The Green Beret versus Gwyneth Paltrow: The Military-Civilian Divide

“Gwyneth Paltrow was at the Code Conference in California to promote her lifestyle brand Goop, when she said in an interview, “You come across [online comments] about yourself and about your friends, and it’s a very dehumanizing thing. It’s almost like, how in war, you go through this bloody dehumanizing thing and then something is defined out of it.”

This response garnered a response from Green Beret, Bryan Sikes, SFC, USA Clash Daily Guest Columnist

“To Miss Paltrow,

I’d first like to start out by saying how terrible I feel for you and all your friends that on a daily basis have to endure mean words written by people you don’t know. I can only imagine the difficulty of waking up in a 12,000 square foot Hollywood home and having your assistant retrieve your iPhone, only to see that the battery is low and someone on twitter (the social media concept that you and all of your friends contribute to on an hourly basis to feed your ego and narcissistic ways), has written a mean word or 2 about you. You’ve hit the nail on the head, war is exactly like that. You should receive a medal for the burden you have carried on your shoulders due to these meanies on social media.

You said, “Its almost like, how in war, you go through this bloody dehumanizing thing and then something is defined out of it.” I could see how you, and others like you in “the biz”, could be so insecure and mentally weak that you could pair the difficulty of your life on twitter to my brothers who have had their limbs ripped off and seen their friends shot, blown up, burned and disfigured, or wake up every morning in pain – while just starting the day is a challenge. How about our wives? The ones that sign on to be there for us through thick and thin, that help us to shake the hardships of war upon our return? And do all this while being mothers to our kids, keeping bills in order because we are always gone, and keeping our lives glued together. They do all this, by the way, without a team of accountants, nannies, personal assistants, and life coaches. Yeah, reading a mean tweet is just like all that.

You know what is really “dehumanizing”, Miss Paltrow? The fact that you’d even consider that your life as an “A-list” celebrity reading internet comments could even compare to war and what is endured on the battlefield. You and the other “A-listers” that think like you are laughable. You all have actually convinced yourselves that you in some way face difficulty on a regular basis. Let me be the first to burst your bubble: a long line at Starbucks, your driver being 3 minutes late, a scuff mark on your $1200 shoes and a mean tweet do not constitute difficulty in the eyes of a soldier.
Understand me when I say this: war does not define me. It is a chapter in my life that helped shape me. Being a husband and father is what defines me. Remember, sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never...be close to what war is.”

Read more at http://clashdaily.com/2014/05/green-beret-slams-gwyneth-paltrow-theres-big-difference-real-war-twitter/#6HeIDaPFXPbII0Fd.99

Write about a time when you heard a civilian compare an experience in life to war or battle and how you reacted and/or what you thought, felt, or wanted to say at the time. If you can’t remember a time when something like this happened, write a piece that considers the military-civilian divide that this Paltrow-Sikes interaction highlights.

Memory vs. Imagination / Cueing the Reader (revised from Jan. 2014)

“Memory begins to qualify the imagination, to give it another formation, one that is peculiar to the self... If I were to remember other things, I should be someone else.”

-- N. Scott Momaday

“I am forced to admit that memoir is not a matter of transcription, that memory itself is not a warehouse of finished stories, not a static gallery of framed pictures. I must admit that I invented.”

-- Patricia Hampl

The problem of memory is that while we rely on it for self-knowledge and expression, it is invariably slippery, subjective, and incomplete. As Patricia Hampl points out, memory can’t provide a totally precise catalogue of what happened; it is fraught with moments of invention. As writers, one tool for dealing with such pockets of uncertainty or gaps in memory is to be explicit about where and when these moments of uncertainty arise. Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola, authors of Tell It Slant, recommend using a device called “cueing the reader” as a way of communicating the limits of your own memory or the degree to which you suspect it may involve some invention. In cueing the reader, you begin key passages with phrases or statements that indicate how precise or unstable you believe your memory to be. For example, you can say, “I wish I could remember...” or “When I try to remember that day...” or, something slightly fancier like, “I never saw his face, but I like to imagine him this way” or “If I dreamed this scene, this is how it would go.”

Writing Exercise (15 mins.)

Part 1. (5 mins.)
Make a short list of 5-10 cueing lines—phrases or sentences that indicate that the narrative to follow may not be precisely what happened. These lines may relate to your
own experiences, or you can make them up. Be as inventive as you can and have fun with this exercise.

**Part 2. (10 mins.)**

Pass your cueing lines to the person sitting to your left. Choose one of your neighbor’s cueing lines, and try using it to launch a scene from your own memory. You may alter the other person’s language slightly to make the line your own.