

D O N A L D A N D E R S O N

War Chatter

—from *Gathering Noise from My Life: A Camouflaged Memoir*

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In our home, there was plenty of aspirin and Vitamin C. Apples and turnips (and canned beets and peas) in the root cellar, a converted bomb shelter. My father had not finished pouring the concrete walls or installing the lead ceiling. The ventilation system remained what my father termed a *quandary*.

You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you.

—Leon Trotsky

Eddie Turner, Jackie Baker, and I lobbed dirt clods at Mrs. Lorango’s wet sheets every wash day until we got caught. We were surprised that Mrs. Lorango knew we were the throwers and that our parents, without checking with us, believed her. We’d hid behind a berm in the cow pasture where we pretended we were pulling grenade pins with our teeth.

My father’s best friend Sidney died at Pearl Harbor. My father had tried to join up but had been denied enlistment because of a childhood mishap in his father’s wood yard that had blinded one eye. My father had wanted to join the Navy before the attack on Pearl Harbor, explaining that if he and Sidney had been able to enlist together, they could have asked to be assigned to the same ship. Whatever would

have happened to my father on board Sidney's ship would have happened more than four years before my birth.

Donald Arthur Anderson is interred in Butte. His engraved name is shortened to Don A. Anderson: the way he signed it. After the burial, I returned to Colorado to a letter posted three days before the day my father died.

Dec 8, 1993

Merry Xmas. We will put our tree up tomorrow. Your mother is going with me today to buy one. It's been quite cold here but it's warmed up some. I can still start all my cars without plugging them in. Yesterday, it's been 52 years since my pal Sidney's boat sunk. How could I still miss him? We have new carpet in our kitchen, bath, and back porch. Our upright freezer finally gave up—we had to get a new one. We have 2-refrigerators, 2-freezers, 2-microwaves, 4-TVs, 4-phones. I think we are pretty well equipped, don't you?

—All love.

P.S. I've got to do something about the carport.

Sometime during the nine minutes after the U.S.S. *Arizona* was initially struck, Sidney, died. "Drowned," guessed my father. At 8:10 a.m., December 7, 1941, a 1,760-pound bomb pierced the deck of the ship to explode a fuel tank. Seven seconds later, when the forward ammunition magazines blew (1.7 million pounds of ignited gunpowder), heads and other human parts and random metal debris rained down on sailors and the seemingly steelier decks of adjacent ships. The few *Arizona* crewmen to survive swam to shore naked, their clothes stripped from them by the force of the ship's detonations. By 8:19, the *Arizona* had settled to the bottom of Wai Momi, as the early Hawaiians had titled the "pearl waters" of the Harbor.

A summer of '46 birth, I supposed myself an emphatic consequence of armistice, my father and mother properly delaying my birth until their upheaved world became safe—for me. This dreamy version of my parent's decision about my conception seemed to me sound and true for years. Actual military events in Korea and French Vietnam and Hungary and Poland and the Suez seemed distant and unmournful as I confronted them from within the high-windowed walls of my schools through my *Weekly Reader*. Sputnik, though, and the discovered presence of Soviet ballistic missiles in nearby Cuba quailed me. Weapons which could climb to space to descend unimpeded to earth pressured up dread, particularly when my

father pondered aloud (during family meals) the constructing of an underground shelter, then actually began storing water in emptied Clorox jugs and our canned and dried foods in an interior room in the basement.

Draft lottery “#1” for the 1970 drawing is July 9: *my* birthday. I immediately join Air Force ROTC. My plan is to stay clear of the Army (more soldiers being buried than airmen). And if forced to Vietnam, I mean to be forced there as a lieutenant—an *officer* in charge of his future. The month I sign up for the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps, the Pentagon releases to the public news of thirty-four deaths in two hundred nine incidents in Vietnam of officer “fraggings”—that is, U.S. officers being attacked by their own soldiers. Attacks by their own troops on officers in time of war reached unprecedented proportions in Vietnam, with some historians reporting as many as two thousand incidents a year.

A female Air Force captain, recently returned from Afghanistan, rightly spoke of the youth of the troops: “All they want to do is eat pop tarts and play video games and all we do is give them grenades.”

Nietzsche understood that the trouble with war is that it induces stupidity in the victor and vengeance in the vanquished.

“FRAG”:

One of war's few privileges, this, after fragmentation grenade, is the verb for wounding or killing an unpopular officer in one's own unit. It was done in other wars, too, before we had a word for it. My father, a sergeant, was suspected of it in World War One, when a certain lieutenant suggested they go out into no-man's-land just to waste some time and give him an opportunity to write my father up for a decoration. "I don't care to have an undecorated senior NCO." My father came back unscathed and alone. The lieutenant's successor repeated the excursion, but had the same bad luck, and my father returned intact and undecorated, saying a sniper each time had fired on them. There was no third time: No officer could be found willing to take my father again into no-man's-land, lest he get fraggged by whomever. Did German nighttime snipers kill officers only?
—Paul West

We hear of, say, My Lai or Abu Ghraib, and want to believe—don't we?—that our choices would have been different from those who will find their place in history as moral dwarfs. Except: as the Milgram and the Stanford Prison experiments uncomfortably disclose—humans are only too willing to obey authority, even when that

authority conflicts with their conscience. As we should by now know, it is in this way that ordinary folk, by merely “doing their jobs,” become agents in persecution, “cleansing,” and genocide.

