I: Did you have any difficulty on the way to the camp on the train?

V: No, we didn't. We were called to Marion, and there were given another physical examination. If there were any ones that were not fit they would be rejected. They usually called one or two more than the quota desired of the county. If there was somebody not fit they let him go back home. But this time they kept them all, although even I myself and two others they examined physically quite a bit, more than the others, and they finally said, "Well the camp examiners will decide that with these three." And then that was in the afternoon, then in the evening they wanted us to attend a moving picture show, and then the sheriff took us to Fort Riley. Well, we went into the theater, most of us sat there, weren't at all interested in the movie whatever they had, but since they wanted to we had to sit there and then they took us on the train. We had no difficulty on the way down, everything went smoothly. In the morning we were there and shown a place where we got a breakfast. Then during the day they took us around to the place where the physical examinations were taken and then through the quartermaster, where they wanted to give us our uniforms and then the next day we were supposed to be off in drill. But there, when they took my physical examination again, they waited three days before they passed me. You see, I had been through the thrashing season on August the 5th and ran a separator and that is sometimes quite dusty and I knew I had weak lungs and they were pretty well filled up.

In fact, I believe that I had no more than one lung capacity the way they drew the diagonal where it was inactive. But on the third day, after they had worked me very hard three times to do some breathing, as to whether I could open them, and I was physically worn out, but the third day after they passed me.

I: You weren't mistreated in the process of registration and examination though, or did they know you were a conscientious objector yet?

V: Well, when they took us through the quartermaster to take the uniform I said, "No, I don't wear a uniform. I am not a soldier, I refuse." Then the whole crowd bursted out in a big sneer and yelled but what was that to me. I'd expected all that. And, but the lieutenant finally told them, "Why just walk on through then. If you don't want a uniform, just pass on through." He probably knew from before that nothing could be done with men like us anyway.

I: So what kind of a classification were you given or where were you sent then after they passed you?

V: Well, after I passed my physical examination I was just a plain soldier in their minds. The army didn't classify me. I had registered on my registration card, I had stated that I claimed exemption on conscientious grounds because war was or life was sacred, human life and also on agriculture grounds. I wanted a farm deferment. And I stated that also very clearly in the questionnaire, but they seemingly paid no attention to that. They just took us to the company in the morning where we would drill on the drilling field.

I: You weren't put into the C.O. company right away?

V: No. You see, the War Department had given the army officers the right to deal with the conscientious objectors about three weeks to four weeks. If during that time they could persuade them to take some form of military work,

accept that, that would be all right. Or if they could scare them into it, that would be all right too, but nothing could be done with them. If the army officers could do nothing with us inside about three or four weeks, then they should segregate us in a detention camp. And there we were to wait to be given a hearing from the Board of Inquiry as to our sincerity about our conscientious scruples. See, an army officer was not considered qualified to determine whether we were sincere religiously or not. For that purpose the government had created a Board of Inquiry of two civilian men--in this case it was Dean Harlan F. Stone (he was the Dean of Columbia Law School) and Judge Julian Mack (he was a judge somewhere in the circuit court, I don't know what). And then there was an army officer, Walter S. Kellogg. Those three comprised the Board of Inquiry and as soon as they had collected a number of C.O.s at detention camps, well, what they would do was they would move them from one camp to the other. From other camps they brought them up to Fort Riley. Then, that Board of Inquiry came around and they would give us a hearing to determine whether we were conscientiously sincere. And they would classify them in one of four classes: those that were sincere were given class I-A. And they had the privilege of accepting a farm furlough, an industrial furlough, or a reconstruction furlough. And those that were doubtful as yet--you see quite a few people, boys had registered late, I mean they had joined the church late. Some were already twenty-eight years old when they joined the church. And that looked a little suspicious. Now, did they just join the church to evade the draft? Besides, the draft law really stated that those registrants who belonged to a church that had a well established creed against participation in war, they should have some exemption. Now if they just joined at a fairly old age, that looked suspicious. So in that case they give those a deferred hearing, that is, they give them a hearing once again. And that was class II, I think. I remember one of the boys especially, he was a Holdeman and joined late, about twenty-eight years. And you know, they wear a beard and he didn't have a beard yet. So it all looked a little suspicious. And then he was given a hearing and a second time later on when he came up then, his beard is full grown already. And then this Judge Mack told him, "Well, you look a lot different now then you did the other time," kind of in a humorous manner. Well, that was just on the side, but after all, this Board of Inquiry wasn't hard on us. I think they tried as best they could to decide whether we were sincere. I think they were fair and honest.

