

**Ron Carver, David Cortright, Barbara Doherty, eds.** *Waging Peace in Vietnam: US Soldiers and Veterans Who Opposed the War*. New York: New Village Press, 2019. xv + 239 pp. \$35.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-61332-106-5.



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US service members during the Vietnam War faced the elliptical precision of battle described in Joseph Heller's 1961 novel *Catch 22*. Unlike Yossarian though, many of them did not whistle respectfully at the military's rationalization of war. Indeed, the testimonies that make up *Waging Peace in Vietnam* by Ron Carver et al. constitute an important and too often overlooked aspect of the war in Vietnam: that active-duty GIs across the forces joined the antiwar movement from within the military and subverted the war effort in many ways. Popular perception spurred on by revisionist historiography casts the military as a victim stabbed in the back by politicians, the media, and domestic antiwar sentiment. This collection of first-person accounts outlined by academic contextualization challenges such perceptions by re-constituting a time when GIs' political consciousness and solidarity undermined the domineering imperatives of the war machine.

Their actions took many forms; this textbook-like compilation of mostly primary sources is organized into chapters that elaborate on each one.

Stories and photos depict the surprisingly wide world of the GI Press, a global network of underground antiwar publications that circulated throughout the armed forces. GI coffeehouses on the outskirts of military bases were primary spaces for dissent. Troops petitioned politicians and the public to end the war. They marched with civilian activists, exposed war crimes, staged uprisings, and enacted violent revolts. Indeed, the cruelty that the military bade them use against Vietnamese people was not lost on activist-GIs. This was embodied by fragging, wherein troops turned and used weapons against their own commanding officers rather than engage in what they saw as a hollow imperialist war. Through these passages, a narrative emerges that challenges two key perceptions: that the antiwar movement was against rank-and-file service members, and that the military would have "won" the war had it been left to its own devices.

The first of these arguments is encapsulated by the history of GI coffee houses. Civilian antiwar activists who saw the potential of service mem-

bers joining the movement collaborated with GIs to open coffee shops adjacent to bases across the country. There were thirty-two of them open by 1971 and they functioned as a network that fostered free speech and antiwar thought among GIs but also united them with the broader civilian movement. This connection gave the antiwar movement significant power, as the historian David Parsons points out: “officials feared exactly the kind of alliance between civilians and soldiers that Fred Gardner and Donna Mickleson had in mind when they opened up the first GI coffeehouse in 1967.... [Such disruptions] were a significant factor in the government’s decision to end the draft” (p. 40). The GI-civilian coalition was exemplified by the presence of antiwar spokespeople like Jane Fonda and Pete Seeger in and around coffeehouses. In these spaces, the violent animosity typically associated with activists was most likely seen from pro-war civilians toward antiwar service members. For example, Pfc Jesse Woodard was shot by vigilantes in the Camp Pendleton, Oceanside, CA coffeehouse in 1970. These stories undercut the revisionist myth that to be antiwar was to be anti-soldier.

The second argument is the volume’s most important contribution. The military has long enjoyed an apolitical veneer in the United States and it is fortified by the idea that the troops would have succeeded in Vietnam if it were not for civilian meddling in military affairs. But the widespread efforts of GI dissent reveal the very people who were meant to run the war machine grinding it to a halt instead. The revisionist line not only saves the image of the military by discrediting those who opposed the war, but it also portrays service members as monolithic, steadfastly waiting in vain for support from civilian leadership. Service members who waged peace in Vietnam demonstrated that the military was not immune to the global social upheaval of the long sixties: “the dissent and defiance of troops played a decisive role in limiting the US ability to continue the war and forced an end to the fighting” (p. 4). Thus, this

volume makes decisive interventions into Vietnam War historiography that no study of the war and/or antiwar effort should be without.

*Waging Peace in Vietnam* only suffers insofar as it fails to explicitly grapple with the writing of pro-war veterans. One could forgive an unversed reader for displacing the radical consciousness of these troops onto the military at large. However, many veterans of the war see things differently and are represented in the historiography the volume contends with. This is particularly salient because comparing the top-down perspectives of conventional military history to those of the overwhelmingly enlisted troops whose exposure to combat informed the activism in this study could add to its analysis rather than detract from it. Despite the array of experiences throughout these pages, the singular focus on antiwar GIs risks flattening the overall narrative. But the arc of Vietnam War history and memory is not in antiwar troops’ favor; *Waging Peace* chips away at this imbalance and outweighs such a minor criticism.

The book is persuasively edited into accessible chapters that weave together commentary, testimony, and visual sources. It is approachable to a wide audience while being conversant with contemporary historical research. Its textbook-like layout makes it ideal for undergraduate classrooms. But it is also an excellent access point for any student or scholar interested in the broader contours of the GI movement as well as a rich collection of published primary sources. This is particularly valuable right now as a new class of Vietnam War historians who are a generation removed from the war come of age and a new generation of foreign war veterans collectively reflect on the conclusion of more recent American exploits in Afghanistan. The more we ignore histories like these, the more our militaristic identity and economy seem inevitable. The GI movement captured in this book holds valuable lessons for our future.

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