A War Never Ends for Those Who Witnessed Its Destruction

By Paul Moriarity

A war once begun never ends for those who have experienced and felt it. I myself have not experienced the stress of combat, but as a NATO peacekeeper in Bosnia in the late 1990’s, I was surrounded by war’s effects, not only in the decimation of every physical structure, but also in the angry and broken human beings who lived through it. I remember feeling awe and fear on a cold and foggy morning crossing the narrow, wavy bridge over the Sava River from Croatia. We were slowly moving towards what seemed an ancient town, where no building had a complete red tile roof, no walls intact. These memories and the feelings from them are an intimate part of me.

Over the past ten years, I have watched as my brothers and sisters were sent into combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, where they have employed savage force and been brutally attacked, the same as people had done in Bosnia before my arrival. All of this for dubious reasons given to us by our leaders, who for the most part have not experienced what they order us to do. When politicians say that a war has ended, this statement is a falsehood, meant to distract us from the healing that must begin for everyone once the physical destruction of conflict has subsided.

Just as the Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims are intimately entwined in a collective memory of war with each other, a memory that may be a path to future healing or future war, the same is true for the peoples of the United States, Iraq and Afghanistan. There is no “end” to this war in Iraq and Afghanistan, since the raw violence of battle raged in their cities, villages and homes. They are reminded daily through the physical devastation around them, traumatic personal memories, PTSD, dead family and broken people and social institutions.

In the U.S., it is our veterans who bring the experiences of war home to teach us of its inhumanity. Many veterans have somehow found the strength to share what has happened. They have forced us to listen to what it is like to take another’s life, to raid a home in the middle of the night, to level a city, to carry a dying child who’s been shot. Military training attempts to strip the enemy of their humanity, but for many veterans, once they have taken a life, they see through this lie and suffer tremendously from it.

Paul Moriarity was in the U.S. Army from 1995 to 2002. He served as part of the Sustaining Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina, ’97-'98. He is a member of Veterans for Peace-Milwaukee Chapter 102 and a WNPJ Board member. Paul can be reached at freepj@gmail.com.

A War Never Ends for Those Who Fought It

By Zach LaPorte

Shortly after the C-17 Globemaster lifted off from the tarmac in Balad, Iraq circa January 2007, I closed my eyes in relief. I knew that in a couple brief months, I’d be back in civilian clothes. I could shake off these dusty fatigues, turn in my rifle, untie my boots and turn the page that had been my military experience. The war was over for me and I could move on with my life.

Unfortunately, it is never quite that easy. The never-ending media blitz keeps the illusion of the frontlines vivid. Memories of nights that were condemned from the beginning never seem to escape me. No matter how hard I try, the war still rages inside of me. My old veteran buddies tell me to suck it up. My college buddies don’t want to hear about it. My
therapist says that I need to talk about it. My meditation coach says that I have to take it head on. Often I think back to the blatant war crimes that I witnessed. We ended the lives of many innocent bystanders simply because the military didn’t use us correctly. It is analogous to a surgeon using a claw hammer instead of a scalpel. Try telling some of those mothers that lost their sons and daughters by the barrel of a gun that the war is over.

You think the war is over? Try telling that to Ashley Hagemann. Her husband Jared was a fellow Army Ranger that I served with. After he returned from his eighth deployment, he told his wife that God would never forgive him for the things that he had done. He was so tormented by the atrocities his unit had committed that he took his own life during a training exercise at Ft. Lewis, Washington last year. He was scheduled to leave on his ninth deployment but was repeatedly denied access to help that he needed. He left behind a wife and two children to pick up the pieces.

Now from both sides of the aisle in Washington we have calls for military action against Iran. Many of the calls for war remind me of the days leading up to the war in Iraq. Much of it is rhetoric, while very little of it is backed up by fact. We can’t let our country go down this road again. In an Orwellian twist, a state of permanent war seems to be the new norm. In fact, the current generations of pre-adolescent Americans do not know anything other than a country at war. Video games and movies are used as propaganda to recruit younger and younger soldiers.

