

4 May 2005

Dear Family and Friends,

In my last message to you of the Conscience & War Group, I discussed how to prepare a personal CO file so that you can prove to some future draft board that your conscientious objection is not just a spur-of-the-moment whim. Probably more important than preparing a CO file is preparing your life as a conscientious objector to war and killing. First review your past to see if there is anything that should be documented in your personal file.

EXAMINE WHAT YOU HAVE DONE IN THE PAST.

COs are concerned about people and, besides not wanting to kill them, they frequently do things to help. Analyze what you have done in the past to help people. Make a record of all this and put it into your file. Showing that your concerns of conscience are backed up with action is excellent proof that you are a genuine CO.

Examine all your past actions carefully. What kind of work have you done? I know that some of you have worked with elderly people. This would carry a lot of weight – especially since you chose to earn your livelihood by helping other people – putting your life in line with your convictions.

Some of you may have had a particular class in school that inspired you. Make a record of that. Explain it in all its nuances. It was part of the formation of your conscience. Perhaps it was a weekend retreat. Or maybe the actions and concern of a particular teacher – or a classmate. Think about everything that helped to form your personality and conscience, and document it extensively in your personal CO folder.

Perhaps you have volunteered someplace, like a soup kitchen or homeless shelter. Or maybe just to collect donations for a good cause, or collecting names on a petition, or writing letters to congresspersons. Try to recall everything and make a memo of it.

Do you get the idea? Make notes of everything you can think of that has influenced your life. Everything! Scratch your gray matter and examine where you stand now and why you are standing there. Now I would like to share a recent newspaper article that impressed me.

ENCOURAGING INFORMATION.

Sometimes it lifts our spirits just to hear something encouraging – a goal accomplished or a deed someone did. The story of Camilo Mejia inspired me. Mejia was born in Nicaragua and came to the US at age 18. He enlisted at age 19 and served four years. He explained: “I felt I needed a radical change in my life and the Army seemed like a way out.” When his four years of active duty was over, at age 23, he enlisted in the National Guard. This was partly motivated, he said, because of the chance it provided for a college education. He attended the University of Miami.

A couple years ago his Guard unit was “called up” and sent to Iraq. He was a sergeant and infantry squad leader. He spent about five months in Iraq and then came home on a 2-week furlough. When it was time to go back, he refused, deciding to go AWOL instead. He cited two reasons why he could no longer cooperate. One was seeing civilians die and prisoners of war tortured in a camp his unit helped run. The other was the constant pounding by rocket-propelled grenades and mortars. He said “It got real bloody.” He couldn’t think straight over there in a survival mode. But when he got home where he could view it all from a saner perspective, he decided he didn’t want to be a part of it.

After being AWOL for five months, he turned himself in and became the first Iraq war veteran to apply for a conscientious objector discharge. Instead, a military jury found him guilty of desertion. He was sentenced to a year in a military jail, demoted in rank, had his pay cut, and given a bad-conduct discharge.

Meija is now 29 years old and has a 4-year-old daughter. He was released from prison last February. In prison he had a lot of time to reflect and he was greatly encouraged by the support he received – demonstrations outside, over 10,000 letters received, and a constant stream of visitors. He said, “I felt really connected.” Now he says, “I plan to keep speaking out until I die. I can never ignore what my heart and conscience are telling me.” So far he has had plenty of opportunities for that speaking out. At present he is booked through 2005. (From Gonzales, Sandra; “Former Soldier Speaks Out Against the War in Iraq,” San Jose *Mercury News*, 2 May 2005.)

VIRTUAL DRAFT COUNSELING.

In a first-of-its-kind effort, Peninsula Peace and Justice Center, in cooperation with the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors, will offer a free online draft counseling/counter-recruitment session with a live online chat at our website. Steve Morse of CCCO will join us online to answer your questions about becoming a conscientious objector, what happens if you refuse to register, opting out of recruiters’ phone lists, and more!

Just go to our website chat feature at <http://www.peaceandjustice.org/chat>, log in and join the conversation.

(E-mail from Peninsula Peace and Justice Center, Palo Alto, CA)

INFORMATION UPDATE SINCE LAST E-MAIL MESSAGE.

I am trying to keep you up to date on recent events pertaining to a draft. For a complete history of such events, start with my paper on Conscription and Conscience (PLRC 050227, dated 27 February 2005) Then review each of the e-mails I have sent to you as each of them contain recent updates. Here are the recent updates since my last e-mail:

The Military Is Stretched Too Thin.

