

Auto-archaeology and the Political Affect of War

Benjamin Schrader*

In July of 2001, I joined the United States Army to serve as 19D Cavalry Scout. The next five years would be very transformative, as I would go from being a young Republican in college to a soldier who would go on two deployments and live overseas to a radical activist fighting for peace and social justice. This paper stands alone as a sort of mini-biographical/auto-archeological account, but also fits in to my larger works as it locates me in my work.¹ When thinking of this concept of auto-archeology, the image that comes to my mind is that of a core-sample that an archeologist might examine. In this case, I am the core sample, and like the archeologist I am looking at all strata of the sample and telling a story about a particular history, but I am examining it from my current/present positionality. The story is not as I understood it at the time in which it happened, but rather in how I understand it now. Therefore, this paper will take selected experiences from my past to reveal some of the consequences of militarization and the subsequent affects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder that has become a common theme of American military veterans. Furthermore, my experience with war, militarism, and violence also highlights a number of theoretical explorations by a number of different social scientists, most notably and pertinent for this paper are the philosophers Michel Foucault and John Protevi.

In Michel Foucault's lectures entitled *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, he outlines a number of methods related to an introspective line of understanding that looks to locate the intricacies that are tied between the concepts of the subject and truth. Within this journey, he examines the concept of knowledge and "true discourse," when he states, "making the truth your own, becoming the subject of enunciation of true discourse: this, I think, is the very core of this philosophical ascesis."² It is in this spirit, of making my experience the subject of enunciation, that I hope to draw out why my work is important. By turning the gaze inwards, hopefully a new discourse can be found and a personal account of political affect, as described by John Protevi, can be seen. Furthermore, by examining this particular narrative through different lenses, the political can shift as a different understanding of the Iraq war can be told and used as a lesson of war and violence. The narrative thus becomes its own body politic as similar stories can be heard

* Benjamin Schrader is an Iraq War veteran, turned peace activist, turned academic. He is currently finishing his doctorate in Political Science at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. His dissertation, titled, "Fight to Live, Live to Fight: Mapping Veteran Narratives of Violence in Peace," examines veteran activism centered on social justice issues. Ben is also currently teaching classes around militarism in the Ethnic Studies Department at Colorado State University. He can be reached at btgs@hawaii.edu

¹ I would like to thank Elizabeth Dauphinee for the term "auto-archeology," as this is not quite an autoethnography, but still has many similar qualities as it is drawn from my personal experiences. I would also like to thank Jenny Edkins for her comments at the 2014 International Studies Association Annual Convention in Toronto, which helped me to better conceptualize the term.

² Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981--1982*, trans. Graham Burchell, (New York: Picador, 2005), 333.

from veterans across the nation which highlights how war and veterans subsequent return has affected society. Furthermore, this account can be seen as a model for examining narrative accounts, which highlight the politics of narrative IR.

Joining the Army

One day while driving down Patterson Rd. in Grand Junction, Colorado, my best friend Garrett tells me he had a dream; in it he saw himself in the military.³ “I’m thinking of joining,” he said, “which is crazy because I told myself that I would never join after the torture that my dad put me, my brothers, and mom through.” His father was a Drill Sergeant in the army, and had received a Purple Heart among other medals for his time in Vietnam. He died from complications with shrapnel that eventually formed cancer after being in his body for over 20 years. I told Garrett that I had tried to join many years before because I did not know what I wanted to do after high school and thought, why not, but I was overweight at that time and thus not able to join. I knew the recruiters from my previous attempt at joining and told him, “Well, if you wanna go, I would be down, let’s go talk to them.” I had spent the prior year in college, but I could not afford to continue to take out loans. I also knew I was not ready for college since I had spent the last few years partying and not taking my studies seriously because school bored me at the time, so again I thought, why not.

Initially we tried contacting the Colorado National Guard, but only got the answering machine and didn’t hear back from them, so we went to the regular Army recruiters. I had been to the recruiting station before and recruiters Staff Sergeant (SSG) Gerald and SSG Barry greeted us; the latter would die in Iraq at the same time I was deployed there. The job of the recruiter is to be your best friend, he is there to reassure you, excite you for joining, and make sure that you qualify. The recruiter is often calling you, talking to you like he is a sympathetic friend, as someone who would never betray or lie to you; even after I had expressed that I changed my mind, they stayed in contact and called me from time to time just to see how I was doing. They tell jokes, hang out, tell stories, call to shoot the shit often; they are some of the friendliest people you will ever meet. The first time I had attempted to join a couple years before I was barely overweight and told to come back the next month, which discouraged me, and this would be the first time that I had seen the recruiters since my initial rejection. The two men seemed genuinely happy to see me, perhaps because they knew that, besides my past weight problems, I was a quality candidate; I had no major health problems, had a high school diploma, and no criminal record. They assured me that this time they would help me get to where I needed to be so that I could join.

SSG Barry was a Cavalry Scout, and one of the videos that he showed us was actually a Special Forces video, but he said that this would basically be our job if we chose to be Cavalry Scouts. The video was very exciting as soldiers zipped around on dirt bikes and dune buggies, and were shooting weapons neither of us had seen before. We decided that this would be a fun option if they offered it for the Army Reserves. Looking back, part of me laughs at the lies that were told, but another part of me is angry. Because while the recruiters often become very friendly with recruits, their primary task is to get bodies to fill the needs of the military, in any way possible. Sometimes it means being a friend sometimes it means lying. Talk to almost any

³ Most names have been changed, besides those whose consent I obtained.

enlisted soldier or veteran and odds are you will often hear a story of how their recruiter lied or stretched the truth in one way or another.

Within a couple of days of talking with the recruiters we were on a plane to Denver to go through MEPS (Military Entrance Processing Command). They flew us over the night before and we were put up in a hotel. Early the next morning we would be rushed through breakfast and then put through a number of lines, tests, background checks, and paperwork. I had gone through the process before, and knew that much patience was needed to get through the long day. Once we had both passed all the tests and were done being poked and prodded we were taken to the contracts office. Garrett went ahead of me, and came out and told me, “so I decided to sign up for active duty for 3 years, but got guaranteed to be stationed in Germany, do you want to do the same, cause if you do we can go on the buddy program?” The buddy program guaranteed that we would go to basic training together and be stationed at our first duty station together. It didn’t take me long to decide that it would be fun going to Germany, so I agreed, and within an hour the contracts would be drawn up and we would sign our lives away for at least the next 3 years. What we were told, but not very clearly—and would later become a very stressful aspect of our service—was that our contract was actually for 8 years, 3 years of active duty service, then 5 years of Individual Ready Reserve. Furthermore, what they quickly say while reviewing the contract with us was that anytime during those 8 years we were at the will of “the needs of the Army.” Meaning, if they need us to stay in, they would extend our service beyond the 3 years of active duty service, which did end up happening. However, all of this seemed as some sort of distant thought since we weren’t at war. We also decided to go on the Delayed Entry Program, not leaving until October of that year.

