

# Children of the Racket's Red Glare

The Rev. Ralph Garlin Clingan

Marine Corps Brigadier General Smedley T. Butler's 1933 book, *The Racket of War* ([www.theracketofwar.com](http://www.theracketofwar.com)) exposed the financial, moral and psychological problems the war racket creates. Now published with Mark Twain's 1910, "The War Prayer" ([www.racketofwar.com](http://www.racketofwar.com) link). He detailed what USA founding ancestor James Madison wrote about in "Political Observations," 20 April 1795 ([www.vermontrepublic.org](http://www.vermontrepublic.org)) that war impoverishes a nation by plunging it into debt and the US should avoid it at all costs. I experienced traumas shared with children of combat veterans, the underside of what I read in Butler, Madison, one of my Iona Community mentors George Macleod and seminary mentor, Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Mystery of Peace* (Elgin IL: Brethren Press, 1986). I have included here some seamier aspects of military service and US history. Not only our beloved Presbyterians for Disability Concerns (PDC) network but all of our social justice networks of the Presbyterian Health, Education & Welfare Association (PHEWA) must address the problems created by combat. We children of the war racket's red glare speak and act and want the church to join us.

**Combat creates the need to have enemies.** Dad always commented that he killed men who looked like him and shared the same religion. His platoon slaughtered an entire company of German soldiers who surrendered at dawn without firing a shot on orders from his Captain. He woke up every night screaming. We, his unwitting and unwilling enemies, grew up with a bunker mentality. Something always made him mad enough to whip me with his belt and I never knew what that would be. He feared every man in town committed adultery with his wife, my mother, and took it out on her, not physically but psychologically. The same pattern continued into his second marriage. He presented the public persona of a family man, competent factory worker, Labor Union negotiator and member of the Masonic Lodge. In real life, we never knew which mood he would manifest among his bipolar options, which ranged from happy, smiling and nice to hateful, spiteful, depressed and at times, suicidal. Our happiest times occurred when he was at work or away at a Union meeting in Detroit or Chicago. We never had friends over unless we knew for sure he would not be at home. Two movies contend for Best Picture at AAMPAS this year, "Avatar," and "Hurt Locker." They depict anti-war messages; the latter very dramatically, if non-combat folks can stand to sit through it. Mother actually enabled these problems by rationalizing his actions away, even at her emotional expense and refusing to get counseling because she feared telling family secrets to strangers. Can the church even admit this is a problem? Are you an unwitting child of the racket's red glare?

**Tickling and teasing that hurt.** Dad hurt us with really hard tickling. I can still remember his painful pinches of my ribs, stomach and gonads. I can hear the scrape of a hammer against the wall of a room accompanied by his imitation of a roaring bear scaring me to shed tears of abject terror. He chased my younger brother, then 14, around the yard on our subsistence farm one time with a 2 x 4 board. "Oh," he said, "I was just teasing." He pestered us until we all walked away from him. Wounded by his behaviors, we walked from his polarities into problems of our making until we sought healing. Each of us children reached points in our lives when we realized that the way our relationships malfunctioned directly derived from a seriously conflicted family

context in which our emotional needs could not be met. Getting in touch with our feelings and needs became a path to authentic growth beyond the racket's red glare.

Jealous combative rage, hurtful teasing and tickling manifest problems combat veterans visit on their spouses and children whether they come from Australia, Britain, Canada, Croatia or the USA. The data now available provide useful bases for several generations to find support and healing. Other problems demand our attention. In this brief piece, I will mention only two with which I am familiar because of my career as a Pastor and theological educator. Everywhere, I meet children of the racket's red glare.

Don Winkler, a combat vet of WW 2, wanted to confess the sins of murder he committed as part of his recovery from alcoholism. I worked with Don at the Oakdale Addiction Treatment Center at Iowa University. He went from Pastor to Priest and a wide, ecumenical variety of clergy but they rationalized his murders in the name of the so-called "good war." Finally he found a Pastor who believed all murder is evil and would hear his confession and help Don atone for his sins. Our national addictive culture, as our PHEWA network on addictions knows, includes war addiction. The USA must have enemies and tickles and teases peace advocates until they grow sick and tired of failure and walk away from the struggle. Can we stand the heat of the racket's red glare, or will we walk away, too?

The rationalization of sin and evil done in the name of Just Wars includes Rape, both hetero and homo sexual. The shame that rape creates, combined with the failure of our military services to take such complaints seriously, creates delayed, devastating responses. Male victims of homosexual rape, sometimes gang rape, often delay any confrontation of their shame until panic attacks or relational failures finally drive them into therapy or into a Pastor's or Professor's office. Men and women who lived with these events sought me out for help from my college days until my most recent ministries. Internalized heat from the racket's red glare burns many.

Women victims of rape in US military services have several websites; one devoted to Latinas ("The Rape of Latinas in the US Military"). A Korean elder recently related how as a child he saw US soldiers line up to go into Korean homes to rape women. The Geneva Conventions have no provisions to protect the many Italian, German, North African, Japanese, Vietnamese and other civilians raped by armies during combat and we learned how impotent the Geneva Convention ban on abusing combat veterans and prisoners of war were at Abu Ghraib Prison. Brutalizing women and men of color by the European American members of the US military branches is a well documented historical fact and the day has come when they no longer keep silent about it. They exchange the racket's red, glaring pain for the healing fire of the shalomatic struggle for justice and peace.

The US government amended our treaty with South Korea to abandon holding US military personnel free from the Korean judiciary and place them under Korean law. A European American Army Colonel who beat his Korean wife to death was the first soldier prosecuted under the new arrangement. He appealed to the Army Courts Martial on the basis of military exemption. His appeal denied, Koreans tried and convicted him for his crime. The US has military forces in more than 120 nations; wherever they are, the racket's red glare burns in them and in their relationships with their host nations.

Many members of my family experienced combat. Great grandfather David Clingan was a Horse Boy for the Confederate Cavalry and saw rivers at Antietam and other battle sites run red with blood up to the horses' eyes. Great grandfather William Talley was an Abolitionist who came to Kansas and joined John Brown on his sorties to free slaves in Missouri. Uncles on all sides of my family, Dad, brother, two nephews all participated in combat. They all would go again in a second, as in "Hurt Locker," and "Saving Private Ryan." Will we help children of combat veterans and their parents get the honest help they need so they can achieve strong and spiritual health? Too often the church rationalizes the wounds veterans inflict on others, whether in combat or rapine within and outside combat when they volunteer to participate in the red glare of this racket.

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