Breaking Ranks: GI Antiwar Newspapers and the Culture of Protest

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Popular works about the United States in the 1960s often analyze the Vietnam war in terms of the actions of Lyndon Johnson, Melvin Laird, and William Westmoreland juxtaposed to the protests of Abbie Hoffman, Mark Rudd, and Bernardine Dohrn. But such a "top down" approach is unsatisfactory in analyzing the decentralized and loosely structured opposition to United States military involvement in Southeast Asia. The antiwar movement was not a single entity, but a coalition of organizations on college campuses, in local communities, and, increasingly after 1968, on military bases in the United States and abroad. GI "alternative" or "underground" newspapers gave voice to antiwar sentiment within the military along with calls for First Amendment rights for soldiers and an end to racism and sex discrimination in the United States.

The idea of opposing the Vietnam war within the military took shape as the civilian antiwar movement began to expound a broad protest agenda and as soldiers began to see themselves as occupying the front ranks of a multi-faceted struggle against American imperialism abroad and injustice at home. Just as the civilian/student antiwar movement considered the war as part of a wider pattern of serious social ills, there were voices in the military that articulated personal and collective discontent, of which the war was one major cause. Modeled in many cases after civilian underground papers that were easily obtainable off base, GI antiwar newspapers were a sounding board for expressions of resistance in an environment not known for its tolerance of dissent.

Challenges to military authority that ranged, even in wartime, from grumbling comments on latrine walls to draft riots and refusals to fight, were not new in the 1960s and early 1970s. American soldiers had
long complained about the oppressive nature of the military bureaucracy and the meaningless quality of its regulations, the degree to which advancement was based less on merit than on favoritism, and the fact that the institution saw no need to recognize or grant its citizens in uniform basic constitutional rights. But expressions of dissatisfaction did not necessarily connote a spirit of resistance or rebellion. Prior to the Vietnam war, GIs generally accepted the legitimacy of military authority and the capacity of superiors to make a dissenter’s life unbearable.

Resistance and rebellion against policy in Vietnam and against the military itself diverged sharply from dissent in America’s wars earlier in the twentieth century. The new military protest, which was small at first, grew dramatically in its power and impact as the war dragged on. Antiwar activists demanded that the various branches of the military recognize its subordinate members as citizens with a constitutionally guaranteed right to dissent from established policy. They demanded the right to defy and modify regulations, and they insisted that soldiers as workers had the right to bargain collectively with base commanders on such issues as work assignments, recreational activities, and the right to express opposition to the war.

Why did these soldiers presume that they had rights protected by the First Amendment when their predecessors had resented but essentially accepted the Uniform Code of Military Justice? Clues can be found in the nature of the war itself, the profile of the antiwar GI, and the emergence of protest as a significant aspect of American culture by the late 1960s.

The fighting in Vietnam was part of an undeclared “non-war” against unseen enemies. It exacted a high cost in American and Vietnamese lives with few if any signs of victory. Even soldiers who enlisted with the idea of saving the world from the “Communist menace” often became disillusioned because they were fighting a war they could not win. The ranks of antiwar soldiers and veterans swelled after the Tet Offensive of January 1968, and many of the men and women who were most vocal in opposing the war and demanding GI rights had recently returned from service in Vietnam.

Many of the men drafted into military service came to the fighting with overwhelmingly negative feelings about the war. As draftees, they accepted the mission in Vietnam with little enthusiasm and often sought to evade rather than obey military rules. African-American and Latino soldiers and those from poor families saw themselves as cannon fodder with little to gain from the abstraction of a fight to preserve American interests in Southeast Asia. With the end of student deferments in 1966, some of the military’s lower ranks were populated by young men drawn from the counter-culture itself. Those who could not avoid military service and for whom obtaining conscientious objector status or evading the draft were not realistic options now found themselves subjected to a system of total military regulation. For young people who had recently begun to question and challenge authority and to see this challenge as
a legitimate exercise of popular political will, the reality of military life ran
counter to their notions of the fundamental principles of American
politics embodied in the Bill of Rights.

The GI protest movement comprised many groups of soldiers
who had come to mistrust both the military and government policy-
makers. Some, who at first had no specific identification with the
antiwar movement or the counterculture, saw the war as unwinnable,
many African-American and Latino GIs felt that they had no stake in the
struggle, and many middle- and working-class young conscripts began
their military careers with strong opposition to the war. To some extent,
the GI antiwar movement mirrored the culture of protest and resistance
to government policy that developed on college campuses with the first
Teach-ins and antiwar protests as early as 1965 and which permeated
the larger culture by the end of the decade.

Oppositional culture in the U.S. in the late 1960s can be
discussed in terms of both the challenges it posed to traditional authority
and the search that it demanded for a better community that would be
achieved through struggle with established ideas and social structures.
America’s war in Southeast Asia became for many Americans and, most
particularly for the men and women who rejected its basic premises even
as they were asked to fight it, a symbol of misguided policy and outright
betrayal. Protest against the politics of passivity that had made the war,
along with racism and sexism, possible, became central to the lives of
many GIs and recently discharged veterans. The slogan “No More
Vietnams” connoted resistance to what many in the antiwar movement,
both in and outside of the military, saw as an imperialist venture by a
hierarchical and undemocratic government. In antiwar papers all over
the United States and in Germany, Japan, and the Philippines, citizen
soldiers criticized the war, not in isolation, but as part of a larger matrix
of social ills that was very much in need of radical change.

The presence of a military antiwar press underscores the extent
to which official pronouncements of victory, high military morale, or
“peace at hand” in Vietnam were less than candid assessments.
Nevertheless, it is difficult to quantify the extent of GI resistance from the
papers. Many GIs took part in antiwar demonstrations but did so out
of uniform and on their own time in order to stay within the regulations.
Circulation figures for unofficial GI newspapers are an unreliable
indicator of the extent of antiwar activism, as papers were often passed
from hand to hand when funds to print a large run could not be raised.
The GI antiwar press provides qualitative indicators of dissent within the
armed services, as many papers covered protests over conditions in
military jails, individual and large-scale refusals to fight, racism and
sexism in the military, the civilian antiwar movement, massacres and
other battlefield atrocities, the use of chemical weapons and defective
weapons in Vietnam, and attempts to censor or eliminate anti-military
papers. The antiwar press and the attempt to suppress it shows that
resistance was a serious problem for the military brass, which infiltrated
newspapers and off-base antiwar groups and harassed movement leaders and participants.4

GI newspapers emerged in part to fill a gap in the mainstream press coverage of news that GIs though was important. Until 1968, the majority of American newspapers accepted government assertions of the validity of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia and military assessments of the extent to which we were “winning” the war. It was not until after the Tet Offensive that reporters challenged the information that was fed to them in the daily Saigon military briefings that came to be known as the Five O’Clock Follies. Even as the mainstream press began to take notice of the student/civilian antiwar movement, major city and small town newspapers offered very little coverage of strong resistance to the war within the armed forces. Further, military papers such as Stars and Stripes offered no outlet for expressions of protest. For example, when The Armored Sentinel, the official post newspaper at Fort Hood, Texas, carried an advertisement during the summer of 1968 soliciting contributions to a writing contest sponsored by the radical magazine Ramparts and the Summer of Support—a project launched by Rennie Davis to raise funds for antiwar coffeehouses—all 12,000 copies of the issue were burned before any soldiers could see the ad. In some localities, publishers whose papers were distributed on military bases demurred from printing news that was potentially critical or damaging to the brass.5 For many, the need for an alternative press was obvious.

