

Marketing Enlistment

Military recruiting campaigns are second to none. Strategically informed by sophisticated marketing analysis, the Department of Defense (DoD) spends its time and money in an efficient and effective manner (e.g. DMDC 1999, CYPMR 2003, JAMRS 2004). According to Citizen Soldier's Tod Ensign, "The sophistication of the military's recruiting operation today is comparable to that of a Fortune 500 corporation (Ensign 2004, pg. 7)." From the production of exciting video games such as America's Army (2002) to technical support for blockbuster Hollywood movies (Suid 2002), the military has long recognized the power of popular media among our youth.

As present conflicts continue and casualties mount, enlisting fresh recruits has become a top priority for DoD, which means to expand its reach within our schools, our communities, and the media -- witness recent increases in television, magazine and Internet advertising aimed at teens and their families.

The military's collective recruiting budget for FY2004 was over \$2.7 billion, surpassing presidential election year political advertising expenditures by over \$1 billion (TNS Media Intelligence 2004). Enlisting some 212,000 individuals by year's end, recruitment costs reached \$14,000 per recruit (GAO 2003; Policy Almanac 2004; Saulnier 2004). With a budget of \$3 billion for FY2005, and with the addition of over 1,000 recruiters, we are bound to witness significant increases in recruiting activity overall.

The central recruiting strategy is to portray military enlistment as a desirable choice for one's future or the future of one's children (Ensign 2004, pg. 8). Working in consort with Mullen, a leading advertising firm, DoD's Joint Advertising, Marketing and Research Studies (JAMRS) program focuses on selling qualities "like integrity, perseverance, attention to detail, and commitment . . . [rather than] traditional themes of patriotism and duty . . . [found] less resonant with adult influencers" by leading market research (JAMRS 2004).

Military Mission & Enlistment Facts

The military is not an educational institution, nor is it a social program for character development. The military is charged simply with preparing for and waging war.

Many young people join-up expecting guaranteed job training, money for education, and other benefits. A close reading of the **enlistment contract**, however, reveals that the military actually makes no promises, regardless of what recruiters might suggest. DoD's Enlistment/Reenlistment Document is clear in its intent to protect the government's interests:

Laws and regulations that govern military personnel may change without notice to me. Such changes may affect my status, pay, allowances, benefits, and responsibilities as a member of the Armed Forces REGARDLESS of the provisions of this enlistment/re-enlistment document ((DD Form 4/1, 1998) Sec. 9.5b).

This means the military is not bound by any guarantees to the enlistee, even if they are offered in contract. **The military can change one's job field, pay status, or educational benefits at any time, for any reason, without prior notice.**

As exemplified by recent "stop-loss" measures and large-scale activation of the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR), durations of enlistment lack protections as well. Although recruiters may tell prospective recruits that they can enlist for four (4) years, first-time enlistees must agree to serve a total of eight (8) years (Sec. 10.a). Moreover, the military can, without one's consent, extend active duty obligations during times of conflict, "national emergency," or when directed by the President (Sec. 10.d.4).

Delayed-Entry Program

Today, nearly all military recruits sign a delayed-entry contract. By signing this, recruits promise to report on a specific date (up to a year) in the future, at which time one's term of active-service begins.

The military uses the Delayed Entry Program (DEP) for two reasons: First, it helps the armed forces plan their training activities and efficiently distribute new trainees to available training billets. Second, recruiters believe if a young person doesn't have to enter the military immediately after enlisting, it will reduce sales resistance. DEP is often particularly attractive to high school seniors who are unsure about what to do after graduation. A lot can happen in a year, and many young people change their minds about what they want to do with their lives.

An enlistee in the DEP is formally attached to the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR), an administrative limbo shared with veterans who have recently been discharged from active duty. Unlike recent veterans, however, DEP enlistees cannot be forced onto active duty by military recruiting commands (USAREC

Reg. 601-56) -- despite misleading pressures exerted by many recruiters (Ensign 2004, pp. 28-29).

