

# History Changers

By Ed Abbott

In a book by Hans A. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis*, the author makes the statement, "Individuals who stay on the path mapped by their conscience do change history."

Last Saturday I met one of these 'history changers.' Darryl Anderson, a twenty-two-year-old deserter from the United States' military forces, who has sought refuge in Canada, was sharing his experiences with a group of Young Friends gathered at the Quaker meetinghouse.

Several years ago, as a member of an American family who were unable to offer him the advantages of post-secondary education, Darryl was approached by a recruiting officer of the U.S. army. The officer described in glowing terms the great opportunity offered by joining up: college education in his chosen field, free medical coverage, exciting chances to travel, fine companionship, etc.

Like many others in similar circumstances Darryl opted for this ladder to a successful future. But instead of college, he found himself, after rigorous training, bound for Iraq. Assuming that this was an honourable course in service of his homeland he left willingly and starry-eyed. In Iraq he encountered a very different situation than that

he had come to expect through the publicity carried by the media back home. There were no weapons of mass destruction. There was no threat to the United States. There were no crowds anxious to welcome them as liberators. Instead there were people intent on getting rid of these people who had devastated their land with death and destruction and who, on the pretext of bringing democracy, sought to have Iraqi oil resources at their disposal.

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Disillusioned, he could not justify his presence there and his inner being revolted against what he was involved in. He could not find it in him to follow orders that entailed firing on civilians who might have a militant among them. He told of being threatened with discipline by an officer for withholding his fire on a boy who was running away. After a stint exposed to 'insurgent'

fire and having a comrade fall beside him, he got home leave and came back with a very different understanding of the honour of their service and of why he and his comrades were called to lay their lives on the line.

When called to return to duty in Iraq he saw it his duty to refuse on grounds of conscience. When denied the right to avoid further deployment in Iraq, he joined the growing number seeking asylum in Canada. Is Darryl delinquent of duty? Justice Robert Jackson, who was the chief prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials stated, "The very essence of the Nuremberg charter is that individuals have international duties which transcend national obligations of obedience imposed by the state."

Darryl and the several others whom I have met who have sought shelter here from the U.S. military are men of principle and of a calibre by whom our country stands to be enriched. They are those described by Hans Schmitt as the "individuals who stay on the path mapped by conscience" and who "do change history." To this I would add, "for the better." ❀

*Ed Abbott is a member of Simcoe-Muskoka Meeting.*