

The Armies of the Night

HISTORY AS A NOVEL
THE NOVEL AS HISTORY

by Norman Mailer

INTRODUCTION BY ADAM GOPNIK



A PLUME BOOK

5: A PERSPECTIVE OF BATTLE

We can pass over the mood of Washington in the few days before the March, the sympathetic and somewhat coordinated actions of protest in other parts of the country for the week preceding October 21, we may skip over the last meetings of the government and the Mobilization Committee, the denunciations in Congress, the bill which was passed on Friday October 20 to protect the Capitol building from men carrying arms! And the scoldings and adjurations of newspaper editorials which remonstrated with the peace movement to remain peaceful. No, one we must give, it is from *The New York Times* on the day of the March.

It will be totally unnecessary for paratroopers or police or demonstrators to provoke each other, in the exercise either of duty or of self-expression today—and it will be tragic if they do.

The demonstrators will be betraying their own ideals if they follow those extremists who would deliberately turn this rally into a field of violence.

On Friday and Saturday morning, there were front-page stories in the Washington papers on the arrival of troops, and a comic story on LACE, the hippies counterindicant for MACE. A man named Augustus Owsley Stanley, III, had made it. His statement was that LACE "makes you want to take off your clothes, kiss people and make love." Much enjoyable copy on hippie plans to attack with marbles, noise-makers, water pistols. They would jam gun barrels with flowers. They would try to kidnap LBJ and wrestle him to the ground and take his pants off.

Let us move then to the Pentagon. The speeches at Lincoln Memorial were done, and a mass of people, calculated by *The New York Times* as fifty thousand, walked over Arlington Memorial Bridge in the next two hours. Waiting for them at the Pentagon or engaged in police

work on the route were the following forces; 1,500 Metropolitan Police, 2,500 Washington, D.C., National Guardsmen, about 200 U. S. Marshals, and unspecified numbers of Government Security Guards, and Park, White House, and Capitol police. There were also 6,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division flown in from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the same 82nd Airborne which had once parachuted into Normandy on D-Day and was now fresh from Santo Domingo and the Detroit riots. MP units had been flown in from California and Texas, the U. S. Marshals had been brought from just about everywhere—Florida, New York, Arizona, Texas, to name a few states—it was to be virtually a convention for them. In addition, 20,000 troops stationed nearby were on alert.

For the army of the demonstrators, no precise figures are available; government estimates were low and Left Wing estimates were high. The April March in New York had suggested a rule of thumb: the police estimate multiplied by four might be as close to the real number as the Left Wing estimate divided by two and a half. Thus a real crowd of 200,000 people would be described as 50,000 by police and a half million by the sponsors. In Washington these discrepancies had less thunder in the gap. A quote from *The New York Times*

The joint estimate by the police and the military was that a maximum of about 55,000 persons had attended the Lincoln Memorial rally that preceded the March. A *New York Times* employee assigned to make a head count estimated the marchers who crossed Memorial Bridge at more than 54,000.

Assuming this last figure is close to a real count (on the basis that a literal count was actually made, and that the *Times* is presumably an intermediary point of view in this dispute) we can then assume that somewhere between 75,000 and 90,000 people were at Lincoln Memorial, for if 54,000 crossed the bridge, at least 10,000 must have stayed behind, and this is not to include the people who came to Lincoln Memorial in order to be there, listened to a few speeches, and departed, no historic oratory intercepting them. That number could have been as many as twenty or thirty thousand although it was doubtless not so great.

Now another quotation from the *Times*.

The Defense Department said that it had made aerial photographs of the crowd at the Pentagon and had arrived at a maximum estimate there of 35,000 persons through military photo-interpretation techniques.

In other words, 19,000 of the 54,000 demonstrators who crossed the bridge suddenly decided not to continue on to the Pentagon! No, it is obvious the Defense Department is speaking (assuming their estimate has any value at all) of the maximum crowd at any one time, for since it took several hours to cross the bridge (how interesting in this light becomes Rubin's lost desire for two bridges) some of the crowd was leaving while others were arriving.

At any rate, we have an army of at least 35,000 amateur soldiers consisting of doctors, dentists, faculty, veterans groups, housewives, accountants, trade unionists, Communists, Socialists, pacifists, Trotskyists, anarchists, artists, and entertainers, no, even historians may have a joke—there was no more than a smattering and a sprinkling of such professionals at the Pentagon. Present in the majority were college students from all over the East, and high school students and hippies and Diggers and bikers. And—we come to the beginning of the battle—a striking force of shock troops. There was a group which had arrived with a real idea of combat in mind. It was in fact that same advance of hundreds of men carrying placards and flags and standards whose approach on a half-run across the North Parking Area had so impressed Mailer with its resemblance to a photograph by Mathew Brady.