The journalistic activity of antiwar GIs was consistent with the long-standing historical use of the First Amendment to foster dissent. American radicals, from J.A. Wayland, publisher of the early 20th century midwestern socialist newspaper The Appeal to Reason, to contributors to the independent socialist journal Monthly Review (published from the late 1940s to the present), have used the press to articulate a Left political perspective. During the Vietnam war, hundreds of underground or alternative publications produced by individuals, college groups, and organizations that identified with the Left, gave voice to disparate antiwar and counterculture viewpoints and aided in the organization of a broad-based and decentralized antiwar coalition. The antiwar press became an especially important part of the terrain of military rights over which antiwar soldiers and the brass battled frequently. In the early days of the movement, the antiwar GI or officer was an anomaly isolated by the harassment he or she faced simply for challenging prevailing military wisdom. Alternative newspapers provided assurance that there were kindred antiwar spirits as they encouraged the growing tide of protest against the military ethos as well as the war itself.6

The editorial and reporting staffs of these off-base publications were often transient, as writers and editors were shipped off to Vietnam or discharged from the service, although, in a number of cases, staff members were former military men and women who remained in the area of their bases to organize the antiwar movement. Many papers received
support from or were affiliated with other military and civilian antiwar groups. These included the American Servicemen’s Union, Concerned Officers Movement (founded by junior grade officers from all services in Washington, D.C. in early 1970), the GI Alliance (founded at Fort Lewis, Washington in 1970), GIs United Against the War in Indochina (an integrated antiwar group, founded in 1969 at Fort Jackson), Movement for a Democratic Military (founded as a revolutionary organization by Marines at Camp Pendleton, California in 1969 and later established at other west coast bases), the United States Servicemen’s Fund (an umbrella agency that funded newspapers and coffeehouses and provided support ranging from antiwar films and speakers to legal counsel), and Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Some papers developed ties to revolutionary antiwar groups that provided theoretical guidance and production help. Such an alliance, however, could present problems, especially where tension existed between civilian radicals and antiwar GIs who adopted an eclectic and practical approach to ending the war rather than one based on a specific theory.\(^7\) In cases of a conflict between preserving the authenticity of an original contribution and presenting a politically clear analysis, many of the GI papers opted for the direct, often unedited but authentic, voice of the soldier.

GI papers often challenged the notion that a good paper had to be polished in style and appearance. Funds, generally raised by subscriptions and occasional donations, were always in short supply, making high-quality production difficult. In an effort to represent the grassroots GI perspective, editors frequently solicited articles, letters, poetry, and cartoons, with no mention of any standard of journalistic “quality.” The “You write it, we’ll print it” slogan appears often in these publications that preserved the integrity of original contributions by editing them as little as possible\(^8\). The practice of not “correcting” contributions, even for grammar or spelling, was common. The idea that GI antiwar papers presented the views of their readers as they were, without censorship, modification, or the veneer of professional editing or typesetting was an article of faith with many editorial staffs that regarded form as subordinate to content.

The non-professional, even anti-professional, image of many of the GI papers could be interpreted as a weakness rather than a strength of grassroots publications operating with serious resource limitations. Writing in the *Columbia Journalism Review* in 1970, critic Murray Polner, who was one of the first mainstream journalists to recognize the GI press, argued that the papers and the soldiers who produced them were “amateurs, for now at least. Their content is uneven, their style sometimes turgid, their humor simply not funny.” Polner evaluated the appearance and tone of the GI papers in comparison to the mainstream press, but even as he did so he recognized that the value of these papers lay not in their journalistic “quality,” but in the power of their message. The writers, he noted, were “angrier than any other generation of conscriptees” and they would continue to search for an outlet for their
views “as long as the mass media pretend that military life is like a television serial” and as long as the war and military injustice continued. When viewed not as professionally-produced newspapers designed to capture advertising dollars and a large readership, but as expressions of discontent and, in many cases, as organizing tools for the military antiwar movement, the papers appear in a very different light. Some include ponderous political statements, but many provide personal glimpses into the transformation of a generation of soldiers into protesters. Cartoons and articles on the brass, “Armed Farces Day” activities, and the “Lifer of the Month” are sharply critical and often devastatingly funny. Indeed, many of the papers that were the least sophisticated in terms of appearance often contained analyses of the war and military life that gave voice to the deepest anger and frustration of participants themselves.

Contributors to GI antiwar papers often communicated with one another through poetry. The work of Vietnam veteran poets has become familiar in recent years as a result of the efforts of Jan Barry, W.D. Ehrhart, and others to find and publish their work, but the appearance of poems amid stories of military harassment and massacres in Vietnam in the late 1960s and early 1970s was both anomalous and fitting. Soldier-poets looked for a voice and often found it outside of the slogans and clichés of war and military life. Most of these works were unsigned and as a group they fit the description that Ehrhart applied to the poems in Winning Hearts and Minds (1972), the first anthology of Vietnam era poems, which he characterized as “artless poems, lacking skill and polish, but collectively they had the force of a wrecking ball.” In their directness and simplicity, these works communicated the GI response to the hopelessness of fighting in Vietnam without the artifice or conventions of high art:

“Dig it,” they said,
and I dug.
“Shoot it,” they said,
and I shot.
“Eat it,” they said,
and I ate.
But then,
god dammit,
“Defend it,” they said,
and I died.¹¹

This poem appeared in one of the best-known GI papers, Fun, Travel, and Adventure, produced by soldiers at Fort Knox, Kentucky, from June of 1968 to 1972. The paper's initials were quickly identified with the popular coffehouse shows and the slogan, “Fuck the Army.”

Occasionally, an editorial staff would articulate a position that seemed to eschew specific political or antiwar content. Perhaps the editors of A Four Year Bummer (formerly Harass the Brass) at Chanute
Comments on the stultifying effect of the military mindset appeared often in the GI antiwar press. Chuck Mathias' cartoon commentary on military conformity appeared in many papers.

Air Force Base, Illinois, were being disingenuous or cautious when they declared that the paper "does not necessarily have an anti-war slant—it's for GI's, by GI's, and therefore its stand is that of each writer. Most of its writers, however, are anti-war in their philosophy, but we will print all GI articles." Antiwar GIs occasionally claimed that their papers were "objective" voices in the manner of the mainstream press rather than ideologically clear statements against the military whose goal was to organize widespread opposition. As the political analysis of some contributors grew more sophisticated and as it became clear that the mainstream press continued to report government and military disinformation about the war, the GI antiwar press played an increasingly
important role in refuting the official military line from a clearly antiwar perspective.

The GI antiwar press helped to undermine traditional military authority and discipline. Many papers were focal points for specific antiwar organizing through their ties to coffeehouses and civilian antiwar groups, most offered a forum for the expression of broader critiques of American society, and almost all provided an outlet for expressions of frustration with military life and the denial of basic rights of free speech and assembly to service personnel. The papers spoke directly to draftees and short-time soldiers caught in the contradiction of having to fight a professional soldier’s war without the commitment of the long-term fighter. In scathing attacks on lifers and the brass, GI antiwar newspapers highlighted deep division within the military.

