



The NY Times: Smarter and Better

Murray Polner

July 5, 2016

“Instead of honoring our troops, whose chief virtues are obedience and aggressiveness, we could honor our great dissenters and conscientious objectors.”-Roy Scranton, Iraq War veteran, NY Times, 7/3/16.

I once was a columnist for the defunct NYTimesXaminer.com, a serious, well-informed, but cash poor watchdog covering the NY Times, its singular motto “An antidote to the ‘paper of record.’”

Our country’s preeminent newspaper has had its ‘hills and valleys’, from the high point of the Pentagon Papers and its support for reporter James Risen while he was hounded and harassed for seven years by the feds for refusing to reveal a confidential source down to the lower depths, when it backed the invasion of Iraq (for which they eventually apologized though of course the dead remained dead) which was urged on by Washington’s living room warriors, whom General “Stormin’ Norman” Schwarzkopf had in mind when he said, “After Vietnam we had a whole cottage industry develop, centered in Washington, D.C., that consisted of a bunch of military fairies that had never been shot at in anger.” And yes, the Times, incredibly, once hired the neocon’s Big Chief William Kristol as a columnist.

My column critically covered the Times’ shameful treatment of Snowden and Manning (Obama abandoned them while refusing to punish any VIPs for Iraq), Ukraine (I wrote “[Muddle & Lies, Manipulation and Silence](#)” and “[Is Ukraine Worth a War?](#)”), the paper’s obsession with Putin as our latest #1 Man of Evil, and Obama’s wide-ranging use of the 1917 Espionage Act against government whistleblowers while his Justice Department treated General David Petraeus gently and kindly, a la Bill Clinton’s never-explained pardon on the last day of his presidency of the indicted fugitive Marc Rich.

But the Times has another, far more positive side which it has been displayed recently in two investigative series and a number of significant dissenting editorials.

A lengthy examination in June 2016 by Dave Philipps (“[Decades Later, Sickness Among Airman After a Hydrogen Bomb Accident](#)”) revealed how the U.S. disregarded the low-ranking airmen it sent without adequate explanation or protective clothing into rural Palomares, Spain, after a U.S.

plane carrying hydrogen bombs crashed on January 16, 1966, spreading deadly radiation through the area.

“There was no talk about radiation or plutonium or anything else,” said veteran Frank B. Thompson, a trombone player in an Air Force band and one of the cleanup airmen. “They told us it was safe, and we were dumb enough, I guess, to believe them.” Now 72, Thompson has liver, lung and kidney cancer and has been denied government treatment because of the Air Force’s insistence that no toxic radiation was present where the plane crashed. But instead the Times reports that newly declassified documents reveal that “Radiation near the bombs was so high it sent the military’s monitoring equipment off the scales.”

Arthur Kindler, another Palomares veteran and a supply clerk, developed testicular cancer and cancer of his lymph nodes three times.

“You have to understand, they told us everything was safe. We were young. We trusted them. Why would they lie? Years after, sick, he asked the VA for help. “They denied me. Eventually I gave up.”

Nona A. Watson, a dog handler, has had kidney cancers and other ailments. “I think it ruined my life. I was young, in good shape. But since that day I’ve had problems all the time.” The Times adds that “recent abnormal blood tests suggested leukemia.”

After the Times article appeared angry letters to the paper arrived. James C. Whiteside of Danbury, Connecticut., demanded the Air Force be forced to “cough up the names of the heartless wonders of command who refused to treat these 1600 airman with fairness, and the Spanish villagers ignored for the same reasoning.”

Vietnam veteran Bruce W. Rider, in Grapevine, Texas, expressed no surprise at how the airmen were treated. He recalled that it took him “almost 18 years to receive service-related compensation for blindness after serving in Vietnam,” and for developing Type-2 diabetes from Agent Orange, adding, “The effects of war are endless, for friend and foe alike.”

The most unforgettable letter about yet other Times piece was by Edward W. Wood Jr. of Denver, a badly wounded WWII combat veteran. “Real combat,” he wrote, “bears no resemblance to their Hollywood image of war. The reality of a firefight is a form of madness: shifting silhouettes, dimly perceived, pop of weapons, freezing fear, trembling hands, most of all the stink: sick, sweet odor of blood mixed with the odor of feces and urine stale sweat, cordite. Who and where is my enemy?”

Their second investigation by Mark Mazetti and Ali Younes of Al Jazeera (“[Thefts Redirect Arms From C.I.A.](#)”) described how U.S. – manufactured weapons were shipped by the CIA and Saudi Arabia to Jordan meant for allegedly “moderate”—never defined—anti- Assad freedom-loving Syrians. It soon hit the black market and wound up probably sold by many Jordanian officials to assorted criminal gangs. The Times said that after the arms bazaars were shut down

the Jordanian crooks were allowed to keep their pensions and money earned and commented, “This scandal should be a warning to those, including Hillary Clinton, who want to deepen American military involvement in Syria.”

The Times then took after the leaked letter by 51 anonymous (what were they afraid of?) State Department civil servants urging bombing attacks against Assad’s Syria and more support for those ubiquitous “moderate” Syrian rebels.

In “The False Lure of Military Intervention” it rightly asked how that would help end the Syrian tragedy. “There have never been good options in Syria, and the situation is getting worse. But no one has yet made a persuasive case that direct American military intervention against Assad is the answer.” Shoot first, think later, has run out of answers.

A recent libertarian CATO Institute forum urged “restraint” in our foreign policy. Since the issue still isn’t publicly debated, the U.S. remains trapped, as CATO noted, by “decades of rigorous military interventions and long-term military alliances [that] have caused more problems than they solved.” What’s needed instead is “a grand strategy of [military] restraint [which] aligns with the fundamental values at the core of our nation’s founding.”

No more war would be a damn good slogan.