

CAMOUFLAGED BLUES

BY RAY PARRISH

Thinking of enlisting in the U.S. military?

I am the military and veterans' counselor at Vietnam Veterans Against the War. I started doing veterans' counseling in 1976. My father, my mother, and I were NCOs in the United States Air Force. I have also been a mental health caseworker and an American Legion veterans' service officer.

The most important advice I can give you is to follow your conscience. That's what I tell the soldiers who call me for help. I've learned that the veterans with the most disabling post-traumatic disorder (PTSD) are the ones with guilty consciences. In order to survive combat, they were forced to do things that they now think were wrong. You need to listen to these veterans, learn from their experience, and avoid a guilty conscience and a lifetime of nightmares. A wiser man once said, "Recovering from a war is an ascent from hell."

The decision to enlist in the military is the most important decision you will ever make. It will determine the course of the rest of your life. I wish that you had another decade of life experiences you could look at, so that your decision could be better informed. You don't, so listen to the veterans. Think about what it would be like to have to take orders from everybody with more rank. To have your schedule decided for you 24 hours a day. To be in situations where you feel forced to commit evil.

First of all, President Bush thinks everyone who enlists is willing to kill and die at his command. Are you? Do you really want to be a part of his wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, or his perpetual "global war on terror," with future attacks on Iran and Venezuela? If so, go! But be careful, and remember that you can always call me if you need help of any kind. If current American foreign policy makes you uneasy you should wait for it to change before enlisting.

After listening to thousands of vets, I know that all veterans say that they enlisted to defend our freedoms and families and that this is the only cause worth killing and dying for. Since the last real world war — 60 years ago — American GIs have been discovering that the real reason for the particular conflict, "police action," "humanitarian relief," or war had nothing to do with protecting our country. We were deceived by our leaders into sacrificing our lives for their personal, political or economic gain. Now we warn the next generation to beware.

After a lifetime of military training and conditioning and my father's second year in Vietnam, I was a 17 year old warrior wannabe. I became disillusioned after the students were killed at Kent State and Jackson State. I realized I was just cannon fodder after heart-to-heart conversations with Vietnam vets I met while I was doing volunteer work at a medical-evacuation hospital in Japan, where I went to high school. It wasn't the horror stories they told me that hit me. It was them! They had been changed from my older schoolmates, who had marched off to war to protect me, into zombies. They were guilt-ridden and filled with rage and violence. They convinced me that theirs was a group I didn't want to belong to! So I joined the USAF, got trained in Russian, and worked as an intelligence analyst for the National Security Agency. I served in Turkey during their war with Greece over Cyprus and the 1973 Arab/Israeli War.

Even with the GI Bill and free tuition, I needed a part-time job to make it through college, and the VA's work-study program would do it. I used my motorcycle to do "outreach" to Vietnam vets hiding from life in the Shawnee National Forest, and I taught myself veterans' counseling. Helping combat vets, like my new brother-in-law at that time, was very rewarding, but it was also draining.

By 1981, just as many Vietnam vets had committed suicide as had been killed in the war. Why? Because combat-induced post-traumatic disorder was only finally recognized as a disability by the medical establishment that year. It would be years before veterans (and their children born with birth defects)



got treatment and compensation for the diseases caused by exposure to the herbicide Agent Orange, which was used in Vietnam.

Vets felt abandoned and couldn't get help from anybody but themselves. While the war was still going on, it was VVAW that set up veterans "rap groups" so that vets could deal with PTSD. These later became the VA's "vet centers," which handled only mental health problems. And VVAW was the only veterans group to support the VA workers who blew the whistle on the VA's Agent Orange coverup. The U.S. government knew for years that Agent Orange was killing vets and causing birth defects in their children.

If you go, be prepared to pay a heavy price. You will bear most of the costs of this war personally, and it may take

A DARK DAY

History will record October 17, 2006, as a very dark day for democracy and the human rights on which all of democracy is based. President George W. Bush signed the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act of 2007 and the Military Commissions Act (MCA) of 2006. These laws give the President powers staggering in their scope.

MCA has received quite a bit of media coverage. It is the law that suspends habeas corpus protections and allows torture. Habeas corpus is the ancient law protecting against unlawful detention, without which an individual can be held incommunicado for an indefinite time, without court review.

