hour after hour, caressing the warm bricks on the building-sides as I passed through their towns. I stood still to watch the manifold miracle of women simply walking by, of children playing in the parks, of dogs running free, quietly letting all the good, gainful shit fill back in. In prison we were all guards, no matter what we thought. But once out, you could let it all down, and the whole warm world rushed in at you at once.

I had gotten out of the penitentiary five days before my twenty-second birthday. The whole decade had changed, it was 1970 and I was out. I was free.

Mike Ferner

The military housing my wife and I occupied was right along the perimeter of the base, right on the fence. On Armed Forces Day, the "Movement for a Democratic Military," a GI-civilian organization in the area, decided to hold a demonstration they called "Armed *Farces* Day." They marched around the perimeter of the base going right past my house. I ripped off a sheet from the surgery ward, spray painted a peace sign on it, and stuck it on the fence. Then, I sat down on my back stoop, waiting for the march. Well, the Shore Patrol was hiding in the bushes; they saw this sheet and went out of their minds. They came roaring up to my house and were jumping up and down, livid, turnin' purple mad! They hauled me away in a pick up truck and kept me locked up until the demonstration was over.

They released me, but they had arrested me. I could have taken nonjudicial punishment, but I requested a court-martial instead. Base policy was to post court-martial charges on the bulletin board. Somebody, God bless his soul whoever he was, saw this charge sheet and sent it to a reporter, figuring it was worth a story. The reporter contacted me and did a story about my situation.

Coincidentally, right around that time, an Air Force colonel ordered an illegal bombing in Indochina. All they did to him was bring him back, slap him on the wrist and reassign him. That was the analogy the reporter used, a comparison of what the military was doing to me and what they did to this colonel. Well, the day after this article came out, they dropped the charges against me. This was the first time I tried something and won, and it gave me encouragement. I saw that you could beat the system, even if it was by a lucky accident.

I also wrote a couple of letters to President Nixon, telling him what an asshole he was. I put down my name, rank, serial number, address, the whole shot. I called him every name in the book; I mean, I was pissed. I figured they could hang me for this, but man, that son-of-a-bitch was blowing up all these people, so the least I could do was write him a

nasty letter. I never got a response; but later, when I shipped out to California, I walked in and handed the guy my orders and he said, "Oh yeah, we've been waiting for you, Washington called." I thought, "Well, somebody's been listening."

I worked at the Great Lakes Hospital for a year-and-a-half. During that time I began to question the militaristic part of me that had been real strong when I was younger. Bits and pieces of that remained. It took a long time to work through this, and to finally decide that war was wrong—that it was not the thing to do. In the meantime, I continued to have other, contradictory thoughts, like, the war represented a historical period and I should experience it to the max.

Now, I worked on a psychiatric ward and a neurosurgery ward, and I saw a lot of brain and nerve damage caused by battle wounds. In the surgery ward we pieced guys back together who were only a couple of years older than I was. Those guys had pieces of their heads missing, and stuff like that—I worked on those kinds of cases for a year-and-a-half—and, as I talked to more and more Vietnam vets, it really began to sink in. I slowly began to challenge a lot of the views I had about duty, God, and country; that is, what duty was and how we should carry it out.

Another image affected me, and has stayed with me vividly. My duties included meeting medevac planes, loaded with the wounded, that were coming back from Vietnam. We'd go to the Naval Air Station on a bus fitted out for stretchers that were stacked four-high. The inside of the plane was altered in the same way.

One day, after the stretchers were loaded up and the bus started back to the hospital, a seventeen year old Marine laying on a stretcher turned to me and said, "Doc, do you think you could help me, my hand's stuck in the side of the stretcher between the window." I pulled the sheet back, and saw his forearm wedged in a very uncomfortable position. When I went to free it, I saw that it was only his forearm. He'd lost his entire hand in Vietnam. Here was a kid, even younger than me, who would go back to his hometown, and

make his way for the rest of his life, with a hook instead of a hand.

The real turning point was running into some older guys who had graduated from college before they came into the military. They did drugs and listened to music that I thought was odd. They also talked about things I thought were odd at first. But they struck me as being very good people. I was taken by them, and they befriended me. They were very different from the other guys I had been hanging around. I remember getting off-base, as much as possible, with a couple of these guys. We talked about a lot of things; so, I was finally able to bounce some ideas off people who were receptive. Up to that point, those thoughts had just been running around in my head. Now, I could bounce them off these guys to get feedback and reinforcement. I also began to read antiwar literature. This helped me to solidify those ideas that were leading me against war.

