

Quaker House Newsletter

Front-Line Peace Witness Since 1969

Winter 2003

Fayetteville, NC www.quakerhouse.org

Chuck Fager, Director

Dear Friend,

It's that time of year again: the artillery at Ft. Bragg has been booming a lot, rattling the windows. We don't need any reminders, but they shout the fact that as I write, we seem poised on the cusp of war or non-war.

Millions around the world have made visible and audible demands for the U.S. government to back away from the plans for war against Iraq. But at Fort Bragg and so many other bases, the buildup to invasion goes on, grim and relentless, day in and day out, around the clock.

When you read this, the war may have begun, and some of what follows could be overcome by events. We have to run the risk, though, because so much is going on.

Here we've been working on several fronts: debating war advocates, visiting Iraq, speaking and conducting peace workshops, writing, marching and even facing arrest. More about all that in a few moments.

But much of our work is outwardly undramatic: the counseling phone line rings day in and day out, more calls than ever, from GIs we may never meet, as well as some we do.

Cumulatively that work becomes dramatic, at least for us: we're close to swamped. We recently got the totals from last year for the GI Rights Hotline, the nationwide hookup which Quaker House helped start (at **1-800-394-9544-pass it on!**), and can put them in historical context. Take a look:

A Growth Industry: Call Statistics for Quaker House and The GI Rights Hotline

2002 Total GI Hotline calls nationwide: **21,218**
(23 % increase over 2001)

Quaker House (QH) share of this total: **4,067** calls.
(30 % increase over 2001)

2001 -- Total Hotline calls: 17,267 – QH total: 3128
(1999-2000 data incomplete)

1998 Total GI Hotline calls: 4140 – QH total: 1872

1997 Total GI Hotline calls: 3294 – QH total: 1231

1996 Total GI Hotline Calls: 1734 – QH total: 727

The trends here are worth underlining: Since 1996, Quaker House calls have gone up 560 %, and total Hotline

calls have jumped 1225 % . (The Hotline began in 1994.)

The Quaker House total is actually understated, because it counts only calls taken through the 800 number, by our main counselors, Lenore Yarger and Steve Woolford. To these should be added the emails, and calls to the house phone number. These too have been rising steadily.

And these involve more than just conversation. A few days ago, I was in a dingy Fort Bragg barracks, sitting beside the wife of a GI who was being grilled by a truculent captain about his CO application. As the hearing opened, the captain summarized the official ground rules: one is that it was not supposed to be "an adversarial proceeding." Then he proceeded to rip into the GI, challenging his honesty, the authenticity of his claim form (saying I wrote it for him—I didn't), alleging he was lying about having come to his CO convictions while on combat missions in Afghanistan, and so forth.

It was a tough, grueling session, and the captain's report and recommendations were just as negative as we expected. The CO has ten days to submit a rebuttal, which I've been helping him prepare. If his claim is turned down, then he'll need to decide what to do next, which could mean jail. We'll walk with him through all of that.

One other bit of news: Even before the latest round of huge protests, the mass media had finally begun to notice (*surprise!*) that there really is a peace movement in this country, and that it's worth reporting on. The upshot is that calls from reporters have been coming to the house every couple of days for the past few weeks.

Mostly the reporters are hungry to talk to a real GI resister; but they haven't had much luck so far. The GIs we're working with are keeping their heads down right now, fearing retaliation if they go public before getting out. We don't push them on this; but my prediction is that before too long, there will be GI resisters ready to face the press, and adding their voices to the chorus demanding an end to this folly. When they do, we'll help them all we can.

In the midst of all this, the bills still need to be paid, and your continuing support of our work is greatly appreciated, and much needed. And keep us in your prayers. We hope you'll consider sending a contribution soon.

Peace,

Chuck Fager, Director

PS. GI Hotline stats for January '03 just came in: Total calls = 3582—That's an all-time monthly high! (661 calls came to Quaker House. This will also mean a record-high phone bill.)Thanks for your help!

Quaker House: Up to Our Necks in Work & Protest

Lenore: Iraq Visit

Our GI counselor Lenore Yarger went to Iraq in January; along with members of Peaceful Tomorrows, a peace group whose members lost close family on 9-11. While there she visited many families, almost all of whom had lost members to the ravages of war and sanctions.

Lenore wrote a report on the trip, and has since been giving talks and showing slides. The Fayetteville *Observer* published a version of this report at the top of their Op-Ed page in early February. Here's an excerpt:

"I found it wrenching to say goodbye to the people we met in Iraq. The reality that they could be dead – in two weeks, a month, six months – because of a U.S. invasion stood like an icy pillar between us that no words of comfort or reassurance could diminish. To more than one person, I said upon departure, 'I am holding you in my heart.' But I could read the doubt in their eyes:

"What good will that do me?"

"What good indeed, unless more of us in the United States can hold the people of Iraq in our hearts and, like the families of Peaceful Tomorrows, turn our grief and compassion into action for peace?" (The full text of her article is on our website: www.quakerhouse.org)

Steve, Jailbird-to-be?