I: Did you appear before the Board?

V: Yes, I appeared before the Board in Fort Riley. Before they gave us a hearing, however, the day before, they called the whole C.O. camp from the group from the detention camp to somewhere in the open and this Major Kellogg, one member, and a few other colonels, they really gave us a talking to.

I: What did they say?

V: Well, they called us "yellow" and they said, "You men make this mistake. You think if the government is lenient that is weakness. But that is not the case. The government is ready to shoot--shoot individual people, conscientious objectors because the 64th Article of War,* the article on disobedience, calls

---

*The 64th Article of War reads: "Any person subject to military law who, on any pretense whatsoever, strikes his superior officer. . . or wilfully disobeys any lawful command of his superior officer, shall suffer death or such other punishment as a court-martial may direct."

for death." He did not say that that was only on the battlefields. See, out home on the training camp, if a person is disobedient, he is arrested and tried by court-martial and given a long-term sentence imprisonment. But on the battlefield where things must move fast and they can't allow a soldier to turn back, any officer has the right to shoot him down immediately.

I: The day before you had your hearing before the Board of Inquiry, Major Kellogg brought all the C.O.s together and threatened them with death?

V: Itwasn't that Kellogg did the threatening, but those other colonels did that. Kellogg didn't do so much of the talking.

I: But he was present?

V: He was present. He later on wrote a book on the conscientious objector--yes, I have a copy of it.* Kellogg did not do so much of the threatening, but when the hearing was given, he was not so sympathetic to us as was Stone and Mack. Mack was a Jew. He was a man that after the war was over, he joined Chaim Weiman in the Zionist movement to bring the Jews back to Palestine. Now he was considerate. Well, they classified them in four ways: Class 2, I think, was up for reconsideration, and those they thought weren't quite sincere enough, they were given Class 3. And that was noncombatant. And those they thought were not at all sincere, they were given Class 4, combat duty, is what they were. Well, we had been examined by this Board and we were classified 1-A, all of us. And waiting now to be furloughed out, but somehow we never got a chance to take a furlough. I had told my father he should talk to some of his relatives in Minnesota. And if they needed some farm help, write to Fort Riley and inquire about a conscientious objector. And he did that, but he wrote back the following and said, "Es scheint mir so die Herren wollen das nicht." [It seems to me that the leaders don't want that.] No, the army officers did not want to furlough us out. And you know later on the group in Camp Funston that had been drafted after I was, about September, they were there waiting and waiting to work but nobody got a chance. They just didn't furlough them out. Seemingly the army didn't favor that plan.

I: Was the army perhaps afraid to send the conscientious objectors out into where local American patriots would cause them trouble?

V: No, I don't think that was the consideration. I think it was just that they were unsympathetic. They were afraid that we were getting too much privilege. I think that's what it was although I cannot prove it. I don't think they were afraid that there would be some disturbances in public life out in the country because of this.

I: What did you do during the three-week period during which they tried to persuade you to accept military service, before you were put in the detention camp?

V: Well, you see I hadn't passed the physical examination, so they sent me to the reject station where they had some rejected soldiers--there were a few C.O.s also. Some were these lowdown venereal diseased. And there were some that were mentally not right. It was a pitiful sight, in fact they called that

---

*See Walter Kellogg, The Conscientious Objector, in which he clearly reveals his attitude toward Mennonites. He describes them for the most part as slow, course, ignorant and almost "bovine."

the crazy hall. And there we stayed, close by where the kitchen was where we could eat, but we had our bunks there with these, with these rejects, these incapacitated people. And there was a lot of cussing and swearing going on which these rejected soldiers did and so on. And in fact it was so bad that I had never heard anything the like. And one of the Mennonite boys said, "Why it's so bad there the way they cuss, you could even smell the language." I don't know if it was quite that bad, but you see my sense of smell wasn't very keen, but he claimed he could not only hear it, he could smell it. Well, we stayed there and then every so often they would take us out and give us a hearing and a bawling out and ask us to do some work. When they took us out, well somewhere separately, they would talk to us real hard. And they used language, words that I had never heard before. I know they weren't English, they weren't German, they weren't French, and I don't think they were Italian. And I'm sure you couldn't find them in any Webster's dictionary. They just rained a lot upon us. And what I did then, when they did that, I just tried to put up as if I were taking it very easy. I stepped off a little, once in a while I'd look at them into their face--I didn't stare at them--and I pulled my cheeks a little. I surely didn't want to sneer or laugh at them because all I wanted to do was to behave myself so that I appeared to them as just easy, not a bit scared. My knees wouldn't rattle and legs weren't stiff and I wasn't scared one bit. That is the way I did that and when they ejacalated a lot, I kept on thinking in my mind and that kept me from just holding my poise, I think, very much like a choral director--he usually doesn't sing with the group but he sings in his mind. So I was thinking along with what these people said, realizing and thinking that after all, you have no right to do what you do now. And usually in about five to ten minutes they had so completely exhausted themselves, they stopped of themselves. And then they had to see that after all we had the same convictions that we had before. They had gained nothing by doing that.