Although recruiters often suggest that backing-out of one's DEP contract is illegal or impossible, the military presently releases all DEP recruits who request separation. **Recruits may cancel their contract by sending a letter requesting separation to their local recruiting command**, the address for which can be found in one's local phone book under US Government.

The military's list of acceptable reasons include: conscientious objection (a belief that it is wrong to participate in war); pursuit of higher education or vocational training; civilian job opportunity; erroneous enlistment or recruiting error; failure to graduate high school; family issues (marriage, children, hardship or dependency); homosexual conduct; medical or psychological issues; personal problems; failure to report for active duty, and a catch-all of other. Quite simply, anything will do (USAREC Reg. 601-56, i3-1).

Money for College?

Getting help with college tuition is one of the major enticements used in recruiting campaigns. In reality, however, GIs rarely get anywhere near the amount of aid from the military they were led to believe. **The average participant in the Montgomery GI Bill actually receives less money than a student who simply receives a Pell Grant and a Stafford Loan.**

Moreover, many enlistees do not even qualify for the GI Bill or the Army/Navy College Fund, as these benefits generally require the GI to have served under specific conditions:

[Individuals must] enlist for a critical skill [generally high-risk combat service] as announced periodically and as displayed on the Recruit Quota System and remain qualified in the military occupational specialty (MOS) for which the soldier enlisted (USAREC Reg. 621-1, i1-2.3.b.1.d).

According to the US Veterans Administration, only 35% of veterans receive GI Bill funds for college, while only 15% ever receive a college degree (Ensign 2004, pg. 22). In comparison, 70% of students who apply for civilian financial aid receive help paying for college (SNAFU 2004).

Military Training & Civilian Careers

While many soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines do receive specialized training in order to fulfill support functions, the central focus of their

military preparation is for combat. Although some Military Occupational Specialties (MOSs) are comparable to civilian job descriptions -- nursing and electronics repair among them --most lack the breadth and depth of learning required by employers.

Those trained as mechanics generally learn to service vehicles exclusive to the military, while those taught the skills for maintaining F-16 fighter jets do not gain the knowledge necessary to compete against civilian aviation technicians. Moreover, as the military has increasingly outsourced its support functions to private contractors in recent years, these desirable MOSs are difficult for service members to obtain.

Wilhite and Bryant found that veterans averaged only 1.78 months of training in 31 months of active duty (Wilhite & Bryant 1993). Mangum and Ball, Ohio State researchers who received funding from the military, found that only 12% of male veterans and 6% of female veterans surveyed made any use of skills learned in the military in their civilian jobs (Mangum & Ball 1989).

Prominent labor policy specialist Stephen Barley found that the average recent veteran will earn between 11% and 19% less than non-veterans from comparable socioeconomic backgrounds (Barley 1998). Barley makes his recommendation for career-minded youth accordingly:

The evidence on rates of return to training and the probability of finding a job in one's chosen occupation, strongly suggests that, all else being equal, young people should look to sources of training other than the military if they wish to optimize their careers (ibid.).

Military advertising planners are well-aware of the discrepancies between overall recruiting strategies and the limits of training. According to the US Army's Advertising Program Planning and Execution (1995) regulations, when developing advertising images:

Care must be taken to avoid excessive exposure of attractive skills where real opportunities to enlist are limited (USAREC Reg. 5-3, Appendix B-12).

This does not, however, prevent recruiters from resorting to empty promises in order to make a sale --a circumstance so common that it has become legendary throughout military and civilian circles alike.

In fact, what the military needs most of all are boots on the ground --in other words, combat troops. How many civilian jobs require combat experience? How many of us would recommend to our children that they go out

and get some combat time?

