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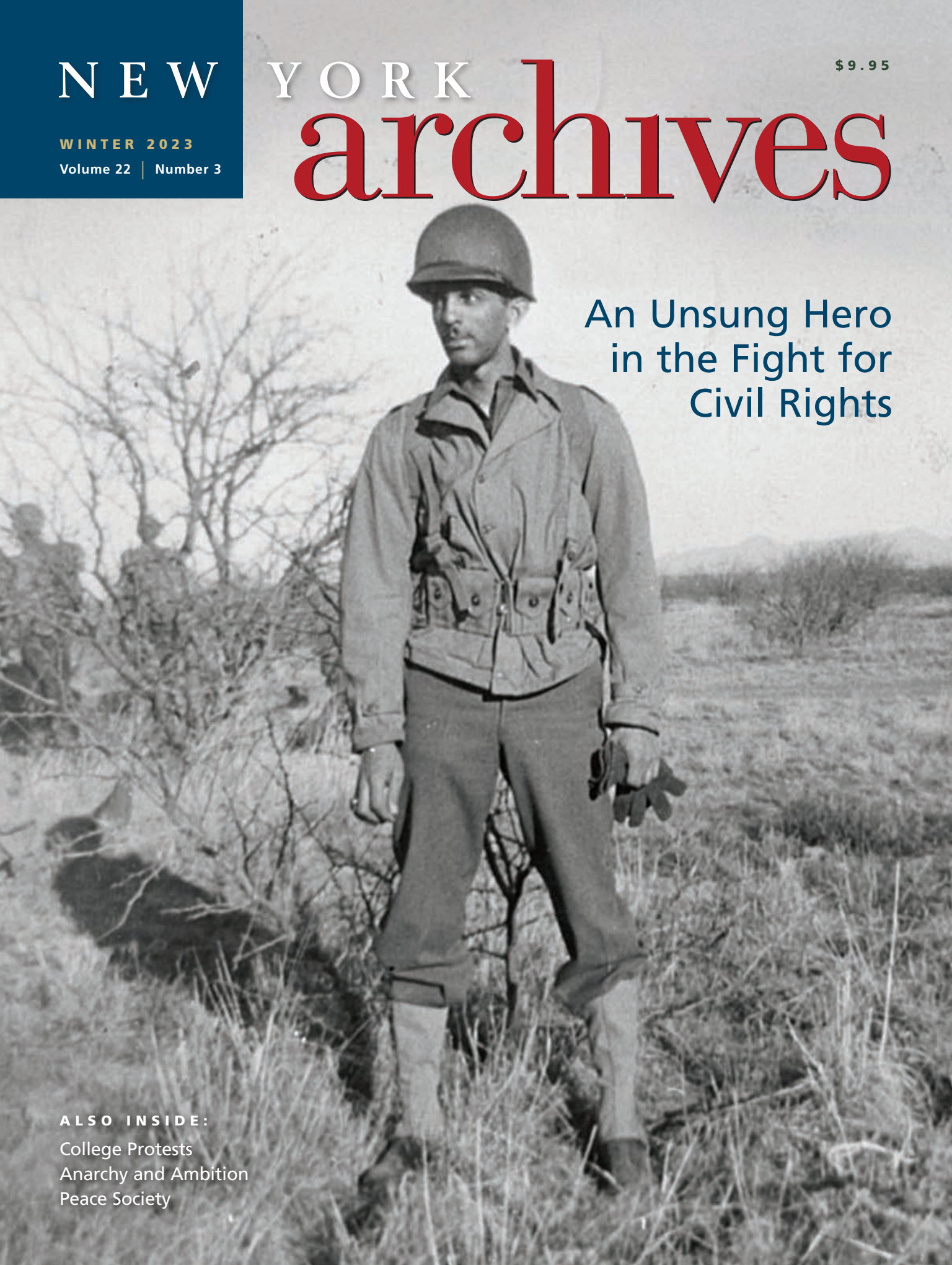
Volume 22 | Number 3

archives

An Unsung Hero
in the Fight for
Civil Rights

ALSO INSIDE:

College Protests
Anarchy and Ambition
Peace Society



ACTIVE DISSSENT

BY SETH KERSHNER

Protests erupted in 1972 throughout the country.



On May 8, 1972, New Paltz students went from dorm to dorm at the state university, pulling fire alarms, their reaction quick and spontaneous. Few students had television sets, but word spread quickly about President Nixon's broadcast announcing he had ordered the mining of North Vietnam ports.

Just hours after Nixon's address, around midnight, the college's assistant director of housing placed a frantic call to campus security.

