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Military Counseling Network

Helping Military Servicemembers Lay Down Their Arms

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Introduction

This issue of the *Peace Office Newsletter* focuses on the topic of counseling provided to military servicemembers of the United States around the world. That activity in Germany occurs because of the large number of U.S. military bases located there, and those bases continue to be pivotal for the U.S. military deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Wolfgang Krauss reflects on the mood in Germany following World War II and the importance of trans-Atlantic ties to retransmit Christian pacifism to Germany after its erosion over much of a century. The German Mennonite Peace Committee (DMFK) was formed eleven years after the end of World War II, when compulsory military service was re-introduced in West Germany, to counsel and support German young men in conscientious objection to military service.

André Gingrich Stoner provides some history and reflections on the early days of the Military Counseling Network (MCN) following its launch in 1987.

Tim Huber relates several first-hand stories of his current experience in working at MCN, and passes along stories from the experiences of U.S. servicemembers trying to obtain conscientious objector status.

David Stutzman, who finished his term at MCN in 2006, calls our attention vividly to the techniques for recruiting American young men and women into the military and reminds us that some of those people are the most in need of hearing about a Christian pacifist alternative.

Titus Peachey describes the activities of the GI Rights Hotline, which functions inside the United States in similar ways to which the MCN offers counsel to American military servicemembers in Germany.

MCN's Early Days

by André Gingerich Stoner

Matthew was a young soldier pulling guard duty at the U.S. Army headquarters in Heidelberg in the fall of 1990. A small group of Germans from a local Mennonite congregation and the German Mennonite Peace Committee were handing out leaflets there that day. The flyers included questions about the war build-up in the Gulf, information about conscientious objection, and a phone number to call. When he dialed the number, the phone rang in our kitchen.

But at boot camp Matthew was troubled by the drill chants. He wrote alternatives for himself using scripture and hymns.

Cathy and I were on an MCC assignment in Germany. We lived next to a large U.S. nuclear weapons base and were active in the local church-based German peace movement. Our primary effort was to build relationships with U.S. military personnel and share with them Jesus' way of peace. We taught German to GIs and their wives, played racquetball with them, sang in the base choir, invited airmen and their families over for supper, and introduced them to our German friends. In preparation for this assignment, we had received military counseling training through the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors (CCCO).

As we talked with Matthew on the phone, he shared his story with us. He had grown up in a military family. His father was a Naval intelligence officer. After high school, Matthew spent several years at Oral Roberts University. It seemed only natural for him to enlist. But already at boot camp Matthew was troubled by the drill chants. He wrote alternative chants for himself using scripture and hymns. He shared his questions with a fellow Christian in the Army who convinced him, however, that soldiering could be reconciled with Christian faith. But now, as preparations for the first Gulf War in the early 1990s got into full swing, his job would not just entail guarding a building in Germany. He was facing the prospect of combat and the question of his own possible death—and whether he was ready to kill. He couldn't square his work in the military with his Christian faith.

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Matthew came and spent a weekend with us. Much of the time we talked about his life and his faith and he worked on the six questions he needed to answer for his CO application. He brought a friend along from his unit who was also questioning his role. Chris's sacred texts were the lyrics of the rock group U2! Though not explicitly religious, this friend sensed that at the core of his being he wanted to be about peace and not war.

Both Matthew and Chris submitted their CO claims. They faced harassment in their units. Though they didn't have to carry weapons while their claim was being processed, they struggled with obeying commands to salute the flag and wear the uniform. I attended their CO hearings and both were eventually discharged as conscientious objectors.

The Military Counseling Network was formed in the fall of 1987 by three U.S. civilians living in Germany—Christians active in the peace movement—who had each received military counseling training through CCCO. A few months later we invited CCCO to conduct a training in Germany for an additional nine volunteers to broaden the network. Through a German-English newsletter, a GI info-line and word-of-mouth, a steady trickle of soldiers found their way to MCN counselors for help with discharges or information about their rights.

In the Spring of 1989, MCN sponsored a ten-day speaking tour with civil rights veterans, Vincent and Rosemarie Harding. They spoke on numerous bases in numerous settings about Martin Luther King, Jr. and what he might say to people in the military, resulting in some remarkable encounters and conversations.

Financial challenges dogged MCN, however. As MCC volunteers, Cathy and I were the only MCN counselors who could count on ongoing support, even if modest. Our term of service was scheduled to end in a few months. In the summer of 1990, the core MCN team decided to "fold shop." Some of us who had received training would still make ourselves available to the occasional soldier, but a coordinated outreach effort would not continue and the office in Stuttgart would close.