Venues & Tactics of Recruitment

How does the military attract so many young people? Military recruiters make their sales pitch through a variety of venues and tactics, each designed to play to the interests and concerns of our impressionable children. Based on a century of tradition and now buttressed by provisions in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB 2001), our schools serve as open marketplaces for easy sales:

- * Recruiters may be able to pull prospective recruits from scheduled classes, may be allowed to take our children to lunch or to other off-campus activities, and may even have an office in the school.
- * Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp (JROTC), touted as an educational program by schools and the military alike, serves as little more than an intensive recruiting tool through which largely low-income children are enticed by a sense of exceptionalism, comradeship and patriotic zeal.
- * Often acting in consort with JROTC programs, recruiters make their presence known at school and district-wide sporting events where conversations about physical prowess can be easily turned toward options for military service.
- * Military "Adventure Vans" and other specially outfitted vehicles tour the country with weapons simulators, high tech video presentations, and cadres of highly trained recruiters who present themselves as educators.
- * With a strong presence at career fairs, recruiters are able to attract students who lack direction or academic prowess, or may be intimidated by the financial burden of a college education.
- * Often welcomed by students seeking diversion, classroom presentations provide recruiters with a captive audience.
- * Many recruiters receive referrals from school guidance counselors who consider the military a viable option for children lacking discipline.
- * Whether in school or at a recruiting station, students taking the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) exam are offered glamorous sounding jobs based on test results.
- * In addition to the ASVAB, students and educators are encouraged to utilize DoD's ASVAB Career Exploration Program, an online recruiting tool presented as a balanced career, education and "self-knowledge" development site (ASVAB 2004).
- * Facilitated by student contact lists provided to the military by our schools (in accordance with NCLB, 19528.a.1), juniors and seniors routinely receive telephone calls, mailings, and surprise visits by recruiters.

While students are exposed to the recruiter's message throughout their high school careers, special attention is given to attracting seniors. Recruiters are trained to "identify" and "capitalize" on periods of natural indecision or fear among seniors faced with tough choices regarding employment and further education.

According to the US Army Recruiting Command's (USAREC) School Recruiting Program Handbook (2004), a "System of Senior Contacts" is implemented through which students will be independently contacted by recruiters during the summer before beginning their senior year, again during the first quarter with the intension of ASVAB scheduling, and finally during the spring term when many of come to believe that "college is not an option (USAREC Pam. 350-13, ¶2.6)."

Educators/Centers of Influence

The recruiters handbook is frank when describing the School Recruiting Program (SRP): "the goal [of which] is school ownership that can only lead to a greater number of Army enlistments (USAREC Pam. 350-13, ¶1-4.c)." To this end, recruiters are instructed to establish and maintain a rapport with our schools because "once educators are convinced recruiters have their students' best interests in mind the SRP can be effectively implemented (ibid.)."

In order to elicit support among educators and community members, recruiters are directed to identify and utilize individuals who are "neutral" on or possess a "predisposition" for favoring military service. A budget is allotted for courting these individuals (USAREC 37-16, ¶8.a-b).

According to USAREC, these prospective Educators/Centers of Influence (E/COIs) are to be formed into groups and given four-day tours of military training and operational installations (USAREC Reg. 601-81). Shown first-class hospitality otherwise reserved for congressional overseers and top-level contractors, E/COI prospects are briefed on military educational "opportunities" and the "merits" of service.

Publicly couched as an informational and community outreach program, E/COI tours are designed to position support for recruitment within our schools and our community overall. USAREC regulations outline the program's objectives (bracketed comments are inserted for clarity):

- * Provide tours of Army installations to educators and other centers of influence (COIs) to improve their knowledge of Army education and training opportunities;

- * Supporting the recruiting field force by improving recruiter access to high schools and post-secondary institutions;
- * Improve the potential to produce grad I-III A [as determined by the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT)] and high grad accessions [recruits];
- * Solicit support from E/COI to improve access to schools, obtain [student] directory information, schedule the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery, and refer potential prospects to the local Army recruiter (USAREC Reg. 601-81, 14.a-d).

