



Conscientious Objector Service

of the
National Interreligious Service Board for Conscientious Objectors

HOW TO FILL OUT FORM 150

A claim of conscientious objection is normally made by answering the questions on the SSS Form 150, Special Form For Conscientious Objector. It is largely on the basis of the answers you give to these questions that the local board or an appeal board will determine the nature of your beliefs and whether or not they qualify you for the conscientious objector classification. It is essential, therefore, that this basic form be filled out carefully, thoroughly, and thoughtfully.

It is also important that you answer the questions on the Form 150 as fully and completely as you can. You should not give mere "summary" answers to the questions in the expectation that you can "fill them out" later at a personal appearance. It is essential that you give in writing the fullest possible account of your views about participation in war, so that it becomes an irrefutable part of your SSS file.

PROCEDURES

If you believe that you are a conscientious objector when you register for the draft at age 18, you should check the box in Series IV of the Registration Questionnaire (SSS Form 100) indicating your desire to claim conscientious objector status. By checking the Series IV statement you will automatically be sent the Form 150 at the time when you are reclassified out of Class 1-H. If you did not check this statement, or if you became a conscientious objector after registration, you can request a Form 150 from your local board at any time and file your claim. You can submit a CO claim to your local board at any time before you are mailed an Order to Report for Induction.

As a general rule, the earlier you submit your claim, the better. However, if you submit a claim of conscientious objection while you are in Class 1-H or a deferred classification, your claim will not be considered until you are reclassified into an "available" classification. If you are already in Class 1-A, the local board must reopen your classification and consider any serious, new claim of conscientious objection. However, once an induction order has been mailed to you, the local board does not have to consider your claim. The only exception to this is in the case of a postponement of your induction date for more than 40 days. During this postponement, your classification can be reopened and your claim considered, as long as a new date has not been set for your induction.

Remember to keep copies of your answers to the Form 150, as well as everything which you send to your local board. They should be sent by Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested, so that you can prove that your claim was received by the local board.

If you wish to have your personal appearance with the local board *before* they consider your claim and reclassify you, you should make this request when you submit your claim. If you have your personal appearance before classification, you are not entitled to another personal appearance with the local board after classification. You may, however, request an appeal and appearance before the appeal board if you receive an undesirable classification. Usually it is preferable to request a personal appearance

after the local board reclassifies you (if you are unsatisfied with the classification), because this allows you to discuss with the board their opinion of your claim and their reasons for turning it down. The board members will have to reconsider their decision when they classify you again after the personal appearance.

ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS

Before writing your answers to the questions on the Form 150, read it over carefully, and take time to understand the questions so that you can answer them directly and completely. You may wish to read NISBCO's brochure, "Who is a Conscientious Objector?" (available for 10¢), which explains the legal definition and the criteria of conscientious objection.

"Essay type" answers will be required for most, if not all, the questions. It is not necessary for you to answer the questions separately, or even in the order in which they are asked on the Form 150. But, no matter how you construct your response, you should be careful to answer each question asked. It is important that you answer the questions as completely as you can, so that the local board has the clearest possible view of your beliefs. Keep your statements concise and to the point. If you write too much, or go too far afield in your answers, you may lose the attention of those who must review your claim in a very short time.

Your answers should be typed or printed on separate sheets of paper, and should not ordinarily exceed 5 or 6 typewritten, single-spaced pages. Be careful to check one of the boxes on the back of the Form 150, indicating whether you claim exemption only from *combatant* training and service in the armed forces (Class 1-A-0), or exemption from *all* training and service in the armed forces (Class 1-0). Both the Form 150 and your answers should be signed and returned to the local board.

Question 1. *"Describe the beliefs which are the basis for your claim for classification as a conscientious objector."*

This question asks you to describe the religious, moral, or ethical beliefs which do not allow you to participate in war. This is the most important question on the Form, and it should be answered carefully. What are the basic reasons why you believe it is wrong for you to fight in war? What are the basic moral principles by which you live, and how do these principles apply to the matter of war? Do you believe in the sacredness of human life? In the ideal of love or nonviolence? Have you committed yourself to follow the teachings or life style of a great prophet or religious or moral leader, such as Jesus or Gandhi? Do you believe in adhering to certain biblical teachings, such as "Thou shalt not kill," "Love your enemies," or some other religious or ethical text? In other words, what is the belief in your life which forces you to say "I will *not* participate in war!"

You should try to be as specific as possible in your answer to this question. A vague, uncertain response such as, "I just feel that I can never participate in war, and I have always felt this way, but I am not able to say why," would probably lead most local boards to conclude that you have a "merely personal moral code." It is difficult for many people to express the moral or religious principles by which they live, but if you think about it you can discover the things in your life which are of highest value to you and which motivate your actions. What are these values, and how are they related to your refusal to fight in war? What do you consider to be the highest duties which you have? What is the source of these duties? God? The value of human life? Your heritage? Try to spell these things out as clearly as you can.

~State your beliefs in a positive way. Do not waste time explaining what you *don't*

believe, only what you *do* believe. By emphasizing what you don't believe you are only taking the chance of antagonizing a board member who may strongly believe what you are attacking. State your convictions in a simple, forthright, and personal way. If you are uncertain about any aspects of your beliefs, don't bring these things up. This is not the time to confess doubts or unanswered questions in your mind, but to emphasize what you *do* believe.

