

## *From pacifists to patriots*

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### Sept. 1, 1944

D-Day in Normandy has turned American involvement in World War II into a two-front enterprise, but as summer wanes, the war in Europe is still very much in doubt. Although Paris has just been liberated and Allied troops are about to enter Belgium, the Battle of the Bulge is 2 ½ months away, and soldiers are still dying at an alarming rate.

With these issues occupying headlines in all the newspapers, F.B. Hertzog, Mennonite Brethren in Christ pastor, sees fit to take pen in hand and write a letter to those who were serving abroad, both in Europe and in the Pacific.

Hertzog's letters are not intended to dabble in guilt, although it is certainly true that some of his clergymen counterparts in the MBC are still using their pulpits to forcefully encourage their young people not to take up the sword, or the rifle, in battle, no matter how evil the foe and how great the Allies' need for more manpower.

But Hertzog knows his men need encouragement, and he is quick to give it. And so as front-line soldiers receive their much-desired mail, they open it to find these gentle words from a loving pastor: *"Whenever God puts us in any place He does so intelligently, with some purpose of good for us... There are some lessons He wants us to learn which we can learn in no other place quite so well as where He sets us.*

*"Boys, remember that Christ is not merely a Saviour who died two thousand years ago, not one who lives away up in heaven and thinks of you," Hertzog concludes. "He is a friend right by your side, coming into your everyday life, into all your experiences, into your joys and sorrows, into your pleasures and pains. You have no affairs in which He is not deeply interested and in which He will not help you. There are no troubles which you cannot take to Him, assured that He will help you to bear them."* **(Hertzog letter to U.S. Servicemen, Sept. 1, 1944)**

Publicly, Rev. F.B. Hertzog did not encourage military service although he was not particularly vocal about it. "There was not really much discussion among the membership about non-resistance. Pastor Hertzog told us of the position of our denomination, and the position of our local church, but that was it," noted Bob Kauffman, who had grown up in the Emmaus church under Hertzog's ministry and went on to serve actively with Gen. George Patton's Third Army, earning a Purple Heart in the process following action in Normandy. "There was no coercion, simply a statement of fact." **(e-mail interview with Bob Kauffman, July 1, 2012)**



**F. B. Hertzog**

Privately, when his son Ernest talked about joining the military, F.B. Hertzog's advice was simple. "As I understand it, Dad encouraged him to go as a Conscientious Objector, but also discussed Non-Combatant service as well," recalled Roy Hertzog, Ernest's younger brother and F.B.'s son. "Dad encouraged him to go as a CO but in the final analysis indicated it was his [Ernest's] decision to make and that he would support either decision which he would make." **(e-mail interview with Roy Hertzog, June, 2012)**

Ernest Hertzog took the non-combatant route and found himself in Cardiff, Wales with the U.S. Medical Corps, where he received a visit from his Emmaus buddy Kauffman. "I had visited him when I had been wounded in Normandy and was sent to a hospital outside of Bristol, England," Kauffman said. **(e-mail with Kauffman, July 1, 2012)** Ernest Hertzog later served as a non-combatant in France and Germany before the war in Europe came to an end in May, 1945.

Bethel Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church in Emmaus was fairly reflective of the broad mixture of feelings and positions adopted throughout the MBiC during World War II. There were those, like Kauffman, who picked up weapons and proudly served their country. There were those, like Ernest Hertzog, who refused to kill their enemies and instead spent the war in medical service, patching up bodies that had been torn in action. And there were those like James Koch, another young man from the Emmaus church, who took the Conscientious Objector position and served his nation without violating his conscientious by taking up arms.

"He and I had a very lengthy discussion about the subject," Bob Kauffman said of Koch. "I always had the highest regard for Jim and the position he took." **(Kauffman, e-mail interview, July 1, 2012)**

By World War II, there was no clear single position taken by the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church. If you were a young man of service age, depending on where your church was located and who was serving as pastor, you may have been encouraged to fight, encouraged not to fight, or encouraged simply to pray and follow the dictates of your conscience.

But it had not started out that way. We used to be pacifists. Now, go to any Bible Fellowship Church and seldom will you hear a discouraging word about enlisting in any branch of the U.S. Military. Call that a more patriotic approach, if you will, but we are no longer pacifists. And the move from one end of the spectrum to the other was a long and gradual one that began with our Civil War and continued through two World Wars and costly engagements in Korea and Vietnam before reaching an overwhelmingly pro-



**Roy and Ernie Hertzog**

service position by the time of our country' s military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq.

### **Do not take up the sword...**

As Mennonites, our forbears subscribed to the tenets and doctrines of their namesake, Menno Simons (1496-1561). Simons, who was not the founder of the Anabaptist movement but has rightly been called the “regenerator” of Anabaptism, clearly espoused biblical nonresistance.

“If Christ fights his enemies with the sword of his mouth, if he smites the earth with the rod of his mouth, and slay the wicked with the breath of his lips; and if we are to be conformed unto his image, how can we, then, fight our enemies with any other sword?” Simons taught. (**The complete works of Menno Simon, Elkhart, Indiana, 1871**)

In a reply to a letter sent to Simons by Gellius Faber, Simons wrote, “The Scriptures teach that there are two opposing princes and two opposing kingdoms: the one is the Prince of peace; the other the prince of strife.

Each of these princes has his particular kingdom and as the prince is, so is also the kingdom. The Prince of peace is Christ Jesus; His kingdom is the kingdom of peace, which is His church; His messengers are the messengers of peace; His Word is the word of peace; His body is the body of peace; His children are the seed of peace; and His inheritance and reward are the inheritance and reward of peace. In short, with this King, and in His kingdom and reign, it is nothing but peace. Everything that is seen, heard, and one is peace. (**Reply to Gellius Faber, Complete Writings of Menno Simon, pp. 554-556**)

Simons pointed to several Scriptural supports, among them Jesus' words in Matt. 5:38-39 – “You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

“Peter was commanded to sheathe his sword. All Christians are commanded to love their enemies; to do good unto those who abuse and persecute them; to give the mantle when the cloak is taken, the other cheek when one is struck,” Simons told Faber. “Tell me, how can a Christian defend Scripturally retaliation, rebellion, war, striking, slaying, torturing, stealing, robbing and plundering and burning cities, and conquering countries?” (**Reply to Gellius Faber**)

“O, beloved reader,” Simons noted elsewhere, “Our weapons are not swords and spears, but patience, silence and hope, and the word of God. With these we must maintain our cause and defend it.” (**Complete works, Elkhart, Indiana, 1871**)

Ever since, Mennonites have largely been non-participants in military affairs. The 1963 Mennonite Confession of Faith, Article 18 (Love and Nonresistance) states,

We believe that it is the will of God for his children to follow Christian love in all human relationships. Such a life of love excludes retaliation and revenge...As nonresistant Christians, we cannot serve in any office which employs the use of force. Nor can we participate in military service, or in military training, or in the

voluntary financial support of war. But we must aggressively, at the risk of life itself, do whatever we can for the alleviation of human distress and suffering. (1963 Mennonite Confession of Faith, Article 18, Love and Nonresistance)

Of course, it is important to note that even present-day Mennonites have strayed from the teachings of their founder and have been tested in time of conflict. As far back as the Revolutionary War, it is well-known, for instance, that Mennonites in Montgomery County, PA were divided in their loyalties, some siding with the British, citing New Testament passages declaring submission to authorities, and others identifying themselves with the cause of our American Revolution, but struggling over whether to involve themselves in a cause that involved taking up arms.

In a blog entitled, “Confessions of a modern-day pacifist,” Eastern Mennonite University professor Lisa Schirch admitted that her fellow Mennonites have often been inconsistent in practicing what Simons taught. “Loving those [who are] condemning Mennonite pacifism means taking seriously their accusations of our contradictions and double standards,” she said. “If the concept of pacifism is to be anything more than a quaint if naïve relic of the past, it needs some serious updating.”

Schirch then admitted her own family’s deviation from Menno Simons’ teaching: “As for many other Mennonites, pacifism has been a point of family conflict. In the last few generations, my Mennonite-born uncles and grandfather served in the U.S. military.” (Lisa Schirch, “confessions of a modern day pacifist,” Feb. 1, 2011, [www.themennonite.org/issues/14](http://www.themennonite.org/issues/14))

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### October 2, 1944

Victory in Europe seems closer than ever. There has been a breakout from Normandy, and Allied forces are racing toward Germany. With optimism reigning, F.B. Hertzog writes to his beloved servicemen.

*“Victory! Victory! People are talking more and more about Victory, and many of God’s children are earnestly praying for the day of Victory and the restoration of peace,”* Hertzog writes. *“I am sure that our feeling is mutual when I say, the day of Victory can’t come too soon for me. The Churches – Protestant, Jewish and Catholic – have agreed to have services in their church on “V-ONE-DAY.” I think is commendable that they want these services to be services of consecration rather than celebration. Our service is announced for Emmaus at 8.00 p.m. on the day of Germany’s capitulation.*

*“My, what an inspiration it would be to have all you boys with us for that service, to praise the Lord, and to re-consecrate yourselves to God,”* he continued. *“This, we know, is impossible for that occasion, but we are expectantly looking forward to the time when we shall have the privilege of meeting all you boys regularly in God’s house. I feel that the multiplied experiences of these war days will tend to make you more devout and sincere in following the Lord when you return home.”*

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### **Pacifism and nonresistance**

If we are going to correctly understand the position taken by those who went before us, we must define our terms. Mennonites are frequently termed “pacifists,” but

more accurately, Mennonites practice nonresistance, although the two terms are often interchangeable. Classic pacifism has two basic tenets. First, it actively opposes war or violence as a means of settling disputes. Second, it refuses to bear arms in time of war.

