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## Their War

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Less than 1 percent of the U.S. population serves in our military. In a time of war, what should that mean to the rest of us?

By Kristin Henderson  
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MILES OF CHAIN-LINK FENCE RUN through the coastal Carolina pine forest. Armed [Marines](#) guard the gates. Pass through those gates, and, at first, you might not realize you've left the civilian world behind. Inside this cluster of military installations are tidy neighborhoods, shopping centers and a golf course. It looks like Suburbia, U.S.A. But then, as families push shopping carts through a parking lot full of SUVs, off in the distance there's the crackle of small-arms fire. Artillery booms, a dull thud.

Deep in the fenced-off woods, at the edge of a firing range atop a man-made rise of earth, a sergeant stands over a Marine. The cords in his neck strain as he roars: "You don't have time to watch your rounds go downrange! You got Iraqis shooting at you! Reload!"

Camp Geiger, [N.C.](#), next door to [Camp Lejeune](#), is home to the Marine Corps' East Coast School of Infantry. A dozen Marines at a time climb to the top of the rise and take positions in bunkers and behind sandbags. Strapped into body armor and helmets, they're learning to fire the M-203, a grenade launcher that looks like a short tube slung below the barrel of the standard-issue rifle, the M-16. Each time a grenade leaves a tube, it sounds like a giant cork popping.

Down the line, Pfc. Theo Tuyishimire finishes taking his turn. He jumps up. "Good shooting," the sergeant barks.

Tuyishimire says that when he tells his mother what he's doing here, firing weapons, she asks him: "Why do you have to shoot guns? Do you not remember what happened to us?"

Back in their native [Rwanda](#), she was an educator with two degrees. But in 1994, when Tuyishimire was 9, the bloody genocide broke out, Hutus killing Tutsis and any Hutus who got in the way, and Tuyishimire's Hutu family was getting in the way. They fled to America.

He sits back down among the rows of Marines waiting below the rise. His fingers brush at the sand that sugars his skin after a brief night's sleep on the ground. After training all day yesterday, he and the other Marines out here hoisted heavy packs and humped them 11 miles through the pine forest to the firing ranges before finally crawling into their sleeping bags. Three hours later, their sergeants shouted them awake for another day.

"Ever since I was young," Tuyishimire says, "with war breaking out in Rwanda, I've wanted to prevent that from happening elsewhere. I want to do something meaningful."

When asked if he considered something like the [Peace Corps](#), he shakes his head no. "I'm a person of action, not words."

He's 21. He was in college, aiming for a degree in physical education, but he couldn't concentrate on school. He kept thinking about the Marines. "I needed to get it out of the way," he explains. "It's not that college was wrong for me. Just not right now." His parents tried to talk him out of enlisting. His friends said he was stupid for joining during a war.

"Why would you join in peacetime?" he counters. "In wartime, you get to go do something." His round face is

calm, his voice matter of fact. "I know war is nasty. I've seen dead bodies, death and destruction back in my home country. Can't say I'm ready for war, but I want that sense of helpfulness. Back then, I was too little to do anything about it."

The night the killing started in Tuyishimire's [Kigali](#) neighborhood, the Tutsi children from next door jumped the fence to get to the safety of his family's house -- safe because it was the Hutu pastor's house. His father is a Free Methodist minister. Half an hour later, the house the children had fled burned down, and their parents were dead. Tuyishimire's family joined the flood of people fleeing to the countryside. They passed a Tutsi family Tuyishimire's mother knew.

"They were exposed, out in the open, just sitting on the side of the road," Tuyishimire remembers. "They said, 'We're sitting here waiting for death.'" He says that later "we could hear them screaming. We could do nothing."

He's sitting in the Carolina sun with the three other Marines on the fire team that Tuyishimire leads. They've all grown quiet. *Thoonk*, go the M-203s. *Thoonk*.

"My mom has nightmares that someone tries to break into the house and kill the whole household. She comes out with her eyes wide. We're like, 'Mom, don't worry. It can't happen here.'"

Rifle fire chatters from an unseen range beyond the trees.

"Yeah, we're lucky," murmurs one of the Marines.

Most Americans seem to take their luck for granted. Even September 11, 2001, didn't motivate a surge of young people to enlist the way Tuyishimire's bitter experience in Rwanda motivated him. In the six years since, with America's wars dragging on overseas, the military services have struggled to meet recruiting goals. The Army recently widened the door to admit recruits in their early 40s.

"Warriors," bellows a sergeant on the firing range, "don't forget to hydrate!"

