

WE WON'T GO:

Narratives of Resistance to World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the 1990–91 US-Iraq War, and the 2003— US-Iraq War

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KENNETH GARVER

There were about 12,000 of us in the Second World War who were conscientious objectors. We were primarily from the three historic peace churches — the Brethren, Mennonites, and Quakers — and also from other denominations.

Having attended the Church of the Brethren from my birth, almost 85 years ago, I was well-schooled and taught by my parents that all violence and taking of another human life could not be supported by the teachings of Jesus Christ.

I was a third generation farmer on my grandfather's farm, south of Boardman [a southern suburb of Youngstown]. Following graduation from high school, and working with my family during 1937-38, I applied to the Cooperative Engineering School of General Motors Institute and was accepted. For three and a half years, on an alternating monthly basis, I went to school and worked at the AC Sparkplug division of General Motors in Flint, Michigan.

After Pearl Harbor, AC started building machine guns and other war-related products. Feeling the hypocrisy of helping directly in this work, I quit work and was not permitted to continue the three months of school needed for graduation.

Returning home I was scheduled to take the Army physical in Detroit. I failed because of a heart murmur. My older brother had been deferred for farming, and

rather than replace him I worked for a year as a tool grinder at Mazda GE in Youngstown.

During this year my classification was changed to 4E, Conscientious Objector. A second physical in Akron found no objectionable heart murmur.

The next year and a half I worked at a former CCC camp in Pennsylvania. It was totally church-supported. We were paid \$2.50 a month, for postage and so forth. My wife Beth and I were married October 1, 1944. Returning to camp, I helped close it to make it ready for use by German prisoners of war.

Many of us then transferred to a veterans' hospital in New Jersey. It was a challenging experience. After the Japanese surrender, many of us were accepted as "sea-going cowboys." We transported 860 bred mares in converted Victory ships to devastated cities in Europe. Following a trip to Gdansk, Poland, and a second to Bremen, Germany, I received my discharge papers.

This was in 1946.

In my work as part of the Civilian Public Service program, I feel that what I did as an attendant to the suffering and disadvantaged men at the hospital was most beneficial in meeting human needs. However, the sight of the bombed-out cities and starving people of Europe, who had eaten most of their farm animals, made a lasting impression on me regarding the futility of war.

STAUGHTON LYND

I hardly deserve the description "war resister." I declined to kill in the most moderate possible way.

When the Korean War came along, I felt uneasy about asking to do the kind of civilian public service that Ken and his associates did, because I felt it wasn't as dangerous as being in the front lines. I sought a way that, on the one hand, I wouldn't have to kill anyone (which I wasn't going to do), but on the other hand, would share the vulnerability of young persons who are compelled to go to war. There was a draft then.

So I applied for a classification called 1AO, which was noncombatant service in the military. I asked to be a medic. I did research and discovered that medics have a higher casualty rate than infantrymen, and I decided that if I sought that particular kind of service, I would not be seeking a sheltered position nor could I be accused of being “chicken.”

I could end the story there and say that I was honorably discharged. But the example of our President, who skipped over a year or two and then said that he was honorably discharged so it must have been OK, leads me to want to tell you what happened between completing medical basic training at the end of 1953, and receiving an honorable discharge in 1958.

Senator McCarthy — not Eugene, but Joe — had discovered an officer at Fort Dix who he believed to be a member of the Communist Party of the United States. The Army panicked, lest the Senator point to other persons in the military and say that they, too, were subversives. And so more than 100 of us were summarily discharged on the basis of allegations that looked like this (holding up a document). This document was received from the Adjutant General, addressed to Private Staughton Lynd, and begins, “Derogatory information has been received in this office which reveals the following”

Not one of the allegations had to do with conduct. They all had to do with groups I had belonged to or beliefs I was alleged to hold. My favorite allegation is that I have a mother, Helen — that was true — who “was described as a hyper-modern educator who follows the Communist Party line.” Mind you, these allegations are all anonymous. There is no way to confront your accusers. You are simply intended to pick up your cross of having a hyper-modern educator for a mother, and stagger on through life.