The emphasis of nonresistance is on the second half of the definition. It takes its name from Christ's own words in Matt. 5:39 – "Do not resist the one who is evil." And it has a more gospel-driven motivation than that of pacifism.

J.C. Wenger, Professor of Historical Theology at Goshen College Biblical Seminary in the 1960s, presented this viewpoint in a paper read on Nov. 30, 1967: "The most basic principle is to act at all times in terms of a genuine interest in and concern for those who show hatred or ill will toward us. Christian love is not a matter of gushing sentiment, nor even of trying to feel a certain way. It is rather a deep desire to manifest in actual life the same caring love toward all men which Christ manifests."

**(<http://www.bibleviews.com/Biblicalnonresist.html>)**

Guy F. Hershberger, a 20<sup>th</sup> century American Mennonite theologian, noted several differences between pacifism and nonresistance. First, the pacifist may devote his labors to the abolition of war while those who practice nonresistance are primarily concerned with bringing men and women "to the experience of 'peace with God' through responding to the glorious gospel of Christ in repentance and faith."

Second, Hershberger wrote, "Pacifism as a movement does not always reckon as seriously as it should with the depths of sin in the human heart, and consequently, is overly optimistic about the possible abolition of war." Those who are nonresistant are more realistic about war but still oppose it.

Third, pacifism decries all use of force, even when necessary in the maintaining of law and order, while nonresistance supports the government's role to maintain order as "the state functions as an agent of the wrath of God against sin." (**Mennonite Encyclopedia, "Pacifism"**)

So, in many respects, we come from a background of nonresistance, not of pacifism. Our forbears supported our government's laws and prayed for those in authority over us. We grasped the depth of our sin and prayed that the Spirit would work in sinners, bringing them to repentance. And they correctly understood that the gospel of Jesus Christ, and not a mere absence of war, was the primary goal and the task about which they were to devote themselves.

Martin Schrag, a Swiss Mennonite who faced the World War II draft and served in several Civilian Public Service camps from 1942-46, stressed, "Biblical nonresistance does not mean passivity in the face of evil. It calls for a vigorous, loving, non-violent response in which both the way we proceed and the end we seek provide the possibility of a positive solution.

"In war," Schrag continued, "the way we proceed corrupts the goal sought. To some, loving our enemies is foolishness or a stumbling block. But those whose hostility has been overcome by God's love understand that they are to love others as God loved them. Knowing the power of love, they follow their Master." (**Brethren in Christ 'Accents and Issues' – "Christians & War," by Martin H. Schrag**)

The Schleithem Confession of 1527, which codified the Swiss Brethren position that served as a source for our own practice of nonresistance centuries later, noted Jesus' response to the woman caught in the act of adultery in John's gospel in stating, "In the Law the sword was ordained for the punishment of the wicked and for their death, and

the same (sword) is (now) ordained to be used by the worldly magistrates. In the perfection of Christ, however, only the ban is used for a warning and for the excommunication of the one who has sinned, without putting the flesh to death – simply the warning and the command to sin no more.” (**Schleitheim Confession of 1527, Anabaptists.org**).

Longtime BFC missionary and historian Dick Gehman summarized the Schleitheim Confession this way: “Those in Christ are absolutely forbidden to use the sword for any cause; neither are they permitted to participate in the settling of disputes with unbelievers; nor should they serve as magistrates.” (**Faith of Our Fathers,” p. 175**)

Centuries later, as members of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ churches, we were still largely following Simons’ tenets. “For Mennonites,” Gehman wrote, “their emphases are...rejection of all violence and war (they are the ‘peace churches’), and showing love and compassion to all.” (**Faith of our Fathers, p. 187**)

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### **Dec. 1, 1944**

The fighting in Italy has reached a bloody stalemate as Allied offensive efforts have been stalled by both heavy Nazi resistance and torrential rains. In the Pacific, American sailors are experiencing the horrors of Japanese kamikaze (“divine wind”) pilots who dive their bomb-laden aircraft into U.S. warships in massed suicide attacks.

Again, F. B. Hertzog writes to encourage the troops, who are undoubtedly beginning to realize that they will spend the holidays far from home.

*“Though you are many miles away from your home and your church, I can assure you that you are not forgotten here at home. It would, I am sure, greatly encourage your hearts if sometime you could step into our weekly prayer meetings and hear the many earnest prayers offered up in your behalf. These praying fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sweet-hearts and friends of you boys, have in the spirit of their Master given a generous offering to make possible a Christmas gift for each one of our boys whose name appears on our Service Honor Roll.*

*“Enclosed please find your gift in the form of a money order worth five dollars. With this gift come our prayers that God shall continue to bless and keep you, and our sincere wish that you may enjoy a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, wherever Christmas and the New Year may find you.”*

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### **Civil War comes to Pennsylvania**

War wasn’t far away in September, 1858, when seven Pennsylvania German Mennonite revivalists established the Evangelical Mennonite Society (*Evangelische Mennoniten Gemeinschaft*). Simply put, their minds were on other things, like prayer and reaching out to their neighbors with the gospel.

So when war came to Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863, it made barely a ripple among our forbears. While the availability of official denominational documents going back to our inception is limited, what we do have mentions almost nothing about the Civil War.

Within the larger framework of diaries and records kept by Union soldiers, it was frequently noted that PA German-Americans around Gettysburg were greatly offended by

the requisitioning of their fence posts and foodstuffs to feed the Army of the Potomac or the invading Army of Northern Virginia.

In short, they simply wanted to be alone, and our forbears were no exception. The work of farming, and the spiritual work of sowing seeds and reaping a spiritual harvest, far outweighed the coming of war to their homeland.

Levi Jung (Young), a young Pennsylvanian whose contact with the Evangelical Mennonites came through the evangelist and missionary Eusebius Hershey, kept an extensive diary throughout the Civil War years, but Jung's daily entries made only a few passing references to the Civil War, even though many around him greatly feared the invasion of the north by Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.

Indeed, Jung's July 11, 1863 diary only mentioned the war because he had learned that a neighbor had been killed a week earlier, at Gettysburg.

"Today true reports came that Wm. Beaver was killed in battle July 1 in the vicinity of Gettysburg Pa. and is now buried in a cemetery in Gettysburg, though at first was buried by the rebels," Jung wrote. "He cannot therefore be at present taken home for burial. Thus another of my friends has gone to the land of spirits and left me here in the vale of tears." (**Young diaries, July 11, 1863 entry**)

The threat of invasion gone, Jung did not directly mention the war for nearly two years, and then only because President Lincoln had been assassinated. As for Jung himself, he had been drafted and had been ordered to report to Easton, PA for induction, but like many others, he had paid a \$300 fee to be excused from military service.

It is unknown how many, like Jung, paid their way out of military service. What is known, however, was that the Evangelical Mennonites' only official statement connected to the war dealt directly with slavery, not military service.

"We believe that slavery (the institution of slave holding) is sin in the eyes of God and a curse on the land when it is tolerated," noted the proceedings of the Ninth Semi-Annual Conference on Oct. 1, 1863. "Therefore, be it RESOLVED: That we use our influence against it, in Christian spirit, with word and deed, after our confession of faith." (**Ninth Semi-Annual Conference, November, 1863, Proceedings of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference – second meeting, Thursday afternoon, Oct. 1, 1863**)

"Word and deed," however, apparently did not allow for military service. Harold P. Shelly notes that, near war's end, the Evangelical Mennonite Society restated its adherence to the Dortrecht Confession with several articles, including Article 15, "Resistance" (*Von der Gegenwehr* in German), which noted, "As far as vengeance is concerned, by which an enemy is resisted with the sword, we believe and confess that the Lord Jesus has forbidden his disciples and followers to show vengeance and resistance, that he has commanded them not to return evil for evil, or curse for curse; but to sheathe the sword, as the Prophets foretold, to make coulters of them. Further, we believe that war and blood shedding are not conformable to the teaching of the Gospel of Christ." (**What mean these stones? Edited by Leonard E. Buck. Published by The Historical Committee, Bible Fellowship Church, Oct. 1983**)

"Resistance" was strengthened by another affirmation entitled "Inoffensiveness" (*Von der Wehrlosigkeit*), which read as follows: "It is ordained that in the Evangelical Mennonite Society it is forbidden to take the sword in order to carry out war, because we believe that only the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, is given to believers for defence," (**Shelly, The Bible Fellowship Church, p. 91**)

“The wording of this statement of duty suggests that it was carefully drawn up to reflect the times,” Shelly cited (**Shelly, the BFC, p. 91**)

While the Evangelical Mennonites were unequivocally against any kind of participation in active military service, some did serve. Like William Ellinger, for instance. Ellinger, who later came to saving faith in Christ and active connection with the Evangelical Mennonites, including a stint as a traveling preacher, led a wild life prior to his conversion – one which included service in the U.S. Cavalry. His service was not without trouble, and at one time he found himself sentenced to hard labor, only to be pardoned by future Confederate President Jefferson Davis, who at that time was Secretary of War.

