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NEWSLETTER

First Issue

Washington, D. C.
April, 1970

The Concerned Officers' Movement was formed by a group of active duty and reserve officers who could no longer continue to be passive, unquestioning agents of military and national policies they found untenable. Realizing that silence implies consent and cooperation, the members of COM are resolved to speak out on issues that concern them as officers and American citizens.

Paramount in the program of COM is a fervent opposition to the continuing military effort in Vietnam. COM decries the military policies that turned an internal political struggle into a nation-destroying bloodbath. The application of American military power in Vietnam was as unnecessary as it was unworkable. There is no need to prolong the mistake. COM supports a cease-fire and the rapid disengagement of American troops from Southeast Asia.

COM further abhors the military mentality that promotes absurd measures like the body count; that leads to the indiscriminate slaughter of innocent civilians; that destroys land and villages and calls it victory.

COM is opposed to the preponderant share of national resources devoted to the military. While Americans go hungry, while cities decay, while our natural resources become more despoiled, the Pentagon is able to get billions of dollars for an ABM system that may not even work. National defense is important, but so are poverty, education, and the environment. It is time to reexamine our priorities.

Within the military structure itself, COM supports the free expression of dissenting opinion. GI movements with legitimate grievances have too long been suppressed by a military hierarchy that considers honest questioning a threat to its power. The military can no longer consider itself a closed, private sector of society; the constitutional rights of free speech must be guaranteed for all servicemen.

COM advocates a full airing of questions concerning the quality of life in the military. There are many points that should be considered, from haircut regulations to enlisted-officer class differentiation, from low pay to the harassment of new recruits. COM does not question the need for discipline within the military, rather it seeks out areas that can be improved to make military order more humane and reasonable. The worsening problem of low retention rates in the service proves that something is wrong. A full inquiry into all aspects of military regulations and customs should not be avoided.

The members of the Concerned Officers' Movement are loyal, responsible military officers. Many have served in Vietnam, an experience that forced them into the realization that unquestioning acceptance of national and military goals could only further war and injustice. Officers, as part of the military power structure and as enforcers of military policies, have an obligation to express themselves on some of these important issues. The members of COM refuse to be classified as part of a manipulated "Silent Majority"; they will speak out. To do less would be to betray their commissions and duties as American citizens.

THE HISTORY, BEING THE ACCOUNT OF THE TRIBULATIONS AND REWARDS OF AN AMBIGUOUSLY UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF CONCERNED COMMISSIONED OFFICERS

Last November 15, the Washington Post ran an article on Marine Captain Bob Brugger. Bob, a Vietnam veteran, was acting as a marshal for the March on Washington and he detailed his antiwar views for the Post. There were two results. Bob received an unsatisfactory mark for loyalty on his fitness report and two other officers called to support him and get together. Telephone conversations led to rap sessions throughout November, December and January for a small group of servicemen, mainly commissioned officers who were Vietnam veterans.

Experiences, disappointments, joys and tragedies were exchanged. Composition of the group and proposed actions were discussed. It was eventually decided that the group would focus on military officers, especially those on active duty although reservists and retirees were also welcome. The platform was to be reasoned activity to end the war and promote civil liberties in the service.

The first action of the group was to participate as "Officers' Resistance" in a March 14 G.I. 'Rally for Peace and Justice' in Washington, D. C. Leaflets were passed out, and a short speech made. The group and the member's speech were mentioned in the Washington Post and slight tremors were felt throughout the Washington military establishment. People just weren't used to the idea of active duty officers participating in protest activities. The Post article was followed by this published letter to the editor clarifying our position:

Your article of March 15 on the GI Rally for Peace and Justice mentioned the participation of an officers' group. As members of this group, we find it necessary to expand our position as reported. We are loyal officers and Vietnam veterans who feel a professional and moral obligation to express our concern on national policies and military issues. The Vietnam war continues today because of the pervasive influence of the military over society and its repression of dissenting opinion within its ranks. For too long, the informed officer has been unwilling to speak out because of extra-legal harassment in the

absence of clearly defined rights. The result has been leaders who equate silence with loyalty and dissent with disloyalty. This we resist.

The letter resulted in several of the authors explaining their political and social views to their Commanding Officers.

