

**Preface by the Interviewer:**

This interview took place with elder Vasili Eyonich Berokoff in December 2004, at his home in Beaver Creek, Oregon. Its value as a guide and history of our Molokan participation in the Second World War is invaluable. It shows the lack of communication of first generation Molokan parents with their children and a lack of community involvement in one of the most basic principles of Christianity, non-participation in the Military. Participation in military activities were never a part of the Apostolic church, and not till the advent of political and religious governmental union did the false Christian involve himself with killing other human beings. It is hoped that future Molokan generations, both male and female stay involved with church activities, attend weekly church services, and read the large volume of Molokan historical books and documents. That a clear picture of their sincerity is provided to our government, that they truly follow in the footsteps of our forefathers. This basic principle of Christianity is the reason we Molokans left Russia to a land recognizing religious freedom and being able to practice the word of God as set forth by our prophets and elders.

These young men, some married, some single, gave up better than 2 years of their lives to not serve Mammon, and fulfill God's commandment "Thou shall not kill."

William William Botieff Silverton, Oregon October 10, 2005

**The Interview:**

My Name is Vasili Eyonich Berokoff. The war started in December, 1941. I was married in February, 1942, and I registered. Everybody had to register. But of course a lot of guys they were anti-government, so they didn't register. They were arrested. The government found out about it, and they were actually arrested after, and they were sentenced to whatever prison sentence they had. But me, I registered and I followed the law.

They sent me my 1A registration right away, getting a 1A classification meant you had to go into the Army. Well I refused to go into the Army. I had to go to the draft board with my Father and Mother and wife. I went to the draft board and had to explain why I did not want to go into the service, they listened to my explanation, they were all ex-soldiers on the draft board and they couldn't care less. They, sent me another letter after the meeting with a 1A classification; still I was to be drafted. So, we appealed to a higher draft board court, same location with different people, they questioned me, "So what do you want to do?" I answered, "I want to be a Conscientious Objector." Then we had another appeal to another appeal board, this was 6 months later, and they sent me another classification of 1AO, Meaning I will be assigned non-combatant service, but I have to go into the Army. I refused to go into the Army, then the government took over from the draft board, and the appeal process moved to downtown Los Angeles, in the Federal Building. So I had to go there, there was a meeting there, they started to interview me, it took a half an hour, and they still refused my CO classification. We went home and they sent me another letter with a 1AO classification of non-combatant service, so we again refused that, and we had to have a final federal investigative meeting with a group of Federal attorneys that were conducting the investigation about conscientious objectors.

So we had a molenia at my father's house; we were living with my folks at that time because I didn't know when I was going to have to go. So, my family, I had my daughter and my wife, and she moved in with my folks, we lived with my folks. So my parents and I called our preacher and several proroki and deistviniki, to the house and had a molenia because I was going to go to this meeting with this attorney. They told me po-duxu that when you go to wear your Russian shirt, and take startsi with you. And everybody wear your Russian shirts, like you dress when you go to church. So, we all did that; we had a meeting with the Federal attorney, and we came to this attorney, and here all of these bearded elders came there. Well anyway, we had about 7 or 8 people that were willing to come with us. Well they started questioning us. I mean me, "Well what do you think about this. And how come you don't want to go to war?" They wanted to see if I had any religious background personally, and

that I was not just following my parent's position, but whether I am doing this on my own. Well I answered a few questions. Our preacher went with us. They questioned him, interpreted by my father; the preacher stated we were conscientious objectors and gave our religious background. My elders were asked whether or not I went to church They stated I went to church all the time, and we Molokans are against war, and that was the reason we came to this country. The rest of the elders answered that, "Yes he attends church and is a conscientious objector." Then they asked my father, they said that they knew he was involved with the government in Washington DC, and asked why he was involved with all this? "Who appointed you as spokesman to this group?" He told them that each church has someone appointed to represent each church, and in a counsel meeting he was selected to go to Washington DC, and be able to explain to the government what our church represents. He took a long time and he did a very good job.

