



The Center on
Conscience & War

The Reporter for Conscience' Sake

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Truth Commission Releases Report on Veterans Day 2010



Above: J.E. McNeil speaks at the press conference. Behind her are from left: COs Josh Stieber, Logan Mehl-Laituri, and Camilo Mejia, and Jake Diliberto, founder of Veterans for Rethinking Afghanistan. Top right: Rev. Mpho Tutu receives the report for the international community from Drs. Gabriella Lattini and Rita Brock at the interfaith service. Right: Rev. Herman Keizer, retired Army chaplain, speaks with Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach from Mennonite Central Committee after the press conference. *Photos by Bill Galvin*

Bill Galvin, Counseling Coordinator

The Truth Commission on Conscience in War officially released its report on 11 Nov. 2010 in Washington, DC. The release corresponded with Veterans Day, which was formerly Armistice Day.

The report states, "The Truth Commission on Conscience in War was created to address moral dilemmas created for members of the U. S. Armed Services by current regulations governing Conscientious Objection. It seeks to provide greater protection for religious freedom and the exercise of moral conscience in war and to educate the public about moral injury."

In March 2010, the Truth Commission held a public hearing at Riverside Church in New York City where it heard testimony

from veterans, conscientious objectors (COs), legal experts and others. (see *Reporter*, Spring 2010) After the hearing was a day of consultation between testifiers and commissioners, followed by an ongoing discussion among the commissioners, which continued through September. The report is the culmination of those conversations.

Besides addressing the need for a change in CO law to include selective conscientious objection, the report also addresses "moral injury." While there is no denial of the moral dilemmas faced by those in combat, until recently moral injury has been lumped with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

During one of the panel discussions at the November event,

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Founded in 1940, the Center on Conscience & War works to extend and defend the rights of conscientious objectors to war. In pursuit of this calling, the Center provides these services free of charge:

- Counsel military conscientious objectors.
- Provide legal support for military personnel.
- Lobby Congress to extend and defend the rights of conscientious objectors.
- Provide accurate information to the public on Selective Service registration.
- Provide support to COs who refuse to register for the draft through F.E.A.T student loans.
- Counsel soldiers on the GI Rights Hotline with accuracy and honesty.
- Military counter-recruitment information
- Provide workshops, training, and speakers on any of the above topics.

News Briefs

United Kingdom

A Royal Navy medic from Plymouth who objected to serving in Afghanistan in the wake of WikiLeaks revelations had his appeal to stand down on moral grounds dismissed on 17 Dec. 2010.

Michael Lyons, 24, cast himself as a conscientious objector after reading the “enormous under-reporting of civilian casualties in the conflict I was about to enter.”

His request to leave was refused by his command. He then appealed to the Advisory Committee on Conscientious Objectors, which advises the Secretary of State for Defence on all claims of conscientious objection.

The committee heard how anecdotal evidence of civilian casualties, including children, had prompted Lyons to research the political reasons for the war. “I came to the conclusion I couldn’t serve on a moral ground and I couldn’t see any political reason for being there.”

But after deliberating for about an hour, Judge Timothy King, chairing the panel, told him: “Having considered the matter with great care we have come to the decision that our advice to the Ministry of Defence must be to . . . uphold the decision of your commanding officer.”

No reasons were given for the rejection of the appeal. In a departure from past practice, King said the written reasons would be published and made available to Lyons’ chain of command.

The panel’s recommendation will be sent to the Ministry of Defence, which will make the ultimate ruling on Lyons’ conscientious objector claim. The appeal was the first such hearing in 14 years.

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Egypt

Maikel Nabil Sanad, Egypt’s first openly declared conscientious objector, was due to report to military service on 22 Oct. 2010, but did not.

According to the Egyptian constitution, “defense of the homeland and its territory is a sacred duty and conscription is compulsory, in accordance with the law.” Accordingly, military service is required for all Egyptian males who are 18 years old.

Egypt does not recognize the right to conscientious objection. Maikel sent several letters to military authorities, asking for recognition of this right, and to be transferred to a purely civilian ser-

vice instead. However, he did not receive a reply, and on 18 Oct. 2010 a final letter stated he was to report on 22 Oct. to begin his military service.