When war came in 1861, Ellinger found himself in the Washington Guards, which was sent to Baltimore to quell anti-Union riots. “I was wounded in this battle, but I never left a battle-field until I left my mark,” Ellinger wrote. “Here I was compelled to kill a rebel, after which I was wounded and taken prisoner, and sent home to Philadelphia [as part of an exchange] with five hundred more.”

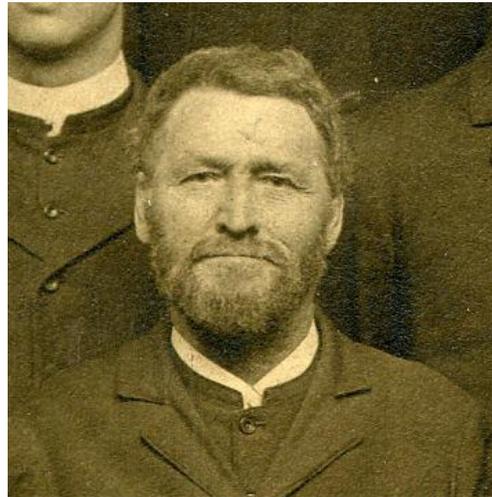
Ellinger would later serve with distinction, and his stint included three more wounds, time as a prisoner of war, service as a spy, and action in which he helped to capture the battle flag of the 34<sup>th</sup> North Carolina Infantry. (**What Mean these Stones, Life Experiences of William K. Ellinger, Traveling Preacher**)

All of this happened prior to Ellinger’s conversion and ministry, but for the rest of his life, he may have had to explain to his fellow Mennonite servants that he had carried a rifle and had killed enemy soldiers. One can only imagine their reaction.

The experiences of George A. Campbell, a shoemaker-turned-preacher from upper Bucks County, mirror Ellinger’s in some ways.

Long before his conversion, Campbell enlisted on Sept. 11, 1862 as a member of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery and was captured two years later during heavy action at Chaffin’s Farm/New Market Heights, part of the Petersburg, VA campaign.

Campbell’s life as a prisoner of war was difficult; he was taken to Salisbury Prison in North Carolina, where he suffered from the effects of scurvy and was wounded in the side during a botched mass escape attempt. He was released as part of a prisoner exchange on March 20, 1865 – released as a desperately sick man.



**G. A. Campbell**

During his convalescence in Annapolis, MD, Campbell began to experience the Holy Spirit’s stirrings during a conversation with a hospital visitor. “I was in a prison in Salisbury, N.C., came to Anapolis [sic] hospital as a mere skeleton, about ready to die, when a sister in Christ came along and stopping before my couch commenced talking with me,” he later wrote.

“She asked me whether I expected to get well. I told her I did not know nor care. Then she asked me whether I had peace with God. I in my spiritual unconsciousness told

her I did not know. She then spoke with me on the subject of religion. After she left me, I contemplated, commenced to pray and obtained peace in a small measure, but when I got well it was like sickbed conversions mostly are: I was soon lost.

“But a small light was still glimmering,” Campbell added, “and a small voice calling; and I thank God that I am what I am; nothing to boast of myself.”

Campbell traced his own conversion to March, 1876, when he attended meetings held in Springfield Township under the ministry of Jonas Musselman. Feeling a calling to the ministry, Campbell was presented as a probationer to the Annual Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ in 1887 and served faithfully in several PA churches.

Campbell’s past, however, was never forgotten. He still suffered from his wounds and illnesses and attempted – unsuccessfully – to obtain an invalid pension in 1880 and again in 1882.

Beyond that, his ministry did not allow for him to bask in the honor and respect that many other Civil War veterans received because of our nonresistance position. “The Civil War veteran turned preacher could not tell the stories of his experiences,” noted Dick Taylor. “His experiences did not make him a hero in their eyes. No one in his church would thank him for what he endured. What he suffered was not to be shared but rather kept to himself.” (“**George A. Campbell – The Untold Story,**” **Richard Taylor,** <http://www.bfchistory.org/Campbell.htm>).

But that didn’t keep Campbell, despite his own ill health, from taking a train trip back to Salisbury in November, 1910, just under a year before his death, to honor fellow Union soldiers who had died in captivity.

Again, we largely mirrored the official Mennonite position concerning war, one which was held by John M. Brenneman, a Mennonite bishop from Allen County, Ohio. Brenneman wrote a letter to President Lincoln on August 19, 1862, in which he informed the President of his people’s cause.

“We would herewith inform the President that there is a people, scattered and living mostly in the northern parts of the United States – Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana – and some few in Illinois and Iowa – called Mennonites, who are greatly distressed at the present time on account of the war,” Brenneman wrote. “As it is against their Confession of Faith and also against their conscience to take up arms therewith to destroy human life, the President must not mistake us to be secessionists or rebels against the government, as we are entirely free from that guilt.”

Brenneman stressed that Mennonites were “generally, as far as we know, in favor of, and well-wishers to, the Union,” and he wanted the President to know that if he were to learn that any of his kinsfolk were found to be abetting the “rebellion” against said Union, “then let them be dealt with as rebels. We would be far from holding such as brethren in our church. Would to God that we were all as clear from all guilt as we are of the present rebellion or of being secessionists.”

At the same time, however, he wanted President Lincoln to understand that his people were “subject to higher powers” than the United States of America. Should the government allow, Mennonites would gladly pay their taxes and would continue to be good citizens. Would the government allow them “freedom of conscience in all points to believers, so that they may worship God in their religious ordinances according to their truth and the voice of conscience”? If so, the President would find them “the more gratefully submissive and obedient.

“We do by no means expect or ask to be entirely screened from the burden of the war. But we pray and beg for God's sake that the liberty may be granted us to pay a fine when drafted, instead of taking up arms,” Brenneman noted.

“We hope and pray that the President will be so kind as to issue immediate orders to the several governors of those states wherein the Mennonites reside, instructing the governors to be favorably inclined to us poor creatures of the dust – especially to the governor of Ohio, as the Mennonites in Ohio seem to be in the most danger,” he petitioned. “By so doing the President would do us a great favor, never to be forgotten, and we hope and pray that God the judge of all the earth will richly reward him for the same, with an unfading crown of glory.”

There is no record that Brenneman’s letter ever reached the eyes of the President. (Brenneman letter, [www.mcusa-archives.org/MHB/Petition-Lincoln.html](http://www.mcusa-archives.org/MHB/Petition-Lincoln.html))

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### **Jan. 1, 1945**

Many American servicemen and women welcomed in 1945 in frozen foxholes in Europe or in the dangerous swelter of the Pacific. The hammer of the desperate Nazi counterattack known as the Battle of the Bulge has been broken, but not without heavy Allied casualties, and no one knows how long German resistance will last. Again, F.B. Hertzog writes to those who are defending our freedoms...

*“In the last twelve months we have, sometimes with troubles hearts, watched a world treading the path of war. We approach the new year well aware of the uncertainties that it holds for all of us, as a world, a nation and as individuals. We know not where the course of our world and nation will lead. We know not what is in store for each of us in our individual lives.”*

*“The road may be uncertain but there is one certainty that can never fail. A safe and sure journey is ours if we secure a trustworthy guide, stay with him and do as he says. Our coming journey may be perilous and hard going at times but if we have Christ as our Guide, if we stay with Him and if we obey Him, then our destination is assured and our journey is safe and sure. For we know that the Lord will shepherd us and guide us in the ways of righteousness for His Name’s sake, and in the end, we, too, shall come to the House of the Lord where we shall dwell forever and ever.”*

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### **The War to end all wars**

The first mention of our position regarding war is a single sentence in the 1866 General Rules and Appointed Duties of the Society section of the *Doctrine of Faith and Church Discipline of the Evangelical Mennonite Society of East Pennsylvania* – which was the first doctrinal statement of any Mennonite Church in North America.

“It is required of each fellow member of this Society to be subject to all government which has power, so long as it ordains nothing which militates against the teaching of Christ...” Nothing further was said about our response to war, showing, by its brevity, that we were Mennonites, but we were not good Mennonites in the sense that we held the same pacifist/nonresistant positions with the same zeal as other Mennonites (**“What Mean These Stones,” p. 33**)

The 1880 “Doctrines and Discipline of the Evangelical United Mennonites” offered a more detailed statement of our position in Article XXI, Defense: “Jesus has forbidden His disciples and followers all revenge and resistance, with the Divine injunction, ‘resist not evil;’ again, ‘my Kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, but now is my kingdom not from hence.

“The Prophet, when he alludes to Christ’s kingdom, says, ‘They shall beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more.

