

# WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?



BY LEE R. BUELT

On January 16, 1991, Operation Desert Storm, the final phase of the Persian Gulf War, began with air strikes on Bagdad and Iraqi positions in Kuwait. In less than a month the war was over. Iraq retreated from its summer conquest of Kuwait, leaving behind burning oil fields and uncounted thousands of dead Iraqi soldiers.

Three years ago Lee Buelt, a former Astoria resident now living in Forest Grove, Oregon, wrote his immediate reactions to the war.

*"Too many times, as we sat in the house, we'd hear that you'd done it again -- manhandled another affair of state with your usual staggering incompetence. Then, masking our worry with a nervous laugh, we'd ask you, brightly, 'How was the Assembly today, dear? Anything in the minutes about Peace?' And my husband would give his stock reply. 'What's that to you! Shut up!' And I did.*

--ARISTOPHANES, *LYSISTRATA\**

WAR! I'm angry because a handful of men compel me to confront it. I have more important things to do than having to worry, agitate, over war. Recently seven Marines were killed, slaughtered by our own bullets no less. Friendly fire, it's called, a nomenclature the military invented for, *oops, sorry about that death.* These are seven human lives lost, seven human families in pain, grief. These deaths are not abstractions. One cannot turn the channel and escape from them. They are flesh and bone, desire and love, soul and spirit, vanquished forever from earth.

President George Bush, the 41st President of the United States of America, says this war is moral. Who is he kidding? War is never moral. War is male aggression. War is political posturing. War is the premeditated killing of the so-called

\*Douglas Parker translation (1964)

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enemy. War is an attitude, a state of mind perpetrated by older men. As Andrea Dworkin says: "Older men kill boys by generating and financing wars. Older men hate boys because boys still have the smell of women on them. War purifies, washes off the female stink. The blood of death, so hallowed, so celebrated, overcomes the blood of life, so abhorred, so defamed." War is death to the innocent, the poor, the unlucky ones.

Throughout President George Bush's address to the nation television cameras scanned the House of Representatives chamber. Seated at polished wooden desks were, predominately, men in dark suits. These men sat at their desks gracefully, legs crossed, confident in their beliefs, actions. When it came time to applaud the rhetorical President George Bush, most of the male members of Congress stood and enthusiastically beat their hands together. Others seemed to simply go along with the pomp, as to sit back might show impudent behavior. I reacted with anger as I watched this scene -- and embarrassment for the shameless President George Bush. He was cuckolding the audience with divine patriotism. I kept asking myself, eyes searching the television screen: *Where are the women?*

I don't understand war. I don't comprehend what it is, what it is supposed to accomplish, or why there has to be war, given all the illuminating evidence of its brutality, loss of life and shattering of family. I do not believe government explanations for war. Governments are only concerned with perception, seeking public approval through rhetoric and propaganda.

I suppose there is a history to why there is war. I don't doubt that war can be connected anthropologically, sociologically and psychologically to humanity's past. It must have to historians a painted reality, explainable and reasonable. The only reality I see in war is innocent death; the rest is political and historical illusion.

Here we are, the divine USA, sending naive, propagandized, innocently hubristic women and men, a generation of Big Mac Coke & Fries kids into battle. "We're going to kick their butts!" they shout heroically. War gives us heroes. Odysseus. Alexander the Great. Napoleon. Rommel. Eisenhower. Patton. I abhor the thought of more heroes.

Before the war, before the choreographed AMERICA AT WAR and WAR IN THE GULF television specials, I recall images on the screen of men in dark suits sitting around U-shaped conference tables. They smiled or looked grave, shook hands, posed for TV and press. *Where were the women?*

A viewer might see a woman in the background, as often as a northwest logger might spy a spotted owl.

I believe I have finally realized why the USA is at war. We do not have women seated around the conference table. Nor does any other nation. No equal amount of women, or anywhere close to equal, negotiating, compromising, problem solving, sharing responsibility and power on the issue of war. We do not have the proper individuals rightfully participating who know instinctively the ardent reality of life and death.

A woman who chooses to give birth also chooses to face death. Death matches her steady gaze in childbirth, and either takes her or lets her stay with her child. Men counter this instinctive death experience with rituals designed to perpetuate male dominion over women, test their strength, courage and endurance, suppress pain and emotions, promote conquest and dominance; in essence men test themselves against death. Hence, war.

President George Bush says all was done that could be done to preserve peace in the Middle East. A baldfaced lie! Women are not at the negotiating table. Women have birthed every one of the individuals on the battlefield, yet are not allowed an equal right to decide their fate.

There are myriad reasons for war, but no excuse for it. Creating heroes is always a byproduct, which assists its perpetuation. The hero of this television war will be the media darling, jovial, testy, movie-like General H. Norman ("Stormin' Norman") Swartzkopf. I watch this telekinetic military transgressor joke, gloat and point-a-finger at Saddam on TV. He proudly describes for viewers the war toys in use, their destructive capability. He strokes patriotism to fever-pitch. My stomach churns with bile, not so much for the man but for what he represents, for what the military has done to him. He could have been a poet, a painter. Instead he has dedicated his life to killing people. Books by generals and other warmakers are on his desk. General, I say to his TV image, humanity has experienced enough war. Thanks to television we daily witness women and men weeping in streets of shattered cities. These tragedies are not abstractions. When the unlucky suffer, so do the rest of us.

The war in the desert did not have to happen. Diplomacy, sanctions and other untried, unthought-of ideas and proposals would have filtered through creative human brains to resolve the conflict without war. Patience, brain power and gender equality would have sought a peaceful, humane New World Order. By committing to this war we have given Saddam Hussein power, a world stage to act out his fanatical dreams. President George Bush and his male Knights of the Cabinet have splattered blood all over themselves, which will not wash off.

If only we might have a few women around those negotiating tables, in the Cabinet, and even more in Congress, in the United Nations, in all world governments, then just maybe assinine, absurd, wasteful, male created and dominated war will finally be stillborn.

Lee Buelt recently finished a novel, *Temptations of a Servant.*

**TO AMERICAN WOMEN SERVING IN THE GULF**

Take your mind off your personal strife, the heat, your cramps, tampons rife with sand  
Let the President's wish be your command:

Preserve the American way of life.

What can he mean when he speaks of freedom to a woman who can't even walk alone at night in her own home town?

Wife beaters, molesters, rapists, your boss who cornered you-- they all miss you, wish you were here.  
Luckily some of them have volunteered to serve their country, to avenge the rape of Kuwait.

Meanwhile, fight for your right to fight, work twice as hard to be thought almost as good, and remember, you're not afraid of the sight of blood-- you see it every month.

O, sisters, the enemy surrounds us all.  
When you've done your duty  
Come home to the babies crying to be nursed-- if the friendly fire doesn't kill you first.

--ALLISON McLEAN (1991)

Allison McLean lives in Bellingham, Washington.

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