

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF MY EXPERIENCE AS MEMBER OF EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE DURING THE WAR 1914 1918

My Father Christian Reesor Bishop of the Mennonite church for 50 years having died Dec 26 1915 . I was ordained as Minister in 1916,

As the war had been raging about two years matters for the Non-Resistant Churches became somewhat tense, but it was not until Aug 29, 1917 that the MILITARY SERVICE ACT was passed for the purpose of raising 100,000 men by conscription first draft to consist of single men between the age of 20 and 24 years.

On Nov 17th 1917 a meeting of ministers of the various non resistant denominations was called at Widemans church , the following persons were present L.J.Burkholder , Isaac Wambold , Christian Gayman , Levi Grove , Thomas Reesor Samuel Goudie , E Sevenpiper , Milton Bricker , Representing the three branches of the Mennonite church , and Fred Elliott, and D.W.Heise representing the Tunkard church. These men were called together unofficially by L.J.Burkholder. for the purpose of considering ways and means by which the NON-Resistant bodies , which they represent as officials , might be able to express in some practical manner to the Military representatives of Canada, their profound gratitude , and appreciation , for the enjoyment of exemption privileges granted them from the performances of any class of Military service.

After considerable discussion the following resolution was carried.

WHEREAS it appears , from official documents ; and correspondence in the hands of those present , that the Government of Canada, through the Militia department has endeavored to make ample provision for the exemption of the various bodies represented , and yet there seems to be room for suspicion at least that their security after all is not absolute.

THEREFORE be it resolved , that Eld S.Goudie (as chairman) L.J.Burkholder , E. Sevenpiper , Thos Reesor , and Fred Elliott be a committee to investigate the present situation . And if possible learn definitely what the statutes of said bodies really are relative to the said exemption matter. and call a meeting in the near future, and providing for the personnel of the meeting so called an official name. The resolution was sustained.

L.J.Burkholder , Chairman . W.D.Heise Secy

A second meeting was called on Dec 11 , 1917 , and the official name of Non Resistant Relief Movement given of Ontario was chosen .

Resolved that the different representatives appointed by the Non Resistant bodies, with two additional representatives from Bro Thos Reesors branch of the Church or their successors on office as may be appointed from time to time , constitutes this organization.

Resolved, That one representative from each society represented constitute the executive Committee.

The following were appointed. L.J.Burkholder , S.Goudie, D.W.Heise Thos Reesor and .C.Gasho.

During the Dominion Election after passing the Military service act I with a few others interviewed Premier Sir Robert Borden at Mr Weichels house in Waterloo regarding the drafting of some of our boys who came under the provision of the act as class, 1. Sir Robert gave no encouragement but referred us to the Highest Tribunal at Ottawa,

S.F.Coffman D.W.Heise and myself went to Ottawa under appointment and interviewed a Mr Calder M.P. received an attentive hearing but as we had no first hand knowledge of the act covering the exemption of Mennonites we made no noticable headway, Mr Coffman addressed the Minister.

As I had received instructions from a former meeting I made arrangements with A.F.Wilson, Solicitor to search throughout the Archives in Osgood Hall and Queens Park, for the Act covering the exemption from Military service of the Mennonites which turned out to include the Tunkers and Quakers as well

That is ,giving the latter the same privilage as the Mennonites.

The first act recorded is dated 1808 under George 3 which exempts members in good standing of the above Denominations or Societies. provided they produced certificates to the effect that they were members in good standing and paid a tax of twenty shillings in time of peace and five pounds in time of war or invasion, this tax to be paid every year before the first of december, this act included every male between the age of 16 and 60

The Military service act was revised from time to time until the Military Service act passed during the war, on the 29th day of August 1917,

After receiving an exhaustive copy of the various acts covering the exemptions of the nonresistant bodies we as members of committee had definite ground to work on, but on account of each delegate working for the interest of his own particular branch ,caused more or less confusion which were straightened out when we all met on various occasions, there also was quite a difference in the judgement of the different officers commanding in the various districts. Military districts No 1 and No 2, were Toronto and London ,Toronto district Officers were far more exacting than London towards the end of the war.

