
See related newsletters at http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/
and related posts at Dick’s Blog, It’s the War Department, http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/ .

OMNI NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL DAYS PROJECT

Contents of #1 May 15, 2010
History of International Conscientious Objectors’ DAY
Nuremberg Principles and CO: Lynd
Josh Stieber, CO and Whistleblower in Iraq
Books and Film

Contents of #2 May 15, 2011
Film: The Conscientious Objector

Contents of #3 May 15, 2012
G.I. Rights Conference in Fayetteville
Conscientious Objection
Selective Conscientious Objection
Eyal Press, Beautiful Souls

Contents #4 May 15, 2013
Dick: US Fear of COs
Boardman: CO Private First Class Kimberly Rivera, in Prison
War Resisters International: Women Conscientious Objectors
Mehi-Laituri, Christian Iraqi Veteran CO
Google Search Page One
FEAR OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS by Dick Bennett

Our stupid and brutal leaders (spending thirty million dollars an hour to kill tens of thousands of civilians and thousands of our own troops in Iraq and Afghanistan) fear the handful of conscientious objectors. Why is that? The US is a superpower, a label for superfluous, egregious, out-of-control power. We have a dozen carrier battle groups when no other country has even one. The leaders (the rulers!) could decrease military spending by tens of billions and still spend more than the next ten largest military powers combined.

And yet they fear those few who will not kill. Fear? The Pentagon places a huge burden of proof on the individual seeking CO status. They must prove their conscientiousness. For thanks, in the past thousands have been imprisoned. Why are our leaders so up-tight over these few who declare their conscientious objection to killing? Do Obama, Bush, Clinton, Bush, Reagan……think the COs can impede the most powerful military the world has ever witnessed? Do they fear the morality and the critical thinking of COs, who declare the wars immoral? Do they fear the COs will wilt Basic Training’s reversal of values from valuing the worth of all people to willingness to kill without question?

The misperception is so great as to invite us to wonder if our leaders are mentally ill, psychopathic. Spending as much as the next ten biggest military spenders surely qualifies for inclusion in a textbook on paranoia.

And then think—as I believe everyone reading these words has thought—of what a sane person would have done with that misused money. Think of the needs here and abroad, and the paranoia is trumped by the sociopathic. Ethical Christians and Jews know the texts. Our budget shows where our heart is. Perverse and crooked generation, is this how you repay your Lord, you brutish and stupid people!?

Instead of persecuting the peaceful, let us call for dismissal of all laws against conscientious objectors. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it in “Letter from Birmingham Jail”: An unjust law is “out of harmony with the moral law.” We’ll not accommodate such laws; they must be resisted until repealed. And let us also now shift the burden of proof to the warriors and ask them to justify trashing their religion’s morality, the Constitution, and international law by choosing to invade, occupy, and kill.
Pregnant Conscientious Objector Sentenced to Prison
By William Boardman, Reader Supported News  02 May 13

Criminalizing resistance to war crimes

...mnesty International identifies her as a prisoner of conscience, she was the first American female conscientious objector to flee to Canada, but mainstream media mostly ignore this Iraq war vet with PTSD – unless they're labeling her a "deserter."

A Texan married to a Texan, Private First Class Kimberly Rivera, 30, is a poor, pregnant mother of four who was sentenced to 10 months in jail on April 29 by the United States Army.

Her crime, after serving a tour of duty in Iraq in 2006, was seeking help from her military chaplain about her growing conscientious objection to the American war in Iraq, getting dishonest advice from her superiors, and thinking as a result that she had no realistic options other than returning to Iraq or emigrating to Canada. She and her husband and two children went to Canada in 2007.
Her story illustrates some of the chronic injustices of American life, not least the extra vengeance the society likes to visit on those who resist, and who make that resistance public.

**Economic Coercion Boosts Enlistment Rate**

By 2005, Kimberly and Mario Rivera had two children and financial pressure, even though they both had jobs at the local Walmart, where they'd met. Kimberly, then 22, had her first child when she was 19 and the second two years later. They were living in Mesquite, Texas, a city of about 140,000 within the greater Dallas-Forth Worth metro area.