About a week after we had signed up, our buddy Jeff had decided that he wanted to join us in Germany, so he went through the same process and we were all then on the buddy program together. Once we had signed up, the recruiters kept contact to ensure that we were preparing for basic training. We did so primarily through working out and by watching Stanley Kubrick’s famous film, *Full Metal Jacket*, which was one of Garrett’s favorite films. We built up an idea of what boot camp would be like by repeatedly watching the film, which on one level terrified us, but felt that it prepared us for the worst. The recruiters assured us that it would be much easier than the movie, but that it definitely did resemble it in many ways. And like generations of soldiers before us, we turned to popular culture to build conceptions of war. Generations before us had looked up to John Wayne and Audie Murphy; we had directors like Kubrick and Stone.⁴ While the tenor of the films changed over time, the glory and excitement had not. Movies prior to Vietnam seemed to glorify the soldier as a hero, and while many post-Vietnam movies showed the layered complexities of war, the imagined masculinity of being a soldier still shined through.

Just less than two months after signing, I was awakened by my roommate telling me that there was an attack on the World Trade Center in New York. I told him to fuck off, and he said, “Seriously, come check it out.” I got up and went into his room as the first tower fell. My mind began to swim and my stomach knotted up as I knew that this would change everything with my upcoming entrance into the military. At the time, I was working at a river rafting company and had a trip to lead that afternoon. The trip was different than any other trip I had guided, as the shadow of the moment ominously loomed over the day. To add to the awkwardness, the family

⁴ Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 60.

who was on the float trip was from New York. The silence was piercing, and I remember asking, “have you been in touch with your friends and family?” The father replied, “yeah, we’re actually from upstate New York, but we have talked to most of our friends and family back home.”

That night I went to hang out with Garrett and Jeff to discuss the situation. While we were all scared about the future, we were still adamant about joining. I was more so than Garrett and Jeff because of my conservative political leanings—as I not only identified as a Republican but I also was entrenched in the white male dominated culture that permeated throughout Grand Junction – so like others, I was pissed—but Garrett, too, was determined, and Jeff decided he was still along for the ride. The discussion came up between the three of us as to what could happen if we did not go, and we concluded that we probably did not want to find out. Our recruiters had called the day after 9/11 to see how we were doing, but they also called to tell us that we had signed contracts and that we could go to jail if we did not go. This confirmed our thoughts on what would happen if we did not go. We would later find out that our recruiters were lying to us, since our contract was not solidified until we were sworn in before we left for basic training, but either way we planned on going. I was proud to be going, as I thought at the time that we were doing the right thing. On October 15th, 2001, we would leave Grand Junction, fly to Denver, be sworn in, and fly out to Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Boot Camp

*...there are psychiatrists who recommend fear, violence, and threats in every case. Some see the fundamental imbalance of power as sufficiently assured but the asylum system itself, its system of surveillance, internal hierarchy, and the arrangement of the buildings, the asylum walls themselves, carrying and defining the network and gradient of power.*⁵

Much as Foucault points out in the above quote, basic training was an imbalance of power. After a week of waiting for space to open up in a new training company we were given our initial physical test, those who passed would go on to the training company, those who failed would have to wait longer and try again. We were told that the next chance we would have to do this would be a month, so it motivated us that much more to pass the first time because the wait felt miserable as we sat around with little to do each day. The Sergeant in charge of us until we went to our training platoon was now unleashed and was finally allowed to “smoke us” now that we had passed our physicals. He had us going back and forth between the “front leaning rest position” (better known as the push-up position) and standing at attention for hours. He would call-out “Bawk Bawk,” to which we were to reply “Chicken Chicken,” he would then call it out again and we were to reply, “Chicken Head.” The cadence was from a popular rap song that came out that year, called ‘Chicken Head’ by Project Pat.⁶ The song meant to degrade women, which it seemed he enjoyed transferring upon us as he laughed every time we said it.⁷ Later that morning

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973-1974* (New York: Picador, 2008), 148.

⁶ Project Pat, ‘Chicken Head,’ *Mista Don’t Play: Everythangs Workin*, Three 6 Mafia, 2001.

⁷ The song was actually aimed at another rapper, likening him to a woman who gives oral sex to a man, thus making the degradation towards women obvious.

we would get on a bus and go get all of our issued equipment that we would need for our time in basic training; we then went to our training company, Echo company.

As the bus pulled up, the Drill Sergeants were waiting outside for us, and they boarded the buses and began screaming at us to get off the buses. It was a torrent of yelling, as curse words and degradations were being thrown at us as we tried to exit the buses and get in line outside as quickly as possible. Once outside we were to empty our duffle bags on the ground for their inspection, though they barely looked at the contents strewn across the lawn, as they would yell at us to “get our shit back in our bags.” One smaller Drill Sergeant walked around with a clipboard and got the recruits’ names, and told them which platoon they would be in. Once we were told our platoon, and all of our stuff was back in the duffle bags, we were told to get our stuff up to our barracks as quickly as possible and to get back down stairs for formation. I was put into 3rd Platoon, while my friends Garrett and Jeff were put into 2nd Platoon. It was distressing at the time, but it seemed that I had much bigger problems to worry about, as we were all constantly being disciplined and broken down at every turn.

The first few weeks of basic training is known as ‘black phase’—which is called as such because it reflects the status of being completely out of supplies, or more particularly out of ammunition; we are seen at this point as starting from zero—and this was probably the most difficult portion of basic training. It is in these first few weeks that the initial imbalance of power is formed, primarily through a somatic process that includes discipline centered on the body and psychological degradation meant to break down the soldier. Punishments were usually focused on individuals but often the whole platoon would be punished for the action of an individual. Often there was no real cause for punishment, but rather a statement being made that we were not individuals, that I would not realize until after my exit from the military. We were now property of the US Army, and we would be used in whatever way they deemed necessary. Drill Sergeants would scream in our face, call us names, and make us do hours of bear crawls, push-ups, sit-ups, running, etc. We would be kept up late and awakened early to ensure that our mental and physical capacities were worn down to a bare level of survival.

Throughout these first few weeks we were constantly exhausted, and it seemed that everything we did was incorrect. A button would be undone on our pockets, and we would be punished, some one next to you would fall asleep during a class, you and he would have to do push-ups, it got to the point where I questioned which way was up and which was down. I questioned why I joined, why I was there. It is in the first few weeks that the highest turnover of recruits takes place, but with the attacks of September 11th having just occurred, our Drill Sergeants aimed to make it very difficult for anyone to get out of their contract, which made us hate them that much more.

One night in the first few weeks my “battle buddy,” Jared, told me that ‘he couldn’t take it any more’ and told me that he was going to tell the Drill Sergeants that he was gay.⁸ I asked him if he was telling the truth, and he said he had a whole black book of contacts to confirm his story. The confrontation must not have gone well because the next time I saw him he was in tears and wearing a bright orange vest that read “SUICIDE WATCH,” and we had to take shifts to watch him. He later told me that he had threatened to commit suicide if they didn’t let him out,

⁸ Battle Buddies are an assigned soldier that you are supposed to do everything with. In some ways it acts as a support system, but also it works as an accountability system, because if one messes up then both mess up and both are punished.

which later created a spectacle as the Drill Sergeants would berate him as weak, a pussy, and a faggot. This was prior to the repeal of the military's policy of "Don't Ask Don't Tell," which would make coming out as gay a crime within the military. This punishment was purposeful humiliation as he was used as an example of the hell that they could put us through, because if we thought we had it bad, they showed us that they could make it a lot worse. He was eventually sent to an out processing unit and kicked out of the Army, but the message was sent, it may just be easier to finish than get kicked out like Jared was. A part of me looks back and sympathizes with him, but another part of me feels like he is the one who got off easy.

