

## **Military veteran to speak candidly of War**

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**Former Marine Corps Capt. Tyler Boudreau**

By Katelyn Gendron

Reminder Assistant Editor

WEST SPRINGFIELD The Oath of Enlistment of the United States Marine Corps reads, "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same. That I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God."

What if obeying the orders of the President or an officer means sacrificing the lives of your men? Must Marines obey, or, if they cannot does that make them unfit to maintain their posts?

For retired Marine Corps Capt. Tyler Boudreau the latter was his fate.

On Dec. 10 at the West Springfield Public Library (WSPL), Boudreau will speak candidly about his freshman novel, "Packing Inferno," which chronicles his "unmaking" after his last mission in Iraq in 2004.

"War is a dangerous environment; to achieve military objectives, commanders must be prepared to sacrifice the lives of some of their men," Boudreau told Reminder Publications. "No matter how much he might love his troops, he's got to love the mission more. Ultimately, I came to a

point where the opposite was true for me; I revered my Marines more than the mission. I, therefore, deemed myself ineligible to command and [was] professionally obligated to resign."

Boudreau enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1989 at the age of 18 and went on to serve on active duty for over 12 years. He said he chose to become a Marine because of "the nobility of serving, the camaraderie, the esprit de corps, and the challenge."

However, his devotion to those he served with began to compromise the beliefs engrained within his military psyche.

Boudreau explained that writing a book about his experiences within the military as well as spending time with his family has helped him to assimilate back into civilian life.

"Writing for me has been tremendously therapeutic," he said. "The greatest value has been in the revision process because as I physically manipulate the words in each line I confront and manipulate the ideas I'm discussing as well. I learned a great deal about myself through writing and revising and revising and revising."

Boudreau said he hopes that those attending his book reading and discussion will grow to understand the complexities of war and hero worship.

There is a great mythology about battle in this country, a great deal of glorification of war," he said. "Honoring veterans is good, but not to the extent that it becomes a blinder for Americans. I'd like to see the discourse on war broadened substantially. I'd like people to say about my book and about me, 'Hey, this guy is still honoring the veterans, but he's speaking quite candidly about his experiences; he hasn't allowed himself to be bound up and silenced by ideologies. Maybe I can do that too.'"

Anna Popp, assistant reference librarian at the WSPL, said she organized this event in order to draw attention to the timeless phenomenon of war while bringing it to a local level.

"['Packing Inferno'] has political and civic meaning," she said. "The fact that he was a 12-year veteran that was disenfranchised [with the military is poignant]. It brings up issues that we, as a community, need to look at such as post-traumatic stress disorder. There's no recognition of what these people went through [in Iraq]."

Boudreau said in addition to his speaking engagements and humanitarian aid he continues to write and has plans to publish "another book dealing with the nuanced dimensions of war in the American consciousness."

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HOLYOKE Outside of a history class, how does one have a conversation about war? Is war like other topics such as religion or politics thought of as off limits in polite society?

For former Marine Capt. Tyler Boudreau, war is not just a conversation to be had but an "inferno" raging furiously inside his mind since his deployment to Iraq in 2004 and subsequent deactivation from the armed forces.

Since the publication of his debut book, "Packing Inferno: The Unmaking of a Marine," Boudreau has been traveling throughout the Pioneer Valley to speak about his experiences and how they led to his chosen retirement from the military after 12 years of service. His next appearance will be at Barnes & Noble on Jan. 10.

"The trouble with this particular topic war is that it is so volatile, so polarizing, that people, most people, tend to shy away from the conversation altogether to keep the conversation polite," he said, adding that he is "not always welcome" among people with varying views of the war.

Boudreau went on to say that there is no question about his military life that he will refuse to answer because Americans deserve to know the truth.

"The fear is, I think, that there are events that were so traumatizing for the veteran that he/she would rather not discuss them," he explained. "And of course there are times when this is true. But there's also a bit of a 'code of silence' thing going on here. This 'code' has no particular value, no particular function; it's a cultural code. It facilitates a sort of exclusivity for the warrior class. But I find that code utterly antithetical to the principles of democracy. The people the voters need to know what war is all about. Excepting possibly those with serious combat stress, I think soldiers have an obligation to openly discuss the nature of war. On the other hand, I'd say the people back home have an obligation to openly listen. As far as I can tell right now, neither is happening."

Since leaving the Marines, Boudreau has dedicated his time to his family and to the open discussion of war. He explained that his affection for his men and their well being trumped any mission therefore challenging traditional military strategy and his need to end his career.

Boudreau said people often ask him, "What was the moment you knew you could no longer support the war in Iraq? Did you have an 'aha!' moment?"

"I did not have an 'aha!' moment," he explained. "Officers are trained to watch for trends, not make snap judgments on a single events or factors. So that's what I did. I watched for trends. By the time the deployment was over, I'd noticed a number of trends that led me to the conclusion that we were not on the right path."

Boudreau said writing his book has proved to be a therapeutic exercise for his psyche that began

while reading "Dante's Inferno" during his deployment.

"As I traveled with Dante and Virgil down through the circles of Hell, I noticed curious similarities emerging between the conditions of Dante's underworld and the battlefield which I was traversing," he wrote. "The heat grew more intense as the summer approached, the danger more severe. There was death, and blood, and hypocrisy, and as much 'sin' in one place as I'd ever witnessed. But it was more than that I saw the struggle in humanity, and in the heart; I saw the political strife, the regret, and the rage, and the hardship, even the characters I saw them all in both the battlefield and the book. when I got home, I found the war was still raging, but it was not outside me anymore, not to touch, or to see, or to hear, or to smell. It was within me. I was no longer packing 'Inferno' in my sea-bag [to read during my deployment], but in my head."

Boudreau explained that writing about the war was difficult, mostly because of people's varying political views.

"It's a socially fragile conversation," he said. "So to write about it, to get people to listen objectively, to get them to care and even possibly open their view. that is the greatest challenge of writing about war. I say to myself: 'How am I going to get people to relate to me? How am I going to get them to see that I have no agenda? How do I break this conversation from the confines of rhetoric and ideology?' It's tough to do."

However, Boudreau fights through the war raging through his mind daily, having spewed it onto the pages of his book in the hopes that one day all people will be able to speak candidly of war.

"Ultimately it is my struggle," he wrote. "I am packing 'Inferno.' But slowly, slowly, day by day, year by year, I am unpacking it."

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