Surveying their limited prospects, Kimberly and Mario decided that one of them should join the military. Both of them needed to lose weight to qualify. Kimberly lost weight faster and enlisted in January 2006. Her incentives included an $8,000 signing bonus and family health insurance.

The enlistment process led Kimberly to expect to spend her time loading and unloading equipment at Fort Carson, Colorado, where she was a wheeled-vehicle driver in the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team. But in the fall of 2006, her unit was ordered to Iraq, where she was a "gate guard," as she put it in an interview with Courage to Resist in 2007:

I was a gate guard. This was looked down on by infantry soldiers who go out in the streets, but gate guards are the highest security of the Forward Operation Base. We searched vehicles, civilian personnel, and military convoys that left and came back every hour. I had a huge awakening seeing the war as it truly is: people losing their lives for greed of a nation and the effects on the soldiers who come back with new problems such as nightmares, anxieties, depression, anger, alcohol abuse, missing limbs and scars from burns. Some don't come back at all.

On December 21, 2006, I was going to my room and something in my heart told me to go call my husband. And when I did, 24 rounds of mortars hit the FOB in a matter of minutes after I got on the phone ... the mortars were 10-15 feet from where I was. I found a hole from the shrapnel in my room in the plywood window. That night I found the shrapnel on my bed in the same place where my head would have been if I hadn't changed my plans and gone to the phone.

**What Happens When Your Country's Leaders Betray You?**

Kimberly hadn't thought that much about the war in Iraq during 2002-2003. She was preoccupied with being a new mother, and the Bush administration was preoccupied with lying the country into an illegal war. In Iraq, in 2006, her disillusionment grew quickly. She wrote about her feelings later:

Your basic role as a soldier being invalidated, finding out your job has no meaning. No reason. Higher command just let bad people past you, demanding they do not get the same treatment as others who come in the base every day.

This is the same as jeopardizing every man and women on the front line. That was the most angering moment for me. From this point on I had no pride in my work, no reason for being in Iraq. It was obvious to me that security was not the top priority for the troops and as one person not allowed to do my job efficiently and to the highest ability was the final straw. Finding that out is the hardest. It was my last reason for staying. For giving my life. You believe you are doing the right thing.

Kimberly stopped believing she was doing the right thing in Iraq, and she stopped believing the United States was doing the right thing in Iraq. Americans were getting wounded and killed, but she saw more of Iraqi suffering. As iPolitics.ca reported in 2012:
Rivera was troubled by a two-year-old Iraqi girl who came to the base with her family to claim compensation after a bombing by US forces.

"She was just petrified," Rivera explained. "She was crying, but there was no sound, just tears flowing out of her eyes. She was shaking. I have no idea what had happened in her little life. All I know is I wasn't seeing her: I was seeing my own little girl. I could imagine my daughter being one of those kids throwing rocks at soldiers, because maybe someone she loved had been killed. That Iraqi girl haunts my soul."

**What Happens When You Look for a Christian Answer to War?**

Troubled by the war, Kimberly was reading the Bible in an effort to make sense of the conflict between her faith and her experience. She came to believe that, faced by Iraqi civilians and given an order to shoot, she would not pull the trigger. She knew this could put other soldiers in danger if she didn't shoot. She took this concern to her chaplain for guidance.

The chaplain was not about to discuss religious questions with her, certainly not the peaceable aspects of Christianity. He was hard line, unyielding about her duty to fulfill her mission, basically telling her to suck it up.

He could have advised her of her rights, that there was a regulation, AR 600-43, that gave her the right to petition to be classified a conscientious objector. That might have been the Christian thing to do, but the chaplain didn't do it.

In December 2006, Kimberly returned from Iraq on leave for two weeks. She researched her status, but did not seek legal advice. She came to the conclusion that the only way she could avoid going back to Iraq was not to go back to the Army, to go absent without leave (AWOL, as George W. Bush had done under very different circumstances).

"I guess the hardest thing for people to understand is the reason you join the military is not the reason you leave it," she wrote later.