This group consisted in fact of two groups, the Students for a Democratic Society, and a considerably smaller group of unattached elements who had once called themselves the Revolutionary Contingent, but had been unable to function together because of many arguments on the proper style of their militancy, i.e. whether to use Vietcong flags or some of the specialized techniques of Japanese students such as snake dances for breaking through police lines. Once, the Revolutionary Contingent had consisted of the Committee to Aid the National Liberation Front, the Black Mask, and other high-fragmentation sects, but now no alliance was left, other than their agreement to work together at the Pentagon. In preference to a new name, let us however still call them

the Revolutionary Contingent. (It was to this group, incidentally, that Walter Teague was attached.) That the Revolutionary Contingent happened to be in the vanguard was not surprising, but the body of the striking force remained the SDS, and that was significant, for the SDS, sharing apparently the detestation of some on the Left for the mass rally and the Great Left Pall, had a practice never to take part in large demonstrations. The Students for a Democratic Society did their work in the field—they organized in the colleges and went to live in the ghettos. They were an American form of the nineteenth-century back-to-the-people movements among Russian intellectuals.

But when on October 6 Van Cleve first stated that the government would not allow civil disobedience in any form, SDS decided to work for the March. (Thus, this first announcement of government repression had helped to bring in not only Dr. Spock on the right but SDS on the left of the Mobilization.) In the two weeks which followed, however, SDS's enthusiasm cooled over some of the compromises. Yet in the week before the March, it still appeared as if the government and the Mobilization might be able to come to no agreement on details, and so the government would not grant the Mobilization Committee a rally and parade permit. If our history has deliberately made little of such last-minute dramas, it is because all emphasis here has been in the other direction; it was assumed that once the government permitted some kind of assembly on the Pentagon steps with a recognition of the likelihood of civil disobedience, the rest was negotiation and detail. That is an advantage of history—it can assume that certain supposedly dramatic issues were never in doubt, even though last-minute agreement on the specific road to the Pentagon was never made, and there were threats on both sides through the last week to break off negotiation. It is obviously safe to assume then that the atmosphere around the headquarters of the Mobilization Committee was dramatic. Without a permit, some violent confrontation between demonstrators and the authority would be inevitable. So SDS kept up word to its members that Washington was very much an active front, worthy of their activity. They got ready for the March.

SDS was, however, nothing if not wary of the Mobilization Committee and its tail of cautionary bureaucratic moderate peace groups. SDS

did not wish to compromise its own militancy and its own view of civil disobedience, confrontation, and resistance by falling into the toils and instrumentalisms of the others. So it formed a temporary alliance to go into action with the Revolutionary Contingent. They would get themselves in the vanguard of the March—it was their militancy the line of notables may have been feeling most directly behind them—and, once on the Virginia side of the bridge, would separate from the other marchers and proceed by their own private route, running most of the way for a mile, through the woods to the North Parking Area where they would assemble and make their charge. Elements of SDS were lost on the rush, but determined not to wait and in fact obviously determined to start the combat before the second rally at the North Parking Area had well begun (in order to break what they considered the ridiculous petty legalities of the agreement: talk from 3 P.M. to 4; fight from 4 to 5!) the Revolutionary Contingent and SDS had charged across the parking area and made an assault on the military police barrier at a point considerably to the left (all directions will be given from the point of view of the demonstrators facing the Administration wall of the Pentagon) indeed far to the left of the Pentagon itself, so far to the left that if they had broken through, they would probably have been forced to try to cross the ramp which went over Jefferson Davis Highway into the River Entrance, and from there might have tried to circle back to the asphalt plaza in front of the Administration Entrance, or might simply have continued on into the Pentagon itself by the River Entrance. In any case, they were stopped. There were barriers, there were troops, they were winded by their run all the way from Arlington Bridge, “the crowd was not yet mad enough to back them up,” as Teague was to put it later (although if it was an angry crowd they desired for a base, they could hardly have expected much support from the empty reaches of the North Parking at that early stage) and they were charged by MPs with rifles and sheathed bayonets. It is possible that bayonets were in panic unsheathed—reports of such bayonets appear here and again in accounts, none remotely verifiable, even the hour in doubt; but for whatever reason, the vanguard of this militant striking force certainly faltered, and abruptly fled backward in panic. (Precisely the retreat which was to discover Mailer's own panic of MACE.)

