

# MILITARY COUNSELING NETWORK

# SOUND OFF



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## Aguayo awaits court martial

By Tim Huber

MANNHEIM, Germany – After two failed attempts to gain conscientious objector (C.O.) status within the military, an on-again-off-again civilian struggle in U.S. District Court and nearly 20,000 miles on international flights, Army specialist Agustin Aguayo sits today in the U.S. Army's Europe Confinement Facility in Mannheim, Germany.

Aguayo applied for a C.O. discharge early in 2004 and has spent the time since struggling to convince the military he fits the C.O. definition. When faced with a second deployment in Iraq in September, Aguayo fled his Schweinfurt, Germany, military base on foot, rather than be sent to Iraq in handcuffs as his commanding officers threatened. He ultimately arrived in Los Angeles, Calif., where he turned himself in to military authorities in October.

Members of his unit then traveled to Los Angeles, where they



Agustín Aguayo and MCN counselor Michael Sharp speak with a reporter in September of 2006 in Frankfurt.

immediately accompanied him back to Germany.

Aguayo originally committed to four years in the Army, scheduled to end this month. However, that commitment was extended by the Department of Defense until September of 2007. But now – faced with potential charges of desertion, absent without leave, and “missing movement” – he could receive as much as seven years in military prison. Military

law still allows for death by firing squad, but that form of desertion punishment has not been exercised since World War II.

As he waits for a court martial date – anticipated to occur sometime in February or March – Aguayo also waits to learn the decision of the three-judge federal appeals panel hearing his appeal of the military's denial of his original conscientious objector claim.

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## C.O. Success

By Kyle Huwer

In almost two months it will be a year since I was released from the Army as a conscientious objector. Yet, it seems it was just yesterday that I was suiting up in green camouflage and wondering what my 'leaders' would do next with me. After all, I wasn't the most liked soldier at that point.

So as I look back, it is amazing to see both the road I came down and the people I met along the way. I learned a lot about the military, America, and most importantly myself and what mattered to me.

I remember finding MCN and meeting up with (MCN counselor) Reuben near my base. I remember telling him my story and feelings and how my beliefs went against me and my service. It was the first time I didn't feel like an outsider when telling my story. Sadly, everyone on the other side of the fence believed that what they were doing was right. Yes... it was a different world on the inside of that fence. A world that I don't ever care to go back to.

From about March 2005 until April 2006 I interacted with members of MCN.

Sometimes asking them for advice on how to handle situations, sometimes to just complain about my situation, and sometimes just as a friend. I learned very quickly that everyone I met at MCN and through MCN was my friend. Maybe they didn't have experience in going through what I was going through, but they did lend me their ears and their hearts. I really appreciated it.

On April 13th, 2006, I got on a plane not as a soldier, but as a

civilian. But my struggle did not end there. It may seem weird to some people, but it was easier to be a conscientious objector soldier than a conscientious objector civilian.

While in, my life consisted of "fighting" for what I believed in. Out here, nobody cares what you think. Shortly after getting out I had two of my friends, both of which knew my story, tell me that they were joining the Army. I was heartbroken. It was my first lesson in that no matter how bad I believe the military to be, others will still think that it is great.

Oddly enough, as two friends joined, two other people came to me to have me help them get out. I was thrilled to have people come to me for my help. Maybe with my experiences, I would be able to

help them get out like MCN helped me!

Sadly, both people shied away from the task and I didn't get to help them for too long. However, to their credit, making that first step in noticing that you don't agree with what you are doing, that you disagree with the mighty military, is many times the hardest step to take.

As for me, I still call myself a conscientious objector, even to those who are very proud of their military service. Maybe I haven't been able to help anyone directly, but maybe it is just better to let people know that I don't agree with what the military does. More specifically, that I was a soldier that stood up for what I believed in even when repercussions loomed in my face, and that others can do the same thing too if they happen to disagree with what the military is having them do.





## A dollar a day

By Michael Sharp



As the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan continues, and the estimated costs rise, many of us paying taxes to the U.S. government are keenly aware that it is our money that funds these actions. Although former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld suggested in January of 2003 that the war in Iraq would cost "something under \$50 billion," the cost is already estimated at over \$300 billion. We're spending the equivalent of the annual GDP of Nigeria every day in Iraq (about \$200 million). Even ignoring the war in Afghanistan and the other huge military costs that are accrued annually just for "upkeep," those of taxpaying age donate about a dollar a day.

For those of us who believe the war in Iraq is wrong, whether for moral, ethical, religious, or political reasons, we have to decide how we will grapple with our financial support of that war. It's disheartening to think that each of us has given enough since the start of the war to buy thousands of M-16 rounds.

