

2.9 AFGHAN WARS: 2000–PRESENT

Names for soldiers during this war: troops, peacekeepers, warriors.

Afghanistan has been a place of conflict since 1978, when Russia began battling against what became al-Qaeda. 2001: NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) intervention began. The public aims were to dismantle al-Qaeda and deny it a safe basis of operation in Afghanistan by removing the Taliban from power. Afghanistan asked Bin Laden and al-Qaeda to leave, but did not demand it.

As of 2013, tens of thousands of people had been killed in the war; over 4,000 ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) soldiers and civilian contractors as well as over 10,000 Afghan National Security Forces had been killed. —<https://en.wikipedia.com>

“Encourage the exhausted and strengthen the weary.
Say to those with an anxious heart, “Take courage, fear not.”
(Isaiah 35:3,4)

“Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear.” —Mark Twain

“Cobbled together in Kabul together.” —Angela Hunt

Dedication

For all those who have mostly come back,
For those who kept vigil at home,
For those who are yet to go,
I salute you.

Flying Solo

Our whole family history is tied to the sea.
My great-great grandfather had a schooner in the War of 1812.
In my lifetime, no sooner than he left, my dad died in the Navy in WWII
And came back to us by Destroyer in a box at the Boston shipyards Oct. 10, 1946.
My grandfather was a Coast Guard lifer and served until Oct. 16, 1947.
If one word could describe a family,
Ours would be “stoic”.
Gone from each other for months at a time,
Everyone carries on.

In this Afghanistan generation,
Navy Special Forces still perch in crow’s nests.
The surroundings are rocks and sand, lonely as water.
Being a drone operator (my nephew) is like being submerged in stealth:
There are nests¹ where operators are stationed alone for months.
Sometimes in the heat one can barely breathe;
At other times one barely *dares* breathe.
When they are rotated back to civilization,
They are overwhelmed by things and people and can hardly speak.

—Jane Lumsden

¹Based in secret locations. Aboard an 1812 schooner, a “crow’s nest” is a place apart providing a bird’s eye view.

Welcome Home

Out past the laws of propriety, back in the raw,
We test the incoming cherries,¹
Pit them against each other,
To prove ourselves.
Stressified boredom produces
Brutal examinations
Simulating combat to the death,
Because the time, it will come.

Testosterone takes us by the throat
And because no one can survive here with *crystal* balls,
We beat each other up to test our mettle,
To keep us alert, to say “welcome” and “farewell”.²

So what's the problem, as MOF³ rotated out,
When I greet my wife,
Home from work,
With my fist?

¹Freshly rotated-in recruits

²“For a lot of men, the security of being enclosed by a group like this apparently outweighs the terror of being in combat. During World War II, wounded soldiers kept going AWOL (Absent Without Leave) from the rear-base hospitals in order to rejoin their units on the front line. Clearly, for those men, rejoining their comrades was more important than the risk of death.”
—Poem based on War by Sebastian Junger, Hachette, 2010, p. 39.

³Modern Opposition Forces

Note: Some have experienced 2-3 hyper-stressful tours of duty in Afghanistan lasting 12 months each. No wonder yo-yoing between cultures creates difficulties with reassimilation.

Choices

Decisions soldiers face can be tough.
You capture 4 people on a recon mission.
You know in your gut one is an insurgent
And have a pretty good idea the other three are innocent goat herders
But nobody ain't sayin' nothin', at least that you can understand.

In order to act, there is a strict protocol:
There must be deadly force used against you before *your* first shot.
The rules of engagement¹ come multiple choice.
(Note: All might be wrong answers):

- A. Execute the probable terrorist in front of three witnesses.
- B. “Dispatch” them all for security’s sake, making more enemies in the village. Or,
- C. Because there is no certain proof, let all 4 go free, which will return 3 fathers safe to their children tonight, and allow the other one to set up an ambush—for you.

—Based on scenario in movie “Sole Survivor”.

¹The upshot is the rules of engagement are becoming impossibly complex—to the point that our soldiers are being mowed down before they can sort out the details.

No Excuses

A blast
Instant shrapnel to the thigh
Medic materializes, extracts,
Applies a miracle pack
It burns bad, but
Cauterization: immediate!
Sarge barks,
“Now get up that hill.”
No butts.