Just a few weeks later, however, Iraq invaded Kuwait and the United States responded with a massive military build-up in the Persian Gulf. Germany was the staging ground for an impending military confrontation. American units in Germany were being readied for combat and thousands of troops from units in the U.S. were moving through the large air bases in Germany. Soldiers were facing new challenges, fears and questions, leading some to earnest soul-searching.

As part of our outreach efforts, Cathy and I and several German Christians had been handing out leaflets on various topics at the local U.S. military base every other week. We now wrote leaflets about war and Christian faith, about conscientious objection and other discharges with reference to particular Army regulations. The leaflets included our home phone number.

Through an informal network of friends and acquaintances, copies of these leaflets were sent to other local peace initiatives. Some groups copied them and began handing them out at their local bases. This was one concrete action available to Germans opposed to the war. Suddenly we were getting phone calls from all over Germany. We could tell where people were handing out leaflets. Two or three days later, the calls would start coming in from that area. First it was Bremen, then Ansbach, then Frankfurt and so on.

In December 1990, Erik Larsen spoke at a large anti-war rally in Bonn. Larsen was a U.S. Marine reservist and an outspoken critic of the war build-up. After this rally, he and I traveled through Germany meeting with some of the soldiers we were counseling, with Germans in the peace movement, and with the German press. The whirlwind tour generated increased interest in the German peace movement and the broader public about the plight of U.S. soldiers opposed to the war. Meeting and learning about such soldiers was a revelation for German peace activists. Some began seeing soldiers less as the enemy and more as victims, possibly even allies in the struggle against the war.

Already in November 1990, Cathy and I had put out an appeal to military counselors in the U.S. to come help us work with GIs stationed in Germany. The request to the MCC Peace Office made its way to Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder who was teaching at Notre Dame. He passed it on to contacts in the Catholic peace network. As a result, in December, six individuals (one Mennonite and five Catholics) flew to Germany for ten to fourteen days. They were hosted by German groups from Bremen to Nuernberg and offered on-site military counseling in the days immediately before many troops were deployed to the Gulf.

This work drew considerable attention from the media. Even The Stars and Stripes, the "authorized unofficial publication of the U.S. Armed Forces" ran a front page article and a two-page spread on the work of the Military Counseling Network and conscientious objection.

In the six months of the war build-up from August 1990 until January 1991, MCN counselors took calls from more than one thousand U.S. soldiers, family members or girlfriends. During this time they assisted roughly seventy GIs in filing CO claims. Matthew and Chris were two of them. MCN also counseled several dozen AWOL (Absent Without Official Leave) soldiers and helped provide them with legal support.

MCN continued its work after the first Gulf War with the help of workers through Brethren Volunteer Service and Mennonite Central Committee. As the urgency of the war receded and the attention of the German and American peace movement shifted to other issues it was increasingly difficult to generate funds for the MCN work, and the number of soldiers seeking support dramatically decreased. In 1995 it was decided that MCN be disbanded as a coordinated organization and remain only as a passive network of connected individuals which could be reactivated in the case of increased inquiries from soldiers (which it was in 2003).

No U.S. Mennonite has been drafted into the military for years. Yet every day young men and women in uniform wrestle with questions of Christian faith and conscience. Some of them are making costly choices to be peacemakers. They may face intimidation and threats, harassment and abuse, and even imprisonment. It is particularly difficult to be a conscientious objector on a military base during a time of war and especially in a foreign land far from home and civilian support. Though it may require us to enter the foreign world of military culture, it is an obvious calling for Mennonites to stand in solidarity with these brothers and sisters. It is extremely encouraging that the German Mennonite Peace Committee, with the support of MCC, the Mennonite Mission Network and others, has revived and is continuing this ministry among military personnel.

André Gingerich Stoner is Pastor of Missions at Kern Road Mennonite Church in South Bend, Indiana, and Director of Interchurch Relations for Mennonite Church USA. He served with MCC on two peacemaking assignments in Germany from 1984 to 1991. He was married and joined by his wife, Cathy, in 1989. Vignettes and experiences from his work with military personnel are collected in the MCC Occasional Paper No. 12, Entering Samaria: Peace Ministry Among Military Personnel in West Germany.

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Transatlantic Friends

by Wolfgang Krauss

1945—those Germans who had come through World War II were fed up with militarism and dictatorship. Re-education laid the groundwork for a new German identity as democracy, human rights and the rejection of war became basic values. Germans were also hungry for American culture: Jazz music, modern literature, chewing gum, whisky and cigarettes.

In 1956 the U.S. administration had pushed the West German government to set up an army again.

1956—eleven years after the end of World War II the Cold War had started and compulsory military service was reintroduced in West Germany. Two weeks later leading German Mennonites founded the German Mennonite Peace Committee (DMFK) to counsel and support young men in conscientious objection to military service. The U.S. administration had pushed the West German government to set up an army again and to become part of NATO. American Mennonites helped their German brothers and sisters, who had lost their way in nationalism and even national socialism, to find a new orientation.