After a year-and-a-half of duty at Great Lakes Naval Hospital, I got sea duty, on an aircraft carrier off the coast of Vietnam. As soon as I realized what my orders were I put in a request for a transfer. My reason for doing this was not, as the Navy later claimed during my CO process, because of fear of combat duty off Vietnam. Chances of personal danger on a carrier were slim, at any rate. I requested a transfer because I saw carrier duty as being more directly involved with the war than I could justify. That fine line of what I could or could not allow myself to do was beginning to be defined. But I was still feeling my way along.

The request for a transfer was turned down. So, my only options were to take my month's leave, and then report to the ship, or to desert. I went on leave and decided to look into finding a counselor. I ran into a guy who was counseling out of a run-down church in Toledo. He told me what I could do legally, and encouraged me to develop my own thoughts, ideas and judgments. He also gave me the name and phone number of a counseling service in Oakland, California.

When I got to Oakland, I located the Pacific Counseling

Service and asked them for help. The counselor there showed me how to prepare an application for discharge as a conscientious objector. So, I started writing this thing, redrafting it three or four times.

At the time, I was on the Naval Base in San Francisco Bay. The ship I was supposed to be on was at sea, off of Vietnam. I assumed they were going to fly me out to the ship, but I told them, "I'm not going out to that ship, I'm not going to cooperate with this." Finally, I had decided to make my stand, and to take the consequences.

They decided not to fly me out, that I should wait for the boat to come back from Vietnam. So, there I was, I waited for three weeks, did some serious partying in my off-duty hours, hung around, fine-tuned my application for discharge, and talked to the counselors some more.

Finally, the boat got back. It was a World War II aircraft carrier, the kind you'd see on *Victory at Sea.* An old boat, but it was a workhorse that didn't break down like the newer boats. That thing had the record at the time for on-line flight operations, twenty-four hours-a-day for fifty-four days, this rusting, aging hulk, the *USS Hancock.*

The first day it arrived I walked in there and handed them a twenty-page application for discharge. The guy I handed it to didn't quite know what to do, and I was surprised at the lack of static I got for submitting it. I guess it was because everyone on that boat just wanted to get off of it, and go back home.

It took a couple of weeks until they finally realized what I'd been up to. Then I started getting negative feedback from some of the officers. They tried to talk me out of it, using the patronizing, fatherly approach. One lieutenant commander, the head of the medical department on the carrier, called me in. He went on about, "I looked at your records and you're a very intelligent guy" and blah, blah, blah. It was bullshit. He asked me, "What do you think is going to happen if people start thinking about the fact that they can file for discharge as conscientious objectors?" He said, "What do you think that's going to do to the morale of these people? Don't you think it's going to make them feel

like their time in the service and the work they are doing is worthless?" I remember, very specifically, looking at the guy and saying, "Maybe they *should* start thinking about this." He just kind of looked at me, like, "hmm, this line of talk isn't going to get very far."

In my CO application, I basically talked about the experiences I had patching guys up, thinking that something was wrong there, and how I wasn't going to be part of it. When you file for CO status, they send you to a line officer, a chaplain and a psychiatrist. While I was waiting for the boat to come back I did my psychiatrist interview. My first reaction was to question the whole process. I thought, "These guys think I'm nuts, because I don't want to participate in this crazy, fuckin' war; but obviously, they're the crazy ones."

When the boat came back I saw the chaplain and the line officer. The interviews went really well. The psychiatrist and the chaplain recommended that I get out. But the officer listened to my story, read my application and wrote a report that said, "Mike is sincere, but he should not be discharged, he should get noncombatant status and finish his tour." I had ten months left in my four-year tour when my claim was rejected.

Meanwhile, I was getting help from the Bay Area Military Project which was hooked-up with the Pacific Counseling Service. The attorney there thought I had grounds for an appeal. At that time, the criteria for CO status centered on whether or not the applicant was sincere. So, he wrote the appeal.

My stand was if they didn't discharge me by the time the boat was to go back to Vietnam, I would cease participating in anything the Navy wanted me to do. If that meant the brig, so be it. I told all the lifers this and they thought I was nuts, but the word got around that I was serious.

After the *Hancock* got out of drydock, we'd go down to San Diego for flight operations. They were getting the ship ready to go back to Vietnam. While we were on flight operations I tried to get the Navy for everything I possibly could. If we dumped garbage, I'd check the charts to see if

we were beyond the limit for legally dumping the trash. I'd mark down the times we were within that limit and write to Congressman Dellums and others. I'd say, "Look at what's going on, isn't this illegal?" I did anything I could to get them.