Now and again during the Milgram experiments, someone would refuse to “obey,” either to start or to continue to administer what they had every reason to believe was debilitating, if not fatal, electrical shock to unseen but screaming recipients. But such forswearing individuals were always in the minority.

If you can't imagine yourself an SS officer hustling the Jewish women and children to the gas chamber, you need to be more closely in touch with your buried self.

—Paul Fussell

Samuel Hynes heard a man at a dinner party suggest a solution for the siege of Sarajevo: “We could take those guns out with a little napalm.” Hynes, a former marine pilot, thought, “You have never seen napalm dropped, you don’t know how it flows and spreads like a wave of fire and burns *everything*.” Hynes also records a French foot-soldier from the First World War who said it this way: “The man who has not understood with his flesh cannot talk to you about it.”

—*The Soldier's Tale*

*Nothing has changed.
The body is susceptible to pain,
It must eat and breathe air and sleep,
it has thin skin and blood right underneath,
an adequate stock of teeth and nails,
its bones are breakable, its joints are stretchable.
In tortures all this is taken into account.*

—Wisława Szymborska, from “Tortures”

Mission Accomplished.

—George W. Bush

The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. From the viewpoint of our legal institutions and of our moral standards of judgment, this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together.

—Hannah Arendt

You can tell a true war story if it embarrasses you. If you don't care for obscenity, you don't care for the truth; if you don't care for the truth, watch how you vote. Send guys to war, they come home talking dirty.

—Tim O'Brien, from "How to Tell a True War Story"

An observant 19th-century cardiologist noted that a Civil War combatant's cardiovascular system could be altered by that soldier's battlefield experiences. Named for the cardiologist, "Da Costa's Syndrome" manifests a set of symptoms like those of heart disease and anxiety, though a physical examination will not present physiological abnormalities. Perhaps because of its parallel psychological manifestations, "Da Costa's Syndrome" became more commonly known as "Soldier's Heart." What with World War I's constancy of barrage on crammed trenches, the medical term for seemingly intact but maimed soldiers morphed into "Shell-Shocked" and "Battle Fatigue," to be followed by World War II's and Korea's familiar "Thousand-Yard Stare." The term since Vietnam, is, as we know, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD.

Our current war's injuries, an odd consequence of effective body armor and blasts from explosive devices, are contributing as never before to "closed head wounds"—invisible damage contributing strenuously, as you might expect, to PTSD.

It is all practice: when we emerge from experience, we are not wise but skillful. But at what?

—Albert Camus

My old editor at the National Geographic Adventure magazine used to be a Golden Gloves fighter in Ohio, and he was talking about the young interns they had working at the magazine. He said, "You know the trouble with a lot of these people, a lot of them have never been cut."

—Philip Caputo, quoted in Herzog

The three of us crouched in the corner of the house, trembling and crying all at once, thinking that surely we would die here as the bullets and shrapnel were destroying our small wooden home. We decided to leave and find a safe place to hide. So we went through the back, through the kitchen, my husband carrying our young daughter in his arms. A plane flew very low and seemed to be coming directly at us and firing rockets all over, striking my daughter in the back and my husband as he carried her. From where I was, only a few paces behind them, I saw only the heart and the entrails of my child. She seemed to have been blown apart, completely destroyed. My husband stumbled some thirty steps with his arms torn away, blood pouring out of him till he fell dead. There

was a great hole in his chest. Part of it was still smoking, a smoking rocket was still in one leg. The other was stripped of all flesh to the bone. I wanted to pick up my daughter, but there were only pieces of her.... I ran and found her arm and tried to put it back on her, tried to put back everything that had spilled out of her. But she was already dead. She was my only child and it was hard for me to have her. I dressed her myself for parties. Spoiled her. I don't know what I'm going to do.

—Nicaraguan mother, *Writing Between the Lines*

WHAT I LEARNED IN THE MILITARY:

Nothing is impossible to people who don't have to make it come true.

Battle is a great leveler of human aspiration when it most surely should not be. Stray bullets kill brave men and miss cowards. They tear open great doctors-to-be and yet merely nick soldiers who have a criminal past, pulverizing flesh when there is nothing to be gained and passing harmlessly by when the fate of whole nations is at stake. And that confusion, inexplicability, and deadliness have a tendency to rob us of the talented, inflate the mediocre, and ruin or improve the survivors—but always at least making young men who survive not forget what they have been through.

—Victor Davis Hanson

THE FATHER OF A 24-YEAR-OLD SON, DEAD IN IRAQ:

Don't use the word "closure" with me!

[T]here is nothing oblivion won't forgive.

—Mark Jarman, from "The Northern Lights"

THE MOTHER OF A 19-YEAR-OLD SOLDIER KILLED IN KIRKUK OF THE KNOCK ON HER DOOR:

It was the lightest tap on my door that I've ever heard in my life. I opened the door and I seen the man in the dress greens and I knew. I immediately knew. But I thought that if, as long as I didn't let him in, he couldn't tell me. And then it—none of that would've happened. So he kept saying, Ma'am, I need to come in. and I kept telling him, I'm sorry, but you can't come in.

