

GI CIVIL LIBERTIES DEFENSE COMMITTEE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 18, 1969

FT. JACKSON ANTIWAR GIS HOLD NEWS CONFERENCE TO ANSWER ARMY OFFICIALS

"GIS UNITED AGAINST THE WAR IN VIETNAM" IS CIRCULATING PETITION  
ASKING FOR PUBLIC ON-BASE MEETING TO DISCUSS WAR

ANTIWAR GROUP PROTESTS PUNITIVE TRANSFER OF PVT. JOSEPH MILES, A  
BLACK LEADER OF "GIS UNITED"

The Ft. Jackson "GIS United Against the War in Vietnam" held a news conference in Columbia, S.C., on Saturday, February 15. They set up the meeting to make known their activities at Ft. Jackson and to protest arbitrary and summary harassment and attempted intimidation of their group by Army officials.

GIS United has been circulating a petition asking for facilities on base for a meeting open to all at Ft. Jackson to discuss the war in Vietnam and recent developments on post. Over 400 petition sheets are now circulating and over 200 signatures had been turned in after only 2½ days of petitioning.

The GIS protested most strongly the punitive transfer of Pvt. Joe Miles, a leading spokesman for the group. In a highly unusual move, Pvt. Miles was given three hours to clear post on Friday, Feb. 14, and to report to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. The GIS believe this is a deliberate attempt to intimidate their group and prevent them from circulating their petition. This frantic Army action followed the summary arrest of five black GIS on trumped-up charges in the last two weeks.

At their news conference, spokesmen for GIS United answered the official Ft. Jackson statement on their petition. As reported in the Columbia newspaper, The State, the Army position was that "The Army does not recognize any collective bargaining unit representing members of the armed forces." GIS United charged that the Army was purposely avoiding the issue. GIS United is petitioning for facilities where GIS may exercise their constitutional rights to free assembly and free speech. They desire solely to discuss the war in Vietnam and are asking the Army to uphold their constitutional rights. "Collective bargaining" is not at issue. The GIS believe the collective bargaining statement is a subterfuge to prevent GIS from discussing the war in Vietnam, as is their right.

Enclosed are copies of the Ft. Jackson petition now in circulation, the statement released to the press on Feb. 15th, and the statement of aims which Ft. Jackson GIS have addressed to their fellow soldiers.

(over)

To the Commanding General of Fort Jackson, South Carolina

We the undersigned enlisted men, stationed at Fort Jackson, South Carolina request permission to hold an open meeting on post on 26 Feb. 1969, at which all those concerned can freely discuss the legal and moral questions related to the war in Vietnam and to the civil rights of American citizens both within and outside the armed forces. It is our intention to hold a peaceful, legal meeting open to any enlisted man or officer at Fort Jackson. We desire only to exercise the rights guaranteed to us as citizens and soldiers by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

We believe that the best way to avoid further incidents such as have occurred at Fort Jackson; recently, is by full discussion and clarification of our rights as citizens. We hope that the authorities will cooperate with us in determining whether any infringement of the soldier's constitutional rights was involved in the following specific cases:

1. The summary arrests of Privates Madison, Toomer, and Davis of Co. B, 14th Bn, 4th CST Bde, and their confinement in the Post Stockade without trial.
2. Prohibition of group meetings in the barracks on the grounds of Upper Respiratory Infection Season, impeding the exercise of our right of assembly.
3. The hasty dispatch of members of an Infantry AIT Company in the 3rd Bde, to Vietnam, under armed guard and without the customary pre-embarkation leave.

One of the purposes of this meeting will be the preparation of a petition to the Department of the Army and Congress expressing the sentiment of the GIs attending the meeting about the war in Vietnam.

We would like to have an early response to our request so that appropriate arrangements can be made. If for any reason response is to be delayed we would like to know when we will have a response.

Copies of this petition will be sent to the Secretary of the Army, Secretary of Defense, and to the Senators of the undersigned.

