

Behind the Camouflage

A Primer on Military Enlistment for Youth Pastors, Mentors and Counselors

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Table of Contents

Title	Page
Letter to Pastors	3
Power Dynamics in Military Recruitment	4
Delayed Entry Program	6
Enlistment Contract	7
Mental Health	8
Education Benefits	9
Combat	10
Quitting	11
Sexual Assault	11
Racism	12
Counseling	14
Alternatives and Mentoring	15
Moral and Spiritual Concerns related to Enlistment	16
A Guiding Story	17
Combat and Morality	19
Conclusion	19
More Resources	20
GI Rights Hotline	21
About the Author	21

Dear youth pastor, mentor or counselor,

If a 17-year old high school student in your congregation asked you whether he could trust a promise made by his Army recruiter, what would you tell him?

- How would you help a young person evaluate the recruiter's promise?
- What role should a church play in helping youth think through the questions that surround military enlistment?

As a pastor or youth mentor, you are in a unique position to help young people evaluate military recruitment messages. You may be able to ask questions or probe motivations without all the *baggage* of a parent or immediate family member. You can help the young person take a step back from the pressure of peers or the positive spin of a recruiter, and give her a space to think about the long-term implications of enlistment.

The stakes are high. While the military may provide a path toward more education and a stable income for some, it may leave others struggling with life-long physical and emotional scars that stem from the combat environment.

Whether you are from a church in the just war tradition or from one of the historic peace churches, you can help a young person understand that a decision to enlist is larger than the signing bonus or educational benefits that he/she might gain.

The first part of this document addresses the many practical questions that young people should consider if they are talking to military recruiters. From the fine print in the enlistment contract to information about incidents of sexual assault, this section will help young people evaluate the military recruitment messages.

The second part of this document addresses some of the moral and spiritual issues related to military service and combat. Jesus came to bring abundant life, wholeness and well-being (John 10:10). War inevitably involves dehumanization, suffering and death. These are spiritual concerns. Even if youth are not "religious", participation in war is likely to stir questions about justice, morality and guilt. This section encourages young people to have a sober conversation about killing and their own vulnerability in a combat environment.

This document does not address issues related to active duty soldiers. Those concerns should be referred to the GI Rights Hotline (877 447-4487), or you may call Titus Peachey at MCC.

Thanks for your willingness to walk alongside youth who are making important decisions about their lives. If you have further questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

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Power Dynamics in Military Recruitment

We were really assigned to build relationships. We didn't talk a lot about military service, but we got to know what (young people) were interested in. We got to know the dog's name...and all the while our objective was to lure them into the military.

Ertell Whigham, former Marine recruiter

See: <http://co.mcc.org/Resources/VideoClips>



There is an obvious power imbalance between a seasoned military recruiter, dressed in a sharp military uniform, and a 17-year-old high school student. This may be true in any sales situation in which a youth may find himself, whether purchasing an X-box, an I-pod or a sports car. Skilled sales people in commercial settings are adept in the art of persuasion. Military recruiters are skilled at casting military enlistment in terms that benefit youth. While the young person can try out the X-box or take the sports car for a spin, they cannot “try on” the reality of military life and combat. This makes signing an 8-year enlistment contract (active duty and reserves) a high stakes venture, particularly if the young person is relying primarily on the recruiter as their information source.

Recruiters naturally emphasize the positive benefits of military service in order to secure enlistees. This is good sales technique and no doubt necessary for being a successful recruiter. But when the focus on money for college and job training excludes serious discussion about the stresses of military life and the trauma of combat, some would-be enlistees may be signing-up with only a limited picture of what they are about to face.

Some youth are able to fill in what the recruiters and military ads avoid by talking with friends, relatives and veterans to get a more complete picture of what is at stake. But there are other youth whose life situation pushes them toward the well-advertised benefits of military service

with such momentum that they don't pause to consider what important information may be missing.

While the military insists that the armed forces are representative of American society, the recruitment command acknowledges that recruitment is an easier task in an economically stressed environment. When young men and women are desperate for stable income, recruiters have more power.

Since the stakes in this decision are high, it is in everyone's interest for recruitment to be as truthful and transparent as possible. As a pastor or youth mentor, you can play an important role in helping to balance the power dynamics between the young person and her recruiter. It may be as simple as providing additional information, asking reflective questions or arranging for the young person to talk with a military veteran.

Whatever the young person's goals or motivations might be, it is clear that military service is not for everyone. For example:

- Army officials report that only 30% of 17-24 year olds could actually qualify for military service. Obesity, gang connections, mental health concerns, moral issues and a host of medical conditions are all potential reasons for disqualification.¹
- Roughly 1/3 of recruits across all the service branches are discharged before completing their first term of duty. Of those who leave early, half of them do so within the first year.²

Since many of the advertised benefits are pegged to length of service and honorable discharge characterizations, not all enlistees will receive their hoped-for benefits.

Many young people who enlist are able to qualify and complete one or more tours of duty. The cautions presented here are reminders that it is important for young people to consider information and perspectives from many different sources when considering military enlistment.

