

# **Military Project Organizing Manual: Resources for Starting a Local Chapter**



**“There has to be a point when we reach a high enough number of troops in our peace effort that a unified boycott of all military action will have a desired effect.”**

**- Soldier X**

**“The single largest failure of the anti-war movement at this point is the lack of outreach to the troops.”**

**-Tim Goodrich,  
Iraq Veterans Against the War**

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## **Why We Are Here**

*Note: A Military Project organizing committee member (and veteran) crafted this statement for distribution at military installations to explain our presence and show our support for anti-war troops.*

Our mission is to support and provide aid to soldiers opposed to continuing the war in Iraq. All troops—including members of the Guard and Reserve—have every right to question and oppose this war and occupation. No one has more of a right.

Every time you speak out, it gives a voice to the soldiers in Iraq who don't want to be there. It gives others the courage to resist and openly dissent inside the military. This takes real courage—not the false courage of those who never have and never will be in harm's way.

A soldier's voice, when it's raised, carries authority.

When the U.S. invaded Vietnam, the anti-war movement within our own armed forces was the decisive factor in ending the war.

Now we're at a decisive moment in history. The majority of the American people—including the troops—want the troops to come home now.

GI resistance will stop this war. No one has a bigger stake.

With respect for your service,  
*The Military Project*

## **Building Trust, Solidarity, and Alliances with Troops Is Possible**

(Some Things I Saw When I Was In Iraq)

[Prepared by an Iraq veteran for the meeting “Resistance Where It Counts: Hear Soldiers Who Served In Iraq Report How They Organized Against The War On The Front Lines” November 17, 2006 NYC, sponsored by The Military Project, IVAW and NYCLAW.]

Some Things I Saw When I Was In Iraq:

I apologize but I could not attend because tonight I have drill duty in [xxxx] with my National Guard unit.

In the winter of 2003-2004, my National Guard unit was training to go to Iraq at Ft. Dix, New Jersey. Myself and a friend went around the barracks and hung up flyers on the bulletin boards. They said “Bring them Home Now” and they had a picture of National Guard soldiers in a truck riding down the highway in Iraq. The truckers had a sign that said, “One weekend a month my ass.”

Nearly a year later, while we were in Iraq getting ready to come back home my commander threatened to keep our unit in Iraq. Someone stole the Battalion Flag and a wooden plaque of our unit crest. My commander thought one of us in the unit did it and told us we would stay in theater until he had his items back. It was a bluff and we secretly called him on it.

Myself and a friend sent anonymous emails to the White House, Hillary Clinton, Charles Rangel, The New York Times, The LA Times, The Washington Post, The Village Voice, The Daily News and a few other people. All the emails had the same message that explained our situation, and started, “We are soldiers of Alpha Company and we are being held hostage in Iraq by our lieutenant colonel.”

Less than 24 hours later my lieutenant colonel’s boss informed us that we would be going home as scheduled.

A few months before that, in October of 2004, 19 members of 3rd Platoon 343rd Quartermaster Company refused a mission to deliver fuel. It was the first mutiny of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

I ran a couple of missions with people from the 343. One of the leaders of the refusal — Scott Shealy, ended up in my tent when they separated him from his platoon. From them I learned the untold story of the 343rd:

When the 3rd platoon openly said no and refused that mission in October 2004 it was their third attempt.

Once, around summer of 2004, they tried a sick out.

All of 3rd platoon went to see the triage clinic (sick call for military folk) instead of rolling out for a mission.

The sick out didn’t work.

Their commander simply changed the mission time and ordered them to roll out once all the soldiers moved through triage.

They couldn't get in trouble because you can't formally punish someone for going to sick call in the military.

Another time, the 3rd platoon took cables out of all their trucks so they wouldn't have to go on a mission.

That didn't work either.

When their commander realized they would miss their roll out time he got trucks from another platoon and sent them packing. They didn't get in trouble because the command couldn't prove who did it.

The next time I heard about 3rd platoon was when they openly refused a mission. That worked.

When the story of their unit broke out my girlfriend and activist friends started sending me snail mail about the 343. There was a petition from Staten Island Peace Action, a statement of support from a radical communist group, and a story about New Jersey anti-war activists with a sign reading, "Support the 343rd Troops."

My girlfriend had no idea I knew the 343rd soldiers. Scott Shealy happened to be on his bed across from me in his tent when I got this package. I handed over the petitions and articles to him and he said, "Holy Shit!" Later Staff Sergeant Butler, another 3rd platoon refusal leader, came by to visit Scott. Butler saw the petition and stories and said, "That's wild man." Over several days, he secretly passed them around to the rest of his platoon.

I told my girlfriend to keep sending me stuff and over the next few weeks I handed some five packages over to the

343 with stories and statements of support.

From what I heard, most of 3rd platoon read everything they could get their hands on. Later they all received article 15s — the lowest disciplinary charge they can receive from their commanders — partially because of the support they had from people back home.

To get to the point of all these stories: Building trust, solidarity, and alliances with troops is possible.

Peace and anti-war activists should not be scared of building long term face to face relationships with troops and sharing movies, flyers, petitions, events, and information.

Soldiers will find their own ways to resist if they're motivated to do so.

The point is to motivate them to do so and to let them know you'll have their backs if they do.

Specifically, you can reach troops in the New York metropolitan area.

There are at least six major armories in the five boroughs. Once a month, on a weekend like this one, they're filled with hundreds of soldiers.

Ft. Dix, New Jersey, a little more than two hours from here, is now swelling with 5,000 to 10,000 National Guard troops training to go to Iraq, many for the second time. They're in the 5900 buildings.

Activists can go to armories and military bases with information of how to sign the regress of grievances asking congress for “prompt withdrawal.”

Activists can ask National Guard and Reserve to sign the petition for the government to compensate for their civilian salaries if they're deployed.

Both are legal under UCMJ military law. Both allow activists to engage troops in conversation.

You can give soldiers your contact information, be available to hear what they have to say, and you can offer to write them while they're in Iraq.

You can also reach out to troops you know personally and talk to their friends clandestinely.

These activities are legal but the risks are greater than the risk of doing vigils and peace marches in empty streets.

You should be cautious but not scared.

The risks are only greater because doing active concrete work to raise the consciousness of troops, and backing them if they take action on that consciousness, threatens the war makers more than marching in empty streets and standing around holding candles.

The authorities take these activities seriously but most of the time, it is not been the authorities that has prevented anti-war activists from reaching the troops.

It has been anti-war activists themselves.

**Introduction:**  
**Why we do this work**

Forging New Links With The Troops  
Turning Against This War:  
They Have The Power To Stop It.

Remarks at the “Exposing the  
Empire” panel, Rochester Institute of  
Technology, Rochester NY, 3.24.06,  
presented by RIT Antiwar:

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Thomas Barton compiles the *GI Special*  
newsletter, lives in New York City, and  
is a hospital worker and union shop  
steward.

During the American war on Vietnam,  
Barton helped distribute on Vietnam GI,  
a monthly newspaper for troops  
opposed to that war edited by Vietnam  
Veteran Jeff Sharlet. Ten thousand  
copies monthly were sent to anti-war  
troops.

Today, Barton is a member of the  
Military Project, an organization of  
veterans and antiwar activists who focus  
on providing aid and comfort to service  
personnel who question, oppose or  
resist U.S. military operations in  
Afghanistan and Iraq.

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Good evening brothers and sisters,

It’s an honor to be allowed to speak  
here today in Rochester.

Things are pretty messed up these days,  
but that’s not new.

The Biblical prophet Isaiah had this to  
say to the traitors who ran the  
government of his day:

“Ye beat my people to pieces, and grind  
the faces of the poor,

“Ye have eaten up the vineyard, the  
spoil of the poor is in your houses.

“Thy prices loveth gifts, and followeth  
after rewards, they judge not the  
fatherless, neither doth the cause of the  
widow come unto them.

“How is the faithful city become a  
harlot,

“It was full of judgment; righteousness  
lodged in it,

“But now murderers.”

Sounds familiar, doesn’t it?

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The good news is how far we have  
come in a year.

Every day more and more Americans  
are turning against the war.

Most importantly, resistance is growing  
inside the armed services as well.  
Where it really counts.

But you don’t have to take my word  
that’s where it really counts.

Let’s look at some history.

During the Vietnam War, the anti-war  
movement at home was necessary to  
stop the war, but it was not sufficient.

The resistance in Vietnam was necessary to stop the war, but it was not sufficient.

But the rebellion against the war in the armed forces was both necessary and sufficient to stop the war.

And the war stopped.

It was the greatest insurrection against an Imperial war since the rebellion of the Russian army in 1917.

But you don't have to believe me about that, and you shouldn't.

Check out: Heinl, Jr. Col. Robert D.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE ARMED FORCES, *Armed Forces Journal*, 1971

But you don't have to believe Col. Heinl about this, and you shouldn't.

There's a new documentary film, *Sir No Sir*, opening next month in theaters across America that shows us the war in Vietnam didn't end because the politicians or the rich or the commanders or even the anti-war movement wanted it to end.

The war in Vietnam ended because the troops there rebelled against it wholesale. There were "search and evade missions," arranging private truces with people they didn't see as "the enemy" anymore.

There were flat-out refusals of combat missions. There were more lethal expressions of opposition to those in command as well.

And the rebellion spread to the Air Force: pilots refused to bomb. And it

spread to the Navy: sailors disabled their ships so they couldn't engage in combat.

In *Sir, No Sir*, you will meet the Vietnam troops up close and personal, and you will see them with your own eyes, wrecking the war machine until it breaks down completely.

Lots of soldiers can fight in wars.

It takes something very special in soldiers to stop one. Honor and respect to them all.

Respect also to the civilians who forged the links to the anti-war troops, gave them aid and comfort, and helped make that rebellion possible.

Now it is time for us to follow the instruction of the prophet:

Go thou and do likewise.

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Today, the anti war movement is necessary to stop the war in Iraq, but it is not sufficient.

Today, the Iraqi resistance to Imperial invasion and occupation is necessary to stop the war, but it is not sufficient.

But the coming rebellion in the armed forces will be both necessary and sufficient. It may not come as soon as we might wish, but it will come. And this war will stop.

But you don't have to take my word for that, and you shouldn't.