In his 4 April 2005 article, San Francisco Chronicle’s correspondent Edward Epstein pointed out that “a cross section of Washington’s policymakers has proposed a solution” to the war-strained all-

volunteer Army – “increase the size of the regular military by 30,000, 40,000 or even 100,000 more.” Congress did temporarily increase the Army by 30,000 last year, over Bush’s objections. But where are all these extra troops coming from? According to Army secretary Francis Harvey, last January and February the regular Army was 6% below its recruitment goal, the Army Reserve 10%, and the Army National Guard 25%. Epstein warns: “The military draft ... could make a comeback if recruiting doesn’t pick up and if America’s commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan turn into long-term occupations, or if the Bush administration’s tough-minded foreign policy means military action in places like Iran and North Korea.” Lawrence Korb, an assistant defense secretary under Reagan, says: “You’ve got another year. If you don’t cut back in Iraq, your all-volunteer Army and Marine Corps are going to be in big trouble.” But, as we will see below, the US has no exit strategy for Iraq.

No Exit Strategy From Iraq.

General Richard B. Myers, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, told Congress on May 2nd that the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq have strained the military to the point where it would be difficult to intervene or prevent conflict in another part of the world. Myers report says there is “significant risk” the US military won’t be able to prevail against enemies as the Pentagon insists it should. This is considered a significant admission because “the nation’s highest military officer was giving a candid assessment of the strains the US military was experiencing. [Mazzetti]

In early 2005, Marine Lieutenant General James Conway floated the optimistic idea that US troops could soon be withdrawn because the Iraqis “were starting to take control of their own situation.” He said terrorist attacks against US troops have declined, but didn’t mention the steadily increasing and well-organized insurgency against Iraqi security forces and government officials. Then Conway bragged that the US and British have trained and equipped 147,000 Iraqis for security forces. I have written previously regarding the myth being propagated about the well-trained and well-equipped Iraqi security personnel. But let me go on.

On April 12th, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld indicated the US has no exit strategy or timetable for pulling out of Iraq. He said: “We don’t have an exit strategy, we have a victory strategy. ... The goal is to help the Iraqi forces develop the skills and the capacity to provide their own security.” Earlier, the top US commander in Iraq, General George Casey Jr., alluded to substantial reductions in US forces by next spring. At the same time, President Bush told soldiers in the US that “Iraqi forces are becoming more self-reliant.”

All of these generalities were put in perspective by *Business Week*. Its 18 April 2005 news analysis commenced: “The new police force is largely untrained, frequently unreliable, and all too ready to abuse civilians. ... The Bush administration and senior military commanders have suggested in recent days that the training of Iraqi security forces – one of the linchpins of America’s exit strategy – is going so well that significant troop reductions may be possible by early next year.” Then the article mentions Rumsfeld’s, Casey’s, and Bush’s remarks (see preceding paragraph), and continues that “the training of the 142,000-member police force – about half the total security force supposedly needed – is moving more slowly and fraught with bigger problems than reports by US officials might suggest. ... Many police lack the skills, confidence, and gear to help quell a fierce insurgency and safeguard a fledgling democracy.” Last spring “police and armed forces in Fallujah and Najef vanished rather than fight insurgents.”

Another critical problem is that the police force is being infiltrated by insurgents. Weapons and patrol cars disappear. One US Army captain declared: “In some towns we don’t trust the police as far as we can throw them.” In a February 2005 US State Department report on Iraq’s human rights record, it is reported that “in the last half of 2004 Iraqi police have killed political opponents, falsely arrested people to extort money, and systematically raped and tortured female prisoners.” *Business Week* says another “fundamental problem is that Iraqi and US officials don’t know exactly how many people are working on the police force.” Iraqi officials are conducting a study “of the Iraqi police payroll to detect the number of deserters, crooks and retirees.” But that study’s deadline is continually extended “because certain parts of the country have been too dangerous to visit.”

In fact, the police force and police academies/recruiting stations have been a primary target of terrorist insurgents. Just this morning, May 4th, the day after an Iraqi government was finally sworn in, a suicide bomber killed 50 and wounded about 100 at a police recruitment center. It was the deadliest attack since the February 28th bombing of police and Iraqi national guard recruits, killing 125 and wounding over 140. It is no wonder that US troops are having such problems building up Iraqi security forces.

The lack of Iraqi security personnel is compounded by US allies – members of the “coalition of the willing” – becoming unwilling to be willing any longer. Ukraine, the Netherlands, and Spain have begun withdrawing their troops from Iraq. Poland may leave by the end of the year. More and more of the load is piling up on US troops. No, it doesn’t look like US forces in Iraq will be reduced very soon. The military will still have to maintain its strength to continue the occupation, a task becoming increasingly difficult as recruiting goals lag.

