigs and NIS agents around to make sure nothing happened. I wandered around and they took some pictures and I took some pictures

of them, and then I went back out and helped with the demonstration. It was not a bad demonstration. There were a lot of people coming on to the base of course, they had a good presence there. It was a pretty good day.

JW: I know the last year that I was there, they had it open by invitation only, they were so afraid of demonstrations they didn't open the base up to the general public.

BH: This one was to the general public. We also had a demonstration on the Christmas bombing which was a better day. There were 40 or 50 Japanese involved in that and we had about 5 or 6 GI's getting as close as possible to being involved without being busted. The Japanese had a sit-in at the gate. It was a night demonstration and a good demonstration. We put out an Extra of the Fi because of the bombing and all that.

JW: How many GI's were active at this time?

BH: How do you define active?

JW: Doing something within the organization.

BH: Oh, well, see there were so many different levels of involvement, let's say to the extent of coming by to the house and from that up. For the year I was there, let's say, it would vary from a low of four or five to a high of twenty-five or thirty. It would go in cycles up and down. In terms of real activists, that is people who actually worked consistently, day in and day out or regularly that you could count on, we never dropped below a minimum of about four or five and sometimes we were up to maybe a dozen Semper Fi hard core activists. We called them cadre GI's, that was our name for them. So there were anywhere from four to twelve generally.

JW: How were the Fi's received, you say you distributed about 500 of them.

BH: Let me go back to the cadre a minute. Once a GI became cadre he only lasted about three months before he was discharged, so there was overlap.

In terms of how the Fi's were received, I thought they were received very good. I don't know how it was when you were there, but in the entire time, the full year, that I was there passing out Fi's, I think only twice was any of us hassled by average GI's. I'm not talking now about Naval Intelligence or CID, but just your ordinary GI's. The first time it happened I wasn't the one being hassled, Lana was being hassled and immediately there were 15 to 20 GI's defending her saying, "Look, who wants to beat this crud up," and just hoping he would do something so they could cream him. The one time I was hassled it was by a drunk and my biggest problem was keeping other GI's from fighting him. I said, "This man's just drunk, we'll have a big incident, you'll all get busted, stick around if we need you but don't let him provoke you." He was running around screaming "Communists" and all this buzz. Now, of course on the other hand, we were always being hassled by CID and NIS and all that shit.

I would say the Fi had become pretty much of a real institution by that time, to the extent that in the Torii Teller they would have little jokes like for example on April Fool's Day when they always put a listing for the television Armed Forces Network, they put in that there would be a panel show on the war sponsored by the Semper Fi. Every once in a while they would allude to something that was in the Fi or say something about the Fi. It was practically an institution on the base. That was good, but I think it was also bad in that I think that we should have been more controversial. I mean we certainly were controversial, but it got to be the point where people were beginning to take the Fi for granted and the problem was that the existence of the Fi wasn't an issue. What we said they didn't like but its existence was taken for granted, and I'm not sure that was good.

JW: I can disagree with that because I think that by having your existence accepted you'll get spread out a lot further, you'll get a lot more exposure.

BH: But I think people tended to think less about what we were saying because they felt, "Oh, here's the Fi, right on..." and breeze through it but not really think about it because it was so accepted, just like reading the Torfi Teller and the "Stars and Lies." They would breeze through it, you know, and it didn't mean anything. I don't think that really happened with the Fi but as we became more institutionalized there was that tendency. Of course by the time that happened we were a pretty "militant revolutionary rag" and they certainly didn't agree with a lot of what we said, the brass didn't anyway, and the brass would try and harrass the Fi as much as they could.

JW: It's a different world from the one I knew.

BH: Well, I think that's also because the attitude of the Marines was different, people were waking up. Realities had percolated and the work of the Fi has been successful too.

JW: Did you have a lot of response as far as articles of contribution and letters were concerned?

BH: Most of the articles were written by people who came to the house, and off hand I would say roughly 40% of the articles were written by GI's and about another 40% were taken from other kinds of literature, other newspapers that we would get at the house, and the other 20% were written by civilians or Beheiren.

JW: Who had the final say so on all the newspaperapers?

