

Quaker House Newsletter

Front-Line Peace Witness Since 1969

September 2002

Fayetteville, NC www.quakerhouse.org

Chuck Fager, Director

Dear Friend,

Have you heard of the Quaker Youth Pilgrimage? Each year an international group of approximately 30 Friends travels together for most of a month. They alternate tours in the US and England. This year they were on this side of the pond, sampling North Carolina's rich Quaker heritage.



Arriving at the Airborne Museum

On July 23, however, this peace-loving group took a bit of a break from the succession of meetinghouses, cemeteries and schools, to a location which might not have occurred to many of them: Fort Bragg, one of the largest American military bases, and a forward post in the "war on terrorism."

Quaker House was their host for this detour, which involved visits to the huge new Airborne & Special Operations Museum downtown, then a brief tour of the post itself, culminating in a stop at the John F. Kennedy chapel by



Security Check at the Gate—Ft. Bragg

the Special Warfare School. Afterward, we gathered at Quaker House for lunch, a spirited discussion of what we had seen, and some relaxation before they reboarded their bus and moved on.

The most weighty moment of the visit came when we entered the JFK chapel on Ft. Bragg. It's decorated with several large stained glass windows celebrating the military, and the Special Forces in particular, including a "Special Forces prayer," calling for divine aid in their mission to "liberate the oppressed."

As they took in these vividly colored, oversized images, the normally animated young Friends fell into a hush. After a few moments of silence, a few began singing softly, a song new to me, asking God's help in being instruments of peace. The singing spread, and the quiet anthem seemed to hang in the air behind us as we filed out.

Feedback afterward indicated that many of the pilgrims found their time in Fayetteville among the more memorable and provocative moments of the trip.

I hope this was so, because the visit was not just a



lark: it's my observation that most Friends live on the other side of a great cultural gulf from the world of the military, and this mutual isolation is unfortunate in all sorts of ways. It's our hope at Quaker House that the summer's pilgrims will be followed by other groups from Friends schools and meetings. Crossing this civilian-military gulf, even briefly, can be an eye-opening and thought-provoking experience, which could only enrich our discernment and witness.

If your meeting, school or other group would like to pay a similar visit to Fayetteville/Ft. Bragg, let us know, and we'll help set it up. Y'all come!

Peace,

Chuck Fager

A Profile of Our GI Counselors

By Chuck Fager



Steve Woolford & Lenore Yarger -Ace GI Counselors

“I’ll get that,” says Lenore Yarger, when the phone rings a few minutes into our conversation.

Its ringing interrupts us again a little later.

The phone in question is the GI Rights Hotline (1-800-394-9544), and it’s a typical day for Lenore and her husband Steve Woolford. Between them they answer most of the GI calls for counseling that come to Quaker House.

In 2001, that phone rang 3128 times.

Central as they are to the Quaker House mission, Steve & Lenore don’t live here. Modern telecommunications make it unnecessary. But their lives are also about more than this ringing phone. They live at the Silk Hope Catholic Worker, about 60-plus miles away. There they offer hospitality to homeless women and children, grow a large garden, and are active in various peace protests.

The radical pacifist Catholic Worker (CW) movement has been important to them since their college days in the late 1980s. At Duke, Lenore was very moved by Dorothy Day’s memoir, *The Long Loneliness*. At Notre Dame, Steve caught the bug during a summer at a CW house in Illinois. This common interest led them to a CW-related house—and each other—in Phoenix Arizona, in the early 1990s.

In 1997 they came to Durham, NC, to be nearer their families, and hoping to start a CW house of their own. “We wanted something big enough to offer hospitality,” Lenore says, “but also rural enough so we could do a large garden.”

“And we needed to be able to afford it,” Steve adds. Silk Hope, in an area beset by the collapse of the Carolina textile industry, fit the bill.

While in Durham, though, they often attended the Friends Meeting there. “We’re Catholics,” Steve notes, “but with a fondness for the Quaker way of worship.” Lenore adds, “We’ve met lots of Quakers through various peace actions.” In one such action Lenore got arrested at Ft. Bragg. And maybe, she muses, it was this that moved Durham Meeting to ask her to be their representative on the Quaker House board.

Lenore was drawn to Quaker House, but found GI counseling more compelling than Board work. “Usually I was on the other side of the fence from the GIs, at protests,” Lenore says, “but I wanted to have a positive form of contact too. So many GIs are victims of military culture, and they’re desperate for helpful contact with someone on the outside.”

Steve agrees: “It’s important to fight injustice in the abstract. But when you can also connect that to an individual human being, and help them out, it’s very rewarding.”

In late 2000, Quaker House Director Phil Esmonde left to return to peace work in Sri Lanka. Lenore and Steve volunteered to keep up with the counseling. But calls kept increasing, and soon were more than they could handle part-time. That December, they asked the Board to put them on contract, to share the counseling load from Silk Hope. The Board agreed, pending the hiring of a new Director.