It will be noted that the exemptions covered only those who were members in good standing , producing a Certificate to that effect signed by a Bishop of the branch in which he was a member, (the names of each Bishop having been forwarded to the Government officials) Consequently there were quite a number of young men who had not been bapitized ,in the various denominations ,therefore did not qualify as members in good standing, these were all drafted or court-martialed and put to various Jaols. This condition produced a serious problem for all .

As I had worked with N.M.Bearinger in the interest of our branch, together we got a great deal of assistance from the member of Parliament of North Waterloo, who however was defeated in the War election (~~1917~~ ¹⁹¹⁷) he however continued to work in our behalf through the member elect of South Waterloo.

On a sunday we had an appointment with the South Waterloo member at Preston Springs Hotel at Preston.

We presented the case on behalf of our young boys in the various Camps thus; The presbyterians and varioud denominations bapitise their Children in infancy therefore they are members from childhood ,but as we do not believe in Infant baptism ,some of our young people are not baptised and taken into the church until after military age notwithstanding that they had been brought up and had been regular attendents and never had affiliated with any other denomination, Therefore we maintained that they should be classed as Mennonites ,or any of the Nonresistant branches as the case may be.

By this time the Nonresistant branches had become very unpopular with the public in general and there was considerable hesitation by the South Waterloo member on this account, as many of in his riding were very sore against any special privilages being granted to the Mennonites who were by this time getting the full benefit of unprecedented war prices for all products of the farm, and gave nothing in return. However he and our friend of Waterloo went to headquarters in ~~WATERLOO~~ ^{OTTAWA} Ottawa ,spent considerable time presenting our case ,and finally won out in this that every young man drafted or otherwise detained should be given a leave of absence ,which order released every young man detained, as none had gone overseas ,We however in the Toronto district had considerable trouble on account of various officers being determined to evade this order ,but in my own experience I always got results with My Waterloo friend refering each case direct to Ottawa.

We all had been advised to have all the boys drafted to obey orders pending further investigation, in this quite a bit of friction developed in that a few did not report when called, thus opening the way for complications. One young man in particular was called, did not obey the order, and was later taken to Niagara On the Lake Camp, As I called on his behalf at the camp I again met with the statement of the Mennonites having the protection of the best Government in the world and not doing or giving a single thing to show our appreciation for the protection we enjoy. This statement I admit was only too true.

About this time we had commenced an agitation to raise funds for the war sufferers in general, which movement was somewhat slow in developing, as many thought it something new for the nonresistant bodies to undertake. Just at this time a certain pamphlet turned up in one of my Fathers old books which no one knew to be in existence dated on the 7th day of November 1775

Following is a copy

A SHORT AND SINCERE DECLARATION.

To our Honorable Assembly, And all others in High or Low station of Administration, and to all friends and Inhabitants of this Country, to whos sight this may come, be they English or Germans.

In the first place we first acknowledge us indepted to the most high God who created Heaven and Earth, the only Good being, to thank him for all his great Goodness and manifold Mercies and Love through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is come to save the souls of Men, having all Power in Heaven and on Earth.

Further we find ourselves indepted to be thankful to our late worthy Assembly, for their giving so good an advice in these troublesome times to all Ranks of People in Pennsylvania, particularly in allowing those, who, by the Doctrine of our Savior Jesus Christ, are persuaded in their conscience to love their Enemies, and not to Resist evil, to enjoy the liberty of their Conscience, for which, as also for all the good things we enjoyed under their care, we heartily thank that worthy body of Assembly, and all high and low in Office, who have advised to such a peaceful Measure, hoping and confiding that they, and all others intrusted with Power in this hitherto blessed Province, may be moved by the same spirit of Grace, which animated the first Founder of this Province, our late worthy Proprietor, Wm Penn, to grant Liberty of Conscience to all its Inhabitants that they may in the great and Memorable Day of Judgment be put on the right Hand of the Just Judge, who judges without Respect of Person, and hear of Him these blessed words, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you," &c. "what ye Have done unto one of these my brethern, ye have done unto me," among which number (i e The least of Christ's brethern), we, by His grace, hope to be ranked; and every Leniety and favor shown to such tender conscienced, although weak Followers of this our blessed Savior, will not be forgotten by Him on that Graat Day.