Here is what one soldier in the 1st ID wrote to GI Special on behalf of a group of anti-war soldiers in Baquaba Iraq:

“Before any soldier risks going to prison he should realize that his ability to communicate with other troops will be limited.

“We choose our battles and continue to speak out in our underground action.

“There has to be a point when we reach a high enough number of troops in our peace effort that a unified boycott of all military action will have a desired effect.”

“A unified boycott of all military action will have a desired effect.”

Think about that.

But you don't have to take his word for it, and you shouldn't.

Thanks to a Zogby poll released this month, you don't have to:

Today we know that 72% of the troops in Iraq say “get out this year,” and 29% are for immediate withdrawal.

What's more important is that because of the publicity about that poll, now those troops know it too.

Think about that.

Now they know there is a new political majority among men and women in arms in Iraq, which may be summarized as follow: this bullshit has gone on too long and it has to stop.

It's only a matter of time before this dawning consciousness finds expression

it ways that are unmistakable, and will shake the world.

The Imperial politicians, Republican and Democrat, always knew what Iraq was really about.

They thought they would win an empire of oil.

They have ended by losing their army.

But those troops are not lost to us.

Let all of us opposed to this evil war open our arms to them and say Brothers and Sisters, welcome home.

Welcome home to sanity, decency and honor.

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It's time now for Veterans, military family members and responsible civilians to act.

Not talk, act.

Specifically:

To give aid and comfort to members of the regular armed forces, reserves and Guard who are turning against the war.

In New York City, members of Veterans For Peace, Military Families Speak Out, and the Military Project are reaching out to make contact with National Guard soldiers.

Many of them have served in Iraq, some expect to be sent soon. They thank us for coming, for the publications against the war we offer, and so far, not a harsh word spoken.

This can be done anywhere there is a military presence: National Guard, Reserves or regular armed forces, like right here, and a small, or large, group of allies.

Think about that, and where that can lead.

Nothing is more important today than forging new links with the troops turning against this war. They have the power to stop it.

Please, let us all now most solemnly pledge to our brothers and sisters in arms:

We will not turn our back on you.

We will help you do what is necessary to stop this war.

Together, we can end forever the power of the predators who rule America. They have betrayed us all.

If we act together to take back our lives and our futures from those who would steal both, there is no force on earth that can stop us.

We need you by our side.

When you enlisted, you took an oath to defend our liberties. The time has come.

We must have your protection from the enemies domestic, the Imperial politicians, Republican and Democrat, who hate our liberties.

Without you we are truly lost. With you, everything is possible.

Now let's get to work.

Thank you for your attention.

## **Military Project** **Points of Unity**

Members of the Military Project:

1. Do not “support the troops” in the abstract. We focus on support for Armed Forces resistance, giving aid and comfort to those who are against the war.
2. Are for the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of all occupation troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.
3. Believe that oppressed peoples and nations have the right to self-determination and the right to resist Imperial invasion and occupation.
4. Do not require others to be in complete agreement to work together with them towards common objectives.
5. Reject the idea that organizations working together on a common project must not debate differences about the best way forward for the movement. On the contrary, we encourage debate and discussion as the most useful method to arrive at the best course of action.
6. May choose to support candidates for elective office who are for immediate withdrawal from Iraq, but do not support candidates opposed to bringing our troops home now.
7. Are committed to organizational democracy. This means control of our organization by the membership, through freely elected delegates to any coordinating bodies that may be formed, whether at local, regional, or national levels. Any member in good standing may run for any position, with or without a slate. Coordinating bodies must report their actions, decisions and votes to the membership who elected them for approval or rejection.
8. Are committed to putting in time taking action in an organized way to reach out to members of the armed forces, including local community Reserve and National Guard units.
9. Are not commissioned officers, active duty or drilling reserve, or former members of the military police or any law enforcement agency.

## **The Olive-Drab Rebels: Military Organizing During The Vietnam Era (excerpted)**

Matthew Rinaldi  
Radical America Vol.8 No.3 1974

### **Introduction**

"The morale, discipline, and battle worthiness of the U. S. Armed Forces are, with a few salient exceptions, lower and worse than at any time in this century and possibly in the history of the United States.

By every conceivable indicator, our army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and non-commissioned officers, drug-ridden, and dispirited where not near mutinous. Elsewhere than Vietnam, the situation is nearly as serious."

So wrote Col. Robert D. Heintz in June of 1971. In an article entitled "The Collapse of the Armed Forces", written for the eyes of the military leadership and published in the Armed Forces Journal, Heintz also stated, "Sedition, coupled with disaffection within the ranks, and externally fomented with an audacity and intensity previously inconceivable, infests the Armed Services." This frank statement accurately reflects the tremendous upheaval which occurred among rank and file GIs during the era of the Vietnam War. Covered up whenever possible and frequently denied by the military brass, this upheaval was nevertheless a significant factor in the

termination of the ground war, and helped to imbue a generation of working class youth with a deep-rooted contempt for America's authority structure.

Military morale was considered high before the war began. In fact, the pre-Vietnam Army was considered the best the United States had ever put into the field. Consequently, the military high command was taken quite by surprise by the rapid disintegration of the very foundations of their power. But the brass were not alone in their surprise; the American left was equally unprepared for the sudden appearance of rebelliousness among GIs. The left had only recently emerged from the highly polarized years of the civil rights movement, and was still permeated with a consciousness that distrusted whites in general and working class whites in particular. As a consequence, in the early years of the war the general attitude of the left was that whites were rednecks and were somehow personally implicated in the continuation of the war.

The class composition of the American left, particularly of its ruling segments, played a significant role in separating it from the realities of the GI experience. When the war in Vietnam first became an issue, early in 1963, the primary base for organized anti-war sentiment was the intellectual community and the middle class. As American presence reached major proportions in 1964 and 1965, the anti-war movement solidified its strength in the middle class but had little impact on the blue-collar working class. As a consequence, the movement developed primarily middle class forms of resistance, which meant that there was heavy emphasis on draft resistance

and draft counseling. While actual resistance only reached minor proportions, draft counseling and effective methods of draft evasion saved the majority of white middle class youth from the U.S. military.

Simultaneously, there were economic factors molding the composition of the armed forces. Middle class youth could afford college and looked toward professional careers, while working class youth were systematically channeled into the military. Though the draft claimed a high number, a large percentage also enlisted, since job opportunities were limited and the military seemed to be inevitable after high school. In addition, the court system continued to offer "voluntary enlistment" as an alternative to a couple of years in jail, and many guys thought at the time that it was a good offer. As a result of these factors, the Armed Forces were quite efficiently filling their ranks with third world and white working class youth.

The image these youth had of life in the military was shattered quite rapidly by the harsh reality they faced.

Those who had enlisted found that the promises made by recruiters vanished into thin air once they were in boot camp. Guarantees of special training and choice assignments were simply swept away. This is a fairly standard procedure used to snare enlistees. In fact, the military regulations state that only the enlistee, not the military, is bound by the specifics of the recruiting contract. In addition, both enlistees and draftees faced the daily harassment, the brutal de-personalization, and ultimately the dangers and meaninglessness of the endless ground war in Vietnam. These

pressures were particularly intense for third world GIs, most of whom were affected by the rising black consciousness and a heightened awareness of their oppression.

These forces combined to produce the disintegration of the Vietnam era military. This disintegration developed slowly, but once it reached a general level it became epidemic in its proportions. In its midst developed a conscious and organized resistance, which both furthered the disintegration and attempted to channel it in a political direction. The following will be an attempt to chronicle the growth of GI resistance and to study the attempts by the left to organize and intensify that resistance.

### **Early Resistance**

In understanding the development of resistance within the military it is important to focus on the organic connection between the civilian political situation and the level of struggle within the military. The fact that people pass through the military, that it is clearly defined as a transitory situation, and that there are extreme dangers involved in resisting leads to the fact that greater pressure is required to bring about an upsurge among soldiers than is required to bring about an upsurge among civilians. Consequently, if pressures are developing within the society as a whole, they will find expression first within the civilian world. New recruits will then bring this outlook of developing upsurge with them into the military.

This phenomenon developed during the Vietnam era. The early years of the Vietnam War, up until 1966, were fairly

quiet. While there was protest against the war, this protest was still quite isolated, and to the majority of Americans the war could still be justified on the grounds of classical anti-communism. In addition, the black liberation struggle had not yet reached the point where it was affecting the consciousness of the mass of black youth, while similarly the anti-authoritarian dope culture had not yet reached widespread proportions among white youth. Consequently, soldiers entered the military in this period with a passive acceptance of the war and a predisposition to submit to military authority.

At the same time, the mechanisms of internal control were functioning at maximum efficiency within the armed forces. Military personnel are deprived of the rights and protections of the civilian constitutional legal system; instead they are subject to the feudalistic laws of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). Under the UCMJ there is no trial by your peers. Rather, rank and file GIs are tried by boards composed largely of officers and NCOs. The attitude of these trial boards was accurately reflected by an Admiral serving on the Twelfth Naval District Court who commented, "Anyone sent up here for trial must be guilty of something." Under the circumstances it's hardly surprising that the military achieves convictions in 94% of its court martials.

The ever-present fear that is used to control GIs is quite consciously cultivated by the military. This is done partly by creating a state in which you never know what the reaction will be if you break a particular rule. Thus, at times minor infractions are treated with

very harsh punishment, while at other times they are treated lightly. Major offenses are more likely to receive harsh punishment, yet they can also result in simple discharge. It's totally unpredictable. The result is to keep GIs constantly off balance; afraid to take the slightest move toward resistance because there is no accurate way to judge the response of the authorities. In a world where an authority has total control over your life and seems to exercise this control in a completely arbitrary manner, the safest course is to remain anonymous.

The years 1966 and 1967 saw the first acts of resistance among GIs. Given the general passivity within the ranks and the tight control exercised by the brass, these first acts required a clear willingness for self-sacrifice. For the most part they were initiated by men who had had some concrete link with the left prior to their entrance into the military.