“Christ’s followers are denominated his sheep, whose nature is the direct opposite of the wolf or lion. Christ, in His suffering, has given us an example, that we should follow His steps...we are commanded to ‘recompense to no man evil for evil,’ nor to occasion grief or suffering upon any one; and if required, for conscience sake, at the Lord’s bidding; if persecuted in one place, flee into another; and also take the spoiling of our good joyfully for the Lord’s sake, ‘knowing that there is reserved for us in heaven a better and enduring substance.’” **(The Doctrines and Discipline of the Evangelical United Mennonites, 1880, Article XXI, Defense)**

In 1883, the Evangelical United Mennonites merged with a small Ohio-based group, the Brethren in Christ, to form the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. A quick perusal of the minutes of Annual Conference shows any number of issues that needed to be resolved, but one subject was largely absent: war and our response to it.

Not that an official response should be surprising, for the wars of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were largely regional affairs. The Indians Wars were far away. The Spanish-American War lasted only a short time. And life in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ largely mirrored life in the rest of America. The message sent by President Theodore Roosevelt’s sending of his Great White Fleet notwithstanding, American sentiments were largely sectarian and isolationist; what does war across an ocean matter to us?

That said, with the Civil War still fresh in the minds of some, the winds of peace movements caught the attention of some. The August 27, 1895 edition of the *Gospel Banner*, for instance, noted that Ocean Grove, NJ hosted a Christian Peace Conference on July 20<sup>th</sup> of that year, and the event produced the following resolution: “Resolved, That the various denominations be appealed to to appoint a Lord’s Day next preceding Christmas Day in each year, or such other Sunday as may be more convenient, for special services, in which prayer shall be offered and sermons preached on behalf of the establishment of the Christian method of arbitration in place of war.” **(Aug. 27, 1895 Gospel Banner, p. 8)**

About the only mention – not an official position, but a mention – of our direct forbears’ perspective on war issues was presented via an essay read at the 1900 Mennonite Brethren in Christ ministerial convention. Presented by Elder R.L. Woodring, it defined war as “a contest between nations and states for territory, destruction and dominion,” and noted that war, while frequent in Scripture, is never to be a Christian’s pursuit.

“It is our duty to pull men out of the fire, and run men out of this dangerous world into the heavenlies – Christ our eternal safety and refuge,” Elder Woodring stressed. **(1900 Ministerial Convention, Woodring essay)**

As war came again to Europe in 1914 and erupted into what came to be known as “The War to End All Wars,” or World War I, members of the Mennonite Brethren in

Christ Church likely cast wary eyes, but President Woodrow Wilson had promised to keep us out of war and it was largely thought that America would “be neutral in fact as well as in name ... be impartial in thought as well as in action.” (**Lawrence Journal-World, July 28, 1924, “Ten Years After” – as noted in Wikipedia, “American Entry Into World War One”**).

Wilson had even been reelected in 1916 under the campaign slogan “He kept us out of war.” Despite increasing pressure from within and without, America maintained its neutrality until 1917, when Germany’s decision to conduct unrestricted submarine warfare and the discovery of secret attempts by Germany to enlist Mexico as an ally, Wilson delivered a war message to a joint session of Congress on April 2, 1917, asking Congress to pass a declaration of war so that the world “be made safe for democracy.” Congress officially voted to declare war four days later. (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4943>)

With America now at war, the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church found itself torn between the pressure of expected patriotism and the long-held Mennonite position of nonresistance/pacifism.

President Wilson was himself a powerful force not to be taken lightly, but his Vice-President, Thomas R. Marshall, was likewise strident in his position – a position that was clearly against pacifism.

“I have had but little patience with any man of any race or any creed who is not with our country in the hour of war,” he said. “Regardless of the issue involved, our duty is loyalty to our country.”

Religious conviction, he added, held no sway. “O fall, hypocritical lovers of peace,” Marshall said. “The pacifist belongs in the thirty-third degree... I do not conceive that the peace of the world is to be promoted by putting up a sign to all the predatory peoples of the world: ‘We will not fight! Come and take what you want!’... I think the peace of the world is to be preserved by America being ready to defend her institutions, her citizens, and her property.”

This from a man who said he was “born and bred a Democrat and a Presbyterian.” (**Philadelphia Inquirer, March 18, 2012, “A hidden gem of a vice president,” by Frank Wilson**)

But religious convictions and traditions are not cast easily aside, especially when what is being attacked is at the core of what makes one a Mennonite. For Mennonites, convinced that their country would remain neutral, the move to war was a tough pill to swallow.

That said, even within the Mennonite Church at large, long-held positions were beginning to weaken. “Leaders of both the Eastern and Franconia Conferences seem to have made little or no special attempt to prepare their people for a major test of their ‘nonresistant’ faith,” noted Mennonite historian John L. Ruth.

There were those, like Hereford, PA native Herbert W. Burky (who later became a teacher at Bluffton College), who grew up without having heard much about the pacifism of his ancestors. “I don’t recall ever hearing a pacifist sermon all my life,” he noted. “[It] was dormant, excepting in print... We had no discussions on pacifism that I recall, till the war came.” (**From John L. Ruth – Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History – “Maintaining the Right Fellowship”**)

What to do? For some area Mennonites, even the possibility that America could go to war led to the formulation of strategies that would produce hoped-for results of bringing people back to Menno Simons' old beliefs.

The 1915 *Mennonite Year Book and Almanac*, which was edited by N.B. Grubb, Harvey Allebach and Quakertown, PA printer Uriah Stauffer, included the reprinting of an old Revolutionary War petition by Lancaster County Mennonites and Dunkards, setting forth traditional Mennonite feelings about war. That same article was reprinted, without comment, three times over the next four years. (**Ruth, "Maintaining the Right Fellowship**)

Salford Mennonite Church in Montgomery County, PA, was experiencing some of the same struggles that its neighboring Mennonite Brethren in Christ congregations were encountering. The church's July 1917 baptismal class included 12 men who, it was thought, had joined the church to prove their status as legitimate Conscientious Objectors.

"The Franconia Conference leaders instructed their young men not to accept the military uniform when they got to camp," wrote church historian Joel D. Alderfer. "Many of the men were ridiculed and abused while at camp, for not wearing the uniform. A few were subjected to heavy labor until they consented to wear it." (**From "Peace Be Unto This House: A history of the Salford Mennonite Congregation: 1717-1988 – By Joel D. Alderfer**)

So how would our churches respond?



**Feb. 1, 1945**

In Europe, the horror that is the death camp at Auschwitz has just been uncovered when its victims were liberated by Soviet forces on Jan. 27. In the Philippines, American troops are fighting their way through the streets of Manila. The invasion of Iwo Jima is 19 days away. Many lives will be lost before the end comes. The casualty statistics remain staggering. And so F.B. Hertzog tries to make sense of the war in his latest letter to his beloved servicemen.

*"Does God give thought and care to one little child among the millions of the world? Yes! This is the very thing that He wants to do for us as we pass through the world with its storms and dangers."*

*"We can commit our lives into His hands with absolute confidence. He will take us with all our faults and our sins and restore us. He will bring out all the possibilities of our lives. He will keep us from every hurt in all the perils of the way. He will lead us in the right path amid all the confusion and tangle. He will eventually bring us to glory and eternal blessedness. My dear friends, I plead with you, always give God the first place in your life."*



**Taking an official position**

A special session of Annual Conference was convened on May 14, 1917 at Ebenezer Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church in Bethlehem. Chairman H.B. Musselman explained the purpose as "the matter of our attitude relative to the militarism of the present day." A length discussion ensued, and in the end, a resolution was adopted.

“**Resolved**, that the Chairman appointed a committee of five to draw up some statements re-asserting and explaining our position relative to militarism.” Chosen to study the matter were C.H. Brunner, J.G. Shireman, W.S. Hottel, W.G. Gehman and E.N. Cassel.

Business was suspended to allow the committee to formulate its position, but when the meeting resumed, the first committee restated its commitment to the conference’s Articles of Faith, which support the belief that “for us as Christians, war is wrong and conflicting with the dictates of our conscience and the word of God.”

Believing that Christian participation in war is unbiblical, the committee further stressed that “to compel a person to engage in warfare is, therefore, to compel a person to act contrary to ‘the supreme law and will of God.’”

Furthermore, the committee concluded, “We believe that war causes grief and suffering to come upon many innocent ones to an incalculable extent. Therefore, our policy is, and always has been a policy opposed to warfare. This was proven by the fact that our people were never allowed to take part in any previous wars, as for example, the Rebellion and the Spanish-American War.”

The committee’s summary declaration was as follows: “We, therefore, declare that we are and always have been strongly opposed to all warfare and do not approve of any members taking part in any warfare.” And then several practical applications were spelled out. Members in good standing of MBC churches should pay their taxes, obey “magistrates and such who are in authority wherever it does not conflict with the supreme law and will of God,” that they honor and respect, and pray for, their rulers and all who are in authority.

The report was adopted, becoming the official position of the Pennsylvania Conference of the MBC.

On that day, H.B. Musselman also formed a standing committee, with himself a member, to “consider matters relative to the present war.” Joining Musselman were Brunner, Hottel, Cassel and W.G. Gehman.

