

THE HUFFINGTON POST

THE INTERNET NEWSPAPER: NEWS BLOGS VIDEO COMMUNITY

Explore War and Rethink Afghanistan

As anyone who knows me knows, I've always had at best an ambivalent relationship with the military. Coming of age as I did during the tail end of the war in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, like many of my generation I have always been highly skeptical of military speak and assertions by the American military leadership that its missions are noble and grand. And to miss the irony of President Obama receiving the Nobel Peace Prize as he pours more troops onto the fire in Afghanistan would be like missing the coverage of Michael Jackson's funeral or Roman Polanski's current digs in Switzerland.

Admittedly, I have lived a charmed life as far as military service goes. But as those who have driven with me know, I'm no pacifist and if called to serve, I would. The fact is, I've never been asked and now that my skin is wrinkled and my hair is turning gray I doubt I'd be much use on the battlefield anyhow, except perhaps behind the wheel of a tank.

While some may resent that I make no apologies for not volunteering for the armed forces it's who I am and I sleep just fine in the bed I've made. When registration for the draft was reinstated during my college years I reluctantly signed on, waiting until I'd received a thoughtful reminder from the boys at the Selective Service. If you looked at my lineage, I guess you could say it's hereditary. The last male in my direct line to serve in the military was my maternal grandfather who proudly served his country in Brooklyn while attending engineering school at Pratt Institute. His honorable discharge sits framed in my home. Another ancestor cut off his trigger finger rather than serve in the Czar's army, while legitimate medical dispensations kept my father and his father out of the service, though I suspect my grandmother would have found another way to keep her son out of harm's way if she needed to.

Two uncles *did* serve proudly during the Second World War, one with the Marines at Iwo Jima and the other at the Battle of the Bulge where he took a bullet for his country. Choice words about their commanding officers aside, to this day, both men speak often and proudly of their service and country. But formed as I am by books (though I could never get through it) like the *Pentagon Papers* and the music and dark humor of Bob Dylan and Tom Lehrer, my regard for the military has been minimal at best. I expect I will go to my grave as skeptical of generals as I was as a 19 year old driving 8 hours from Ann Arbor to Washington to protest the country's military involvement in El Salvador. If I understood Chomsky I might be able to better articulate my distaste for war and an unrestrained military but I could never get past the fact that he looked too much like my trombone teacher. In any event, anyone that self righteous can't be correct all of the time.

THE HUFFINGTON POST

THE INTERNET NEWSPAPER: NEWS BLOGS VIDEO COMMUNITY

Since life for me lately is about surprises, given my military pedigree I was pleased to recently find myself choked up during a preview of a short film entitled, *Fish Out of Water*. The film which is due out on November 11th (that's Veteran's Day for those of you like me who didn't know), was produced by [Explore](#), a special project of the Annenberg Foundation. The film's title is a riff on the wisdom of Lao Tzu, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." *Fish Out of Water* profiles the important work of [Sun Valley Adaptive Sports \(SVAS\)](#) a nonprofit the Annenberg Foundation has funded to support its work helping wounded warriors with their recovery and reintegration into society.

Since 2007, about 1.65 million U.S. troops have been deployed to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Given the nature of the conflict and "improvements" in munitions including IEDs, traumatic brain injuries have become the most common injuries of the wars. A recent RAND study found that about 200 veterans have suffered spinal cord injuries and 1,200 amputations, but around 325,000 have suffered traumatic brain injuries and 300,000 suffer from PTSD. According to Tom Iselin who runs SVAS, "The general public believes the signature wounds of war are a guy in a wheelchair or a guy with an amputated leg or arm. But the real signature wounds of war are the invisible wounds -- traumatic brain injuries, PTSD, and major depression."

Explore's mission is "to champion the selfless acts of others" and who can think of anything more selfless than losing life and limb for one's country. While the Weavers singing "Study War No More" remains my theme song, studying war isn't the same as studying the origins of conflict and the consequences that wars cause. Explore's film and another from the Brave New Foundation entitled, [Rethink Afghanistan](#), are worth a look. Both films present the complex, harsh, and enduring legacy of the Iraq and Afghan wars. Explore's tag line is, "Never stop learning." Sage advice, especially in these strange times when a barrier breaking and inspiring president named Barack Obama is accepting the Nobel while expanding America's troop presence in the curious and insoluble conflict in Afghanistan. And from what I read, there aren't too many fishing rods amidst the materiel U.S. soldiers are packing. Maybe we should reel them in before it's too late.