Since I was not cooperating very much they took me off my job in the sick bay. They gave me the job of inspecting the bathrooms. The enlisted men's quarters were just abominable, especially those that were six or eight decks down. Some of these bathrooms were awash with four or five inches of raw sewerage. Men had to walk in there to take showers and to try to clean up. I started writing these things up and sending them to the officer responsible for sanitation. I'd report problems like inadequate urinals, the need for soap and towel dispensers, and so forth. I read the rule books, and used the regulations. I wrote up everything that wasn't up to snuff. They got three warnings; the fourth time, you had to write them up. I used a section in the Uniform Code of Military Justice that said even an enlisted man could write-up an officer if they were breaking the regulations. So, I started writing-up officers, and that really got to them. Like, "This guy can't even inspect bathrooms without screwin' up."

I also figured I'd do what some of my friends called "copping an attitude." For most, this meant breaking regulations and getting busted all the time. But my "attitude" was to abide by the regulations one-hundred percent. I started cutting my hair more often and shining my belt buckle. I was trying to drive them nuts with their own regulations, that was my "attitude."

Now, I had already requested a couple of, so-called "Captain's Masts." This was a attempt within the Navy to try to be more progressive. Basically, it was a request to see the commander of the ship, base, or whatever. It was like a grievance procedure; if you went up the chain of command and your request wasn't dealt with, you met with the commander. The "Captain's Mast" was like going to binding arbitration.

Well, I read these regulations as soon as they were is-

sued. The officers on the ship weren't really aware of them; so, I just ran my requests up through the chain of command. One of my requests was to be able to circulate pamphlets on how to apply for conscientious objector status. Of course, none of the officers would okay this, they thought it was crazy. They just kept passing it up the ladder until I got to see the captain of the ship. Of course, he thought I was some kind of basketcase up there asking to pass out this type of information.

Another time, I drafted a petition with a group of counselors and antiwar activists; we were attempting to stop our ship from going back to Vietnam. It basically said that since this was an old World War II aircraft carrier, and the peace treaty had already been signed, it had no business going back over there. We were requesting a Congressional investigation regarding the need for it to go back again.

We pulled into San Diego one weekend, I got off the boat, and on city property, I collected signatures as the guys came off the boat. I got a good response. I went back on the boat and decided to do the petition on the ship. One guy helped me do this on shore, but he wasn't about to do it on the boat. So, I did it before my work shift. I got up early and started circulating the petition in the cafeteria. Well, one of the lifers saw the petition and ratted on me.

The next day I got busted and hauled up to the captain. This was the second or third time I'd gone to see him. Well, he just lost it, he was screaming at me. I didn't say anything. He screamed at me for about five minutes, reduced me in rank, fined me two hundred bucks and confined me to the ship.

So, I called my lawyer and we got the American Civil Liberties Union involved. Ultimately, they took a deposition on my charges that the Navy violated the First Amendment by not allowing me to petition or distribute literature on the boat. Our case was simply that we had the right to do a petition. The Navy's position was that when you're in the military, your First Amendment rights are suspended. I was discharged before the case was settled, it actually took about eight years to adjudicate.

I heard stories of guys doing even more serious stuff. There was a guy on the *USS Ranger,* the sister ship to the one I was on, who was charged with dropping two six-inch bolts into the main reduction gears that transferred power to the shaft powering the boat. These gears were located right along the bottom of the boat, probably twelve decks down. A guy dropped this shit in there and wrecked those gears forever. To get to the problem, they had to cut out a section of twelve steel decks to lift the damaged parts out and replace them. It took them six months and millions of dollars; it was a celebrated case in the Bay area. They found some guy they accused of doing it and brought him to trial. Sabotage in time of war meant the death penalty, which had never been meted out to anyone during the Vietnam era, but it was a very serious offense. This was a major case, and after a political fight to keep his trial from being transferred to the Philippines, the guy was acquitted.

The Navy actually had Marine guards on many of the larger boats. Any ship above a destroyer had a Marine detachment on it. They put Marines on these ships, in part, to prevent acts of sabotage; plus, they had Marine guards around the fighter planes. I'm sure the Navy's original intent wasn't to prevent sabotage, but eventually, that's what their jobs came to include. Guys used to throw handfuls of nuts or bolts into the engines of these planes; pilots would start 'em up the next morning and blow the engines. Marines, with M–1s, would guard these things so *their own people* wouldn't sabotage things!

There was a lot of sabotage on my ship; a lot of frustration was being vented. Not big time stuff, like on the *Ranger,* but a lot of low-level sabotage went on—salt poured into this, turpentine dumped into that, things thrown overboard. It was basically antimilitary as opposed to antiwar stuff. I didn't know very many people who were doing it, but it happened everyday.

I strongly suspect there were no other conscientious objectors on board, people just hated being on that boat, they were just pissed-off and frustrated; you know, "Show me something to break and I'll break it," that sort of thing.