By providing youth with good information, questions and other options, you can help youth carefully evaluate the military recruitment message.

More Information

For some thoughtful reflections from recent military veterans on the military recruitment process, along with recent articles, visit: <http://co.mcc.org/militaryenlistment/recruitment>

When I was in college...that's when the real recruitment pitch hit me and I didn't even know it was a recruitment pitch. My two best friends came back after being in the service about 6 months a piece...and they sold me. Pablo Paredes

1. Delayed Enlistment Program (DEP): What if youth change plans after enlistment?

Most young people enter the military through the Delayed Enlistment Program (DEP), which is also known as the Delayed Entry Program or the Future Soldier Program. This allows youth to sign up while they are still in high school, but not report for boot camp until sometime after graduation. As you might imagine, a significant number of young people change their minds before going to boot camp. This is not uncommon. Young people make and change plans quickly in response to new opportunities, the influence of peers or a change in their own interests.



Delayed Entry Program (DEP) participants and Sailors from the Navy Recruiting Station, Killeen Texas (NRS), enlist and reenlist in the Navy by Capt. Ronald Sandoval. The ceremony took place during a pre-game warm-up for the San Antonio Spurs versus the Cleveland Cavaliers NBA game at the AT&T Center.

It is important to note that enlistees who have not yet reported to boot camp can withdraw from the program, if they wish to do so.

Military regulations consider enlistments a binding commitment, but are very clear that enlistees who change their plans and decide not to report to boot camp, are to be released.

The official procedure for withdrawing from the Delayed Enlistment Program is simple. Enlistees in these circumstances can send a letter to the Commanding Officer of their recruitment station, and state their reason for withdrawal.

- a. When military recruiters learn of an enlistee's decision to not report to boot camp, they usually ask them to come to their office. This is normal procedure, and part of the recruiter's job. In some cases, however, recruiters have threatened legal action or jail. For this reason, young people may not want to meet with military recruiters alone. **Military regulations clearly state that if an enlistee persists in his or her desire to withdraw from the program, they shall be released.**
- b. According to military regulations, **military recruiters are not permitted to threaten those withdrawing from the Delayed Enlistment Program with legal action or**

other negative consequences. For example, Army regulations state:

Members of the recruiting force must respond positively to any inquiry from DEP members concerning separations from the DEP. Under no circumstances will any member of this command threaten, coerce, manipulate, or intimidate DEP members, nor may they obstruct separation requests.³

c. Because recruiters sometimes threaten or intimidate young recruits who put their intentions to withdraw from the DEP in writing, some enlistees do not write a letter to their recruitment commander or meet with them in person. They simply fail to report for basic training. These recruits are released the same as those who write the letter, with no negative consequences.

More Information

You can read the regulations about the Delayed Enlistment Program for each military branch at: <http://griightshotline.org/en/military-knowledge-base/topic/delayed-entry-program-discharge-dep-discharge>

2. Enlistment Contract: a one-way agreement

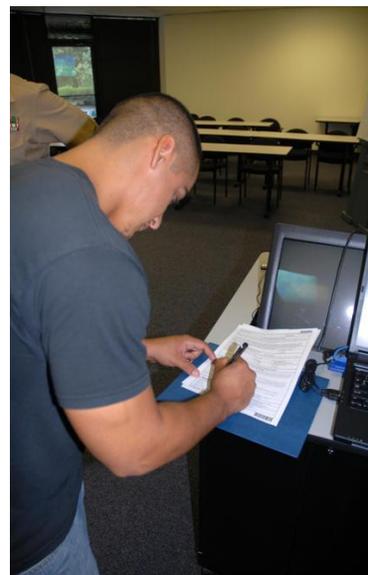
Most military enlistments extend for a period of 8 years. For a 17 or 18-year-old, this represents nearly half a lifetime. This is a major commitment at a time when most young people are still trying to figure out their interests. You can play an important role by making sure the young person realizes how long their commitment is.

A portion of many enlistment contracts includes active duty, involving an assignment at a specific duty station which could be stateside, overseas, or a combination of the two. After an active-duty assignment of several years, most enlistees spend the remainder of their time in reserve status. During times of war such as the U.S. is now experiencing in Iraq and Afghanistan, reservists may also be activated and required to spend time in active duty.

If you are talking with a young person who is intent on enlisting, make sure they read the following language in the military enlistment contract:

Laws and regulations that govern military personnel may change without notice to me. Such changes may affect my status, pay, allowances, benefits, and responsibilities as a member of the Armed Forces REGARDLESS of the provisions of this enlistment/reenlistment document. (emphasis in the original)⁴

While the above language does not mean that the contractual agreement between the enlistee and the military will be broken, it does mean that a recruiter cannot guarantee that an enlistee will in fact spend their enlistment in the job of their choice. Young people who want to enlist in the military based on specific promises or offers made by a recruiter should be sure to read and understand this part of the contract.