In late March, the name of the group was changed to the Concerned Officers' Movement. Since then, activities have included a telegram to LT Louis Font commanding his public expression of his objection to the Vietnam war and a letter to Senator Charles Goodell supporting his proposals to end the war. Participation in the April 15 Moratorium demonstrations is also planned. This newsletter represents the most significant attempt to date to publicize our views.

LET'S GET TOGETHER: ONE OFFICER'S VIEW

Why should an officer, apparently co-opted in his leadership role, become associated with an organization that may be said to be "prejudicial to the good order and morale of the armed forces"? Each individual must obviously make the decision for himself. If you are a Viet vet or are being ordered to go, or are even secure in a stateside assignment, take a look. Take a deep, introspective look, at yourself and the military conformity you are surrounded by. With all this absurdity and pollution encompassing you, is it really the squeeze of loyalty that causes you to remain a silent, bowing sycophant to the system or is there some greater call to re-examine, dissect and change this system which you are an integral part of by act of Congress. If there is a questioning in your mind, come meet us and judge for yourself the righteousness or disloyalty of our joining in mutual discussion of the military, its purposes and its means of consummating its stated goals. You are out there and we are ready to listen to you and discuss what we are doing. We are not derelict in our duties. We are not "sour grapes". We are honest, conscientious individuals. Come judge for yourself.

(The author of the above piece is departing for Vietnam in early May)

THE NAVAL CAREER OF PETER HAGERTY

COM does not necessarily advocate the following course of action for officers who are opposed to the war in Vietnam. There is much that can be done from the inside. Nevertheless, ENS Hagerty's case is another example of what can be done when an officer's professional duties come in conflict with his moral beliefs. It is also a case of an officer who attempted to make his military service personally meaningful and socially relevant.

As a senior and a member of NROTC at Harvard College, Peter Hagerty had serious doubts about accepting his commission. He had been active in civil rights and social welfare work as a student and was afraid that service in the Navy would be totally irrelevant to society's more pressing needs. Then there was the war in Vietnam which at the time still seemed far away, especially to a Navy man. Still, by accepting a commission, he felt he would be tacitly aligning himself with the military's Vietnam policy.

Hagerty talked over his concerns with his present and former NROTC commanding officers. Both men were unusually sympathetic and willing to help him. After much careful discussion, Hagerty agreed to accept his commission and in turn was sent to Prairie View A & M in Texas to help his former Captain set up an NROTC program. The scene at an all-Black college was very bad. The college suffered from everything from poor physical conditions to a faculty and staff that was sadly out of touch with the students. Hagerty, attempting to bridge the gap between teacher and student (and also between military authority and the Black serviceman) set up a study group in "Black consciousness". The students were receptive but after introducing the group to books by the likes of Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver and Julius Lester, Hagerty quickly became persona non grata to both the administration and the Navy. He was therefore transferred back to the fleet in August, 1968, to the destroyer "Lloyd Thomas" based in Newport, R. I.

On board the Thomas, Hagerty established himself as a good officer both in the eyes of his men and his command. He quietly resigned himself to finishing his tour as deck officer on the destroyer, still irrelevant to what he considered important, but after all, was there any alternative?

An alternative soon developed. The Thomas learned in the Spring of 1969 that it was going to deploy to Vietnam the following September. Hagerty decided it was finally time to stand up for his beliefs. He let it be known that he would refuse to go to Vietnam and also sent a letter to the Bureau of Naval Personnel requesting to be classified as a conscientious objector with the service (I-AO). The sincerity of his beliefs were attested to by his commanding officer, a priest, a psychiatrist, and others. Despite this support and despite his willingness to perform non-combatant functions within the Navy, Hagerty's petition was denied. The Chief of Naval Personnel's reply accused him of "foundering on the rocks of esoteric idealism" and further stated that because of his views, his ability to command men was high / question b/a. He was therefore to be assigned to a less critical billet which turned out to be duty as a port control officer in Okinawa. In addition, Hagerty was denied the almost automatic promotion from Ensign to Lieutenant (junior grade).

It looked as if the matter was closed, but after more careful consideration, Hagerty decided not to accept the Navy's rebuff. He continued to press his claim, saying that he would refuse his new orders if his request was not given full consideration. He could not accept duty that was connected with the Vietnam war, however remotely (Okinawa being a major staging site for Vietnam-bound supplies and bombing raids). Hagerty's fight to be considered a C. O. was apparently unprecedented for a naval officer and nobody knew quite how to react. He was eventually given a leave of absence for over a month, then he was temporarily assigned to a chaplain in Newport. Eventually, in December, 1969, Hagerty was honorably released from active duty with a statement that due to his beliefs, he was not to be called back to active service.

