



P.O.V.

Discussion Guide

Season **21**

Soldiers of Conscience

A film by Catherine Ryan and Gary Weimberg



www.pbs.org/pov



Letter from the Filmmakers



Director / Producer Catherine Ryan.
Photo courtesy of Catherine Ryan



Director / Producer Gary Weimberg.
Photo Courtesy of Gary Weimberg

AUGUST 2008

Dear Viewer,

Thank you for preparing for a discussion about *Soldiers of Conscience*.

We made this film with a specific goal of encouraging dialogue and understanding, which is why we are especially glad you are bringing this film and its ideas to your friends and neighbors.

We also made this film to honor those who are willing to serve our country in the armed forces — all of them, including both conscientious objectors and sincere war-fighters.

We started making this film with the misconception that only conscientious objectors suffer profound moral pain from having to kill another human being in war. We soon learned we were very, very wrong. Every soldier has a conscience. Every soldier who kills in combat suffers the burden of his or her conscience. Some soldiers suffer so deeply after killing another person that they end up committing suicide over the guilt of what they have done. The Army's own combat stress manual reflects this and describes the mental trauma resulting from the act of killing to be as great or greater than the mental trauma of seeing one's fellow soldier killed.

Adding to the trauma is the silence around the issue. Soldiers often feel cut off from friends, family and society because they have done the unspeakable — at the request of their nation — and cannot share that pain with their familiar support networks. For this



Letter from the Filmmakers

reason, many soldiers and veterans find talking about killing to be healing. The overwhelming response from active duty soldiers and veterans following screenings has been an appreciation for the opportunity to simply discuss this taboo subject. We think perhaps this is why the Army decided to support our film with their assistance agreement — to help soldiers heal so they can lead healthy and productive lives after the stress of combat and war.

With this in mind, we came to see the profound agreement between the sincere war-fighters and the sincere conscientious objectors. Both understand the horror of having to kill. In fact, when thinking about killing, these two types of soldiers actually agree more than they disagree. We hope that when soldiers and veterans view the film, they will come to the same conclusion: seeing their own common ground and learning to honor and respect each other more, even when they do disagree.

In a very real way, we have seen this occur in many public screenings. We have had peace activists speak about how the film has helped them appreciate soldiers in a way they never had before, and we have had active duty soldiers voice their understanding of conscientious objectors in a way they had not imagined possible before seeing the film.

However, soldiers represent only a small portion of our nation's population. We wanted to make a film to encourage civilians to find common ground as well. We tried to make a film that was so respectful of all points of view that viewers would find themselves agreeing with many different opinions expressed in the film, even if some of those opinions seem contradictory. We hoped that the result would be to encourage discussion that helps us all to sort out what we believe and why — and to do so in a spirit of respect that emphasizes our agreement rather than our differences.

Gary's grandmother often expressed an opinion that we seldom hear these days, but was once an often-recited statement of a core American belief: "I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." This is why we end the film with a quote about dissent:

Freedom to differ is not limited to things that do not matter much. That would be a mere shadow of freedom. The test of its substance is the right to differ as to things that touch the heart of the existing order.

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson, 1943

We believe it is okay to disagree. In fact, it is necessary. By respectfully sorting out our disagreements, we can create a better world. That process starts now — with the screening and discussion you are preparing to hold.

Thank you,

Catherine Ryan and Gary Weimberg,
Filmmakers, *Soldiers of Conscience*



Table of Contents

Credits, Acknowledgments

5	Introduction
6	Background Information
6	Moral and Religious Perspectives on War and Killing
7	Conscientious Objection in the United States
7	History
10	Application Procedure
11	Impact of War on Soldiers
12	Selected People Featured in <i>Soldiers of Conscience</i>
14	General Discussion Questions
15	Discussion Prompts
20	Taking Action
21	Resources
26	How to Buy the Film

Writer

Faith Rogow, PhD
Insighters Educational Consulting

Research Editor

Daniel McDermon

Guide Producers

Eliza Licht
Director, Community Engagement and Education, P.O.V.

Jessica Lee
Outreach and Development Coordinator, P.O.V.

Irene Villaseñor
Youth Views Manager, P.O.V.

Design: Rafael Jiménez

Copy Editor: Joan D. Saunders

Thanks to those who reviewed this guide:

Bill Galvin
Counseling Coordinator, Center on Conscience and War

Dr. Shira Maguen
Assistant Clinical Professor, UCSF Medical School, and Staff Psychologist, PTSD Program, San Francisco VA Medical Center

Catherine Ryan
*Director, **Soldiers of Conscience***

Ian Slattery
*Associate Producer, **Soldiers of Conscience***

Col. (ret.) James W. Stokes
*Psychiatrist, US Army Medical Corps
Co-editor, *WAR PSYCHIATRY TEXTBOOK*,*

Gary Weimberg
*Director, **Soldiers of Conscience***



Introduction



"It's a taboo topic." So says Major Pete Kilner, from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, in reference to soldiers talking about the morality of killing. But talk is exactly what they do in the feature-length (90-minute) documentary ***Soldiers of Conscience***. From West Point graduates to drill sergeants, Abu Ghraib interrogators to low-ranking reservist mechanics, soldiers in the U.S. military reveal their deepest moral concerns about what they are asked to do in war.

Made with official permission from the U.S. Army, the film profiles conscientious objectors as well as soldiers content with their choice to serve. What is the singular message from these very different perspectives? That every soldier wrestles with his or her conscience over killing. Each soldier's very personal

Conscientious objector Camilo Mejia during his deployment.
Photo courtesy of Camilo Mejia

story challenges the audience to think deeply about the meaning of patriotism, the process of preparing soldiers to kill and the moral burden faced by soldiers who kill on behalf of our country.

