

Army deserter jailed for one year

A U.S. man who took refuge on Gabriola Island after fleeing military service hopes to return

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The U.S. Army deserter who spent nearly three years working at a Gabriola Island grocery store has been sentenced to a year in prison after pleading guilty to desertion.

It ends a saga that began in 2005 when Cliff Cornell walked away from the 1st Battalion, 39th Artillery Regiment in Fort Stewart, Georgia.

The sentence is high compared to similar cases. "We were disappointed," lawyer James Branum said.

After his arrival in Canada, Cornell became active in the War Resisters Support Campaign, something a spokesman for the group said affected his sentence. "The U.S. military is punishing (him) for speaking out about (his) conscientious objections to the Iraq war," said Ken Marciniac.

Cornell applied to stay in Canada but was denied. In February, he walked across the border and turned himself in to the military.

On Tuesday, Cornell tearfully read a prepared statement to the judge, apologizing for leaving his unit. He said that when his regiment was ordered to Iraq he became anxious about being asked to do things that go against his conscience.

"I think when he was most emotional was when he explained what he had in Canada," Branum said.

Cornell, from Mountain Home, Ark., grew fond of his adopted West Coast home and hopes to return.

Immigration lawyer Saba Naqvi, said a felony conviction in the U.S. could block his re-entry to Canada. But the sentence included a finding only of bad conduct, rather than the more serious dishonourable discharge, which is a felony.



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Cliff Cornell

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