

# FTA Project Report

We are located in Louisville, 30 miles from Ft. Knox. Tr. Knox is primarily involved with Armor and Track training. Of 30,000 soldiers, all but about 5,000, the 194th Armored Bde., are involved with either basic, or armor AIT. The 194th is about 90% Viet Nam Vets, and pretty much strung out. Ft. Knox draws basic trainees from Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania, and many NG's and ER's from the Northeast. Of the guys who are in the 194th, most of them live within 350 miles, and after returning from Vietnam have less than 6 months left. Most AIT graduates, go either to Viet Nam or Germany and Korea. Ft. Knox is to armor what Ft. Sill is to artillery. There is everything from Armor Officers Basic, to Sherridan Tank School, and an ominous thing called Armor Research and Development, and Armor training for "allied" (Greek, Laotian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Jordanian, etc.) officers.

This is a short review of FTA's work between April of '71 and August of '71. In late April several things happened more or less simultaneously. We began doing military counseling (the decision to do so had been made two months earlier and we'd had a training session in late February); Yale and Denis left the project for personal reasons leaving just Hal and Marc. We began putting out the paper again, producing a short paper for April and a full size issue for May. At this time John was still on base and wrote many things for the paper and did some counseling on his own (or referred people to us). Also our relationship with Rick grew both personally and politically. He became virtually another member of the staff--as much as someone living at Ft. Knox could. His trailer apartment near base was a place to take literature to be distributed on base. There was a lot of distribution of FTA's, counseling literature, stickers (from CAMP), and other literature most of it done by Rick and friends of his. Rick spent most weekends in Louisville. Both Rick and John came to most of the Sunday programs. We had several good programs with about 5-8 GI's in a group discussion and counseling for those that wanted it.

After John left, FTA began to feel the pinch of too much work on its short staff. We had trouble keeping up with everyone we wanted to see on base, fell behind in the mailing and were getting personally drained. This was relieved for about a month by the addition of a civilian, Richard, to the staff. Richard helped out considerably and had many good ideas but left after a month, also for personal reasons. By August FTA was doing far less work than in the Spring and early summer. Virtually nobody came to the program week after week. The only new contact was Mike, a GI who moved into an apartment in Louisville with Rick. Mike and Rick worked on the September issue but personal concerns soon drew them out of the work also.

FTA began doing military counseling with a training session provided by CAMP in late February of '71. Denis and Marc went on from that to sit in on the work of other counselors i.e. Dave Colby of Kentuckiana Military and Draft Counseling project and CAMP in Chicago (Marc made a one week visit there in March). We began advertising that we did counseling at our Sunday program and also had cases referred to us by CAMP. In most cases counseling was done on base or initially at the program and then followed up by on base visits. From the beginning three serious problems were 1) The inability to stay in touch with people we were counseling. Often in the case of trainees a two week delay in seeing the person again would mean it was too late to help them. 2) The other side of this was the failure of GI's needing counseling to stay in touch with us. There were exceptions to this, but even when the GI and the counselor stayed in close touch there was often not enough time to get anything done before the GI had to leave. On one Friday two GI's shipped out to Ft. Polk before they were able to submit CO claims. 3) a third problem is that Marc did most of the counseling. For most of the summer there was a division between Marc as counselor and Hal as politico. This not only put a burden on Marc (which isn't to say that he wasn't equally to blame for maintaining things that way) and kept Hal from developing in ways that would have been very good for him. It also kept Marc from developing. It gave him an excuse for slipping into his old role of being non-political. When Dan arrived he also began doing counseling but was hampered by not having a drivers license (he now has one). Dan did counseling and political work and has helped to bridge the gap between Hal and Marc and has helped to relieve some of the individualism which the differences between Hal's work and Marc's work encouraged.

Counseling was a real boost to the work of FTA which has always been hindered by a lack of contact with GI's. It gave us a much clearer picture of what was happening on base day to day. We also got a lot of stories and ideas for the paper from people we were counseling. The other good thing



is that GI's started doing counseling. John had done some counseling long before we began. Rick picked up a lot from us and also knew a lot that no counseling training could teach you (having been in for almost four years). We should be criticized for not encouraging him further and giving him the resources he needed to do more counseling. Gary and Paul are two people we counseled who did some counseling in their own companies.

We have some very limited contacts with lawyers, doctors and clergy in town. We haven't had much occasion to use them, but have had cases when we wished we had better contacts. We should have gone out trying to find more resources instead of waiting til we needed them or relying on those we have.