As fire alarms continued going off throughout the early morning hours, a sympathetic professor allowed students to



DAILY NEXUS, UC SANTA BARBARA LIBRARY

2,500 shut down S.B. airport

Large campus crowd moves on ROTC bldg.

By SKIP RIMER and ABBY HAIGHT
Yesterday afternoon, the People owned an airport. Demonstrators estimated at 2,500 marched on Santa Barbara Airport and occupied the main runway yesterday afternoon.

At the other end of the airport, an estimated 150 policemen, some in riot gear, two dump trucks and two buses stood by.

The airport march began at Perfect Park and moved through Isla Vista down Los Carneros to the runway lights. There, some

500 began climbing the fence, heading for the main runway, but were turned back by a 35-foot-wide water channel.

The crowd moved on to Hollister as police vehicles paraded up and down the main runway. Then, at the first entrance to the airport, the crowd moved in through the buildings, across a four-foot fence to the main landing strip.

By this time, the airport had officially closed, with all flights cancelled for the day.

At press time yesterday, the

(Continued on p. 8, col. 1)



2,500 BECAME human blockade against 150 real police and an unreal war. photo: Kevin Murphy

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

access the administration building, where they got to work. After placing furniture in stairwells to block the building's upper levels, protesters locked the outer doors, then smeared epoxy cement in keyholes to prevent anyone from entering. With the uprising spreading rapidly across campus—and the nation—students broke into the college print shop and removed

In Santa Barbara, California, protesters briefly occupied an airport runway.



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mimeograph machines and typewriters. By the time State Police arrived later that morning, the pilfered equipment had already produced an "Information Bulletin" and a flyer titled "Where Will Escalation Stop?"

National Protests

New Paltz residents were not alone. President Nixon's decision to further escalate the war in

Indochina triggered a wave of indignation across the state and around the country. Hundreds of Columbia University students marched down Broadway, snarling traffic, while at Cornell, approximately 100 demonstrators occupied the engineering library for several days. Both *The New York Times* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* agreed that the demonstrations were the

most disruptive in years.

At the start of 1972, there was little indication that within a few months, campuses would erupt in some of the most turbulent protests since those following the killing of four Kent State students by Ohio National Guardsmen in 1970. Bellwether organizations, like Students for a Democratic Society, were in disarray. Other

Protests erupted across the country.

groups, like the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, as well as Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam, had been hemorrhaging members for the past three years. In February, the president of the State University of New York (SUNY) College at Geneseo

reported a "greater degree of apathy" among the student body than in years past. A Vassar College peace vigil in Poughkeepsie that same month only drew single digits. Turnout was equally anemic at SUNY Cortland, where agents of the New York State Police Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) reported that "all anti-war demonstrations during the current academic year have been poorly attended."

BCI Spies

The BCI was in an excellent position to know. After all, the investigators assigned to its countersubversive unit monitored many demonstrations in the state during the 1960s and 1970s. Like every large police agency in the country at that time, the State Police devoted significant resources to the surveillance of groups advocating social change. As BCI agents later told members of a New York State Assembly Task Force, plainclothes officers attended

demonstrations undercover and observed the activities of protest leaders because they feared potential violence. During those turbulent years, college campuses across the Empire State were honeycombed with informants who collected intelligence on political activism and funneled what they learned back to the BCI and other agencies like the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Dapper "BCI men" also routinely visited campuses to observe rallies, logging the names of speakers and others in attendance, and even snapping photographs of participants.

The BCI spies knew that behind the clichés about student apathy, there was a far more complex reality of persistent campus protest. Students were organizing around a variety of issues, demanding a greater voice in campus governance, and lobbying for equal rights for gays and lesbians. Despite its efforts to tame domestic dissent through "Vietnamization"

OAKLAND MUSEUM OF CALIFORNIA



President Nixon's decision to escalate the war in Indochina triggered a wave of indignation.



PHOTO BY CATHERINE CONOVER, ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, BARNARD COLLEGE

of the war, the Nixon administration's aggressive maneuvers in Indochina also fueled campus protest. The so-called Vietnamization strategy shifted the US role to bombing targets in support of South Vietnamese forces who were expected to take on the brunt of ground combat operations. Between April 1971 and February 1972, American troops in Vietnam fell from 281,000 to 45,000 as the war was increasingly fought in the air. In June alone, US forces dropped more than 100,000 tons of bombs on targets in North and South Vietnam.

Although Vietnamization and a draft lottery made it less likely that college students would be drafted, it was the seeming brutality of a "remote-controlled" air war that drove dissent. At the end of March, North Vietnamese forces crossed over into South Vietnam, routing the South Vietnamese forces before quickly capturing Quang Tri City. A desire to influence negotiations with North Vietnam (which were by then at an impasse) and retaliate for the North Vietnamese incursion motivated the president's decision to escalate further.

