

CXXII – An Open Letter to Col. Boylan

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By Butler Shaffer

To: Lt. Col. Steve Boylan Director, Multinational Force Press Center Re: 2,000 Dead Soldiers

The media inform me that you have sent an e-mail to news reporters asking them not to treat the 2,000th American serviceman killed in Iraq as a milestone. You reportedly asked journalists to think about the effects on the families and those serving in Iraq. You added that the 2,000 figure was an artificial mark on the wall set by individuals or groups with specific agendas and ulterior motives. You then echoed the party line about these men and women dying to ensure freedom for a people who have not known freedom in over two generations. You concluded with the plea to celebrate the daily milestones of the war and to look to the future of a free and democratic Iraq.

I don't know that there is ever an appropriate moment for spokesmen of the war system to lecture others on ethical matters. Every war is an abomination to life, and those who choose to participate in the systematic slaughter of men, women and children in order to advance the interests of the politically ambitious, have sufficient cause for soul-searching of their own.

But, to paraphrase Shakespeare, methinks you doth protest too much when you chastise the media for choosing to report truthful matters concerning a war that has been built upon nothing but a pyramid of lies, deceit, forgeries, and other forms of what the state's public relations boosters refer to as disinformation. It has long been said that the first casualty in any war is truth. Your statement ranks right alongside the government's current practice of not allowing the flag-draped coffins of dead soldiers to be seen: the real casualties must not become known to the public.

I suspect you are a career military person. As such, your life has been lived in a socialistic environment in which many of the costs others of us have to incur in life are borne by the state. Housing, food, medical and dental care, on-base retailing, schools, and other services whose costs civilians must incur in the marketplace are, for the most part, provided you by the state. Perhaps these experiences have made you less sensitive to the fact that life is not a cost-free experience.

If one is to live a responsible life, he or she must be prepared to incur all of the costs associated with the pursuit of one's interests, and not to impose such costs upon others. War is the very essence of irresponsible behavior, for it is always conducted against persons who, apart from the fortuities of geography, have no interest in the contrived disputes by

which competing political systems manipulate and control people. If Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, and the armchair neocon war-whoopers; along with the top officials of the Halliburton/Bechtel/KBR corporate-state alliance; had truly believed in the moral necessity for this war, they would have been in the first planeload of paratroopers to descend upon Baghdad, rather than ensconced in their plush offices or underground bunkers. Your bosses don't even believe in the nonsense you have had the poor judgment to send to members of the media. Their unwillingness to personally incur the costs of this obscene undertaking should be a tip-off to their irresponsibility.

In the face of all the politically self-serving, war-profiteering, and other conspiratorial purposes that have engineered this collective atrocity, I find it difficult to accept your casual dismissal of its critics as people with specific agendas and ulterior motives. Have years of working within the state apparatus allowed you to absorb such Orwellian corruption of language and concepts and to truly mistake propaganda for reality? Perhaps you are aware that the milksop character of most journalists will allow for your expectations to find expression. You will doubtless not be disappointed with the crowd at Fox News. But did you truly expect intelligent people to be bamboozled by your efforts to project the specific agendas and ulterior motives of the political establishment onto the critics of this war? Do you really believe the administration lies about this war going well?

The 2,000 dead military people are neither a milestone nor an artificial mark on the wall. This number represents what collectivists always want suppressed: knowledge of the personal costs individuals end up having to pay for political behavior. The 20th century added some 200,000,000 corpses to the grisly history of the state. There is a semblance of humanity in your statement that the first that died . . . will be just as important as the last to die in this war. Please keep that thought in the forefront of your mind: if it is wrong to kill millions of people, it is just as wrong to kill one person.

The costs of war go far beyond the material expenses associated with it. Of far greater significance are the spiritual and other human costs that degrade both the souls of individuals as well as the fragile nature of our social relationships. If we do not pay attention to its machinations, war can make us ugly and depraved. People who are psychologically, philosophically, and spiritually centered may, as Viktor Frankl, Carl Jung, and others have demonstrated, survive such hideousness. But for mankind generally, wars help to destroy the civilizations upon which they feed, which may help to explain why increased militarism has long been seen as the final stage in the collapse of hitherto great societies.

If you are not prepared to assess these deeper costs, then at least accept the recognition of 2,000 dead soldiers as the most basic cost, in human life, of this war. You might add to that number figures that the American government refuses to acknowledge, namely, the number of Iraqi men, women, and children who have thus far been killed. Some independent sources estimate the Iraqi victims as being in excess of 100,000. The state

wants us to disregard such numbers. It asks, as do you, that we bask in some pretended glory that will arise from the butchery and destruction visited upon innocent people, and to ignore the costs. The state is never comfortable having us consider the consequences of its actions.

You offer the phony argument that journalists ought to think about the effects on the families and those serving in Iraq when reporting on the number of dead soldiers. My god, don't you think the soldiers and their families are already aware of the dangers faced in Iraq? Do you think there are many parents, grandparents, or spouses of soldiers who are not terrified when the telephone rings or there is a knock on the door that might bring them news they dread each hour of every day?

And do you think that the people of Iraq are any less concerned about the lives and well-being of their loved ones; that they worry any less than do Americans that their children might be blown to pieces by a bomb or felled by a bullet? As our minds become infected with the divisive thinking of political systems, we can become morally lobotomized robots. Thus, was Madeleine Albright able to find the deaths of 500,000 children an acceptable price to pay (albeit not by her) for American boycotts of Iraq. I ask you to extend the thought I raised earlier, namely, that if it is wrong to kill one American soldier, it is equally wrong to kill one Iraqi civilian. Until you — and the rest of us — can regard the systematic killing of any people as an offense against all of humanity, we shall be fated to the carrying out of the mutual suicide pacts that governments regard as honor and glory.

But if you are truly concerned about the effects on soldiers and their families of reporting these costs of war, you might wish to consider an alternative course of action. I will admit to having a specific agenda and an ulterior motive in opposing the war system. My purposes are to help us discover the thinking and the social systems under which we can live productively, peacefully, and freely with one another.

If you share these sentiments, and care to end the death and suffering now being endured by Iraqis and Americans alike, then come home, and bring your fellow Americans with you. Put your creative talents and skills to work in the marketplace, helping to produce the values that sustain life, rather than continuing in service to the slaughter and devastation practiced by the state.

The Best of Butler Shaffer