Teague, carrying the N.L.F. flag in the forefront, was at this point lost. Someone grabbed his flag. Teague struggled to get it back, and was thereupon arrested, but the flag was left in his possession. Shortly afterward, Mailer, picking a point still further to the left of the charge of the SDS and the Revolutionary Contingent, stepped over the line and was, as described, arrested, brought over the ramp to the River Entrance, and deposited in a Volkswagen where he was soon to meet Teague and the Nazi.

Let us go back to the alliance between the Students for a Democratic Society and the Revolutionary Contingent (which alliance for the sake of brevity we may as well begin to call SDS-Contingent). They had obviously been charged for combat for days, and such tension in men who are determined, usually succeeds in concealing from themselves the extent of their fear. In combat which comes after long spiritual preparation, there is an instant of relaxation in the very first moment altogether dangerous to dedicated troops—all the fear they have denied can now flood them. They can panic and flee—the inner preparation has been too great. (One must, after all, contemplate the extent of that fear, made up in part of sustained political brooding about the nature of American brutality at home and abroad—they were now going to confront this brutality; the very imagination which stimulated them to think radically now had added its exaggerations to the possibilities of reprisal.) Where the dedication is serious, however, the recovery is quick. Furious with themselves at this first rout, they now reassembled, conferred among themselves, moved past the Fugs, climbed the embankment which bordered the four-lane Jefferson Davis Highway, broke down the newly erected wire fence which restrained them to the Parking Area, gathered numbers from arriving unattached demonstrators, and crossed the highway, entered the Mall, went up the long diagonal steps in the face of the stone wall which separates the asphalt plaza of the Administration Entrance from the Mall, then climbed the approach steps, pushed back the MP line, and broke through it at the head of the stairs to fan out and occupy the left side of the plaza, only—so far as can be determined from the conflict of reports—to be immediately cut off from the main body on the stairs and the center of the plaza by a bracing of MPs and U. S. Marshals who virtually separated

the two groups, thereby making passage from the left side of the plaza back to the stairs impossible. Still, this group which overflowed the plaza on the left was to retain these positions until morning by which time arrests and the attrition of departures had emptied their salient. More centrally located, the group in the center of the plaza and stairs was to hold their position for thirty-two hours, a perfectly legal position by the terms of the GSA contract, although no one on the line, troops or demonstrators, were too aware of this, and illegalities on both sides in relation to this line abounded. The estimates of Left Wing and underground newspapers put the number of demonstrators on the left of the plaza at 2,500, and the number on the central plaza, entrance stairs, and diagonal steps leading to the stairs as double. Since underground papers seem to pride themselves on being even more inaccurate than their enemies, the rule of thumb previously suggested would put no more than one thousand demonstrators in the "illegal area" of the plaza and a maximum of two thousand on the "legal" stairs, steps, and center of the plaza.

Let us not however go another step into developments until we have fortified our picture of the situation. Far away, a quarter of a mile away, across the Mall, the four-lane highway, a wire fence, and a small intervening hill, the rally is taking place in the North Parking and somewhere between ten and twenty thousand people, nervous, bored, uncertain whether they are relieved or disappointed that so little seems to be taking place, are out there receiving the long tasteless unleavened bread of fiery political speeches, the apogee of this irony achieved by the most militant speech of them all, made by Carl Davidson, the interorganizational secretary of SDS (even SDS had its table of organization) who said, "Repression must be met, confronted, stopped, by whatever means possible." The next major demonstrations would arm to disrupt draft induction centers. "We must tear them down," he said. "Burn them down, if necessary." That was strong stuff. Over the hill, across the highway, along the Mall, up the steps, the first heads were being cracked by the clubs of the Marshals, while some true hearts of the orally-oriented Left were listening to their fourth hour of oratory—how much of one's own saliva must have been tasted by now.

Younger spirits were now breaking down a new section of fence be-

tween the Parking Area and the highway in order to get to the Mall. The monitors made impotent efforts to hold them off. "You're not supposed to go over there until later," they shouted through their bullhorns while people crossed. All the while, marchers in that long line of 54,000 people taking two hours to cross the bridge (it is possible Chaplain Boyle was being released from Alexandria Post Office as the last marcher reached the Pentagon) were trickling into the Parking Area, listening in confusion to the speeches (for many of the marchers must like Mailer have foreseen a dramatic confrontation with a line of soldiers for himself) and then looked about them for the next move. Meanwhile, rumors were arriving and passing through the crowd of the action at the Pentagon itself. As speakers continued, the crowd began to diminish—now thousands were going through the gap in the fence, crossing the highway, and invading the Mall. The legal time of entry on the Mall arranged by Van Cleve had been 4 P.M., the first attack had come earlier, but the majority of demonstrators, being present at the Parking Rally, did not cross over to the Mall until 4:30, being thus left with not much more than an hour of daylight.

