

The First Casualty of War is the Truth. “Lies Which Soldiers Kill and Die For”

April 25, 2014 was the 99th Anniversary of the Disastrous Battle of Gallipoli

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*A number of years ago I read portions of a book entitled *The First Casualty: From the Crimea to Vietnam: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth Maker* by Phillip Knightley.*

Knightley points out in that book that in order to start (and then perpetuate) a war, a nation's leaders have to lie, and the lies usually start with the war correspondents or “embedded” journalists who obediently only tell pre-approved sugar-coated, heavily censored versions of what is really happening in the war zone. Conservative editors, who are sensitive to the demands of patriotic advertisers, typically edit out the unpleasantness that has been written by their more progressive journalists, who want to write the truth, even if it is gory truth.

It is a historical reality that aggressive nation-states often cunningly provoke their intended nation-victims into drawing “first blood”. That is a tactic that most bullies employ, even inexperienced playground bullies.

All militarized aggressor nations that are spoiling for a fight try to find ways to lie themselves into war, often by claiming “self-defense”. Invasion, occupation and colonization can easily be obfuscated by the nation's propaganda machine by calling it “liberation” or “protective custody” rather than criminal acts of theft, rape and murder.

Sadly, whistleblowing truth-seekers who try to expose the dark underbelly of war usually are silenced and accused of being unpatriotic or subversive or, in the case of capitalist and fascist nations – “soft on communism” and insufficiently punitive.

Promoting lies and half-truths about a nation's wars has certainly been true of most kingdoms, empires, dictatorships and other totalitarian states, and that includes the Greek and Roman Empires, the British Empire and the various Fascist imperialist powers like Hirohito's Japan, Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany, and it has also been true of almost every American war in recent memory.

Part of the propaganda campaign to glorify American war-making via propaganda was the change in the name of the pre-World War II Department of War to what is now benignly, and falsely, called the Department of Defense. Tellingly, the DOD has been behind many overt wars and hundreds of covert acts of lethal violence, many of which have met the definition of international war crimes and/or crimes against humanity – none of which have even come close to fulfilling the Christian Just War Theory precepts.

Lies Which Soldiers Kill and Die For

Examples of the “Lies that Men Kill and Die For” would include the following short list of just the last two American wars. In the first Gulf War, President George Herbert Walker Bush lied when he claimed that US satellite photos showed Iraqi troops massed on the border of Kuwait. Then he promoted the false testimony of a Kuwaiti girl (actually the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the US) who tearfully told a lie about Kuwaiti babies being thrown out of their incubators by cruel Iraqi troops. Both these and a number of other propaganda stories were soon shown to be lies, but most of us gullible Americans had already bought into the stories and enthusiastically endorsed the illegal invasion, led, of course, by paid war correspondents and uber-patriotic retired generals on CNN and all the other major media outlets.

In the second illegitimate Bush-led Gulf War (George W. Bush’s Operation Iraqi Liberation), this short list of lies was aggressively spread and dutifully repeated by the media: 1) Saddam Hussein had Weapons of Mass Destruction (no WMDs were ever found); 2) Hussein’s had plans to build a nuclear weapon (no yellow cake uranium or aluminum centrifuge tubes existed); 3) Hussein was allied with Osama bin Laden (they hated each other’s guts); and 4) Hussein’s military threatened the US. Bush also lied about his intention to ‘liberate’ Iraq and form a truly democratic government.

Then Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld, along with their assorted henchmen and henchwoman, lied about the progress of the war. They lied about the torture, the “extraordinary rendition” and the true economic costs of the war, and they refused to discuss the psychological, physical and spiritual costs to the returning soldiers. It seemed like there were more lies told than there were truths.

Gallipoli and the ANZAC Spirit Myth

Years ago a young Australian actor named Mel Gibson starred in a movie titled Gallipoli. The last half of the film told the story about First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill’s disastrous plan to invade World War I Turkey in 1915. The plan was hatched after Churchill realized that the western Front war against Germany had turned into a stalemate so he assigned the King’s Navy to reinforce the Eastern Front where Britain’s ally Russia was losing its war against Germany.

The ill-conceived plan was to open sea lanes to the Black Sea (in order to supply Russia with armaments) by invading Turkey and conquering Istanbul, one of the choke points in gaining naval access to the Black Sea. The necessary first step was to conquer and occupy the narrow sea lane that was called the Dardanelles strait, which was bordered on each side by land that was held by Turkey, an ally of Germany.

The Gallipoli peninsula, on the Adriatic side of the Dardanelles, was the initial target of Churchill’s invasion plan, and on April 25, 1915, a massive invasion force of mainly British Empire soldiers, including green Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (aka, ANZAC) troops. It was the first time Australian and New Zealand conscripts had fought a major battle, and they found themselves, on day one, suffering massive casualties as they tried to disembark from the ships. Those that managed to get to land found themselves trapped on the beach below the machine gun nests of the Turkish army that inflicted massive casualties. The water turned red with ANZAC blood.

35,000 Anzac troops died in the 10 month campaign, with the troops mostly immobilized beneath the well-protected cliffs above them. The botched invasion was a military misadventure of huge proportions and a logistical nightmare that should have been seen by the military strategists beforehand. A total of 120,000 deaths (and 250,000 total casualties) occurred among all combatants before the campaign ended in humiliating defeat for the United Kingdom.

