OMNI CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR NEWSLETTER #3, INTERNATIONAL CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS’ DAY
MAY 15, 2012, Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace.
and related posts at Dick’s Blog, It’s the War Department, http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/.

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National G. I. Rights Hotline Conference
May 31 – June 3

The OMNI Center for Peace, Justice and Ecology, Fayetteville, is proud to host the National G. I. Rights Network, Inc. at the Mt. Sequoyah Conference and Retreat Center. Volunteer counselors from around the U.S. gather annually to receive in-depth and updated training.

An estimated 50 individuals will be attending. Counselors are traveling at their own expense. To keep the registration fee as affordable as possible, community support in the following areas is needed.

- Driving to and from the airport - various times on Thursday, May 31 and Sunday, June 3
- Driving to and from Mt. Sequoyah and the Farmer's Market, Saturday 7-9am Saturday, June 2
- Driving around town to pick up food - Thurs, Fri, Sat various times
• Kitchen/Dining help (light food prep, set-up, serving, clean-up) Thurs evening through lunch Sunday

PLEASE CONTACT Alison Carter at 479-521-5678 or alisoncarter2@yahoo.com to help.

The G.I. Rights Hotline (www.girightshotline.org) provides accurate information to prospective, current and veteran members of the U.S. military, their family members and friends regarding service member’s rights under military regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Military regulations are vast and complex and few enlisted people are aware that a legitimate discharge exists for their situation. Hotline counselors provide reliable and nondirective information that is often withheld by the service members’ chain of command. Hotline counselors have civilian legal and medical resources to refer callers to when needed.

The military is a closed and often scary institution and many members feel isolated and hopeless when they have a problem and a command that is unresponsive to it or even punitive toward those who seek help. Hotline counselors are not just a resource for help with the problem; they are a compassionate human connection in a time of need.

Your donation of food and time will assist this important work.

G.I. RIGHTS HOTLINE: Conscientious Objection

Fact Sheet

After you read this fact sheet, please call the Hotline (877-447-4487) to talk over your options with a counselor.

Conscientious Objection Discharge

Everyone has a conscience. Few people wrestle with their conscience as much as members of the military, especially those in combat. Counselors with the GI Rights Hotline talk with military personnel every day who are questioning the morality of the orders they have received or jobs they are expected to perform.

If you are one of those people, you came to the right place. You should know that you are not alone. In fact, every year hundreds of military personnel apply for conscientious objector status. Conscientious objectors have been with us as long as there have been wars.

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Definition of Conscientious Objection

Current military policy has defined conscientious objection as the following: “A firm, fixed, and sincere objection to participation in war in any form or the bearing of arms, by reason of religious training and/or belief.” (DOD 1300.6) This definition has been further clarified by both military policy and our legal system. Here’s what some of the words or phrases found in the above definition really mean:

“Religious”
- The term “religious” also includes moral and ethical beliefs that have the same force in a person’s life as traditional religious beliefs.
- The term “religious” does not include essentially political, sociological, or philosophical views.

“Training and/or Belief”
“Training and/or belief” refers to the source of conviction or, more simply, the experiences and values you hold that do not allow you to participate in military service or the bearing of arms. This may come, for example, from a lifetime of involvement in an organized religion that teaches active love for the enemy (i.e. not killing) or from books, movies, or TV shows. It could also arise from experiences serving in the military or from other life experiences.

“Participation”
This term highlights the personal nature of the claim. Thus a CO claim cannot be an abstract critique of war. It indicates that your set of personal values is the reason you are requesting discharge or reassignment, not that you think war is illogical or bad policy, for example.

“In War”
The term “In War” does not mean that a CO has to object to the use of violence by a police force or for self-defense, although many COs do hold nonviolent convictions. Additionally, it is important to note the difference between force and violence. Punching someone is an example of violent force, while pulling a child away from a moving car is an example of nonviolent force.

“In Any Form”
This means that you must be opposed to all real war at this point in time. Those who object to a particular war would be called “selective conscientious objectors” and they do not qualify as conscientious objectors under current US law. If you believe in “Just War Theory”, held by many religious traditions, then to be a conscientious objector under the current legal definition you would have to apply the theory and conclude that there is no just war.

