

**Memoirs of Field Marshall Don Cox
(excerpts from future book)**

It was with enthusiasm and honor that we finally met Bobby. He had been in jail all that time. It was Bobby that led the Panthers to the Capitol in Sacramento. I was surprised to see him just as enthusiastic to meet us. Nothing was said directly, but he made it clear he had heard about our activities and that swelled us with pride. He asked if I would accept a position on the central committee. I was knocked off my feet, thrilled by the offer, and secretly very proud. There was a nagging doubt whether or not I was worthy of such an honor. I told him I would submit it to the group and abide by their decision. They had no objections and I was overjoyed to accept. The only condition being that my appointment had to be kept secret in order to maintain my effectiveness with the group and my activities as a guerrilla.

By that time we had discovered Regis Debray and his book "The Revolution in the Revolution". We were reinforced in our belief that armed action was the highest form of politics. We didn't relate to any literature that didn't support that thesis. We also got our hands on General Giap's "People's Army, People's War". Given what we thought were the subjective conditions, we had no doubt that the 'foco' theory could be applied to the situation inside the United States. It was only necessary to adapt it to an urban situation.

About that time, February 8, 1968 to be exact, three blacks were killed and fifty were wounded in the Orangeburg, South Carolina massacre. They had wanted to have access to the local bowling alley, which up until that point didn't allow blacks. They were shot down by the local police assisted by state troopers and national guardsmen.

A big rally was planned for the twenty-fifth of February to celebrate Huey's birthday. It would be held at the Oakland auditorium. Stokely Carmichael would be coming so it was going to be a big event. Many new members were recruited into the Panthers at that time. It was necessary to increase forces to handle the workload that was growing daily. I didn't get involved with the planning of the rally, but took care of organizing the invisible security that was to be placed throughout the auditorium. They had killed Malcolm, but the night of the rally for Huey, if anyone attempted anything, we would be in a position to assure that, at least, they would not escape.

Very few Panthers had handguns at that time. In discussing the problem with Eldridge, I told him that in Nevada it was possible to buy them over the counter like a package of cigarettes, with no waiting like in California where it was necessary to wait until the police had approved your purchase before a handgun was delivered. A few days before the rally, Eldridge gave me two thousand dollars to make a trip to Nevada and bring back a load of handguns.

In Reno, I found an army surplus store that had a small counter where handguns were sold. He had just received a shipment of Spanish Astra 9mm, semi-automatic pistols. I checked them out and saw that they were in working condition and told him I would take all that he had, and pulled out a handful of crisp, hundred dollar bills. His eyes lit up like a

christmas tree. He brought out his wife and father from the back of the store to introduce them and made a pot of coffee. If it had been a century before, he probably would have been selling guns to the Indians which was just what I was looking for. With the genocide of the Indians, the repressive machinery was now turned on Blacks, so in that sense, we were the Indians of today. He was only interested in money and that suited me just fine. I told him to try to find some 9mm Brownings and exchanged telephone numbers with him. He said he would do his best and I split back to San Francisco with my precious cargo.

The next day was full of anticipatory excitement. Stokely was the first to arrive. Eldridge brought him to sister Barbara's house where I was then staying. When they arrived, they were accompanied by a couple carloads of Panthers from Oakland. Eyes popped out when I started passing out the pistols. It was only a few hours before the rally and thank god there was no occasion that necessitated the use of weapons. Without any training or practice, I'm sure it would have been a disaster.

Stokely explained the difficulty they had on the East coast acquiring handguns and convinced me of the necessity of letting him have some to take back. I couldn't help but be honored by supplying Stokely Carmichael with guns, so I agreed and would just have to make a trip to Reno sooner than planned.

Eldridge soon returned and that time he was accompanied by no other than Rap Brown and James Forman. My head was swimming. Just a few weeks before these were the people we were hearing about in the news and admiring the most for their militant activities and now, here we were, all in the same room. It was really a surprise seeing Rap because he was supposed to be under house arrest and not allowed to leave the Island of Manhattan in New York.

In another car was Bunchy. After all I had heard about him I was just as anxious to meet him as the others. The thing that struck me about Bunchy was his eyes. He looked at you. It's rather difficult to articulate, but sometimes, when someone is looking at you, you get the impression that their eyes are turned on you, but they aren't really looking at you. Almost like a sideways glance. But when Bunchy turned his eyes on you, there was no doubt that he was looking at you.

