

11-28-2017

Interview with Dan Nolta

Cherice Bock

George Fox University, cbock@georgefox.edu

Ralph Beebe

George Fox University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/conscientious_objectors

 Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bock, Cherice and Beebe, Ralph, "Interview with Dan Nolta" (2017). *War & Conscientious Objection in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1940-1975*. 23.

https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/conscientious_objectors/23

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives and Museum at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in War & Conscientious Objection in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1940-1975 by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

Transcript of interview with Dan Nolta

War & Conscientious Objection in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends
November 28, 2017

Cherice Bock: The following recording is an interview of Dan Nolta for the project War and Conscientious Objection in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1940–1975. You will also hear the voice of Ralph Beebe, one of the researchers for this project, and I am Cherice Bock, the other researcher. The interview took place at Friendsview Retirement Community in Newberg, OR on November 28, 2017.

Ralph Beebe: Hi, Dan. Nice to have you here.

Dan Nolta: Thank you.

Ralph: What year were you born?

Dan: 1939.

Ralph: And when you registered for the draft, what, how did you register? Like, 1A, or 1AO?

Dan: 1AO.

Ralph: 1AO. Were you drafted?

Dan: Well that's a, that's a good question. Only sort of. When I left, I, I got married between my junior year and senior year, laid out a year, laid out a year of George Fox, and when I laid out, of course, I called my draft board and said, "How do you want me to handle this?" And they said, "Well, you're fine. We don't draft pastors anyway," because I was going to be an assistant pastor at Medford Friends and (well, pastoral staff at Medford Friends, I don't know if I was assistant pastor or not. I was a little bit of everything that year. They were building a new building, and so I worked on the building, that's where part of my money came from. Judy was going to Southern Oregon College for that year or so, Medford offered me that position and that was perfect for me, so that's what I did).

But anyway, I called my draft board and they said, "Well, we don't draft pastors anyway, just let us know when you go back to school."

So a year later when I went back to school, I wrote them a letter and said, "OK, I'm going back to school now, thank you, goodbye." And so, thinking that was just fine, I, I went on through the year and, let's see, I don't remember exactly when in the year it was, I got a notice that I had to go to Portland for a physical, military physical, and so I called my draft board again and I said, "Well, what about this?"

And they said, “Oh, don’t worry,” they said, “Everybody has to go for a physical. Just don’t worry about it.” So I didn’t, I didn’t worry about it.

Well, it wasn’t too much longer, later, that I got a letter from the military saying, “Report to Fort Sam Houston Texas on such-and-such a date,” and in a sense I was being drafted. And so that bothered me some, because here I am married, back in college, so I called my draft board, and they said, “Well, you don’t have a student deferment,” and I said, “What do you mean I don’t have a student deferment? I did what you told me to do,” and they said, “Well, you didn’t apply for a student deferment, or a continuation of your student deferment,” or something like that, and so I thought, “Oh boy, I’m in trouble now.” So I think I probably went to Kenneth Williams, and Kenneth Williams, I think he must have called the draft board, consulted with the draft board or something, and at that time Judy was pregnant, and so the draft board sent me back a letter that said, “Well, forget about it. We don’t draft pregnant fathers,” so that was all of it.

So was I drafted? Not really. I mean, I never reported. So that’s my story.

Ralph: Okay, any questions—anything you want to add to it?

Cherice: Not at this point.

Ralph: Okay, well, how did you make your choice about whether to go into the military or be a conscientious objector?

Dan: Well, I became a Christian when I was 16, and when I registered for the draft I was 18, so I would have to say, probably, was very much an emotional decision. It wasn’t a head decision at all. It was a heart decision. I, when I came to the Lord, I did it with my heart, not my head. And what I mean by that was...

It was quite some time later, I was actually already a pastor by then, when I started reading E. Stanley Jones, and E. Stanley Jones was, he was a very holistic sort of person and he knew lots about science and lots about politics and he was at that time a missionary in India, and so he had all of this background, all wove together. So I started reading his book *Is the Kingdom of God Realism?* And that’s what made Christianity make sense to me, was that book. And I always held that book up as the book that convinced me that the decision that I made years before when I was 16 was the right decision to make.

So I was very much under the influence of E. Stanley Jones, and so read most of the books that he had written, including the one I brought with me, that again later helped me to make sense of the choices and the decisions that I was making as a Christian, and particularly about the time that I got involved with the police. I was a chaplain for Tacoma Police Department and then later the sheriff’s department down there. And that really made a lot of sense to me. So under the influence of E. Stanley Jones and—probably not so much influence—well, I’m sure that Bertie

Roberts talked to me, I'm sure that Clinton talked to me, I'm sure that Dr. Wayne [Roberts] talked to me about those choices, but—I think Dr. Wayne was in the military. I believe he was, or had been in the military.

