THE TREATMENT OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS DURING WORLD WAR I: Mennonites at Camp Funston

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WITH THE ENTRY of the United States into the first World War, the War Department was confronted with sections of the population that refused to serve in the military forces. These conscientious objectors, whether motivated by religion, conscience, or political considerations, posed a challenge to the nation’s military system. The government had not developed a policy concerning these pacifists before conscription was begun. Like other eligible men, they were inducted and required to report to mobilization camps. This article is a study of the gradual evolution of the War Department’s policy, its effect upon one group of religious objectors, the Mennonites, and the treatment they received at a mobilization camp in Kansas, Camp Funston.

World War I was transformed into a crusade to “make the world safe for democracy.” Refusal to participate in such a lofty struggle seemed to undermine this militant national ideology. Patriots were infuriated by the pacifists’ unwillingness to defend liberty abroad. This hostility threatened to endanger liberty at home as vigilante violence and social isolation met “slackers” who objected to the war, would not contribute to the Red Cross, or refused to subscribe to liberty loans. One measure of the success of this pressure was the Socialist party’s support for America’s entry into the war. There remained, however, opponents to the war, political and religious objectors, though few in number, who continued their opposition.¹

Among the religious objectors, the Mennonites were prominent. The pacifism of Mennonites was especially viewed with suspicion because of their German background, use of the German language, and their newspapers’ initial support for the German war effort. Nu-

Numerous Kansas citizens proved their patriotic fervor by periodically reporting on the activities of these “German sympathizers” to U.S. Attorney Fred Robertson.2

It was not until conscription began, however, that the United States was required to develop a policy relating to conscientious objection. That policy evolved slowly and was not complete until June, 1918. Until that time, the War Department gave little substantive instruction to commanders concerning the treatment of pacifists. What little they gave was frustrating for the officers: orders forbade disciplinary action against the objectors. Most officers tried to maintain order, require performance of duty, and prevent the defection of other soldiers to the ranks of objectors without blatantly defying the War Department. Under these conditions, treatment of the pacifists varied greatly among camps.

The treatment of conscientious objectors at Camp Funston reflected the confusion, ignorance, prejudice, and frustration of the officers. They received little guidance in dealing with this problem, for which they had received no training. To these officers, objectors were merely a threat to be contained. The camp commander, Maj. Gen. Leonard Wood, shared these sentiments, and could give little constructive guidance. Those who understood the scruples of the objectors and sympathized with the needs of the army, tried to juggle two conflicting sets of requirements. Eventually the War Department found a solution which led to more satisfactory treatment of pacifists during World War II, but through most of the period under discussion the officers’ dilemma could be summarized in the words of Wood’s chief of staff, Lt. Col. C. E. Kilbourne, in a letter to the Mennonite minister, Aaron Louckes,“. . . I have been so embarrassed by my inability so to govern events in this camp as to reconcile the claims of your people with my duty to the government. . .”3

While the War Department’s policies were widely criticized at the time as too lenient,
recent authors have concentrated on the negative aspects of life in camp. Abuses have been cited and nefarious designs ascribed to Secretary of War Newton Baker. At Camp Funston, pressure did exist to change the pacifists' minds, and instances of physical violence occurred. Still, overall it seems that the Mennonite conscientious objectors were treated relatively well. Two reservations must be noted, however. First, political objectors and the Hutterites, a small religious group distinct from the Mennonites in their communistic way of life, received generally worse treatment than did the Mennonites. Second, subjective definitions of abuse differed. What to an officer was a routine tap with his riding crop was viewed by one who eschewed physical violence as abuse. While it is not possible to deny that what the objectors perceived was indeed mistreatment, its severity must be considered. The nature of evidence pertaining to abuse must be considered in assessing the extent of ill-treatment. Investigations were carried out and reports made by military officials, some of whom were unsympathetic to the Mennonites; reports are also available from Mennonite sources. The biases in both types of evidence have been taken into consideration in this study. Finally, it is important to note that the mistreatment which did occur was in disregard of the national policy, which was vague, and was the result of local disregard for that policy or of the extension of popular hostility into the camp.

The Mennonites broke from the Swiss Protestant church in the 16th century. Advocates of adult baptism, they rejected the state church, used the Bible as their sole source of doctrine, and taught nonresistance. Persecuted for their beliefs, the Mennonites had migrated to Germany, Russia, and the Netherlands. Although they began to arrive in America in 1663, most of them immigrated after Russia suspended their exemption from military duty in 1873.

Most Kansas Mennonites arrived in the Middle West in the 1870's and 1880's. They settled in the rural areas of McPherson,

Marion, Harvey, and Reno counties, and engaged primarily in agriculture. By the advent of the first World War, 11 distinct sects were to be found in Kansas, which differed primarily in their approach to modernization. Although groups like the Old Amish dressed in 19th-century European garb and forbade technological change, the General Conference group was hardly distinguishable from their Protestant neighbors except by their pacifism and sometimes their German language, which had been retained despite migrations. One author has shown that the less acculturated groups were more adamant in their refusal to serve in the war.