Then these guys, the Federal Attorney said, that he had FBI reports concerning me. I did not know about any FBI reports. He quoted the FBI report as stating that you are a good American boy, you played football, you played basketball, you were involved in college activities and sports and therefore you are a good American boy, and that you should be qualified as an officer, as an officer in the army. And here you are refusing this commission as an officer, and we are going to decline your request as a CO, and induct you into the Army as an officer, and he said "We need qualified people like you." And I told him that he looked qualified to be an officer, and how come he was not in the Army. He got mad at me and said, "You are dismissed. Dismissed, go home, you are not qualified to be a CO."

The draft board again sent me a notice that I was to be drafted.

We got home and my father and I wrote a letter to the President, asking the President for a Presidential appeal, and to reconsider me as a CO, and the only reason I was not receiving my CO status was because of my involvement with sports in college. We want our qualification as a conscientious objector. The presidential board heard my appeal, and sent me a letter stating I was qualified to go into the conscientious objector camp program. That was probably in May of 1944 (the appeals process took 2 years to complete). They told me that I was to report in June of 1944 to the North Fork Mennonite Conscientious Objector camp, east of Fresno. Mike Planin was with me when we took a bus from Los Angeles to Fresno. He was one of our Molokans who got his classification at the same time. So we rode up to Fresno, and we were met by the director of the North Fork CO camp. He took us to the North Fork camp, which is about 40 miles into the mountains, and we stayed up there. The camp was right in front of a little canyon area, it was formally a CCC camp in the 1930s, where young boys 16 to 18 were allowed to work for the government to fix roads and work in the forest to give them a job (depression period). The camp was vacant, and the Mennonites acquired the land and used it for one of their camps. At that time, as I remember, only 3 other Molokans were at this site. We stayed there for about a year. The work we did was to be on call for fires, we were on a couple of fires, and we also did road repair work. Worked 9 to 10 miles into the hills. I drove a dump truck and we repaired roads with black top.

The Molokan fathers and mothers got together and said, "Why don't we get all of our Molokan children together. Instead of being scattered all over, like Sacramento, Oregon, near the border, Lake Tahoe, some of them were Quaker camps, lets try and get the young men together in one camp." So they got permission to use the Mennonite camp in Three Rivers which is east of Visalia and north of Porterville off Hwy 20, which leads up to Sequoia National Park, we went there, so there were quite a few of us, maybe 24 or 25 of us. I don't remember, we did road maintenance work especially. We were building a rock wall that was along the Sequoia Hwy all the way up to the National forest. We would get the rock from an excavation near Three Rivers, and brought it down to where we were working on the rock walls. Then comes forest fire season, they got our Molokans together and moved them to Cedar Grove, up by Kings Canyon National Park, and we went up there, probably 3 or 4 thousand feet up. We slept in tents while we were building our barracks. The barracks came in sections, the floor,

walls, roof, 8 ft. sections, and we put those together. The Forest Service delivered all of that to us, it took us a month at least to assemble them. We were not doing any other work but that, and were on call for forest fires, on one occasion we had to hike to the end of the road at Cedar Grove. We hiked up the hill, ten or eleven miles, there was a lightning fire, one tree was on fire, it was a dead tree, it was on fire, and we had to go put it out and they did not want the tree to keep burning and set the rest of the forest on fire. There was 8 or 10 of us. We chopped that tree down, and put out the fire. We did repair work on the roads, we cut trees down interfering with the roads. At the end of Cedar Grove there was a hiking trail, we widened hiking trails, people were hiking, of course they were not in the service. We mostly did road repair work from the entrance of the National park to Cedar Grove. The road was about 20 miles, and we maintained that road for fire suppression in case of forest fires, they would need equipment coming in there, so that was generally our work at that time. One day we had our kitchen tent, it was isolated from the barracks, which was probably 100 feet away from us, we had our kitchen there and stored food in the same area. We woke up, and the tent was all torn up, the whole thing was torn up by a bear. It was eating up all our food, it was quite an experience, we were just a 100 feet away from it. So we called the Forest Service, someone called headquarters, so they came out, had a big round trap, and they put honey about 20 feet away from the trap. Next morning we see the bear coming up, licking the honey, so he is crawling up to this trap, goes into the inside, and that door closed off the trap. The Forest Ranger was waiting there with his pickup, he knew that was going to happen. He then hooked the trap to his pick up, and took the bear way up into the mountains. There was no road above Cedar Grove, so where he took the bear I don't know. That was one of our experiences there. We stayed there most of the summertime, we had a couple of reported forest fires up in the mountains, but when we got to the area, there was no fire. So we spent our time waiting for forest fires, and enjoyed swimming in the Kings River, we had a rope on a tree, and took turns diving into the river, like we were on vacation. After the fire season, we were called back to the main camp at Three Rivers and then the war ended.

