Stephen Funk turns himself in. Photo: WRI Archive

Stephen Funk was one of the first resisters who went to prison for his conscientious objection to the war in Iraq in 2003, serving six months. For The Broken Rifle, he tells his story.

I joined the United States Marine Corps when I was 19 years old. I was looking for adventure, for a sense of purpose, and for a sense of belonging. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. When I entered Basic Training and was forced to be violent, shout “kill, kill, kill!” constantly, shoot human shape targets, and stab human shaped sandbags, I knew I had made a grave mistake by enlisting in the military. Unfortunately, like most people who enter a military contract, I had not seriously asked myself the questions military recruiters will never ask. Why does war exist? Is war justifiable? Could I kill another human being?

When I discovered I was a conscientious objector I didn’t know that I had any rights to act on those beliefs. Military indoctrination leads one to think that their own beliefs are insignificant and selfish, and that no enlisted person have the power or the right to act as individuals. While in rifle training I happened to qualify as an expert riflemen. Instead of congratulating me, my instructor told me that in a real situation I wouldn’t have “scored” so well.

At first I was angry, after all I had excelled at what was asked of me, but then I thought about what he had said and realized he was right. I told him that he was right, that I would not “score” as well in a real situation, because I believe that killing is wrong. Although it may seem insignificant, stating out loud what had been repressed throughout my training, that I am a pacifist, had an amazing effect. It was as if I had been holding my breath underwater the entire time and I had finally surfaced for fresh air.

In late 2002 I lived in San Francisco and spent one weekend a month as a Marine reservist. The rest of the time I spent marching in the streets to protest the invasion of Iraq, and to work on my application for conscientious objection. With support from other activists I organized a press conference in April of 2003 to declare myself a conscientious objector. I was among the earliest applicants for conscientious objector status in this war and the very first to go public with my beliefs. I went public because it was the right thing to do; I was able to go public because of all the support I was receiving from the peace community.

With continued support I began a public campaign to let others in military service know that they have the right and the duty to disobey unlawful and immoral orders. The military wanted to silence my voice and sought to make an example out of me. In September 2003 I was brought before a military court martial. I was sentenced to six months in military prison, my military rank was reduced to Private, and I was given a Bad- Conduct Discharge.

I went to prison proud of what I had accomplished, but sad that I was being incarcerated for speaking out for peace. While I was imprisoned the antwar movement marched on without me but I continued to receive support from people who had heard about my story. I received thousands of letters from people all around the world who supported my act of peaceful resistance. The continued support meant so much to me, it meant I had not been imprisoned for no reason, it meant that others were out there and were working for a peaceful world.

I was released in 2004 and continued to work for peace and justice. I work with various organizations including Iraq Veterans Against the War, Veterans for Peace, and Vets4Vets. I transferred to Stanford University last fall and have declared a major in International Relations.

May 15th is International Conscientious Objectors’ Day. It is a time to celebrate the victories made by CO’s such as the recent release of Mehmet Tarhan of Turkey, as well as the progress of US conscientious objectors. It is also a time to renew support for those who are continuing to struggle in their work for peace. Most recently, Flight Lieutenant Dr Malcolm Kendall-Smith was imprisoned for his refusal to serve. In the U.S. Kevin Benderman is serving a prison sentence and the military is threatening action against Katherine Jashinsky for her public resistance. These men and women, and others who are being persecuted in the quest for peace, deserve and need our support.

Peace,

Stephen Funk

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www.operationrefusewar.org

Support US War Resisters

Stephen Funk

Editorial

The 15th May is International Conscientious Objectors’ Day, and in 2006 War Resisters’ International focuses on the situation of US and support to US war resisters: GIS applying for conscientious objector status, going AWOL, or finding other ways to get discharged from the US military.

