

In Case You Missed ...

Some of our special stories in November dealt with logical and evidentiary failings of the Russia-gate investigation and President Trump's bombing of Syria over a dubious chemical-weapons attack.

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["The Legacy of Dennis Banks"](#) by Dennis J. Bernstein, Nov. 4, 2017

["How US Blunders Strengthened Iran"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Nov. 5, 2017

["Learning to Love McCarthyism"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 6, 2017

["The Dangerous Business of Journalism"](#) by Don North, Nov. 7, 2017

["The Politics of Sexual Harassment and War"](#) by David Marks, Nov. 7, 2017

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["Did Al Qaeda Dupe Trump on Syrian Attack?"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 9, 2017

["The Saudi Hand in Lebanon's Crisis"](#) by Dennis J. Bernstein, Nov. 10, 2017

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["Mocking Trump Doesn't Prove Russia's Guilt"](#) by Ray McGovern, Nov. 13, 2017

["America's Righteous Russia-gate Censorship"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 14, 2017

["Trump Adds to Washington's 'Swamp'"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Nov. 15, 2017

["The Charmed, Doomed Life of Barry Seal"](#) by James DiEugenio, Nov. 15, 2017

["America's Renegade Warfare"](#) by Nicolas J.S. Davies, Nov. 16, 2017

["Russia-gate Spreads to Europe"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 16, 2017

["Trump's Saudi Scheme Unravels"](#) by Alastair Crooke, Nov. 17, 2017

["Signs of U.K. Misconduct in Assange Case"](#) by Dennis J. Bernstein, Nov. 18, 2017

["Israel's Ploy Selling a Syrian Nuke Strike"](#) by Gareth Porter, Nov. 18, 2017

["How Syrian-Nuke Evidence Was Faked"](#) by Gareth Porter, Nov. 19, 2017

["The Lost Journalistic Standards of Russia-gate"](#) by Robert Parry, Nov. 20, 2017

["Trump Resists Progress on Global Warming"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Nov. 24, 2017

["The Struggles of 'A Good American'"](#) by James DiEugenio, Nov. 28, 2017

["Russia-gate Inquisitors Subpoena Journalist"](#) by Dennis J. Bernstein, Nov. 28, 2017

["US Bows to Israeli/Saudi Alliance in Blaming Iran"](#) by Ted Snider, Nov. 29, 2017

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Remaking Armistice Day into Veterans Day

The holiday now celebrated as Veterans Day – to thank American soldiers – started as Armistice Day, a time for reflection on the horrors of war after millions died in World War I, as Gary Kohls recalls.

By Gary Kohls

One year shy of a century ago, on Nov. 11, 1918, at precisely 11 a.m. Paris time, a cease-fire (aka "truce" or "armistice") was agreed to and signed by military negotiators from France, Britain and Germany. The terms of the truce ultimately resulted in the end of the "War to End All Wars" seven months later when the Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28, 1919.

Germany's surrender to the Allies was regarded as the prudent thing to do after Kaiser Wilhelm's tyrannical monarchy was overthrown by democratic socialist forces earlier in 1918. Erich Ludendorff, a classic example of Prussian militarism, was one of the German generals who first broached the idea of starting the negotiations that eventually led to Germany's surrender.

Ludendorff saw that 1) Germany's army was terminally exhausted, demoralized and poorly equipped; 2) the United States had finally entered the war with fresh

troops; 3) the fledgling government at home was in disarray; 4) the war had bankrupted the nation (as all wars eventually do – unless there is enough looting and plundering of the occupied territories); 5) civilians at home were starving; and 6) victory was an impossibility. The writing was on the wall; Germany had no choice but to surrender.

The armistice was signed at Compiegne, France, by four French and British military officers, the German Foreign Minister, two German military officers and one German civilian.

According to the terms of the armistice, Germany agreed to immediately evacuate all occupied territories within two weeks and to surrender 5,000 cannons, 25,000 machine guns, 1,700 planes, and all German submarines. All Allied prisoners of war were to be released by Germany immediately, but German POWs were not to be released until a peace treaty was signed sometime in the future.

The year after the war ended, most of the national leaders that considered themselves victors proclaimed Nov. 11 to be a day of reflection on the horrors of war and for prayers that there never would be another war. All businesses were ordered to stop work for two minutes and stand in silence at exactly 11 a.m., a tradition that continued in the decades that followed. It was called Remembrance Day in the United Kingdom and Armistice Day in the United States.

Nov. 11 was intended to be a day of mourning and repentance for the satanic carnage that killed about 10 million soldiers, wounded another 20 million and inflicted more than 2 million civilian deaths.

The senselessness of that war should have resulted in the courts-martial of every gung-ho officer, the demeaning of every war-mongering politician, and the decertifying of every war-profiteering corporation. But it did not. The warmongers and war-profiteers just went into hibernation.

But the war did result in the dissolution of four empires, their emperors and kings, and the assorted aristocrats and sycophants who had been so cruelly ripping off the multitudes of poor people for so many centuries. The four empires that collapsed were the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman empires. And good riddance it was.

Of course, Germany did not celebrate Armistice Day because that Nov. 11 and the date of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles (that formally ended the war) were regarded by many Germans as the dates of treasonous acts committed by Germany's new civilian democratic leaders who signed the documents – holding blameless the German military officers who suggested that the German army surrender in the first place.

The Nov. 11 date was despised by patriotic “Deutschland Uber Alles” Germans, especially the right-wing, pro-monarchist, proto-fascist and “Germany First” nationalists who repeatedly used the “Stab-in-the-Back” and “November Criminals” deception to weaken and then overthrow the Weimar Republic’s experiment in democracy.

After 12 years of pro-war propaganda from militarists like Adolf Hitler, Ludendorff and the Nazi Party, democracy never had a chance, especially with all the economic turmoil that followed the war and the 1929 Wall Street crash that spread mass unemployment around the world.

According to Wikipedia, the “Stab-in-the-Back” Myth is the notion, widely believed and promulgated in right-wing, pro-militarist circles in pre-Nazi Germany, that the Imperial German Army did not lose World War I, but rather the German military had been betrayed by the civilians on the home front, especially the pro-democracy groups that overthrew the tyrannical monarchy during the German Revolution of 1918-19.

The Fading of Reflection

Still, elsewhere the tradition of Nov. 11 continued. In 1926, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution declaring that Armistice Day should be a day of “thanksgiving and prayer and exercises designed to perpetuate peace through goodwill and mutual understanding between nations.” In 1938, Congress made Armistice Day an official holiday that was explicitly dedicated to perpetuating world peace. But world peace would not last.

For some, the horrors of World War II reinforced the need to further abhor war. General Omar Bradley delivered an Armistice Day speech in 1948, chastising those who placed their trust in military dominance. He said: “We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living.”

But the military and economic entities that are in control of the world didn’t take Bradley’s admonition seriously. In the post-World War II years, the U.S. was sensing that it could easily establish a powerful global empire. The CIA – created in the years following World War II – was feeling its oats and the Department of War was name-changed to the Department of Defense. Planetary, full-spectrum military and economic dominance by the U.S. was a possibility.

To promote these imperial objectives, anti-war and pro-peace sentiments had to be suppressed. Peace-loving holidays like Mother’s Day, Memorial Day, Armistice

Day and Labor Day needed to be de-emphasized or co-opted. And so they were. The process was so subtle that the public never flinched.

In June 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower signed a bill changing the name of Armistice Day to Veterans' Day. The stated purpose of the new holiday was "to thank all veterans who had served the United States of America."

America's neglected or wounded military veterans applauded the change in the Nov. 11 holiday as they seemed to appreciate being thanked for their service, even if many resented the empty sentiments.