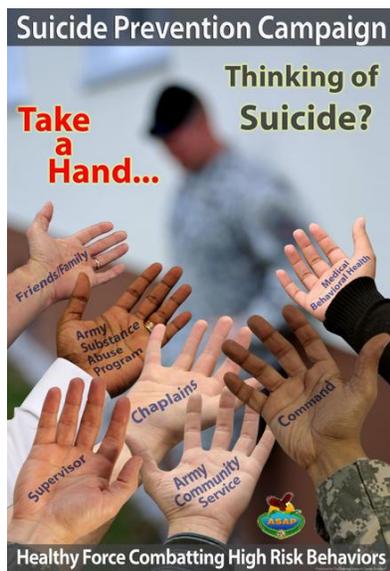


More Information

For a more detailed study of the enlistment contract and all the provisions that a prospective enlistee should know about, see Sgt. Abe, the Honest Recruiter : <http://quakerhouse.org/documents/enlist.html>

3. Mental Health

Some military recruiters urge young people to hide mental health issues such as depression or anxiety in order to meet enlistment requirements. Some recruiters have even urged youth to stop taking their medication in advance of their military physical exam.



Enlistees who follow this advice often suffer real difficulties during the rigors of basic training. This is not good for the long-term health and well-being of the enlistee, or for the military mission. Military regulations exclude people with certain mental health concerns from enlistment for a reason.

In your role as a pastor or mentor, you can encourage potential enlistees to be honest about their mental health history in order to protect their long-term health and well-being. The combat environment is very stressful, even for soldiers and marines who do not enlist with pre-existing mental health concerns.

Consider the following statistics on mental health and suicides:

- In 2009 mental health disorders resulted in more hospitalizations (17,538) among U.S. troops than any other reason.⁵
- An estimated 25% of veterans returning from duty in Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- In 2008 Army suicide rates exceeded that of the civilian population for the first time in history.⁶
- The Army reported 239 suicides (active duty and reserve components) in 2009, plus an additional 146 deaths from high risk behavior such as drug overdoses. This totals just over 1 death per day in the Army from suicide or high risk behavior.

Army and Marines suicide rates have been rising steadily over the past 5 years, while civilian rates have remained steady. These service branches have borne the brunt of ground combat, with many troops seeing multiple deployments in high-stress environments.

Not all soldiers, marines and seaman serve in combat, and even many who do go on to lead productive lives. Not everyone who serves suffers from PTSD or ongoing mental health

concerns. Yet the impact of war on soldiers and civilians is real. As a counselor, you can help potential enlistees understand that they may face both mental and physical trauma in the military environment.

More Information

God has not designed us to be people who can do that stuff and still not do harm to yourself. Every time you hurt somebody you hurt yourself. Every time you kill somebody you kill a part of who you are. Conrad Moore, Vietnam War Veteran See:

<http://co.mcc.org/Resources/VideoClips>

Mental care stays are up in the military, by Gregg Zoroya, USA Today

http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2010-05-14-mental-health_N.htm

4. Education Benefits

The military has long promoted education benefits as a way to encourage young people to enlist. It is clear that education benefits or the stability of a job and health care are significant motivators for young enlistees.

The new Post 9-11 G.I. Bill provides post-high school education benefits to enlistees based on length of service in the military (after 9/11). High school students who are considering military enlistment because of the education benefits should be aware of the following:

- a. Many of the education benefits are only available to those who receive an honorable discharge from the military.
- b. An early discharge from the military will likely result in a lower education benefit. For example, honorable discharges after 6 months to one year of service mean that enlistees will likely be eligible for 50% of the education benefit rather than the full amount.⁷
- c. Historically, fewer than 3 percent of enlistees who enroll in a four-year degree program receive a diploma within five years of starting classes...Among non-veterans that five-year rate sits near 40 percent.⁸ As of 2009, only 8% of Iraq and Afghanistan War vets were fully using the \$36,000 guaranteed by the GI Bill.⁹ The Post 9-11 G.I. Bill, and accompanying legislation establishing vets centers on college campuses is attempting to raise these graduation rates among veterans.
- c. The education benefits offered by the military should be weighed alongside the hardships and risks that soldiers must endure. Unless enlistees have other strong motivations such as patriotism or service, the hope for education benefits may not be enough to sustain them in a combat setting.

Your challenge as a youth pastor or mentor is to help young people find the opportunity for education and training that fits their long-term needs and interests. The fact that the military education benefits appear to be generous addresses only one part of this challenge.

5. Combat: something every enlistee should discuss

Given our post-9/11 context, it is hard to imagine that any young person might assume they can enlist in the military and never risk being called to serve in a combat environment. However, the G.I. Rights Hotline receives many calls from young people who enlist for the advertised education benefits, or because of difficulties in their home environment, only to discover later that they do have deep misgivings about their mission, or perhaps a conscience against taking the life of another human being.

Young people should understand clearly that the military is *not* a program designed to meet the individual needs of the soldier. The U.S. military mission is to protect and defend the United States through the threat or use of force. Almost all *enlistees will be trained to kill and may be called upon to serve in a very harsh and deadly environment.*

This training, which takes place during boot camp, intentionally breaks down an enlistee's inner resistance to killing. In this way, enlistees are prepared for combat environments where they respond reflexively to stimuli with reference to *rules of engagement* rather than their own values or moral code.