Napalm is a petroleum gel that is ignited by contact and burns prolongedly. Because napalm is a jelly, it affixes to what it burns. Napalm was developed by Harvard University scientists.

Once you're in the field, the argument has passed clean through the "politics" of the discussion. You were standing in the middle of an awful nightmare. Politics had nothing to do with it. First things first, cousin. No, we were completely focused on making it through the night. A ghetto mentality...The war was fucked up, that was clear. We were not very sophisticated about the rightness or the wrongness of the war, but everybody did know that it was bullshit. The lieutenants knew, the captains knew. When our new platoon leader, the one lieutenant I had any regard for, came into the platoon in the fall of '67, he had the NCOs, the track commanders meet. He looked at us and said, "Gentlemen, our job is to make sure everybody goes home in one piece." And we looked at him and said, "Lieutenant, this is an excellent plan; how can we help you?" And just like that we stopped doing ambushes; we stopped doing a lot of crazy, just-looking-for-shit-to-do stuff. There was a lot of just hanging back, lots of convoys. Meanwhile, we were, of course, headed straight for the Tet Offensive of 1968. Not fun. I should have come home in a bag.

—Larry Heinemann, quoted in Herzog

"Although Mengele's subjects," Diane Ackerman writes in *The Zookeeper's Wife*, "could be operated on without any painkillers at all, a remarkable example of Nazi zoophilia is that a leading biologist was once punished for neglecting to give worms enough anesthesia during an experiment."

The power of the atomic bomb comes from the forces holding each atom of substance together.

At 5:46 a.m., January 17, 1995, Japan's worst earthquake in fifty years struck Kobe. Registering 7.2 on the Richter scale, Kobe's surface shimmied for twenty seconds, killing more than 5,000 people. That same week, following more than a full month of effort, the Russian army was effectively erasing Grozny, the Chechen capital, from the surface of the earth.

Beginning January 17, and for a week thereafter, the morning radio news brought ever-mounting Japanese death tolls and damage estimates. Interspersed among reports from Japan were on-site reports from the outskirts of Grozny. I heard a live report from a stone hut in the hills outside the capital. A peasant couple had gathered a number of children from Grozny and had brought them to the hut to escape the bombing. Also in the hut: a pregnant woman who, assisted by the older woman, was birthing a child. Over the voice of the radio reporter, you could hear the new mother scream, the children cry, and the unimpeded Russian bombers overhead, on track to their targets.

Many of the Warsaw Zoo's animals were shipped by the Nazi leadership to purify their breeding. One high Nazi zoo official was in particular interested in back-breeding projects that would reintroduce European forest bison and superior ancient horses. In effect, selective and retro-breeding of superior game for a superior human race to hunt—a mania that stretched to the uprooting of indigenous Slav plants to make room for Aryan seed.

The firebombing of Dresden took place on February 13-14, 1944. February 14, 1944 was not only St. Valentine's Day's, but was the seventh Wednesday before Easter and the first day of Lent—that is, *Ash Wednesday*, the day on which many Christians receive a mark of ashes on their foreheads as a token of penitence and mortality.

In Poland alone, 860,000 Jews were resettled, with 75,000 Germans taking over the acquired lands. 1,300,000 Poles were shipped to Germany as slave labor, with another 330,000 being simply shot. The invading Germans, remaining Poles and Jews now stood in bread lines or, rather, three separate lines. Germans received 2,613 calories, Poles 669, Jews 184.

Combat is so separate, so distant from normalcy that to expect soldiers to return easily from battle during or after war is an illusive prospect. All to say that much of what propels a soldier's world view and living must stem from war-learned behavior—reliance on instinct and the ugly effectiveness of violence.

There's a passage where Paul Berlin is going to war and he looks at his own hands, "my hands, my hands." Love of one's limbs. Love of their presence, because in war there's always the proximate danger of their absence. No hands. No legs. No feet. No testicles. No head. That passage in Cacciato was written with a real purpose in mind: "my hands." Those are things we take for granted. We don't look at our hands and take a shower and say "my hands." But war teaches you to value those hands.

—Tim O'Brien, quoted in Herzog

There were three penises, two complete faces, which looked like masks they were so complete, five soles of feet, their hands, and few other parts. The largest body part was a section of a rib cage with parts of four rib bones connected to a small section of the shoulder.

—Frederick Downs, writing about counting bodies, or parts of them, to sustain the American policy of attrition, qtd. in Nadelson

After counting, Downs's men situated one of the Viet Cong hands into the soft ground and stuck a cigarette between two Viet Cong fingers. "It looked great," Downs said.

Years after, veterans still find memories of combat victory and killing exhilarating. Soldiers as yet “uncooked” by combat often scrutinize the face and body of the killed enemy in wonder at their ability to create something as profound and enduring as death. Soldiers tie themselves to the dead by photographing dead enemy soldiers or by taking the possessions of the dead as trophies to preserve the moment.