Another allegation was that I “included considerable Marxist philosophy in papers submitted while a student at Harvard University.” Which raises the question, how did they know that? Is it possible that some of my professors at Harvard took a break from the timeless, selfless search for truth to snitch to whatever government agency they were talking with about my student papers?

I and this entire group of young men received undesirable discharges. Two of my colleagues took the case to the Supreme Court, the point being, maybe we were

unclean personages who should not have been inducted to begin with, but to take us into the service and then give us a bad paper discharge on the basis of things the Army knew at the time we were inducted, was dirty pool.

Before the Supreme Court of the United States, the government took the position: We didn't have authority to do what we did, but you don't have authority to do anything about it. Experience leads me to believe that that's a bad way to approach a judge. Judges like to think that their mission in this world is to set wrongs right. And sure enough, in our case the Court instructed the Army that we should all be given honorable discharges.

That's my story. I can add that when the Vietnam war came along, in addition to doing everything else I could think of to oppose it, I mailed my draft card back to my draft board. When you do these things, you don't know at the time what's going to happen. In that case, nothing happened. I was in my late 30s. They figured I wasn't worth bothering with. But I can describe to you in minute detail the mailbox into which I dropped that letter, because I didn't know at the time what the reaction would be.

DAVID MITCHELL

I was a draft resister in the 60s to the Vietnam war.

There is a long tradition in this country of non-cooperation with what are considered unjust or immoral policies of our government, based on an individual's conscience and an individual's responsibility for his own participation in events.

We can go back to John Woolman and the Quakers in the 1700s, refusing to pay taxes levied for war against Native Americans.

Notably, and contributing to the development of my own draft resistance in the 1960s, was the refusal of Henry David Thoreau for a number of years in the 1840s to pay a poll tax because of his opposition to slavery and the Mexican War — a war also opposed at the time by a Congressman named Abraham Lincoln, who thereafter lost his Congressional seat.

Thoreau wrote an essay, "On Civil Disobedience." Thoreau set forth a position

that the act of non-participation or saying “No” to your government was not simply an individual withdrawal from the injustice to satisfy one’s own conscience — but also a step in confronting the government and attempting to effect social change.

We have a rich history of “civil disobedience” in subsequent years, in the labor movement, in the civil rights movement with sit-ins, etc., and of course, with resistance to war and militarism.

In my specific case, I initially followed the law and registered for the draft at the age of 18. Then, in response to U.S. policies and our developing involvement in Vietnam, I refused to cooperate with the draft because it was being used to implement illegal and immoral policies and actions in Vietnam.

I was a member of an End The Draft group opposed to war and the draft. The group’s statement read in part: “In the tradition of Thoreau, and the principles of INDIVIDUAL GUILT and INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY established in the Nuremburg trials and in the first session of the United Nations, we assert the right and obligation of the individual to protest and disassociate himself from these criminal preparations.”

My own disassociation or “non-cooperation” meant that I refused to report for a physical, refused to fill out any forms, and I even refused to apply for an exemption from service as a Conscientious Objector (CO). While my actions were certainly based on a sense of individual responsibility and the need to satisfy my own conscience and integrity by non-cooperation, I also hoped to create a forum on the issues to attempt to effect change. As I wrote in an article in 1964:

In my own case, my draft refusal rests not on an abstract philosophy, but on the political situation as it exists. I non-cooperate with my government, not because I am a pacifist or occupy a position somehow uninvolved with the world, but on the contrary because I am very involved and specifically condemn the United States for crimes against peace and humanity. I refuse to cooperate with the Koreans, Cuban invasions or blockades, Vietnam, or with the nuclear arrogance with which we threaten to blow up the world. . . .”

In response, my Draft Board declared me delinquent and ordered me for induction into the armed forces. Eventually, I was arrested and after two trials (one in 1965 and another in 1966 after the reversal of the first trial) I was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison. I served two years and the remainder on parole.