The Pax Boys, Mennonite conscientious objectors (COs) from the U.S., had a vital role in Mennonite "re-education." They distributed food and clothing and built houses and church buildings for Mennonite refugees from the east. Their witness had a strong impact on a faith community which had lost its peace witness during more than a century of accommodation to growing nationalism and militarism. Some Mennonite leaders had even officially renounced resistance to military service when Hitler came to power. Many Mennonites subsequently served in his armies. Now Mennonite COs from across the sea were building new homes for those who had been driven away from their ancestral land as a result of Hitler's war. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) supported theological retreats and an emerging bible school to foster the development of a new Christian peace witness, as well as the newly-founded German Mennonite Peace Committee.

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1964, 1967 and after—As a post-war kid I had been in contact with GIs since my childhood. It was always a sensation when a helicopter landed on the soccer field. From my school window I could watch paratroopers jump every other week. And we lived close to a housing area for GI families. When I was ten I made friends across the big fence, and as a teenager I was babysitting the kids of an officer's family. I shared the fascination of my generation for American pop culture. AFN (American Forces Network) had the best music on air, and I had free access to the music records of my army friend. We stayed friends though I joined the protest against the war in Vietnam, and we watched the movie on Woodstock together. Later he confessed he had almost left the theater when Jimi Hendrix played his protest version of the Star Spangled Banner.

1983—The tricentennial anniversary of the first Germans emigrating to America was celebrated by the German and the U.S. governments as the beginning of close ties that led to the present military alliance of NATO. DMFK joined the protests and tried to correct the picture of a German-American brotherhood in arms. We informed the public that the early emigrants were Mennonites and Quakers from Krefeld, who crossed the Atlantic to find religious freedom including the right not to fight. We invited American Mennonite churches to join us in celebrating a Transatlantic Peace Sunday to show our fellowship in Christ's peace.

1984—In October DMFK started a permanent office and employed me as a peace worker. The peace movement became very strong in the 1980s, and some demonstrations had more than 300,000 people in attendance. A human chain ran 100 km (62 miles) from Stuttgart to Neu-Ulm to protest against the new middle range missiles the US/NATO and the USSR/Warsaw Pact wanted to deploy on both sides of the "Iron Curtain". Early warning time shrank to minutes, and nuclear holocaust became a real danger. The protest movement was denounced as "anti-American" by the German government, but the protesters formed their own alliance with American friends: peace groups and churches. Transatlantic cooperation did not remain a military prerogative.

1989—After the nonviolent revolution in East Germany and other countries, the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and German reunification, many expected a time of peace and less conflict, but soon Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in the summer of 1990 brought a major crisis.

1991—After several ultimatums the U.S.-dominated Operation Desert Shield led to the Gulf War early in 1991. Several years before, MCC workers André und Cathy Stoner had started a project to contact and befriend U.S. soldiers in Germany. They soon learned that many had joined the military for socio-economic reasons; often it was the only way for them to find a job, an education and social advancement. They got to know GIs who wanted to get out of the military, and the need for qualified counseling became clear. This led to the founding of the Military Counseling Network (MCN). A growing number of GIs tried to register as COs. Many of them were Christians who were rediscovering their faith and who for the first time heard Christ's call to repent and make peace. Some were Muslims who did not want to fight against other Muslims, and some were Agnostics who did not want to kill. Some of them went public and this contributed to more support for MCN. The majority of the financial support at that time came from MCC across the Atlantic.

In the years after the Gulf War we tried to keep the infrastructure of MCN, but the number of soldiers seeking counsel dramatically declined. In times without major tension and war the social security aspects of military service seem to take predominance over matters of conscience. For lack of demand MCN was closed or "frozen" in the mid-1990s.

2001—The September 11 attack on New York first led to an overwhelming wave of compassion and sympathy for Americans. Flowers were put in front of military installations that some years before had seen huge protests. But the "war on terror", the invasion of Afghanistan, the installation of the Guantanamo prison and the imminent war with Iraq led to a loss of sympathy, and protests became stronger than ever. More than 70 per cent of the Germans did not believe the lies of the Bush administration about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and were opposed to the war, and the German government distanced itself from it.

2003—There were hints that people within the U.S. military also did not buy this war and that very soon there would be a need for counseling again. A group of activists from different organizations decided to re-launch MCN and to appoint David Stutzman to the task of counseling and rebuilding the organizational infrastructure. We were lucky to have him in the DMFK office at the right time.