BH: Usually there would be a kind of ill-defined and undefined collective. We always tried to get it more organized than that but usually we didn't. Anyway, generally it was this collective which would pretty much decide. It usually wasn't much of a problem as our general policy was that if anybody wanted to write anything, they could put it in the Fi but that the Fi reserved the right to put another article along side of it saying why we disagreed with it. Of course, very, very few, I mean maybe once or twice in the whole year did anybody put an article in the Fi who wasn't a Fi

supporter because those who were against the Fi wouldn't want to support the Fi by writing for it. It very rarely happened where we had to write an article that disagreed. Usually when it was, it was in answer to an article by someone who thought they supported what the Fi was for but in such a way said things that we disagreed with. Maybe for example they would be against the war but write in a way that was really sexist or racist, so we would then run an article saying why we thought this was racism, what we agreed on and what we disagreed on. There was only about four or five times when an article was ever rejected and usually they were rejected simply because they were so garbled nobody could understand what was being said. As far as I can recall, there was one real super-racist article I think we didn't run, but other than that it was never a problem.

JW: Would you care to talk about the legal work that was done with the GI's, some of the problems around it, and how it was organized?

BH: Well, we took different types of cases. First there was conscientious objector cases, GI's wanting a CO type discharge. Then there would be cases of other kinds of discharge like hardship, etc., and then also there would be the regular type of punishment cases, like those where someone was late for formation or was UA or things like that. Our policy was generally that if a GI wanted civilian representation in a court martial case, we would give it, with the exception of drug cases. It was our policy not to take a drug case unless it had some other aspect to it, like for example, if somebody who was active in the movement would be framed on drugs or something like that. That would be the only time we would handle drug cases. Then also, a lot of our cases grew out of the movement itself, from guys being harrassed because of their work with the Semper Fi or with VVAW, and being transferred because of this activity. Another kind of case we had a lot of was where guys were being transferred to the war zone when they did not want to go to the war zone. Sometimes what would happen was that a guy would get his transfer notice and realize that he didn't want to go, so he would come to us and we'd try to keep him

from going. From there he might either become active in the movement or decide that he wanted a CO discharge. Finally there were large cases dealing with fundamental political issues. For example, we had a big struggle to allow Marines to pass out the Semper Fi while they were off base, out of uniform and all that. The Marine Corps said that even on their free time off the base they couldn't do it. Well, we fought a case, we won that case and then after I left they put down some new rule or something that knocked it back, I don't know what the status of that is now. But while I was there for most of the time, the Marines could pass out the Fi. Another example would be the Hobbit case. To me the Hobbit case just always really typified the Marine Corps "justice."

In the spring of '72 they started shipping squadrons to Thailand and Bien Hoa to take part in one of the big bombing offensives. About a week before the squadrons were moved south, of course, everybody on the base and everybody on the bar row and everybody in Iwakuni who had anything to do with GI's was talking about it, and all the bar owners were running around trying to find out which squadrons were moving so they could quickly collect all the bar checks. Everybody was uptight. Beheiren put out some leaflets saying, "Hey, you know people are being sent to Thailand" and talking about the war. Well, the brass got all uptight about that and we think that that's the reason they put the Hobbit off-limits, but they would never actually say that. Anyway, that was in the spring. A couple of months later, I think it was June of '72, they issued this order putting the Hobbit off-limits. There's a law that says if the military wants to place an establishment off-limits that it's necessary for them to go through a long procedure, notifying the owner of the establishment that they're mad at him and saying what is wrong and giving him an opportunity to correct whatever it is that's wrong, and have a bearing and all of that. Well, they did none of that with the Hobbit, later on in the case we said, "Well, why didn't you do any of that?" And they said, "Well, we didn't have to do that because that law only applies to Americans, if it's owned by a

foreigner, the law doesn't count, only for American establishments." This always seemed to me a little chicken shit being as they're in Japan. But they would only follow this law for Americans. Anyway, it was also an illegal order on a number of other bases. According to Navy regulations, the guy that issued the order didn't have the authority to issue it, it was supposed to come from someone else, So there were about 15 or 20 procedural screw-ups that made the order illegal. Anyway, the order came down and was publicized and everything. This was before we had rented a house near the base to use as a center, so we had no place to put together the Fi except the Hobbit and if GI's were coming to help the Fi they would be violating the order, so we decided we'd collate the Fi outside the Hobbit on the sidewalk. Actually, this was a little bit before I arrived, I'm saying "we" meaning the project. Anyhow, the MP's drove by and there was this real enthusiastic MP, Corporal Bailey I believe it was, who jumps out and busts this guy Bo, saying he went in the Hobbit. Actually he didn't go in the Hobbit, he was just leaning by the door there talking to Sandy who was an NLG lawyer.

