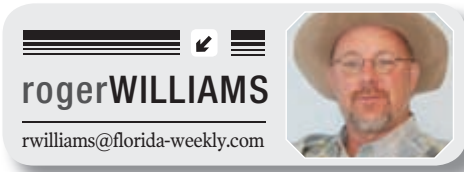


COMMENTARY

War by the numbers



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The Wall is 493 feet 6 inches long. There are 58,256 names of dead Americans who never got old inscribed in the black granite that seems to point to the Washington monument a few hundred yards beyond it, on the mall, in Washington, D.C. It took the United States about 10 years to run up those casualties, although that's arguable.

American troops had been in Vietnam since the mid-1950s (which would be 20 years), and two were killed in July, 1959, while many more arrived in 1961, flying air support.

But many view the Vietnam War as beginning on March 8, 1965, when President Johnson ordered 3,500 Marines — combat troops, not “advisors” — to go ashore at a place called China Beach.

We pulled out finally on April 30, 1975 when the last 10 troops, also Marines, famously evacuated Saigon by chopper, from a rooftop besieged by desperate locals, who also wanted to leave.

All of which points to why I think we should quit whining and pining and moaning and groaning and crying and sighing and whatever else we do, about a mere 4,000 dead Americans in Iraq.

As Americans at home, we've turned into a bunch of complainers, lately, a bunch of non-hackers, a bunch of damn pussy-footers.

We got into the war 5 years ago, after all, and look at us now — only 4,000 dead, a mere pittance, as of early this week. That's nothing, and yet here we are bellyaching again. I can't

believe anybody is truly worried about a light casualty count like that.

Suck it up, people, and let's get tough. No pain, no gain. If it doesn't hurt, it doesn't count. Let's GET SOME, bellyacher, okay? I'm talking a nice little chunk of terrorist butt.

After all, we have a lot of troops to spare, so we can stick to any principle we choose — like fighting a “terrorist” war in Iraq, which is clearly a long way from Osama bin Laden (as I call him) and saving the country for Democracy and the American way, whether we went there on false premises or not — because American blood is not in short supply. There's lots of it, millions upon millions of gallons of it.

Look, people, you can take this to the bank: The human body contains about 6 liters of blood, which is more than a gallon and a half, okay?

And we have a mere pittance of 158,000 troops in Iraq right now, which means we have more than 236,000 gallons of American blood still walking around on the hoof in Iraq. Think of it as investment capital in the future, only red, not green.

Yeah, I know, we've spent billions of dollars of the green stuff, and we might spend trillions before it's all over, too, whatever that figure means, but who cares? If you're going to whine about economics, about mere dollars, I have no respect for you, mister. None. Nada. Zip.

Besides, we won't have to pay for that. Our kids and grandkids will, and you know what? They can. It'll build character and teach them frugality.

Necessity is the mother of invention. Either put up or shut up, those future generations will learn. And I think that kind of knowledge is a better legacy from us than a mere no-deficit situation. That doesn't teach

anybody anything, except that your parents actually cared for you and lined your cradle with cotton. And that just makes our kids soft and weak.

Hell, people, that and a dollar — or maybe by the time the next generation gets a seat in the coffee shop, that and a thousand dollars — will get you a cup of coffee.

So back to the figures, instead of the fugue: If Vietnam was a 10-year war, then we lost an average of 29,125 troops every 5 years there — not some piddly little 4,000.

If you still feel like whining, then consider that in one day at the Battle of Antietam, during the Civil War, there were 23,000 casualties on both sides, including 12,401 Union soldiers killed, missing or wounded — twice the casualties of D-Day, 82 years later (I learned this from Ken Burns).

And nobody went around crying in their beer about it, either, like these people who want to wimp out on a little spectacle such as Iraq. These little patsies today probably cry in their single glass of white wine, or maybe red wine, and I'm fed up with it.

From Florida now, if the Chicago Tribune is right, we've lost 203 Americans in this Iraq soiree. When I read the casualty accounts it looks to me like many of them got killed by mines. They don't call them mines, they call them “improvised explosive devices.”

All of which makes me think we've got this thing under control. Look, let me be plain here — we can whip these guys, so why not? Come on, people, let's hang in there and pound them into the ground. You don't hear about American squads or platoons or companies, even, getting ambushed and overrun — that means wiped out — like they did in World War II, Korea (where an entire Marine division almost got its clock cleaned at the Chosin Reservoir), or Vietnam, do you? Nope, this is easy stuff.

The bad guys have to resort to these puny little “improvised explosive devices.” Take

out three or four troops here or there, and so what?

We can put up with that, forever. Like I said, we've got 'em to spare, and they all come with about 6 quarts of blood.

Which is why I loved hearing that the Vice President, Dick “Double-barrel” Cheney, responded with one word when he was told that the majority of Americans think the Iraq War is not worth fighting.

“So?” the vice president replied.

Now that's a leader, by God. George W. Bush himself, our big guy, our architect, the man with the plan, had to be more tactful about the news of 4,000 American dead in Iraq.

So he sent out a woman to tell us what he felt, probably because women can express their feelings better than strong men like Bush. She's his press secretary, Dana Perino.

“He obviously is grieved by the moment, but he mourns the loss of every single life, from the very first that was lost in this conflict, to the ones that are lost today,” she said, describing it as a “sober moment.”

As for the families of the 4,000, Bush “wants them to know that their sacrifices will not be in vain,” the little lady added.

And I want you to know that “sacrifice” is an American tradition. It makes us better and stronger.

So it's good that we're not just going to stop here, with 4,000 dead, and a hell of a lot of damaged Americans (never mind them). It's not just 4,000, after all — it's the children those 4,000 might have borne in our society, and their children, and so on.

Conservatively, I estimate that 4,000 dead really amounts to about 32,000 children and grandchildren who will never see, now, the American landscape, or for that matter the landscape of life, just in the next 50 years.

And that makes me proud, doesn't it you?

Besides, the wall may be 493 feet long, but there's plenty more feet there in Washington where those came from. ■

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