Nonresistance is a fundamental tenet of the Mennonite faith. Literally interpreting the Gospel admonition to forsake violence, Mennonites refuse to fight for either national or personal defense. When struck, their defensive


5. Parish, Kansas Mennonites During World War I, p. 45.
One official policy announced in September, 1917, allowed conscientious objectors to wear civilian clothes in camp; and as seen in this photograph, some Mennonites chose not to wear military uniforms. Further definition of policy concerning noncombatant service was not given by the President, however, until March, 1918, and other treatment of religious objectors had to be based on local policy. Photograph reproduced courtesy of the Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton.

response must not be physical force. To maintain this absolute pacifism, the Mennonites have settled wherever they were assured of exemption from military duties. World War I was the first time that Mennonites faced decisions on the nature of their participation. In the past they had emigrated when faced with military service. Few fought during the revolution in America. The first widespread conscription in the United States, during the Civil War, was avoidable through payment for a substitute. When legislation was passed in 1917 to raise an American army, circumstance and optimism deluded them about the nature of their promised exemption.

The selective service legislation of May, 1917, was vague in relation to conscientious objectors. It stated that persons belonging before May, 1917, to a church which prohibited the bearing of arms were exempt from military service, except service "that the President shall declare to be noncombatant." Mennonite leaders feared that their exemption had been compromised, and sought reassurance from the War Department. Secretary of War Newton Baker, although affirming the intention not to betray religious scruples, would not specify what "noncombatant service" would be. In the face of this, a few Mennonites emigrated. Most seemed certain that what they saw as previous promises would be fulfilled. Some felt that they belonged here, and would stay and suffer the consequences of their pacifism. Many believed that noncombatant service would be under civilian direction. Most important, by refusing to define what would be required of members of the historic peace churches, the War Department did not permit the mobilization of protest. The Mennonites could hardly

6. Generalizations on nonresistance have been taken from Hantzler, Mennonites in the World War, and Cov Franklin Herschberger, War, Peace and Nonresistance (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1969).


8. A discussion of the impossibility of accepting this interpretation can be found in a memorandum from the acting judge advocate general of May 18, 1917, "Records of the Adjutant General," Record Group 407, National Archives. Copies at the Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College.
reject undefined noncombatant service. Instead, they awaited definition, which was not to come for 10 months.

Meanwhile, Mennonite leaders felt persuaded to comply with the act. On September 1, 1917, a committee from the General Conference telegraphed fellow ministers after their interview with Secretary Baker. They reassured their colleagues that no Mennonite would have to violate his conscience, and advised men to go to the mobilization camps and inform the officers of their religious scruples. There they would be put into detention camps, not forced to drill or to wear army uniforms.

There is no evidence of Mennonites refusing to register for the draft on June 5, 1917. No prohibition existed against registration, and Mennonites, accepting the need for government, complied with the laws as long as they were able. Those opposed to combat were furnished certificates of exemption from their local draft boards. Beginning with the first increment on September 5, 1917, Mennonites were called up. They were transported by train to the mobilization camps. For many young Mennonites this was their first time away from their communities. Their parents and ministers left behind, they were required individually to define nonresistance as it related to their daily tasks. Although the prohibition against violence needed little elucidation, the prohibition against war left room for dispute. Which support services were acceptable? Such questions had to be resolved by each recruit, and the remarkable diversity of responses confused their officers.

CAMP FUNSTON had been hastily constructed during the summer of 1917 to house the conscripts which were to form America’s army. It was barely complete by the time the first groups arrived. Located in north-central Kansas, on the Fort Riley military reservation, it was to house three separate units: the 89th division; part of the black 92d division; and the autonomous 164th depot brigade. Maj. Gen. Leonard Wood was commander of the camp. Many of his officers were products of the intensive officers’ training course which he

For many young Mennonites, military service was their first time away from their communities. Their parents and ministers left behind, they were required individually to define nonresistance, and the remarkable diversity of their responses confused their officers. The Mennonite draftees pictured here are on an uphill hike north of Camp Funston. Some of the men were persuaded to carry rocks for “exercise,” but stopped this activity when they learned the rocks would be used to build a road. Photograph reproduced courtesy of the Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton.
Officers at Camp Funston were concerned that the pacifism of the conscientious objectors would appear attractive to other soldiers and would undermine army discipline. A group of Mennonite draftees are pictured at right singing hymns at an informal service. Below, a group of the men are shown at Sunday morning worship at Camp Funston. Photographs reproduced courtesy of the Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton.