As an outreach tool, ***Soldiers of Conscience*** helps audiences explore the tension between duty and conscience, responsibility to God and service to country, and civilian and military ethics. It reminds viewers that whatever soldiers do — the good and the regrettable — they are doing it in our name.



Background Information



Conscientious objector Camilo Mejia holding a "Give Peace a Chance" sign during his deployment.

Photo courtesy of Camilo Mejia

Moral and Religious Questioning of War and Killing

As long as there has been war, there have been questions about whether it is right to kill. There have been those who argue that war itself is immoral and that individuals may bear a moral responsibility to abstain from participating in them. Every faith has produced individuals or groups who argue against participation in war based on religious faith. Atheists, agnostics and humanists have also argued for pacifism and against participating in war, basing their claims on ethical philosophy and other principles.

Conscientious Objection in the United States

HISTORY

Colonial Age

In the colonial age of America, the right to religious freedom was often expressed as the right of an individual to his or her own conscience. This freedom, which was recognized in many of the colonies — and eventually by the first amendment to the Constitution — shielded many religious sects, including pacifist groups such as the Quakers.



Background Information



Conscientious objector Joshua Casteel during his deployment.

Photo courtesy of Joshua Casteel

Near the beginning of the American Revolution, George Washington called for a draft to fill the ranks of the Continental Army, exempting “those with conscientious scruples against war.”

Civil War

During the Civil War, the first federally mandated draft in the United States was implemented, and instances of cruel punishment and deaths of conscientious objectors were first recorded, including being starved and hung by their thumbs.

Source:

Lillian Schlissel, *Conscience in America: A Documentary History of Conscientious Objection in America, 1757–1967* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968).

World War I

World War I saw the reinstatement of the draft at the same time that popular opinion was divided over American participation in the war. Government prosecution of conscientious objectors was intense, and resisting conscription or encouraging others to resist conscription led to arrest and imprisonment for many Americans. Of the 450 conscientious objectors found guilty at military hearings during World War I, 17 were sentenced to death, 142 received life sentences and 73 received 20-year prison terms. Only 15 were sentenced to three years or less.

Source:

Stephen Kohn, *Jailed for Peace: The History of American Draft Law Violators, 1658–1985* (Westport, CT: Praeger Paperback, 1987).



Background Information



World War II

In the time leading up to World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt implemented the Selective Service and Training Act of 1940, which was the first peacetime draft in United States history. This period was also marked by the government's recognition that some would oppose military service for religious or conscientious reasons. During World War II, there were 34.5 million men who registered for the draft. Of those, 72,354 applied for conscientious objector status. Of those conscientious objectors, 25,000 served in noncombatant roles, and there were 12,000 men who chose to perform alternative service.

Those who chose alternative service worked in Civilian Public Service camps. These service camps were operated by religious groups, including churches rooted in the pacifist tradition, such

Conscientious objector Aidan Delgado during his deployment.
Photo courtesy of Aidan Delgado

as the Mennonites and the Quakers. These camps predominantly put men to work on improving soil conservation or preserving state and national parks.

Sources:

"Civilian Public Service Camps," *Ohio History Central* (July 1, 2005), <http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/entry.php?rec=1713>;
"Nebraskans on the Front Lines," *Nebraska Studies*, http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0800/stories/0801_0107.html;
<http://www.sss.gov/FSconsobj.htm>.



Background Information



Vietnam War

The Vietnam War, which became a flashpoint for controversy in the 1960s and 1970s, provoked many more individuals to claim conscientious objector status. Over the duration of the conflict, the Selective Service recognized 171,000 conscientious objectors; 3,275 soldiers received discharges for conscientious objector status that developed after their induction into the military. In addition, hundreds of thousands of men, many of whom were conscientious objectors, avoided the draft by leaving the country or refusing to register.

Sources:

L. Baskir and W. Strauss, *Chance and Circumstance: The Draft, the War and the Vietnam Generation* (New York: Knopf Press, 1978); Margaret Levi, *Consent, Dissent, and Patriotism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

New recruits in formation with Sgt. Washington at Ft. Jackson, SC.

Photo courtesy of Luna Productions

The Gulf War and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

After the end of the draft in 1973, the military became an all-volunteer force. Before the 1991 Gulf War, 2,500 men and women refused to serve based on conscience. Eventually, 111 members of the Army were officially recognized as conscientious objectors.

During the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, far fewer soldiers have made it through the process to become conscientious objectors. In 2006, the Army reported only 42 applications, of which 33 were approved. Advocates and outside observers have argued that these numbers are artificially low because they reflect only those soldiers who complete the lengthy application



Background Information

process. According to the Center on Conscience and War, they received one to two calls per month to their GI Rights Hotline in 2000 and 2001 from someone in the military raising questions of conscience. By 2002 and 2003, they were receiving at least one to two such calls per day.

The conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have been the occasion for a growing number of desertions — defined by the military as soldiers absent without leave for more than 30 days. In 2006, the Army reported 3,196 desertions, a sharp increase from two years earlier, which saw 2,357 desertions. At the same time, the number of prosecutions for desertion went up, a move described by military lawyers as an effort to discourage soldiers from leaving their assignments.