To qualify for discharge from the military you must show that you do, in fact, conscientiously object to participating in war, and that your beliefs have changed, or “crystallized” since you joined the military. If you believe you might fall within this definition, read on.
If You Are Facing Deployment

Usually applicants for conscientious objection wait until their application is complete and ready to turn in before informing their command that they intend to apply. This ensures that they have as much time as they need to put together a thorough application with the best possible chance of winning approval without being pressured by the command. However, if you are facing imminent deployment, you may want to write a short letter to your command informing them of your intent to file for a conscientious objector discharge. While this statement may not protect you from deployment, going on record in this manner gives your command time to reassign you to a position that conflicts as little as possible with your values (per the regulations) and possibly to assign you to the rear detachment. Regulations do not require a command to reassign a conscientious objector applicant until a complete application is submitted, but typically commands will reassign conscientious objector applicants on the basis of notification of the intent to apply. The disadvantage of informing your command in this manner is that they may give you a deadline for submitting your application that doesn't give you enough time to put together your best application. Your command does not have the authority to require you to submit an application for conscientious objection by a particular date, but they can wait to reassign your duties until the complete application is submitted. If you are facing deployment, please call the hotline immediately at 1-877-447-4487 or contact a branch of the GI Rights Network to talk over your situation with a counselor.

The Guide for COs in the Military

The Center on Conscience & War's document The Guide for COs in the Military (123 KB) can help you decide whether to apply for CO status. The document also provides a detailed description of the application process.

The Written Application

Those applying for CO status are required to answer essay questions about their life and beliefs, and it's probably more writing than you normally do. Remember: you're trying to convince the military to release you after they've spent thousands of dollars training you. You will need to write more than seven paragraphs to convince them!

There are over 20 questions you will be expected to answer. Many of them are not very relevant. There are six questions about your beliefs that get to the heart of your CO application. They can be summarized by these three questions:

· What do you believe (about participation in war)?
· How did your beliefs develop (what events, factors influenced you to believe this)?
· How does your life reflect those beliefs (or how do your beliefs influence decisions or choices you make daily)?

You should also submit letters of support from people who know you and can testify to your sincerity or to the truthfulness of what you have said in your written application.

The Process

Once you submit your written CO application, you will have 3 interviews:

· One with a psychiatrist (or mental health specialist) to determine if you are fit to go through the CO discharge process. They will be looking to see if your application is really the result of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), or some other emotional or mental issue.
· One with a military chaplain (even if you're not religious) who is supposed to look at the basis of
your claim, and make some determination about your sincerity.

· One with an investigating officer (IO) who will get all of the written material you have submitted in support of your claim, reports from the chaplain and psychiatrist, and then conduct an investigation. At the hearing, the IO is supposed to ask questions about your beliefs, things you said in your written application, and anything else that seems appropriate based on what was discovered in the investigation.

The IO will write a report describing the interview and other information s/he has discovered. The IO will also make a recommendation as to whether or not your application should be approved. At that point you will be able to see the report and recommendations and have the opportunity to submit a rebuttal.

The entire packet goes up the chain of command, ultimately getting to Headquarters where a CO review board will decide whether to approve or reject your application. Before the application is forwarded to headquarters, you should get a second opportunity to write another rebuttal if anything new has been added to the record.

**The Decision ShareThis**

If your application is approved, you will be discharged (or reclassified as a non-combatant if that's what you applied for). Normally COs get an honorable discharge, the characterization is based on your military service record. You would also be eligible for all veterans benefits you earned, based on your length of service and characterization of discharge.

If your application is denied, a counselor with the GI Rights Network can help you figure out what to do next.

**See related regulations and commentary**

- [Conscientious Objection: Department of Defense](#)
- [Conscientious Objection: Air Force](#)
- [Conscientious Objection: Army](#)
- [Conscientious Objection: Coast Guard](#)
- [Conscientious Objection: Marines](#)
- [Conscientious Objection: Navy](#)

**Related News**

- [6 Myths About Conscientious Objection](#)

**Contact the Hotline** today to discuss your options with a trained civilian counselor.

Phone

1-877-447-4487

CHRISTIAN PEACE WITNESS

**Why Do We Support Selective Conscientious Objection?**

Our nation has now been at war for almost a decade. As our soldiers consider re-deployment
or combat veterans return to rebuild their lives in light of their experiences in war, we are increasingly aware of the crisis of conscience some soldiers wrestle with and the moral injury some have experienced in combat.