Lenore's husband, Steve Woolford, has also been busy beyond the Hotline work, with protest actions. On December 30, he and three others were arrested for throwing blood on a security entrance at the Pentagon. The action, which produced about twenty other arrests, was part of a retreat of the Atlantic life community, a Catholic Worker-related resistance network.

That retreat was in large part a memorial to one of its founders, the activist former priest Phil Berrigan, who died on December 6. Berrigan had been jailed numerous times for similar nonviolent protests, and his widow, Elizabeth McAllister, was arrested with Steve. The action coincided with the Catholic Feast of the Holy Innocents, which recalls the slaughter of children by King Herod, in hopes of killing the infant Jesus. This ancient event, the protesters said, is echoed by the sanctions and impending war against Iraq.

Steve has been arrested at least ten times before, and faces a trial date in early March. He assures us that if he gets jail time, Lenore will cover the Hotline phone in his absence, as he did when she was in Iraq.

Chuck: Facing the Special Forces

Director Chuck Fager has not courted arrest; but in early February he did confront a Special Forces major in a debate over the plan to invade Iraq. The encounter came in a panel discussion at Methodist College in Fayetteville.

The Special Forces officer was very enthusiastic

about the impending invasion, which he expected to be greeted by cheering Iraqis, overjoyed to be liberated by U.S. troops. Ousting Saddam Hussein, he argued, would reshape the Middle East in a positive, democratic direction, and even open the way to an Israeli-Palestinian settlement.

Chuck challenged this plan, contending that the human cost, especially to Iraqi civilians, would be enormous, as it was in the first Gulf war, and that this prospect robbed the invasion plan of any moral justification. When the major rejected a student's charge that the plan amounted to US imperialism, Chuck countered with an alternate concept, "messianic hegemonism," which he said would likely turn out to be even more dangerous. (A detailed account of this debate, and the major points on both sides, is available at the Quaker House website. Look for the link to "Pineland Journal.")

Ft. Bragg Domestic Murders: An Update

The shocking series of family homicides at Ft. Bragg last summer, described in our last newsletter, has largely faded from the news. But its impact is still being felt; and there is considerable spin being applied to the aftermath.

Two sharply differing reports about the homicides were issued in the late fall. One came from a field investigation by an Army medical team. The other was a lengthy, probing piece in *Vanity Fair* magazine's December issue.

The Army report's authors went out of their way to insist to the press that an anti-malarial drug called Lariam, given routinely to soldiers overseas and recently linked to numerous cases of violence, psychosis and suicide, was not a culprit in any of these cases, blaming "family stress" instead. This is curious because the actual report, which few reporters apparently read, does not at all exculpate this drug, which at least two of the killers had been taking.

By contrast, *Vanity Fair*'s Maureen Orth, an ace investigative reporter, dug up plenty of information pointing to Lariam's side effects as a likely factor in at least one of the homicides—evidence the Army team did not even look for. Why, one wonders, was the Army team so anxious to "clear" Lariam, especially when this conclusion was not supported by their own evidence?

Drugs aside, however, both reports painstakingly documented in their different ways the destructive impact of much of the army environment on families and marriages.

The military's epidemic of family abuse may have been cloaked for now by the shadows of war, but this issue has not gone away—and we have not forgotten it.

The Ft. Bragg Public Affairs Office will email or FAX copies of the Army report; call: 910-396-5620. The *Vanity Fair* piece is not on the web. But an interview with reporter Maureen Orth about it is at: http://www.aaconsult.com/lariam/lariam_news_35.html There's also a transcript of an Oprah Winfrey show on the Ft. Bragg murders at: http://www.aaconsult.com/lariam/lariam_news_21.html

Letters to Quaker House

[From a GI in Afghanistan, awaiting action on his CO application; we've worked with him for a year.]

Subj: I'm in the land of Canaan, I mean Afghanistan.
Date: 12/xx002 4:00:08 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.com
To: chuckfager@xxx.com

Greetings. I've been here for about a week now. Despite the fact that I was told that I'd be cooking, it seems as though I was misled. Instead, I've been washing pots and pans for the last week. Go figure. Because of the way the water is treated or the harshness of the soap or some combination of the two, my hands already feel as though they are perpetually burning.

Other than that, this place is reminiscent of prison, complete with all the equipment one needs for weightlifting. I won't deny that I have been partaking in this pastime and, if I continue at the rate I'm going, should look like Arnold did in his prime.

It's not all bad though. Being away from everybody and most everything is allowing me to gauge what was meaningful in my life and what was merely superfluous. Silence is very hard to find, for everyone seems as though they're on a constant quest to be distracted.

I spoke to [my wife] on the telephone a few minutes ago. She is racked with a cold, but is glad to be home. [Their 9-month old son] has his two front teeth and, as can be expected, is being spoiled by the family.

This camp could just as well be in Arizona. There are virtually no locals to be seen. We are strongly discouraged from associating with the soldiers from the other country who has soldiers here, which is that pest of Europe, Romania. The higher-ups must be horrified at the prospect that they would sell us vodka, speak a language other than english or spanish, or generally show us that there is another culture in the world that may be just a tad bit different than ours. . . .

