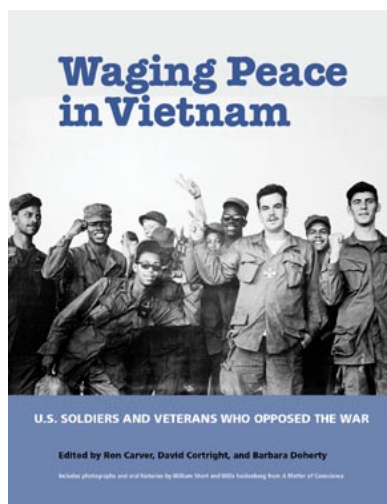


In his contribution to *Waging Peace in Vietnam*, **Derek Seidman** writes of the rise of underground newspapers produced by active-duty servicemen and their civilian supporters that called for an end to the disastrous US war

Words against war: The birth of the GI underground press

THE last half decade of the US war in Vietnam saw an historic phenomenon: a wave of antiwar newspapers, circulated across the globe, published by and for the American GIs who were angry at having been drawn in to fight the war. These papers came to be known by a few terms: the GI underground press, the GI antiwar press, or simply the GI press. They were a vital wing of the larger GI movement against the Vietnam War.

The GI press was made up of scores of antiwar newspapers that were oriented toward active-duty US service members. The total number of the papers can never be known for sure, but credible estimates range from 144 to nearly 300. In part, the GI press was inspired by the explosion of the 1960s alternative press – papers such as the *Berkeley Barb*, the *Los Angeles Free Press*, and *The Great Speckled Bird* in Atlanta. The makers of the GI press sought to



WAGING PEACE IN VIETNAM

**US Soldiers and Veterans
Who Opposed the War**

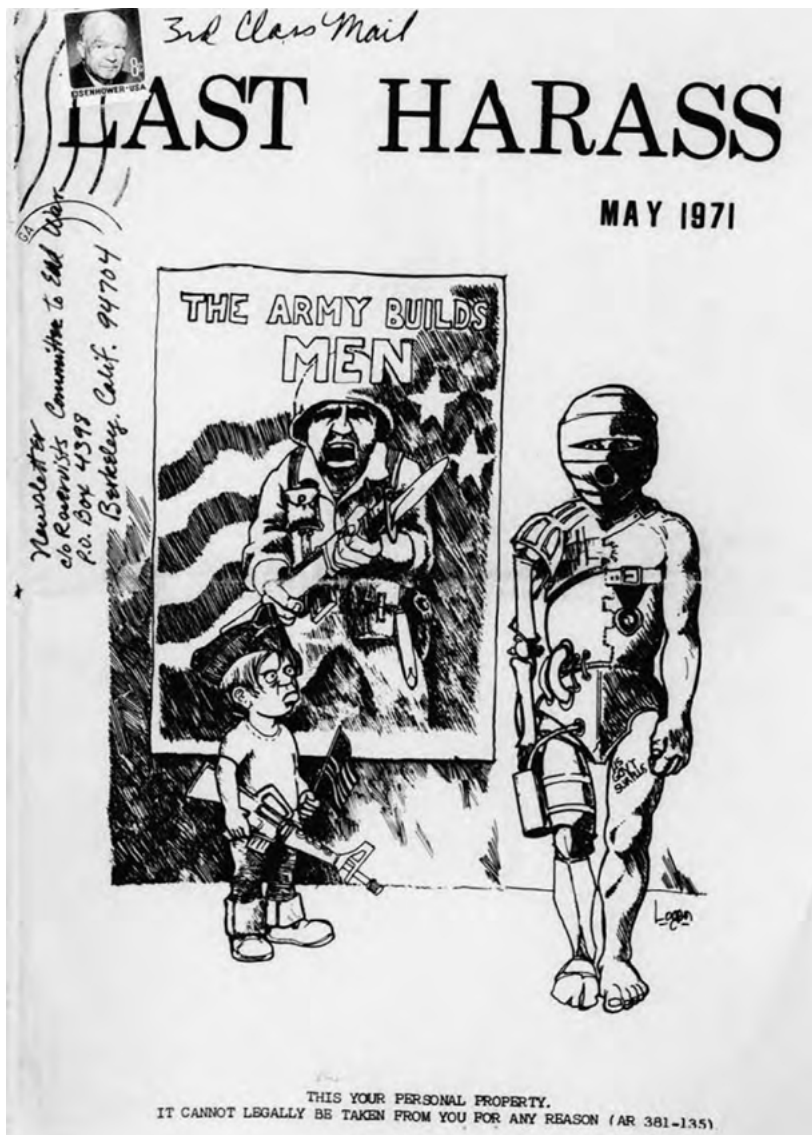
Ron Carver, David Cortright,
Barbara Doherty (editors)
New Village Press, New York
www.newvillagepress.org

US \$35

bring this new media into the military to reach US soldiers – and, hopefully, to help those soldiers build a bridge to the antiwar movement.