Originally when we located to our camps, you could not be closer than 200 miles from your home. So some of the Molokans from Fresno, who were qualified as COs, they were serving in a camp above Los Angeles near Azusa. Their closeness to Los Angeles let them attend a Molokan church doing during the weekends. I know that Morris Jacob Mendrin, the preacher in the Mendrin Church, at the time, he was in Azusa (Glendora), and was able to attend young church on Sunday nights. He was able to get away from camp and attend young church. They were not required to work on Sunday, and he had permission to leave the camp site. When the war ended the government began to relax a little bit and allow the COs in the Azusa camp to leave and go to church on a Sunday. Initially we were not in the Azusa camp, and were not able to attend church services. We did not have the gasoline or a car, so we were at a disadvantage. Our camp at Kings Canyon was closed up at the end of the war, and they began to send us down to the Southern California, Los Angeles area.

**Question:** What was the general over all feeling concerning the CO Molokans within our Molokan Churches?

Originally in 1940 it started (governmental war preparations). There was a meeting of elders from various churches concerning what we should do, because they were starting to draft at that time. The draft came in at this time (before the war actually started) and everyone of the age of 18 had to be registered, and so what should we do. All elders were in agreement that we should: first it was 100 percent. So then my father was sent to Washington DC, to get us qualified by the government as COs, and he went to Washington DC, met with the Attorney General and the Army, regarding what our Molokan COs should do, or what the American Government would allow them to do. So they made arrangements to meet with the government officials and they were very cooperative (the government officials). The government recognized our religious history and opposition to the military. But they

insisted that each person was to prove themselves as religious objectors. Within our community were lots of juvenile delinquents and persons with arrest records, so each person was going to have to prove their case. My father came back and reported to the elders what had happened.

So about that time the war started, in December, 1941 the war started. Well, when the war started our young people did not want to become COs. They were influenced by the propaganda about all the things Hitler had done, and what the Japanese did to the island of Hawaii. The Japanese killed American soldiers, damaged warships, and created the war. Our young people were influenced by this propaganda. Our Molokan youth had very little religious education and training. It was surprising how little education they had about being Molokans and Christians. They began to be drafted, they began to enlist, the attitude of our people changed: "My kids are in the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corp, why should I support the COs I'm going to support my kids that are in the military." The parents were also being influenced by the propaganda of war. The Russian government was involved in the war, and being of Russian ancestry, they began to forget the fact why our people came here in the first place, which was to escape from participation in war. They were influenced by all of that non-Molokan propaganda, anti-Christian propaganda. They began to drift away from the Molokan teaching and the support of the CO situation. My father told me that fewer and fewer people were supporting our anti-war stand. But among our Molokan youth, there were over 955 boys that were drafted and enlisted into the various services, so that was a problem at that time.

Most families who had men in the service became anti-CO, and there was a lot of friction between families with sons in the military and families who had sons at the CO camps. Most people just would not contribute. They would have in the Big Church molenias for their boys in the Army. So one time they had a molenia, and someone said pa-duxu to send this prayer in English to the boys in the military, that they should learn the prayer, read it and study its meaning, and possibly they might receive some sort of salvation, even if they were killed. That was the attitude at that time. There was a lot of that, and they sent a copy of that Psalm too.