The Advice to those who do not find Freedom of Conscience to take up Arms, that they ought to be helpful to those who are in Need and distressed Circumstances, we receive with cheerfulness towards all Men of what station they may be -- it being our Principle to feed the Hungry and give the Thirsty Drink; --- we have dedicated ourselves to serve all Men in every Thing that can be helpful to the Preservation of Mens Lives, but we find no Freedom in giving, or doing, or assisting in anything by which Mens Lives are destroyed or Hurt We beg the Patience of all those who believe we err in This Point.

We are always ready, according to Christ's Command to Peter, to pay the Tribute, that we may Offend no Man, and so we are willing to pay Taxes, "and to render unto Caesar those things that are Caesar's, and to God those things that are Gods," although we think ourselves very weak to give God His due honor, He being a Spirit and Life, and we only Dust and Ashes.

We are also willing to be subject to the higher Powers, and to give in the manner Paul directs us; -- " for He beareth the Sword not in vain, for he is the Minister of God, a Revenger to execute Wrath upon Him that doeth Evil."

This Testimony we lay down before our worthy Assembly, and all other Persons in Government, letting them know, that we are thankful, as above mentioned, and that we are not at Liberty in conscience to take up Arms to conquer our Enemies, but rather to pray to God, who has power in Power in Heaven and on Earth, for US and THEM.

We also crave the Patience of all the inhabitants of this Country, - what they think to see clearer in the Doctrine of the Blessed Jesus Christ, we will leave to them and God, finding ourselves very poor for Faith is to proceed out of the Word of God, which is Life and Spirit, and a power if God, and our Conscience is to be instructed by the same, therefore we beg for Patience.

Our Small Gift, which we have given, we gave to those who have Power over us that we may not offend them, as Christ taught us by the Tribute Penny.

We heartily pray that God would govern all Hearts of our Rulers, be they high or low, to meditate those good Things which will pertain to OUR and THEIR happiness

The above Declaration, written by Benjamin Hershey, Minister of the Mennonist Church, and signed by a number of Elders, and Teachers of the Society, of Mennonists, and some of the German Baptists, presented to the Honorable of Assembly On the 7th day of November, 1775, was most graciously received.

It appeared to me to be remarkable that the above pamphlet should turn up just at the time it was most needed as it gave us a clue to the way our forefathers approached the subject in the critical period of the Revolutionary War. A crisis no doubt similar to our own at this particular time.

As the question of looking after the welfare of the boys had been satisfactorily adjusted and a pressing need for raising a substantial amount as an appreciation for the generous treatment received from the Government we were as representatives of the various denominations, called together to formulate a plan, and organize for the collection and distribution of a substantial fund to be distributed among the War sufferers and dependents.

After several meetings had been called to discuss the subject, At a meeting called at Kitchener, Ont., after considerable discussion, the following resolutions were passed.

Jan 16. 1918
RESOLVED. That we approve of the steps taken at the former meetings, and do hereby for ourselves into an Organization, assuming the name, "Non-Resistant Relief Organization.

Whereas we as Mennonites and Tinkers, whose tenants of faith forbid any form of Military Service in time of peace or war, and desirous to help in bearing the burden due to the conditions of war. THEREFORE Resolved that we the Non-Resistant Relief Organization recommend that a generous fund be raised among the Churches interested, which shall be donated to the Government. As a memorial of appreciation for the privileges of religious liberty, and our freedom from Military service, which fund shall be used for relief and charitable purposes. And that a Committee be appointed which shall interview the Government for suggestions as to the disposal of said donations according to our faith.