In Foucault's *Psychiatric Power* lectures the construction of the soldier as a subject can be related to his description of subject formation in the asylum, which comes in progressive steps. The first step that Foucault identifies is the creation of an imbalance of power between the doctor and patient, wherein the doctor is demonstrating force in order to make the patient conform to his will and the patient learns to "accept the doctor's prescriptions."⁹ Similarly, black phase is meant to perpetuate this imbalance of power, from the constant punishment which broke down not only our bodies but also our will, to making an example of my battle buddy; the laws had been set as to who was the doctor, and to survive, the Drill Sergeant's prescriptions must be taken. It was a constant mix of emotions that drove me the first few weeks, fear of being punished or even worse, recycled and having to start all over; a deep anger and hatred at the Drill Sergeants and what seemed like cruel punishment; the feeling of pride, whenever a task was completed, or when we overcame an obstacle; and the constant extreme exhaustion. While that might not seem like an emotion, it definitely was one; perhaps an anti-emotion, because when you become too exhausted you become completely devoid of emotion, and you start to move on auto-pilot, which is what they wanted, and often how we operated.

A Reuse of Language

...it is equally a matter of re-teaching the subject to use the forms of language of learning and discipline, the forms he learned at school, that kind of artificial language which is not really the one he uses, but the one by which the school's discipline and system of order are imposed... making the patient accessible to all the imperative uses of language: the use of proper names with which one greets, shows one's respect and pays attention to others; school recital and of languages learned; language of command.¹⁰

In our right cargo pocket we were to have with us at all times our "Soldier's Blue Book." We were to memorize our chain of command, ranks, the seven core Army Values, how to address our superiors, etc. We were told to be reading it and reciting it whenever we had free time. At any time, day or night, we were subject to examination, and an incorrect answer would result in corporal punishment. The "Soldier's Blue Book," contained everything from the definition of a soldier to the national anthem, it was the "go-to" guide for any questions we had for the first half of our training.

When we would run or march anywhere, we would chant military cadence as a group to ensure that we were all in step with one another. Protevi describes this as an 'entrained acculturation through rhythmic chanting to weaken personal identity in order to produce a group

⁹ Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 146-147.

¹⁰ Ibid, 150.

subject.¹¹ This was especially effective because it made one feel more powerful as a group and not alone as an individual when chanting the different cadences. The loneliness that came with such training, the feeling of alienation, seemed to disappear as the group became more proficient at running and marching while singing cadence. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, it helped us to stay in step with one another when marching in formation. As the cadence caller would sound off, the first word is when your left foot is to hit the ground. The most basic cadence, that most soldiers first hear, and is often used as filler between cadences, is the simple “left, left, left right.” It is through this basic coordination that a somatic reflex begins to be formed so that the individual ceases to be and thus becomes a part of a group as they march as a single organism. To this day when I go for a run, cadences go through my mind, even at times when I walk I hear the “left” as my foot hits the ground. There was a sense of unity in this constant drilling, especially when we practiced for parade drills. This unity was both positive and negative because when someone would mess up and we would have to start over, we would all be angry, but when we perfected our parade steps, a unified smile could be seen. While it seemed that I was losing myself, I was gaining brothers in arms, who knew the feelings I was feeling because they seemed to be experiencing the same.

A few weeks later, while training, Drill Sergeant Rodriguez was yelling at us and said something that I will never forget: “listen here privates, you need to take this shit seriously. Many of you will be going to Iraq and some of you won’t come back. You need to know how to kill those Hajis so that you can come back.” The main reason this has always stuck in my head was because at the time there was no talk of going to Iraq, Afghanistan was the primary focus. I have always wondered, was this a premonition or did he know something that many did not. Perhaps it was neither and in his own ignorance he was lumping the whole of the Middle East into one enemy. There is no way to be sure. However, it is in this quote that we see a number of things within this concept of the reuse of language that is seen within basic training; first and foremost is a dehumanization of the enemy. As Protevi points out, this is done primarily through creating sterilized euphemisms that makes it as if one is not killing a fellow human but rather a wild beast that would otherwise kill you.¹² Protevi identifies names of past “enemies” of the US such as “Kraut, Jap, Reb, Yank, Dink...”¹³ but none of these were used when I was in training. Instead it was, “Sand Nigger, Haji, Camel Jockey, Dune Coon, etc.” This updated version of racial epithets is fairly spatially and ideologically specific, making the enemy of the state not only those who live within the Middle East but also those who are of the Muslim faith. At the time I had no problems with these sorts of terms because I had grown up in the very white, middle class, conservative town of Grand Junction, Colorado, where many of these terms and worse were commonly used; and racism, sexism, and homophobia were often very prevalent and had become common in my everyday thinking growing up. But racial epithets were not always tolerated, as it would be a soldier in 2nd platoon who would say that “he wouldn’t take orders from that fucking nigger,” talking about Drill Sergeant Stone. The word got back to Drill Sergeant Stone about what Polaski said, and within an hour he was sent up to 3rd platoon where Drill Sergeant Rodriguez made him hate life, after which he was eventually kicked out. This move meant that

¹¹ John Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 156.

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ *Ibid*

2nd platoon needed another soldier, and knowing that my friends were in 2nd platoon, I was sent down, which seemed to be both a blessing and a curse. I was near my friends, but with Drill Sergeant Stone who not only scared the crap out of me, but also had a reputation for being the most difficult Drill Instructor.

Returning to Drill Sergeant Rodriguez's "premonition," the idea of needing to know our jobs because otherwise "Hajis" would kill us is the way in which a dichotomy of life and death is formed. You must kill, before being killed. It will be a "Haji" trying to kill you. It is in this point that I feel I must push against Protevi in that as being a 19D Cavalry Scout, which is a combat arms specialty, there were no sterilized euphemisms for killing. We were expected to be killers, trained to be killers, told consistently that we were killers. On the whole, other military occupation specialties were trained differently, specifically the support specialties that were not combat arms—because they were not expected to be killers—but our training glorified combat and killing. Furthermore, this killing instinct is specifically drilled into us through raw emotions in the bayonet-training course.

