

# Thousands Said 'No' to Gulf War

## Military Continues Assault on GI Resisters

Mitchel Cohen

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Before the bombing of Iraq started, the paper of record—*The Star* (yes, that's right, the supermarket tabloid)—reported that Sylvester Stallone had turned down an invitation from Marine Commandant Alfred Gray, Jr. to entertain the troops in the Gulf.

Said Rambo: "No, I won't go... I don't think what's going on over there is right. So, why go over there and support it? Is the fact that we're going to pay more for gas a situation which justifies sending 500,000 men over there to put their lives in jeopardy? Because Exxon is feeling the pinch?"

Now that the bombing has stopped and the cattle, 376 fewer than went out, are returning home to their families, having slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Iraqi people, Bush takes to the tube to reminisce about the moment when he ordered the world's most powerful air force to pound Iraq's cities. He points to his eye sentimentally, whining, "See, see, there's a tear there right now just thinking about it. See it. See it."

Czechoslovakian novelist Milan Kundera wrote that "the struggle of human beings against power is, in some important sense, the struggle of memory against forgetting." How will the people of this country remember the war?

The ruling class is firing all its ideological cannons in epic attempts to blast away the truth beneath hundreds of tons of confetti and tickertape, parading the one circumstance that most everyone cares about—the young men and women who came home alive—down the Wall Streets and Constitution Avenues of every town between New York and Nuremberg. Perhaps they think their PR firms can, like Rumpelstiltskin, "spin" those lies into gold forever, and parlay them into new electoral victories and conquests.

But between the idea and the loom falls the shadow, as an old monarchist poet was wont to put it; between every master and his whip another army is marching: the thousands of military resisters who heard the Stallone beneath the Rambo and refused to kill.

## Hell, No, Thousands Didn't Go

In a steaming, packed courtroom on the Marine Corps base at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and at other military bases across the U.S., court-martial proceedings against soldiers who resisted the Gulf War have been underway since mid-May. Most of the resisters are African-Americans, Latinos and Asian-Americans.

The New World Order is speaking loud and clear. As Johnny and Joanie come marching home victorious, and everyday Americans don the new brownshirts and swagger through the streets with yellow ribbons and stars and stripes streaming from the empty sockets of their eyes, their commanders cannot let up for a second harassing and torturing those heroes who refused to kill.

Perhaps it is not so satisfying as they thought—massacring 300,000 people who didn't fight back, bombing their sanitation and water-purification plants, infant formula factories, dams, houses, shelters and shooting them

in the back as they fled unarmed through the desert carrying white flags of surrender—a turkey shoot, one U.S. general called it.

This time the Red Sea didn't part; the Pharaoh's Apache helicopters swarmed like a plague of bees, cutting down their victims all through the day, and then night, and then day again. It was all too easy. The desert became a "red sea" (bringing the mountain to Mohammed). And, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers—the cradle of civilization where, we're told, human life probably began, and at their nexus, the site of the biblical Garden of Eden—the B-52 serpents carpet-bombed the Garden with apples of the New World Order, unleashing a plague of cholera, dysentery and typhoid that will, according to a Harvard University medical team report, likely kill 170,000 more children over the next year alone.

The resisters' shadows loom large between the evil and the whitewash; they must be exorcised before the obliteration of memory can successfully proceed and the new bibles written. They are reminders of what it means to be human in a season of robots, and devils.

## **They Didn't Follow Orders**

So, it is to be expected that the corporate press would cast a "silent curtain" around the vast anti-war resistance. The videotapes taken through the infra-red scopes mounted on the Apache helicopters (manufactured by General Electric) of Iraq's teenage soldiers gasping for breath beneath the U.S.'s new fuel-air explosives, which burn up all the air and suffocate everyone in the vicinity, never made it onto NBC-TV (owned by General Electric), and the American people were kept from seeing the slaughter.

