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“Sure, what th’ hell, take all you want . . . They ain’t registered on our books, and what the taxpayers don’t know won’t hurt ’em . . . right?”

## Kerry was right Great falsehood about military service

**CHARLES PINNING**

ONE OF THE MOST damaging things a person can do is present the truth as false. A common example of this is when one lies to a lover or spouse when asked: “Are you having an affair?” The fidelity question often arises not out of concrete proof, but rather circumstantial evidence or, more often than not, “a feeling.”

This feeling, our ability to know without “knowing” — our instincts, if you will — resides in the deepest part of ourselves, that place where our inner gyroscope keeps us balanced and sane. When that balance is thrown off, we feel discombobulated — not right. If that imbalance is nourished and goes on long enough, if we become convinced that what we know to be the truth is in fact, not the truth, then we do go insane.

This kind of induced insanity occurs not only on personal levels, but has infected whole countries. Witness Nazi Germany, where an entire country let itself believe that Jews were evil and needed to be exterminated. A false truth was promulgated and taken up, by leaders and citizens alike, and an entire nation went insane, with catastrophic results.

Today, in another country — our own — another false truth is being spread: that most of our military personnel and our troops in Iraq are bright, motivated young people, who, with eyes wide open are defending our country from terrorists and spreading democracy.

This falsehood was publicly challenged last week by Sen. John Kerry, who urged college students to study hard, or they could “get stuck in Iraq.”

What an outcry! Republicans jumped on Kerry for suggesting that U.S. soldiers are uneducated, and Kerry scurried for cover, claiming he didn’t mean that at all, but that he’d botched a joke.

Cowards and liars all. Most of our military personnel in Iraq are kids who come from socio-economic back-grounds that weren’t putting them on a

path to college. As a result, they opted for military service because it offers a steady salary, three square meals a day, health coverage and other benefits, including technology training. For many, it offers something to do with their lives and a family.

The sticky part comes when they are called upon to go into battle. Then, they pay the highest price. Absent a draft, kids who are college-bound and kids from affluent families aren’t going to be “dumb enough” to enlist in the military.

When I was growing up in the ’60s, I watched the Vietnam War on television. Every night the news had rat-a-tat-tat film clips of soldiers marching through the jungle getting pegged off. And for what? By the late ’60s, it was obvious to most bright, educated kids that Vietnam was a total disaster and if you went, you stood a good chance of merely becoming a back stop for a bullet. Most who enlisted to fight that war either needed a job or weren’t too bright, probably both.

I went to college, made damn sure I kept my GPA above 2.0 (the cut-off mark, below which you could be yanked out of school and thrown into the Army), and when the lottery came along (and no, kiddies, it’s not the lottery you think of today) my birthday pulled a 350 — Yippee! My buttocks were golden!

World War II was the last “good” war this country has fought. It was obvious we had to fight it to save our country. Rich people enlisted. Celebrities and movie stars enlisted. That would never happen today. It stopped with Vietnam. During a recent debate in the U.S. senatorial race in Rhode Island, Sheldon Whitehouse and Lincoln Chafee were asked if they’d served in the military. Both said no. Of course they didn’t; they’re not stupid. Nor did they need the work.

My father was orphaned during the Great Depression. When he graduated from high school, in 1936, at 18, he had nothing. He didn’t even go to his own graduation because he was embar-

assed; he didn’t own a suit to wear. What he did do was to enlist in the U.S. Navy. When I was a kid and asked him why, he said, “Because, when I was your age, I didn’t even have a bicycle. I often went to bed hungry.”

The Navy was a steady salary, three squares a day, and, as the recruiting poster said, “A Chance for You!”

My father made the most of his chance, becoming an officer and serving 30 years’ active duty in the Navy. He then served 20 more years working for the Navy Department as deputy assistant chief of staff for training effectiveness, encompassing all of the Navy’s schools worldwide. He would come back from trips to these schools and tell me, “One of our biggest problems [at the Navy schools] is that we have to teach these kids remedial English so they can comprehend the training manuals in order to operate the equipment on submarines and ships so that they can operate the weaponry.”

This notion that our military is mostly composed of individuals possessing good intellect and judgment, as opposed to being mostly made up of kids lacking in both education and resources, is broadcast by our Democratic and Republican leaders. For the most part, these privileged politicians will never serve in the military, nor in all likelihood will their children — yet they must convince others to do so. And the parents of the children who serve will not cry out, at least not in great enough numbers, because they don’t want to believe that they’ve merely reared cannon fodder. And as for the kids themselves fighting, they’ve been told that they are heroes defending their country, but most of them know it’s just a job. And in our guts, where we visit our gyroscope and get jiggy with our true feelings to stay sane — we all know the naked truth, don’t we?

Charles Pinning is a Providence-based writer.

## Plebiscite stirs trouble in Serbian pot

**PYOTR ISKENDEROV**

MOSCOW

SERBIA’S LEADERS considered the Oct. 28-29 constitutional referendum to be very important and wanted to hold it as quickly as possible.

Consequently, there was no preliminary extensive discussion of the draft

Bosnian Serb leader, Gen. Radko Mladic, who is allegedly concealed by Serbian authorities.

Many E.U. members want to grant independence to Kosovo by persuading Belgrade to allow that territory to secede in exchange for Serbia’s subsequent accession to the E.U. The approval of the new Serbian constitution will hardly influence their position.

Western politicians and diplomats do not conceal their intention to settle the Kosovo issue by late 2006. Consequently, Serbian authorities must consolidate their modest success at the constitutional referendum during parliamentary elections before this happens. One can suppose that international mediators will now try to slow down the Kosovo final-status process