

## Letters to the Editor

Editor: *Indiana Magazine of History*

In the article, "The Decline of Quaker Pacifism in the Twentieth Century: Indiana Yearly Meeting of Friends as a Case Study," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XCVI (March 2000), 44-71, Thomas D. Hamm and his students seek to demonstrate "that in the twentieth century pacifism has lost much of its force in the lives of members of Indiana Yearly Meeting." They support this argument with evidence that during the major wars of the twentieth century more male Indiana Quakers of military age chose to serve in the military rather than to be conscientious objectors.

The authors seem to assume that men faced only two options—military service or conscientious objection leading to alternative, non-military service if called to duty. From the first World War on there was a third option—to register with Selective Service as a conscientious objector who, if drafted, was willing to serve in the military as a noncombatant, usually as a medical corpsman. This provision was originally made to accommodate members of the historic peace churches. For the argument of the article to be compelling, the authors would have to establish that most Indiana Quakers in the military were not serving as noncombatants. Unless and until this can be demonstrated, the thesis remains unproven.

In the meantime a disservice seems to have been done to hundreds of Indiana men who made a difficult and brave choice that allowed them to serve both their nation and their religious heritage.

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*John D. King*

Editor: *Indiana Magazine of History*

Mr. King raises a good point. Explicit consideration of non-combatants would have strengthened our article.

It is impossible to do what he thinks necessary, however, because we cannot find, nor could archivists at Selective Service headquarters, any statistics that differentiated between combatant and non-combatant Friends from Indiana or elsewhere. As we point out, other than the Brown survey of World War I, we have none at all. We do, however, have some fragmentary information which suggests that most Friends who went into the military did not do so as noncombatants. For World War I, we have a survey of members of the Five Years Meeting that had a response rate of 27%. It showed that of the respondents, 350 said they would choose to be absolute conscientious objectors, 600 would accept some form of noncombatant service, and about 2,300 would go into the regular military. We know of no reason to think that Indiana Friends would have differed significantly [see Elbert Russell, *The History of Quakerism* (New York, 1942), 516]. We also know that the entire state of Indiana produced only 263 men

registered as noncombatants in June 1944 [see Charles B. Hirsch, "Conscientious Objectors in Indiana During World War II," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XLVI (March 1950), 60]. Even if all of these men were Quakers, which is highly unlikely, they would have been a minority of Indiana Quaker men subject to the draft. Since our article was published, we have also obtained a copy of a study of Richmond churches done in 1945 by a group of Earlham College sociology students that includes statistics on service in World War II. It showed the following for the three Friends meetings in Richmond: First Friends had 53 in military service, 6 noncombatants, and 3 in CPS; North Tenth Street had 3 in military service, none in other categories; West Richmond had 59 in military service, 3 in CPS, and no noncombatants.

Contrary to Mr. King's assertion, we do not base our case for the decline of Quaker pacifism just on evidence of military service. We also base it on numerous statements by Indiana Friends over the course of the twentieth century that that was the case, and who justified various kinds of warfare. If most of the Indiana Quakers entering the military were noncombatants, it seems likely that someone would have noted that. To our knowledge, no one did.

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