

FRED REED

Military service warning labels

If you are the parent of a young man who is thinking about joining the armed forces, permit me to offer advice:

Tell him not to. Be emphatic about it.

I've spent much of my life around the military — grew up on a military base, drove AMTRACS for the Marines in Vietnam, and spent decades covering the military as a reporter. I didn't do the Pentagon. Usually I didn't know who the Joint Chiefs of Staff were. I spent my working hours with the troops, in the tanks and fighters, aboard the carriers, in the jungles and swamps and war zones. It made me hard to con.

An observation: The armed services are today in the worst shape I have seen, and I remember the days of the post-Vietnam slump. You don't want your kid in this military.

You don't understand how bad it is.

This country characteristically goes into wars unprepared, and kills off large numbers of young men while trying to make up lost time. We then tell ourselves stories about the heroism of the needlessly dead, and about the evil Japanese and dastardly Viet Cong. We did this in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. We're getting ready to do it again. The military has decayed since the Gulf war, decayed badly. The public just doesn't know it. If a substantial war comes, soldiers will, again, die for no reason. Your son could be one of them.

He needs to know this. He also needs to understand that neither the political nor the military leadership much cares whether he lives or dies. Their careers come first. You doubtless think this

sounds extreme, embittered, paranoid. And yes, any general officer will tell you that, why, he lives for the troops, cares for nothing else. He's a *soldier's* general.

Yeah. In Vietnam, it was for some time military policy that enlisted men in the infantry spent 13 months in the field. Their officers often spent only six. If you don't believe this, check it out. The officers were getting their tickets punched: Combat command looked good on a promotion record. The Career. On the other hand, if you stayed out there too long, you might get shot. The fleshpots of Saigon were succulent. The consequence of course was that field troops always had green, inexperienced officers.

There were too many ticket-punchers. Officers who won't take the same risks their troops take are . . . I think the word is "cowards." Guess what generation of officers is now reaching the top at the Pentagon. You don't want this crew commanding your kid.

Further, note that the United States regularly, with the occasional

exception, puts politics ahead of the lives of its troops. Remember the 241 Marines killed in Beirut when their barracks was blown up by the terrorist truck? I was there on a story a couple of weeks before it happened. Know who killed those guys?

The United States. It went like this.

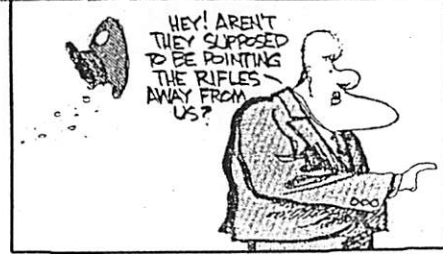
Coming down the road from the airport in Beirut, to get to the Marines you turned right on a small road that had a guard post with two Marine guards. Their rifles were at sling arms, no round in the chamber. Loaded rifles might cause an incident, and, hey, you can always get more Marines. Simply driving past the guards would have been — as it turned out, was — effortless.

A few feet later you turned right through one of those flimsy stick things that go up and down to stop traffic at toll booths. I probably could have broken through it without a truck. A few feet later you were in the middle of the Marine position.

Which is what the driver of the suicide truck did. Easy.

The Marines were undefended, naked, in a city known to be full of terrorists. Why? Because the State Department didn't want to look too military. We sacrificed our own men to keep up appearances for a pack of cookie-pushers in Washington. They'll do it again.

The foregoing is the norm. (We



did the same thing in Mogadishu, for example.) Today politicization of the military is worse by far than it has ever been. The emphasis is overwhelmingly on social engineering: sensitivity training, toleration of homosexuals, feminization, promotion of minorities. Affirmative action runs rampant. Standards have been lowered drastically for women, many of them using the military as an improved form of welfare. Discipline has suffered. Commanders cannot discipline the protected groups, which makes it hard to discipline anyone.

If you think I'm kidding, talk to someone you know who is in.

Unsurprisingly, morale is way down. Equipment ages. The

services are hemorrhaging young officers in the O-3 range (Army captain). Key enlisted men bail out. Second-raters move up the ranks. No, not all of them are, but too many. In war, there will be a price for this. Your boy, or someone else's. Getting the body bag isn't fun.

For eight years we have had an administration that is actually hostile to the military. This is new. Before, presidents have alternated between neglect and build-up, but haven't had the visceral loathing for the armed services that Bill Clinton has professed. To me, the damage looks deliberate. Nothing like the current wholesale gutting of the services by angry feminists has happened before. We have never had a government that would have

allowed it.

The generals know all of this. They're self-serving, but they aren't fools. They are knowingly, willingly, allowing the institutions they oversee to deteriorate while relentlessly lying to stay in their jobs. (The Marines remain stubbornly resistant, but they too are being slowly Clintoned down.) The brass know their troops regard them with contempt. They know why soldiers bail out. They don't care. Commanders like this — I don't think they can be called men — will preside over a slaughter if war comes.

You don't want your kid there. Especially if he is smart and gung-ho. If he just wants to get salable training, and get out, the services are probably a good idea. Electronics is always a good choice. The military is a good place for a woman who wants to have her baby and isn't sure which division is the father. But for a young man who wants to be part of something he can be proud of, a hard-charger who sets high standards for himself, it's a bad idea. He'll hate it. It will hate him. Should we ever need the military, it just might kill him. Don't let him do it.

Fred Reed writes the Police Beat column for The Washington Times Metro pages.