In the outside world, civilians tend to use the word "warriors" only when they're describing the fighting men of ancient or primitive cultures. But within the [U.S. military](#) establishment, "warriors" is a common form of address, even an e-mail salutation, as in this automatic message sent by a Marine public affairs officer: "Warriors, I will be out of the office until Monday."

The difference in the way the two groups, military and civilian, use this word reflects the growing gulf that yawns between them. Many of the soldiers and Marines interviewed for this article mentioned that when civilians try to connect with them and affirm their military service, the civilians often echo the Army's "Be all you can be" pitch: You'll learn valuable skills . . . It'll be a great résumé builder. It's as if, looking in from the outside, these civilians just want to see tidy uniforms and high-tech gadgetry, as if soldiering is a modern-day job like any other.

Infantrymen, on the other hand, learn that the military's basic job is to break the enemy's will by killing him, or threatening to. Looking at their training from the inside, infantrymen conclude that their job hasn't fundamentally changed since the days when naked men threw spears at one another to protect their families. It's an ancient role, and they're proud of it.

But these days, that part of the job apparently makes America's civilians uneasy. World War II headlines celebrated accomplished military killers and called them heroes. Second Lt. Audie Murphy mowed down dozens of attacking German soldiers, won the Medal of Honor and went on to become a movie star. Today, U.S. soldiers in [Iraq](#) and [Afghanistan](#) who win medals for successfully doing their jobs while obeying the laws of war might get local coverage. But the brightest national spotlight is reserved for killers who are war criminals, such as the alleged perpetrators of

the [Haditha](#)

massacre, or heroes who are victims, such as prisoners of war. American civilians no longer seem comfortable labeling a soldier as both a killer and a hero.

In fact, they're not particularly comfortable with the military in general.

Less than half the civilian population believes military leaders can be relied on to respect civilian control of the military, according to surveys by the Triangle Institute for Security Studies, an academic think tank in North Carolina. Never mind that 92 percent of military leaders still insist their civilian masters should have the final say on whether to use military force. And while nearly two-thirds of military leaders believe they share the same values as the American people, only about one-third of their civilian counter-parts agree. The vast majority of civilians believe service members are intolerant, stingy, rigid and lacking in creativity. More than 20 percent report they'd be disappointed if their children joined the military. Before the invasion of Iraq, the editorial boards of major newspapers endorsed the use of force, yet a search turned up no calls for Americans to join up to support the effort. [President Bush](#) urged civilians to go shopping.

"The military is at war, but the country is not," warns [University of Maryland](#) sociologist David Segal. "And the military resents that."

BEFORE REPORTING TO THE SCHOOL OF INFANTRY ON CAMP GEIGER, Pfc. Tuyishimire went home for a visit. He'd been away for only 13 weeks, had just completed basic training, but already a visit to his family's [Dayton, Ohio](#), suburb of one-story brick homes seemed like a trip to another planet.

His old friends took one look at him and exclaimed: "Whoa! What the heck happened to you?" The Tuyishimire they knew had been 40 pounds heavier, less focused, the hyperkinetic class jokester. He tried to tell them about his new life in the Marines. All he got were blank faces.

"I had changed," he says, "but everyone else hadn't. I felt like I should be back with my boot camp buddies. We went through a lot together, and here I am sitting with these people who don't understand. The things they were into -- watching movies, going bowling -- it was fun for 10 minutes, but then I had to wait two hours till I could leave. It seemed like a waste of time."

He's saying this as he sits near the firing range, and his fellow Marines are nodding. They're all about his age; they all had that feeling of moving in separate orbits. "A few asked me about basic," says Pfc. Christopher Hendricks. "I said, It's just something you've got to experience yourself."

"During leave, I'd get lonely at night," Pvt. Jimmy Potts muses out loud. "My family thought I was depressed, but I was just used to being around a bunch of guys all the time. I kept calling the squad bay 'home.'"

Pfc. Richard Berthelot says, "It was irritating to see people leaning on a bulkhead chewing gum," using the Marine and Navy word for wall. In basic, both wall-leaning and gum-chewing are strictly verboten. He says, "People are getting lazier and lazier."

"Shocked" is how Tuyishimire describes his reaction to the provocative and unkempt way "people out in the world are dressing."

This, after only 13 weeks on the other side of the fence.

Three-hundred-fifty miles and a world away from Camp Geiger, in a comfortable Washington suburb, Matt Suls and Scott Lutsky are killing time at Westfield Montgomery mall. It's Memorial Day weekend, and they're munching a sub and a burger at the back of the mall's crowded, sky-lighted food court. Suls and Lutsky grew up around here in upper middle-class families, graduated from [Walter Johnson High School](#) together, went on to the University of Maryland and [Montgomery College](#), respectively. They're about the same age as Theo Tuyishimire. None of their friends has joined the military.

