

30 May 2005 – Memorial Day
“God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen.”

UPDATE 3

Dear Family & Friends,

In my last conscription & conscience update I pointed out how past experiences which contributed to character and conscience formation should be documented in the personal CO file. In this message I want to address how a conscientious objector can start doing something right now to demonstrate his or her concern for people and objection to war.

DOING SOMETHING RIGHT NOW

What I want to suggest is to getting involved. What moves you? What problems do you see that you would like to have fixed? What is happening that you deplore? What is happening that you wish to support? Sit down and make a list of everything along these lines that you are concerned about. I'm sure more searching questions can be asked. Brainstorm with family – with friends.

Then do something about it. Find an area that you feel comfortable with and motivated about. Set a schedule for the time you can spend to work in that area. It doesn't have to be big. Don't try to change the world in one swing. Just begin doing something, no matter how small. Everyone finds time to do things one really wants to do. It should be just as easy to find some small bite of time to help someone or something – to act according to conscience.

There is no better history for a conscientious objector to have than adjusting ones life as conscience prescribes. There is no better personal CO file than personal activities.

ADDITIONAL HELPFUL INFORMATION

Two good documents have been published by the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Some of the information overlaps with what has been sent before. But it is always good to read things presented in different ways. I hope they will be helpful. They are:

“The Nyack Declaration” at <http://www.forusa.org/programs/disarmament/NyackDeclaration.html>.

“Thoughts for Young Men Who Would Be Conscientious Objectors if the Draft Returns” at http://www.forusa.org/documents/FORThoughts_000.pdf

UPDATES SINCE LAST MESSAGE

Following are some events and circumstances which have appeared since I sent the last message to the group.

Army & Marines Are Still Not Meeting Recruiting Goals.

The two branches of the military that provide ground combat troops have missed their recruiting goals again in April. That is the third month in a row for the Army, with a shortfall was almost 2,800 recruits, or 42% of its quota. The Marines also missed their goal for April – that makes four months in a row for them.

Pentagon officials downplay this recruiting trend as not a crisis but they admit it is a major concern. They call it a battle here at home to win the hearts and minds of potential recruits. One problem they recognize is that concerned parents are convincing their sons and daughters not to sign up. New recruiting commercials are aimed more at parents than recruits.

To help offset this problem the Army has raised its signing bonus from \$8,000 to \$10,000 for the NATIONAL GUARD. It has also raised college scholarships from \$50,000 to \$70,000.

There are further proposed increases in bonuses in the House version of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006 (H.R. 1815). Fiscal Year 2006 starts next October 1st. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has examined the Act and made the some estimates:

- 1) Section 622 of the Act would raise the maximum ACTIVE-DUTY enlistment bonus from \$20,000 to \$30,000. CBO estimates that after this raise the average award will be about \$17,000.
- 2) Section 618 of the Act would raise the maximum ACTIVE-DUTY re-enlistment bonus from \$60,000 to \$90,000. The actual amount would depend on the critical skills the re-enlistee has.
- 3) Section 627 of the Act would authorize retention bonuses to certain RESERVISTS who posses critical skills. CBO estimates the average bonus to be about \$30,000 (about half of what is currently being given to active-duty personnel).

Military analyst Loren Thompson sees the recruiting trend as a greater problem than the Pentagon admits: “This raises questions about whether the all-volunteer force can really cope with a long war.” If it can’t cope, a draft will be needed.

Over 40% of the ground troops in Iraq are from the Army National Guard or Army Reserve. As a further indication that a draft may be necessary – especially a “skills draft” – Guard officials warn that by year’s end they’re going to run out of additional troops with the right skills to send to Iraq” If of this is putting much heat on military recruiters.

Deception by Military Recruiters.

Recruiting has become such an issue for maintaining an all-volunteer military – the only alternative to a draft – that extra stress has been put on recruiters to meet their quotas. Recruiters, in turn, have employed unethical means of enticing young people to sign up – means which range from deception on what they can expect in the military to outright lies.