Since March 2003 MCN has worked with hundreds of GIs. Dozens were able to register as COs, and many others received information for other ways out. Four young Mennonite volunteers from across the Atlantic provided the actual manpower. As good pacifists and Mennonites they had no idea about the military world before they started to work with MCN, but they were quick in learning about military law, army regulations and counseling skills. A number of Germans and American citizens living in Europe gave support, and vital help and finances came from Mennonite Mission Network (MMN) and MCC.

MCN was organized as a project of DMFK. We share office rooms and facilities and contacts to Mennonite churches, the peace movement, and the German public. MCN is a quite independent branch of our work, and it receives much public attention. With all the media inquiries it is sometimes difficult to give the necessary priority to counseling.

As in 1990–91, many friends were made, and even some soldiers who stayed inside the military became friends. Human faces became visible behind uniforms and weapons. Human need became visible, visible in people who did not know beforehand how their decision to join the army would affect their conscience, people who did not expect to hear the voice of God in the middle of combat, people who suddenly just knew they could not continue to be part of the war machine.

At present there is no draft in the U.S. In Germany we have the draft, but it is very easy to be registered as a CO. The witness of resistance to military service was very important throughout our faith history, but for our young generations it is not at the center of their faith. In counseling GIs we learned that the "frontline of conscience has moved" as David Stutzman put it. Today this frontline runs within the armed forces. Maybe it always was there, but as we had little contact with soldiers—even Mennonite soldiers—we did not know. But now we do know: people near the frontline need our help

As a German Mennonite I feel indebted to Americans. It may sound contradictory or theologically incorrect, but I am thankful that the U.S. and its allies liberated Europe from fascism. Likewise I feel a debt of gratitude for North American Mennonites who committed themselves to the liberation of German Mennonites. I appreciate that they kept the Anabaptist peace witness and resistance to military service alive. I feel indebted

Some peace movement demonstrations in the 1980s had more than 300,000 people in attendance.

Young Mennonite volunteers with MCN were quick in learning about military law, army regulations and counseling skills.

The witness of resistance to military service for our young generations it is not at the center of their faith.

to my transatlantic sisters and brothers for the wealth of theological development and the Anabaptist vision of a church that practices active nonviolence and peace service in the footsteps of Christ. I feel indebted to scholars like John Howard Yoder, who articulated an ecumenically challenging peace theology and a renewed peace church identity.

Maybe we cannot or should not even try to pay back these debts, but in supporting the counseling work among GIs we can at least reinvest part of the capital that was invested in us. "He came and preached peace to you who were far away and to those who were near." Ephesians 2:17

Wolfgang Krauss, 53, has been director of the German Mennonite Peace Committee since 1984. The website of the German Mennonite Peace Committee is www.dmfk.de.

After a servicemember changes his/her mind about violence

by Tim Huber

His application to be recognized as a conscientious objector wasn't going so well, despite recommendations for approval from the military chaplain, psychiatrist, and investigating officers.

"My commander is perfectly aware that I won't perform duties that are combat-oriented, but nevertheless expects that I will go back to my original duties. This is either because he doesn't take me seriously in my stated intentions to refuse to follow orders of that nature, or he just flat-out would rather see me in prison than have me doing something useful for him."

Private First Class Robert Weiss wrote those words in a letter after arriving in Iraq in October 2007. His application to be recognized as a conscientious objector and receive an honorable discharge wasn't going so well, meeting roadblocks at virtually every level in his chain of command, despite recommendations for approval from the military chaplain, psychiatrist, and investigating officers who interviewed him.

Defined in military jargon as a Cavalry Scout, his job consisted of driving the eight-wheel-drive "Stryker" combat vehicle, which fills the operational gap between a Humvee and a tank. Seated relatively safely deep within the contraption, the driver and commander use periscopes to view what lies on the other side of their armor.

However, before he even arrived in Iraq, he was already looking at the world from a different angle than when he enlisted in the military at 17, two weeks after graduating from high school. Full of patriotism but lacking in foreseeable future, he found the military's welcoming arms a one-way ticket to turning his life around. The abstract motions of killing in basic training did little to give him qualms, but when an acquaintance was stabbed in the heart at a party and died on the way to the hospital, Weiss was forced to confront head-on what death actually meant.

"One kid died and another would soon go to prison, and the families and friends of both parties would be affected as well," Weiss said. "As these thoughts went through my mind I began to question the morality of killing and what good could be brought about by ending someone's life."

Seeking answers, he returned to a Bible he'd abandoned soon after joining the Army. Combined with an improbable discovery of John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*—among other works—Weiss found he simply could not reconcile Jesus' teachings with those of the military. He did his research, discovered that the U.S. Armed Forces provide an avenue out for conscientious objectors, and sent an e-mail to the Military Counseling Network, located in Bammental, Germany.