Meanwhile, in the vanguard, on the asphalt plaza and on the Pentagon steps, not a great deal was happening, yet everything was happening. The military situation had not altered appreciably, although a few significant events took place, notably three: first, a member of SDS, Tom Bell, succeeded in climbing an isolated wall of the plaza bordering the steps accompanied by his bullhorn. He was thus in position to talk to the groups isolated on the left side of the plaza from the steps. When a Marshal or an MP (accounts conflict) attempted to pull him down, he pushed him off—to the cheers of the demonstrators watching—and proceeded to serve as communications center. He also proceeded—well grounded doubtless in Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*—to talk to the troops. This was to be the first of many speeches to be made to them, and the content of these speeches must eventually be given, for the most conventional and original aspects of Left polemic were to be presented by different speakers, some professional, some—girls, for instance, opening buttons on their blouses—improvisational. More of that, later.

The second significant event in this relatively constant military situa-

tion was that some of the demonstrators, having overrun the restraining lines of rope in their push through to the plaza, now began to use them. Tying knots in the ropes, they lowered them over the wall to the Mall where young demonstrators, anxious to join them, now began to climb up. Since the wall was built of massive bevelled blocks of stone, it was not altogether difficult to hold on to the rope, and climb up, using the serrations for toe-holds. Still, it had risk, a fifteen-foot drop on one's back at worst, and so the men who climbed were full of good morale on reaching the top and probably inspired the next and third significant action which is that a group probably composed in the main of SDS-Contingent on the plaza saw a side entrance door to the left of the main Administration Entrance guarded only by six MPs. Since only a relatively thin line of MPs were on the line to restrain them here, a small group, perhaps twenty-five, made a quick push, broke the line, broke through the MPs, and actually entered the Holy of Holies—they were in the Pentagon racing down a corridor.

Not for long! Troops had been brought into the Pentagon the night before, they had slept on cots in the corridors of the building (which is not unlike laying out one's mattress in Lincoln Tunnel). Confined inside, suffering the tension of endless hours waiting for unseen anarchists, bomb-throwers, Communists, poison gassers, poison in the water, nymphomaniacs, drug addicts, insane Negroes, and common city folk to inundate them under their human wave in these drear corridors, one can only guess—unless there are films—at the unmitigated fury with which the few demonstrators were clubbed and kicked, arrested, and carried off.

One can of course ask why so few felt obliged to attempt the sortie, and no one behind to follow them; the answers cannot be definitive. But two factors apply. One is the extraordinary demand for initiative on the side of the demonstrators if they were to do anything at all. Anyone who has passed through the educational system of America is in unconscious degree somewhere near half a patriot. (We may reduce the fraction when considering progressive schools.) The brain is washed deep, there are reflexes: white shirts, Star-Spangled Banner, saluting the flag. At home is corporation land's whip—the television set. Who would argue there are no idea-sets of brave soldiers, courageous

cops, great strength and brutal patriotic skill in the land of authority? Obvious remarks, but it is precisely this huge and much convinced unconscious part of oneself which a demonstrator has to move against when he charges with his small part of an army into a line of MPs close-packed, arms locked; anxiety washes the will with its dissolving flood. Demonstrators may break off at the last moment. Moreover, one moves forward unarmed into men who hold clubs or rifles. One does not even know the guns are unloaded—these are amateur soldiers so innocent of war they do not know enough to deduce that if there are no magazines loaded into the rifles, there can be at most but one round in the chamber. It was not so easy, therefore, when the moment came to charge into the Pentagon.

In any case, the group on the plaza was already divided. SDS-Contingent was now separating (in the centrifuge of revolutionary activity) back into SDS and the Revolutionary Contingent. They now had different ideas of how to proceed. SDS was for consolidating the ground gained by sitting down. Bell at the bullhorn was telling demonstrators to sit on the theory that the troops were being baited, and people could be trampled on the steps if there was a charge and a panic. SDS, profoundly influenced by the ideas of Che Guevara, was now opposed to any further violent confrontation at this point for they thought it would be suicidal—it was not Guevara's maxim to confront a superior military force from fixed positions.

