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Statue of Liberty Case

View from the Inside: I Remember Ray Wood

by Susan Brownmiller

"Ray Wood, let me tell you, I knew him—it was hysterical," screeched the pretty little red-head from the Village Independent Democrats. "They had his picture in the papers the day after the arrests, the back of his head, and my husband said, 'Honey, that's the guy we knew as Woodall.'" A few days later she unearthed some letters that the undercover police agent in the Statue of Liberty bomb plot case had written to her. Nice, chatty letters from a New York Negro involved in CORE to a pretty white acquaintance on a Mississippi summer project: "Dear Miss Blood and Guts," he wrote in an even hand, "Take care of yourself down there. Don't do anything rash. . . . Mississippi is the whole United States of America. . . . I'd like to take a rifle and go down and join you, but that's just daydreaming." In one letter he enclosed some clippings of the summer's Harlem riots and offered his own eye-witness account: "I have seen cops beating cowering Negroes in the streets of Harlem." Was this confused and angry leftwinger Woodall talking or was this the cool and calculating policeman Wood establishing his identity as a cop-hating militant? "Yeah, I knew him, like from around." The speaker was a Negro in his late thirties who left Harlem for West 4th Street many years ago. "What do you want to write about him for? He was just a guy who found a way to get ahead, that's all. You want to tear him down, just like you white liberals always try to tear

a Negro down who's making it. He just found a way to make it a little, that's the Ray Wood story, so leave him be."

After the spectacular arrest of three New York Negroes and assorted white Canadians in the alleged Statue of Liberty bomb plot last February 16, U. S. Attorney General Nicholas de B. Katzenbach fired off a letter to New York City Police Commissioner Michael Murphy with a note of special congratulations to Detective Raymond Wood for his "remarkable undercover work." To a covey of bewildered East Village chicks, "undercover" is an ironic sick joke. One determined young lady rang the old familiar number and was told by Wood-Woodall's roommate, "It's best if you don't call here again." Romance is chancy in the city of opportunity. Later, the number was disconnected.

For the Cause

In the middle of April of last year, shortly after the plans for the controversial World's Fair stall-in had been announced by three rebel New York City chapters of CORE, a tall, good-looking Negro who called himself Ray Woodall walked into the Bronx CORE office and asked if he could work "for the cause." He dressed well, was soft-spoken and said he was 27, a graduate of Manhattan College and currently studying law at Fordham. He indicated that this was his first militant civil-rights activity but mentioned a slight association with a Bronx reform democratic club with whom he was disenchanted because of their pussyfooting around on civil rights.

If CORE had placed an advertisement in the Amsterdam News describing what it was looking for, Woodall would have fit the bill. For an organization

which fought one wrenching battle against white domination, and a second against black female leadership, Woodall was the prototype of the new Negro militant. "He was the all-American boy," said one Negro male associate. "He had such leadership ability," said a young white girl wistfully. Probationary membership requirements were winked at. Within two months Woodall was chummy with the executive board members of the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan CORE chapters, and an elected delegate to CORE's national convention in Kansas City, where he chaired the dissident New York caucus. "In CORE we suspected the white folks as the cops or the organized leftists," says Dwayne Bey, a dedicated photography student and former activist from Brooklyn CORE, "but who would have looked at him?"

This was a time of hectic organization and front-page publicity for CORE. Woodall sat-in at the World's Fair, and slept-in at the Bronx Terminal Market construction site. He vigilled for Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman at Foley Square and marshalled demonstrators at the Democratic convention in Atlantic City. During the Harlem riots he captained a picketline at police headquarter on Centre Street. When spirits were down, it was Woodall who led the group in freedom songs. He had a beautiful voice.

Ray Woodall was a man's man and a ladies' man. With the men he fooled around with Karate, smoked some, and drank. He bartended at all the fund-raising parties. With the women, "Well, it got so he couldn't go on a picket line because all the girls were chasing him," says a Village observer. "You know the expression. We call them 'baggel babies.' They go after any-

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VID Collects For Greenville

The Village Independent Democrats are collecting money, food, tents, cots, shoes, and sleeping bags for striking farmers in their adopted town of Greenville, Mississippi.

On Monday, Negro tractor drivers, who earn \$6 for a 14 hour day, struck the Andrews Plantation, near Greenville. They and their families are now faced with eviction from the land. Their strike, however,

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ZEN



View from the Inside: I Remember Ray Wood

Continued from page 3

one black in trousers. Woodall was cool. He was the sweetheart of the bagel set. Each girl thought she was the only one. I guess they just didn't want to see the truth."

Physical Metamorphosis
Woodall was named Bronx CORE housing chairman and also put in charge of a voter registration project. "He goofed up," says a member. "We began to wonder if he was just jive talk and no action." An interesting physical metamorphosis occurred in Woodall as the summer progressed. The clean shirt and pants gave way to dirty blue denims. His hair grew longer.

