COUNTER-RECRUITING VISITS
BOSCOBEL HIGH SCHOOL

By David Giffey

Last month, as part of our counter-recruiting program, I visited with 20-25 students at Boscobel High School to talk to students about alternatives to enlisting in the military. The school is about 90 miles west of Madison. Three women from the peace group, Code Pink, came to observe.

On September 8, after updating body counts and other information for the visual display, I arrived at the high school about 45 minutes before lunch. I chose that date because students are given only a two-week period after the school starts to opt out of having their contact information given to recruiters.

I met with the guidance counselor who was very supportive of Veterans for Peace. She was surprised when I told her that 6.8 percent of the 2009 graduating class in Boscobel signed up for the military, making it one of the highest percentages in southwestern Wisconsin. I also arranged for a $300 scholarship to be given to the 2011 graduate who wins a VFP essay contest. The topic: “Why I believe war is not the answer.” The counselor indicated that

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No “Memorial Mile” for Veteran’s Day This Year

After three years of braving the winter winds we have decided not to set up tombstone replicas this Veterans Day. We will continue to display them on Memorial Day along either Olbrich Park or Speedway Drive.
Recently I heard an American General in Iraq try to deflect criticism by stating that nine out of 10 civilian casualties were caused by insurgents. That means that one out of 10 civilian deaths was caused by the US or its allies. I did some research and discovered that estimates of the number of civilians killed in both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars vary greatly. The most conservative figure was around 100,000. Using that figure, our military admits to killing at least 10,000 innocent civilians.

This got me to thinking about the “Three Holy Wars” speech I saw historian Howard Zinn give last year at The Progressive’s 100th Anniversary celebration shortly before he died. He talked about the three wars that Americans consider sacrosanct: The Revolutionary War, the Civil War and World War II. Zinn asked, “Were they worth it?”

In the Revolutionary War at least 25,000 people died-- the equivalent of 2.5 million today. When the war ended the Indians had their land stolen, Blacks remained slaves and women were still considered the chattel of their husbands. When the Constitution was adopted the pursuit of happiness promised in the Declaration of Independence became the pursuit of property. Today we live under a corporatocracy where one percent of the population controls 23 percent of the wealth.

In the Civil War 600,000 people died (the equivalent of five million in today’s figures). A lot of people like J.P. Morgan got rich, poor whites who couldn’t buy their way out of serving died in huge numbers and the slaves were delivered into semi-slavery. Other nations ended slavery without a war. “Was it worth it?”

During World War II, 50 million people died yet fascism has lived on as does militarism and racism.

Zinn concludes that, “war cannot be accepted no matter what…The means are horrible certainly. The end is uncertain. That alone should make you hesitate… Surely you should be able to understand that in between war and passivity there are a thousand possibilities.”

That brings us back around to the 10,000 civilian deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan. The equivalent number in the United States would be 50,000. Each of those people killed has a family. Many of those families have sworn “death to America.” How many more martyrs will we continue to create? Who wins and who dies? Is it worth it?
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the military recruiters move around the cafeteria during their visits, so I did the same.

I found many students to be very interested including a young man who had recently enlisted. I gave him some information and reassured him that legally he could change his mind.

A most interesting conversation involved a group of five students. A young girl, who was an exchange student from Germany, said she was amazed to learn that military recruiters were allowed in the schools. Her Boscobel friends listened carefully and were equally surprised to learn about her observations. I gave them a copy of “Addicted to War” that they promised to share with others.

A teacher approached me and said, “I’ve been deployed and I’d like to join Veterans for Peace.” He was a special education teacher and I’ve known his family for years. He would be a valuable asset to our chapter. I also provided the school library with a new copy of our award winning book, “Long Shadows: Veterans’ Paths to Peace.” Funding for the book was provided by the Evjue Foundation two years ago, and facilitated by VFP member Paul McMahon.

As usual, there were no direct results of this counter-recruiting trip, but I felt very pleased with the contacts made and the responses.

Military Watch List

Wagner National Guard photo by 1st Sgt. Vaughn R. Larson

Crews prepare the RQ-7 Shadow 200 for a training launch at Fort McCoy last year.

NATIONAL GUARD TRAINING FOR DRONE BASE AT VOLK FIELD

Plans are proceeding to build an $8 million operations center at Camp Williams for the RQ-7 Shadow, a tactical unmanned aerial vehicle fielded to a Wisconsin Army National Guard unit.

Last fall training began on the equipment at Fort McCoy about 100 miles northwest of Madison.

The Shadow should not be confused with the Predator, the larger armed aircraft used primarily by the Air Force in Iraq and Afghanistan to hunt for and destroy insurgents. It will be used tactically for target acquisition, aerial reconnaissance and surveillance.

Operating and maintaining the four UAVs will be the responsibility of 22 soldiers from Company B of the 32nd Infantry Brigade.

Construction of a 10,000 square foot building is expected to begin in December of 2011 and conclude in December 2012.

From Wisconsin Army and Air National Guard Press Release
Book Review:

The Lonely Soldier
Written by Helen Benedict

Reviewed by Gail Price, LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker), Clinical Substance Abuse Counselor and Associate Member of Veterans for Peace.