—Mike



Because ballistics are so effective, platoon members so spread out, personnel so minimal, and terrain so rugged, wounded guys can bleed out before medics can approach them. Each soldier is now provided a standard issue personal medic pack like this one from the 1st Gulf War, but now with instructions how to stop one's own bleedout.

Ameliorate Or Aggravate?

Wounded Vets in Vietnam had Air Evac
To give them a 97.6% survival rate.
There is not sufficient cover in Afghanistan to provide
Immediate helicopter support for the wounded; so
A modern medic is trained to treat soldiers the same as in the Civil War:
Ambitious field surgery. The operating theater? The all-outdoors.
Amputate. Amend with prostheses¹ later. But,
Rather than ameliorate, that surgery can leave
Ambient dust in wounds
Causing sepsis, sometimes years later,
Which ramps up auto-immune responses,
Bringing ambiguous symptoms.

—With Paul Overton, “Project Neurosteroid”. TPT.org at Pittsburg, PA, Research Hospital.

¹Each prosthesis costs about \$50,000, requiring regular tune-ups/adjustments and replacements. Pricey medical technology and the staggering need for it has been an unexpected cost of this war.

Q: Is funding for the war factoring in the specific policy to amputate?

Q: Is paying for the war sustainable, given the prognosis for its aftermath?

Caged Rage

Soldiers have been
Guinea pigs
Way too long.

—Connie

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3041126/Almost-1-000-membersArmed-Forces-require-psychiatric-treatment-given-anti-Malaria-drug-linked-mentalhealth-problems.html#ixzz3XWRbvErD>

Take Cover

As a translator,
I was reassured by a
Description of the objective,

But also by the fact that
Rangers hadn't prayed as a team
Before they left that day.

A group prayer always came
On nights when the men believed
They were facing a dangerous task.

Otherwise, most of them
Prayed as I did, quietly and in their own way,
As they headed out.

—Nadia, Afghan translator, based on Ashley's War: The Untold Story of a Team of Women Soldiers on the Special Ops Battlefield, by Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, 2016, p. 228.

Cleaning House II

What is it
About death or life
That demands our attention
Keeps us beating our hearts



Even when emergency rooms
Paddles and monitors
Are nowhere in sight?

What is it
About the will to live
That creates order
Prioritizes duty
Lays the facts in neat, stacked piles
And helps us work
Through them in nanoseconds?

What is it
That coagulates a potential bleedout
From bullet-ripped flesh
Into congealed buddies, compression of time
Tourniquets made from our own belts
—That might have hung *ourselves* an hour ago—
And the sweet Rx of encouragement
Until The Crisis has passed?

—Based on “Cleaning House” by the author, from I Am Still Me! p. 74.

Standing for What’s Fair

Everything about the military
Is hurry up and wait,
But
Hurry to surgery
Then have to wait in line for years
For health care when
I’ve already given away my legs?

Peg in a Deep Dark Hole

Learning to walk
With stick legs
Is easier than learning
To live with bionic nightmares.

It's the mental aspect of injury that's tough:
The electric pain my mind still knows as
The limb that is currently invisible,
I grieve for the parts I left in Afghanistan;
Maybe these stabs are *my pieces*
Grieving for *me*.

They cool the body in crisis down to 10 degrees Celsius brain temp
To control massive blood loss,
Which provides twice the survival rate for dramatic injuries,
Allowing more multiple amputees to walk away
With even greater grieving over more lost parts.
In a previous war, we would have been casualties remaining at rest.
Now we must remain in ertia...I'd rather be inert..
What meaningful jobs are there for Titanium Men that *don't* include
“Lab Rat”, “Super Sprinter”, or “Detector of Poison’s¹ Exit (DOPE)?”
Now a Chromali part or two is screwed in,
Some say “better than new”,
But we, the screwed, know better.

This is the new frontier:
We must negotiate *mortis causa*, the prospect of death,
Then beyond—
Coming to *modus vivendi*,
A way of getting along with our selves—
And coming to terms with all our moving parts.
How much can be lost and still be us
On the precipice of this brave new world?

