

The following is from the court-martial proceedings of the forty-one CO's in Camp Travis who refused to wear the army uniform. Harry L. Charles, a Quaker and conscientious objector as well, had been transferred out of the company and testified in their defense. The following are excerpts from his testimony.

Questions by the Court:

Q: You have been enjoying the liberties guaranteed by the American Government?

A: I have, sir.

Q: What obligation do you feel that you are under now to protect those guarantees?
(64)

A: Sir, I feel that I am under obligations to serve my country in ways in which I conscientiously can.

Q: Serve it how?

A: In ways which I conscientiously can.

Q: You have enjoyed its protection, have you not?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Now, it is threatened to be overthrown, or to be destroyed, and the masses with it; what obligation do you feel, what moral obligation do you feel you have for the benefits you have enjoyed?

A: As I stated before, I feel that I should perform such constructive work or part that I can.

Q: These liberties are being assailed by a force that will destroy them unless you destroy that force.

A: I base it solely on religious grounds. I fully realize the political significance of the situation, and also the obligations.

Q: Then are you willing to make any sacrifices necessary to protect those liberties?

A: Insofar as I can without a violation of my conscience, sir.

Q: Suppose it comes to a show down of your life or the other fellow's then what do you feel would be your duty?

A: Sir, they will have to take my life.

Q: You would give up before you would fight?

A: I would, sir.

Q: You state you are now wearing the uniform under protest?

A: I am, sir.

Q: I will ask you to look at the clothing those men are wearing back of you (indicating the accused). Where did they get that clothing? Where did that man behind you get that pair of shoes he is wearing?

A: I think it was issued.

Q: If it was issued to him, is it not a part of the United States equipment of uniform? If that is equipment furnished by the government, for government use, is it not a part of the uniform?

A: Sir, I cannot state.

Q: You cannot state?

A: No. I will state the order was read that they should wear the regulation uniform of a soldier on duty.

Q: As I understand a conscientious objector, you do not believe in shedding the blood of a man. In other words, you would not want to go and kill the enemy of this country? Is that right?

A: That is correct.

Q: Would you be willing to help a soldier who had been wounded?

A: Certainly, sir.

Q: Then would you, or do you know whether or not these conscientious objectors would be willing to go into an ambulance company and go out on that No Man's Land and pick up wounded soldiers, without having a firearm, would they be willing to do that?

A: I think they would not do that.

Q: They would not be willing to pick up a wounded soldier and help him?

A: They might if they were civilians, but not as a part of the army service.

Q: If the army is the government, then, it is simply an objection to being a member of the government?

A: No, but being a member of the army.

Q: How is that?

A: No, an objection to being a member of the army.

Q: Well, the army is the government. Do you object, then, to being identified with the government? (66)

A: I had never interpreted the army as being a part of the government.

Q: Upon what do you base your objections to wearing the uniform? You say you are wearing it under protest.

A: It makes me appear as a soldier on regular duty in the Depot Brigade.

Q: Do not soldiers in the Depot Brigade, and other branches of the service, wear the same kind of clothing those men behind you are now wearing?

A: How?

Q: Regular soldiers of the other branches of the service do wear those same kind of clothes these men behind you are wearing?

A: They wear the clothes, with the exception that they wear the hat and hat-cord.

Q: Do you know of any instance where any of these men, the accused, became conscientious objectors after they were drafted into the service?

A: I do not, sir.

Q: How long have you been a member of this particular faith which opposes war?

A: I cannot give an exact date, but considerably between a year and a half and two years. I am a member of the Society of Friends.

Q: Were you a member before the war was declared?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Before the Mexican trouble?

A: I was not.

Q: Before the militia was mobilized on the border were you a conscientious objector?

A: I was not, to the best of my recollection. (67)

Q: I will ask you if that Society of Friends was not organized by Germans, or a society of Germans?

A: No, sir, it is purely an English organization.

Q: Most of these forty-one men are of German descent--these forty-one accused, are they not?

A: To the best of my knowledge they are.

Q: Do you know whether or not a soldier in time of war is permitted to wear any other clothing than soldiers' uniform?

A: I think they are not, sir.