Further, you should avoid mention of beliefs or attitudes which you have that are unrelated to your *religious* or *moral* opposition to war. For example, you may have very strong feelings about your country's political or military policies, but these should not be emphasized in your claim. The board members might be led to believe that your objection is merely "political" or "sociological."

Question 2. *"Will your beliefs permit you to serve in a position in the armed forces where the use of weapons is not required? If not, why?"*

The purpose of this question, of course, is to determine whether you should be given the 1-A-0 or the 1-0 classification. If you checked the statement on the back of the Form 150 claiming 1-A-0 status as a noncombatant in the armed forces, you need only to answer this question "yes." But if you claimed exemption from all training and service in the armed forces (Class 1-0), your answer to this question should explain why you feel that any participation in the armed forces is wrong, even though you would not have to bear arms or kill. You should specify what it is about noncombatant service in the armed forces which would violate your conscience. Relate your reasons to the beliefs which you explained in the answer to Question 1.

Question 3. *"Explain how you acquired the beliefs which are the basis of your claim. Your answer may include such information as the influence of family members or other persons; religious training, if applicable; experiences at school; membership in organizations; books and readings which influenced you. You may wish to provide any other information which will help in explaining why you believe as you do."*

This question deals with how you came to your position. Your answer should be more than just a list of the things asked for in the question. For example, if you list a book that influenced you, tell *how* it influenced you. If you list an association with a clergyman, tell *how* he influenced you. You do not have to show that you have received any formal training as a conscientious objector, but you should be able to point out the religious and moral influences in your life which helped to shape your thinking about war. There is no need to shy away from negative experiences (such as ROTC, or newspaper or TV accounts of war) if these experiences have made your beliefs stronger. Your answer should demonstrate that your beliefs are the result of strong influences in your life which have stimulated you to think seriously about participating in war.

If you became a conscientious objector after you registered, you should be especially careful to trace the development of your beliefs up to your more recent decision to claim conscientious objector status. What were the most important influences which caused you to change your mind about participation in war since you registered?

Question 4. *"Explain what most clearly shows that your beliefs are deeply held."*

This question, along with the following two questions, is asking you basically to demonstrate that you are seriously committed to the position which you claim. You may wish to answer these three questions together with one essay. Use this opportunity to relate to the local board any public expressions you have made against participation in war which show that you have taken a public stand for your beliefs.

Have you made sacrifices for your beliefs in the past, or are you willing to make sacrifices for them in the future? For example, would you be willing to go to prison or make some similar stand rather than violate your beliefs? If so, let the board know it. Let them know that your claim for conscientious objector status is not just a matter of "expediency" or "an easy way out" for you. It is also helpful if you can point to other areas of your life where you have very deep moral or religious commitments which you follow consistently. For example, by recounting a situation in which you acted with moral resolve, you can illustrate to the board the fact that you are a person who seeks to act consistently with your moral principles.

Question 5. *"Do your beliefs affect the way you live? Describe how your beliefs affect the type of work you will do to earn a living or the types of activity you participate in during nonworking hours."*

This can be a tough question, particularly for the younger registrant who has given little thought to the question of a life vocation, or for the person whose beliefs have matured recently. Use this, and Question #6 to show the board that the beliefs which you profess are not inconsistent with the way you live or intend to live.

If you claim to be nonviolent, does your life show this? Have you been involved in humanitarian projects or activities of any kind which are evidence of your concern for human life? What are your life's goals, and how do these goals reflect the values you claim to hold? You do not need to be specific about the vocation you will choose, but you should be able to state the principles you will use in making this choice. You should be able to specify the kinds of vocations you could *not* choose because of your beliefs.

Question 6. *"Describe any specific actions or incidents of your life that show you believe as you do."*

This question asks for specific examples of past activities which demonstrate your commitment as a conscientious objector. Have you been involved in peace activities, demonstrations, or other forms of public witness against war? Be careful with this one, so that you do not appear to the board to be "merely political" in your opposition to war. Show how your activities are a natural outgrowth of your religious or moral beliefs. Have you been in situations where you refrained from reacting violently or aggressively when the average person would have reacted in such a manner? If you have just recently matured in your beliefs against participation in war, you should explain why your previous life may not reflect the beliefs you now hold. Do not just ignore these last two questions.

* * * * *

Above all, your answers to these questions should reflect a serious commitment on your part to the position you claim. Be simple and direct in your language, yet forceful. Do not give board members the idea that you are trying to "snow" them with big words or deep insights. You are not writing a research paper on conscientious objection; you are trying to convince the board members that you are deeply committed to religious, moral, or ethical beliefs which do not allow you to participate in war. Do not use expressions which are likely to antagonize board members, such as anti-military or anti-American rhetoric. The board members are going to make their decision on the basis of their personal impression of you, so there is no need to rankle them with inflammatory language.

You may attach a statement of your church or other organization which supports the right of its members to be conscientious objectors if you are related to such a group (see NISBCO's book, *Religious Statements on Conscientious Objection*, \$1.00).