

# VETERANS Education PROJECT UPDATE

## The war in Iraq: 1st person

*Vets, parents share stories & insight*

Requests for VEP presentations on the war in Iraq are increasing. Which is not surprising, given we are approaching the 5th anniversary of the invasion, many troops have deployed for multiple tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, military families are strained, and there is no end to the fighting in sight.

VEP veterans and military parents in our Military Families Connect group spoke about the Iraq war at a variety of school and public events focusing on the current conflicts. The volunteers offered compelling first person accounts.

Every VEP speaker's story and the lessons conveyed are different from others. An example, with some thought-provoking insights, follows.

### *Tyler's Story*

When prepping U.S. Marine captain Tyler Boudreau and the company he commanded for the battle to win the "hearts and minds" of the Iraqi people they would encounter when deployed to Iraq in 2004, commanders told them to smile and wave at civilians.

"When I first got there, I was smiling and waving with one hand," he told an audience of 600 students and teachers at a Williston-Northampton School Veterans Day event. "But I sent a mixed message: I always pointed my weapon with the other hand."

He noticed Army personnel who had been in Iraq for some time were not waving. Three days later, he realized why. One of his men was killed instantly by a roadside bomb, and he stopped waving too.

"I never saw one of my marines waving after that," he said.

The Williston event was organized by Middle School teacher Paul Sonnerson, a Vietnam veteran

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## War and the spirit

*VEP & church collaborate on event*

For months, members of Wesley United Methodist Church in Hadley had heard of mental health, medical and economic challenges facing many military personnel and veterans returned from war zones in Afghanistan and Iraq, and troubles veterans' families face as a result.

Last September, with VEP's help, they launched an effort to do something about the problems. The Spiritual Journey Home from War, an afternoon workshop open to the public, featured sharing by combat veterans of Iraq and Vietnam, military family members and counselors who work with veterans.

There also were breakout groups for the more than 50 people attending, discussing how churches, organizations and individuals could assist veterans and families facing medical disorders, emotional stress and post traumatic stress disorder, and other barriers to reintegration into civilian life.

***The event, sponsored by local interfaith groups, was part of a new VEP initiative. Many congregations, we are finding, are seeking ways to reach out to veterans and their families. And many are interested in the insights and perspectives VEP offers.***

"Our returning veterans deserve community support and we need to figure out how to best serve them," said Wesley Church event coordinator Louise Minks. "And there is much our veterans can teach us. We want to make sure there are places for this learning and support to happen."

VEP Board member and event organizer Barbara Tiner added that VEP was working with Congregation

B'Nai Israel to explore ways the synagogue can support local veterans and military families. Events with other area congregations are planned in the New Year.

## Multiple events observe Veterans Day and VEP's 25th anniversary

VEP speakers participated in a variety of events that marked this Veterans Day, including large public events that celebrated our 25th anniversary year. See related articles in this newsletter.

Right: Navy veteran Paul Slater shares his story with students in a classroom at Frontier Regional High School. The program was an exciting collaboration with the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Teachers' Center to teach the lessons of WW2.



*Photo by Gary Boisseau*



*Photo courtesy of Williston-Northampton*

Left: VEP's Tyler Boudreau gestures as he shares his Iraq experiences at a Veterans Day assembly at Williston-Northampton School. He spoke with Army National Guard Capt. Mike Lynch and another Iraq vet with Williston affiliation, adding to the variety of perspectives expressed.

Right: Vietnam vets discuss their war experiences in a play created in a drama therapy group. This scene is from the documentary "No Unwounded Soldiers," a film sponsored by VEP and screened at the Northampton Independent Film Festival last November.



*Photo courtesy of Becky Abbott*

## World War 2: from home front to battlefield

*Collaborations with a college, a historical association and a PBS station to bring the WW2 era to life for students and teachers*

This fall VEP staff and veterans teamed with the Teacher Education Center at Westfield State College (WSC), the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association (PVMA) Teachers' Center in Historic Deerfield, and the Springfield PBS affiliate station, WGBY, to provide teachers and students a multi-media exploration of World War 2 history. The result, in the words of one teacher, was as if "you brought us all back to the 1940s in a time machine."