Even so, tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers had enough sense to "forget to show up" for this war or went absent without leave. Anti-war resistance within the military was widespread. In one incident, 67 National Guard members from Louisiana went AWOL as a group from Fort Hood, Texas to protest inadequate training, unfair leave policies and racism. Similar protests swept the country and, indeed, occurred throughout the world.

[Web archive note: Search FE for articles on Ft. Hood GI resistance to the war against Vietnam.]

Approximately 2,500 U.S. soldiers filed for conscientious objector status. What's a conscientious objector?, you ask. Malcolm X gave the best definition: "They asked me if I knew what conscientious objector meant. I told them that when the white man asked me to go off somewhere to fight and maybe die to preserve the way the white man treated the black man in America, then my conscience made me object."

The government considers the CO applicants serpents in their garden and it has brought desertion charges against hundreds of them. In addition, over a hundred anti-war GIs in Germany are still being held by military authorities or have been forced to go into hiding. And, there are reports mostly coming from soldiers returning from Saudi Arabia, of hundreds more being held in that bastion of democracy.

Because of the turmoil that mass trials of dissidents would stir up, the government is hell-bent on suppressing any memory of their existence. In the case of the Fort Hood 67, most of the Guard members were allowed to return and received only a slap on the wrist. Three "ringleaders," however, who tried to persuade 100 Guard members to leave, were court-martialed. Sgt. Robert Pete was sentenced to six years in a military prison, and Dwayne Black and Derrick Guidry were thrown into the brig for a year each.

## **Hands Off Sam!**

The New York-based Hands Off!, which was formed last year by students at the New School for Social Research to defend Pfc. Sam Lwin, a classmate and conscientious objector, has expanded into one of the key groups defending military resisters across the country. Lwin was the first resister to come to trial at Camp Lejeune. His Bronx-based reserve unit, Fox Company, was activated last November after he had filed for CO status. Lwin, along with seven other COs from his unit, refused the call-up, and he faced seven years in jail, a dishonorable discharge, and loss of all benefits including health care and pension...for refusing to kill.

At Lwin's court martial, which began on May 20, the government's star witness, Cpl. David Patrick Conley, admitted under cross-examination by Lwin's attorney, that he had bragged: "The last good deed I do for the Marines [before being discharged next month] is to send Sam Lwin to jail for 20 years."

The defense, bolstered by Lwin's supporters who filled the courtroom, argued that the trial was more a political persecution than a prosecution. In a stupendous victory for the anti-war movement, the heavy desertion charge was voided, the judge castigated the Marine Corps for its harassment, Lwin was sentenced to just three months in jail—three months too many, to be sure, but a clear political victory, nonetheless.

But to rely on the "decency" of the courts for exoneration would be a big mistake. Lwin was quick to point out that whatever victories we win in the courtrooms will be made possible only by anti-war activity in the streets.

And, some of the resisters are in even more dire need of such support: Lance Cpl. Erik Larsen, a student at Chabot Community College in California, and Tahan Jones—two of the most visible of the resisters because they helped organize anti-war demonstrations across the country—and Kevin Sparrock, a student at New York City's School of Visual Arts, are accused of desertion during a time of war. The government's attorneys have already filed briefs calling for the death penalty for the three young refusers.

Or, take the case of Eric Hayes, who was the president of the Black Students Association at Southern Illinois University. Eric, a Marine Corps reservist, was dragged out of his dormitory room in the middle of the night last December, handcuffed by military police and hauled off to the brig at Camp Lejeune a thousand miles away for failing to report when his Illinois unit was activated. In a plea bargain arrangement, Eric was sentenced to eight months in jail.

## **The Role of Racism**

As it became evident that not all military personnel were eager to fight for the Emirocracy, the U.S. military began forcing military resisters onto planes destined for the Gulf. Bryan Centa, a medic stationed at Lee Barracks in Mainz, Germany, filed an application for a conscientious objector discharge. On Jan. 3, Centa was handcuffed and put in leg irons and placed against his will on a plane for Saudi Arabia. The same thing happened on Dec. 28 to Spc. David Owen Carson, as well as to Pvt. Robert Chandler and dozens of other military resisters.

