

NORTH COAST



TIMES EAGLE

MAY/JUNE 2004

'In a dark time the eye begins to see'
—THEODORE ROETHKE

50CENTS VOL25NO7



DEAD SOLDIER / SHATTERED LOCUST-HUSK
LEGS BLOWN AWAY / GRIPPING RIFLE

H03

ROGER HAYES

DO DEAD SOLDIERS HAVE SOULS?

BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

"May is the 6th annual National Military Appreciation Month—and with 440 thousand military now deployed overseas, it has special significance. Public events are scheduled across the country."

—PARADE MAGAZINE 4/25/2004

"Why should we hear about body bags and deaths...it's not relevant. So why should I waste my beautiful mind on something like that."

—BARBARA BUSH
(*'GOOD MORNING AMERICA'*, 3/18/2003)

Americans seem to want to make war but not be exposed (or responsible) for its consequences. Support for the troops is a warcry that enforces their continuance at war rather than returning them home alive — and it serves to disparage their deaths when they return home in flag-draped coffins. Any public display of the coffins is criticized as debasing the honored dead.

The Pentagon has closed a brief window that allowed a glimpse of coffins of American war dead from Iraq, citing that it is not "policy" to permit public display or access to the dead, or for that matter to the wounded who stream back to the USA like spring runoff. The policy, Pentagon spokespeople say, is to "respect the privacy of the families" of the dead — yet the real purpose behind this banal sophistry might more truthfully be to protect, as Joyce Maynard writes, "the delicate sensitivities of the ruling class as Americans die to build them an empire."

The Pentagon is notorious for dissembling the horrors it perpetrates. Almost from the time the Pentagon was built in 1943, the War Department (Mars) was given a name change as well as a facelift, becoming the Defense Department (Mother) — and the more disingenuously it acted in the half century Cold War that immediately succeeded World War 2, the more necessary its contradictions required unctuous dissimulation. In recent wars American war casualty tolls are manipulated to obscure their numbers, while inflated casualty counts of an enemy are increasingly relied upon as the measurement of success. Even the body bags are euphemized: they are now referred to as "transport containers."

Americans should not be allowed to simply view the coffins of their war dead, but compelled to see the blasted, dismembered bodies inside to witness exactly what we continece (despite claims of righteousness)

when we give free hand to make war. And perhaps it would be even more pertinent for Americans to also see the Iraqi dead our war has produced, as Germans were ordered by the Allies to view the masses of dead of liberated deathcamps at the end of World War 2.

Unlike the German people, who could claim no political rights or freedoms other than obedience to the state during the Nazi reign, Americans are constitutionally in charge of their government and are responsible for its doings in their name — and are obliged to pressure their leaders rather than be coerced when they start acting Hitleresque.

An essential reason war is universally abhorred and cautiously perpetrated is the rise of mass media that has chronicled global aversion toward warfare by ordinary folk who suffer most from it.

History records the lives and affairs of kings and generals, and of course their interminable wars. The hundreds of millions of common people impressed into wars and whose homes, towns, occupations and lives were decimated by them have been ignored until only recently — and only because early mass media began linking their concerns and pandering to them to sell newspapers.

The only purpose for armies is the destruction of other human beings. Soldiering is big business, the first order of every empire as it has been since ancient times, but soldiers themselves are little more than expendable pawns, readily discarded.

Without soldiers there would be no wars. No Caesars, no Napoleons, no Hitlers. Soldiers kill, rape, pillage, burn, and if they are unlucky, stupid or badly led, they die.

Support for the soldiers acts contrarily as a relentless goad that pushes troops into irreversible horror at the same time the cheering warcries crush any who would conscientiously object.

The soldiers feel compelled to carry out what they perceive as public mandate, and in the belief that any personal doubts would be met with disapproval, they do their duty at whatever cost.

Yet the soldiers we are exhorted to uncritically support can be turned against us, ordered to suppress dissent and round up political activists. In times like these such repressive use of soldiers could have wide popular support.

Quite a few people think dissent is improper once a war is started and refuse to believe it is more necessary than ever — their point is that dissent succors an enemy and betrays American troops fighting the war.

Yet, as realized by the Vietnam War, dissent is the only way to stop questionable wars. Dissenters are not responsible for the misuse of the lives of soldiers. The people who start wars are.

The war parties always attempt to capture patriotism as their own, and portray dissent against their wars as sedition and disloyalty. But dissent is the true act of patriotism and a more sensible way to support the troops than dispatching them into horror.

America's self-styled 'War President' is essentially a deserter who utilized preferential treatment to stay out of a war he supported but did not feel compelled to serve in. He is a fervent believer in "American exceptionalism" and veins his discussion of the war on terrorism as a "divine mission" and the "language of righteous empire." He says "I believe God wants me to be President," and that "our rights were derived from God."

A true millenarian whose holy grail is to decimate in the name of God other millenarians who are of different cultures, races and creeds. He portrays opponents of his righteous war (and his Presidency) as heretics and traitors to one nation under God. Our ancestors, the traitors who conceived the nation, feared someone like him would rise to power and did what they could to prevent the militant theocracy he espouses with their own secular set of ten commandments, the Bill of Rights — which he of course disdains.

National Military Appreciation Month is low-scale agitprop that boilerplates the President's militant ministry. Its ironic yet fittingly tragic finale is commemoration of the heaps of war dead on Memorial Day.

MEMORIAL DAY

a black granite wall to rest against
each name an act calling for a re-write
50,000 times rendered under Caesar
50,000 rendered like hot fat on the stove.

—LARRY KERSCHNER