—Based on a report by Paul Overton. TPT.org “Project Neurosteroid” at
Pittsburg, PA Research Hospital and Grady Memorial Hospital/Dr. Wright, BBC,
5/31/2013, 8:30 pm.

¹It has been suggested that Titanium could be a carcinogen, so a new steel process has provided
a new product: Chromali. —Jesse H.

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“152 women have now (2016) died serving the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

—Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta at a news conference with Chairman of The  
Joint Chiefs Martin Dempsey, reported in [Ashley's War](#).

## Uniformity

There is no question  
Women and men are both  
Committed to doing the job  
A uniform demands.  
They're fighting and  
They're dying together.  
The time has come  
For our policies  
To recognize that reality.

—General Leon Panetta, U.S. Pentagon

In June 2013, a Pentagon news conference highlighted integrating women into more combat-interfaced jobs like Special Operations, according to General Bennet Sacolick. That includes American women soldiers interacting with Afghan women and children to obtain information about insurgents. Sacolick said, “These women very well may provide the foundation for ultimate integration of men and women in the service.” The women of CST (Command Forward Support) Battalion have pleaded that the appeal to Afghan women to help finish the war in Afghanistan be expanded because it is working.

On 1/1/2016, President Obama quietly signed a special operations command that each of the services will either fully open all roles to women or explain the reasons why they will stay male-only. All exemptions will have to be approved by both the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of Joint Chiefs. (Based on Ashley's War, p. 280.)

Some read that to mean a wall has been breached, a ceiling smashed. Others feel a dam has burst: women will no longer have a choice in their service whether they are sent to combat units or to support roles.

With this executive directive, women's service can provide a new demographic not only to keep the war-machine well-oiled, but potentially to escalate its influence, to fuel its reach.  
**Q:** Is this the very best use of the natural resource of our young women and men?

Women who are expected to carry 70# packs have ended careers prematurely with painful hip socket wear because women's pelvises are built differently than men's. **Q:** Will this type of repetitive motion injury treatment be funded when men don't seem to suffer from it? Is it prudent to submit any soldiers to a practice that could wear down bone?

—Partially inspired by the news story, “Growing VA Needs More [Help For] Women,” KARE-TV 11 News, 3/31/2015, 10 pm. 30,000 female vets in Minnesota have been admitted to the VA Hospital with sexual trauma, gynecology and mental health issues.



## ♀ Shut Up and March!

Women are recruited with this basic premise:

Be a man. Join the Army.

It used to be they were offered support roles

And could apply for more dangerous missions.

The lobby to say women are as capable has some credence,

But now there is no longer a choice how to serve.

They will put you where they need you. No discussion.

—Barb

## ♀ Kill Them With Kindness?

I hope to help the neediest people.

I never felt I could bring enough benefit along.

There is great poverty and need during any war.

I still want to do humanitarian aid when the conflict stops,

Still want to build schools, maybe clinics.

That is the best way to convince people away from jihad;

Are we doing kind things for the populace that really matter?

I pray for the safety of those I meet.

Also that there will not be personal repercussions

For the women who provide us with information.

It is an incredibly courageous thing they do.

Husbands or brothers might beat their wives or sisters

—Or worse—if they found out they are “soft” on Americans.

It is an amazing thing that in order to save other’s lives,

Afghan females provide American females information

About where weapons are stashed,

IEDs are buried, or insurgents are hiding out.

It takes great trust that we can do the job they place faith in us to do.

—Nadia, translator, based on information in Ashley’s War, p. 229.

**Q:** Does the CIA/military ask some missionaries to be translators? If so, how does that impact the effectiveness of their other message to the culture? Do CIA agents pose as missionaries and English teachers?

**Note:** “Some Afghan women are trying to end this war, and some Afghan men also risk their lives for ideology, and to help American soldiers.” —”The Voice of the Martyrs”,

## In Tact

He came home from the war intact  
Stopped to change someone's tire on the side  
Of the road, was hit by a passing car;  
He'll be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

He makes sandwiches for his daughter  
Every morning with great and painful difficulty.  
Each moment is a sacrifice, a sacrament,  
Of knife, of bread, of handing a bag.