The first major public act of resistance was the refusal, in June of 1966, of three privates from Fort Hood, Texas to ship out to Vietnam. The three men, David Samas, James Johnson, and Dennis Mora, had just completed training and were on leave before their scheduled departure for the war zone. Mora had been affiliated with the W.E.B. Du Bois Clubs in New York prior to being drafted, and is generally considered to have been the prime mover behind the refusal. The three announced a press conference, but federal agents arrested them before they could make their statement. Nevertheless, the fledgling New York peace movement succeeded in giving the case wide publicity. The men were each eventually sentenced to three years at hard labor.

There followed a series of individual acts of resistance. Ronald Lockman, a black GI who had also had previous connections with the Du Bois Clubs, refused orders to Vietnam with the slogan, "I follow the Fort Hood Three. Who will follow me?" Capt. Howard Levy, who had been around the left in New York, refused to teach medicine to the Green Berets, and Capt. Dale Noyd refused to give flying instructions to prospective bombing pilots. These acts were consciously geared toward political resistance. Since the GI movement was a heterogeneous phenomenon reflecting many different trends in the civilian world, there was also in this period the beginning of a kind of moral witness resistance. The first clear incident occurred at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, where in April of 1967 five GIs staged a pray-in for peace on base. Two of these GIs refused a direct order to cease praying and were subsequently court-martialed. While this act was never duplicated pro-forma, it was the forerunner of numerous acts of resistance based on religious and moral grounds.

The majority of these early instances of resistance were actually simply acts of refusal; refusal to go to Vietnam, to carry out training, to obey orders. They were important in that they helped to directly confront the intense fear that all GIs feel; they helped to shake up the general milieu of passivity. But they still focused on individual responsibility. In a sense they were a continuation of civilian resistance politics transferred to the military setting, the notion that individual refusal would shake the system. But the military was quite willing to deal with the small number of GIs who might put their heads on the chopping block; to really affect the

military machine would require a more general rebellion.

In 1967 the left was still suspicious of, and at times hostile to, GIs, but there was an increasing minority, particularly within the Marxist left, which was beginning to come to grips with the possibility and necessity of doing political work within the military. This growing awareness led to four different efforts to do such organizing.

The first attempt was the creation of a newspaper called VIETNAM GI. The paper was created by Jeff Sharlet, a vet who had served in Vietnam in the early years of the war. He came back to the States fairly disillusioned, returned to school and found himself alienated by the student movement, particularly by its hostility to GIs. In early 1967 he set out to create some form of communication and agitation within the military. That vehicle was VIETNAM GI, which was very effective at this time. It carried a lot of very grisly news about the war, but it also carried lots of letters from GIs and consistently ran an interview with a GI either just back from Nam or recently involved in an act of resistance. The paper was widely circulated and well received.

Unfortunately, VIETNAM GI never advanced beyond the purely agitational stage. Vets on the staff occasionally visited bases around the country, but these visits were primarily to aid distribution of the paper. There was never an attempt to link various contacts together and create some form of organization. With Sharlet's early death from cancer, the paper never advanced beyond this point. The paper continued, but GI resistance advanced to the point where there was on-base

organizing going on and local papers coming out, and those local papers were for the most part more interesting to GIs than a national paper put out by vets. So VIETNAM GI faded in importance. Nevertheless, it represented a significant breakthrough when it first appeared, and helped play a catalytic role throughout the service.

Another approach was an early attempt at colonization by the Socialist Workers Party. Pfc. Howard Petrick, a full member of the SWP, was stationed at Fort Hood and began to distribute literature within his barracks. The authorities reacted swiftly and Petrick found himself threatened with a court martial. The SWP focused on this as a violation of "GI rights", and decided on a campaign for GI rights as their strategic approach to military organizing. This had two flaws. First, while Petrick had in fact been attempting to organize his barracks, the effect of the SWP campaign was to focus on the case as another act of individual resistance. Secondly, while GIs certainly understood that they had no "rights", they also understood that this was not the basis of their oppression. The war, the class system in the military, the general oppression of their lives was far more potent to them. Consequently, when GIs did become politically involved, the issue of "GI rights" became quite minor. The Socialist Workers Party, however, never advanced beyond this conception, and while their early work helped to stimulate GI resistance, they became increasingly irrelevant when GI resistance became widespread.

The most dramatic of these early organizing efforts, and the first to really focus on the need for collective resistance, was the work done by Andy

Stapp at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Stapp entered the Army independently, experienced with the civilian left but unconnected to any organization. He began rapping with the guys in his barracks, giving out literature, and gathering a small group around him. The brass soon moved against him, demanded that he surrender his literature, and busted him when he refused to hand it over. At this point his efforts at organizing could have ended. But he appealed to a variety of left groups for support, and the Workers World Party in New York came forward to help. Their influence transformed the nature and future of his work. Their immediate impact, the result of their determined presence at Fort Sill and the media coverage they were able to generate, was to save Stapp from heavy repression. He served 45 days at hard labor in 1967, was busted again and acquitted, and was finally discharged for "subversion and disloyalty" in April of 1968.

The political impact of the Workers World Party on Stapp was profound. His work had at first been courageous but unfocused. The party provided a focus. They emphasized the need for organization, and convinced Stapp of the viability of calling for a union within the military. Consequently, a few months before his discharge Stapp helped to found the American Servicemen's Union, and as a civilian he assumed its leadership. Through the ASU and its paper, THE BOND, GIs around the world were exposed to the concept of organization, and this influence helped to stimulate spontaneous organizing efforts at many bases.

Unfortunately, the long-term effects of the intimate link between the ASU and

the Workers World Party were largely detrimental. The WWP focused its attention largely on the media and on spectacular acts of confrontation, but rarely undertook any consistent day-to-day organizing. Ironically, they contributed the concept of organization but were unable to implement it. As a result the ASU collected paper memberships, circulated THE BOND around the world, but was never able to sustain an organization. Its attempts in the next few years to connect with local organizing groups consistently led to sectarian battles, leaving the local efforts in a shambles.

The fourth attempt in this period was the creation, by leftwing civilians, of the off-base coffeehouses. The coffeehouses represented the first significant step by the civilian movement to reach GIs. The first coffeehouse was set up at Fort Jackson in 1967, and soon afterwards coffeehouses were established at Fort Leonard Wood and Fort Hood. These eventually developed into a network of coffeehouses, storefronts, and bookstores that covered most major bases in all four branches of the service.

The original conception behind the coffeehouses, while fundamentally valid, was faulty in two regards. First, the initial coffeehouses were located at major basic training bases, the idea being to struggle with the brass for the mind of the GI during his basic training. If the brass won, this thinking ran, they would have an effective killer in Vietnam; if the coffeehouse won, there would be refusals and disaffection. Basic trainees, however, are completely isolated. Not only are they restricted to base and supervised around the clock but also their training areas are even off-limits to other GIs. Consequently, there was

never a real opportunity for organizers to relate to basic trainees. In a sense, though, it didn't matter, for it wasn't the arguments of the brass versus the arguments of the coffeehouse that were going to alter the thinking of these GIs. It was their concrete experience in the military and in the war that was going to transform them into dissidents.

The second error concerned the nature and style of the coffeehouses. The original conception was that by creating a semi-bohemian counter-culture setting, it would be possible to reach the "most easily organized" GIs. This emphasis on culture did in fact attract in the early days those GIs who were just getting into the dope scene, but it didn't necessarily lead them toward political action. Consequently, the political work often floundered. The advantage, though, of the coffeehouses and storefronts was that while their original strategic conceptions were faulty, the form in which they existed was quite malleable, and thus most of the projects were able to transform themselves to meet the developing needs of the GI resistance.

The reaction of the military brass to these first attempts at organizing were in keeping with traditional military practice. Individual GIs court martialed for political activities received stiff penalties, and any groupings that developed were broken and scattered. But the brass were still dealing with a situation in which their forces were still fairly intact. Though the early rumblings of discontent were spreading, the troops were still fighting in Vietnam, orders were still being obeyed, and the chain of command still functioned smoothly, so there was not yet an apparent need for the brass to develop

an overall strategic approach to political activity in its ranks. The next few years would create such a need.

### **The Ground War Expands, The Movement Grows**

The period from 1968 to 1970 was a period of rapid disintegration of morale and widespread rebelliousness within the U.S. military. There were a variety of causes contributing to this development. By this time the war had become vastly unpopular in the general society, demonstrations were large and to some degree respectable, and prominent politicians were speaking out against the continuation of the war. For a youth entering the military in these years the war was already a questionable proposition, and with the ground war raging and coffins coming home every day very few new recruits were enthusiastic about their situation. In addition, the rising level of black consciousness and the rapidly spreading dope culture both served to alienate new recruits from military authority. Thus, GIs came into uniform in this period with a fairly negative predisposition.

Their experience in the military and in the war transformed this negative predisposition into outright hostility. The nature of the war certainly accelerated this disaffection; a seemingly endless ground war against an often-invisible enemy, with the mass of people often openly hostile, in support of a government both unpopular and corrupt. The Vietnamese revolutionaries also made attempts to reach out to American GIs. A medic stationed at Chu Lai told how he made friends with a local Vietnamese boy who took him on walks around nearby

villages and talked to him about the war. One day, after there was a trust developed between them, the boy pointed out a man casually walking from shop to shop and explained that he was the local NLF tax collector. "It really blew my mind", the GI later said, "to realize that the people right around our base were willingly supporting the Viet Cong."

Many GIs also learned through bitter experience that the ARVN troops were not only unreliable allies, but that in a tight situation they could be as dangerous as the NLF. The ARVN troops would often fade away at the height of a battle, and it was not uncommon for them to turn their fire on the Americans if the NLF was making headway. The feeling spread among U, S, troops that they were fighting this war all alone. These experiences created a mood of despair, disgust, and anger, as GIs turned increasingly to dope and played out their time with the simple hope of survival. As one GI put it, "Our morale, man ? It's so low you can't even see it."

This situation led to the rapid decay of the U. S. military's fighting ability in Vietnam. The catchword was CYA ("cover your ass"); as one GI expressed it, "You owe it to your body to get out of here alive." Low morale, hatred for the Army, and huge quantities of dope all contributed to the general desire to avoid combat. One platoon sergeant stated, "Almost to a man, the members of my platoon oppose the war ... The result is a general malaise which pervades the entire company. There is a great deal of pressure on leaders at the small unit level, such as myself, to conduct what are popularly referred to as 'search and avoid' missions, and to do

so as safely and cautiously as possible." The brass watched these developments with general helplessness. As a brigade commander in the 25th Division put it, "Back in 1967, officers gave orders and didn't have to worry about the sensitivities of the men. Today, we have to explain things to the men and find new ways of doing the job. Otherwise, you can send the men on a search mission, but they won't search."

