

Protest politics of Persian Gulf war, not soldiers

Soldiers hope for peaceful settlement

By Joy Pope

With Jan. 15 encroaching, I am becoming increasingly concerned about the attitude of this new generation of anti-war activism. I am particularly addressing those activists who have taken it upon themselves to correspond their anti-war positions directly with the soldiers sitting in the desert, trembling with the fear of death and the sadness of lives left behind.

My brother is one of these soldiers.

Commentary

I support the anti-war movement wholeheartedly when it comes to protesting the reasons behind this conflict and the corrupt actions and individuals associated with the U.S. government. On Jan. 15, I will be out there protesting along with all of you who think this conflict is unwarranted and poorly handled.

However, my anger will never be directed at the soldiers, and I plead for this same sentiment from my fellow war protesters.

The image of the American soldier has been badly tainted by Hollywood's portrayal of the Vietnam conflict. I am disappointed to see how easily this image has been swallowed by my generation. To think that every soldier sweating out his or her fear in the desert is uneducated or negligent or even more patriotic than human is a grave mistake.

I ask you, the ones who choose to so carelessly question the soldiers' intellect or reasoning, to travel out of narrow-mindedness to rural America and see for yourselves the possibilities available to men and women who can't afford college, who come from broken families, or who desire a

chance to see and experience the world. These men and women are intelligent enough to leave oppression for opportunity. The soldiers who desire blood are certainly in the minority.

It is up to us to stop the anti-soldier propaganda before it gets out of hand as it did with Vietnam. We can't just sit in our trendy little pubs and smoke our French cigarettes, out of the cold and in the comfort of our friends, and wait for an organized chance to spit on our soldiers. We can't disregard the pain felt by the families saying goodbye to their sons and daughters, husbands and wives — to their lives, childhoods and futures.

I would be so impressed by an intelligent anti-war movement that could protest the horror going on in politics and philosophy while respecting the sacrifice and the loss felt so deeply by our soldiers and their families. Can't we voice our opposition and our sympathy in the same breath? If it is a humanitarian issue we are protesting, can't we protest in a humanitarian manner?

I will certainly be there with you to protest on Jan. 15. Together we can voice our concern and troublesome thoughts about the politics behind this possible war. There will be one fundamental difference between you and me, however.

When it's over and Jan. 16 comes around, you can go back to your pubs and smokes and forget about the pain involved in this war until the next time someone is bold enough to stage a protest. But when the 16th rolls around for me, and all the days after until this situation is settled, I must listen to the news, watch for the mail and swallow my pain everytime the telephone rings, dreading the possibilities.

Joy Pope is a Eugene resident.

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P.O. Box 3159, Eugene, Oregon 97403

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The Emerald is operated independently of the University with offices on the third floor of the Erb Memorial Union and is a member of the Associated Press.

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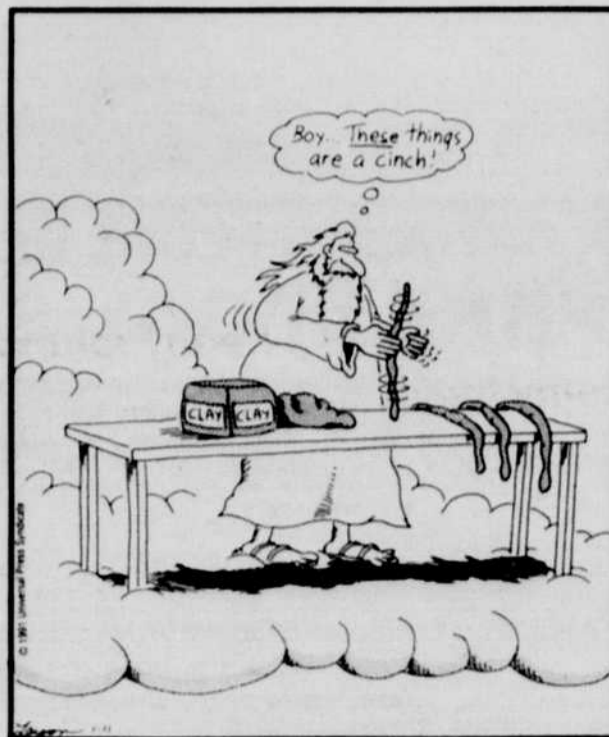
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