### Stories from the factories and the frontlines

The journey through the decades began in September, when the four organizations collaborated on a WSC teacher workshop on WW2. Ken Burns' soon-to-be-released epic PBS documentary, "The War," had created strong public interest, and many teachers turned out. The event featured clips from a WGBY documentary, "From the Factories to the Frontlines," with interviews with Pioneer Valley veterans and home front workers, moderated by a WSC History professor. A panel of WWII veterans organized by VEP shared their stories, and VEP Executive Director Rob Wilson shared strategies for using veterans' oral histories in the classroom.

#### *"Rosie the Riveter" learns to fly*

VEP speaker Gigi Green, an Army Air Corps veteran and a member of Veterans for Peace, talked of quitting college to get a job in a California factory, making equipment for the war effort. She left her "Rosie the Riveter" role eventually to enlist in the Army, where her hopes of becoming a military pilot were squashed by a quota on women pilots. Gigi eventually got her pilot's license.

***"It was as if you brought us all back to the 1940s in a time machine."***

-High school teacher attending the workshop at WSC

Charles Scott also spoke of falling victim to a pilot quota, this one regulating the number of black airmen in combat. Accepted to the Tuskegee Airmen, a segregated fighter squadron, Scott flew many training missions but never was deployed for combat duty. He shared his experience of the institutionalized racism in the segregated military and the South. On a base there he won a small victory against discrimination by refusing to move from the "white only" seating to the back of a city bus, defying the orders of the armed bus driver.

"That was just one little step that I took against racism," he said. "My victory was I wasn't shot. More and more of us took those kinds of steps, and finally, years later, when Rosa Parks refused to move to the back, big changes happened."

Ed Wells, a Marine veteran of the Pacific theater, and Sheldon Berman, an Army fighter pilot in Europe, also shared their stories.

### "Living history" presentation to students

Following the interest in WW2 created by Burns' film, VEP arranged several school Veterans Day events. VEP Board member Ray Elliott, also a veteran of the segregated Army, teamed with Charles Scott for assemblies at South Hadley High School. Ray also joined PVMA at Frontier Regional High School events in Deerfield, as did PVMA Marine veteran volunteer Ed Wells and VEP speaker Paul Slater, a Navy vet.

Each of the three 90 minute Veterans Day events featured a veteran sharing personal stories and "Living History" educator Reba-Jean Pichette, attired as a homefront WWII housewife, talking about the tremendous impact of the war on families and households. Pichette, Historian in Residence at the PVMA, started by conducting a Civil Defense air raid drill common in wartime schools, getting students under their desks.

After the all-clear sounded and students were seated, she passed out WWII artifacts from overseas and from the home—a gas mask, a canteen cup inscribed with soldiers' graffiti, a women's hair net for the assembly line, a rubber girdle to support the back during long hours of work, and magazine advertisements of the early 40s. Soon the students were hypothesizing what items were used for and talking about the subtle and not-so-subtle propaganda messages in the magazine ads.

***"We want to help students to understand that World War II had a big impact right here, in the Pioneer Valley, as well as over there, in Europe and the Pacific,"***

-Reba-Jean Pichette, PVPA Historian-in-Residence

#### *From segregated boot camp to the Atlantic to Nagasaki*

The veterans shared stories and insights about their respective experiences—Ray struggling to get ahead in a racist military and survive in the Pacific war, Paul serving on a destroyer escort in the dangerous North Atlantic, and Ed accompanying one of the few U.S. military units to go into the Japanese city of Nagasaki after an atomic bomb had been dropped there in the summer of 1945.

"Hearing first-hand oral histories made these veterans and their time become real to my students," said Frontier history teacher Gary Boisseau. "They created a memorable and lasting vision of an important part of our American History."

*Call VEP if you are interested in arranging a VEP-PVMA living history presentation on WW2*



*Photo by Gary Boisseau*

*Reba-Jean Pichette of the PVPA, dressed in clothing of the 1940s, reenacts and talks about life on the WW2 homefront at Frontier Regional H.S. WWII vets shared their stories with her in each of three Veterans Day presentations.*

## Veterans Day and VEP's 25th Anniversary

VEP celebrated its 25th anniversary in a big way, participating in three large public events: screenings of two very different and very compelling documentary films about war and a Veterans Day choral music concert.

### *"Reel" war stories*

The two movies were screened the week before Veterans Day, co-sponsored by VEP and the Northampton Independent Film Festival.