While this malaise seriously affected the war effort, the spectre of open mutiny was even more startling. In 1968 there were 68 recorded incidents of combat refusal in Vietnam. By 1969 entire units were refusing orders. Company A of the 21st Infantry Division and units of the 1st Air Cavalry Division refused to move into battle. By 1970 there were 35 separate combat refusals in the Air Cavalry Division alone. At the same time, physical attacks on officers, known as "fraggings", became widespread, 126 incidents in 1969 and 271 in 1970. Clearly, this army did not want to fight.

The situation stateside was less intense but no less disturbing to the military brass. Desertion and AWOL became absolutely epidemic. In 1966 the desertion rate was 14.7 per thousand, in 1968 it was 26.2 per thousand, and by 1970 it had risen to 52.3 per thousand; AWOL was so common that by the height of the war one GI went AWOL every three minutes. From January of '67 to January of '72 a total of 354,112 GIs left their posts without permission, and at the time of the signing of the peace accords 98,324 were still missing. Yet these figures represent only the most disaffected; had the risks not been so great, the vast majority of Vietnam era GIs would have left their uniforms behind.

There is a common misconception that it was draftees who were the most disaffected elements in the military. In fact, it was often enlistees who were most likely to engage in open rebellion. Draftees were only in for two years, went in expecting the worst, and generally kept their heads down until they got out of uniform. While of course many draftees went AWOL and engaged in group resistance when it developed, it was enlistees who were most angry and most likely to act on that anger. For one thing, enlistees were in for three or four years; even after a tour of duty in Nam they still had a long stretch left in the service. For another thing, they went in with some expectations, generally with a recruiter's promise of training and a good job classification, often with an assurance that they wouldn't be sent to Vietnam. When these promises weren't kept, enlistees were really pissed off. A study commissioned by the Pentagon found that 64% of chronic AWOLs during the war years were enlistees, and that a high percentage were Vietnam vets. The following incident at a GI movement organizing conference illustrates this point:

"A quick poll of the GIs and vets in the room showed that the vast majority of them had come from Regular Army, three or four year enlistments. Many of them expressed the notion that, in fact, it was the enlistees and not discontented draftees who had formed the core of the GI movement. A number of reasons were offered for this, including the fact many enlistees do enlist out of the hope of training, & better job, or other material reasons. When the Army turns out to be a repressive and bankrupt institution, they

are the most disillusioned and the most ready to fight back."

Resistance in this period took a variety of forms. Spontaneous and often creative individual acts were widespread, from subtle expressions of disrespect to sabotage on the job. More significantly, the general mood of anger and alienation led to a number of instances of spontaneous group acts of rebellion. These were likely to explode at any time. Often they occurred in the stockades, which were over-crowded with AWOLs and laced with political organizers. In July of 1968 prisoners seized control of the stockade at Fort Bragg and held it for three days, and in June of 1969 prisoners rebelled in the Fort Dix stockade and inflicted extensive damage before being brought under control. Probably the most famous incident of stockade resistance occurred at the Presidio, where 27 prisoners staged a sit-down during morning formation to protest the shotgun slaying of a fellow prisoner by a stockade guard. The men were charged with mutiny and initially received very heavy sentences, but their sacrifice had considerable impact around the country. After a year their sentences were reduced to time served.

A significant amount of resistance also occurred around riot control. While there were individual white GIs who refused riot control training, such as Pvt. Richard Chase at Fort Hood and Pvt. Leonard Watham at Fort Lewis, it was black GIs who spontaneously reacted in a mass way against being put in the position of being riot troops. During the summer of 1968 troops were put on alert for possible use at the Democratic convention in Chicago, and 43 Black GIs at Fort Hood held an all-

night demonstration declaring their intention to refuse any such orders. This was a harbinger of continued discontent among black soldiers. During the summer of 1969 black GIs in the 3rd Cavalry Division at Fort Lewis walked out of riot control classes en masse, and the brass were so anxious to avoid an incident that they let it pass.

In this milieu of widespread restlessness within the ranks, the left worked to generate conscious political action. The attempts made were varied. Groups like the Progressive Labor Party and the Spartacist League sent in individual members to organize, but they generally isolated themselves and were unsuccessful. The Socialist Workers Party continued to send in members, and at Fort Jackson in 1969 was able to create an organization called GIs United. This group contained a number of very capable organizers, and in March they succeeded in holding a large open meeting on base to rap about the war and racism. Over 100 GIs participated in this free-floating rap session, and the brass moved swiftly to bring the organizers up on charges. But media coverage and public support resulted in the Army taking a different tack; they simply discharged most of the men and scattered the others around the world. Once this incident was over the SWP continued to focus on GI rights, and was never again a significant force in the GI movement.

The ASU continued to be a highly visible force in this period, but it suffered from the limitations of Workers World politics and rarely advanced outside of its New York office. When it did, the results were often disastrous. A clear example of this occurred at Chanute Air Force Base. Here a number of airmen

and radical civilians created a paper called A FOUR YEAR BUMMER (AFB) and began organizing on base. They recognized the need for national connections, and without an understanding of Workers World Party influence decided to affiliate with the ASU. National office people then came to Chanute, and within a short time created an intense split in the group over WWP politics, siphoned off a few members, and left the rest of the group in disarray. Most of the newly active airmen were stunned by the political infighting, and several decided to think it over in Canada. As one AFB organizer wrote later, "In practice, the WWP, YAWF, and ASU put very little emphasis on ongoing, day-to-day organizing. Instead, they rush in when things start happening, carrying lots of posters, banners, etc., and attempt to assume the leadership. Hopefully, a number of things will happen - the bourgeois media will give them credit for what happened, and the 'most advanced' of the participants will join the vanguard. This hope is based on a combination of an early Abbie Hoffman approach to the media and an extremely mechanistic concept of Leninist party building."

Thus the ASU, which was most promising in its conception, was unable to fulfill its potential. Yet because it had a clear political line and a national image, it was able to remain a consistent force. A large reason for this was the lack of cohesive politics on the part of many of the groups developing around the country. As the same AFB organizer wrote, "One of the reasons the ASU has been so frequently able to pose as something it is not is the failure of those of us engaged in military organizing, and of the movement in general, to come up with a consistent analysis of our own,

rather than a patchwork creation which passes for an analysis. This shortcoming was specifically the reason AFB fell apart."

The most consistent, and certainly the most heterogeneous, of the attempts of the left to relate to GIs in this period centered around the coffeehouse projects. By the height of the war there were over twenty such projects, located at most major Army bases, the two key Marine Corps bases, and scattered Navy and Air Force installations. Staffed at first primarily by civilians, with vets soon joining the staffs in increasing numbers, the coffeehouses and storefronts reflected all the various forces that existed within the movement. There was never a cohesive, national ideology guiding this work; rather, different project staffs struggled out their orientation toward military organizing, some projects achieving a unified direction, some projects remaining scattered in their approach. As the war escalated, though, and as discontent and anger swept the ranks of GIs, the majority of coffeehouses abandoned the old orientation toward cultural alienation and consciously set out to do direct political organizing.

The primary function of these projects was to provide off-base meeting places for GIs. The majority of guys who came to these storefronts were attracted by their anti-brass atmosphere, stuck around to rap with some people and perhaps read an anti-war paper, and generally got exposed to left-wing politics. The service was permeated with an FTA ("Fuck The Army") consciousness, and many GIs felt so mind-blown by their recent experiences that they were actively seeking a new way to understand the world around

them. Consequently, they were open to heavy raps about the war, imperialism, and the class nature of society. A certain number of GIs who came around reached a point where they wanted to participate in direct political work, and they plugged into various activities. The most common form was the creation of a GI newspaper. While some of these papers developed spontaneously at certain bases, the overwhelming majority were begun through joint work by GIs and civilians.

These papers were the most visible and consistent aspect of the GI movement. Starting with early papers like FTA at Fort Knox and FATIGUE PRESS at Fort Hood, local papers mushroomed around the country : SHAKEDOWN at Fort Dix, ATTITUDE CHECK at Camp Pendleton, FED-UP at Fort Lewis, ALL HANDS ABANDON SHIP at Newport Naval Station, THE LAST HARASS at Fort Gordon, LEFT FACE at Fort McClellan, RAGE at Camp Lejeune, THE STAR-SPANGLED BUMMER at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base... the list could stretch to over a hundred different papers. Their contents varied, from paper to paper and at times from issue to issue, from local gripes and a basic anti-brass, anti-war, anti-racist consciousness to an understanding of the nature of imperialism and attempts to move toward revolutionary socialism. Some lasted for only a few issues, folding when the guys putting it out were transferred or discharged. But most of those connected with organizing projects came out consistently, if sporadically, through the war years.

Generally, the papers were produced by small groups of GIs who then received help from other guys in circulating them.

It was illegal to distribute on base, but nonetheless countless copies were smuggled on and placed around the barracks, stuck in bathrooms, casually left in lounge areas. A few found their way into the stockades, often through sympathetic guards, A large number were simply distributed in off-base towns, and were well received. As one marine organizer put it, "Guys ask if the paper is underground. If we reply yes, they take it. Guys identify with a rebellion if not with the revolution." It was generally through these papers that the mass of discontented GIs were exposed to a sense of solidarity with other GIs and some level of political analysis of their situation. While the number of GIs who created these papers might total in the hundreds, the number who helped distribute them numbered in the thousands and the number who read them and related to them numbered in the tens of thousands.

Relations between GIs and civilians on the projects took many forms. On the one hand, civilians provided some essential functions, could keep the places running and do legal and organizational work while guys were on base, and generally provide contacts and resources from the world of the movement. GIs valued these contributions. But civilians clearly didn't share the same experiences or the same risks, and this at times led to conflict. Most projects experienced an ebb and flow of conflict and unity. A large degree of the conflict occurred because of civilian proficiency at certain tasks, which at times led to their domination. As one organizer expressed it, "People assume power depending on how priorities are defined and what skills are valued. If skills that only educated

people have, such as speaking eloquently, laying out newspapers, gathering literature for a bookstore, legal assistance, etc. are rewarded, then people who don't have those skills become intimidated, feel useless, and do basically what they do in society at large—they withdraw and fuck up."