The Revolutionary Contingent on their side (the two factions mixed and arguing with one another on the stairs and the plaza) were for pushing actively against the line of MPs and attempting to breach them—either some deep principle of martyrdom was involved (some revolutionary mystique of an initial bleeding) or they were working on dubious military principles, since a breach in the MPs' line would serve to advantage only if thousands could follow through behind them, and those thousands were not available. Since they were cut off from all reinforcements on the Mall, the first push, in the military sense, should have been through the troops holding the access road off Jefferson Davis Highway. A breach there would have opened the left side of the plaza to the tens of thousands on the Mall whose only way of reaching them now was by climbing the ropes on the fifteen-foot wall. But then

the Revolutionary Contingent produced at once the bravest and most ineptly directed troops of the demonstrators' army.

Let us recapitulate their errors. They assembled too soon, and they attacked too soon. Knowing they were the only dedicated troops (but for SDS) they might have done better to have reconnoitered the ground, waited for thousands of marchers to arrive, next established lines and zones of communication between the Mall and the Parking Area, and then with latent armies ready, even looking for action, they could have charged suddenly, hoped to make a major breach, and might have counted on tens of hundreds to follow them. It could of course be argued that their early attack succeeded precisely because it was early, but then they only gained a small illegal area of the left side of the plaza beyond the steps. To enter the Pentagon in numbers, which was the real objective of the Revolutionary Contingent, would have been possible only if they were the point of attack for some determined available mass of hundreds, preferably thousands of demonstrators ready to follow in their wake.

At any rate, if this is the military situation with which we are left, let us now take a look at the front line, at the six inches of no-man's-land across which troops and demonstrators—in the closest use yet of this word—confront each other.

6: A PALETTE OF TACTICS

It is on this particular confrontation that the conceit one is writing a history must be relinquished. Doubtless it has been hardly possible to ignore that this work resides in two enclaves, the first entitled *History As a Novel*, the second here before us called *The Novel As History*. No one familiar with husking the ambiguities of English will be much

mystified by the titles. It is obvious the first book is a history in the guise or dress or manifest of a novel, and the second is a real or true novel—no less!—presented in the style of a history. (Of course, everyone including the author will continue to speak of the first book as a novel and the second as a history—practical usage finds flavor in such comfortable opposites.) However, the first book can be, in the formal sense, nothing but a personal history which while written as a novel was to the best of the author's memory scrupulous to facts, and therefore a document; whereas the second, while dutiful to all newspaper accounts, eyewitness reports, and historic inductions available, while even obedient to a general style of historical writing, at least up to this point, while even pretending to be a history (on the basis of its introduction) is finally now to be disclosed as some sort of condensation of a collective novel—which is to admit that an explanation of the mystery of the events at the Pentagon cannot be developed by the methods of history—only by the instincts of the novelist. The reasons are several, but reduce to one. Forget that the journalistic information available from both sides is so incoherent, inaccurate, contradictory, malicious, even based on error that no accurate history is conceivable. More than one historian has found a way through chains of false fact. No, the difficulty is that the history is interior—no documents can give sufficient intimation: the novel must replace history at precisely that point where experience is sufficiently emotional, spiritual, psychical, moral, existential, or supernatural to expose the fact that the historian in pursuing the experience would be obliged to quit the clearly demarcated limits of historic inquiry. So these limits are now relinquished. The collective novel which follows, while still written in the cloak of an historic style, and, therefore, continuously attempting to be scrupulous to the welter of a hundred confusing and opposed facts, will now unashamedly enter that world of strange lights and intuitive speculation which is the novel. Let us, then, fortified by this clarification, this advertisement of intentions, move up to the front, to the six inches of no-man's-land between the U. S. Army and the demonstrators.

It is safe to say that the beginning of this confrontation has not been without terror on each side. The demonstrators, all too conscious of what they consider the profound turpitude of the American military

might in Asia, are prepared (or altogether unprepared) for any conceivable brutality here. On their side, the troops have listened for years to small-town legends about the venality, criminality, filth, corruption, perversion, addiction, and unbridled appetites of that mysterious group of city Americans referred to first as hipsters, then beatniks, then hippies; now hearing they are linked with the insidious infiltrators of America's psychic life, the Reds! the troops do not know whether to expect a hairy kiss on their lips or a bomb between their knees. Each side is coming face to face with its own conception of the devil!

Let us give the literal picture. At this early stage, before the demonstrators were to sit down, a close-packed line of MPs with clubs, backed by another line of soldiers, was supported further by separate U. S. Marshals a few feet behind them, arrayed like linebackers—it could not have been unself-conscious. In other places of tension and at other times, soldiers were to advance with rifles, with sheathed bayonets, with tear gas, but this had not happened yet on this front where the line of standing demonstrators was composed of a mix of SDS-Contingent with a greater number of unattached young demonstrators caught in the suction of the action. Posed against the lines of soldiers, already some historic flowers were being placed insouciantly, insolently, and tenderly in gun barrels by boys and girls.