One of the (perhaps intended) consequences of the gradual change away from the emphasis on peace was the amnesia over the horrors of war. Both adults and children were easily brain-washed into mindlessly glorifying the diabolical. Keeping America militarily strong was emphasized. In the halls of Congress and in the White House ever since World War II, there was little consideration of the cruelty, stupidity and futility of war.

In our corrupt capitalist society, there is just too much money to be made by war-profiteering corporations and wealthy investors when there are potential military conflicts brewing. The stocks of war industries surge when Donald Trump tweets about bombing foreign nations. And then there are legions of major media outlets that are always ready and willing to cheerlead for wars and rumors of war.

On Veterans Day in America today, none of the people in power are sincerely praying or working for a truly sustainable peace, even during the obligatory two minutes of silence.

Dr. Gary G. Kohls is a retired physician who writes about peace, justice, militarism, mental health and religious issues.

In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in April focused on the continuing Russia-gate imbroglio, President Trump's missile strike on Syria, and the danger of the mainstream media mediating "truth."

"Democrats' Blind Obsession on Russia-gate" by Daniel Lazare, Apr. 1, 2017

"Trump's Foreign Policy Incoherence" by Robert Parry, Apr. 3, 2017

["MLK's Warning of America's Spiritual Death"](#) by Gary G. Kohls, Apr. 4, 2017

["Mainstream Media as Arbiters of Truth"](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 4, 2017

["Team Trump Ponders Climate 'Engineering'"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Apr. 5, 2017

["Another Dangerous Rush to Judgment in Syria"](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 5, 2017

["The Ugly Underbelly of Russia-gate"](#) by James W Carden, Apr. 6, 2017

["NYT Retreats on 2013 Syria-Sarin Claims"](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 6, 2017

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["How Media Bias Fuels Syrian Escalation"](#) by Rick Sterling, Apr. 10, 2017

["Neocons Have Trump on His Knees"](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 10, 2017

["Trump Should Rethink Syria Escalation"](#) by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Apr. 11, 2017

["Trump's Syria Attack Trampled Many Laws"](#) by Marjorie Cohn, Apr. 11, 2017

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["NYT Mocks Skepticism on Syria-Sarin Claims"](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 18, 2017

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["Intel Vets Voice Doubts on Syrian Crisis"](#) by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Apr. 26, 2017

["More NYT 'Spin' on the Syria-Sarin Case"](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 28, 2017

["The Existential Question of Whom to Trust"](#) by Robert Parry, Apr. 30, 2017

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MLK’s Warning of America’s Spiritual Death

From the Archive: A half century ago, The New York Times accused Martin Luther King Jr. of “slander” for decrying the Vietnam War and The Washington Post detected “unsupported fantasies” in his speech, recalled more favorably by Gary G. Kohls.

By Gary G. Kohls (Originally published on Jan. 19, 2014; slightly edited for time element)

Martin Luther King Jr.’s Riverside Church speech was titled “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence.” It was delivered exactly one year before his April 4, 1968 assassination in Memphis. In the speech, King declared, “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.”

The people who heard that speech recognized it as one of the most powerful speeches ever given articulating the immorality of the Vietnam War and its destructive impact on social progress in the United States. In explaining his decision to follow his conscience and speak out against U.S. militarism, King said:

“I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such.”

But King went farther, diagnosing the broader disease of militarism and violence that was endangering the soul of the United States. King said, “I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today – my own government.”

Poisoning America's Soul

King knew very well that the disease of violence was killing off more than social progress in America. Violence was sickening the nation's soul as well. He added, "If America's soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read 'Vietnam'." King urged his fellow citizens to take up the causes of the world's oppressed, rather than taking the side of the oppressors. He said:

"I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a 'thing-oriented' society to a 'person-oriented' society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

"We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity. We still have a choice today; nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation. We must move past indecision to action. We must find new ways to speak for peace and justice throughout the developing world a world that borders on our doors.

"If we do not act we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality and strength without sight."

King pointed to an alternate path into the future: "Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter but beautiful struggle for a new world. This is the calling of the sons of God, and our brothers wait eagerly for our response. Shall we say the odds are too great? Shall we tell them the struggle is too hard?"

Signing His Own Death Warrant

By denouncing so forcefully the war crimes that the U.S. military was committing daily in the killing fields of Vietnam, some of King's followers understood that he had just signed his own death warrant. But King, being a person of conscience, was compelled to express his deep sense of moral outrage over the horrific maiming, suffering and dying of millions of innocent Vietnamese civilians in that unjust war that afflicted mostly unarmed women and children and that was going to leave behind lethal poisons in the soil, water and unborn babies that would last for generations.

He knew that non-combatants are always the major victims of modern warfare,

especially wars that indiscriminately used highly lethal weapons that rained down from the air, especially the U.S. Air Force's favorite weapon, napalm – the flaming, jellied gasoline that burned the flesh off of whatever part of the burning adult or child it splashed onto.

King also connected the racist acts (of American soldiers joyfully killing dispensable non-white “gooks” and “slants” – often shooting at “anything that moves”) on the battlefields of Southeast Asia to the oppression, impoverishment, imprisoning and lynching of dispensable, deprived non-white “niggers” in America.

King saw the connections between the violence of racism and the violence of poverty. He saw that the withholding of economic and educational opportunities came from the fear of “the other” and the perceived need to protect the white culture's wealth and privilege with violence if necessary.

King knew, too, that fortunes are made in every war, and the war in Vietnam was no exception. In his speeches, he talked about that unwelcome reality that the ruling class preferred not be discussed. That meant his well-attended Riverside Church speech threatened not only the powerful interests already arrayed against his civil rights struggle but also the interests of the war profiteers and the national security establishment.

War is Good Business

The longer the Vietnam War lasted, the more the weapons manufacturers thrived. With their huge profits, there was a strong incentive for these financial elites to continue the carnage. And therefore the Wall Street war profiteers financed, out of their ill-gotten gains, battalions of industry lobbyists and pro-military propagandists who descended upon Washington, DC, and the Pentagon to claim even more tax dollars for weapons research, development and manufacture.

With that funding secured, armies of desperate jobs-seekers were hired to work in thousands of weapons factories that were strategically placed in congressional districts almost everywhere, with weapons research grants likewise being awarded to virtually every university in the nation. Thus, weapons-manufacturing and R&D soon became vitally important for almost every legislator's home district economy as well as for the household budgets of millions of American voters who indirectly benefitted from the U.S. military's killing, maiming, displacement, starvation and suffering of non-white people in war zones.

King's anti-war stance was based on his Christianity and on the ethics and life of Jesus, but it was also based on his standing as a revered international peace

and justice icon. Those factors made him a dangerous threat to the military/industrial/congressional/security complex.

The powerful forces that were working hard to discredit King had already infiltrated the civil rights movement. Their efforts, cunningly led by the proto-fascist and racist J. Edgar Hoover and his obedient FBI, accelerated after the Riverside speech. The FBI ramped up the smear campaigns against King. Eventually he was “neutralized” with a bullet to the head. [The case for believing that King’s murder was not simply the act of lone gunman James Earl Ray is laid out in many studies, including attorney William F. Pepper’s *An Act of State: The Execution of Martin Luther King.*]

King’s Prophetic Vision

Now, five decades after his anti-war speech (which was widely kept from the public), it is clear how prophetic King’s observations were. America is indeed losing its soul. Violence, racism, militarism and economic oppression are still American epidemics.