On 9/11 they were high school freshmen. They watched over and over again as the planes exploded into the twin towers on their classroom TV. Joining the military didn't occur to them.

"Looking back on it, it should have," says Suls. "This is our country, and people were attacking us, and that shouldn't happen."

A couple of years later, Suls did think about joining the Air Force to help pay for college -- his father, a lawyer, died when Suls was 12. He'd been in the [Air National Guard](#) for two years long before Suls was born. "My mother said: 'I'm not going to let you go in the Air Force. It's not happening.'" He laughs. "Typical mother response."

Now he's majoring in government and politics instead, preparing to study law. He wears his father's dog tags.

Back in high school, a military recruiter walked up to Lutsky and asked if he'd ever thought about joining. "No," Lutsky says he replied, "I gotta go to lunch." Lutsky wears his hair on the longish side and his ball cap backwards. He hasn't chosen a major yet, but he's interested in music. He initially describes himself as "against the military," but, as he and Suls talk, he decides that what he's really against is the war in Iraq. "There are things to fight for," he says. "I know you can get a good education in the military, get trained in a lot of different areas -- stealth, special forces."

"SEALs," says Suls, and then they're both laughing at their own preoccupation with the military's glamour boys. Lutsky blames the shortage of troops on Iraq, but both he and Suls frown at the suggestion of a draft.

"Political suicide," Suls declares. "And there are always too many loopholes. The people who would go would be the underprivileged people who are getting recruited right now."

Lutsky puts down his burger. "We saw how it turned out with [Vietnam](#). We don't want a repeat. To get people to join, they should offer better perks."

"The perks are decent. It's what they do with the military," Suls argues, and Lutsky nods. They agree that they don't trust their elected leaders to pick causes worth fighting for. They compare Afghanistan with Iraq, cite nonexistent weapons of mass destruction, their voices fading into the roar of shoppers, mall Muzak and beeping cash registers on a long, idle holiday weekend commemorating America's war dead.

## VIETNAM WAS THE TURNING POINT.

In the heat of an unpopular war, decades of social trends boiled over: the development of relativistic theologies, growing legal emphasis on the rights of the individual and the emergence of the teenage years as a time free from both parental restrictions and adult responsibilities. These trends empowered and united war opponents with a moral certainty that surpassed anything seen during previous conflicts, as described by Frank Schaeffer and Kathy Roth-Douquet in *AWOL: The Unexcused Absence of America's Upper Classes From Military Service -- and How It Hurts Our Country*.

In Vietnam, Gen. William Westmoreland lied about body counts, and American soldiers massacred women and children at My Lai. Vietnam taught its generation to distrust the military. The collective memory of Vietnam's luckless, disadvantaged draftees, forced to fight a politically polarizing war, and the certainty of the protesters that they were right to oppose it, still shape civilian American attitudes toward the military. While pre-Vietnam generations saw military service as an apolitical civic duty, Schaeffer points out that today's civilians tend to see it as a career choice for the underprivileged, a choice that also depends on whether they approve of the policies of the moment.

"The new excuse is, I'd never send my son to fight in Iraq," says Schaeffer. An author with no military background who lives in an affluent area near [Boston](#), Schaeffer also blames the lingering priorities of the Me Generation. "My class are dismissive of anything other than the glittering fast track of money."

Statistically, recruits are less likely to come from affluent Zip codes such as those in many Washington area suburbs. Some claim this is because military recruiters target the poor. But recruiters are not welcome in most affluent neighborhoods.

When recruiters began approaching the teenage sons of [Montgomery County](#) peace activist Pat Elder, he turned his energies to counter-recruiting. He and a few other parents were upset that recruiters had free access to students during lunch period at [Walt Whitman High School](#). They succeeded in restricting recruiters' visits to the guidance office, where interested students now must make an appointment.

When Frank Schaeffer's son John enlisted, Schaeffer himself wasn't sure it was such a great idea. The other parents at John's exclusive prep school reacted with horror. Schaeffer recalls: "One of them, a professor at Brown, went to the headmaster and demanded a special meeting of the board and faculty to look into what went wrong with John Schaeffer. They were worried: Is this contagious?" At graduation, another parent commented about John, "What a waste."