The papers spoke the everyday language of the rank-and-file GI, and they served as a voice for draftees and enlistees who, under the constraints of military service, had little. They often carried irreverent titles that mocked the war and the military – *A Four Year Bum-mer*, *Kill for Peace*, and *Green Machine*, for example. Perhaps the most biting title in the GI press was *Fun Travel Adventure*, or *FTA*, which mocked one of the Army’s recruitment slogans and riffed on a widespread, darker GI sentiment, “Fuck the Army”.

Their pages were filled with critical news about the war, cartoons that lampooned the military leadership, updates about soldier protest, and information on where GIs could find legal help. Most of all, the GI press promoted a wider narrative for soldiers to connect with: one that opposed the war, lambasted the army brass, and offered identification with and participation in a worldwide movement of GI dissent as a response.



LAST HARASS, published by GIs for Peace at Fort Gordon, in Augusta, Georgia.

The GI underground press arose in 1967 and flourished for several years.

The first paper was probably *Vietnam GI*, which was started by Jeff Sharlet, a Vietnam veteran. Sharlet wanted to reach soldiers and veterans with an antiwar perspective, written by their peers. The paper was an immediate smash hit with GIs,

who responded with hundreds of letters. “What impresses most of the guys is that *Vietnam GI* is written to us,” said one letter, “the first termers and lower rank enlisted men, not the lifers”. Another widely read and prominent early GI paper was *The Bond*, which became the paper of the American Servicemen’s Union – a group of radical antiwar soldiers led by



FTA, published by GIs at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Pvt. Andy Stapp that wanted to unionise lower-ranking GIs.

Into the early 1970s, the GI press exploded, with dozens upon dozens of papers – some short-lived, some lasting for years – flourishing across the United States, Europe, and the Pacific Rim. One paper, the *Stuffed Puffin*, was even published in far-off Iceland.

The contents of the GI press spoke to the disenchanted soldier. The papers criticised the war and mocked the “lifers” who commanded GIs (the title of one fleeting paper out of Fort Leonard Wood was *The Pawn’s Pawn* – one of many that railed against the class divide in the war and the army’s authoritarian culture). Papers criticised racism in the military and US society, and analysed the racist and imperialist nature of the Vietnam War. Many contained hilarious features, such as a regular contest for “Pig of the Month” or “Lifer of the Month”. In one case, the “winner”, a

despised officer nominated by the readers, was awarded a well-ripened set of pigs' feet.

Active-duty GIs were central to the production and distribution of the GI antiwar press. Every paper had its own local context. Some were produced for a single base and some aimed at a global readership; some were more radical and hard-edged, while others relied on the language and visuals of the hippie counterculture.

There were reports of the rare paper being produced in the lower decks of ships, and even in Vietnam. But typically, the papers were put together – columns penned, articles and letters collected, visuals laid out, and the whole thing usually mimeographed – by a combination of GIs, veterans, and antiwar civilians. The papers were aided financially by a network of civilian-backed fundraising efforts. One prominent organisation that raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for GI papers and coffeehouses was the United States Servicemen's Fund.

Once printed, the papers would be circulated on military posts and in surrounding towns, as well as in transport hubs like bus stations, and in GI antiwar coffeehouses where service members congregated. Soldiers across the United States, Europe, the Pacific, and Southeast Asia requested bundles of different papers, which they would distribute in mailrooms, mess halls, and



RAP!, published by antiwar soldiers stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia, and their civilian supporters.

barracks. This was a key way that GIs from all over the world were able to join the GI movement – by interacting with and spreading the contents of the GI press.

The news reports in the GI press also inspired soldiers to take action.