had previously developed. Conscripts were processed upon their arrival at camp. Sanitary precautions were exercised: the men were required to surrender their clothing and shower immediately. Processing included physical examination, completion of papers, and assignment to units. Uniforms were to be issued, but since they were not yet available, General Wood decided to issue everyone blue overalls. 10

Some of the Mennonites decided before or during this initial processing that, although they would not serve as combat personnel, they could provide other service. Many accepted assignments to work in the hospital at Fort Riley, in the kitchen, or in the quartermaster corps. In most respects these recruits were indistinguishable from others in their units. They were given furloughs, permitted visitors, and felt little hostility from their fellows. Indeed, some later joined the American Legion. 11 Since they were inconspicuous, required no

10. Water heaters and the heating system were not installed until late in the fall. Mennonites frequently referred to icy showers as "soups." The division historian considered that this "icy bath in the small hours of the cool nights of early fall was a splendid test of the qualities of the embryo soldiers."—George H. English, Jr., History of the 35th Division, U.S.A. (n.p.: War Society of the 35th Division, 1920), p. 23.

special treatment, and were little threat to the military system, these noncombatants and the few Mennonites who accepted regular combatant service will be excluded from the discussion of the treatment of conscientious objectors.

All conscientious objectors were initially scattered among many units. Late in September, it was decided to segregate those who would not perform noncombatant duties. Unit commanders were ordered to submit the names of objectors in their command, who were then transferred to the 164th depot brigade. By October 9, 1917, 82 objectors were assigned there, and at least 30 more were expected in the near future.

The War Department hoped to develop its policy on conscientious objectors from experiences in the mobilization camps. Ignoring urgent requests from General Wood and others for a comprehensive policy, it constantly demanded information from the camps on the success of their programs. Officers at Camp Funston had little to go on. From the exemption clause, they knew that the Mennonites who had been baptized before May, 1917, did not have to serve in combat units. They did have to perform whatever President Wilson defined as noncombatant service, but Wilson would not give any hints. On September 24 Baker declared that they did not have to wear uniforms. All other treatment had to be based on local policy, bias, imagination, and pragmatism.

Officers assumed that drafted men were supposed to perform tasks, for it was inconceivable to permit these men to be idle. Therefore, attempts were made to enforce participation of the conscientious objectors. Only 16 days after the first group arrived, Col. James H. Reeves of the 353d infantry regiment reported his tactics for enforcing work and discipline. While most pacifists were willing to perform "any other service" which did not require bearing arms, one member of the Church of the Brethren refused to do anything. He was denied food until he helped prepare it in the company kitchen. This private assisted in the kitchen, and General Wood approved this method.

On September 25 the division headquarters outlined its treatment to date of the conscientious objectors. Objectors were transferred to the training battalion of the 164th depot brigade pending definition of their duties. Wood suggested the medical corps, the quartermaster corps, or the fire department. Those who claimed membership in a pacifist group were being classed together, even if they had not yet presented credentials. Finally, the only duties being required of them were the care of their beds, clothing, and other equipment; camp maintenance and work in the kitchen; and sufficient military courtesy to avoid reprimands.

On October 10, 1917, the War Department endorsed for general application the policy that had been implemented by Gen. J. Franklin Bell at Camp Upton. Essentially, the goal was to make conscientious objectors disappear by treating them well, exposing them to the excitement, patriotism, and esprit de corps of the army, and by ignoring their objections. Commanders were ordered to segregate the pacifists and give them instructors who could handle them with "tact and consideration." Questions were to be answered fully and frankly, but objections were to be "quietly ignored." They were not to be treated as violating military laws or punished for refusing to work. In one division, some objectors had "renounced their original objections to military service and voluntarily offered to give their best efforts to the service of the United States as soldiers" after this treatment.

General Bell's policy did not work at Camp Funston. The Mennonites' sincerity precluded their conversion, and the officers, angry at this undermining of military discipline, were frustrated by their lack of recourse. Intent upon having their authority respected and not permitting idleness, the officers violated the spirit of the order while its letter was followed.