Sources:

"Army Is Cracking Down on Deserters," *The New York Times* (April 9, 2007), <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/09/us/09awol.html>;
The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It, Independent Television Service, <http://www.pbs.org/itvs/thegoodwar/story.html>;
 "A Nation at War: Dissent – Conscientious Objector Numbers Are Small But Growing," *The New York Times* (April 1, 2003), <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F02E7DD1039F932A35757C0A9659C8B63>;
 "Soldiers' Choice: Fight or Flight," *The Denver Post* (April 14, 2007), http://www.denverpost.com/lifestyles/ci_5665199.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Currently, to qualify for conscientious objector status a member of the military must demonstrate that he or she has a "firm, fixed and sincere objection to participation in war in any form or the bearing of arms, by reason of religious training and belief." Objections based on a particular conflict or on political considerations are not considered. All incoming soldiers must sign a statement that they are not conscientious objectors. Therefore, any conscientious objector applicant must also demonstrate that this belief "crystallized" — or solidified — during their military service.

Soldiers who want to claim conscientious objector status may face a difficult burden of proof. Applicants are interviewed and



Close up of recruits' bayonet on training course at Ft. Jackson, SC.
 Photo courtesy of Luna Productions

evaluated by a chaplain, a psychiatrist and an investigating officer. Their applications must be submitted in writing to a review board, but soldiers are not permitted to appear in person before the board. Applications that are rejected are not eligible for reconsideration.

Sources:

"Army Is Cracking Down on Deserters," *The New York Times* (April 9, 2007), <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/09/us/09awol.html>;
 "Fighting Not To Fight," *The Guardian* (April 1, 2003), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/apr/01/usa.iraq>;
 "Conscientious Objection and Alternative Service," Selective Service System, <http://www.sss.gov/FSconsobj.htm>; https://ivaw.org/files/Navy_CO_regs.pdf;
Gillette v. United States 401 U.S. 437 (1971);
 "Soldiers' Choice: Fight or Flight," *The Denver Post* (April 14, 2007), http://www.denverpost.com/lifestyles/ci_5665199.



Background Information

Impact of War on Soldiers

Studies conducted by both the military and outside researchers have found that soldiers returning from combat are subject to a host of mental health challenges, including post-traumatic stress disorder. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that occurs after a person is exposed to an event that is life threatening, extremely dangerous. Symptoms of PTSD include flashbacks, nightmares, insomnia and general anxiety that make returning and readjusting to civilian life difficult. People who suffer from PTSD may also have problems with substance abuse; employment; relationships; controlling impulsive behavior, including violence toward self and others, with higher rates of suicide; attention deficit; and tendencies to withdraw and/or intrude within the family, resulting in a higher incidence of abuse, separation and divorce.

The number of veterans seeking health care through the Veterans' Administration grew by 79 percent from 1999 to 2004. Estimates suggest that one in six veterans who saw combat in Iraq has experienced PTSD. Within a year of their service, 35 percent of Iraq veterans sought some form of psychological counseling. Rachel MacNair, an expert in the field of peace psychology, also conducted a study that showed higher indicators of PTSD from soldiers who have killed in combat versus those who have not.

Studies have also found that rates of suicide among service members and veterans have increased in recent years, suggesting that deployment to combat can take a powerful toll on soldiers' mental health. Veterans are more than twice as likely to commit suicide. In 2005, 6,256 veterans took their own lives, an average of 17 suicides a day.



Sgt. Jaime Isom instructs a recruit on a practice range at Ft. Jackson.

Photo courtesy of Luna Productions

Sources:

"America Suffers an Epidemic of Suicides Among Traumatized Army Veterans," Times Online, www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article2873622.ece;

"The Military Ethicist's Role in Preventing and Treating Combat-Related, Perpetration-Induced Psychological Trauma," <http://www.usafa.edu/isme/JSCOPE05/Kilner05.html>;

"PTSD Facts and Figures," NOW (September 28, 2007), <http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/339/ptsd-facts.html>;

"Suicide Epidemic Among Veterans," CBS News (November 13, 2007), www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/11/13/cbsnews_investigates/main3496471.shtml;

U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, "What Is PTSD?" http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/ncmain/ncdocs/fact_shts/fs_what_is_ptsd.html;

William Welch, "Trauma of Iraq War Haunting Thousands Returning Home," *USA Today* (February 28, 2005), http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2005-02-28-cover-iraq-injuries_x.htm.



Background Information

Selected People Featured in *Soldiers of Conscience*



Sgt. Kevin Benderman

The son of a World War II veteran, Kevin Benderman joined the Army in 1987 and reenlisted in 2000 in order to continue serving his country. He was a sergeant when he was deployed to Iraq in March 2003. Between deployments, he decided he could not return to combat and applied for conscientious objector status in 2004, 11 days before his unit was expected to redeploy to Iraq. His application was denied, and he was charged with desertion and the lesser charge of "missing movement by design." Benderman was acquitted of desertion, but convicted of missing movement. He was sentenced to 15 months in prison and received a demotion and a dishonorable discharge.



Spc. Joshua Casteel

Former West Point cadet and evangelical Christian, Joshua Casteel served in the Army Reserves and was later called up to active duty. He trained as an interrogator and an Arabic language specialist before being sent to the Joint Interrogation and Debriefing Center at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. He applied for and was granted conscientious objector status in 2005, receiving an honorable discharge.



Spc. Aidan Delgado

After joining the Army Reserve in 2001, Aidan Delgado developed an interest in Buddhism and began to reconsider the morality of military service. After being called to active duty, Delgado served at the Abu Ghraib prison compound before seeking and receiving conscientious objector status in 2004.