In an interview with *Ynet News* from Israel, Maikel said, “I am a pacifist, I am against bearing arms and participating in military and paramilitary organizations . . . I think obligatory service is a form of slavery.”

There is no experience in Egypt regarding treatment of conscientious objectors. Maikel was arrested on 12 Nov. 2010, but released on 14 Nov. While not amounting to a recognition of Maikel’s conscientious objection, it at least means that he will not be prosecuted for it for the time being.

War Resisters’ League

Venezuela

In Oct. 2010, the Venezuelan government backed down regarding compulsory registration for military service, which would have come into force on 21 Oct. 2010. In Oct. 2009, the parliament passed a new law on military recruitment, which for the first time also introduced compulsory military service registration for women. Failure to register was punishable with a fine, and military documentation was required in a range of situations, from entering a university to obtaining a driving license.

According to an article in *Global Voices Online*, the government’s decision to “reactivate” the Military Conscription and Enlistment Law generated an attitude of resistance from civil society. At the beginning of Oct. 2010, the government declared those not enrolled in the military record before 21 Oct. would face penalties under the law.

The Venezuelan human rights organization Provea, along with other organizations and individuals, launched a campaign against the law on recruitment, especially highlighting the unconstitutionality of the law, as it fails to guarantee the right to conscientious objection.

According to state television, VTV, parliament was to vote on amendments to 17 articles of the year old law on 12 Oct. In the report, the chair of the Defense Committee, Juan José Mendoza, said the deadline for registration would be scrapped and there would be no punishment for non-registration. In addition, military documentation would not be required in order to study, work, obtain a driving license, or other reasons, and neither universities nor employers would be allowed or required to ask for it.

War Resisters’ League

New BVSer Joins Staff

Jake Short, Brethren Volunteer

Growing up in the Mennonite church, conscientious objection was something I had heard about fairly often, but it wasn't something discussed in great detail. I do remember hearing that men from my congregation had done alternative service during the wars of our past, but never heard the specifics.



While I studied at Bluffton University, I learned more about the history of conscientious objection from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective and heard more of the stories of those who were brave enough to stand up for what they believed in and not fight.

These COs in the church became some of my heroes, not the normally glorified military.

Such is the background to my coming to the Center on Conscience & War as the new Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS) member on staff.

I am glad to be here and have J.E. McNeil and Bill Galvin welcome me onboard. It was rather overwhelming when I started, with the introductory training concerning CO discharges, military regulations, etc. It was (and still is) a lot to remember, but I've been getting better at taking phone calls and am very relieved that people don't automatically hang up when I apologize, tell them I'm a new counselor, and I don't immediately have the answers they seek.

It's frustrating since I have high expectations of myself, but I keep trying to remember to take things one step at a time and take joy in the little things.