Of course the rhetoric of the Left had been consistent in referring to these troops as innocent victims of the military machine, and there is the real possibility that some fraction of the soldiers may have been secretly sympathetic to the demonstrators. The following is from an allegedly unedited tape of an interview with a soldier who had been at the Pentagon. "Around 40 percent of all the military is in favor of your demonstration. This is a big point that I have found. They go out there, and around 30 percent are just out to hurt anybody, beat anybody up they can, just because they have a rifle and all this other stuff. However, 30 percent of them are sort of serene about the whole thing, and they couldn't care less. They have a job to do and that's all."

Since this interview was printed in the *East Village Other*, one cannot be certain it exists; psychedelic underground papers consider themselves removed from any fetish with factology. Still the dialogue has its ring—"sort of serene" is not an easy remark to make up. In any case, if

the soldiers at this hour were not generally, by all accounts, interested in brutality, they were certainly fascinated by their foe, and when the minutes of confrontation went by and then the first hour, there began some lessening of woe and some lessening of the soldiers' extraordinary attention; the true literal fear of losing their lives began to go away from them. They had been sent out after all with God knows what orientation. "Well, men," says the major, "our mission is to guard the Pentagon from rioters and out-of-march scale prearranged-upon levels of defacement, meaning clear? well, the point to keep in mind, troopers, is those are going to be American citizens out there expressing their Constitutional right to protest—that don't mean we're going to let them fart in our face—but the Constitution is a complex document with circular that is circulating sets of conditions—put it this way, I got my buddies being chewed by V.C. right this minute maybe I don't care to express personal sentiments now, negative, keep two things in mind—those demos out there could be carrying bombs or bangalore torpedoes for all we know, and you're going out with no rounds in your carbines so thank God for the .45. And first remember one thing more—they start trouble with us, they'll wish they hadn't left New York unless you get killed in the stampede of us to get to them. Yessir, you keep a tight asshole and the fellow behind you can keep his nose clean."

If the troops were relieved that a pullulating unwashed orgiastic Communist-inspired wave of flesh did not roll right over them, and that in fact the majority of demonstrators right there before them were not unlike in appearance the few quiet long-haired cool odd kids they had never quite gotten to know in high school, the demonstrators in their turn were relieved in profounder fashion that their rank of eyes had met the soldiers, and it was the soldiers who had looked away. They looked across the gulf of the classes, the middle classes and the working classes. It would take the rebirth of Marx for Marxism to explain definitively this middle class condemnation of an imperialist war in the last Capitalist nation, this working class affirmation. But it is the urban middle class in America who always feel most uprooted, most alienated from America itself, and so instinctively most critical of America, for neither do they work with their hands nor wield real power, so it is never their lathe nor their sixty acres, and certainly never

is it their command which is accepted because they are simply American and there, no, the urban middle class was the last class to arrive at respectable status and it has been the most overprotected (for its dollars are the great nourishing mother of all consumer goods) yet the most spiritually undefended since even the concept of a crisis in identity seems most exclusively their own. The sons and daughters of that urban middle class, forever alienated in childhood from all the good simple funky nitty-gritty American joys of the working class like winning a truly dangerous fist fight at the age of eight or getting sex before fourteen, dead drunk by sixteen, whipped half to death by your father, making it in rumbles with a proud street gang, living at war with the educational system, knowing how to snicker at the employer from one side of the mouth, riding a bike with no hands, entering the Golden Gloves, doing a hitch in the Navy, or a stretch in the stockade, and with it all, their sense of élan, of morale, for buddies are the manna of the working class: there is a God-given cynical indifference to school, morality, and job. The working class is loyal to friends, not ideas. No wonder the Army bothered them not a bit. But the working class bothered the sons of the middle class with their easy confident virility and that physical courage with which they seemed to be born—there was a fear and a profound respect in every middle class son for his idea of that most virile ruthless indifferent working class which would eventually exterminate them as easily as they exterminated gooks. And this is not even to mention the sense of muted awe which lived in every son of the urban middle class before the true American son of the small town and the farm, that blank-eyed snub-nosed innocent, bewildered, stubborn crew-cut protagonist of all conventional American life; the combination of his symbolic force with the working class was now in focus here.