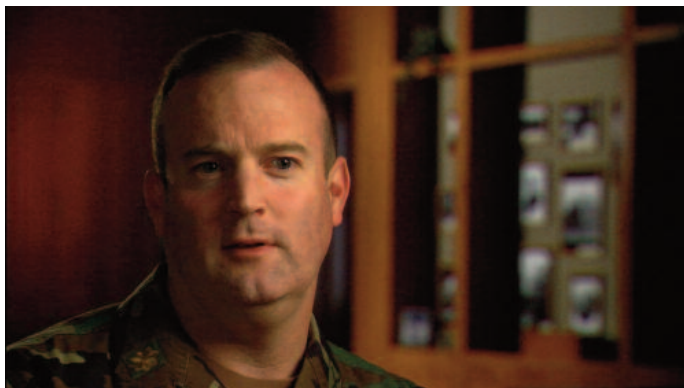
Sgt. Jaime Isom

A drill sergeant at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, Jaime Isom served in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom.



Background Information

Selected People Featured in *Soldiers of Conscience*



Maj. Peter Kilner

A philosophy instructor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Pete Kilner has commanded an airborne anti-armor company in the 82nd Airborne. He has written on the subject of unit cohesion and spoken out on the necessity for enhanced preparation for soldiers in the moral justifications for war and killing in combat.



Staff Sgt. Camilo Mejia

A citizen of Nicaragua and Costa Rica and a permanent resident of the United States since he moved with his family in 1994, Camilo Mejia joined the Army at the age of 19. After active duty service, Mejia was a reservist in the Florida National Guard, with a service obligation due to expire in 2003. After serving as a squadron leader for six months in Iraq during that year, Mejia decided he could not return to service. He went into hiding and was classified as a deserter. After five months of absence, he surrendered to military authorities and filed an application for conscientious objector status. His application was denied, and he was convicted of desertion in 2004. He was sentenced to one year in prison and a dishonorable discharge. He served nine months.



1st Sgt. Todd Savage

A drill sergeant at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, Todd Savage served in Iraq during the Gulf War in 1991 and in Operation Iraqi Freedom from October 2004 until October 2005. Savage officially retired from the military on September 1, 2008, and is now a business owner in Kent, Washington.



Sgt. Thomas H. Washington

A drill sergeant at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, Thomas Washington served in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom.



General Discussion Questions

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. If the mood seems tense, you can pose a general question and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion.

Unless you think participants are so uncomfortable that they can't engage until they have had a break, don't encourage people to leave the room between the film and the discussion. If you save your break for an appropriate moment during the discussion, you won't lose the feeling of the film as you begin your dialogue.

One way to get a discussion going is to pose a general question such as:

- Did anything in this film surprise you? If so, what? Why was it surprising?
- Was there anything that surprised you in terms of your reaction?
- Was anything particularly emotional for you?
- What insights, inspiration or new knowledge did you gain from this film?
- Was there a moment or scene in the film that was particularly memorable, inspiring or disturbing? What was it about that scene that made it stand out to you?



Discussion Prompts



New recruits on the bayonet course at Ft. Jackson, SC.

Photo courtesy of Ian Slattery

Moral and Religious Questions About Killing in War

- Consider how various soldiers in the film come to view killing in war:
 - *It is just what happens in war:* “They’re trying to kill us. We’re trying to kill them. And that’s just the ugly face of war.”
 - *If I didn’t kill them, they would kill us:* “If he threw that grenade, it would have been five or six or maybe the entire squad would have been killed or wounded.”
 - *I owe it to my buddies:* “It’s about the man right next to your left and your right, and that’s about it.”
 - *It is just a job:* “It’s my job. It’s what I do.”
 - *It is my patriotic duty:* “I do what I have to do to defend my country.”
 - *I am protecting the innocent:* “I am the person who allows people to sleep comfortably in their beds at night.”

What other reasons have you heard? How does each of these reasons fit or conflict with your belief system about when and why war is justified? According to your faith tradition or ethical principles, under what circumstances is it acceptable for a society or government to give people permission to kill?



Discussion Prompts

- List the justifications for killing given by military ethicist Maj. Pete Kilner. Does he provide any arguments that you find particularly compelling or particularly weak? In your view, do his arguments apply equally to all conflicts?
- Camilo Mejia asks, "In what situations would killing be right?" How would you answer him? Would your answer change if you were answering it as a matter of public policy rather than for you personally?
- As early as basic training, Joshua Casteel identifies a troubling conflict between his military service and his evangelical Christian upbringing. He recalls the teachings of the Christian Bible about "turning the other cheek" and being a "peacemaker." What, if anything, have you been taught about:
 - the morality of war?
 - the distinction between killing and murder?
 - instances when killing might be justified?
- Reflecting on how soldiers experience and evaluate the act of killing, Camilo Mejia says, "We all have a conscience. We all have a sense that tells us [the difference] between right and wrong." What factors shape consciousness about what kind of killing is "right" and what kind of killing is "wrong"?
- Though he has no regrets about his decision, Jaime Isom describes being haunted by the decision to shoot a 10-year-old boy in order to save his squad from the grenade in the boy's hand: "It's like, the demons come back." Why might there be a particular aversion to killing children? What other kinds of limits are there on killing in a war that is conducted ethically? If you could decree the parameters of war, what rules would govern soldiers' behavior? What underlying foundation or moral authority would you use as the basis for your parameters?
- In the film, several of the soldiers come to the realization that their "duty to God" conflicts with their "duty to country," or as Joshua Casteel puts it, "loyalty to nation-state comes into conflict with loyalty to the kingdom of God." How would you describe "duty to God" and "duty to country"? How are they similar and how are they different? How does the way you reconcile the potential conflicts compare with the ways the soldiers featured in the film reconcile the differences?
- Reflecting a common military experience, Sgt. Isom says, "When the bullets start flying, it's not about God or country or anything like that, it's about the man right next to your left and your right." What do you think he means?
- What do you think of Maj. Pete Kilner's assertion that "war is necessary if we want to live fully human lives ... you can't say that you believe in human dignity and human rights if you're not willing to defend them"? What do you think are the best methods for defending human rights?
- Kevin Benderman talks about being influenced by movie images of war that glamorized killing. What film or video images of war have you seen? What impression did they leave? In your view, what role do media play in preparing people to go to war?
- Like thousands of other soldiers, Camilo Mejia was a teenager (age 19) when he enlisted. How do you feel about the expectation that teens are prepared to make decisions about the complex moral issues surrounding killing? How does moral reasoning change with age and experience?