We also recommend that an Executive Committee be appointed at this meeting. Whose duty it shall be to dispose of the fund contributed.

We further recommend that we encourage a continued support of relief and charitable work during the continuance of the War and so long thereafter as deemed advisable by this organization.

Resolved. that the Executive Committee write up a circular letter in which is explained the Nature and purpose of this Organization, and that an urgent appeal be made for said purpose. And this letter be distributed among the Bodies represented

Resolved. That one representative from each Society represented constitute the Executive Committee.

The Following were appointed: L.J. Burkholder. S. Goudie. D.W. Heise. Thos. Beesor. C. Gasho.

Following is a copy of Circular Letter distributed among the members of the various Nonresistant Societies.

 TO THE VARIOUS BRANCHES OF THE MENNONITE. AND TUNKER CHURCHES
 IN CANADA

" ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~
 " Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these"

The Non Resistant Relief Organization, was formed in the Month of January, 1918 having for its object, the raising of a MEMORIAL FUND, to present to the Government of Canada, in recognition of our religious Liberty, and for the purpose of Relief work, made necessary by the present War conditions. The Fund is to be used by the Government in whatever way may be found necessary, while at the same time using it in harmony with the Faith and practice of the religious bodies constituting this organization.

The objects of the organization have considerably delayed on account of uncertainties which obtained relative to the Legal Status of the Churches, represented in this movement, Under the Military Service Act, of 1917 and the Order In Council of April 20 1918.

After considerable enquiry and effort these uncertainties have in a large measure been cleared up, and with gratitude to our God, and grateful appreciation to the Government of Canada, we rejoice to be able to say, that we as a Non-Resistant people, shall be permitted the continuance of the privilege of honoring God, and His Gospel principles, and our personal convictions, by being relieved of the duty, of taking up arms, and engaging in Military Service.

While many of our people have been sharing in the work of charity and relief of suffering, giving generously of their labor and means, as far as consistent with their peace loving principles, the movement in connection with this organization is a special effort, and affords a favorable opportunity to do more work along the same lines, and to share more fully in the privations and burdens of our fellow-citizens, and to support the Charitable work of the Government.

The Government of Canada has been earnestly solicited to devise for some plan by which such a donation could be expended for the benefit of the worthy poor, either at home or abroad who are in actual need of relief, (preferably Widows and Orphans) and who are not pledged to support, as War Dependents.

In view of the foregoing facts, this letter comes as an earnest appeal to every member of the churches forming this organization. For a general financial contribution, in the name of Him whose word says, "But to communicate, and to do Good forget not, for which such Sacrifice the Lord is well pleased)" we should show in a very practical manner, that while we as a people are averse to the bearing of arms, or engaging in common warfare in any form, we nevertheless are not a selfish, and unsympathetic people in the matter of our duty towards suffering humanity, fulfilling such duties in harmony with the principles which we profess and by which we live.

We therefore bespeak for all our people, a large heartedness, and a liberal response to this worthy cause.

The methods of raising this fund will be left to the choice of each individual Congregation, or district, but care should be taken that any method chosen is in full keeping with the principles and practices of these Churches, and that it may be done in as private a manner as possible.

Formulated by -W.D.Heise, S.F.Coffman. Approved by -S.Goudie.

Executive Committee - L.J.Burkholder .S.Goudie, W.D.Heise .Thos Reesor, C, Gasho.

P.S.- All communications should be forwarded to Thomas Reesor, Treasurer. R.R. # 2, Pickering Ont,

Following the distribution of the above Circular Letter it took some before the full meaning of the amount desired was uniformly understood, As mentioned, The Military service Act of 1808 stipulated that all men of military age (between 16 and 60) be taxed 20 shillings in time of peace, and five pounds in time of war, As this tax had been dropped many years ago it was thought expedient to set the amount desired by the Committee as one Hundred Dollars for every boy enjoying Military Exemption.

