

## [Criminal Complaint Served and Seven Arrested at the Army Experience Center in Philadelphia Mall](#)

by Elaine Brower



A few months ago, when I first discovered the existence of a place called [“The Army Experience Center”](#) in a Philadelphia mall that enticed kids as young as 13 to not only play violent video games, but allowed them access to a real Apache helicopter, M-16 rifle, automatic machine guns, an armored humvee and a tank, I decided that everyone who cared about our youth should be outraged and take action.

We couldn't allow the Department of Defense to use this first-of-its-kind center, which cost an initial investment of \$12 million, and has over 14,000 sq. ft. of space which houses a “Tactical Operations Center”, gaming stations allowing kids to play the most violent video games available, and the back room where they can touch and feel weapons created for killing, to produce any more around the Country. We decided to shut it down.

Yesterday, over 300 people from all over the northeast decided to take action. A coalition of over 30 anti-war, peace and justice groups rallied at St. Luke's Church on Knights Road, just about a mile away from the Franklin Mills Mall, which houses the AEC. Everyone was fired up about shutting this atrocity down, and you could feel the energy in the crowd that ranged from Viet Nam vets to Iraq Vets to young students. Drums were heard, speeches and rallying cries to “Shut it Down!”

With that, everyone took to the street and marched to the mall, ready to deliver the “Private Criminal Complaint” to the commanding officer at the AEC, as well as to the mall owners, who allow this place to exist. The complaint states in part *“the Army Experience Center is involved in “Endangering the Welfare of a Child” and “Criminal Solicitation of a Minor” and “Corruption of Minors” – soliciting underage persons to act in a violent manner, and thereby supporting criminal and corrupt behavior...”*

Over 300 activists entered the mall banging drums and screaming their rallying cries to “SHUT IT DOWN!” and “WAR IS NO GAME!” as the complaint was handed to the recruiting officer in charge. The complaint was read out loud, which had a profound effect on everyone who was there shopping, and visiting the various eateries.

People stopped to listen, and really couldn't believe what was happening. I myself, was part of a group of protesters who donned death masks and the names of fallen soldiers and stood directly in front of the AEC, which was at that point surrounded by police.

But that didn't stop us from demanding that it be closed and they should cease and desist corrupting our youth. Those of us in death masks stood silently by and watched the rest of the group shouting at the recruiters. “Stop stealing our kids” “No wars for empire”, “SHAME ON YOU!” to the endless pounding of drums.

It seemed to me that the recruiters were becoming a bit unnerved, and the police were becoming extremely impatient. This was a peaceful protest, as we were not only

exercising our first amendment right of “freedom of speech”, but trying to get our youth de-militarized, and away from the clutches of bloody war games.

Of course, since the AEC is open to the “public” many demanded to go inside, but weren’t allowed. Ret. Army Col. Ann Wright at that point was speaking directly to the kids who had gathered to witness what we were doing and told them not to “buy the recruiters stories” of patriotic glory. That there was “nothing glorious” about war, and it definitely was “not a game.”

Debra Sweet, National Director of World Can’t Wait, who co-sponsored and planned this event, took charge of the microphone and denounced the AEC and the government for allowing this place to exist, recruiting youth to participate in an illegal war, as well as enticing them with games when war is “not a game.”

Pat Elder of Peace Action, Montgomery, had packs of candy cigarettes which he labeled **“Warning: Allowing teens to shoot weapons at the mall is like a heavy dose of CANDY CIGARETTES!”** and gave out to youth witnessing our protest.

After only one warning, the police decided to aggressively arrest seven of the protesters who were wearing death masks, peacefully standing in front of the AEC and not blocking the entrance. Taken to a distant precinct, the civil affairs Captain vowed vengeance by trying to charge the seven with a “misdemeanor in the third degree.” After 6 hours in the most deplorable conditions, they were released to return to court in June.

#### We Must All Take Action

What is happening right under our noses is a transformation of the way in which the military plans on re-wiring the brains of kids at a very young and impressionable age to turn them into silent killers. By allowing anyone from the age of 13 to 18 to handle a machine gun, or use games that promote violence, it creates a generation that is wired to kill and think that killing is something that is easy and sanctioned.

Allowing this to happen is being complicit in the violence we see now occurring on our high school and college campuses. The numbing of the child’s brain to react to witnessing death and destruction is what is happening in this center. Common sense tells us that, and yet this place is allowed to exist and paid for by taxpayer funds.

The federal budget allocated to the Department of Defense is almost \$700 billion, with increasing funding coming this fiscal year, yet the Department of Education is allocated approximately \$114 billion. There is definitely an imbalance which must be addressed.

The criminal complaint will go forward, and more protests and actions are planned for the future.