Pete Hagerty is now working full-time for the National Moratorium Committee in Cambridge, Mass. He has set up a project that provides legal assistance for servicemen who protest the war, are applying for C. O. discharges, or

who are being unfairly harassed by their commands.

ALIENATION IN THE MILITARY: THE CASE OF TONY HIXON

Loneliness does not come from not having people about one, but from being unable to communicate that which seems important to oneself, or from holding certain views which others find inadmissible.

C. G. Jung, Memoirs, Dreams, Reflections

My name is Anthony Hixon. I was a LT (jg) in the Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal. I became a bomb defuser because I couldn't figure out any other way to absolve myself from actually being in the military during 1967-68. Inwardly, I found myself in deep sympathy with the Movement; outwardly, I tried to continue with my work. I felt that speaking out against any of the situations that disturbed me--the war attitudes, the racism, the bureaucratic inefficiency, the pervasive inhumanity--was both useless and dangerous. A folklore voice insisted, "When you get in the military, you will find a crazy world--just do your job and don't let it bother you". It bothered the hell out of me and worse, I tried to contain that bother within me.

After twenty-three months of active duty, I went to my superiors and quit. Nobody knew quite what to do with an officer who said he couldn't and wouldn't go on living a moral dilemma. I was discharged.

The only reason for telling this story is that the whole of it is unnecessary. Isolation, futility, and fear drove me to the point where all I could do was lie down and say no. Quitting the military is as irrelevant as going through it with your heart and imagination and abilities locked in a time vault dated for your separation, your return from Nam, or your retirement. You must assume responsibility for your ideals. I know that in the military at large there are many OCS as well as career Officers who have experienced the same isolation, the same alienation. You are not alone, brother. If, through this newsletter, or through your own searchings, you can find other officers who are divided into public and private men and want to get themselves together, then you can find the strength to let people know where you stand. As an officer, you enlisted presumably because you felt you had a duty to your country. Is the nature of that duty to become a machine, or a man? Be honest. Talk to people. Let's get human intelligence and understanding right in the middle of our lives, where it belongs. There is no way to become invisible by putting on a hat.

1/LT LOUIS FONT: LOYAL DISSENTER

Lieutenant Louis Font recently applied for a discharge from the Army on the basis of conscientious objection to the Vietnam war. He received nationwide

television and newspaper coverage for his stand. Lou Font graduated from West Point in the top five percent of his class and is a model officer in every sense of the term. Extremely loyal and dedicated to the Army, his decision to apply for a C. O. discharge was clearly a difficult one. Excerpts from his statement follow:

"I have thought long and hard about my role as a military officer during the Vietnam war. I have been guided by the statement in DOD Pamphlet 1-20 (The Armed Forces Officer), that an officer 'has veracity if, having studied a question to the limit of his ability, he says and believes what he thinks to be true, even though it would be the path of least resistance to deceive others and himself'. On grounds of conscience I can in no way participate in the Armed Forces in any capacity during the Vietnam war. My religious beliefs compel me to regard the Vietnam war immoral and unjust and I cannot contribute in any capacity to an immoral war.

"....I know deep down inside me that I could no more lead a company of men--120 souls--in Vietnam than I can cease to be Louis Paul Font, human being. I cannot write condolence letters to the mournful mothers and fathers and new widows. I have seen military funerals up close; I have served on the honor guard of some of my close friends who are now interred at the West Point Cemetery. I know it would destroy me to gaze into the tearful eyes of a mother whose son I led into a war I regard as immoral."

"To me, the war is destroying the integrity of the United States and of some of its best men. I have spoken with Vietnam returnees. Some of what I have been told has jarred my conscience. There is no doubt in my mind that this war is dehumanizing some of America's finest men, some of America's finest military officers. At West Point I once spoke with a Major, not a member of the academic faculty. I asked him, "How does it feel to kill?" He replied, "I feel the same elation as when I kill deer." I could not believe his words. I paused for a moment, collected my thoughts, and then asked, "Do civilians die in Vietnam, and if so, to what extent?" He then said, and these are the exact words he used, for they are etched in my memory: "Cadet Font, it is like this. You are walking down a street after a battle and you see a six-year-old girl lying there. You roll her over (and with this he made a rolling motion with his foot) and you say 'How about that, the Viet Cong are now using six-year-old girls to do their dirty work!'" I stood listening, dumbfounded. I had asked the questions because they were on my mind; his replies caused me to investigate further questions pertaining to the Vietnam war and conscience and religious belief. This claim, written after considerable personal anguish, is the result of my inquiry.