When this amount was made known throughout the funds came in quite freely and a nice total was received.

I might mention that at this time there was a strong feeling developing through the country, several large bodies passing resolutions disapproving the Mennonite principle, and exemption enjoyed.

On the very same day as one of these resolutions was published in the press The report of our donation was published, this was reported being the largest donation proportionately, of any organized body.

I considered this was the greatest conciliatory factor in redeeming the respect for the Nonresistant bodies which I am sure is appreciated by every true member in all the different bodies represented in our movement, I am sure the parable " Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesars ". will apply here

From that date I do not remember seeing an unkind word being published in the press regarding the integrity of the Nonresistant Bodies.

I am sure all those who so willingly did their part never had a reason to regret their actions.

 Following is a copy of Report of receipts and distribution of funds.

MENNONITE RELIEF FUND

R.R.#.2. Pickering March 27. 1919

To the Brethern who have contributed to the Non Resistant Relief Fund.

I beg to submit the following report :-

At a meeting of the Executive Committee held at Widemans Church, Jan 7. 1919, The following resolution was duly passed unaniam imously :-

" That the Treasurer shall have a report issued in printed form for distribution, of the receipts, in sum total and expenditures, in detail, with Auditors report attached."

On motion, duly seconded, J.L. Byer and David Grove were appointed to audit the Treasurers account.

D.W. Heise, Second by S. Goudie, Moved that :-

"Whereas by reccommendation of the Committee of the whole of this Organization, at its last meeting, the Executive Committee, were asked to consider the Merchants Sailor Organization, and also the reconstruction in relief Organizations, which are looking after the interests of Belgium, France and and other Countries, when deciding upon the dispencing of moneys to the Memorial Fund, And inasmuch as there has been paid over to the Merchants Sailors relief, more then 7000 dollars donated by members represented in this Organization :-

Therefore be it resolved that a further sum of ~~XXXX~~ \$ 5000 be appropriated to the said Merchant Sailors Relief Fund, \$ 15000 to the Soldiers Aid Commission of Ontario, for the care and education of Solgiers Children; And that \$40000 of the said Memorial fund be appropriated as per reccommendation of the Committee of the whole as follows :-

To the Belgian Relief Fund	\$ 15,000.00
To French Relief Work	10,000.00
TO ARMENIAN RELIEF WORK	AT.
	15,000.00

I have therefore endeavored to follow the instructions of the Committee and am able to report as follows

RELIEF FUND

Mar 27, 1919	Total Receipts	\$ 68,367.62
	Total Expenditures	60,005.50

	Balance in banks	8,362.12

EXPENDITURES IN DETAIL

Mar 24	Soldiers aid Commission of Ontario for the relief of Soldiers Children	\$ 15,000.00
	Belgian Relief Fund	15,000.00
	Secours National French relief	10,000.00
	Armenian and Syrian relief	15,000.00
	The Navy League for Merchants sailors	
	Widows and Orphans	5,000.00
	Exchange in Bank	5.50

	Total	\$ 60,005.50

EXPENSE FUND

Mar 27, 1919	Total Receipts	\$ 433.96
	Total expenses	305.20

	Balance in bank	\$ 132.20

The above expenses were incurred by several of the Committee interviewing Government officials in Ottawa, and also interviewing members of Parliament re Military Service Act.

The Books will be open for inspection at all times to the members of the society who contributed the funds

THOMAS REESOR, Treasurer

AUDITORS REPORT

Markham Mar 27, 1919
We the undersigned have carefully the accounts of the Treasurer of the Non-Resistant Relief Organization, and we find report as submitted for your consideration, to be correct in every way.

David Grove
J.L. Byer
Auditors