

1) An express, specific statement as to whether the person requests classification as a conscientious objector 1-0, or as a conscientious objector 1-A-0.

I, Albert Richard Siems, am seeking an honorable discharge as a **conscientious objector 1-0**

2) What is the nature of your belief that requires that you seek separation from the Military Service or assignment to non-combatant training and duty for reasons of conscience?

First and foremost I believe that war in all of its forms is wrong and has no place in this world. I am absolutely against participating in any war because the experiences I have had in the army and my strong religious views have forced me to face questions that I must answer honestly and in accordance with my beliefs. I belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the center of my faith is Jesus Christ. I am called to be reflective of Christ's example with my life. I have a personal testimony and relationship with Christ and I feel that participating with the military in any form hinders my spirituality from flourishing. As a Christian I strongly feel that I am to emulate the example of Christ in all ways. Christ taught about peace and loving my enemies. In the bible Christ teaches that we should turn the other cheek. He also tells us to "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). The teachings of Christ have brought me to my belief that violence is not the answer, it is disobedience to God. The killing of another person is a permanent and irreversible action. I do not believe that God wants his children to kill each other. He alone decides the destiny of every one of us. I do not believe as humans, that we can decide who lives or dies.

One of the primary teachings involved with my religion is free agency. This means that every person has a right to make decisions based on the dictates of their own conscience. God has given me a conscience for a reason. The reason God has given all mankind a conscience is to be a moral compass, to serve as a guide and direct as to what is right and what is wrong. It is for that reason I cannot kill, participate in warfare, or support any organization that does, whether through violent or non-violent means. The military is asking me to ignore my conscience and continue the mission. I cannot go against my conscience, lest I sin against God.

For these reasons I seek to separate myself from the military as a conscientious objector 1-0.

3) An explanation as to how beliefs changed or developed, to include an explanation as to what factors caused the change in or development of conscientious objection beliefs.

I did not enlist in the army as a conscientious objector. As a child I was passed around through many foster homes and adoptive families. Because of this I never had a consistent religious influence in my life and continually felt that something was missing. As I entered my teen years I finally had the opportunity for some form of consistency. My adoptive family carried a tradition of military service and my father had high expectations of me in the service. After I joined, I experienced various situations in basic training that caused me to question whether or not I had made the right decision in joining the military.

My adoptive family taught me all about the Presbyterian religion and taught me that it was all right to go to war in the name of God. My father being an ordained pastor pacified me on all of my uncertainties pertaining to war. My father told me that it was traditional in our family to be in the military and that a real man would join. My father told me that if I joined the military not only was I serving my country but I was serving God. I felt that to "honor"

my father and my mother it was necessary for me to join the military and become “a real man”. With these views I served 2 years under these beliefs.

In 2005, I met the woman that would become my future wife. Through her, I began to learn about a faith that was new to me. I was baptized, against the wishes of my family, into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Only one week after being baptized and barely a month after meeting my wife I was deployed to Qatar.

Being deployed so quickly after my conversion prevented me from interacting and growing in my new faith. I honestly did not understand very many things about my new faith for the first year after my conversion. I returned from the Middle East on Christmas Eve of '05.

In January 2006 my future wife and I began plans for our wedding which took place in April. During those few busy months of planning I finally was able to begin going to church and learning more about my new faith. Even though I did not understand very much at that point I knew that I had joined the right church for me. The same month that my wife and I married I reenlisted in the military. This was a hard decision because something still did not feel quite right to me, but I needed the money, and at that point I still was still not a conscientious objector. I did not believe that the war we were involved in was right and could not relate with the excitement many of my fellow soldiers felt about deployments, simulation training, etc. I also hated going to the range. It felt awkward for me to shoot my gun and imagine that my target could potentially be another person. With just the pull of the trigger I could destroy a human life. That amount of power did not seem like it belonged in my hands. I had my doubts, but obviously did not believe all war was wrong at that point or I wouldn't have reenlisted.