The Military Counseling Network's primary goal is to assist military servicemembers like Weiss to receive discharges, in a similar vein to its parent organization, the German Mennonite Peace Committee. That committee was formed in response to the return of German military conscription following World War II, and continues to help young German men seek alternative social service opportunities.

Germany plays a key role in the United States' global military presence in central Europe. In Germany alone, more than 60,000 American soldiers plus their families occupy bases stretching across the country. Landstuhl Regional Medical Center is the first stop for any servicemember wounded

in Iraq or Afghanistan, and is the largest U.S. military medical center outside the United States. Ramstein Air Force Base was and continues to be the hinge linking the United States to military operations in the two theaters. Other U.S. military concentrations are located in Italy and the United Kingdom. MCN is the only node of the GI Rights counseling network outside the U.S. staffed by and serving Americans.

Changes in the American military—most notably away from a draft system after the Vietnam War—have made seeking recognition as a conscientious objector (CO) difficult. However, though arduous, a conscientious objection discharge is not impossible. In today's military, a servicemember must explain how he or she could voluntarily join and swear an oath to defend the United States with their life before travelling a 180-degree philosophical journey to the use-of-force spectrum's opposite end. However, regulation AR 600-43 and Department of Defense directive 1300.6 dictate that soldiers harboring "a firm, fixed, and sincere objection to participation in war in any form or the bearing of arms" are entitled to a discharge from the military.

Like any great journey, the path from soldier to CO is typically traversed with small steps rather than one giant leap. It may begin as an acute distaste for a certain commanding officer's management style. Then specific aspects of mission protocols, like aiming an assault rifle at small children while on guard duty, start to wear. Instructions to plow through any women or children while driving in a convoy take on new meaning as the overarching mission's goals lose their luster. Independent research is sought. Books are read. The first Gulf War of the early 1990s is questioned for the first time, and a new light is cast on the Vietnam War. For soldiers stationed in Germany, interactions with locals bathe the enemy—no matter how historical—with the humanity that boot camp removed. Over time, what began as a nagging pet peeve can grow into a terminal case of full-blown conscientious objection.

To be recognized as a CO by the U.S. military, a servicemember must submit an application including a lengthy response to a handful of questions covering the nature of the applicant's beliefs about participation in war, how those beliefs changed or developed since entering the military, when and why the applicant feels he or she can no longer serve in the military, and how his or her daily lifestyle has changed as a result of these beliefs. This is followed by interviews with a psychiatrist, a chaplain, and an investigating officer to determine the level of sincerity and depth of belief. After recommendations are made up the chain of command, a three-person board at each branch's department headquarters takes a vote to determine whether or not the applicant is granted CO status and an honorable discharge. With no external assistance, the average approval rate for Army applicants is around 40 per cent. In the last two years, all soldiers applying with the assistance of MCN successfully received CO status.

Mandates require the application process to be confidential and take less than 90 days, but in reality, start-to-finish more often lasts seven to nine months, and word somehow gets out across the base. As it is, foreign-based American bases are essentially self-contained islands. They are physically and ideologically cut off from the surrounding society and culture by walls, by fears of terrorism, and by a poor exchange rate. However, the closer one comes to becoming a CO, the further he or she drifts from the military community and unit. That community also ostracizes the CO, when his or her new-found beliefs are interpreted as finding immoral the beliefs for which members of that community are willing to lose their lives.

It is at this moment that MCN can become an invaluable asset to a servicemember frightened of the prospect of deploying to Iraq (almost always less than 12 months away), unsure of the processing application's chances of success, and often feeling more alone now than ever before. A simple English conversation with sympathetic Americans can be the highlight of the month, and worth travelling halfway across a country.

MCN networks with other Americans living in Germany—some are Vietnam-era COs themselves—who are interested in providing support to Europe-based conscientious objectors. These individuals and groups constitute a vivid coalition of anti-war activists that the U.S. military holds in low regard, and a chasm exists between the two because the feeling is often mutual.

To build bridges of understanding between the two entities, MCN works as an interpreter for each, dissecting the assumptions and languages each utilize. Effigies of the president and various twists of the American flag might feel good at the time, but something is inevitably lost in the potential rhetorical connection. Ironically and painfully, sometimes the most combative force in the debate is actually the pacifist.

Further Resources

BOOKS

Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg (ed). *10 Excellent Reasons Not To Join the Military.* New York: The New Press, 2006.

Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society.* Little, Brown and Co, 1995.

MOVIES

"The Ground Truth"

ONLINE DOCUMENTARIES FROM PBS FRONTLINE

A Soldier's Heart—
www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/heart/

A Company of Soldiers—
www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/company/

Endgame—
www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/endgame/

Private Warriors—
www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/warriors/view/

The Military Counseling Network's primary goal is to assist [American] military service members to receive discharges.