Ralph: This would be Wayne Roberts.

Dan: Yeah. So I don't really remember a lot of that at all, and I don't really remember that the things that were said at Medford Friends made me make that choice, because I'm just barely into this as a Christian. And so I think that I really did make a lot of emotional decisions about that.

This many years later, I certainly don't regret that decision that I made, but my feeling, even at that time, was that, that I wanted to be supportive of what our country was doing, but I didn't feel like it would be my place to take another person's life. And that's all I can really explain about it, because we're talking about 60 years ago. So there was no cataclysmic kind of thing that happened to me, some big decision that I made in a meeting or at an altar call or anything like that, that I could say that was a defining thing that I made that decision at that point in time, because I, you know I don't recall anything like that. But that may be my, my memory.

So the things that I, that I read in—by E. Stanley Jones really did make a lot of sense to me in regard to making a decision that, yes, I could work with the police in good conscience, and, and be supportive of what they did, and I brought the book, this portion of the book, and the thing that I read there, that really made a lot of sense to me. This is out of the book *Christ of the Mount*...I'll just start at the middle of page 177, in there, in *Christ of the Mount*:

The soldiers of Cromwell recognized this kind of strength when they went to arrest George Fox, the Quaker, for preaching against war. He turned on them and preached to them so daringly that they involuntarily exclaimed, "You're the man for our officer! Come and join us."

And Pilate, used to seeing Emperors and triumphal entries, exclaimed as he saw Jesus, "Behold, the man." This was a real manhood, the supreme manhood.

Let us get the issue clear: this statement of Jesus does not say, "If a man strike your child on its cheek, you are to turn the child's other cheek also." In that case, I would have a duty to protect society with my life. Where the offense is personal against me, I am to bear it and to conquer it by other weapons.

But how about this duty we owe to society? Can we use force in that case? Is the police force justified? We would answer yes, under the

present conditions of human society, since society as a whole, on a widespread scale, is not yet able to use these higher weapons of loving restraint. They must use the weapons of force restraint.

But even this does not make war justifiable, for there is a distinct difference between a police force and an army trained for war. The police force is not trained against another police force, it is trained against criminals. The police force is for the purpose of apprehending the guilty, and the guilty alone. But an army does not pretend to apprehend the guilty. It destroys the innocent and the guilty alike. Those guilty in war are seldom or ever apprehended. A police force brings the criminal to the process of law and justice. An army does not arrive to bring the guilty to process of law and justice, but to settle things by arbitration and force. The objectives are different: one looks to the arbiter of might, the other to the arbiter of right.

And I think I'll end there.

Ralph: Pretty powerful. Would you repeat the name of the book and the page?

Dan: *The Christ of the Mount*, E. Stanley Jones, started on page 177, I guess.

Ralph: Okay, yeah, thank you. Well, you grew up, then, in the Friends church?

Dan: No, I did not.

Ralph: Okay, so, tell us—

Dan: Okay, I started when I was sixteen. It was Boy Scout Sunday, and I was a part of an Explorer Post, and the leaders of our post said, "Boy Scout Sunday is coming and you should all go to church." So we all looked at each other, I think there were ten or twelve of us in that post. We looked at each other, and none of us went to church anywhere, and so we thought about that and, I don't know if we had a conversation amongst ourselves, but anyway, some of us said together that we would. We decided that we would go to Larry and Gary Smith's church, which was Medford Friends. Gary and Larry lived right down the street from me. They went to the same high school that I did and I saw them every day and so I just thought, "Well, okay, well, we're supposed to go to church," and I was a pretty obedient kid at that point in time in my life and so I said, "Okay, we'll go."

And so Jerry Kind, another boy who was in the Explorer Post, and I were picked up by Gary and Larry Smith's parents and they took us to Medford Friends. Baird Stone, who live just down the street and was a good friend of mine in high school, we got to the church, Baird was not there, and he was a part of that Explorer Post also, he was not there so we said, "We're gonna go get him!" So he was—we walked down a

couple blocks down the street, got him out of bed, and brought him back to the church, and that's the story, anyway, that's how I got to the church.

And I came from a home where there was lots of drinking, there was lots of arguing, divorce, all of that kind of thing, and I was really looking for role models in my life at that point in time, and that's where I found them: Clinton and Marge, Bertie and Wayne, huge instruments in my coming to the Lord eventually.