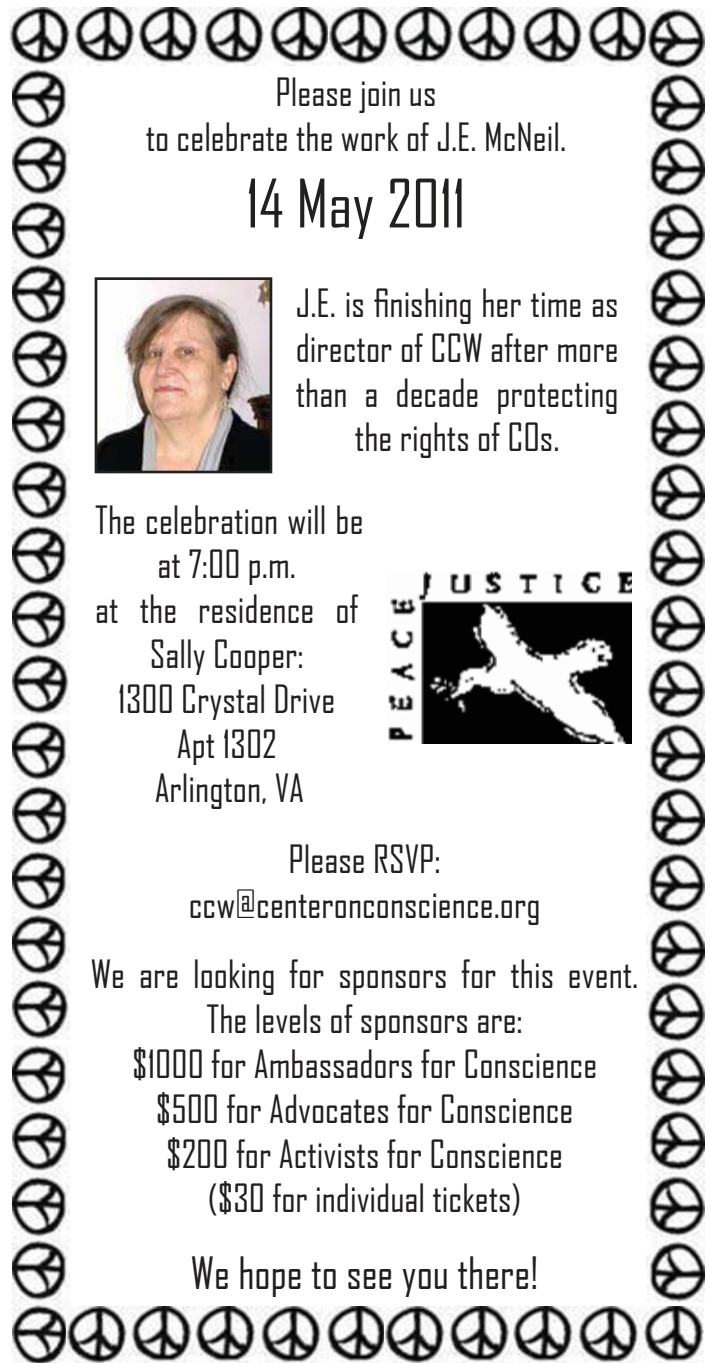
During my time at CCW, I will be working as the editor of our newsletter, *The Reporter for Conscience's Sake*, in addition to my daily tasks of answering phones and performing other office duties. I also plan to help update the book *Words of Conscience* that CCW reprints every so often, along with other publishing projects.

CHECK OUT OUR NEW WEBSITE:
[HTTP://CENTERONCONSCIENCE.ORG/](http://centeronconscience.org/)

Ricks Moves on from CCW

Russell Ricks, Communications Director

It has been two years since I came to the Center. In that time I have touched on nearly every part of the work we do here, from lobbying the halls of Congress to stuffing thousands of envelopes. The faces of the Center are changing, but the work done here remains just as important, and I am glad that I could be a part of it.



Please join us
 to celebrate the work of J.E. McNeil.

14 May 2011



J.E. is finishing her time as director of CCW after more than a decade protecting the rights of COs.

The celebration will be
 at 7:00 p.m.
 at the residence of
 Sally Cooper:
 1300 Crystal Drive
 Apt 1302
 Arlington, VA



Please RSVP:

ccw@centeronconscience.org

We are looking for sponsors for this event.

The levels of sponsors are:

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(\$30 for individual tickets)

We hope to see you there!

SAVE THE DATE

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ANNUAL ADVISORY COUNCIL GATHERING

CONTACT CCW FOR MORE INFORMATION

Excerpts from the Truth Commission Report

For the full report, visit: www.conscienceinwar.org

“[C]urrent U.S. military regulations governing Conscientious Objection (CO) require objection to “war in any form.” This requirement creates a major, irresolvable conflict. It denies freedom of religious practice and the exercise of moral conscience to those serving in the military who object to a particular war based on the moral criteria of just war, which the military itself teaches and upholds as important.

What the military teaches, therefore, it also punishes. Those who oppose a particular war have no legal basis for refusing to deploy, even if they believe participation implicates them in an immoral war or in war crimes. Instead, they face sanctions, and even court martial and prison for their refusal to serve. In other words, soldiers are taught to use moral discrimination in war, but they have to serve in all wars they are called on to fight, regardless of their moral evaluation of a particular war. . . .