**Canadians Provided Shelter – Except the Government**

On February 18, 2007, Kimberly and Mario Rivera and their two children, Christian and Rebecca, entered Canada and found sanctuary among the war resister community in Toronto. Kimberly became the first known US war resister to apply for refugee status in Canada.

Her legal struggle to stay in Canada lasted for the next five and a half years, supported by the War Resisters Support Campaign and others.

Among her supporters was Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a Nobel Peace Prize winner like Barack Obama, but with little else in common. Archbishop Tutu published an op ed column in the Globe and Mail in September 2012, opposing the Canadian government's effort to deport Kimberly, calling it unjust:

When the United States and Britain made the case in 2003 for the invasion of Iraq, it was on the basis of a lie. We were told that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, and that these weapons posed an imminent threat to humanity….
But those who were called to fight this war believed what their leaders had told them. The reason we know this is because US soldiers such as Kimberly Rivera, through her own experience in Iraq, came to the conclusion that the invasion had nothing to do with weapons of mass destruction. Indeed, the presence of US forces only created immense misery for civilians and soldiers alike.

**Should a Government Be Swayed by Facts, Justice, or Mercy?**

But Premier Harper and other government officials still supported the war on Iraq, and that had politicized the American war resisters seeking shelter in their country. Twice the Canadian Parliament voted to support these political refugees. A large majority of Canadians, 64 per cent, wanted to allow conscientious objectors to the Iraq war to remain in their country, but the Harper government gave no ground.

On February 2013, in another case, the Federal Court of Canada ruled in favor of a war resister's right to due process in Canada, since the American military justice system was so flawed that it "fails to comply with basic fairness requirements found in Canadian and International Law."

In a reference clearly relevant to Kimberly Rivera's case, the court also found that consideration should be given to evidence that soldiers who have spoken out publicly about their objections to US military actions are subjected to particularly harsh punishments because of having voiced their political opinions.

And still the Harper government gave no ground.

Ordered deported, Kimberly Rivera surrendered to US border officials on September 20, 2012, and was immediately taken into custody. Faced with a court martial and a possible sentence of five years in a military prison, Kimberly made a plea agreement that limits her prison time to ten months, but includes a dishonorable discharge. At her sentencing hearing April 29, she pleaded guilty to two counts of desertion.

**Military Justice Is to Justice as Military Music Is to Music**

Her attorney, James Branum, has also represented dozens of other conscientious objectors and is legal director for the Oklahoma Center for Conscience and Peace Research. While acknowledging that some war resisters have been sentenced to as much as two years, Branum told DemocracyNOW that Kimberly's sentence was relatively harsh:

… many other resisters receive little jail time or no jail time. And people that desert, generally, over 90 percent do no jail time at all. And so, we feel that Kim was singled out.

Another thing, the prosecutor at trial said that he asked the judge to give a harsh sentence to send a message to the war resisters in Canada….

... the Canadian government, in deporting Kim, said she would not face any serious punishment because of her political and conscientious objection to war. And in reality, that's exactly what happened. That was the prosecution's argument: that because she spoke out against the war, she therefore should be punished.

So this Canadian-American collusion, which started with the illegal war in Iraq, continues to illuminate the likelihood that when you have authoritarian officials in charge, you get a judicial system that imprisons a poor, pregnant, thirty-year-old mother of four for her conscientious objection to an illegal war.
Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu asked: "Isn't it time we begin to redress the atrocity of this war by honouring those such as Ms. Rivera who had the courage to stand against it at such a cost to themselves?"