Both upper- and middle-class investors of get-rich-quick schemes in America have succumbed to predatory lenders, cannibalistic corporate mergers and acquisitions, psychopathic multinational corporate schemers, corrupt crony capitalists, and the rapist/exploiters of the land and water by extractive industries all schemes that will eventually burst as part of predictable economic bubbles.

Those busted bubbles regularly wipe out investors (except for the large, deep-pocketed “insiders” who, usually being forewarned, will have sold their holdings just in time, before the publicly revealed “bust”), leaving the taxpayers to bail out the financial messes that were created by the so-called “invisible hand of the market” but are really caused by the cunning work of corporate gamblers.

King was trying to warn us not just about the oncoming epidemic of violence toward victims at home but also about the tens of millions of people around the world who were and are still being victimized by U.S. military misadventures. King was also warning us about the multinational corporate war profiteers whose interests are facilitated and protected by the U.S. military whether they are operating in Asia, Latin America, Africa or the Middle East.

The Pentagon budget averages well over \$700 billion per year, including wars that are often illegal and unconstitutional. That amounts to \$2 billion per day with no visible return on investment, except for the military contractors, the oil industries and Wall Street financiers.

Vast sums also are needed to address the physical and mental health costs needed

for the palliative care for the permanently maimed and psychologically-traumatized veterans. Hundreds of millions of dollars more are spent paying down the interest payments on past military debts.

All those potentially bankrupting costs represent money that will never be available for programs of social uplift like combatting racism, poverty and hunger, or paying for affordable housing/healthcare, universal education or meaningful job creation. Can anyone else hear a demonic laugh reverberating down Wall Street?

King was warning America about its oncoming spiritual death if it didn't convert itself away from military violence. But most observers of the U.S. see America still worshipping at the altars of the Gods of War and Greed. Our children may be doomed.

The vast majority of American Christian churches (whether fundamentalist, conservative, moderate or liberal, with very few exceptions) have failed King's vision, despite the lip service they sometimes give to King on MLK Day. Churches whose members were brought up on the Myth of American Exceptionalism (and the myth of being "God's chosen people") consistently refuse to take a stand against the satanic nature of war.

Past the Point of No Return?

If America is to avert future financial and military catastrophes, King's central warnings about the "triple evils" of militarism, racism and economic oppression must be heeded. That means a retreat from worldwide network of budget-busting military bases. And, if America wants to shed the justified label of "Rogue Nation," the covert killing operations of its secret black ops mercenary military units all around the world must be stopped, as should the infamous extrajudicial assassinations by America's unmanned drones.

If King's 50-year-old warning continues to be ignored, America's future is bleak. The future holds the dark seeds of economic chaos, hyperinflation, unendurable poverty, increasing racial/minority hostility, worsening malnutrition, armed rebellion, street fighting, and perhaps, ultimately, institution of a reactionary totalitarian/surveillance police state in order to control citizen protests and quell rebellions.

In 1967, many Americans considered King hopeful vision for a better future as irrational idealism. He was told that the task was too great, the obstacles were too imposing, and there was no will for even the churches to reverse their age-old, conservative pseudo-patriotism and society's institutional racism. I suspect that many of the churches that called King a communist and therefore

ignored him back then wish that they could turn back the clock and give King's (and Jesus's) path a try.

King finished his speech with these challenges: "War is not the answer. We still have a choice today; nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation. We must move past indecision to action. We must find new ways to speak for peace and justice throughout the developing world a world that borders on our doors. If we do not act we shall surely be dragged down the long dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality and strength without sight."

And he had these sobering words for the churches that are immersed in a polytheistic culture (the worship of multiple gods, including the gods of war and mammon) and thus are tempted to quietly ally themselves with those gods rather than the God of Love that King was devoted to:

"I have traveled the length and breadth of Alabama, Mississippi and all the other southern states. I have looked at her beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlay of her massive religious education buildings. Over and over again I have found myself asking: 'What kind of people worship here? Who is their God?'"

Today, the task is even tougher, the obstacles much more imposing, but the path that King outlined remains.

Dr. Gary G. Kohls is a retired physician who writes about peace, justice, militarism, mental health and religious issues.

A Christmas Message of Peace

From the Archive: In today's "endless war," there are few moments that inspire hope like the one 102 years ago when soldiers of World War I took a break from killing to exchange Christmas cheer, recalls Gary G. Kohls.

By Gary G. Kohls (First published on Dec. 24, 2015, with updated time)

On Christmas Eve, 102 years ago, one of the most unusual aberrations in the bloody history of the organized mass slaughter that we call war occurred. It was so profound and so disturbing to the professional war-makers that it was never to be repeated again.

"Christian" Europe was in the fifth month of the so-called Great War that would

grind on for another four years of what amounted to mutual suicide, ending with all the original participants financially, spiritually and morally bankrupted.

British, Scottish, French, Belgian, Australian, New Zealand, Canadian, German, Austrian, Hungarian, Serbian and Russian clergymen from church pulpits in those overwhelmingly Christian nations were doing their part in fomenting the un-Christ-like patriotic fervor that would result in a holocaust that destroyed four empires, killed upwards of 20 million soldiers and civilians, and resulted in the psychological and physical decimation of an entire generation of young men in France, Britain, Germany and Russia.

Christianity, it needs to be noted, began as a highly ethical religion because of the teachings and actions of the nonviolent Jesus of Nazareth (and his pacifist apostles and followers). Tragically, the nations that profess Christianity as their state religion have, for the past 1,700 years, never nurtured their churches to be truly peacemaking churches.

And, contrary to the ethical teachings of Jesus, modern Christian churches have not been, by and large, actively resisting their particular nation's imperial aspirations, their aggressive wars or their country's war-makers and war profiteers. Instead, the churches have become a bloody instrument for whatever warmongers and corporations that have achieved political and economic power.

So, it wasn't much of a surprise to see that the religious leaders that were involved in World War I were convinced that God was on their particular side and therefore not on the side of those followers of Jesus that had been fingered as enemies on the other side. The obvious contradiction (that both sides were worshipping and praying to the same god) escaped the vast majority of combatants and their spiritual counselors.

Pulpits and pews all over Europe with few exceptions reverberated with flag-waving fervor, sending clear messages to their doomed warrior-sons that it was their Christian duty to march off to kill the equally doomed Christian soldiers on the other side of the line. And for the civilians back home, it was their Christian duty to "support the boots on the ground" who were destined to return home dead or among many of the survivors wounded, psychologically and spiritually broken, disillusioned and faithless.

A mere five months into this frustratingly stalemated war (newly featuring trench warfare, artillery, machine guns, tanks, aerial bombardment and poison gas), the first Christmas of the war on the Western Front seemed to offer a respite to the exhausted, freezing and demoralized troops.

Christmas was the holiest of Christian holidays for all sides, and in this time

of death, hunger, thirst, frostbitten limbs, sleep deprivation, shell shock, suicidality, traumatic brain injuries, mortal wounds and homesickness, Christmas 1914 had a very special meaning.

Christmas reminded the soldiers of the good food, safety, warm homes and beloved families that they had left behind and which – they now suspected – they might never see again. They did not yet know that even if they survived physically, they would never be the same again.

The soldiers in the trenches desperately sought some respite from the misery of the water-logged, putrid, rat- and lice-infested, corpse-ridden and increasingly frozen trenches.

Trench Warfare in 1914

By this time, the frontline soldiers on both sides were wondering how they could possibly have fallen for the propaganda campaigns that had convinced them that their side was pre-destined to be victorious and that they would be “home before Christmas” where they would be celebrated as conquering heroes.