Q: And that uniform which these men are wearing is legalized as a part of our uniform?

A: I don't know, but I understand it is to be used while on certain duty.

Q: If soldiers could wear nothing except the uniform this must be a part of the prescribed uniform?

A: That might be, sir.

Q: And they are, therefore, wearing clothing issued for use in the military service?

A: Sir, may I ask this question? If a man wears the blue clothing in civilian life he would not be arrested as a soldier, but if caught wearing khaki he is arrested.

Q: They are civilians in disguise, then?

A: Yes, sir, civilians in disguise.

Q: Did you not say a while ago you did not think those men would object to serving on the battlefield and aiding the wounded as civilians, but would object to aiding the wounded as soldiers?

A: Yes, sir, that is my understanding of it.

Q: Your religion goes further than the killing of a man, it is against, or will not permit you to help the government in that way, is that it? (68)

A: The belief is this: That if we do not believe in the taking of life that to directly aid in such an organization is only saying that we are not willing to take the dangerous places ourselves; that is what it sounds like when we are willing to serve in another part of the army.

Q: Is that the essence of your doctrine?

A: No, sir.

Q: Is that the sum and substance of your doctrine?

A: No, that is a statement on my part.

Q: You accept it as that?

A: I accept that as part of it, sir.

Q: The bigger part, or the smaller part?

A: Well, the smaller part, because my belief is this, that if I do not believe in taking human life, then to assist in that way I am as guilty in the sight of my Creator by giving my assent to and consent to being a corporate part of such an organization.

Q: You give your consent when you belong to the government, do you not?

A: No, sir. I do not consider myself as belonging to the government, sir; I consider myself as being a part.

Q: Did you ever vote?

A: Yes, sir, but because I vote does not mean that I approve of our policies which might have been carried out.

Q: What did you wear before you wore that uniform, Charles?

A: I wore the blues, the same as these men are wearing.

Q: Did you wear the blues under protest?

A: No, sir.

Q: Why, not?

A: Because I did not consider that I was wearing the uniform. My objection to the uniform is not because it is better made (69) clothing, or made a certain way, but it is because it places me in a false position.

Q: Do you receive any pay from the Government?

A: I do not, sir.

Q: The PROSECUTION: Do these forty-one defendants understand that they can be transferred to the Medical Corps, or to the Quartermaster Corps, or to the Engineering Corps, and that the President of the United States has declared those branches to be non-combatant branches?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: And they have been given that opportunity, and declined?

A: Yes, sir, or I suppose they have.

Q: Is it the belief of a conscientious objector, and a part of their faith that they had rather suffer death than go to war?

A: I believe it is, sir; that is my feeling.

Q: How about killing snakes? Have they any objection to killing snakes?

A: No, sir.

Q: You would not object to killing a snake if it were about to destroy you?

A: Certainly not.

Q: You don't realize the existence of human snakes, though, do you?

A: I do not, sir.

Q: You say your creed also forbids you to go on the battlefield and help save life as well as it forbids your going on the battlefield and helping destroy life?

A: In helping save life as a soldier, yes, sir.

Q: And then you don't believe in saving life or destroying it?

A: Yes, sir, as a soldier. My objection is based on the fact that I do not like the means used to obtain this end, (70) and I consider that to take any part in it is wrong.

Q: The battle is raging in Europe now--take this hypothetical question: suppose it to be possible that you should be transferred to that battle line, and you found there a man mortally wounded, wearing the American uniform, and you recognized him to be an American soldier, would you attempt to give him any relief?

A: I certainly would, sir.

Q: You would?

A: Yes, sir, because I should consider myself as being a soldier, and that would be my duty, and as such I would certainly attempt to give him some relief.

Q: That statement you made, then, that you do not consider it right to help

them as a soldier kind of falls flat?

A: How is that?

Q: You stated awhile ago that you objected to assisting a wounded soldier in the capacity of a soldier?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Then that statement falls down, according to your last answer?

A: I understand the question to say to be put there in the uniform of a soldier.

Q: And the question asked just then was as a soldier, also.

A: (Hesitates; no response.)

Q: Of course, it is immaterial in the case.

(Witness excused.)