

Traveling Soldier

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Free To Service Men and Women

December 2010

Donations Welcome

Issue 33

"A War With No Clear Objective"

Letters To The Editor

Army Times

August 23, 2010

Featured on the cover of Time magazine this month is the picture of a disfigured Afghan woman, the result of Taliban cruelty.

As upsetting as the image may be, I wonder what the result would be if they covered their pages with pictures of disfigured soldiers, parentless children and shattered families.

The result would be more anger over a war with no clear objective, no clear borders and no one clearly in control.

Why are they building permanent barracks and facilities in a country we are planning on leaving?

Why do high-paid civilian contractors stand around watching Afghan workers make three dollars a day, doing all of the labor?

Why do U.S. soldiers wait for hours in line to use a phone or computer in a Morale, Welfare and Recreation facility? They do be-



cause it is packed with contractors. The same contractors who treat us like second-class citizens in the bubble of security we provide.

In the wake of revelations about misplaced funds throughout the war, why is no one answering for this?

I'm sorry that bad things happen in the world. But it's hard for me to care when my own chil-

dren suffer emotional trauma because of my deployments. And where is the money for the counseling they are supposed to receive?

It's in the bank account of the clean civilian contractor who looks down on me from his SUV as he blows dirt all over my buddies and me while we wait for a bus to take us to chow.

Staff Sgt. Stephen Rogers
Big Rock, Tenn.

“We Should Just End It. Bring The Troops Home”

[Thanks to Michael Letwin, New York City Labor Against The War & Military Resistance, who sent this in.]

September 18, 2010 By Peter Slevin, Washington Post Staff Writer [Excerpts]

ELKHART, IND. - The Afghan war began more than half a lifetime ago for the teenagers in Adam Meyers's world history class.

“We should just end it. Bring the troops home,” said Ashley Ivory, 17, who thinks the war is doing nothing to stop terrorists. “They’re just sneaking in here while we’re over there. We don’t have enough eyes.”

The views of the students and the community around them echo a growing national skepticism about U.S. involvement in a distant war that will soon enter its 10th year and register its 1,270th U.S. casualty.

A majority of Americans say the war has not been worth its cost, an opinion voiced frequently in Elkhart, a hard-luck town that sees the conflict through the lens of loss and economic hardship.

Meyers and his students have a particular reason to reflect. Army Spec. Justin B. Shoecraft, 28, who attended Elkhart Memorial High School with Meyers, was killed late last month by a

roadside bomb, barely a month after he reached Afghanistan.

When his mother in Elkhart heard the news, she screamed, then fainted.

As combat deaths reached new monthly highs this year, 69 of the 301 U.S. soldiers killed in Afghanistan came from a dozen Midwestern states. Among the home towns of the fallen in the past month are Creve Coeur, Ill.; Mulvane, Kan.; Papillion, Neb.; Prairie du Sac, Wis.; White, S.D. And, on the morning of Aug. 24, Elkhart, Ind.

Disapproval of the war was once rare.

“I Never Wanted My Son To Be A Little Old Obituary In The Paper,’ Donna Shoecraft Explains, Still Reeling From The Shock”

When President George W. Bush ordered the invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, four weeks after the Twin Towers fell, American support for the overthrow of the Taliban was strong. Ninety-one percent of Americans supported the war at the end of its second month, 79 percent of them “strongly,” according to a Washington Post-ABC News poll.

This July, however, the number seeing the war as worth it dropped to 43 percent, with 53 percent saying the costs

outweighed the benefits.

Even people who think U.S. troops should keep fighting tend to say so in reluctant tones.

“We’re stuck. I just wish we could pull out, but we can’t,” said Becky Cole, an office manager having a drink recently at the Bulldog, a restaurant in east Elkhart. “The one thing I hate about it is we’ve been there nine years.”

“I never wanted my son to be a little old obituary in the paper,” Donna Shoecraft explains, still reeling from the shock.

When she learned that Justin was heading to Afghanistan to fight, she tried to talk him out of it, telling him, “You go over there, you’re going to be in nothing but dirt, mud and sand.”