Actually, it was a little disappointing that the destruction going on was not directed in any particular political manner. I tried to get the word through the grapevine that if people were interested in conscientious objection they should come see me. One or two guys came by, but that was it.

There was a time when I seriously doubted my sanity. I was bothered by the fact that nobody there seemed to consider what I was doing as sane. Nobody I knew, except for my one friend who helped me to petition, felt what the military was doing was wrong. There were thirty-five hundred guys on that boat, I probably knew a hundred or a hundred and fifty, and nobody thought what I was doing was sane, let alone agreed with me.

Most people had absolutely no idea that conscientious objection existed within the Navy regulations. They never understood that what I was doing was a Navy procedure. They just thought it was crazy. So, I was really isolated. I'm on the boat, out on the ocean playing war games for two or three weeks at a time, having only one person I could really confide in. I began walking around the ship wondering "Am I crazy? What's going on here? Why am I the only person out of thirty-five hundred guys feeling this way? Am I nuts, or what?"

I worked this through and finally reached a point where I felt inner peace. I no longer thought I was crazy, and even if I was, I didn't really care. I knew what I was doing; I had gone through enough experiences, had written enough about it, and had seen and heard enough about Vietnam to know I was no longer going to participate. If they wanted to call that crazy, so be it.

This was one of the few things in my life that I have been absolutely sure about. I decided they could do whatever they wanted to do with me, but I was not going to cooperate. They could put me in the brig for the rest of my natural life and I didn't care.

Being on that carrier helped me to see my role in the Navy very clearly. It became evident that everyone's job was directed to one end—catapulting those fighter bombers

off the end of the flight deck and into combat. Whether it was loading bombs into planes or working in the sick bay, our work, every day, was directed to the same purpose. No matter how detached or uninvolved a corpsman's job could be considered, it was directly supporting something I could no longer be part of.

I waited for five months for a decision on my CO claim, it must have gotten lost on somebody's desk or something. But, the day I got busted for doing the petition on the boat, it was miraculously found. Later that same day I was told I was going to be gone within two days. A happy day in my life!

This is what happened. My lawyer contacted the Bay area Congressmen; they, in turn, wrote telegrams to the Secretary of the Navy, the Commander of the Pacific Fleet and to the captain of my boat. Boy, you talk about the shit hitting the fan. It hit the fan royally! The next morning I was called down to Personnel and processed out of the Navy. The Personnel clerk told me, "The captain said to get the fuck off the ship." I was escorted, with a military guard, out the gates of the Naval Base. I was so elated, you couldn't have brought me down to the ground if you had skyhooks to pull me down.

Richard Lovett

In-service, discharged CO
U.S. Army 1967–1969

We were on the outside, inside.

[AUTHOR'S NOTE]

Richard Lovett came from a family background sensitive to violence as an acceptable expression for settling disputes. There was no history of war resistance in the family; however, Richard did report that "cultivating an independent frame of mind" characterized his father's side of the family.

Early on, Richard came to the conclusion that "Other people were a reflection of myself. I found that I had difficulty crossing the boundary of deliberately doing physical harm to another. I believed that violence was not an acceptable mode of life."

In college, Richard found himself becoming more and more concerned with issues surrounding human dignity and the importance of life. Attracted to the civil rights movement, he took a job in Washington, DC with the Office of Equal Health Opportunity. He also enrolled in Catholic University as a graduate student majoring in philosophy. He focused his study on ethics and metaphysics developing a "Deep, intense, intellectual preoccupation with the connection between values and civil rights." He read Satre, Camus, Kierkegaard and Thomas Aquinas, masterworks that advocated, "Total respect for coming to the independence of one's own conclusions."

While these studies kindled a keen interest in concerns like civil rights, they also turned Richard within. He became preoccupied intellectually, and that, he re-

DAYS OF DECISION

an Oral History of Conscientious Objectors in the military during the Vietnam war

GERALD R. GIOGLIO

THE BROKEN RIFLE PRESS, Trenton, New Jersey

DAYS OF DECISION

an Oral History of Conscientious Objectors in the military during the Vietnam war

Gioglio, Gerald R.
Days of Decision.

1. Vietnamese conflict, 1961–1975—personal narratives.
2. Conscientious objection. Pacifism. Antiwar movement.

Printed in the United States of America.

Cover by: Howard V. Koby, Los Angeles.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 88–70891.

ISBN: 0–9620024–0–2 Softcover.

TO:

EVERYONE I HAVE EVER LOVED.

FOR:

THE CHILDREN.

THERE ARE NO WARS WAGED WITHOUT OUR CONSENT. JUST SAY NO . . . AND MEAN IT.


DAYS OF DECISION:
an Oral History of Conscientious Objectors
in the military during the Vietnam war
Pax