From the first publication in Berkeley in June, 1967, of The Bond, a civilian antiwar paper that later came to be identified as the “voice of the American Servicemen’s Union,” to the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam in 1973, GI underground or alternative newspapers were effective mechanisms for communication within military installations. In many instances, the papers also facilitated the sharing of information and ideas among GIs from different bases and branches of the service, as they reprinted articles, cartoons, letters, and poetry from other antiwar papers. Many papers also printed lists of GI antiwar publications, coffeehouses, and drop-in rap and counseling centers as a direct response to military attempts to censor the papers and close down “unofficial” gathering places for military personnel.

The disclosure in these papers of official harassment of antiwar soldiers aided the organizing effort of the GI movement. An individual soldier who was punished for unpopular, though not necessarily illegal, protest could be ignored, but as the numbers of publicly antiwar soldiers grew, their actions, as reported in the GI press, encouraged others to express their resistance to American policy more openly. When Lt. Henry H. Howe became the first serviceman to be prosecuted under Article 88 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice in 1965 for carrying a sign that read, “End Johnson’s Fascist Aggression against Vietnam,” at a local antiwar march in El Paso, few groups existed that could support him. With no one to testify in his behalf or publicize his trial and the fact that the Supreme Court had previously upheld a citizen’s right to criticize the president, Howe received a sentence of a year’s hard labor followed by a dishonorable discharge. When black Marines George Daniels and William Harvey spoke out publicly against the war and racism in their branch of the service in the wake of ghetto disturbances in many cities in the summer of 1967, they were arrested, tried, and sentenced to long jail terms.

By 1969, growing opposition to the war improved the situation somewhat for antiwar soldiers. The extensive coverage and public protests over the Navy’s arrest of seaman apprentice Roger L. Priest for publishing OM, The Liberation Newsletter (Washington, D.C.) helped to
Antiwar commentators attacked the hypocrisy of veterans' groups and others who insisted on continuing the war at whatever cost. (The Ally No. 19, September 1969.)

keep the climate of resistance alive. Faced with fourteen charges, including the encouragement of sedition and desertion, Priest declared that "the admirals and generals are trying to silence dissension in the ranks by any means. This is the only way to view the heavy-handed attempts to put out of commission the antiwar, anti-military newsletter which I edit." Priest received a bad conduct discharge but did not serve time in a military jail, in part because his case had received considerable public attention in the GI alternative press. Similarly, the response to the repeated firebombing of a coffeehouse near Fort Knox and the attacks on the Movement for a Democratic Military center in San Diego
prompted more rather than less resistance to military authority. According to *A Four Year Bummer*,

The organized GI Movement has grown in the last few years largely as the response of servicemen and women to the brass's attempt to repress any and all dissent in the military. From individual or isolated acts of resistance more and more GI's are moving toward more organized forms and long-range goals.¹⁵

The protection of the first amendment rights to free speech and a free press was a major issue in many GI antiwar papers. Clearly, editors were vitally concerned with their right to publish unpopular views in the military, but the issue transcended the desire for a free military antiwar press to encompass a broad range of rights that enlisted personnel began to demand as citizens. The first issue of *Fun, Travel, and Adventure* identified the paper as "Published Underground—for and by the GI's at Fort Knox, Dedicated to Free Speech and the Struggle for Our Rights."¹⁶ Such rights were not always spelled out clearly in the papers, but military personnel had a clear understanding that they wanted, for example:

- freedom from harassment for attending antiwar demonstrations off base;
- the right to produce, distribute, and possess antiwar newspapers and other antiwar and anti-military documents;
- the right to wear peace signs, long hair, African unity arm bands;
- an end to institutionalized military racism;
- an end to sexism in the military;
- the right to refuse an order to fight that a soldier considered unlawful or immoral.

That this generation of soldiers spoke in terms of rights that had long been denied in the military as a matter of course and as a way of maintaining discipline in both war and peacetime reflects the extent to which broader challenges to authority fueled opposition to American policy in Southeast Asia. Soldiers could not have presumed to struggle for their rights as citizens without indications that they would find support in the culture of protest that influenced American political life after the mid-1960s.

The vast majority of the GI antiwar papers included in their masthead this assertion: "This is your personal property. It cannot legally be taken away from you." The right to possess a single copy of an unofficial military paper was protected by Department of Defense Directive 1325.6. The Department's communique, "Guidance on Dissent," issued on May 27, 1969, allowed the publication of such papers under certain conditions:
Unless such a newspaper contains language, the utterance of which is punishable under Federal law (e.g. 20 USC sec. 2387 or the UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice]), authors of an "underground newspaper" may not be disciplined for mere publication.

But the editors of *Up Against the Bulkhead*, and unofficial Navy paper affiliated with the Movement for a Democratic Military and published, first in Berkeley and later in San Francisco, recognized that Defense Department regulations offered little protection against harassment on individual bases. Readers were advised that "you can still be put on report or cited with an Article 134 if the Brass feels like citing you. So don't kid yourselves. Although you may have many rights on paper, you have none in practice."17

While possession of an antiwar paper could be a problem for an individual soldier, the distribution of the paper on base touched off battles between base commanders and antiwar newspaper staffs. Shipments often had to be smuggled on base, and officers could and did confiscate bundles of papers before they reached their destinations. Individual commanding officers had wide discretionary power to allow or prohibit antiwar papers. Col. Harold G. Lund, the outgoing commander of Selfridge Air Force Base in Michigan, wrote to *The Broken Arrow* that Air Force regulations allowed commanders to exclude from their installations "material they consider to be detrimental to the loyalty or morale of their personnel."18 The paper continued to publish articles and letters critical of the military, including the reminder to readers that "if you believe the brass and the straight press tell you the whole story, you're in for quite a shock."19 In the fall of 1970, harassment of the paper and GIs who distributed it prompted *The Broken Arrow* to print the text of a petition to the new base commander in support of the paper's right to publish. The tone reflects an overriding emphasis on civil liberties:

WHEREAS the First Amendment to the United States Constitution recognizes that freedom of speech and freedom of the press are guaranteed to all citizens and

WHEREAS Air Force regulations recognize that members of the United States Air Force are entitled to possess any written materials for their personal use that they desire, and

WHEREAS AFR 35-15 states that "The service members [sic] right of expression should be preserved to the maximum extent possible," and that distribution of literature "may not be prohibited solely on the grounds that the material is critical of Government policies or officials,"

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED personnel of Selfridge AFB, Michigan, petition Col. Kenneth I. Gunnarson, Base Commander, to grant the request of *The Broken Arrow* for distribution rights pursuant to Selfridge AFB Reg 5-1, which indicates that distribution may be accomplished with "prior written approval." Although we do
not necessarily agree with all the views expressed in *The Broken Arrow*, we feel that the right of free expression of all points of view should be protected.\(^2\)