While Protevi points out that rage is ineffective for the contemporary soldier, that emotion is still tapped into within the training of the soldier, though only briefly, and at specific times. The first half of the bayonet training consists of pugil stick training. The pugil stick is meant to act as a replacement for a rifle. There was about an hour of training in different moves that were to be performed if we were attacked, such as a butt stroke and the thrust, and while the initial training seemed important I eagerly anticipated what was to come. I could see it in others' eyes as well, and I could hear the hypermasculine calls for the pugil sticks. Everybody was given a football helmet and put into a circle. In the circle two soldiers would come together and were told to rage upon one another. It was a primal feeling that you could feel in your gut with emotions going wild as we were screaming and everyone around the circle was chanting and yelling, hoping for blood. Like *Fight Club*, everyone must fight, but it doesn't end until the Drill Instructor says it's over. Me being one of the larger soldiers, I was matched up with another large guy, Anderson. The lessons that were just learned about camaraderie were easily been forgotten as I swung with a wild rage trying to hit a homerun, pretending Anderson's head was the ball. I was reminded of my time playing football, when the blood pulsing through my head drowned out the sound of everybody screaming and yelling. He hit me hard in the jaw, which knocked me backwards. He lunged forward, but as he lunged he tripped, and like a tiger pouncing on its prey, I attacked, hitting him on the back of the head. As I went to swing again the Drill Sergeant had called the match but I could not hear him as my adrenaline pumped, as I swung again at the man on the ground only to be tackled by the Drill Sergeant. While in another arena this may be discouraged and looked down upon, here it was encouraged as the Drill Sergeant slapped my ass afterwards and told me "good job", which made me feel high with pride.

The second half of the training was just as intense. Soldiers are given a fake rifle but a real bayonet. We were again instructed on how to stab someone with it, while it was affixed to the rifle. The Drill Instructor would yell out, "What is the spirit of the bayonet?" We promptly replied, as loudly as possible, "TO KILL KILL KILL WITH COLD BLUE STEEL DRILL SERGEANT!" The Drill Instructor then asked, "What makes the green grass grow?" To which we respond, "BLOOD BLOOD BLOOD MAKES THE GREEN GRASS GROW DRILL SERGEANT!" This was done many times over the course of the day, and every time we thrust with the bayonet we were to scream with our "battle cry," like in *Full Metal Jacket*. Like the marching and cadence, this repetition works to erase the individual and replace it with a group

identity, one that removes the moral ambiguity of killing, and instead normalizes it. We were then sent to a mile long obstacle course in the forest where we were to jump logs, crawl under concertina wire, run up to a large human shaped wooden targets, scream, stab, twist, and pull. There were at least 5 different dummies along the course and if it was completed in a certain amount of time, we were awarded expert in Bayonet training achievement medals. This day seemed to act as a turning point; not only was it a confidence booster after so many days of being mentally, emotionally, and physically beat down, but we were also given constant positive reinforcements. The act of killing was being transformed from what I had always been told as bad, to something that was righteous, powerful, and good. It was the first time in weeks that we had all been in high spirits, as we all joked and laughed before going to bed that night. The hypermasculine violence that had been encouraged throughout the day—as we beat each other up and stabbed mannequins with bayonets—left us feeling proud because instead of being punished and disciplined by the Drill Sergeants, we were praised and encouraged.

Management or Organization of Needs

*The third maneuver in the apparatus of asylum therapy is what could be called the management or organization of needs. Psychiatric power ensures the advance of reality, the hold of reality on madness, through the management of needs, and even through the emergence of new needs, through the creation, maintenance and renewal of needs... Basically it involves establishing the patient in a carefully maintained state of deprivation: the patient's existence must be kept just below a certain average level.*¹⁴

One of the most basic and consistently drilled managements of needs comes in the form of shining boots. The appearance of the boots is to be scuff free and shiny at all times in garrison and as much as possible in the field.¹⁵ If the boots are not adequately shined, as per usual, the soldier will more than likely be punished; I am not sure how many pushups I was subjected to throughout my time in the military due to 'not shiny enough boots,' but it was definitely a lot. Throughout basic training and the rest of my time in the military, countless hours were spent shining boots. While the boots are the focal point for this entrained action, the whole uniform is to be honored, thus creating a need within the reorganization of needs within this process of subjectification. There should be no wrinkles, all pockets should be buttoned, the beret should be properly formed, etc. As stated in the *Soldier's Blue Book*:

Personal appearance is important—it demonstrates the pride and self-discipline you feel as a Soldier in the U.S. Army. Being neat and well groomed contributes to the esprit in your unit. Your uniform should fit well and be clean, serviceable, and pressed as necessary.¹⁶

¹⁴ Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 152-153.

¹⁵ Since my departure from the military they have switched to a tan suede boot that does not require shining, but the shining of boots serves as a good example of one way in which soldiers' needs are managed. However, while boot shining is no longer required, I am sure they have found other ways to manage soldiers' needs as it is an integral process to the subject formation that the military strives for.

¹⁶ Headquarters Department of the Army, *The Soldier's Blue Book: The Guide for Initial Entry Training Soldiers*, TRADOC Pamphlet 600-4, Fort Monroe, VA, 2010.

This passage highlights that the Army sees a fluid exchange between the individual and the group, wherein they are affective upon each other. Personal appearance becomes a statement of one's feelings and emotions towards the military and their country. The soldier who is "ate up" or in other words, looks like a slob, shows a lack of respect for his/her self, the uniform, and for the military. It is thought within the military that it affects the morale of the unit, which then becomes a reflection upon the leadership.

Probably one of the most somatic aspects of the management of needs comes by way of nutrition, and is also alluded to as a tactic by Foucault as meals are targets of making the subject become more docile.¹⁷ This is done in a number of ways and begins in basic training. All meals are set at specific times, with a specific amount of time to consume each meal. Soldiers who are larger are regulated as to what they can eat, while soldiers who are under weight are forced to eat more than they normally would. This is to put soldiers at an "ideal" weight, but in reality it is a transformation of the body into a productive subject aimed at being able to complete the tasks the military requires.¹⁸ Soldiers who are overweight are highly scrutinized and face punishment as extreme as expulsion from the military, but that is only for those who cannot get to more of an ideal weight through rigorous, often forced, exercise. I was one of these soldiers, as I have always been heavier than most people. I had entered the Army weighing 250 pounds, and by the time I left I weighed 180 pounds as the result of many extra miles of running, additional push-ups, sit-ups, food being taken off my plate at dinner, and other forms of punishment. At times it felt like punishment, other times it fueled me to lose more weight and become stronger. My body had changed and I no longer looked like an offensive lineman in football, but now looked more like a running back or a linebacker, or more to the point, like an ideal soldier. When I went home on hometown recruiting after completing basic training, my bodily transformation inspired two of my other friends to join. At the time this seemed cool, but once my views on the military had changed, I would come to regret it. I feel partially responsible for the difficult experiences they would have in military, as they had to constantly deal with the misogyny and sexual advances that are common for women in the military; though I know they do not regret their choice to join. Either way, I was transformed into a new man, I was a soldier, I was a 19D Cavalry Scout.

Transitions

After graduation I went home, as mentioned, to do two weeks of hometown recruiting. After hometown recruiting I finally arrived at my unit in Vilseck, Germany, where Garrett and Jeff were waiting. At this time I still considered myself a Republican, and having just finished basic training feeling like a new man only worked to solidify those ideals of patriotism, masculinity, and power. Garrett and Jeff on the other hand were both fairly apolitical going into the process—though they leaned left as their ideologies were formed by the music of punk bands like The Dead Kennedys, NOFX, and Bad Religion; which all perpetuate anti-fascist, anti-nationalist, and anti-capitalist ideals—and while they too had been transformed physically, they maintained their left-leaning ideals. Even though we had different political ideologies, we were much closer after our experience in basic training because we were able to constantly give one another mental and emotional support, and their thoughts and ideology would eventually help me to open my eyes.

