

Editorial: TROOPS NOT SERVED BY PERPETUATING HERO MYTH

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This piece was printed in The Capital Times - of Madison, WI - 12/5/07, page A9. On Veterans Day, members of Veterans For Peace erected and managed the somber display representing American soldiers killed in the illegal invasions/occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

"We erected over 4300 tombstones (in Olbrich Park) so that people can comprehend the magnitude of this tragedy and reflect upon its meaning," project co-chair Richard Chamberlin said. While I was walking the line over and over and listening to the people who came to view it, recollections from Vietnam and a host of related thoughts and reflections welled up. Here are some I'd like to share.

The scope of the tragedy expands exponentially when considering the defenseless civilians killed by our troops. It would require over 250 times more tombstones than were displayed. Our dead were, unwittingly or not, involved in that slaughter. So they're not heroes. In fact, they were victims in multiple ways. And when we parrot the media hype about "fallen heroes," we perpetuate victimization by promoting the continuation of the slaughter.

The hero hype works for those who use lies and deception to sell wars to the unwary - wars that serve their interests. These folks profit mightily while sacrificing nothing. The planned invasion of Iran will require many more bodies and the hero hype helps lure them in. And again, the future "heroes" like the ones already "fallen" will not come from the families of those who profit from war. They will come from that rapidly expanding pool of the poor, the powerless, the disadvantaged - especially people of color. These will be the ones to sacrifice mightily and profit not at all from the folly. They will be the future victims (one who is killed, injured, or subject to suffering; one who is swindled or tricked).

Note: we're hearing the same rhetoric about Iran from the same people who lied and deceived us about Iraq. In fact, the Bush regime has employed some folks who deceived us about Vietnam - Colin Powell comes to mind.

Given the nature and intent of these ill-begotten wars, the most idealistic soldier is given no opportunity for heroic actions (characteristic of a hero; noble). The indefensible attacks on Iraq and Afghanistan are illegal by all measures of US and international law. They likewise stand condemned by universal ethical principles common to all wisdom traditions. Thus our soldiers are victims from the moment they arrive. The slaughter of defenseless civilians in Iraq alone and the millions of refugees driven from their homes will soon exceed that of Vietnam.

The war on Vietnam was epitomized by the My Lai massacre of 500 defenseless Vietnamese children, women, and elderly by a cross section of average American teenagers and young adults. Documented charges included mutilation and rape of

children, the hanging of elderly invalids, and the Nazi-style machine-gunning of women and children into a ditch. The Vietnamese people were commonly called "gooks," "dinks" and "slopes" and were looked upon as less than human. My Lai was only one of many similar "incidents".

What atrocities are American youth committing in Iraq and Afghanistan, where Islamic people are commonly called "sanji," "rag heads" and "sand niggers?" For those orchestrating these wars, Islamic believers are also considered enemies of God. George Bush called it a "crusade" at the start, and Erik Prince calls his highly paid, kill-for-profit, Blackwater mercenaries "Crusaders for Christ." Worse yet, the widespread torture (including waterboarding) and summary executions of Vietnamese "suspects" were illegal back then, but today's mercenaries can now kill with impunity and torture has since been legalized.

How did America's image as the gleaming "City on the Hill" sink into the hell hole of a torture gulag as Abu Ghraib overshadows the Statue of Liberty in the eyes of the world? The "Memorial Mile" is about the need for REDEMPTION - which can't begin until we courageously face the truth.

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