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12. Reports by unit commanders showed 23 in 353d infantry, one in 354th infantry, 13 in 355th infantry, three in 355d machine gun battalion, two in 340th machine gun battalion, and two in 314th engineers; commanders' reports to General Wood, September 25-28, 1917, Record Group 93, National Archives.
13. General Wood to the adjutant general, October 18, 1917; Headquarters 164th depot brigade to chief of staff, October 9, 1917, 46d.
14. Easby-Smith, Statement Concerning the Treatment, p. 36.
15. Commander, 352d infantry, to General Wood, September 21, 1917, Wood to the adjutant general, September 24, 1917, Record Group 93, National Archives.
16. Report from 88th division headquarters to the adjutant general, September 25, 1917, 46d.
17. Easby-Smith, Statement Concerning the Treatment, p. 38. On December 10, 1917, these instructions were also applied to those having "personal scruples against war," ibid., p. 39.
18. Assistant Secretary of War F. P. Keppel suggests this in his statement to the Secretary of War, ibid., p. 8.
Like many of their countrymen, these officers failed to understand pacifism as anything other than shirking duty to the country, cowardice, or assisting the enemy. The Mennonites' German origin exacerbated this intolerance. Colonel Reeves observed that all of his objectors were German, except Pvt. Noah Leatherman, who "claimed to be French but looked German." Maj. S. M. Williams, the camp executive officer, made the connection even clearer, claiming that many relatives of the objectors, "nearly all of whom are of German descent," had made trouble by "spreading conscientious objector propaganda, which is nothing but German propaganda." References to the subversive role of the pacifists abound in the officers' reports. The lack of specific regulations and orders in the program was anathema to military minds that craved rules. Demands were continually made by commissioned and noncommissioned officers for definition of the exempted sects and the work which could be required. Instead of seeing their role as tolerant mentors enlightening the unbelievers, the officers at Camp Funston concentrated upon daily chores and maintenance of authority. They feared that the pacifist alternative might appear attractive to others given the rigor and hardship of training and war. Such a development would undermine both the military and the country.

Following the War Department's confidential order of October 10, all objectors who refused to be assigned to noncombatant positions were transferred to the Department of Sanitation under Camp Funston's quartermaster, Jacob Frank. They were housed in barracks and ate in the regular dining hall. At the beginning of this period, the pacifists worked with civilians collecting the camp's trash. Many worked only under protest while awaiting the official definition of what they would be required to do. After a while, the civilians were dismissed, which must have changed the character of this duty in the objectors' eyes. Soon thereafter, they heard of a letter from one of their officers asserting that this sanitation duty was essential to the running of the camp. It became apparent to some of the objectors that they were violating the prohibition against helping the war effort. "So then we saw what we were into, we was just a part of the military and in the department of sanitation." The 13 who refused further sanitation work, and others who would later stop cooperating, had to decide what other service they would provide. Most cleaned up around their barracks, but refused to do camp police outside their own area. Some accepted duties at the Young Men's (or Young Women's) Christian Association, and some cooked for their fellow objectors.

Hostility toward the Mennonites, prevalent in their civilian communities, was also present in the mobilization camp. Although the Mennonites interviewed differed in their descriptions of the animosity they encountered, on occasion resentment flared into violence. During their initial processing they encountered kicks, stabs with a pen, yellow paint, or attempted humiliation, usually ended by the intervention of an officer. A serious incident occurred on Sunday, October 14, 1917, which was investigated by the camp authorities. Since it was their Sabbath, five Mennonites refused to work. When they did not appear, men in the sanitation unit picked them up at their barracks and transported them by truck to the reporting area. There they refused to haul trash. The lieutenant in charge assigned three sergeants and one private to march them to their quarters and confine them there. En route, the soldiers, angered by the objectors' refusal to work and their "unpatriotic attitude," attacked the Mennonites. Although reports differ on the extent of the physical attack and the way it ended, they confirm that the Mennonites were repeatedly struck. Although

19. Commander, 353d infantry, to General Wood, September 21, 1917, Record Group 595, National Archives.
20. S. M. Williams to Governor Capper, October 3, 1918, ibid.
21. Captain Negretto to Director, Military Intelligence, January 20, 1918, War Department, Military Intelligence Division, Record Group 152, National Archives. Copies at the Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College. Diary of Leonard Wood, entry for December 1, 1918, manuscript division, Library of Congress. Copies at the Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College. R. K. Spiller, judge advocate, to camp executive officer, August 25, 1915, Record Group 936, National Archives. In response, the War Department claimed that it was awaiting reports of the total number of objectors who would be indoctrinated in the first increment — War Department Chief of Staff to the adjutant general, November 22, 1917, Record Group 407, National Archives.
22. Interviews with Noah Leatherman and John Andres, "Showalter Collection.
23. Those interviewed differed greatly on the extent and origin of this hostility, some reporting none, others a great deal from either soldiers or noncommissioned officers. See interviews with Harry Graber, David Beachy, and David Krekhoff, ibid.
Conscientious objectors were initially scattered among many units at Camp Funston, but eventually were gathered together into one company. At left the men have packed their gear to move to other quarters. Below is one of the barracks where they were later housed. The three men at the left in the picture are peeling potatoes. Photographs reproduced courtesy of the Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton.

the investigation asserted that the commissioned officers had no knowledge of the assault and ordered that the objectors not be molested, at least one of the victims suspected their acquiescence. The investigator recommended courts-martial for all four offenders. 24

In explaining this harassment, General Wood told the adjutant general that strong resentment existed in "a large portion of the command" against the conscientious objectors, and contempt and hostility were present because of their attitude and refusal to work. Although he tried to keep this in abeyance and insure them from attacks, occasionally these did occur. Wood's own biases are apparent in his list of the pacifists' offensive characteristics: attitude, uncleanliness, German language, and opposition to the war. The commander promised, however, that reports of abuse would be investigated and those guilty would be punished. An extra barracks would be set aside for the objectors who would not work pending the decision as to what services they would be required to perform. If it proved necessary, he would surround it with a fence.