Recruiters are directed to select individuals who are "key influencers" And "decision makers" within schools, district offices and communities for E/COI participation. "Influencers" are identified as school counselors and teachers --those whose direct contact with students affords them credibility among local youth (USAREC Reg. 601-81, 15.b-c). "Decision makers", also referred to as "policy influencers", include school superintendents and board members, principals and college administrators. In addition, school registrars and college admissions officers are to be utilized as campus assets, while community leaders such as police chiefs, city council members and clergy are to be recruited from the community overall (ibid).

Military Recruiting Vans

Appealing to young minds, the "Army Cinema Vans", the "Army Cinema Pods", the "Army Adventure Van" and the "Navy Exhibit Centers" are crisscrossing the country with high-tech "educational" shows that glamorize military life:

- * Five "Army Cinema Vans" are each equipped with nine slide projectors and three screens.
- * Six "Multiple Exhibit Vehicles" are equipped with state of the art DVD presentations which can be viewed in the vehicle or brought into classrooms.
- * Four "Rockwalls" are accompanied by six recruiters.
- * The "Army Adventure Van" and "The Armor Experience" feature an M-1 tank simulator, a Cobra helicopter simulator, and a "Weaponeer" -- an M-16 rifle simulator. The Weaponeer provides each student with a printout showing exactly where each "hit" tore through their depersonalized, but human, target.
- * Four "Air Force ROvers", specially refitted recreational vehicles wrapped in bold Air Force graphics provide an F-16 minijet simulator.
- * Five "Navy Exhibit Centers" include a "Nuclear Power Van" and an "America's Sea Power Van."

While the Army Recruiting Command advertises the vans as a "A Learning Experience," the so-called "academic" slide shows are packaged with far

more blatant advertisements for the military. "The vans zero in on our target market, and that's in high schools," explains Fred Zinchiak, Public Affairs Specialist in the Sacramento Army Recruiting Battalion (CCCO 2004).

The Army slide shows feature Combat Arms - The Tough Choice, with 21 minutes of artillery, armor, and combat engineering, absent the carnage that results when these weapons are actually used; Path to the Future, bringing to multi-media life the recruiters' promises about education and career training; and Path to Professionalism, a "guide on the transition from civilian to soldier."

Strategies for Action

We must make a serious stand to present our children with the facts of military service. Our efforts must counter the recruiters' pitch through thoughtful guidance and factual information.

We must provide our children with alternatives. Simple warnings lack effectiveness when young people are searching for avenues through which to obtain an education or achieve their independence.

We at the VFP know this from first-hand experience. Remember, many of us were recruited. We understand the tempting option a hasty enlistment offers.

Any of these following strategies can increase public and student awareness. The VFP stands ready to provide information, speak at local schools, and organize and train counter-recruiters as needed.

Ensure Distribution of Opt-Out Forms

According to the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), schools under federal mandate to provide student contact information to recruiters must honor parent and student privacy rights.

Referred to as "Opt-Out Forms", these requests are often not made available unless pressure is applied by parents or other community members. Some schools are unaware of the seriousness of the issue, while others simply lack understanding of the law. You can make a difference by ensuring school compliance through inquiry and tactful pressure. In addition, an advertisement can be placed in the school paper, explaining the importance of submitting the opt-out form to the school, and copies of the forms can be handed out on campus and at PTA meetings.

Challenge the ASVAB

Parents have the right to challenge any use or proposed use of the ASVAB military aptitude test in overall high school assessment. Not only do recruiters use the results to offer prospective recruits glamorous sounding jobs, but taking the exam provides the military with student contact information.