¹⁷ Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 154.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 162.

Within the coming months we would spend much time traveling around Europe, experiencing the world and soaking in new cultures. Many of our friends in the platoon would stay close to base as it provided everything an American craves, bars, bowling alleys, movie theaters, and restaurants. We were constantly told about “the dangers” of going off base and told to stay within a 50-mile radius of base; the dangers were primarily being the target of anti-American sentiment, but we never had a problem with this. This meant that soldiers could go as far as Nuremberg, but no farther without written consent. However, having each other as pillars of support emboldened us to go where we pleased. Many of our fellow soldiers expressed their fear of going too far, especially without permission, but we felt that one of the main reasons we had joined was to see Europe, and we did. We often tried to stay away from places that soldiers went, because all too often that would be the center of trouble as fights often broke out between drunken soldiers.

Our refuge came from a small Irish Pub in Nuremberg called PJ O’Shea’s. We became family with the staff, sometimes spending the night at different staff members’ homes. We seemed to be experiencing Germany and Europe very differently than our compatriots, as we became embedded within the German economy, and made many friends from all across the world. It was this time that probably softened my American exceptionalism, but it would all be shattered upon our first deployment to Kosovo. We trained to be the battalion’s Quick Reaction Force, and in September of 2002 we were sent to a small town called Vitina, near the Macedonian border.

The training leading up to our deployment consisted of preparing for mortar attacks and sniper attacks. We were to be prepared for everything, and were told the worst; so on our first day in sector, when doing a ride along with the unit we were relieving, I was shocked when a little girl came up to the Humvee and threw flowers at the window. Immediately the Sergeant on my truck yelled at me and said, “that’s why we keep our windows up, for all we know that could’ve been a grenade and we would all be dead.” I wasn’t sure how to react; a part of me was fearful that this place was as violent as the sergeant made it seem, another part of me was angry because what was said made no sense since it was a little girl. In my mind, she could not be the enemy since she was just a young child, but it is this type of rhetoric that had become so common in the military.

Over the next six months I would be assigned to drive the Platoon Sergeant around, Sergeant First Class David Jenkins, or Sgt. J. Our time driving around Kosovo together changed me in ways I hadn’t thought possible. Sgt. J was a Black man from “Hot-lanta, Georgia!” And this was my most intimate experience with a Black man as we spent thousands of hours together, discussing every detail of our lives with one another. I grew to not only respect him but I also looked up to him as a sort of father figure, as he often gave me advice and helped me whenever I was in need. All my racist ideas and stereotypes I had grown up with, believing as facts, were dispelled; from believing that Black men were dangerous to them being lazy, as well as all the other stereotypes of the many other racial groups that I had learned about through dirty jokes as a kid, I had to rethink all of them. To this day I still try to track down Sgt. J, and hope to someday reconnect with him and tell him how much he meant to me, and his contribution to my transformation into the person I am today. I would later work to understand racial politics, social justice, and white privilege, which might never have happened had I not spent so much time with Sgt. J. While the army is not trying to make people more “liberal” (i.e. inclusive and accepting of diversity), it does need for soldiers to work together across racial boundaries with minimal

friction. So the military's production of subjectivity can take unpredictable turns, as some young white men recalibrate racism in system-challenging ways as evidenced here.

Another thing that made me question my identities (primarily that of being a white American male) that I had grown up with came that winter as it was especially cold and there were multiple blizzards that brought a lot of snow. While on patrol one day I noticed that none of the houses in the area had windows. This thought blew my mind, as I could not imagine living in this climate, in a house with no windows. Having grown up in Colorado, I knew about the cold, but everybody I knew lived in a house with windows. To stay warm people had trash barrels in these windowless concrete homes. To add insult to injury, one of our tasks was to stop smugglers, not smugglers of drugs or weapons mind you, but rather smugglers of wood; we were never given a good reason as to why this was our mission. This left an awful taste in my mouth, and made me question my privileges as an American. Furthermore, our day-to-day missions were filled with useless tasks that felt like a waste of time. I had no idea as to why we were really there, as we felt more like cops than soldiers.

While we sat in Kosovo, George W. Bush and company ramped up for a war in Iraq. With the walls of my ideologies and ardent belief in my government slowly failing, I did not know what to believe anymore. I stayed up at night watching the news, listening to Colin Powell's speeches to NATO. I even went as far as printing out the transcripts of different speeches detailing why we were going to war with Iraq, just so that I could fully understand why we were being sent. If these reasons held up, then it seemed justified, but as time went on the justifications for why we were going to Iraq fell, as did my conservative leanings as I followed my friends and became more and more liberal. This caused a lot of personal tension as I slowly lost faith in our cause, which would eventually make me not only angry for being sent to Iraq, but also feel betrayed by my government for sending me to a war that seemed to be justified by lies.

Upon our return from Kosovo we were told we would be deploying to Iraq within six months, and we promptly returned to training. This time we had much more intense weapon and reaction training. As a Cavalry Scout, I was constantly at different firing ranges learning different weapon systems throughout my time in the military. My personal weapon throughout my time was an M4A1 semi-automatic carbine rifle. While I was a driver, my rifle had an M203 grenade launcher attached to it, but once I became a gunner this was removed. When I was a gunner I served on two primary weapon systems, the 50-caliber machine gun, and the MK 19 automatic grenade launcher. Both weapons were mounted to the tops of our Humvees, and I was considered an expert marksman with both weapon systems. When training with our personal weapons, the silhouettes we fired at were pop-ups at various ranges, which resembled human targets. We would fire from a standing position and while lying in the prone position. When firing a crew-served weapon such as the 50 cal. or the MK19, we would fire at vehicle silhouettes. I fired at numerous different firing ranges, and it was always exhilarating to shoot these weapons. The adrenaline rush of shooting automatic weapons is amazing, as I would fire and see things destroyed before my eyes. The shooting of targets that resemble actual bodies and vehicles, as Protevi highlights, raises the probability that soldiers will fire upon real targets when faced with a threat, because the protoempathic identification processes have been bypassed and killing an enemy becomes no different than killing a target.¹⁹

¹⁹ Protevi, *Political Affect*. 147.

Protevi also points out that the use of these automatic weapons is to kill through the use of technology at a distance, because it is more effective and the soldiers will be more likely to pull the trigger, since the distance keeps them from being able to identify with the subject.²⁰ The military does not label or think of it in this way but rather conceives of the technologies as “combat multipliers,” whereas the better our technology and the farther away we can kill from, the fewer soldiers it will take to neutralize a greater number of their soldiers. It is in this sense that a sterilization of the terms has shifted the most when examining the act of killing, which has a double effect, one on the soldiers, the other on society in general as the act of killing then sounds not as morally reprehensible.