Military protest also sometimes reflected revolutionary goals of transforming the military and American society that were part of a broader New Left agenda. The Movement for a Democratic Military, founded in 1969 by Marines from Camp Pendleton and sailors from the San Diego Naval Complex, was especially active in spreading the antiwar message in California. The interracial MDM, that referred to itself as a “rainbow coalition,” published several papers\(^2\). A statement in *Duck Power*, the paper of the San Diego MDM group, connected the servicemen’s demand for rights and a larger worldwide “struggle for basic human rights.” The MDM demands included:

1. The right to collective bargaining.
2. Constitutional rights for military men and women.
3. Stop all military censorship and intimidation.
4. Abolish mental and physical cruelty in military brigs.
5. Abolition of the present court-martial system and replacement with trial by jury of one’s peers.
6. Wage rate the same as the federal minimum wage.
7. Abolition of the military class structure, an end to saluting and officer privileges.
8. End all racism everywhere.
9. Free all political prisoners.
10. Stop the glorification of war.
11. Abolish the draft.
12. Pull out of Vietnam now.\(^2\)

The positioning of the idea of withdrawing from Vietnam at the end of the statement hardly detracts from its importance. Rather, it places the war in a much broader context of military and social oppression that MDM hoped to eradicate. For many groups on the Left, ending the Vietnam conflict was a liberal issue in comparison to the more revolutionary goal of transforming American society. For members of the armed forces facing the prospect of combat in Southeast Asia, ending the war was a critical issue. The MDM demands, framed as they were in broad social and political terms, reflect a strong Left political influence on at least some of the GI antiwar groups.

In 1969, an MDM spokesman, writing in *Up Against the Bulkhead*, produced in the San Francisco Bay area, declared the Movement to be:

...dedicated to using every means at our disposal to bring about a prompt end to the war in Vietnam, the exploitation of our brothers and sisters abroad, and the repression—both physical and economic—of those in our own land.
We feel that by remaining silent, the serviceman has contributed to the denial of this deep-founded right of himself and of people everywhere to live free from intimidation and oppression. We have been silent for a long time. We will be silent no longer.23

In a style reminiscent of Abbie Hoffman and the Yippies, a few antiwar military groups combined serious political ideas with anti-military proposals that were humorous or fantastic. The Movement to Off the Military presented its demands in April of 1971, in All Ready on the Left, published at Camp Pendleton:

1. The right to free and open purchase of marijuana in the mess halls and P.X.
2. The right of Black, Brown, Yellow, and Red GIs to form their own armies.
3. The abolition of uniforms.
4. The right to wear hair any length but not less than three inches. (Persons with shorter hair should be busted for indecent exposure.)
5. Community control of officers and staff N.C.O. clubs so they could be used as ethnic studies centers, free schools, etc.
6. A descending pay scale where E-1s would receive $3,000 a month and 0-10s would get $143 a month.
7. Compulsory retirement at 25 years old.
8. Government credit cards instead of military IDs.
9. Stockades turned into rehabilitation centers for lifers and officers.
10. We demand that 50% of all military personnel at all ranks be women.
11. We demand peace.
12. We demand the President of the U.S. be replaced with a statue.24

Whether the various antiwar organizations in the military inspired serious political discussion, informal rap sessions, or a humorous evocation of what military life might look like with the troops in command, they were powerful vehicles for communicating a counterculture voice. There was energy in the military to demand change, and some papers reiterated Joe Hill’s “Don't mourn, organize!” dictum to their readers, even those who might be considering desertion as an act of protest: “If you’re that pissed off at the military and you’re thinking of deserting, write to us instead. You couldn’t be in a better mood and position than you are right now to do something about the Military-Industrial complex.”25
Breaking Ranks

Black GIs and the Antiwar Movement

Articles on military discrimination and the denial of basic rights often went hand in hand with exposés and analyses of military racism, and black soldiers were an important component of the GI antiwar movement. Black casualties numbered about 13% of the total and, while this figure was only slightly larger than the percentages of African-Americans in the population at large, these young men numbered close to half the infantry population, the “grunts” whose only training was in combat and whose job was disproportionately risky. The significance of using less-educated minority men on the front lines was not lost on black soldiers who defied military authority in many ways, from the “dap” handshake and Afro hairstyle to refusing to fight. For minor infractions of military discipline, black soldiers were called up on Article 15 charges more frequently than their white counterparts, and blacks received a majority of the less-than-honorable discharges during the Vietnam war. Articles and letters on racism in the military and in American society appeared often in the GI press, and black soldiers often connected their oppression in the military to the struggle for Black Power.

To regard African-American soldiers who opposed the war simply as a part of the larger antiwar movement in which white students, civilians, and military personnel played major roles would be to oversimplify that movement and present an incomplete picture of black resistance and rebellion. Black soldiers responded not only to the Vietnam war, but also to rising demands in the late 1960s for Black Power. Their motivation to protest was often driven more by racism than by the war itself. Like many civilian activists, black soldiers launched their own protests and formed their own organizations. In many cases, they also published newspapers that articulated their own demands in their own style.

Revelations of the hostility of black soldiers to the military and the war were not confined to the unofficial GI press. Indeed, as the war dragged on, mainstream newspapers began to cover dissent in the military in general, with a particular focus on the problems of black soldiers, whose emerging nationalist consciousness prompted a critique of the “white man’s war.” In April of 1969, the New York Times quoted the Defense Department’s director for civil rights, who characterized the problem of racial unrest in Vietnam as “serious and comparable to the potential for racial discord within the United States.” Similar articles in other major newspapers focused on black discontent and offered various opinions on the clenched fist salute, the dap handshake and the display of the Black Power flag, sometimes in the context of an escape from the war through drugs or an assertion of cultural independence.

But in articles like “Army is No Army at All... Discipline’s Gone to Hell,” from the 23 May 1971 Philadelphia Bulletin, the writer concluded that, in spite of peace signs, heavy heroin and opium consumption, Black Power salutes and loud rock music, “the job still gets done. The ammo gets humped, the hill gets taken.” From this type of coverage,
The hierarchical structure of the military and the ultimate power of money were portrayed in this Liberation News Service cartoon that appeared in both the civilian and GI antiwar press. (*Aboveground* 1:7, March 1970).

The American public was given the impression, as late as 1971 when public opinion polls were revealing full-blown dissatisfaction with the war, that all was well in Vietnam. Most mainstream press coverage of black protest in Vietnam and in the military at home failed to relate the struggle for equality and power to opposition to the war itself. The antiwar press raised this issue frequently and powerfully with the argument that military racism was part of the larger fabric of oppression and that black opposition to the war was a step toward self-determination and power.

In January of 1966, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee issued a formal statement in opposition to the war in Vietnam. Coming on the heels of the murder of SNCC member Sammy Younge, a college student and Navy veteran who had tried to use a “White Only” bathroom in Alabama, the statement connected Younge’s murder to the killing of Vietnamese peasants, arguing that both attacks were against people “seeking to secure the rights guaranteed them by law.” SNCC articulated its opposition to the draft as well as to the war. Stokely Carmichael even declared that blacks who fight for the rights of others while possessing no rights themselves at home were little more than mercenaries. Although black respondents to public opinion polls indicated an early support for Lyndon Johnson’s conduct of the war, the extensive use of ground troops and the escalation of the fighting diminished that support considerably by 1967. On April 4 of that year, Martin Luther King, Jr. publicly broke with the Johnson administration and announced his opposition to the war in a speech in New York City’s Riverside Church, in which he urged African-Americans to protest the
war, calling the United States government "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today."