Some churches within the United States began to establish CO camps. Principally the Quakers and the Mennonites were establishing camps. Some of our Molokans were in Mennonite camps and some were in the Quaker camps. So it came to a point, that there was less and less support within the Molokan community, and say in 1944 there was hardly any. So my father had to raise money within our Molokan people and various churches to support and pay for each family with a boy in camp. They had to pay \$30 a month for the support in these Mennonite camps. Either the parents had to pay for each of their children or the community had to gather the money for each person in the CO camps. So gradually the community began to drift away from the support for the camps, and less and less money was gathered. We accumulated a debt, and if my father told me correctly there was \$10,000 that we owe the Mennonites right now, because the Mennonites paid for our support. My father paid for my brother Peter and me, but many parents were not able to pay, so that debt accumulated for at least 2 years that I was involved with the Mennonite camp. So that was the attitude of our people.

One day my father was in the Samaritan Church. He was in that church for a time, and the elders asked him to make a sermon about the COs, and he spoke about how we should support the COs, and how we should collect money for the COs, and we need money. For food, clothes, whatever they needed, and they had to pay \$30 per month to the Mennonites that amount, because it was a Mennonite camp. Some of the families could not afford the money, some had 1 or 2 in camp and they could not afford that kind of money, so they didn't pay. So the debt ran up, so my father was in charge of gathering the money, and we still owe the Mennonites know how many thousands of dollars still. So the Samaritan Church said OK we will donate money. At the end of church they passed a basket around for everyone to donate money, the Samaritan church itself donated money and individuals donated money to the support of the COs. There was one person there, that when that basket came to him, he was so mad about the COs, he took the basket and scattered the money all over the church, there was probably a few hundred dollars in there. He scattered the money, there were coins everywhere, and he got really

mad about us supporting the COs, while his son was in the military, that's the way it was at that time. People were upset because their children were in the services, so the parents were influenced by their children and they were supporting their children. Instead of supporting our faith, they were supporting their children who entered the military service, army, navy and marines. So they were very much against supporting the boys in camp and assisting them in any manner. When the war ended the men in the service were coming back, and there was very much a feeling of anti-CO attitude.

The parents forgot about our Molokan faith, the kids grew up with a lack of communication with their parents and children. The parents could not communicate in English and translate their teaching to their children, and the younger people did not know Russian well enough to communicate with their parents to understand what our faith was about. Most of the men who went into the Military came from older Russian parents who could not communicate our faith to the young kids. In fact one time I was on a streetcar, this was about 1940, going to LA City College to school. Here was one of our Molokan elders going downtown with his son, and the young Molokan man went along with his father to be able to translate for him, because the father did not understand English. We were sitting on this streetcar; people were going to work. Must have been about 9 o'clock in the morning. People were shouting at them, "Hey you communists, hey, you Bolsheviks." That was the attitude at that time, if anybody had a beard, he was a RED, communist Russian. Because of your appearance they thought you were a communist, a Bolshevik. They did not understand that we left Russia to get away from the communists and REDS. So it was difficult. So I am listening to all this cursing, and I explained to my father what I had witnessed and that I could do nothing, and that it was very difficult for a young person at that time.

It was so important for our young people to know why we came to this country, but they could not speak to their parents. They had to work, the oldest daughter cooked, when dinner was ready they would sit down to dinner, and they were not able to communicate, they were tired and wanted to go to sleep, they were tired, and were working till 6 or 7 o'clock at night. So there was no communication among our people. Our people disintegrated, they lived in the flats area, and I saw so much of that there, that the behavior of our young people is a story in itself. Our young people did not know our religious background. Did not know what Scriptures were, absolutely did not know it.

Most kids did not grow up with the attitude of knowing about our faith. My father used to sit down with us, we would have supper, pray, and after supper we would sit down and read the Bible in English, and we would have questions, what do you think about this and that. We were able to communicate, to discuss, we had political and religious discussions about war, and we grew up with the attitude that war is bad and we should not participate in war.