Considering that many of the most influential men within the Pennsylvania Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church were parts of these committees, the issue of our response to the war was considered to be of the greatest seriousness...which, of course, it was.

The committee met at H.B. Musselman’s home on Sept. 6, 1917. It was decided, at that time, to send W.G. Gehman and E.N. Cassel to meet with other Mennonite groups who had held interviews with government authorities, among them Major General Enoch Crowder, Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Army, and U.S. Secretary of War Newton Baker.

A day later, the committee reconvened to hear Gehman’s and Cassel’s findings, and the committee adopted a resolution. Four days later, a meeting of all the pastors and presiding elders of the Pennsylvania Conference was held at Bethel MBC in Allentown.

The committee reported the following findings:

- None of our brethren need serve in any capacity which violates their creed and conscience.
- When they are called, they should report at the place designated on their [draft] notice.

- From the place designated on their [draft] notice, they should go with others, who are drafted and called, to the training camp.
- [They should] report to the army officers the Church to which they belong, and their belief in its creed and principles.
- This non-resistant position will place them in detention camps, where they will be properly fed and cared for.
- In these camps, they will not be uniformed nor drilled.
- A list of services considered non-combatant will be offered, but they need not accept any in violation of their conscience.
- Those who cannot accept any service, either combatant or non-combatant, will be assigned to some other service not under the military arm of the government.
- Our ministers will be allowed to visit the brethren at these camps and to keep in touch with them.
- Our ministers will be privileged to give this information and advice to our brethren in private or in public meetings.

“We have unanimously agreed to advise our brethren to state their position on church, creed and principles to the army officers at mobilization camps,” the committee reported.

Further, the committee encouraged MBC men “not to accept any service, either combatant or non-combatant, under the military arm of the Government in violation of their consciences and the creed or principles of the church.”

In conclusion, the committee noted its gratitude for being given serious consideration by our government and urged its churches to pray, both for those who would be drafted and must wrestle with the decision of whether to serve or not, and for those in authority over them.

Each of the presiding elders and pastors was furnished with a copy of the committee’s findings, and the session adjourned following an extended time of discussion and clarification. **(BFC history, 1917 PA Conference adjourned sessions)**

After the war ended in 1918, Jasper Abraham Huffman, editor-in-chief of the Ohio-based Bethel Publishing Company, in producing a “History of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church at the request of the MBC Executive Board, admitted that the war had largely caught the MBC General Conference (which included the Pennsylvania Conference) off-guard.

“The M.B.C. Church has maintained the historic Mennonite attitude on this subject. Having arisen in a time of comparative peace, and little expecting that non-resistant faith would be submitted to any severe test in America, too little emphasis was placed upon the teaching,” Huffman wrote in 1920.

“When the World War broke out, the church was scarcely prepared for the test to which it was to be subjected,” he added. “But it was the rare exception when a young man volunteered for army service, and it was not general that so-called ‘combatant’ service was accepted.

“Most of the young men either secured farm furloughs, thus rendering service of a non-military nature, or where no favorable action could be secured, paid the price of their non-resistant attitude by suffering segregation in military camps or serving sentence in

federal camps.” (**History of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church – by Jasper Abraham Huffman, editor in chief, Bethel Publishing Company, New Carlisle, Ohio. Produced by the order of the Executive Board of the MBC Church., 1920.**)

The World War One Conscientious Objectors data base reveals some interesting MBC entries. Walter C. Gehman, listed as a silk weaver from Emaus (sic), PA, arrived at Camp Meade on Sept. 19, 1917 and was declared a C.O. three days later. He was discharged for health reasons.

T.D. Gehret, the future MBC pastor, was listed as a grocery clerk and machinist from Bethlehem when he was drafted. Along with Gehman, he arrived at Camp Meade on Sept. 19, 1917. He was declared a C.O. on Sept. 27.

Some, like Charles R. Sonon of Reading, were discharged for health reasons; Sonon apparently had a heart defect. But others were described as being a bit more – pardon the term – militant in their response to being drafted.

Henry W. Riffell (also listed by his nickname, Harry) listed the Mennonite Brethren in Christ as his denomination. His official record listed him on the Judge Advocate General’s file card entitled “Conscientious Objector – Mennonite – Refusal to Wear Uniform.”

It seems Riffell objected to putting on military garb and would not back down. “An order given a Mennonite to ‘don the prescribed uniform of the United States Army and do fatigue duty in the common quarters,’” Riffell deemed that such an order “was improper and one which the accused could not lawfully be required to obey, in as much as the order to don a uniform was made a condition precedent to doing fatigue duty, and Mennonites are specifically excepted by instructions of the Secretary of War from wearing a uniform.”

Riffell’s record lists a court-martial trial dated Nov. 8, 1918, but no conclusion to the trial was noted in the file. (**WWI Conscientious Objectors data base, part of Swarthmore College Peace Collection**)

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## **Different types of nonresistance**

Although differences between the types of non-resistance options were further codified during World War Two, the First World War produced distinctions between the types of service offered to those, like our Mennonite Brethren in Christ forbears, who refused to serve as combatants.

First, there are Conscientious Objectors, defined as “one who is opposed to serving in the armed forces and/or bearing arms on the grounds of moral or religious principles.” (**SSS.gov website - <http://www.sss.gov/FSconsobj.htm>**)

Conscientious Objector status, while largely sought on religious grounds, may also be claimed for other moral or ethical reasons. But qualification wasn’t afforded without scrutiny; indeed, it was clearly stated that “a man’s reasons for not wanting to participate in a war must not be based on politics, expediency, or self-interest. In general, the man’s lifestyle prior to making his claim must reflect his current claims.” (**ibid**)

Upon being granted Conscientious Objector status, two types of service were available and were assigned based on the C.O.’s specific beliefs.

For those opposed to any form of military service, Alternative Service matched those who qualified with local employers who provided work ranging from conservation, caring for the very young or very old, education or health care. “Many types of jobs are available, however, the job must be deemed to make a meaningful contribution to the maintenance of the national health, safety, and interest.” (**ibid**)

That meant that one who refused to take up the sword could end up with a plowshare on a farm, producing food for his country’s armies. He might find himself in a hospital or nursing home, and as such he would not need to travel abroad.

Such was the lot of many of our young men in both World Wars.

But a second type of Conscientious Objector status sent many of our young people abroad, mostly to Europe. For not everyone was as hard-line in their opposition to military service. For others, it was enough to serve in a non-combatant capacity – still serving in our Armed Forces, but not assigned training or duties that would involve the use of weapons.

For many who fell into the category of Non-Combatant, service as a medic – often right up on the front lines – was fairly standard.

In each case, the length of service was equivalent to the time that would have been served as a draftee – in many cases, 24 months. (**ibid**)

“During World War I, most young men from the Pennsylvania Conference became conscientious objectors and served in conscientious objector camps. Conference sanctioned this posture: ‘We again encourage our brethren not to accept any service, either combatant or non-combatant, under the military arm of the Government in violation of their consciences and the creed or principles of the church.’” (**1917 Yearbook, P. 76.**)

While service as a Conscientious Objector was supposed to be a safe enterprise, in many instances it was not, especially during World War One. Menno Diener, serving at Camp Taylor, KY, witnessed the bayonet stabbing of one Amish boy and wrote about an instance where he protested wearing a military uniform and taking orders.

“So the commander got a broomstick and beat me across the legs till he broke his stick. I had streaks and swelling on my legs. Then he got a 2 x 4 about three feet long that had four spikes in one end, and threatened to hit me in the face with it. He put it near to my face and then back again like a ball bat and said, ‘If it weren’t for the law, I would like to see how far I could sink these spikes into your face.’” (**Nonresistance put to the Test, 1981**)

“C.O.’s were drafted into the army and posted to military camps with the hope that they would enter noncombatant service,” Albert Keim wrote, “The question then became one of how much to ‘cooperate.’ Their resistance to wearing uniforms rather than their plain clothes, and their refusal to bear arms, resulted in harassment, beatings, and humiliation in many cases.” (**The Amish and the State**)

The mistreatment afforded to Mennonites and Amish – and others – was usually born in relative silence. Those who believed the Scriptures to promote peace mostly “turned the other cheek.”

“The inner struggles and temptations which they overcame through faith can be worth more to us than the knowledge of the physical sufferings they endured,” wrote Nicholas Stolfus. “May our youth today compare their lot with those who were often abused, who suffered from cold, hunger, and lack of Christian fellowship. Through all

this, their main concern was to do the will of God.” (Nicholas Stolfus, **Nonresistance Put To the Test**)

World War II produced the first peacetime draft in U.S. history, one that was initiated a year before Pearl Harbor. With the knowledge that many World War One C.O.’s had endured much negativity, Mennonites, Quakers and the Church of the Brethren, all of which espoused a non-resistance position, worked to ensure that their young people would receive better treatment, and their efforts produced Civilian Public Service, which allowed them to perform “work of national importance” in a non-combatant role.