Instead, each frontline soldier was at the end of his emotional rope because of the unrelenting artillery barrages against which they were defenseless. If they weren't killed or physically maimed by the artillery shells and bombs, they would eventually be emotionally destroyed by “shell-shock” (now known as posttraumatic stress disorder – PTSD), suffering horrifying nightmares, flashbacks (usually misdiagnosed as a sign of mental illness), blindness, sleep deprivation, suicidality, depression, hyper-alertness and any number of other mental and neurological abnormalities, including traumatic brain injury.

Among the other common “killers of the soul” were the perpetual hunger, malnutrition, infections (such as typhus and dysentery), louse infestations, trench foot, frostbite and gangrenous toes and fingers. None of these survivors would truly appreciate being lauded as a military hero in future parades staged in their honor.

Poison gas attacks from both sides, albeit begun by scientifically-superior Germany, began early in 1915, and Allied tank warfare which was a humiliating disaster for the British innovators of the tank – wouldn't be operational until the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

One of the most stressful realities for the frontline soldiers was the suicidal, misbegotten, “over the top” infantry assaults against the opposition's machine gun nests. Such assaults were complicated by the shell holes and the rows of coiled barbed wire that sometimes made them sitting ducks. Artillery barrages from both sides commonly resulted in tens of thousands of casualties in a single

day.

The over-the-top infantry assaults that sacrificed hundreds of thousands of obedient soldiers were stupidly (and repeatedly) ordered by senior officers such as Sir John French and his replacement as British Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig. Most of the old-time generals of a century ago had trouble admitting that their out-dated horse and saber cavalry charges across the muck of No-Man's Land were both hopeless and suicidal).

The general staff planners of their disastrous attempts to end the war quickly (or at least end the stalemate) were safely out of the range of enemy artillery barrages. The general staff war planners were always comfortably back at their warm and dry headquarters, eating well, being dressed by their orderlies, and drinking their tea – none of them at any risk of suffering the lethality of war.

The continuous digging with their entrenching tools in order to improve the safety of the trenches was frequently interrupted by preparations for attack. Screams of pain often came from the wounded soldiers who were helplessly hanging on the barbed wire or trapped and/or bleeding to death in the bomb craters. Often their deaths would linger for days, and the effect on the troops in the trenches, who had to listen to the desperate, unanswerable cries for help was psychologically devastating.

By the time Christmas came and winter hit, troop morale on both sides of No Man's Land had hit rock bottom.

Christmas in the Trenches

So on Dec. 24, 1914, the exhausted troops settled down to Christmas with gifts from home, special food, special liquor, chocolate bars and the hope for peace, even for only one night.



A magnanimous (and deluded) Kaiser Wilhelm had ordered 100,000 Christmas trees with millions of ornamental candles to be sent up to the front, expecting that such an act would boost German troop morale. Using the supply lines for such militarily unnecessary items was ridiculed by the most hardened officers, but nobody suspected that the Kaiser's Christmas tree idea would backfire and

instead be a catalyst for an unplanned-for cease-fire, a singular event previously unheard of in the history of warfare and one that was ultimately censored out of mainstream history books for most of the next century.

The Christmas Truce of 1914 was a spontaneous event that happened at a multitude of locations all along the 600 miles of trenches that stretched across Belgium and France, and it was an event that would never again be duplicated. An attempt at a Christmas Truce in 1915, orchestrated by the boots on the ground, was quickly put down by senior officers.

Ten years ago, the movie "Joyeux Noel" (French for "Merry Christmas") received an Academy Award nomination for best foreign film of 2005. It tells the moving tale that was adapted from the many surviving stories that had been told in letters from soldiers who had participated in the truce.

As told in the movie, some young German started singing "Stille Nacht." Soon the British, French and Scots on the other side of No Man's Land joined in with their versions of "Silent Night." Before long, the spirit of the Prince of Peace and "goodwill towards men" prevailed over the demonic spirit of war, and the troops on both sides began to sense their common humanity.

The natural human aversion to killing other humans broke through to consciousness and overcame the fear, patriotic fervor and pro-war brainwashing to which they had all been indoctrinated.

Soldiers on both sides gradually dropped their weapons and came out of their trenches to meet their former foes face-to-face. They had to step around shell holes and over frozen corpses (which were later to be given respectful burials during an extension of the truce, with soldiers from both sides helping one another with the gruesome task).

The spirit of retaliation had been replaced by a spirit of reconciliation – and the desire for peace on earth. New friends shared chocolate bars, cigarettes, wine, schnapps, soccer games and pictures from home. Addresses were exchanged, photos were taken and every soldier who genuinely experienced the emotional drama was forever changed.

And the generals and the politicians were appalled.

An Act of Treason

Fraternization with the enemy (as well as refusing to obey orders in time of war) is regarded by military commanders as an act of treason and is severely punishable. In the "Great War," such crimes were dealt with by firing squad.

In the case of the Christmas Truce of 1914, most officers feared mutiny and did not want to draw public attention to the potentially contagious incidents by using such penalties. War correspondents were forbidden to report the unauthorized truce to their papers. Some commanding officers threatened courts martial if fraternization persisted (getting to know your supposed enemy was obviously bad for the killing spirit).

There were still lighter punishments to be invoked. Many of the Allied troops were re-assigned to different and less desirable regiments. Many German troops were sent to the Eastern Front under much harsher conditions, to fight and die in the equally suicidal battles against their Russian Orthodox Christian co-religionists.

If humanity is truly concerned with the barbaric nature of militarism, and if our modern-era wars of empire are to be effectively derailed, the story of the Christmas Truce needs to be retold again and again. These futile, unaffordable and very contagious modern wars are being fought by vulnerable, thoroughly indoctrinated Call of Duty or Halo first-person shooter gamers who, unbeknownst to them, are at high risk of having their lives negatively and permanently altered by the physical, mental and spiritual damage that always comes from participating in actual violence.

Combat war can easily doom its participants to a life overwhelmed by the wounds of war (PTSD, sociopathic personality disorder, suicidality, homicidality, loss of religious faith, traumatic brain injury, neurotoxic, addictive drug use, either legal or illegal) all of which, it must be pointed out, are totally preventable.

It seems to me that it would be helpful if moral leadership in America, especially its Christian leaders, would discharge their duty to warn the children and adolescents that are in their spheres of influence about all of the serious consequences that being in the killing professions can have on their souls and psyches.

War planners do whatever it takes to keep soldiers from recognizing the humanity of their enemies, whether they are Syrians, Iranians, Iraqis, Afghanis, Pakistanis, Yemenis, Vietnamese, Chinese or North Koreans. I have been told by many military veterans that military chaplains, who are supposed to be nurturers of the souls of the soldiers that are in their "care," never bring up, in their counseling sessions, the Golden Rule, Jesus's clear "love your enemies" commandment and his other ethical teachings in the Sermon on the Mount.

Military chaplains seem to just be another cog in the apparatus of making war maximally effective for their military, economic, political and corporate

overlords. Christian chaplains, who are very well paid, seem to not pay much attention to the Ten Commandments either, especially the one that says "thou shalt not kill."

In their defense, I suppose, military chaplains, similar to their colleagues from divinity school, may have never been schooled adequately (beginning in their Sunday School upbringings) in the profoundly important gospel truths about humility, mercy, non-violence, non-domination, non-retaliation, unconditional love and the rejection of enmity.

Theological Blind Spots of War

These theological blind spots are nicely illustrated near the end of the "Joyeux Noel" movie in a powerful scene depicting a confrontation between the Christ-like, altruistic, antiwar Scottish chaplain and his Calvinist bishop.