The war in Iraq is over for the U.S., but the civil war there will rage on for years. Sectarian violence will continue to dominate the lives of most Iraqis as a consequence of our action there. The war will never end here for our veterans with PTSD, for the families who’ve lost their loved ones in combat or through the desolation of suicide. Unfortunately for the rest of the world, they are forced to stand by and hope they aren’t the next country to be “liberated” by the American military.

Zach LaPorre was in the U.S. Army from 2004 to 2007, and served in Operation Iraqi Freedom ’05-’07. He is a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War and can be contacted at zachlaporte26@gmail.com.

YOUTH PEACE ACTIVITIES

As part of WNPJ’s efforts to nurture the next generation of peacemakers, we bring to you this listing of youth-centered activities that promote cooperation, sustainability and other social justice values. If we missed something, please email the details to Judy at info@wnpj.org and we’ll include it in our weekly e-bulletin of statewide events.

• Veterans for Peace chapter 25 in Madison will sponsor scholarships at least four area high schools this year, to graduating seniors who apply by writing an essay on the topic “Why I believe war is not the answer.” For more information, call 608-231-9171 or see www.madisonvfp.org.

• On Saturday, May 12, Portage County will hold its 20th annual cultural festival in Stevens Point, with dancing, food, music, art and clothing from many cultures and countries. www.portagecountyculturalfestival.org.

• From late June to early August (different weeks for different ages), Echo Valley Farm in Ontario will host “Sharing the Earth with our Children.” The camp focuses on exploring nature, community and the possibility of living in peace. Call 608-337-4871 or see www.echovalleyhope.org.
A WAR NEVER ENDS FOR THOSE WHO LIVED IT

By Luke Wilcox

Standing in front of 40 religious leaders in Najaf, Iraq last summer, I wondered how they would react to my presentation. I was an unarmed American spending five weeks in Iraq with the Muslim Peacemaker Teams (MPT). That night I was presenting at a “cultural council,” a group that gathers periodically to discuss cultural and political issues. My topic was the relationship between Iraqis and Americans and the possibility of “reconciliation.”

During the five weeks I spent in Iraq in June and July of 2011, I lived in Minneapolis’ Sister City of Najaf at the home of my friend and colleague, Sami Rasouli. Invited by Sami, I helped teach English classes and visited the homes of artists, businessmen, farmers, university professors, and others. All welcomed me with big smiles. Most were eager to see the U.S. military leave, but also eager to work with American civilians to rebuild a better future for their families and children.

While the U.S. military withdrawal in December marked a symbolic end to almost nine years of war and occupation, it’s not “over” for the people I met. They, their children, and future generations of Iraqis (as well as Americans) will live with the consequences of the war on Iraq.

In Iraq, at least 100,000 civilians died from 2003 to 2011 as a result of the war. Some estimates put the number at over one million. Approximately 4.7 million Iraqis were displaced by the war, including 40 percent of the middle class. Seventy percent of children in Iraq suffer from trauma-related symptoms and there are perhaps five million orphans in Iraq. Electricity comes and goes every couple of hours, and 7.6 million people still lack access to clean water. According to Transparency International, Iraq was the eighth most corrupt country in the world in 2011—a legacy of both previous power structures and the U.S. occupation.

Nearly everyone I talked to while in Iraq had a friend or relative killed, injured, or tortured since 2003. Torturers included the Iraqi Army, U.S. forces, Saddam Hussein’s henchmen, Al Qaeda, and sectarian militias. One of the students I helped teach, Muhammad, played on Iraq’s national tennis team. In 2007, his coach and three of his teammates were stopped in the car they were driving, ordered to get out, and executed “for wearing shorts.”