While this type of service had been offered in World War One, now it was recognized as an official option, and men representing more than 200 religious groups – and others who did not identify themselves with any religious organization – were offered alternative service. “Their only shared philosophy was the rejection of war.” (PBS, **“The Good War and those who refused to fight it”**)

Men began arriving at the camps in 1941 with the expectation that they would serve for six months. It didn’t turn out that way. Many stayed for the full duration of the war, some for as long as six years, and the last participants were not released until 1947. In CPS service, they would be expected to work nine hours per day, six days per week, and they were expected to pay the U.S. government \$35 per month for room and board.

While some paid out of their own pockets, for the most part, their “peace churches” paid the monthly fee. CPS workers were interned in 152 Civilian Public Service camps scattered throughout the country and performed a wide range of activities, from planting trees, fighting fires, building roads and constructing dams to running medical clinics and working on soil conservation projects. Many found themselves working in mental institutions, replacing the majority of employees who in 1942 had left for better-paying war industry-related jobs.

These men, too, were covered under the larger umbrella of Conscientious Objectors. (PBS, **“The Good War and those who refused to fight it”**)

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### **May 1, 1945**

Nazi Germany is crumbling. Adolph Hitler has just committed suicide in his Berlin bunker. Germany will surrender in less than a week. But in the Pacific, fighting continues in the Philippines, in New Guinea and on Okinawa. It is feared that an invasion of Japan’s home islands will produce tens of thousands of casualties, and many more.

With the end so close, it is perfectly natural for our servicemen in Europe to start thinking about home, and that’s the subject of F.B. Hertzog’s latest letter.

*“What is it that makes our home such a precious place to us? It’s certainly not the bricks and mortar, nor the carpets and furniture, nor its particular location, is it? It requires hearts that are dear and true and loyal to make a home. Yes, it is the folks in the home that make it what it is. Father, mother, and the family circle, and all the boyhood memories. How they come back to one in these times.”*

*“We are all praying for God to constantly protect you and spare your life, and soon return you to your home. Very recently I have been doing some serious thinking regarding this return home. I am convinced that for those who have been true to their*

*God and loved ones it will be a time of real rejoicing, but for such who have a guilty conscience it will undoubtedly be a meeting mingled with joy and fear.”*

*“Many of you are young men, unmarried, and not in love with any particular individual of the opposite sex, but you are surrounded with all manner of sin, and confronted with strong temptations to do that which you know to be contrary to the Word of God, to you let me say, keep yourself clean and pure for God and the girl that God may some day give you for your wife. Who would not rather return to the home circle minus an arm or a leg than minus his good name? Yet how many do it? YOU CAN, by God’s power, retain your good name. Do it!”*

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## **Another World War and our response**

At least this time, we had more warning. When the 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference convened at Bethel Church in Allentown starting on Oct. 19, 1939, war had already begun. Hitler’s armies had rolled across the Polish border on Sept. 1, and two days later, Great Britain and France declared war. Not that a declaration prevented anything; the Nazi blitzkrieg forced Poland’s capitulation in 30 days.

The thinking on this side of the Atlantic was, for many, *here we go again*. And while the United States remained neutral – officially, at least – many in the MBC wondered how long before we would be dragged into war again.

With that in mind, Annual Conference took a proactive approach as Chairman H.B. Musselman appointed a three-man committee “to compile a statement of our attitude and belief relative to war and military service and present this statement to the Executive Board for printing and distribution among our members.”

Once again, C.H. Brunner and E.N. Cassel were selected, along with T.D. Gehret, who had been a Conscientious Objector in World War One.

The committee quickly produced a four-page pamphlet, *A Summary of the History and Faith of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Pennsylvania Conference Relative to War and Military Service*. (**Shelly, The Bible Fellowship Church, 271**)

The pamphlet was largely a rehashing of past positions; it included a restatement of classic Mennonite beliefs and a reiteration of Articles of Faith # 22 and 23, “Civil Government” and “Self Defense” before concluding with seven summary points.

“Our conviction on the doctrine of non-resistance remains unchanged. Should the United States at some future date unhappily find itself again plunged into the throes of war, we must be true to our God-given convictions and refuse to bear arms. We must also refrain from serving under the military arm of the government, whether that be designated either as combatant or non-combatant.” (**A Summary of the History and Faith of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Pennsylvania Conference Relative to War and Military Service, p. 4**)

Also included in the pamphlet were a rejection of participation in the manufacture of “implements and machinery necessary to warfare” and military training in schools and colleges. (**Shelly, The Bible Fellowship Church, p. 271**)

So, from an official MBC perspective, nothing had changed. But when war came to America in December, 1941, it hit home in almost every church, courtesy of the draft. T.D. Gehret’s own son Robert, for instance, was drafted; He served as a Conscientious Objector in Alternate Service, carrying out his duties in an office (whereas his father had

served on a farm). Bob Gehret later delivered animals to war-ravaged Europe at the conclusion of the war, under the auspices of the Mennonite Central Committee (**ibid**)

Years later, Bob Gehret voiced his opinion on the matter in an interview with Harold Shelly. “I don’t think there is any thing as a righteous war,” he said in 1982. “I think there will be a time when we fight with Christ against...Satan, but until that time I don’t think war serves any useful purpose. We teach our kids not to fight, not to hit, and then, when they grow up, we say ‘kill them.’” (**ibid, p. 273**)

In 1942, the Mennonite Brethren in Christ’s General Conference resolved not to meet for two years, but General Conference was held in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada on Nov. 3-8, 1943. By then, the tide was turning against the Axis, and many men were serving as Conscientious Objectors, and Conference opted for a formal resolution expressing its gratitude.

“Resolved, that this General Conference go enthusiastically upon record as genuinely grateful to the two Governments of Canada and the United States, for their kind consideration of us, their Historic Peace Church subjects, in extending to us these opportunities to serve our countries in a way which need not violate our faith.”

**(Minutes, 1943 General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church)**

Closer to home, there was the official position of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church, and there was reality. For the first time, our young people were serving in large numbers, and there was genuine tension between following the wishes of the Pennsylvania Conference and following the call to take up arms for one’s country in what was clearly delineated as a war against evil enemies.

A lot simply depended on where you went to church.

Bethel MBC in Emmaus, pastored by F.B. Hertzog, had men who took differing positions. Ernest Hertzog went the non-combatant route. James Koch was a Conscientious Objector. But Bob Kauffman went into active service, and with little resistance from his home congregation.

“I was a member of our church since I was at least twelve years old,” he remembered. “There was really not much discussion among the membership about non-resistance. Pastor Hertzog told us of the position of our denomination, and the position of our local church, but that was it. There

was no coercion, simply a statement of fact.”  
**(Kauffman, e-mail interview, July 1, 2012)**

Many, like Kauffman, took up arms and went to war. Again, it largely depended on where you went to church.



**Bob Kauffman**



## War stories and the MBC

R.C. Reichenbach was pastoring our church in Staten Island, NY, and his congregation was fairly characteristic. Ralph Cole was a Conscientious Objector. Another congregant went into the Army and another chose the U.S. Navy.

After the D-Day invasion in June, 1944, it was noted in a Jewish-based newspaper in New York City that local Mennonite boys who had served as medics were being rejected by their churches at home. The paper called Reichenbach and asked for his perspective on the matter. His explanation: “We back our young men whatever they choose. We do not throw them out of membership of the church.”

Cole, for instance, returned to the Staten Island church after serving for one year as a Conscientious Objector and was immediately accepted; he later spent many years as Staten Island’s delegate to Annual Conference.

Reichenbach, for his part, noted that while he largely left the decision up to the individual, there were others in the MBC who were much more vocal in their opposition to active service. He said T.D. Gehret “strongly pushed that you did not go into military service.” On the whole, though, Reichenbach said the decision “was not rammed down people’s throats.”

Part of the reason, he suggested, was that the press was so adamantly pro-patriotism that anyone who adopted an opposing position was seen as less-than-American. Given the obvious evil the Axis represented, it was hard for the public to see why Mennonites acted as they did.

“It was not popular,” Reichenbach said of our stance. “The pressure of the service was strong enough to do away with that position.”

And, he added, increasing interaction between church and culture played a role, too, in a gradual swing from a non-resistance position to a position supportive of military service. “The church mingled in society and mingled with other churches,” he noted. As such, our people were aware of public sentiment and, fed by that sentiment, began to back away from our traditional non-resistance stance. **(Interview with R.C. Reichenbach, Spring, 2012)**

For Byron C. Cassel, the influence of his father, MBC pastor E.N. Cassel, weighed heavily upon his decision. According to Byron’s son Carl C. Cassel, when it was time for men to register for the draft, E.N. Cassel wrote his son, asking him to consider being a Conscientious Objector.

“Dad did not explain to me the basis on which his father made this appeal, but Grampa did close the letter saying something like this: ‘Your decision will depend on how much of the love of God has been shed abroad in your heart.’”

“When my Dad told me this,” Carl Cassel explained, “He also said, ‘Pop never asked me what my decision was.’”

Byron Cassel was never called for military service; he did receive training and served as a neighborhood monitor for air raid practice blackouts during the war. **(E-mail interview with Carl Cassel, Oct. 4, 2012)**

Bryan Schaeffer, the brother of longtime BFC missionary Doris Hoyle, was attending Bethel Church in Allentown when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Seventeen years old at the time of the attack, he did what many other young men from Allentown did – he enlisted in the U.S. Navy.