**Christian Peace Witness is committed to work for the establishment of selective conscientious objection based on our support of Christians and others whenever they take steps of conscience to reject violence and killing.**

Conscientious Objector Status has protected the conscience of Christians in the pacifist tradition in times of war for decades. However, under present law there is no legal avenue for soldiers outside of these pacifist traditions to exercise his/her conscience regarding specific wars.

*A change in U.S. policy to include Selective Conscientious Objection is needed now to reflect a broader spectrum of religious traditions and respect the sacrifice made by our soldiers.*

- Religious traditions that adhere to a Just War ethic believe the Christian soldier is obligated to refuse participation in wars, weapons systems or military orders deemed unjust. Under present law there is no legal possibility for the Christian soldier to exercise his/her conscience in this way. For the just war theory to have practical meaning, there must be the option of selective conscientious objection.

- Those traditions that affirm a Just Peace ethic believe that only true justice will lead to a sustainable peace. Supporting selective conscientious objection is a way to ensure justice both for the individual soldiers involved in war, as well as transforming the system that supports it. Peace is the goal, but so is ensuring that individuals are given the right to exercise their conscience.

- Those in the pacifist tradition, believing that the way of Jesus prevents them from engaging in any form of war, naturally support others whenever they make a choice against violence. By working across theological differences to recognize and heal the injuries of war, pacifists continue their work of peacemaking.

On Veterans Day 2010, The Truth Commission on Conscience and War, representing a variety of religious leaders, chaplains, vets, and ethicists, made public a report on the continued struggle of conscience many of our current soldiers and veterans face. The call was made to update U.S. policy to include selective conscientious objection and thereby reflect a broader spectrum of religious traditions. Christian Peace Witness joins this movement to acknowledge the deep and diverse moral issues in war and support soldiers of conscience. We look forward to your partnership!

For information, visit [www.christianpeacewitness.org](http://www.christianpeacewitness.org) or email conscience@christianpeacewitness.org.

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**Beautiful Souls**

*Saying No, Breaking Ranks, and Heeding the Voice of Conscience in Dark Times*, by Eyal Press

Farrar, Straus and Girou, 2012

On the Swiss border with Austria in 1938, a police captain refuses to enforce a law barring Jewish refugees from entering his country. In the Balkans half a century later, a Serb from the war-blasted city of Vukovar defies his superiors in order to save the lives of Croats. At the height of the Second Intifada, a member of
Israel’s most elite military unit informs his commander he doesn’t want to serve in the occupied territories.

Fifty years after Hannah Arendt examined the dynamics of conformity in her seminal account of the Eichmann trial, *Beautiful Souls* explores the flipside of the banality of evil, mapping out what impels ordinary people to defy the sway of authority and convention. Through the dramatic stories of unlikely resisters who feel the flicker of conscience when thrust into morally compromising situations, Eyal Press shows that the boldest acts of dissent are often carried out not by radicals seeking to overthrow the system but by true believers who cling with unusual fierceness to their convictions. Drawing on groundbreaking research by moral psychologists and neuroscientists, *Beautiful Souls* culminates with the story of a financial industry whistleblower who loses her job after refusing to sell a toxic product she rightly suspects is being misleadingly advertised. At a time of economic calamity and political unrest, this deeply reported work of narrative journalism examines the choices and dilemmas we all face.

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Connect with the Author

Eyal Press

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Macmillan Newsletter

Reviews

Praise for Beautiful Souls

“Proving time and again that the boldest renegades are just regular people with independent minds—rather
than dyed-in-the-wool radicals—Beautiful Souls underscores dissent’s populist potential. Acts of conscience, as Press puts it, 'have a way of reverberating.’” —Hannah Levintova, Mother Jones