—Dr. Theodore Nadelson

One of Dr. Nadelson’s patients puts it more crudely: “You could do anything you wanted—shit, I was eighteen—kill anyone or anything in Vietnam and get away with it. It was like being drunk and walking around with a hard-on.”

... though as Nadelson points out: if soldiers “cannot be aroused to kill to avoid their own death and that of their comrades, they are a detriment to the safety of others.”

Mission Accomplished.

Few things in this world are as unforgiving, pitiless, ungovernable, and irrecoverable as lead and steel loosed from a weapon. The transfigurations they effect on the bodies of friend and foe alike form a permanent backdrop to all of a soldier’s future visions. While others experience intervals of silence between thoughts, a combat veteran’s intervals will be filled with rubbery Halloween mask heads housing skulls shattered into tiny shards, schemeless mutilation, and shocked, pained expressions that violent and premature death casts on a dead face. These images are war’s graffiti.

—John Wolfe, quoted in *When War Becomes Personal*

FIRST WORLD PROBLEM:

Tanorexia, a term used to explain addiction to sunbathing or use of tanning beds.

In six months of firebombing, starting with the Tokyo raid, civilian casualties in Japan doubled those suffered by the Japanese military worldwide in 45 months of war. By the time “Little Boy” and “Fat Man” struck, B-29s had triumphantly firebombed five dozen Japanese cities.

Firebombing is efficient, as approximately 85% of the weight of a firebomb is fuel.

There were, remarkably, 2.7 million U.S. participants in the Vietnam War, in a strip of a nation you could drive the length of on a good highway in ten hours, the width of in three.

Over 7 million tons of bombs were dropped by the U.S. during the Vietnam War, almost four times the total dropped in World War II.

Because McNamara published his recollections of the Vietnam War the same week that the Alfred P. Murrah Building was bombed, the former Secretary of Defense kept showing up on the screen between reports of casualties from Oklahoma City. In a *Harper's* essay, Lewis Lapham compares Robert McNamara to Timothy McVeigh in that both employed bombing as a means of rhetoric.

Tom Valley, who directs Indochina programs at the Institute for International Development at Harvard, was a member of a faculty panel to discuss with McNamara his confessional memoir. Valley, who served as a 19-year-old radio operator for his infantry company near DaNang, said he could make night into day by calling B-52 bombers, Huey helicopter gunships, or naval bombardment. He could call anybody he wanted, he said, but added, "I couldn't call anybody to tell them we were wrong."

The average age of the Vietnam War dead is 23 years.

... there is something wrong with a culture in which McNamara is feted for his "guts" [for confessing] while George McGovern and Gene McCarthy who opposed McNamara's mistakes, are regarded as nobodies.

—Mickey Kaus

May we remember that in addition to our losses—200,000 wounded, 58,000 dead—the Vietnamese suffered up to two million wounded and three million dead.

In Afghanistan, Taliban clerics, as a matter of course, ordered amputations—a hand, a foot, combinations. A father of seven, picnicking near Kabul, was accused of spying. Unknown to the man, Taliban troops had been encamped nearby. Pulled from his home three days after and escorted to an unused soccer field, his left hand and his right foot were removed. His foot now missing above the ankle and his hand above the wrist, the thirty-seven-year old man was not the only patient that day in Kabul to be sent home with stumps blunted by poorly stitched skin folds. Eyes wide, the man has in the newspaper photo a hunted expression.

A leading cause of amputation is landmines. By last count, over 250 million landmines (approximately one mine per able-bodied American) are thought to be stockpiled around the world, with some 70 million already deployed. Landmines are cheap, but defusing them is expensive. The cost ratio to mine versus to de-mine is 3:1000.

Should it be remembered that America's longest war was for Vietnam, in its longer history its shortest?

With no declaration of the war, exact dates are sketchy. It is, however, generally accepted that the Vietnam War started on November 1, 1955 (when Truman inserted advisors) and lasted until April 30, 1975 (The Fall of Saigon), roughly 20 years.

*He says, "You've never seen anything
unless you've seen a man hit in the chest
with an RPG round."*

*I said, "I guess not," and drank on
into the heavy Asian night, weighted and packed.*

*I thought how many times you could say,
"You've never seen anything unless you've
Seen..." and then go on, just fill in
the blanks...*

an F-4 Phantom drop napalm along a tree line

*an illumination round light up the perimeter
as night probes catch in the outer defenses*

*body bags lined up at the edge of the pad,
rotors rippling the plastic as they descend*

*And I said, long after that night, after I'd felt their
names carved in that stone, "You've never seen anything..
anything...anything..."*

—Dale Ritterbusch, "Conversation"

I suppose admitting mistakes is better than not admitting mistakes. But McNamara was a more sympathetic figure when he seemed tortured by guilt in private than now, when he is cashing in on it in public. There is something creepy, even slightly obscene, about the whole process, and it gets creepier upon inspection.

—Mickey Kaus

Pentagon strategists privately acknowledge that, in Afghanistan, it was a mistake to make humanitarian aid food rations dropped by the U.S. the same color and relative size as cluster bomblets. Bomblets which survive impacting, even penetrating earth, can be detonated by perching birds, passing cows, a farmer's plow—or the touch of a hand, maiming or killing who would mistake these containers for food.