William M. Boardman has over 40 years experience in theatre, radio, TV, print journalism, and non-fiction, including 20 years in the Vermont judiciary. He has received honors from Writers Guild of America, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Vermont Life magazine, and an Emmy Award nomination from the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

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Women and Conscientious Objection - An Anthology

22 Dec 2010 — warresisters
Women Conscientious Objectors — An Anthology
Edited by Ellen Elster and Majken Jul Sørensen
Preface by Cynthia Enloe

PUBLISHED BY WAR RESISTERS' INTERNATIONAL
April 2010

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CONTENTS

- Publisher's Preface
- Cynthia Enloe: Preface
- Ellen Elster & Majken Jul Sørensen: Introduction
- Mitzi Bales: They Said "No" to War. British Women Conscientious Objectors in World War II
- US Women Conscientious Objectors in World War II
- Majken Jul Sørensen: Swedish Women's Civil Defence Refusal 1935—1956
- Total Resistance to Military Service (Statement from Women’s Gathering in Scotland 1980)
- German Women Said No
• French Women Say “Non à la guerre”
  Rebecca Gumbrell McCormick: Women Conscientious Objectors in Belgium
Israel
• “Coffee Serving Resistance”? An Introduction to Women’s Conscientious Objection in Israel
  Tali Lerner: On Women’s Refusal in Israel
  Idan Hallili: An Israeli Woman’s Story — A Bold Act of Refusal
Eritrea
• Eritrean Women: In a Crossfire Between Conscription And Denial Of Conscientious Objector Status
  Ruta Yosef-Tudla: "I’m Against War On Principle."
  Bisrat Habte Micael: “I’ve Had Enough of the War.”
USA
• Women from the US Resist War in the Gulf, Afghanistan and Iraq
  Stephanie Atkinson: A Proud Deserter
  Diedra Cobb: The Power of Telling One’s Story
  Anita Cole
  Tina Garnanez
  Katherine Jashinsky
Turkey
• Ferda Ülker: Turkish Women Awaken to Conscientious Objection
• Ferda Ülker: I reject (conscientious objection declaration)
• Hilal Demir: A Feminist Perspective on Conscientious Objection in Turkey
• Hilal Demir: Conscientious Objection Declaration
Korea
• Jung-min Choi: Women Activists in South Korea’s Peace Movement
Paraguay
• Maríal Elena Meza Barboza: Paraguayans Unite Against Militarism
• Mujeres Antimilitaristas — MOC Paraguay: Presentation of Women Conscientious Objectors in Paraguay, 1995
  MOC Paraguay: Presentation of Women Objectors and Antimilitarists
Colombia
• Introduction to Colombia
• Andrea Ochoa: Women Conscientious Objectors in Colombia
• Alejandra Londoño: Women Objectors in the Colombian Context
• Sandra Murillo Marín: Conscientious Objection Declaration
• Estefanía Gómez Vásquez: Conscientious Objection Declaration
• Milena Romero Sanabria: I Declare My Objection
• Ellen Elster & Majken Jul Sørensen: Women’s Conscientious Objection as a Strategy Against Militarism — Concluding Remarks From The Editors

---

**Attachment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Download as PDF: Women And Conscientious Objection - An Anthology</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
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For decades now, the United States has proudly claimed the mantle of "the world's only superpower" based on military might and the scope of military interventions throughout the world. As a result, whole generations are growing up with the understanding that war is the norm, that perpetual conflict is a way of life. But is it the way of Christ?

Logan Mehl-Laituri grew up in a community that celebrated military service. His faith reinforced his love of country and his sense that that love was best expressed by fighting its battles. Then he went to war, and then he was born again.

In you'll learn through Logan's story the real cost of war to military personnel, the real challenges to Christians that are raised by military service on and even off the battlefield, and the real questions that each of us must wrestle with as we hold in tension our love of country with God's love for the world.

Review

Publishers Weekly Starred Review; "A warrior who deeply honors the values of the Army... Mehl-Laituri seamlessly weaves church history and facts. With a well-crafted story and a compelling narrative, this book is well worth reading and rereading." Reviewed 06/18/2012 atpublishersweekly.com/978-0-8308-3652-9

"If we want to truly 'support our veterans,' we can't put them on a pedestal where they have to pretend all is well, nor can we look at them with suspicion born of political disapproval, nor can we push them aside and consign the reality of war to secrecy. Instead, we must listen to veterans, making room for them to speak freely and let us know what war was like for them and how it has marked them. If you don't have experience with that kind of listening, reading this book with an open heart is a great way to start. Logan Mehl-Laituri opens his heart in these pages and helps us better understand not only the veteran experience, but the American experience--and the Christian experience too." (Brian McLaren, author, Naked Spirituality)

