



The Low Information War

By Tim Einkenkel

Do you know about that whole right wing theory that liberals don't support the troops and won't talk to them? It's not true. Air America's Tim Einkenkel sat down for an interview with Former Marine Captain Tyler Boudreau, a 12-year veteran, who served one tour in Iraq and wrote a new book, *Packing Inferno*.

TIM EINENKEL: There is a lot of criticism about the reporting from Iraq, what is the media failing to report?

TYLER BOUDREAU: One of the most significant absences, I think, in the American media, is any real investigative work on the impact this war and the Gulf War and the period in between has had on the Iraqi people in terms of deaths, wounded and their society. I think this is a critical body of information, particularly in light of the U.S. intention to help the Iraqi people.

TIM EINENKEL: When the right wing and President Bush blame the media for reporting only on the negatives of war, does that have a negative effect on our troops?

TYLER BOUDREAU: First of all, I look for factual reporting. If the facts turn out to be bad news, so be it. News is not meant to be a morale booster, it's meant to be unbiased information. It is certainly true I think that news which reflects poorly on the war effort can have detrimental effects on the troops in the short term, but that should not be used as an excuse to filter out the bad news. Democracy depends on an informed citizenry.

TIM EINENKEL: Why did you resign your commission in April 2005?

TYLER BOUDREAU: In the military, "mission-accomplishment" always comes ahead of troop welfare—that's doctrine and it's common sense. War is a dangerous environment; to achieve military objectives, commanders must be prepared to sacrifice the lives of some of their men. 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.



TIM EINENKEL: How have your military friends, co-workers, etc. responded to *Packing Inferno*?

TYLER BOUDREAU: To my surprise, I have received a tremendous amount of support. I think that's because I show a deep respect for the goodwill and character of the people I served with. It is not my intention to show that the military is flawed, just to discuss its nature and consider that nature in the context of Iraq. Furthermore, I focus entirely on my experiences, that is, what I saw and how I felt about it. The reader may agree or disagree with my interpretations, but at very least, he or she will come away knowing with certainty that there were some soldiers out there who saw things this way.

TIM EINENKEL: What is the best way to win the war in Iraq? Is it possible to win the war on terrorism?

TYLER BOUDREAU: Though I am in the habit of referring to our operations in Iraq as a war, it is truly more an occupation than a conflict. And occupations cannot be won or lost. I support President-elect Obama's plan to withdraw American troops within 18 months. It is what the Iraqi people want, it is what the American people want. But there is a very real and important concern about the state of Iraq in our wake – will there be a bloody civil war? It is indeed possible. If that happens, we need to address it the way we should have addressed this war from the beginning, in a legitimately international context. Addressing human rights issues and atrocities in that type of international forum will go a long way to holding in check the influences of national self-interest and racism. It would keep us honest, so to speak, and prevent us from hastily using force where diplomacy might work better.

TIM EINENKEL: Does an Obama presidency mean good things for veterans?

TYLER BOUDREAU: President-elect Obama strikes me as a compassionate man, and so I think yes. But we need to pay close attention to the fact that the majority of men and women dealing with post-traumatic stress are not yet Veterans, they're still in the active-duty forces. That places their treatment in direct conflict with war. The Rand Corporation estimates that nearly 20% of returning soldiers are contending with post-traumatic stress. I do believe that the military will make an honest effort to help those soldiers initially, but it will never allow a 20% drop in its force. Never. That leads to one of two conclusions: Either they will have to eventually de-emphasize the screening of post-traumatic stress or they will have to develop a dubious short-term treatment that will allow retention

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