After everyone was assembled, we made a convoy and split for the Oakland Auditorium. In appearance, the rally was a relative success. Eldridge announced the merger of SNCC and the Panthers-also the appointment of Rap Brown as Minister of Justice and James Forman as Minister of Foreign Affairs. But behind the scenes a lot of shit was going on that I was not up to date on and didn't understand. There were contradictions between Stokely, Rap, and Forman amongst themselves and between all of them and Eldridge. At the rally, Stokely spoke and completely contradicted everything he had said during his trip to Havana, Hanoi and Europe. He more or less condemned all whites and any working coalitions with them which was totally contrary to the direction Eldridge was taking the Party in order to free Huey. It was necessary to make alliances wherever they could be made. The infrastructures available that would permit the necessary work of disseminating information were mainly in the hands of whites. Whenever such resources

could be found and those responsible were willing to put them at the disposal of the campaign to free Huey, there was nothing that would stop Eldridge from making an alliance.

After the rally, Stokely decided to stay for a few days more, which suited us fine. The group was convinced that if there was anyone that could tell us, and connect us to what was going on in the rest of the country, it was Stokely. For the past couple of years there had been no one that had commanded more attention from the media, plus he had traveled far and wide and we assumed any others moving on the level we were would have the same desire to know him and make themselves known to him.

The day after the rally, before Rap and Forman left, everyone made the pilgrimage to see Huey in the Oakland jail. Pigs were everywhere. Even if you went to the toilet they were either already in there, or they followed you in. In front of Barbara's pad, it looked like the FBI parking lot. When we moved in cars they were bumper to bumper. That first experience with surveillance was very uptight, to say the least. Stokely explained that for them, it was always like that.

Invitations were coming in from all over the Bay Area for Stokely to speak. However, he agreed to meet the group at the first opportunity. I passed the word and the reception for him was prepared. We went from meeting to meeting and finally, after two days and nights of constant activity, we were finally free and headed for the group. '

When our convoy arrived, the neighborhood was such that the pigs finally laid back and waited outside the area. The whole community had been alerted and everyone came outside to see and talk to the great Stokely Carmichael. At the first opportunity, I pulled him away and led him down some stairs into a pitchblack basement. The group had prepared its own type of reception for him. At the bottom of the stairs I raised the flashlight and moved it from face to face and made introductions. I then turned it on the long table that everyone was standing behind. I passed the light slowly from one end to the other. There were weapons of all types, ammunition, a stack of dynamite and fuses, and spaced between the items were newspapers with headlines showing different actions we had made. Stokely's reaction was totally contrary to what we had expected and were waiting for. The nigger panicked and said, "Get me out of here."

Our admiration for his 'militant' reputation did not let us believe what we really saw. We attributed his reaction to the fact that only a few yards away were pigs of every species you could think of, and for him that meant danger. We were convinced that if he really knew this community and knew how it was organized, he would have felt as safe as he would in his own home. We just refused to consider that fact that he might just be all talk. Anyway, we asked him about the rest of the country and people moving in our fashion and we didn't get a clear answer either. After he returned to the East Coast we still didn't know what was going on in the rest of the country. We were very confused, to say the least.

After the excitement of the distinguished visitors and the rally passed, there was a meeting called of all the Panther leadership and that time, I was present. It was at that meeting, in

March of 1968, when the definitive structure and hierarchy was outlined that was to govern the Black Panther Party until the split in 1971. The one change that took place was the position of Minister of Education. After George Murray was jailed for his activities at San Francisco State College, and he began talking to God, he was replaced by Ray 'Masai' Hewitt from Los Angeles. It was at that meeting that I was designated 'Field Marshall'.

Field Marshall! That sounded good. I knew of Field Marshall Montgomery of Britain and his reputation as an excellent strategist during the second world war. Since I considered myself well on my way to a good military career I considered the title of field marshal to be right in line. But in terms of the Panthers, I was hoping someone would tell me exactly what I was supposed to do. Some time later, I had the chance, rather I took the opportunity, to ask Bobby just what I was supposed to do. His response was not reassuring. He said simply, "whenever you see something that needs to be done, do it."