Military Recruiters In High Schools.

The Bush administration’s “No Child Left Behind” educational initiative requires that high schools provide military recruiters with names, addresses, and phone numbers of juniors and seniors unless the parents or guardians choose to “opt out.” But most parents don’t even know about schools providing this information much less the ability to opt out. The default is that recruiters get the information. The ability to opt out should be made very clear to parents and guardians. However, even if an opt out form is filed it is frequently ignored or overlooked. Also, filing an opt out form does not prevent recruiters from contacting your child on campus or speaking to his or her class.

Federal law also makes it mandatory for schools to allow recruiters the same access to campuses as is granted prospective employers and university representatives. In an attempt to meet their recruiting quota, recruiters are taking extreme advantage of this provision. Erika Hayasaki of the *Los Angeles Times* reports that “they do push-ups with students during PE classes and play in faculty basketball games. During lunch they pass out key chains, T-shirts, and posters that proclaim ‘Think of Me as Your New Guidance Counselor’.”

In 2004 the Army published a *School Recruiting Program Handbook*. Hayasaki explains: “The guide instructs recruiters to deliver donuts and coffee to the school staff once a month, attend faculty and parents meetings, chaperon dances, participate in Black History Month and Hispanic Heritage Events; meet with the student government, newspaper editors, and athletes; and lead the football team in calisthenics. It lays out a month-to-month plan to make recruiters ‘indispensable’ on campus. The booklet states: ‘Be so helpful and so much a part of the school scene that you are in constant demand’.”

Recruiters also entice many school administrators to give the 3½-hour “Armed Services Vocational Aptitude battery” test on school time. Hayasaki continues: “The test is designed by the Department of Defense as a prime recruitment tool providing the military with ‘pre-qualified’ leads, according to the Army handbook. Recruiters pitch the test to principals and counselors as a ‘career exploration and assessment exam’.”

Recruiters focus this effort on the poorer schools which have a low percentage of graduates that go on to college. Nevertheless, schools don’t have to allow such unrestricted access to recruiters.

Prospective employers and university representatives do not enjoy such liberties. Some schools are tightening up by requiring recruiters to check in at the office and only meet students in a designated area. The San Jose (CA) Unified School District has gone further with new regulations instituted in March 2005. Each military branch is restricted to a table at each school one day a month. Handouts and videos are permitted. They are also allowed to attend Career Days with their sensational vehicles and military toys. Recruiters don’t like these restrictions. But this gives you some idea of the extent they will go to get soldiers to fill the ranks in Iraq.

Women In Ground Combat.

One scheme to make up for recruitment shortfalls that Pentagon planners are pondering is adding 10 combat brigades (30,000 - 50,000 soldiers) to the Army by switching soldiers from staff positions to front-line troops. Another possibility being investigated is changing the existing practice of not placing women in ground combat units.

In 1994, President Clinton opened about 90% of all military jobs to women. They can now participate in combat by air and by sea. But they are not presently allowed to engage in ground combat – they are barred from the general infantry, special forces, and units that are right alongside combat troops. Today, women make up 15% of the regular Army and 25% of the Army Reserve (I don’t have a figure for the Army National Guard).

During the Vietnam war, eight servicewomen were killed – all nurses. Four died in the 1991 Persian Gulf war. But the nature of the war in Iraq has changed the conditions of engagement. Women are caught in firefights and other situations where they have had to shoot back. As of May 1st, 35 US servicewomen have been killed in Iraq and 271 wounded. That ratio to total casualties is much smaller than the ratio of women in the military. But if the ban on women in combat were lifted, the number of female casualties would soar dramatically.

Nevertheless, there are indications that Pentagon planners want the ban lifted. The London *Observer* reports: “Army documents have surfaced, however, recommending a lifting of the ban on women in units serving alongside other units that primarily go into combat. Officials say it is no more than a discussion document at this stage, others say it is the first step toward sanctioning women in land combat.” Of course we must remember that all policy and doctrine were once “a discussion document at this stage.”

The conditions in Iraq have provided fuel for those who want to eliminate the ban on women in combat. They claim the events in Iraq have shown that women can hold their own in any military role. That may be true, and it may be a noble stand for those championing equality of the sexes, but the real objective is obvious. Lifting the ban would help the military fill its ranks with front-line troops. Lifting the ban

would be another strong indicator that the military is in dire need of personnel.

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