

War Veterans Ask “Democracy Now” for Real Investigative Reporting on Syria. “Many Progressives Seem Totally Blind”

Interview with Daniel Borgstrom, Veterans for Peace-East Bay, Chapter 162 by Ann Garrison

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Global Research, May 18, 2017

Region: [Asia](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#)
Theme: [History](#), [Media Disinformation](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)
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Amy Goodman, host of the Pacifica Network’s flagship news hour “Democracy Now” is on a speaking tour of the country to celebrate the show’s 20th anniversary. When she appeared in Berkeley, East Bay Veterans for Peace, Chapter 162 were outside the First Presbyterian Church beforehand to distribute copies of their “Open Letter to Amy Goodman and Democracy Now: We Need Better and More Diverse Coverage on Syria.” Dissident Voice had published the essay on April 15.

I spoke to Daniel Borgstrom, a former U.S. Marine, who wrote it for his vets group.

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Ann Garrison: Daniel, first, when and where did you serve in the U.S. Marine Corps?

Daniel Borgström: I spent four years in the USMC, 1959 to 1963. That was during the Kennedy years, the Bay of Pigs invasion, and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. I was stationed at Camp Lejeune, NC in 1961, when some 1,400 counter-revolutionaries landed on a beach in Cuba. We thought we’d be sent to back them up, so it looked like we’d be seeing action in Cuba. The atmosphere of the whole base was electric; guys had their field gear out, were wearing their hunting knives and stuff, looking very much like a regiment of Boy Scouts eagerly gearing up for a camping trip.

But we didn’t go. JFK refused to send us. And I remember being terribly disappointed at the time. Now I look back and realize what a courageous president Kennedy was. He stood up to the warmongers and said NO. I believe he paid for that with his life about 3 months after I got my discharge. According to the official story, JFK was killed by an average marksman using a totally unsuitable weapon, who nevertheless performed the most phenomenal feat of marksmanship ever known.

AG: And when did you begin to protest US wars?

DB: That was around 1970, nearly a decade after my discharge. I didn’t start out my life being a left-wing person. At first I was gung-ho, pro-war. When President Johnson bombed North Vietnam over the Gulf of Tonkin incident, I cheered. It took awhile – a long while – for

me to figure things out. After my discharge, I took off and traveled around the world for a few years — Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and Japan. Even Afghanistan.

Some people tell me I “missed the sixties,” but I did see the sixties, though from a different perspective.

While abroad I met and talked with many people, locals as well as travelers like myself, travelers from a dozen countries. Many were students, others were farmers, workers or shopkeepers. I talked with veterans who’d fought on different sides in different wars – World War II, the Algerian conflict, the Six-Day War. A Frenchman who’d fought in Algeria told me about his experiences and about popular resistance to that war. Some French soldiers had refused orders to fire at non-combatants.

Somewhere in the course of these experiences I came to realize that a lot of what I’d been told and assumed to be true just wasn’t so. There wasn’t any single moment of enlightenment; there were many. Like when I visited my Aunt Julia in Sweden; she was a Socialist and she must’ve been really disappointed to find that her American nephew was so poorly informed as to what went on in the world. She tried to wake me up.

But back to your question. I came back to America around 1970, and it was a whole different America from the one I’d left. Everything seemed different. There were huge antiwar demonstrations. No one had protested war or anything else in the America I remembered.



I listened to all the arguments against the Vietnam War and pretty soon I joined an antiwar veterans group. We believed that, as former military personnel, we could be especially effective in speaking out. It was our response to the warmongers and pundits who were saying, “Support our boys in Vietnam! The antiwar protesters are just college kids who don’t know what life is all about.

“Just ask a GI! Ask any veteran! They’ll tell you why we’re in Vietnam!” they claimed.

“Okay, fine, good!” we answered. “So ask us. We’re ex-GIs and we’ll be glad to tell you.”

On rare occasions journalists did actually ask us and give us good coverage, but that was very rare because what we had to say wasn’t part of the official story that the mainstream media (MSM) was there to tell.

On one occasion about 15 of us were arrested for occupying an Air Force recruiting office, and the MSM reported a whole lot of data about us, our names, our ages, etc., but NOT the fact that we were ex-GIs. I still have the newspaper clippings of that.

Another time, on December 29, 1971, we occupied the offices of the South Vietnamese consulate in Downtown San Francisco’s Flood Building. We did get good media coverage that day, but not during the trial that followed.

Thirteen of us ex-GIs went on trial together for trespassing, failure to disperse, and failure to obey a police officer; we could have all been sentenced to six months in jail. The trial lasted four weeks and there was a lot of really dramatic antiwar testimony in that courtroom – four weeks of it that the MSM refused to cover. We asked reporters why they wouldn’t come in

and see the trial, and they told us they'd been ordered NOT to cover it.

Actually the trial was covered by the "underground" newspapers, as they were called back then. The Berkeley Barb, Good Times, The Tribe, and a bunch of others. I used to write for some of them; that's how I got my start as a writer. Nowadays I write for websites.

At the end of the four weeks, the jury found us not guilty, despite abundant evidence that we'd done exactly what we were charged with. One of the jurors was a former U.S. Navy officer who took our side, and the whole jury was affected by the pervasive antiwar passion of the time.

After the verdict, the MSM did finally publish a rather bland article, not really saying much.