The problem was not simply a civilian-GI dichotomy. One organizer at Fort Lewis wrote, "Often, the problem was much more blatantly one of classism, that is that the middle-upper class people would dominate the meetings and directions, with the lower class people doing most of the work. The way the problem looks is that the civilians dominated no more and no less, on the whole, than middle class educated GIs." But there were few middle class educated GIs in the movement; the general situation was that the bulk of the GI dissidents were blue collar working class youth, while most of the civilian organizers were middle class. A positive situation, in that it was a meeting between the middle class left and the working class, but it was a constant struggle to overcome the inherent roles established in relations between the classes. Similar dilemmas have confronted the left whenever it has attempted to change its class base.

Despite these internal struggles, the high degree of transience among GIs, and the pervasive power of the brass, the overriding intensity of the war ensured that the work continued. Since the high level of risk limited what actions could be undertaken, newspapers were the most realistic form of political expression. Attempts were made, however, to find forms for a higher level of struggle. At first this

involved attempts to find a way to achieve base-wide actions. Sick call strikes were organized at Fort Knox early in the war and later at Fort Lewis. Soldiers cannot legally go on strike, but military regulations supposedly guarantee them the right to go on sick call, so if masses of GIs went on sick call on the same day it would in effect create a strike situation. But such efforts had to be publicized well in advance, and the brass resorted to intimidation, harassment, and outright refusal of the sick call privilege to crush these strikes. The attempt at Fort Knox resulted in failure, though at Fort Lewis it had a moderate impact, with up to 30% of the base trying to go on sick call.

Attempts were also made to hold meetings on base, partly due to the example of the GIs United meeting at Fort Jackson, but these meetings were extremely vulnerable. In October of 1969 an effort was made to hold a meeting at a service club at Fort Lewis, but an agent had infiltrated the group which called the meeting, and soon after it began it was raided by the MPs. Thirty-five GIs were picked up and placed on restriction. Though formal charges were never brought against these men, in the following months almost all of them were transferred, shipped to Vietnam, discharged, or simply busted on other charges.

Since it seemed that on-base activities were too risky, attempts were made to mobilize massive numbers of GIs for off-base actions. These were at times successful. Frequently, efforts were made to mobilize GI participation in civilian peace demonstrations. A series of marches outside Fort Hood and Fort Bragg and in cities like San Francisco were participated in by hundreds of GIs,

and in December of 1969 almost 1,000 marines participated in an anti-war march in Oceanside, California. But the military was able to stifle this expression of resistance, largely by placing whole units or entire bases on restriction. Thus, when national demonstrations were called for Armed Forces Day, a radical GI at Fort Ord had to relate, "May 16, 1970 was a Saturday, and there was a huge gathering outside the gates of Ford Ord, but neither I nor any other GIs could participate, because the commanding general had ordered everyone to work all day Saturday, until the demonstration was over." While scattered GIs often went AWOL to participate, it was not possible to sustain mass GI participation in these marches. The power of the military authorities was simply too limitless.

This often led to a reconsideration of attempts to organize on base, and a new strategy was developed. Rather than concentrating on large base-wide actions, an effort was made to concentrate on localized, unit organizing. This meant that radical GIs, who were working on a base-wide paper and relating to an off-base storefront, would also attempt to create an organized group in their barracks. These groups would put out small, mimeographed unit newspapers, like SPD NEWS or FIRST OF THE WORST, struggle against immediate forms of harassment, and occasionally submit group Article 138 complaints against a particularly oppressive officer. Because they dealt with immediate local issues, these unit organizations were frequently able to effect some genuine changes. In addition, these unit groups could raise conceptually the issue of power in the military. For example, the FTA program written at Fort Knox, which first

described the class nature of society and pointed toward the goal of socialism, went on to state, "We know that to achieve these goals will take a long fight. To begin to implement this program we intend to build our own democratic organizations within our units which serve our own interests, to protect us now from our present leaders, and later to replace the existing organization of the military." While this goal was far beyond what was realistic in this period, it was useful as a method of describing a possible transition to power.

Throughout this period, the GIs who related most directly to the organized forms of the GI movement tended to be white working class Vietnam vets. Racism clearly played a role in preventing solidarity between white and third world GIs. But the primary reason it tended to be overwhelmingly white had to do with the nature of the organizing. While black GIs were frequently in the forefront of spontaneous confrontations, such as combat refusals, stockade rebellions, and resistance to riot control, they did not relate in large numbers to putting out newspapers and doing agitational work. The consciousness of the mass of black GIs was generally higher than the consciousness of white GIs, which meant that the need for sustained agitational work was higher among whites. Consequently, black GIs participated heavily in group actions, while it was white GIs who developed agitational forms to reach their less politicized brothers.

The organized GI movement was primarily a stateside phenomenon, but there was also a strong pocket of resistance among U.S. troops stationed in Germany. Dope use was staggeringly

high here, black consciousness was very developed, and spontaneous rebellions erupted periodically. Germany was often a transit point for GIs going to or coming back from Vietnam, and this added a direct consciousness of the war to the turmoil. Various papers were published in Germany, including a widely circulated GI paper with avowedly socialist politics, THE NEXT STEP. And at times mass actions were organized, one of the strongest being an anti-racism rally in Heidelberg in 1970, which drew over 1,000 GIs.

The military leadership was thus faced with the widespread breakdown of its authority, a deteriorating fighting force in Vietnam, and political dissidence throughout its ranks. Its response was twofold; more repression, and the development of a strategic approach to the problem. The repression was most intense on individual GIs. Pvt., Gypsy Peterson, who had helped create the FATIGUE PRESS at Fort Hood, was sentenced to eight years at hard labor for possession of an amount of grass so small it "disappeared" during analysis. Two black marines, William Harvey and George Daniels, were sentenced to six and ten years at hard labor for rapping against the war in their barracks. Privates Dam Amick and Ken Stolte were sentenced to four years for distributing a leaflet on Ford Ord. Pvt. Theoda Lester was sentenced to three years for refusing to cut his Afro. And Pvt. Wade Carson was sentenced to six months for "intention" to distribute FED-UP on Fort Lewis. The pattern was widespread and the message was clear—the brass was not about to tolerate political dissent in its ranks. But a number of factors helped to weaken this repressive power. Media coverage, public protest, and the growth of GI

resistance all played a part. The key factor was that political GIs continued to be dangerous in the stockades, and after numerous stockade rebellions the military often chose to discharge dissidents and get rid of them all together.

The repression on civilians was not as severe. One of the first moves against the coffeehouses was the effort to place the Shelter Half at Fort Lewis off-limits to GIs, but this required a legal hearing. When GI protest and media coverage were mobilized, the military backed down and simply cancelled the hearing. The campaign against the coffeehouses then took a less direct form, usually carried out by local civilian authorities. The UFO at Fort Jackson was busted for being a "public nuisance", and the coffeehouse at Fort Knox was simply driven out of town. But though this harassment was costly, it never effectively disrupted the functioning of the organizing projects. What is significant is that the federal authorities never moved against the civilians involved. There is a federal statute, 18 USC 2387, which prohibits "all manner of activities (incitements, counseling, distribution or preparation of literature) intended to subvert the loyalty, morale, or discipline of the Armed Services", and carries a penalty of ten years in prison. But while hundreds of civilians openly violated this law, none were ever arrested. The unpopularity of the war, the spontaneous nature of GI resistance, and the general desire on the part of the Pentagon to avoid publicizing this resistance probably all contributed to the decision by federal authorities to withdraw from direct confrontation with the civilian organizers.

The new strategy developed by the Pentagon involved a strategic change in the nature of the war and a cosmetic change in the nature of the military. The ground war was going badly, the American public was distressed over high casualties, and the Administration reasoned that it could fight just as effectively from the air. The ground troops would be replaced through the program of "Vietnamization". So, the central cause of the military's decay was to be gradually relieved as ground troops were withdrawn from the fighting and the new phase of air war was initiated. In addition, a new image was developed for the Army, de-emphasizing discipline and attempting to relate to black pride and the new youth consciousness. This was seen as the first step toward the development of a volunteer service. Through these transformations the military leadership hoped to back off from its disaster.

### **A Changing War, A Changing Movement**

The years from 1970 to 1972 marked the almost total collapse of the U.S. Army in Vietnam. Drug use became virtually epidemic, with an estimated 80% of the troops in Vietnam using some form of drug. Sometime in mid-1970 huge quantities of heroin were dumped on the black market, and GIs were receptive to its enveloping high. By the end of 1971 over 30% of the combat troops were on smack. Fraggings continued to rise, from 271 in 1970 to 425 in 1971; one division alone, the "elite" Americal Division, averaged one fragging a week. Search-and-evade and combat refusals were widespread. In a sense, the Army virtually ground to a halt. One newsman wrote in early '71, "Since the end of the Cambodian

operation last June, the United States Army in Vietnam has fought no major actions, launched no significant operations, captured no territory and added no battle honors to its regimental flags. In this same period, the army has abandoned at least one base under enemy fire and suffered most of its losses from accidents and booby traps." One top ranking officer was moved to lament, "Vietnam has become a poison in the veins of the U.S. Army."

Troops sent to Vietnam in the early seventies had good reason to avoid combat. Not only were they in a war almost no one believed in any more, but they were shipped over long after the Administration claimed to be withdrawing. There didn't seem to be any reason to risk being killed. At the same time, the States were being flooded with Nam vets back from the fiercest years of fighting, and their disillusionment was plainly evident at every stateside base. Dope and disrespect were everywhere, and the desertion rate was still climbing, reaching 62.6 per thousand in 1971, Many of these vets connected with the ongoing organizing projects; within a week after the 173rd Airborne was shipped back to Fort Campbell over 300 GIs from its ranks participated in a local anti-war march.