Finally I was settled into married life and began adjusting to my new life. I learned about my free agency, that God allows me to decide between right and wrong, I learned about Christ teachings of peace and better understood what it meant to love your neighbor and your enemy. Where, before I hated the people that I considered my enemies, I began to feel pity and sorrow for them. I want every person to be able to know Christ as I do and enjoy the happiness that I have from knowing my Savior. How can I teach my enemies the love of my Savior my going against them in the exact same manner that they are fighting me? In the last year or so I have met some people that I would typically have strongly disliked. But instead of feeling repulsion I felt a love for them and a need to help. Instead of walking past a beggar on the streets, averting my eyes and pretending not to notice, I walk up to them, give them what I have and shake their hands. When doing this I feel a joy and love for strangers that I didn't know I could have. I helped someone feel better and felt like I was better myself. With these experiences and the knowledge I have gained from them, I can not go against someone and try to kill or control them. I also learned of many different stories and events in which a person or people refused to take up arms against their enemies and tried to live as much like Christ as possible. One of my favorite examples of non violence can be found in The Book of Mormon, which is a set of scriptures that I believe are true in addition to the Bible. It talks about a group of ancient Americans that fought many wars with their enemies and took many lives. After they were taught and converted to the teachings of Christ they buried their weapons of war in the earth and made a covenant with God that never again would they shed another person's blood. When their enemies came to war against them they fell on their knees in prayer as their enemies began to slaughter them. When their enemies saw that they would not take up the sword, not even to defend their own lives, they stopped the bloodshed and many were converted to Christ that day through the example of these peaceful people. I believe that the best way for me to emulate the teachings of Christ is not to be in a military that I don't support, but to make an oath of non violence and teach others by my example.

After not having seen my father for nearly two years I had the opportunity to visit him for a week. He had just returned from a 15 month tour in Iraq. While I was there he showed

me videos that displayed different acts of violence in war. He seemed very excited about “blowing things up” and “destroying the enemy”. I was honestly shocked at the contrasting feelings I had. I knew that in my heart the things in that video were wrong and did not understand how my father, a proclaimed man of God, could possibly find happiness in something so wrong. Within a few months of visiting my father my wife and I relocated to Germany, which is where I am currently stationed. It was at that point in my military career that it became clear to me that my conscience no longer allowed me to continue my military service.

4) Explain when and why these beliefs became incompatible with military service.

My beliefs became incompatible with military service when I witnessed the birth of my daughter. For me, that was the point of crystallization. I knew that for myself to fully value life and love others as Christ does, I could not serve in an institution that teaches me to kill. I could never face a person with the intent of killing them without thinking to myself, “this man could be a husband, a father, a son” how could I possibly take away something from another that I know to be so dear. I love my daughter very much and want to teach her to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. The army requires soldiers to wear a uniform. To me, the uniform symbolizes war. I personally could not picture Jesus Christ wearing a military uniform. Therefore, my personal conviction to be like Christ in all ways has compelled me to seek separation from military service. Over time I began to understand that there was something essentially wrong in my life. After being married for a year, my wife and I were assigned to Germany, arriving there in April of 2007 at which point my wife was four months pregnant. On September 8th, 2007 my wife was taken by ambulance to a German hospital and was induced because of complications. That night was one of the longest nights of my life as I anxiously worried about my wife and our child. The next day my wife gave birth to our beautiful daughter. This was the most amazing event I have ever been privileged to witness. It made me understand what a miracle life was and made me realize it was something I could never take away.

At this point I realized that what was weighing on my conscience was the fact that I was part of an organization where I was supporting something that was against my conscience and religious beliefs. I thought back to all of the stories that soldiers in my old Special Operations unit had shared with me from their deployments. Before they were only stories to me but now they were the reality of the horrific details that are involved in a war and what I was helping support by serving in the military. I also thought about different things that I had seen and heard while I was deployed. My perspective of everything I have experienced has completely changed with my new convictions. I now cannot believe that I was able to listen to soldiers talk about their different encounters with enemy forces without feeling completely repulsed. I know that in no shape or form could I possibly be put in that situation again and be the same person that I was previously. I could not complete the mission, just as I know feel that I am unable to be a good soldier and help support military operations. I continued to go about my daily routine not really knowing what I could do to solve my conflict of conscience. I talk to a psychiatrist and was prescribed anti anxiety medication to help me cope with my job better. The last few months have really been a struggle for me fully believing that what I support every day is wrong. I have now come to understand what a conscientious objector is and know that with this knowledge I cannot continue supporting the military.

5) An explanation as to the circumstances, if any, under which the person believes in the use of force, and to what extent, under any foreseeable circumstances.

