



Center on Conscience & War
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The Reporter

From the Desk of the Executive Director

What would happen if I shot myself in my foot? . . . What would happen if I tattooed [an obscenity] on the edge of my right hand so it would show every time I salute? . . . What would happen if tested positive for drugs? . . . What would happen if I got pregnant? . . . What would happen if I said I was Gay? . . . What would happen if I tried to kill myself?

What would happen . . . Can you hear the desperation in their voices? Men and women are contemplating the unthinkable in some cases, life changing in others, in order to solve a temporary but unbearable problem.

We hear the desperation in the voices every day. When we have time, money and staff, we try to train others to help provide support for the ever growing number of the men and women with a commitment to the U.S. military who have reached the point where they will contemplate practically anything—even genuine thoughts of suicide—to stop participating in the military.

Are all of these young men and women conscientious objectors to war? Very few are in the strictest legal sense: of being opposed to their own participation in war in any form. Some of the people who call us meet that requirement. More are simply desperate to escape what they perceive as an impossible situation.

But even more of them have come to object to the war we now face—the war in Iraq. They, like Lt Watada, who choose a potential jail sentence and a dishonorable discharge rather than fight in Iraq, which he felt was immoral and so many others, have reached the point where they cannot participate in THIS war.

THIS war is illegal and unthinkable, and they draw the line. Others, like Liam Madden and Jonathan Hutto, members of the Appeal for Redress, a group of active members of the military who are speaking out against the war to Congress, and so many others have reached the point where they continue to follow their oath to the government but cannot keep from speaking out against THIS war. THIS war is illegal and unthinkable and they, too, draw the line—although in a different place.

Many years ago, during the war in Vietnam, I, reached the place where I could not keep from speaking out about THAT war; I could not participate in THAT war. It was a relatively lonely place in the cannon-fodder neighborhood in Texas where I grew up.

My first step toward refusing to participate was my first step toward reaching the legal definition of conscientious objection, my first step toward doing the work I do today.

So while I hear the desperation in the voices, I also hear a hope for the future—a hope that our callers do not even know is there. What I hear is the opportunity for the Center to provide help in a desperate situation and light for the next step in their journey in life. Perhaps even the first step toward the legal definition of conscientious objection.

Yours for Peace and Justice,

J. E. McNeil
J. E. McNeil





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News Briefs

War objector's mom asks Mexico for help

Susana Aguayo asked Mexico to appoint a lawyer for her son, Agustin, who faces a court-martial in March at a U.S. military court in Germany on charges of desertion and missing a troop movement. His application for status as a conscientious objector was denied, and he went AWOL in September after being ordered to return to Iraq.

(Army Times 2/20/07)

Dale E. Noyd, Dies at 73; Air Force captain became conscientious objector during Vietnam War

Dale E. Noyd, a decorated Air Force captain and fighter pilot who during the Vietnam War became the first conscientious objector to oppose a specific conflict, has died. He was 73.

After 11 years in the Air Force, Noyd asked that he either be allowed to resign his commission or be classified as a conscientious objector because of his feelings about the Vietnam War. His request was denied.

Then the Air Force ordered Noyd to train a pilot who was likely on the path toward Vietnam. Noyd refused and was court-martialed for disobeying orders.

During his military trial, the captain's belief that the war was immoral and illegal was not addressed.

Noyd was sentenced March 9, 1968, to a year in prison. He was also given a dishonorable discharge and stripped of his pension and benefits.

(LA Times 1/30/07)

Turkey: Amnesty International concerned about treatment of CO

Amnesty International is deeply concerned at reports that on 26 January conscientious objector Halil Savda was ill-treated by military personnel in the disciplinary ward of the military barracks in Tekirda where he had originally been summoned to perform military service. Furthermore, Turkish legislation does not provide for an alternative civilian service for people who refuse to perform military service on grounds of conscientiously-held beliefs. Turkish authorities are urged to recognize and guarantee the right to conscientious objection and make provisions for alternative civilian service which is not discriminatory or of punitive length.

(Amnesty International 2/8/07)

Last-Minute Extension for Unit Whose Bags Were Packed

The 3,200 soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division whose one-year deployment in Afghanistan has been extended by four months were so close to the end of their tour that their uniforms, gear and equipment had been packed into shipping containers and an advance party had already reached Fort Drum, their home in upstate New York.