From talking to soldiers who have been here for a few months, I was surprised to hear how many are questioning why we are here, and some even voicing criticism at America's motives. Ayotollah Ashcroft's henchmen are probably reading this as I write, so . . . watch out. Anyway, I'm sure 80 percent of it is simply bitterness from being away from home, family and automobile rather than genuine dissent. Perhaps I'm too cynical in my assessment of this.

My allotted half hour is about to end, so I will conclude. I hope all is well. Please give my regards to the meeting or forward this to them. Have a merry consumeress and a happy new year. Really though, take care and have a nice holiday and safe travels.

Yours in the Light,
[Name withheld]

Chuck,

I'm not sure if you were the person who I spoke with several times, over four years ago now when I "left" the military . . . At that time however, I was scared and confused and the Quaker House could not have treated me any better. Your organization helped me to realize that breaking the military's contract did not mean that I'm not a patriot, or that I don't LOVE

my country, or that I'm a criminal. I never took the time to say "thank you," and I truly regret that. I've lived out many of my dreams since cutting my military career short. I never would've been able to do it without your help. So, officially . . . THANK YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART. I hope you can stay afloat, and please keep in touch with me, as I want to help as much as I can.

May your creator's blessings be upon you, and merry Christmas.

Noah Hittner
Fridley, MN

[NOTE: Noah worked with former Director Phil Esmonde.]

Quaker House,

I am writing in hopes that you can provide information, which may help me and others in my situation. I joined the Army in 1994 as a military police officer, a decision I consider to be the largest mistake of my life. However, since I signed the contract I felt obligated to fulfill my obligation. I served on active duty from 4 May 1994 until 3 May 1999, as stated in my contract, and at the end of which I received an honorable discharge. At the completion of my active duty I had a reserve obligation term lasting until 15 March 2002, which has obviously passed and during which time I was never contacted about being re-activated.

In September of this year after receiving many Army letters and publications, about re-enlistment and other junk type mail, I decided to send a letter reminding the army that I was no longer in the military in any form or fashion and would appreciate it if they would stop wasting taxpayer money. I then received a reply stating that I had been involuntarily extended due to operation enduring freedom until 24 December 2031 due to being a military police officer, and was instructed to get a 5 year military physical, which I don't need as it hasn't been 5 years since my last military physical.

I do not plan on taking a physical, signing any military paperwork, or having any involvement in any military activity. As far as I am concerned I fulfilled my contract honorably, and have no further obligations. I am concerned however that in this rush to war with Iraq, I am going to get cornered into service or jail, contract be-damned.

I am seeking any information you can provide on this matter. If I can get my matter resolved, I would also be interested in ways to get this information out especially to high school grads. I think they should know that they are not joining for 3,4, or 5 years, that those joining today are signing up for service "until further notice".

Thank you, and keep up the good work.
Robert Bryan Wiskeman
Fairbanks, AK

[NOTE: We established that YES, the Army CAN extend someone involuntarily, even for 30 years until 2031—the date is NOT a mistake.]

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Winter 2003 – INSIDE:

- ▶ Getting Ready for War
- ▶ Our Staffer Visits Iraq
- ▶ Debating Empire With
the Special Forces
- ▶ A GI CO in Afghanistan
- ▶ **Domestic Murders at**
Ft. Bragg - Update
- ▶ More Quaker Chuckles

Quaker Chuckles

Caring for the Caretakers

A Meeting in the west was considering whether to reestablish its Garden and Flowers Committee, which had languished and withered some years before. When the subject came up for discussion, a former meeting Clerk spoke up: "Oh yes, I remember the Garden committee; I was on it for awhile. That's where they sent you for rehab after too many years on Peace or Ministry and Counsel."

No Great Mystery

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle once visited Philadelphia, traveling, as he thought, incognito. But when he arrived at his lodgings, a small well-kept boarding house, he was greeted by the owner, a man clad in brown named Penington. Penington escorted the guest to his room and then said, "I hope thee enjoys thy stay here, Friend Conan Doyle."

"Why, how did you know my name?" asked the surprised visitor.

"Well, Friend," said Penington, "I have seen in the papers that thee was coming from England to visit America, and thy general appearance told me thee was English. And the ink stain on thy fingers suggested thee is a writer, so I put these together and guessed it was thee."

"That was a remarkable deduction," said the author. "My own Sherlock Holmes could not have done it better. Had you really only that much evidence to go on?"

"Well," Penington admitted, "for the sake of truth I must admit that the name printed on thy luggage also helped."

Speaking to Their Condition

In the midst of a tangled and difficult discussion, a Friends meeting felt pulled toward a controversial decision, even though many obstacles could be foreseen. One member summed up their situation this way: "I think we just have to go forward, and hope that way will open ahead of us at least as fast as it closes in behind us."

His Brother's Keeper

During the Civil War, a young Quaker farm lad, leading a donkey, passed by an army camp. A couple of recruits saw his broadbrim and decided to have some fun. Leaning over the fence, one said, "Hey, what are you holding on to your brother so tight for, sonny?"

"To keep him from running off to join the army," replied the youngster without missing a beat.
