

THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE ENLISTING IN THE U.S. ARMED FORCES

RECOMMENDED SOURCES

Prepared by Fox Valley Citizens for Peace and Justice, Nov. 2014

Note: The following books may be purchased as used books on Amazon for less than \$2. Those with call numbers in parentheses are available at Gail Borden Public Library in Elgin.

•Finkle, David. **The Good Soldiers**. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2009. (956.704434 Finkle)

Drawn from his 14 months in Baghdad with Battalion 2-16 during the 2007 troop surge, this has been declared "the finest book yet written on platoon-level combat in the Iraq War." It certainly helps one understand why the numbers of those suffering from combat trauma are so high as well as why so many soldiers have become disillusioned.

•Benedict, Helen. **The Lonely Soldier**. Beacon Press, 2009. (956.704434 Benedict)

Although she subtitled her book The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq and included much about the pervasive and persistent sexual harassment women experience in the military as well as the trauma resulting from rape, Benedict also segues into much in-depth reporting about the conditions all soldiers have faced in Iraq, conditions such as -lack of proper military training for conditions and jobs assigned, -lack of necessary equipment, such as armored Humvees & plates for flak jackets, -poor leadership, pointless assignments in dangerous territory & meaningless fighting, -dangerous conditions, such as contaminated water & truck breakdowns, resulting from private contractors short-changing soldiers in order to make a greater profit for themselves, -exposure to depleted uranium, -mandatory vaccinations that can be hazardous to soldiers' health, -extensions of tours of duty and redeployments, -difficulty of getting VA help once back in U.S.

•Filkins, Dexter. **The Forever War**. Knopf, 2008. (956.70443 Filkins)

Drawing from his eight years in Iraq and Afghanistan as a foreign correspondent for *The NY Times*, Filkins introduces an array of interesting people: leaders and fighters on all sides and the civilians helping them as well as neutral, pro- and anti-American bystanders. He reports on his experiences with them to illuminate the day-to-day realities/ complexities of war and the difficulty of trying to win or just survive.

•Bouvard, Marguerite Guzmán. **The Invisible Wounds of War: Coming Home from Iraq and Afghanistan**. Prometheus Books, 2012. (616.85212 Bouvard)

Bouvard details not only the difficulties some soldiers face (often as a result of post-traumatic stress and grief) upon their return home, but also on the stress their families experience, both during and after their deployments. There are also chapters on the insufficient health care available and the high rate of military suicide.

•J. Schwab, ed. **A Guide to Alternatives After High School: It's My Life!** (2nd Ed. Fully Updated), 2009.

With links to websites of many possibilities, this complete book can be downloaded as a pdf file for no charge by just googling the main title.

Note: Because the URLs are often long, the films and articles noted are usually more easily accessed by their titles. Only when this is not the case has the URL been given.

•**The War Tapes (2006 Iraq War Documentary)**. (1 hr., 36 min.)

Available on YouTube for no charge, this shows the day-to-day experiences filmed by National Guardsmen during their year in Iraq and briefly after their return home.

•**Before You Enlist! (2011 revision)**, Telequest, Inc. (14:20 min.)

Available on YouTube for no charge, straight talk from soldiers, veterans and their families tells what is missing from the sales pitches presented by recruiters and the military's marketing efforts.

•"**Targeting Youth: What Everyone Should Know about Military Recruiting in Public High Schools,**" Parts II, III & IV. Nov. 2008.

For an easy-to-read copy, see www.american-buddha.com/rep.targetingyouthrutgers.htm. Links to each section of the report follow a boxed series of facts from it.

Note: All information is documented in the End Notes in Part VII.