The ongoing war in Iraq lead to growing dissatisfaction among soldiers, especially from the US forces, who form the main foreign contingent in Iraq. Those who apply for discharge as conscientious objectors, or who go AWOL, are only the visible tip of the iceberg. The ‘stop-loss’ policy of the US military – a policy which means that a soldier has to continue to serve although his/her contract has come to an end – is not only a reaction to the growing counter-recruitment movement (see page 3), but also a reaction to soldiers’ unwillingness to re-enlist after the end of their contract.

However, at the same time this policy adds to the growing dissatisfaction.

For anti-war activists it is important to build bridges to soldiers who oppose the war, and who want to get out of the military. The US anti-war movement has a better understanding of this than most other anti-war movements, especially in Europe. Focusing on soldiers’ resistance from within – in order to get out – there also provides an opportunity to learn from the US experience, and to build support structures for soldiers/conscientious objectors in other countries.

Andreas Speck

The Broken Rifle

The Broken Rifle is the newsletter of War Resisters’ International, and is published in English, Spanish, French and German. This issue is 70, May 2006.

This issue of The Broken Rifle provides information on WRI’s campaign for International Objectors’ Day, and was produced by Andreas Speck. Special thanks go to Stephen Funk, Steve Morse, Kevin Rahn, Stephen and all others who provided the information used in this issue. If you want extra copies of this issue of The Broken Rifle, please contact the WRI office, or download it from our website.

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Women Resisting War
War Resisters League Peace Award

Since 1958, WRL's US section War Resisters League honours a person or organisation whose work represents the WRL's radical platform of action with the WRL Peace Award. Recipients have included peace activist A.J. Muste, civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, feminist and pacifist theorist Barbara Deming, Plowshares movement founder Daniel Berrigan, Women Resisters, and many others.

The 2006 Peace Award goes to Women Resisting War from within the military.

Anita Cole

In late November, 2001, Anita Cole received two stitch marks from the U.S. Army as a conscientious objector (CO) to war.

Before I entered the military, I felt as many people do. Generally speaking, I felt murder was wrong, but at times I considered killing unavoidable and even justifiable such as in war. I am a person of intense conviction. My parents raised me believing that service to society—volunteering time and donating resources—is a moral imperative. Since I was a child, I have always been grateful that I am an American citizen and felt everyone should serve his or her country. The Armed Forces appealed to me as a meaningful, shared public effort. After graduating from college I decided to join the Army. I was not motivated to join the military for—or did I receive—college loan repayment or any other monetary incentive. At the time of my enlistment, I felt full of pride and duty fulfilled by my commitment to serve my country. But after graduating from college I decided to join the Army. I was not motivated to join the military for—or did I receive—college loan repayment or any other monetary incentive. At the time of my enlistment, I felt full of pride and duty fulfilled by my commitment to serve my country.

I have a deeply held belief that people must solve all conflicts through peaceful diplomacy and without the use of violence. Violence only begets more violence. Because I believe so strongly in non-violence, I cannot perform any role in the military. Any person doing any job in the military contributes in some way to the planning, preparation or implementation of war. For eighteen months, while my CO status was pending, I have honored my commitment to the Army and done everything that they asked of me.

Now I have come to the point where I am forced to choose between my legal obligation to the Army and my deepest moral values. I want to make it clear that I will not compromise my beliefs for any reason. I have a moral obligation not only to myself but to the world as a whole, and this is more important than any contract. I will exercise every legal right not pick up a weapon, and to participate in war effort. I am determined to be discharged as a CO, and while undergoing the appeals process, I will continue to follow low orders that do not conflict with my conscience until my status has been resolved. I am prepared to accept the consequences of adhering to my beliefs.

Alyssa Berrigan

I am a SPC in the Texas National Guard. I was born in Milwaukee, WI and I am 22 years old. At age 19 I enlisted in the Guard as a cook because I wanted to experience military life. When I enlisted I believed that killing was immoral, but also that war was an inevitable part of life and therefore, an exception to the rule.

