

U.S. Gulf War Vet Prosecuted for Opposing Military Recruitment

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Tim Coil served in the first Gulf War and now suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

On March 12, he and his wife, Yvette, went to the Stow-Munroe Falls Public Library in Ohio. At 37, she is a student at Kent State and needed to study for a biology test. Tim, 40, was reading some books.

Then they noticed two military recruiters trying to enlist someone in a nearby room, with a large glass window.

She decided to take action.

She took out some 3x5 cards and wrote messages to the man being recruited and then put them up on the window sill.

Don't fall for it! Military recruiters lie," said one.

"It's not honorable to fight for a lying President," said another.

She says she cleared it all first.

"Before I put those cards up, I went to a volunteer and I asked her if it was OK if I put those cards up in the window, and she said she didn't have a problem with that but talk to someone who works there," Yvette says. "The next person said it was fine so long as there is no confrontation. And she said, 'Between you and I, I wish they weren't here, either.' "

The recruiters were none too happy with the cards.

One of them came out and asked Coil who put them up.

When she admitted she had, he asked for her name, which she didn't give him.

He told her that she and her husband couldn't put the cards up.

"My husband asked him if he was trying to keep us from using our freedom of speech," Coil says.

He didn't answer that, she says, but he did tell her again to stop.

He took the cards and went to find the library director.

In the meantime, Coil put some more card on the sill:

"Don't do it."

"My husband is a Gulf War Veteran. He can tell you the TRUTH."

"To the military, you are cannon fodder."

"Recruiters: You're fighting for my freedom of speech, too!"

The library director, Doug Dotterer, told them that if they put up one more card, he was going to ask them to leave, Coil says. He told them they couldn't display things that were disturbing other people in the library. She told him that the Army had its brochures out on a nearby table, and they were disturbing her, she says.

"My husband said that the library was a public place and we are allowed our freedom of speech," Coil says. "The director said it was his library, and so we would have to follow his rules."

When he left, they knocked on the window and urged the man being recruited not to join up.

Soon the police arrived.

They asked the Coils to leave the building.

"We said, 'Gladly,' " Yvette recalls.

But on his way out, Tim called the director a name.

"One more word from you and I'll arrest you," the police officer told Tim.

Then Tim shouted, "Don't let the military recruit people in the library."

Whereupon the police arrested him and took him to the station and booked him for disorderly conduct. A little while later, Yvette came and picked him up.

The district attorney did not return phone calls for comment.

Library Director Dotterer would not talk except to say: "I contacted my board president, who is an attorney, and he indicated that because this is an ongoing case we're not going to comment. What I would refer you to are the official police reports."

The police report says Coil was arrested for "causing a disturbance within a library."

At an April 30 pretrial meeting, Coil was asked if he wanted to make a plea and settle the whole thing.

"No, I'm not guilty," he said, according to his wife.

She explains: "We're Mennonite. To lie about that would be wrong. I don't want him to go to jail. Neither does he. He doesn't need that. But I believe that God's going to take care of it. We're OK with whatever happens. The point is if we don't stand for these freedoms and we don't allow ourselves to be put on the line for those things, there won't be an option

anymore.”

Attorney William Whitaker is representing the Coils.

“If a statute punishes this conduct, then that statute is unconstitutional since it sweeps protected speech within its orbit,” he says. “They were engaged in protected First Amendment speech. It’s legitimate to use the public library in the same way that the recruiters were using it.”

On May 10, Yvette Coil says that her lawyer was advised that the state would drop charges if they would pay \$100 in court fees.

“Tim said he should not have to pay for being harassed,” says Yvette. “No one has the right to take your freedoms away.”

The case is scheduled for June 5.

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