

PRESS RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT:

Lisa Petrie
lpetrie@presidiotrust.gov
(415) 561-5424
M (415) 707-9489

PRESIDIO COMMEMORATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PRESIDIO 27, “MUTINY” AT THE STOCKADE

Public Programs, October 13 and 14



Presidio of San Francisco (September 24, 2018) – Fifty years ago this October, the Presidio Stockade at Fort Winfield Scott was the site of the *Presidio 27 Mutiny*, a defining moment in the growing movement against the war in Vietnam. On October 14, 1968, 27 prisoners in the stockade staged a peaceful protest, reading their list of demands against harsh conditions in the jail and singing *We Shall Overcome*. For this they were tried for mutiny, the most serious military offense. In the days prior, a guard had shot and killed a prisoner and a massive anti-war demonstration had come right up to the Presidio’s gates, the first organized by GIs and veterans nationwide. To commemorate this pivotal time in our history, the Presidio Trust presents two public programs which illuminate the “mutiny,” the context from which it grew, and its significance today. A showing of rare film clips documenting this story followed by a panel discussion October 13 and an immersive experience and re-enactment at the former stockade on October 14, invite visitors to hear first-hand accounts from the original *Presidio 27* soldier activists, their defense attorneys, filmmakers, scholars and historians as they share personal stories and stimulate discussion on such relevant contemporary themes such as a divided nation, dissent, and non-violence.

History of the “Mutiny” at the Stockade

On October 14, 1968, 27 prisoners in the Presidio Stockade broke ranks during roll call formation, sat down in a circle in the grassy yard, joined arms, sang *We Shall Overcome*, and asked to present a list of demands to the stockade

www.presidio.gov

103 Montgomery Street
P.O. Box 29052
San Francisco, CA 94129-0052
T (415) 561-5300

commander that addressed the treatment of fellow prisoners and the conditions inside. The 27 also called for an end to the harassment of Black prisoners and many expressed their opposition to the Vietnam War. Just days before a guard had shot and killed a prisoner and GIs had taken to the streets of San Francisco in massive demonstrations against the war that came right up to the Presidio's gates—the first anti-war marches organized by GIs and veterans in the nation. For staging this peaceful protest, amidst the heightened tensions of a country increasingly divided over the Vietnam War, the Army tried the 27 for mutiny, the most serious military offense. The actions of the 27 and their subsequent trials made headlines, shocked the Army and the nation, brought the GI movement onto the national stage, inspired the anti-war movement, catalyzed improvements in U.S. military prisons around the world, and ultimately helped to end the Vietnam War.

In 1968, as more and more soldiers began questioning the Vietnam War, going AWOL (absent without leave) and deserting the military, many flocked to San Francisco's counterculture. Those who turned themselves in or were picked up by authorities, were brought to the Presidio, the nearest Army post, and held in the Stockade. As its population swelled to nearly twice what it was designed to hold, stockade conditions became increasingly chaotic and overcrowded, a ticking time bomb. The average age of the Presidio 27 was nineteen and all were AWOL's. Most were from working-class backgrounds, some came from career military families, and only five had finished high school. Their convictions for mutiny came with sentences ranging from six months to sixteen years. Years later, and only after great personal hardship and sacrifice, including years spent in federal prison, the military overturned their convictions on appeal and reduced their sentences. In the end, the appeals judge found that rather than intending to usurp or override lawful military authority, requirements for the charge of mutiny, the Presidio 27, in reading their demands to their commanding officers, were actually invoking and imploring the very military authority they had been charged with seeking to override.

Interpretive Programs at the Presidio

As a US Army post, the Presidio has served as the backdrop for decisive moments in our nation's history – some triumphant, some tragic. Today a national park with over seven million visitors annually, the Presidio hosts free public programs and exhibitions to illuminate place-based history, both human and natural, and to use this past to explore themes that have relevance in our world today.