Soldiers harboring "a firm, fixed, and sincere objection to participation in war in any form or the bearing of arms" are entitled to a discharge from the military.

Using the stories and experiences of COs and veterans like Robert Weiss, MCN seeks to flesh out the faceless soldier to peace advocates and the activist community. There are plenty of reasons why someone can feel patriotic. Why someone would equate their religion with service to their nation. Why someone would believe the television commercials about starting a new life, receiving money for college, and just plain helping other people. That's what Weiss thought he was doing before the military's horrific means outweighed the suddenly less-than-honorable end.

"As it stands I am left with two possible options," Weiss wrote from that Iraq base. "The first is that my application is accepted and I will have my discharge. The second is that my application is rejected, they order me back to combat duties, I refuse orders, I am incarcerated."

"Hopefully the final result will be an approved packet. However if it is not, I need a plan."

Tim Huber has been working with the Military Counseling Network in Bammental, Germany, since 2006. The Military Counseling Network website is www.mc-network.de.

Some Stories from Soldiers who became Conscientious Objectors

If you are going to war, do it because you honestly feel that all the lives that are destroyed are worth the cause.

The following are excerpts from writings or interviews with American servicemembers who applied for Conscientious Objector status while in the U. S. military in the past five years. The stories in their words are supplied by Tim Huber, MCN.

Vince was attending community college and working as a waiter. Unsurprisingly, he was not able to make enough money to stay in college, so he started looking for other ways to fund his education. $50,000 for college from the armed services sounded pretty good. He originally considered to be a paratrooper in the Air Force—he liked the idea of going behind enemy lines and getting other soldiers out of harm's way. Instead, he ended up in the Army as a combat engineer.

"Looking back I feel that I was pretty naive. The fact that I had to witness a combat zone to understand that killing humans is not a good thing still disturbs me. The hard fact is I was in it for the money from the beginning. And people died because of it. And I have to live with that."

He wrote, "If you are going to war, do it because you honestly feel deep within that all the men that die on both sides of the war, all the civilians that are killed on and off the battle field including women and children, all the children that have to grow up without parents, all the cities that are destroyed, all the lives that are destroyed are worth the cause. Because it will be you who is responsible for it. Whether it's your finger on the trigger, your thumb on the bomb release, or your pen sending supplies, it is you that is responsible. If you don't believe deep within that those cities, those lives, those men, women and children are worth destroying for your cause, then they will haunt you for the rest of your life. Good luck to you reader, I hope your life is well and that you make the best decisions not only for you, but also those around you."

Clifton writes, "I was disgusted by my own reflection in the mirror. I saw and did things there that should never be viewed as acceptable by civilized people. I have been shot at, I have been mortared, I have destroyed the livelihood of innocent people, and I have seen men rejoice in the torment of other men. As I recall these unfortunate events I find myself disgusted and ashamed. I pray that I may never live to endure such things again."

Dean says: My first concepts of Army life were from watching television shows, movies, and my dad saying, "Let me show you something I learned in the Army". I remember playing with a yellow plastic M-16. I would run around the house "shooting" at birds and squirrels. The idea was romantic. I wasn't actually killing anything. I didn't understand the concept of what I was doing. I was just doing what the guys on television had done. There were no little birds or squirrels falling

out of the trees and lying dead on the ground as a result of my actions. *Had there been, maybe I would have seen things differently a long time ago. But, seeing as how there were no repercussions for my actions, I had fun and I wanted to play Army when I grew up too.*

Marksmanship training and hand-to-hand combat/bayonet training seemed surreal to me. I didn't think of the E-type silhouette as being a person. . . . I began to have feelings against war when I was deployed to Kuwait and then to Iraq as the war progressed. I hated the fact that I was required to run over women or children if they were to get in my way. It was also required of me to point my weapon at small children with no shoes and dirty faces that were starving if they stood around my tower while on guard duty. I absolutely could not do this and cringed at the fact that the soldier in the tower with me could and did. I sat and ate lunch with the local men who were contracted to work on our buildings on the airfield and began to see them as what they were—human like me. I didn't understand the feelings that were growing in me.

I wasn't a conscientious objector (CO) before I joined the Army and in fact thought it necessary to have an Army to fight and defend the country. I didn't even know what a CO was when I joined. I remember hearing something about being a CO when I was in Basic Training and the connotation was that someone had to be weak to be one. I know that is not the case and that it actually takes a strong person to stand up for what he or she believes.

Kyle writes: I cannot shoot or even aim my weapon at someone. To combat evil, I believe that we must combat evil with the opposing forces that Jesus demonstrated—unconditional love, unconditional forgiveness, and unfailing grace. I can no longer believe that war is the lesser evil. I believe that war is evil and as a Christian I do not want to justify it.