At that time the propaganda was unbelievable, everything was war related: the Japanese did this and the dirty Japanese did that. The Japanese are going to land on our seacoast, so be prepared, so that's why they chased the Japanese citizens, who were born and raised here, into concentration camps. Some were sent out of California to get them away from the coast, because the Japanese were going to land on the coast and invade California and Oregon and Washington. In that respect they did not allow any Japanese in California, and they were citizens! They were arrested and they put them into these concentration camps, as a result of all this propaganda, and it was very influential. And if you went to school and did not follow that propaganda, you were anti-American. You were thought of as anti-American, and pro-Japanese and pro-German, and you should not be qualified to live here in the United States. So that was a problem, a real problem. So in 1941, when the war broke out, here were 17-year old kids going to school, they were under the propaganda influence. People were propagandizing the war, they were telling the young men that the Japanese were going to invade, and we were going to have to protect our coast. So they grew up with that influence, and that influence was greater than any teaching that they had at home, much greater than the influence they had at home which was very mild, so they were at a disadvantage. So when it came time to be drafted they went in. A lot of them willingly enlisted or were drafted. Quite a few enlisted into the services.

Across the street we had Japanese people living there. And I was about to be drafted, so I was living with my wife and daughter, and we were living with my parents. We were helping with the rent there, we were living with my parents, it was it 1941, the beginning of '42. So across there street were Japanese people, there were 5 Japanese houses on our street, State Street. We went to see them, and told them how sorry we were that they were being evacuated, they were innocent; they lost everything. We told them to not hold us responsible, and that we were not anti-Japanese because we grew up with you people here, we know you well; you are not Japanese spies, which they weren't. So that was the whole attitude at that time, and the Japanese were going to invade the coast.

Where we lived, over there on State Street, the neighbors over there were ex-soldiers. They heard we were COs, it was terrible; they would come and tell my parents off. And at that time the Americans were losing, the war wasn't going well, and the Americans were going to invade France, and invade German-occupied France. So there was a scare at that time that the Americans were going to invade German-occupied France. And if they did invade they were going to lose, that it might be a failure, it might be a complete failure. Same thing happened when they invaded Italy, that when they got close to the French and German border, they said that we needed soldiers, we needed soldiers because they will kill so many that we need replacements. So the propaganda was heavy, in order to fulfill those requirements. So the teachers were promoting it; everybody was promoting it.

**Question:** Describe what teaching you received from your parents concerning the military.

We had excellent communication with my parents, my father was very literate, he was very intelligent as far as what is going on in the world. He was exceptionally intelligent and he knew what was to happen in this county during the war, because he was 18 years old during the first world war. He saw what happened at that time: if you were an alien you were not drafted. If you registered that you were an alien, you were not drafted. There were several Molokans that enlisted in the first world war. I don't remember their names, he knew the propaganda that went on at that time, the war propaganda, it was huge, they had to enlist and draft into the Army at that time. It was a huge propaganda, so he grew up with that. So as we were growing up and Russia became communist, they were saying the Russians were a threat to the world.

My Father was involved with the CO situation, because the church asked him to become their spokesman for the group of other churches, so they had a meeting at the Big Church in 1940. They started to draft before the war. And so he represented our church, and so they gathered different churches. I don't remember all of the names, but anyway they gathered, and they selected three elders, David Petrovich Miloserdoff, and Walter P. Shinen, and my father to go to Washington and consult with the Attorney General regarding conscription among our young people, as far as conscientious objection. So, the three of them went, and it ended up that my father was actually the one who was the spokesman for our faith with the Attorney General at that time. So then he (my father) went and described our forefathers and what they went through, and why we came over to the United States, and explained this to the government official, the Attorney General. And so he got it down to the point where this guy says, "Well, you're qualified, since in the first World War, a lot of you people were in jail because of anti-war, so your church is qualified to be conscientious objectors, but just because you belong to the church does not mean that you're going to be a conscientious objector automatically. You have to prove INDIVIDUALLY that you are conscientious objectors as a member of that church; if you're a qualified member of that church." So, okay, they agreed to all of that, they came home, they told the various churches and their membership what went on and what the government said. So, the government established a draft system and they started to draft people. So right away, most people got pretty panicky. Parents got to be pretty panicky, because they never were able to communicate to their own sons, their own children about our objection to war.