Before I enlisted I began the slow transformation into adulthood. Like many teenagers who leave their home for the first time, I went through a period of growth and soul searching. I encountered many new people and ideas that broadly expanded my narrow experiences. After reading essays by Bertrand Russel and traveling the U.S. and Europe, I began to see a bigger picture of the world and I started to reevaluate every- thing that I believed about war. I also felt the belief that taking human life was wrong and war was no exception. I then was able to clarify who I am and what it is that I stand for. The thing that I reverence most in this world is life, and I will never take another person’s life. Just as others have faith in God, I have faith in humanity and therefore, an exception to the rule.

I am a person of intense conviction. My parents raised me believing that service to society—volunteering time and donating resources—is a moral imperative. Since I was a child, I have always been grateful that I am an American citizen and felt everyone should serve his or her country. The Armed Forces appealed to me as a meaningful, shared public effort. After graduating from college I decided to join the Army. I was not motivated to join the military for—or did I receive—college loan repayment or any other monetary incentive. At the time of my enlistment, I felt full of pride and duty fulfilled by my commitment to serve my country. But after graduating from college I decided to join the Army. I was not motivated to join the military for—or did I receive—college loan repayment or any other monetary incentive. At the time of my enlistment, I felt full of pride and duty fulfilled by my commitment to serve my country.

In August 2000, I was sent to the border between Mexico and Texas with other members of my unit to stop illegal immigrants. At the time, I thought that if I were called to do it I would go, but I never thought it would be ten years later.

I have a deeply held belief that people must solve all conflicts through peaceful diplomacy and without the use of violence. Violence only begets more violence. Because I believe so strongly in non-violence, I cannot perform any role in the military. Any person doing any job in the military contributes in some way to the planning, preparation or implementation of war. For eighteen months, while my CO status was pending, I have honored my commitment to the Army and done everything that they asked of me.

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Tina Garnanez

Tina Garnanez interviewed by Christine Attn, Women of Color Resource Center, War Times; Tiempo de Guerras

I grew up on a Navajo reservation and attended public school in Farmington, New Mexico. The only daughter of children who were raised in a single mom, Tina enlisted when she was 17, to get my status. I wanted to attend college, and I knew that between my family situation and the way I was raised, I didn’t have any options to get a college education.

Tina was stationed in Kosovo in March 2003 when U.S. planes started bombing Baghdad.

In July 2004, Tina deployed to Iraq. Tina had already completed her four tours of duty, but the Army could extend a soldier’s enlistment through a policy known as stop-loss. Tina knew that the army could not lose her in this war. “I’m just a soldier. I can’t do anything for any- one’s oil agenda.”

Tina is home in Silver City, New Mexico, honorably discharged. “I really wish I never went through the military. I now have Post-Traumatic-Stress-Diorder. I jump at everything.”

Tina’s message speaks to a lot of high school students about why the recruiters target poor, minority students. These youth are looking for a way out, out of the ghetto, out of poverty, out of places where there is little hope for advancement. “The military is not the only option but it’s usually only the military recruiters that are there in schools.”

Tina has struggled to understand how she, an Asian American, could be part of the same machine that nearly exterminated the Native Americans. “Broken treaties. Forces us on reservations. I was a lost Native.”

But Tina Garnanez has found her way as part of a growing movement of soldiers speaking out against the war in Iraq.
Student or Soldier: Youth Take the Lead in Countering Recruitment

Kevin Ramirez
and Steve Morse

2005 has been a pivotal year for counter-recruiters as the Army, Army National Guard, Army Reserve, Navy Reserve and Air National Guard have attempted to realize the direct link between JROTC and military recruitment. In states such as Maine, many adults such as veterans, educators, and activists have for years been working to demilitarize high schools; they organized Out Week to distribute flyers about the No Child Left Behind Act (The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 states: “No child shall be deprived of the right to a fair education”). Students have vigorously organized counter-recruiters unless the student or parent “opts out” in writing) and have directed pressure on school officials, as political actors, to adopt policies that restrict recruiting and advocate for more “truth in recruiting.” Policy changes at high schools regarding military recruiters are happening in states such as Maine, Maryland, Ohio, whereas the struggle to remove JROTC units from high schools has garnered more interest. In the war in Iraq, more former JROTC cadets return home from Iraq in body bags, and more people begin to realize the direct link between JROTC and military recruitment.

