

# Former soldier recalls reactions to close call in conflicts past

Personal account of military life tells of pride, courage and fear.

A friend recently asked me what I thought was going through the minds of soldiers preparing for war in Iraq. I had served three years in an Army paratroop unit in the mid '70s, and so my friend thought I might

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have some insight into their feelings. Our unit mission was to defend American interests in the Mideast in the event of war.

Fortunately, we never had to fulfill that mission, but we came close a few times, being ordered to standby-alert status enough that at the age of 19 I had more opportunities than I wanted to wonder how I would react in the face of death.

I tried to answer my friend's question by telling him a story about a guy in my platoon named Milligan. Tall, handsome, athletic and funny,

Milligan was immensely popular with everybody in the platoon. Even the hardened NCOs liked him. With his physical prowess and sharp wit, Milligan had the makings of a natural leader. What was most appealing about him was his unfailing decency and compassion. When the rest of us were exhausted, homesick and pissed off, Milligan was the one we turned to in order to rally our spirits.

Then Milligan changed. Off duty, he started hanging out with a pacifist religious sect in the local town. Within a few weeks, he declared himself a pacifist and refused to carry a weapon. He applied for Conscientious Objector status and requested a discharge from the Army on religious grounds. We were all stunned. Milligan had quietly challenged all we had been taught to embrace.

In many ways, he was still the same Milligan, always friendly, smiling, ready to commiserate with anyone feeling down, and we were eager to hold on to the side of him that made it easy for us to believe in what we were doing. The Army, however, did not indulge such mixed emotions. In the words of President Bush, you were either with them or against them.

While the brass decided what to do with Milligan, he was required to accompany us on training exercises,

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pulling KP duty, digging latrine ditches and all the other dirty work that make up military life. We were in the middle of a month-long exercise in West Germany when we got put on alert for a war in Cyprus between the Turks and Greeks. Unlike other alerts, which usually ended in a stand-down without our leaving the barracks, this time it looked like we were heading for combat. Instead of training blanks, we were issued live ammo; flight manifest lists were drawn up, squad-level operations orders for assembling on a hot drop zone were given. I wrote a quick letter home to my parents, telling them not to worry, but the truth is I was scared.

Then, to our surprise, Milligan wanted to rejoin us. He got another NCO to ask our platoon sergeant to take him back. Sgt. Smith, a Vietnam vet with four years combat duty,

turned him down flat: "No," he said. "He quit me on once. He'll do it again."

As it turned out, the Cyprus mission was aborted at the last minute, but when we returned to base camp, Milligan had been transferred out of the battalion, never to be heard from again.

I've often wondered what caused Milligan to change his mind: Guilt? Loneliness? Patriotism? Years later I found a possible answer in "The Things They Carried," a short story about Vietnam by Tim O'Brien: "They carried the soldier's greatest fear, which was the fear of blushing. Men killed and died because they were embarrassed not to. It was what had brought them to the war in the first place, nothing positive, no dreams of glory or honor, just to avoid the blush of dishonor. They died so as not to die of embarrassment."

This happened early in my tour, and after a while, I forgot about Milligan until a couple of years later when two men in our battalion were killed on a training jump. With less than 90 days left to my discharge, I had calculated that this jump should have been my last. I was congratulating myself on having survived 40 jumps with only a few bumps and scrapes when the Battalion Commander ordered a