I believe that there is a significant difference between being a conscientious objector and being a pacifist. If I were in a situation where someone came into my home to attack my family I would defend my family with my life. I plan to do everything possible to prevent myself from ever being in a situation that would require me to do so. By participating in the military I am constantly allowing myself to be in a situation where I could have to take someone's life. A person's life is valuable and to take it away would be a permanent act. It is something I never would want on my conscience. Christ taught us to love our enemies not to go in search of them and kill them. I strongly object to the use of military force on any person.

6) Explain what in your opinion most conspicuously demonstrates the consistency and depth of your CO beliefs.

The few people that I spoke with before I declared myself a conscientious objector warned me that as soon as everyone in my unit found out, I would be treated differently. Many people would probably look down on me. I know that my adoptive family is going to think I am a failure. There will probably be people that I don't even know that will laugh at me or persecute me for my beliefs. Despite all of this I know that this is what I need to do to be honest with myself and with the Army. In the bible, all of the followers of Christ were persecuted because of their beliefs, most of all the twelve apostles. Most of the apostles suffered unimaginable things in the name of Christ, refusing to ever deny their beliefs. Many even died rather than deny what they knew to be true. This stood as a testimony against all the people that persecuted them. They were true up until the very end. I am willing to subject myself to the persecution that I know will come with what I am standing for. The fact that I will not waver, even if I fail the expectations of my parents, demonstrates the true depth of what I believe to be true.

In addition, all of my ambitions to be promoted to E5 have diminished since I became a conscientious objector. For example, I have withdrawn from going to WLC because I refuse to advance in military training that is contrary to my beliefs. If I went through with this training I would have been required to lead soldiers in a military setting that I do not support which would cause me to be an ineffective leader. Despite the fact that a promotion would have been an increase in pay and rank I turned down the opportunity to advance. This shows the true depth of my conscientious objections to my military service.

7) An explanation as to how the applicant's daily life style has changed as a result of his or her beliefs and what future actions he or she plans to continue to support his or her beliefs.

My life style has changed drastically as a result of my beliefs. In fact my whole mentality has changed. I attend church services and functions on a regular basis. Everywhere I go, I realize how much the teachings of Christ affect me in the way I think and act. When I am at work, the enthusiasm and motivation I once felt for the tasks assigned to me is no longer there and has been replaced by feelings of adverse affect because I believe I am not doing what God has intended for me. When I have prayed about this issue I do not feel in my heart that taking another person's life was something that I could be responsible for. With these feelings in my heart, I can tell that I have a bigger respect and love for friends and strangers that I see every day. Whether it is my next door neighbor or a beggar on the street, I feel a need to love and serve all people as Christ would.

After I realized how my feelings towards the army had changed, my work life became a lot harder for me to cope with. Every task I was assigned brought me down just a little bit further as I thought to myself what am I helping the army accomplish by doing this paperwork or by transporting these goods? I became more and more stressed with my work and did not

have the ability to put as much thought or effort into the tasks I was assigned. I continually feel unable to support the mission that I am involved with, whatever it may be. Because of all of the stress I was under I had to see psychiatrist and was prescribed anti-anxiety medication to help me cope better with my job. I do not believe that I can successfully continue to do the things that the military asks of me and comply with the demands of my conscience.

My wife and I have become good friends with our next door neighbors since moving here to Germany. Over the last several months I have had many discussions with them about my frustrations and unhappiness with the army. They have been a great support to me and support my decision of no longer serving in the armed forces. They have helped me recognize that with the feelings I am carrying I am unable to be a responsible and accountable soldier.

I believe all people have free agency which is the freedom to choose whatever path they want in life. I have deep respect for the soldiers I work with for they chose their path. Although I do not support the cause they support, I will never disrespect them or resent the fact that they followed their conscientious beliefs. As President John F. Kennedy stated:

“In whatever arena of life one may meet the challenge of courage, whatever may be the sacrifices he faces if he follows his conscience—the loss of his friends, his fortune, his contentment, even the esteem of his fellow men—each must decide for himself the course he will follow.”

I believe in doing what I believe is right no matter what the price. By standing up for myself now, I am showing the world that I am making changes in my life and will continue to make changes that will enable me to live my life parallel to the example set by Jesus Christ.