Ralph: And then you became a role model for the next 65 years, or whatever.

Dan: Well, thank you for that.

Ralph: And so I'd like you to tell us briefly about the years since this happened. You've had an interesting career, so tell us a little bit about it.

Dan: I'm assuming everything, meaning my career as a chaplain?

Ralph: Yeah, but, but other...

Dan: Well, I fought the battle about being a pastor. I didn't want to be a pastor. I told the Lord I'd be anything, but I did not want to be a pastor, even though Clinton was a wonderful role model as a pastor and he was the only pastor I ever knew to that point in time, and... Not me. I did not want to be a pastor.

Ralph: And this was Clinton Crisman?

Dan: Yeah, yeah. And so I was into my junior year, solid biology major, but in a terrible quandary about what I wanted to do. I think, well the people at Medford Friends saw some potential in me, and so, it didn't take very long where they were saying to me, "You should be a pastor. You should be a pastor." And I said, "No, no, no, no." So, after, the year after Judy and I were married, we were at Medford Friends that year and I was working on their staff. During the week I worked on the building, and on Sunday—Saturday I was the church janitor, and on Sunday we were the youth workers, so I had three jobs going on.

So at the end of that year, Judy's uncle who lived in Indiana invited us to go back there and live with him for the summer, and I would work with Jack and, and we would live with him, and so I decided that that would be the thing to do. Again, I think there's a pretty emotional decision, because I really liked Uncle Jack and Aunt Betty, and they were a wonderful part of Judy's family, and so that invitation was enough to take me away from Medford Friends at that point in time, and went back there and worked with Jack.

Jack was a real sportsman, and so they were going to go camping one weekend, and they said to us, you know, "You can go to church. There's a church right there in this little town and, right by where the lake is," and so I went there, got up on Sunday

morning, it was pouring down rain, and so they decided we would break camp early and we would drive home. And as we were driving home, we would go through all these little Indiana towns and there was, you know, a church on every corner and—very prominent churches to drive by, anyway. And every church that we would drive by produced a guilt feeling in me, that I wasn't in church. I was a pretty new Christian at that point in time.

And so I came to the end of that ride home, pretty much of the conviction that if church meant that much to me...still emotional. That I would say "yes" to the Lord, that I would do what he wanted me to do, and so of course then I had to be a pastor, because I knew that's what he wanted me to do. So, that's how I did. I came back to George Fox at the end of that year, finished out my biology major—everybody knew I was too far into the biology major not to finish it, so I finished it—knowing full well that when I left school that I would drive away from school and I would go start pastoring someplace.

And so the Board of Evangelism asked me to go to Swenson to take Gene McDonald's place, and for a guy who never wanted to be a pastor, who always said, "No, no, no, no, no, I don't want to be a pastor," I couldn't wait to get out of school and go start preaching. And that's exactly what I did.

So, the year of Medford Friends was a great education for me. I didn't know anything about being a pastor or what being a pastor was like or anything, didn't go to seminary, came right out of, right out of George Fox and went right to Swenson, was preaching there the next week. So that's my story.

Then, so I was at Swenson for a little over four years, Charles Ball came to me at a pastors' conference and said, "We would like to have you come to Newberg," and so I thought, "Uh..." So I think at Swenson, that I didn't grow along with the congregation. The congregation was growing by leaps and bounds and I don't think I was. So I looked at Newberg as an opportunity to come back, kind of get re-centered, and Charles Ball had a reputation of being a great administrator, and I thought, "What a good opportunity to learn church administration." Lon Fendall had been the education guy there and, but I told Charles, "I don't, I'm not really interested in being an education person." He said, "Well what do you want to do?" And I told him that, you know, I had a real concern for people who were lost and needed the Lord, and so I told him that I would like to go out and visit people and mentor them and bring them back into the church, and so he said, "Well, you can do that, we can arrange that," so he did. So he gave me people to call on every week and things like that, and one, one year after I got there Charles left, and then they brought Gerry Dillon in to preach, and I continued to be that, kind of, like the church administrator, and then I followed along with Gerry.

Well, at the end of those two years, I was eager to get back to preaching, and so the Board of Evangelism, again—the Board of Evangelism always seems to direct me, bail me out—asked me if I would go to Tacoma. Well, I've never been in Tacoma

before, didn't know anything about Tacoma, so I said, "Yeah, I'll go up there and take a look." So I went up and, and the old northeast Tacoma church was being closed down and they had Fred and a group at that church had started building this new church, just a mile away. They were calling it Olympic View. So I preached at the old church for two Sundays and then moved to the new church.