Though the ground troops were gradually coming home, for some elements of the U. S. military the war was escalating. The increased use of air power meant not only that more pilots were flying through anti-aircraft fire to bomb the Vietnamese, it also meant that tens of thousands of low ranking GIs were needed as back-up troops to service and maintain the squadrons of fighter-bombers. These men were

predominantly third world and white working class youth who had enlisted in the Air Force or the Navy mostly because they wanted to escape being in the Army. There was widespread anti-war feeling among these crews, but (their resistance differed from the resistance of Army GIs in some critical ways. First, they were not in the direct line of fire, they neither killed nor risked being killed, and consequently they had less motivation to rebel than did ground troops. The killing and the dying was done by the pilots, who were all officers and who tended to see themselves as "professionals." Second, because the support crews were not involved directly with combat, their resistance did not affect the war in an immediate way. But they were far from powerless.

The primary resistance that developed in this period was among crews on Navy attack carriers directly involved in the bombing. While there was dissidence and some political organizing among Air Force personnel and in other commands of the Navy, it was where the support crews most directly touched the war that resistance flared. Probably the most dramatic incident occurred aboard the Navy attack carrier USS Coral Sea in the fall of 1971. The Coral Sea was docked in California while it prepared for a tour of bombing duty off the coast of Vietnam. On board was a crew of 4,500 men, a few hundred of whom were pilots, the rest being support crews. A handful of men on the ship began circulating a petition that read in part, "We the people must guide the government and not allow the government to guide us! The Coral Sea is scheduled for Vietnam in November. This does not have to be a fact. The ship can be prevented from taking an active part in the conflict if we the

majority voice our opinion that we do not believe in the Vietnam War. If you feel that the Coral Sea should not go to Vietnam, voice your opinion by signing this petition."

Though the petition had to be circulated secretly, and though men took a calculated risk putting their name down on something that the brass might eventually see, within a few weeks over 1,000 men had signed it. Out of this grew an on-ship organization called "Stop Our Ship" (SOS). The men engaged in a series of demonstrations to halt their sailing date, and on November 6 over 300 men from the ship led the fall anti-war march in San Francisco. Their effort to stop the ship failed, and a number of men jumped ship as the Coral Sea left for Vietnam. But the SOS movement spread to other attack carriers, including the USS Constellation, the USS Hancock, and the USS Ranger.

The Navy continued to be racked by political organizing and severe racial unrest. In June of 1972 the USS Ranger was disabled by sabotage, and in October both the USS Kittyhawk and the USS Hassayampa were swept by fighting. In November of that same year the USS Constellation was damaged by sabotage, docked to repair the damage, and was confronted with 130 crewmen refusing direct orders to return aboard. Though the impact of these actions only slightly impeded the war effort, they helped to maintain a constant pressure on the Administration to withdraw the military from the disaster of the Indochina war.

The changing nature of the war forced the existing elements of the GI movement to re-evaluate their work.

Most of the projects dealing with ground forces, the Army and Marine Corps, found that stateside bases were filled with disaffected, angry GIs. Yet the ground war was "officially" over, and the sense of urgency had left the movement. The result was contradictory impulses among rank and file soldiers; a feeling of anger tempered by the sense that it was no longer worth the risk to fight back, that the easiest road was waiting for discharge. The military authorities in their turn sped up discharges, offered a series of early outs, and moved to clear stateside bases of Vietnam vets. The anger continued to lead to sporadic acts of resistance, but it was rarely channeled into sustained organizing work.

Organizers at Fort Hood, attempting to analyze this situation, wrote, "The three main elements of the GI movement, as we see it, are 1) a high degree of militancy 2) a high degree of apathy and 3) almost a complete lack of organization. The first two may seem contradictory, but in reality they aren't. One can be ultra-militant in your hatred of the brass while being completely apathetic to the prospect of change." Dealing with the question of organization they wrote, "The transitory nature of the military and the deep fear of the UCMJ play a part in the lack of organization. On Fort Hood, which is mostly Vietnam returnees, the majority of GIs hates the Army with a passion, but won't move against it for those reasons. So, the GI movement today consists basically of fragging, shamming, individual defiance, and sporadic mutinies and demonstrations. Anything and everything short of ongoing organization."

The Fort Hood account fairly accurately describes the situation at most Army and Marine Corps bases in this period. It was understood that the war was evaporating as an issue, and most organizers were shifting to issues that related directly to class oppression at home. A GI group at Fort Hood called the GI Summer Offensive Committee chose to concentrate on a boycott of Tyrell's Jewelers, a national chain of rip-off jewelry stores which specialized in selling cheap jewelry to GIs for the "wife, sweetheart, or mother" back home. The chain featured a "Vietnam Honor Role" listing all the GIs who had been killed while still owing Tyrell's money; the chain magnanimously absolved their debts. The boycott effort found a responsive note on Fort Hood and mobilized large picket lines and demonstrations. The boycott then spread to other bases and forced a number of local Tyrell's to alter their business practices. But while this action did succeed in helping to create an organization at Fort Hood, at the conclusion of the boycott the old contradictions re-surfaced and the organization slowly disappeared.

Some of the same problems faced organizers at Navy and Air Force bases. While those dealing with the attack carriers faced an explosive situation, the remainder of the Navy and Air Force exhibited only scattered resistance in this period. There was some positive work. Papers were begun and continued at many bases, and at Newport Naval Station on-board organizing occurred on a ship about to make a "goodwill" tour of Portuguese colonies in Africa. But this work rarely resulted in either mass actions or direct impact on the war. When a major offensive was launched by the North Vietnamese and

the NLF in the spring of 1972 and the collapse of the Saigon forces seemed a realistic possibility, the U.S. was able to carry through a tremendous mobilization of air and sea power without any significant difficulties from the ranks, a task which would have been unthinkable in the Army.

In the early years of the seventies the organizing collectives at most bases also felt the dramatic impact of the women's movement. The most immediate effect was intense internal struggle over male domination on both the personal and organizational levels. The more long term effect was the re-evaluation by many women of the work they had been doing in previous years, and this frequently led to a decision to begin to orient toward organizing other women. In the military situation this meant organizing women in uniform and women who were dependents.

Most of the initial work focused on women in uniform. Women enlist for many of the same economic reasons that motivate men; the military seems to offer a secure job with "travel" opportunities and a certain level of respect. As well, many working class women find that upon leaving high school they have a choice of either remaining at home or getting married, and the military seems like a convenient escape from that trap. Consequently, enlistments are high. Organizing efforts by collectives of women occurred at both Fort McClellan and Fort Bragg, but in both situations it was found to be very difficult to organize WACs. The level of discontent was not high; in fact, 70% of first term recruits re-enlist. In addition, gay WACs were found to feel that the infantry offered them a fairly secure community of gay women; free

from the general harassment in civilian society consequently they were reluctant to risk discharge for political activity. While individual WACs did relate strongly to developing women's consciousness, their acts of resistance remained individual and isolated. The women at Fort Bragg concluded, "It is our feeling that there will not be a mass movement among WACs."

There was more success in organizing women who were dependents of men in the military, particularly wives of GIs. They were in the position of following their husbands around from base to base, living in poor housing, and being forced to exist on meager military salaries. The lives of these families were often financially very tight; in fact, a study done by the government in 1970 found that the families of 50,000 servicemen were existing below the "poverty line". These women were consequently often receptive to anti-military actions, were mobilized in a number of tenant's rights campaigns, and were frequently open to a developing women's consciousness. But there was also a high level of fear. Under Army regulations a GI is held to be responsible for the actions of his wife, and a number of GIs were punitively transferred when their wives became politically active. This and other factors, such as transience and the absence of stable GI organizations, tended to greatly hamper the development of a large movement of dependents.

For the military authorities, this period was one of cautious retreat. The services were in a state of disarray, many career officers were leaving in disgust, and the brass wanted to extricate themselves from the mess as easily as possible. The repressive

apparatus was geared down, and the policy of early outs and discharges for Nam vets and political dissidents became widespread. Even in the Navy, which was experiencing heightened resistance, the brass chose moderation and conciliation.

The major response was a concentration on the development of an all-volunteer service. Though the war was still on and the draft was still functioning, the military experimented in this period with a number of programs that it hoped would cool out stateside bases and provide a model for the new volunteer army (VOLAR). These included race relations councils, some loosening of barracks regulations, and at some forts the development of ersatz coffeehouses on base, complete with black light posters and peace signs. (The one at Fort Carson was appropriately called The Inscape.) These early programs often led to disaster for the brass. Militant black GIs often disrupted the placid race relations councils, and an early VOLAR rock concert at Fort Ord turned into a battle between GIs and MPs. But these early programs were only the sketchy beginnings of the VOLAR effort. As the military gradually withdrew from the war in Indochina, the plans for a fundamental change in the services were put into full operation.

### **The Modern Volunteer Army**

The signing of the Vietnam Peace Accords in January of 1973 marked the formal end of over a decade of U. S. military involvement. While the war itself still lingered on, and renewed U. S. involvement remained a problematic possibility, the accords did signal the beginning of a new era. Ground troops

were gone from Indochina, the bombing was ended, and GIs found themselves to be peacetime soldiers. Coupled with the end of the draft, these changes marked an opportunity for the armed services to rebuild themselves.

There are two primary elements to this current reconstruction. First, the Army and ground forces in general are being de-emphasized. Instead, there is an increased focus on mechanized warfare and the power of the Navy and Air Force. The advantage of these services is high mobility, tremendous striking power, and reliance on a smaller number of men. The second element is the transformation of the Army into a force composed of economically motivated volunteers. The belief is that military pay hikes, coming in period of rising unemployment and general economic instability, will motivate working class youth to enlist in larger numbers.

To some degree this effort has succeeded. The military has spent millions of dollars on advertising, greatly enlarged its corps of recruiters, and managed to come close to meeting its recruitment quotas. The Air Force and Navy have had no problems, the number of women enlisting has increased by 50%, and a significant number of men have enlisted for the Army and the Marines. But there has been one glaring failure. They can't find enough men to enlist for Combat Arms, the very heart of the Army. In fiscal year 1973 only 34,000 men, 57% of their stated goal, enlisted for the infantry, despite a \$2,500 bonus for a four-year Combat Arms enlistment. In order to increase these enlistments they lowered the educational requirements, but in the first months of fiscal year 1974 the

percentage of black enlistees rose to 31%, and given the continuing spectre of black rebelliousness, that scares them. In a new effort to deal with the shortage of combat troops the Army announced in February of 1974 that it was creating a new combat division by shifting men from headquarters and support jobs. So much for unit of choice enlistment!