These parents believed all Molokans had conscientious objectors status from the First World

War, after that, there wouldn't be any more wars, and everything would be freedom of religion, freedom of choice; they were relaxed. They got to be exceptionally overly relaxed, as far as teaching their young people that. That's what I meant before about communication. Their kids were just disregarded, actually ignored! And it was a shame because I had too many of my friends that were in that predicament. We at home always, prayed before our dinner, and there was a law in our house that we have to be home on time in order to have dinner together as a family. Not just individually come and show up when he wanted to show up and have supper. We prayed, and we sat down to eat. So, as we ate, of course, we had regular dinners, maybe half an hour dinner, and so after that there was sort of a semi-law in our family with my father, that we were to discuss anything that might come up within our group, within our young people as we were growing up, as we were involved with sports. And being involved with other people going to school and learning about foreign and other different environments, things that were contrary to our faith. So, we would read from scripture and we would discuss what we read. And so, being my father was involved in the conscientious objector situation, he involved us in it. He began to explain what he had done, and what he had to go through, and what the government expected of our people, not because you're a member of the church that you're automatically a conscientious objector; but you're going to have to prove it yourself in your own daily existence, in your own life, because the FBI will automatically find your records, automatically find your history, and consult people, your neighbors and other people who you're involved with. The FBI will ask about you personally whether you are a faithful person in that church, and if you are actually a conscientious objector. So everybody that was involved in being a CO was examined by an FBI agent; maybe one or two or three. The FBI even asked the neighbors about you. I know when I went to L.A. City College and played football and basketball, the FBI went and saw the coaches. They talked to them and asked, "What kind of guy is this? What does he do? Is he a roughneck? what sort of person is he?" And they all concluded that I was a great American, a good American boy. So, in that respect, we had that background in our home. My father was always involved because a conscientious objector would call and say, "could I see you? Can I come down and see you tomorrow? Will you be free? I want to talk to you about my conscientious objection." And, so we were always involved in that because he was involved. And since he was involved, we were involved. And someone, a future conscientious objector, would come over and discuss with my father what he has to do, we would be listening, too, because we would be home doing homework, or whatever the case may be. Sometimes we were not home, but most of the time we were. So we were involved always with our parents with them being conscientious objectors themselves, and their involvement with conscientious objection in the church itself, and in the group among our people.

**Question:** How did the Molokan girls treat the CO boys?

The Molokan girls, as far as I know, my own self personally, they never disregarded, in any sense of the word, conscientious objectors. All they were interested in was finding a boy, especially a Molokan boy, a good Molokan boy, and they were actually not concerned, those that I knew. Some were conscientious objectors, some were followers of the faith, but most of the girls were ready to go with any Molokan boy. But boys that were available, whether he was going to be drafted into the Army, whether he was going to be a conscientious objector, to them it didn't matter. All they were interested in was to become involved with a boy, a Molokan boy, as they are now.

**Question:** Did you have a physical examination prior to induction?

Yes I did, when they gave me my 4E classification, conscientious objector classification, we had to go get a physical examination. The physical examination was done by a government doctor, downtown on 6<sup>th</sup> and Main Streets. It was an old street car barn, they were drafting people in that barn, and I had to

go through that line. And here is another thing interesting that happened when I had my physical. And when you get your physical, where were 5,000 young men, so I had to line up with them to get my exam. This doctors checks this, this guy is a psychologist, this other doctor checks that, and everything checked OK. And I had on my paper written CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR 4E, and now what happens. You go through all these processes with all these soldiers, and these soldiers are going through the same processes, and this is probably in March of 1944, that's when they really needed soldiers, and they were pushing men through the process like nothing. So we went through this line, and I'm in line first, and there ahead of me are three tables, the Army, the Navy and the Marines. At the Marine table there was this guy sitting there with no legs, a Marine staff sergeant, then the Navy guy, then the Army guy. There were three tables, and they had the ability to chose who they wanted, so you came through with your file. If you were big and strong, the Marine had the first option of drafting you, so here I am coming to this guy, ohhhh man, I am going to have trouble. I come to the first table and here is this Marine. He had no legs, they were shot off in Guadalcanal. That's what the guys in the line were telling me, they were saying, "He is going to put you in the Marine Corp." I said, "I won't go into the Marine Corp." And so as I come up, I show him my file, my conscientious objector folder, that I was not going to be drafted. So he looks at me and starts cursing me, up and down, you so and so, and this went on for some time, and everyone in the area was listening to this shouting and cursing, the whole building, he hollered and cursed some more, then he just picked up the table and pushed it right onto me. And he upset the table, still cursing, then some guys picked up the table, and he hollered "Get the hell out of here. I'll kill you, you yellow so and so." I then went over to the Navy guys, he looked at my folder, he told me to go to the Army guy, finally the last guy, the Army guy, he looked up and said, "No one wants you, get out of here." I was pretty glad to be out of there too.