As I look back on the history of war and its weapons I also notice something else. As technology increases, so do the weapons' destruction and ability to kill. I do not believe that we have gone from spears to muskets to machineguns to modern artillery to fighter planes to tanks to biological weapons to atomic bombs to make the world a better place. We have made these to inflict more pain on a broader scale—not to promote peace.

As time goes on, wars happen more and more frequently with more deaths than the previous war. Why are more and more civilians killed and hurt in each war? If we are truly fighting for peace, then why are weapons being built on greater scales and why are wars becoming more frequent?

In my Bible I continually and consistently read about how peaceful Jesus was and how many times He preached that we should love one another. Through this, I deepened my realization that I was not able to consciously carry out war, or its preparations, because I believe that it harms the spreading of the Gospel and ignores the non-violent teachings of Jesus.

I do not believe that we have gone from spears to muskets to machineguns to modern artillery to fighter planes to tanks to biological weapons to atomic bombs to make the world a better place.

I remember playing with a yellow plastic M-16. There were no little birds or squirrels falling out of the trees and lying dead on the ground.

The Front End of Recruitment for War

by Dave Stutzman

The Front End

Before patrols there's deployment. Before deployment there's basic. Before basic there's enlistment. Before enlistment there's recruitment. In a war very far removed from everyday American life, recruitment is possibly the only visible issue we face in our towns, our malls and our schools.

In Germany, we at the Military Counseling Network counseled United States servicemembers all of whom had already gone through the recruitment and enlistment process. We dealt with the "back end" of the issues of recruitment. Although it wasn't my specialty, I learned the profound significance of recruitment and how it serves as the "front end" of the war.

It takes place in our own backyard.

I learned the profound significance of recruitment; it takes place in our own backyard.

After counseling and getting to know hundreds of servicemembers, I learned to view the war in Iraq from the bottom up. Instead of viewing the military in monolithic terms, I learned to listen to the personal stories and the reasons that young persons decide to join. Instead of starting with the issues at the top—politics, policies or public figures—I learned to see the military through the personal level. I learned that who joins is more important than why. There is no better starting place.

Who Joins?

We Americans live in a country where the U.S. military budget exceeds the military budgets of the next 20 countries collectively. The resources of military recruitment are vast, powerful and persuasive. In 2005, the Army alone increased its recruitment budget by $500 million. Despite that, the Army is struggling to maintain enlistment quotas and is resorting to increasingly pervasive tactics to win the hearts and minds of America's young.

The military can be very attractive to some people. On average servicemembers are from lower socioeconomic classes and disproportionately represent minority groups. Most recruits are young, between the age of 18 and 20, looking for a job, opportunity, stability, education, a new chance in life, and, commonly, are seeking escape from inner city poor neighborhoods where there is not much hope for a successful future.

The military is very aware of who is most likely to join. Recruiters target working class youth and communities of color. According to Defense Department studies, 43 percent of new recruits come from the South compared to that of only 15 percent from the more populous and wealthier Northeast. Additionally, only 8 percent of new recruits come from families with a father or mother in the "professions." Socioeconomic factors determine much more about why people join rather than their beliefs on war. Throughout history the poor have been most attracted to the promises of military service. America today is no exception and that is only accentuated by the presence of a professional military.

It is no secret that military recruiters have become more assertive, the target recruits have gotten younger, and the enlistment bonuses are getting larger.

Professional Recruitment

Armies need boots on the ground. Recruitment is the military's instrument to secure the necessary manpower for the business of war. For a professional military, recruitment becomes the crucial mechanism in being able to sustain an unpopular war.

It is no secret that military recruiters have become more assertive in their efforts: there are more recruiters deployed, they are equipped with more sophisticated approaches, the target recruits have gotten younger, and the enlistment bonuses are getting larger. Recruiters have also enjoyed an unparalleled increase in access. Recruiters' right of entry to college campuses has been maintained since 1996 under the Solomon Amendment, which links federal funding to schools' willingness to allow recruiters on campus. And the military is taking full advantage, especially at community colleges, where students with fewer choices are more likely to consider a military career. More recently, the military has gained free access to high schools as well, under a little-known clause in the No Child Left Behind Act. In a brief section, it states that all public schools are required to share student names, addresses and telephone numbers with recruiters

One tactic has remained consistent. Among all the Hummer parades, showcases of technical gadgets, nifty weapons, and state-of-the-art video games, the military soft-pedals the war. Military recruiters stress the military as a job. *Learn to be a mechanic. Learn to be a medic. Become a computer specialist. Build your job skills and training. Make something of yourself.* The military is perceived as an opportunity. Rarely does the task of killing get tagged in on the sales pitch. Most recruits just don't think about the essence of their job. They see the promises.

