

# THEY WOULD HAVE INVITED NAZIS TO DINNER HERE

## Aides at Howard Still Stand Firm on "Good for Evil"

BY SELIG GREENBERG

Five young men who had refused to fight for their country talked about it with unusual candor yesterday afternoon.

The place was the medical library in the administration building of the State Hospital for Mental Diseases, where 65 Mennonites and other conscientious objectors have been working for the past three years under assignment from Selective Service.

The occasion was an informal seminar on the philosophy of non-resistance arranged by Dr. John F. Regan, superintendent of the hospital.

A young woman, one of the 17 wives of Mennonites now living at Howard, also sat in on the interview to represent the woman's point of view.

### Would Ask Nazis to Dinner

Her point of view, it developed, was the same as that of the men, which is best summarized in the following interchange:

**Q.** Just in order to make clear your views, let's assume that this



OBJECTORS: Left to right, Warren Leatherman, Mrs. Jean Yoder, William Keeney, James Shank, Clair Hoffman and Monroe Yoder.

country had been 'invaded by the Germans, that the Nazis had sailed up Narragansett Bay and landed in Rhode Island. Would you have taken up arms in such a case?

**A.** (enthusiastically concurred by all) No. We would have invited them in for dinner.

This answer may sound fantastic, but it wouldn't have if you had sat around the large table in the oak-paneled room with these six people,

heard the deep conviction in their voices and observed the obvious sincerity of their manner.

From the windows of the library could be seen the long rows of buildings housing nearly 3000 men and women whose minds had cracked under the strains of life. At times you disagreed violently with the views of the five men and the woman, but you couldn't help but be impressed by their serene faith in

what they consider the good life and the only way of serving God. Even if their opinions often sounded odd, there was an impressive sanity about their dogmatic views "based on the literal following of the teachings of Christ." These people plainly had the courage of their convictions. They knew they were non-conformists and said they were ready to pay the penalty, even if it should mean giving up their lives.

Only three of those interviewed, the woman and two of the men, were Mennonites. Of the others, one was a Disciple of Christ, another a member of the Church of the Brethren in Christ, and the third an Amish.

None of them smokes, drinks liquor or dances. Their religious objections to war extend even to defense work.

Continued on Page 2, Col. 1.

Mennonites

## MENNONITES

Continued

They said that, if necessary, they would have gone to jail rather than work in a war industry. All were modestly dressed, two in the uniforms of hospital attendants.

The Amish, a gnomic-looking fellow with long hair and piercing eyes, plans to start raising a beard after he's married, in accordance with the custom of his sect. The members of this sect have hooks and eyes instead of buttons on their coats because they regard buttons as too ostentatious.

Sitting in on the interview were Mrs. Jean Yoder of Elkhart, Ind.; James Shank, 26, of Chambersburg, Pa.; and Warren Leatherman, 24, of

Doylestown, Pa., all Mennonites; William Keeney, 23, of Penn Craft, Pa., a Disciple of Christ; Clair Hoffman, 27, of Maytown, Pa., of the Brethren in Christ; and Monroe Yoder, 23, of Sugar Creek, O., the Amish, who is no relation of Mrs. Yoder.

### "Must Love Enemies"

They believe, they said, that it's a sin to kill, that "you must love your enemies and do good to those who hate you" and that "you must differentiate between an evil and the person who commits it."

Leatherman, who until recently served as group leader of the conscientious objectors at the State Hospital but is now attached as co-director of all hospital units under the Mennonite Central Committee of Akron, Pa., the agency in charge of the civilian public service program for the objectors, did much of the talking. He had come to Howard yesterday to take home his wife, who has been employed as a teacher at the Oaklawn School for Girls.

### Try to Win with Good

It was Leatherman who made the statement, fully approved by the others, that he would have invited any invading Nazis in for dinner.

"Not from any collaborationist point of view," Shank interposed, "but in an attempt to win them over with good rather than overcome them with evil."

"You can't overcome evil with evil," said Mrs. Yoder. "Evil has to be overcome with good."

"If you return evil with evil," asserted Keeney, "it becomes an endless cumulative process. Somebody has to reverse the dog-eat-dog process."

In answer to the question as to whether they really believed the Nazis or the Japs could have been won over by kindness to the good way of life, Leatherman said: "If the whole population of England would have had enough faith in God to remain non-resistant, the Germans might have occupied the country but they would never have conquered it."

"And suppose the Nazis had killed everybody, as they came close to doing in some places?" was the next question.

"The testimony of God would have been so great," replied Mrs. Yoder, "that it would have come even to the Nazis."

### Attitude on Atrocities

"In speaking of atrocities," said Shank, "we believe God allows these things. We don't know His purpose."

"Faith in God," remarked Leatherman, "means that you can't always understand why He does those things."

Later he added that he disagreed with the Potsdam decision that the people of the formerly occupied countries should be fed before any food is sent to the Germans and was opposed to any such discrimination against this country's former enemies. The Mennonite Central Committee, he said, was eagerly awaiting Government permission to send relief supplies to Germany.

At one point, after Shank had expostulated his belief in the absolute separation of church and state, he was asked: "What comes first, your church or your country?"

"God comes first," he replied.

In answer to the question as to how it felt not to have fought for their country in its hour of supreme danger while hundreds of thousands of Americans suffered, bled and died, the objectors said they felt they had served God to the best of their ability in an effort to give the rest of the world an example of the good way of life. Far from being ashamed of their wartime role, they emphasized, they now believed more than ever in the principles of non-resistance and in the urgent need for "a transformation of the spirit and a change of heart from selfishness and greed."

### Followed Consciences

"We did as our conscience dictated," said Hoffman, "not knowing what was ahead of us."

"I acted the only way I know how to act," said Yoder. "I couldn't have acted any other way."

In the course of the discussion it developed that Lew Ayres, the film star who served in a non-combat capacity with the Army Medical Corps, is not regarded by the objectors as a conscientious objector in the full sense of the term, because of his army connection. "It makes no difference," observed Keeney, "as to who drinks the whiskey and who pours it out."

After they are discharged and sent home, most of the objectors plan to return to college. One is planning to go into mission work in British East Africa.

Although they are both non-Mennonites, Hoffman and Keeney are, respectively, the group leader and educational director of the conscientious objectors at the State Hospital. The majority of the Howard group are Mennonites, but there are also five members of the Church of Brethren in Christ, four Amish, one Methodist, one Jehovah's Witness, one Disciple of Christ, one Evangelical Reform Church member, and one belonging to the Church of Brethren.

Even the Mennonites at Howard are split into five different sects. The Mennonite Church, it was brought out, has 18 different branches. These sects disagree in matters of practicing their religion, but they are united in believing in "non-resistance, simplicity and non-conformity."