Every moment, therefore, is holy.  
He chooses to fill his heart with good,  
Figuring he cannot give to others  
What he does not already own.

—Based on story related by Father Thomas Joseph from Becoming Who You Are by James Martin, SJ, Subject of a homily at St. Nicholas Church, Carver, MN, 9/2/2012.

## War Hounds

The secrets of combat  
They are dark  
And they are deep  
They howl  
And bark in the night  
They must be taught  
To heel, to sit, to stay.

## Screams

My warfare-obsessed 11-year-old grandson and I are seated at the kitchen island, paging through his book of military vehicles when he asks, "What was it like

in Afghanistan, Grandpa?” and suddenly I see the little girl outside the frost-etched window in her ragged tunic, staring at me with wide-open, emotionless, haunting eyes.

I see her frequently, almost everywhere I go, in fact, but never before at my grandson’s house, and instantly I worry that she has intentions upon him as well. I have no weapons that can stop her now. I glance at him quickly to see if he has noticed her, but she is not yet visible to him and besides, he is busy memorizing tanks. I have told no one about her.

He asks again and I can only offer generalities in words he has already heard: dangerous, traumatic, hot, exhausting, exhilarating. I know what he really wants to understand, but how can I tell him? I cannot even find words for it inside my own mind and fear its true expression will be a volcanic, innards-spewing eruption of a scream that, once released, might never end.

But even if I *could* find words he is too young, his world too good and full of promise to be prematurely awakened. He still trusts. He still believes. I know that sooner or later he will eat the forbidden fruit, yet right now his innocence is a glorious thing, a shining protective cloak, and I wish I could touch its hem and be made whole.

I can tell he is impatient with my sanitized answer for he sits drumming his sturdy athletic fingers on the granite countertop, but there is another hand drumming there, too: skinny with almost translucent skin. Grandson is between her and me, obscuring her except for the hand and the stick-like arm.

“Well, did you kill anyone over there?” he persists, stirring the rumbling magma, and she leans forward to fix those hollow eyes on me, waiting for my answer.

For my scream.

It nearly comes, but quite unexpectedly he gently slides a hand over mine as he reads my face and says, “It’s OK, Grandpa. It’s OK.”

Almost instantly she vaporizes, and I can almost hear *her* scream. I will hold fast to him for as long as he will permit, for right now he has the greater power. He is my newfound weapon.

—James Robert Kane, author and veteran. Short Story first published in Talking Stick 23 by Jackpine Writers’ Bloc, October 2014. Used by permission.

## Sending Military Aid: Flashback

Someone said, “Have you heard the latest dumb stunt President Bush has done? He has sent an aircraft carrier to Indonesia to help the tsunami victims. What does he intended to do, bomb them?”

An engineer replied quietly, “Our carriers have three hospitals on board that can treat several hundred people; their nuclear power can supply emergency electrical power to shore facilities; they have three cafeterias with the capacity to feed 3,000 people three meals a day, they can produce several thousand gallons of fresh water from sea water each day, and they carry half a dozen helicopters for use in transporting victims and injured to and from their flight deck. We have eleven such ships; it’s called ‘humanitarian aid’. What did you send?”

—Based on blog post by ChuckExAnon on 3/25/2009. [http://www.answerbag.com/q\\_view1354354](http://www.answerbag.com/q_view1354354)

### ♀ *A-propos'*

I am one sub-contractor of many. We work in retrofitting the M-RAP (Mine-Resistant Attack Protection) vehicle so the contractors can do the actual repairs. I do background checks to make sure everything is done safely.

I’m honored to do my job. I hold our flag, our nation and patriotism very tender to my heart. It’s a family affair; 2 brothers-in-law, father, grandfather and his two sisters have all served. My sister is in Afghanistan now. I always saw people in uniform honoring that uniform.

The more I see discontent over a nation that is drawn toward conflict, the more appreciative I am of the faithful and cooperative service of individuals. It’s admiration, even. I realize I shouldn’t take things for granted: my freedom to vote, my freedom of religion.