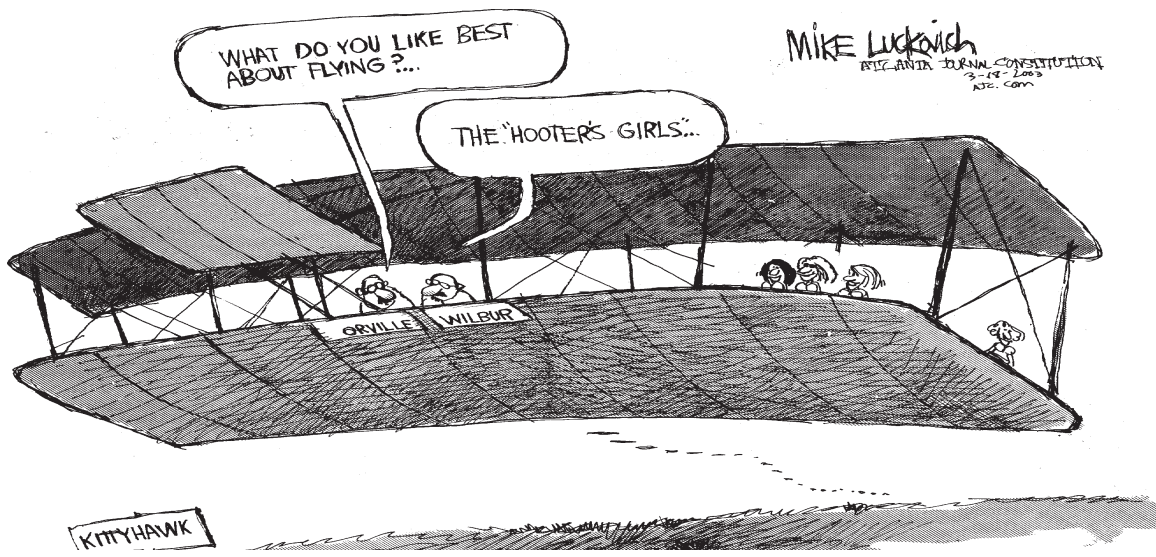
"confidence" jump for the following week.

I did not have to jump if I didn't want to. Airborne was voluntary, and you could terminate your jump status anytime, forfeiting only the extra \$55 a month jump pay and the respect of your fellow paratroopers. *Why take the risk?* I argued with myself. *You'll probably never see these guys again anyway.* The decision should've been that simple, but it wasn't. I thought of Milligan watching us drive off in trucks for the airfield to board planes ready to fly us to war in Cyprus, leaving him behind.

The journalist Murray Kempton, a WWII vet himself, once wrote, "The one thing that guts is not is a quality that can be depended on. That is why it is useless continually to test it, because there is always a time when it fails almost anyone ... Dignity, not courage, is all anyone can hope to keep."

I ended up making that extra jump. To Mr. Kempton, I would add that the drop from bravery to cowardice, even at 1,200 feet, is a short one, and once you exit a plane in midair, there's no turning back to retrieve your dignity or courage.

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## WWJD? Strive for peace with Iraq

Campus Ministers send a plea for peace and morality.

Saddam Hussein has brutalized and repressed the Iraqi people for more than 20 years and more recently has sought to acquire weapons of mass destruction that could be made available to terrorists

The debate around the legitimate use of violence against the people of Iraq is an important one, but it can't be the main one. Of far greater importance is our vision of how God wants to reconcile the world, and our embracing a discipleship so total, it knows no compromise with the uncertainty of the world around us.

with the United States. We live in a time where wars and rumors of war swirl. We offer fervent prayers for all world leaders, that guided by the power of the Holy Spirit, they would seek peace.

We pray for the women and men who are deployed overseas and stateside that they will find support during this time and will be held safe.

We pray for families who know even now the pain that war brings - fear, separation and deep uncertainty. We pray they will feel Christ's presence and protection.

And finally, we pray for those who have already died in this conflict. We pray that their families may be comforted in their grief, and that through the power of the Holy Spirit, we may offer our hearts and hands to bring God's healing. We remain "in this world, but not of it," citizens of a kingdom whose origins are from above but whose domain is here below. We believe that nonviolence reflects the character of this higher, ultimate order: the love that will one day turn swords into plowshares. As Christian campus ministers and as ambassadors of the King of Love, we must proclaim this message of peace and reconciliation.

A "Comfort and Hope" chapel service organized by Chaplain Christman will be held at 8 p.m. March 24 in Wait Chapel. Organ, violin and piano music will accompany the service.

This column was the collective work of Campus Ministers Tim Auman, Laura Wind, Rebecca Hartzog, Stewart Ellis, Bob McGee, and Ed Christman.

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worldwide. President Bush and members of Congress are right to call him an international threat to peace.

The debate around the legitimate use of violence against the people of Iraq is an important one, but it can't be the main one. Of far greater importance is our vision of how God wants to reconcile the world, and our embracing a discipleship so total, it knows no compromise with the uncertainty of the world around us.