When Sami and I visited Baghdad, he said, “Look what’s happened to this city. It was such a beautiful place when I visited it growing up.” I saw buildings riddled with bullet holes, concrete walls and military checkpoints still dividing neighborhoods, and garbage covering street corners. Iraq’s slow fall from regional leader in health and education to ruined state did not begin with the United States, but U.S. involvement in Iraq over the last few decades (including bombing during the 1990-91 Gulf War, international sanctions, and the most recent war and occupation) completed the destruction.

Yet Iraqis are working hard to rebuild. Iraqi dentist Mahdi Al-Faraaon, part of a medical delegation to Minneapolis last fall organized by the Muslim Peacemaker Teams and the organization I work for, the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project (IARP), came to the United States to build relationships with healthcare professionals and help rehabilitate Iraq’s medical system. “Otherwise we are talking for nothing,” he said.

The withdrawal of the U.S. military from Iraq brings new opportunities to build peace—and a greater imperative to work toward reconciliation. Sami, MPT and the Iraqis who welcomed me were willing to focus on a shared future. What about Americans? Will we forget about our war and its consequences, or will we work for reconciliation, helping to rebuild Iraq and a shared future?

Luke Wilcox is the Development and Communications Director of the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project in Minneapolis, MN, a member group of WNPJ. He can be reached at luke@reconciliationproject.org References for this article at: WNPJ.org/newsletters.
Ashraf al Taie is one of more than three million Iraqi refugees who have fled Iraq since the U.S. invasion in 2003. A freelance journalist who had worked with ABC News, he quickly found that his association with the Americans placed his life and the lives of his family in danger. Fleeing to Jordan in June of 2007 on a tourist visa, he told Democracy Now reporter Jennifer Utz: “Well, after my visa runs out, so I’m just going to hide in my apartment and wait something to happen, because I can’t really - I can’t go out in the streets, because if the police stop me and ask me for passport and they’re going to see that I’m not - I’m illegally in the town, they’re going to just deport me. And also, not only that, they’re going to stamp on your passport that you are not allowed to enter Jordan for five years. And they’re just going to throw me and my family on the border.”

Obtaining work is virtually impossible for Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria, forcing Iraqi refugees live off of money obtained from homes and possessions sold off in a panic as they fled Iraq. Some work in the underground economy, like the Iraqi youth in Damascus who were interviewed by the Iraqi Refugee Assistance Project: “They have been unable to attend school since the third or fourth grade. Nearly a decade behind their peers in school and unable to work legally, they struggle to survive as street vendors or touts. When asked where he saw himself in five years, one teenaged Iraqi responded, ‘Nowhere.’”

The flood of Iraqi refugees can be traced back to a bloody ethnic civil war that still continues, albeit in diminished form, to this day. Although this conflict is often portrayed in simple terms as a “Sunni vs. Shia” struggle, attitudes towards the U.S. occupation did as much as religious differences to divide the population of Iraq. The process chosen by U.S. officials for organizing local elections under the occupation encouraged parties to organize along religious sectarian lines, and the U.S. decision to disband the Sunni-led national army, followed by a vindictive “de-Baathification” process that mainly targeted Sunnis, also did much to heighten ethnic and religious tensions. In Iraq, it is still common to hear the suspicion voiced that the U.S. encouraged these divisions as part of a “divide and conquer” strategy.

But having started the war that triggered the refugee crisis, the U.S. has allowed entrance to only a trickle of Iraqi refugees, leaving the refugee problem to other nations, such as Sweden and Denmark, whose governments had warned of the consequences of a U.S. invasion. Anders Lagohe, mayor of the small Swedish town of Södertälje, told a U.S. Congressional hearing in 2008 that Södertälje alone, with its 85,000 inhabitants, had taken in more Iraqi refugees than the United States and Canada combined. But now, even these nations are slowing down — and even reversing — their acceptance of Iraqi refugees. A 2007 ruling by the Swedish Migration Court of Appeals that there was no longer an “internal armed conflict” in Iraq drastically cut the number of applications for asylum being accepted. The Swedish government, which declared 2009 as a “Year of Return” for Iraqis, began forcibly returning to Iraq those whose asylum applications had been rejected.

