

Resister Update

They Refused to Follow Orders

Mitchel Cohen

1992

FE readers may remember the case of Danny Gillis [Fifth Estate #337, Late Summer 1991], a black man from Baltimore, who refused to board the Marine Corps bus to Saudi Arabia last December 17, and was beaten up (with his hands cuffed behind his back) under his Sergeant's orders by four white Marines. Gillis required an operation on his shoulder due to injuries received during that attack, and is serving out his 18 month sentence.

Meanwhile, one of the Marines who came to Danny's defense during the fight, Jody Anderson, did go with his unit to Saudi Arabia. Jody, like virtually all the Marines, never saw combat despite all the hoopla; but the Marine Corps did wait for the war to be over before arresting Jody on charges of mutiny, inciting to riot, three counts of assaulting an officer, threatening officers, and disobeying a direct order. All told, Jody faced life imprisonment plus 44 years.

Due to the big-name peace groups' lack of sufficient monetary support for organizations like Hands Off!, which has been doing heroic work in defense of the resisters, Jody Anderson was forced to retain one of the non-movement lawyer sharks who totally fucked up his case.

As a result of lawyer incompetence, Jody was sentenced to two years in jail. Anti-war resisters rallied to Jody's cause; his trial and sentencing created a real bond between many of the soldiers who went to the Gulf and those who resisted, which has allowed them to organize in the brig. That organizing has been one factor in the unexpected early release of many of the resisters who had applied for conscientious objector status.

Some Resisters Out of Jail

Indeed, many of the non-active duty resisters have received clemencies, and are out of prison after serving six months. Among the Camp Lejeune, N.C. group are Wayne McWhite, Marcus Blackwell, Colin Bootman, Doug DeBoer, Keith Jones, George Ward and Marquis Leacock. David Bobbitt and Demetrio Perez are scheduled for early release before Christmas, while Sam Lwin served his full four-month sentence and got out last summer.

All had applied for conscientious objector status while they were in the service, and, with the exception of Lwin, had copped pleas. On the other hand, Enrique Gonzalez and Jimmy Summers, who pleaded not guilty and maintained that plea throughout, have been denied early release, a clear discrimination by the military. And, active duty GIs like Danny Gillis, Paul Cook, Kenneth McGee, Ken Sharp and Glenn Mulholland will be forced to serve their full sentences despite copping pleas.

Each of the resisters has his own special story about how they developed anti-war consciousness in the midst of enormous military pressures to conform. Paul Cook's story, though, is even more hair-raising than most. The Marine Corps wouldn't let him file for conscientious objector while he was stateside. He was sent with his unit to the Kuwaiti border, but he refused to carry a weapon.

At one point, his unit was ordered to attack, and Cook, still weaponless at the very front, refused. He was hauled back and arrested, and eventually charged with misbehavior in the face of the enemy, which carries the death penalty. To avoid that possibility, he plea-bargained down to 15 months.

Erik Larsen and Tahan Jones also faced the death penalty. They were charged with desertion. After a great deal of publicity, in which anti-war activists from around the country flooded the bases with protests, mail for the prisoners, and dozens of visits every day, Larsen was finally offered a dropping of the heavy desertion charge in exchange for a guilty plea to unauthorized absence.

He was supposed to be sentenced to eight months. But, unlike the others, he won the opportunity for a jury to do the sentencing, and they reduced his sentence further, to six months—six months too many for these young heroes who refused to kill for imperialism, to be sure, but a far cry from facing death. As of this writing, Tahan Jones's trial is yet to be scheduled.

How many resisters were there? No one knows for sure, but Hands Off! reports that added together across the country, tens of thousands of troops “forgot to show up for the war” or walked off their bases and tried to disappear, or filed for conscientious objector and refused to kill. The reach of the anti-war sentiment was long and powerful, and the movement helped create a climate in which there were probably more resisters per square inch than at the start of any other war in recent U.S. history.

Of the 2,500 who applied for conscientious objector, hundreds were incarcerated; most of those who simply went AWOL, on the other hand, were barely reprimanded and faced little or no jail time. The military still wishes to cover up the vast extent of the anti-war movement.

Anti-Warriors Still Held

Aside from Camp LeJeune, there are still three anti-warriors being held in Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas: Yolanda Huet-Vaughn, William Allen and Robert Pete (who is appealing his six-year sentence); five at Fort Sill, Oklahoma: Tracy Robb (18 months), William Walker (27 months), and Addis Wilely (9 months)—all arrested in Germany, where there was far more resistance to the war than in the U.S.; four that we know of at Fort Knox: Jimmy Jones (11 months); Michael Bell, who is married to Tracy Robb at Fort Sill (18 months); Oronde Gibson (11 months); and John Pruner (4 months, and appealing); in Fort Lewis (Washington State): Tim Silvey (18 months).

Amnesty International has declared many of the resisters “prisoners of conscience”; in fact, they point out that there were more “prisoners of conscience” at Camp LeJeune than at any other site in the world. This has prompted U.S. Rep. John Conyers (Detroit) to launch an investigation of the military's treatment of CO applications, and a new bill will be introduced by Rep. Ron Dellums (CA) next year to curtail military abuse and revise the statutes.

But Congressional legislation is secondary to those who want to overthrow the system that generates war after war, rather than merely reform it: And here, there's a lot to be learned from the resisters themselves.

Realizing this, the military has now applied a gag order on all resisters coming out of the brig. Melissa Ennen, of Hands Off!, reports that dozens of high school teachers have called asking for anti-war resisters to counter military recruiters in the NYC public schools, and similar trends are evident across the country.

Indeed, in Oakland, Leonard MacNeil of Third World Resisters, and in Philadelphia, Hal Jordan of the American Friends Service Committee, are organizing many of the resisters to go on speaking tours, to barnstorm the country, so great is the demand. In response, the military informed Eric Hayes, the resister who is president of the Black Students Association at Southern Illinois University (who had been dragged out of his dormitory room in the middle of the night last December by military police and hauled off to Camp LeJeune a thousand miles away, and who served a portion of his 8-month sentence), that he—like all other personnel—would need prior clearance to speak in public or to the media.

Hilary Richard (of the law firm Rabinowitz & Boudin), a dedicated lawyer working with Hands Off! who represented many of the LeJeune resisters, is now filing a First Amendment lawsuit against the Marine Corps on behalf of Eric Hayes. “What do you want him to do?” she asks, sarcastically. “As president of the student body, do you want him to address the students one by one?”

The anti-war movement is doing a good job, one by one. One by one, we've managed to get many resisters out with suspended sentences, due to continued pressure. One by one, write to the resisters (remember, all the mail is read by the commanders as well, so get your licks in!). One by one, publicize their cases. And one by one, begin preparing to target key fissures in the ruling class consensus, to blow them wide open, as part of a larger, more coherent radical strategy to split the ruling class and stop the next war. The movement across the country has to begin devising longer term strategy to effectively oppose the New World Imperialist War-der, and turn it into revolutionary movements here at home.

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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/338-winter-1992/resister-update>
Fifth Estate #338, Winter, 1992

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