

I. OVERVIEW

Information about the overall functioning of the military and its role in global affairs is by and large hidden from the people who need it the most -- the men and women who serve in the Armed Forces. An incredibly limited amount of factual information about the organization to which he or she belongs is provided by the Pentagon to the individual. The criterion the Pentagon uses is an individual's "need to know." That "need to know" is based on an understanding of human beings as functional components of weapons systems. An average person in the military will be given detailed information only about his or her personal function. G.I.'s will learn how to fire an M-16 rifle, how to fix a radarscope, or how to release bombs. They will not be given an understanding of how what they "do" affects global affairs in human or political terms. Nor will they readily be given information beyond patriotic platitudes as to how they might change or alter the institution to which they belong in order to make it more responsive to human needs.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The idea for a G.I. Office was conceived at a time when courts martials, desertions, AWOL's, and punitive discharges without trial were increasing at an alarming rate, and, for the most part, completely unnoticed by the general public. The G.I. Office was established in Washington, D.C. in July 1970 by former Special Forces Master Sergeant Donald Duncan with the support of his friends. It attempted to bring to public attention how and why the rights of thousands of G.I.'s were being abused and to initiate hearings into the entire area of military justice.

In order to begin to document specific cases, the Office asked G.I.'s to send along examples of unjust treatment and summary punishment. We were caught in a paper avalanche. They sent their complaints, but with each letter came an individual cry for help. Overnight, from necessity, we were ombudsmen, counselors, and a legal assistance center. Soon the Office was handling up to 400 active cases per week. As often as not, the letters came from bases where G.I. projects existed to handle such problems.

Although satisfied that a needed service was being performed, this success at what soon became "mail-order" counseling raised disturbing questions: 1) Why were G.I.'s not contacting local G.I. coffeehouses and projects with their problems? 2) How long could we handle individual cases at an ever increasing magnitude? and 3) Although giving assistance to hundreds of individuals, were we in fact solving any basic problems? G.I.'s were not taking control of their own lives but were merely on the receiving end of another service.

NOTE: For brevity, the term G.I. is used generically to include both male and female personnel in the armed services regardless of branch of service or rank.

There was an obvious need for an innovative approach to counseling. The relationship between counselor and counselee needed to be changed. Counselors should not resolve a G.I.'s problem for him; the G.I. should resolve the problem himself. The counselor should have the expertise and experience, however, to provide the G.I. with the necessary information which would enable him to take action in the resolution of his own problems.

Experience has shown that the deeper an individual is involved in the "help" process, the more likely he or she will be to see the problem beyond an individual level -- a politicizing process albeit without ideology or articulation.

Thus, the establishment of G.I. counseling offices near major military installations would provide G.I.'s with a needed facility. They would be able to interact on a personal level with counselors competent in this new approach to counseling.

III. PRESENT OPERATIONS

A. THE WASHINGTON G.I. OFFICE

The Washington G.I. Office has developed a functional structure which places trained people in the field at as many locations as funds allow. At the same time, the Office, with three full-time staff members and numerous volunteers, provides the full range of support necessary to sustain projects at the highest level of effectiveness.

Support for field offices takes varied forms: initial fund raising, recruiting and training of counselors, liaison with Congressional Offices and the Pentagon, coordination of communication between people working near different military installations, appellate service for individual cases, initiation of class action suits, and coordination of national press when merited.

As an example, the G.I. Office acts as liaison for groups of G.I.'s who may be confronting specific issues within the military (i.e. 1st amendment rights, deployment to Vietnam, poor living conditions, etc.) In this capacity, the Office is able to seek general Congressional support and/or investigations on behalf of G.I. groups. Most recently, through the efforts of the Office staff, 21 Congressmen and Senators, including four Presidential candidates, sent telegrams of support to crewmen of the attack aircraft carrier USS KITTY HAWK who were protesting that ship's return to Vietnam. The men who had taken sanctuary in a San Diego church were greatly encouraged by this sign of support from Capitol Hill.

The Office has also been acting to make Congressional offices more aware of the realities of military law and to help educate the staffs in the techniques of handling military problems. The Office helped to publish a Manual for Congressional Military Caseworkers in January of this year. This 100 page manual was distributed in conjunction with a three-day course attended by

representatives from 256 Congressional offices. The manual and the course added to the G.I. Office's credibility with Senators and Congressmen as the increase in requests for advice and assistance has shown. Having dealt totally with the Pentagon Liaison Office in the past, many Senators and Congressmen feel that it is valuable to have an alternative source of information available to them.