I: Didn't they convince anybody at all?

V: Well, there were some boys that had never fully been decided of themselves what they wanted, and some signed up for noncombatant work. But those that had, like I and a few others, that had pretty well thought the matter before that there was nothing noncombatant in the army and that war was sin, not one of them was persuaded. They just stood their ground.

I: What kind of arguments did they use?

V: Well, let's go back to the Board of Inquiry. The man that asked the boys there--there was a small young Negro boy appeared in the group. And he asked him something like this: "Can't you take some work, some noncombatant work in the army?" He said, "no." "Why not?" "Why Christians must not help kill each other." And he asked him, "Well, are you a church member?" "Yes." "What kind of a church?" "Church of God." And then this member of the Board of Inquiry told him--no, then Kellogg spoke up and said, "Well, I am a church member and I believe war is all right." Well, just out open frankly this Negro boy told him, "Yes, but not all church members are Christians." (Laughter) And we noticed then that Kellogg then, when he got that answer, really didn't know what to say, we think, because he looked down tried to bury his face. He was just about ready to--he had to smile a little and didn't want it to come out. So after all those hearings, if a person, as I said before, if you had the matter thought through, it was nothing so very hard about everything in camp. It just, those people that found it hard, those boys, they were the ones who found it so hard to decide themselves what they really wanted to do. If they had that, well, just as I

said before, a little suffering, you just take that for granted. One of the Quaker boys one time, he was given nothing to eat for two and a half days. When he came out and ate some he told us, "Well, I don't mind. I just consider that my fast days." Joking there, and so that was that. It didn't bluff him. And that's the way all the boys, they were willing to stand up for what they believe was right and willing to take a little suffering. It wasn't so bad.

In my case, finally, at one time they wanted to send us to another camp, to Houston, Texas. The company was going there and the company to which I had drafted, they wanted to send me along. Well, and the way they did that is they had the soldiers sign off here the transfer papers, then shipped them over there by truck and there they signed in again. That was their way of keeping record of where each one was. Now when they wanted me to sign the transfer papers, I didn't do that. I told them, "I am not a soldier, and I don't sign a thing. I don't sign anything." Well, they spoke a little hard to me, finally one corporal said to me, "Well, if he doesn't sign, the farmers never have the cows and the horses and the pigs sign a transfer when they ship those to market. We can ship him without that." Well, I didn't say anything to that. When the company was on the trucks, I was the last one. I wouldn't go on. Then finally about a two-hundred pound corporal lifted me up from the ground in the palm of his hands--see I weighed only about 115 pounds and he could easily move me--he held me off the ground as if he wanted to set me on the truck. Well, I held perfectly still--there was nothing I could do. The truck drivers were already gunning their engines, getting ready to go. And then he set me down and he jumped on the truck and I stood, and then a lieutenant stuck his head out of a cab to the side and said, "Go back to the place where you came from." And the trucks rolled off and I stayed here in Fort Riley.

This was still before I was in a detention camp. That is, this happened in the first three weeks when the army still tried to persuade me. You see if they had sent me over there into new company, new officers, then they would have tried another three weeks on me. And I didn't want to go through all that, and what's more, if I should get into real trouble, I was further away to call on the ministers. Over here in Fort Riley they could sooner come over and help me. Rev. Richert told us that if you get into trouble, just wire us and we will do something for you, and if we can't, we'll wire to Washington for you. So we could get some help that way, and I didn't want to be sent to Houston, Texas, but nevertheless, I saw that if they put me on and shipped me, there's nothing I can do. But I just have to go. But it didn't happen.

I: Were there some who did get help from their ministers?

V: Well, the ministers made their visits to Camp Funston every so often during the first part of the time when we were drafted. And when there was a question as to whether the boys could do this and that, the minister would sometimes try to help solve that question. But for the most part, I thinkthat the boys knew how to handle the situations themselves just as well what the ministers could do for them.

I: When the ministers came to visit the camp, could they actually go in the detention camp?

V: Yes, they could. They came there more before the detention camp was established, before the fuller system was in operation. Then, they could see the