In the U.S., the picture is even more bleak. Even those Iraqis who worked for the U.S. military and now face death threats for “collaborating with the occupiers” find entrance to the U.S. to be nearly impossible. In 2008, Congress authorized up to 25,000 “special immigrant visas” for Iraqis endangered because they helped the Americans, but now, four years later, fewer than 7,000 of these visas have been issued. The State Department has cited “security concerns” as a reason to reject many visa applications, even for those who underwent a security background check in Iraq before beginning work with U.S. forces and who have multiple letters of recommendation from U.S. soldiers that they had assisted.

An aide to Senator Ron Johnson, meeting with WNPJ members in February, said he has tried to expedite visas for Iraqis who have worked with the U.S. military in Iraq, but with little success. “In one case, the applicant had many letters of recommendation, but we were told by the Department of Homeland Security that ‘there was more to the story’ and that ‘security reasons’ prohibited this person from receiving a visa. There was nothing more we could do.”

Read more:

Steve Burns is Program Director of the Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice. He can be reached at outreach@wnpj.org.
On February 4, the last known surviving veteran of World War I died at age 110. She was Florence Green, a Women’s Royal Air Force waitress working at a base in England on Armistice Day 1918. A four-sentence newspaper story reported her death, and raised a persistently troubling question: When does a war end?

For many, the end of a war is the moment of death in combat. The war in which Florence Green participated brought death - and with it an end to the war - to 10 million soldiers and seven million civilians. U.S. military deaths in World War I numbered 5,000 fewer than the 58,000 Americans who died in the War in Vietnam. Credible estimates place Vietnamese fatalities, soldiers and civilians, at three million. But wars don’t end when the shooting stops.

The official end-dates of wars tend to encourage us to file the violence in our memory, to ignore its true costs. When citizens are convinced that wars have a specific end, they are likely to look at future wars less skeptically. Historical timelines present wars as being neatly packaged between certain dates. The latest Iraq War, we are told, began with the invasion of March 20, 2003, and ended on December 15, 2011. Would the hundreds of thousands of combatants wounded and psychologically damaged agree with that?

I left Vietnam in 1966 after a tour of U.S. Army duty with the 1st Infantry Division. Discharged in Oakland, I was returned to civilian life with some mus-tering-out pay and a heart gladdened at being alive. I checked into a small hotel and decided to hire a cab to drive me across the Bay Bridge to San Francisco, a city I grew to love during the few months I spent there before being drafted in 1964.

Arriving in the North Beach neighborhood, the driver stopped and began calculating my fare. Not until then did I realize that I could not exit the cab wearing my Army uniform. Feeling utterly estranged from a place I once knew and appreciated, I asked the taxi driver to take me back to Oakland where I bought a pair of blue jeans and a t-shirt, and deposited my uniform in a garbage can. After spending a few days visiting friends and relatives in California, I hitch-hiked back home to Wisconsin.

Like many veterans, I feel obliged to say that my war experiences weren’t nearly as bad as those of my comrades. I wasn’t injured physically. And the bad dreams and periodic nightmares didn’t begin right away. What about the troubling skin conditions which eventually appeared? Agent Orange?

The consequences of my participation in the U.S. War in Vietnam remain with me on a daily basis. Most helpful in the decades since Vietnam have been loving family members and friends, work as a visual artist, pursuing a spiritual path, and remaining active in the peace and justice movement.

Still I ask myself: When do wars end? I don’t think it’s cynical to say that wars don’t end until the final survivor, like Florence Green, dies. But that’s not entirely accurate either. Because human lives are brief compared to, for example, cycles of life in the environment. And environmental disasters, such as the 72 million liters of herbicides sprayed in Vietnam, reach into the human future, causing congenital abnormalities to children born of parents exposed to Agent Orange.