Thomas Jefferson said, "The habeas corpus secures every man here, alien or citizen, against everything which is not law, whatever shape it may assume." Jefferson said on another occasion, "I would rather be exposed to the inconveniences attending too much liberty than to those attending too small a degree of it." With this bill, the United States Senate reverses that profound judgment of history, chooses against liberty, and succumbs to fear.

Deep in the text is buried a presidential gift. Section 1076 makes it easy for the President to declare martial law. The Insurrection Act has historically, along with the Posse Comitatus Act, helped to enforce strict prohibitions on military involvement in domestic law enforcement.

The President no longer needs a request from a state's governor, or legislature, or other local government official, not even Congress. At his discretion and over their objections, he can declare an emergency and bring the armed forces, including the National Guard, into a state to perform law enforcement activities.

Habeas Corpus, Posse Comitatus, The Insurrection Act, Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, martial law, War Crimes Act, enemy combatants, Abu Graib, extraordinary rendition, Detainee Treatment Act of 2005, secret CIA prisons, Military Commissions Act of 2006, and uncountable other embarrassments and assaults make me fear for America.

~JEROME ARNOLD

Jerome Arnold is newly elected member of the Cannon Beach City Council.

years for some of the bills to come due. First, 56% of the 1991 Persian Gulf War veterans are already on disability, and 11% have died. There are a lot of reasons why today's wars are causing such widespread and severe physical and mental injuries to the soldiers who fight them. In addition to dying or being maimed in combat or by accidents, deadly pesticides and chemicals and experimental anti-malarial and anti-chemical weapons drugs sometimes disable or kill. The deadliest killers are DU and PTSD. Second, Bush is selling bonds to finance the war that won't come due for payment for thirty years.

DU is depleted uranium. It's the still-radioactive remains of fuel rods from nuclear power plants that are no longer hot enough to boil water. It kills and causes birth defects. Armor-piercing shells are coated with it, and it's used in the armor on American vehicles. Millions of tons of this cancer-causing element have been released into the air. Millions of people in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo have inhaled and ingested particles of it, and thousands have died or become disabled by it. The military's coverup of DU continues.

Half of all veterans need treatment for combat- or rape-induced PTSD or other service-connected mental disorders. Despite expectations of a 25% increase in new requests for PTSD treatment, the VA is budgeting for a 3% increase this year and cutbacks for the next four. The severity of the depression or anxiety can be disabling. There are veterans who haven't had a decent night's sleep for thirty, forty or fifty years because of the memories. And there are many who aren't around because they couldn't stand the nightmares for another day.

PTSD comes from what was done to you and what you did. It comes from enduring the threat of death 24/7 for months on end. It comes from seeing buddies get injured or die horrible deaths. It comes from surviving. It comes from killing an innocent civilian accidentally, or as part of "collateral damage." It comes from realizing that killing anyone for lies, oil, and politics is a sin and may be seen by the world as a war crime. It comes from being raped by a fellow GI. It comes from regretting that you didn't do more to stop an atrocity. It comes when you realize that "even a cook" contributes to the bloodshed. It comes from seeing a future for yourself without an arm or a leg. It comes from being involuntarily activated after being out of the military for years. It comes from being kept on active duty past the date on your enlistment contract because of "military necessity," or from thinking that the only way home is in a body bag. It comes from not being allowed to use your educational benefits because your commander thinks you're too busy. It comes from worrying about how your family is worrying about you and suffering because of your absence. It comes from not being allowed to take care of family problems because the military "needs you more." It comes from being denied help by the local VA because they can't find your military medical records, or they can't figure out what is causing your medical problems, or they're just too busy.

When you hear some veterans say that we should "stay the course," remember they are a minority. Reliable polls show that 72% of the troops in Iraq say we should have got out by the end of 2006, and the media rarely shows troops who don't support the war.

I realize that after you finish reading this, there will still be plenty of reasons to enlist. If nothing else, think of your family. Your family will have to deal with worries during your service — and if you don't survive, the empty chair at the dinner will remind them every day. When I was in basic training my father supported my efforts to stay out of Vietnam, but not because he no longer supported the war. He said his major concern was not forcing my mother to endure another year of worrying.

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