The news of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Schaeffer said, led to a conversation with his parents, who encouraged him to enlist and helped him to do so. With so much publicity against Japan following the sneak attack, Schaeffer said he couldn't concentrate on his school work and enlisted before graduating.

Schaeffer learned to fly in the Navy during his four years of active service, later served in the Reserves, and was recalled to serve as a fighter pilot during the Korean War. He went on to become a career pilot.

Schaeffer said he was never approached by his pastor (B. Bryan Musselman) to see if he wanted to become a Conscientious Objector. "Everyone was gung-ho to enlist and join the war," he stressed.

There were other attractions to active military service, he added. Part of his training gave Schaeffer two years of college credits, and he received his G.E.D. because of his Navy training. It was through the popular G.I. Bill that Schaeffer prepared for his career as a commercial pilot. (**interview with Bryan Schaeffer, Spring, 2012**)

For Joe Wire, growing up in the York church under the ministry of W.F. Heffner had little effect on his decision when war came. While his wife Doris considered the York church more "legalistic" (as compared to her own Northampton congregation, which she thought more "broad-minded"), Wire said he doesn't remember hearing anything from the pulpit about adopting a non-resistance position.

Two men from the York church did choose Conscientious Objector status, but Wire said they later regretted doing so because several of the others in their C.O. unit were "wicked men." He noted how some Conscientious Objectors were movie actors who didn't want to fight while others were regular guys who just didn't want to serve.

Personally, Pastor Hefner thought the two C.O.'s in the York congregation were doing the right thing. "He was Old Mennonite," Wire said. But he



**Bryan Schaeffer**



**Joe Wire**

never pushed Wire that way.

While family connections may have been a factor – Doris’s cousin was Bob Gehret, who went the C.O. route – Joe had heard of how Conscientious Objectors were frequently harassed. “They were accused of being afraid to fight,” Doris Wire recalled.

So Joe went into the U.S. Army Air Corps, leaving high school in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and spending three years in active service. He never served overseas, but because of a hernia, not a doctrinal position. When he reported to the Army Air Corps Training Center in Wichita Falls, TX, his hernia was discovered, and he was told, “We’ll operate on you, send you home for 15 days, then ship you out overseas.” Joe declined and was sent to the Army Air Force base in Orlando, FL (current site of Disney World).

Because Wire had declined to have surgery, he was given a home job and was responsible for setting up ammunition demonstrations for officers.

Of course, that was not without its own hazards. His job was to show officers the effect ordinance had on our weapons, and in the process, demonstrations would blow up brand new tanks and other vehicles. One day, as personnel were sent to clean up the debris after a demonstration, Joe was told not to participate, and God’s grace to him was displayed as an explosion killed a sergeant and wounded several others.

Discharged after the war ended in 1945, Wire returned to York and found employment. He doesn’t remember being treated as a hero – or as a traitor to his Mennonite heritage, either. There was little reaction, at least not that he can remember more than a half-century later. He simply went home without fanfare. **(interview with Joe & Doris Wire, April 21, 2012)**

Roy Gaugler, raised in the Graterford Church, volunteered to join the U.S. Merchant Marine as an 18-year-old in 1945, when the war was winding down. He did so despite the advice of Rev. Rudy Gehman, who privately told Gaugler not to go into military service.

Gaugler, however, was not the only active participant from the Graterford church. Roger Detweiler had been drafted and served in the Panama Canal Zone. Roger’s older brother Ray enlisted in the Air Force at the beginning of the war. He survived the war but was killed in an airplane crash a few years later while flying passenger planes. **(interview with Roy Gaugler, Oct. 24, 2010)**

An active member of the Coopersburg church, Ralph Mann, upon being drafted, never really wrestled with his decision. While F.B. Hertzog was his pastor in 1941, Hertzog didn’t push Mann toward a C.O. position. Ralph said it wouldn’t have mattered anyway, because his mind was made up: he wanted to serve in the military.

Finding the adventure (and extra pay) of a paratrooper too enticing to ignore, Mann went that route when he was given the opportunity one month into boot camp. His first jump, he admitted, was frightening, but Mann later considered jumping to be like driving – “scary, but once you got used to it, it wasn’t scary.”

Mann proved himself quite efficient as a soldier, advancing to First Sgt. But his service behind the front lines – which is the paratrooper’s lot – effectively ended when he was accidentally shot in a friendly fire incident. His unit engaged in pre-D-Day action – part of the same pre-invasion behind-the-lines activity that helped weaken German defenses before the Normandy landing. Indeed, he jumped in his unit’s # 2 aircraft.

But once in France, Mann was wounded when a fellow soldier's weapon discharged as he jumped over a tailgate, and the bullet hit Mann. And so he did not see much fighting. But Mann's military career hadn't ended; it simply took a turn, for once his wound healed, he was assigned to General – and future U.S. President – Dwight D. Eisenhower as one of the future President's bodyguards.

Mann, whose brother Ray was also drafted, was aware that two of his fellow Coopersburg church members, Paul Shelly and Leroy Knipe, had chosen to be Conscientious Objectors, showing that Coopersburg, like most MBC churches, was divided during World War II.

Discharged in December, 1945, Mann returned to his old job in the local coal, feed and lumber yard. It had been promised to him, he had worked there before the war, and the job was held for him upon his return.

Looking back upon the decision faced by many MBC members of the "Greatest Generation," Mann offered, "I don't see whether it matters if Objector Status or Regular status is chosen, because someone has to take care of the sick, wounded, ambulance driver, and attendant." He added that there were plenty of important non-combatant jobs that needed to be filled so that those who were doing the actual fighting could do so without the concern that they would be adequately supplied or cared for. **(Ralph Mann interview, Spring 2012)**

Naturally, World War II didn't just affect many of our young people; it also affected our pastors, who found themselves on the horns of a dilemma: should they vocally support the position of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church, or should they largely keep quiet – a more popular decision – and allow their young men to make up their own minds?

For Jack Riggall, born in 1917, his age and ministry didn't make him prime fodder for service. He had been placed in Section D, which was reserved for ministers, and Riggall, then serving in a Methodist church (as a missionary under MBC care, having most recently served at our Nazareth church), was involved in chaplaincy, giving him a direct connection to our armed forces.

Riggall received a phone call in December, 1944, around the time of the Battle of the Bulge. At that time, he was preaching in a Methodist church in Kentucky, and he responded to a plea for overseas service by saying that his church in Kentucky needed him. That might not have made much of a difference, but a member of his church was a U.S. Senator and pulled some strings to keep Riggall where he was, saying he was "essential" to his church.

While Riggall was aware that he was to espouse a Conscientious Objector position, he noted that we were "not as strict as regular Mennonites." A lot of our young men, he noted, served in hospitals and worked on farms while the Amish and "plain" Mennonites would not even go the C.O. route.

Riggall's brother Gordon, for instance, became a Conscientious Objector. He was given a medical placement in the regular army and served as an assistant to a surgeon, working in a field hospital.

Our official position, Riggall said, was as follows: "As a denomination, we advocated all young men would apply as Conscientious Objectors." But he also admitted that the stridency of that position rested upon the individual pastor in his own church,

who had to choose how firmly “up front and from the pulpit” he would advocate adopting a C.O. position.

Riggall, for his own part, encouraged men to become Conscientious Objectors rather than rejecting even Alternate Service as an option. (**Interview with Jack Riggall, Spring, 2012**)

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### **September 3, 1945**

On the deck of the battleship Missouri, American General Douglas MacArthur accepted the unconditional surrender of Japan, officially signaling V-J Day and the end of World War II. The newspaper headlines read as follows: “Three Cheers. Japanese Accept Terms. The War is Over.” And so, with gratitude to God for His providential care, F.B. Hertzog again addresses our servicemen.

*“The news of these headlines set off the fire works of man’s celebration of this event. Everywhere there was the spirit of exuberant joy and overflowing gladness because, at last, the long prayed for and awaited day had arrived. We all knew that the day of Victory would come sooner or later, but now that it has come, it is hard to make ourselves believe it is true.”*

*“We certainly rejoice with you boys in the fact that Victory has come. We had a special service of thanks in our Emmaus Church on Wednesday evening August 15. Our people joined with the other peoples of the world in returning thanks to Almighty God for bringing this terrible war to an end.”*

*“It is simple enough to sit at home, snug and smug, and belittle the hardships of warfare. Certainly none of us in your Home Church circle have any such inclinations. But there is in all conflict a degree of exhilaration, a thrill of conquest that helps one to move on toward the goal of Victory. When this stimulus is no longer present, the regimented military life becomes irksome. Then there’s grave danger that the monster Monotony may put in an appearance and tempt you to pursuits you will later regret.*

*“There is need for a new kind of courage - a quiet, determined resolution to make your life, from this moment forward, count for God. Whether you are presently transferred to another theatre of service, or returned to civilian status, be firmly resolved now that you will not fall as a casualty in the ‘Bulletless Battle.’ We are continuing to pray for all you boys and girls where ever you may be located.”*

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### **The final shift: Korea, Vietnam and our present position**

In the long run, it was World War II that loosened the hold our pastors and denomination had upon its young men. The pull of active service, against a decidedly wicked foe, was simply too strong. Many entered active service despite the urging of their pastors; others, not hearing much direction from their respective pulpits, made their own decisions.