It is important to stress that an economically motivated enlistee is not necessarily a gung-ho soldier. Recruiters still spin tales of an unreal world in order to meet their own enlistment quotas, and GIs are still finding that the military is not what they had been led to expect. The indicators for morale and discipline used by the Army are showing that discontent is high among new enlistees. At Fort Lewis, the model VOLAR unit on base is called the "New Reliables." A study done in the first five months of 1973 showed the New Reliables to have an AWOL rate averaging 47.2 per thousand, while the AWOL rate for other units on the base averaged 21.9 per thousand. At the same time, the Correctional Training Facility at Fort Riley, which was established during the war years to deal with chronic AWOLs, is continuing to process 150 GIs a week. Clearly, the new enlistee is often dissatisfied with his situation.

But this dissatisfaction is not sufficient to generate massive resistance. The end of the ground war removed the primary motivation for GIs to risk punishment; while there may be discontent now, it is generally overshadowed by fear of the UCMJ. As the organizers at Fort Bragg wrote in early 1973, "We began to grasp what we had been refusing to understand-the overwhelming majority of GIs at Fort Bragg had not been to

Vietnam and probably would never be sent. The vets who swelled the ranks of the GI movement, as well as giving leadership, were all getting out, and guys just coming into the Army now were not facing a year of humping the boonies of Nam."

The organizational forms of the GI movement began to fade away. Storefronts and coffeehouses folded, newspapers became infrequent or ceased publication entirely, GI groups disappeared as their last members were discharged. While some scattered organizing continued, and some successful work was done at some forts around class-based issues, these efforts were unable to generate new growth. The era of massive GI resistance was over.

## **Conclusion**

The disintegration of the ground forces in Vietnam was a major factor in causing U. S. withdrawal. A complexity of factors caused this disintegration, ranging from the upsurges in civilian society to the impact of the Vietnamese revolution, and much of the breakdown in morale and fighting capacity developed spontaneously. Nevertheless, the conscious organizing of radicals both in service and out helped play a catalytic role in this disintegration.

The veterans movement, and the political development of Vietnam Vets Against the War, certainly illustrate that a durable change of consciousness occurred among thousands of GIs.

## **Starting Local Organizing Committees**

Forming an organizing committee sounds complicated, but it's not. What it means is something very practical: identifying several people you know (and people these people know) who are interested in putting together a group to go out to armories, bases, and do other outreach work. You can begin with as few as two or three committed people. Experience is not required, but respect, commitment and dependability are what matters.

Think of people who might be interested in doing this work, their personal qualities and how they relate to other people in person.

- Are they committed to this work, and do you know them to be reliable and respectful? This is important for obvious reasons.
- Are they respectful of others and willing to engage with people who don't share their opinions on every single issue?
- Are they willing to try new ideas and strategies to build support for anti-war troops (without taking lead if they are civilians) and doing what is necessary to support these troops and their families?
- Are they motivated by concern for bringing the troops home now and willing to challenge those who would have one more life lost?

Once you have identified several people, get together informally to talk about goals and ideas for your local group. A good place to start the discussion is to determine the locations of nearby bases or armories and whether anyone has contacts based at these installations. Serving refreshments is a nice idea too, but not necessary. This first meeting is to establish trust and common values. Focus will come as you schedule regular meetings. This is important, it will enable you to get a lot more done and talk things through. Email and phone communication among members is key to staying "on the same page."

After you have established a small, tight group, you may want to branch out. Before doing this, make sure you have a strong foundation of shared goals. Remember—the people on this committee are your closest allies. Treat each other with respect, listen to everyone's ideas, and act democratically. Ordinary people can do extraordinary things when they work together!

## **Running a Meeting**

There are two components of a meeting: the content; what is said and the form; how the meeting is structured. That the way a meeting is structured largely determines if people are able to contribute to the discussion in a productive way.

There are a lot of different ideas out there about how to run a meeting. Some people prefer formalized voting others prefer consensus. Both methods have the potential for abuse. The best way to avoid this is to know that you can trust people you are working with before you invite them to be part of your local group. A group of people sharing the same vision, commitment and goals generally achieve consensus even if formally the group uses majority vote.

The role of the chair is to make sure that the meeting achieves its purpose: to coordinate the work of the group. This is necessarily going to be subjective. If people committed to the politics of Military Project are running the meeting differences in people's styles and opinions hopefully should spark healthy discussion both inside and outside of meetings.

Always have a note taker. Notes should reflect decisions made and work people have committed to. It is not necessary for the note taker to be a stenographer. Note taking duties may rotate or a particular individual who is trustworthy and has adequate time can take notes over an extended period.

It is advisable that the note taker assembles the agenda for the next meeting. If note taking duties rotate it is a good idea for the person taking notes at one meeting to propose the agenda and chair the next meeting, this insures continuity. The note taker is also responsible for circulating the meeting notes to group participants.

A proposed meeting agenda should look something like this:

1. Election of chair for meeting
2. Adoption of agenda (Call for additions, deletions, then vote.)
3. Additions or corrections to minutes of prior meeting. Followed by adoption of minutes.
4. Motion on time to end meeting (This is subject to motions to extend or cut.)
5. Time and place of next meeting (Make a proposal and vote.)

These introductory items are followed by an expansion of the sub-topics in item 2. Once you've gotten agreement on these you can move on to the business of the meeting. Items can be added or subtracted from the agenda as participants see fit. It's best to do this at the outset of the meeting. Sometimes it is necessary to add agenda items on the fly.

Circulate the agenda before the meeting via email or other means so people that have additions or alterations can propose them.

## **Outreach to Troops: Practical Suggestions**

It isn't brain surgery to conclude troops are no different from the rest of us in most aspects of life. Nevertheless, people feel service members are somehow "remote," and operate on another plane entirely. This isn't true and approaching and engaging the troops is not a foreign language problem.

It's perfectly normal to voice concern with a service member about the current war(s) if you know any or are related to one. To meet any beyond that ask your contacts that they know and find out how they (the troops) feel about Iraq/Afghanistan. If they're anti-war set up a meeting and go from there.

If you live near an armory or military base it should be that much easier. Some troops drink (like the rest of us) so talking one or two up in a bar shouldn't be difficult nor beneath one's principles. Remember, these people are vital in terminating the disastrous conflicts we find ourselves in.

Troops send their kids to school too. These kids may move around some (army life) but there still are PTA meetings and other school activities.

Troops attend church, mosques, synagogues, et al, as well. This is another forum in which to contact them at a relaxed pace. What you want to look for are commonalities.

Public troop concentrations occur on Memorial Day or July 4<sup>th</sup>. Many service members are young, away from home, perhaps for the first time. You have their best interest at heart so talk to them, give them directions, and wish them well. They aren't aliens, they're ours.

## **Prisoners Against the War:** **Connecting the War at Home and the War Abroad**

Prisons are among the most difficult environments in which to organize politically. Politicians do not recognize prisoners as having political influence besides being justification for "get tough" policies to garner the law and order vote come election time. The media is only too happy to follow the politicians' lead and consistently presents incarcerated people in an unfavorable light. For these and other reasons prisoners have few allies on the outside besides their family and very close friends.

The stated role of prisons is to prepare someone who has broken the law to useful citizenship. Unfortunately prisons fail as an institution to achieve their stated purpose and recidivism rates increase directly proportional to the length of a person's sentence. Nobody emerges from prison undamaged and most prisoners suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental afflictions.

Many states deny the vote to incarcerated persons. In some states their status as non-voters is permanent. Even in states that restore a person's voting rights upon release, prisoners may not be informed about their voting status. Even assuming their voting rights are restored and they are informed of the fact, who would an antiwar prisoner have to vote for? Both parties in the U.S. back the war as well as the expansion of prisons and social control over the formerly incarcerated.

A government that locks up 2 million of its citizens and executes them, and sends others to fight a war on the flimsiest of pretenses is one that must be stopped. As antiwar activists, we want to build a movement that includes people whose voices are commonly excluded from politics. Working with folks inside prison walls to build a just and peaceful society for them to return to is one of the best ways to bring those voices back into the public sphere, where they belong.

The decision to work along with Prisoners Against the War is not one to be taken lightly. Carpenters have a saying "measure twice, cut once," and it definitely applies in this case. Your relationship with an antiwar prisoner should be one of mutual respect and sincerity.

Realistically, most of your communication with people in prison will be through letters. It is advisable to open a P.O. Box if you intend to correspond with folks in prison. You may move or travel and/or responsibility for communicating with prisoners may shift from one individual to another. And for prisoners, whose belongings and papers may be lost, taken away or destroyed, keeping track of changing addresses can be complicated.

When you send a letter, always date it and send a list of enclosures where applicable. Listed items have a better chance of being recovered if they are confiscated.

Policies on what can be mailed to prisoner vary from state to state and prison to prison. Since most prisoners are flat broke, it is common courtesy to include return postage with your letter. The majority of prisons do not allow prisoners to receive stamps from friends on the outside.

The best way to subsidize communication costs is to include a postal money order for a few dollars. Make the money order out to the prisoner with her/his prisoner ID number. Put your name in the "FROM" space provided. This will enable you to cash it if it is returned to you.

Some state prisons in Texas and parts of the Midwest will not allow any funds to be sent directly to prisoners. In these instances there are usually forms to be filled out in order to send any money. Also, no one under eighteen should be corresponding with incarcerated people. This is for the security of the prisoner in addition to the security of the correspondent.

The best sources of information about navigating prison bureaucracy are the prisoners themselves. Before you are in contact with incarcerated folks you owe it to them to do some research of your own. A page with links to many state departments of correction is available at:

<http://www.fcc.state.fl.us/fcc/justice/otherdclink.html>

Federal information is at:

<http://www.fcc.state.fl.us/fcc/justice/fedlink.html>

Also try a nearby library with a government documents section.

It's a good idea to educate yourself about the prison system as a whole and its role in the United States. You may be familiar with Christian Parenti's short book on his visit to Iraq, *The Freedom*. A few years earlier he wrote *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis*, which is extensively researched and well written and still a fairly current book on this subject.