How many centuries were required to form the delicate desert ecosystems of Kuwait and Iraq that were destroyed in a few days during the first Gulf War in 1991? Environmentalists say that explosions caused underground creatures to surface thinking the vibrations they felt were life-giving rain. The opposite was true.

Rather than confusing ourselves with unanswerable dilemmas about the ends of past and present wars, hope for survival of the world truly rests in our ability to end wars before they begin. With sabers rattling toward Iran, there’s an immediate need to resist going to war there, not to repeat lessons already learned but forgotten and ignored.

Wars don’t really end at all. They become new wars. We can only celebrate the end of war when the next war being planned isn’t allowed to begin.

David Giffey was in the U.S. Army from 1964 to 1966. He served in Vietnam in 1965-1966. He is a member of Veterans for Peace Chapter 25, a WNPJ member group, and can be reached at barnowl1941@gmail.com.

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Youth Activities from page 3

- From July 29 to August 4, the Friendship Center Children’s Camp near Dodgeville will host “Befriending Each Other - Befriending the Earth.” Contact info@friendshipcenterwi.org or see www.friendshipcenterwi.org.

- From August 19 to 25, the first WI Peacemakers Adventure Camp in New London will offer activities highlighting critical thinking, consensus building and sustainability, along with horseback riding, hiking, music and art projects. See www.wnpj.org/node/6430, email morton@hughes.net or call 920-982-6908.

See Youth Activities, page 6
WNPJ MEMBERS SAY YES TO PEACE, NO TO NATO!

By Diane Farsetta

On May 20-21, military and civilian representations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will hold an international summit in Chicago. NATO is the military organization for 28 of the world’s most powerful countries. Its Chicago meeting will focus on Afghanistan.

What better time and place to mobilize for peace? And it’s right next door to Wisconsin!

As the No to War - No to NATO international coordinating committee explains, “While the 21st century challenges facing humanity are increasing inequality and the planet’s environmental sustainability, NATO enforces inequitable access to the world’s resources and wealth and destroys the environment... NATO’s ‘if-you-want-to-have-peace-prepare-for-war’ approach to the world is a recipe for endless wars, not human security.”

That’s why WNPJ member groups are mobilizing for Chicago protests.

Voices for Creative Nonviolence will hold a peace walk, leaving Madison on May 2 and traveling through Milwaukee and Racine before arriving in Chicago on May 18. Playing off of Chicago’s motto, “the global crossroads,” Voices’ walk is called “At a global crossroads: Turn against war.”

Throughout the walk, Voices will hold public events to educate communities about NATO’s agenda, and to demand an end to NATO’s drone strikes, occupation of Afghanistan and support of Afghan warlords. Voices also calls on NATO to provide reparations to the Afghan people.

Walkers are welcome for a day, or for all three weeks. Support along the route is also needed. For more information, see Voices’ website, www.vcmv.org.

If you prefer bicycling, Grassroutes Caravan — a new WNPJ member group — has the mobile protest for you.

The Grassroutes Caravan ride “Cycles of Revolution: Brake the Banks!” will leave Madison on May 13, and pedal through Milwaukee, arriving in Chicago on May 18. Cyclists will ride 40 to 50 miles a day, in a “mobile community” with camping and group meals along the way.

This will be Grassroutes Caravan’s fourth major ride. During each one, “riders engage with locals by offering our people power to service projects, performing a variety show according to the theme of the ride, and sharing knowledge and skills. Emphasizing consensual democratic process and joyful visions of cooperative and collaborative living, we focus on ‘being the world we wish to see.’”

For information about how you can support and/or take part in the “Cycles of Revolution” ride, visit www.grassroutescaravan.org or email grassroutescaravan@gmail.com.

Lastly, WNPJ is organizing a bus from Madison to Chicago for the May 20th protests. Please contact Steve Burns at outreach@wnpj.org or 608-250-9240 to help with bus organizing.