The current suffering and moral dilemmas of the service men and women who morally object to the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars are evidenced in the large number of those in military service who have refused deployment, are in prison, have been dishonorably discharged, or have committed suicide. In addition to unprecedented suicide rates among active duty military, veteran suicides (6,000 a year or twenty percent of all U.S. suicides), have taken more American lives than the Afghanistan and Iraq wars themselves. Tragically, an average of eighteen veterans kill themselves each day, and from 2005-2007, the suicide rate among younger veterans rose 26%. Some of these deaths, perhaps a substantial number of them, occur because people are

forced to fight wars they come to believe are morally wrong.

When people in military service are forced to fight a war that violates their most deeply held moral beliefs, the aftermath can be severe. Indeed, new research is showing that war can bring long-lasting moral harm to veterans. VA clinical psychologists have identified a previously untreated and still rarely addressed hidden wound of war called “moral injury.” Moral injury comes from “perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.” The long-term impact can be “emotionally, psychologically, behaviorally, spiritually, and socially” devastating, sometimes lasting an entire lifetime. Or the impact of moral injury can foster internal conflict and self-condemnation so severe that their burdens become intolerable and lead to suicide.

The formation of ethical sensibilities and the freedom to exercise moral choice are sacred dimensions of faith. Hence, religious communities must also take responsibility for what they teach about the moral conduct of war, become educated in and involved with healing the impact of current CO policies, and support expanding the right to moral conscience in war. As VA clinical studies indicate, the support and understanding of communities willing to listen to veterans experiencing moral injuries, to hear their confessions, and to help them heal is crucial to their recovery. While this healing is crucial, prevention of such injury is also of utmost importance.

Forcing service members to act against their own moral consciences denies them their religious freedom . . .”

German Parliament Votes to Suspend Conscription

War Resisters League

Published in CO-Update, January 2011, No. 62

The German parliament approved amendments to the conscription law on 15 December 2010, which will suspend conscription from 1 July 2011 on. The last conscripts will start their compulsory military service on 3 January 2011 for six months.

Besides suspending conscription in peacetime, the medical examination of potential recruits will also be suspended.

Registration, however, will be extended to women. According to a new article 58 of the conscription law, the local authorities will have to hand over names and addresses of German youth—boys and girls—who will turn 18 in the following year, to the local military authorities (*Kreiswehrrersatzamt*) at the beginning of the year, for the purpose of “sending information about a service in the Armed Forces”. This means 16-17 year old youth can be contacted by the military, and can be sent military propaganda.

While it is possible to object to such propaganda, this will need to happen in the year before the data will be passed on to the military authorities. This means someone who turns 18 in May of 2013 will need to object to his or her data being passed on in year

2011, at the age of 16.

The amendments to the conscription law also include new regulations for a voluntary military service for men and women of initially six months basic training, which can be extended by up to 17 months.

With the suspension of conscription, substitute service for conscientious objectors also will be to be suspended. A draft law aimed primarily at establishing a new, federal voluntary service, which also includes the regulations for the suspension of substitute service, has been presented the German government. According to the draft, substitute service will also be suspended from 1 July 2011 on. But from the same date on a new voluntary service, open for women and men, will be available, administered by the former Federal Agency for Substitute Service (*Bundesamt für Zivildienst*), which will be renamed “Federal Agency for Family and Civil Society” (*Bundesamt für Familie und zivilgesellschaftliche Aufgaben*). The new voluntary service will last 6, 12, or 24 months, and it is planned that there will be about 30,000 places initially.

This new voluntary service on a federal level is in addition to existing voluntary service schemes of the German states (*Länder*), the Voluntary Social Year and the Voluntary Ecological Year.

Truth Commission

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Camilo Mejia, a CO once imprisoned for going AWOL to avoid returning to Iraq, explained he suffers from PTSD and moral injury. The effect of PTSD for Mejia is when he enters a crowded room, he always needs to know where the exits are and keeps his back to the wall. Yet the moral injury is having to live the rest of his life knowing that he participated in things that he knows deep down are wrong.