About 50 soldiers from the advance party came home in late January, said Benjamin Abel, a Fort Drum spokesman. A second group of about 150 were intercepted in Kuwait before they could reach the States, he added. All have since been sent back to Afghanistan as part of a buildup in anticipation of a renewed Taliban offensive in the spring.

(The New York Times 2/16/07)

In Print



"Mission Rejected: US Soldiers who say NO to Iraq" by Peter Laufer.

Review by Roger Farmer

"You wanted in; now you're here; driven by hate, consumed by fear..." This rhyme, quoted by Marine Robert Zabala in the book "Mission Rejected: US Soldiers who say NO to Iraq" describes the dilemma that many

recruits face as they begin to understand the reality of military life, training, and purpose. Like many young people, Zabala joined the Marine Corps out of a sense of duty and to find structure in his life. But the horror and brutality of military training began to mount almost immediately in basic training. "Everything they do is 'Kill,' and I was the only one who wasn't screaming it with passion," Zabala recounts. Finally, he filed his application for release from the Marine Corps as a Conscientious Objector.

"Mission Rejected: US Soldiers who say NO to Iraq" contains the true stories of Robert Zabala and dozens of other young persons who joined the military because they were poor, didn't have another plan, or were deceived by a recruiter. Former NBC News correspondent Peter Laufer criss-crossed both the United States and Canada interviewing former soldiers who were Absent Without Leave (AWOL), or who had emigrated to Canada, or who were now conscientious objectors. Along the way he also talked to parents, recruiters, lawyers, activists, and others who were involved in their lives.

But the book contains more than the personal stories of young persons who made a mistake. "Mission Rejected" explores the reasons why they went and even the motivations of recruiters who lure inexperienced young people into situations for which they were not prepared and which they never anticipated. After three years of chasing recruits, Staff Sergeant Jimmy Massey said he was "tired of lying." But Visalia, California, recruiter Sergeant Quick refused to talk about her efforts to recruit Ryan Johnson, who now lives in Canada.

Ryan Johnson says, "It seems absolutely insane; they put someone in jail for five years for not wanting to kill somebody..." Clara Gomez tells the story of how Army recruiter Sergeant Daniel Lopez called her up and asked to meet her parents. "Why was I so naive?" Clara now asks. Clara didn't know Lopez and had never called him. She only escaped from his influence when she called the GI Rights Hotline and was told that she didn't have to show up for any appointment with a military recruiter. "It just makes me so mad," Clara now says.

Other chapters in the book explore Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), public opinion, AWOL processing, and the public opposition of such well-known soldiers as Jessica Lynch and (now deceased) Pat Tillman. An Army study in 2004 estimated that one-sixth of all returning soldiers suffered from PTSD. More recent estimates have suggested that over 25% of returning veterans have mental problems, and the trend is increasing. Veterans Administration psychiatrist Marion Eakin says her caseload of Iraq war victims is growing exponentially. "I just feel like shooting people," says one of her patients. "Something was wrong with me," Charlie Anderson says with the tragedy of understatement.

"Mission Rejected: US Soldiers who say NO to Iraq" is a brief but comprehensive study of soldiers and recruits who oppose the Iraq war as well as the people and situations with which they are involved. Well researched by a professional writer, this book has both an index of persons and topics discussed and an appendix of organizations and sources of further information. As a resource and as a history of current events, this book should be high on the list for every person concerned about the issues and people involved in the Iraq war. 

"Mission Rejected: US Soldiers who say NO to Iraq" by Peter Laufer is available for \$14.00 from the Center on Conscience and War online store at

<http://www.centeronconscience.org/store/missionrejected.shtml>

or you can call the Center at 202-483-2220 to order a copy.



Lobby Day for CO Rights

May 14, 2007

Advocating for the Rights of Conscientious Objectors in the Military

9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Our voices together are magnified when we gather and organize to lobby Congress for the sake of rights for the conscientious objector in the military. It is important to support servicemembers who become conscientious objectors, to lobby for a place for conscience in an inherently violent organization suffering from a dire lack of it.

A law to protect the rights of conscientious objectors in the military is needed. With no end in sight to the brutal wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places around the globe, the number of COs in the military is increasing. The GI Rights Hotline has experienced a sharp increase in the number of calls from those seeking a CO discharge. The current military policy for COs is not working: They face harassment, they are forced to violate their beliefs, and they are denied CO status for arbitrary reasons. A law passed by Congress is needed to fix the broken system and to put specific procedures in place for the CO discharge process. May 14th will be a day for voters to make their voices heard for the proposed bill, the Military CO Act.