Civilian and military researchers have confirmed that recruiters are not targeting the very rich, but neither are they aiming at the very poor -- the privileged aren't interested, and the disadvantaged can't handle the increasingly technical training. It's the middle they're after.

Studies by organizations ranging from the University of Maryland's Center for Research on Military Organization to think tanks to the [Department of Defense](#) indicate that members of the military are actually better educated on average than their peers. As many as 98 percent earned a high school diploma or equivalency degree, compared with 75 percent to 84 percent of young civilians.

Until Vietnam, the military broke down along the same political lines as the rest of the country, about one-third independent, one-third Democratic, one-third Republican. The enlisted ranks still do. But in the past 30 years, the officer corps has undergone a revolution. In the most recent comprehensive study, conducted in the late 1990s by the Triangle Institute for Security Studies, Republican officers outnumbered Democrats 8 to 1. In 2006, only 16 percent of Army Times active-duty readers, who are mostly senior in rank, declared themselves Democrats.

Contrary to a common misperception, minorities are only slightly overrepresented in the military, making up 35 percent of service personnel compared to about 33 percent of the general population.

Overall, recruits tend to come from small towns. And, while these small towns often have a boarded-up factory, family incomes indicate that those joining the military are the upwardly mobile working middle class.

There's clearly some self-selection going on, too, because nearly half of all Army recruits are following in the footsteps of a parent who has served. We seem to be creating an American warrior class.

Yet, historically, America's military has always been small, volunteer and professional in peacetime, swelling with draftees in times of war. Large, professional standing armies made the Founding Fathers nervous, because they had watched the monarchs of imperial [Europe](#) use armies to oppress their own people, writes military historian Russell Weigley. So, until recently, whenever we needed an army big enough to do real damage we relied on conscription.

Even today's all-volunteer force, designed in the 1960s and launched when Congress repealed the draft in 1973, was originally based on that pattern. "The blueprint says when we're in a situation like the one we're in now -- a large-scale, protracted war, with more than a hundred thousand deployed, lasting longer than six months -- that would trigger a draft," says sociologist Segal, who directs [Maryland's](#) Center for Research on Military Organization. "We're asking the volunteer force to do something it was never designed to do."

The 1991 [Persian Gulf](#)

War, and now Afghanistan and Iraq, are the first major wars America has fought with an all-volunteer force. For a democracy, it's a huge experiment in the art of waging war.

"In a democratic society, the army is a people's army, a reflection of the popular will," Segal explains. "Military operations cannot be successful in the long run without popular support."

To some degree, the gap between the military and the people has been masked by one of the other lessons of Vietnam: Don't blame the soldiers for the military misadventures of our civilian leaders. Today's peace marchers generally take care to chant that they support the troops, not the war. But Segal worries that the military's low visibility in American society is leading to estrangement. "People say they support the troops, but I don't know how long one can sustain that if one doesn't know what a soldier is."

In a nation of more than 300 million people, less than 1 percent serve in all the armed forces combined, active duty and reserve. Compare that to previous wartimes: 4 percent served during Vietnam, 12 percent during World War II, 11 percent during the Civil War. Today, in many neighborhoods, civilians can go about their lives without ever crossing paths with someone on active duty. Even in military towns, connections are hard to sustain -- active-duty service members move every three years, on average. "They're coaching youth soccer, serving as deacons, volunteering in the schools," Segal says. "But if they're deployed, you lose your deacon." Meanwhile, rootless military children are always the new kid, rarely graduating from the same high school where they started as freshmen.

More and more in America, civilians have no contact with the people who do the fighting, yet civilians are the ones who decide when and where those people fight. What happens to a democracy when its civilians live in one world and its warriors in another?

**MOST OF OUR CIVILIAN POLITICAL ELITES GRADUATE FROM ELITE CIVILIAN UNIVERSITIES. Not so our military leaders. Not these days.**

Beneath one of [Yale University's](#) neo-Gothic stone buildings in [New Haven, Conn.](#), a professor drills rapid-fire Spanish at 13 students in a basement classroom. The students hunch around a large oval table, slouch in chairs lining the walls. Twelve of them are nearly indistinguishable in their Abercrombie & Fitch T-shirts, Gap jeans, vintage jackets, flip-flops and beaded slippers. Only the 13th student, a political science major with the shortest hair in the room, is out of uniform. He's dressed in gray-green digital camouflage.