It seems to me there are many stories to be found in any book. There are the stories of the people the book is about. There is the story, often hidden, of the author who wanted to write the book and had a purpose for doing so. And this book has an additional story I would call the story of humankind, of individual humans struggling to mature.

The people selected for the book among many interviewed are five women soldiers in the early years of the Iraq War. They were women who joined the military young, naive, searching for a way to become a “somebody” and who, because of their backgrounds found other avenues cut off, or for whom the romance or security of this path beckoned. Their purpose for being in the book had to do with wanting to be honest about what war does to others and what it does to us.

**Mickela**, 21, athletic, came from a family entangled in Mexican gangs in Los Angeles. She is the product of a long line of teenage mothers whose drug addicted mother locked her in one small room for days at a time, who slept with her siblings in one small bed or on the floor and, with her siblings, was taken into protective services several times while growing up.

**Eli**, 46, Native American, had a 22-year career in the military as an NCO. Growing up, her alcoholic and violent father moved the family every six months following work and her mother once shot herself in the head while drunk. She was raped at age 13 and, pregnant, her father forced her to marry the violent and abusive man who raped her. Later, divorced and living on welfare with two children, she had to remarry this abusive husband in order to be allowed to enlist in the military.

**Jennifer**, 23, was a Midwestern athlete who competed in high school wrestling with boys. Her mother was a nurse and her firefighter father had wanted to go to Vietnam but the war ended before he was old enough. She joined out of high school to realize his ambitions for him. She signed up for the military police. She currently suffers from a combination of post traumatic stress and physical disorders that cause her to shake constantly.

**Terris**, married with four children, served 16 years in the military reserve. She says of childhood, “my life was a little drastic.” Her father was a violent drunk who beat his wife and kids and stabbed his wife. As the eldest she tried to protect the younger kids by locking them in a room. Once, she and one of her brothers attacked their father with a baseball bat to try to stop him. All her brothers subsequently went to prison or died or were murdered. She was married with no money and joined the National Guard for the better life promised by the recruiters.

**Abbie**, 24, rebellious as a teen and now a nursery school teacher grew up in a religious family in a small Wisconsin town. She had a strong willed mother and a “perfect” sister and had always wanted to help people. She joined the National Guard out of high school to make everybody in the town proud of her and says, “I finally felt like I belonged.”

The author’s story is that she wanted to expose the incredible ignorance, stupidity, greed, incompetence and emotional

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immaturity of the corporate and military powers who created the circumstances within which these women were sent to war. Thus the book is full of blood and maimed bodies, starving children, excrement, sandstorms, boredom alternating with terror, inadequate or nonexistent water, food, medical care, body and truck armor, radios, maps, misogyny, isolation, sexual harassment and assault, fear of rape, weight loss, PTSD, dehydration and bladder infections. The author writes of Halliburton and its subsidiary KBR “buying shabby or broken trucks on the cheap” then torching them and collecting full payment from the government, or “delaying deliveries to build up billable employee hours then threatening to refuse to deliver anything at all until it was paid.”

My story is that I wanted to know these women. My interest has always been in how people find a way out of the wreckage after their fantasies about life and of themselves have come crashing down. I was frequently angry at the author for imposing her anti-war motivation on those of the women, and although it is a story people need to be educated about, from my point of view it is a story that anybody with any imagination who has ever watched MASH or read “Catch 22” or seen football players ramp themselves up into warrior mode by slamming their pads together could guess about.

I was angry that people come from such unhappy and dysfunctional backgrounds, that greed and selfishness rule people and institutions the way they do, that denial and wishful thinking are so prevalent and that violence is so human.

Eventually the author settled down (or maybe I settled down) so that the stories of the women did come through and I was able to enjoy learning about them and appreciate who they were and who they were able to become. They went on with their lives trying to make their past and ongoing suffering meaningful, including offering their stories for this book.

In the last chapter the author lists 39 things the Army could do to make women’s lives easier such as placing more women in units so they would be able to confide in each other, educating officers about sexual violence, and having more female physicians and gynecologists. She also would like to see the military train therapists on how women react differently to stress than men.

The Good Soldier Wins An Emmy

Last month Madison VFP’s Will Williams was in New York City to take part in the award ceremony where The Good Soldier won an Emmy for outstanding historical programming.

The documentary film follows the journeys of five American combat veterans from different generations.

The awards were presented September 27, at Lincoln Center where over 1000 news executives and journalists waited for the winners to be announced.

“I was elated when they said that we had won,” said Williams who took to the stage with the film’s producers, writers and two other combat veterans to accept the award.

Will said the impetus for the film came after Michael Uys and Lexy Levell, the husband and wife team who produced the documentary, began talking with veterans about their combat experiences. They eventually invested most of their money in the project. The film gained prominence after it was featured on the PBS show Bill Moyer’s Journal.

The award was presented by legendary TV anchor and reporter Dan Rather.
Memories of Friend
Who Died from AIDS:
“He was Mad to Live”

By Joel Garb

I first met Bob at Letterman General Hospital on the Presidio in San Francisco. This was the old Letterman, built around 1905, with its long inner hall which connected the wards and enclosed an inner court yard on three sides. It was early spring of 1968, and the hall with its almost floor to ceiling windows which wrapped around the inner court yard seemed especially filled with sunlight.