An “Urgent Action Alert” from The Center on Conscience and War states: “On May 3, 2005 *The New York Times* reported on military recruitment misconduct and impropriety. ... Recruiters have been

known to cover up disqualifying medical conditions like asthma, chronic back pains, bipolar disorder and other things in order to fill their monthly quotas. They have also been known to mislead a recruit on what military life is all about and on many occasions recruiters have promised that an individual will never have to go to war.”

WLWT (TV Channel 5 in Cincinnati) aired a report on its 11:00 PM Target-5 newscast on 18 May 2005. The announcer starts out: “An explosive Target-5 investigation. Our hidden cameras catch military recruiters making the Tri-state sound more dangerous than Iraq.” By wiring high school seniors with hidden cameras, the station was able to broadcast “what goes on when teenagers go behind closed doors with Tri-state military recruiters.” [The Tri-state area is Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky.]

One recruiter told a teenager: “You have more chance of dying here in the United States at, what is it, 36% kill rate here in the United States, people here just dying right and left, you have more chance of dying over here than you do over there.” Obviously uninformed, yes, but easily believed by impressionable youth. WLWT Channel-5 points out: “The US does not have a 36% kill rate. If that were true, more than 100 million people, one-third of the US population, would be killed each year.”

Another recruiter told a student in a private interview: “The way I am, I’m a no-bull type of guy. ... If you get on the internet and look up how many deaths are in Columbia, S.C., in the past year, year and a half, and then compare that to how many deaths there are in Iraq, there’s more deaths going on in Columbia, S.C., for no reason, none, over a pair of Nikes, over a jacket, people stealing people’s wallets, shooting people. There’s more deaths going on in Columbia, S.C. – I know, I just came from there – than there was in the whole time when I was in Iraq.” Wow! That may be true if he was never in Iraq. But the Columbia, S.C., police say there were 16 homicides in the city during 2004, with 5 so far in 2005 – hardly a hotbed for killing.

The tales get wilder. Another recruiter told a high school senior this story: “Dayton area alone, which is about four or five counties, Dayton area alone, 1,500 people died in two weeks. You know what that was from? Car wrecks. Those numbers that we get, we get from the actual highway patrol. So, I mean, all that stuff’s factual. So, you look at [it] that way. We’ve lost 1,500 soldiers so far in Iraq. We’ve been over there for three years. If you add it together, 1,500 people died in five counties alone within two weeks, just from car wrecks.” Double Wow!

WLWT Channel-5 checked it out and discovered that over an entire year (not just two weeks) there were not 1,500 auto fatalities in the entire state of Ohio (not just the Dayton area). Bill Fisher, a retired Army master sergeant who had recruited for 15 years, commented on this recruiter’s spiel: “Conduct unbecoming a non-commissioned officer is what those statements are. I don’t know where he came up with it. It’s just insane.”

The Center on Conscience and War says: “On the GI Rights Hotline, which receives thousands of calls per month, almost every caller talks about recruiter deception. ... the pressures of missing its recruitment goals have created a new low in recruitment tactics.” All this flurry of publicity caused Army recruitment commander, Major General Michael Rochelle, to call a one-day recruiting stand-down for 20 May 2005. All Army recruiters will attend training on acceptable recruiting practices.

Is this a sincere attempt to correct a problem, or is it just a PR gesture? Some circumstances suggest the latter. These training classes were closed sessions. Both the press and Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney (who introduced legislation to provide relief from recruiting improprieties) made official requests that independent observers be present at the training. The Army did not respond to either and has stonewalled any request for observers. The Center on Conscience & War concludes: “This behavior of blocking any kind of observation clearly demonstrates that the Army will be going about business as usual when the ‘stand-down’ is over. And, of course, the other branches are not even pretending to change. ... The GI Rights Hotline, which receives thousands of calls per month, reports on improper recruitment practices from all branches of the military.”

Congressman Pete Stark has successfully attached an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2006, through the Rules Committee, that, if passed, will require the Government Accountability Office to study possible criminal activity by recruiters. This would be an important step towards curbing aggressive recruitment practices and criminal behavior. This is especially true when dealing with teenagers in public schools.