While Hussein is a cruel tyrant, we believe that a pre-emptive war with Iraq would not be a just war. It would be an unprovoked attack upon a nation which has not attacked the United States.

Such a unilateral action would undermine the work and purpose of the U.N. and set a dangerous precedent for other nations. It would bring death and destruction to Baghdad, a huge city filled with innocent civilians - our brothers and sisters on this planet.

## Measured response most apt

British politician's speech shows that resolution to Iraq conflict is not just black and white.

Nearly one-third of the British House of Commons recently voted to declare "the case for military action against Iraq as yet unproven." The proposition failed, but its supporters included a high-profile member of the opposition Conservative Party, Kenneth Clarke. But why, some may ask, should

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and political reconstruction, a costly endeavor for which Western countries seem insufficiently prepared, Iraq may plunge into chaos more deadly and unstable than the status quo. And Iraq's Kurdish minority will be loath to support a reconstruction plan involving a Turkish presence in northern Iraq.

Perhaps the most menacing threat stems from the potential for engendering ill will toward the West and cultivating a greater terrorist threat. Hawks often claim that military intervention coupled with democratization will yield greater stability in the region. As good as this may sound, if al-Qaeda can successfully point to an American "invasion" of Iraq, their numbers and wrath toward the West could swell. The vision of Americans and Iraqis united in the fraternity of democracy could be a chimera.

Mr. Clarke also underscored that skepticism of war is not the same as anti-Americanism, which he explicitly condemned. As someone who has been studying in England since Sept. 2001, I can attest that Mr. Clarke's position is by far the most common sentiment in Europe and beyond. From Britain to northern Africa, I have consistently been greeted by people who embrace Americans and American culture while simultaneously objecting to American foreign policy. A Tunisian restaurateur eloquently captured this idea: "We love Americans. It's your government we don't like."

As Americans we must differentiate between the unbridled hatred of anti-Americanism and legitimate differences of opinion. Otherwise, we jeopardize relations not only with our historic allies but also with countries such as Turkey, Pakistan and Egypt, where the American values of democracy and human rights have begun to take root.

Despite all of this, military intervention in Iraq may still be the best solution. As the United States begins to pursue such a course, though, we should consider all of the possible consequences, from our relations with other countries to the emergence of new security threats. The justification for war should not simply be that Saddam Hussein is dangerous. Rather, the standard should be whether war is the best way to deal with the situation, and whether it will solve more problems than it creates.

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Americans care about the opinions of a virtually powerless British politician?

Kenneth Clarke's speech succinctly exposed a false dichotomy that has dominated much of the discourse on Iraq: either you accept that Saddam is a threat and support war, or you ignore the danger entirely. While fully cognizant of Saddam Hussein's threat to international security and human rights, Clarke does not jump to the conclusion that war is the solution. Not because he is a weak-kneed peacenik, but because of a war's potentially disastrous ramifications. "We should avoid (military action) because of the consequences of war. How many other terrorists will we recruit in the long standing battle against international terrorism ... and what will we have done to the stability of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt?"

President Bush and French President Jacques Chirac embody the polarized thinking that Clarke combats. On one side, Bush asserts that if you view Hussein as a threat to peace and human rights, only a coward could oppose what would be a just war.

On the other side, Chirac has attempted to avoid war by ignoring the true threat that Saddam poses. In almost childlike fashion, Chirac has virtually shut his eyes, stuck his fingers in his ears and adopted a "see no evil, hear no evil" attitude. Neither of these dogmatic positions is necessary or helpful to resolving the impending crisis.

Military experts and politicians, including Mr. Clarke, largely agree that from a tactical perspective, the United States can easily win a war in Iraq. The real question concerns what happens afterward. Those who support a swift intervention assume that oppressed Iraqis will overwhelmingly greet Americans as liberators. But what kind of Pandora's box do we risk opening if Iraqis, even if they wish to be rid of Saddam, view Americans as imperialistic conquerors?

As bad as Saddam is, in the eyes of many Iraqis, Americans may be worse. The potential exists that without sustained efforts at economic