Learning to Kill

- Maj. Pete Kilner observes that "people are shocked by how upsetting it is to kill another human being." How does the U.S. military help soldiers overcome the human aversion to killing?
- In response to evidence that only one in four World War II soldiers actually fired their weapons at the enemy, the Army developed reflexive fire training — a "muscle memory" regimen that makes shooting an automatic reflex. What are the benefits and drawbacks of eliminating "think time" from the decision to shoot?
- As part of basic training, soldiers chant, "Kill, kill, kill without mercy." How did this make you feel?
- Maj. Pete Kilner notes that military training should not be about bypassing or ignoring moral guidelines for conduct, because a "soldier can do so much good or so much bad." What kind of moral code develops out of the set of expectations to be



Discussion Prompts



Director Gary Weimberg interviews recruits at Ft. Jackson, SC.

Photo courtesy of Ian Slattery

moral and humane, but also kill? What would happen if that moral code were applied to society in general, that is, outside of military life? How might adoption of this moral code influence soldiers' worldview once they leave combat or leave the military?

- Describing his moral qualms about his assignment guarding prisoners, Aidan Delgado says: "I was not able to make the jump to turn those people into subhumans. ... The act of turning them into subhumans causes, creates atrocities. ... It's one thing to think of an impersonal enemy. It's another to see an Arab young man who is you — another young soldier, who just happens to have lost in this particular battle and is now being held in a prisoner of war camp. I looked at them and I saw my own unit, but with brown skin. I was not able to make the jump to turn those people into subhumans." What role does

dehumanization of the enemy play in preparing soldiers to go to war or helping them cope with the need to kill? In your view, what are the long-term consequences of training people to think of other humans as less than human?

Coping with Killing

- Maj. Pete Kilner notes that soldiers rarely talk about the morality of what they do. In your view, why is the morality of killing such a "taboo topic"? How might the military change if recruiters, drill sergeants, officers and chaplains actively, openly and routinely engaged in conversations about the morality of killing?



Discussion Prompts

- Sgt. Jaime Isom observes that soldiers often only talk with others about their violent acts when they get drunk. Why might soldiers turn to alcohol or other mood-altering substances to cope with having killed or having to kill?
- As Sgt. Jaime Isom describes it, “All you basically try to teach them is ... go in there, do your thing, come back out and try to forget about what you did.” What are the benefits and drawbacks of asking soldiers to forget? How might those benefits and drawbacks differ for soldiers, their families, policy makers and the general public?
- Aidan Delgado’s sergeant says that, for him, “it’s not what you do. It’s the mentality that you do it with. If you hurt others because you have to, and without hatred in your heart, then it’s all right.” How is this attitude reflected — or not reflected — in basic training or in reasons given for going to war?
- Compare the following two perspectives:

In an e-mail received by Maj. Pete Kilner, a Vietnam veteran acknowledges doing things that he “supremely regrets” and asks, “Will I ever again be the person I used to like?”

Sgt. Savage says that “being a soldier is a job. Killing each other is just what soldiers do.”

What do you learn about effective coping strategies from the differences in these soldiers’ views?

- Aidan Delgado shows gruesome images of “collateral damage” in his slideshow presentation. What is your reaction to these images? In your view, what are the potential benefits or damages that result from showing gruesome images from the battlefield while the nation is at war?

Understanding Conscientious Objection

- Describe each soldier’s “crystallization of conscience” — the moments that transformed his perspective about killing and war. (Examples include Joshua Casteel’s interaction with a jihadist prisoner who challenges his commitment to his faith, and Kevin Benderman wondering, “Why am I carrying around an M-16 in the Garden of Eden?”) What did you learn from those moments?

- After announcing their intention to become conscientious objectors, several of the men experience hostility from other soldiers. Why do you think that happened? Do conscientious objectors pose a threat to the military? If so, what, precisely, is the threat?

- When he decided to enlist, Camilo Mejia says he assumed that, “if we end up going to war, it’s going to be for a good cause.” Conscientious objection regulations do not allow soldiers to refuse deployment simply because they don’t believe that a particular assignment meets their idea of a “good cause.” In your view, if soldiers need to think they are fighting for a good cause in order to justify killing, what should a soldier be permitted to do if their definition of “good cause” differs from the government’s or the military’s definition? How would you define “good cause”? What are the sources of your beliefs about when or whether it is morally acceptable or unacceptable to go to war?

- Using Maj. Pete Kilner’s analysis of the story of the Good Samaritan as context (“it takes more courage and more nobility to get in there and to risk your own life to protect the innocent person”), discuss Kevin Benderman’s conclusion that “there is nothing honorable in killing.” In your view, how is each man defining “honor”?

- To those who see pacifism as naïve or unrealistic, Kevin Benderman responds that people figured out that human sacrifice and slavery were wrong and stopped doing them despite centuries of historical acceptance, so why wouldn’t it be possible for people to stop war? Do you find his argument convincing? Why or why not?