JW: Sandy Carp?

BH: Right. So, he's busted, and then a few months later comes the trial for this crime. Of course our first line of defense was that the order was illegal. We hoped to get the order thrown out. So, our first line of defense was that the order was illegal. First of all we went through all the procedural hoopla and then the case was delayed while they'd rearrange their footwork and everything. They cleaned up a lot of the screw-ups and they got the right guy to issue the order again, all this, and so finally it came down and we really were fighting away on whether the order was a legal order or not because of course if it was an illegal order Bo didn't have to obey it and thus couldn't be convicted. So, there were a whole lot of things that went on and finally we came to a point in the trial when we were finished presenting our case, and the military judge says to the prosecutor, "Are you finished?" And the prosecutor says,

"Yes, we rest our case." Then the judge looks around and comes back, and says, "Well, based on the evidence presented to me, I would have to rule that this order is illegal, so I'm going to suspend the trial (there's a legal word for that, I forget what it is) I'm going to suspend the trial for 30 days and tell the prosecutor to go out and get some more evidence before I make my decision." Now they had already rested their case, we'd rested our case, and he said I'm going to give them 30 more days to find some more evidence so I don't have to rule this order illegal. Well, see the issue here was that the point we were winning on was they had never told us what we'd done wrong. We wanted to have testimony from the guy who issued the orders so we could say, "Why'd you do it, what was your justification?"

JW: Col. Van Campen.

BH: Van Campen, right. And they brought out this garbage that classified information was leaked at the Hobbit. What classified information? Every bar owner on the strip knew about that thing, that's where we'd heard it from, it was from the bar owners. So we wanted to know what classified information, which would have revealed that they'd had the Hobbit bugged, and all this kind of stuff. Well, they didn't want to do that, so 30 days go by and we come back into the court. We expect Van Campen to be there and in fact Van Campen was there, but they must have had a conference and decided that he would have to answer a bunch of questions in terms of illegal surveillance and CIA activity and shit like that that they didn't want to get into; so they come in and the prosecutor says, "Your honor, we're ready to go; we have all this fine evidence to show that these are real no goodniks, but since Major Shithead (I forget what his name was) who's on the jury has happened to overhear something that might tend to prejudice him against the defendant, in the interest of justice we're going to move to dismiss the case." Then the judge says, "Oh, that's really noble, and that proves that Marine Corps justice is really right-on and I'm dismissing the case." This meant

that the order was never overturned. They would have had to overturn the order. So ever since then every new GI that comes to the base is told very strongly, "If you go to the Hobbit, it's a violation of the order," and every year the order is republished in the Torii Teller and there's a big thing about it, but they're very careful not to arrest anyone, because if they arrested anyone it would give us a test case, and if we had a test case, we'd clearly win the test case. So, what they do is they're enforcing an order they know is illegal, and they're enforcing it by threatening and frightening everybody with it but never busting anyone.

The great Declaration of Independence arrest is another example. It was really funny, the guys arrested were so disappointed that the Marine Corps chickened out and discharged them instead of trying them. They were studying up on Patrick Henry and the quotations of Thomas Jefferson, I mean they were going to go to town, "Have the British taken over Iwakuni?" and all that. They were just going to make the Brass look like idiots.

There was quite a big crowd scene too, when they were busted, and a lot of people went down to the MP shack, even officers and dependents, and they were shouting, "What is this, are you crazy, how can you arrest somebody on the Fourth of July for passing out the Declaration of Independence." The Corps had just had this Admiral, Lord High Poobah, come down and talk about the Fourth of July and all that shit, and this was a lot of fun, probably the funnest thing we did the whole year.

JW: You talked a while before about sponsoring speakers and stuff with Beheiren, could you elaborate on this a bit, tell us who the speakers were and how it happened and so on?

BH: Well, actually we didn't have all that many different speakers, it wasn't like it was a big formal thing, but sometimes Beheiren people or anti-war people or somebody might be coming and since the project in Japan was pretty famous throughout Japan, particularly among the Japanese anti-war movement, a lot of people wanted to come

down and talk to the Marines. It wasn't like we wrote to someone and said, would you please come down, or like we would set up a thing, though sometimes if we knew in advance we might even put out a leaflet or a notice in the Fi, but usually we didn't. People would just drop in and talk to whoever was around, or we'd say, "Tell everyone to come out here tomorrow and talk to or hear so and so."