**Question:** Describe the support you received from friends and relatives while you were in Camp.

Gas was rationed, you had 4 gallons of gas a week. If you had a business and a C classification you had unlimited gasoline. You had to have coupons. They did not visit us. A couple of guys came one time, others finally came up later on, but they did not send any kind of gifts. I was allowed 30 days per year as a CO to come home, it was like an Army leave, the same principle. You were allowed a pass to come home for 30 days. I went to church and they treated me very well, and they let me sing on occasion, they knew I was involved with spefkas and the UMCA Wednesday night group and sang in it, and a couple guys knew I liked to sing. My uncle was in charge and he always asked me to sing, and they treated me royally that way. They would give me preference, the elders knew I was trying to follow the precepts of our faith. But like I was telling you this last time, I was on one of these 30-day occasions.

All men in the CO camps, their parents were 100 percent for them being there. Especially the Tolmachoff family in Arizona, they contributed more than their share of support for the boys and men in camp. My father received money from that family in Arizona, that was much more than the support of their boys in camp. That's what allowed our boys to stay in the camp, because of their generosity.

**Question:** What were your own personal convictions? We know you had teachings from your father, but how did you feel inside? What were you own feelings about participation in the war?

I knew I did not want to disappoint my father, I knew I wanted to be a CO, I knew it was the faith of my forefathers and was taught by my father to not participate in the military, but early on I did not take an active role in getting others to go CO. I participated in sports and was going to school. When I got married I then became more involved. I would talk to people at work who were in the process on being drafted, at that time it took longer to process draftees, and I would talk to guys older and younger than me. I began to tell my fellow Molokans that we were not pro-war, but we were anti-war. My friends

began to say that I was involved with sports and that I should serve in the military and be involved like the rest of the Molokans. The propaganda was getting to everybody, so you became either for or against America by involvement or not involvement with the military, you became either pro-America or anti-America. And if you were a CO you were anti-America and a Bolshevik. If you were a Russian Molokan you must be a Bolshevik, they said. And these guys they were my good friends.

After the war started I got married, and they got married, and they were very much influenced by the war effort, and were not taught by their parents to be against military participation. They did not communicate with their parents, they did not participate in church services, their parents were always in church but they knew nothing about our forefathers' teachings. So our social lives began to separate, in that we began to argue about being COs. I really liked those guys but we were miles apart on participation in the military.

**Question:** What was the best experience in Camp concerning your stand against military service? What made you keep a positive attitude that you were doing the right thing, and that your stand was the correct thing to do, and what kept you strong and not depressed?

Well, what made us stay together? At first we were scattered all over, one person here, one in Sacramento, some guys were in Central Oregon, below Bend, the camp near La Pine. So we were spread out. Then our parents got together and decided that we should be together. So they made arrangements with the Mennonites to get us to go to the Three Rivers camps, and get us together. So it got us all together, we liked each other very well, we got along very well and we began to start a church service, started a Wednesday night church service and became closer Molokans. If anyone was having problems or doubts we would talk to them and in that way we stayed close.

A couple of young guys from Arizona, they were about 18 and they decided they were going to go into the service. So they got on a bus from Glendale, because there was no money for gas at that time, and they headed on the bus to LA to enlist, so half way to LA they began to talk to each other, and have doubts about what they were doing. They got off the bus half-way to LA and took they next bus back to Arizona. They became COs after that.