- The film recounts the quintessential objection to pacifism: “What if no one had stopped Hitler?” Yet in 2004, of the 150,000 Germans called up for mandatory national service, fewer than half (70,000) served as soldiers. The others identified themselves as conscientious objectors and served in nonmilitary institutions. What lessons might Germans have taken away from World War II that differ from the lessons learned by the United States?

- Kevin Benderman asks if his ultimate duty to his fellow soldiers is to be by their side in Iraq trying to save as many as



Discussion Prompts

he could “or to try to get people to eradicate war altogether, so no soldiers will die in it?” Are those actions mutually exclusive? How does each option support members of the military? In your view, why is Benderman’s choice to oppose all war often portrayed as opposition to the military rather than as supportive of soldiers?

- Camilo Mejia says, “There’s no higher assertion of your freedom than to follow your conscience.” Though it landed him in prison, how did following his conscience free Mejia?
- Sgt. Jaime Isom differentiates a soldier from a civilian by noting that every soldier “swore to defend the Constitution of the United States, against all enemies both foreign and domestic.” How do the conscientious objectors in the film interpret their oath? How do they distinguish their duty as soldiers from their duty as human beings? How do others reconcile their identities as soldiers and as human beings?
- In the film, some of the conscientious objectors report being labeled “cowards” or “traitors.” Others have called them “patriots.” How would you label the conscientious objectors profiled in the film? Would you consider their actions heroic? Why or why not?

On Our Behalf: The Moral Responsibility of Civilians

- Aidan Delgado says, “Every soldier who goes, goes in our place. They fight in our name.” Of all the things that you see in the film, which are you comfortable having done in your name and which make you uncomfortable? If you could write your own chapter in the Army Field Manual, what guidance would you want to give soldiers about what is acceptable for them to do in your name?
- Joshua Casteel grew up believing that “we sleep comfortably in our beds at night because violent men do violence on our behalf.” Who is the “we”? Does “we” include Iraqis? What are the ethics of fighting wars in other places in order to avoid having to fight on U.S. territory?
- Maj. Pete Kilner says that “war is necessary sometimes because it’s been brought upon peace-loving people by people

who are, for whatever reasons, not willing to let another society, another people, live in peace.” In your view, is it possible to achieve peace while relying on war as a strategy? Do you think that the rest of the world sees the United States as “peace-loving”? What evidence would influence their conclusions one way or the other? How does the Bush administration’s doctrine of preemptive war either affirm or undermine Kilner’s argument?

- After watching the film, what’s changed for you on a personal level — as a civilian, service member or veteran?



Taking Action

- Create opportunities for respectful dialogue between conscientious objectors (and their supporters) and soldiers who have chosen to fight (and their supporters). Pay special attention to the ways in which both positions embody honor and patriotism.
- Organize a letter-writing campaign to your representatives concerning mental health benefits, suicide prevention and other counseling resources for soldiers, veterans and their families. More information can be found in the “Resources” section of this guide.
- Publicize or find ways to support existing efforts to help soldiers apply for conscientious objector status or fight dishonorable discharges for refusing to kill.
- Write letters to servicemen and women. For more information, please visit the website of *America Supports You*, a program of the Department of Defense that provides opportunities to citizens who want to show their support for the U.S. Armed Forces. (www.americasupportsyoudo.com).
- Research the history of conscientious objection or pacifism in the United States. Invite speakers from organizations such as the Center on Conscience and War, International Women’s League for Peace and Freedom, and the War Resisters League. Contrast their positions with those taken by veterans groups or military ethicists.



Flag lowering ceremony at Ft. Jackson, SC.

Photo courtesy of Ian Slattery

IF YOU ARE RELIGIOUS:

- Examine your religion’s teachings about war, peace, aggression, self-defense and killing. Share what you learn with members of your congregation.
- Engage leaders and members of your religious congregation or denomination to craft a statement of conscience about war and peace.



Resources

FILM-RELATED WEB SITES

Original Online Content on P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s *Soldiers of Conscience* companion website
www.pbs.org/pov/soldiersofconscience

The companion website to *Soldiers of Conscience* offers exclusive streaming video clips from the film, a podcast version of the filmmaker interview and a wealth of additional resources, including a Q&A with filmmakers Catherine Ryan and Gary Weimberg, ample opportunities for viewers to “talk back” and talk to each other about the film, and the following special features:

WATCHING SOLDIERS OF CONSCIENCE

Soldiers of Conscience takes a powerful look at a central drama of our time — how a soldier decides to kill or not and the life-changing consequences that come with either choice. We asked military chaplains, religious leaders and veterans groups to comment on the film.

Q&A: POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Dr. Shira Maguen, a staff psychologist at the San Francisco VA Medical Center, answers some frequently asked questions about veterans and post-traumatic stress disorder.

ON THE P.O.V. BLOG

Maj. Peter Kilner, Aidan Delgado and Joshua Casteel will respond to viewer questions on the *P.O.V. Blog*.

What's Your P.O.V.?

Read what other viewers have to say about *Soldiers of Conscience* and add your own thoughts about the film to the P.O.V. Blog at www.pbs.org/pov/blog/

Websites Related to People Featured in *Soldiers of Conscience*

IRAQ VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR

www.ivaw.org

Affiliated with Veterans for Peace, the membership of Iraq Veterans Against the War consists of men and women who have served in the U.S. military since September 11, 2001. Camilo Mejia chairs the board of directors. The organization's website offers first-person testimonials from Iraq veterans who are opposed to continuing the Iraq war, including several posts from Joshua Casteel.

