

Flag is a fitting gesture of war and remembrance

by Charita M. Goshay

Ken Bean of Springfield Township, Ohio, flies his flag at half-staff every day in tribute to the Americans who died on Sept. 11, 2001, as well as those killed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I am old enough to remember Vietnam and the anguish so many adults experienced to have as a result. What I do not recall is the emotional disconnect that seems to overshadow this current conflict.

Unlike our grandparents, nothing has been asked of us, and we have behaved accordingly. We don't make even a pretense of conserving fuel, though our addiction to oil will continue to lash us to a region and to nations who clearly despise us.

Perhaps I'm misreading the mood. Perhaps people have chosen to internalize their anguish because they simply don't know what should be done.

NO WAY OUT?

Iraq, more than Afghanistan, has become the foreign-policy equivalent of Chinese handcuffs: The longer we stay, the more of our people will die. But we cannot unilaterally leave because the blood that currently covers the ground, might crest at the horse's bridle.

Though they have the luxury of kicking around President George W. Bush because it has gone so badly, the Democrats don't have a definitive solution, either. Their dog and pony show of voting for legislation they knew full well would be vetoed by the predictably stubborn Bush wasn't so much about the troops, as it was about pinning Bush against the ropes.

Neocon assurances that we would be greeted as liberators have been dashed by the reality on the ground. They too, are bereft of an answer for the mess they've created.

It is fitting that Ken Bean is flying his flag at half-staff because, to borrow from the T.S. Eliot, April really was the cruelest month, "Breeding lilacs out of the dead land, mixing memory and desire."

In April, we learned that the truth about Pat Tillman's death was the second casualty. Cruellest of all, we lost

100 Americans.

WORTH REMEMBERING

He's just one man with one flag, but I'm glad Bean is honoring Marine Lance Cpl. Jose Antonio Gutierrez, a Guatemalan immigrant who became the first American to die in Iraq. It's also nice to know that the 158 Ohioans who have died, including Aaron Seesan, Michael Barkey, Heath Warner, Jesse Buryj, Richard Ramey, Daniel McVicker, Daniel Crabtree and Richard Hardy, will be missed by someone other than their families and friends.

Small-town police officers, factory workers, nurses, pilots, big-city firefighters; teenagers eager to make their first mark on the world; new fathers, brothers, aunts, sisters; people who just wanted to serve their country out of gratitude. Career soldiers who loved the regimen and immense pride they found in military life; people who simply wanted to see the world; blue-collar 20-somethings and daughters striving to be the first in their families to attend college.

People whose deaths will leave a huge void in one-horse hamlets you've never heard of.

All worth remembering.

At Gettysburg, Abraham Lincoln noted that "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here."

Ken Bean's simple gesture is a stark, daily reminder of something most of us wish we could forget.

Charita M. Goshay writes for the Canton (Ohio) Repository.

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