"In Reborn on the Fourth of July Logan Mehl-Laituri opens his soul and invites us to journey with him as he struggles at the intersection of faith, patriotism and conscience. Logan articulates how God laid claim to his life as he wrestled in the dark valley of moral ambiguity, the dialogue of contrary forces tugging for control of his life. He is a person of courage, of heroic valor, who sees his duty and does it; he is a child of God, since he was reborn on the fourth of July." (Herman Keizer Jr., U.S. Army (retired), and director of chaplains, emeritus, Christian Reformed Church of North America)

"This book is not just for Americans. Not just for patriots. Not just for pacifists. Not just for Christians. This is a book for everyone who would dare to listen to those who return from war and ask not for honor but for permission to be honest. This is for everyone who longs to rediscover our humanity, and Jesus' message, in a world at war." (Jarrod McKenna, Australian Peace Award recipient and World Vision advisor)

"Logan Mehl-Laituri's Reborn on the Fourth of July provides military readers with deep insights into the mind and motivations of a genuine conscientious objector. Sergeant Mehl-Laituri is not a coward, and he deeply respects his fellow soldiers.
His story—which he shares in this book with candor and conviction—challenges all of us to reflect upon what it means to serve both God and country." (Peter Kilner, military ethicist)

"Logan Mehl-Laituri, a natural and compelling storyteller, guides us into acute empathy for victims of war, including the combat soldiers themselves. His honesty about the role he played as a soldier in Iraq helps release us from false valorization of warfare. How can Christians challenge the vast American indifference toward the consequences of war? *Reborn on the Fourth of July* tackles this question and welcomes people from all walks of life to explore putting an end to war." (Kathy Kelly, co-coordinator, Voices for Creative Nonviolence, and author of Other Lands Have Dreams)

"Logan Mehl-Laituri is not one of those persons who would dare say, 'My country! May she always be right. But right or wrong--my country!' Instead, he challenges America to do what is right at a time when, to many, patriotism has become idolatry. He loves this country, and that's why he challenges its tendencies toward nationalism." (Tony Campolo, professor emeritus, Eastern University)

About the Author

Logan Mehl-Laituri is an Army veteran. He served in the Iraq War as a forward observer/fire support specialist before applying to change his status to conscientious objector. After his discharge he went to Palestine with Christian Peacemaker Teams, and later returned to Iraq with Shane Claiborne for the documentary film *The Gospel of Rutba*. He speaks and writes broadly about veterans issues and Christian perspectives on militarism and nationalism.

Product Details

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- **Average Customer Review:** 5.0 out of 5 stars_ See all reviews_(7 customer reviews)_

More About the Author

› [Visit Amazon's Logan Mehl-Laituri Page](#)
Biography
Logan Mehl-Laituri spent over six years in the United States Army, including a 14 month deployment to Iraq as a forward observer for the field artillery. In 2006, he was honorably discharged after applying to be recognized as a noncombatant conscientious objector in order to return to combat without a firearm as a Christian pacifist.

In 2008, Centurion's Guild emerged in response to a general lack of substantive and meaningful engagement with service members in churches and Christian communities. Logan acts as the Executive Officer for the Guild, where he counsels past and present service members and their families on theologically relevant, historically grounded practices and perspectives within the Christian faith for understanding military service.

As a student in the Master of Theological Studies program at Duke Divinity School, he became a founding member of the student group Milites Christi and was lead organizer for After the Yellow Ribbon (a 2011 Veterans Day conference focused on equipping congregations, colleges, and communities engage more meaningfully with past and present service members in their midst). He continues to speak and write broadly about veterans issues and Christian perspectives on militarism and nationalism for local, national, and international news outlets.