MAJOR PETER KILNER

<http://soldier-ethicist.blogspot.com/>

Major Pete Kilner's blog includes a myriad of posts about his reflections on the morality of war.

Websites Related to the Film and Filmmakers

SOLDIERS OF CONSCIENCE

www.soldiers-themovie.com

The official website of the film includes more details on the making and distribution of the film.

LUNA PRODUCTIONS

www.lunaproductions.com

The website of filmmakers Catherine Ryan and Gary Weimberg has more information about their films and background.



Resources

Resources for Soldiers, Veterans and Those Considering Military Service

Conscientious Objection and G.I. Rights

BBC: HEAD-TO-HEAD: REFUGE FOR DESERTERS?

<http://news.bbc.co.uk>

In this point-counterpoint argument, American National Guardsman Corey Glass, who went AWOL and sought asylum in Toronto, debates Canadian commentator Jonathan Kay about his decision to desert the National Guard. (June 11, 2008)

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR REGULATIONS

www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/130006p.pdf

This downloadable version of the military's official conscientious objector policy is available in PDF format from the San Diego Military Counseling Project.

CENTER ON CONSCIENCE AND WAR

www.centeronconscience.org

This counseling and advocacy organization for conscientious objectors provides a variety of online resources relevant to conscientious objection, including a self-help guide for military conscientious objectors. The center also seeks to improve U.S. law pertaining to conscientious objector rights.

CENTRAL COMMITTEE FOR CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

www.objector.org

The website of this organization for conscientious objectors and their supporters includes guidelines for applying for conscientious objector status as well as a useful archive of documents related to war resistance by members of the armed forces.

DEMOCRACY NOW!: CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR WITNESSED ABUSE, KILLING OF IRAQI DETAINEES AT ABU GHRAIB

www.democracynow.org

In this interview with Democracy Now!, Specialist Aidan Delgado, seen in *Soldiers of Conscience*, explains his military history, the reasons for his conscientious objector claim and what he observed at the Abu Ghraib prison complex. (December 17, 2004)

HISTORY OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

<http://civilliberty.about.com/od/religiousliberty/p/objectors.htm>

On this About.com page, historian Tom Head gives a short history of conscientious objection in American history.

G.I. RIGHTS HOTLINE

1-877-447-4487

www.girightshotline.org

The G.I. Rights Hotline is a network of nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations that provide information to service members about military discharges, grievance and complaint procedures, and civil and legal rights as well as resources for medical and psychological help. To call from outside the United States (or wherever toll-free numbers don't work), please dial: 907-374-2822 or email: girights@girights.org.

MEN AGAINST FIRE: THE PROBLEM OF BATTLE COMMAND IN FUTURE WAR BY S.L.A. MARSHALL

www.books.google.com

Google Books offers a selection of pages from official Army historian S.L.A. Marshall's book about the fire level of American troops in World War II.

THE NEW YORK TIMES: WAR DODGERS

www.nytimes.com

Jeremy Hinzman was one of the first U.S. Soldiers to seek refugee status in Canada due to his objections to the Iraq war. This *New York Times* article follows his struggle to remain in Canada. (March 23, 2008)

General Veteran Support

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

www.va.gov/

The website of the national government agency includes information about benefits — including health care services — for veterans of the U.S. military.



Resources

COALITION FOR IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS

<http://coalitionforveterans.org>

Funded by the Iraq Afghanistan Deployment Impact Fund, this partnership of 45 or so organizations works to improve access to and quality of services for Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom military, veterans and their families.

SWORDS TO PLOWSHARES

<http://swords-to-plowshares.org/>

This organization of veterans helping veterans focuses on health and social services, housing, employment and training, and legal support for those seeking benefits. Their website provides a detailed explanation of the services they offer as well as a section on resources for veterans.

VETERANS AND FAMILIES

www.veteransandfamilies.org/

This nonprofit community service and support organization has a host of resources that address PTSD, offer career transition tools and a Homecoming Preparedness Guide in PDF format.

Mental Health and Counseling

SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE: 1-800-273-TALK (VETERANS, PRESS 1)

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

The 24-hour, toll-free suicide prevention service is available to anyone in suicidal crisis.

NATIONAL CENTER ON PTSD

www.ncptsd.va.gov/

The Veteran's Administration site has information on post-traumatic stress disorder for veterans and their families as well as for medical professionals and social service providers.

GIVE AN HOUR

www.giveanhour.org

Give an Hour is a nonprofit organization that offers free mental health services, through a national network of providers, to U.S. military personnel and families affected by the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

SOLDIER'S HEART

www.soldiersheart.net

A return and healing project for veterans, Soldier's Heart addresses the emotional and spiritual needs of veterans, their families and communities. The website has information about veteran retreats, clinical consultations and a mentor program.

THE COMING HOME PROJECT

www.cominghomeproject.net

A nonprofit organization of veterans, psychotherapists, and interfaith leaders, the Coming Home Project's website gives veterans and their families information about psychological counseling and local forums.

VETS4VETS

www.vets4vets.us

This nonpartisan organization's website connects Iraq- and Afghanistan-era veterans and provides an opportunity for peer counseling to help the healing process.

Advocacy

IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS OF AMERICA

www.iava.org/

The first and largest group dedicated to the current service members and veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and their civilian supporters provides news about pending legislation, policy changes and benefits as well as photos and videos from current and former troops, links to resources, and more.

Peace Resources

UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

www.internationaldayofpeace.org/

Established by a United Nations resolution in 1981, the International Day of Peace was first celebrated on September 21, 1982. This website provides a primer on peace building and an opportunity for individuals, organizations and nations to create acts of peace on a shared date.



