

Tuesday, November 11, 2003

EDITORIAL

Veterans' Day should honor young soldiers

So, you woke up this morning, took a shower, had breakfast (if you found the time for it) and boarded a bus or walked to school. You went to classes, maybe took a quiz, ate lunch (if you found the time for that, too) and went home or to work.

Just another day in the life of a traditional college-age person, right?

Well, for students, sure. But not everyone takes the same path. Some 620,000 Americans between ages 18 and 25 are on active duty with the military — 45 percent of the services.

As America is involved in a military conflict, this Veterans' Day makes for a particularly apt time to reflect on veterans' efforts and what other college-age people are doing with their lives.

But in many ways joining the military is a special path — one that students might not have the scope or time to appreciate. For most students, a bad day means getting by on five hours of sleep. For the soldiers involved in the occupation and reconstruction of Iraq, a bad day means dodging bullets.

On Nov. 2, 15 soldiers died when their CH-47 Chinook helicopter crashed, possibly the result of a missile attack, witnesses said. Of the 11 soldiers the military identified by Sunday, six were younger than 24.

It can be easy to forget how significantly college-age soldiers affect the world and local communities in a state without a major military installation, such as Oregon. But in many places, the military world is much closer to the forefront of the local collective consciousness.

Consider the story of one of the 15 soldiers who died in the copter crash, Army Spc. Darius T. Jennings, 22. Jennings — who hailed from Orangeburg, a South Carolina town of about 13,000 — became the third graduate of the town's only high school to die while on military duty in Iraq since August. (Army Sgt. Anthony Thompson, 26, was killed Sept. 18 in an ambush near Tikrit; Pft. Vorn Mack, 19, drowned Aug. 23.)

At Orangeburg-Wilkinson High, 85 percent of the students qualify for discounted or free lunches, making the military a more realistic immediate option for many students than a four-year college program.

"They turn to the military as a means to an end," Air Force Junior ROTC Director Maj. Frank Douglas told CNN about the popularity of military aspirations at Orangeburg for a Nov. 5 article.

Douglas added that many students at the school have been discouraged from military service by the untimely deaths.

"There were some who I knew absolutely were geared towards the military," he said. "They had planned to go to college and then join as an officer later on and now have those reservations and have those questions like, 'It's not safe, and if it can happen to someone here, it can happen to me.'"

That danger is something that college students studying in the States don't — and don't have to — think about in their day-to-day goings-on.

But regardless of whether you agree with the current war's motivations or justifications, it's important to consider the life of college-age soldiers and to recognize the efforts of those who volunteer themselves for potentially perilous duty to serve their nation.

EDITORIAL POLICY

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailymerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submission must include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.



Steve Baggs Illustration

Homegrown cult classic

Chuck Palahniuk is the literary equivalent of "The Usual Suspects." And it's not because his name is as much of a mouthful as "Kaiser Söze."

He's a cult hit.

That much was clear as Palahniuk, who wrote "Fight Club" after he graduated from the University of Oregon, played to a packed WOW Hall on Tuesday night. The event was less of a reading and more of a rock concert, and Palahniuk embraced the role of the rock star.

As he told stories of touring the country, sharing a mononucleosis-infested coffee cup with Quentin Tarantino, it occurred to me that here's a writer, finally, who's turning fiction into the rollicking medium it should be. He's crazy. He's edgy. And he's bringing fiction back to the people. A popular, good modern writer. My neurons are on overload.

Palahniuk appeals to college readers like "South Park" appeals to college television-watchers. The Tuesday event was dominated by students, most of them male and all of whom obviously worship Palahniuk. A single chair and a microphone sat on the WOW Hall stage, and people cheered as the lights dimmed for the first time. False alarm. They dimmed again, people cheered again. I wondered if I was waiting for Palahniuk or U2.

Finally, he was introduced and he came



Peter Hockaday
 Today is Hockaday

on. I expected Bono but got a math professor. He had Urkel-sized glasses and a puke-brown vest. But then he opened his mouth, and the professor image didn't mean anything. He was funny, sure, but unpredictable and nuts at the same time.