Come and lobby in Washington, DC or lobby your member of Congress at their local office near your home.

On May 15th, International CO Day, CCW is participating in two events:

Congressional Briefing: 9:00 am - Noon

An Aspect of Religious Freedom: Conscience in the Military, sponsored by FCNL, Peace Tax Fund, and Congressman John Lewis

Please Contact CCW at 202-483-2220 or at ccw@centeronconscience.org for details.

Advisory Council, 1:00 pm - 5:00 pm

Location: Church of the Brethren 337 North Carolina Ave. SE Washington, DC 20003

Visit our website at www.CenterOnConscience.org for more information, including copies of the Military CO Act.

Selective Service Contacting Churches

Selective Service has been contacting many churches and inquiring about statements of understanding for placement of Alternative Service workers (see article pg. 1). If you are aware of Selective Service contacting your church, please let us know by calling 202-483-2220/ 1-800-279-2679 or emailing us at ccw@centeronconscience.org. We appreciate your help in this matter.

Continuing Legal Education Training Now Available Through CCW

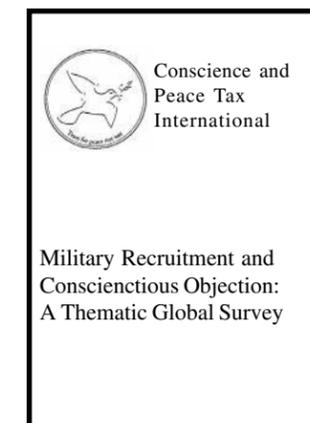
The Center is now providing Continuing Legal Education (CLE) trainings concerning GI Rights and CO Rights in particular. The CLE is led by J. E. McNeil, attorney with 25 years experience and the Executive Director of the Center, and Deborah Karpakin, an attorney experienced in CO hearings and habeas petitions. Topics include military recruitment and discharges. An hour of ethics credit is also included.



With a two-month lead-time, the Center on Conscience & War can work with you to set up the CLE and obtain accreditation for it. Interested attorneys would be able to attend the CLE for a reasonable cost to cover the expenses related to the CLE.

J. E. and Deborah have already provided this CLE in Iowa and will be repeating it in New Orleans on May 4.

New Book



Military Recruitment and Conscientious Objection: A Thematic Global Survey is a new book exploring the issues of military service and international standards on conscientious objection.

Cost \$10
Available online at www.centeronconscience.org/store Or call us at 202-483-2220



Check out our webpage, www.CenterOnConscience.org or contact J. E. at 202-483-2220 for more information or to help bring a CLE to your state.



Stories of Conscientious Objection

Words can be as Powerful as Actions



By Ryan Sigley, a conscientious objector from the War in Iraq.

The date is June 1, 2002. I am enrolled at the United States Military Academy, attending the graduation ceremony for that year's class. President George W. Bush is giving the speech, and in hindsight, it is a monumental speech that changed, and will continue to change, the history of the United States and the world. Many consider this the speech that establishes the policy of preemption in the "War on Terror," the "Bush Doctrine." For me, this is when I realized that I was a conscientious objector.

I had an idea that I was a conscientious objector before this, but this is the definitive point where I said to myself, "I just cannot do this anymore." I enlisted in the Army one month after my 17th birthday in October 1998, and in July 1999 I reported to Fort Benning, GA to become an infantryman. At that time, before the current cowboy foreign policy, I wanted to be a cowboy. I never envisioned myself actually fighting in a war; I just wanted to be able to say that I was an Army Ranger, that I was a tough guy. I eventually became an Army Ranger, but by that time I had come to realize that I was in the wrong profession.

During basic training, as my drill instructors tried to make me believe that killing was cool with silly sayings like "What makes the green grass grow? Blood, blood, blood!" I was discovering that I did not want to kill anyone, no matter how bad the people above me said my government's enemies were. Sometimes it takes a culture shock of sorts to make someone realize what he or she is, and basic training was that culture shock.

It did not take very long for me to say to myself "I have to find a way out of this."

My way out of it was acceptance into the United States Military Academy. My intention was to move to a place in the military where killing people would not be my main mission, such as being a quartermaster or military intelligence. My naivety seemed to know no bounds. Thanks to President Bush's speech, however, and the subsequent research and deep thinking that I conducted, I realized that if I wanted to be true to myself and my beliefs I would have to leave the Academy and the Army altogether. In April 2003, I did just that. However, because of the timing and the process, I mistakenly resigned on grounds of "motivation" instead of conscientious objection. When I was recalled back into the Army in October 2005 in order to be deployed to Iraq, I would come to regret that mistake.