Roads Blocked

The preferred mode of militant action on campus was to block traffic on major highways. In Santa Barbara, California, protesters briefly occupied an airport runway and shut down a three-mile segment of US Route 101 for two hours. During rush hour, demonstrators in Chicago abandoned cars on the Eisenhower Expressway. In

Boulder, Colorado, students used cars and burning logs to block a highway bridge and several major traffic arteries, as well as a Denver-Boulder turnpike. Protesters also blocked traffic on highways near the University of Iowa, Michigan State and Northwestern University. Meanwhile, attempts to do the same in Gainesville, Florida, and outside the campus of the University of New Mexico, resulted in violent clashes with police.

On May 9, more than 500 students marched down Route 32 towards the Village of New

stop and think of what their country was doing in Vietnam. "Think, reflect as you sit in your cars about the situation of the world, about the situation of our country," a flyer exhorted. "Understand, please, that this reflecting pause is necessary—for things can hardly continue as they are now."

State Troopers met the student motorcade at the interchange but let them onto the Thruway after receiving assurances they would not attempt to block traffic. The protesters did not keep their word. Traveling

"THINK, REFLECT AS YOU SIT IN YOUR CARS ABOUT THE SITUATION OF THE WORLD, ABOUT THE SITUATION OF OUR COUNTRY. UNDERSTAND, PLEASE, THAT THIS REFLECTING PAUSE IS NECESSARY—FOR THINGS CAN HARDLY CONTINUE AS THEY ARE NOW."

Paltz, where they blocked traffic at a major intersection in the Village. With traffic at a standstill, students passed out leaflets to puzzled motorists as a BCI investigator on the scene snapped photos, collected flyers, and identified protesters.

Back on campus, activists attended an afternoon rally on the campus quad where they discussed plans to block the New York State Thruway. Unfortunately for the activists, an informant working for the BCI also attended and tipped off the State Police.

By 3:15 p.m., dozens of students piled into their cars and left campus for the nearest Thruway exit, hoping that their action would force motorists to

in the right-hand lane, their motorcade first slowed to a crawl before eventually occupying both lanes and coming to a full stop. Photographs taken by BCI plainclothesmen show a frenzied scene as long-haired youth stand defiantly atop stopped cars, while others play a game of cat-and-mouse with the police who seek to regain control. In the end, New Paltz's Thruway action involved as many as 125 students in eighteen cars holding up traffic for twenty-five minutes. After protestors refused to move their vehicles, Thruway Authority snowplows came to do the job for them.

Besides militant actions like highway closures, students also sought to demonstrate their dis-

The seeming brutality of a "remote-controlled" air war drove dissent.

Read the Fine Print on The Viet Nam War: There's a Bomb In It!

The best laid plans.

In February, 1971 our government revealed all eight prior plans prepared to end our costly involvement in southeast Asia. But those revealed in White House intelligence and government seal!

The Secret War made a little less secret.

The government's secret magazines failed to reveal our past efforts in making sure that a wounded subject of the war returned by Hanoi whenever government administrators could if it were. Plans formed in Hanoi. How do we guarantee that with insurance? With funds. It seems our money plan was an attempt to make the American public believe we were caring about getting out. It appears to have been a campaign for increased vaccination against North Vietnam. How could we possibly look bad for killing, maiming, and making refugees of over one-third of the entire population of Vietnam? After all, we did make a plan for peace.

It's 1981 in Vietnam.

It's been our government's pulling the ground troops out of Vietnam. But they're leaving out things behind - a very large air war. Air war was the last secret before could from each nation. In 1970 President Johnson stepped the air war. It was covered up right during the present administration. We are now engaged in a war of war - with American leaders profiting through dissemination of the bombing and their promising that certain targets are bombed. They don't do it, they're really in "guilt-free" regions. It makes us feel we cannot work to end the war. What should be asked is whether the lives of innocent children, women, and old men, and the spreading of epidemics in children in proper exchange for the possibility of killing five of the enemy. Every month we lose about a million tons of bombs. That's more than six thousand tons a month. Seven million tons of bombs were dropped during the Vietnam War. During that time between November 1, 1969 and March 1, 1970, we have been dropping the bombs where the majority of bombs dropped in Indochina have been dropped under the present administration in a million tons of bombs were dropped during the Vietnam War. Further significant information. One of the bombing site statistics at least three million tons of bombs, and government officials assure ourselves that by dropping more bombs we can win. Indochina.