I had been at Letterman about four months. Bob’s was a new face as we passed in the hall, he with his jaunty walk and, as I was recently reminded, twinkling eyes. We greeted each other, ate lunch together, and smoked that evening at the Palace of Fine Arts.

It was maybe then, maybe another night or that weekend that we began the first of many forays into the City, the Marina, the Aquatic Park, North Beach, Market Street, the Tenderloin, Lafayette Park, sometimes Golden Gate Park, sometimes to hear music, criss-crossing the city, always laughing, mostly at ourselves.

Our barracks were on the southern beach front of the Bay. To the left as we gazed out on the Bay was the Golden Gate Bridge, the grand icon of the city and of our lives.

Bob was to me courageous, compassionate, highly sensitive, and authentic, a poet and a lover of life. He had come to Letterman to learn the cast room, but could not stand to witness the pain and was reassigned to the orderly room. Many a life has been saved for those who could type and were thus assigned to the orderly room. During our journeys he often spoke with and gave money to the homeless. Alas, I fearfully kept my distance. Once he told me, with such passion I’ll never forget, that he didn’t want to die, he wanted to live.

To me he was a young Zorba. Sometimes we would meet in the hospital and he would say, “Joel, make me laugh!” I would say, “Bob, teach me to dance.”

Within a few months Bob was assigned to Germany. On that final day he told me he had lied to me only once, that he didn’t want to die, he wanted to live.

To me he was a young Zorba. Sometimes we would meet in the hospital and he would say, “Joel, make me laugh!” I would say, “Bob, teach me to dance.”

Within a few months Bob was assigned to Germany. On that final day he told me he had lied to me only once, that he was really only 17-years-old. I went to Vietnam and we lost track of each other.

For years I searched for him. I thought of him most every day. Thirty-eight years later I realized that I was spelling his name wrong, with one ‘L.’ We would have laughed heartily at that. He was in the San Francisco phone directory and I called him.

He answered suspiciously. When I told him who I was he at first did not recognize me. How we would have laughed. Was I an old lover? I said not, but then thought again and said we were lovers. “Yes or no,” he demanded.

When he realized who I was, he gave me this update. He had soon been court marshaled in Germany. “There are two things the Army won’t tolerate, being gay and drugs,” he said. He was six years in Leavenworth prison. Then he was married “for a minute,” then “sleeping in doorways” for 12 years, then finally employed by the city of San Francisco. He was HIV positive, an alcoholic, but only drank now to “keep from getting the shakes,” and crack addicted. I said I wanted to come to see him. He said not, that he was, “a 60-year-old flake, a scoundrel.”

That was in November. I spoke with him by phone and wrote to him. He warmed up to the idea of my visit and then cooled off. Finally in April 2007 I did see him for a minute, then let him chase me away. He had recently been diagnosed with AIDS and he died in May.

Paraphrasing Kerouac, Bob was mad to live, mad to talk, never saying the commonplace, the compassionate one who burned, burned, burned.
NEW VETS FOR PEACE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VISITS MADISON

On July 19 Veterans for Peace Executive Director Dennis Lane was in town as part of a tour to connect with local chapters. About a dozen people showed up at the Hawthorn Library for an informal meeting with pizza and conversation.

The main focus of his tour was to strengthen the bonds between the local and the national VFP groups. Something that will help is an endowment fund being established in the name of prominent historian and VFP member Howard Zinn to fund local chapter projects.

Lane also said that Veterans for Peace is going to become more attuned to the issues of female veterans. It is working with US Representative Nikki Tsongas on the HR 5197, The Sexual Trauma Response Oversight and Good Governance Act (STRONG) that would make it easier for women soldiers to report sexual harassment. It has passed the House and is currently in the Senate.

Another way for the locals to connect is through “webinars,” live computer feeds where members can engage in questions and answers with presenters. One webinar on victims of torture in Iraq was presented August 7 and another about the effects of torture on the torturers was presented October 9. Check the VPF national website for updates and viewing.

Lane also wants to highlight the effects of PTSD on returning veterans and bring younger members into VFP.

Lane recently replaced Michael McPhearson as executive director. Lane was in the Army and served in Vietnam in an artillery unit from 1967-69. Before coming to VFP he spent 25 years working with non-profits.

CHEW ON THIS

A warning from Scottish Historian Professor Alexander Tyler, circa 1787. Re: The Fall of the Athenian Republic.

“A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves largesse (generous gifts) from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits form the public treasure, with the result that a democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy, [which is] always followed by a dictatorship.

“The average age of the world’s greatest civilization has been two hundred years. These nations have progressed through this sequence: from bondage to spiritual faith; from spiritual faith to great courage; from courage to liberty; from liberty to abundance; from abundance to complacency; from complacency to apathy; from apathy to dependence, and from dependence back to bondage.”

(Editor’s Note: Some historians have cast doubt on the authenticity of this quote by Tyler, but it is still food for thought.) RC
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