Take Advantage of Equal Access

Activists and concerned community members have a legal right to talk to students about the drawbacks of the military if the school allows recruiters to do so [790 F.2D 1471 (9th Cir. 1986)]. The US Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit decision states that the question of military service (whether voluntary or compulsory) is a controversial political issue, and if a school establishes a forum for one side to present its views on the issue, it must give opponents equal access to the forum (ibid.). Therefore, as recruiters have access to school campuses, teachers, administrators and students, so can those offering an alternative view.

Adopt a School

Can you, or people you know, agree to keep just one school supplied with counter-recruitment literature? Visit the guidance counselor's office, where military brochures often have their own fancy display.

Post flyers on school bulletin boards. This simple but potent action can then become the basis for a district-wide public awareness campaign.

Circulate leaflets before or after class. Many organizers choose Friday morning, before the start of the school day.

Bring one-page, half-page, even quarter-page leaflets that let kids know they can fight JROTC – and that the military isn't the fabulous opportunity recruiters suggest.

After school, go where young people hang out, such as concerts or shopping malls.

Coming to a Town Near You!

Twenty-one "Adventure Vans" staffed by Army recruiters are touring the United States, armed with video screens, slide projectors, weapon simulators --to impress young people with the military's "exciting career opportunities." Be there to counter-recruit with literature, videos and speakers.

Placing Ads

Place advertisements in your high school or college newspaper, offering alternatives to military enlistment and giving information to those who have already signed up on how to get out.

Career Fair Alternatives

At Career Fridays, right next to the law offices and computer companies, you'll usually find the military recruiter's table, full of glossy brochures and false promises. Activists from Washington D.C. to San Diego put counter-recruitment literature right next door, and have spent the afternoon providing alternatives to military service.

Counter-Recruitment Parties

Throw a party for your friends, your parents, your children and grandchildren and their friends --and spread the word at the same time! Few efforts can be as successful as personal, grass-roots movements.

Media Campaigns

Whatever action you choose to take, remember the media: it's crucial to getting the word out, whether your aim is to stop a JROTC unit or to keep individual kids from signing their lives over to the military. Sending "letters to the editor" of your local paper, contributing to a feature news story, or launching a promotional campaign can be highly effective.

Here is some advice on writing 'letters to the editor' from media watchdog group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR):

- * Make one point (or at most two) in your letter or fax. State the point clearly, ideally in the first sentence.
- * Make your letter timely. If you are not addressing a specific article, editorial or letter that recently appeared in the paper you are writing to, then try to tie the issue you want to write about to a recent event.
- * Familiarize yourself with the coverage and editorial position of the paper to which you are writing. Refute or support specific statements, address relevant facts that are ignored, but do avoid blanket attacks on the media in general or the newspaper in particular.
- * Check the letter specifications of the newspaper to which you are writing.

Length and format requirements vary from paper to paper (generally, roughly two short paragraphs are ideal). You also must include your name, signature, address and phone number.

- * Look at the letters that appear in your paper. Is a certain type of letter usually printed?
 - * Support your facts. If the topic you address is controversial, consider sending documentation along with your letter. But don't overload the editors with too much info.
 - * Keep the letters brief. Stick to 250 words or less, typed when possible.
 - * Find others to write letters when possible. This will show that other individuals in the community are concerned about the issue. If your letter doesn't get published, perhaps someone else's on the same topic will.
- Iraq Veterans Against the War

In addition to VFP support, members of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) are available for special speaking engagements. These are young men and women who are presently serving or have served during recent hostilities. They are our new generation of combat vets --youthful in appearance, yet aged beyond their years. Contact IVAW for a speaker in your area: <<http://www.ivaw.net>>.

Resources

Information is the fuel of activism. After obtaining the schedules of military recruiting trucks, targeted communities have won equal access for military critics. Activists have used data about the costs of JROTC to convince school boards to reject the program. Facts showing that the military has made a profit from the GI Bill convince youth not to enlist.