If it seems to fall to the historian to make distinctions among wars, each war's larger means and ends, the trajectory for the artist, regardless of culture or time, seems to fall towards an individual's disillusionment, the means and ends of war played out in the personal. For the individual soldier, the sweeping facts of history are accurately written not in the omniscient, third-person plural, but in the singular first.

W.H. Auden, who came into his fullness as a poet as fascism was creeping across Europe, wrote about that scourge and then concluded that “poetry makes nothing happen,” that nothing he ever wrote saved one Jew from the gas chambers. Yet, art markets authority. Why else would officials at the United Nations have decided to cover the tapestry of Picasso's *Guernica*, as council members met to discuss the start of Gulf War II?

Because it made Marines feel dumb, the Corps changed the term *booby trap* to *surprise firing devices*.

EUPHEMISMS:

You think *friendly fire* isn't a powerful concept?

It takes 15 minutes of stoning to kill people.

Have you read *Lord of the Flies*?

*In Midwestern farmlands rustling wheatcrowns,
spreading out with alfalfa and sorghum, sprouting corn,
I thought I was lost, in the crickets and songbirds,
But tire whine and bumper glare kept me on course
and when I picked up the soldier mugged in the bus station,
teeth kicked in, wallet taken, hitching back to base in Waco
to his tank-repair unit readying for another Iraq war
I knew I was on the right road, running like a lifeline
across the palm of America.*

—John Balaban, from “Highway 61 Revisited”

If you're in a war, instead of throwing a hand grenade at the enemy, throw one of those small pumpkins. Maybe it'll make everyone think how stupid war is, and while they are thinking, you can throw a real grenade at them.

—Jack Handey

I love the smell of napalm in the morning.

—Colonel Kilgore, *Apocalypse Now*

At the Alamo there were overweight women in puffy clothes, speaking in concentrated drawls. Mexicans were at work in the gardens, thinning ice plant. I was handed a brochure listing the heroic dead: Jim Bowie, Davy Crockett, etc. The dead soldiers were all listed by name, rank, birth date, city/state, e.g., *Peter James Bailey III; Private; 1812; Springfield, Kentucky*. The final entry read: *John, Negro*.

If you discover that some among them steal, you must punish them by cutting off nose and ears, for those are parts of the Body which cannot be concealed.

—Christopher Columbus, 1494

In 1493, Europeans taste pineapple for the first time. Columbus is credited with discovering the fruit.

Columbus pointed out that Indians didn't use napkins and would give away their own things, as if they didn't believe in private property...

Pineapple: slang term for fragmentation grenade.

If you were a poor Indian with no weapons, and a bunch of conquistadors came up to you and asked where the gold was, I don't think it would be a good idea to say, "I swallowed it. So sue me."

—Jack Handey

Genocide, after all, is an exercise in community building. A vigorous totalitarian order requires that the people be invested in the leaders' scheme, and while genocide may be the most perverse and ambitious means to this end, it is also the most comprehensive. In 1994, Rwanda was regarded in much of the rest of the world as the exemplary instance of the chaos and anarchy associated with collapsed states. In fact, the genocide was the product of order, authoritarianism, decades of modern political theorizing and indoctrination, and one of the most meticulously administered states in history. And strange as it may sound, the ideology—or what Rwandans call "the logic"—of genocide was promoted as a way not to create suffering but to alleviate it.

—Philip Gourevitch

The specter of an absolute menace that requires absolute eradication binds leader and people in a hermetic utopian embrace, and the individual—always an annoyance to totality—ceases to exist.

—Ibid.

And: Without all that technology, the argument goes, the Germans couldn't have killed all those Jews. Yet it was the Germans, not the machinery, who did the killing. Rwanda's Hutu Power leaders understood this perfectly. If you could swing the people who would swing the machetes, technological underdevelopment was no obstacle to genocide.

—Ibid.

I'll tell you what war is about. You've got to kill people, and when you've killed enough they stop fighting.

—General Curtis E. LeMay

By 1989, it has been reported, the total number of Vietnam veterans who died in violent accidents or by suicide after the war exceeded the total number of American soldiers who died during the actual war.

Military Glossary:

SNAFU (Situation Normal All Fucked Up)

Lifer

FUBAR (Fucked Up Beyond All Recognition)

Short-timer

FIGMO (Fuck It Got My Orders)

"Boy, I don't like you. You better move, you Communist motherfucker. I know the sand jockeys sent you to fuck up my Marine Corps."

—Taped dialogue at Parris Island

Profanity, swearing, and verbal filth is discouraged. A person who must resort to profanity demonstrates his inability to verbally express himself in a socially acceptable fashion.

—Marine Corps Instructional Manual

KNIFE ATTACK AGAINST A SENTRY:

a. *Be noiseless*

b. *Your attack must be launched not less than five feet from your opponent.*

c. *Your attack should be immediate and from your opponent's rear.*

d. *Thrust your knife upward, into his kidney.*

e. *Place your free hand over your opponent's mouth and nose.*

f. Withdraw your knife with a ripping motion.
g. Lift your opponent's head and slash his jugular vein.
—Ibid.