Resources

UNITED FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

www.unitedforpeace.org/

United for Peace and Justice is an online resource and national coalition that brings together a broad range of organizations across the United States to help coordinate work for peace and justice. The website includes a member directory that lists peace organizations around the world.

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

www.usip.org/

The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan institution established and funded by Congress. The institute's website offers a list of publications and information about numerous affiliated centers that focus on peace-related issues.

Faith Resources

BBC: RELIGION AND ETHICS

www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/

This website offers some introductory information on a selected range of world religions and their central teachings and beliefs.

CHRISTIAN PEACE WITNESS FOR IRAQ

www.christianpeacewitness.org/

An ecumenical, ad hoc group of partners from various Christian denominations who are working to raise a Christian voice for peace. Includes listing of peace fellowships from various Christian denominations.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PLURALISM PROJECT: INTERFAITH AND FAITH PEACE ORGANIZATIONS

www.pluralism.org/

The Pluralism Project at Harvard University seeks to engage Americans with the realities of religious diversity and provides site visitors a breadth of resources, ranging from research conducted by the Pluralism Project to links that lead to other interfaith and peace-related organizations.

JEWISH PEACE FELLOWSHIP

www.jewishpeacefellowship.org/

Founded in 1941 to support Jewish conscientious objectors to the military, the Jewish Peace Fellowship works to help educate local draft boards on the theological basis of the Jewish position on conscientious objection. The website includes links to publications and to other peace resource organizations.

RELIGIONS FOR PEACE USA

www.rfpusa.org/

Religions for Peace is a coalition composed of leaders from more than 60 U.S. religious communities. Visitors to the site can find resources about other world faiths, read book reviews and learn about the different programs the organization sponsors.

Military Ethics

ETHICS UPDATE

<http://ethics.sandiego.edu/Applied/Military/index.asp>

Edited by Lawrence Hinman, a professor at the University of San Diego, this website has an extensive collection of multimedia resources on the ethics of war, peace and terrorism, including links to articles by Major Pete Kilner, who is featured in the film.

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR MILITARY ETHICS

www.usafa.edu/isme/

Formerly known as JSCOPE (Joint Services Conference on Professional Ethics), the International Society for Military Ethics has amassed a rich archive of conference papers related to questions of morality and war.

WAR, FROM THE STANFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/war/>

This online resource strives to be a "dynamic reference work," providing open access to an encyclopedia of philosophical topics. Entries are maintained by an editorial board of experts. Here, Brian Orend discusses the ethics of war and peace, including the Just War theory.



Resources

PBS and NPR

PBS

THE GOOD WAR (AND THOSE WHO REFUSED TO FIGHT IT)

www.pbs.org/thegoodwar

The website of this PBS documentary about World War II conscientious objectors includes a brief history of pacifism in the United States and a useful set of links to websites related to peace and conscientious objection.

HISTORY DETECTIVES: "WWII CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS"

www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives

This episode of the *History Detectives* features information about conscientious objectors during World War II and the challenges they faced.

NOW: "A CLOSER LOOK: CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION"

www.pbs.org/now

NOW talks to two soldiers who went AWOL and eventually left the Army, but took two very different paths. (August 24, 2007)

THE PERILOUS FIGHT: AMERICA'S WORLD WAR II IN COLOR

www.pbs.org/perilousfight/social/objectors/

Witness World War II through rare color film, read letters from a nation redefining itself and learn more about conscientious objectors during that time.

NPR

MORNING EDITION: "ARMY WAR CRITIC WILKERSON AWAITS SENTENCE"

www.npr.org

Steve Inskeep interviews Army Specialist Mark Wilkerson, who was sentenced after pleading guilty to leaving his Army unit. Already a veteran of one tour in Iraq, Wilkerson had applied for conscientious objector status. (February 22, 2007)

MORNING EDITION: "AVOIDING WAR SERVICE A MINOR PROBLEM FOR MILITARY"

www.npr.org

The all-voluntary military handles many fewer cases of conscientious objectors today than it did during the Vietnam era, when a draft was in place. During Vietnam, as many as 50,000 Americans fled to Canada to escape the war. Current numbers are in the hundreds. (September 1, 2006)

NPR: SLATE "EXPLAINER: CLAIMING CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR STATUS"

www.npr.org

Slate senior editor Andy Bowers explains the process by which a soldier might claim conscientious objector status. (March 17, 2004)



How to Buy the Film

To order *Soldiers of Conscience*, go to www.soldiers-themovie.com or email info@socfilm.com



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and entering its 21st season on PBS, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running series on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through October, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought more than 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, P.O.V.'s Borders. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation around today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V. is available online at www.pbs.org/pov.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, The Educational Foundation of America, The Fledgling Fund, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, The September 11th Fund, and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s Diverse Voices Project is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston and Thirteen/WNET New York.

Front cover: Conscientious objector Kevin Benderman leaves his court martial immediately after having been found guilty of missing movement but innocent of desertion. Ft. Stewart, GA, July 28, 2005. Photo courtesy of Maritza Castillo

P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these originally produced materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders, and general audiences nationally. P.O.V. also works closely with local public-television stations to partner with local museums, libraries, schools, and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films.

P.O.V. Interactive

www.pbs.org/pov

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces a Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, P.O.V.'s Borders. It also produces a website for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information and feedback on the issues. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses our unique Talking Back feature, filmmaker interviews, viewer resources and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

American Documentary, Inc.

www.americandocumentary.org

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream-media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic-engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

