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THURSDAYS AT THE CLAMBUCKET

THIRTY-ONE YEARS AFTER HE WAS BEATEN BY POLICE IN A NOTORIOUS ANTI-WAR PROTEST, A FORMER CAMPUS RADICAL GOES BACK TO MEET HIS ENEMIES AND LEARN THEIR SIDE OF THE STORY.

BY GEORGE PAUL CSICSERY | It was still dark that morning when 3,500 demonstrators flooded the streets surrounding the Armed Forces Induction Center on Clay Street in downtown Oakland. I had driven down from Berkeley on my motor scooter with my neighbor, an art student named Barbara Fisher, and we milled around as the crowd grew and tension mounted. Facing us was a wall of Oakland policemen, Alameda County Sheriff's deputies and California Highway patrolmen. They stood in a wedge-shaped phalanx that stretched across the street, eight to 10 rows deep.

When the police suddenly lunged forward in a solid mass, Barbara and I were very close to the front line. The wall of cops, marching in half-step, collided with the surprised demonstrators with a loud clap. The noise of cracking bones, thudding bodies and screams echoed from the buildings. Struck across the back, I tripped over

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By Dan Stern
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someone and fell face to the pavement. The world began turning in slow motion and I lay there quietly at the eye of the storm. Then two people fell on top of me and I blacked out. Seconds later the jumble of bodies untangled and I was on my feet again, moving away from the cops. Injured people staggered for cover, blood streaming from their heads. Some gasped for water to wash chemical mace from their eyes. The whole incident had lasted less than two minutes.

Thirty-one years later the memory of that bloody October morning in 1967 has brought me to the Clambucket, a hofbrau-style restaurant near Oakland's industrial port where retired Oakland cops have met for lunch every Thursday for eight years. The hallway that separates the cozy bar and dark-wooded main dining room from the stark vinyl banquet rooms in the back is covered floor to ceiling with photographs and posters. The Oakland Police Department has its own wall, with some group shots going back to the 1920s. The blackboard outside the door of the room where 20 men and three women chew on the heavily battered calamari steak special has a cartoon drawing in chalk of a cop and fireman next to the words, "Really Tired Police and Firemen." Several of the men inside marched in the phalanx that rolled over me.

The Thursday Club is the domain of a dying breed. Surrounded by a sequence of presidential portraits that ends with Ronald Reagan, the men retell vivid and uncensored stories of long-forgotten crimes. Bob Ford, a rangy retired captain with a full head of white hair, introduces me as a writer, mentioning that I got scraped off the sidewalk at a demonstration back in the '60s. The retired cops look me over, then a voice declaims: "I welcome the writers. We have a lot of policemen here who've written reports. We're all fiction writers of sorts."

Eventually, I realize that the men here are as curious about me and what I think of them as I am about discovering who they are. It's all strangely familiar; then I recognize that I am taking part in a ritual I have only read about -- the meeting of former enemies. Ford, an inveterate storyteller who at 75 stands as tall and straight as the day he left the Marine Corps, has no qualms about talking about police clashes with demonstrators or his enduring sense of pride. "Policemen in my age group probably had a larger sense of duty than they do today," Ford says. "We were Depression kids, World War II kids. This strong sense of duty was a part of our reaction to those kids."

Born in Oakland and raised there during the Depression, Ford decided to become a cop after seeing a refrigerator stuffed with food at the house of a classmate whose father was an Oakland policeman. After serving in World War II as a Marine and fighting on Guadalcanal, Bougainville and Guam, he returned home to pursue his dream. In 1947, he became an Oakland cop with a starting salary of \$250 a month. By 1967 he was a lieutenant in Criminal Investigations, and had been reacting to "those kids" for three years.

In 1964, during the Free Speech Movement sit-ins at the University of California, Berkeley, he stood next to the famous police car that the protesters had surrounded and watched Mario Savio address the crowd from on top of the car. "I could empathize with what he was saying about the lack of communication between students and faculty," he tells me upon finishing a glass of milk. "Then Bettina Aptheker warned the students to watch out for the Oakland police because we'd steal their wallets. I could feel this tension begin to build that wasn't there when Mario was speaking. 'Look out, those Oakland cops are here,' like we were the Gestapo or the S.S. It kind of put me off."

Ford's only permanent scar from the 1960s seems to be the four-inch-long tattoo he sports on his right forearm. It's a cartoon drawing of a pig wearing a police uniform and cap, standing over the letters OPD and the dates 1947-1979, Ford's years of service with the Oakland Police Department. Could there be a more fitting tip of the hat to my generation -- whose favorite slur for cop was "pig"? "It's a symbol of our trade," Ford tells me, brimming with sarcasm.

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ABOVE PHOTOGRAPH: CLUB-SWINGING POLICE CLEAR ANTI-WAR CROWD FROM INDUCTION CENTER IN 1967. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OAKLAND TRIBUNE.

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