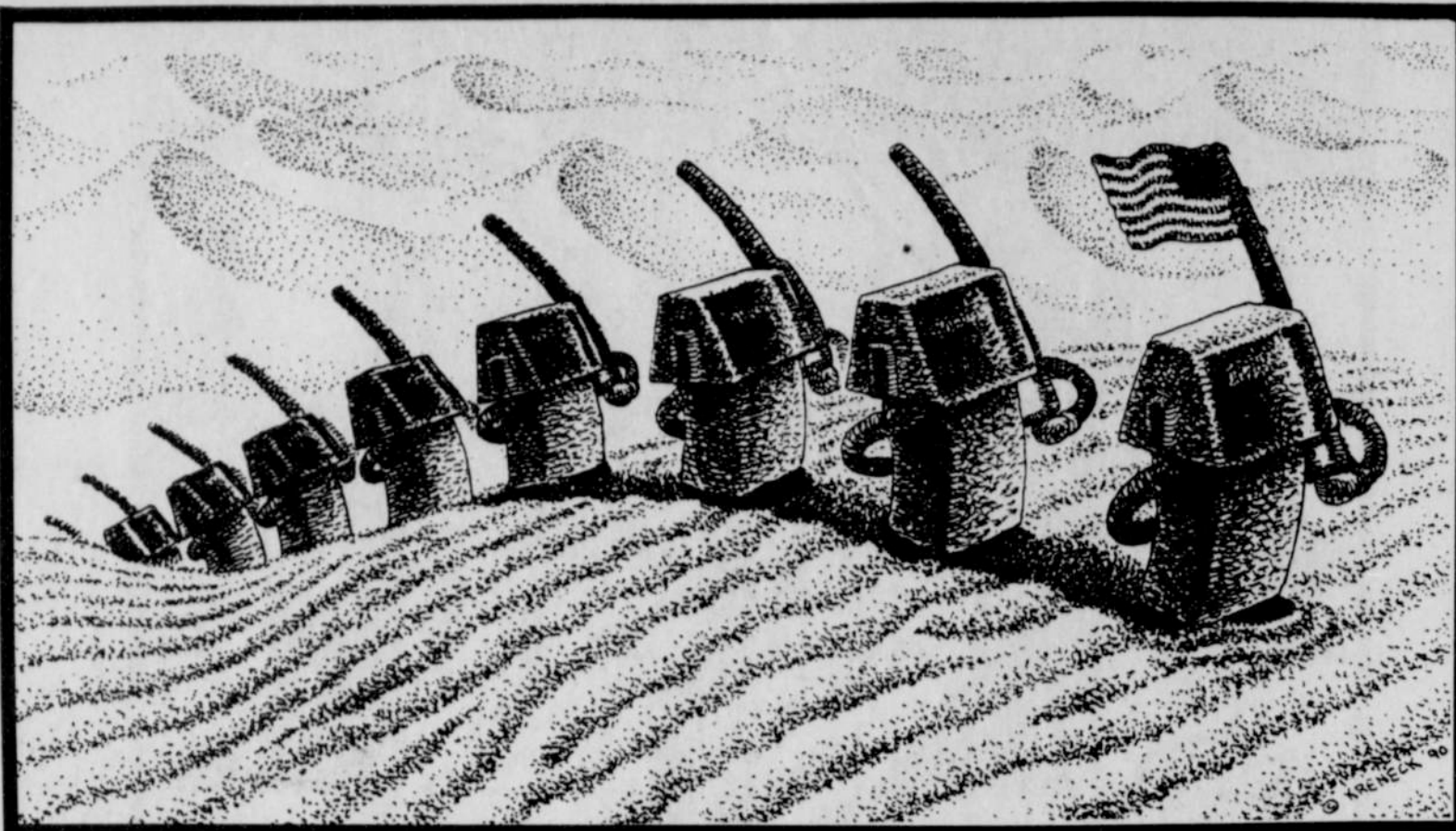




KEVIN KRENECK (1990)

tragedy. I find no redemption in murder and gore. I am ashamed that megamedia has wooed ratings and acts like a White House and Pentagon propaganda platoon. I am disappointed that my profession spreads war fever and helps whip up a nationalist frenzy for fiasco and folly. But I am not surprised. Journalists have always been scavengers of pain and tragedy.