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24. Interview with Fred Schroeder, ibid. Telegram from Adj. Gen. H. P. McCain to General Wood, October 22, 1917, report of investigation from division inspector to General Wood, October 27, 1917, telegram from Kilbourne to the adjutant general, October 27, 1917, Record Group 259, National Archives. An investigation was also conducted into attacks upon Hutterites, see report of November 6, 1917, and testimony of the victims, ibid.
and refuse to admit anyone except objectors, officers, and ministers. 25

Conscientious objectors were a problem for General Wood not only because they required special treatment, but also because they threatened morale. General Wood and his officers feared mass defection to the ranks of the pacifists unless measures were taken to make their situation unattractive. When some pacifists refused to work, he sent an urgent telegram to the adjutant general requesting an immediate decision that sanitation was proper noncombatant service. Wood wanted to court-martial these men for their refusal, stating that “otherwise their presence in camp will become a serious menace to the discipline of the command.” Strong action, he felt, was necessary immediately to remedy this intolerable situation. “Time has arrived when prompt and strong action should be taken. If definition of nonmilitary duty can be furnish[ed] me this situation can be cleared in twenty-four hours.” 26 Four days later, he again demanded definition of noncombatant duty, warning of the danger of temporizing. In the present situation, since no one knew the rights and duties of the objectors, it was impossible to deal “justly” with the men. Wood worried about the precedent being set. The present situation “serves morally to put a premium upon cowardice and disloyalty.” He was concerned that others who didn’t want the “dangers and discomforts” of war would follow the pacifists’ lead, which would seriously impair the future needs of the country. 27

Lt. C. C. Ray, who was in charge of the conscientious objectors from November 23, used imaginative measures in order to prevent widespread defection of soldiers to the conscientious objectors, and of the working objectors to those who would not cooperate. Those who would not work were ordered to stand outside while the others loaded the sanitation trucks. A complaint by the National Civil Liberties Union was filed against this practice, and an investigation followed. Lieutenant Ray denied that his method was punishment. Rather, it was necessary so that the others would not become angry at their peers being allowed to stay on their bunks all day, and a general strike ensued. There was no place yet to segregate the nonworkers. In any case, they were still better off than those who worked on the trucks, since they could enter the steamheated toilet whenever they became cold. He also cited sanitary reasons for refusing to let these men remain in their barracks all day, and claimed that he had ordered the nonworkers to receive only two meals daily in order to keep them fit. Ray denied ever having been informed of the confidential order of October 10 requiring tolerant treatment of the pacifists. He had been told only not to punish them for violating rules. In response both to abuse and Ray’s desire to segregate workers and nonworkers, the stockade was completed to house those refusing sanitation duty. 28

Fears of increased noncompliance seem to have some foundation in reality. The number of men refusing to work increased throughout this period. During the investigation, Ray stated that 87 of his 140 men worked on sanitation trucks and only five refused all work, including maintenance of the camp and kitchen duty. By January 28, 1918, 21 out of 151 men refused all work, and only 60 did sanitation. On March 4 the camp quartermaster claimed that of 149 men, 119 refused all work. 29

Various explanations were proposed for the increase of those not cooperating. Most prevalent were complaints about the role of the Mennonite clergy. Wood did not approve of the segregation of the pacifists, because they were “singularly susceptible to influence of their priests.” He complained that some who received passes for religious services “used this pass to foment trouble in the camp.” “Priests” had tried to “secure converts to their faith.” Ministers wrote letters of complaint to the adjutant general and Third Assist. Sec. of War F. P. Keppel, to whom Wood explained that everyone who met the intelligence officer’s qualifications of loyalty was permitted to visit the objectors. Mennonites continually

25. General Wood to the adjutant general, November 13, 1917, ibid.
26. Ibid., October 11, 14, 1917.
27. Ibid., October 18, 1917.
29. Investigation interviews, January 14, 1918, camp quartermaster to General Wood, January 28, 1918, camp quartermaster to the acting quartermaster general, March 4, 1918, Record Group 393, National Archives. Report from 89th division headquarters to the adjutant general, January 23, 1918, Record Group 407, National Archives.
stated in the interviews that visitors were not permitted. 30