The only clear cut instruction I was ever given was to organize a Panther office in San Francisco. That was easy. It was only a matter of renting a storefront on Fillmore Street, cleaning it up, painting and hanging out our shingle. At that stage in the development of the Party, more people were coming to join than we had the real capacity to deal with. It was also at that time, I quit working and became a fulltime militant.

I rented a large, five-room flat on Page Street so that my closest comrades wouldn't have any problems with lodging. Very quickly, when I would get up in the morning and step into the hallway, it would be wall to wall niggers. Literally no place to walk. It was necessary to get other pads. Jerry Vernardo of the San Francisco State Black Student Union took the flat just next door that was identical to the one we already had so that took up some slack. Those that were left over took another flat around the corner. Finally, everyone had a place to sleep. Then the real work of learning to live together really began. At the pad where I stayed, for example, the average number to eat and sleep every night was between forty and fifty. It was indescribable. It was the necessities of the struggle and the need to provide our own security that were the determining factors in the collective living experiences we had. Just the simple fact of shopping and preparing food necessitated revolutionizing one's way of thinking and doing things. Individualism would block and destroy any attempts to do anything. The only thing that worked was the subordination of one's own desires to the collective good. That doesn't sound difficult, but try doing that with forty or fifty people that don't know it is the only thing that will work. Especially amongst males that had never given one instant's reflection to the social relationships between males and females. Imagine taking junkies, dudes just out of the joint and just any lumpen types, from any ghetto and put them in the kitchen to cook and clean up. I'll just say this. Whenever a pad was abandoned, for whatever reason, it was no longer fit for human habitation. You can't imagine the crass and filth created by forty to fifty people living together in five or six rooms. It was frightening. I had to draw the line and call meeting when I discovered every time I went to change underwear that someone was taking my clean shorts. That wasn't the problem. The problem was the fact they were leaving behind their dirty ones. And they were dirtier than anything imaginable. To avoid an epidemic or something, it was necessary to deal with the education of hygiene.

Very quickly, individualism and selfishness became dirty words, also liberalism. It was necessary to constantly make criticism and learn to make self-criticism. That's why Mao had such an influence on us. It was in his writings that we found principles to apply in learning to live with each other. As I mentioned before, it was the imperatives of the struggle that dictated the need for collective living and not any abstract utopian idea about wanting to set up communes. If it had been that, I don't think it would have worked. But thank somebody, it did.

It was in May of 1969 that I left the Bay Area to go to the East Coast and put back together the Party that had been severely damaged by the increasing repression. My first trip back was in July at the time of the Conference against Fascism. When I walked into the first pad where members of the group were living, that I had been living with before I left, my eyes watered up with what can only be described as tears of joy. Neat as a pin. Everything had and was in its place. Tears of joy because that represented a revolutionary change in the way those comrades lived their daily lives with those around them. With that leap in consciousness, the final day of victory could only have been brought a little bit closer.

The other pre-occupying thing was military preparedness; assuring everyone with the necessary means of defense in case those cowboy pigs that parked in front of the houses every now and then with their shotguns hanging out the window, got some ideas about playing Superman.

We had our neighborhood's security as well organized as was technically possible with what we were able to lay our hands on. All our pads were within a square block. If anyone ever came under attack there were several places to fall back on, each one organized as well as the other. Also in those first days, there weren't yet rules that prevented anyone that wanted to set up and execute an operation of a military nature. In fact, most ways that daily needs were provided for in those days could be classified as military. Nothing was ruled out. If it paid the rent, the gas and lights, the telephone, food, clothes, guns ammunition, transportation, gasoline, office supplies, you name it, it was valuable.

In the year 1968, more arms were stolen from the mails in San Francisco than the rest of the country combined. In San Francisco, parcel post had its buildings close to the ferry building. Being civil service work with a relatively simple test as the only requirement, the personnel was about eighty percent black. Being an inside job with no contact with the public, everyone wore their street clothes. By way of pushing for gun control, someone in congress got the brilliant idea to pass a law that required any package containing firearms to have a big, red label on it saying GUNS! We had a field day. Every now and then we would go down, walk into the building through the loading ramps that were never guarded, and pick up all packages with the red label. As simple as that. I don't know about the rest of the country, but I know for a fact that in San Francisco, there were a lot of guns in niggers hands.