But that search lasted more than a year. As it continued, Steve & Lenore answered hundreds of calls. Along the way they gained a familiarity with arcane military regulations and procedures that’s rare in this field.

The most frequent complaint? “Easy,” Lenore says. “Lying recruiters.”

Quaker House GI Hotline Calls—Going Up:

YEAR	Total	Monthly Avg.	Increase
1-6/2001	1609	268	-----
1-6/2002	2027	338	26% ▲

Call Totals for June 2001 & 2002

2001 = 209	2002 = 302	44% ▲
------------	------------	-------

CO Calls to GI Hotline, June-August

2001	13 calls
2002	24 calls (85%) ▲

When I accepted the Director’s post late last fall, a big question was: “What happens now with Steve and Lenore?” Traditionally, Quaker house has had a one-person staff, unless the Director had a willing spouse.

But to me, this was a no-brainer: Especially after 9/11, it would be (and has been!) a full-time job just doing the fundraising, outreach and peace education work (along with walk-in counseling) that clearly lay ahead. But the GI Hotline phone was ringing off the hook. It would be crazy to reinvent this wheel, and I’d soon be crazy trying it.

Thus what began as a stopgap now seems like a stroke of genius: a demanding full-time load of GI counseling called for professional quality counselors. We need to keep Steve and Lenore as long as possible.

So that’s what we plan to do. The table above shows that Hotline calls, including CO inquiries, keep increasing; the specter of war makes this look like a trend with legs. What’s not in the table is the continuing need to raise the budget to support all this activity. For that, we look to you.

Reflection: Domestic Murders at Ft. Bragg

There was something surreal about Fayetteville's community meeting on domestic violence on August 21. The mix of victims, civilian and Army professionals were to talk about how to prevent more domestic homicides. We were all there, of course, because seven corpses had been hauled from local homes in the space of five weeks, the deadly result of murders and suicides by military family members.

This bloody outburst brought national media attention, as well it should have. It also aborted the city of Fayetteville's latest PR campaign to change its unhappy "Fayettenam" image. But all this was muted nearly into invisibility that morning. A Colonel Davis, Ft. Bragg's garrison commander, spoke, but his rhetoric was almost as hard to make out as the nametag sewn on his camouflage green uniform.

This was a "great day," he declared, in which to "come together" and "move forward" to increase "awareness" and "outreach" to "people who are hurting." Pausing to praise Fayetteville as an "All-American City," he insisted on "accountability" for people involved in "these situations" as the Army worked for "more productivity" on the "issues at hand."

He could have been talking about diabetes or drunk driving. Only when announcing a newly-scheduled seminar on post did he actually speak the "DV" words, hurrying past them to wrap up with a promise that this was not "a short-term thing." He finished to warm applause.

Most of the rest of the session was carefully focused on domestic violence away from Ft. Bragg, as a statewide problem in North Carolina, and on pleas to get more information for families at risk, about counseling and other services. The oblique character of the event was probably unavoidable; certainly spousal murders are a scourge across the state, occurring almost weekly. But that wasn't why we were there, nor did it explain the gaggle of reporters and TV cameras outside the door collaring anyone willing to call herself a victim or an expert.

Only in the back of the room, little-noticed on a literature table, was there a discordant, more revealing note: a stack of reprints from a newsletter, *Domestic Violence Report*, which presented data on the real issue, the 900-pound guerilla everyone was stepping so carefully around: the epidemic of domestic violence in the US military, and the blatant, chronic inadequacy of its responses.

One speaker could have cut through the fog of phony optimism: Deborah Tucker, who is Co-Chair of a task force on DV that was forced on the Defense Department by Congress in 1999 after earlier searing exposes of "The War At Home" on TV's *60 Minutes* and elsewhere. Tucker's task force has issued two reports which, within reams of carefully modulated bureaucratese, deliver a damning indictment of systematic denial and coverup of rampant family abuse in the military. But Tucker too pulled most of her punches, offering only the mildest of criticisms, carefully wrapped in praise for the good intentions of the Pentagon brass.

As an exercise in Army damage control, the meeting was a success: I watched a uniformed officer shrug and tell a TV reporter that there was nothing special about the recent killings: "They were just an anomaly." And the *Fayetteville Observer's* report dutifully headlined the event with a distinctly upbeat slant, portraying it as somehow marking the turning of the tide. The issue has since been receding from Fayetteville's public consciousness—at least until the next bodies turn up.

Given the institutional and cultural realities here, the meeting probably went as well as could be expected. But what was not said, and has not been acknowledged, is that the real news about this rash of killings and what it represents is—that it really isn't news at all.

In this regard, the experience of the *Fayetteville Observer* is revealing: The *Observer* has the makings of a good paper, but its coverage has a predictably ingrained pro-military bias. Thus its early stories on the killings reflected spoon-fed Army PR, with spokesmen expressing shock, bewilderment and the "just an anomaly" line.