Tuesday, 1/29/91

George Bush abdicated the social responsibility of government in his State of the Nation speech tonight, and put the burden of social stability and eradication of poverty on the shoulders of the individual, which is of course the firmament of the national ideology but is also the precept of winner take all, screw everybody else.

I am a strong believer in individual reliance but I believe its purpose is to assist community not rape or abandon it, which is Bush's underlying message: fend for yourselves, expect no help from the disaffected wealthy who are seceding from their national responsibilities after acquiring their riches at the expense of almost everybody else.

Perhaps eventually the self-reliant individual might be aware s/he is a sacrificial victim to wealth's socialism, such as are the hundreds of thousands of Americans (*et al*) poised to kill and die to maintain lines of supply to the corporate elites whose decline would be precipitate without their petroleum.

Wednesday, 1/30/91

Twelve U.S. Marines have been killed in a ground battle in Saudi Arabia attempting to repulse an Iraqi armor and infantry attack on a frontier port, Khafji. The Marines were (as I am not surprised) the first Allied ground troops to die in the Gulf War.

I spent much of today rewriting and typesetting an article for the Feb '91 NCTE. The article is a strong dissent against the war in the Persian Gulf. A few key paragraphs are:

"Perhaps the past can be dismissed as irrelevant, but we cannot live outside history. We are what we are as a result of our history. We are a proud and warlike nation, and we believe that our way of life is on the march, that our ideological genes will be grafted onto the global DNA and transform the world into our cultural replica. With virtual dissolution of our ideological nemesis (the USSR) we now surge forth as missionary warriors into the power vacuum left by the end of the Cold War. Simply settling in peaceful coexistence is not enough, has never been enough. This is the 'New World Order', the military dominance of world affairs by the United States. This is what the war against Iraq is all about. Not only do we intrude our power of 'protection' (an old Mafia activity) into new areas of the world, such as the broken fragments of the Soviet empire, but also conduct a post-Cold War cleanup of dangerous former allies who have been armed to the teeth as bulwarks against our deflated rival and now pose a threat with their subsidized war machines.

"Looking at history through only the bloody prism of war is to miss much of the best of it — yet war shapes nations and individuals; much of what each claims as heritage and honor is bequeathed by war. Waging war is a nation's most serious business...

"The U.S. gloats in its reigning superpower status and acts in the old Roman way, inflicting its immense capacity for war upon the world, which is its major offering to the 'New World Order'. The imperial fabric is tearing apart, primarily due to its own internal rapacity that has put the nation at the brink of ruin.

"The hundreds of billions of dollars of public money wasted on the military at the expense of its own civic disintegration in the holy names of defense and national security have altered the nation's international status on the open market; no longer the world's foremost producer of goods and the lion of trade, the U.S. is instead the planet's largest debtor nation with only a huge 'police force' as interest.

"We are a defective colossus. Our economy is coming undone, yet this war must be paid for. Taxes will be raised, more money will be looted from already prostrate social programs, and increased borrowing from more cash-fattened nations will probably be necessary to prop up and replenish our hugely expensive war machine. In the meantime domestic poverty will increase, the society will continue to disintegrate into fragmented polarities...

"Perhaps after the war is finished and the shock of its costs and consequences numb the current rally around the flag frenzy, many more American citizens might wish they had been more sympathetic to voices of protest they this moment spurn or even denounce as traitors. 'How empty, how sickish, how senseless everything suddenly seems when a war is over,' Edmund Wilson once wrote."

And a couple of other paragraphs:

"Dissent in this country against the Gulf War has been craftily undermined with the virtual decree that everyone must support American troops in the Gulf whether or not they support the war. That is rather like saying one can deplore the deed but praise the doer; in this case, taking offense at the killing should not interfere with cheering on the killers. There is no little bit of schizophrenia here, and once again the Vietnam War is misconstrued. The shabby treatment Vietnam veterans received is invoked as a *causa belli* to condone war in the Gulf through patriotic sympathy for those who are waging it. Much abuse has been heaped upon the antiwar movement of the Vietnam era for

perceived contempt for veterans and though that certainly occurred the greater antipathy for Vietnam veterans was exhibited by the government itself in its denial of Agent Orange claims, its stinginess with the G.I. Bill and its refusal to tend to the medical and psychological problems of the veterans, instead tightening up eligibility for treatment or compensation.