JW: These were mostly Japanese people then.

BH: Well, the Japanese and let's see, we also had a Vietnamese woman who was a leader in the third force, the neutralist element--kind of the Buddhists, who spoke, and then some Americans, that's basically it.

JW: Were these people sent down by Beheiren or aided by Beheiren to come down and speak or did they just come?

BH: Well, Beheiren people did come, of course, and some people came once from Gensuikyo, but it's really hard to say because, first of all, Iwakuni is sort of on the main rail line south and second of all, it's near Hiroshima, so a lot of people in the anti-war and peace movements going to Hiroshima for, say, a conference or a meeting or the Hiroshima Day Memorial Services would come to us too since we were only just down the tracks forty clicks (kilometers). I don't know exactly who was sponsoring them, but Beheiren leadership came, certainly.

JW: It wasn't really formal, organized programs then was it? It was just more or less people dropping in and saying hello.

BH: Right, except for things like the FTA show which we sponsored. That was arranged.

JW: You talked once before about a demonstration at the main gate where the GI's sat in.

BH: That was on the New Year's or Christmas bombing.

JW: I think it was the Christmas bombing. Did the GI's themselves actually have a sit-in at the gate or was it Japanese?

BH: And others.

JW: Did you ever pass out things in Japanese?

BH: No, none of the Americans ever did. Beheiren did.

JW: I get the impression that you're saying with this legal activity you were encouraging GI's to work through the laws, through the rules to turn the rules against the military, rather than to actually break the rules, other than rules that were obviously illegal in a court case.

BH: Right, and to push the legal rules to the limit, and in some cases to bend the spirit if not the letter. Of course we were against the spirit in most of those regulations, but you know not to violate the letter. What is a demonstration? Our position was that it had to be something that they could clearly prove was a demonstration. Fine, that's their problem.

JW: What about the Torii Teller during the time that you were there? You said before that they'd gotten to the point where they were mentioning the Fi and stuff. I know when I was there the existence of Semper Fi itself was something that was hotly denied. I mean the Torii Teller only once ever printed an article on it, and that was just a brief warning after our second issue that such crap wasn't authorized and that the people shouldn't read it. After that the base position on the Semper Fi was that there wasn't a Semper Fi.

BH: Yeah, I think that their position was that they didn't know what the hell to do. I think a lot of the officers wanted to take that position here too, but other people said, "Look; who are we kidding; it's like pretending Red China doesn't exist." So, occasionally, not regularly but three or four times in the course of the year, the Torii Teller mentioned something about the Fi or quoted the Fi or made a joke about the Fi. Also, they would do their red baiting, smear things, like they wrote an article red baiting the National Lawyers Guild, dredging up all this HUAC garbage. They made the claim that Reber, that was the lawyer, was using his 13-year old

daughter to sexually lure GI's out to the Semper Fi house and then implied that we got them out there and brainwashed them or some bullshit. It was just absurd kind of stuff. Pissed us off a little; it was so absurd, but it pleased all those Marines that were adamantly against us from the jump; however, anyone who was trying to make up their mind wouldn't be convinced by it.

JW: What about the dependents on the base. Did you have a lot of involvement with the younger dependents, the high school group?

BH: No, a few, two or three and a couple of wives, but generally when I was there, pretty much the only people who could have dependents were officers or real career lifers who had been in for years and were like E-5 or 6 and above, and they tended to be pretty up tight about their wives or children associated with us as it would affect their career. Some of the guys whose wives did come around the project were transferred to sea duty and to 'Nam and sent to Siberia or something. In fact one guy, a Navy guy, which is much more liberal than the Marines, they really landed on like a ton of bricks and they were going to send him to a carrier and this whole business. He was a pilot.

JW: Was the project receiving money from Beheiren?

BH: In cash money, no. As a matter of fact, we were contributing to Beheiren. But, of course, we used the facilities at the Hobbit, and we contributed some money to the up-keep of the Hobbit, so in terms of cash money, no; in terms of the use of their facilities, yes. Who could equate if our cash money was equal to the use of the printing room and stuff.

JW: So it was just more of a co-existing relationship.

BH: Yeah, we actually gave them money regularly.

JW: It was different when I was there, we didn't actually get financed by them but depended on them for a lot of things.