Combat environments are fast-paced. Decisions often have to be made quickly and in the “fog of war” not everything goes according to the rules. Soldiers may see and do things that they know to be wrong. The result is what clinical psychologists now recognize as “moral injury.”¹⁰

The young person you know may never face the many questions and moral anxieties of a combat environment. But they should never assume that a recruiter's promise will safeguard them. You may be the person in the best position to help a young person think about the question of killing and whether they are willing to be reshaped to do it on command. Don't pass up the opportunity. See the section on Combat and Morality for more discussion of this issue and for suggestions.

More Information

I never knew that if you joined the military that you would have to actually fight in war. Because I was like, well I'm a woman, right? Because technically we can't be in infantry. I'm going to be in the medical field. I never thought...that I would have to do anything violent until of course I got to basic training. Mari Villaluna, former Army recruit See:

<http://co.mcc.org/Resources/VideoClips>

See the Truth Commission on Conscience in War for testimony and articles from veterans, parents, religious leaders, academicians and legal experts on moral issues in war.

<http://conscienceinwar.org/>

6. Quitting: not really an option

Enlistees should understand that many of the assumptions about life and rights in the civilian world do not apply to life in the military. One of the most important realities is that once an enlistee reports to boot camp, giving two weeks notice of one's intention to leave is not an option. While there are military discharges available in cases where they are warranted (medical, psychological, family hardship, conscientious objection, failure to adapt, to name a few) each discharge involves a process of interviews and paperwork which may require some months to complete and may in the end not be successful.

Whenever enlistees experience difficulties in the military, the first response of the command structure is normally a strong effort to retain the enlistee. Sometimes this involves medical treatment or psychological counseling, but it may also involve intimidation. Young people who have a record of quitting tasks that are difficult should realize that they will be expected to stay the course.

Refusal to train or follow orders will likely result in a discharge...but only after a mountain of trouble that may include a court-martial, jail time, and a bad discharge characterization that will remain on the person's record.

6. Sexual assault in the military

Sexual assault and harassment are evident in our social system, whether military or civilian. The military is not an escape from these realities.

*According to CBS News, one in three women will experience sexual assault while in the military, compared to one in six women in the civilian world.*¹¹

Of the more than 2,200 military cases of sexual assault investigated in 2007, only 8% were prosecuted, according to Michael Dominguez, Principal Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. This compares to a 40% prosecution rate in the civilian world.¹²

In addition, the military acknowledges that there is significant underreporting, largely due to fear of retribution on the one hand, or lack of response on the other.¹³ A GAO survey on sexual

assault in a sampling of military installations uncovered 103 cases of sexual assault in the previous year. Of this number, 52 service members (50%) stated that they had not reported the assault.¹⁴

Iraq War veteran Wendy Barronco notes that both the hierarchical command structure and the close-knit nature of a unit can make it difficult to report sexual harassment or assault. In some cases, “people at the top think that they can just do what they will with their subordinates. On top of that, these people are my family and I train with them, I live with them, I eat with them...to turn on that is a big deal and is not very accepted.”¹⁵

The December, 2009 report by the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Task Force reported that: "DoD's procedures for collecting and documenting data about military sexual assault incidents are lacking in accuracy, reliability, and validity."¹⁶

Aside from the higher incidents of sexual assault in the military, another difficult factor is the restricted set of options available to a military member who has been assaulted. Chances are high that while an assault survivor waits for the assault to be investigated and addressed (if it has been reported), the survivor may still have to live and work in close proximity with the perpetrator. Changing jobs or housing arrangements is no simple matter when subject to military command. Nor is it possible to quietly leave if the incident is too overwhelming.

The overwhelming number of sexual assault victims/survivors in the military are women. While all sexual assault is likely underreported, 7% of assault reports in 2007 were of men.¹⁷

The reality of sexual assault in the military is a pastoral concern and should be addressed with potential enlistees. Young people who have already suffered sexual violation must be given the opportunity to read the reports and understand this reality.

More Information

For thoughtful reflections from several recent military veterans on sexual assault in the military, along with recent articles, visit: <http://co.mcc.org/militaryenlistment/harassment>

See also: <http://www.sapr.mil/>

7. Racism in the military

Racism is a reality in our society and is also present within the military. Yet perceptions vary widely about whether racism within military structures is more deeply entrenched than it is in the civilian world.

In 2007, 34.5% of U.S. military recruits self-identified as other than white. In the military's hierarchical system, personnel are in proximity with one another based on rank and military occupational specialty. For many white recruits, this results in greater exposure to people of other races than they would have encountered in civilian society. Greater exposure does not guarantee equal treatment, but some soldiers report more interaction and greater equity among people of different races than is often found in civilian society.