As the chaplain was mercifully administering the "last rites" to a dying soldier, he was approached by the bishop, who had come to chastise the chaplain for fraternizing with the enemy during the Christmas Truce. The bishop summarily relieved the simple pastor of his chaplaincy duties because of his "treasonous and shameful" behavior on the battlefield.

The authoritarian bishop refused to listen to the chaplain's story about his having performed "the most important mass of my life" (with German troops participating in the celebration) or the fact that he wished to stay with the soldiers that needed him because they were losing their faith in God. The bishop angrily denied the chaplain's request to remain with his men.

The bishop then delivered a rousing pro-war, jingoistic sermon (which was taken word-for-word from a homily that had actually been delivered by an Anglican bishop later in the war). The sermon was addressed to the fresh troops who had to be brought in to replace the veteran soldiers who, because their consciences had been awakened, had suddenly become averse to killing and were refusing to fire their rifles.

The image of the dramatic but subtle response of the chaplain to his sacking should be a clarion call to the Christian church leadership of our militarized, so-called "Christian" nation – both clergy and lay. This good man of God hung up his cross and walked out of the door of the field hospital.

"Joyeux Noel" is an important film that deserves to be annual holiday fare. It has ethical lessons even more powerful than "It's A Wonderful Life" or "A Christmas Carol."

One of the lessons of the story is summarized in the concluding verse of John

McCutcheon's famous song about the event. It is title "Christmas in the Trenches":

"My name is Francis Tolliver, in Liverpool I dwell.

Each Christmas come since World War One, I've learned its lessons well: That the ones who call the shots won't be among the dead and lame And on each end of the rifle we're the same."

A critical scene from the movie is at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPk9-AD7h3M>

Additional scenes from the move, with the narration of a letter from one of the soldiers involved can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehFjkS7UBUU>

Dr Kohls is a retired physician from Duluth, Minnesota. He writes a weekly column for the Reader, Duluth's alternative newsweekly magazine. Many of his columns are archived at

http://duluthreader.com/articles/categories/200_Duty_to_Warn

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Christianity and the Nagasaki Bomb

Though Christianity began as a religion of peace, it soon became a cloak for genocidal violence, such as the incineration of defenseless civilians in Nagasaki, including many Japanese Christians, 71 years ago, writes Gary G. Kohls.

By Gary G. Kohls

Seventy-one years ago, on Aug. 9, 1945, an all-Christian bomber crew dropped a plutonium bomb on Nagasaki City, Japan, instantly vaporizing, incinerating, irradiating and otherwise annihilating tens of thousands of innocent civilians, men, women and children. Very few Japanese soldiers were affected.

In a nation whose citizens are historically non-Christian (Shintoism or Buddhism are the major religions), a disproportionately large number of the Nagasaki victims were Christian (see below for the history of that reality). The bomb mortally wounded uncountable thousands of other victims who succumbed to the blast trauma, the heat trauma and/or the radiation trauma.

In 1945, the U.S. was regarded as the most Christian nation in the world. The bomber crew, as were the two Christian military chaplains of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki crews, were products of the type of Christianity that failed to teach what Jesus taught concerning violence (that it was forbidden to his followers) – which has been the case for the vast majority of Christians, both clergy and laity, for the past 1,700 years. For the first three centuries of its existence, Christianity was a pacifist religion.

Ironically, prior to the bomb exploding directly over the Urakami Cathedral, Nagasaki was the most Christian city in Japan, and the massive cathedral had

been the largest Christian church building in the Orient.

Those Christian airmen, following their wartime orders to the letter, did their job, and they accomplished the mission with military pride. Most Christian Americans would have done what they did if they had been in the shoes of the crew.

And, if those Christians had never seen, heard or smelled the suffering humanity that the bomb caused on the ground, most of them would not have experienced any remorse for their participation in the atrocity – especially if they had been blindly treated as heroes in the aftermath.

Some of the crew did admit that they had had some doubts about what they had participated in afterwards. But none of them actually witnessed the horrific suffering of the tens of thousands of victims up close and personal.

“Orders are orders” and must be obeyed, and disobedience in wartime was known to be severely punishable, even by summary execution. So the bomber crew had no alternative but to obey the orders. Even the two chaplains had no doubts before they finally understood what they had participated in.

Hard for Japan to Surrender

It had been only three days since the August 6th bomb had incinerated Hiroshima. The Nagasaki bomb was dropped amidst massive chaos and confusion in Tokyo, where the fascist military command was meeting with the Emperor Hirohito to discuss how to surrender with honor. The military leadership of both nations had known for months that Japan had already lost the war.

The only obstacle to ending the war had been the Allied Powers insistence on unconditional surrender (which meant that Hirohito would have been removed from his figurehead position in Japan and perhaps even subjected to war crime trials). That demand was intolerable for the Japanese, who regarded the Emperor as a deity.

The USSR had declared war against Japan the day before (Aug. 8), hoping to regain territories lost to Japan in the humiliating (for Russia) Russo-Japanese War 40 years earlier, and Stalin’s army was advancing across Manchuria. Russia’s entry into the war had been encouraged by President Harry Truman before he knew of the success of the atom bomb test in New Mexico on July 16.

But now, Truman and his strategists knew that the bomb could elicit Japan’s surrender without Stalin’s help. So, not wanting to divide any of the spoils of war with the USSR, and because the U.S. wanted to send an early Cold War message to Russia (that the U.S. was the new planetary superpower), Truman ordered

bomber command to proceed with using the atomic bombs against a handful of targets as weather permitted and as atomic bombs became available (although no more fissionable material was actually available to make another bomb after Nagasaki).

Decision to Target Nagasaki

Aug. 1, 1945, was the earliest deployment date for the Japanese atom bombing missions, and the Target Committee in Washington, D.C. had already developed a short list of relatively un-damaged Japanese cities that were to be excluded from the conventional USAAF (US Army Air Force) fire-bombing campaigns (that, during the first half of 1945, had used napalm, augmented by high explosives, to burn to the ground over 60 essentially defenseless Japanese cities).

The list of protected cities included Hiroshima, Niigata, Kokura, Kyoto and Nagasaki. Those five cities were to be off-limits to the terror bombings that the other cities were being subjected to. They were to be preserved as potential targets for the new "gimmick" weapon that had been researched and developed in labs and manufacturing plants all across America over the several years since the Manhattan Project had begun.

Ironically, prior to August 6 and 9, the residents of those five cities had considered themselves lucky for not having been bombed as had the other large cities. Little did the residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki know that they were only being temporarily spared for an even worse carnage from a revolutionary experimental weapon that could cause the mass annihilation of entire cities and their human guinea pig inhabitants.

The plutonium bomb that had been field tested at Alamogordo, New Mexico, was identical to the one that was dropped at Nagasaki. It had been blasphemously code-named "Trinity" (a distinctly Christian term) and had been detonated in secrecy three weeks earlier on July 16, 1945. The results were impressive, but the blast had just killed a few hapless coyotes, rabbits, snakes and some other desert varmints.

Trinity had produced large amounts of an entirely new type of rock that was later called "Trinitite." Trinitite was a "man-made" radioactive molten lava rock that had been created from the intense heat that was twice the temperature of the sun. Samples of it still exist in the desert at Alamogordo.

At 3 a.m. on the morning of Aug. 9, 1945, a B-29 Superfortress bomber (that had been "christened" Bock's Car) took off from Tinian Island in the South Pacific, with the prayers and blessings of the crew's two chaplains. Barely making it off the runway just yards before the heavily loaded plane could have gone into the

ocean (the bomb weighed 10,000 pounds), it headed north for Kokura, the primary target.