FTA has had many of the same problems with its contacts on base as with counseling. One problem is that we have often not had the initiative or the time to visit everyone we'd like to and often we've met someone at a Sunday program and never seen them again. Those GI's who have been most active in FTA are the people who took the trouble to keep contacting us. Part of this is a result of difficulties arising from our distance from base and other problems like that. Ft. Knox is an hour drive from Louisville. Contacting a GI is often very chancy. More than once we've gone to base with time to see three or four people and only seen one or none. John, Rick, Rick's friend Mike, Paul, and Gary are the only GI's who have ever stayed here. All of them were close enough to be considered friends. Recently we have invited GI's over to the house to do work and also to eat or party. Before we have gotten to know these people as friends we have invited them over to the house regularly. Most people we have met this way have become friends and have been interested in doing work.

#### THE PAPER

For the last 18 months, through September of this year, FTA has come out every month except for Oct. '70, and Feb. and March of this year. In Oct. '71 we did a 3 page mimeo paper (rather than our usual 16 page offset).

The paper had gotten to the point where it was almost entirely done by civilians, and most of our time was put into the paper, rather than into involving more GI's in any of the work we were doing. We felt that until the time when there were GI's who were willing to take over the responsibility of putting together the paper, writing, layout, folding, collating, etc., the paper should not be printed. We feel that at this time, we could distribute leaflets explaining what we were doing, Sunday program, Counseling, etc.

We have recently consolidated everything that has anything to do with FTA all in one place, and the three of us are living together. It is kinda crowded with one bedroom, a kitchen and a living room that is now the FTA office. We have spent quite a bit of time getting the house together; curtains, a real long desk, shelves, book shelves, and kitchen and bedroom and a coherent filing cabinet. We feel confident that the office, at this time, can fill the needs as a place to meet with people, and a place to work. We feel that until there is a need to have a different place to work, the office/house arrangement will be good.

#### VOLAR

There is another problem that should be talked about here. VOLAR has given many people from Knox the opportunity of going home over the weekend, since people no longer have to work on Saturdays (permanent party anyway). There have been fewer and fewer people in Louisville over the weekends since the spring, something the downtown merchants aren't all too pleased about either. Many permanent party people here live within 6 or 7 driving hours from their home, and usually leave Friday afternoons. Most of the people in town over the weekend are then trainees, and although this has always been the case, there are very few permanent party people in town now than ever before.

#### Distribution

In the past month we stopped distributing the paper. We were passing out the paper on weekends. On Fridays we went to the airport and passed out papers to the huge crowds of GI's going home for the weekend. Saturday afternoons and evenings we'd go downtown and pass out papers to people on the street. Sundays before the program we'd pass out papers to the few people on the street and ask them to come to the program. We also stopped doing the mailing which was several hundred papers, almost all subs were to civilians.

No GI's had helped us distribute the paper since September. We hadn't tried very hard to get help. GI's would come to the program and pick up papers and we'd never see them again. People liked getting the paper so we felt that



we should keep doing it. Civilians were doing most of the distribution for many months. When we distributed at the airport and on the street Saturdays we spent our time trying to get as many papers out as we could. We never got any feedback except a comment like: "Who puts out this paper?" We had a hard time explaining that GI's wrote a lot of the articles when we civilians passed it out. We also couldn't talk to people who might have been interested in working with us. The same time that we realized that we were spending a lot of our time putting out the paper and not getting much response, we stopped distributing the paper.

We finally had a criticism meeting about the work with GRA. We talked about how the work was mostly confusing since we'd stopped doing many bad things but hadn't started doing any GRA work together. We decided that one of the things which needed some change was the Sunday program. We also talked about our work with civilians in the community (almost no work).

The Sunday Program had been run for a long time, for over a year, as a sort of Sunday Coffeehouse. People would come and would be shown movies or talked at about the war, the brass, the system, etc, when they were the people who could talk the best about the brass, the war; and the system. In the spring and summer there were some good discussion groups but no GI group ever came out of that. In the past three months there haven't been any "raps" or movies shown. People would come in and we would do counseling or just talk. We had never gone to the program knowing what we were going to do. People never came back. One weekend we ran around the church trying to keep up with two guys who were so freaked out about the army that they couldn't sit still. At the same time we were trying to talk to 3 guys who had thousands of ideas of things we should be doing, like a nationwide mailing about how really awful the army is. None of them ever came back even though we talked to a couple of the guys at base that week. We decided that one of the biggest problems of the Sunday program was that people never saw any work done. We never looked like we were really interested in doing anything about the army because we just sat around the meetings waiting for something to happen or for the right person to walk in. So GI's were turned off. We didn't provide a better alternative to the Army than their own individual solutions. That week we called for a meeting. One guy that Dan had dragged home from one of the Sunday programs to help with the mailing list and housework showed up. Another guy who had come in one day just as we were leaving, he caught the mizzle of a little dance routine we were doing to kill the boredom, came with a friend. The last person who came to the meeting was an old friend of ours who had never showed up at a Sunday program but had worked a little on the paper. We had a really fun day and everybody came over to dinner instead of fleeing to the USO. We also decided to do a leaflet for distribution to GI's. It looks like we will be getting help from the GI's to do distribution of the papers we have left and any other leaflets we want to do in the future.