Papers contained stories about antiwar protests across the country, some staged by soldiers specifically, others by the wider antiwar movement. The

papers also promoted upcoming local and national protests, and covered causes célèbres – stories of the national and global heroes of the GI movement whose actions and arrests grabbed media headlines. By reporting on protests involving GIs at other bases, the papers also encouraged soldiers to create their own.

It's worth noting that troops who produced and circulated the GI press took serious risks.

the Ally

A NEWSPAPER FOR SERVICEMEN



INT. INSTITUTE SOC. GEOGRAPHY

No. 10 October, 1968

FREE to GIs

Box 9276 Berkeley, Calif.

Brass helpless

GI's TO MARCH; THIS TIME FOR PEACE



AIC Michael Locks, LL, Hugh Smith, and AIC John Wright at a press conference concerning the march. If they can openly organize and publicize this march, so can you. March with them or telegraph support.

IT IS ABSOLUTELY LEGAL FOR GIs WEARING CIVILIAN CLOTHES TO MARCH IN THE GIs AND VETS MARCH FOR PEACE ON OCTOBER 12.

IT IS YOUR RIGHT AND MORAL DUTY TO DEMONSTRATE. ONLY THEN WILL THE PUBLIC KNOW OF THE SOLDIERS' CONCERN.

ONLY WE CAN END THIS WAR. LET THE ONES WHO MUST DIE FOR PEACE, WAGE PEACE ALSO.

- LL, Hugh Smith

More GI's Resist

As election time approaches resistance increases. This seems to be the development.

LLJ STILL HANG ON
A dozen Black GIs are still hanging out and conducting a section of the Long Binh stockade.

FOUR HOOKED AS MIBS
The nine twelve of the party-three Black GIs who refused first duty in Chicago have been court-martialed. Seven have been convicted of disobeying a superior's report for refusal.

ONLY ARMY OFFICERS
MARCHING IN SAN FRANCISCO
Two Black Army officers, Lt. James Anderson, and Lt. Robert Harris, both stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, were recently apprehended in San Francisco, California, for the following punishments were:

Another Letter from LBJ

Dear Editor,
Don't get me wrong I don't see you out there, at least at first I had 2 years to go. I'm from Cleveland, Ohio. And I just got out of LBJ. It's a long story but you know how I got in. The F-4 was new. Here it was about 1964.

I'm a good brother and I put LBJ on the 4th of September with only 17 days to go. I'm not sure my GIs' until September 12. They were let out of camp. I'll leave here December. LBJ is not a place where you can change. I had 4 months to do and if you are good they give you five days good time for every month.

This is true. At first I was up for a 212 which means out of the Army, but they said LBJ is best for me. We get up at 6:30 every morning. Chow is from 5 to 8 and we go to work for work call with guard. It's two sides to LBJ. I had it a good side and a bad side. We have still call three times a day and the only thing that is good about LBJ is when you get short. For those it's like shit, it's pieces of shit.

given to them; Anderson, loss of benefits pay for 3 months; Harris, loss of 3 months pay for 6 months, and six months confinement.

The optimistic Black GIs had been gone for three weeks and wanted to file a conscientious objection. Lt. Anderson was permitted to file after returning to Ft. Campbell. They are being represented by attorney Whitworth Stokes, Jr., of Nashville, Tennessee.

It's LEGAL to march

Members of the Armed Forces are entitled to march on October 12 if they wish to. This is a Constitutional right. If the Armed Services take any action against any active or inactive member of the Armed Forces the full weight of the 125-man Lawyers Guild Service Force will be used in their behalf.

If you are prevented from marching, do not despair. The 125 Lawyers Guild Service Force will be used in your case. If you have a case for the phone, you have enough money.



AIC AUBREY GROSSMAN

EAST COAST MARCH

As the Ally goes to press, we have information of another GI march for October 12th. The Servicemen's Peace & Freedom League is planning to march on the White House at the same time that West Coast GIs will be marching in San Francisco.

East Coast GIs should contact GI Barry, 1204 Wyoming St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005, or District of Columbia, peace groups.

(Continued on Back Page)

Inside this Ally...
U.S. elections: ALLY comments... p.23
A WAC speaks... p.8
SUPREME COURT and the MARCH... p.7

get six months in the stockade, the potential punishment for distributing unauthorised literature, which the papers were characterised as".