Bock's Car's bomb was code-named "Fat Man," partly because of its shape and partly to honor the rotund Winston Churchill. "Little Boy," first called "Thin Man" (after President Franklin Roosevelt), was the code name of the uranium bomb that had been dropped on Hiroshima three days earlier.

Japan's Supreme War Council in Tokyo, scheduled to convene their next meeting at 11 a.m. on Aug. 9, had absolutely no comprehension of what had really happened at Hiroshima. So the members had no heightened sense of urgency. The council was mostly concerned about Russia's declaration of war.

But it was already too late, because by the time the War Council members were arising and heading to the meeting with the emperor, there was no chance to alter the course of history. Bock's Car – flying under radio silence – was already approaching the southern islands of Japan, heading for Kokura, the primary target. The crew was hoping to beat an anticipated typhoon and the approaching clouds that would have delayed the mission.

The Bock's Car crew had instructions to drop the bomb only on visual sighting. But Kokura was clouded over. After making three failed bomb runs over the clouded-over city and then experiencing engine trouble on one of the four engines (using up valuable fuel all the while) the plane headed for its secondary target, Nagasaki.

History of Nagasaki Christianity

Nagasaki is famous in the history of Japanese Christianity. The city had the largest concentration of Christians in all of Japan. St. Mary's Urakami Cathedral was the megachurch of its time, with 12,000 baptized members.

Nagasaki was the community where the legendary Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier planted a mission church in 1549. The Catholic community at Nagasaki grew and eventually prospered over the next several generations. However it eventually became clear to the Japanese that the (Catholic) Portuguese and Spanish commercial interests were exploiting Japan. It didn't take very long before all Europeans – and their very foreign religion – were expelled from the country.

From 1600 until 1850, being a Christian in Japan was a capital crime (punishable by death). In the early 1600s, Japanese Christians who refused to recant of their new faith were subject to unspeakable tortures – including crucifixion. After a well-publicized mass crucifixion was orchestrated, the reign of terror stopped, and it appeared to all observers that Japanese Christianity was extinct.

However, 250 years later, after the gunboat diplomacy of U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry forced open an offshore island for American trade purposes, it was discovered that there were thousands of baptized Christians in Nagasaki, living their faith in secret in a catacomb-like existence, completely unknown to the government.

With this revelation, the Japanese government started another purge; but because of international pressure, the persecutions stopped and Nagasaki Christianity came up from the underground. By 1917, with no financial help from the government, the re-vitalized Christian community had built their massive cathedral in the Urakami River district of Nagasaki.

So it was the height of irony that the massive Cathedral – one of only two Nagasaki landmarks that could be positively identified from 31,000 feet up – became Ground Zero. (The other identifiable aiming point landmark was the Mitsubishi armaments factory complex – which had run out of raw materials because of the successful Allied naval blockade.)

At 11:02 a.m., during Thursday morning confessions, an unknown number of Nagasaki Christians were boiled, evaporated, carbonized or otherwise disappeared in a scorching, radioactive fireball that exploded 500 meters above the cathedral.

The “black rain” that soon came down from the mushroom cloud also contained the mingled cellular remains of many Nagasaki Christians as well as many more Shintoists and Buddhists. The theological implications of Nagasaki’s Black Rain surely should boggle the minds of theologians of all denominations.

Nagasaki Christian Body Count

Most Nagasaki Christians did not survive the blast. Six thousand of them died instantly, including all who were at confession that morning. Of the 12,000 church members, 8,500 of them eventually died as a result of the bomb. Many of the others were seriously sickened with a highly lethal entirely new disease: radiation sickness.

Located near the cathedral were three orders of nuns and a Christian girl’s school. They all disappeared into black smoke or became chunks of charcoal. Tens of thousands of other innocent non-Christian non-combatants also died instantly, and many more were mortally or incurably wounded. Some of the original victims (and their progeny) are still suffering from the trans-generational malignancies and immune deficiencies caused by the deadly plutonium and other radioactive isotopes produced by the bomb.

And here is one of the most important ironies: **What the Japanese Imperial**

government could not do in 250 years of persecution (i.e., to destroy Japanese Christianity) American Christians did in mere seconds.

Even after a slow revival of Christianity after WWII, membership in Japanese Christian churches still represents a tiny fraction of 1 percent of the general population, and the average attendance at Christian worship services across the nation is reported to be only 30 per Sunday. The decimation of Nagasaki crippled what at one time was a vibrant church.

Father George Zabelka was the Catholic chaplain for the 509th Composite Group (the 1,500-man USAAF group whose only mission was to deliver atomic bombs to Japanese civilian targets). Zabelka was one of the few World War II clergy leaders who eventually came to recognize the serious contradictions between what his modern church had taught him and what the early pacifist church believed concerning homicidal violence.

Several decades after Zabelka was discharged from the military chaplaincy, he finally concluded that both he and his church had made serious ethical and theological errors in religiously legitimating the organized mass slaughter that is modern war. He eventually came to understand that (as he articulated it) “the enemy of me and the enemy of my nation is not an enemy of God. Rather my enemy and my nation’s enemy are children of God who are loved by God and who therefore are to be loved (and not killed) by me as a follower of that loving God.”

Father Zabelka’s sudden conversion away from the standardized war-tolerant Christianity changed his Detroit, Michigan ministry around 180 degrees. His absolute commitment to the truth of gospel nonviolence – just like Martin Luther King’s commitment – inspired him to devote the remaining decades of his life to speaking out against violence in all its forms, including the violence of militarism, racism and economic exploitation.

Zabelka travelled to Nagasaki on the 50th anniversary of the bombing, tearfully repenting and asking for forgiveness for the part he had played in the crime.

Likewise, the Lutheran chaplain for the 509th, Pastor William Downey (formerly of Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota), in his counseling of soldiers who had become troubled by their participation in making murder for the state, later denounced all killing, whether by a single bullet or by weapons of mass destruction.

Wars That Ruined Their Souls?

In Daniel Hallock’s important book, *Hell, Healing and Resistance*, the author described a 1997 Buddhist retreat that was led by the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. The retreat involved a number of combat-traumatized Vietnam War veterans

who had left the Christianity of their birth.

The veterans had responded positively to Nhat Hanh's ministrations. Hallock wrote, "Clearly, Buddhism offers something that cannot be found in institutional Christianity. But then why should veterans embrace a religion that has blessed the wars that ruined their souls? It is no wonder that they turn to a gentle Buddhist monk to hear what are, in large part, the truths of Christ."

Hallock's comment should be a sobering wake-up call to Christian leaders who seem to regard as important both the recruitment of new members and the retention of old ones. The fact that the U.S. is a highly militarized nation makes the truths of gospel nonviolence difficult to teach and preach, especially to military veterans (particularly the homeless, psychologically tormented, spiritually-depleted, malnourished, over-diagnosed, over-medicated, over-vaccinated, homicidal and suicidal ones) who may have lost their faith because of horrors experienced on the battlefield.

I am a retired physician who has dealt with hundreds of psychologically traumatized patients (including combat-traumatized war veterans), and I know that violence, in all its forms, can irretrievably damage the mind, body, brain and spirit. But the fact that the combat-traumatized type is totally preventable – and oftentimes impossible to cure – makes prevention work really important.

An ounce of prevention is indeed worth a pound of cure when it comes to combat-induced PTSD. And where Christian churches should and could be instrumental in the prevention of the soul-destroying combat-type PTSD is by counseling their members to not participate in it (which should be obvious when considering the ethical message of the nonviolent Jesus, a message that guided the pacifist church in the first three centuries of its existence)

Experiencing violence, whether as victimizer or victim, can be deadly, and it can run through families like a contagion. I have seen violence, neglect, abuse and the resultant traumatic psychological and neurological illnesses spread through both military and non-military families – even involving the third and fourth generations after the initial victimizations.