I took a legal position that U.S. policies (particularly in Vietnam) were in violation of International Law (including the UN Charter and various other treaties and conventions to which the United States was obligated). Under our Constitution, treaties that we sign are part of the “supreme law of the land.” I argued that United States policies must be judged by the principles of the Nuremburg Trials by which we had tried the Germans after World War II. At those trials we had declared that an aggressive war was a “crime against the peace,” and various types of conduct during war were classified as “war crimes” or “crimes against humanity.” Individual responsibility was imposed by Nuremburg. The Nuremburg principles were part of a treaty (the Treaty of London) to which the United States was a signatory.

As Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson (the leading U.S. prosecutor at Nuremburg) stated: “If certain acts in violation of treaties are crimes, they are crimes whether the United States does them or whether Germany does them, and we are not prepared to lay down a rule of criminal conduct against others which we would not be willing to have invoked against us.”

Of course, the courts did not want to deal with my defense that the application of the draft to criminal policies was illegal and my refusal to cooperate with a draft used for such purposes was justified. Allowing my defense would have subjected United States policies and conduct in Vietnam to scrutiny and to a potential finding that they were illegal. Instead, the jury was only allowed to decide the uncontested issue of whether or not I reported for induction.

My case went up to the Supreme Court, which denied review. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas wrote in voting for a review that these issues should be addressed — especially since the Nuremburg trial (pursuant to the Treaty of London) “purports to lay down a standard of conduct for all the signatories.”

Similar arguments were raised in 1966 by three soldiers who refused to be deployed to Vietnam. The three (James Johnson, Dennis Mora, and David Samas) came to be known as The Fort Hood Three. Their case also was denied review by the Supreme Court, but this time another justice joined Justice Douglas in voting for review. The State of Massachusetts also sued the government on behalf of its citizens subject to the draft, asserting that they could not be drafted for the illegal Vietnam war.

While the courts would not hear these issues, many citizens did. By the late 1960s a large movement of protest against Vietnam, draft resistance, draft card burnings, etc. had developed. In fact, Staughton Lynd and Michael Ferber wrote a book about this period called *The Resistance*. Many different people with different positions and different strategies were part of this movement that collectively made a difference.

A question before us today is how International Law and the Nuremburg principles and precedents apply to our current intervention and occupation in Iraq.

CLIFFORD HAYES

I was a Marine. I was a door gunner on a medivac helicopter, on night missions, in Vietnam. I stayed in Vietnam 18 months. I learned that Vietnam was not a John Wayne movie.

In my family there's a tradition of military service. I can remember my aunt telling me that she has the records of my great grandfather, who served in the Civil War, First West Virginia Cavalry. I can remember the statement on his enlistment papers that he was sober enough to enlist. My father and his brothers and my cousins all joined. We sat down at a family reunion one time and we counted up the years of military service. It turned out to be 200 years of military service to our nation in just three generations. It was a long tradition.

I did honorable service and I learned about the ugliness of war. There are many in the present Administration who cannot say the same thing about honorable service in the military, because of their privilege and connections. We call them "chicken hawks."

There are many in the present Administration who pay lip service to me and my fellow veterans. I want to explain what a "warrior" is. Warriors prepare for war to protect this country, but really, they have souls that pray for peace. They prepare to protect us in just causes, in just wars. Iraq is not a just war.

Where's the equity, justice and fairness in health care for the veterans? According to veterans' groups, Bush's 2003 budget fell \$1.5 billion short of caring for

veterans' health needs. On January 17, 2003, his Administration cut off health care to 164,000 veterans. North of us, in Erie, Pennsylvania, is a VA veterans' medical center. The Republican Party is trying to close it down.

I want to ask you a favor, as a combat veteran; as a man who stood on another man's sucking chest wound, and protected him and delivered him to a field hospital; as a man who had another man die in his arms two minutes away from a field hospital, in Vietnam. Help me go to Erie next Friday morning to a veterans' rally to help save a medical center from the clutches of the Republican Party.

I thank you for your time. Semper fi.