She and her husband, Carroll, known as “Blue,” don’t know what inspired Justin to enlist in his mid-20s. Maybe the fact that he had always wanted to drive a tank. Maybe the bonus money and the chance to leave northern Indiana. A few months earlier, his mother had forbidden him from traveling to London. Too dangerous to visit such a big city alone, she said.

“We’re just old factory people,” Donna Shoecraft says.

Blue wears an enormous gray beard and punches the clock at a local machine shop. On Sundays, he works at the local drag strip. He spends his

spare time collecting Schwinn bicycles and fixing up old cars, most recently a '27 Dodge coupe, now a gleaming yellow.

After finishing high school in 2001, Justin Shoecraft showed little interest in the military recruiting pitches that came his way. He spent six years hefting boxes for UPS. "Big heart, do anything for you," said Kevin Doctor, who often gave him a ride to work. "Real mild-mannered, head down. The kind of guy who flew under the radar."

He married his girlfriend the day before he left for basic training.

When a pair of soldiers appeared unannounced at the

Shoecrafts' front door the other day, Donna Shoecraft screamed so loudly that neighbors four houses away heard her.

The war that she had long doubted finally broke her heart.

"Why are we there? Why are we eventhere?" she asked a few days later, the shock still fresh. "Start taking care of our own people."

From the front door of his secondhand shop down the street, Don Fisher watches the comings and goings at the Shoecrafts' home. He was fond of Justin and considers Blue Shoecraft a real friend. But he has not stopped by.

"I need to go down and hug

him, and I just can't bring myself to do it," Fisher said. "Because I know that when I do, I'm going to cry, too."

Fisher is an Army veteran who voted twice for George W. Bush and backed Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) over Obama.

Although polls show stronger support for the war among Republicans than Democrats, Fisher says he always considered the Afghan war unwinnable.

The billions in taxpayer dollars should be spent on "people who are sleeping under bridges or living out of food banks," he said.

The Politicians Won't Talk About The War: "But For The Olechnys, Avoidance Is Not An Option"

[Thanks to Phil G, who sent this in.]

November 2, 2010 By Faye Fiore and Mark Z. Barabak, Los Angeles Times [Excerpts]

Reporting from Marydel, Del., and Los Angeles

It's easy to tell 1st Sgt. Patrick Olechny is away.

The freezer is stocked with single-serving dinners.

The TV is off and, at nearly 8 p.m., the living room is dark.



Veda Olechny's husband, 1st Sgt. Patrick Olechny, is on his fourth tour of combat duty. (Carolyn Cole / Los Angeles Times, November 1, 2010)

Olechny is at war in Afghanistan, on his fourth tour of combat duty. His wife, Veda, is waiting for his return — in time for Thanksgiving, she prays each night.

War sets the rhythm for military families like theirs: Home by 9, in case he beeps on Skype. Cell-phone charged, in case he calls.

No point buying pot roast; she can't finish it herself.

In this turbulent election season — amid the talk of “tea parties” and the economy and President Obama’s approval rating and the fight to control Congress and bailouts and deficits and fear and anger — there is little mention of Afghanistan or Iraq.

“I hate to say we’ve moved on, but politically and from an election standpoint there’s nobody out there trying to prosecute this as an issue,” said Evan Tracey, whose Campaign Media Analysis Group tracks political advertising nationwide.

“There’s no discussion in any detail in any campaign that I’ve seen at any level, state or federal.”

Even here in the shadow of Dover Air Force Base, where the coffins come home, the political conversation is not about war but witchcraft — a youthful dalliance of Republican Senate hopeful Christine O’Donnell — and whether her Democratic rival, Chris Coons, was only joking when he described himself in a college essay as “a bearded Marxist.”



Veda doesn’t blame people for their inattention. They have troubles of their own. “People are busy with their lives because of the economy. It’s understandable,” she says. “A wife sitting at home waiting for a soldier to finish deployment, that’s her focus every day. You want to tell people about it, then you realize they really aren’t interested.”