Another form of target practice we frequently prepared for was room-clearing tactics. While in Germany, preparing to go to Iraq, our platoon did a full day of training with a Navy SEALs unit on room-clearing, which we would repetitively practice for the next few months. We started doing room-clearing tactics with no ammo, then with blank bullets, and finally with live ammo. This repetition helped to create a muscle memory, or as Protevi puts it, “direct access of the military machine to reflexes embedded in the spinal cord of the soldier—as clear an instance of political physiology as one can imagine.”²¹ This training would prove useful in Iraq as our platoon was tasked with a number of house raids, and we were able to safely clear rooms with no casualties on any side, though while there were no deaths, there were definitely physical, mental, and emotional casualties. We were good at what we did, which was quick, efficient, and terrifying. I have no idea how many people we frightened, made cry, slammed on the ground, butt stroked with our rifles, tore apart families as we took the males away for questioning. It was all a very traumatic experience for those who were our targets, often based on poor intelligence.

The last form of reflex training we conducted before leaving for Iraq was a month long training exercise in Hohenfels, Germany. Hohenfels, an ex-German Army training site, is an expansive area where brigades can hold training exercises that have a brigade that plays as OPFOR (Oppositional Forces). Throughout the month numerous live-action scenarios are played out, all while wearing MILES gear (Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System). The MILES gear consisted of a laser system attached to our weapons that would fire if we fired (when we fired we were using blanks so it still sounded like we were firing an actual bullet), and receiving sensors that we put on our vehicles and our bodies so if someone fired at us we would know we were hit by the “enemy’s” fire. With each platoon there was a referee that would tell us the extent of the wounds if someone shot at us and it hit the receiving sensors, and we then had to react accordingly. This simulation is meant to try and match the intensity of real combat situations, as local actors are brought in to act as civilians, small cities are erected and given names of towns we will be deployed to, and past events are recreated.

At the time, though, it felt like an extreme waste of time to me, partially because it was snowing most the time we were there so most of us seemed more concerned with staying warm, and secondly, knowing that none of it was real when we would soon be facing the real thing made it seem less glamorous. However, the simulation would often spark the adrenaline that I would face in the combat zone—even if it was only a fraction of the intensity; as even an unconvincing practice produced a version of the desired militarized affect. The month before we left was nerve racking as we packed up all of our equipment and had a constant ear on the

²⁰ Ibid, 151.

²¹ Ibid, 155.

happenings in what would become our AO (Area of Operation). At the time I had thought that there was a chance that I would be getting out of the military in October, since my three years would be up in the middle of our deployment, but all hopes were lost when we were told we were being put on a stop-loss that would last until three months after our deployment. When I heard the news it was like somebody had kicked me in the stomach. Not only was I being sent to a war that I no longer believed in, but I would be stuck there after I was supposed to get out. It looked like the needs of the Army had won out and I was on the receiving end of what we called the “big green weenie.”

Iraq

Our mission in Iraq was to be somewhat similar to the operations we had conducted in Kosovo for nine months. We were told that we would be primarily the Battalion’s QRF (Quick Reaction Force), but would also be tasked with the Brigade’s QRF duties as well. This task would be split up into three sections – two sections from our Scout platoon, and one from the Mortar Platoon. Each day, one of the sections would be on call for 24 hours, and it would then rotate to the next section. When on call, we would have to be prepared to leave the base within 5 minutes and get to any situation to respond to IED’s (Improvised Explosive Devices), ambushed convoys, mortar attacks, and so on. On days off, we were tasked with regular patrol missions, convoy escort missions, house raids, and a number of other operations. When we were not out on mission we would have to do maintenance on our vehicles. So needless to say, there was little to no personal downtime for my platoon, making our year there a constant adrenaline high that was very physically, mentally, and emotionally strenuous, which has contributed to the PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) that I would be diagnosed with upon my exit from the military. In relation to PTSD, Protevi states, “many of the problems have to do with the sustained high cortisol levels and the high endorphin-release thresholds of the traumatized body. In other words, PTSD is at least as much physiological as it is psychological disturbance, though neither one nor the other exclusively.”²² This has played out in a number of ways throughout the years; I will now try to discuss some of the events and situations that led to the different elements of my PTSD and discuss my symptoms in general, which in turn show the affective somatic relationship between the individual body and war.

Many of our missions were conducted at night, under the cover of darkness, such as: Raids, Counter-Mortar operations, patrols, over watch operations, and so on. At least half of our encounters when we were fired upon occurred at night. This has had a lasting effect on me, which is one of my symptoms of my PTSD. To this day, my anxiety level is usually higher at night, especially while driving. Whether walking or driving, I usually feel like someone is following me. The darker and more quiet it is, the more I am at unrest. Years after exiting the military, I was riding my motorcycle the day before the 4th of July, when a loud “BOOM” went off, followed by a number of small “pops.” It sounded as if an IED went off followed by small arms fire. I almost drove my motorcycle off the road. I pulled over and cried for nearly 2 hours. Protevi links this crying to a “reprogramming... joy/endorphin triggers, which are set at a very high level due to the intensity of battle.”²³ It may have worked in some sense, because since this situation my sensitivity to fireworks has lessened over the years to a level where it does not really

²² Ibid, 156.

²³ Ibid, 155.

bother nor surprise me anymore. However, my anxiety levels and vigilance at night are still a problem, as I am often hyperaware of my surroundings, and often feel like I am being watched or followed.

Another source of anxiety for me comes when I am driving slowly. When driving, I usually try to drive as quickly as possible, without getting a ticket. I attribute this to two things that stem from my time in Iraq. The first is the fact that we had to drive as fast as possible to avoid IED's, which hit us frequently in Iraq. However, because we drove so fast, we usually came out of the situation unscathed. The second is when we were assigned movement to contact missions or, as we liked to call it "Trolling for Fire" missions. Whenever a particular road or stretch of highway became areas of high contact, we were sent out to drive slowly up and down that area to try and draw fire. After the first few times of this, it became ineffective as the Iraqis realized what we were doing, which then proved dangerous for us, as we became the targets of IED's. Every few months, the command would make us do this, because they thought it might be effective since we did kill some Iraqis the first couple of times, but it never was.

With only a few months left in our deployment, my section was on QRF duty and at around 9 am we were spun up and told to be on stand-by as the city of Ba'qubah was being overrun by insurgents. While this may sound fairly exciting or dangerous, it just seemed like another day to us, as it seemed that we had been constantly on mission and in danger since we had arrived. We got into our trucks and moved to the front gate. It seemed very chaotic as we waited to get our orders as to what the commander wanted us to do. Our PL (Platoon Leader) came out and told us the situation. We were to get into the city square and secure the location until the areas that were overrun could be retaken. In some ways I was excited because it seemed like this was a legitimate mission to get rid of some actual bad guys, but it also carried a bit of fear since we could hear the chaos from the radio and the booms of explosions outside the wire. As we approached the edge of the city, a tank battalion was parked in the middle of the road, blocking our entry. We contacted their PL who told us that there was an IED ahead and said that we shouldn't proceed until it was cleared. While waiting for them to clear the IED, we started to take automatic fire from a nearby building. The gunner in front of me, Jacobs, opened fire with his 50 cal. on a nearby building that subsequently was found to be a hospital, which angered me at the time because nobody was clear as to where the fire was coming from at that point, but Jacobs opened up fire anyways. The fire continued for what felt like an eternity, as time seemed to slow down. We took more small arms fire that I could hear pass over my head and then an RPG was fired and exploded near the tank, which caused all of us to open fire to the southwest as the sun was high overhead. A few minutes later the fire stopped. We waited for about 10 minutes, which at that point the tankers disarmed the IED by shooting at it and blowing it up. We had used this tactic to disarm IED's many times and every time it seemed gratifying to me.