The 13th amendment, which abolished slavery, made the specific exception of prisoners. Federal Prison Industries or Unicor is a government-owned corporation that uses the labor of prisoners mostly in federal facilities to build weapons and munitions and other military equipment. State prisoners often work for smaller companies making a variety of products. In states where prisoners receive any wage at all, most of it is taken by the government for room, board and other expenses. The most accessible source of information on prison industries is the Internet. Be resourceful and look for allies with relevant knowledge. Not all of this information has been gathered into a single archive yet.

Passing judgment on prisoners you may be in contact with serves no useful purpose. People in prison may be Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist or of another religious persuasion. They may be pro- or anti-war for reasons other than your own. If necessary, you can politely explain your views on the war and discontinue your contact with the prisoner.

Be aware that there are white supremacist gangs in prison and that these prisoners may have counterparts on the outside, another reason it is wise to use a P.O. Box (instead of using your home address or telephone number).

There are a number of good groups who have been active around prison issues for years. They are often situated to support prisoners in ways that would be impractical for Military Project. Some good folks to be in touch are:

Critical Resistance:

<http://www.criticalresistance.org/>

Books Through Bars:

<http://www.booksthroughbars.org/>

<http://www.abcnorio.org/affiliated/btb.html>

<http://www.btbitthaca.org/>

Prison Moratorium Project:

<http://www.nomoreprisons.org/>

Prison Activist Resource Center:

<http://www.prisonactivist.org/>

Prisoners have a 1st Amendment right to voice their opinions against the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Military Project supports their right and believes that most prisoners are against the war, want to speak out, and only need help getting organized.

Special Thanks to Stanley Howard, founder of Prisoners Against the War, who edited this section for clarity and content. Stanley, a vocal opponent of police torture and member of the Death Row 10, can be reached at:

Stanley Howard #N71620  
R.R. #4 Box 196  
Mt. Sterling, IL 62353

Please write and show your solidarity and learn more about what Prisoners Against the War is doing to support anti-war troops and organize within the prison system.

Read more about Stanley's struggle here:

<http://204.3.201.185/factsheets/deathRow10.html>

## **Tabling: Meeting New People and Building Membership**

Once you have set up your organizing committee, you will want to build your group so that you can accomplish more—and with less stress on individual members of the organizing committee.

“Tabling,” is simply setting up a literature table in a promising location with plenty of foot traffic and a high likelihood of meeting likeminded folks. Peace Fairs, public meetings, film showings and other events are good possibilities. It’s a great way to connect with people who are interested in supporting anti-war troops. Here are some simple pointers to help you in your efforts to establish your group’s local presence. Of course, the most important thing to remember is to be friendly, straightforward, and helpful—but you already knew that.

### **Location, location, location**

Find a good location. Depending on who you want to meet this could be a political meeting, rally, an armory, or a main street. If you want to meet troops in a town where a lot of military personnel live with their families, just about anywhere might be a good location. If you’re tabling when people are out of uniform, they may feel safer speaking with you. Any area where people take a break or congregate is good—like near restaurants and shopping areas. Try to get a major, visible corner if you are setting up a table on a sidewalk. Remember, you have the right to be there, and exercise your right to free speech. Do not be

intimidated by police, but politely stand your ground. Do not impede traffic, or you could be risking arrest.

### **Staffing**

Make sure you have plenty of people, and schedule shifts—two- to three-hour shifts (for a full-day event) are ideal to make sure that everyone can remain “fresh”—not exhausted and worn out from being there all day. Two people at a time should work for a small table. One can manage getting contact information (name, phone, email, etc.—see the sample contact sheet included here). The other person can focus on explaining the literature you have, such as newsletters.

### **Materials**

Make sure that you have a sturdy, foldable table that can accommodate at least two people. If you need back support, make sure that you also have chairs. Standing for hours straight can take a toll on your body. You might want to get a nice banner to go across the front of the table. Example: three-line vinyl banner, about five feet long. Make sure you have plenty of outreach materials, such as literature, petition, etc. If you have DVDs, T-shirts, and other items, people tend to gravitate toward them and want to check out your table.

### **Making contacts**

Introduce yourself with a smile. If people seem interested, get them on your mailing list. Don't forget to have a membership packet handy—people may want to join your group, or at least think it over! Tell them about the GI

Special Web site and other resources and information and upcoming events that may interest them. Be clear, open, and friendly. If they seem really interested, find out more about their interests and background (why they're interested, etc.) Let them know that you will be contacting them soon (within a week), and hold yourself to this commitment. Remember, you don't want to be calling a month down the line and asking them whether they remember meeting you!

Get names and information—and put today's date on the signup sheet (a good place is the upper right-hand corner). On signup sheets, the person who spoke with each individual should put their initials by that person's name. This way at the end of the day it is clear who spoke with whom, making it will be easier to establish a connection with your new contacts.

### **Following up**

If any of these folks contact you, get to know them and explain what you're up to and why you started your group. When you call and email people (it's good to do both!), make them feel needed and encourage them. If they come to a meeting, try to involve them in your group's work.

When you call or email reintroduce yourself and update them on your upcoming activities. Invite them to your next business or public meeting. If there was a conversation worth mentioning, do so. At that point you can get to know them on a deeper level and ask them to lend their talents to the group and get involved. Solicit their opinions and input! If people don't call or email

back, try again—at least a few more times. Don't give up!

### **Take Care of Yourself**

Before you go out, check the weather and dress appropriately. If there is a major storm coming, you may want to reschedule—especially if you're planning to be outside. During outreach tabling, you will be speaking to a lot of people and your throat may get dry. Bring a beverage and stay hydrated, especially in the summer. Try to set your table up in the shade—you and your contacts will be more comfortable. Know your physical limits. This is hard work, but it should be exciting. Have fun!

### **Hosting a Public Meeting**

After you meet a number of contacts through tabling, friends, other groups, etc., you will want to host an event—possibly a film showing or panel discussion on the war, or something similar.

### **Contact Your Contacts!**

When deciding to host a public meeting, be sure to email and call everyone! The email should be an official announcement and include all of the important details: date, time, location, directions, and the topic/focus of the meeting.

Make sure that your announcement is punchy and graphically clear. Include photos if possible, with text that is easy and exciting to read. After you send out the announcement to your contacts (use blind copy, or BCC for security reasons...and put your own address as

the “mail to” address), follow up with personal phone calls.

During the phone calls, re-introduce yourself and your group. You should review your records so you can say something like “Hi, my name is...and we met at the...(name of the event) recently. I am calling to invite you to (film showing/panel, etc.)...” You might mention a recent success with troop outreach, for example. This will convey a sense of urgency, and let the contact know that you’re moving forward—not just calling a meeting to call a meeting. You want to update them on what you have been doing and get to know them better!

### **Topics and Formats**

The subject matter you are sharing with your audience should be relevant to your organizing work. Be creative and get people engaged, excited and interested in your group! You may want to show Sir! No Sir!, a wonderful and informative film about the GI movement during the Vietnam War. Before the activity (film or panel, for example) begins, you should introduce yourself and the organizing committee.

Afterwards talk about current organizing work. Encourage people to think about what skills/talents they could bring to the group and let them know that you are trying to build a larger membership—their input is welcome! On that note, it’s best to have membership materials available for people to take as soon as they walk in the room (they can be placed on a literature table and you can point them

out when you introduce the group). After you speak about your current work, invite people to ask questions and/or speak their minds about what could be done to build the movement. Remember that it’s really about getting new people on board, not a one-way conversation or a corporate Power Point presentation. Be open to everyone, and make sure that everyone has an opportunity to speak. (See the chapter on running a meeting for some ideas on how to make the meeting professional and efficient.)

### **Show Hospitality and Sincerity**

Create a welcoming, social atmosphere. Having some snacks available like chips, pretzels, pizza, and soft drinks is a good idea. You could of course make it more interesting depending on people’s preferences.

If you show people that your group is a great opportunity to build the GI movement and explain the importance of this movement in bringing the troops home, you are bound to interest your audience. Best of luck!

**If you have questions about any of the topics covered in this manual or want to join as a member or chartered chapter of the Military Project, please contact us at:**

**Contact@militaryproject.org**

## **Contacts and Links for the GI Movement**

### **Publications, News & Other Information:**

Traveling Soldier:

**[www.traveling-soldier.org](http://www.traveling-soldier.org)**

GI Special:

**[www.militaryproject.org](http://www.militaryproject.org)**

Counterpunch:

**[www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org)**

Fight to Survive (blog from an Iraq vet)

**<http://ftssoldier.blogspot.com>**

The GI Rights Hotline

**<http://girights.objector.org>**

Iraq Body Count

**[www.iraqbodycount.net](http://www.iraqbodycount.net)**

Iraq Casualty Count

**<http://icasualties.org/oif>**

The Military Law Task Force: Attorneys for soldiers in trouble, via

National Lawyers Guild:

**[www.nlg.org/mltf](http://www.nlg.org/mltf)**

Protest Net – Worldwide announcements for protests:

**[www.protest.net](http://www.protest.net)**

Sir! No Sir! Archives from the GI Movement

During the Vietnam War:

**<http://tinyurl.com/y55uah>**

"The Collapse of the Armed Forces" Col. Robert D. Heinl, Jr.  
Armed Forces Journal, June 7, 1971

**<http://tinyurl.com/y4feoa>**

Films:

Occupation Dreamland

**[www.occupationdreamland.com](http://www.occupationdreamland.com)**

Sir! No Sir!

**[www.sirnosir.com](http://www.sirnosir.com)**

War and Anti-War Films (Discussion of war and anti-war movies  
from pre-WWI to the present day):

**<http://tinyurl.com/y8basa>**

The Ground Truth

**<http://www.thegroundtruth.net/>**

Books:

Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance During the Vietnam War

By David Cortright

**<http://tinyurl.com/y9q6bf>**

A People's History of the Vietnam War

By Jonathan Neale

**<http://tinyurl.com/y5o53u>**

The Spitting Image:

Myth, Memory and the Legacy of the Vietnam War

By Jerry Lembcke

**<http://www.amazon.com/Spitting-Image-Memory-Legacy-Vietnam/dp/0814751474>**