But then something truly anomalous happened: the *Observer's* phones began to ring, and wouldn't stop. On the other end were military

wives, dozens of them, spilling out gruesome tales, not only about beatings and abuse, but of a military culture that, despite PR protestations, remains deeply and systematically indifferent to their plight. The recent killings, these witnesses made plain, were just the bloody, impossible-to-ignore tip of a very large and otherwise submerged iceberg.

This outpouring must have been difficult to listen to, but the reporters, to their credit, paid attention. While the *Observer* still ignores or downplays the plentiful evidence that DV rates are much higher in the military than the civilian population, it chose not to ignore the anguished testimonials of dozens of its local neighbors.

The Army clearly hated that. It works nonstop here and elsewhere to project a wholesome, family-friendly image, for various reasons, not least as an aid to recruiting. And to be sure, many Army families are perfectly normal. But too many are in serious difficulty. Nor is this epidemic confined to "families": the *Army Times* reported on August 19 that there had also been five GI suicides on Ft. Bragg since January. A strong case could be made for adding them to the tally, but this report has not made it into the local press.

And there have been two other spousal killings this year which are likewise not included in the current tally: A female officer at nearby Pope Air Force Base was killed by her estranged husband in front of their children—but that happened in South Carolina; and in January, a woman was stalked and stabbed to death by her ex-husband in broad daylight at a restaurant—but he had been discharged from the Army a few days before, so that case doesn't "count" in their already inadequate statistics.

What accounts for this institutional tolerance of domestic violence? This is the last question the Army brass wants to have to face. And I don't blame them; it's disturbing enough to contemplate even from the outside: After all, the army is the enforcement instrument of the American body politic, that is to say, us. We pay for it, the polls say we admire it, and take pride in its skill at its assigned job of killing people and breaking things in an admittedly dangerous world.

Can we really be surprised when this violence comes home, when what is sown elsewhere is also reaped among the families who live with its professional purveyors?

Deborah Tucker's task force has come up with some constructive ideas; but even if they're adopted by the Pentagon (a big IF in the current macho administration), it isn't clear they'll get to the bottom of this ongoing plague. The more I look into it, the deeper the roots seem to go, far beyond the guarded enclosures of our military bases.

I won't pretend to have a list of ready solutions to this unfolding horror. But there's one thing I am sure of:

It is not an anomaly.

ONLINE RESOURCES

The *Domestic Violence Report* article is at:

http://www.civicsresearchinstitute.com/vi2_military.html

The DOD Task Force reports are at:

<http://www.dtic.mil/domesticviolence/index.htm>

Survivors Take Action Against Abuse By Military Personnel:

<http://www.staaamp.org/>

The Miles Foundation, Service & Advocacy

http://members.aol.com/_ht_a/milesfdn/myhomepage/

Defense Department Site on Domestic Violence:

<http://www.defenselink.mil/specials/domesticviolence/>

Quaker House Newsletter

Front-Line Peace Witness Since 1969

223 Hillside Avenue, Fayetteville NC 28301

www.quakerhouse.org

Address Correction Requested

IN MEMORIAM

All the Victims of 9/11 and its aftermath,
everywhere.

September 2002 – INSIDE:

- ▶ Domestic Murders at Ft. Bragg
- ▶ Quaker Youth Pilgrims at Quaker House
- ▶ A Profile of Our GI Counselors
- ▶ More Quaker Chuckles

Quaker Chuckles

Hanging Around

An elder Friend was once talking with a young non-Quaker who insisted that a bishop was more powerful than a judge.

The reason, the young man explained, was that a judge could only say, “You be hanged,” whereas a bishop could say, “You be damned.”

“I’m not sure I agree with that,” the Quaker responded skeptically. “After all, when a judge says ‘Thee be hanged,’ thee **is** hanged.”

The Friendly Old West

A drunken cowboy charged into a frontier saloon, waving a Colt .45 and yelling, “All right, you mangy varmints, *clear out* and give me some elbow room!”

All the customers fled except for one man wearing a broadbrimmed hat. The cowboy sauntered over to his table and said ominously, “Maybe you didn’t hear me, partner. I said for all the mangy varmints to clear out.”

The other looked up from his glass of soy milk and replied, “Yes, I heard thee, Friend. And I must say, there certainly were a lot of them, weren’t there.”

A View From the Bridge

Awhile back a Washington tourist was standing near the Lincoln Memorial when another visitor to the city pointed out toward the broad Potomac River.

“Look,” he said, “I can see a Quaker swimming in the river!” (Editor’s Note: This was, of course, back when the river was swimmable.)

The first tourist squinted at the speck in the water and asked, “How can you tell it’s a Quaker from this far away?”

“Oh that’s easy, the other answered, “she’s swimming upstream!”

Is Thee Having Fun Yet?

Did thee see the cartoon, in one of those off-beat series, which showed several wide-eyed adolescent Friends gathered around a table, each with a hand stuck inside a container of breakfast cereal bearing a picture of a smiling man wearing a broadbrimmed hat?

It seemed innocuous enough; but the caption read: “Young Quakers feeling their oats.”