Then he started in on his reading, a short story from his upcoming book of horror stories. He told us we'd be sweating soon, and he didn't lie. The story was nastier than nasty, to the point that if I simply told you the plot, you'd get squeamish. A lot of "oohs" and "ughs" rippled through the audience.

After the reading, Palahniuk answered questions and gave out plastic limbs from his "Choke" book tour. He stayed for at least an hour and a half to sign every last book brought by every last fan.

That's what makes Palahniuk great. He cares about his writing. He stayed for every-

body at the reading, and you got the sense it wasn't just because this was his old hometown. He runs a workshop on his Web site, <http://www.chuckpalahniuk.net>, where he picks a story every month and critiques it. He recommends books on that Web site and was quick to recommend other writers at Tuesday's reading.

All that makes him a cult hero to readers and writers alike. I'm half journalist, half creative writer, and that second half of me was inspired by Palahniuk's obvious passion for his work. I couldn't come close to imitating his nuts-o style, but I do appreciate his zeal.

A friend told me a story about Palahniuk. Apparently Palahniuk, who lives in Portland, sometimes waltzes into the Portland Barnes & Noble, yanks his books off the shelf and signs them, right in the store. He puts the books back himself.

So yeah, he's a little cocky. But it's awesome. He's cocky about his writing because he truly loves it. And that means that thousands of people, like those who showed up at the WOW Hall on Tuesday night, love him back.

Even if he doesn't look like a rock star.

Contact the columnist at peterhockaday@dailymerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OSPIRG campaign benefits polluted Willamette

I want to address a problem that is being ignored by the governor, namely the clean-up of the Willamette River. Many companies along the river dump tons of toxins into it, and much of the state's garbage finds its way into the river as well. These polluters are working hard to keep the taxpayers paying for the clean-up, not themselves. The level of toxins in the Willamette is so bad that swimming and fishing have been prohibited throughout much of the river. Originally from Los Angeles, I came to Oregon to study at the University in part because of all the great outdoors activities Oregon has to offer. I am disappointed to hear of the condition of one of Oregon's most precious resources. That is why I joined the group OSPIRG to help deal with this problem.

The main way OSPIRG students are trying to change this situation is by applying pressure to Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski to make him keep his campaign promise of cleaning up our river. We need Kulongoski

to force the Department of Environmental Quality to enforce existing laws and force big-time polluters to take responsibility for their actions. For our part, OSPIRG organized a river walk in Eugene on Oct. 25, and volunteers picked up two hundred pounds of trash. There will be another one on Nov. 16, and many University students are going to help and show our support for cleaning up the Willamette.

Luis Garcia
 freshman
 psychology

Public should take action to help clean Willamette

I am writing because I am concerned about the Willamette River. The river is a source of recreation for many Oregonians and now, because of toxic emissions, fishing and swimming have been prohibited in many areas throughout it. Right now, there are point sources along the river where pollution is being discharged by industries that have expired permits. These chemicals not only affect the purity of the water but cause serious effects to the species living there. This fall, the Oregon Student Public Interest Re-

search Group is continuing its efforts to make the Willamette River clean again. OSPIRG is working on pressuring Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski to keep his gubernatorial candidacy promise to take charge of the Willamette River restoration. If he uses his power, he can pressure the Department of Environmental Quality to enforce pollution permits along the Willamette River.

By holding educational events, exposing big polluters of the Willamette River and working to enhance the public's awareness, this issue can grab the attention of the governor, who has the power to do something. But the public should care the most about this problem. They are the people who can no longer swim or fish in the river. Most importantly, they are the people who elected Kulongoski because he pledged to clean it up. Educate yourselves and find out what you can do. Volunteer at river clean-ups, find out what products are safe for our river, or write a letter to Kulongoski asking him to keep his promise and clean the Willamette River.

Laura Church
 sophomore
 undeclared
 OSPIRG intern