Until the Vietnam war, the military had been an accepted and sometimes desirable route out of rural poverty or the urban ghetto for young black men. Frederick Douglass had even declared in the mid-19th century that, with his uniform and musket, "there is no power on earth which can deny that he [the black soldier] has earned the right to citizenship in the United States." But reality was not so happy as Douglass' pronouncement. The career black soldier was often able to make accommodations to a military establishment that used his skills, paid him almost a minimum wage, and gave him a pension after twenty years, and the black draftee, like his white counterpart, simply hoped to survive his hitch with a minimum of difficulty. But Vietnam was a different war, and the black men who were drafted and black women who enlisted were sensitive to military injustice and often began to think about the relationship of the war they were being asked to fight to their own struggles for personal and collective liberation.

The first soldiers who gained national publicity for their refusal to fight in Vietnam took their stand, not only against the war, but against racism, whether it was directed at blacks in the United States or Vietnamese in their own country. The Fort Hood Three—Dennis Mora, David Samas, and James Johnson, declared in June of 1966 that they would refuse orders to fight in Vietnam. Johnson, a black soldier, linked his struggle to that of the Vietnamese people:

Now there is a direct relationship between the peace movement and the civil rights movement. The South Vietnamese are fighting for representation, like we ourselves.... Therefore the Negro in Vietnam is just helping to defeat what his black brother is fighting for in the United States. When the Negro soldier returns, he still will not be able to ride in Mississippi or walk down a certain street in Alabama. There will still be proportionately twice as many Negroes as whites in Vietnam. Those Negroes that die for their country still cannot be assured of a burial place that their family feels is suitable for them. His children will still receive and inferior education and he will still live in a ghetto. Although he bears the brunt of the war, he will receive no benefits.... We can gain absolutely nothing in Vietnam.32

It was in this context of opposition to the war by advocates of black power, a weakening of popular support for the war, and the public refusal to fight in Vietnam by a black soldier for explicitly political reasons that black resistance grew within the military. Reports of black soldiers being disciplined for minor infractions of dress codes and standards of military "attitude" were accompanied by coverage of serious trouble in military stockades over the conditions in which prisoners were held. Riots involving black GIs in the summer of 1968 at military prisons in Da Nang and Long Binh were part of a growing pattern of resistance to the war and the military that had specifically racial overtones.
Harassment of black military personnel for political and antiwar activities was reported in the GI antiwar press because such cases were useful in rallying GIs to the defense of a particular comrade and of organizing the larger antiwar movement. In August of 1970, Cliff Manskar, a black Marine who was known to be a member of the Movement for a Democratic Military at Camp Pendleton, was arrested for assault. The specific charge was that Manskar had threatened three military police officers who attempted to remove the black unity band that he was wearing on his wrist.

Writers for *All Ready on the Left*, an antiwar paper that leveled particularly sharp critiques at the military brass, argued that Manskar's "crime" had been to distribute copies of *Black Unity* in the local community of Oceanbottom and that the city police had turned him over to military authorities who then charged him with disobeying a "legal order" to remove his unity band and with assault when the MPs forced the issue. Describing the fact that many enlisted men came to Manskar's defense in the early days of his trial, *All Ready on the Left* connected the case to military racism and the larger question of resistance:

Why do the piggies fear Cliff? Is it because GIs rallied to his defense, eagerly testifying on his behalf in the opening days of his trial? These people realize that the lifer may come down hard on them because of their insolence. Still, they testify. Is it because Cliff relates to all people and is well-liked by everyone who has come in touch with him (except a certain few who sport bars and rockers)? Is it because Cliff refuses to accept a deal from the pigs, shunning a UD in order to expose lifer oppression?... Pigs realize their days have become numbered. With people like Cliff around, those days of power are dwindling even more rapidly. It is hard to relate just how much Cliff means to the GI movement in our country. Maybe it is sufficient to simply say that we love this beautiful brother who has dedicated his life to his people in order to help them to determine their own destiny. And that's good for all of us.

Manskar's trial ended with a ruling by the military judge that the original order to remove the unity band had been illegal. In addition to concluding one Marine's chapter in the military justice system, this ruling also clarified that, in the future, other GIs could not be harassed for some of the sartorial trappings of Black Power.33

Billy Dean Smith, an Army private, was the first soldier to be brought before a courts martial for fragging two white officers in Vietnam. Smith, who had enlisted from the Watts neighborhood in Los Angeles in 1967, was open about his hatred of the military. Marked with the reputation of having a "bad attitude," he was often charged with minor rules infractions and was in the process of being dishonorably discharged when the fraggings occurred. Because of Smith's notorious views and the fact that he was arrested with a live grenade in his pocket,
he was charged with murder. His case aroused indignation in the GI antiwar press, which generally viewed it as a frame-up of a troublesome black soldier. All Ready on the Left compared Smith’s case to that of Lt. William Calley:

Calley is the convicted murderer of at least 22 Vietnamese but is only on restriction, and may well be pardoned by old Dicky. Billy on the other hand is only suspected of murder, but you can bet he is in solitary confinement in some stockade. And considering that he is a black enlisted man accused of killing two white officers, you can guess how fair a trial he’ll get. Let’s hear it for American justice, right on right on right off!34

Smith’s trial did not take place until 1972, when he was acquitted on the murder charge but found guilty of assault. In a statement reprinted in the Lewis McChord Free Press, Smith described himself as, “a candid black, outspoken individual. I had stated time and time again that I realized that the war in Indo-China was unjust and racially motivated, and most of all that I strictly hated all who had high regard for the habitual butchery of the Vietnamese people.” The paper went on to argue that Smith’s guilt or innocence was less important, especially given the particularly flimsy nature of the evidence against him, than “the Army’s blatant attempt to smash the resistance of GI’s, and to intimidate those who are unafraid to stand up.” The article ended with a poem, “Mr. Yes-Sir,” that Smith had composed from his prison cell:

Hey! Brothers, listen to what I have to say.  
You say you want equal opportunity each and every day.  
Well, how’re you going to get this if you’re not willing to fight  
And stand up for what you believe in because you know it’s right....