Nonetheless, a survey of active-duty Army service members in 2004¹⁸ revealed the following:

- 3% of white officers reported experiencing discrimination within their current unit
- 27% of black and Hispanic officers reported experiencing discrimination
- 84% of white officers believe there is less discrimination in the military than in civilian life
- 52% of enlisted whites believe there is less discrimination in the military than in civilian life
- 35% of enlisted African Americans believe there is less discrimination in the military than in civilian life
- 36% of enlisted Hispanics believe there is less discrimination in the military than in civilian life

The fact that 80% of the officers are white, and that 84% of them believe racial discrimination in the military is lower than in civilian life...compared to only 35% and 36% of their African American and Hispanic enlistees presents a troubling gap in perception and awareness. To state it differently, well over half (65%-64%) of African Americans and Hispanics in the military believe that racial discrimination in the military is higher than in civilian life. Will complaints of racist behavior or racial bias be taken seriously by a predominantly white power structure that perceives racism in the military to be at a significantly lower level than enlistees of color?

Service members from the various racial groups are not represented among the officer corps in proportion to their military membership. A 2005 study¹⁹ by Mark Adamshick, Captain in the United States Navy reveals that “minority officers” made up 19.7% of all military officers in 2002, compared to “minority enlistment” of 38.8%.

By 2008 the percentage of officers belonging to racial/ethnic groups remained at 20.58%, a very slight increase since 2002,²⁰ and still well below the total racial/ethnic group representation of 36.25%. Some of this disparity may be explained by factors that are clearly evident in the civilian world, such as lower college enrollment/graduation rates among racial/ethnic groups than among the white population.

While the military has clear rules prohibiting racially offensive tattoos or participation in racist groups, these regulations are not uniformly enforced.

An article in Salon Magazine²¹ chronicles the story of Forrest Fogarty whose white supremacist tattoos and openly racist views did not prevent him from serving two tours of duty in Iraq. The article suggests that soldiers with extremist views are tolerated as long as they perform their duties. In contrast, a May 4, 2010 article in WorldNet Daily²² tells of a young Marine recruit who passed all his pre-enlistment tests and physical exams, only to be rejected because of the confederate flag tattoo on his shoulder.

While there are conflicting perceptions about the extent that racism is experienced by military personnel from within, there is broad acknowledgement that racism plays a strong role in the way the enemy is portrayed. Iraq War vet Aiden Delgado²³ describes the widespread use of ethnic slurs for Arabs and Muslims among U.S. troops. From the cadences at boot camp which referred to “burning turbans” or “killing ragheads”, to the widespread use of the term “Hajis” for Iraqis, the enemy is frequently dehumanized through the use of racial characterizations.

Some enlistees from racial/ethnic groups see the military as a safer place to be than their difficult

civilian environments. Some new immigrants enlist in the hopes that serving in the military will help them gain better acceptance among their white neighbors and the dominant culture. To the suggestion that racism in the military is a thing of the past, Delgado asks a troubling question. “Have we overcome racism in the sense that blacks and whites are banded together in the hatred of Arabs?”

8. Counseling

When you talk with young people about enlistment in the armed forces, it is important to consider motivation. Counselors on the GI Rights Hotline frequently speak with enlistees who signed up with the military in order to escape a difficult situation in their home or community.

Military training is very rigorous, even dehumanizing. Serving in the military can place young people in harsh combat environments. If the primary motivation for enlistment is fleeing a difficult situation at home, this may not be a good recipe for success.

Good, guiding questions might include:

- a. Why do you want to enlist?
- b. How does enlistment fit into your long-term goals? Have you considered other ways to reach these goals?
- c. What questions or hesitations do you have about enlistment?
- d. Who have you talked to about enlistment? Who have you asked for advice?
- e. Do you have the strong support of your family?
- f. Do you feel motivated by patriotism, family tradition or a larger cause such as justice or security?
- g. What examples can you give of difficult things you have done requiring discipline and persistence?
- h. How does military enlistment fit into basic values and faith commitments that you hold? How does your decision to give your life to God and the way of Jesus fit with what the military will require you to do?

Questions such as these will help young people guard against an impulsive decision to enlist based on difficult factors in the home or community environment.

Some youth, because of race, class or geography grow up with very limited opportunity for advancement, and see military enlistment as a way to gain an education, steady employment and some real option for future success. There are indeed environments, both rural and urban, which can seem hopeless. Yet this presents a difficult counseling dilemma. Should someone whose real motivation is a college education commit up to 8 years of their life to the risks and hazards of military life, including the potential for combat? Is this a fair or a just trade-off?

Counselors and pastors sometimes assume that difficult social environments create a strong rationale for military enlistment as a way out. But the military, especially war and combat, is also a difficult social environment with its own very real challenges. Many youth who do not have the advantage of a strong education, family support and good personal discipline will also find it difficult to do well within the military system.

Perhaps one of the most important questions rests with you as a pastor or youth mentor.

Are you willing to research and help youth explore other options? Are you willing to make sure that someone can invest the time to walk the young person through application procedures for internships, scholarships, loans or jobs? If a young person really does need a structured environment that will instill greater discipline, are you willing to help them find such an opportunity?

Just as it is unjust to require young people trapped in poverty to enlist in the military so that they can go to college, so it is unjust to simply tell youth trapped by poverty and racism to find other options on their own, especially in the context of a struggling economy. This is particularly true for youth who may not have strong support and assistance from their families.