Recruiting in Public Schools.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, high schools must provide military recruiters with names, addresses and phone numbers of all students. Failure to do so would forfeit federal funding under the Act. The only exception is for parents to sign so-called opt-out forms saying they don’t want their children’s names given out. But as Congressman Mike Honda says: “Most parents are unaware of the opt-out requirement. Among the daily deluge of mailings and many responsibilities of tending to school-age children, an obscure administrative form like an opt-out card is easy to overlook – assuming the school even sends it to the parents.”

Congressman Honda has introduced H.R. 551 – The Student Privacy Protection Act of 2005 – which amends section 9528 of the No Child Left Behind Act. It makes the simple change that schools may not release information on students unless parents expressly permit it. Honda says “recruiters should have to wait for explicit consent before they have access to these records.” In April, the National PTA endorsed H.R. 551, stating: “The right to disclose personal information of minors should remain solely with their parents.”

Write to your representative in Congress and ask him/her to co-sponsor or support H.R. 551.

Preventing recruiters from accessing a student’s records with an opt-out form doesn’t prevent them from contacting students at school. Federal law requires that they have the same access to the campus as prospective employers and college representatives. But they don’t have to be given free access to roam the campus anytime they wish, as some schools permit. More responsible school administrators and PTAs restrict recruiters from each branch of the military to the same times and locations as business and college representatives. Parents can check on the practice of their particular schools and take steps – through the PTA or otherwise – to restrict recruiters’ access. In the meantime the military is quietly moving women to fill vacancies which recruiting can’t seem to do.

Women in Combat.

Historically, only men have endured combat. Until the Gulf war of 1991, the closest women have come to combat was as nurses. During World War II there were the WACs, WAVEs, and LAMBs, but they were all volunteers and were never put in combat. Draft laws have always pertained only to men.

In 1980, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, President Jimmy Carter wanted to include women in the draft, but Congress would not allow it. Carter then had Army Secretary Clifford Alexander redefine “combat” so that women were excluded from only 22% of the military jobs.

In April 1991, after the first Gulf war, Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder successfully attached an amendment to the 1992 defense authorization bill that cancelled the US law that barred women from flying combat missions.

Then in 1993, Defense Secretary Les Aspin, of the Clinton administration, further redefined “combat” by eliminating the “no risk” rule. Women could henceforth be assigned to units close to combat forces in hostile territory where there was a high risk of enemy fire or capture. That is the definition with which America entered the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. Since 1994, keeping women out of combat has only been done by Pentagon policy which only prohibits women from direct ground combat. There is no law doing that although Congress must be advised of any change to that policy.

This issue came to a head again on 23 March 2003 when the 507th Ordnance Maintenance Company was ambushed. Pfc Jessica Lynch was wounded and captured (and subsequently rescued), Pfc Lori Piestewa was killed, and Spec. Shoshana Johnson became a POW. Iraq is a whole new ball game. Hostility is everywhere. The only way to keep women out of ground combat is to keep them out of Iraq. That would be unthinkable with the soldier shortage. About 20% of the combat support and service jobs in Iraq are filled by women.

There have been many more ambushes and firefights since that March 2003 incident. “The Army has to understand the regulation that says women can’t be placed in direct fire conditions is archaic and not attainable,” said Lt. Col. Cheri Provancha, a 21-year Army veteran who commands a Stryker Brigade support battalion. “This war has proven that we need to revisit the policy, because they are out there doing it. ... We are embedded with the enemy.”

Some redefining has already taken place unofficially. In order to avoid having to obtain Pentagon approval and having to advise Congress, the Army in Iraq has conjured up some deceptive terminology. The Pentagon policy bars women from being “assigned,” ... etc. So in Iraq women are “attached in direct support of” the units in direct ground combat – the difference being only semantic.

In early May, the Personnel Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee approved an amendment to the 2006 defense authorization bill that would ban women from combat support or service units. When the bill went to the full committee a week later, the Pentagon and other opponents to the ban said it would close almost 22,000 jobs to women, undermine morale, and hamper operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The full committee was pressured to revise the amendment to merely codify the Pentagon policy barring women from direct combat. Then when the bill came to the floor of the House, the amendment was dropped altogether. Meanwhile, the Senate version had no mention of women in combat. We are now back to the 1994 square with no actual law to keep women out of any form of combat.