- "The conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan have taken a tremendous toll on the people of those countries. As of April 2014, 174,000 civilians, at the very least, have died violent deaths as a result of the war. But the actual number of deaths, direct and indirect, as a result of the wars are many times higher." Otterman & Hil report that as of 2009, over 4 million Iraqis had been injured, and 4.7 million had become refugees.
- "Civilians Killed and Wounded," updated May 2014 <http://costsofwar.org/article/civilians-killed-and-wounded>
- M. Otterman & R. Hil. **Erasing Iraq: The Human Costs of Carnage**. NY: Pluto Press, 2010.
Note: Available through interlibrary loan or on Amazon, this book features Iraqis, many of whom are now refugees, relating their experiences during/after the Gulf War (1991) and the current war that began in 2003.
- For a detailed explanation of why the number of those killed/injured from the U.S. and allied nations is significantly higher than reported, see C. Lutz, "US and Coalition Casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan," 2013.
<http://costsofwar.org/sites/default/files/articles/10/attachments/USandCoalition.pdf>
- "Between more than half to two-thirds" of Americans killed and/or wounded in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan have been victims of IEDs [improvised explosive devices].
- G. Zoroya, "How the IED Changed the U.S. Military," Dec. 19, 2013.
Note: The link "Battlefield Commanders Pressed Pentagon for Help" in Zoroya's article is the only way to access the 2007 article "Pentagon Balked at Pleas from Officers in Field for Safer Vehicles," a disturbing piece that should be read by any who think those who send servicemen/women to war have their interests first and foremost in mind.
- 43% percent of the service members sent to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 report that their physical health has deteriorated; almost 33% say their mental health has.
But almost 80% of them say "they were not seriously injured in combat. Their wounds instead stem from the chaos and grind of modern war, the cost of saddling one's frame with a bulky armored vest and extra clips of ammunition, the failure to provide basic safety gear, the mistakes that occur when hulking vehicles are driven by sleep-deprived troops, the eardrum-rattling blasts of gunfire and artillery." –R. Chandrasekaran, "The Other Wounds," Apr. 8, 2014.
- Although tours of duty can no longer be involuntarily extended, there is no limit to the number of times one can be deployed. Since 2001, more than 33% of the members of the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard and related Reserve and National Guard units were sent to Afghanistan and/or Iraq more than once. 400,000 of them were sent three or more times. And as of 2012, nearly 37,000 were sent more than five times, among them 10,000 members of National Guard or Reserve units.
- C. Adams, "Millions Went to War in Iraq, Afghanistan, Leaving Many with Life-Long Scars," Mar. 14, 2013.
- See also A. Mulrine, "Sgt. Robert Bales and Multiple Tours of Duty: How Many Is Too Many?" Mar. 21, 2012.
- "In the Vietnam and Persian Gulf wars, the level of combat exposure was strongly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD], depression, and substance use disorders. IEDs and frequent, unexpected mortar attacks have brought the 'front line' to most military service personnel [serving in Iraq and Afghanistan post-9/11]."
Though President Obama stressed that the additional 1,500 troops to be sent to Iraq will only serve as advisors, they will be in highly volatile sections of the country and thus at the front.
- K. Seal, et al, "Getting Beyond 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,'" Apr. 2008.
- P. Martin, "Obama Doubles US Troop Strength in Iraq," Nov. 8, 2014.
- For detailed information about the "invisible injuries" that can result from being in a war zone see the following:
– "Veterans of PTSD PBS NOW" (25:46 min.) PBS, Sept. 2007.
For a transcript of the program, see <http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/339/video.html>
- D. Wood, "Iraq, Afghanistan War Veterans Struggle with Combat Trauma," July 4, 2012.
- N. Kristof, "Veterans and Brain Disease," Apr. 26, 2012.
- "Service medical records often lack substantial documentation of incidents related to head trauma, and although the agency allows a 'lighter burden of proof' for brain injuries if the troops directly fought the enemy, many veterans get turned away because they lack the paperwork to back up their symptoms."
- C. Prine, "Combat Head Trauma Figures Suspect in Iraq, Afghanistan Wars, Study Finds," May 18, 2014.
Note: Prior to 2012, numbers were underreported.
- Since 2001, the military has discharged at least 31,000 service members because of "personality disorder." This is a diagnosis that "for years veterans' advocates have said the Pentagon uses to discharge troops because it considers them troublesome or wants to avoid giving them benefits for service-connected injuries" such as PTSD.
- J. Dao, "Branding a Soldier with 'Personality Disorder,'" *NY Times*, Feb. 24, 2012.
- J. Goldberg, "Military Sex Assault Victims' PTSD Claims Neglected, Panel Told," *LA Times*, July 19, 2012