Profanity is discouraged.

A slash rarely kills, however powerfully delivered, because the vitals are protected by the enemy's weapons, and also by his bones. A thrust going in two inches, however, can be mortal. You must penetrate the vitals to kill a man. Moreover, when a man is slashing, the right arm and side are left exposed. When thrusting, however, the body is covered, and the enemy is wounded before he realizes what has happened. So this method of fighting is especially favored by the Romans.

—Roman army training manual

War is God's way of teaching Americans geography.

—Ambrose Bierce

Convincing people to fight, and getting them to do it well, is one of the more essential and less noticed aspects of maintaining an armed force. Illusions must be created, and maintained, often unto death. Few individuals, once aware what combat is all about, want to spend any time at it.

—James F. Dunnigan

No one who's been shot at retains the enthusiasm of the uninitiated.

—Ibid.

Raw, unthinking courage is no match for firepower.

—Ditto.

Fritz Haber, a Prussian Jew, directed the first gas attack in military history. He supervised the release of 150 tons of chlorine in 1915 across the fields of Flanders, killing British and French soldiers. He won a Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1918. In time, he invented Zyklon-B, originally put in use to de-louse German troops in the trenches of the Great War.

Haber's wife, distraught with her husband's chemical experiments, shot herself. The German government downplayed the suicide.

Stalin's second wife may have killed herself too. The son of his first wife tried to kill himself but botched it. Stalin criticized his son's marksmanship.

Ideas are more powerful than guns. We would not let our enemies have guns, why should we let them have ideas.

—Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin

VICTORY:

Assertive avoidance of war crime trials.

It takes 15,000 casualties to train a major general.

—Ferdinand Foch

A T-shirt featuring mounted Comanche or Sioux. Printed above and below the image:

HOMELAND SECURITY

Fighting Terrorism since 1492

What it feels like to be discovered...

The United States Marine Guidebook of Essential Subjects suggests that should you have to react to a nuclear explosion that you *Drop flat on your stomach with your feet toward the explosion, close your eyes, place your hands under your body, and put your head down.*

2011. There are two and a half wars going on and in America everyone's Netflix still arrives on time...

If you were that close to a nuclear explosion, wouldn't you run toward it with your mouth open?

Even if a submarine should work by a miracle, it will never be used. No country in this world would ever use such a vicious and petty form of warfare.

—William Henderson, British Admiral, 1914

Your chances of dying in the Civil War were 1 in 15; in Vietnam 1 in 185.

2,100,000 people died during the siege of Stalingrad.

Richard Jordan Gatling, who gave us the world's first effective machine gun, was trained as a physician.

I call your attack a massacre, you call my resistance treachery. One of us may be lying, but one of us may lie dying. If I die, your word, "treachery," is almost as important as my wound, since you alone survive to make meaning of my death. War is a contest of injuries and of interpretation.

—Jill Lepore

December 7th is memorialized as the day the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. August 6th is not memorialized as the day the Americans bombed Hiroshima. The Japanese killed outright 2,400 soldiers. The Americans killed 70,000 to 80,000 people, mostly civilians. After that atomic blast another 100,000 died from complications.

We weren't in My Lai to kill human beings, really. We were there to kill ideology that is carried by—I don't know. Pawns. Blobs. Pieces of flesh, and I wasn't in My Lai to destroy intelligent men. I was there to destroy an intangible idea.

—William Calley

DEATHS FROM 9/11:

Americans on American soil: 3,000 give or take.

Iraqis and Afghans on Iraqi and Afghan soil: 100,000 give or take.

FEE, FI, FO, FUM.

Turns out that during the Nuremberg Tribunals, the U.S. was conducting medical experiments on Guatemalan male prisoners (in Guatemala), infecting them with syphilis by providing syphilitic prostitutes, or, in the interest of efficiency, applying syphilis-ridden cotton to intentionally lacerated appendages, or by injecting the prisoners' spines with "syphilitic-mixtures"—all overseen by Dr. John Cutler of the U.S. Public Health Service. Following Guatemala, Cutler involved himself in the earlier-started-but-ongoing Tuskegee Study.

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT TALIBAN TALKING:

The officer said to Nadir, "Brother, tell your sister not to go to school. Otherwise we will kill her." The man was serious. Recently, there had been a chilling message broadcast on the radio in Mazar: "There are only two places for an Afghan woman," the radio announcer had said. "In the husband's home. And in the graveyard."

—Doug Stanton

Tariq Aziz, the international face of Saddam's regime, sentenced to 15 years in prison, was subsequently sentenced to hang by an Iraqi court. Aziz is reputed to have saluted the telephone whenever Saddam called.

As of 2010, the U.S. is spending (for military assistance alone) 100 billion dollars a year in Afghanistan—this for a country with a GDP of 14 billion dollars. At least 1 billion dollars a year is being transferred out of Afghanistan by top government officials and other well-connected Afghans. Karzai lashed out against investigations of this sort.

Heinrich Heine, in the 1820s, understood that people who burn books will, in time, burn people.

Plutonium possesses a half-life of 24,400 years. When plutonium (minuscule particles) is taken into the body, the result is generally cancer, damaged immunity, genetic abnormalities...

