

# First Amendment Rights!

Fifth Estate Collective

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Over the past year, 58 GI antiwar newspapers published by and for GIs have sprung up on bases around the country and overseas—substantially augmenting the quality of news and analysis for GIs who previously had access only to such military publications as *Stars and Stripes*—the official mouthpiece of the brass and lifers.

Needless to say, the brass and lifers are not very pleased about their new competitors. Pleased or not, they are going to learn that “freedom of the press” applies not only to their publications and the establishment press—but also to the publications which the GIs themselves wish to publish.

This means not only the right to publish a paper, but also the RIGHT TO DISTRIBUTE IT—ON POST.

A number of GI antiwar newspapers have begun the fight for on post distribution, including *Bragg Briefs* at Ft. Bragg, *Left Face* at Ft. McClellan, *Gig-line* at Ft. Bliss, *Aerspaced* at Grissom Air Force Base, and *Your Military Left* at Ft. Sam Houston.

The right to publish and distribute was grudgingly given to antiwar GIs by Department of Defense directive 1325.6 called “Guidelines on Dissent” issued last year.

The directive, issued because of the enormous pressure of the growing GI antiwar movement, went so far as to state that, “A commander must have cogent reasons, with supporting evidence, for any denial of distribution privileges. The fact that a publication is critical—even unfairly critical—of government policies or officials is not in itself a grounds for denial.”

Actions, however, speak louder than words. And the fact is that all four newspapers have been denied distribution rights on post in spite of the fact that not one has carried any statements that would be in violation of a federal law or military regulation.

The editors of both *Aerspaced* and *Gigline* were not only denied distribution rights on post—but were given no reason for denial.

The editors of *Bragg Briefs*, the first to face this exemplary implementation of military injustice, have already begun court proceedings against the Army.

Charging that the United States Army has violated the First Amendment rights (free speech, press and association) of GIs, attorneys are seeking to enjoin the U.S. Army from interfering with the distribution of *Bragg Briefs*.

*Bragg Briefs* reports in its December issue of a hearing which took place over the case: “The Army was saying that, it alone can determine what is best for its soldiers. The Army forgets that its soldiers are not hired mercenaries, but citizens of the United States who are entitled to Constitutional protections.”

It appears that the issue of distribution rights will become a central focus of the GI antiwar movement in the coming period, and it is likely that the brass won’t be fretting about a mere 4 or 5 distribution requests—but rather 50 or 60!

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