

# Extracts from Jeremy Hinzman's Testimony before the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board



**E**ditor's Note: Jeremy Hinzman, his wife Nga Thi Nguyen, and son Liam, are applying before the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board, asking to remain in Canada. Jeremy deserted the United States army after his conscientious objector application had been refused. These selected quotes from the transcript of Jeremy Hinzman's testimony provide an eloquent expression of the circumstances that brought him – with his family – to this act of conscience. (Photos by Rose Marie Cipryk, of Pelham Executive Meeting)

I objected to taking part as a combatant when I submitted my Conscientious Objector (C.O.) application. I don't condone violence, I think it creates endless cycles of violence, so I didn't see what good was going to come out of it.



In my thinking, any act of violence in an unjustified conflict is an atrocity. No one should have to die for a war that has no justification. So, any act I think that takes part in a war that has no justification, any violent act is atrocious just for the fact that it has no rationale behind it.

Through training I had to do, witnessing what was happening in the world at the time, I came to the conclusion that I couldn't kill. That all violence does is perpetuate more violence, and if I have an issue with that the only way I can say anything about it or do

anything about it was to take myself out of the equation. The equation being killing, and I just came to the conclusion through my process of having to dehumanise other people, having to dehumanise my co-workers and look at them really as functionaries and objects, that killing was wrong. Period. Full stop. And that I couldn't participate in it any more ...

I've been pretty influenced by a Buddhist outlook on my life. You couldn't officially call me a Buddhist. I went to a Quaker Meeting which I began attending shortly after arrival at Fort Bragg (North Carolina). I did that because the Quaker mode of worship is the closest thing I could find to silent meditation in the Fort Bragg area and my wife also had some interest in it, and at that time when I started going to the Quaker meet-

ings, I had already started to have these issues with killing and violence.

I became familiar with some concepts that I've since found are pretty universal and doesn't matter what religion it is. Mainly it was the inter-connectiveness of everything. If I harm something it's going to harm something else and then it's going to create a chain reaction, or if I do something good to somebody it's going to have an effect as well.

Beginning in my basic training you go from being a

civilian to a soldier and there's a lot of measures that take place to turn you into a soldier and so beginning in basic training, we would be marching around yelling "Trained to Kill, Kill We Will," or "Hoo Haw I Want To Kill Somebody," or on a run singing cadences about, raping and pillaging villages. I started to question it, at least internally. It was the collective kind of shedding of self and it's a big, long process of being desensitised.

**F**or instance, when we begin rifle marksmanship training the first week of it we shoot at black circles. Then the second week the black circles have shoulders. The third week they have torsos and then they pop up over and over again and it becomes a reflex and we're told that it's a target to be acquired.

I remember one instance we were marching to the chow hall during basic training and we were yelling, "Trained to Kill, Kill we Will, Trained to Kill, Kill we Will," and we were told by our drill instructors that we weren't giving an enthusiastic enough rendition of the chant and we were threatened with extra physical encouragement if we couldn't give a more enthusiastic version of it and I remember at that time just looking around me and seeing my colleagues becoming red in the face and hearing them become hoarse and feeling myself becoming hoarse yelling "Trained to Kill, Kill We Will," and at that point I guess it really hit me. The training, repeatedly stabbing a bayonet into a dummy yelling, "What Makes The Grass Grow? — Blood, Blood, Bright Red Blood."

Given the atmosphere of where I worked; it's loaded with machismo and you don't talk about your doubts or what you're thinking in regards to your job. You talk about messing people up and killing them. Because that's the way of fitting in and if you go to your platoon Sergeant and say, you know, I don't know about this shooting people, you're done. I mean, you'll still be in your unit but your life will be a living hell, so you just don't discuss it.

PRESIDING MEMBER, BRIAN GOODMAN:  
And what impact, if any, did the birth of your son have

on your decision to make the (C.O.) application?

JEREMY HINZMAN: He cemented in my mind that I didn't want to kill babies and I didn't ever want to have the possibility of killing babies, sir. Becoming a father really wakes you up to a lot of things and so I'm sure it had some impact in my thinking.

I discussed it with my spouse and came to the conclusion that I was not going to go (to Iraq). We explored two different things. Either to refuse the orders of my command and take whatever repercussions stem from that or to go AWOL or go somewhere else and Canada was close by and my reason for choosing to come to Canada rather than refuse orders and be subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice was because in my mind the expedition in Iraq was of an illegal nature and that by complying with it I would be complicit in a criminal act.

Given what I've done, if I were to go back, at least in the culture of the military and popular culture too, many people would say what I've done has been treacherous, and so I would infer from that that there is a good possibility that I would be treated more harshly. Despite that, I will say that any amount of incarceration for refusing to participate in an unlawful act is too much incarceration.

I felt that based on what I had read, that soldiers who had refused to participate in an illegal war and faced prosecution for that refusal, are considered political refugees and I felt I stood on solid ground and I still feel I stand on solid ground in asserting that and so I mean, I had confidence that I will be able to stay on that ground.

I think if I was to be prosecuted it would be — I mean, I would be prosecuted for acting upon a political or moral belief. I will say spending one day, one week, ten years, any amount of time for refusing to take part in an unlawful conflict; that is too long. \*

*Jeremy Hinzman, Nga Thi Nguyen, and Liam Hinzman are attenders of Toronto Monthly Meeting.*