"A people will generally support a war once it is initiated, if for no other reason than they feel there is not much else left for them to do. That support is considered essential for conducting a war to its end in victory or defeat. In this era of the supposed common person the focus of support is upon the average soldier, sailor and airman(woman), who are not responsible for the wars they fight in but who make them possible. Bellicose war fever is whipped up to discourage questions of a war's purpose or cost, and to disguise the contradiction that supporting a soldier's warlike duty is a sure method of killing or injuring him (or her). Paradoxically, this support leaves the soldiers little recourse but to carry out what they perceive to be the public will until they are wounded or die."

A later report today of the dozen dead Marines in Saudi Arabia was that they were killed in error by a U.S. jet that fired a rocket into their tracked combat vehicle.

Sunday, 2/3/91

I have lived through four major wars that the United States has fought. The first was World War 2, in which millions of children died all over the world while I was a spoiled and safe American baby, but I was too young to know anything that was occurring until I was much older and became fixated in my early teens in the 1950s with the war and read hardly anything else except World War 2 subjects. I dreamed constantly of being a soldier of the early '40s, but as I grew older I realized how much I would dislike being a wartime combatant.

The second war was Korea. I stuck pins into maps of Korea after reading accounts of the war in the daily press, a rather pathetic imitation of the global battlefield maps the kids of World War 2 covered their bedroom walls with. At least I was conscious that a war was being fought, and though I had little understanding of its purpose, and at my age no concept of murky complexities and political betrayals of soldierly sacrifice, I was able to trace its tactical perplexity in fluid lines that revealed war as an existential exercise of huge wastefulness.

The third war was one in which I spent a few months, a year (1966-67) that usually receives little mention in histories of the Vietnam War. I witnessed and participated in several bloody episodes that revealed the worst aspects of warfare, yet the year of my awakening to chilling reality is of sparse consequence in the larger maps of the war. My experience in the desperate and willfully mutual butchery by otherwise decent persons metamorphosed my opinion of warfare into a bitter antipathy for organized mass murder. As a result I battled as a peace soldier and organizer of former soldiers in the war against the war.

Now I am once more on the homefront as a war erupts in the Middle East, hopelessly witness to the pathologically

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.

savage howls for the blood of others, represented by innocuous yellow ribbons.

Sunday, 2/10/91

I acted as a participant this afternoon in a radio debate about the war in the Persian Gulf. The program lasted two hours on KMUN, and there were four of us in front of the microphones, with a moderator accepting phone calls from listeners who made their own comments and asked us questions.

My companion in dissent was a woman from Seaside, the mother of a young man whose nuclear submarine might have fired the first missile of the Gulf War. She is passionately critical of the war and has organized with her husband antiwar rallies and marches on the north Oregon coast. Opposing us were two men. The younger man was a member of an anti-abortionist group and his position was that God sanctions the war for Christian control of the Middle East. (Good manners prevented me from asking him a question long on my mind: Why do so many passionate believers in abortion as murder ardently support wars that slaughter human beings on a mass scale?) The last member of the debate was a local slum lord whose younger brother, a Navy admiral, seems to have imperiled his chances for membership in the Joint Chiefs of Staff by opposing the Gulf War.

We spent the two hours amiably exchanging opinions, answering listeners' questions. Afterward I gave copies of the February Times Eagle with its front page opposition to the war to my friend the slumlord and to the young anti-abortionist, who recoiled as if I was putting a snake into his hands.

Sunday, 2/17/91

Today is the 31st day since the war in the Persian Gulf began. I marked my debut as a recycled antiwar speaker this afternoon at a small rally in Seaside. I was the eighth speaker in a crowd of eleven. All of us were asked to keep our remarks short, and as anyone would expect, the second person on the platform sermonized about God long beyond acceptable limits. By the time he pronounced that we in the half-asleep crowd knew nothing about eternity, all of us seemed ready to respond that he had just forced us to endure it.