Amid the talk of “tea parties”, there is little mention of Afghanistan or Iraq.

The United States is now in the ninth year of the longest conflict in its history, fought by 150,000 troops on the ground in Afghanistan and Iraq at a cost of more than \$1 trillion.

That is considerably more than the ultimate price of the much-debated Troubled Asset Relief Program, which bailed out automakers, banks and a handful of insurers.

Yet neither party has much incentive to discuss the fighting half a world away.

Democrats are pleased with the winding down of U.S. involvement in Iraq, but divided over Obama’s decision to escalate efforts in Afghanistan; they don’t want to pile onto a president already in political trouble.

Republicans, unhappy with Obama’s opposition to the Iraq war when he ran for president, tend to agree with his approach in Afghanistan; but they aren’t about to praise the Democratic commander in chief in the middle of the midterm campaign.

But for the Olechnys, avoidance is not an option.

He’s 57, she’s 56.

They live in a double-wide trailer on two acres they bought 37 years ago on the Maryland-Delaw-

are border. They grew up on the Delaware side, where chickens outnumber people 300 to 1.

He used to chase her around the playground in grade school. At 16, she was engaged. At 17, he joined the Army and went to Vietnam. She wrote him every day.

They married as soon as he returned, before she even graduated.

unteered to go to Bosnia. Who goes to war at 43? And where is Bosnia? Veda was confused. Nine weeks later he came home in one piece. "I told him if he ever did that again I would divorce him," she remembers, laughing.

Years passed.

Then came Sept. 11, 2001, followed by the war in Iraq.

In the summer of 2004, Olechny's unit was called. "I swear

get on a plane and go," said Norbert R. Ryan Jr., a retired Navy vice admiral and president of the Virginia-based Military Officers Assn. of America.

"Out of sight, out of mind."

For members of the National Guard and Reserves — civilians like Olechny called up for war — the isolation seems even more acute.

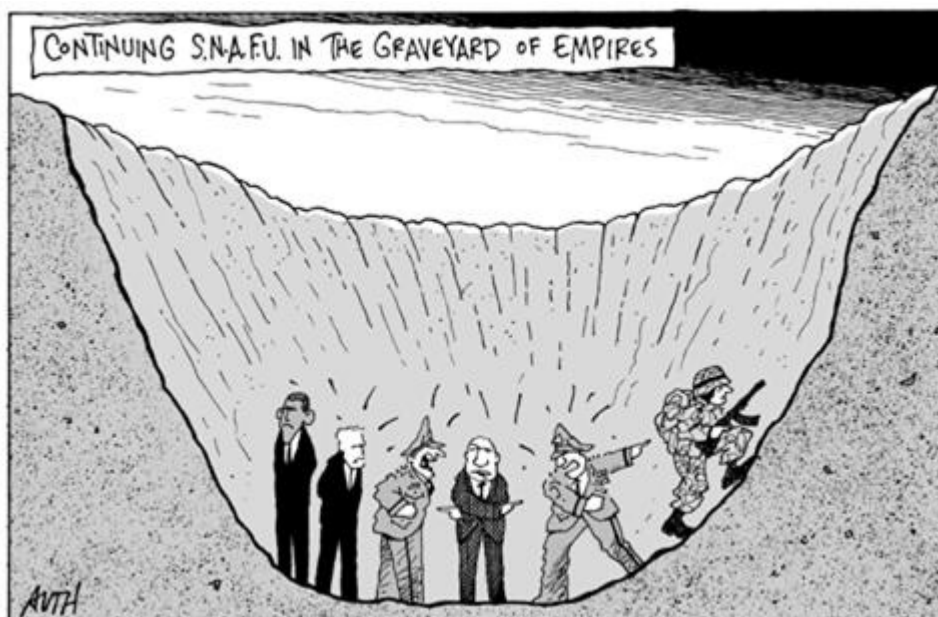
They are sprinkled throughout 3,000 or so communities across the country, attached to no base, no military housing, no ready group of people like them.

Veda can count on one hand the number of military households in Marydel, population 1,117, a half-hour drive from Dover. Amish buggies are a more familiar site than Army uniforms.