Diane Farsetta is the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice, and a contact for WNPJ member group the East Timor Action Network - Madison. She can be reached at diane@wnpj.org.

Youth Activities from page 5

- From November 9 to 11, the Youth as Partners in Civic Leadership Conference, organized by Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development, will be held. See www.4h.uwex.edu/YPCL.cfm.

If you are so moved, many of the organizers - including Echo Valley Hope and the Friendship Center - would appreciate donations in support of their camps. Please contact the groups directly to donate or for more information.
WNPJ Membership Renewal Form

Name_________________________________________________________
Address _______________________________________________________
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Contact Person for Organization Membership ______________________
I prefer my next newsletter on-line only, please ______________________

Send completed form to: Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice
122 State Street, #405
Madison, WI 53703

Phone 608-250-9240; E-Mail info@wnpj.org; Website www.wnpj.org. WNPJ is a 501(c)3 organization and donations are tax-deductible.

REPORT FROM THE WNPJ OFFICE
From Diane Farsetta, WNPJ Executive Director

We have spring fever in the WNPJ office, with talk of seeds, sustainability and nurturing young peacemakers!

On February 19, we held a free, family-friendly outreach event, “Sowing the Seeds of Peace and Justice,” in Madison. It was a great success, with more than 100 people enjoying live music, making art in the beautiful kids’ activities area, sharing a potluck meal, exchanging seeds and making “throw and they’ll grow” seed balls. Many thanks to Family Farm Defenders, Emmett Shulte, Olds Seeds Solutions, Jung’s Northport Garden Center, Sustainability on Stilts and the Madison Area Permaculture Guild for donating materials! Thanks also to Christine Kopish and Tamara for creating a wonderful and welcoming children’s arts area. And deep gratitude to the musicians who donated their time: Galynne Goodwill, Mark Riggenbach, Roger Wendover, Vanessa Tortolano, Julia McConahay and Patrick Bayles.

Speaking of outreach, we’re very happy to welcome several new member organizations to WNPJ! Since the beginning of 2012, the Press Connection Foundation, Grassroutes Caravan, and Forward Marching Band, all based in Madison; Community for Change in Racine; SOUL in LaFarge; AFT 212 from Milwaukee; and the Yip Harburg Foundation in New York have become part of our Network. Welcome!

A double congratulations to WNPJ member group Solidarity Sing-Along, which recently celebrated its first anniversary of bringing a daily dose of harmony to the People’s House, and received the “Civil Libertarian of the Year” award from the American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin (another WNPJ member group). In bestowing the award, the ACLU noted the Sing-Along’s principled “expression of the First Amendment rights of free speech and freedom of assembly.”

Thanks to the 110 of you who responded to WNPJ’s member survey. Our Board officers and a special planning and vision committee have been reviewing your input. As I write, they’re readying proposed vision and values statements, and next steps forward on planning, for our mid-April Board meeting.

Thanks also to our many active groups, especially the WNPJ Change team, outreach committee, and environment and anti-militarism work groups, and office and event volunteers Stefania Sani, Kathy Walsh, Helen Findley, Barb Boehme and Nadja Nordstrom. All of us together make our Network work!

We will have held the WNPJ spring steering committee meeting and Board meeting at WNPJ member group Echo Valley Hope Farm in Ontario just before you receive this newsletter. Hopefully you were there! Either way, please mark June 15-17 on your calendar. That’s the weekend of the annual Energy Fair in Custer, held by WNPJ member group Midwest Renewable Energy Association. Please stop by WNPJ’s info table at the fair, come to our workshops on mining threats and shifting away from a war economy, and of course enjoy our Pancakes for Peace breakfast fundraiser! See our website for details.

Pancakes for peace at 2011 MREA Fair (photo by Judy Miner)
Please check your membership renewal date on the attached mailing label .........