Racism plays a very important part in the government's attitude towards resisters. Danny Gillis, a black man from Baltimore, became a Moslem in the military and filed for CO status in November 1990. On Dec. 17, Gillis' unit was ordered to Saudi Arabia.

As the rest of Gillis' unit boarded the bus, he sat down on the cement and refused to get on. Staff Sgt. Schillumeit, who is white, ordered him onto the bus. Gillis again refused. Unable to get Gillis onto the bus, the sergeant called four white Marines to tie Gillis' hands behind his back and beat him up.

Meanwhile, two black Marines, passing by, saw four whites punching and kicking a tied-up black man and immediately came to Gillis' defense. Officers as well as enlisted men standing by entered the fray according to race. The fight continued until a colonel came by and ordered everyone to "clean it up."

At this point, the white sergeant called for a van with wider doors, and a battered Gillis was thrown into it. A minute later, however, he managed to jump out, run about ten feet, and then he collapsed. Gillis was arrested and thrown into the brig for 41 days and finally sentenced to 18 months in jail.

Resisters' depositions are filled with reports of abuses, many of them racial, which began once they applied for CO status. Sam Lwin, who is originally from Burma, reports being called "Chinaman" and "gook" throughout boot camp. He told me, "I was ordered to count from one to ten in Burmese and to sing in Burmese by my sergeant, in front of the drill instructors." During his CO hearing, Lwin was asked if he knew kung-foo or karate.

One resister reported a sergeant who "enjoyed ordering us to line up and chant 'I am shit' over and over."

## Supporters Packed the Courtroom

At Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, Capt. Yolanda Huet-Vaughn, a Mexican-American doctor who refused orders to be sent to the Gulf when her unit was activated in December, won an unusual victory recently. She succeeded in having her hearing officer removed from her case when she charged him, and the prosecutors, with political bias.

Crucial to Huet-Vaughn's initial success was the support she's received from Kansas City anti-war activists. Fifty to 60 supporters have packed all of her hearings, refusing to allow the government's machinations to be hidden behind closed doors.

The Camp Lejeune resisters also believe that their supporters, who have packed the courtroom each day—and who have also set up a “peace camp” 20 miles away—have helped them enormously. The GIs won an important pretrial motion against the Marine Corps in April when a judge ruled their confinement to barracks was illegal, that they be permitted to leave the base and most importantly, recognized that the harassment they underwent was systematic and illegal.

Several human rights groups are looking into charges of torture of imprisoned resisters. Thirty-three Catholic bishops from 23 states, have called on President Bush to “stop the military's prosecution of COs” and to grant them amnesty and honorable discharges. The Canadian branch of Amnesty International is sending an observer to some of the trials, and is considering adopting the resisters as prisoners of conscience.

Some of the resisters are undoubtedly confused. They have not thought out all the ins and outs of imperialism. They have not issued long tracts on political economy; they are not guerrillas of thesis warfare protracted, firing wordy salvos from their tenured ivory towers (although many of them are students). But, dammit, listen to the voices of these resisters!

Sgt. David Bobbit, of Staten Island, New York:: “War is destruction, destruction of the environment we live in, and the destruction of life. To me there is nothing on this earth worth killing for. As for war, I am against it, not just this war, any war.”

Bobbitt was sentenced to 14 months in jail.

Marcus Blackwell, of Brooklyn, NY and a student at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, is another resister. He writes: “Universal love should be the basis of man's action and this should be apparent in his deeds. I respect other people and live by that rule. War destroys more than just property or landscape. It also destroys human beings and the human soul.