9. Alternatives and Mentoring

When a young person enlists in the military, the recruiter guides her through the process of signing papers and explaining procedures all the way to military boot camp. In the civilian world, young people generally rely on their families or close friends to help them find jobs or money for college. However not all young people are blessed with this kind of support.

This is where you as a youth pastor or mentor can be of real service. Helping a young person find job training, money for college, an internship, leadership training or a service opportunity can be difficult, but it is also highly rewarding. A bit of patience, along with some research and knowledge of your local community or region can go a long way toward helping a young person find the right fit.

If you do not have a listing of post-high school opportunities in your town or region, you can help churches and peace groups band together to create a listing and keep it up-to-date. It's important that the list be varied, as one type of alternative will not fit everyone. Providing local, tangible options that young people can "touch" is key, and helps restore the balance of power between the recruiter and potential enlistees.

Mentoring need not apply only to individuals. For a period of several years, the student-led peace club at Reedley High School (Reedley, CA) offered information on post-high school opportunities to their fellow students as an alternative to the options being presented by military recruiters. Through the help of the Reedley Peace Center, the students in the peace club were able to receive training in nonviolence and outreach, as well as information and resources on career options. This group-to-group relationship was a positive experience for both groups. It gave the Peace Center an entrance into the issues and concerns of youth in the community, and the students were able to benefit from the experience and wisdom of the adults. See:

<http://co.mcc.org/Resources/VideoClips>

Some youth may reject alternatives to the military because the benefits are not nearly as generous. On the other hand, the demands and risks of military life are often much greater. Active duty members are "on call" 24/7, and lose a lot of control over their personal lives. You can help a young person consider the big picture when comparing military benefits with other opportunities.

More Information

Some groups have researched opportunities in their local region in order to make the search for alternatives easier. You will find several examples at:

<http://co.mcc.org/system/files/Resource%20listing2.pdf>

<http://afsc.org/sites/afsc.civicactions.net/files/documents/Great%20Careers%20Booklet.pdf>

<http://centeronconscience.org/alternatives/index.shtml>

You can find a listing of service opportunities with church and government/secular agencies at: <http://co.mcc.org/system/files/Resource%20listing2.pdf>

You can find a listing of alternatives by state at:

<http://centeronconscience.org/alternatives/index.shtml>

Another good source on alternatives from a youth-oriented site is: *Get a Life...Alternative Ways to Meet Your Goals Without Joining the Military* <http://yayanetwork.org/alternatives>

The American Friends Service Committee has produced an excellent guide to post-high school alternatives, called *It's My Life!* This book outlines interesting options that may catch the imagination of youth who are uncertain about their interests or career path. See:

<http://tools.afsc.org/itsmylife/>

Moral and Spiritual Concerns related to Military Enlistment

As a result of my combat experience, I came to find that violence contradicts not only the natural order and impulses instilled in each of us, but it violates the image of God in our neighbor (whom we will call our enemy to make ourselves feel better). Logan Laituri, Iraq War Veteran, See: <http://co.mcc.org/veteran/logan>

The life of every soldier, marine or seaman has spiritual content rooted in values about human life, individual rights, justice, loyalty and allegiance. Soldiers carry these values into battle. In addition the military has its own rules of engagement and a strong chain of command designed to uphold certain values while achieving the military mission.

It is not unusual for a soldier's own values and moral commitments to be challenged in the heat of battle. Often they are violated. Soldiers deal with this violation in different ways, but the comments of a U.S. soldier in the Gulf War represent the experiences of many.

In war you have to kill. It's self preservation, it's survival...On the other end of my sights is going to be someone...a person...someone else with a family that I will probably have to kill in order to complete my mission...I'm going to push all the civilized person inside of me saying "don't kill" back somewhere, and do what I have to do to get out of here.²⁴

Silencing or ignoring one's moral compass may be a necessary survival technique during battle, but this silencing can take a psychological and spiritual toll that is felt many years afterward.

In this section of the document we will look at some of the moral and spiritual concerns of soldiers from the perspective of Christian faith. This document does not attempt to survey all the texts related to peace, war and the protection of the innocent in the scriptures. The goal is rather to make certain that our faith commitments, whether from a pacifist or just war tradition, are part of the discussion when youth are making decisions about military enlistment. This is part of the pastoral and mentoring task. The *Guiding Story* below provides one example.

A Guiding Story

The story of Jesus' encounter with the teacher of the law in the Gospel of Luke includes a teaching central to both Jewish and Christian understandings of faith. In this story, allegiance to God engages our total being and this all-encompassing allegiance to God directly affects our relationship with our neighbor.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Lk. 10:27)

Jesus follows this central teaching drawn from the Torah (Deut. 6:5), with the story we know as the Good Samaritan. In this story, the one who models the grace and mercy inherent in being a neighbor is a Samaritan, a social enemy of Jesus' hearers (Lk. 9:51-56).

We can learn many things from this familiar story. The following points seem relevant to our discussion about military enlistment and participation in war.

Allegiance: It is clear from this and other teachings of Jesus that allegiance to God supercedes all other allegiances.

Love: Love is central to our relationship with God and neighbor.