Standing against them, the demonstrators were not only sons of the middle class of course, but sons who had departed the middle class, they were rebels and radicals and young revolutionaries; yet they were unbloodied, they felt secretly weak, they did not know if they were the simple equal, man for man, of these soldiers, and so when this vanguard confronted soldiers now, and were able to stare them in the eye, they were, in effect, saying silently, "I will steal your élan, and your brawn, and the very animal of your charm because I am morally right and you

are wrong and the balance of existence is such that the meat of your life is now attached to my spirit, I am stealing your balls." A great exaltation arose among the demonstrators in that first hour. Surrounded on the plaza and on the stairs, they could have no idea of what would happen next, they could be beaten, arrested, buried in a stampede, most of them were on the mouth of their first cannon, yet for each minute they survived, sixty seconds of existential gold was theirs. Minutes passed, an hour went by—these troops were more afraid of them than they were afraid of the troops! Great glory. They began to cheer. Those who were not in the first row yelled insults, taunted the soldiers, derided them—the demonstrators in the front looked into the soldiers' eyes, smiled, tried to make conversation. "Hey, soldier, you think I'm a freak. Why am I against the war in Vietnam? Cause it's wrong. You're not defending America against Communism, you're just giving your officers a job." Some of the dialogue was better, some was worse, some was face to face, some by bullhorn to the troops—technology land at the front. The dialogue was to change character yet, become more intimate, more awful, more excruciating for the soldiers, and the demonstrators; it was to go on for thirty-two hours of close-up dialogues across the line of confrontation, first standing, then—in response to the fear of stampede—sitting, faces inches apart, the demonstrators speaking softly, the soldiers under orders silent, some soldiers trembling—there were reports of officers coming up to say, "Steady, soldier!" and of soldiers here and there specifically relieved, even unconfirmed stories of three soldiers who took off their helmets and joined the demonstrators.

Of course this was only the first hour of thirty-two, and involved but the first line; three or four rows back the condition was different, one was safer, more anonymous—one's abuse could have more bite for considerably less cost. And down in the Mall a different condition existed, one of excitement, bewilderment, interest, anticipation. Cut off from the demonstration on the stairs or the plaza by the press of the crowd at the base one had only to ignore the possibility of climbing the ropes and there was no way one could not in good conscience declare one had done his best. Of course, there were confrontations here as well. Where soldiers cut off the access roads, demonstrators from the Mall were pressing against them. Here the attitude was more ugly. Here soldiers

were not cutting people off from the Pentagon, but from their own demonstrators, so the imperative to get through was more direct, the fear of being stampeded was less—there was all the Mall to run out into. Therefore the inability to mount a charge to break the soldiers' line was less excusable, closer perhaps to cowardice—hence the ugliness of the crowd. And indeed far out in the Mall, isolated altogether from other soldiers, were very small detachments on now unknown details, three soldiers here, five there. Newspaper stories referred to them, Breslin reported they were reviled and tormented unmercifully; when it got dark a few soldiers were beaten up—so goes the story. It may be well to quote Breslin here.

Taste and decency had left the scene a long time before. All that remained were these lines of troops and packs of nondescript kids who taunted the soldiers. The kids went to the bathroom on the side of the Pentagon building. They threw a couple of rocks through the first-floor windows. The soldiers faced them silently. From the steps, a captain in the Airborne kept calling out through a bullhorn.

"A Company, hold your ground, A Company," his voice said. "Nobody comes and nobody goes. Just hold your ground, A Company."

The mob on the grass in front of the soldiers began chanting. "Hold that line, hold that line."

There was no humor to it. These were not the kind of kids who were funny. These were the small core of dropouts and drifters and rabble who came to the front of what had started out as a beautiful day, one that would have had meaning to it. They turned a demonstration for peace, these drifters in raggedy clothes, into a sickening, club-swinging mess. At the end of the day, the only concern anybody could have was for the soldiers who were taking the abuse.

On the steps leading from the grass to the blacktop the kids taunted the troops and kicked at them.

"Hit them—they won't hit back," somebody yelled.

A scraggly bearded guy in a blue denim jacket shrieked. He ran up with a flag holder and swatted a soldier in the back.

Whatever it was that this peace march had started out to be, it now became an exercise in clawing at soldiers. And it lasted into the darkness.

In contrast let us now dare to give an extract from Gerald Long's account in the *National Guardian*. It is not a paper famous for its lack of bias and the account here is obviously partisan, but its virtues are to be brief and vivid.

