

# Army Attacks Coffee House

Liberation News Service

1970

TACOMA, Wash. (LNS)—The Army has declared the Shelter Half coffee house near Ft. Lewis here “off limits to all personnel serving in the Armed Forces.”

It is the first time the brass has tried this tactic in its campaign to squash GI rights.

The Shelter Half is an anti-war coffee house, and like most of its counterparts across the country, its warmth and lively political discussion has become increasingly popular for the young men trapped in the monstrous machinery of the U.S. military.

Hundreds of GIs visit the coffee house every week, and 4,000 copies of the last issue of *Fed Up*, the local GI paper, found their way onto the base.

The Army says that the Shelter Half is “a source of dissident counseling and literature and other activities inimical to good morale, order and discipline within the Armed Services.”

One coffee house staffer said, “Of course the Shelter Half is inimical to good morale, order and discipline in the Armed Services—Mission Accomplished.”

Until now, the Army has been afraid to bust coffee houses on political charges. This latest move suggests the Army had decided it is simply too dangerous to let GIs talk to people who disagree with army policies.

“The tempo of political activity has stepped up considerably in recent months,” said a coffee house staffer. “It is very hard for an officer to stand up and say anything without getting an argument.”

The situation on base is touchy. Ft. Lewis is an embarkation point for Vietnam and the resistance to the war among GIs is reaching mutinous proportions.

A year ago an entire company, about 250 men, refused to go. When the Post Commander tried to address the unit, he was shouted down, but no disciplinary action was taken against the men.

On October 20 a meeting on post between GIs and civilians was broken up by MPs. Thirty-six people were held and interrogated, but no charges were brought against them.

Civilians are regularly banned from the base just for talking to GIs. In a recent incident, women talking to the wives of GIs in the post donut shop were busted off base by MPs.

But as the repression increases, so does the militancy of the GIs. On Dec. 13, the same day the news broke about the coffee house, 20 GIs of the American Servicemen’s Union demonstrated with five other unions in Tacoma against discrimination in construction unions. There have also been GI demonstrations on the base in support of the grape strike.

The Army’s decision to put the coffee house off limits is not yet final. In a letter to the Shelter Half, the Armed Forces Disciplinary Control Board invited the staff to the Board’s next meeting on Jan. 22 to show cause why the coffee house should not be placed off limits.

The coffee house staff say they plan to fight the army all the way. “Even if the coffee house is declared off limits,” said one staffer, “the army will not have solved its problems of discipline and morale. The Shelter Half will stay, and the movement has such a real presence on base that it can’t be suffocated just by cutting off contact with the coffee house.”

The coffee house now must add legal and publicity costs to their operating expenses and they are just barely surviving now. They ask that any contributions be sent to Shelter Half Coffee House, PO Box 244, Tacoma, Wash. 98409.

## **Related**

See *Fifth Estate's* Vietnam Resource Page.

# fifth Estate

Liberation News Service  
Army Attacks Coffee House  
1970

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/96-january-8-21-1970/army-attacks-coffee-house>  
Fifth Estate #96, January 8-21, 1970

**[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheestate.org)**