"No Unwounded Soldiers" followed a group of Vietnam veterans working to heal the psychological scars of war through a drama therapy program. These vets—as well as veterans of WWII, Desert Storm and Iraq—shared their stories during the film. Filmmaker Rebecca Abbott and most of the veterans in the film attended and participated in a lively post-screening discussion.

***"We made this film to show how war changes those who fight it, and the devastating ripple effects those changes have," Abbott told the audience. "We also wanted to reach out to help a new generation of soldiers home from Iraq and Afghanistan, to show healing is possible."***

The film "War Made Easy," a documentary created by the Northampton-based Media Education Foundation, illuminated a topic some VEP veterans explore in their presentations: how U.S. politicians have promoted agendas for war through the media, especially with Vietnam and Iraq. A discussion featuring VEP veterans Chris Myers (Vietnam) and Tyler Boudreau (Iraq) and MEF Executive Director Sut Jhally followed the film.

"The film and the personal stories shared by the VEP veterans after the screening transcended partisan politics and promoted critical thinking, much in the spirit of our school presentations," commented VEP's Executive Director Rob Wilson.

### *Veterans Day benefit big success*

VEP's public Veterans Day programming ended on Nov. 11, on a musical note, with The Local Vocal Chorus Bowl benefit concert at Northampton's Academy Theatre. Five Pioneer Valley a capella groups provided a lively afternoon of entertainment. Organized and implemented by the members of one of the groups, Green Street Brew, proceeds from the concert benefited VEP's Military Families Connect group and another worthy program, The Cancer Connection.

VEP appreciation goes out to the organizers of this benefit concert and all the performers. We also send our thanks to the Film Festival, the filmmakers who participated in the discussions of the films VEP sponsored, the Smith College School of Social Work, History Dept. and Theatre Dept. for their event sponsorship, and the more than 600 people who attended the three public events and made our 25th Anniversary Veterans Day most memorable.



*Joyce and Kevin Lucey on MSNBC; See article, column 2*

## VEP's family voices reach many audiences

The Military Family Connect group helps members to move from individual isolation to mutual support and to understand the stresses of multiple wartime deployments. Many group members now share not only with each other, they also are reaching out to share with a wider community that may not feel a direct personal impact from war. Their voices in newspapers, electronic media and at public events help us all feel the costs of war from a military family's perspective.

Annie Diamond, whose son is a helicopter pilot deployed in Iraq, spoke at a conference for state and local EMT and law enforcement agencies about responding to emergency situations involving veterans and their families. Annie also spoke on war's impact on families to thousands gathered at a rally on the Boston Common. Group member Laura Stranlund spoke with local media, addressed public forums at churches and colleges, and also contacted MSNBC to initiate national media coverage. (Her efforts earned her an award: See back page.)

### *National network interviews*

MSNBC, the all-news TV affiliate of NBC, aired interview with the group members in September, on their website. Annie Diamond, Barbara Diamond Goldin, Kevin and Joyce Lucey, Bob Massey, and Laura and John Stranlund shared their stories. The military moms and dads talked about the challenges of their sons' and daughters' wartime deployment.

Bob Massey, a Marine veteran, has seen three of his sons go to war. "I've had a son in combat for three and a half of the past four and a half years," Bob reflected. "My wife and I take every day one day at a time."

The group interviews are at [www.msnbc.msn.com/id/20624292/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/20624292/) on the internet. Many of the families' sons and daughter deployed overseas watched the interviews and called home to thank the parents for their courage in speaking up, and for helping them to better understand their families' experience.

### *Luceys contribute to CBS expose*

The CBS Evening News interviewed the Luceys for a November report uncovering significant shortcomings in the DOD's and VA's reporting instances of suicide.

Kevin and Joyce's son, Jeffrey, took his life in 2004, nine months after returning from a tour of duty in Iraq. The Luceys described the Marine Reservist's gradually emerging PTSD symptoms, and their frustration at trying to find Jeff medical help from the Reserves and the VA.

***The Luceys have become tireless spokespeople on veterans' issues and the war in Iraq. An internet Google search found more than 51,000 references to the activists and VEP family group co-founders. Visit [www.msnbc.msn.com/id/20624292/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/20624292/) to hear the Luceys interviewed by MSNBC.***

Since the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan began, the study revealed, per week an average of more than 120 active duty personnel and military veterans commit suicide, a number far higher than previously reported.