Some demonstrators near the entrance and a good number behind the front lines urged the crowd forward, into a clash with the troops who were standing with rifles at the ready. A debate ensued. SDS leaders, also among the first near the doors, grabbed portable loudspeakers and urged the crowd to sit down. ("It would have been a bloodbath," SDS leader Greg Calvert commented later. "A thousand people could have been killed if they attempted to storm those lines unarmed. We regarded those urging the crowd forward as left adventurers and tried to stop them. We succeeded.")

A company of MPs materialized from the right, running awkwardly like puppets. They stopped in front of the ramp, regrouped, leveled their rifles and marched forward. Unbelieving demonstrators just gaped at them, stunned, confronted for the first time by the guns of "our boys." Then something remarkable happened. People began laughing. Someone threw yellow flowers at the MPs, who by now had stopped, frozen, guns pointed at young men and women their own age.

Every time the troops moved forward to push demonstrators away from the ramps, scores, hundreds of youths would sneak behind them—up the ramp. The MPs were enveloped. People were standing with faces just inches from the barrels of M-14 semi-automatics and an occasional single barrel shotgun.

The MPs executed an about-face, seeking to clear out the demonstrators who ran behind them. A youth refused to be

moved. A rifle butt landed in his stomach. He grabbed the rifle. Several youths grabbed rifles. Four helmets were stolen. A demonstrator was slugged. An MP was slugged.

White-helmeted federal marshals, impressed for service from the calm of courtrooms, moved forward, clubs swinging. It seemed to this observer—both in this incident and for the next 30 or so hours—that the marshals aimed particularly at women.

Each time the action stopped in a particular spot, demonstrators sought to speak with the soldiers, who were under orders not to respond. "Why are you doing this?" a demonstrator asked. "Join us" the soldiers were asked. It was obvious that some of the troops were weakening. A few soldiers seemed ready to faint. "Hold your lines, hold your lines," a captain repeated harshly, over and over, to the soldiers.

A girl confronted a soldier, "Why, why, why?" she asked. "We're just like you. You're like us. It's them," she said pointing to the Pentagon. She brought her two fingers to her mouth, kissed them and touched the soldier's lips. Four soldiers grabbed her and dragged her away, under arrest. The soldier she had spoken to tried to tell them that she hadn't hurt him.

It may be obvious by now that a history of the March on the Pentagon which is not unfair will never be written, any more than a history which could prove dependable in details!

As it grew dark there was the air of carnival as well. The last few thousand Marchers to arrive from Lincoln Memorial did not even bother to go to the North Parking Area, but turned directly to the Mall and were cheered by the isolated detachments who saw them from a ledge of the wall at the plaza. Somewhere, somebody lit his draft card, and as it began to burn he held it high. The light of the burning card traveled through the crowd until it found another draft card someone else was ready to burn and this was lit, and then another in the distance. In the gathering dark it looked like a dusting of fireflies over the great shrub of the Mall.

By now, however, the way was open again to the North Parking. The chartered buses were getting ready to leave. That portion of this revolu-

tion which was Revolution on Excursion Ticket was now obliged to leave. Where once there had been thirty thousand people in the Mall, there were now suddenly twenty thousand people, ten thousand people, less. As the buses ground through the interlockings of their gears and pulled out into a mournful wheezing acceleration along the road, so did other thousands on the Mall look at one another and decide it was probably time to catch a cab or take the long walk back to Washington—they were in fact hungry for a meal. So the Mall began to empty, and the demonstrators on the steps must have drawn a little closer. The mass assault was over.

A few thousand, however, were left, and they were the best. The civil disobedience might be far from done. On the Mall, since the oncoming night was cold, bonfires were lit. On the stairs, a peace pipe was passed. It was filled with hashish. Soon the demonstrators were breaking out marijuana, handing it back and forth, offering it even to the soldiers here and there. The Army after all had been smoking marijuana since Korea, and in Vietnam—by all reports—were gorging on it. The smell of the drug, sweet as the sweetest leaves of burning tea, floated down to the Mall where its sharp bite of sugar and smoldering grass pinched the nose, relaxed the neck. Soon most of the young on the Mall were smoking as well. Can this be one of the moments when the Secretary of Defense looks out from his window in the Pentagon at the crowd on the Mall and studies their fires below? They cannot be unreminiscent of other campfires in Washington and Virginia little more than a century ago. The Secretary of Defense is by all report a complex man, a reader of poetry—does he have a secret admiration for the works of Robert Lowell as he stands by the window?

But what has happened to Lowell, to Macdonald and Lowell, to Delinger, to Dr. Spock, and Father Rice, and Lens, and all? We must move on.