Subversive literature was also a factor, according to Capt. Eugene C. Brisbin of the provost marshal's office. Clippings from the Gospel Messenger and similar literature were distributed in camp, which "caused a marked increase in the number of so-called conscientious objectors." 31 The War Department itself was suspected of complicity in the behavior of the objectors. One intelligence officer noted that the pacifists received War Department orders concerning treatment of the pacifists, sometimes in advance of their official receipt. Lieutenant Ray claimed that the objectors had shown him a War Department order not to punish them for refusing to work, but that he was uncertain of its authenticity. One of the Mennonites claimed that they were indeed aware of policy changes through correspondence with Secretary Keppel. Keppel instigated investigations of alleged mistreatment, and often sent the reports of those investigations to the inquiring party. 32

More important than any of these, and not considered by these officers, was the growing feeling of betrayal held by the objectors. Having patiently waited for a definition of what would be required of them, having worked under protest for a military system which was anathema to their principles of nonresistance, the Mennonites were frustrated that a definition was not forthcoming and suspected that the unacceptable status quo would be maintained indefinitely. They quit working to protest the situation which was untenable for the long term.

On March 23, 1918, the President defined noncombatant service. This was ultimately only another intermediate step in the evolution of the War Department's policy on conscientious objection. The definition was inadequate at the time it was given, since many pacifists had previously expressed their refusal to accept noncombatant service within the military. 33 According to the President's declaration, service in the medical corps both in the United States and Europe, service in the quartermaster corps in the United States and in the rear of operations in Europe, and engineer service in the United States and the rear of operations in Europe, were defined to be noncombatant. In the same declaration which defined this service and the method to effect transfers, the President acknowledged the limitations of his definition. The third paragraph required monthly reports concerning "all persons . . . who profess religious or other conscientious scruples as above described and


33. Quaker leaders had specified that noncombatant service must be under civilian direction. Two Hutterite ministers and their lawyer had expressed the same opinion in an interview with Major Howland, camp executive officer. Mennonite opinion was divided. See S. T. Ansell, acting judge advocate general, to Baker, May 18, 1917, interview of F. D. Wicks, Christian Walden, and Joseph Kleinsasser, September 23, 1917, Record Group 407, National Archives.
who have been unwilling to accept, by reason of such scruples, assignment to noncombatant military service as above defined. . . . . Those unwilling to accept assignment were to be segregated, placed under a qualified and tactful officer, who would “impose no hardship of any kind.” Courts-martial were permitted for cases where objectors “fail or refuse to comply with lawful orders by reason of alleged or other conscientious scruples,” but these were subject to review. It appears that the War Department tried to remedy the ambiguous situation by disposing of as many cases as possible. Those whom it expected to reject the new duties were to await further directions, while the department assessed the scope of continued objections.

At Camp Funston 64 objectors had accepted transfers to noncombatant duties by June 15, 1918, three months after the declaration. The others, 100 by that date, were transferred from the Department of Camp Utilities back to the 164th depot brigade under Capt. F. J. Kintz to await the department’s further instructions.

For the remaining pacifists and their officers, the President’s declaration altered the situation little. Objectors were still not to be punished for refusing to work, and could not be required to accept noncombatant duty. That this situation was difficult for officers is apparent in the necessity of issuing a statement on April 18, 1918, reiterating the prohibition of punishment for those refusing service. Discipline remained unenforceable. Worse, officers did not understand why obviously nonviolent service was rejected by these pacifists, ascribing to them both subversive motives and personal defects. Officers at Camp Funston tried constantly to ascertain which duties were considered acceptable. Confused by the wide divergence in the objectors’ willingness to cooperate, and intent upon achieving discipline, the officers verbally questioned the objectors and tested the limits of their scruples. Menial chores were commanded: moving rocks, cleaning barracks, cutting weeds. When the pacifists cooperated, the scope was enlarged: making a road, cleaning others’ barracks, cutting all the weeds in camp, caring for horses. In Henry Cooper’s words, . . . it came to the place where some of those things we had to refuse because we saw it was just leading from one thing to another, a little bit more along the military activity or things that had to be done for the military. . . .” 37

H. E. Dahl agreed, “In World War I your trouble was if you started to work and you did this. Then they would say if you can do this why can’t you do that. You are taking part, why make a choice of what [to] do.” 38

When the demands were increased, the objectors had to make arbitrary determinations of when to stop cooperating. Their lack of uniformity confused and angered many officers, who could not perceive any rational basis for the decisions. During November, 1918, eight men who had previously cooperated were arrested for willful disobedience to an officer after refusing to move rocks to make a road from their quarters to the kitchen. Since they had been recommended for furlough, the explanation of their guilt given by the investigator is questionable. Nonetheless, they were tried, found guilty, and imprisoned at Fort Leavenworth. 39