We slowly crept towards the city center, leaving behind the tankers that were cordoning off the city. The city, a heavily populated and normally very active city, was like a ghost town. We would go one block and stop and wait for a minute or two. My truck was in the rear of the convoy so my sector of fire was anything behind us, and about half way to the city center we took fire from the west. We stopped as the drivers and dismounts got out of the vehicle to cover the east as we turned our crew-served weapons to the west. Down an alley I saw a man in black running closer towards us with an AK-47; I opened fire with my MK19 and saw the man fall from the blast. I could only see half of the man's body as the other half was hidden by a building, but he lay there without movement. It was a strange mix of emotions seeing the body of someone

I had just killed. My adrenaline was pumping, as there was fear, excitement, satisfaction, anger, sadness, and joy all at once. The fear was for my own life, excitement and satisfaction from doing exactly what I was trained to do, anger for having to be there and from these people attacking us, sadness for having taken a life, and joy for having come out alive at that moment. The negative feelings would not become prominent until later as I reflected upon the moment, but they seemed to be there still as I fought to survive.

My hands were shaking as we moved on to the city center, but that would prove to be the last contact we received for the rest of the day. It was hours until our relief came, and as time went on in the day people slowly started coming out of their houses. Few dared to cross the main road that we were sitting at, and then a car came out on the road and started coming towards us. I asked my TC (Truck Commander) if I should open fire, and he approved. I then told him that I was going to fire a warning shot with my MK19 first. Shooting a warning shot with an MK19 is a difficult task as it is an area weapon that has a 15-meter blast radius, but I was confident in my ability. I shot and it landed just outside of the blast radius directly in front of the oncoming vehicle, which caused the car to make a 90-degree turn onto a side road. Myself and the few soldiers that were standing there watching this all burst into loud laughter as none of us had ever seen a car turn so quickly and sharply. It was shortly after this that our relief would come and we would return to base.

It was upon our return and as I was lying in my bunk that the guilt would begin to flood my mind, which is another aspect of the PTSD that I live with today. Protevi links this to the protoempathic identification that was not completely bypassed by the neural conditioning that I had received throughout my time in the military.²⁴ The guilt that I felt was a mixture of thoughts and feelings. First and foremost was wondering about who this man was that I had killed earlier in the day, did he have a family, and thinking that he would never see them again. Secondly, I was angry that I was put into that situation, as I was supposed to be out of the military a month earlier, but because of our deployment I was stop-lossed. I wanted to throw down my weapon and tell my command to “Fuck off,” “do what you will,” “take me to jail.” Though I knew this would do nothing and I knew that I would feel like I was abandoning my brothers in arms who had my back; I knew I had to be there for them. Lastly, was the emotional drain of being in an intense situation for nearly 12 hours; I was mentally, emotionally, and physically drained. I lay on my bunk, unable to sleep, feeling sick to my stomach, shaking and crying. For years after my deployment, I would dream of this day, and wake up in a sweat. Furthermore, one of the side effects that would come from my PTSD would be my weak early morning stomach, as I would often vomit up my breakfast if I walked too quickly in the morning. It still happens occasionally, but only when I am stressed.

These examples, which can be tied to my PTSD, are an excess of war and docility. The life of a person within the military is filled with this disciplinary training upon the body, which is affectively physiological and psychological, in a sense this is masculinizing, feminizing, and infantilizing the soldier all at once. This is done in order to maintain the ability to do the job required of a soldier, which is often to kill but only to kill those whom they are told to kill and when they are told to kill. Upon leaving the military, the neurons reroute and the soldier is forced to face those memories without the blanket of disciplinary thinking that shields the morality of warfare and maintains the distinct boundaries of their identity. Soldiers are expected to be docile

²⁴ Ibid. 155-157.

in relation to their chain-of-command and when a soldier is traumatized by war that docility becomes dislodged and the excesses of masculinity come through if not properly maintained, controlled, and regulated. The docility that soldiers are trained to exhibit runs counter to the ideal of masculinity, since docility is often thought to be a feminine trait; as the disciplinary lifestyle within the military can sometimes not be enough to maintain the “military bearing.” Soldiers sometimes crack, and the boundaries of reality began to blur, which is why you see some soldiers crack while still in the military. This leads to incidents that vary in intensity, from subtle problems like driving erratically or not socializing well outside of the military, to more intense problems like domestic violence or murder, which have become all too common on and around military bases across the country.

Transitions II

We left on Valentines Day in 2004 and returned on Valentines Day 2005. It seems that the irony of this was not lost on the military, as the day that was meant for love was transformed into fear, but was again transformed back into a day of rejoicing as we returned to celebrate with our loved ones. While there was no sweetheart waiting for me upon my return, I was deeply looking forward to seeing my friends at P.J. O’Shea’s, which was a double-edged sword because I knew the drunkenness that would ensue, but this, too, was something I was looking forward to. The next three months would be spent in some stage of non-sobriety, as I fought to forget the past year. Our base butted up against a firing range, so at night I would often hear the booms of tanks, which would cause me to jump out of bed in a panic as I searched for my weapon.

Two weeks after we had returned we were given a month leave, and I decided that I would go on a trip by myself. I bought a Euro Rail pass and headed north. While crossing a bridge into Sweden, listening to my MP3 player, Pink Floyd came on, *The Gunner’s Dream*. A lot of the music on my MP3 player I had not heard in a long time, and as I listened to this song I was taken into the memories of the past year, as the sound of bombs, helicopters, and bullets resonate throughout the song. As the song progressed, waves of emotions washed over me, from disgust when he says, “You never hear their standard issue kicking in your door,” to an immense sadness when he sings, “And no one kills the children anymore.”²⁵ As the tears streamed down my face a searing anger rose up within. I wanted to hurt someone, not an innocent random person, but whoever was responsible for causing this pain. I wanted to fight, but I had no idea as to where to point my rage. My time in Iraq had been an injustice and I felt a need to correct this injustice. I wasn’t sure how I would do this, but it was at this point that I was determined to do something. The song still acts as an emotional trigger for me, as I still get emotional whenever I hear it, even as I write this, my eyes become teary.