So I hadn't been at the new church, let's see, that was '69...probably sometime in 1970, there was a little note that came through the mail, a little flyer that said that Comprehensive Mental Health Center was recruiting people to be what they called "crisis clergy," and I never liked the term "clergy" at all, but I responded to that little blurb. And that, they, I signed up for that with 15 or 16 other pastors in the community and we took three days of training and became what they called crisis clergy.

Well, to make a long story short, then, after we'd been doing that for part of the better part of a year, we sat down together and said, "You know, there's got to be more crisis going on in the City of Tacoma than, than we're seeing." I was kind of an adrenaline freak. And so we contacted the Chief of Police, Lyle Smith, and asked him if he would consent to our riding along with his officers on Friday and Saturday night. And we met with him and with his captain, one of his captains, still remember this captain's name was Captain Grady, and after we've made our pitch to Lyle Smith, he said yes, that we can do that, and captain Grady said this, quote: "The damn program won't work." That's the way he phrased it: "The damn program won't work." But it did—still going on now. I think that was about 1970. I did my first ride-along with a police officer on January the 2nd, 1971, and away we went from there, so the rest is history.

Ralph: I want to go back to [throat clear] excuse me, as you grew up, what influence did the peace testimony of the Friends church have on you, and how did you register?

Dan: Well, I registered 1AO. Yeah. You know, frankly, I can't, I can't really say that the peace testimony prior to the time I registered, other than the fact of what people were feeding me, and remember every, probably every decision I was making at that point was an emotional decision in the sense that, I probably wasn't thinking through the things that I was deciding.

Ralph: But you did register 1AO.

Dan: Mm-hmm.

Ralph: So there must have been some influence.

Dan: And, I honestly can't remember what that was. I can't remember that a Cherice Bock came and spoke on peace. Probably in those two years that I was there at Medford Friends before I became a Christian, before I registered for the draft, which

was probably a very scant—let's see, it probably would have been only a year and a half before I registered for the draft, because I started in the spring, I started attending Medford Friends in the spring when I was 16, so I would have been 16, not quite 17, within probably three months I turned 17, and then in a year 18 and I would have to register for the draft, so I was probably in the church only about a year and three months—so, I don't remember any peace presentations or... You know, I was probably getting what I was getting from, from Clinton and Marge, Bertie and Wayne and some other people in the church, but I don't have any memory of that kind of thing. So somewhere along the line, it must have affected me, but it was affecting my heart, it was not really affecting my head.

Ralph: But it's pretty certain that, if those experiences hadn't occurred you would have been 1A.

Dan: Oh yeah, if I, if I had—I've often wondered what, what would have happened if I had gone to an Assemblies of God church, or if I would've gone to a Baptist church or something. I don't know. You know, I think that, essentially, the only church I've ever gone to is the Friends Church, y'know. When we were, when I quit pastoring and started chaplaining full time, we left Olympic View and we attended some other churches for a year, but I don't know, what if I'd gone to an Episcopal Church?

Ralph: It sounds like the, the effect of the peace testimony, of the Friends doctrine—

Dan: Somehow, somehow, it got into here anyway [indicating heart], and later, then, it got into here [indicating head]. So.

Ralph: Cherice, do you have any other questions?

Cherice: Yeah, it sounds like there's kind of a thread of responding to conflict situations using some sort of chaplaincy strategies, so can you say more about that in terms of connecting your, your sense of being a non-combatant (if you had gone into the military) and the chaplaincy, and, and the reading from E. Stanley Jones? Those kind of seem to follow a similar thread.

Dan: Yeah, yeah, it did. And I've always had— I just, I think long even before I was a chaplain— I always had an incredible respect for police officers, firefighters, first responders... Sort of later, they became my heroes, but at that stage of the game, I was probably more drawn to the adrenaline kinds of things that were going on. My first ride in a police car was terribly exciting, terribly exciting. Not because a lot of things happened, but because, there I am, sitting in the backseat of this police car.

I think it was later that I really began to see the mission of the police and more aligned with the E. Stanley Jones, um, I really saw the mission of the police, and it was a very emotional moment when I—it was when I went to the sheriff's department, and I hadn't been at the sheriff's department very long and I—without going into the long story of it, because it is a long story—I saw a 13-year-old girl

shoot and kill herself. It was a very emotional thing. And I saw a deputy—at that stage of the game, I didn't know very well, but I came very well acquainted with him later—I saw a deputy who was a commander of this situation. This girl had come to school and shot and killed these two boys, junior high boys, as they left wrestling practice. (And I was a pretty new chaplain there. We'd just begun to recruit volunteers and things.)