<u>NAME</u>	<u>UNIT</u>	<u>SERVICE NUMBER</u>	<u>HOME STATE</u>
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Return this petition to: GIs United, PO Box 543, Columbia, S.C., 29202

GIS UNITED AGAINST THE WAR IN VIETNAM  
P.O. Box 543, Columbia, South Carolina, 29202

STATEMENT TO THE PRESS  
15 February 1969

GIs United Against the War in Vietnam (GIs United) is a group of soldiers opposed to the Vietnam war. We have no formal membership and welcome the participation of all Ft. Jackson GIs. Our purpose is to discuss the war in Vietnam and ways it can be ended. It is our duty as citizens of the United States to exercise our constitutional rights of free speech and assembly to find a means to stop the war which is not in the interests of the United States.

The GIs United has been circulating a petition (enclosed in your press kits) asking the Ft. Jackson post commander to provide facilities on February 26 where anyone at Ft. Jackson may come and discuss the Vietnam war, the right of the Vietnamese and black Americans to self-determination, and the many recent harassments at Ft. Jackson. We are certain that such a democratic discussion will help alleviate the tension now felt at Ft. Jackson. GIs United is now circulating over 400 copies of the petition throughout the base. Over two hundred signatures have already been collected.

While these petitions were circulating the Ft. Jackson authorities made a statement quoted in the Columbia, South Carolina The State, "The Army does not recognize any collective bargaining unit representing members of the armed forces." The State article implied that our petition would be therefore disregarded.

We do not understand the Army's statement. We have not asked to represent the GIs at Ft. Jackson in collective bargaining. That is not at all at issue. We are asking the Army to provide facilities for GIs to discuss the war, as is our constitutional right.

It has been our observation that the great majority of GIs are opposed to the war in Vietnam. They are looking for a way to air these views. Groups such as the GIs United Against the War in Vietnam are a result of this opposition. The brass does not want GIs to discuss the war and are denying GIs their constitutional rights to keep them from voicing their views. This has been demonstrated by the recent harassment of GIs United at Ft. Jackson.

In the past two weeks, several black GIs have been victimized: two have been court martialed, one for six months at hard labor, four are in the stockade, and yesterday a leading spokesman of the GIs United, Pvt. Joe Miles, was punitively transferred to Ft. Bragg.

We wish to protest these acts most strongly, especially the punitive transfer of Pvt. Joe Miles. On Friday, February 14, in a highly unusual move, the Army ordered Miles to clear Ft. Jackson within three hours and to report to Ft. Bragg. The brass evidently thinks it can disperse GIs United by transferring and harassing its activists. These acts, however, have only strengthened the determination of GIs United to express its views.

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Following is a summary of the cases of the five black GIs recently victimized:

Pvt. Lawrence Hart was charged with assault, disrespect to a non-commissioned officer, and attempting to defraud the US government. All charges are full of holes. A). Assault: All the witnesses at the court martial testified that Pvt. Hart did not commit assault on anyone. One witness only said he came closer than ten feet of the person supposedly assaulted. B). Disrespect to a non-commissioned officer (NCO). This alleged disrespect occurred after Sp/4 Holbrook called Hart a "motherfucker." But the amazing fact is that Holbrook did not become an NCO until after this incident occurred. C). Defrauding the US Government. One of Hart's checks bounced through no fault of his. Either the Army or his bank made an error, and Post Finance told Hart before the court martial that the matter had been cleared up. In spite of all these facts and even though the prosecution admitted their case was not very strong, Hart was sentenced to six months at hard labor.

Pvt. Andrew Pulley was convicted and given a suspended sentence for disobeying an order. The order was "to go to bed." Pulley, however, was in bed, sitting. Prior to the trial the trial officer had told a local ACLU lawyer that Pulley was the "culprit", thereby revealing a clear prejudice against the defendant. An appeal is being made on the basis of this prejudice.