Among Yale's 5,300 undergraduates on this Wednesday morning, precisely two are wearing camouflage -- one of them is the young man here in Spanish class, senior Chris Day. He's a scholarship student in the Army's [Reserve Officers' Training Corps \(ROTC\)](#), and this is drill day, the one day each week that he wears his military uniform. None of Day's fellow Spanish students even glanced at him when he walked in this morning. More than a month into the semester, they're used to the Wednesday camouflage routine. But when asked how many were taken aback the first time they saw Day looking like a soldier, nearly all raise their hands.

As the class scatters out the door, Day follows them into the cold, clear morning air and heads across campus. Surrounded by the stone walls of academia, a passing young woman does a double take at his uniform. This year, he will be the Army's one and only newly minted ROTC graduate with a Yale degree.

Cadets such as Day haven't always been this lonely on America's top campuses. In 1956, during the draft era, 400 members of [Princeton's](#) graduating class of 750 went into the military; five decades later, Princeton led the [Ivy League](#) by producing all of nine new officers. It's been this way since the angry college protest days of Vietnam.

Back then, as America's elites were deferring their way out of military service, so were America's elite universities. Faculty and student leaders argued that ROTC was an academically limited program that shut down discussion instead of broadening the free and open exchange of ideas. In 1969, the Yale faculty voted to

stop giving academic credit for military science courses, which are taught by the military officers who run ROTC and are open to any student, not only cadets. In response, the military closed down the Yale ROTC programs. The same thing happened at many leading schools nationwide.

As a result, students such as Day who attend schools such as Yale, [Harvard](#) and [Stanford](#) have to go somewhere else to find the military science classes and physical training that their ROTC scholarships require. The Army runs ROTC programs at other Connecticut schools, close enough to Yale that the two cadets can get to them. The [University of Connecticut](#) and Sacred Heart University, for instance, are a reasonable driving distance away. But Yale's isolation is underscored by the fact that a state institution such as UConn hosts more than five dozen cadets, compared with Yale's two.

Congress launched ROTC during World War I to standardize the education of America's citizen soldiers. Along with the [National Guard](#) and Reserves, ROTC acts as one of the few connecting threads that weave the military into the broader fabric of society -- cadets live, learn and socialize alongside civilian students, building relationships and helping to ensure that the military and civilian communities each have a stake in the other.

But since the end of the draft in '73, the percentage of officers educated in the isolated bubble of the military academies, instead of in ROTC, has doubled. This is producing an officer corps that collectively is less and less representative of the civilian world it serves, a trend observed by professor and national security specialist Michael Desch.

A similar process is occurring on the civilian side. Since 1992, continuing another trend that started early in the last century, five of the six Republican and Democratic nominees for president have held a degree from Yale or Harvard -- Ivy League schools have become the incubators of our top civilian leadership. The absence of military science classes and cadets from those campuses means our future civilian leaders are less likely to learn about military issues and have fewer opportunities to get to know the officers they will one day command.

The consequences appear to be suspicion and stereotyping. Those Triangle Institute for Security Studies surveys reveal that only 1 percent of military leaders think civilian leaders are very knowledgeable about the military. More than one-third of civilian leaders believe the military is dishonest, and fewer than half believe it's attracting high-quality recruits.

The military and civilian camps must work together on life-and-death issues that face the country, yet, increasingly, they neither understand nor trust each other.

NEAR THE BACK OF A YALE LECTURE HALL THAT LOOKS LIKE A CHURCH, Chris Day listens quietly, camouflage cap perched on his knee. The class is political science, the subject: strategy, technology and war.

Professor Paul Bracken has a foot in both worlds -- as an Ivy League PhD here in the hallowed halls of the academy and as a consultant in [the Pentagon's](#) 17.5 miles of utilitarian corridors. From this unusual perspective, Bracken has observed the different ways in which military and civilian leaders tackle the challenges that confront them.

He estimates that 90 percent of civilian effort goes into formulating a strategy rather than figuring out how to implement it. The military, as he describes it, is an action-oriented institution, all about making things happen, and could give advice on how to formulate strategies that could actually be implemented if civilians could hear and understand it. Bracken calls it a dialogue of the deaf, and over the past 30 years he's witnessed it getting worse.

"I've seen generals come out of briefings with civilian leadership shaking their heads, asking, 'What the hell was he saying?'" Bracken's amplified words about civilians who don't have a grasp of military strategy echo through the hall. Pacing the raised chancel down front, he also takes on generals who don't understand basic economics. "The Pentagon wants the world's best equipment at minimum cost. I bite my tongue, because you can't maximize performance while minimizing cost."