Neighbors: When we love our neighbors, we will not dehumanize them. As is clear from Jesus' many encounters with Samaritans, even our social enemies can be ministers of reconciliation, grace and healing.

Action/Practice: Jesus told the teacher of the law to “go and do likewise.” We are enjoined to act on our love for God and neighbor. This love is not just in our heads, but expresses itself in our actions and practice.

Discernment: Through stories and questions, Jesus led the teacher of the law through a process that challenged his perceptions of neighbor and his own assumptions about who could offer grace and healing. If the teacher of the law was to “go and do likewise,” he would have to dismantle his prejudices and social constructs of “the enemy.” Rote obedience to the law was no longer an option.

In an earlier encounter with Samaritans (Lk. 9:51-56), James and John respond to a Samaritan insult by imploring Jesus to call down fire on an entire village of Samaritans. Jesus rejected their call for violent revenge. In the aftermath of this event, the story of the Good Samaritan takes on greater significance as a commentary on how Jesus invites us to relate to enemies.

Pastors from various church traditions may well interpret this biblical story differently. Some may view it as irrelevant to the question of war, while others find that it speaks directly to it. Some will emphasize allegiance to God over country while others may emphasize the obligation toward our neighbors.

This story is referenced not as an attempt to respond to all questions about military service in our context. Rather, it is to highlight several key questions that many soldiers, particularly those in combat settings will face.



1. Where is our highest allegiance? What do Christians do, whatever the context, when allegiance to God conflicts with allegiances or loyalty to human power structures? What does a soldier do if obedience to his/her command structure conflicts with his/her inner sense of morality and justice? Soldiers are trained to follow orders, and are not asked to act on their own sense of morality or justice. Can a soldier give total allegiance to God while working in the context of a strong hierarchical command structure? What guidance does this story give?

2. In every war the enemy is vilified and dehumanized. This biblical story challenges our impulse to construct less-than-human caricatures of social or national enemies. Can a soldier recognize the image of God in the enemy, and still remain a soldier? What guidance does this story give?



These "insurgents" held all the same values and qualities of my fellow Marines for whom I was ready to take a bullet, and somehow, we were killing each other... It was with my boots on the ground, constantly interacting with the Iraqis, that the veil began to be lifted from my eyes. I was finally able to see the suffering I was enacting on other humans. See: <http://co.mcc.org/veteran/Conor>

Conor Curran, Iraq War Vet

3. Whether or not one is considering military enlistment, a third question emerges from the story. What about prevention? What about the responsibility to protect the innocent from violence? What if the Samaritan had arrived a little earlier, just as the robbers emerged to beat the hapless traveler?

a. For those who find military enlistment morally unacceptable, what guidance does this story provide? The story clearly rebukes the pious response of the religious leaders who “walked by on the other side.” The story compels the Christian to engage and respond to human need. How do Christians confront the reality of violence in our world? How do we protect our families and neighbors without participating in the violence that we deplore? What options besides violence might the Samaritan have used if he had arrived a little earlier? What non-violent tools have we been deliberate about creating and practicing in our own settings?

b. For those considering military enlistment, protecting the innocent is often the declared reason for military action. Yet “collateral damage” is a common feature of modern warfare

which inevitably happens in “mixed” environments. Despite all the “smart weapons”, war is never surgical. Weapons miss their targets. The wrong people are targeted. Soldiers sometimes lose control and avenge the loss of their friends by killing innocent people. Unexploded ordnance continues to maim and kill people after wars are over. In reality, does military action really “protect the innocent?” What alternative options might we be able to create if we put all the financial and people resources into nonviolent options that we now expend on military operations?

Combat and Morality

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman writes convincingly that “there is within most men an intense resistance to killing their fellow man. A resistance so strong that, in many circumstances, soldiers on the battlefield will die before they can overcome it.”²⁵ Grossman notes that military training now relies heavily on “automatic conditioned response” as a way to overcome this resistance and ensure that soldiers will indeed shoot to kill the enemy in combat.

Cpt. Pete Kilner, Instructor at the U.S. Military Academy explains that modern combat training has taught soldiers to act reflexively in response to stimuli and has greatly increased the soldier’s lethality. In doing so, however, the soldier’s own moral autonomy is bypassed. “The problem” notes Kilner, “. . . is that soldiers who kill *reflexively* in combat will likely one day reconsider their actions *reflectively*. If they are unable to justify to themselves the fact that they killed another human being, they will likely—and understandably—suffer enormous guilt.”²⁶

The solution to this dilemma, according to Cpt. Kilner, is for military leaders to not only give soldiers the skills they need to kill in combat, but to explain the moral justification for such killing.

Clinical psychotherapist Edward Tick who has counseled hundreds of combat veterans, writes about the spiritual dimensions of war in his book, *War and the Soul*.²⁷ According to Tick, “the common therapeutic model . . . misses the point . . . PTSD is primarily a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic disorder—in effect, not a *psychological* but a *soul* disorder.”²⁸

Whatever our beliefs about whether war can be just, or whether Christians have a duty to participate in war as soldiers, it is clear that combat touches soldiers at a deep moral and spiritual level. This is true whether or not the soldier self-identifies as “religious” or acknowledges a faith commitment.