And as World War II ended and wars in Korea and Vietnam followed, the voice from the pulpit was largely silenced. No longer did most of our young men have to wonder whether their desire to serve their country would produce a backlash from their home churches; they were free to serve, and many did.

James Ernest Hartman, the son of MBC pastor E.B. Hartman, volunteered for the Army in 1958. His preacher father did not object. Yes, Conscientious Objector status was still the preferred option for some; indeed, E.B. Hartman signed the papers for Jerry Swartley, who had been drafted, to receive C.O. status. But for his son, active service was not seen as a disloyalty to the MBC. **(Interview with James Ernest Hartman, Oct. 24, 2010)**

Royal Kramer, from the Bethel (later Cedar Crest) Allentown congregation, was 8 years old when World War II began – old enough, though, to remember. “I recall the days when many of the men from this church went into the military service,” he said in a 2002 Historical Society newsletter article. “There were 38 men and one woman who served.” All of them, he added, came home alive. “God did and still does answer prayer.”

He knew, growing up, that “being a member of this conference, you took a passive attitude toward serving in the military.” But that attitude was changing.

Kramer was drafted into the U.S. Army in January, 1957, just five days before his first wedding anniversary. It was an interim period in our history, between the end of the Korean War in 1953 and the start of active involvement in Vietnam in the early-to-mid 1960s. “I was in during the so-called ‘Cold War period,’ he noted. “No one was shooting at anyone, and the world at that time was considered fairly peaceful.”

Kramer ended up serving in the Army, although an episode during his basic training at Ft. Benning, GA reminded him of his Mennonite Brethren in Christ heritage.

At one point, Kramer was called into the office of his battery commander, a Capt. Koop – an officer Kramer considered a good man, genuinely concerned about the soldiers under his care. “He told me that he was looking over our records, and he saw that I was a Mennonite,” Kramer explained. “I was the only one called into his office.”

Capt. Koop, it seems, knew quite a bit about the Mennonites and their position relative to military service, and he wanted to offer Kramer an option. “He said that when I spoke to my parents and wife again, I should tell them that he would do his best to have me released from the military on these grounds.”

Kramer, however, wasn’t eager to cooperate, and he largely gave Capt. Koop a “thanks but no thanks” response.

“I told him that I felt the Lord wanted me serving in the military at this particular time in my life and I was willing to serve my two years just like all the other guys in my unit,” Kramer said. “I also told him that no matter what our denomination or religion was, deep down inside we were all opposed to warfare. No one wanted to fight and kill.

“He continued telling me that he would do his best to get me out if my family requested it but I thanked him very much for his concern and said that I would remain for those two years.”

Which is what Kramer did, eventually serving in West Germany for 18 months as part of a Signal Corps battalion. “As I look back on those days...I can honestly say that I never regretted my decision to stay in for that period of time,” he concluded.

Kramer offered this opinion on the matter of war and military service: “I do not know how many men who served our country in past wars were ever in combat, but I am quite sure there were quite a few of them, who never saw combat or had to carry or fire a weapon, yet they served their country honorably and courageously. The Lord had a position for them in places where they were needed and at places where they could feel

His presence all the time.” **(Jan. 2002 BFC Historical Society newsletter interview with Royal Kramer)**

David E. Thomann had been a divinity student during World War II, thus excusing him from military service. His wife Polly (nee Musselman) had three brothers; during World War II one had served as a cook, one as a medic, and the third had been drafted so late in the war that he never had to report. **(Interview with David A. Thomann, April 21, 2012)**

But when the Thomanns’ son David A. graduated from Souderton in 1968, war in Vietnam was at its height, and his father was pastoring Faith BFC in Harleysville. What to do?

“He didn’t really tell me much of anything,” noted David A. Thomann. “Basically, he said it was my responsibility to register for the draft, but he didn’t say yes, no or any other thing.”

Thomann, who had already been accepted to attend Berean Bible School (later Pinebrook Junior College), received 4D Divinity status and graduated three years later. At that point, he got a card from the draft board. His education was complete, and his status was about to be changed from 4D to 1A, making him a likely draft prospect.

But Thomann, as it turned out, was already planning on furthering his education at United Wesleyan College in Allentown, so he made a phone call, asked some questions, and was told that because his draft number was so high, it was highly unlikely that he would be drafted, and if he went through the end of December, 1971, he would no longer be eligible. And besides that, if he was drafted, he was told that he could ask for and receive 4D status because of his United Wesleyan plans

“Can I have that in writing?” Thomann asked. The draft board obliged, and that was the end of that.

“I had friends who went to Vietnam,” he added. “I had friends who died in Vietnam.”

Had he been drafted and had being a student not protected him, Thomann, longtime senior pastor at Faith BFC, Lancaster, said he would have attempted to become a chaplain’s assistant. Others, however, were more proactive. Thomann’s friend Steve Groff, with a much lower 1A draft number, enlisted in the active reserves, went on active duty for six months, and never left the country. **(phone interview with David A. Thomann, Sept. 4, 2012)**

For his part, Jack Riggall, one of our pastoral “elder statesmen” in the Bible Fellowship Church, doesn’t know exactly when the change in our stance toward war took place. He simply thinks that our men gradually began to trickle into regular military service as “regular soldiers.”

Indeed, Rev. Dan Allen’s son Jay Allen – related to Riggall by marriage; Dan is Jack’s step-son – served two tours of duty in Iraq. **(Interview with Jack Riggall, Spring, 2012)**

Today several BFC churches feature plaques honoring the faithfulness of servicemen and women. Cedar Crest, for instance, has separate plaques for World War II, Korea, Vietnam and 9/11. The World War Two plaque reads as follows: “In honor of the following of the Bethel Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church who served their Country in World War II.” There are 39 names on it: 38 men and one woman.

Many of the names on the World War Two plaque at Cedar Crest are classic MBC surnames: Schaeffer, Musselman, Stengele. Listed among them are Melvin and Orville Shick, the sons of E.T. Schick, who was pastoring MBC churches during World War One. And yet they actively served their country a generation later.

It is not unusual for our pastors to preach sermons – especially on Memorial Day or Independence Day – in which they reflect on war. Rev. Keith Plows, for instance, preached one such message at Graterford BFC on May 25, 2008.

“Do you hate war? Do you support those who are in the war because you believe it’s a necessary war and your government has called us to take up arms?” Plows asked. “It’s a tough situation...but do you believe that war sometimes is a necessary evil in a sinful, anti-God world? I do, and I believe that the Scriptures do not condemn that.”

**(Graterford BFC, Sunday morning worship service, May 25, 2008)**

For Bob Kauffman from the Emmaus MBC church, his service in World War Two was not unique. He was one of almost 25 from his church who actively served. “The consensus among most was that the personal choice was a private matter and never the source of any controversy,” he said. **(Kauffman e-mail, July 1, 2012)**

By the 1950s, “Conference came to the place where they realized it wouldn’t go over,” R.C. Reichenbach noted. “Conference realized the men would not follow that pattern anymore.” **(R.C. Reichenbach interview, Spring, 2012)**

World War Two had made a profound change in our stance on war. Before it, it could largely be said that we largely stood alongside our Mennonite brothers, opposed to war in most forms. Afterwards, whenever war came calling, we answered the call and served our country.

We had been pacifists; we were now patriots in the sense that when evil threatened the safety of our country and the world, we were willing to take up arms.

“After the war [World War II] both servicemen and conscientious objectors returned to their churches without animosity,” Harold Shelly noted. “Both had travelled out of the more restrictive little worlds in which they had grown up.

“Veterans could get a good education at government expense and many did. They would not look at society or the church in the same provincial way they might have before the war. Things would be different if these men had any influence.” **(Harold Shelly, The Bible Fellowship Church, p. 273)**

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Elsie Miller, from Emmaus PA, offered a prayer for her serviceman son and others like him who had been called to fight the Axis in World War II.

*Dear Father, one day not so long ago my own son, young, slim, quiet, and loving, turned eighteen and became eligible for the draft. The sad day of his departure came and only Thou knowest how I left things go that day because he said, ‘Mother, I can’t bear to have you cry.’*

*“I tried to keep a smile on my face that really hurt, while within, my heart was weeping. I stood there beholding his beautiful and shining youth, which somewhere along the way I was sure he would lose in the war. I knew that I would never again see him as he was then, and that only Thou, my God, knewest how he could come back home.*

*“I know that when he left he hated no one. I pray Thee Father, let him return home without bitterness and hate in his heart toward anyone, but with a greater love for*

*the souls of men and women who are lost. Help my dear boy to keep faith in Thee forever. Forbid that this war should black out his vision of Thee, and Thy Son, The Lord Jesus Christ.*

*“Give him courage to stand for Thee now, and to love his fellowmen and his country who he is serving so eagerly. Protect him from all harm and danger and keep him from sin so that he may dwell in Thy House forever. Amen.”*