MIKE ALEXANDER

In 1968 I turned 18. At the time I was a recovering Catholic. I decided to apply for conscientious objector status.

I remember going to the draft board. I was a young kid, my ideas were certainly not fully formed. But I knew that there was something morally wrong about going to war.

The draft board summarily dismissed me in a matter of minutes. There was no way in the world I could be a conscientious objector because I was not a Mennonite, and I wasn't even a Catholic. I was out the door and that was it.

Subsequent to that, around 1969, I was sent up for a physical. Between the time I turned 18 and 1969, several things happened. My religious beliefs changed drastically. Number two, I was completely radicalized by the war, by attending several anti-war demonstrations and talking to people. I became much more political and a lot less religious.

So in 1969 I didn't cooperate very well at my physical. I flunked the mental test. I might even have flunked the physical.

It was 35 years ago and I don't remember, to be honest, what my draft status was after I got out of that physical. Very soon after that, though, what I ended up doing is that I tore up all the papers that I had received from the draft board and wrote a

letter — not a very nice letter — and sent them all back.

When Staughton talks about not knowing what's going to happen, I was in the same position. I was doing it, and whatever was going to happen, would happen. And much as with Staughton, nothing happened. I think it was the times: late 1969, draft resistance was at an all-time high, there were anti-war demonstrations with millions of people in the streets, and I think that the draft board must have said, Well, we've got better things to deal with.

And that's the last I've heard from them. It's not a very sexy story, but I think it's a story that happened to more than myself. Obviously there were a lot of other people doing the same thing.

ANDY RYAN

I have a different spiel. I grew up as a military dependent. My father was a lifer in the Air Force. That always sounded like a penal term: a "lifer." And I was a military brat.

We moved around a lot. My parents were from New York. I was born in Oxford, England. But I don't know where I'm from, because we constantly travelled.

I ask myself, Were there pivotal moments in my life? When we lived in Germany we went to Dachau. I was seven or eight years old. I remember seeing these horrific sights. For the next fifteen years, I looked into everything I could concerning man's inhumanity to man. I really couldn't fathom, I still cannot understand it. I can't process that information: how some people do what they do to other humans.

In 1966 or 1967 I was at a scout camp in the Rocky Mountains. My father came up to me on the rifle range and said, "Son, I've got orders to go to Vietnam."

Up until that point in my life, I thought I was a normal kid. I rode my bike, I hunted for snakes in the river, had squirt gun fights, hung out at the pool, went to the movies: did basic stuff.

But when my dad went to Vietnam, I went from suburbia to the inner city in New

York. It was a nightmare for me. I was a scared, timid little kid. I was getting beat up, I didn't know anybody, I was getting robbed every day. Some cousins took pity on me and introduced me to some extremely rough 19- or 20-year-olds. I started hanging out with these people and my life changed drastically. By the time my father got back from Vietnam I was already on my run, and that would go on for quite a few years afterwards.

When my dad came back from Vietnam we moved to Spain, and from Spain we went to Germany. I was getting into my later teens, around draft age. I gravitated toward the music and the culture of that era. I became very political. I remember when Mark Rudd's SDS people came over, and talked to us at school (outside in the smoke shack: they couldn't talk to us in the school, it was a military school). We would strike our school! This must have been horrific for our parents, because they were in the military, we're in a military installation, and my friends and I were walking out to protest the Vietnam war.

The CIA, and CID, and OSI, all these people were watching us and following us around. My friends were getting deported from Europe. Their fathers were getting stuff on their records. I finally left the country.

I burnt my draft card. The first thing we noticed under the Nixon regime, we would always look at the police badges. If they put tape over their badge numbers on that particular day They had shields, and clubs. These guys were geared for battle. We were in shorts and sneakers.

We were against the war. The Gulf of Tonkin resolution: that was a lie. 55,000 Americans were murdered by this government over a lie.

Right now, in Dover, they fly the dead home under the cover of night. Because Americans can probably still process some information on an emotional level. And that might be one of the things. And this Administration does not want the American people to know the truth.