Some officers believed that agitators, mostly socialists, were influencing the religious objectors in their decisions not to work. As early as March 11, 1918, the War Department issued an order urging the separation of political and religious objectors. This segregation was inadequate, and there was still no recourse to punishment. On April 27, 1918, the adjutant general issued instructions that men whose attitude is “sullen and defiant,” whose “sincerity is questioned,” or who are “active in propaganda” should be promptly court-martialed. Although previous orders forbidding punishment for refusal to work were to remain in force, this new order would permit trial for a variety of offenses interpreted to indicate these attitudes. This order was still vague, however, as to leave questionable what constituted a punishable offense. 40

34. Eastby-Smith, Statement Concerning the Treatment, p. 40.
35. Kintz to General Wood, June 15, 1918, Record Group 93, National Archives.
36. Eastby-Smith, Statement Concerning the Treatment, p. 41.
37. Interview with Henry Cooper, “Showalter Collection.”
38. Interview with H. E. Dahl. ibid. See, also, interviews with Ford Schroeder and Henry Fast. Kilbourne to the adjutant general, October 14, 1917, Record Group 93, National Archives.
39. Kleinsasser to Keppel, November 25, December 24, 1918, investigation report, December 10, 1918, Record Group 407, National Archives.
40. Eastby-Smith, Statement Concerning the Treatment, pp. 39, 42-43.
Through its efforts to accommodate a small group of conscientious objectors in World War I, the War Department gradually evolved a policy acceptable to religious pacifists. Its long course of trial and error led to more favorable treatment of objectors in subsequent wars. Animosity to the Mennonites at Camp Funston was apparent among officers, other soldiers, and the public, but systematic abuse did not exist at the camp. At the end of the war, conscientious objectors were discharged gradually, and the process was slow. By March 12, 1919, 224 noncombatants were still at Camp Funston. This photograph of men at work near the “First Capitol of Kansas,” Fort Riley, is reproduced courtesy of the Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton.

Confusion was thus not dissipated by the long-awaited definition of noncombatant service. Officers had been anticipating a definitive list of activities to be required on the threat of disciplinary action. What they received instead was a suggested list of activities not binding on the objectors. The eventual solution for handling the conscientious objectors ultimately did not come from the War Department, but rather from congress.

On March 16, 1918, the furlough law had been enacted to relieve the agricultural labor shortage. According to this legislation the secretary of war could use his discretion to furlough soldiers, upon their voluntary application, for agricultural or industrial pursuits. It is doubtful that this act was intended to solve the problem of the objectors. Assistant Secretary of War Keppel, who was in charge of affairs relating to conscientious objectors, first heard of the act on May 15, 1918. Although he was hopeful of its potential for the pacifists, the applicability of the law to the objectors was doubtful. Indeed, the acting judge advocate general, James Mayes, claimed that to use the Act of March 16, 1918, as a means of enabling so-called conscientious objectors to evade their statutory obligations would be to violate its spirit, and to furlough them as a mere subterfuge for exempting them from noncombatant military service would be plainly illegal.

Despite this advice, the secretary of war decided to furlough the remaining pacifists. Since their work would not be under military direction, they should easily accept such assignments. It would, moreover, free combat personnel for conducting the war. In his order

41. Keppel to the adjutant general, May 15, 1918, Record Group 407, National Archives.
42. “Memorandum for the Third Assistant Secretary of War,” from Mayes, May 31, 1918, ibid.
of June 1, 1918, Secretary Baker outlined a satisfactory policy for the treatment of conscientious objectors. A board of inquiry was established to assess the sincerity of the objectors. This board would interview each objector and recommend for noncombatant service those sincere in their objections to combatant service; and for farm furlough those who were sincere in their objections to both combatant and noncombatant service. The furlough program was to be administered jointly through the Departments of Agriculture and War, and volunteers would be supplied to those farms requiring assistance. Reports on their performance were required monthly, and the furlough would be terminated if the work was unacceptable. Although the employer would be required to pay the prevailing wage for labor in his area, each worker would receive only a private's pay (one dollar daily and subsistence), the difference would be donated to the Red Cross. In some cases, furloughs were also granted for industry and the Friends Reconstruction Unit in France. While waiting to appear before the board of inquiry, each man would be treated according to previous instructions. Public health measures were to be enforced, and those declining military duties were to prepare their own food, and were not to be required to bear arms or wear uniforms. They would not be punished for refusal to work.

Initially, all objectors were to be transferred to Fort Leavenworth for examination. The board eventually interviewed objectors at various camps. Those at Camp Funston were transferred to Camp Dodge, Iowa, to see the board of inquiry in July, 1918. Nationally, roughly 85 percent of those interviewed, 1,500 men, were recommended for furloughs. Since there was only a short time between the creation of the new system and the end of the war, some of those to be furloughed remained in the camps awaiting their transfers when the armistice was signed.