He drafts you into the army, where you are strong and brave,  
But if you happen to be Black, you wind up being a slave.  
He sends you cross the waters to fight the Viet Cong,  
But if you think on who caused the trouble, you’ll find out that he’s the the one.  
He’ll put you in the stockade, because you’ll learn the truth.  
Now if you’re not willing to do his dirt, for you he’ll have no use.35

Occasionally, statements from outside the military in support of resisting soldiers appeared in the GI antiwar papers. From her prison cell, Angela Davis wrote in “Love, Strength, and Solidarity” to members of the armed forces, in a letter printed in July of 1972 in Offut Times, from Offut Air Force Base near Omaha, Nebraska, the headquarters of the Strategic Air Command:

In recent years, the people in this country have learned a great deal from prisoners and from men and women in the military. The long concealed brutalities woven into the normal routine of prison life have been laid bare. Prisons have been exposed as
central tools of maintaining racism... From those who have experienced it first-hand, people have learned how the military is used to maim and kill people in Indochina who are desperately trying to be free.... Through their functions, both the prisons and the military touch almost every section of the people in this country who have no power—Black people, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, working people, and the poor. It is only natural that in both of these structures, many of the ills which afflict American society as a whole will be reflected.... The stockades and prisons are full of beautiful, committed, strong, struggling people. Their beauty, their commitment, their strength are a threat to the interests of the rich, to racism, to wars which sacrifice human lives for profit and power.36

One issue that helped to place military racism in a familiar context was the increasingly frequent deployment of troops in ghetto neighborhoods to control civil disturbances. Many of the major military antiwar groups included planks in their platform positions that decried the use of troops in American cities. For black soldiers, this use of troops was an example of how, as workers in the military, they would be ordered to attack their own people. Recalling earlier uses of troops against strikers, Shakedown, a paper published at Fort Dix, New Jersey, argued that it was important for soldiers
to understand what riot training is really aimed at, since we all will be subjected to mandatory training and in some cases will be called to “pacify” areas here at home. Vietnam, Berkeley, Newark, and Columbia University are all recent examples of the armed power of the state in action against the people.... The most vicious use of armed power by the state has been against people of color—at first to annihilate the Indians and to take their land, later to preserve and protect the slave system, and today to control the ghettos [sic] of our country.37

The particular problems of harassment and military racism received attention in GI antiwar papers, most of whose staff members were white. Expressions of solidarity with black service people included exposés of the abuses of local and military police authorities. In addition, articles on the struggle for racial equality appeared often. On the second anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s murder, Aerospaced reprinted its version of “10 Commandments on Vietnam,” that it attributed to the slain civil rights leader:

1. Thou shalt not believe in military victory.
2. Thou shalt not believe in a political victory.
3. Thou shalt not believe that the Vietnamese love us.
4. Thou shalt not believe that the Saigon Government has the support of the people.
5. Thou shalt not believe that the majority of the South Vietnamese look upon the Viet Cong as terrorists.
6. Thou shalt not believe the figures of killed enemy or of killed Amerikkans.
7. Thou shalt not believe that the generals know best.
8. Thou shalt not believe that the enemy victory means Communism.
9. Thou shalt not believe that the world supports the United States.
10. Thou shalt not kill.38

Aerospaced and other papers helped to keep military racism in the forefront of the GI antiwar movement.

Occasionally, the antiwar press brought a light touch to the fight against racism. When the Beatle Bailey cartoons, a regular feature of daily newspapers throughout the country and in the military, began to include Lt. Flap, a bearded black officer who asked questions like, “How come there’s no blacks in this honkie outfit?” the Pacific Stars and Stripes, an official Army paper, pulled the strip, arguing that “Negro soldiers aren’t like that. Besides, the Army regulations wouldn’t allow a soldier to grow a goatee.” The Ally, published in Berkeley, suggested that Flap’s facial hair had nothing at all to do with his disappearance from the Army’s voice of record: “Flap might have been a ‘bad’ example: he takes no shit. And then there’s the fact that all those white lifer sergeants have to call him ‘Sir!’”39

When they appeared in the mainstream press, reports of disaffection and racial violence in the military were often accompanied by assurances that the problems were being investigated, that hot lines and counseling services were being put in place for black soldiers, and that the situation was under control. A’bout Face, a “Black GI Publication of USB, Unsatisfied Black Soldiers,” based in Mannheim and Heidelberg, Germany, offered a differing perspective:

It is the policy of this paper to expose the racist-military clique for what they are. Down through the years black GIs have never had a voice to speak their true opinions. To that we say ‘no more.’... As the struggle intensifies there will be stronger repressive measures, again we say ‘no matter how hard you try you can’t stop us now.’... We see ourselves as the vanguard of the revolutionary struggle....

— Editor-in-chief
A’bout Face

Black soldiers were not alone in seeing their struggle against military authority and against the war as part of a broader pattern of resistance to oppression. Women in the armed forces began to speak out in the GI antiwar press, just as they were beginning to articulate an understanding of their oppression in the broader culture. In the press, articles on women’s issues discussed gender stereotyping, harassment, sexuality, abortion, and the right of women to express independent views.
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WOMEN'S VOICES IN THE GI ANTIWAR PAPERS

It was in the context of a culture of protest that women's voices began to be heard within the GI antiwar movement through the alternative press. Their letters and articles reveal a growing awareness of women's oppression in the larger culture, dissatisfaction with the treatment of women in the enlisted ranks, and a sense of futility with regard to their ability to bring about an end to the war.41 Antiwar activists who organized women on or near military bases realized that enlisted women and military wives who may have opposed the war did not “see themselves in a direct relationship to the war effort as guys do.... no one seems to see herself as able to do anything to stop it.”41a

Women who were dissatisfied with military life could not help being ambivalent about their newly found urge to speak out. They were, after all, volunteers, who entered the service with the expectation that the military would do something for them and would, at the same time, value their contributions. They did not call themselves “feminists.” GI women's narratives collected in recent years reflect this ambivalence as they reveal a strong nurturing, care giving impulse. According to Renny Christopher, who has analyzed oral histories of both male and female veterans:

Women often felt that they were supporters of the men, and not participants in their own right. Women in the military often felt that what they were doing was not as important as what the men were doing, and that in addition to their own jobs they also had the responsibility of acting as mother, sister, and girlfriend to male soldiers. Having absorbed the gender role stereotypes of the larger American society, these women expected to submerge their own needs, and to take care of the men, whose role as combat soldiers was valued more highly than that of nurses of ‘support’ personnel.41b

Despite a sense of powerlessness and an absence of control over their lives, many women began to speak out in the GI alternative papers that were available to them about the conditions of military life, institutionalized sexism, and what they, like their counterparts in an emerging feminist movement in the larger culture, saw as the objectification of women. They did so in a language and style that lacked theoretical clarity and intellectual polish, but their views mirrored those of women in the civil rights and antiwar movement and, increasingly, in American society as a whole.41c

One important subtext of the GI papers is the close personal bonding of men who come to depend on each other for support, either in combat or in opposition to the military. In military training, an important aspect of this bonding process is achieved through the high value placed on “male” aggression and the fear of being labeled a woman. Mark Gerzon has argued that the fear of man's:
As opposition to the war intensified, cartoonists drew sharp distinctions between antiwar GIs and civilian supporters of the fighting. (The Ally, No. 27, June 1970.)

The female side, the 'anima' in Jungian terms, seems inextricably involved in triggering our apathy for destructiveness. It is as if war provides men with a periodic exorcism of the anima—a ritual cleansing and purification of masculinity. The anima is banished from the Soldier's consciousness because it disturbs, in Emma Jung's words, "a man's established ideal image of himself." 