B. FIELD OFFICES

Norfolk, Virginia was the site of the Office's "pilot" project. Norfolk -- known as the "Capital of the Navy" -- has an active duty military population of 100,000, and houses major U.S. and NATO commands. The success of this initial project is indeed encouraging. A detailed description of the G.I. Office of Norfolk is included under separate cover.

A second project was recently opened in Denver, Colorado. This Office provides support for service men and women from Lowry AFB and the Rocky Mountain Arsenal.

C. THE NECESSITY FOR AN EXPANDED APPROACH

The success of the Norfolk pilot project has helped to validate the Office's new approach to counseling. However, feedback from this project has also confirmed an anticipated need for an expansion in the scope of the G.I. field offices.

Although many G.I.'s come to a G.I. center in order to seek legal advice and expertise, many more come in just to talk. As a G.I. feels more and more comfortable with the people in the Office, he or she begins to relate stories about the misery of military life. It becomes obvious that the G.I.'s gripes are not always related to sweeping political analyses of U.S. imperialism or militarism. But rather, the G.I. is disturbed by some rather nebulous frustrations in his day-to-day, minute-to-minute life in the military. He feels unable to clearly define and cope with his situation. The military makes no attempt to explain to a G.I. the reasoning behind the various orders he receives.

Service men and women often feel like pawns; they are merely cogs in a huge machine which has never been fully explained to them.

The G.I. Office realizes the necessity of making specific and easily understood information about all aspects of the Armed Forces (weapons systems, strategic policy, legal and administrative procedures, etc.) readily accessible to men and women in the military. Only through a real understanding of the military will service men and women be able to alter the institution within which they act.

An Explanatory Situation

Seaman Jones periodically drops by a local G.I. Office. The staff members there deal with him as a human being and show a sincere interest in matters that concern him. He has also learned that the Office provides good information on a variety of issues that relate to his everyday existence in the Navy. He has obtained solid, straight-forward information about the latest discharge procedures and drug policies. Also, since he'll soon be going on a cruise to the Mediterranean, he was interested in reading a pamphlet that deals with the implications of the new U.S. Naval Base in Piraeus, Greece; he'll be going on liberty there.

Recently, Jones, who is stationed aboard an aircraft carrier, saw a movie about carriers at the G.I. Office. The film, edited and distributed by the Washington G.I. Office, helped him to understand what it really means when an aircraft carrier "shows the flag." Of course, Jones had always disliked his chores aboard the ship, but he had never before known much about the specifics of his ship's total mission. The Navy only bothers to tell him that his ship is a part of the "National Defense System."

Jones becomes more and more interested, and he expands his knowledge about the Navy and his role in it. He begins to talk about these things with his buddies and as a group, they come to the Office to talk with the counselors, many of whom share similar military experience. The topics of their discussions range from strategic military policy to everyday occurrences in their lives. Conversations often come to the level of barracks bitching. "Organizers" in the past have been too quick to dismiss this bitching as irrelevant and then proceed in "talk to" fashion in some esoteric class analysis which, though perhaps accurate, is not particularly directional. But G.I.'s do not want rhetoric, slogans, or evasive responses to their comments and complaints. They want honest, understandable answers to their questions and realistic information about the institution within which they act.

The job of the counselor is to help define the specifics of the individual bitches, show the relationship between them, and aid the group in isolating the most aggravating ones to the most people with whom they have contact. The counselor, through his experience in dealing with the military, should be able to help the group anticipate obstacles that may be placed in their way. However, the counselor must remember that he is not there to make any decisions for the G.I.'s. It is important for them to face their own problems and deal with them as they see fit.

Any number of things can happen as the sailors continue to talk about the Navy and begin to define common problems and grievances. They realize that together they can take action to question and challenge illegal and unfair practices aboard their ship. (For example, perhaps their commanding officer forces them

to cut their hair shorter than the Navy regulations require; or perhaps punitive extra duty is administered unfairly by a petty officer who is impressed by his dictatorial authority and ignores standard legal procedures.) It is possible that the group's interests will go beyond immediate injustices aboard their ship, and they will begin to take action (petitioning selected Senators and Congressmen, as well as their superiors) questioning the fact that their ship, by its presence in Spanish or Greek ports, tends to show support for the non-democratic governments which are in power there.