And that has been the experience of the hibakusha (the long-suffering atomic bomb survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), whose progeny continue to suffer disease – which has likewise been the experience of many of the progeny of the warrior-perpetrators who participated in the act of killing in every war.

Years ago I saw an unpublished Veteran's Administration study that showed that, whereas most Vietnam War-era soldiers were active members of Christian churches before they went off to war, if they came home with PTSD, the percentage

returning to their faith community approached zero. Daniel Hallock's sobering message above helps explain why that is so.

Therefore the church – at least by its silence on the critical issues of war and war preparation – seems to be actually promoting (rather than forbidding) homicidal violence, contrary to the ethical teachings of Jesus, by failing to teach what the primitive church understood was one of the core teachings of Jesus, who preached, in effect, that “violence is forbidden for those who wish to follow me.”

Therefore, by refraining from warning their adolescent members about the faith- and soul-destroying realities of war, the church is directly undermining the “retention” strategies in which all churches engage. The hidden history of Nagasaki thus has valuable lessons for American Christianity.

Bock's Car Crew and Chain of Command

The members of the Bock's Car bomber crew, like conscripted or enlisted men in any war, were at the bottom of a long, complex and very anonymous chain of command whose superiors demand unconditional obedience from those below them in the chain.

The Bock's Car crew had been ordered to “pull the trigger” of the lethal weapon that had been conceptualized, designed, funded, manufactured and armed by any number of other entities, none of which would feel morally responsible for doing the dirty deed because they didn't have literal blood on their hands.

As is true in all wars, soldier trigger-pullers are often the ones unjustly singled out and blamed for the killing in the combat zone, and therefore they often have the worst post-war guilt and shame that is often the most lethal part of combat-induced PTSD (other than the suicide and violence-inducing aspects of many psychiatric drugs and the chronic illness-stimulating aspects of the over-vaccination schedules to which all military recruits are subjected).

However, the religious chaplains that are responsible for their spiritual lives of their soldiers, are also at the bottom of the chain of command and may share their guilt feelings. Neither group usually knows the real reasons their commanders are ordering them to kill or participate in the killing operations.

The early church leaders, who knew the teachings and actions of Jesus best, rejected the nationalist, racist and militarist agendas of whatever passed for nationalism 2,000 years ago.

And by following the Sermon on the Mount, true Christians of today similarly reject the homicidal agendas of the national security state, the military-

industrial-congressional complex, the war-profiteering corporations, the mesmerizing major media, and the eye-for-an-eye retaliation church doctrines that have, over the past 1,700 years, enabled baptized and confirmed Christians to, if ordered to do so, willingly kill other humans in the name of Christ.

Gary G. Kohls is a retired physician from Duluth, MN, USA. He writes a weekly column for the Reader, Duluth's alternative newsweekly magazine. His columns mostly deal with the dangers of American fascism, corporatism, militarism, racism, malnutrition, psychiatric drugging, over-vaccination regimens, Big Pharma and other movements that threaten the environment or America's health, democracy, civility and longevity. Many of his columns are archived at http://duluthreader.com/articles/categories/200_Duty_to_Warn, http://www.globalresearch.ca/authors?query=Gary+Kohls+articles&by=&p=&page_id= or at <https://www.transcend.org/tms/search/?q=gary+kohls+articles>

When Black Lives Surely Didn't Matter

Many whites counter the Black Lives Matter movement with the rejoinder "all lives matter," a way of ignoring the ugly American history of torturing, shooting and lynching blacks, as Gary G. Kohls recalls, citing two notorious cases.

By Gary G. Kohls

Sixty-one years ago this week (July 25, 1955), an innocent 14-year-old black youth, Emmett Till, was kidnapped, tortured and murdered by an angry vigilante mob of white racists in Money, Mississippi. Ninety-six years ago last month (June 15, 1920), three innocent black men were tortured and murdered by an angry vigilante mob of white racists in Duluth, Minnesota.

A couple of days ago, ex-Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan and Louisiana Republican Party member David Duke announced his candidacy for the U.S. Senate, crediting the political statements and announced agenda of Donald Trump and, presumably, the platform of the Republican Party. Months earlier, after Duke publicly endorsed Trump for President, Trump unconvincingly claimed that he didn't know anything about Duke.

Because a multitude of unbiased observers have documented what is obvious to many others (that white racism is alive and well in America), I submit extended excerpts of two articles that will give readers a historical perspectives on the "black lives don't matter" reality of our not-too-distant racist past.

A Mob Lynches Three Black Men, by Chriss Julin and Stephanis Hemphill, June 2001:

On a June night in 1920, hundreds of angry men and thousands of curious onlookers surrounded the downtown headquarters of the Duluth police department. The crowd might have reached 10,000. They wanted the handful of police officers inside to turn over their prisoners – a group of young, black circus workers.

The police had arrested the men earlier that day. They accused some of the out-of-towners of raping a young, white woman at the circus grounds. Later investigations cast serious doubt on the rape charges, but the howling mob outside the police station had no doubts.

“This is where the mob broke in,” says Michael Fedo, who wrote a book about the 1920 lynchings. “I think this was a Sears store or a hardware store. The mob came into this store – which is now the casino – and the proprietor gave them rope for the hangings and said it was on the house.”

Standing in the heart of downtown Duluth, Fedo points across Superior St. to a handsome, three-story brownstone building full of offices. The word “POLICE” is still carved in the stone over the door.

Fedo says when the mob closed in on the police station, the city’s public safety commissioner ordered the 12 officers inside to holster their guns. He didn’t want anyone in the crowd to get hurt. A few officers came out onto the street, and tried to fight the mob back with their bare hands and a fire hose. But the crowd surged past them into the jail, with a roar that could be heard a mile away.

“Most of the cells were on the second floor, so they went in and broke into several of the cells.”

While members of the mob sawed and smashed on the bars, some of the men inside the cells pleaded their innocence. Others prayed.

“The people in the mob believed that six had attacked the girl, so they tried to get six – they only managed to get into three of the cells. There were several people in the cells with the prisoners, asking questions, trying to find out in their minds who the six were among the more than a dozen who were in the cells,” says Fedo.

“The people who were outside were saying, ‘Just give us somebody,’ and that first somebody was a young man named Isaac McGhie, who was just thrown from the cell to the hands of the mob who took him out front, brought him up the hill here one block, where he was the first one hanged,” Fedo recalls.

Isaac McGhie was beaten and bloody when he got to this corner, right next to the Duluth Shrine Temple, which is still here.

"This is where they were brought to be hanged. I don't know why they would have been brought up the hill instead of down the hill. But it may have been because there was a young man perched on top of this pole, and they just assumed, 'He's already there, we'll take them up there, we'll have this kid tie a knot on the lamppost above the street, and take care of business that way,'" says Fedo.

A priest named William Powers pushed his way to the front of the crowd, and climbed part way up the lamppost. The priest managed to quiet the crowd for a few moments. He begged them to stop. But members of the mob pulled Rev. Powers down, and hoisted Isaac McGhie up.

Then the mob dragged Elmer Jackson and Elias Clayton out of the jail, and up the hill to the street light. When all three men were hanging, battered and dead, the crowd parted so a photographer could capture the scene.

"This was a significantly posed photo," says Fedo. "It took a couple of automobiles with lights to illuminate the scene so the photographer could get his picture taken."