Our work with civilians in Louisville has been very slow. We've relied on old contacts to take care of some of the work we can't do ourselves. We have friends in almost all of the movement groups in Louisville. We haven't done much work with them. We feel like we are still at the point where we have to spend most of our time working to build a GI organization. We could have spent more time recently working with people in the civilian community. One of the biggest reasons we haven't is that there are only three of us. Louisville is a large enough city that it could support a local GI movement. It would mean a lot more to Louisville if the GI Movement were local people, but it has been a lot easier to do GI work here than to organize a group of civilians to do GI work. We have worked with gay liberation in cases of gay GI's. Students have helped us with distributing the paper and with Benefits. The Unitarian Church has provided a meeting place for us and has turned guys on to us. Labor Movement people have worked with the project in the past. Other groups have helped us out with work but none of them have seen a need to have a continuing GI project in Louisville mainly because we haven't made it clear to them that we need people to work with us and that we would be happier having staff from Louisville than having to rely on people from the north. One talk we had with people from gay liberation has already gotten one response from a guy who would like to work with us, so we will probably try to do more work organizing civilian support for GI's as soon as we are sure that there is a group of GI's for them to work with.



We'll try to answer some of CAMP's question in this part of the project report. We hope that we understood those questions. We would like to have asked CAMP to explain those questions but in the short time we've had we tried to figure them out for ourselves the best we could.

We have spent a lot of our time trying to make better contacts with people in the Louisville area. We feel that since the base affects people in Louisville a lot that they should be the ones to do something about the problems that the base makes for them. Baseworkers and workers in base towns near Ft. Knox should be involved in those struggles. Labor in this area has been involved in a lot of strikes lately but there haven't been any radical caucuses or people in the labor movement who could make the connection between the army and their problems. There is a lot of hope in us that radical caucuses will come about because of the number of wild-cat strikes and people who are working in the labor movement, and that other people will begin to make the connections between the way the New Economic Policy affects GI's and workers. Since the military makes problems for almost everybody (except the brass) many people in different movement groups have seen the connection between their problems and the way that other groups are oppressed. Many people from different groups have met each other through us. We invite people to help us with different cases, gay liberation for gay people, women for women in the military, black people to work with black people in the military, etc. and many people have helped us with distribution of the paper and other small things. GI's have almost every problem that the system can make for people so it's been possible for us to get many different people involved in at least one or two things.

Many people from the midwest go to Knox and fr. Campbell. We are both southern projects and are only a few hours drive away from each other. We have had a lot of contact with each other. Anniston and Wright-Patterson are also close to us. It's very nice for us to visit other projects because we learn a lot from each other and the different people we are working with. Many times we turn each other on to people who are interested in working with us or people who have problems. We help each other to build our work on the local level. We feel that the work we do locally is the most important work we can do, especially for the south. There are many things people who are working in our region can do for us since most of the people at this base are from near here. People who are doing draft work can help let people know who we are and where we can be contacted. This kind of work would be really helpful to us because Knox is mostly a training base. Part of the burden of moving on to do this kind of work is that we would have to spend time educating people to what the GI Movement is like and what kind of people we are working with. There are many differences in the type of work draft movement people do that make it difficult or unusual to contact people who we are most interested in working with. Draft work reaches mostly middle class people who we have a little contact with but who are not the best people to build a GI organization. With differences like these we have always chosen to do local work. Part of the reason for that is that we would rather talk to people face to face than try to deal with educating people outside of the GI Movement who we can't talk to face to face. We would like to make better contact with GI Movement groups outside of our region but can't spend much time doing that kind of work because there are so few of us. There is a possibility that Marc will be leaving FTA in a few months which would leave only two of us. We would rather spend time making sure that there is going to be a project here than building better communications with other groups. Outside of staff problems we have benefited more from our contacts with projects close to us than we have with groups that are far away. We have enough problems enough communicating with GI's at Knox and people in Louisville that we will probably spend most of our time in the future working with people here. If our experience here shows us that we can get more people involved in and interested in the GI Movement than we may be interested in doing those things on a regional and national level but until then we would be a pretty shaky foundation for any work on a national level and would probably be drained by being involved in national work.

We're sorry if this statement is confusing. Please just try to get some of the general ideas if you can. If you are confused about what we say or disagree with what we have said please tell Hal and he'll relate your criticisms to all of us so we can help to clear up some of the confusion.