No matter what they do, for many or most, it will be the first time they have made a decision or taken an action to change their life situation rather than asking someone else to do it for them.

The long range effects on Seaman Jones and his friends can be dramatic and extreme. They move from a position of individual concern to one of collective concern and action. They have broken the dependency cycle. They have learned a means of handling problems that is not self-destructive (i.e. desertion, AWOL, drugs, hitting an officer, etc.) Having dealt with a certain situation, they become anxious to apply their new-found knowledge and proceed to accumulate more information and think out the next issue. Others having witnessed the success of the group will come to the group to ask questions. We now have a movement with the first trace of some direction. In short, Jones and his group have politicized themselves and will proceed to politicize others. Further, they take this knowledge and ability with them to a new base, or most importantly, to their home town. The counselor must always remember that sooner or later the G.I. goes home and that if he or she is to affect long range change, he or she will have to be armed with the confidence of success of collective action and with more tools than brave sounding slogans.

IV. PROJECTED OPERATIONS

In order to provide crucial information and support to as many active duty G.I.'s as possible, it is important both to expand the functions of the Washington G.I. Office and also to continue to establish effective field offices.

A. THE MILITARY INFORMATION SYSTEM

It is necessary for the Washington G.I. Office to research, write, publish, and distribute pertinent information for active duty G.I.'s. This information must be straight-forward, simple and digestible.

The Office's sources of information about the military are varied. By scrutinizing periodicals, journals, and newspapers published by the Department of Defense and the federal and civilian agencies which relate to the military, the Office can obtain a plethora of "in-house" information about the Armed Forces. Other sources of information include Congressional testimony and

public statements of military leaders, military research done by private organizations, and even information received directly from G.I.'s.

A radical perspective must be taken on policy trends, changes in procedure, developments in weapons systems, and projected military strategy. Widely distributed newsletters for Army, Navy, and Air Force personnel will be produced which note the implications of current trends and developments in understandable terms.

More detailed reports on specific topics will be produced in the form of pamphlets and possibly films.

The Washington G.I. Office presently has the physical facilities necessary to carry out this new function. We have IBM typewriters, an electric stencil cutter and mimeograph machine, and Xerox facilities. Offset printing facilities are also available to this Office at minimal cost.

However, an additional full-time staff member will be needed in Washington in order to allow the Office to take on this expanded operation. An exceptionally well-qualified person has come to Washington, and support funds are now being sought.

Of course, in order for information to be of any value, it must reach the G.I.'s for whom it is intended. At present, information will be primarily distributed through the G.I. Offices in Norfolk and Denver and through the people of Concerned Military in San Diego with whom a close working relationship exists. At these places, we can be sure that the project staffs are capable and willing to interact with the G.I.'s in ways which we feel are positive. In addition, materials will be sent to other existing G.I. groups and organizations who express a desire to distribute this information. As more projects are established and a workable information network becomes defined, a maximum number of G.I.'s will benefit from this service.

B. THE FIELD OFFICE PROGRAM

Of course, the continued establishment of field offices is necessary. The step-up in both air-level and technological warfare demand unique projects at Air Force bases and the Navy's carrier ports. The frailties and failures of the Army's new volunteer program, VOLAR, are on the minds of many G.I.'s. There must be projects and staffs capable of dealing with those frailties and failures in an original way. The Administration's new emphasis on the Navy, which will place the bulk of military foreign policy in the hands of an expanded naval and nuclear submarine force, creates a necessity for initiating serious and creative projects at Navy bases. Therefore, we are anxious, and feel it imperative, to have several projects established as quickly as possible without diminishing quality and/or effectiveness.

Establishing Field Offices

Prior to the establishment of a field project, a potential site is thoroughly analyzed, and the following factors are considered: the strategic mission of the military bases in the area, the number of active duty G.I.'s in the immediate area, the political and economic climate of the related civilian communities, the possibilities of eventual local financial support, and the potential for recruitment of future staff members from the local area. This is done in order to establish a realistic understanding of the projected site and to anticipate obstacles that do or will exist. This phase of project planning has proven to be extremely valuable.