Perhaps you're not going to choose to stop paying taxes, but a goal for 2007 might be that for every dollar you give to support the war in Iraq, you also give a dollar to an organization that works for peace.

Our job at MCN is to offer something other than bullets to American servicemembers. Our job is to offer them alternatives, and the more support we receive from our readers, the better we are able to do that.

We are largely dependent on individuals and churches in the U.S.

for our operating budget. With this support, we can meet personally with servicemembers who are questioning their participation in war; we can supply them with literature about peace theology and just alternatives to warfare; we can speak to groups around Europe and the U.S. about the effects of the war; we can visit those who are put in jail because they refused to fight; and we can continue to be a Christian witness for peace among those who have to deal with the issues of war on a daily basis.

We've worked with over 350

soldiers since the war in Iraq began. We are now looking for that many people to pledge at least \$25 in the coming calendar year. We can also reach our goal if 25 churches, individuals, Sunday School classes, or small groups pledge to giving \$1 a day to this project. By the end of February, we hope to have collected enough pledges to secure our operation through the upcoming year.

Because we are an ocean away, it is difficult for us to reach a large number of people, so we are dependent on our readers to spread the word and help collect pledges.

We have reached more servicemembers every year since the war in Iraq began, and with your help, we'll continue that trend in 2007.

**Our job at MCN is to offer something other than bullets to American servicemembers.  
Our job is to offer them alternatives.**



MCN counselor Tim Huber discusses issues affecting American soldiers with a German teenager October in Karlsruhe.

## Tübingen x two

By Tim Huber

The Military Counseling Network recently teamed with retired Army Sergeant Robert Evers to take part in two speaking engagements regarding the war in Iraq.

In the same town.

In the last month.

Evers and MCN traveled Nov. 8 to attend a screening of "Gunner Palace" – a documentary detailing one year in the lives of members of 2/3 Field Artillery as they go on patrol throughout Baghdad – hosted by the German-American Institute in Tübingen, Germany.

The event provided an opportunity for locals and Americans living or studying in the southern Germany university town to not only get a visual taste of the G.I. experience, but also hear about what life as a soldier is like, directly from Evers.

A veteran of the Gulf War, Kosovo, and the Iraq War, Evers received an honorable discharge on and medical grounds in 2006.

Though he would still levy his life militarily for a cause vital to the United States, Evers is thankful he was afforded an early exit from a conflict that is, to him, both immoral and illegal.

He imparted thoughts about the



Retired Army Sergeant Robert Evers and MCN counselor Michael Sharp speak to a group at the German-American Institute Nov. 8 in Tübingen.

film's accuracy, answered questions about the military, and gave advice based on his background as a soldier concerning how the peace movement can be more successful.

MCN and Evers returned to Tübingen Dec. 10 to speak as part of a peace conference convened by the Society for a Culture of Peace.

Evers gave a call for Germany to become the first nation in the world to offer political asylum to American

soldiers who wish to no longer take part in the Iraq War but cannot return to the United States. He said Germany – and several other nations around the world – have officially designated the war illegal, but have yet to back up those words with actions.

Evers and MCN counselor Michael Sharp were joined by a host of German peace activists which included Tübingen University nuclear physics professor and Right Livelihood Award (Alternative Nobel Prize) winner Hans-Peter Dürr, Italian journalist and Iraqi insurgent kidnapping victim Giuliana Sgrena, White Rose co-leader Sophie Schull's sister Elisabeth Hartnagel, German psychoanalyst Arno Gruen, Israeli human rights attorney Felicia Langer (winner of Right Livelihood Award for defending Palestinians), and Iranian guitarist and singer Moghaddam Shahram.

"By offering G.I.'s a new home with the safety and acceptance they can no longer find in the United States, you will be doing two very real things that can end this war sooner rather than later," Evers said. "You will be taking soldiers who only want to do what is right, out of the fight in Iraq. And you will show the current U.S. administration that Europe will govern its own internal affairs without outside interference, and that America cannot act without her friends."



## Sir! No Sir!

Forty years ago, an anti-war movement blossomed in the U.S. and around the world, eventually permeating the military throughout Vietnam and at home.

Rather than focus on the college campuses and marches so many documentaries exalt, "Sir! No Sir!" takes a different approach, revealing the backlash against the conflict which took place within the military.

According to the Pentagon, 503,926 incidents of desertion took place between 1966 and 1971. Stockades and federal prisons swelled with soldiers jailed for refusing to deploy. More than 200 underground newspapers were published by soldiers around the world. By 1971, entire units ignored orders to fight.