I am tired of fighting. Our chiefs are killed. Looking Glass is dead. Toohulhulsote is dead. The old men are all dead. It is the young men who say yes or no. He who led the young men is dead.

It is cold and we have no blankets. The little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away to the hills and have no blankets, no food. No one knows where they are—perhaps freezing to death. I want to have time to look for my children and see how many I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead.

Hear me, my chiefs. I am tired. My heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever.

—Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce

Teddy Roosevelt required his U.S. military officers to cover 50 miles on foot in 20 hours to maintain their commissions.

I am not afraid of an army of lions led by a sheep; I am afraid of an army of sheep led by a lion.

—Alexander the Great

*Do not expect:
When bombs fall on people
they will be thankful;
that bombs will tilt the scales
the way the experts presume.*

Expect:

Every war contains traces of all the others.

—Jason Armagost, from “These Four Archaic Truths and Martial Virtues”

People who came to the site in those early days often had the same first sensation, of leaving the city and walking into a dream. Many also felt that they had stumbled into a war zone. “It’s like something you’d see in the movies,” people said. Probably so, but my own reaction was different when I first went in, soon after the attacks. After years of traveling through the back corners of the world, I had an unexpected sense not of the strangeness of this scene but of its familiarity. Wading through the debris on the streets, climbing through the newly torn landscapes, breathing in the mixture of smoke and dust, it was as if I’d wandered again into the special havoc that failing societies tend to visit upon themselves. This time they had visited it upon us. The message seemed to be “Here’s a sample of our political science.” I was impressed by how faithfully the effects had been reproduced on the ground.

—William Langewiesche

SPEAKING OF A 600,000 TON, 110-STORY TOWER:

Still, if not exactly shrugging off the hit, the South Tower had absorbed it well: absent an earthquake or strong windstorm, the building would have remained standing indefinitely.

But then, of course, there was the fire...

The fire fed on wrecked office furniture, computers, carpets, and aircraft cargo, but primarily it fed on ordinary paper—an ample supply of the white sheets that were so much a part of the larger battlefield scene. Without that paper... experts believed, the fire might not have achieved the intensity necessary to weaken the steel beyond its critical threshold. It would be simplifying things, but not by much, to conclude that it was paperwork that brought the South Tower down.

—Ibid.

It is forbidden to kill; therefore all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets.

—Voltaire

It is common knowledge— isn’t it?—that the prizes Alfred Nobel funded, benefiting science, culture, and peace, were (and are) made possible by his manufacture and sale of TNT?

The Shadow Knows...

Megaton: a measure of explosive power (of an atomic weapon) equal to that of one million tons of TNT.

“Castle/Bravo” (the largest nuclear weapon detonated by the United States) set off at Bikini on February 28, 1954, produced twice the expected energy equivalent of 8 million tons of TNT—an explosion equivalent to some 15 million tons of TNT.

The world’s most powerful hydrogen bomb was detonated on the 30 October 1961 over Novaya Zemlya by the Soviet Union. The bomb had an explosive force of 58 megatons, or almost 6,000 times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb. Dropped by an aircraft, and detonated 1,200 feet above the earth’s surface, the Novaya Zemlya shock wave was so powerful, it circled the planet three times, the mushroom cloud extending 38 miles into the atmosphere.

The Soviets labeled the experiment *Tsar Bomba*.

Alfred Nobel’s father manufactured land mines.

The myth of war entices us with the allure of heroism. But the images of war handed to us, even when they are graphic, leave out the one essential element of war—fear. There is until the actual moment of confrontation, no cost to imagining glory. The visual and audio effects of films, the battlefield descriptions in books, make the experience appear real. In fact the experience is sterile. We are safe. We do not smell rotting flesh, bear the cries of agony, or see before us blood and entrails seeping out of bodies. We view, from a distance, the rush, the excitement, but feel none of the awful gut-wrenching anxiety and humiliation that come with mortal danger. It takes the experience of fear and the chaos of battle, the deafening and disturbing noise, to wake us up, to make us realize that we are not who we imagined we were, that war as displayed by the entertainment industry might, in most cases, as well be ballet. But even with this I have seen soldiers in war try to recreate the fiction of war, especially when a television camera is around to record the attempted heroics. The result is usually pathetic.

—Chris Hedges

We go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in the world...

—George W. Bush

Two of the women were in their twenties, the third was an old lady. Someone had shot her in the mouth and her shattered dentures cascaded with her own teeth down her front like mashed melon pips. One girl had been shot repeatedly in the chest. It was

difficult to tell whether the other had had her throat cut or been shot; a great gash of blood crescented her neck. The expression on their faces had survived the damage. It was so clear. A time-valve that opened directly on to those last moments. So you saw what they saw. I hope beyond hope that I never see it again.

In the recess of the shed something moved. It was a cow. The only survivor in Stupni Do. Someone had pulled a large plastic barrel over its head. The neck of the barrel fitted tightly around that of the beast, whose horns impaled the sides, keeping it locked in place. It must have taken a great amount of time and energy to bring the cow to this state: unable to see or eat.

