Q: How do your Anarchist beliefs fit in with draft resistance?

A: As an anarchist, I could define it as a radical theory of democracy or as anti-authoritarian communism. I think that people need to be giving allegiance not to a state or a leader, but to the idea of helping each other as people. I think that I have more in common with a Salvadoran student or a Soviet farm worker than I do with politicians of either country. And something that has been said, "War is the health of the State." War comes down to being a game. The people with power play with power for money. It's not something that benefits ordinary people. It's not something that's going to benefit you or me. It's a game that the Pentagon and Kremlin use as an excuse to loot the world between themselves. It's an excuse to maintain power at home. Because there is supposedly a threat overseas, you have to be cracking down on people at home who are weakening the State by working for a better country. And that makes me an Anarchist.

Q: What opposition have you encountered to your resistance other than prosecution by the federal government?

A: Well, the government is trying to put me in jail, but I have found very little hostility from anyone else. It surprised me, the amount of sympathy people have expressed. People coming up to me in the street, strangers, saying "Are you Russell Ford? Thank you for what you're doing", or "I don't think I'd have the courage to go to jail myself, but thank you", or "Russell, I disagree with your position, but we need people like you who are willing to take risks for what they believe in." Something that one of the federal marshals said when he was dragging me out of the courtroom – on my arraignment I refused to sign bond – when he was throwing me into the lock-up cell, he said, "Ford, sticking up for what you believe in, that's what America is all about", as he turned the key on me. This is something that surprised me because I knew there was considerably more hostility towards war resisters during World War II and Viet Nam. But I think something happened during the 1960's and early '70's. There was a seed planted – an idea, that maybe the government could be wrong, that maybe the government could make a mistake, that maybe the government could have evil motives. And that it's a good thing, it's part of the democratic process for people to be willing to take a position against the government or even the majority of the people. And I think we're seeing that seed growing today with the success of the nuclear freeze movement. The million people in Central Park was as big or bigger than any of the anti-war or civil rights marches.

Q: So you see all these different issues being connected?

A: Yes.

Q: How?

A: The draft is part of the militarization of this country, the way nuclear arms build up is too. Militarization is taking money, taking resources away from human projects. It's leading to a centralization of the economy, of government and of production.

Q: How has your arraignment and your active resistance affected your family relationships?

A: I think in most families it's a little bit hard when the children are going out on their own.

Q: But, this is a little bit more.

A: Yes. This is going a little bit further. And so there is some strain from it. My parents don't want their son to be one of the ones going to jail. But, there is also some pride there, that my parents have brought up my brother, sister, and I to be creative independent thinking people. And to value morality, which shows that my political activities come from the way I was brought up. And it's hard on my family, who are not political, but I think we all realize the reason why I'm active in draft resistance and other political work.

Q: How has this affected your personal life?

A: I think it has brought me closer to many of my friends. The period I was in for this summer, five weeks, for refusing to sign the bond the magistrate wanted, and writing to friends during that time and realizing how physically fragile our relationships are, that we can be separated, that I may be going to jail for a long time – all of these things make me value personal relationships all the more highly.

Q: How do you feel about going to jail now that you've experienced a taste of it? You were in a county lock-up, weren't you?

A: No, I was in Danbury Federal Prison.

Q: And that's where you'd go if you're convicted?

A: If I'm convicted, which is likely, and if I'm sentenced to jail time, which is uncertain, there's a good chance I'd be sent to either Danbury or Allenwood Federal Prison in Allenwood, Pennsylvania. But nobody wants to go to jail and there are certainly things I'd rather be doing. I'm a history major, and in studying American history, it seems to me it's just a moral gesture being willing to go to jail, being willing to suffer the consequences of acting on personal beliefs. It has a powerful effect on other people and their beliefs and consciences. Because if Russell Ford, if David Wayte, if some of these other draft resisters believe so strongly about registration that they're willing to go to jail for it, other people are going to have to re-examine their beliefs. The time in jail is not wasted time or it doesn't have to be. It doesn't mean that you're not there anymore, that you're silenced, you're not politically effective. And I look at examples of people who have gone to prison for political reasons and have continued their resistance effectively in prison. Federal prison systems were desegregated, the visiting facilities and the dining rooms were desegregated during the early 1940's through the efforts of objectors to World War II, who saw no reason to stop objecting to racism just because they were in federal prisons. Susan Saxe in Framingham Federal Prison in Massachusetts, a lesbian-feminist activist who was framed during the 1970's, was active organizing the women prisoners there for rights to see their families and their children, and for better prison conditions. These are things that we need to be part of. Prisons are terrible places. Perhaps they should not even exist. But, I don't think we can let our lives be governed by fear of prisons. They're something that needs resistance. Activists working against them, as much as draft registration or war or rascism.