The Office is currently considering the feasibility of establishing projects in the following areas: Fort Eustis, Va. (The Army's Transportation Center); Offutt AFB, Omaha (SAC Headquarters); Charleston, S. Carolina (Charleston Naval Station, Naval Shipyard and Air Force Base); Key West Fla. (Key West Naval Station and Naval Air Station); and Atlanta, Ga. (Dobbins AFB, Atlanta Naval Air Station, Fort McPherson).

Once a site has been selected, the Washington Office recruits and trains a competent staff. If possible, the training takes place in Washington. After one week of formal training, it is good for the new staff to spend another week either in Norfolk, Denver, or San Diego, in order to gain some more practical experience.

The Washington Office provides the staff with the necessary documents, manuals, and supplies in addition to "seed" money for the initiation of the project. The amount of money provided to the field office from Washington will decrease monthly as operating costs level out and local funding is obtained. If all goes well, the project should be self-supporting within six months.

Present goals are to firmly establish four new projects and initiate six more within the next year. Currently, the main barrier in establishing the next project is neither recruiting of a qualified staff nor selection of a prime area, but rather financial support.

V. BUDGET

A copy of the G.I. Office annual budget with monthly breakdown is attached. The budget is open-ended in terms of funding field projects, but is presented in terms of each project per month. Provisions for an additional staff member are included in the budget. We are striving for a budget of \$102,000 in the calendar year 1972. As of February 1, 1972, grants totaling \$10,000 have been received. Another grant of \$5,000 is anticipated in April, 1972.

BELLA S. ABZUG
19TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

COMMITTEES:
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
1806 LOANSWORTH OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

DISTRICT OFFICE:
252 7TH AVENUE
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10001

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

January 27, 1972

The G.I. Office
145 12th Street S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20003

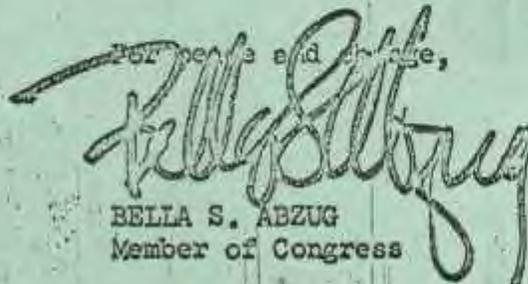
Dear Friends:

I would like to express to you my appreciation for the fine work you have been doing in support of men and women in the Armed Forces over the past year and a half. So much needs to be done to help G.I.'s, and there are so few organizations which have a clear understanding of how to fulfill those needs. The G.I. Office is one of the few.

Jim Crawford, my staff member who deals with the problems of servicemen, has the highest praise for all of you at the Office. He has said many times that your cooperation in various military case and research matters has proven invaluable. The many telegrams and statements of support to service people which you have initiated, the documentation you have provided in individual cases, and the attention you have brought to the issues of civil liberties within the Armed Forces indicate that you are truly performing the role of ombudsman for G.I.'s.

It is my hope that your creative efforts to counter militarism will be fruitful, as in the past, and that we can continue working together on behalf of G.I.'s.

For yours and mine,



BELLA S. ABZUG
Member of Congress

BSA/jcc

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

RONALD V. DELLUMS, 7TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COMMITTEE
FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
1417 LONGWORTH BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
(202) 225-2561

DISTRICT OFFICE:
201 13TH STREET, ROOM 105
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA 94604
(415) 763-0370

March 6, 1972

The G. I. Office
145 12th Street, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20003

Dear Friends:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the fine work you are doing for the nation's service men and women. Your continuing cooperation with my staff in handling military cases is invaluable.

As a Member of Congress, I appreciate the assistance of your organization in providing an avenue by which military men and women may obtain needed information and advice when confronted by the sometimes subtle intimidation of the military establishment. Your office has been successful in bringing the average serviceman a better understanding of his rights under current military regulations. By being made aware of his rights, he can better fight the repression, racism and denial of due process which is found in the military.

My staff and I hope that you will continue to be successful in your efforts to bring justice and humanity to the armed services.

Yours in peace and freedom,



Ronald V. Dellums
Member of Congress

RVD:mae