Gallipoli was just another example of the many shameful episodes in the history of warfare that were lied about or unreported by the war correspondents, military leaders and politicians who were witnesses to the disaster but who refused, or were not allowed, to tell the horrifying truth.

And yet, 99 years later, Australia and New Zealand still seem to be in denial about the reality of Gallipoli, and, somehow, proudly celebrate the senseless death and dying every April 25th.

Down Under, April 25 is called ANZAC Day in New Zealand. In Australia it is called Australia Day, and the Australian national anthem, "Waltzing Matilda", is played reverentially on that day (and often during the rest of the year as well). Most non-Aussies don't understand the meaning of the lyrics, but they like the catchy tune.

"Waltzing Matilda" tells a strange tale about a loveless, solitary outback vagabond (whose knapsack he calls "Matilda") who inadvertently poaches a sheep from some One absentee landowner and then drowns himself in a deep pool when the police are about to arrest him for his crime. To me, an American, it seems an odd theme for a national anthem that is more of a drinking song, but it is far easier to sing than the "Star-spangled Banner".

An internet site says this about "Waltzing Matilda"):

"To non-Australians it must seem strange that this much-loved Australian song does not refer to the land itself, but rather mourns the suicide of a thieving vagabond. Nevertheless, "Waltzing Matilda" somehow speaks to the strong anti-authoritarian and independence streak in the Australian psyche, as it represents the battler struggling against the wealthy and being one with the Australian bush."

Most Australians and New Zealanders have been led to believe in the heroic nature of the "Anzac Spirit". As I understand the concept, it represents the courage and loyalty to the Crown that the first ANZAC infantrymen exhibited in their baptism by fire, obediently (and blindly) following the suicidal orders of their commanding officers to go "over the top" over and over again into the deadly machine gun fire.

Certainly ANZAC soldier's misbegotten sense of loyalty to the British Crown was facilitated by the patriotic history book version of war which, as always, was written by the victor's nationalistic pseudo-historians in order to divert attention from what were often fiascos. Not only was the Gallipoli campaign badly bungled, but it was then misrepresented in order to avoid admitting that tens of thousands of innocent troops had suffered and died in vain.

In the following antiwar song, "The Band Played Waltzing Matilda", singer/song-writer Eric Brogle tells the poignant truth about the futility of war and the cognitive dissonance that keeps Australians focused on their national anthem/drinking song rather than on the many

unwelcome truths about war. Brogle wrote the song in 1971 and provides a dose of reality to a world awash in militarism, war profiteering, and pro-war propaganda. We Americans and our mis-leaders could learn a few lessons by acknowledging the many inconvenient truths about our own nation's military misadventures. They are so numerous as to be uncountable.

The Band Played Waltzing Matilda

By Eric Bogle 1971 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WG48Ftsr3OI>

When I was a young man I carried me pack
And I lived the free life of the rover
From the Murray's green basin to the dusty outback
I waltzed my Matilda all over

Then in 1915 my country said: "Son,
It's time to stop rambling, there's work to be done"
So they gave me a tin hat and they gave me a gun
And they sent me away to the war

And the band played Waltzing Matilda
When the ship pulled away from the quay
And amid all the tears, flag waving and cheers
We sailed off for Gallipoli

Well I remember that terrible day
When our blood stained the sand and the water
And how in that hell they call Suvla Bay
We were butchered like lambs at the slaughter

Johnny Turk, he was ready, he primed himself well
He rained us with bullets, and he showered us with shell
And in five minutes flat, we were all blown to hell
He nearly blew us back home to Australia

And the band played Waltzing Matilda
When we stopped to bury our slain
Well we buried ours and the Turks buried theirs
Then it started all over again

Oh those that were living just tried to survive
In that mad world of blood, death and fire
And for ten weary weeks I kept myself alive
While around me the corpses piled higher

Then a big Turkish shell knocked me arse over head
And when I awoke in me hospital bed
And saw what it had done, I wished I was dead
I never knew there was worse things than dying

Oh no more I'll go Waltzing Matilda
All around the green bush far and near

For to hump tent and pegs, a man needs both legs
No more waltzing Matilda for me

They collected the wounded, the crippled, the maimed
And they shipped us back home to Australia
The armless, the legless, the blind, the insane
Those proud wounded heroes of Suvla

And when the ship pulled into Circular Quay
I looked at the place where me legs used to be
And thank Christ there was no one there waiting for me
To grieve and to mourn and to pity

And the Band played Waltzing Matilda
As they carried us down the gangway
Oh nobody cheered, they just stood and stared
Then they turned all their faces away

And so now every April I sit on my porch
And I watch the parade pass before me
I see my old comrades, how proudly they march
Reviving their dreams of past glories

I see the old men all tired, stiff and worn
Those weary old heroes of a forgotten war
And the young people ask "What are they marching for?"
And I ask myself the same question

And the band plays Waltzing Matilda
And the old men still answer the call
But as year follows year, their numbers disappear
Someday, no one will march there at all

Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda
Who'll come a-Waltzing Matilda with me?
And their ghosts may be heard as they march by the billabong
Who'll come a-Waltzing Matilda with me?

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