I strive each day to forgive myself, to absolve myself of guilt, and to live with the wounds of war that will never heal. I know now the true cost of war and the burden of life in its aftermath. I realize as well that all war is profane and unnecessary. War is sacrilege...I believe sometimes that death in war is benevolent and those that die more fortunate than we who are condemned to survive as penance for the sacrilege of war.

Dr. Camillo “Mac” Bica – Professor of Philosophy, School of Visual Arts (NYC), former Marine Corps Officer and Vietnam Veteran – testifying at the Truth Commission on Conscience in War on March 21, 2010. See:

<http://conscienceinwar.org/category/video/expert-witnesses/>

Conclusion

As a pacifist writer, I am clearly not able to join Cpt. Kilner in explaining a moral justification for killing in combat. My plea is simply for pastors of all churches, whatever their theological orientation, to help young people struggle with the moral and spiritual dimensions of military enlistment and war. Every young person should be asked to consider whether they could take the life of another person.

Perhaps one of the most helpful things you can accomplish is to help a young person understand the reality and the depth of what they are committing themselves to if they sign an enlistment agreement. It's about much more than the immediate personal incentives present in military advertisements. It's a much larger commitment than training in a particular job skill or the personal esteem that might come from a signing bonus. The decision to enlist or not to enlist involves one's deepest values and identity. It's a decision to embrace the moral dilemmas of killing. And even enlistees from church traditions which view military enlistment as part of one's service to country blessed by God will not escape them.

10. More Resources

It is difficult to know how to raise moral concerns about killing with a young person who is still surrounded by friends and family in a comfortable environment.

There are, however, helpful audio-visual resources which you can use. One such tool is *Soldiers of Conscience* a film made in cooperation with the U.S. Army.²⁹ In this film, Cpt. Kilner's voice mingles with the voices and experiences of U.S. soldiers in Iraq, including several who have decided that they can no longer participate in killing. Here the moral and spiritual dimensions of war spring to life and are openly discussed by combat veterans. See: <http://socfilm.com/>

Another resource, produced by Mennonite Central Committee is *Thermostat*, also available in Spanish as *Termostato*. This DVD/study guide combination explores the spiritual and ethical dimensions of war and peace through sections on allegiance, security, terrorism, non-violence, imagination, military enlistment and peacemaking. The 3 hours of video clips and 100-page study guide are available for purchase from MCC (PH: 717 859-1151).

There are a number of websites with additional resources which may be helpful to young people considering military enlistment. The websites listed below encourage youth to ask questions about military life, and to consider alternative sources for education and job training.

Mennonite Central Committee

<http://www.mcc.org/us/co/>

See: <http://archive.mcc.org/us/co/counter/ngos.html>

Youth and Militarism Project

American Friends Service Committee

<http://afsc.org/program/youth-and-militarism-program>

See: <http://tools.afsc.org/itsmylife/> OR

<http://afsc.org/sites/afsc.civicactions.net/files/documents/Great%20Careers%20Booklet.pdf>

The Center on Conscience & War

<http://www.centeronconscience.org/home.shtml>

See: <http://centeronconscience.org/alternatives/index.shtml>

Truth Commission on Conscience in War

<http://conscienceinwar.org/>

Reflections from veterans, religious leaders, parents, academicians, legal experts and activists on war and moral conscience

Project Yano

Youth and Non-military Opportunities

<http://www.projectyano.org/>

GI Rights Hotline

If a young person has questions about their status and rights in relation to the military, either before or after enlistment, they can call the GI Rights Hotline.

The GI Rights Hotline is a network of nonprofit, non-governmental organizations who provide information to service members about military discharges, grievance and complaint procedures, and other civil rights.

PH: 877-447-4487 Web: girightshotline.org

About the Author

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Peachey is a pacifist, based on his religious faith. Peachey was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War and did alternative service in Vietnam from 1970-1973 under the auspices of the Vietnam Mennonite Mission.

From 1980-1985 Peachey and his wife Linda administered Mennonite Central Committee's assistance program in Laos, which included efforts to safely destroy the tons of unexploded ordnance left over from the secret U.S. air war. Peachey returned to Laos in 1994 to help initiate MCC's participation in the humanitarian demining program, in collaboration with the Mines Advisory Group and the Lao government.

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³ See: http://www.usarec.army.mil/im/formpub/REC_PUBS/R60I_56.pdf
Chapter 3: DEP Separation Procedures

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⁵ Gregg Zoroya, "Mental care stays are up in military, USA Today, May 14, 15, 16, 2010.

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⁸ Coming soon to a college near you: Vets centers, by Leo Shane III, Stars and Stripes, July 2, 2010

<http://www.stripes.com/blogs/stripes-central/stripes-central-1.8040/coming-soon-to-a-college-near-you-vets-centers-1.109680>

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¹⁵ Interview with Wendy Barronco, <http://co.mcc.org/us/co/enlistment/harassment.html>

¹⁶ http://www.sapr.mil/media/pdf/reports/fy09_annual_report.pdf

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Photo Credits: <http://defenseimagery.mil/index.html>