Q: How do you feel about someone like Paul Jacobs who has opted to go underground and to live his life now as a wanted felon, to avoid someone else having that much control over his life in prison?

A: I think what Paul Jacobs is doing is great. I'm not saying everyone should do what I do, or what Paul Jacobs does, or that anyone should do what any one person does. I respect his decision. He does not want to go to prison, he does not want to go into the army; he wants to live his own life. And I think that's what most people want to do. I've had conversations with David Wayte in Los Angeles who was an indicted draft non-registrant who was raising many more legal questions in his defense than I will be at my trial. Paul Jacobs is doing one thing, David Wayte is doing another, and Russell Ford is doing a little differently than either of them. Part of the strength of our movement is diversity. It comes down to having basically the same beliefs. I don't think that everyone should be public draft resisters. That's crazy. I've talked a lot about this with one of my college roommates a couple of years ago. He had not registered for the draft, but wasn't about to go public the way I had. What he said was that he wanted to get through college, marry and have a family and get into a job and that's what he wanted to be doing. If I were going to prison, then one of the reasons was that I didn't want to be drafted. But, by trying to live an ordinary, decent life, I think that's a political statement itself.

Q: What sort of defense are you planning?

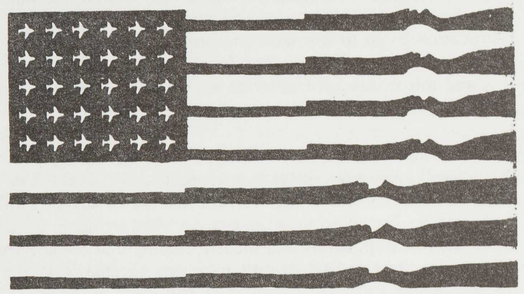
A: Mostly I want to explain why it is that so many American men have not signed up for the draft, why so many American people are against President Reagan's programs. And to raise the argument that most people share a certain commitment to democracy, and we differ as to what sort of political system is necessary to bring about a democratic society. What I want to do is to explain why draft registration is wrong.

Q: Do you think you may find that is inadmissible evidence since that isn't legal grounds for breaking the law?

A: Perhaps, but I think if the prosecutor or federal judge are continually going to be objecting to or ruling anything I say as irrelevant, it's hardly going to make them look very good. Most of what I want to see coming out of this trial is not simply what happens in the courtroom, but there's organizing we can do around my trial, using this as a key to get speakers in high schools and local community groups about draft registration and oher issues, to encourage military and draft counselling groups. To encourage people in my home town of Middletown, Connecticut, to broaden their own commitment in their own community programs or projects, from food co-ops to shelters for battered women, to encourage the spirit of resistance.

Q: How do you think the trial will go?

A: I think that its's unlikely that I will be acquitted. I think it's possible, because while it's very clear that I have broken the law – I have admitted that for a year – there are serious doubts about the validity of the draft registration law. There



are serious constitutional and technical flaws with the registration requirement, with prosecutions of non-registrants. These are things that are being raised by David Wayte and his lawyers in Los Angeles. Questions about the political feasibility of prosecuting or jailing any more than the token number of non-registrants. So, I expect to be convicted. For sentencing, it's possible that I would get time in prison, or it could be a period of community service. I think that a more meaningful sentence would be an agreement to let me do what I'd be doing otherwise – trying to work to improve the lives of people who are suffering so greatly under something that is connected with what I'm protesting in the first place: militarism and priorities that are taking money away from the people and giving it to tanks.

Q: Now that you're just about mid-stream with this, how do you feel about your decision to resist?

A: I think I've done the right thing.

Q: Are you enthusiastic about it?

A: This began a bit more than a year ago with a letter I wrote to President Reagan and the director of the Selective Service System, explaining that I was 18 years old and required to register for the draft and that I'd not done so. I knew that when I wrote that letter that I'd probably be facing prosecution and perhaps jail for it, and for me, there's a sense of outrage about a lot of things that are wrong with this world and this country. It is necessary for people to make commitments in the way they live their lives against injustice. And that for me was something that I was capable of doing by making this sort of public statement against militarism. And I don't regret having done that. It's given me a chance to meet and speak with a lot of people who, otherwise, might not have done much thinking about these issues. And I think it would have been worse for me living my life knowing that there was something more that I could have done. As a friend of mine said, "The prisons of your mind can be worse than the prisons of the government."