The rest of the trip was pure debauchery, as I was drunk nearly every day and every night, also often taking mushrooms or snorting cocaine, sleeping with random women, all in an attempt to numb those feelings and emotions, while not caring about the consequences. While I was determined to make some sort of change, I could not face those memories yet. It wouldn’t be until I returned to Germany weeks later that I would attempt to address some of this anger as I went to see an independent counselor. While the counselor helped, it would be years before I would consider myself at some point of normalcy—if there is such a thing—but what he taught me was that speaking about my experience made me feel better. Being able to tell my story in a

²⁵ Pink Floyd, ‘The Gunner’s Dream,’ *The Final Cut* (Harvest Records, 1983)

way was liberating and healing, as it was an opportunity to release much of the hate, anger and fear that seemed to be strangling me from within.

I got out of the military on May 31, 2005, and was flown back to Denver, Colorado. It was one of the best feelings I had ever had, as it felt as if a huge boulder had been removed from my back. But my return had not brought all good news as I soon learned that my Grandma was not doing well. The day after my 25th birthday, a week and a half after I had returned, she died. I was very close to her throughout my life, but for some reason I was completely devoid of all emotion. While everyone around me was profusely sad, I could not sympathize at the time with their pain; it seemed that they were dealing with a small cut, while I was facing the Grand Canyon. I realize now not only how selfish this was, but how I was attempting to deal with my emotions in a very unhealthy way, as drugs and alcohol filled much of my time.

Garett and Jeff got out of the military on the same day as I did, and while Jeff went to Bulgaria to spend time with his future wife, Garrett headed to Washington DC. He, too, seemed bent on creating change as he teamed up with Vietnam veteran, activist, and Nobel Peace Prize winner Bobby Muller. Garrett would become one of the “poster boys” for the veteran peace movement as he worked with the organizations Vietnam Veterans of America, and Iraq Veterans Against the War. Garrett was the first active duty soldier to become a member of IVAW, and upon our return from the military, he encouraged Jeff and me to join, which we enthusiastically did. IVAW became an outlet for me to release my anger in positive ways, from protests, to hanging out and venting with like-minded individuals who were just as pissed off as me. It felt very therapeutic. It also hooked me into a number of other healing organizations such as Vets for Vets (peer group counseling) and the Warrior Writers project (which taught us to make poetry and art with our experiences).

While IVAW helped, I still felt like something was missing. Late one night while lying on my mom’s couch, flipping through the channels, I stopped on a PBS special highlighting the classical sociologists; that particular episode was examining Karl Marx. I became entranced, as everything that was being said seemed to make sense. So much so, the next day I went to the local library and checked out *Das Kapital*. The next night, the show highlighted Max Weber, and the next night Durkheim. I fell in love and was inspired by Sociology, and decided that I would go back to school to study both Political Science and Sociology in order to best understand my past experiences. The transition into school was tough, especially interactions with the students who were fresh out of high school, who seemed to know nothing, worry about the dumbest stuff, and complain about everything. Though again, this was my selfishness, as I tried to quantify my pain.

I kept myself as busy as possible, in school activities, homework, and activism, as these helped me to avoid the mental and emotional pain I was experiencing. It took close to three years for my VA claim to finally be processed, so I found my own ways to cope with the stress and PTSD. Even after I was receiving VA benefits, I used my own means of coping since I did not like the antidepressants that they tried to keep me on, as they made me feel numb rather than I already felt, which felt disturbing to me. I often returned to drugs and alcohol, but I had gotten over my dependency upon them and my constant need to escape. My activism branched out from war-related issues, to social justice issues, as I began to understand more about race, class, gender, and sexuality. I began to see the connections between these issues and militarism and realized that it was a multifaceted front that I must fight. It was my original intention to go to law school and try to fight that way, but as fate would have it, I’m horrible at standardized tests and did not

do well on the LSAT. One of my professors at the time had other plans as he invited me to apply for the Ethnic Studies graduate program. The same professor, Eric Ishiwata, would encourage me to get my PhD where he did, in the Political Science department at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Following his footsteps, I now seek to be a professor, and I too hope to be "infectious" with my thought, like he once told me was his goal. I hope to teach a new generation of the dangers of militarism, racism, class inequity, sexism, and masculinity. I fight to make a difference in every person I meet, and all the while atone for the wrongs I have perpetuated; as I hope to make the world a better place through my teaching, as opposed to the death and destruction of my past actions.

Conclusion... or where I'm at today...

As I sit here editing and reflecting upon this paper, my story, I listen to a new musical artist that a friend had recently suggested, *The White Buffalo*. In the final verse of his song *Wish It Was True*, he sings:

Country, I was a solider to you.
I did what you asked me to.
It was wrong, and you knew.

Country, now I'm just a stranger to you.
A number, a name; it's true.
Throw me away when you're through.

Home of the brave and the free; the red, white, and blue.
I wish it was true.²⁶

My eyes well up as his somber voice echoes in my head. It makes me think of the battle with PTSD and the trauma of war that rages on in my mind, body, and soul. Lately I have been deeply depressed due to a recent relationship breakup, which has fueled some of my rage and anger associated with my PTSD. My mind returns more often to my past, angry with the Army, angry with the government, angry about the hypermasculine/misogynistic/racist/capitalist system we live in. I try to find healthy ways to cope with this anger, sometimes it is easy, but lately it has been difficult. The smallest things provoke my ire, from ignorant statements of people sitting next to me at the coffee shop, to the mere sight of police. My disdain for authority and the abuses of power that have become so prevalent all feel connected to the militarism and power structures that I was part of and now combat. The only reprieve of late has come from my friends, especially those like Garrett and Jeff who have always been there for me. I know they struggle as I do, as do the millions of veterans coming home from these deployments; some more than others,

²⁶ The White Buffalo, 'Wish It Was True,' *Once Upon A Time in the West*, (Unison Music Group, 2012).

as evidenced by the 22+ veteran suicides a day;²⁷ or as Ann Jones when she talks about the war coming home with the high rates of murder by soldiers and veterans.²⁸

We were transformed in boot camp and could no longer be thought of as regular citizens. We were changed again in war as we left the war shattered. After war, it became a new war, a personal war, a war in which we must pick up the pieces, more often than not we have been fighting this war alone. As the casualties of this new war pile up, I wonder at what point will people start to finally take notice, at what point will people start to care? I know that I have often felt abandoned by my country. I have had this discussion with many other veterans who feel the same. The rhetoric of patriotism and the lip service given to soldiers and veterans further fuels the rage that I feel, from yellow ribbons on the back of the fuel guzzling SUV's to the honors showered upon us at sporting events. It not only makes me angry, but it also makes me nauseous. I often find myself angry that not many people truly care; not about me, but rather about these issues, about our veterans, our country, our environment, our planet, each other, I could go on and on. For now I fight to maintain my sanity without sinking into a drunken stupor. Hopefully I will be able to soon return to a place in which I can fight for the social justices that I hold dear and be able to teach others the hard lessons that I have learned throughout my life that are partially reflected in this piece. And hopefully I can inspire others to fight as I do.

²⁷ Moni Basu, "Why Suicide Rate among Veterans May Be More than 22 a Day," *CNN*, accessed April 19, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/21/us/22-veteran-suicides-a-day/index.html>.

²⁸ Ann Jones, "Tomgram: Ann Jones, Star-Spangled Baggage | TomDispatch," accessed April 19, 2014, http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175832/tomgram%3A_ann_jones,_star-spangled_baggage/.