Our service people are not empowered to decide where to serve but they do bring honor and dedication wherever they are placed. Those of us who remain at home don’t think to uproot *ourselves* in solidarity when our loved ones are shipped out! We citizens get to stay put, to elect who decides how long each war will last; while the deployed only have the choice to muster up the courage to fight it.

Our service personnel get blamed for the actions they are directed to take. Respect is denied them from the whole world due to poor leadership choices or political opportunism. There might be experiments conducted on soldiers in the form of inoculations or maybe amputation of a limb not assured to survive in order to try a new-concept bionic device. They are asked, “Wouldn’t you like to be better than before?” They forget the grieving a wounded soldier goes through on behalf of his own body.

The lowest paid personnel are usually the ones most likely to be in harm’s way. What if that were reversed? Would Brass still stay in *for life*? What is the right compensation for young families who are without a father or mother for their formative years?

Privates, Sergeants and Lieutenants die in the line of duty. But strangers back home breach the sanctity of their memory by protesting at funerals, as if a memorial service were merely another anti-war rally. They were *volunteers who were given orders!* We can’t forget that.

—Denyse

<sup>1</sup>French: *À-propos*: relevant, opportune, appropriate. Transliterated: without theatrical props, genuine.

## Under the Influence

The United States has two faces in the world:  
We might be the saving grace for small nations,  
But they might just as likely consider our intervention  
“Military persecution” when *we* label it “help”.

We say we represent justice and freedom for other countries.  
But not all want our corporate capitalism;  
A benevolent dictatorship might offer a security that people want, too.  
It doesn’t matter the place;  
Everyone pictures his own country as the hero of their people.  
Their military and their leaders might be *their* heroes.

—Denyse

## Bottom Line

“There is very little our own soldiers want:

- To be remembered for their selfless service.
- That their families be taken care of back home while they can't do it.
- To return to intact families.
- To see peace when they leave their station and come back to civilian life.
- To have the sense that it mattered they risked their lives.

Instead they:

- Are belittled for their part in a war that has gone on too long and cost too much.
- Have been demoted at work for taking service leave; find their previous job has been phased out due to economic changes.
- Come back to fractured families and debt.
- Return to a bickering or ungrateful populace.
- See misdirected effort, discover politics rather than prudent strategy.

How can we help? From my perspective:

- Give a “Thank you.”
- Donate a little money to a trusted local organization. If that doesn't feel like enough, consider this:
- If troops are being mobilized, then we citizens should be mobilized to personally help, too.”

—Denyse

## **Here are some of Denyse's ideas:**

### **For families of troops:**

Develop or support effective organizations to help local members of our military.

1. Try **Beyond the Yellow Ribbon** organization: connecting service members and their families with local community support, training, services and resources before, during, and after deployment. <http://www.btyrofchaska.org> (Source: “Chaska Today”, July 2014, p. 1)

2. Concentrate on service families who are our own neighbors as the beneficiaries of service projects. Discover and meet their needs: shovel their driveway, invite them to dinner, shop for their birthdays and Christmas, bring groceries—today's military families fall on tight times.

3. Request the White House send a phone card to a specific soldier: *Write a letter to a soldier, include a request, mail it to the White House, and they will add a phone card and forward your letter to that soldier.* <http://www.saveoursoldiers.us/2.html> Mail to: Mr. President, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Washington, DC 20501-0002.

4. **Ship a Package to a Military (APO/FPO) Address:** <http://www.ehow.com/how/4606462> , includes “What to Send Someone in [Navy] Boot Camp”, “How to Write Someone at [Navy] Boot Camp”, “How to Send Mail to a [Navy] Ship” (5/04/2013). Check the web for the stipulations of other service branches.

5. Learn about aftercare through the **Wounded Warriors** program. Assist with physical therapy. Offer rides to the doctor. Wounded Warrior Project's mission is to honor and empower wounded soldiers. It serves veterans and service members who incurred a physical or mental injury, illness, or wound, co-incident to their military service on or after 9/11/2011, and their families. Programs focus on engagement, economics, families, and mind and body. <http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org>



## ♀ Horrific Hazing

Women have paid to participate as soldiers  
With their psyches (ostracised and bullied by their male teammates)  
Their constitutions (hair set on fire)  
Their hymens (hate/dominance rape).