When her husband left, she slept in his T-shirt for weeks.

"I cried an awful lot," she says, lighting a cigarette in the dining room, which serves as a shrine to her husband's service and reflects her efforts to stay busy. His first of two bronze stars is in a curio cabinet. The patriotic birdhouse she painted is a centerpiece.

In the months after the Iraq war began, the country was flush with patriotism and there seemed no end of support for the 1% of Americans fighting for everybody else. Soon enough, the military was showing the strain of multiple deployments



Veda figured her husband's combat days were over, and for 25 years they were.

He trained in Vietnam to fix helicopters, which proved a valuable skill back home. He was hired by the Army National Guard as a civilian mechanic. He also joined the Guard, which meant a weekend a month of soldiering and two weeks in the summer. She was OK with that.

Then in 1996, at age 43, he vol-

unteered, "I did not volunteer," he told her. It didn't matter. He had a skill his country needed. At 51, he was headed back to war.

The way the military is structured, service members and their families can be inconspicuous. The active-duty force is tucked away on far-off installations — Ft. Hood on the plains of Texas, Ft. Benning in the piney woods of Georgia.

"They train in remote areas, then

and a vicious ground war: amputations, traumatic brain injuries, rising rates of suicide, divorce, prescription drug addiction.

The year her husband spent in Iraq, Veda lived alone for the first time ever.

Their son, P.J., was married and on his own. The separation was different from Olechny's time in Vietnam. Back then, with no cellphones or e-mail, Veda's only connection was the nightly news -- and she stayed glued. This time, she wanted nothing to do with war coverage that would only upset her. She drove straight home from her job as a unit manager at a credit card company and waited.

"I lived around his phone calls, stayed home instead of going out, afraid I would miss him," she says. When she knew his unit was flying a mission, and he didn't check in, she e-mailed: "Car 54, where are you?"

In 2005, Olechny came home to a yard studded with yellow ribbons and flags, four volunteer fire trucks and a gantlet of friends. "I told the general, 'That's it,'" Veda said, already planning her husband's retirement and the traveling they would do.

The retirement lasted two weeks.

Aviation mechanics were in higher demand than ever for two wars that depend on aircraft to move troops and supplies and transport casualties. Olechny was asked back to his

civilian job to fix helicopters part time. He stayed in the Guard, determined to serve 40 years.

In December, his unit — Company A 3/238 Aviation Battalion — was called to Afghanistan. Veda didn't bother to try to talk him out of it: "It gets in their blood."

It took a month before their dogs, Butchie and Mattie, stopped waiting for him at the door.

When the phone rings with campaign calls, Veda hangs up. No candidate is talking about a war she can't stop thinking about. She's not even sure she'll vote Tuesday.

This spring, Patrick Olechny will have met his goal of 40 years of service and Veda will have seen him through four wars.

She has grown from a love-struck



A member of the Kentucky Air National Guard lifts his son before boarding a plane with a Kentucky Air National Guard unit departing for Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan, on Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2010, at the National Guard base at Louisville, Ky., International Airport. (AP Photo/The Courier-Journal, Bill Luster)

She knew how they felt.

The laptop beeps in the corner of the Olechny dining room and Veda pulls up a chair. It's 9 p.m. A black clock is set for Afghanistan time: 5:30 a.m. Her husband's image from his plywood hut pops up. This is how he starts his day and she ends hers.

schoolgirl writing letters to her "Soldier Boy" (it was their song) to a battle-tested military wife and support group leader helping others hold on. People sometimes tell her that after all this time she must have gotten used to it. Veda shakes her head. "You never get used to it," she says. "You just get through it."