The attempted citizen's arrest of Mayor Wagner was his last major activity with CORE. Woodall, Bronx CORE Chairman Herbert Callender, and a third participant were arrested when they stormed city hall to arrest the Mayor. Woodall, who had assiduously avoided arrest on other CORE projects, required special dispensation from the courts to prevent his being fingerprinted and thus possibly exposed. He apparently felt by this time that his work with CORE was not as fruitful as he and his superiors had expected. He had found a few marijuana smokers among the fringe membership and witnessed the illegal sale of drinks at the fund-raising parties at which he bartended. He had been able to tip off Centre Street to a couple of demonstrations before they occurred. CORE was getting disgusted with him, and he in turn said he was disgusted with them. He offered as proof of CORE's irresponsibility the fact that he had to pay his own (the police department's) money in court for the Wagner arrest fine.

During the summer of 1963, Raymond A. Wood, an off-and-on teletype operator, was genuinely studying a business course at Fordham (his third college try). He sent in a postcard to the Great Books club requesting information about their educational program, and Great Books sent a salesman, a serious young man named Paul Boutelle, to interview the prospective customer at his Bronx apartment. Boutelle and Wood hit it off nicely. They were both Negro, about the same age. Both were interested in self-improvement. They discussed Wood's finances and decided he couldn't possibly afford the \$295 for the Great Books set. They liked each other well enough to exchange addresses and phone numbers, and before he left, Boutelle gave Wood some literature about a cause he was interested in, the Committee to Aid the Monroe Defendants. Neither man followed up the initial contact.

Untrained Agent

What Wood hadn't told Boutelle was that he had an application pending with the New York City Police Department. On April 18, 1964, Wood's appointment came through. On that day, and without preliminary training at the police academy, a highly unusual procedure, Wood was sent into CORE as an undercover agent.

In July of 1964, Boutelle, who had gotten immersed in politics as the chairman of the Metropolitan Freedom Now party, addressed a meeting at the Militant Labor Forum on University Place. Ray Woodall came over to him at the meeting's end, shook hands and said, "Remember, you solicited me for the Great Books." Boutelle did remember the young man who had wanted to improve himself. He didn't think anything was strange about Wood becoming Woodall. "People sometimes shorten their names," he says. "I just made a new notation on the next page of my address book, marking down Woodall and his new Bronx address." Woodall told Boutelle he had been working with CORE but was disgusted with their hypocrisy.

By October of 1964, Woodall was working actively with Freedom Now, a group several degrees to the left of CORE. He told his new friends he had a job with Railway Express. Boutelle asked Woodall if he would like to be secretary-treasurer of Metropolitan Freedom Now, and Woodall agreed. Together they opened a checking account for the new party at a Chase Manhattan branch in the Bronx. They were the only ones empowered to sign checks. Boutelle believes, although he hasn't checked recently, that the account is still in existence, with a balance of \$45.

Freedom Now had its organizational problems, but the two

men became friendly. Boutelle introduced Woodall to Robert Collier, another friend of his who was working with Freedom Now. Walter Bowe, a Village jazz musician and judo instructor, fell by about that time, and so did Khaleel Sayyed. The young men palled around, attended YSA parties, showed each other Karate stunts, and tried to organize a series of lecture classes. Woodall was going to teach Negro history. Paul Boutelle had less time this fall and winter for politics. He was working for Great Books and driving a taxi cab at night. One day he read in the papers that Sayyed, Collier, and Bowe had been arrested in a Statue of Liberty bomb plot, and that Ray Wood was a police agent.

Different Pictures

The details or non-details of the bomb conspiracy will have their day in court. The conspiracy trial currently under way at the U. S. Courthouse on Foley Square, where Wood as Woodall had vigilled for the three from Mississippi, alternately pictures him as a hero cop or agent provocateur.

Roy Innis, a medical researcher at Montefiore Hospital and a leading member of Manhattan CORE, ran into Wood not long ago at a Chinese restaurant on upper Broadway. Wood was back in a clean suit and shirt. His hair was cropped. The two former friends were embarrassed at the

chance encounter. "He told me he called some of the old people and they understood," Innis recalls. "I gave him my new home phone number and told him to call me. I really wanted to talk to the guy. One thing I do understand. A policeman starts at \$6000. How many Negroes out of high school or college can earn that? But he marched with us on picket lines and literally slept with us for days at a time on our demonstrations. He saw police brutality in Harlem. Didn't something of CORE have to rub off?"

Prints Shown

Woodblock prints by Shiko Munakata are on exhibit at Pratt Graphic Art Center, 831 Broadway at 13th Street, through June 10.

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