Women now make up 15% of the active-duty, all-volunteer US military. In Army ground units they serve in logistics and service, military police, military intelligence, and civil affairs. They daily face the same hazards as the all-male ground combat units. Without women's role the operation in Iraq would require a draft right now. But an extended stay in Iraq, or if hostilities open up on another front, a draft would definitely be needed. Then, for the first time in US history, considering the social-political atmosphere of today, we must assume that women would be included. And from the looks of things we may be stuck in Iraq for a long time.

Stuck in Iraq.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told a San Francisco audience on May 27th that US troops would remain in the country until Iraqis were able to secure themselves. "It would not be a good thing to leave before the job is finished," she said. Some military experts as well as US soldiers who have worked with the Iraqi forces don't expect a handover of security to the Iraqis anytime soon. Then, of course, Iraq's oil reserve would factor into any equation of how soon the US will pull out. But for this discussion I will only address Iraq's security forces.

On 28 April 2005, a new Iraqi government under Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari was announced. In the month following that announcement, nearly 700 people have been killed in car bombings, shootings, and beheading. The "insurgents" have shifted their focus from attacking US troops to targeting Iraq's fledgling security forces, along with government officials, in an attempt to undermine the new government. Most of those enlisting in Iraqi forces are doing so for the same reason as many Americans – to get a job and feed their families amid the moribund Iraqi economy. A police officer's pay of \$300 per month is three times the average pay in that country.

Current figures show 89,400 security personnel in the police, highway patrol, and some commando units. Another 78,500 are in Iraq's military, mostly in the army. But it is admitted that those figures may include some who have deserted. And these forces still need support from 160,000 foreign soldiers, 138,000 of them from the US. Iraqi security forces are still not trusted alone with any mission except limited operations which are simple and safe.

Now the Pentagon is hailing a crackdown in Baghdad by 40,000 Iraqi security forces. Called Operation Lightning, it is taking place at the time of this writing, and designed to restore the initiative to the new government. A chain of 675 checkpoints along with roving patrols is supposed to prevent insurgents from operating. Of course this effort is backed up by thousands of US forces. There is no indication on how long this crackdown will last and there is uncertainty that the security forces can maintain a sustained operation. There is also uncertainty on what will happen in the rest of the country with all these forces concentrated in Baghdad.

People joining for the money are not motivated to stick around when things get messy. For instance, during the battle of Fallujah last November (2004), there was a widespread flight of Iraqi army and police forces. In only two weeks, according to Lt. Col. Bradley Becker whose battalion commands the approaches to Mosul, most police under his command dropped their weapons and disappeared permanently. "I went from 2,000 police to 50," he said, and there was a similar exodus from the Iraqi

army. Nevertheless, the Pentagon claims Iraqi forces are improving and growing in numbers. It is hoped to have 300,000 policemen and soldiers by the end of 2006.

Building numbers is one thing, getting dependable forces is another. General John P. Abizaid, the top US commander in the Middle East, said the Iraqi police lack “sophistication, chain of command [and] cohesion of leadership,” and are susceptible to corruption and intimidation.

The biggest problem is finding personnel that will stand up to the insurgents. Many are not trustworthy. And the Iraqi police, particularly in Sunni areas, are widely considered the most corrupt and least reliable of all the forces. In addition, the security forces lack equipment – they are short of transportation, radios, and weapons. Rather than armored vehicles, they ride about exposed in trucks or just walk. There are not enough armored vests to go around.

It is even tougher finding suitable leaders. Michael O’Hanlon, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said: “Leadership is not do-able in 12 months. [It] grows in five- to ten-year increments, and it can take up to 20 years to train a senior NCO. They’re the linchpin of a military.”

No, it does not look like we can count on withdrawal from Iraq to alleviate the US soldier shortage anytime soon. In addition, the Pentagon is now building four huge, heavily-fortified bases in Iraq. The likely locations are, one in the north at either Irbil or Qayyarah, one in the south at Tallil, another at Al-Assad in the west, and the fourth at Balad in the center of the country. It appears that the US military is preparing for the long haul in Iraq.

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