Day is a senior. For him, alone among the 250 in the class, all this will soon be more than just theory. He grew up in a [New York City](#) suburb, the son of a police officer. To Day, his father's life has been all about service. The worst thing he can imagine, worse, he insists, than being killed or wounded, would be to find himself at 85 looking back and never having done anything for others, just skating by on what others have done for him. When he decided to serve as his father did, he chose the Army. Any day now he'll find out if he'll get his first-choice military assignment after graduation.

He's hoping for infantry, but he's not sure he'll get it -- an infantry assignment is one of the most coveted. According to statistics, it's particularly coveted by young white men such as Day. "If you choose to do this," Day explains, "you want to do it all the way, hard core -- infantry. It's what you signed up for." With not enough infantry slots to go around, he could wind up in something like artillery or logistics.

Bracken's lecture wraps up, and Day heads out to pick up a car and the other Army cadet. Together they'll drive a half-hour to Sacred Heart University for their military science class and leadership lab. They already made the drive once today, before dawn, for physical training.

The route to the parking garage takes Day through a stone building beneath a green copper dome. Inside, his boots slow down. Other students stream past him, the dusky, echoing space filled with the quick squeak of tennis shoes, the staccato slap of hurried flip-flops. Day always slows down in here. Columns of names of dead Yale men line the walls. The Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the world wars, Korea. For each of these conflicts, the columns fill whole walls.

The Vietnam columns, on the other hand, fit within a short archway. After passing through the archway, Day emerges into an open rotunda, where the walls are empty of names.

ON AN AMBUSH PATROL IN VIETNAM IN 1968, [Chuck Hagel](#) and his brother Tom had just finished taking their turn on point, leading a column of soldiers through the trees. They headed to the back. And then a booby trap killed the men up front. Shrapnel hit Chuck in the chest, hit Tom in the back and arms.

Earlier, they'd survived house-to-house fighting during the Tet Offensive. "Both of us," Tom recalled in a 1997 interview with *The Post*, "were very, very good at killing."

They went on search-and-destroy missions. They manned isolated night outposts, listening in the pitch dark, vastly outnumbered by the Viet Cong, who passed within a few feet of their hiding place.

One night, after a long firefight, the brothers were in an armored personnel carrier when it hit a land mine. Tom, the turret gunner, was knocked unconscious, blood running from his ears. Chuck pulled him out, pulled out the others, until the ammunition in the carrier finally blew and set Chuck on fire, burning his face.

"I can remember that night just like we're sitting here," he says, sitting now in a dainty wingback chair in his office in the Russell Senate Office Building. He remembers sitting then, too, in a helicopter, fighting pain, waiting to be evacuated. "And I remember the thought then: If I can ever be in a position to influence policy to change the world, this is something I will attempt to do." He and his brother were soon patched up and back on the front lines.

Chuck Hagel is one of a handful of combat veterans in the Senate today. In the House and Senate combined, 24

percent are veterans. Fewer than half of those served on active duty during wartime. Fewer still saw combat.

Combat changes people. The closer they are to the killing, the more profound the effect. It shapes how they see the world. Peter Feaver and Richard Kohn, editors of *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security*, conclude from their research, "At least as far back as 1816, the more veterans there are in the national political elite, the less likely the United States is to initiate the use of force in the international arena." Apparently, fighting one war tends to make you wary about fighting another one.

CHUCK HAGEL WAS ELECTED AS A REPUBLICAN SENATOR FROM [NEBRASKA](#) IN 1996. By then, the burn scars on his face weren't particularly noticeable. Vietnam left a more indelible mark on him somewhere inside.

In a crowded hearing room on a cold Wednesday in January, a gallery of cameras watches Hagel lean forward and look round at his colleagues on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. They're debating a resolution that he has co-sponsored, opposing the troop surge in Iraq.

Hagel's rough plainsman's voice punches through the room. "These young men and women that we put in [Anbar province](#), in [Baghdad](#), in Iraq, are not beans. They're real lives. And we better be damn sure we know what we're doing, all of us, before we put 22,000 more Americans into that grinder."

He gestures sharply at the other senators. "And I think all 100 senators ought to be on the line on this. What do you believe, what are you willing to support? What do you think? Why are you elected? If you wanted a safe job, go sell shoes."

Now slouched in the wingback in his office, he acknowledges that if he hadn't done time in a war zone he might have turned out to be a more timid politician. Instead, here he is, by his voting record a conservative's conservative, going toe to toe with a conservative administration.

"This is a tough business," he says, "pretty brutal at times. Endure all of the criticism, and some of it pretty raw sometimes. But this is child's play compared to what I saw in 1968 in Vietnam."