The male soldiers who rejected the war and who, in many cases, struggled to distance themselves from the most destructive aspects of the "male" ethos of the military, nonetheless often developed other bonds that excluded women. The cultivation of ritual handshakes that emulated those of black GIs, calling each other "brother," and speech peppered with expletives and military jargon were all part of a style that can still be observed in antiwar veterans nearly twenty years after the end of the fighting. Military women often used the vernacular of the men simply to "get along" in a male environment and to communicate their political and cultural concerns. While they struggled on the job to survive among "the guys," they wrote in the GI newspapers of their frustrations and anxieties as women.
To read the mainstream press during the war is to get a mixed picture of women serving in Vietnam. The female GIs, so often referred to as “girls,” are portrayed as serious and dedicated soldiers, some of whom had volunteered for wartime service because their husbands were also serving in Vietnam. But however heavily committed the women themselves may have been as they began their tours of duty in Vietnam, the press often spoke of them as ornaments whose presence made life more “bearable” for male soldiers. Under the headline “41 WACs Are First to Serve in Vietnam: 3,000 GIs in Area Suddenly Spruce Up,” UPI ran a story in January of 1967 that described life in Vietnam for a group of clerk-typists in terms of the male soldiers who surrounded them:

After their arrival this month, the WACs appeared on the parade ground for a command formation. When the GIs marched onto the field, there was chaos as more than a few got out of step while watching the girls.... After the girls’ arrival, one company of GIs which had been exercising each evening in dirty fatigue uniforms and T-shirts suddenly appeared in sharp-looking track uniforms.... [One soldier commented] “Take that first sergeant for instance.”.... “First sergeants are supposed to be mean and nasty. But she’s the cutest one in the bunch.”

A few months later, the Philadelphia Bulletin printed an article about the 20,000 service women under the title, “Our ‘Soldiers in Skirts’ are Going Off to War,” that focused on the patriotism of the women and their eagerness to serve in Vietnam. The women, one of whom was described as “a petite, pretty brunette with short cropped hair,” and another as “head of the nation’s lady Leathernecks,” were all volunteers. Most of those interviewed were officers.

The GI antiwar press gave voice to another group of women, mainly enlisted personnel who, while they also began as volunteers and may have been self-described “flag wavers,” now felt a sense of disillusionment at the reality of their military lives. Angered at being treated simply as adjuncts to the male military ethos and increasingly aware of the harassment they faced both as soldiers and as women, the female GIs who expressed their discontent in the antiwar newspapers demanded to be taken seriously. Many women expressed particular disillusionment because they had been promised educational, travel, and other benefits for enlisting. They asserted that the recruiting pitch aimed at women was a lie and that military women were far from “Gung Ho” about the war.

Often, male writers supported the women’s cause, as in the following excerpt from AFB, the American Servicemen’s Union paper at Chanute Air Force base in Illinois:

The WAFs stationed at Chanute are continually oppressed and discriminated against by the brass. They are referred to, and treated in, materialistic ways, as decorations for the “dreary”
offices of the brass, and a release for the airmen on Friday night. The brass refer to WAFs as prostitutes and sex objects, and cannot seem to think of women as normal human beings capable of experiencing emotion and frustration just as you and I feel it as men.

The author also pointed to the absence of recreational facilities for women, a hostile atmosphere for women at the pool halls and recreational clubs provided for servicemen, movies shown on base that showed women as "the main character's playthings, or sex toys," and unrealistic curfews and regulations that prohibited women from being out of the barracks after dark without a male escort. With a sharper and more radical analytical perspective than most papers, AFB argued that military sexism had its roots in "the capitalist economy of this country" and that unequal treatment "dehumanizes both men and women." AFB too the position in its pages that "anything that divides people serves only the pigs, whether it's racism or male chauvinism or intersquadron rivalry." 14

Many of the letters and articles written by women and supportive men stressed that women were treated as inferior soldiers because of pervasive sexism in all branches of the service from the top down. Women complained particularly of sexual harassment and an inability to gain promotions. One medical technician, Spec. 4, wrote to Fragging Action about the special problems of being a military woman, citing frequent weight checks, the absence of weapons training in basic training because, "as the story goes, one very hip sister threatened to do in her C.O.," and the difficulty of attaining higher rank: "Well, where do the promotions come in? The hard part about being a woman in the green machine is if you don't kiss the right ass or fuck the right people, forget about any more rank." 45

Some papers described more than usual harassment of military women. At SAC headquarters at Offut Air Force Base, Offul Times reported that a WAF unit that failed a general inspection was assigned a variety of unusual duties:

Working with little, if any, supplies, our sisters at war have been cleaning in places never touched by civilian janitors. Stripping wax off the floors on their hands and knees until early hours of the morning; scraping paint off windows with razor blades; cleaning vents that haven't been cleaned in a number of years; dusting the inside of BX candy machines; painting over furniture marks on walls; and cleaning stairways with toothbrushes, are only a few examples of the outrageous "duties" that our sisters in the WAF squadron have been doing.

The article ended with the assertion that no Air Force enlisted person should have to put up with the excesses of "military discipline" that the women were enduring. The writer suggested that individual GIs could
file a grievance under Article 138 of the UCMJ, advice that appeared in many antiwar papers as a way to deal with harassing officers or sergeants.

The majority of expressions of women’s discontent in the antiwar papers transcended simple complaints about specific grievances, although these were often reported in the alternative papers and nowhere else. “WAF Harassment [sic] 3” and other similar articles linked the demeaning treatment of women to the more generic oppression of soldiers in all branches of the service. Military women complained, not only of unequal treatment in the military, but of an equality of oppression to which they and their male counterparts were subjected. Writers urged their colleagues, men and women, to file charges against their immediate superiors under Article 138 or, failing this, to contact their member of Congress for a redress of their grievances. Local antiwar projects and coffeehouses increasingly began to offer an opportunity for women to discuss their problems.

Women in the enlisted ranks were more involved than officers in the emerging critique of the war and resistance to military policy and regulations. Enlisted women, wives of service personnel, and civilian antiwar organizers often marched in demonstrations, held consciousness-raising groups off base, and took part in other symbolic acts of resistance. Women at Fort Bragg, North Carolina organized a small group to study American history, which they defined as “worker’s history, third world history, and women’s history.” The Fort Bragg women also instituted courses in such “essential” skills as emergency first aid, basic auto mechanics, self-defense, and carpentry.

Women’s groups in the military were especially fragile and often did not survive for more than a few months. Enlisted women who spoke publicly on women’s issues, like male GIs who opposed the war, were subject to harrassment and frequent transfers, a technique used effectively by military brass to rid a unit of outspoken soldiers. Like participants in the new women’s groups in the civilian population, military women who met to discuss their problems often had no common political perspective. These groups often disintegrated not over common complaints but over strategic and tactical debates over how to organize women and for what purpose.

In addition, military women were haunted by the issue of lesbianism. Homosexuality was cause for less-than-honorable discharges, and many gay women feared being too outspoken on political issues. According to USSF women organizers, gay women don’t relate to FTA politics because the army is basically pretty good for them and our relationship to them was much more essentially political: we talked about class, the war, women. The problem... is that they are not in a position to move politically—they don’t want to get kicked out of the army.
Women who were not gay feared charges and innuendo that they could neither accept nor refute. It was not surprising that women in the military were often wary of organizing in groups. Instead, many used the existing GI antiwar press to express their grievances and correct the record on the issue of what life was really like for them in the service.