This fall the Presidio Trust is welcoming visitors to the park with a fresh and exciting menu of place-based walks and talks, films and performances, immersive adventures, and family fun. This includes honoring the Presidio's extensive military past with a series of events exploring some of the most distinguished as well as darkest chapters in its history, including the Presidio 27 "Mutiny" at the Stockade; the life of one of the post's most celebrated commanders, [General John J. Pershing](#); commemorations of the Veterans Day/Armistice Day Centennial; a [USO style dance](#); the music of [Presidio Bands](#); and the current special exhibition in the Presidio Officers' Club, [Exclusion: The Presidio's Role in World War II Japanese American Incarceration](#).

Public programs and exhibitions are created by Presidio Trust staff and community partners. The Presidio 27 stories are being documented in a joint oral history project with the University of California Berkeley's Oral History Center. For more information on these and other public programs presented regularly at the historic Presidio Officers' Club and around the Park, visit www.presidio.gov/events.

Attention Calendar Editors: (Photos available upon request)

Event: Presidio 27: Panel Discussion - "Mutiny" at the Stockade

Date: Saturday, October 13

Time: 7 pm to 9 pm

Place: Presidio Officers' Club, 50 Moraga Avenue, San Francisco

Price: FREE

On October 14, 1968, 50 years ago, in a country increasingly divided over the Vietnam War, 27 inmates in the Presidio Stockade staged a peaceful sit-down protest after a fellow prisoner was shot and killed by a guard. For this action, that called attention to the treatment of fellow prisoners and the conditions inside, the Presidio 27 were tried for mutiny, the most serious military offense. A panel discussion followed by audience Q&A, will dive deeper into the history of the Presidio 27 and their contemporary relevance. Presidio Trust Historian, **Barbara Berglund Sokolov**, will moderate a conversation with panelists **David Cortright** (Director of Policy Studies at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame and author of [Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance During the Vietnam War](#)); **Jeff Patterson** (of Courage to Resist, first service member to refuse to fight in Iraq); **Randy Rowland** (one of the Presidio 27); **Susan Schnall** (Navy nurse court-martialed for her actions against the Vietnam War); and **Brendan Sullivan** (Army defense attorney for the Presidio 27). Presented in association with Veterans For Peace San Francisco, Chapter 69.

Link: <https://www.presidio.gov/events/presidio-27-panel-discussion-mutiny-at-the-stockade>

Event: Presidio 27 On Site Immersion: "Mutiny" at the Stockade

Date: Sunday, October 14

Time: 1 pm to 3 pm

Place: Fort Scott Stockade, 1213 Ralston Ave., the Presidio of San Francisco

Price: FREE

On October 14, 1968, 27 prisoners in the Presidio Stockade staged a peaceful sit-down protest to call attention to the treatment of fellow prisoners and the conditions inside. Just days before, a guard had shot and killed a prisoner, and GIs had taken to the streets of San Francisco in massive demonstrations against the war in Vietnam. For staging this peaceful protest, the Army tried the 27 for mutiny, the most serious military offense. On the 50th anniversary of the event, immerse yourself in the experience of the Presidio 27 in the place where it happened, with the people who took part. The afternoon includes music of the day, a virtual tour, audio stories, and the opportunities to converse with the original members of the Presidio 27. Listen to the voices of participants, meet them and hear their stories, and learn about the Presidio 27's relevance today. Presented in association with Veterans for Peace San Francisco, Chapter 69.

Link: <https://www.presidio.gov/events/presidio-27-on-site-mutiny-at-the-stockade>

About the Presidio and the Presidio Trust

The Presidio Trust is a federal agency that manages the Presidio of San Francisco, a national park at the heart of the 82,000-acre Golden Gate National Recreation Area. In partnership with the National Park Service and the non-profit Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, the Presidio Trust brings alive the park's historic, natural, and recreational assets for the inspiration, education, health, and enjoyment of all people at no cost to taxpayers. Spanning nearly 1,500 acres in a spectacular setting at the Golden Gate, the Presidio is defined by its history, spectacular views, natural habitats, and beautiful open spaces. It is home to 3,000 residents and 200 tenant organizations, many of which welcome and serve the public. The Presidio Trust is focused on welcoming all to the national park experience, protecting and enhancing the environment, and operating in service to the public. Learn more at www.presidio.gov.