BH: We weren't in any way financially dependent on them for anything.

Thailand, so they were constantly harrassing us in terms of the mails, trying to prevent us from mailing the Fi's to the guys subscribing, and one of the problems we had was that they kept rotating people out who were getting the Fi. A guy might have been gone for two months and we were still trying to send him the Fi, so we were discussing this whole problem and this new guy says, "oh, you know, I work in the office (I forget what office it was, but one of the H&MS or MAG offices) and we have the current roster (for whatever, you know, I forgot what it was) and it's always out there on the desk, I'll tell you what, I'll xerox it and bring it out. It's always available, and we can just go through it and see who's left and cross out all those people who've been rotated." And we said, "Far out." And he says, "I'll bring it out at noon tomorrow." So the next day he come out at noon and he says, "I couldn't get it." We said, "oh?" He says, "Yeah, I came in there this morning and it was off the table and there was a sign that said anybody who wanted to use the roster had to get written permission from the CO since it was now locked in the safe. It's crazy, we're always having to go to the safe to get the goddamned roster." So we felt that that indicated that they had fairly close surveillance on us. I assume it was electronic.

They were always taking pictures and coming up and demanding to see our ID's. One guy in particular was always coming up and demanding to see our ID, and as civilians we always refused to show it to him, so he would try to run this number, he'd say, "You know, after six o'clock this is all under military law, under military jurisdiction, you have to show it." And we said, "No, it isn't and we're not under your jurisdiction and stop bothering us, we're passing out the Semper Fi." Another guy's big thing was taking pictures, and he would always come up and say, "Oh, hello Bruce, I see you're losing a little weight." He was always letting us know how much he knew about us and stuff, I think his name was Mike, Mike something. They would flutter around, and I guess it was really a thrill for them, I mean how much was there for Naval Intelligence to do in a

back water station like Iwakuni? And then all of a sudden here these "Red Communist" agitators; it must have given them a real thrill, something to do, and I'm sure they were really happy in that sense; they could feel they were out there combating the Commie menace, saving America from the Red Tide and all that stuff. So they went at it. I assume that some of the people that came around the Fi house were agents, but they were always really up shit creek with us because we didn't any secrets. That was a real problem for them because nothing we were doing was secret or illegal, and we didn't give a fuck about them knowing about it. That must have really disappointed them. Once in a while we toyed with the idea of giving them a thrill, acting like we had a secret or something but then we decided, what the fuck, why should we make their lives happy, and just went on about our business. We didn't have any secrets so they were frustrated.

JW: You don't really know then if you had informers in your group.

BH: Well, we can make the assumption that we did.

JW: Well, I know when I was there we had pretty well identified one informer who was quite high in the organization.

BH: Yeah, it was our policy, we discussed it, but it was our policy not even to look, even if we were suspicious of someone, not to bother about it because we felt that it wasn't worth the damage that would be done to people's morale and sense of unity. If we acted suspicious or even said, "Look, we know Joe here is an informer," that would create suspicion and disunity in the group. There were some people I was suspicious of, but generally they tended to be very good workers, and very diligent in passing out the Fi and stuff like that, so we said, "Fine, if they want to send us some manpower, good dedicated workers, why should we look a gift horse in the mouth and create disunity and suspicion by trying to expose them or ask questions." So, it was our conscious policy never to bother with that kind of stuff. We figured the only danger they could do would be pinpointing who was active as a Fi member,

which may have been a problem, but we could never have cleaned up the electronic surveillance and since the most active thing people did with the Fi was writing for it and passing it out they were immediately made identifiable anyway. So really, what would we gain, nothing.

JW: That was the kind of position I tried to sell, because informers were actually in the balance more good than bad since they had to do something productive, and what they turned up was common knowledge anyhow.

BH: Of course now that position is only for a very particular circumstance in the GI movement. I mean I would not take that attitude towards informers in most other situations. In that particular situation where we were living in a goldfish bowl and since in fact the worst punishment they could inflict on a Semper Fi supporter was discharge, which was generally considered more of a reward than a punishment anyway, an honorable or general discharge, we took that attitude. I would not take such a laissez-faire attitude towards political informer, say, in the peace movements back in the States which would be a different matter.

JW: Were you there during the protest at Yokohama when they had the trouble with the tanks?

BH: At Sagamihara.

JW: At Sagamihara.