Recently I perused the Army's website, *goarmy.com*, for any acknowledgement or indication of the realities of the war in Iraq. Not once did I see Iraq officially mentioned, but I saw plenty of words like career, education, benefits, and bonus. The military blatantly downplays the downsides to joining up in a time of war. With all the billions spent on advertising campaigns and all the promises of success, adventure, camaraderie, purpose and opportunity, the military still is in the business of war and it should be our business to make sure that this isn't overlooked.

The Home Front

This war in Iraq is characterized by distance. It is being fought by a professional military in a country far away and in a war that hardly infringes on ordinary life in the U.S. No general draft imposes a comprehensive involvement of society or forces the issue of complicity to be addressed by all. The public

rhetoric has not called for national sacrifice or rationing. Similarly the military has publicly tiptoed around the fact that this is a dangerous war. Furthermore, the consequences are out of the public eye. The costs have been relegated to a small minority of the American population. Those serving in the military and their families are bearing the brunt of this war. There is a real disconnect, in which most folks, unless related to or acquainted with military personnel, hardly rub shoulders with the realities of this war.

Truly the issues of this war seem so far removed or so over our heads, that most people feel helpless to do anything. Since this is not a military force overtly activated in a time of crisis it tends to go by unnoticed. However, the activation is taking place every day in our communities and it is up to citizens to start making a difference. Recruitment defines the issue we face on the home front. Even though Iraq is so far way, before Iraq there's recruitment.

David Stutzman was counselor and director with the Military Counseling Network in Germany from 2003–2006. He was a volunteer with the German Mennonite Peace Committee (DMFK) and Mennonite Mission Network.

This war in Iraq is characterized by distance, and hardly infringes on ordinary life in the U.S.

The GI Rights Hotline

by Titus Peachey

Ryan was at Marine boot camp when he first called me on the GI Rights Hotline. It was just after he had completed his first 8 weeks of training. Something within him reacted to all the training about killing and the pressure to show enthusiasm about it. Slowly he realized that he had become a conscientious objector, and he needed to figure out what to do. After a lot of discussion, I helped him start down the long lonely road of applying for a conscientious objector discharge.

In the United States more than 150 counselors scattered throughout the country take calls on the GI Rights Hotline. The Hotline averages more than 30,000 calls a year and provides information to new enlistees, as well as military personnel on active or reserve duty. The callers may be facing medical problems, family hardship situations, mental health issues, questions of conscience or serious adjustment problems. In most of these cases, callers find it helpful to talk with someone who is outside the military command structure about their situation.

Taking calls on the Hotline makes it clear that learning about the realities of military life before enlistment is essential. It's not unusual to talk to a caller who enlisted on impulse because he was mad at his parents, or because she was convinced there was no other way to pay for college. When trying to escape a difficult situation, many young people fail to look clearly at what they are getting into. Even with the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, many callers are surprised by the rigor and discipline of boot camp that focuses so heavily on combat and killing.

Unknown to many enlistees and their families, anyone who enlists in the military and then changes his/her mind, is allowed to withdraw and not report to boot camp. There are no negative consequences. It is a pleasure to receive calls from these people, because if they are clear that their enlistment was a mistake, it is easy to help them avoid a lot of heartache.

The current intense pressure to keep military units filled and combat-ready, makes military command structures very reluctant to grant discharges, even for legitimate reasons. Ryan's conscientious objector discharge request was articulated in clear terms and based on his new-found Christian faith. But after 6 months of interviews and paperwork, the Marines discharged him with what they termed a personality disorder.

It is not always possible to help someone gain a discharge or find a happy solution to their problem, but the Hotline is one place where they can get good information and a sympathetic ear. For more information see: www.girightshotline.org or phone 1 800-394-9544 or 1 877-447-4487. For links to news stories and reflections by veterans and counter-recruitment activists, see: www.mcc.org/us/co/counter.

Titus Peachey is Director of Peace Education for MCC US.

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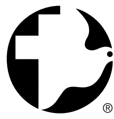

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From the Editor

The Mennonite Central Committee *Peace Office Newsletter* intends to be a forum for serious but concise discussion, focuses on one topic per issue, and intends to include viewpoints from a variety of writers on the topic. It reflects on and preserves learning from the experience and work of Mennonite Central Committee and of other individuals and programs related to peace-making and peace-building.

The *Peace Office Newsletter* is part of the international program department of MCC, a relief, development and peace agency of the North American Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches, at work to "offer a cup of water in the name of Christ." MCC always intends to work in the name of Christ, including those times when sharing is by listening rather than by exhorting.

Plans for each issue are developed by the Editor in consultation with the Consulting Editors, with the MCC International Program Department Area Directors, and with MCC representatives, workers and partner agencies.

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