The release of the report was the highlight of three days of activity, which began on 10 Nov. with a press conference at the National Press Club. While most of the reporters in attendance were from the religious press, several major news sources carried a story about the Truth Commission, including the *New York Times* and *CNN*. Commissioners Dr. Rita Brock, Dr. Gabriella Lettini, and retired Army chaplain Herman Keizer addressed the gathered press, as did CCW's J.E. McNeil, along with a number of conscientious objectors. Following the press conference, several COs and members of the Commission traveled to Capitol Hill to deliver copies of the report to the Armed Services Committees and discuss it with them.

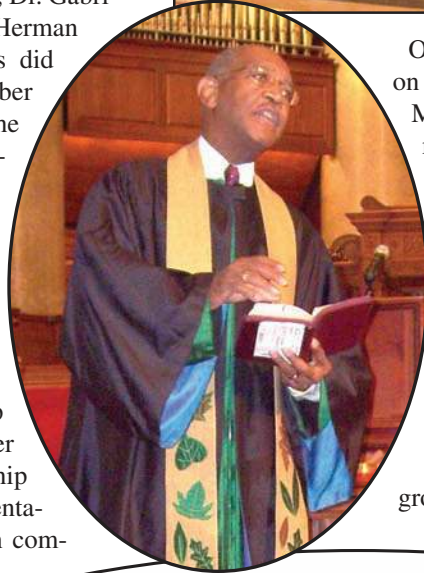
On 11 Nov. a panel of COs spoke at the National City Christian Church. Following the panel discussion was an interfaith worship service. This powerful worship service included statements from a number of conscientious objectors, and leadership from a variety of faith traditions. Representatives from Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities each spoke of the importance of conscientious objection in their respective traditions. The sermon, about Baalam's ass, was delivered by Rev. Dr. James Forbes, pastor emeritus of the Riverside Church in New York City.

The culmination of the worship service was the "official" release of the Truth Commission report. Former CCW board member Rev. David Miller, professor at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, received the report on behalf of the religious community. Rev. Mpho Tutu of South Africa, daughter of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, received the report on behalf of the international community.



On Friday, 12 Nov., the Commission hosted a teach-in on selective conscientious objection, called "Protecting Moral Conscience." After introductory remarks about moral injury from Drs. Lettini and Brock, Rev. Keizer spoke about the dilemma created by the current military policy that requires COs to object to "war in any form." Afterwards another panel of conscientious objectors relayed their experiences with the current military policy. Most of the COs who spoke at the event had been helped by CCW during the CO application process, causing one person in attendance to observe that CCW kept "churning out" conscientious objectors.

The three days concluded by breaking into working groups to plan further strategies to implement the recommendations of the Commission report.



Top: Former CCW board member David Miller, at podium, accepts the report from the Truth Commission from Drs. Lettini and Brock for the religious community, surrounded by leaders of various faiths. Middle: Rev. James Forbes at the interfaith service. Bottom: India Drew, Daniel Lakemacher (former CCW staff member), Josh Stieber, and Camilo Mejia speak at a panel in which COs reflect on their discharges. *Photos by Bill Galvin*

A Veterans Day Lesson for this Third-Grader

Letter to hospitalized veteran brings return letter with surprising message

Everett J. Thomas, Editor, *The Mennonite*

This was probably not the Veterans Day lesson the teacher intended. The Rahe family was unaware that their third grader, Hayden, had been assigned to write a letter to a military veteran, thanking him for his service to the country. Hayden's veteran was hospitalized in Indianapolis.



Hayden Rahe with the letter he received from a Vietnam veteran. Photo by Carolyn Rahe

On 22 Nov. 2010, Hayden received a letter in return.

Dear Hayden,

Thank you for your letter. I was in the Veterans Hospital in Indianapolis when I received your letter. I had a punctured lung. I will be 63 years old on Dec. 19. And this was only my second hospitalization. I served in the Air Force from July 22, 1966 to Oct. 4, 1968, during the Viet Nam era.

Hayden, please do not allow yourself to get caught up in veteran or military affairs. Many of us are anti-military; we joined so we wouldn't be drafted by the Army or Marines. Hayden, our military interferes with other countries and wastes so very much money that could be spent on free quality healthcare and a better quality of life for all.

Your friend,

P.S. Hope you get all As in school!"