In camp we had lots of conversations with our camp group to keep us focused and on the right path. We had very young men about 18 years of age who needed a group support. They were young and impressionable so grouping us together kept us together spiritually, whether at work, at dinner or during time off of work. Some were stronger in the faith and they were able to help others

**Question:** What was the most depressing thing in camp?

I was not with my family. I had two children, and daughter and a son, my wife was living with my parents, it was a very inconvenient situation, cause she wanted to go to work, but my mother had some major surgery, and at that time the patients were not allowed to work for over 6 months. So my wife took care of my mother. She did the cooking, cleaning the house, helping my mother. I would come home on a 30-day leave, and I would see what she was going through. And she was crying, she did not want to live with my parents, but her parents did not have room for anyone else. It was most depressing thing to me to be away from my family. Most of the men in camp were single, only 5 or 6 of them were married.

**Question:** What was the general atmosphere in the camps in relationship to the other faiths and doctrines? You were in a Mennonite Camp, how did you stay separated from their religious influence?

When we first got together with the Mennonites, we were to have our dinners separated, we had our own cooks, and we did not want to have anything to do with their food. They would eat anything, pork,

you name it, and so it was a bad situation to begin with. So the Mennonites asked us if we would like to go to a camp in Kings Canyon, Cedar Grove. It was another 65 miles north into the mountains. So to improve our eating situations, we accepted their offer to relocate. We moved and lived in tents first thing. They were camp tents and there was a lot of inconvenience. The government then furnished a building that we put together, it came in sections, floor, roof, ceiling, walls, door so we assembled out living quarters. The kitchen was built 100 ft. away it was a tent, with stove and storage for our own food. That was in Kings Canyon. When the war ended, all the camps were becoming vacant. The Mennonites had a camp established in the Glendora area, it was a converted CCC camp. They sent us there after the war ended in 1945, about 3 or 4 months after the war.

While we were in Kings Canyon, people would come up from Kerman to visit quite often. They had access to gasoline from their farms, and they paid us many visits and we would have church with them.

**Question:** When the war ended, what were your experiences, how soon were you released?

Most of the camps were being closed down, people were being released, some people had been there four years, and they qualified your release by the amount of total time you had working in the camps. Some guys were in the camps before the war started, because the draft started before the war. They served more than 4 years and they were released at the end of the war.

At Azuza camp there were COs who were not religious objectors and they began a protest. It was a year after the war and we were not being released. The protesters knew the soldiers were being released and wanted to know why we were not being released. In fact they protested so much that they went on strike against the Forest Service, and went down to the Federal Building in Los Angeles. Some of our Molokans went on that strike and participated in this protest. There were probably about 20 men who went on strike in the Azuza camp. My father kept advising the camp participants, that we are not socialists, and we are not to take part in a camp strike and to not associate ourselves with any political movement, and that we were COs on religious grounds and did not have anything to do with political objection to the war. The guys that went on strike were arrested, tried, and just before they were to be sentenced they agreed to go back to work. They were facing an additional 2 years of work because of their strike participation. They were let out of jail, went back to work and did an additional 6 months of camp related activities. Then they were released.

I did not go on strike. I had 2 children and wanted to be released as soon as possible. If I went on strike the government would extend my stay for another 6 months. I wanted to go home and feed my family and go to work. I felt it not necessary to support the strike in order to be released on time and with good behavior. The war ended in May 1945, and they released me in October 1946 and that was the end of that story.

**Question:** What advice do you have for the coming generations of Molokan young men and women to prepare themselves to resist the draft and participation in military service?

Become actively involved in our church affairs, not only going to church, but studying our faith, our background and why we came to this county in the first place. Know the story and reasons we were COs in the first world war: there was no draft, and all you had to do was sign up you were and alien, and you were not drafted. But those guys who went to prison in Kansas, did not want to get involved with signing up as aliens. No involvement with the government at all.

Get involved with church activities; get involved with people of like minds who will not participate any form of military support. Know the governmental procedures to become a CO, and talk to others. Get your children involved at an early age about our historical stand against military service.

Go to classes taught by Molokan Elders, who can teach sound Bible doctrine against going to war and participation on military service.