## ♀ Damaged Goods

Rape is such a terrible raw word  
A cold and brutal utterance  
Sordid, unsavory,  
One stark monosyllable  
That dangles as a suffix  
From everything that happens

thereafter.

When you,  
You you,  
Whoever you all are, harassed,

Then raped my candid, confident, competent daughter  
Simply for sport, to make your point,  
To leave your dominant musk,  
Do you know what a trail of tears you left?  
Do you care?

You you you were supposed to have her back,<sup>1</sup>  
But stole from between her legs.  
As soon as she was able  
She showered and showered again  
Hoping to wash away the stench of you you you  
The feel  
The gooseflesh.  
She kept your secret and kept it well

For the good of the unit  
Not even willing to tell her friends, family, superior officer,  
Confining herself to her barracks, then her room,  
Then her bunk of depression, to lock in the secret,  
To lock out the world, until it seethed, boiled out,  
And she started cutting herself,  
Her only pressure valve.

—Based on “Rape”, from Way Out on a Limb, One Mother’s Journey Through Her Daughter’s Rape, by the author.

<sup>1</sup>30% of U.S. female troops report harassment, sexual harassment, violation and rape. Some consider the actual figure to be more than 50% of all enlisted women. In order to keep units intact to finish the objective, many decide not to report the crime until they are processed out. A variety of sources were consulted including Healing Suicidal Veterans by Vic Montgomery, MAEd,CMAC, RAS. (Master of Addictions Educator, Certified MA Counselor, and Registered MA Specialist.)

## ♀ Erogenous War Zone

Sexual aggressors are often military comrades  
Proving manhood with and without a gun.  
Living in high-stress primitive conditions affects behavior,  
Turns some feral. Female soldiers wonder,  
“What will a report of harassment do to my promotion?  
I’m supposed to be tough.  
What will allegations of his emotional abuse do to my career?  
How will saying a fellow soldier raped me affect the success of this mission?”



Once a victim of sexual assault is physically safe,  
The trauma is not over:  
“I have lost my dignity, honor, confidence.  
I now feel dirty in the uniform, so I have given up my career.  
I am angry, disgusted with myself, live with guilt and sorrow. I cry.”  
The moral burden is not hers, but ours.

Of the female vets returning from OIF/OEF, 23-33% have experienced military sexual trauma (MST). Vet reactions to service abuse and rape range in severity, timing, duration, and type, including bulimia, anorexia, sexual dysfunction, drug abuse, borderline personality disorder (mood swings, physical symptoms without medical diagnosis and others now termed Complex PTSD), apathy and cutting. Military personnel are taught to be self-reliant and courageous, so it can be difficult to ask for help. “A suicide attempt indicates a vet is under extreme duress and in a state of acute crisis rather than primarily exhibiting attention-seeking behavior...Beneficial treatment options: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Interpersonal Therapy (IPT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Service Dogs (SD), Art Therapy. (Try the Art of Recovery Program: <http://www.arts.state.mn.us/aor/2010>) Don't be afraid to seek help from several different counselors, therapists, or to try different treatment methods.” —Vic Montgomery. Based on Healing Suicidal Veterans, pp. 59-69.

## ♀ “Father” Knows Best or Bread and Water

“My curmudgeonly CO is so pro-active about potential entanglements  
Among his male and female personnel, he doesn't even let us talk to each other.  
If there is an exchange, he prods in his brittle way like a protective father  
To see if it was any more than, ‘Do you know what's for dinner tonight?’  
There are so few other women here I may as well be in solitary confinement.”

—One Soldier who volunteered for duty.

## ♀ Pregnant Pilot

I've passed my 1-year pilot's service marker  
Logging a pregnancy.  
We've been hoping for a child for 3 years.  
That can be difficult when we are flying in opposite directions!  
My husband and I are delighted,

Yet, having a baby will affect my career:  
I won't be likely to want those combat stripes now.

Too, there is uncertainty for our little family.  
I am assured 6 weeks leave after the birth,  
But my husband's taking online classes for advancement.  
Throwing a baby into the mix sounds suddenly selfish and foolhardy.  
My parents are on my approved next of kin list.  
There is great comfort in knowing that when I'm deployed  
Or if hubby doesn't make it back, that our child will be well cared for.

