

UNIVERSITY

Anti-war students have alternative

By Meg Dedolph
Emerald Contributor

The situation in the Persian Gulf and the possibility of a draft is leading many students to wonder if they could be considered conscientious objectors and thus ineligible for the draft.

A conscientious objector is anyone who objects to participating in a war any because of religious or moral beliefs.

Being a pacifist, or having strong religious beliefs is no longer necessary, said Marian Malcolm, a member of Clergy and Laity Concerned, a Eugene peace organization.

"You just have to be opposed to participation in war in any form that the U.S. can participate in," she said. "You need to be able to prove that your conscience would not allow you rest if you were in the military."

Barbi Richardson, of the Selective Service Administration, which oversees the registering of men for the draft, said being opposed to a specific war is not suitable qualification for conscientious objector status, and that to be considered a conscientious objector, one must oppose war on religious or ethical grounds.

To prove to a draft board that one is a conscientious objector, a file is usually recommended, containing letters from family members, friends or clergymen attesting to the person's anti-war position.

Other items in the file can include anti-war letters written to Congressmen, or descriptions of ways in which the person has worked for peace, through community service, or peace groups.

Whether conscientious objector status is actually granted depends on the local draft board considering the application, some boards being more sympathetic to objectors than others. Members of a draft board are subjective, Malcolm said.

"Some might think, 'This

person is claiming to be a conscientious objector to save himself,'" she said.

The role of the Selective Service in the event of a draft is to administer alternative service programs for conscientious objectors, and to provide raw manpower to the Department of Defense.

There are two types of conscientious objectors as recognized by the Selective Service. A conscientious objector can be opposed to military duty but willing to do civilian work, or serve in a noncombatant position within the military. The government does not allow people to refuse both civilian and non-combatant military work.

People who find themselves opposed to some wars but not to others may or may not receive conscientious objector status depending on the decision of the local draft board.

The type of conscientious objector status a person is willing to accept is a very individual decision and one of personal conscience, Malcolm said.

If a person refuses to go into the military and has not been granted an exemption, the person is then classed as a draft resister and can receive up to five years in jail and a \$250,000 fine, although this is unlikely, she said.

According to military literature, the main problem with applying for conscientious objector status today is that a draftee has only 10 days to file for exemption status after receiving a draft notice. In practice, this could mean as few as five or six days in which to put together a conscientious objector claim. Previously, exemptions could be filed for on the draft registration form.

Because of the limited time, compiling a conscientious objector file is something a person should think about now, before a draft is actually legislated, Malcolm said.

Among those considering application for conscientious objector status is Dan Skinner, a University sophomore.

"I've always been a very peaceful person, catching bugs and putting them outside instead of killing them, for example," Skinner said. "Ten of my fifteen years of education have been in Catholic schools, and I've been attending rallies and No Gulf War Coalition meetings."

Skinner has considered alternative service, but strictly in a non-military capacity, as has David Anderson, a graduate student.

"I know that I can't actually pull the trigger," Anderson said. "But I feel that if I'm doing anything with the military, even pushing papers, I'm saying 'I can't kill, but it's OK if other people do.'"

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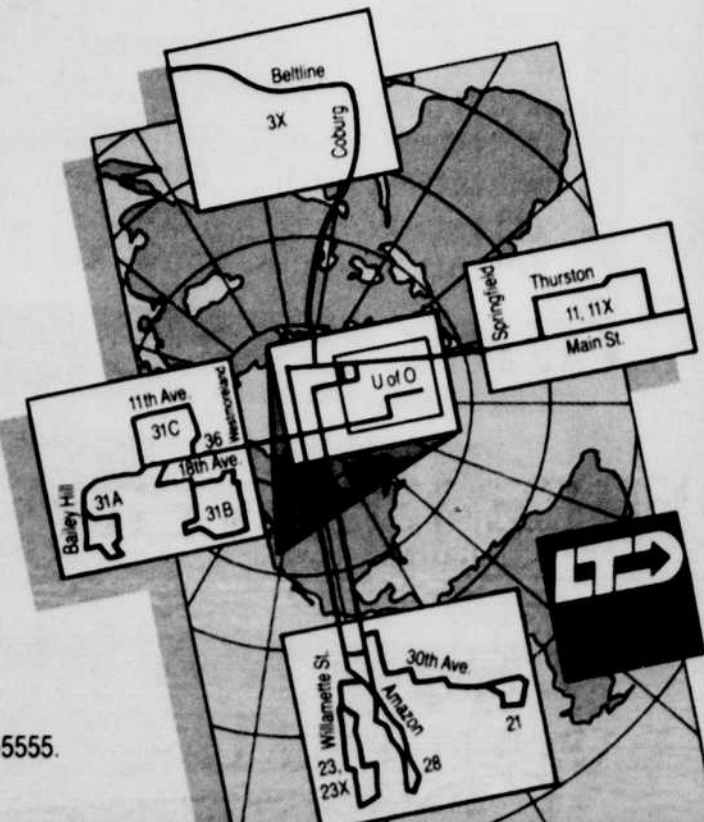


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