Along with production and distribution, the very act of reading and writing for the GI press was a way that thousands of soldiers across the world could plug into a movement of global GI dissent. Letters to specific papers brimmed with readers' words of praise, stories of perceived injustices at their own bases, countercultural musings about love and peace (and sometimes drugs), and updates on their own GI organising efforts. These letters are windows into an otherwise-lost world of Vietnam-era soldier dissent that had the GI press at its center.

For example, *The Ally*, a paper produced in Berkeley and circulated globally for years, with a print run in the thousands, received hundreds of letters in which GIs described their feelings about the war, the military, and their attempts to help build the GI movement. From Korea to the Philippines, from Long Binh to Da Nang, and from bases across every US region, GIs sent letters describing local protests, paper-distribution efforts and run-ins with the brass, and offered critical riffs on the war and the military.

Like many other papers, *The Ally* would print these letters in its pages (in a section called "Sound-Off!" - the paper's most popular feature). These printed

THE ALLY, published by service personnel and supporters in Berkeley, California.

They could face harassment, punishment, and even time in the stockade if they were caught spreading material that was considered subversive. Skip Delano was stationed at Fort McClellan, Alabama, and was a key organiser in the GI organizing efforts there. Delano and others put out a paper called *Left Face*. He recounts elsewhere in *Waging Peace in Vietnam*:

"We'd have to spend a fair amount of time figuring out

how to get the paper out, into hands of people on the base. You'd sneak around at night and you'd run in barracks and you'd throw it on the beds and you'd split and get the hell out of there. I can remember running out and jumping into the trunk of a car and laying in the trunk; the MPs would come and you would be hiding in the trunk of some cars and hoping you wouldn't get caught. Because if you got caught, you could

letters showed readers that they were not alone in their thoughts – that GIs all over the world felt as they did. In this way, the GI press, functioned as the “social media” of its day and, like the GI antiwar coffee-houses, was a core vehicle for the advancement of the wider GI movement.

By the early to mid-1970s, the GI press was in decline, though some papers would continue operations for years after the Vietnam War ended. In today’s Internet age, the power of the GI press lives on – not so much in the print press that the GI movement used, but in blogs, social media accounts, and podcasts



GIGLINE, published by GIs at Fort Bliss, in El Paso, Texas.

by antiwar military groups and individuals who draw inspiration from the history of soldier dissent during the Vietnam era.

The story of the GI underground press is a testament to the scope and dynamism of the historic wave of soldier dissent during the Vietnam War.

Fortunately, through the digital GI Press Collection compiled by James Lewes and made available online by the Wisconsin Historical Society, scholars, journalists, activists, and others now have access to an extensive archive through which we can continue to explore the history of the GI movement. **CT**

Derek Seidman is a researcher and historian based in Buffalo, New York. He has a PhD in history from Brown University. All images provided by the GI Press Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society.

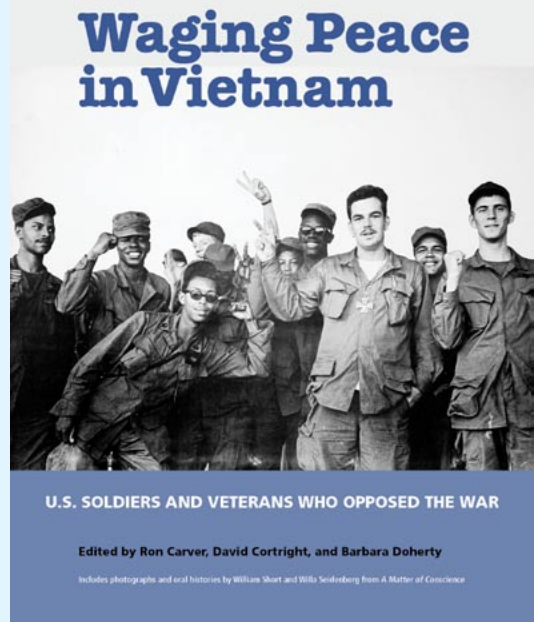
WAGING PEACE IN VIETNAM

U.S. Soldiers and Veterans Who Opposed the War

Editors: Ron Carver, David Cortright, Barbara Doherty – Afterword: Christian Appy

Features first-hand accounts, oral histories, underground newspapers, posters, flyers, and photographs, plus fourteen new essays by leading scholars and activists.

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