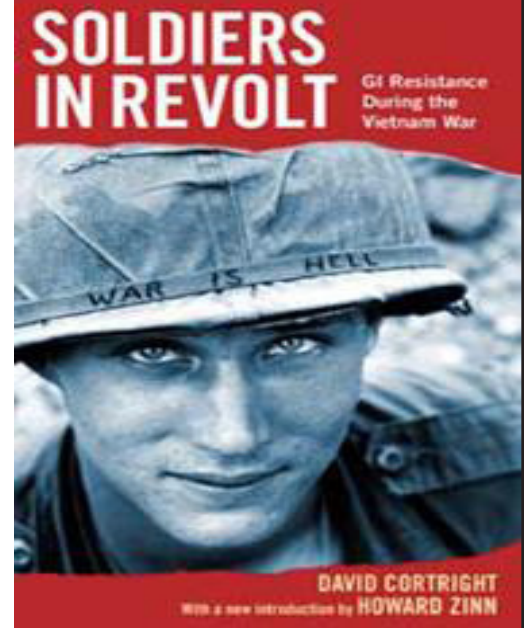
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Troops Invited To Write In

Comments, arguments, articles, and letters from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome.

Write to: Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or send email to Traveling Soldier at contact@militaryproject.org: Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Phone #: 888.711.2550

TRAVELING SOLDIER

Telling the truth - about the occupations or the criminals running the government in Washington - is the first reason for Traveling Soldier.

But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance to Imperial wars inside the armed forces. Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties working-class people inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize resistance within the armed forces. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers. Contact us at

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/>

Traveling Soldier Editorial Board

J. Englehart (Iraq Veteran); P. Binh; F. Bouthillette (USNR, Veteran, Iraq Theatre); A. Winslow; T. Barton
Traveling Soldier is brought to you by the Military Resistance Organization

I say that when troops cannot be counted on to follow orders because they see the futility and immorality of them THAT is the real key to ending a war.-- Al Jaccoma, Veterans For Peace

Military Resistance Ten Points

Mission Statement

1. The mission of Military Resistance is to bring together in one organization members of the armed forces and civilians in order to give aid and comfort to members of the armed forces who are organizing to end the wars of empire in Afghanistan and Iraq. The long term objective is to assist in eliminating all wars of empire by eliminating all empires.

2. Military Resistance does not advocate individual disobedience to orders or desertion from the armed forces. The most effective resistance is organized by members of the armed forces working together.

However, Military Resistance respects and will assist in the defense of troops who see individual desertion or refusal of orders as the only course of action open to them for reasons of conscience.

3. Military Resistance stands for the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of all U.S. and other occupation troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Occupied nations have the right to independence and the right to resist Imperial invasion and occupation by force of arms.

4. Efforts to increase democratic rights in every society, organization, movement, and within the armed forces itself will receive encouragement and support.

Members of the armed forces, whether those of the United States or any other nation, have the right and duty to act against dictatorships commanding their services, and to assist civilian movements against dictatorship.

This applies whether a political dictatorship is imposed by force of arms or a political dictatorship is imposed by those in command of the resources of society using their wealth to purchase the political leadership.

5. Military Resistance uses organizational democracy.

This means control of the organization by the membership, through elected delegates to any coordinating bodies that may be formed, whether at local, regional, or national levels.

Any member may run for any job in the organization. All persons elected are subject to immediate recall, by majority vote of the membership.

Coordinating bodies report their actions, decisions and votes to the membership who elected them, and may be overruled by a majority of the membership.

6. It is not necessary for Military Resistance to be in political agreement with other organizations in order to work together towards specific common objectives.

It is productive for organizations working together on common projects to discuss differences about the best way forward for the movement. Debate is necessary to arrive at the best course of action.

Membership Requirements:

7. It is a condition of membership that each member prioritize and participate in organized action to reach out to active duty armed forces, Reserve and/or National Guard units.

8. Military Resistance or individual members may choose to support candidates for elective office who are for immediate withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, but do not support a candidate opposed to immediate, unconditional withdrawal.

9. Members may not be active duty or drilling reserve commissioned officers, or employed in any capacity by any police or intelligence agency, local, state, or national.

10. I understand and am in agreement with the above statement. I pledge to defend my brothers and sisters, and the democratic rights of the citizens of the United States, against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

Signature

Date

Application Taken/Received By

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Comments:

NOTE: Civilian applicants will be interviewed, in person if possible, or by phone.