This is a demanding career. They say they own me.  
I wonder sometimes if the Air Force will pressure me to abort this mission.  
Even if Mom and Dad come to our aid,  
Why should I have to delegate parenthood?  
Will s/he forgive me for not being there?  
Can I forgive myself for being so far away from motherhood duty?  
How will my not being with our child affect him/her?

—One Female Pilot

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♂ The Joy of Killing

Out in the Korengal
Rock faces shoulder boulders;
Cedar arms
Climb the backbone of a hill.

An enemy's stony silence
A stoic wall of will, vicious vines
Tentacles of terror, roots deepening;
The law of justice: jihad.

A confirmed insurgent?
Rigid guns thrust
Predator aggression pumps,
Ejulating explosive energy.

Testosterone gains
A firefight conquest;

That foe
Won't kill again.

—Based on War by Sebastian Junger

Still There

“I Pledge Allegiance to the flag
Of the United States of America,
And to the Republic for which it stands,
One nation under God,¹
Indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

¹A poll taken by NBC on 9/24/13 (registering the highest number of responses to any of their polls) indicated 86% of America's population wants to keep the words “In God We Trust” on money, and “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance (2007 version, above). 14% were against.

Note: To enter the “Patriot's Pen Competition” yearly essay contest: VFW/Veterans of Foreign Wars and Ladies' Auxiliary, Kansas City, MO. Questions: Kharmar@vfw.org 818-968-1117.

“If we ever forget that we're one nation under God,
then we will be a nation gone under.”

—Ronald Reagan

Project America

One Life, One Flag, One Mile.
Running a risk:
Planting a flag every 5280 feet
Pounding 2200 miles of pavement,
One for each service person lost in Afghanistan
A marathon every day punctuated with 22 salutes.

—Based on a story about Mike Erick <http://www.pickleballchannel.com/2014/05/memorial-day>

“The Battling Boys of Benghazi”

We’re the battling boys of Benghazi,
no fame, no glory, no paparazzi.

Just a fiery death in a blazing hell,
defending our country we loved so well.

It wasn’t our job, but we answered the call,
fought to the Consulate and scaled the wall.

We pulled twenty countrymen from the jaws of fate,
led them to safety and stood at the gate.

Just the two of us and foes by the score,
but we stood fast to bar the door.

Three calls for reinforcement, but all were denied.
So we fought and we fought and we fought ‘til we died.

We gave our all for our Uncle Sam,
but Barack and Hillary didn’t give a damn.

Just two dead Seals who carried the load.
No thanks to us...we were just “Bumps In The Road”.

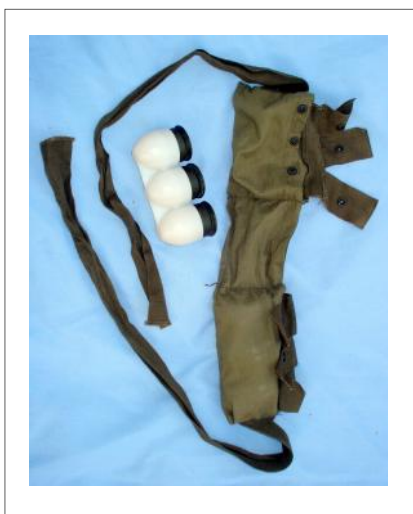
—Excerpts from Anonymous, received by email, 9/16/2015.

Note: U.S. Special Operations, JSOC (Joint Special Operations Command—our most top secret commandos), CIA and State Department worked on a mission in 2012 in response to a premeditated Islamic Militia attack in Benghazi, Libya. Many Libyans condemned Khattala Ansar al-Sharia’s attack and praised U.S. Ambassador Stevens, who was killed. On the weekend of 7/14/2014, U.S. Army Special Operations Forces and the FBI captured Khattala Ansar al-Sharia in Libya.