On college campuses, the counter-recruitment efforts differ significantly from the high school model and center mainly around organizing and actions to protest recruiter visits to the school, ROTC recruitment training, and organizing opposition to the military’s discriminatory policy against homosexuals as well as “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

One of the largest and fastest growing counter-recruitment groups on college campuses today is the Campus Antiwar Network (CAN). They recently organized a very successful counter-recruitment regional conference in the San Francisco Bay Area, and were recently building relationships abroad at the International Peace Conference that took place in London, England. CAN is largely responsible, all across the country, for organizing anti-war and counter-recruitment conferences and events, building chapters on college campuses, picketing and protesting military recruiters at their schools. Recruiters have been forced to leave local schools early, visits have been cancelled, sit-ins have been organized, with the end goal being to shut them down. This has become a sense of accomplishment among college administrators as highly visible and at-times confrontational protests have occurred and conflict among student counter-recruiters, military recruiters, and campus police continues to draw negative media attention to the school. These types of counter-recruitment actions are increasingly being viewed by the military, and by educational institutions, as potential “threats”, and students are being threatened as a result. Luckily, as successful as CAN is in organizing protests, they are equally as effective at organizing support campaigns for students facing disciplinary actions by the school.

A similar effort taking place in the high schools is the group and organizing opposition to the military’s discriminatory policy against homosexuals as well as “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

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Operation Refuse War: A WEEK OF ACTION UNITING RESISTERS
In Celebration of International Conscientious Objectors Day
May 11-16 2006
New York City and Washington DC
WWW.OPERATIONREFUSEWAR.ORG

Through workshops, actions, and an international conference, Operation Refuse War will highlight the difficulties that current conscientious objectors face as well as help build connections and relationships between the various communities within the anti-war movement. The focus of the events is on supporting contemporary American conscientious objectors and their families, as well as examining the current potential of conscientious objection (in its various forms) as a strategy for building an anti-war movement. In addition, Operation Refuse War will bring together international and American conscientious objectors to share their experiences and ideas.

Sponsoring organizations include the War Resisters League; War Resisters’ International; the American Friends Service Committee Youth and Militarism Program; the Center on Conscience & War; the Washington Peace Center; the National Youth and Student Peace Coalition; the Military Law Task Force of the National Lawyers Guild; the Fellowship of Reconciliation Disarmament Program; the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors (CCCO); and the Student Peace Action Network (SPAN).

International Conscientious Objectors Strategy Session
New York City, May 11-12 2006

Bringing together conscientious objectors from across the globe, this intimate session will focus on building international strategies for supporting the right to refuse to kill. Please contact us for more information about participation.

Operation Refuse War: An International Conference of Resisters To Global War Washing DC, May 13-14 2006

Operation Refuse War will be an opportunity for conscientious objectors, anti-war activists, and military families to come together to share strategies and build community.

Workshop topics include:
* Conscientious Objection as a Movement-Building Tool
* Building Support for COs From the Outside
* What does an International CO Movement Look Like?
* Personal Stories of Conscientious Objection and Draft Resistance

* Connecting Resistance within the Coalition of the Willing
* All Wars or This War?
* Conscientious Objection as a Political or Moral choice
* Building Bridges with Military Families

A full conference agenda is available in English and Spanish. Please register online or contact register@centeronconscience.org. You can also download a PDF form and mail it to Center on Conscience and War. Conference registration fee is US$30, which includes lunch on Saturday, May 13th.

Other events include:
* Lobby Day on Capitol Hill for CO Recognition (organized by the Center on Conscience & War),
* Eyes Wide Open Exhibit on the Mall,
* GI Rights Hotline Gathering,
* Silent March Against the War in Iraq.

For more information, please contact: Operation Refuse War, c/o WRI 339 Lafayette St New York, NY 10012 +1-212-288 0450 x102 youth@warresisters.org

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