

## Open Letter to the Madison School Board re: Military Ads in Our Schools

Elton Tylenda

*I presented most of the following verbally at a School Board meeting. Responses received from School Board members seem to miss the point - perhaps the following will help clarify the issues.*

I'm a member of Veterans for Peace, a Vietnam combat veteran, and I hold a Master of Divinity degree from The Chicago Theological Seminary. I'm requesting that all military advertising be removed from our schools. It troubles me that schools would promote the military as if it were just another career choice. What we have in effect is a poverty draft preying on our least privileged and most vulnerable youth. Count the number of children from wealthy, politically connected families "serving" in the military and you'll have fingers to spare. But from the working class you can count lives taken (over 4,000), count the maimed (over 70,000), brain damaged (over 100,000), count the suicides (120 each week) and there's no end to the counting!

You say you're presenting the military as just another career choice. What other career choice requires giving up one's constitutional rights? What other career requires a binding contract that can be rewritten at any time without the helpless recruit's consent to extensions? In what other career is job number one the killing and maiming of defenseless civilians, including children? What other career matches these dismal statistics - 65% of enlistees don't receive the promised money for college and 88% of male veterans say no useful civilian skill was learned? What other career assures young women of a 30% sexual assault rate from fellow employees? What other career will encourage our teenagers to torture helpless civilians and to enjoy killing, like Marine commander Maj. Gen. James Mattis did in Falluja: "It's a hell of a hoot ...it's fun to shoot some people." What other career choice do

you offer students that will require them to commit crimes against humanity in the eyes of the world?

For our children's sake, inform yourselves of the facts about war and the evils enlistees will be pressured into. Conservative WorldWatch Institute figures state that 59% of the casualties in Vietnam were noncombatants. In Iraq the percentage is higher, with a million killed in just 5 years according to the most credible estimate. It took 10 years to kill over a million defenseless civilians and to torture thousands more in Vietnam. Then, as now, the public was continually assured that few civilians were being killed and that: "America doesn't torture!" Inform yourselves about what really happens in today's war zones. Listen to the Winter Soldier testimonies from Iraq and Afghan veterans. Read the testimonies of 19 veterans covering wars from 1937 through Iraq and Afghanistan in the book, *Long Shadows: Veterans Paths to Peace*. These ground truth experiences will not be mentioned in military ads or by recruiters. Let the truth about war and the military guide your decision on banning the ads.

If you recall, I compared military ads to those deceptive tobacco ads designed to lure people into addiction and premature death. Tobacco ads like "you've come a long way, baby" are especially devastating to women - since 1980 their rate of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease has quadrupled. Pulling tobacco ads from our schools saves lives. Military ads, too, are deceptively alluring and far more dangerous to the health, safety and spiritual well being of our youth! Take them out of our schools! Replace "army strong," that throwback to the school yard bully and the might-makes-right nonsense, with timeless and edifying wisdom quotes from peacemakers like Gandhi: "I reject violence because the good it appears to do is temporary, the evil it does is permanent;" and, "means and ends are like seed and tree respectively." Save lives, return the paltry bounty, and remove those military ads.