Through interviews with



members of that movement, "Sir! No Sir!" presents individuals' tales of defiance and examines how the GI movement to end the war transformed into the backlash received by veterans upon returning home.

For director David Zeiger, documentation of Vietnam-era resistance to war came up short when it came to what the actual soldiers involved put on the line to stop the war.

"There had been excellent books written about the GI movement, but their reach was small and, most significantly, none of the feature films made since the war, including documentaries, had even mentioned the movement's existence," he said.

The film, which won the jury award for best documentary at the 2005 Hamptons Film Festival, is now being used to inspire a new generation of American soldiers. Groups like Stop the War Brigade and Iraq Veterans Against the War are distributing free copies of the film to American soldiers in an effort to spark a similar groundswell in soldiers today.

**Title:** Sir! No Sir!

**Format:** Documentary

**Running time:** 84 min.

### How to get it:

To request a free copy of "Sir! No Sir!" to give to a soldier in the United States, visit [www.ivaw.org/sirnosir](http://www.ivaw.org/sirnosir). Europeans wishing to give a free copy to a soldier should contact the Military Counseling Network at [mcn@dmfk.de](mailto:mcn@dmfk.de) or Stop the War Brigade at [stopthewarbgde@hotmail.com](mailto:stopthewarbgde@hotmail.com).

"Sir! No Sir!" is available for purchase or screenings at [www.sirnosir.com](http://www.sirnosir.com).

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Earlier this year, a U.S. District Court judge – and retired Army captain – backed the Army's decision to deny Aguayo his claim. Attorneys for Aguayo contend a favorable ruling in the appeal would grant him immediate conscientious objector status. Furthermore, the attorneys suggest such a ruling should invalidate any illegal actions undertaken by Aguayo in the time following his claim's initial denial, freeing him immediately.

Appeals court deliberations often last several months, but Aguayo's attorneys hope a decision is published before a military court martial takes place.

### But what can I do?

Supporters are encouraged to mail Aguayo postcards or letters at:

**Spc. Agustin Aguayo  
Unit 29723 Box LL  
APO, AE 09028-3810**

A postcard campaign is also underway online at:

[www.connection-ev.de/postanagustin](http://www.connection-ev.de/postanagustin)

Simply select the language, fill in the text, and a postcard is printed and mailed to Agustin in the detention facility for free. Only mail written in English will be delivered. So far, almost 1,500 postcards have been sent to Aguayo.

To support other conscientious objectors like Agustin Aguayo, please see donation information on the back page.



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## How You Can Help a CO

### The Low Down:

MCN has been working closely with COs for over two years now. Many of them have submitted their claims as soldiers on the frontline - Iraq. Sadly, the military is not recognizing many claims, disapproving COs who embody the very definition of having a "firm, fixed and sincere objection to participating in war of any form or the bearing of arms" (Department of Defense Directive 1300.6 §III.A.). These beliefs have crystallized directly from experiences in the military and from the dissonance of coming to terms with the fundamental task of what a soldier is required to do. COs are not the only ones dissatisfied by the military's reluctance to discharge soldiers. Numerous soldiers have expressed to us that in times of war, bodies are simply needed. That is the bottom line.

### What they need:

Folks in the military need to know that there are others on the outside, who support what they are trying to do and will stand by them. They need personal support and financial assistance. Although, their cases involve a symbolic struggle for CO rights, they will also need the personal support.

### How you can help:

*Send this Newsletter to people you know who might want to help.* For individuals, peace organizations, small groups and congregations interested in helping, you can make personal contact with soldiers like Agustín. Financial help is always needed. (See below)



## Contribute Financially



### Germany

#### **Deutsches Mennonitisches Friedenskomitee (DMFK)**

Hauptstr. 1  
69245, Bammental  
Germany



### Bank Account:

Kontonr. 21240069,  
Kreissparkasse  
Heilbronn,  
BLZ 620 500 00  
Attn: "MCN"

### USA

#### **Mennonite Mission Network**

Mennonite Mission Network  
P.O. Box 370  
Elkhart, IN 46515-0370  
USA



### Please send check with note that includes:

- Name of individual or group
- Date
- Mark for "EU 105: MCN"
- Signature

## About Our Newsletter:

*Sound Off* is a publication of the Military Counseling Network (MCN). It is a platform for people to tell their stories and relate their opinions in this time of war and political uncertainty. MCN is dedicated to the discussion of issues relevant to servicemembers and their families; Germans and Americans, soldiers and civilians.

We welcome any submissions to the newsletter that deal with the War in Iraq, Americans abroad, Americans at home and European-US relations. We especially welcome submissions from soldiers and their families. *Please send us your opinions, letters and stories!*