

Eye Witness Report: Behind Bars with 'The Leb 38'

By MICHAEL WINN

There was that huge, shiny fender slowly nudging its way towards my body. The bulk of the bus was a shadow, lost in the din of the clapping and the shouts from the crowd. A policeman bent over me and I looked him straight in the eye as he attempted to announce his intention to arrest me.

There had already been three or four waves of arrests as people had used their bodies to block the bus marked "special" carrying potential draftees to Manchester for a day of medical probings and potetial careers i the United States military. During those arrests I was officially reporting for this newspaper, dutifully taking notes on the details of the demonstration in Lebanon, and theoretically immune to ay interference from the police.

At some point my immunity became unbearable and I felt the need to be exposed to the same tensions which many people both on the bus and in the crowd, had faced; the urge to confront those forces which have torn countless lives and ripped the fabric of this country apart at its seams. At some point the bus became a genuine symbol of the government which sends those thousands of streamlined airplanes with thousands of G.I.'s in them to that emblem of America's failure, Vietnam. When it became a living extension of much that I had detested for so long

yet had done so little about. I pocketed my pencils and defiantly sat down in what was to be the last wave of defenders.

The officer was nearly shouting now. I knew what the charge was, and to avoid any confusion in both our minds I told him I had no intention of moving. It was only when he refused to give me his name or badge number that I went limp. Two officers immediately scooped me up and dragged me over the curb on my ass, my legs dangling behind on the rain-soaked pavement in raggedy-an fashion. I was plopped on the steps of the police bus and photographed. I complained to the officer that i-stead of grabbing the collar of my raincoat, he had clumsily managed to pick me up by my hair. He apologized and claimed it was purely accidental. My tam-o'-shanter, which had been knocked off in the tussle, was returned by a sympathetic demonstrator. I got on the bus and recouped my losses as the final batch of arrestees were quickly deported to the town jail a few hundred yards away. Some pulled hair and a growing sense of satisfaction was the initial tally.

Limp Arrest

The cell was filled with a cheerfulness that is rare in these times: despite the fact that each of us had little more than three square feet per perso to stand or sit in, for over three hours, at all times a light banter, dominated the generally re-

laxed group. There were actually three smaller cells contained within the larger cell, each about five feet by seven with a open topped toilet sitting at the end of eachin full view of the main cell. They had squeezed six adult women into one of them, and three men into each of the others. To compensate for their double imprisonment and confinement, the women kept their spirits high by reading the anti-war graffiti engraved on the walls or climbing about like chimpanzees withi their cage.

Jail

The intense warmth generated by the circumstances of the demonstration seemed to belie a more serious tone beneath the friendly laughter. It was almost a testimony to the fact that while the decision to commit civil disobedience was an individual act based on persoal motivations which may have been widely varied, it was enveloped by the sense of communal urgency to act on convictions which were essentially held in common by all those arrested. It was this undercurrent of solidarity which seemed to purify and elevate the 'criminal acts' committed in the name of peace.

That these acts of civil disobedience were not the rash acts of unthinking and immature youths is indicated by the quality of itellectual excellence demonstrated by the arrested fifteen were faculty members, only nine students, and the rest were members

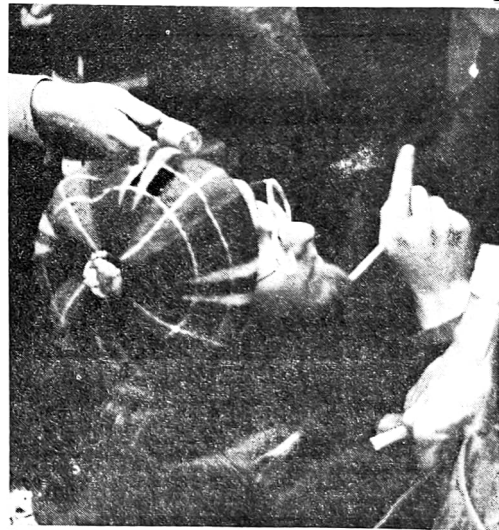
of the community, many of them adults.

No one left the jail until bail was available to everyoe. The charges we face for "refusal to withdraw" are serious — one year in jail or five hundred dollars fine. The only consensus I feel we arrived at was that the issues raised were just as serious.

When we arrived at the station, the assembly line processing was functioning smoothly; we piled in around a large table crowded with cops toting briefcases, FBI fingerprint sets, and a lot of specialized camera equipment. As they asked the expected questions name, rank, serial number, etc., I answered perfunctorily, last, first, middle initial, etc., and noted the thired-but-satisfied look in their eyes.

The most rewardig part of the demonstration and arrest was yet to come — my short stay in the cell. They first made a special point of frisking me for all possible writing implements, having observed my rather obvious note-taking activities and determined not to let me leak an expose on their cozy cell, or barring that, commit suicide.

Whe I finally was tossed into the tiny cell packed with human bodies, it was with an exsilliration sense of relief. The door claged shut behind me and I was immediately assailed by the overwhelming warmth and comraderie of the thirtypeight people arrested.



The Author Makes a Point