Some activists are intimidated by the idea of trying to obtain information from the military. Military information is not as readily available as it should be, but it is more accessible than one might think. Calling the Pentagon will often net information. If that fails, filing a request under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is a powerful tool. For countering the militarization of schools, it is also useful to get information from local military recruiters and school district administrators.

Pentagon Public Affairs Office

Many people mistakenly believe that the best or even the only way of getting information is to file a formal Freedom of Information Act request. It is almost always quicker and easier to pick up the phone, call the Pentagon, and ask (see contact information chart below). When calling, be friendly, because the person you are contacting is a potential ally. Members of the armed forces and civilian DoD employees are often eager to explain their jobs to interested outsiders.

The simplest place to start is at the DoD Public Affairs office headquarters. Call the public affairs offices of specific departments (e.g. Naval JROTC public affairs). Identify yourself as a reporter to each person you reach, so that anything they say is on the record. It is the job of public affairs officers to make information available to the public, especially reporters. Writers for nonprofit magazines, newsletters, and `zines also qualify as journalists. Tell public affairs officers what your deadline is.

You can ask a Public Affairs Officer (PAO) to put you in touch with someone who works directly on your issue of concern. If someone says s/he doesn't know the information you're asking for, note their name, get a referral to another office, and tell the next office who told you to call them. Soon, your head will be spinning as you ricochet through the bureaucratic labyrinth. Be persistent, call multiple times, leave messages, and write emails asking officials to send specific data to you.

If an official refuses or delays your request for unclassified records, ask someone else in the same (or a related) office. Alternatively, ask to speak to the commanding officer or supervisor of the recalcitrant employee. Informing people that you're willing to go up their chain of command, and doing so when necessary, can be very effective. Remind officials that taxpayers pay for government information, and it is the job of government employees to convey that information to you. Insist on getting the information that is rightfully yours. The FOIA of 1966 ratified the principle that the public has the right to know, and put the burden of proof on the government to justify withholding data.

Useful Public Affairs Contact Information

DoD 703-697-5131

Army 703-697-7589

Navy 703-697-5342

Air Force 703-695-0640

Marines Public Affairs Headquarters 703-614-7679

JROTC Public Affairs

757-788-4615; 850-452-4858; 334-953-2014; 703-784-3705

Recruiting Trucks & Ships 502-626-1986; 901-874-9068

Demographics Defense Manpower Data Center 703-696-5790

Understanding FOIA Requests

Filing a formal FOIA request should not be your first step, but understanding which records are legally available to the public is helpful whenever searching for government information. The FOIA applies to records held by federal executive branch agencies, including the military, the Department of Energy, and the Department of Education. Any item containing information that is in the control of an agency is usually under FOIA's scope, including computer records.

There are nine grounds upon which a FOIA request can be legally turned down:

1. National security.
2. Internal personnel rules and practices.
3. Statutorily exempt records (e.g. tax returns).
4. Trade secrets.
5. Internal government communications related to decision making processes (not factual data).
6. Personal privacy (e.g. personnel records).
7. Information that would interfere with law enforcement.
8. Banks' financial records.
9. Geological data.

All other records should be made available upon request. Nonprofits requesting information for educational use are eligible for a fee-waiver, so FOIAs can be free. Theoretically, FOIA requests are to be answered (not necessarily fulfilled) within ten business days. Don't hold your breath. After the deadline has passed, call the agency's FOIA officer to inquire about your request and to let them know you won't go away. File appeals as necessary.

To get sample FOIA requests, and to learn more about appeals, contact the FOIA Clearinghouse for a free guide:

1600 20th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 588-1000

Homepage: <<http://www.citizen.org>>

Getting Local Information

Regional military recruiting commands are excellent sources of information. Such commands know which schools and recruiting stations are recruiting the greatest number of students. They also have detailed itineraries for military recruiting trucks. To get this data, call a local recruiting

station, and ask for a public affairs officer. They will refer you to the regional public affairs office.