I personally know families who have children in Iraq. And those soldiers are telling their families that they want to come home. That's the truth.

CARL MIRRA

I was a conscientious objector during the 1991 Persian Gulf war. I volunteered for the military and then, when it came time for me to deploy, I decided to say “No” and I stand behind that decision to this day.

I was activated as a Reservist. I refused to deploy with my unit but I did show up for duty, telling them that I wouldn't wear the uniform and I wouldn't participate. After some conversation with some decent people in the military, I put on my uniform. I served for about a year and they gave me an honorable discharge from active duty. My application for conscientious objection was not resolved until my lawyer went to a debate with the military at St. John's Law School. He embarrassed them, asking what had happened to my application that had been filed more than a year and half before. Within a week they called me to a hearing, and they decided to give me a general discharge.

The primary reason why they denied my application was — this was an official response — that I did not look like a conscientious objector. And the second reason was that I was raised as a Roman Catholic but in my hearing I chose to quote people like Martin Luther King. I didn't quote the saints of the Catholic Church or the “just war” tradition of the Church. That tradition makes allowances for war, as a last resort, if you're under attack, and so on. To be a conscientious objector you can't make allowances for war, so had I invoked the just war tradition, I would have immediately negated my own case.

My inspiration for resisting the military is rather surprising. I went to boot camp at Paris Island, South Carolina, where all Marines go. In addition to physical training, you get a little study book and they ask you to memorize all sorts of things: the length of the weapon, the weight, I don't remember any of that.

They also ask you a question, “Who were the only two Marines to win two Congressional Medals of Honor?” The correct answer is, “Sir, Dan Daly and Smedley Butler, Sir.” They even named a battleship after Smedley Butler. But he reflected on his experience and, I discovered, Smedley Butler became an anti-war radical. He described himself (this is an exact quote) as “a high-class muscle man for big business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism.” And he concluded that war is a racket.

There's another very interesting source within the military. During World War II,

General S.L.A. Marshall found that he had a problem on his hands. He determined that the riflemen — not conscientious objectors, just ordinary riflemen — were not firing their rifles in combat situations, even at great risk to themselves. Only 15 to 20 percent of the soldiers were firing their rifles. This is what he concluded: “The average healthy individual has such an inner and usually unrealized resistance for killing a fellow man, that he will not of his own volition take a life. At the vital point, he becomes a conscientious objector.”

Many years ago the *Houston Chronicle* wrote a story about then-Governor Bush. On the application to the Texas National Guard, it asked specifically, Would you volunteer for overseas duty? And, according to Bush biographer J. H. Hatfield, Mr. Bush checked the box that said, “do not volunteer.”

I don't criticize President Bush for that. I too would check that box. I do not volunteer for overseas duty. But I think there's a more honorable option: conscientious objection.

There's a quotation from John F. Kennedy that I will read slowly. “War will exist until that distant day when the conscientious objector enjoys the same prestige as the warrior enjoys today.”

GHANIM KHALIL

I am a student at the College of Staten Island. I am majoring in history and wish to specialize in Islamic-Western relations. I spent eight years in the United States Marines and National Guard, four years on active duty and four years in the Reserves. In the winter of 2002, I openly refused to deploy for Operation Iraqi Freedom (if my unit were ordered to deploy), and on February 15, 2003, I spoke at the historic rally in New York City.

Born in England and a citizen of the United States, I have half a dozen reasons for opposing the war in Iraq. I did a lot of reading from which I learned the history of U.S. foreign policy, especially in the Middle East. I came to the conclusion that ideologically the war on Iraq would be based on cultural superiority and racism. Politically it would be based on perpetual conflict and power politics. Economically it would be based on accumulation of wealth, and resisting economic equality domestically and in the world. Nationally it would be based on fear and

hatred of others. Psychologically it reveals weakness and egoism. Argumentatively the reasons for war fall apart. Spiritually it is bankrupt and humanist it is not.