Though he's opposed to the Iraq war, his combat experience hasn't left him opposed to all war. He leans forward out of the wingback. "When you engage a nation in a war, there will always be a great number of unintended consequences, and Iraq is a very good example. That's just the way war is. It is a mess. It is imperfect. It is about suffering. It needs to be thought through very carefully before committing a nation to war. We must do everything we can to avoid that, and economic and diplomatic power are part of those instruments of power that a great nation has, as well as its military power."

The military might be at least partly responsible for Hagel's reputation for bipartisanship, too. The kid from white bread Nebraska fought alongside kids from reservations, border towns and inner cities. They overcame their differences. They depended on one another for their lives. Along the way, Hagel was promoted to sergeant. Sergeants live with and take care of their soldiers. They learn how to work the system, trading favors with other sergeants to scrounge extra rations, mortars or R&R for their guys.

"It's like senators," Hagel says. "Those who may fight like hell with you today, and try to defeat you on a bill, tomorrow may be your closest ally on another issue, and that crosses party lines."

His co-sponsors on that resolution opposing the Iraq troop surge are both Democrats. When it comes time for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to vote on it, Hagel is the only Republican to join the Democrats in voting for it.

DURING WORLD WAR II, all four of FDR's sons joined the military.

Wars have always prompted some to avoid serving, for good reasons and bad. The most notorious examples

occurred during the Civil War, when a rich man could buy his way out for \$300, and Vietnam, when college students were handed deferments that allowed them to postpone draft eligibility until after they left school. Conscription has never been popular, according to Segal, but it was tolerated when the country was fighting a war the population thought was worthwhile. When the call went out, most eligible men served. The result was an Army of the masses that brought each war home to every American neighborhood, every voter, every policymaker.

Today, only a very few of our top leaders have a family member in harm's way. The faces of the children of America's policy and opinion makers are missing from the mirror our military holds up to us. When they join the military, it makes news, not a difference.

The new Marines on the firing range on Camp Geiger are more typical. Their parents include the owner of a construction company, a construction worker, a factory worker, a soldier and a chef. One Marine turned everyone's head when he admitted that both of his parents are dentists. But not one of them is the child of a journalist, a Fortune 500 executive, a celebrity, a politician or a university professor -- America's policy and opinion makers.

Still, Hagel dismisses the idea of another draft as a way to share the sacrifice. These days, reviving conscription is probably even more unpopular in military circles than among civilians. Given how technical the military has become, professional warriors dread the prospect of trying to train, in too short a time, a surly flood of amateurs who don't want to be there. And a high-tech military no longer needs so much manpower in any case.

But that doesn't mean Hagel is happy with the consequences. He tells the story of an Air Force colonel's wife who stood up at a breakfast meeting in Nebraska and pointed out that America is asking a very small percentage of people to carry all the burden and make all the sacrifices, while the rest of the country gets tax cuts.

At the same time, Hagel hears people saying: "Well, after all, senator, nobody forced them to go be riflemen or Marines. They knew what they were getting into." To which Hagel replies: "That's true. I mean, what are you going to say? But what I am bothered by is what that wife of an Air Force colonel said: We are disconnecting from our society."

He's talking faster now, his voice rising. "The consequences are: One, you commit military wherever you think you need them, kind of like committing foodstuffs or some commodity. We'll send a carload of grain to the [Sudan](#). We'll send -- I hear a lot of this -- let's send two more brigades into Iraq. Well, you stop and ask the question: Do you realize what you're saying?"

He points at the air, at the unseen consequences. "You're saying, of course, there will be a number of casualties, and the suffering, and the separation from the families, and the sacrifices. If you have a congressman who's experienced this, you would see the Congress be far more careful and more cautious, if for no other reason than they know what this is about. I'm not criticizing any of my colleagues here. I'm just saying this is just a reality."

He sits back. "Second, I don't think you want a free society where you've got a very clear difference between the people and the paid professional military, kind of the guns-for-hire type, and whatever trouble we get into we'll just send them over."

And how does that hurt anybody besides the guns for hire?

"It disconnects the people from the kind of commitment and sacrifice that goes into this. You ask the question, so what? So what is: You then raise another generation of Americans thinking they have no obligations, thinking they have no responsibilities, thinking that they're born into this world as an American so we'll pay

these kids over here to go join the armed forces. That's the real danger here. Service. Citizenship. What is the responsibility of a citizen?"

