

# The Dramatic Disparities between the Tragic Casualties of Virginia Tech and War (with photo)

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Gulfport -- The 32 people murdered at Virginia Tech on April 16 have received an amazing and heartfelt plethora of national media coverage and public attention for several days, and rightfully so. This coverage included front page stories, color photographs and columns about each victim; all national magazines and television stations carried major in-depth coverage. Virginia Tech is rallying, shouting out, "as terrible as the deaths are, we shall survive and not be defined by this, and we will not forget those who were killed." What a wonderful community and national outpouring of grief, caring, reflection, recognition and determination.

Conversely, as a Vietnam veteran, I am acutely aware of the contrast and the deafening sounds of silence about almost all of the deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan of American servicemen and women. These deaths were recorded in small boxes at the bottom of a page in newspapers. An example of such a recording states, "A Marine died Friday during combat in Anbar province;" some notices add name, rank and hometown. No photographs or columns of testimony about each war casualty, about their lives and dreams that had been snuffed out in the war zone; no coverage of what family, friends, former schoolmates and teachers had to say about them. No nation glued to the television, no other national media coverage and no sharing in a national communal grieving and homage.

In fact, the over 3,300 killed-in-action (KIA) in Iraq and Afghanistan have all arrived back in the United States in caskets -- in the middle of the night. This is a purposeful political decision to keep our war casualties shrouded in secrecy -- diametrically opposite to the national spotlight shining on Virginia Tech. Similar treatment occurs for those classified as wounded-in-action (WIA) and arriving on medical evacuation flights. There are no television cameras to greet them or interviews about how they survived. In contrast to the wounded survivors at Virginia Tech, there are no interviews about their thoughts regarding their comrades-in-arms who were killed. I was in tears as one wounded Virginia Tech survivor described his fortune to be alive and his grief over those killed. Yes, this is how the coverage and homage should be.

Wait a minute. Why not the same extent of coverage and homage for each serviceman and woman KIA and WIA as that accorded to the Virginia Tech casualties? Are American servicemen and women war casualties so inconsequential as to not deserve such prominent, in-depth homage as a group, let alone as individuals? Or perhaps there are just so many KIA and WIA that the grief would be overwhelming if the media and the public attempted to pay the same depth of coverage and homage.

Is it that too many in our country, from political figures and other leaders down to John and Jane Doe citizen, want to avert the painful reality of the mounting toll of losses and how horrific the actual daily carnage of this war is for American servicemen and women? Lest we forget, there is the exponentially greater carnage to the Iraqi people.

Until we are willing to have a Virginia Tech-level of national outpouring of sympathy, caring, grief and homage for each and every casualty of the current war that we are fighting, we will continue to keep our heads buried deeply in the sand. We will continue to deny, minimize, sanitize and avoid, truly avoid, full recognition of the tragedy and grief of the death and mayhem that we are sanctioning hundreds of thousands of Americans to face and experience day after day in a distant foreign land.

I say enough is enough. It's time to stop such collusion of sanitization and silence about the full human carnage that is the immediate cost of this war, the extraordinary longer-term cost of those WIA and the costs for the even greater numbers of psychiatric casualties. Give each and every such casualty the same coverage, caring and homage accorded, rightfully so, to the dead, wounded and other survivors of Virginia Tech. Otherwise, stop the disparity, indeed, the hypocrisy. Treat the dead and survivors of Virginia Tech and their memories just like we treat each KIA and WIA in our nation's war.

Let's uncover who the real hypocrites and sanitizers of the full cost of war are, versus those who are willing, with eyes wide open, to continue to sanction a war about which we truly acknowledge the full human cost. Or we can continue to devote a mere few lines of national media print to each American life snuffed out, no in-depth national media coverage, no national mourning and homage. There will continue to be even less coverage of those WIA and even less of impacted families and friends. We can forget about any mourning and homage for the tens of thousands of dead and maimed Iraqis.

This is one of the many lessons unlearned about our American way during and following every war that we have fought. We engage in war with our eyes wide shut about the full human cost, now and later. The remarkable disparities between how the casualties of Virginia Tech have been appropriately recognized, mourned and honored, in vivid contrast to the pittance accorded to almost any of the 3,300+ KIA in Iraq and Afghanistan, is a tragic testimony to that indisputable fact.

America can treat our nation's finest — who put their lives and health in harm's way in service to our country — a whole lot better.

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