I often hear those times called "The Golden Age of Media." Nonsense! The MSM was as biased then as now. Anyone doubting that should read Carl Bernstein's 1977 article "The CIA and the Media."

I have many nostalgic memories of our veterans group. We had good times. On Saturday nights we'd get together and watch horror movies. That was before the age of VCRs; we watched them on TV. And we'd go on excursions up in Marin County, up to Point Reyes and other interesting places together. Of course we'd march in antiwar demonstrations and join in singing songs like "We ain't gonna study war no more." Then the next weekend we might take our guns and go out to some shooting range for target practice.

AG: And why had you enlisted back in 1959?

DB: The short answer is: there was no KPFA or Pacifica affiliate station where I grew up in the Puget Sound area of Washington. "We have to defend the country against Communism!" That's what I grew up hearing, constantly. Nobody questioned that. They described Communism as really awful - SURVEILLANCE STATES. What they described was pretty much like the surveillance state we live in today here in the US, and that was what I joined the USMC to defend our country against.

AG: So you owe a lot of your current opposition to US wars to coverage you've heard on Pacifica's KPFA-Berkeley, including Democracy Now?

DB: I listen to KPFA almost daily and it's been really important in helping me to keep up on events in a rapidly changing world. I hear reports on KPFA that the MSM simply doesn't cover. Nevertheless, it was my travels and experiences in Europe, Asia and the Middle East that initially opened my eyes to seeing things in a new way.

AG: And why are you and East Bay Vets for Peace, Chapter 162, asking Democracy Now (DN) for better and more diverse coverage of the Syrian conflict?

DB: Partly it goes back to my memories from 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis. Strangely, I had no concept at the time of just how incredibly close we came to being wiped off the face of the earth. But when I think about it now, it makes me shudder. And now it looks like we could be headed for another nuclear face-off.



The warmongers in Washington - and that includes a lot of Democrats as well as

Republicans – seem determined to pick a fight with nuclear-armed Russia. Many progressives seem totally blind to the danger, and Amy Goodman of DN is among them. Syria looks like a serious danger spot where US military forces could literally clash with Russian forces.

The warmongers in Washington seem determined to use the story of Assad bombing his own people with chemical weapons – specifically, sarin gas. The MSM plays that story big time, and Amy Goodman echoes it on DN. She features guests who promote the story, allowing them to give one-sided coverage, without convincing evidence to back their claims. She ignores investigators with evidence to the contrary about the sarin gas. People like Theodore Postol of MIT and Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity have looked at this and reported finding no convincing evidence, but they do not get featured on her show.

We’ve been down this road before. “Gulf of Tonkin” and “WMDs in Iraq” are two big lies that come to mind, but there’ve been many more, including “Remember the Maine” in 1898. In each case there was no convincing evidence, and the lack of it didn’t seem to matter.

For many years now, Amy Goodman’s DN has been my favorite radio show, and also that of a lot of progressives. Progressives like me listen to her, and she has a responsibility to properly inform us of what’s going on. Right now she should be investigating and exposing those lies that could lead to war. Instead, she’s promoting those lies, the “Assad-did-it-again” story, “gassing his own people.” So it’s time for her listeners to speak out.

I mentioned that at a meeting of our Veterans for Peace chapter, and got volunteered to write a letter to Amy. We mailed it via USPS to her a month ago, but still have no response. It was an open letter, and it was also posted on Dissident Voice and other websites. It was even posted to Telesur in Spanish. So even if Amy doesn’t read her mail, it’s a pretty fair assumption that she’s aware of our letter, but as I said, she hasn’t responded so far.

Meanwhile, Amy has continued – with only rare exceptions – to promote the “Assad-did-it-again” stories, featuring guests such as Anand Gopal on her show.

Then we heard Amy was coming to Berkeley on her speaking tour. She was coming on Sunday, May 14th, so we decided to pass out our open letter outside the event. The evening before the event, I spoke to you on KPFA’s Evening News about our plan. As I said then, no hard evidence has been presented on Democracy Now, but they seem to accept the story.



As a former soldier, I see no military rationale or advantage for using chemical weapons in the situations where Assad is accused of using them. I saw no political advantage either. On the contrary; the sarin gas story put so much pressure on Trump that he finally ordered the launch of 59 Tomahawk Cruise Missiles at a Syrian Army air field.

So, on Sunday, May 14th, we showed up at the door of the event with 300 copies of our open letter to pass out. I must admit I had been a bit worried over how people might take it. After all, these were Amy's dedicated fans. I was also a fan of Amy, or had been at least.

I arrived shortly before the doors opened, and there were a dozen or so people waiting to get in. I passed out the letter and people read it while they stood in line waiting. Then a man turned to me and said, "Thank you for writing this. I totally agree." Others said similar things. One said he'd heard about it on KPFA the previous evening, and I told him that was me on the air. "Good for you," he said, or words to that effect.

Finally the doors opened, more people arrived and I was hurrying to pass out copies of the letter as they were hurrying to get in and get seats, so it wasn't possible to get in a lot of conversations as at first. We'd hoped to go in and ask Amy to respond to our letter during the Q and A, but the tickets were already sold out.

We're now thinking of writing an online petition to Amy. That'll be our next step. It's important that people hear about this and speak out. Just because somebody happens to be a major star in the progressive world doesn't mean that they should be beyond criticism.

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