Hayden is the son of Carolyn and Chris Rahe, web services director for Mennonite Church USA. Their family attends Holde-man Mennonite Church in Wakarusa, Ind. Earlier in the school year, Chris shared with other staff his dismay at the patriotic music program in which Hayden was required to participate.

"What I didn't know at the time," Chris said on 6 Dec. 2010, "was that his class was also instructed to write letters to veterans thanking them for fighting. ... It turns out the veteran that Hayden's letter went to wrote back ... God works in mysterious ways."

This article first appeared in the 13 Dec. 2010 ezine, TMail, and in the January 2011 edition of *The Mennonite*. Reprinted with permission.

"Pre-Existing" Psychiatric Conditions Leading Cause of Discharges in 1st Year of Service

Kelly Kennedy, Staff Writer, *Army Times*

10 January 2010 digital edition of the *Army Times*

From 2003 to 2008, more people were separated from the military within their first year of service for "pre-existing" psychiatric conditions than for any other reason, military data show.

After noting that such discharges "do not qualify a service member for medical benefits or medical retirement pay after leaving" the military, the *Times* added, "Two years ago, Congress refined the rules for discharging people for 'personality disorder' as a pre-existing condition after it became clear that many troops in fact" had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or "symptoms of that disorder caused by their combat experience."

While personality disorder discharges "have since declined," discharges for "other mental conditions have jumped."

A separate article, titled "Lawsuit Demands Personality Disorder Discharges," appearing in the same digital edition of the *Army Times* says Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) has filed a federal lawsuit demanding records for 26,000 veterans of the current wars whom the group says were "wrongfully discharged" for personality disorders.

The Defense Department's "personality disorder designation prevents thousands of wounded veterans from accessing service-connected disability compensation or health care," said VVA President John Rowan.

The *Times* added, "VVA hopes the lawsuit will convince Congress to mandate a review of personality disorder discharges and force the Defense Department to make reparations to service members who were wrongfully discharged."

An editorial in the same edition also takes note of VVA's lawsuit, arguing it is "only fair that the military accept responsibility for those troops deemed fit to serve and deploy, rather than try to shortchange them."

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Good Memories of 1-W Work in Cleveland

Charles "Charlie" Beck
Mennonite, Archbold, Ohio

At the time our country was getting involved in the Korean conflict, some of my friends were drafted for the Armed forces. At the beginning of the war, there were no provisions for COs [conscientious objectors], as we were called. You had to apply at your own draft board for a CO classification, which was 4-E at that time, or for a farming classification which was 2-C.

I received a 2-C, so I was deferred for the time being, but each year you would have to reapply. In the fall of 1953, I realized it would be the last farming deferment I'd qualify for. With my father and two younger brothers, it would be pretty hard to prove I was needed on the farm.

So, I decided to go into 1-W service. This meant working some place that would qualify as a job of national interest, exempting you from military service.

Brought up as a pacifist, I decided this is what I would do. I notified my draft board, and they told me to get a job and report back to them. I applied at University Hospitals at Cleveland and was accepted.

In December of 1953, I left the farm, family, and church to go into service. At the time, I wanted to get my two years over so I could get on with the rest of my life. Those years turned out to be two of the most rewarding, and also challenging, years of my life.

I was assigned to the Lakeside 40 South floor by my supervisor, Mr. Panek, who was just a few years older than I and also in the Armed Forces Reserves.

I can honestly say, I don't think I've ever worked for a better boss and working conditions. The head nurse on 40 South was a Catholic lady. They knew why we were there and expected us to live accordingly.

The patients on 40 South were mostly elderly men with heart attacks, strokes, and other problems, many stemming from alcohol abuse. It was interesting work, but at times, also quite depressive. I worked 11 days straight, and then had three days off. On the weekends I worked, I also was a relief (or float) orderly, helping patients on other floors.

One Sunday I was told to go to 50 North to help get patients up. I reported to the head nurse on duty. I noticed the nametag on her

uniform was Miss Bertsche. I asked her if she knew Rev. Bertsche from Archbold, pastor of the Evangelical Mennonite Church. She stopped and looked at me, saying, "I sure do, he's my father." What a small world.

