

Next Guilfordian
staff meeting:
Sunday, November 12th 9 p.m.
BE THERE!!!

The Guilfordian



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by Tim Collins

He weighed about 300 pounds. He was wearing a suit and a hand lettered lapel button: Veterans for the President. I almost hit him anyway. Ellen and Johanna were on the ground, the banner was irreparably ripped, and I almost hit him anyway. Jim Clark said, "No." The sudden awareness of the two Secret Service Agents on both sides of me, the two Secret Service Agents who had been there all along, the two Secret Service Agents there to arrest me if a fight started, abruptly re-established reality and I relaxed. His expression had never changed; the same, almost friendly, almost reaching out, goddamn, shit eating, smug grin. I watched as he slowly, unobtrusively, faded through the crowd in the general direction of another group of demonstrators.

At last, I had had the honor of meeting one of President Nixon's professional enforcers. I had heard about them, we have all heard about them. Martha Mitchell has complained about being kidnapped and beaten by them. The FBI report on the Watergate investigation has sketched a broad outline around their activities. Yet, even after meeting one, I find it difficult to comprehend the reality of them. He was very good at what he did. If our protestors had half his confidence, half his proven professionalism, they too would be able to concentrate on what they are here to do and not allow themselves to be diverted from their purpose.

The story actually began three days before the demonstration. The why, the anticipated what, are as important as the reality of what occurred instead.

Nixon's staff announced his plans to bring the campaign to Greensboro three days before

the election. The McGovern people promptly had ulcers. A few of us, a few more of us, and then not so few of us began to seek each other out. We would not allow Nixon to come and leave without at least knowing that someone, just anyone, but mostly us, disapproved of his policy. As we attracted one another, we began to plan our response.

From the beginning a broad consensus and disagreement were apparent. The McGovern people would never understand, could never understand why and what we had to do. We could sympathize with their fears but we could not escape a realization that paranoia makes one incapable of functioning in society and that there are times when it is necessary to take long steps and make bold moves, even if you fail. A considerable amount of time was wasted in saying everything every possible way only to arrive at the same conclusion each time.

After the departure of the McGovern people those of us who were left began to build our dream.

We all agreed that a show of non-violent, non-disruptive power had the potential to shock people, the potential to possibly make them aware that there was more to the opposition to President Nixon than a few police whistles in San Diego. Unfortunately everyone involved in the planning was very keen on where and why but not to keep on how. "Let's discuss that at our next meeting." "I don't like marshalls." "Why can't those of us who feel like we have got our shit together just function like marshal s?"

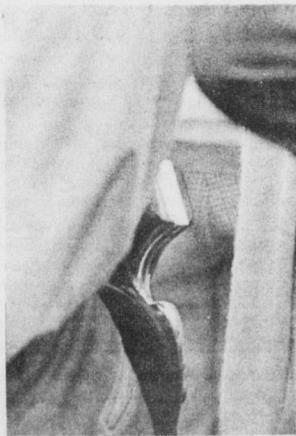
The Greensboro chapter of the Vietnam Veterans

Against the War volunteered to serve as marshalls. Jim Clark of the Inner-Church Ministry got in touch with the Institute for Non-Violence in Durham and they also agreed to help. Several Guilford students and assorted town residents, myself included, also deemed ourselves capable of exercising a moderating, non-violent influence. "I almost hit him anyway." Help what? Provide a moderating influence on what? How? Someway or another that got lost in the discussions we held Thursday and Friday night. Saturday afternoon we all left feeling sure we knew what we were going to do and be when we really knew nothing at all.

Larry York and Ben Matkins of VVAW contacted the Security Police at the Airport. After a series of false stops and starts it finally looked like we had it all together Saturday morning. We could "do our thing," as long as we did not bring our leaflets inside the terminal building or litter airport property.

After a little mass gathering in Binford parking lot we set out. Confident that we would at least have a chance to make our non-violent dream come true. Sure, no one really knew exactly how we would manage it, but with police cooperation, a gift from heaven, we thought we would be capable of exercising enough influence to cope with residual hatred and Nixon's insults. Maybe we would have been but we never got the chance to find out.

"You can either come in or you can stay out, but if you come in you leave that with us." Fifty dollars worth of literature, which Chuck and Janis had worked all night to have printed up, went down the drain. A few stayed out, leafletting the crowd going in. Most went in taking what they could hide, watching what was found get thrown away, or trampled under foot by the crowd.



But that was cool. Not nice, not part of the agreement, but cool. I mean, they even took away the American flag that the little black kid tried to bring in. That pointed tip must have been a potentially dangerous weapon, for they did return the flag . . . minus the stick.

I walked inside and it struck me. Residual hatred, uncool police, ANGER. Nixon banners, Nixon posters, Nixon leaflets, Nixon buttons, Helms banners, Helms buttons, Helms posters, Holshouser . . . Hundreds thousands . . . But that could still be dealt with. A friend smuggled a banner in for me in her purse. I knew of one or two others as well. If we kept our heads we could still make an impressive showing. They could not refuse to let us hold our posters and banners since they let all the Nixon people hold theirs.

Over there was Jim Clark, we discussed the tactical problems involved in finding the best location for the banner. There was a wedge of Nixon supporters between the demonstrators in the front where the banner would have done the most good and the back where we were. I decided to work my way into the crowd as far as I could without entering the "death strip" and hold it there. Four of us would be necessary to get it up high enough to be seen. After one rehearsal we decided to leave it down until Nixon arrived.

Fake out. That Eastern Airlines jet only holds minor dignitaries, Nixon is coming in Air Force One. But the banner went up anyway.

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I relaxed and realized all that we had done wrong. I was aware of the destruction of every other sign of any size, but I did not know about it until later. Later when I knew about the people in the hospital, later when I knew about the people who had been spat upon, later when I had heard all the heckling.

There were so many things we should have done, so many things we could have assumed. We were not cynical enough. We were not professional enough. Had we assumed enough fifty dollars worth of literature would have been distributed inside the rally. Had we been cynical enough large banners would have flown for thirty seconds of prime time TV and the Nixon supporters would have had to have shown the nation that they provoked the incident resulting in their destruction instead of being allowed to quietly eliminate them one by one, so that no one knew except those who couldn't care, and us, the ones no one else would believe. Had we been professionals nothing would have made us change our expressions; "the same, almost friendly, almost reaching out, goddamn, shit eating, smug grin." That shit eating smug grin which no one can destroy, which means I am untouchable, immovable, I will prevail.

But we did not assume enough, we were not cynical enough, we did not behave professionally enough and Nixon and his professionals took us for the provincial rubes we behaved like. "And now in the interest of equal time, turn the cameras on these supporters of my opponent." Cheery wave, gee hi mom and dad. See me on the tube. When to get shown on the tube like that was what we had come out there to avoid while protesting. "I almost hit him anyway."

Saturday, November 4, 1972, a demonstration was held at the Regional Airport. Some of us will assume less, are more cynical, and have at least seen what a professional looks like.