“When I was sent to the School of Infantry in Camp Lejeune, my eyes were really opened. So, now I was able to shoot and kill a person from 500 yards, destroy whole families and villages and kill people from the air. But who was I really harming? I was harming myself. I was harming my spirit, disrupting that inner peace and harmony that hold me together...The job I was doing may have been good for the Marine Corps, but it was not for the good of man.”

Blackwell was sentenced to 17 months at hard labor in a military prison.

For (former) Lance Corporal Keith Jones, the “poverty draft” was very real. At first Keith says, he felt proud of his achievements at boot camp. He was “close-minded” to anti-war organizations on campus. But two years ago, after acting in a play written by Vietnam veterans, he decided that abstract language of Infantry Training School, such as “you'll take many casualties,” served to hide the real physical mutilation of young men's bodies in war.

Keith was, at that time, studying advanced weaponry; he was learning what it was capable of doing. A year and a half ago he joined a Buddhist temple committed to world peace. Now, Keith will spend the next 16 months hammering out license plates, in prison.

## The Power Of Community

The paths by which each individual came to see how the military was turning them into murderers, and their powerful rejection of all that, are varied and multi-faceted. But there are certain common elements which provide the soil that nurtures resistance and fosters the courage to take enormous risks. Especially important are strong

community ties which encourage and support their humane sentiments, and serve as counterweights to the false “community” of the military.

Groups like Hands Off!, Citizen Soldier, the War Resisters League, and many local activists have been mainstays of support for these resisters; and, indeed, the communities of local resistance which have sprung up around them have made all the difference in the world.

In spite of feelings of despair, frustration, and sadness that—given the murderers running the country we live in—all of us in the anti-war movement fall into, in actuality there is an enormous source of hope here: In the courage of the resisters who, against all odds found ways to resist; in the new, creative tactics invented by affinity groups in the movement during the war, and the emergence of new communities of support; in the new alternative press networks and dynamic high school groups; and in the realization that, no matter how much shit they try to make you eat, no matter how sad and desperate the situation, many people always refuse to “only follow orders.”

—Mitchel Cohen

(Mitchel is a Vietnam-era draft resister, and an editor of Red Balloon magazine, which has a new issue available c/o Mitchel Cohen, 2652 Cropsey Ave. 7H, Brooklyn NY 11214.)

## **SUPPORT GI RESISTERS**

We, at the *Fifth Estate* cannot express how strongly we feel about the necessity for supporting the brave men and women who refused to be stampeded into killing and dying for Bush’s New World Order. Mutiny is a word which strikes fear into the rotten hearts of all politicians and generals since they know their power rests on the unthinking response by the cannon fodder to their commands. A military comprised of individuals with their own ethical standards is a disaster for those in power.

We have only admiration for those who courageously defied authority in the face of great cost to themselves. Not only do their acts damage the war-making capacity of the state, but also announce their choice to be a free person, one not subject to the dictates of power.

The following is a list of resources which can be utilized to aid and assist GI resisters. All of the support organizations desperately need funds. Also, a list of imprisoned resisters can be obtained from any of those listed below.

*The ANTI-WARRIOR: A Newspaper of military Dissension and Resistance*, published by Jeff Patterson, the first public Marine resister, 48 Shattuck Square, Box 129, Berkeley CA 94704.

*Hands Off!*, 111 E. 14<sup>th</sup> St., Rm. 132, New York NY 10003; (212) 353-2445. Videotape interviews with resisters and speakers are available.

The Tahan Jones/Erik Larsen Defense Committee: Box 225, 1678 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley CA 94709; (415) 655-1201.

The Military Counseling Network: Vogelsbergstr. 17, 6000 Frankfurt 1, Germany; phone: 011-49-69-490-538.

War Resisters League: 339 Lafayette St., New York NY 10012; (212) 228-0450.

National Campaign for Amnesty for War Resisters, P.O. Box 42488, San Francisco CA 94142. (415) 824-0214. Organizing to create a national campaign to reverse the convictions and free all GI resisters.

# fifth Estate

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