"I hasten to add that I in no way mean to disparage the Armed Forces by relating this incident. The abhorrent incident concerning the village of Song My and its inhabitants has already painted a dark and bloody picture of many officers and enlisted men in the U. S. Army. Also, I should point out that at West Point and elsewhere I have met many officers whom I regard with the highest esteem. Nevertheless, I did war with my conscience to learn, for example, of the photograph mailed in a Christmas card by Colonel George S. Patton III. According to public reports, the color photograph

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featured Col. Patton standing before a pile of dismembered Vietnamese bodies; the caption on the card read "Colonel and Mrs. George S. Patton III-- Peace on Earth". Col. Patton is now a Brigadier General. Countless times I have asked myself: is this the American ideal or has America somehow gone astray?"

"....The Golden Rule, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' compels me to view the Vietnam war from the standpoint of the victim, the Vietnamese peasant and the American Soldier. I am convinced that it makes no difference whatsoever to the Vietnamese who looks up into the sky and sees silver napalm canisters tumble down toward him, whether the napalm falls because the United States government loves him or hates him or is liberating him or pacifying him. The point is that the bombs fall and the human being is dead--and with him a trace ofanking and humanity...."

"It is only after long and careful study, meditation, and prayer with my God that I have come to these conclusions. I have had to ask myself some difficult and grueling questions: Given that I regard the Vietnam war as immoral, can I, should I accept assignment to Vietnam, even if to sit behind a desk in Saigon? Could I perform my job with the initiative and high performance expected of a West Point graduate? Does a moral man whose religious beliefs compel him to find the Vietnam war immoral, remain in the Armed Forces that wages that war? Where do my loyalties lie when there exists a clear conflict between my duty to God and my duty to my country?"

"In essence, then I have concluded that I am part of an immoral force, an Army engaged immorally in war. In clear conscience I cannot participate in the Vietnam war in any form; I cannot squeeze the trigger that would unjustly take another human life, I cannot command others to do so. I cannot participate in any way in a coup or assassination where such things are being done. I therefore respectfully request discharge from the Armed Forces. I place my trust in my God and in the United States of America."

THE VUNTO: OFFICER AND SILENT

There can be little doubt that the majority of junior officers do not like what they are doing. Cynicism and a strong disaffection with the military seem to be the prevailing feelings, much of it below the surface. "Don't make waves" unfortunately is the predominant attitude that tends to keep many of these feelings unexpressed. Too many officers just want to do their time and get out. Dislike things though they do, they prefer to keep quiet and avoid controversy, counting the days until separation all the while.

It is the express purpose of this publication and of the Concerned Officers' Movement to bring these repressed feelings and hidden grievances out into the open; to serve notice to the military and the nation that the officer corps is not part of a silent majority, that it is not going to let its thoughts be fashioned by the Pentagon. As officers, we have our principles and consciences as well as the right to free speech. Since the military is an inescapable part of life for most American young men today, we have

an obligation as citizens and as officers to speak out on what we find repugnant about the armed forces. The fact that most of us are volunteers, not draftees should not mean that we have agreed to accept the existent values of the power structure. Rather it should mean that we have a duty to act as a positive force toward improving that structure.

The years of military life need not be irrelevant and deadening. There is much to be done. The first step must be to make ourselves heard, to bring our dissent into the open. Whether about the Vietnam war, the influence of the military upon national policy, the rigid enlisted-officer separation, military justice, the dehumanizing life of the serviceman or any other important issue, we must speak out. Join us.

COME TOGETHER NOW!!

Our activities have all been open and legal. We are in contact with military and civilian lawyers. We expect to continue to function as a focal point of Officers' free expression. If you support our activities and would like to be placed on our mailing list, please fill out the attached sheet. We welcome (and need) comments, pro and con, personal experiences and inquiries. Feel free to get in touch with any member of the editorial board listed below.

"It is not enough to allow dissent. We must demand it, for there is much to dissent from." --Robert. F. Kennedy

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