

# G.I. Coffee Houses for Peace

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FORT HOOD, TEXAS July 12 (LNS)—The war in Vietnam is now the longest war in America's violent history. In addition to the genocide being committed against the Vietnamese, thousands upon thousands of American G.I.'s have been killed or wounded. But "G.I." is merely a label we use; beneath the uniforms are real people. Sometimes we forget that.

Thus, the Summer of Support project has been organized, first, to break down the attitude among many soldiers that Americans who are for peace have little concern for those who must fight; second, to create an understanding within the peace movement that the average G.I. is not the enemy; third, to serve as a kind of civilian watchdog committee, supporting and drawing attention to the legitimate grievances of G.I.'s which are never heard; and fourth, to give more concrete public focus to the only genuine measure of peace: the demobilization of the troops.

The execution of the project revolves around a number of coffee houses in army towns around the country. To date, there are such coffee houses operating at Fort Jackson (Columbia, S.C.), Fort Leonard Wood (Waynesville, Mo.), Fort Lewis (Tacoma, Wash.) and Fort Hood (Killeen, Tex.). Others are being planned Fort Dix (in New Jersey) and Fort Ord (in California).

The coffee house at Fort Hood is perhaps typical of the operational problems and methods. Having opened only about ten days ago, it received an immediate and enthusiastic response from the G.I.'s. Even in the prior three month period during which it was being readied, numerous soldiers came by to help out with the construction work. The identification with the place — for some of them was an instantaneous one.

Killeen itself has little else to offer. A town of 34,000 with a base of 30,000 men is less than swinging. There are a few movies, some drive-in restaurants, and other assorted garbage, there isn't even a bar—Killeen is a dry town.

Until the Oleo Strut opened, there was really no place where the soldiers could go, relax, bullshit, and most importantly, be treated as people, not Government Issues. For soldiers are characteristically exploited as consumers by army towns, just as they are militarily exploited by armies.

Thus, night after night the Oleo Strut has been packed. Particularly those soldiers who are most turned off by the army (and America in general) are the most turned on to the postered walls and humane treatment. Last Tuesday (July 2<sup>nd</sup>), after the coffee house had been open only a week, the manager, Ralph LeFehre, stood up before the G.I.'s and announced that the Oleo Strut was part of the Summer of Support project. The people responded with a standing ovation. This was their coffee house, and, should trouble come, many of them will defy the army in support of the Oleo Strut.

Such trouble appears imminent. On the local level, Killeen police have done some behind-the-scenes maneuvering to get the coffee house's lease revoked—to no avail. They have also been harassing people by constantly patrolling the street and by occasionally coming into the shop and simply sitting and watching—again, to no avail. The G.I.'s keep coming.

On the military level, there have also been moves against the coffee house. Several officers have extra-legally placed the coffee house off-limits to their men. For instance, it has been reported that a Lt. Col. Kennedy had his first Sergeant, Sorenson, forbid the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division from going to the Oleo Strut. In response,

the coffee house is considering court action both for slander and for placing it off-limits without the necessary due process. In addition, Texas laws against boycotting and restraint of trade are being looked into.

Nationally, the military has known about the Summer of Support for some time now. Being a modern army, it is apparently going to respond with modern legal tactics, i.e. a conspiracy charge. From semi-authoritative sources, it appears that Military Intelligence will claim that the purpose of the coffee houses, called "Operation Armytown" by MI people, is to create "disloyalty and disaffection." Seemingly, these charges would be filed against the project's sponsors, among whom are Edward Albee, Rev. James Bevel, Marlon Brando, Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Jr., David Dellinger, Don Duncan, Nat Hentoff, Dustin Hoffman, Donna Mickelson, Jack Newfield, Phil Ochs, Monsignor Charles O. Rice, and Admiral Arnold True. To date, no such charges have been filed maybe tomorrow.

Perhaps the largest problem presently faced by the Killeen coffee house is the omnipresence of drugs. It is estimated that, at the absolute minimum, 50 per cent of the 30,000 G.I.'s at Fort Hood are using marijuana, LSD, etc., etc. Thus, the coffee house would seem to be a ripe location for making scores.

The house rules, however, forbid holding on the premises; a bust or series of busts could seriously hurt it. Realizing this danger, a number of the soldiers have been making an effort to see that it doesn't happen—they realize all too well what's at stake. Unfortunately, the possibility of grass being planted is always there. Several days ago, a small bag of it was left on the counter. Two minutes later, a couple of very straight, perhaps FBI, guys entered and went directly to the spot where the bag had been left. Luckily, it had been spotted and disposed of in the interim.

Despite these problems, the coffee house is continuing and gaining support daily. More soldiers are attending; some are even setting up a small head shop in the back room. Several officers are even beginning to come and identify with it. Generally, the more the army spreads rumors that the people running it are connected with Havana, Moscow, or Peking, the more the soldiers will defend it. Morale at Killeen is fantastically low; excitement at the Oleo Strut is fantastically high.

In time, it is hoped that a legal commission on military justice will be established, both Texas-wide and nationally, to provide further support for G.I.'s. The coffee houses are merely a beginning, although an important one. The American military is the strongest in the world, and until it is dissipated much of the world will remain an American colony.

Thus, relating to G.I.s as people is crucial. The army does much to turn many of them off; we must do the rest. If people are interested in helping—and people are very much needed—they should contact: Summer of Support, Room 315, 407 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, Illinois 60605. In Texas, contact: Oleo Strut, 101 Ave. D., Killeen, Texas. Money is always needed; people to work could also be used. So if you've got a month, a semester, or whatever, here's your chance to get room, board, and subsistence as well as, most importantly, an opportunity to do some serious relating and organizing.

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- *Fifth Estate's* Vietnam Resource Page
- Barbara Garson, "Their Revolution or Ours!" (documenting G.I. coffee houses)

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