And so they called me to that scene, and the guy who was running that was a guy named Lieutenant Bob Howard. Bob Howard was about six-foot-five; probably weighed two hundred and fifty or sixty pounds, and I always say I always looked up to him. He'd come up through the ranks really fast. He'd been on their department only nine years, and he was number two on the captain's list. That's fast.

Anyway, Bob, because he was the commander of that scene, this girl came back to the school, and I was standing next to our chief of operations, Chuck Robbins, and somebody came up and said, "Are you guys looking for a girl?" and we said, "Yes we are," and he said, "Here she comes right now," and she was coming back across campus carrying this rifle, and so everybody scattered, y'know? By then it turned into a big event, you know, two boys killed, and one of the first instances, I think, of a school shooting—this is way back.

So I didn't, I certainly ran away, but I didn't go very far, and I just ran and hid behind a truck and watched all this transpire right in front of me. And Bob Howard has his service revolver out, those revolvers in those days, had his service revolver out and was telling this girl to put down the gun. And he told her that over and over again. And he told her that it would be okay, that they could get things worked out, that kind of thing, and she raised and lowered the gun twice, and the third time she raised the gun, she shot herself in the head. And there she is laying on her back in the snow, blood running from her ears, from her mouth, and I saw Bob Howard, who's this huge guy, get down on his hands and knees, and this little girl was tiny, just a little tiny thing, probably not much more than five feet tall, and he starts doing CPR on her, y'know. So he comes away from that with blood on his face... Ah, telling this story is terrible.

I decided at that point in time that if that's the kind of men and women that the sheriff's department employed, then that's where I wanted to be. That was, that was more than an emotional decision; it was a decision of my head.

So I went through that for two weeks with that school and did a, did a funeral for the boys and, and Judy and I had a trip planned for Mexico, so we flew to Mexico, and all the way down there I have stomach aches, and I thought, "This job could shorten my life," you know, so I thought, "Well, it might," and I remember making a conscious decision, "If it does, is that okay?" and I thought, "Yeah, it's okay." And so I spent the next 20 years with the sheriff's department and absolutely loved the job, just loved it. It was a real ministry and I know I led more people to the Lord as a pastor than I

did as a chaplain, but I was able to minister to people who were that isolated population, you know. So that's my story.

Ralph: It's a fascinating story, a combination—this whole career—combination of pastor and chaplain. Well thank you!

Cherice: I mean, well, it seems like you're kind of addressing conflict not just by avoiding it through conscientious objection...

Dan: Oh no!

Cherice: ...but by getting right there in the middle of it...

Dan: Oh yeah, well...

Cherice: ...and seeing that as a sense of responsibility. Well and you talked about, and I guess Jones talks about, there was this sense of responsibility, to do something in situations like that, where there's a threat, and how do you resolve that threat? By putting yourself in the way, or by doing something that has a positive impact, maybe? And so, rather than fleeing those situations, getting out of it you—

Dan: Yeah, I think that's why chaplains do well with police officers and firefighters, because police officers and firefighters always run toward it, you know, that's the thing, and so do chaplains, you know, our personalities are so much the same.

Cherice: Mm-hmm. But it's a different type of work that you're aiming at, and instead of the particular "keeping the people from conflict," as police officers do, you're doing a different type of work, so how do you—

Dan: When you come right down to that, what, what, what this says, I, I can't tell you how many officer-involved shootings I was involved in over the years, and I felt—not conflicted, I did not feel conflicted and I can't say I did—I felt supportive, that police officer who may have had to take the life of somebody to save someone else's life, you know, their own or somebody else's, and I did that with a great sense of pride, I did that with a clear conscience, and would do it again tomorrow, same thing, without question.

Cherice: For the spiritual and emotional support of that individual?

Dan: Yeah. I remember a deputy after, it's another story, two deputies responded to a guy who was, had a woman down on the bed, was holding a knife to her throat, and they told him to drop the knife, drop the knife, drop the knife, and he didn't, and at the very last second he plunged that knife through that woman's throat and they shot and killed him. The woman survived, knife went right through her neck, didn't touch anything, but I remember, that deputy, I rode with him later, much later, and

we talked about that, and he felt guilty. He said, "I killed somebody." And I said, "Yeah, you did." So.

Ralph: Thank you so much, Dan.

Dan: Now I'm going to go walk away from here and go meet the sergeant. He was the, he was the sergeant when I went to the sheriff's department, and he became maybe one of my best friends, maybe one of my best friends ever. Wonderful guy.

Cherice: Thanks so much!

Ralph: Thank you.

Dan: Thanks.