**EFFORTS TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN MILITARY AND CIVILIAN ARE RELATIVELY STRAIGHTFORWARD AT THE PERSONAL LEVEL.** For instance, across the country churches, synagogues and temples are developing programs to minister to military service members and their families; some elementary, middle and high schools are inviting veterans to talk with students about their military experiences. But at the big-picture level, building bridges gets more complicated. Hagel suggests some form of national service even as he shrugs, "I don't know what the answer is."

Part of what complicates any solution is this: The consequences Hagel describes have rippled through the Pentagon and beyond it to the [State Department](#). Many analysts are sounding the alarm that over the past 30 years, even during the downsizing era, Congress and a succession of presidents have neglected the State Department and relied too much on the military, saddling it with nation-building tasks.

"The tools for creating and building have withered away, even though we have recognized that they are important to the security fight," observes Sarah Sewall, a former deputy assistant secretary of defense now at Harvard's [Kennedy School of Government](#). "It brings to mind the old saw -- if the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail."

The State Department doesn't just suffer from limited budgets and limited numbers of people. Experts point out that it also has no way to get its people where they need to be on short notice, and in any case can't force them to go if they don't want to. As Hagel knows, war is dirty work even at its edges. Says Sewall: "Civilians who join the Foreign Service at State and the [Agency for International Development](#) don't want to be part of a regime-changing paradigm. They say, 'I'm in this work to do good, thank you very much.'" Only the military has the power to order people to go. Only the military has ships and planes to move large numbers of those people to remote areas around the world and the logistics systems to keep them equipped and fed once they get there.

Echoing Hagel's notion of national service, retired Marine Gen. Anthony Zinni has proposed a deployable State Department force of economists, judges and other nation-building experts. Like military reservists, they would hold regular civilian jobs but could be called up and deployed as needed.

"It's not just a lack of capability, though," cautions Sewall. "What we have are leaders who fail to appreciate how those capabilities might be used, civilians who don't understand the uses, limits and security impact of non-military tools . . . The military officer corps are much better acquainted with the strategic debate regarding military-civilian capabilities than vice versa."

Civilians are less knowledgeable because of a systemic problem: While the military has developed ongoing leadership training programs and war colleges for its people as they advance through the ranks, no such system is in place to educate civilian leaders, whether through universities or federal government personnel practices.

"It's an intellectual vacuum," Sewall says flatly. "Civilians think they can define the problem, then hand it off to the military and point the finger." For her, the proof lies in the fact that a deployable State Department force is the brainchild of a general, not civilian experts. "What's wrong with this picture?" she asks. "It's backwards!"

Sewall calls for a different, hybrid sensibility in the Foreign Service. "We need an expeditionary corps of cross-trained experts, a new breed of State Department officer who's addicted to the thrill and rush of the operations piece and the intellectual complexity of merging the two cultures, civilian and military."

What observers such as Sewall and Zinni are talking about is a radical restructuring of a sprawling bureaucracy and the way people think, both tall orders. "It's hard to get radical change without radical failure," Sewall concedes. "It's a generational challenge."

FOR NOW, AMERICA TUCKS THE TINY TRIBE OF PEOPLE WHO STILL DO ITS DIRTY WORK OUT OF SIGHT OF MOST CIVILIANS, on and around scattered military installations. There, service members and their families live and work -- and mourn -- behind guarded gates and barbed wire.

On Camp Geiger, the Southern sun glares down on a cinder-block building painted a blinding white. This is the School of Infantry's headquarters. From here, Col. David Close watches over the training of Marines such as Tuyishimire.

"When I think of patriotism," the colonel says, "I think of selfless service. I think of the people that are dying." Suddenly, his eyes redden. His mouth quivers. "I have a hard time with the families left behind." The words stop coming.

He's a tall, rangy man, hair bristling gray. He looks like a man who should be carrying a sword, not fighting tears. When he speaks again, his voice shakes. "The word patriotism rings hollow with that. There are no words for it. It can't be explained."

His voice steadies as he describes a scene that movies have made familiar: a recent death notification on the base, the official car driving through a neighborhood of enlisted family housing on a Saturday morning, the young women who were outside setting up a yard sale all going still, waiting to see where the car would stop.

"That's patriotism," Close says. He acknowledges that outsiders, those who haven't lived this iconic moment, can hear about casualties and feel sad and make the connection between the policy decision and the end state. "But the families give up the one they love for their country. It's the families, the way of life. If you don't serve, you don't understand."

*Kristin Henderson, who is married to a Navy chaplain, is the author of [While They're at War: The True Story of American Families on the Home Front](#). She can be reached at [kh@kristinhenderson.com](mailto:kh@kristinhenderson.com). [She will be fielding questions and comments about this article Monday at noon.](#)*

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