After the end of the war, conscientious objectors were discharged gradually. Those on furlough had to await arrangement between the employer and the department. Action on applications for discharge of those assigned to duty was to be the same as for any other enlisted man. Apparently this process was slow, for by March 12, 1919, 224 noncombatants were still at Camp Funston. Those not yet assigned to duty were eligible for discharge, unless they had not yet been interviewed by the board of inquiry, which arrived at the camp to classify these remaining cases in January, 1919. Discharge for the pacifists was neither honorable nor dishonorable. Instead, they received the “blue ticket” which stated, “This is a conscientious objector who has done no military duty whatsoever, and who refused to wear a uniform.”

THROUGH their efforts to accommodate a small group of conscientious objectors, the War Department gradually evolved a policy acceptable to religious pacifists. Their long course of trial and error led to more favorable treatment of objectors in subsequent wars. During World War II, Mennonites organized the Civilian Public Service, working in hospitals and continuing the efforts of Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps. During the Vietnam era many provided alternate nonmilitary service.

In spite of the officers' worst fears, the number of conscientious objectors remained small. During World War I, 2,810,296 men were inducted. Claims were made by 64,693 for noncombatant classifications before local boards, of which 56,830 were recognized.

44. Easby-Smith, Statement Concerning the Treatment, pp. 46-47.
45. Ibid, pp. 25, 44. After the first round of interviews, those who had not been examined, or whom the board wanted to examine, were sent to Fort Riley, which required labor for the hay crop. It is during this period that four political objectors conducted their hunger strike, and that the brutality which Norman Thomas described occurred. Thomas, The Conscientious Objector in America, pp. 119-127, 151-164.
46. Easby-Smith, Statement Concerning the Treatment, pp. 51-52.
47. Easby-Smith, Statement Concerning the Treatment, p. 31.
TREATMENT OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

However, only 3,989 men made any claim in camp to be conscientious objectors. Col. J. S. Easby-Smith attributes this small number to the success of the tolerant policy, but this is improbable since men would have to make their declaration upon arrival, when they would not have witnessed or experienced that treatment. It was not their number which made them important and feared, but rather the challenge that these pacifists presented to the system of conscription and to the discipline of the army.

Systematic abuse did not exist at Camp Funston. Although harassment and physical assault did occur, these were isolated cases condemned by the national government and usually disapproved by the local leadership. Instead, mistreatment was the result of inadequate instruction of officers, prejudice of soldiers, and ambiguous instructions. Officers were not trained to command objectors, they were trained to lead soldiers. Pacifism was either irrelevant or injurious to their job. They were not instructed in tolerance, but instead in enforcing military discipline. Orders exempting recruits from punishment put their jobs on an unfamiliar and confusing plane. In addition to the frustration caused by disobedience and the unexpected turn of events, the officers often had their own biases against pacifists, Germans, or others who were different.

Mistreatment took many forms. Threats and psychological pressure seem to have had limited effects on such a tightly knit and religiously secure group as the Mennonites. Defining abuse also poses a significant problem. Pacifists sometimes perceived mistreatment where typical army conduct was being exhibited. No instance has come to light of death or long-term injury of Mennonites at Camp Funston as a result of abuse, although one Hut terite from Camp Funston died from illness while imprisoned at Fort Leavenworth. Although some victims would not report mistreatment, channels did exist for complaints. As previously noted, the National Civil Liberties Union and the local clergy intervened; even Governor Capper interceded for the religious objectors. Assistant Secretary Keppel responded to these inquiries, even sending copies of the investigation report. In interviews, many Mennonites testified to the relatively good treatment they received, even while mentioning the hostility encountered.

This is not to say, however, that conditions were acceptable. Anomalous to the objectors was apparent in soldiers, noncommissioned and commissioned officers, especially in military intelligence. However, such impulses were restrained by the comparatively liberal War Department, to the disappointment of both officers and the public. Although Baker’s attempt to convert the pacifists through education and tolerance has been condemned recently, the policy for its time was surprising in light of popular and military sentiment. While it is possible with hindsight to assert that the slow evolution of the War Department’s policy had negative consequences for the objectors, it was humane, and did eventually produce an acceptable solution which would be used in the future.

48. Ibid., pp. 15-16, 25. Of these, 1,300 were assigned noncombatant service, 1,200 were eventually recommended for furlough, and 450 were court-martialed. In January, 1919, 113 of those court-martialed were discharged by the board of inquiry.

49. Petition to Governor Capper, November 7, 1917, Capper to General Wood, November 10, 1917, the assistant adjutant, Camp Funston, to Capper, November 18, 1917, S. M. Williams to Capper, October 3, 1918, Record Group 293, National Archives. See also, footnotes 30 and 32.

50. Interviews with John Andres, Ernest Buchman, John J. Becker, Oswin Galle, Alvin Funk, David Krebsiel, and Adolf Freheim, "Showalter Collection."