5.0 out of 5 stars Must read for those interested in questions of faith and service  June 30, 2012
By Angela Nelson

In Reborn on the Fourth of July, Logan Mehl-Laituri dares to speak truthfully about his experience of war in the midst of a cultural climate that often turns a deaf ear to the reality of war and the lives of veterans. In contrast to the simplistic platitudes which surround conversations about war and military service, Mehl-Laituri throws open the doors to his own experience and invites the reader into a complex picture of what it might mean to truly struggle with questions of war, violence, patriotism, and faith; "[H]ow might soldier saints, and patriot pacifists form our faith, particularly in times of war?" he asks (104).

Mehl-Laituri describes his own struggle with this question. After a deployment in Iraq and a period of contemplation about his Christian faith, he files for conscientious objector status, requesting permission to return to Iraq with his unit as an unarmed non-combatant. When his application for CO status is turned down, Mehl-Laituri embarks on a journey of healing and a pursuit of theological clarity. The book is at once lucidly written, accessible to a large audience, and compelling, while accounting for the complexities of faith, service, and combat.

This book deserves to be read carefully, bit-by-bit, and in a reflective manner. Especially good are the chapters "Baptism & Rebirth," which narrates his baptism; "I Can't Save Everyone," an account of
experiences in Iraq that constitute a significant turning point for his own thoughts on war. Also of note are Mehl-Laituri's first experience with PTSD in "Foreshadowing the Shadows"; and his conversations with mentors and friends while in the process of filing for CO status in "Love and War". Finally, the book concludes with a series of helpful appendices which include bibliographic information, frequently asked questions, and information about the process of filing for CO status.

I highly recommend this book, especially to persons contemplating military service, persons in ministry, pacifists with no military experience, those with family members or friends in the military, and those who, for whatever reason, soldiers or not, struggle with questions of faith and patriotism.

1. **Conscientious objector** - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
   en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscientious_objector

   The first conscription in the **United States** came with the Civil War. Although *conscientious objection* was not part of the draft law, ...

2. **Conscientious Objection** Facts, NOW | PBS
   www.pbs.org/now/shows/334/conscientious-objection.html

   Aug 24, 2007 – History of **Conscientious Objection** in the **United States** **Conscientious objection** to military service has been part of American military history...

3. **Conscientious Objection** and Alternative Service - Selective Service
   www.sss.gov/fsconsobj.htm

   Apr 30, 2002 – **Conscientious Objection** and Alternative Service A *conscientious objector* is one who is opposed to serving in the armed forces and/or bearing ...

4. **Conscientious Objection**: Fact Sheet · GI Rights Hotline:
   girightshotline.org › Home › Resources › Conscientious Objection

   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 ...

5. **Who is a Conscientious Objector?**
   www.scn.org/ip/SDMCC/co.htm

   Selective *conscientious objection* is not permitted in the **United States**. The current statute
says that CO claimants must object to "participation in war in any form.

6. **Hundreds of U.S. Soldiers Emerge as Conscientious Objectors**
   www.commondreams.org/headlines03/0415-11.htm

   Apr 15, 2003 – NEW YORK - Although only a handful of them have gone public, at least several hundred U.S. soldiers have applied for conscientious objector ...

topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/.../conscientious_objectors/index.ht...

   Commentary and archival information about conscientious objectors from The New York ... MORE ON CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS AND: UNITED STATES ...

8. **Conscientious Objectors - American Bar Association**
www.americanbar.org/newsletter/.../conscientiousobjectors.html

   Conscientious objection, which the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) defines as a “firm, fixed and sincere objection to participation in war in any form or the ...

9. **Courage to Resist - Home**
www.couragetoresist.org/

   In Berkeley, California, join us on International Conscientious Objectors' Day, Wednesday, May 15th, to celebrate the 7th Annual Berkeley C.O. and War ...

10. **U.S. Conscientious Objectors in World War II ... - Friends Journal**
www.friendsjournal.org/u-s-conscientious-objectors-world-war-ii/

   Dec 1, 2006 – World War II was a very important period in the history of U.S. conscientious objectors. When the draft was activated, i

END CO DAY NEWSLETTER #4, MAY 15, 2013

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Dick Bennett
My blog:
War Department/Peace Department
http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/
Newsletters
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/
Index:
http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/
National/International Days
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