Toxic Wounds of War

•The World Health Organization has declared depleted uranium a Group I carcinogen, and 155 countries have signed a United Nations' resolution urging that weapons made from it be banned. Yet in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, the U.S. military continues to deny their toxic effects. And the Veterans Administration continues to deny the claims of veterans from the 1991 Gulf War and the post-9/11 wars in Iraq/Afghanistan who believe their cancers and other diseases were caused by their exposure to DU.

–D. Swanson, "**US Sends Planes Armed with Depleted Uranium to the Middle East**," Oct. 30, 2014.

–D. Lindorff, "**Depleted Uranium: Dead Babies in Iraq and Afghanistan Are No Joke**," Oct. 19, 2009.

–A. Worthington, "**Death by Slow Burn: How America Nukes Its Own Troops**," Apr. 16, 2003.

<http://renew.com/general37/nukes.htm>

–S. Harris, "**Poison Dust: Health Consequences of Depleted Uranium Home and Abroad [Full Film]**," 2005
This 1 1/2 hour. documentary is available on YouTube at no charge at www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBs1zCVR0Ao.

•"The military's burn pits emitted particulate matter laced with heavy metals and toxins that are linked to serious health ailments. . . Among them are chronic respiratory and cardiovascular problems, allergies, neurological conditions, several kinds of cancer, and weakened immune systems."

–K. Drummond, "**Ring of Fire: Why Our Military's Toxic Burn Pits Are Making Soldiers Sick**," Oct. 28, 2013.

–See K. Vlahos, "**Veterans of the Burn Pits**," May 2, 2014 *for an update of what has/has not been done for affected soldiers & veterans.*

Epidemic of Sexual Assault in the Military

•Based on its estimate that less than 14% of those sexually assaulted by their fellow servicemen report it, the Defense Dept. believes that from Oct. of '10 thru Sept. of '11 over 19,000 were victims. Of the 3,192 cases actually reported, less than half led to referrals for possible disciplinary action; subsequently only 191 servicemen were convicted in courts-martial. —*The Invisible War* Press Kit

•For in-depth reporting on what leaders are calling an epidemic, see the following:

–J. Fishi, "**About 14,000 Men in the Military Were Raped Last Year—Almost None Will Report It**," Oct. 14, 2014.

–M. O'Toole, "**Military Sexual Assault Epidemic Continues to Claim Victims as Defense Department Fails Females**," Oct. 6, 2012.

–S.R. Erdely, "**The Rape of Petty Officer Blumer: Inside the Military's Culture of Sexual Abuse, Denial and Cover-up**," Feb. 14, 2013.

–K. Dick. **The Invisible War**, 2012 (355.0082 **Invisible** Adult DVD Nonfiction at Gail Borden Library)

Note: The only full-length version of this 1 1/2 hr. documentary available at no charge on YouTube has a misleading subtitle, for the film includes men/women in all branches of the military. To see it, go to YouTube, then type in The Invisible War (2012) (Sexual Assault in US Army).

•The Dept. of Defense called the new changes to the UCMJ "sweeping," particularly in dealing with cases of rape and sexual assault. However, a close reading of the three sections detailing them reveals why headlines declared them "limited." Especially disappointing to many was the failure to "remove the decision to prosecute sexual assault crimes from the victim's chain of command." *Note: On March 9, 2014, the proposed Military Justice Improvement Act (www.gillibrand.senate.gov/mjia) that would have done this was blocked in the Senate.*

–L. De Bode, "**Congress Approves Limited Protections for Military Sexual Assault Victims**," Dec. 20, 2013.

–"**New Law Brings Changes to Uniform Code of Military Justice**," Dept. of Defense, Jan. 1, 2014.