Kevin and Joyce helped start the military family group and have done much to increase medical and mental health services for veterans-in-need. They have shared their story many times in major U.S. and international media, in hopes of educating the public and preventing future tragedies.

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who hosts VEP speakers. Featuring Tyler and three other speakers—two Iraq veterans with Williston affiliations, dressed in their Army uniforms, and the wife of one of the soldiers—the presentation was planned to provide students some varied perspectives and Veterans Day lessons on the war and the challenges of the home front.

#### *Human costs vs. mission*

Many of Tyler's lessons zeroed in on the frustrations and grim realities of a war where it usually is impossible to distinguish friend from foe among the civilian population. The veteran also touched on the clash that may occur between a soldier's personal conviction and his mission.

Although he was a company commander with 12 years of service, a love of the Corps and aspirations for a long military career, Tyler told the students, he eventually grew to doubt both the rationale behind the war and the sanctity of the occupation. In the midst of a war, with the lives of his marines at stake, he said he "sucked it up" and did his duty.

After he redeployed from Iraq to the US, Tyler reflected on his likely future re-deployment to Iraq. He determined he loved and valued the troops he commanded too much to agree to send them out to possibly be killed on a mission that he personally doubted. He began the personally difficult process of resigning his commission.

"There is a huge disconnect between our military in Iraq and the rest of America, and I felt it important for our community to hear some voices and perspectives of veterans and their families on Veterans Day," Paul Sonnerson remarked. "Three of our guests had direct connections with our school, and Tyler added an equally important perspective, representing a military officer who did not come from this private school culture.

"The feedback on the event has been overwhelmingly positive from both students and staff," Paul added. "We seemed to have touched the whole audience."

## News Briefs

### Family group member receives Women's Fund Award



Photo courtesy of WFWM

VEP family group member Laura Stranlund (left), whose son served in Iraq and is on his second Army deployment in Afghanistan, recently received the Ripple Effect Award from the *Women's Fund of Western Mass.* The award was presented to 12 area women who use the help they receive from WFWM-supported programs to help others. The award citation, in part, read: "Laura has been instrumental in helping [VEP] reach out to other families organizing gatherings, speaking our publicly, and educating civilians..." VEP thanks her for her work and caring, as we thank WFWM for supporting our *Giving a Voice to the Women of War* project, a program connected to the family group.

### Major Iraq-related conference for doctors, counselors planned in March

Many of the 1.5 million men and women who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan—especially those in the National Guard and reserve—seek or will seek medical and mental health services from private providers when they return to civilian life. Where can area medical and mental health professionals learn more about veterans' medical and mental health problems?

The answer is at a March 8 conference VEP is planning with Baystate Medical Center (BMC) and the Western Mass. chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility. Conference sessions will cover war-related emotional trauma (including PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and mental health disorders in military and veterans' families. Presenters will include nationally-recognized physicians and mental health professionals who work with active duty military, veterans, and veterans' families. Panels with veterans, military family members and counselors sharing stories and insights also are planned.

The event will take place at BMC's Holyoke conference facility, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Medical and mental health professionals may register for professional credits. Military family members and veterans may attend for \$15 (lunch will be included). Organizers hope to raise funds to provide free admission to some family members and vets.

Email [vep@crocker.com](mailto:vep@crocker.com) for more information on the conference.

### Foundation support bolsters VEP's programs

Grants received from the *Susan and Donald Babson Foundation* and the *National Storytelling Network (NSN)* and additional foundation support noted last issue got VEP off to a strong start this school year. These grants, as well as recent funds from the *Gardiner Howland Shaw Foundation* and the *Northampton Education Foundation*, are enabling VEP speakers to offer both academic and prevention programs to several Northampton Public Schools, and other area programs serving high risk teenagers and incarcerated teens. They also are helping us to train a variety of community volunteers to share stories, including residents at the largest area veterans' shelter, *Soldier On* (formerly the *United Veterans of America*). Foundations such as these—and individual donors such as you—will keep our programming going strong in 2008.

#### Please help us to celebrate VEP's 25th Birthday by making a tax-deductible donation to support our programs

The war in Iraq continues, problems such as youth violence are on the rise, and the need for VEP grows. Your end-of-year gift will support our programs in the New Year.

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Please mail this coupon with your tax-deductible check to: VEP, P.O. Box 416, Amherst MA 01004; This information is confidential. VEP does not share its donor list