... war involves very small numbers of people, mostly highly trained specialists. The fighting - takes place on the edge frontiers where whereabouts the average man can only guess at...
George Orwell, 1984

THE AIR WAR CONTINUES

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 1 for \$1.25 - 5 for \$5.00 - 10 for \$9.00 - 25 for \$20.00

CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY, REV. MARTIN L. DEPPE PAPERS, OVERSIZE FOLDER 2

pleasure in more strategic ways. Notably, they targeted corporations that profited from the carnage in Indochina. A day after their Thruway blockade, on May 10, around 600 SUNY New Paltz students attended a 9 a.m. meeting to plan the day's major action: a walk from campus to the IBM headquarters in nearby Poughkeepsie. Later known for developing some of the earliest personal computers, during the Vietnam War, the technology

firm had a Pentagon contract to assist in target selection for bombing runs. Later that morning, as 150 activists proceeded to Poughkeepsie, they circulated a flyer indicting what was then the nation's fifth-largest corporation for profiting from the war: "The automated air war which is killing 300 Indochinese a day," it read, "would have a hard time continuing without IBM's complicity." By 2 p.m.,

after an influx of Vassar students doubled the size of the procession, as many as 300 marchers advanced along Route 9W to the Oakwood School, a Quaker institution, where students would meet with the IBM plant's general manager and a company attorney. Leading this part of the protest was 22-year-old Michael Stamm, a Quaker peace activist whose parents were teachers at Oakwood. According to one press account,

Stamm had attended “more antiwar protests there and elsewhere than he can recall” and in the process had been arrested “more times than most members of the mafia.” As Stamm and other organizers urged these officials to end their collaboration with the war, IBM representatives warned that any acts of civil disobedience would result in arrest.

At 4 p.m., students amassed near an IBM parking lot property in Poughkeepsie. As they held a banner reading, “End the Computer Complicity,” some demonstrators upped the ante by trespassing in an act of non-violent protest. When twelve refused to move from the

Paltz activists marched from a local center of antiwar activity: Kingston’s Trinity United Methodist Church. The two groups converged at the center of Kingston, where they proceeded in a loop around Academy Green, picketing the local draft board offices and a military recruiting station. Police arrested at least a dozen demonstrators for briefly blocking traffic.

The May 1972 protests were the last significant demonstrations of the Vietnam era. Largely forgotten today, they represented both a collective cry against escalation in Vietnam and a rejection of political apathy. An anonymous writer of a leaflet

AN ANONYMOUS WRITER OF A LEAFLET PASSED AROUND DURING THE IBM PROTESTS WROTE THAT THE MAY 1972 ACTIONS GREW OUT OF AN “AWARENESS AMONG AMERICANS THAT THE GREATEST THREAT TO OUR SOCIETY LIES NOT IN THE ACTION OF ANY ‘FOREIGN ENEMY’ BUT IN THE INACTION OF OUR CITIZENRY.”

IBM parking lot property, they were promptly arrested by Poughkeepsie police.

More arrests followed on May 12, in a coordinated action that demonstrated how antiwar dissent could knit together a diverse coalition of students from public and private colleges, two- and four-year schools. As around fifty students walked twelve miles from the Stone Ridge campus of Ulster County Community College, another group of Bard College and New

passed around during the IBM protests wrote that the May 1972 actions grew out of an “awareness among Americans that the greatest threat to our society lies not in the action of any ‘foreign enemy’ but in the inaction of our citizenry.” Protesters may not have stopped the war in 1972, but their remarkably militant actions shattered the myth of student complacency and challenged their fellow citizens to question their own complicity in the Vietnam War. ■

THE ARCHIVES CONNECTION

This article draws chiefly on police intelligence files housed at the State Archives. The *New York State Division of State Police Non-Criminal Investigation Case Files (A0795)* is an invaluable resource for historians of the postwar US. In addition to surveillance reports from BCI agents, the collection includes photographs of student protests and news clippings from dozens of publications. In the course of carrying out their duties, State Police investigators acted as archivists by collecting flyers, posters, and other ephemera at the sites of demonstrations. Since many activist groups of the early 1970s were short-lived and failed to keep archives of their own, the State Police collection is likely to have the only extant copies of such materials. On file at the New York State Library is a 1977 Assembly Task Force report which offers a concise history of the BCI’s counter-subversive unit and explains how it employed a range of investigative techniques—including surveillance at many public demonstrations, the use of paid and unpaid informants, and maintenance of a sophisticated filing system to keep track of so-called subversives. For more about spring 1972 protests, interested readers may consult Christian G. Appy, “‘A Pervasive and Insistent Disquiet’: Amherst College in the 1960s,” in *Amherst in the World* (Amherst College Press, 2020), edited by Martha Saxton.



For more on BCI surveillance of campus groups, see “Investigating ‘Subversives’” by Seth Kershner, Winter 2022.