Like black soldiers and those who openly expressed antiwar and anti-military views, women who gave voice to their grievances often experienced surveillance, restrictions, undesirable job assignments, excessive charges filed against them for minor infractions, and other forms of harassment. Women who distributed *Broken Arrow* at Selfridge AFB in Michigan were questioned by the FBI as well as by military authorities. WACs at Fort Bragg were questioned and intimidated by base authorities in an effort to encourage them to “name names” in order to substantiate “charges” of drug use, homosexuality, or subversive activity. One WAC wrote that the tactics of dragging people who were to be questioned off their jobs in public and threatening them with dishonorable discharge was working:

> WAC company has got us WACs so uptight and paranoid about being reported to the CID as gay, that we avoid sitting together in the dining room or on buses. It gets pretty lonely here when you can’t even be close friends with other WACs for fear of being labeled gay. Don’t let them scare you from relating to your WAC sisters.47

Women began to find a voice in the military, just as they were beginning to express themselves as individuals and as an oppressed group in the larger culture. But they faced major cultural obstacles in the male military culture in which women served men. *Helping Hand*, the antiwar paper at Mountain Home AFB in Idaho, described lectures on sex that were presented to new recruits. The easy availability of oral contraceptives, without a medical examination or warnings as to possible side effects and dangers, and the fact that a pregnancy could be “handled with discretion by the Air Force” received attention in this article. The author wondered why the Air Force was not more candid about its “true” purpose for recruiting women:

> If WAFs are on this or any other base entirely for the purpose of servicing GIs, then there should be some kind of warning that recruiters give to potential WAFs. Each girl who is thinking of joining the service with intent of serving her country should know that the recruiter she is talking to is really a pimp for the United States Air Force. The eighteen year old girl, fresh out of high school and patriotically motivated should be made aware of how the military is planning to use her.48
From time to time, the GI antiwar papers printed articles on individual acts of resistance by women, such as the refusal of a WAF at Travis AFB to accept a transfer to the Philippines because of her opposition to this country's presence and investment in Third World countries. They also printed attacks on sexism in advertising and on the newly-emerging issue of legalized abortion. These contributions
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helped to raise the consciousness of military women and their male counterparts to issues of sexism in American and the relationship of that form of oppression to others.

Conclusion

Resistance to the military ethos and demands for a more democratic organization, along with protests against military racism and sexism, helped to broaden the base of the GI antiwar movement. Military personnel who began to read the papers because of a specific gripe or grievance were exposed to a broad range of issues that demanded engagement. The use of the papers as a forum for antiwar views made it possible for military personnel to connect—as their counterparts in the civilian and student antiwar movement were doing—their own oppression with that of many others in the United States and throughout the world.

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1 1.2 (December 1969): 1. Sources for this article included complete or partial runs of more than sixty GI antiwar newspapers published between 1968 and 1973. These are housed at the Samuel I. Paley Library at Temple University. I would like to thank the staffs of the Contemporary Culture Collection and Urban Archives at Temple, particularly Pam Austin, Elaine Clever, Sharon Fitzpatrick, and Tom Whitehead for their assistance and encouragement. For editorial and substantive help, Steven Tischler, Ben Chitty, Marty Hanlon, Elliott Shore, Rob Snyder, and Calvin Winslow deserve special thanks, as does Bernie Weisberger, who took time from his own research to offer an extraordinarily cogent and helpful critique of an earlier draft.

2 The declaration that possession of unofficial GI papers represented a legal exercise of the right of free speech and was protected by military regulations appears on the front page of almost all of the GI antiwar papers.

3 Military protests against the war arose first in the Army and the Marines, the branches of the Armed Forces most immediately involved in the fighting and the ones that suffered the highest casualties between 1965-1969. After the institution of Richard Nixon’s “Vietnamization” plan that relied more heavily on air and sea power, protests spread rapidly to the Navy and the Air Force. For a comprehensive account of the GI antiwar movement see David Cortright’s Soldiers in Revolt, The American Military Today (Garden City: Anchor/Doubleday) 1975.

4 Other practices directed against antiwar soldiers included restricting individuals and groups to the base or to their quarters when there was word of a demonstration against the war in a local community, delegating unpleasant work assignments to “troublesome” GIs, transferring those who spoke out against the war as a way of breaking up antiwar groups, and, of course, shipping the most vocal dissenters off to Vietnam.


6 Some papers included officers or ex-officers among their staffs. The Concerned Officers Movement published Com Mon Sense, in which it articulated two basic policy positions: “immediate withdrawal from Southeast Asia and First
Amendment Free Speech rights for all servicemen." In January of 1971, COM took up a third issue, "advocacy of GI rights and an end to second-class treatment of enlisted men," about which it issued a questionnaire to members. A number of questions, relating to pay equity, similar punishments for the same offenses by officers and enlisted men, and the use of first names, culminated with the question: "Do you think the military can be democratic and still be an effective fighting force?" See Com Mon Sense 11.1 (January 1971): 15.


"You write it, we print it" was the stated editorial policy articulated in the first issue of Fun, Travel, and Adventure, published at Fort Knox, Kentucky (23 June 1968): 1.


"Song of a Young Soldier," Fun, Travel, and Adventure 2.6, (December 1969): 4.

A Four Year Bummer, 1.4 (September 1969): 1.

Socialist and organizer Andy Stapp was the founder of the ASU. He was joined by Spec. 4 Dick Wheaton and Pvt. Paul Gaedke in organizing soldiers at Fort Sill, Oklahoma and at other bases. The Union assumed control of The Bond, which became its official organ in 1968. See James Robert Hays, "The War Within a War: Dissent in the Military with an Emphasis upon the Vietnam Era," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut (1975): 195.


"GI's Fight Back," A Four Year Bummer, 2.7 (September 1970): 2, 11.

Fun, Travel, and Adventure, issue number 1 (28 Jun 1968): 1.


The Broken Arrow 1.6 (2 October 1969): 6.


Attitude Check began publication at Camp Pendleton in late 1969 and lasted until mid-1970, when a split between black and white members of MDM changed the nature of the organization. Attitude Check was followed by All Ready on the Left (August 1970 to early 1971), published by the white faction of MDM and Black Unity, which also published for only a short period in 1970-71. See David Cortright, Soldiers in Revolt: 287-290.

Movement for a Democratic Military, "What We're For and Why We're For It," Duck Power: Published in the Interest of Enlisted Men 1.3 (18 April 1969): 2.


"M.O.M."


29 “Army is No Army at All... Discipline’s Gone to Hell,” Philadelphia Bulletin (23 May 1971): Sec. 1.


31 Douglass, quoted in Gill, “Afro-American Opposition to the United States’ Wars of the Twentieth Century:” 22, 32.


40 Editorial, A’Boul Face 1.6 (12 September 1970): 1.

41 In 1971, women at Fort McClellan, Alabama, published Whack!, which is the only known GI alternative paper published by women. In a few cases, such as in Fort McClellan’s Left Face (1969-72), a paper’s masthead would indicate that it was published by “GIs and WACs Against the War.” In general, however, women contributed to existing papers produced by men.


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49 See “Sister Says: ‘Hell No, I Won’t Go!’” Up Against the Bulkhead 2.9 (September 1971): 5.
50 See All Hands Abandon Ship, Newport Navy Base (January 1 and October 1971).