So that was how we spent our last few minutes in the dusk in Stupni Do. Fighting the impulse that wanted our legs to kick us out of that place as fast and far away as possible, wrestling in a shed with a cow and a plastic barrel watched by three murdered women. Pulling and cursing and grunting with a torch that barely worked and a pathetic penknife because we wanted the cow to live. We wanted the cow to be able to see and eat again. We wanted that more than anything.

—Anthony Loyd

Peace seems to allow so little space for belief in destiny, fate, God, or ghosts.

—Ibid.

Were only patriotism as simple as a bigger flag...

Have your credit card ready...

The closest I got to Vietnam was Beale Air Force Base near Yuba City, California: the placid, rural town where Juan Corona courted, then hacked and buried all those faceless, nameless, randomly hapless male fruit-pickers in the local peach orchards. Corona's 1971 work became the grisliest mass murder known to date in the United States. The week the twenty-five orchard graves were unearthed along the Yuba City banks of the Feather River, twenty-nine GIs were killed by a North Vietnamese rocket at Charlie Two, a tiny firebase near the Demilitarized Zone. The average weekly U.S. Vietnam death toll that year was forty-nine, down from a weekly average of eighty-one the year before.

Stationed at Beale Air Force Base in California, I began to meet people who had served or were on their way to serve in Vietnam. For one, there was the Marine corporal in a night class I enrolled in at Yuba City Community College. The corporal had come home from the war, mustered out of the Corps after a voluntary second

tour. In class, he read aloud harsh, unrhymed, unmeasured lines he wrote about death and Vietnamese women. “YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I FEAR NO EVIL... ’CUZ I’M THE MEANEST MOTHERFUCKER IN THE VALLEY,” was the silk-screened quote that read split on the front and the back of a T-shirt the corporal had made and brought home. Every time I saw him he was wearing the shirt. If you gazed his way, he would thump his chest and grunt. He was looking for fights.

Dugway Proving Ground is a U.S. Army facility located in southern Tooele County, Utah. Encompassing over 800,000 acres of the Great Salt Lake Desert, it is an area the size of the state of Rhode Island, surrounded on three sides by mountain ranges. After Pearl Harbor, the Department of Defense pushed for expanded capability and knowledge of chemical and biological warfare. Dugway was established to test weapons and defenses.

The term “Dugway” comes from a pioneer technique to dig a trench along a hillside to keep a wagon from tipping.

Curtis LeMay couldn’t smile. A botched sinus operation prevented him from curving his lips.

All the time I was enrolled in ROTC, I believed I had, in an acceptable way, dodged war. But when I received my first ROTC check (\$100 a month), I felt bothered enough to donate the sum to the American Red Cross. But I needed the money, so after giving away the first check, I began to keep them. I did, though, donate blood every six weeks or so when the Red Cross set up to collect in the gym. All-Service ROTC classrooms were housed in the same building as the gym, and everyone knew the blood collected was being shipped to Southeast Asia. I donated the blood (drank the Tang, ate the Oreos), and tried not to chafe at the Marine ROTC midshipmen who would arrive in noisy squads, an enthusiastic arrangement which allowed for competition as to which midshipman could fill his blood bag soonest. These embryo Marines brought handballs to squeeze and clipboards and charts and stopwatches. I worried for the Marine midshipmen then, as I would worry for them now: they could hardly wait to give blood.

In 1968, American troops reach their highest levels in Vietnam, and more Americans die that year than during any other single year of the war. In March of that year, 6,000 sheep die in Skull Valley, thirty miles from Dugway’s ample testing grounds. The Dugway sheep incident, coincided with several open-air tests of the nerve agent VX. The Army admits no liability, but does pay the ranchers for their losses. The air

dispersal missions may have been conducted by the Air Force out of Hill Air Force Base, near Ogden, Utah.

Among materials and methods tested at Dugway: toxic agents, flamethrowers, chemical spray systems, biological warfare weapons, fire-bombing tactics, antidotes for chemical agents, protective clothing...

January 2011. A vial containing 1 ml (a quarter of a teaspoon) of nerve agent VX was mislabeled and erroneously stored, causing a 12-hour lockdown of Dugway Proving Ground until the vial was found. "All personnel are uninjured and safe," the facility said in a news release. "The public is safe as well."

VX is an amber-colored, odorless and tasteless oily liquid that does not evaporate easily unless temperatures are high, officials say. "It evaporates slowly, like motor oil."

Victims are exposed to the agent through skin contact, eye contact, or inhalation. VX affects the body's ability to carry messages through the nerves. It kills sheep.

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The noise gathered from a lifetime of engaging with war, race, religion, memory, illness, and family echoes through the vignettes, quotations, graffiti, and poetry that Donald Anderson musters here, fragments of the humor and horror of life, the absurdities that mock reason and the despair that yields laughter. *Gathering Noise from My Life* offers sonic shards of a tune at once jaunty and pessimistic, hopeful and hopeless, and a model for how we can make sense of the scraps of our lives. In his camouflaged memoir, the award-winning short-story writer cobbles together the sources of the vision of life he has accrued as a consequence of his six decades of living and reading. eISBN: 978-1-60938-224-7. Subjects: History.