Suicide, "a Military Epidemic"

•Since 2002, the U.S. military suicide rates have almost doubled, and 2012 saw them at a 30-year high. In 2011 alone there was an 18% increase among active duty members. And while veterans accounted for but 10% of the general population, they accounted for 20% of America's suicides. Researchers cited a variety of possible factors but conceded that since 90% of them occurred among troops who had no combat history and nearly 1/3 occurred among those who had not been deployed even once, further study is needed. Evidence, however, is accumulating to suggest that the "soaring rates of psychiatric drug prescribing [by the military] since 2003" is definitely a factor.

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- P. Hoffman-Villanueva, "**Suicides in the Military Reach a New High**," *COMD*, Jan.-Mar. 2013.
- K. Murphy, "**A Fog of Drugs and War**," Apr. 7, 2012.
- K. O'Meara, "**Military Mental Health 'Treatment' Becomes Frankenpharmacy**," Oct. 30, 2012.

Veterans Administration Services

- The VA is completing more claims than ever—almost three times as many in 2012 as in 2001. But it cannot keep pace with the growing caseload which, in part because of aging veterans of earlier wars now in need of more help, has increased by almost 45% since 2001. "A grim result of this bottleneck is that in the past fiscal year over \$400 million in retroactive benefits was paid to family members of veterans who died waiting."
-"**The Waiting Wounded**," Mar. 23, 2013.

Servicemen/women Injured due to the Negligence or Misconduct of Fellow Servicemen/women Cannot Sue the U.S. Military

- R. Natelson, "**The Unfairness of the Feres Doctrine**," Feb. 25, 2013.
- W. Innes, "**Medical Malpractice in the U.S. Military Is Shockingly Underreported**," Jan. 4, 2013.

Unemployment

- After adjusting for age and demographic factors, the unemployment rate for veterans who have served since 2001 is 10%. -B. Plumer, "**The Unemployment Rate for Recent Veterans Is Incredibly High**," Nov. 11, 2013.

Homelessness

- Veterans make up between 20 and 25% of the country's homeless population, the fastest growing segment of which is comprised of female vets, who doubled in number between 2006 and 2010.
-S. Jones, "**Homelessness Soars Among US Iraq and Afghanistan War Veterans**," Dec. 31, 2012.
-G. Zoroya, "**Up to 48,000 Afghan, Iraq Vets at Risk for Homelessness**," Jan. 17, 2014.
-P.L. Brown, "**Trauma Sets Female Veterans Adrift Back Home**," Feb. 28, 2013.
-B. Boyarsky, "**No Thanks from an Ungrateful Nation: The Surge of Female Vets Living on the Streets**," Oct. 15, 2014.

Endless War?

- "In 1961, Dwight Eisenhower famously identified the military-industrial complex, warning that the growing fusion between corporations and the armed forces posed a threat to democracy. Judged 50 years later, Ike's frightening prophecy actually understates the scope of our modern system—and the dangers of the perpetual march to war it has put us on." -Andrew Baevich, "**The Tyranny of Defense Inc.**," Jan. 4, 2011.

- G. Greenwald, "**The 'War on Terror' - By Design - Can Never End**," Jan. 4, 2013.

•"War is a racket. It always has been. It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious. . . . It is conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many. Out of war a few people make huge fortunes." -U.S. Marine Corps Maj. General Smedley Butler

Note: War Is a Racket, a 1935 booklet by the most decorated soldier in American history, can be read at no charge at www.ratical.org/ratville/CAH/warisaracket.html#c1.

- "**Fed Contractors Profit from War on Terror**," Mar. 1, 2013.

- W.J. Hennigan, "**Military Firms Likely to Benefit from Airstrikes in Iraq, Syria**," Oct. 5, 2014.

- M. Ismail, "**Investing in War: The Carlyle Group Profits from Government and Conflict**," May 19, 2014.

- Z. Grossman, "**A Briefing on the History of U.S. Military Interventions**" *including common themes*, Oct. 2001.
<http://crossleyenglish.weebly.com/military-interventions.html>

- J. Dufour, "**The Worldwide Network of US Military Bases**," July 1, 2007.