In retrospect, I am happy that I was recalled into the Army. It was a real test of my will and belief system. Telling my company commander that I was a conscientious objector, lead to an incredibly grueling process, but it made me more defiant and firmer in my belief that what I was doing was right. Without being called back, I would not be writing this today. Without being called back, I would not have had the opportunity to meet the soldiers I met in the Army, several of whom, upon finding out what I was doing, expressed to me their personal views and concerns about Iraq and on killing. They agreed with me, at least in part, and how they had respect for what I was doing. Without being called back, I would not have met and talked to people who shared similar views as me, and in particular those at the GIRights Hotline and the Center on Conscience and War, whose help and support was extremely beneficial and comforting. Without being called back, I would not be able to say in confidence what I am today, a conscientious objector. ✍️

Does Your Employer offer Matching Gifts?

The Center on Conscience & War qualifies for matching gifts. Find out if your employer is part of the matching gifts program. If so, don't forget us!

A Gulf War CO- The story of Tim Coil

By Yvette Coil

For most Americans who have little or no contact with the armed services, the condition described as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, is a condition that soldiers and returning veterans suffer. But they are not the only victims. My husband, Tim Coil, although a civilian for the past 16 years, still contends with its effects. The reasons are more complex than they might seem.

Fresh out of high school and faced with few job and affordable educational options, Tim joined the Army in 1986. Both of our families have a long history of military service; from the Army to the Coast Guard, from WWII to the Gulf War, our families have had members on active duty in war-time. Tim served twice for a total of six years. We met after he left the Army in 1988. Once we were married, also in 1988, he re-enlisted for another four years because he loved being a helicopter mechanic. He also wanted to live in Germany again, where he was stationed during his first two years in the Army.

In 1990, Tim had just been promoted to the rank of E-5, Sergeant, and he was very excited about leading his own unit of men. He had the respect of everyone he came in contact with on his base because he knew his job very well and was extremely reliable. Tim was an expert marksman, had an impressive military record, and planned to make a career in the Army. It was hard for him to imagine doing anything he would enjoy more.

Due to a series of events in 1990, Tim's career path changed dramatically. His only sister, Christina, drowned attempting to save someone's life that summer. She had just turned 18. We had our first child that year, and our spiritual journey was deepening as well. Discussing conscientious objector status with other friends in the service, seeing people on the news that were refusing to go, and rethinking our own our commitment to Christ were elements that were changing us far more than we realized. Tim became a CO two days after the birth of our son; he saw that God gives life. He felt condemned for taking life or participating in an institution that promoted that behavior.

On December 5, 1990, Tim's unit was deployed to Iraq. He was told he would have to go or they'd take him in shackles and chains. So Tim went, but he refused to carry a weapon. Partly because he went to Iraq and saw what he saw there and partly because he struggled with the feeling of having compromised his beliefs, he suffered deeply. He also lived with death threats from other US soldiers, a harsh experience for one who had once enjoyed so much respect from his peers. All of these experiences produced PTSD.

The psychological symptoms of PTSD that Tim continues to suffer with to this day are hyper vigilance; nightmares; obsessive compulsive disorder; social anxieties; lack of short term memory; flashbacks; ultra-defensiveness; excessive sleeping; bipolar-like highs and lows; and an inability to attach himself to anyone, including his family. His medical conditions include but are not limited to hypothyroidism, high blood pressure, anxiety and depression, severe and non-healing skin rashes on his hands, night sweats, apnea, colon polyps, low testosterone, and irritable bowel syndrome.

Fifteen years after Tim's return from Iraq, the Veterans Administration has diagnosed him with PTSD, but he is still waiting for an evaluation by the Medical Board to receive compensation and benefits. The Social Security disability office has rated him at 100% permanently and totally disabled, incurable and untreatable. In spite of Tim's ongoing and progressive illnesses, we know that God is capable. And we continue to give Him glory for all that He has done to bring us where we are today. Thankful for the gifts we have received, we share our journey, trusting it might in some way pass on our God-given hope to other soldiers who seek answers for very difficult experiences. ✍️

Leave a Lasting Memory

Help ensure that a cause you support endures. Remember the Center on Conscience & War in your will. There are many ways to continue supporting the Center. Please contact us at 202-483-2220 for giving options and further information.