BH: Well I was in Iwakuni. I was up in Yokosuka for a while, but I didn't go to Sagamihara.

JW: Did a lot of information get down to Iwakuni?

BH: Only what was in the Mainichi Daily News, and "Stars and Lies," and AFN. We followed the news fairly closely in the media.

JW: But no real active solidarity with them.

BH: The VVAW Chapter at Iwakuni sent a telegram of support which I suppose was read up there and we published that telegram in the Fi.

JW: Talking about the media, how were your activities received by the Japanese media, did you get a lot of coverage?

BH: Oh yeah, tremendous. We couldn't hardly sneeze without it becoming major news. I mean any time anything was happening they would come down. For example, when we first had Marines passing out the F1 and we knew that they were going to arrest the Marines thus setting up the test case which allowed us to get that order overthrown, two or three Japanese TV stations came down and filmed the arrests. That was strictly a Marine Corps GI movement thing, it had no ramifications really to Japanese society in the way that the nuclear weapons issue did, but they covered everything we did very closely.

JW: Did they cover it in the English language press or just in the Japanese language press.

BH: Well in the English language newspapers I don't remember much.

JW: It seems like, at least when I was there, that the English language newspapers more or less catered to the business community in Japan, and I think they pretty carefully edited them to not upset anybody's feelings.

BH: That's true. I don't remember any articles in the Mainichi. We got the Mainichi and I think the Asahi English papers and I don't remember much in there; there may have been a short article once in a while. There was something in one of them about the Fourth of July arrest. They wrote an article, but they didn't understand the significance of the Fourth of July and the Declaration of Independence so their article didn't really have much point to it, but they did cover that. Certainly the Japanese language press, of course, covered everything extensively.

JW: Yeah, that was true when I was there too. You could open up the Mainichi in the English and the Japanese editions and there would be a world of difference in the articles.

How would the GI's as a whole accept Beheiren, how aware were they of Beheiren and what it was doing?

BH: You mean the GI's working with the movement or the average GI?

JW: Well both, let's split it and talk about the movement GI's first.

BH: Well, they knew Beheiren, they went to the Hobbit and were friends with all the Beheiren people, we did joint activities like the rock concerts, and the picnics and the demonstrations, different demonstrations. We went on trips to Hiroshima, and we went out to an island once. We did that sort of stuff. They were very close with Beheiren. Now, the average GI's probably didn't know Beheiren from a hole in the wall as the name Beheiren; they knew that some certain Japanese people were always out there passing out anti-war literature, Semper Fi, and they knew them as anti-war Japanese; also, of course, they knew there were demonstrations all the time and they saw the demonstrations, but Beheiren as Beheiren probably didn't mean much to them.

JW: What kind of programs was Beheiren having as to their own education? I remember Shinji was here in the States for a while. Were they habitually sending people abroad for diversified education?

BH: Well, I don't think they sent anyone abroad for education, they would occasionally send somebody abroad as a delegate to meet with someone or attend an international conference, as it happened many Beheiren members may have traveled but they weren't sent by Beheiren; Beheiren was not the kind of a disciplined tightly organized group that had such a structured program. It was sort of a loose association of individuals with a really broad range of politics around a very minimal basis of unity; as I recall I think the basis of unity was only opposition to the war in Indochina, opposition to US bases and opposition to the remilitarization of Japan. You had everyone in there from the vagues of liberals to the reddest of Marxists and anarchists and all other kinds of trends as well. They worked very consciously about that, they didn't want it any narrower than that, they wanted a broad base and each individual Beheiren chapter could pretty much decide whatever they wanted to do and was practically,

totally independent. In fact when they dissolved I think some chapters said, "Aw, we don't want to dissolve, we'll continue," when the central office dissolved.

JW: What about a subjective opinion of Beheiren. How did you feel toward Beheiren?

BH: Well, I didn't have particularly strong feelings one way or the other. I think it was a good thing.

JW: The different people I've talked to have had different opinions.

BH: Well, they were what they were, and what they were wasn't a bad thing, it was a good thing. They weren't trying to pretend they were something they weren't; and they weren't doing things they were pretending they weren't doing. I mean they were very up front. I think that on that level there's not much you can say. There may have been some other forms of organizations I wished were also in existence, but that's largely academic. I think some people felt Beheiren was weak or strong in this area or didn't do this or shouldn't do that, but that might be a personal opinion but really it doesn't have much relevancy, I don't think.