

Marines, Army soldiers left jobless, sockless

OUR OPINION: Military should spend less money on high-tech weapons

If you think our society is obsessed with image, you should check out the U.S. military.

For decades we have been consistently pouring billions of dollars into our defense industry to ensure that we will be viewed as the world's leading superpower.

At the rate we build submarines and bombers, it is obvious we are placing a lot of stock in the intimidation factor.

But there is irony to be found in our country's overabundance of these high-tech weapons and the fear these weapons instill in our neighboring nations: The Marine Corps placed socks at the top of its list of most needed supplies.

After all of the money we've poured into the military, we are leaving our soldiers in dire need of fundamental supplies.

Our government's failure to take care of its soldiers' needs should not be surprising because it has a history of failing to care for its citizens in desperate need, such as the homeless.

But soldiers are employed by the government. They use sophisticated weapons to supposedly save our lives. If we do not provide them with proper supplies, we are placing their lives at risk as well as our own. The image of our infantrymen rushing into battle sockless should be the least of our worries.

Instead, we should be concerned about Marines training on antique radios, straining to hear through the

static. Or better yet, combat soldiers wearing 15-year-old flak vests that less effectively stop a bullet than modern-day police officers' vests.

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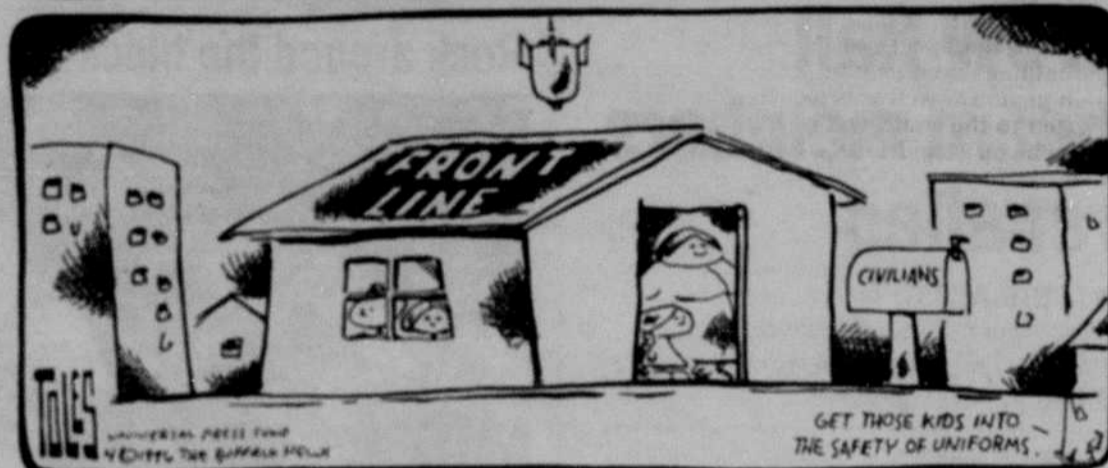
If you can't smell the injustice in these situations, you're most likely a defense company executive or a member of Congress. Both parties receive advantages from troops' disadvantages: Congress gets to enhance the nation's image and claim they are cutting the budget.

The executives get their pockets lined with crisp, green currency from the profits made on the billion-dollar weapons they produce.

The final injustice is that many members of the Army and Marines who are willing to withstand these absurd conditions are losing their jobs.

With the Marines losing 24,000 and the Army losing 250,000 active-duty soldiers, it is obvious our government considers them to be expendable. And soldiers who remain are now expected to work harder than ever.

Reports are showing that a shortage of recruits is predicted in the future. With the trend the current defense program is following, who can blame them?



Time places everything in perspective

This, like every day, is the first day of the rest of my life. The differences between this day and any other from a global perspective are insignificant at best.

Though for others this day is like an ant seen from space, this day is more like the Great Wall of China for me. June 3 hearkens both my departure from the *Emerald* as a columnist and the beginning of a new decade for me. Today I turn 20.

Growing up I never dreamed my exit from the teens would hit me so hard. I always knew 13 was important — finally a teen; the promise of driving was carried with age 16; even voting at 18 seemed like it would change my life. None of those birthdays affected me as profoundly as this one has.

People who are older than me laugh when I say I feel old. They assume I'm joking or making fun of their seniority. But I am, oh, too serious. For the first time in my life, I feel truly old.

I don't attribute this age oppression on any action of mine. No, instead I blame it on the people around me. I feel the same as I did a year ago — my life is virtually unchanged. It is the changes I see in others around me that are scaring me.

I recently heard marital news about a friend of mine from high school. Not that he was getting married or that he's having a child — his first one is already going on two. Oh, no, I am all too familiar with that announcement. My friend is getting divorced. The hated "D" word. It's for real, and it's happening to someone my age. Someone I know. Someone I could be.

That's too scary for me to handle. I look around myself and find that I am somewhere between abnormality and the average 20-year-old. I am a contradiction in and of myself. I reach for the future as I hide in the past, afraid of getting burned but called to the light.

I guess my dual nature makes sense. After all, I am a member of Generation X, the epitome of contradiction. I am lazy, yet I hold down two jobs and go to school full time. I am apathetic, yet I have voted in every election I could and willingly argue my position on any number of articles. I am a freeloader, yet I pay for over 75 percent of my education on my own.

I'm always told how well I've got it. I wasn't alive when Kennedy was assassinated, but I was there to see Nixon shamed, Reagan shot and Clinton dragged through the mud. I haven't lived through a world war, but I've seen the LAPD beat people down and then call it self-defense.

I belong to the first generation who is expected to have a worse standard of living than our parents. A citizen, some would say, of a country

whose time has passed. We know the future is bleak without a college education, but even with one it is clouded by debt and frustration.

We are blamed for our desire to live for the moment, but are not given hopes of a brighter future.

And for this we are to be looked down upon? I just don't buy it. More and more people are not identifying with a specific political group, but that does not mean that we are apathetic. Most people do not trust the government, but we were still watching the Smurfs when most of the current militia leaders were starting their treks.

As Billy Joel sang:
*"We didn't start the fire
 It was always burning
 Since the world's been turning
 We didn't start the fire
 No we didn't light it
 But we tried to fight it."*

I am supposed to be happy with my place in life without knowing what it is. I am supposed to better myself without realizing which direction is "up." My generation is supposed to step forward as world leaders while our lives are still in disarray.

But not yet. I am not ready to try my hand at running the world yet. I am not willing to give up my immaturity even if I am "forced" to give up my teen-age years. My attitudes link me too firmly to the days where I could gain the beauty of Daisy Duke and the powers of Wonder Woman from a pair of underroos and a ratty blanket. How can I give up the possibility of a utopian existence for responsibility and pressure?

I do not know. But I will.

The "real world" will be mine in just a few years. For now, I will hold on to my youth, my hopes, my ambitions. Though 16 has come and gone for us, John Cougar Mellencamp's words still ring true:

*"Hold on to 16 as long as you can
 Changes come around real soon
 Make us women and men."*

Even though I have officially been an adult for two years, I still consider myself to be at the crossroads of adulthood. I look back upon it and see it reaching to the horizon of my birth. The efforts of my parents are plain to see (thank you mom and dad), and the deep markings of friends gone and friends here to stay. As I turn to the future, I see clearly the prints of the people who will affect me — people already loved and people not yet known. I place a tremulous foot ahead of me, stepping into adulthood but keeping one hand back holding onto childhood. It is a good place to be.

Kay Krautscheid, who feels very old today, is a columnist for the *Emerald*. It's your last chance for the year: E-mail Kay at kayk@gladstone.uoregon.edu



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