Pvt. Alfred Toomer and Pvt. John Davis were both picked up under armed guard and are now being held in the stockade. The brass will release no information on Toomer or his charges. Pvt. Davis is charged with assault, but the circumstances are very unclear on the charge sheet. The brass has not revealed when the court martials will occur.

Pvt. Albert Madison was charged with assault. Pvt. Madison was pushed by a white, racist GI, Pvt. Dingleline. Madison tried to prevent an incident by brushing aside Dingleline's hands and walking away. Dingleline, however, slammed the mess hall door in Madison's face. Madison was then restrained by his friends, but did not commit assault. If any assault was committed it was by Dingleline, even though Madison is charged.

GIS UNITED AGAINST THE WAR IN VIETNAM  
P.O. Box 543, Columbia, South Carolina, 29202

FELLOW GIS:

For the past half decade our country has been involved in a long, drawn-out, costly and tragic war in Vietnam. Most Americans do not support this war -- increasing numbers are demonstrating their opposition, including active duty GIs. It is the most unpopular war in our history. Yet the government's policy threatens to continue this tragedy for many years to come.

Meanwhile, our country suffers while the slaughter goes on. The vast resources and sums of money the government squanders in support of a corrupt dictatorship in Saigon belong to the American people. It should be used to improve America, to make our country the shining example all of us want it to be -- a free society -- free of poverty and hunger, free of racial oppression, free of slums and illiteracy, and the misery they produce.

In addition, the rights and dignity of the black man in America have been trampled upon for the past 400 years. While being called upon to fight and die for so-called freedom, he has been forced to suffer racial oppression, discrimination, and social degradation within as well as outside the armed forces. Many black GIs are becoming increasingly aware of the hypocrisy of fighting against other people of color who are struggling for the same rights of self-determination as they are. Afro-Americans and all oppressed national minorities have the unconditional right to control their lives and determine their destinies as they see fit.

We, as GIs, are forced to suffer most of all in the Vietnam fiasco. Many of us were drafted into the Army against our will -- nearly all of us are kept in its grasp against our will -- all in order to carry out this illegal, immoral and unjust war. We are forced to fight and die in a war we did not create and in which we don't believe.

This is not to mention the tens of thousands of innocent Vietnamese who are dying at our hands, many of them killed only because we can no longer tell the difference between them and our "enemies."

While all of this goes on, the Army continues to trample on our rights as well as our lives. All the crap, the harassment, dehumanization and contempt for the enlisted man that make "F.T.A." the three most popular letters in the Army goes on full swing in the Nam, just like it does here. Inspections, haircuts, saluting the brass, etc., are all part of the grind. And there's a reason for it: the Army has to crush our spirit; it has to stamp the humanity and individuality out of us so we won't be able to fight back. This is an undemocratic war -- the only way it can be fought is with an undemocratic army, where GIs can not be allowed to think, to discuss the war and speak out against it, to influence and control policy.

But it is our right to be human. No one can take that from us -- no one has the right to rob us of our dignity, like the Army tries to do every day. It is our right to think, and to speak out against an unjust war, to demonstrate our opposition if that is necessary. We are citizens of America even if the Army would like to forget it, and these rights are guaranteed to us by the Constitution of the U.S.

The Army wants to take away our rights, to keep us from exercising them so they can make us fight a war we don't want any part of. But the Constitution says they can't do that. If we stand up for our rights and use them the Army cannot stop us. If we speak out and demonstrate our opposition to the dirty war in Vietnam, no one can stop us. If we get together, and if we go out and get the support of civilians, who are also against the war, we can defend our rights and make our grievances known effectively. If we get together, we can win.

Some of us have already begun to do this. We have come together as GIs United Against the War in Vietnam in order to organize ourselves to defend our rights and help bring all the troops home from Vietnam now! If you agree with us, join with us. Together we can tell the truth about the Army and war, and use that truth to make us free!

This is your thing, so help spread the good word!