State equivalents of the FOIA (also called Sunshine Acts) vary widely, though they do recognize the key principle that governmental information is public information.

Sometimes it's more difficult to get data from school districts than it is from the military. Each district has policies regulating military recruiters' access to student lists, testing data, career fairs, classrooms, lunchrooms, career centers, billboards, and libraries, and it's useful to learn what these policies are.

If you are researching the local costs of JROTC, ask for the school district's finance and/or budget office, rather than the JROTC office. Ask how much the district spends for JROTC programs (salaries, benefits, remodeling costs if it's a new unit, travel, supplies, etc.), and how much the DoD reimburses the district. If the unit received no special subsidy or is more than five years old, the net cost to the district will be around \$50,000 (or more). If the unit is new and receiving special subsidies, or a JROTC career academy, get the budget office's predictions for the costs of the program for each of the next five years, because the net costs to the district will sharply escalate.

School Boards are notorious for sending out notices for meetings two days in advance with cryptic agenda items such as, "Debate on amendment 31J on Rule 4367b regarding contract #84658-723." Often, the only way to know about upcoming proposals is to be in regular contact with the most sympathetic member of your local school board.

If school administrators are hiding information (about plans, costs, or policies), it's usually possible to get the information through a board member. Utilizing school board meetings to ask, "Why is this information being covered up?" will get people's attention. Informing officials that you intend to take such actions can also be effective. Again, requests for information by mainstream journalists will often meet with swifter success.

A Soldier's Perspective

As America grows increasingly disturbed by the images of carnage and violent death of her own sons in arms, its government loses the justification to continue the bloody debacle. Since all these traits are the conventional power's unavoidable mistakes, the guerrilla campaign will surely succeed. In Iraq's case, complete destruction of the United States military is

impossible, but through perseverance the insurgency will drive us out. This will prove to be the inevitable outcome of the war.

We lost many soldiers in the final battle for Falluja, and many more were seriously wounded. It seems unfair that even after the devastation we wreaked on this city just to contain it, many more troops will die in vain to keep it that way. I saw the look in the eyes of a reconnaissance scout while I talked to him after the battle.

His stories of gore and violent death were unnerving. The sacrifices that he and his whole platoon had made were infinite. They fought everyday with little or no sleep, very few breaks, and no hot meals. For obvious reasons, they never could manage to find time to email their mothers to let them know that everything turned out ok. Some of the members of his platoon will never get the chance to reassure their mothers, because now those soldiers are dead. The look in his eyes as he told some of the stories were deep and weary, even perturbed.

He described in accurate detail how some enemy combatants were blown to pieces by army issued bazookas, some had their heads shot off by a 50 caliber bullet, others were run over by tanks as they stood defiantly in the narrow streets firing an AK-47. The soldier told me how one of his favorite sergeants died right in front of him. He was taking cover behind an alley wall and as he emerged to fire his M4 rifle, he was shot through the abdomen with a rocket-propelled grenade. The grenade itself exploded and sent shrapnel into the narrator's leg. He showed me where a chunk of burned flesh was torn from his left thigh.

He ended his conversation saying that he was just a dumb kid from California who never thought joining the army would send him straight to hell. He told me he was tired as fuck and wanted a shower. Then he slowly walked away, cradling a rifle under his arm (BringThemHomeNow.Org 2004).

Where Have all the Soldiers Gone?

One thousand times now, people have arrived home or looked out the front door only to see a military sedan, with two troops in their dress uniforms.

This was my nightmare while my own son was there. An army sedan.

When people see it, they know in that terrible instant that someone they pushed out of their own body, someone they saw take a first step and speak a first word, or with whom they made love, or the anchor in the stormy world that is a parent, someone called brother or sister or grandchild -- that

sedan with the survival officer and the chaplain signifies that this someone-- has been erased and is no longer in the world with us, that something shocking has happened to the living body we once held close and will never hold again (BringThemHomeNow.Org 2004).

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