The most important reason, however, is: I am a Muslim who likes to practice my religion. Islam prohibits the taking of life except in self-defense. One who kills another unjustly is like one who has killed the entire human race. It is one of the major crimes a human being can commit.

There are 1.5 billion Muslims in the world and 8 million Muslims in the United States. Almost all of them oppose Osama bin Ladin, just as (in my opinion) most Americans oppose Bush. Approximately 6,000 Muslims serve in the United States military.

My objections began before the war. I took them to my staff NCOs. They agreed with what I believed and referred me to a chaplain. The chaplain, on the other hand, lied to me: he said my unit was on “Stop-loss” and I couldn’t get out. I had only four months until my contract ended but a Stop-loss would keep me in until who knew when. I then contacted Citizen Soldier.¹ I spoke at the February 15 rally primarily because I felt I had no other choice.

In Islamic history, a lot of good people (including many shaykhs or spiritual leaders) objected to unjustified policies of their leaders and paid the price by being imprisoned. Objecting to immoral or unjust policies of rulers is nothing new to Muslims, who value obedience to principle over obedience to human power.

I had the opportunity to speak live on the Fox News Channel. Unfortunately the interviewer, Gregg Jarrett, made it seem that I, as a Muslim, was being unpatriotic and then questioned my ability to obey orders. Of course, I have not and will never obey illegal orders that justify war and human rights violations. The truth is, many people in my unit — who were not Muslims — agreed with my objections, and this included high-ranking NCOs.

Many people are confused about what a Muslim is and are fearful of Islam. Muslims, like Christians and Jews, follow according to how they understand their faith. Islam has, therefore, been understood and interpreted differently throughout the Muslim world past and present. Osama bin Ladin’s understanding was created in part by the British when they colonized the Arab peoples. The British put the

fringe Saudi tribe in power over the many other tribes and promised them a handsome wage for fighting the Ottoman Turks during World War I. The Saudis were since the 18th century the principal tribe of the Wahhabi sect, to which Osama belongs. The Wahhabi sect practices a very rigid interpretation of Islam, which excludes many of the peaceful and tolerant traditions Islam is known for in its 1400-year history. Less than 1 percent of the 1.5 billion Muslims actively practice the way of the Wahhabi sect, but many seem to be influenced by their literature, which is widespread because of the Saudi missionary organizations and programs in various Muslim countries. Almost all of the terrorist organizations in the world belong to or are in one way or another influenced by Wahhabism. Americans and other non-Muslims would benefit greatly by not confusing the Wahhabi understanding of Islam with the orthodox Sunni understanding that is the most popular. Many Wahhabi clerics themselves feel that Osama has hijacked their faith and corrupted its interpretation. Wahhabi clerics have been some of the most vocal in condemning the attacks of September 11.

I would like to end with a verse from the Qur'an many are not familiar with. God says: "O mankind! We created you male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may come to know one another (not despise each other). Surely the most honored of you in the sight of God are the most righteous of you. And surely God is knowing, Aware." (Qur'an 49:13)

Note

¹ Citizen Soldier is an organization founded during the Vietnam War and headed, then and now, by Tod Ensign. It is located in New York City and can be reached at (212) 679-2250.

On March 15, 2004, Citizen Soldier sponsored a press conference at which Staff Sergeant Camilo Mejia of the Army National Guard publicly declared his refusal to return to Iraq. Sgt. Mejia served in Iraq from March 2003 to October 2003, when he returned to the United States for a two-week furlough.

According to the *New York Times*, Mar. 16, 2004, Sgt. Mejia's reasons for refusing further service in Iraq included: 1) his unit was not given adequate supplies; 2) his commanders were intentionally courting combat; 3) a young Iraqi boy was shot by American soldiers and, because of confusion at the medical unit, died; 4) his unit was reprimanded for celebrating their escape from an ambush.

Overall, Sgt. Mejia thinks that the war in Iraq is "particularly immoral." He has asked to be classified as a conscientious objector.

In May 2004, Sgt. Mejia was found guilty of desertion, and sentenced to a year in prison and a bad paper discharge.