Two high school girls spoke about their reasons for opposing the war; one of them burst into tears and stepped aside. I followed a chorus of small schoolchildren from a private high-toned liberal and open-ended elementary school on Neah-kahnie Mountain. I spoke about the bloody trap enthusiastic homefront support for the troops in the Middle East represents. A cold wet wind blew in from the ocean when I walked to a make-shift stage set just above a river that flows through downtown Seaside. The rally was in a "park" that consists of a jigsaw of wooden piers above the river just behind the city's main street. Quilts of clouds enfolded the sun as they smoothly blanketed the sky. I pitched my voice against the wind, loud enough for a few hecklers standing on a balcony outside a bar that borders the park to hear. My theme was enlarged from my earlier article in the NCTE, "Manifest Destiny Meets The Sword Of Allah" and devoted primarily to deceptions surrounding blind support of American troops in the Persian Gulf.

I told the small crowd of about 100 that I was a writer instead of an orator and hoped they would forgive a prepared manuscript. I identified myself as a Vietnam veteran and a member and organizer for the Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Then I started reading my usually indecipherable handwriting on yellow-lined sheets of legal-sized notebook paper:

Samuel Johnson said that patriotism was the last refuge of a scoundrel. Ambrose Bierce, though he did not wish to disagree with Dr. Johnson, thought patriotism was the first refuge of a scoundrel.

We are at present assaulted by a bellicose form of patriotism that usually accompanies the beginnings of wars. The demand is that all Americans support the troops who have been sent halfway around the world to fight a war against a desert despot. No matter how anyone might regard the purpose or conduct of the war, everyone who is not cheerleading for the troops is highly suspect of lacking One Nation Under God patriotism.

Protest against the war in the Persian Gulf is severely undermined by the schizophrenic war cheer for the warriors. The movement for peace is immediately on the defense to prove its patriotism through affirmation of support for those who are engaged in something the war's opponents abhor and openly protest. Even religious doctrine that urges forgiveness of the sinner though not the crime does not make such an extreme demand upon us. To forgive a sinner is to acknowledge a crime. We are urged to prove our Americanism by separating our feelings about the war from those who make it possible — by actually approving of them separate from what they do.

In the short term this strategy has shown success. Support of the troops is confused with approval of the war — and in converse, criticism of the war implies disapproval of the troops. Opponents of the war are accused of betrayal of the troops, and specters of hairy creatures spitting upon returning Vietnam veterans are shamelessly lacerated upon the public conscience. The image is distorted. The government's shameful treatment of Vietnam veterans is obscured. Even now the government cuts veterans benefits by millions of dollars while pointing the public eyes toward the soldiers, sailors and pilots who are the hammer of superpower policy.

A major problem with all of this intense support is that it virtually guarantees the wounds and deaths of the troops so ardently cherished by mass rallies of flagwaving citizens who also tie yellow ribbons around the homefront.

This enthusiastic outpouring of love and support for the American G.I. might act instead as a relentless advancing wall that pushes the troops into irreversible horror at the same time it crushes underneath its cheering warcries any who would conscientiously object. The soldiers would feel compelled to carry out what they see to be the public mandate, and in the belief that any doubts of their own would be met with disapproval they would do their duty at whatever cost. They will fight until they die or fall wounded, urged on by the impatiently cheering homefront.

If it is urged we are really concerned with here — then we must realize with clearheaded honesty that there is only one way to support the troops: to remove them from harm's way and return them home alive and unharmed. That means, for all of us who profess to be concerned about the lives of our countrymen and women, is to press for an end to the war that threatens to maim or kill them.

Then when G.I. Joe & Josephine return home we can show our support by opening up our society for them to live and prosper. We will give them a good G.I. Bill. We will extend unconditional medical and health services. We will honor the bargain we offered: time in service to the nation will be fairly rewarded. A large percentage of the Americans on the ground in Saudi Arabia are men and women who enlisted in the armed forces as a better chance at sharing in the American way of life