

## **LET ME RAIN ON OUR PARADE**

### **Joe Carvalko**

Growing up near the ocean, Memorial Day signified the day our beaches opened-up, a holiday celebrated with parades, picnics and revelry. It never quite seemed appropriate. What if, rather than satisfy some hedonistic bent for another barbeque, we were to give some thought to sacrifices made, lives lost, finding ways to make war obsolete in our children's lifetimes, ways that for future generations, memorial days might be remembered more as a relic of a once unenlightened world.

In anticipation of this holiday I challenged myself to remember my first, when I stood next to my mother watching men in uniform 4, 8 and 16 across, ten feet tall, marching down Main Street, USA echoes of brass bands playing in the distance, people cheering, clapping each time the skeleton of a new regiment crossed our path. I remember troops passing who'd fought in the Spanish American War, 1899, dozens of companies who'd fought in World War I, and then those that were then serving in World War II's home front. Among those in the crowd were veterans and veterans to be, and those that would perish in wars not yet named: the Cold War, Korea, Vietnam, El Salvador, the first Iraq War, parents and grandparents of a second Iraq War and Afghanistan. Thinking about those days comes hard, so far away, time gradually erasing the details of scores of flag waving parades in the course of a life.

What cannot be erased and which I'm occasionally reminded is the toll of lives lost in war. By the most conservative estimates the deaths for all major wars in which America fought during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were: (all deaths/U.S. combat deaths) WWI 15,000,000/116,708; WWII 40,000,000/407,316; Korea 2,500,000/36,914; Vietnam 2,500,000/58,169; and including the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Iraq 110,600/ 4,430; Afghanistan 30,000/ 1,423.

What strikes me about these statistics is that we've learned nothing. Rather than the number of wars diminishing, the number is increasing: currently 41 separate armed conflicts plague the world. The number of casualties on a per war basis is decreasing due to new technology and style of warfare, but brutality remains unmitigated e.g., in 2010, 400,000 war motivated rapes in the Congo; between 2001-2010, 168,000 traumatic brain injuries for U.S. military personnel. Yet, for all the resources modern nations exploit, none are committed to counterbalancing, in inspiration, advocacy, people or money a non-violent war against war.

Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world - indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Is it possible that Memorial Day can be set aside to show respect to those that gave their lives during armed conflict by opening a conversation that focuses attention away from war rather than its propagation? A dialogue could address everything from downsizing defense departments,

to converting industrial military complexes into less lethal more productive enterprises, to exploring innovative avenues for both governmental and nongovernmental intervention when nations are at the brink of violence, to ending just a fraction of the ongoing wars. Perhaps the day might afford an opportunity to introduce our kids to the war poetry of Wilfred Owens or Rudyard Kipling, or the lives of Gandhi, King, Sakharov, or Havel. I think I'll write my congressional representative and ask him to explain what was so vital that Private Andrew Barrie Cutts and four others had to die in an Afghanistan last week. Let's give the day the dignity it deserves, a day of contemplation and shared mourning.