Multiple anonymous sources reported the main function of our U.S. Ambassador’s diplomatic office was to move weapons from Libya to anti-Assad rebels in Syria, without any other political role. By contrast, on-the-record testimony reported: “The CIA was not sending weapons. The post was a symbolic gesture, that the U.S. stood behind Benghazi’s dream of establishing a new democracy.” —https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2912_Benghazi_attack

“We’ve spent many years chasing and killing men who were, in fact, not even there.”

—Brian Castner, author of All the Ways We Kill and Die: An Elegy for a Fallen Comrade, and the Hunt for His Killer, 2016, p. 50.



Cartridge bandolier
for M-79 Grenade
Launcher.

What This SEAL Stands For

“Justice, integrity, leadership, but more than that;
Destiny will favor me if I am prepared in mind, body, and spirit.
I must work harder than expected and be more patient than others.
Leadership is a privilege, not a right.
As a warrior, I will be the last to pick up my sword but will fight
To defend myself, my family, my country and my way of life.
I will find my peace and happiness through seeking truth, wisdom and love,
Not by chasing thrills, wealth, titles or fame.
I will seek to improve myself, my team, the world every day.”

—From The Way of the SEAL by Retired Navy Seal Mark Divine as
quoted by Harvey Mackay in “Discover Your Personal Values for a Fulfilling
Life”, “Minneapolis Tribune”, Monday, 10/20/2014.

Sound Off

There’s no way to describe the sound of a high-velocity bullet.
When I was a kid a .22 would go “pew”; in Vietnam it was “pop”.
But in battle these days it is more like a “snap” or an eerie cracky “thoup”
As it breaks the sound barrier right over your head.

—Mike

Rattled

During bivouac training
There were lots of desert survival exercises
To get us to think critically about
How we did things.
One might even say, “To think crucially”.
We learned to shake out blankets before going to sleep.
One morning there was a rattlesnake
On my stomach who had sought warmth overnight.
The training must have helped;
I’m still here.

—Firmus O.

Blue Hats at the Door

“If I don’t answer the door
Then he’s not dead.
He’s not dead yet.

—Jenny W., from All the Ways We Kill and Die” An Elegy for a Fallen Comrade, and the Hunt for His Killer by Brian Castner, p. 8.

“World War II was remarkable, in that virtually 100% of the Minnesota population was involved in some way. Besides radio and newspapers, there were newsreels every day at the movie theaters that kept people informed, even if some was propaganda to keep people motivated to sacrifice, save bacon fat (to pack in bullets to keep the powder dry), and collect milkweed or goat’s beard pods (the fluff was used for life vest flotation) for the war effort.



A goat’s beard pod after it popped open.

But in the Afghanistan era, only about 2% serve, 3% of the population follow news about the war. The government has created a virtual news blackout so people won’t recoil about military spending or object to what they have no knowledge of. Unless you have someone serving there from your family, it’s pretty hard to follow exactly what’s going on.”

—With Tom Kerber, C.E.O., Beaver’s Pond Press.

Note: As of 2014 the VA estimates there were 22 million military veterans in the U.S. population. 7.3% of all living Americans have served at some point in their lives. —Mona Chalabi <http://fivethirtyeight.com/betalab/>

Keep Peace Like the Irish but Learn War from the Scots

I’ve been stabbed.
Shot,

Hit in the head—you name it—In several countries.
I did not start any of those conflicts.

I had to tell myself,
As service personnel
"Ours is not to reason why,
Ours is but to do or die"¹
And so that is what I needed to do.

The Marines want "Scots". That is, historically,
The Irish could dodge and run on their island to disengage conflict.
The Scots, who owned a forbidding sheer rock face, had no such luxury;
They had no place to retreat so had no choice but to learn how to fight.
I've lost some of my own Scots blood soldering on.
My heritage says, "I stand ground".

—Colonel Anonymous, a Scottish-American from Minnesota²

¹From "The Charge of the Light Brigade" by Alfred Lord Tennyson, Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom. Written in 1854 during the Crimean War:

(2) "Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

(3) Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to the left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred."

²The author met the Scottish-American marine one day, a very engaging, brilliant sort who had just returned from war to be with his kids. He was someone with an uncanny ability to read body language and personality type. 2 days later she also met him in jail ministry Bible Study. He had found himself in jail because Afghanistan hadn't let go of him yet.



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