About 6 months after starting my work on 40 South, the supervisor came to our floor and asked me if I'd be interested in working with polio patients as they were turning our floor into a polio ward. This was before polio vaccine. I decided to try it.

I worked with patients from ages 16-30, and what a great experience it turned out to be. When a polio patient was admitted, they often would be very sick with a high fever. After 2-3 weeks, you could usually see many side effects ranging from partial paralysis of their arms and legs to almost total loss of control, including difficulty breathing. This meant for some living in an iron lung. You had to take care of almost all their needs. How helpless they must have felt. However, for many, physical therapy helped them to live almost a normal life. It was real rewarding to see them improve so much. However, some needed to spend the rest of their life in wheelchairs.

After one year of service, Arva and I married and she joined me at Cleveland and worked in the dietary office.

About the same time, I was promoted to Senior Male Attendant. This was really only a way, I think, of the hospital showing that they were satisfied with the work you were doing. I still did the same tasks as before, only wore a white shirt and tie instead of the blue shirt. There was also several dollars more on your paycheck, but having to furnish your own white shirts and launder them meant you probably weren't ahead more financially.

About a year after our marriage, we started thinking about looking for a place and job that would be available. In November, we learned that the farm where we lived for 45 years was going to be available in January. Talk about the Lord's timing. Also, I would be milking cows for a living—something I had decided several years before I'd never do.

But after being a country boy transplanted to a city for two years, I decided you can take a boy out of the country, but you can never take the country out of a boy.

So this was the beginning of a life vocation that I've learned to enjoy. Above all else, I have been most richly blessed.

*Do you have a CO story or memory to share?
Send it the Center on Conscience & War!*

We are looking for a variety of CO stories from any war and/or time in the past 100 years, whether it be WWI, the current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, or any time in between.

CCW wants to feature these stories in future editions of *The Reporter for Conscience's Sake*.

Please send your stories (and any relevant photos if you want) to: jake@centeronconscience.org



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From the Desk of the Executive Director

Anticipation.

Sometimes it is a delicious thing: anticipating the first strawberries of spring (something I personally start when the snow first falls in the winter—it helps my southern bones get through the worst of it). It can be a joyfully nerve-wracking thing, such as anticipating your first day at school or the first time you get to drive the car on your own. Or a joyful and melancholy thing such as anticipating your last day of school or when your child moves out.

But imagine anticipating receiving your discharge papers from the military when it has been more than a year since you knew that your conscience will not allow you to participate in war. Each day you must get up and put on a military uniform, which has come to represent the things that you find immoral. Each day you must participate in the daily life of the base: training, saluting, etc., ultimately helping prepare and support the very thing you know your heart of heart demands that you not participate in: war. Each day you look for ways to avoid being anymore complicit than you have to—even knowing that if you refuse to participate, your years of military service may well count for less than nothing and you may be charged with disobeying orders or other charges and receive an other than fully honorable discharge.

Each day you wonder if your paperwork has moved one more step, if there is some way to help it move. Each day you wonder if someone will confront you with anger, accusing you of cowardice or fraud. Each day hoping that a superior officer will not decide this is the day to make an example of you. Each day you pray you have not moved one inch deeper in the moral morass that the military has come to be to you.

And you do it all alone.

At least you may be alone if you have not found the Center. Because while the Center cannot make things change instantly, it can help you move more carefully, more successfully, and more deliberately. The Center will stand beside you, support you, and celebrate with you when your long days of anticipation are over.

And then the Center will do it all over again for another man or woman just like you.

Some of the Center's supporters have experienced what I just described; many have not. Regardless, you can stand beside these brave men and women. You can contribute to the services that the Center provides by paying for one of us to sit beside a CO in a hearing or to write a brief for the courts. You can participate even more directly. We respect our clients' privacy, so we do not give out the names of COs while their cases are pending, but we welcome letters from supporters for us to forward to them. We have COs who are Buddhist, Ayn Rand libertarians, Islamic, and conservative Christian right now. If you send us a letter or a card or a book, we will forward it on with your contact information to a CO.

Let them know they are not alone. Help them anticipate the day when they are free and help the Center anticipate the day when we are no longer needed.

Yours for Peace and Justice,

J.E. McNeil