In the center of the crisp, black and white photo, Elmer Jackson and Isaac McGhie hang from the street light, stripped to the waist, their necks impossibly stretched and twisted. Elias Clayton lies beneath their feet, tossed onto the sidewalk, to make it easier to frame the picture. Dozens of men lean into the picture facing the camera.

"What this looks like is the kind of photo you would see at a hunting lodge, where the guys had been out shooting bear, and they came back and they said, 'We got three.' You can see people on tip-toe. They've crowded into this shot. These are not people who are ashamed to be seen here. This is, 'I want to be in this picture.'"

"The one that quite stood out is the fellow who's to the left of the bodies who is beaming. He looks like he's very proud of what has transpired, and that is the face that really stands out to me," says Fedo.

Someone made postcards out of the photo, and sold them as souvenirs. Postcards of lynchings were fairly common. A recent book, *Without Sanctuary*, is a collection of photos and postcards from nearly 100 lynchings. It includes the picture from Duluth.

A lynching in northern Minnesota was big news. It made headlines across the country. It stayed in the local news for months during the criminal trials that

followed. Juries in Duluth convicted three men of rioting. The longest sentence served was two years. No one was convicted of murder. But one of the black men who survived the attack on the jail was convicted of rape, in spite of compelling evidence he was innocent. He served four years in prison.

And then, the story of the lynching disappeared from the news.

The Face of Emmett Till By "Big Tex" – May 14, 2009:

On September 6, 1955, a little over a week after he was kidnapped, beaten, and murdered (*July 25, 1955*) for whistling at a white woman, Emmett Till was laid to rest at Burr Oak Cemetery in Alsip, Illinois.

By the time his journey to the grave had ended, Till's body had been seen by as many as 50,000 people who personally came to view his body at a Chicago funeral home. But before long, it would be seen by millions more, as photographs of his badly disfigured corpse circulated around the country, ultimately appearing on the cover of *Jet* magazine.

The image of a 14-year-old boy with his eye gouged out and his head caved in was a shock to the senses of all who saw it; but it was also a rallying point for a generation of young African-Americans, and many whites as well, who saw in his mutilated face the suffering of a people, and who were inspired to end that suffering by organizing, by marching, and by voting.

The face of Emmett Till might not have inspired so many if it were not for the grim determination of his mother, Mamie Till Bradley. The funeral home where Till's body was displayed resisted allowing the casket to be opened, but Mrs. Bradley insisted, threatening to open the casket herself if need be. She wanted to see her son one last time before he left this world, but she wanted others to see him too. And so, because of her perseverance, the casket of Emmett Till was opened, his body was photographed for posterity, and the world saw what they did to Mrs. Bradley's baby.

For African-Americans in the South, the horrors reflected in the face of Emmett Till were a daily fact of life. But for African-Americans who had moved away from the South and its Jim Crow laws to places like Chicago, the face of Emmett Till was a reminder that the brutality of racism could not be left behind so easily.

As for white Americans, they were forced to take a serious look at the human toll of the injustice that they had participated in, or tolerated, or tried to ignore. Though many whites, particularly in the South, were unmoved by what they

saw (or at least pretended to be), many more were deeply affected by it.

Despite the publicity and anger generated by the photographs of Emmett Till, the people who murdered him were never brought to justice. A little over two weeks after Till was laid to rest, an all-white, all-male jury acquitted the only two men ever formally charged with his murder: Roy Bryant, the husband of the woman who Till whistled at, and Bryant's half-brother, J.W. Milam. Both men would later admit to murdering Till, safe from prosecution due to double jeopardy protection. They're dead now, and while as many as 12 other people may have participated in the crime, no one else has been charged in connection with Till's murder.

But though Emmett Till and his family never received justice from the state of Mississippi, the wave of activism spawned by those who were inspired by the sight of his mutilated body brought justice of a different sort.

The face of Emmett Till would inspire Rosa Parks not to give up her seat on a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama later that year. It would inspire nine African-American schoolchildren to desegregate Little Rock Central High School in 1957. It would inspire sit-ins in Greensboro in 1960, and Freedom Riders in 1961. It would inspire voter registration drives, and a letter from a Birmingham jail cell. It would inspire over 300,000 people to march on Washington, and millions to dream of a day when people would "not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." It would inspire the Freedom Summer of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

And more than 50 years after the death of Emmett Till, in a country where racism still endures but without the power that it once had, it would inspire millions of voters, black and white, to reject the prejudices and fears of the past, and elect the son of a white woman from Kansas and a black man from Kenya to be the 44th President of the United States.

Today, as we consider the decision of that same President to block the release of hundreds of photographs showing the torture and abuse of detainees in Afghanistan and Iraq, I hope that those of us who are defending his decision will consider the example of Emmett Till, and of how seeing with open eyes the horrors that he endured brought about change in the hearts and minds of so many.

Bush, Cheney, and their subordinates may have given the order to torture detainees, but it was the apathy, fear, and ignorance of millions of Americans that laid the groundwork for these abuses to take place.

We as a nation need to be confronted with our failures and to take ownership of them, so we can set a positive example for young Americans to prevent such

abuses from happening in the future. And we need to show those outside America that we can and will live up to our democratic values, so that we'll be taken seriously when we attempt to share those values with the rest of the world. This isn't about the next election—it's about the next generation, and about what kind of America they will build on the ashes of what we allowed to be ruined.

The Death Of Emmett Till – by Bob Dylan

'Twas down in Mississippi not so long ago

When a young boy from Chicago town stepped through a Southern door
This boy's dreadful tragedy I can still remember well
The color of his skin was black and his name was Emmett Till
Some men they dragged him to a barn and there they beat him up
They said they had a reason, but I can't remember what
They tortured him and did some things too evil to repeat
There were screaming sounds inside the barn,
there was laughing sounds out on the street
Then they rolled his body down a gulf
amidst a bloody red rain
And they threw him in the waters wide to cease his screaming pain
The reason that they killed him there, and I'm sure it ain't no lie
Was just for the fun of killin' him and to watch him slowly die
And then to stop the United States of yelling for a trial
Two brothers they confessed that they had killed poor Emmett Till
But on the jury there were men who helped the brothers commit this awful crime
And so this trial was a mockery, but nobody seemed to mind
I saw the morning papers but I could not bear to see
The smiling brothers walkin' down the courthouse stairs
For the jury found them innocent and the brothers they went free
While Emmett's body floats the foam of a Jim Crow southern sea
If you can't speak out against this kind of thing, a crime that's so unjust
Your eyes are filled with dead men's dirt, your mind is filled with dust
Your arms and legs they must be in shackles and chains, and your blood it must refuse to flow
For you let this human race fall down so God-awful low!
This song is just a reminder to remind your fellow man
That this kind of thing still lives today in that ghost-robed Ku Klux Klan
But if all of us folks that thinks alike, if we gave all we could give
We could make this great land of ours a greater place to live

Gary G. Kohls is a retired physician from Duluth, Minnesota. He writes a weekly column for the Reader, Duluth's alternative newsweekly magazine. Many of his columns are archived at

http://duluthreader.com/articles/categories/200_Duty_to_Warn,

Forgetting the Crimes of War

In the U.S. political culture, Memorial Day has become one more chance to glorify American wars and to exploit U.S. soldiers' deaths to generate sentiment for more wars, a troubling tactic addressed by Gary G. Kohls and S. Brian Willson.

By Gary G. Kohls

One of the many heroes of the peace movement who came out of the Vietnam War was Vietnam veteran S. Brian Willson. Just like millions of other draft-age Americans, law student Willson had been drafted into that illegal and genocidal war – against his will – and came back disturbed and angry.

For reasons discussed below, he joined the anti-war movement after witnessing the Reagan/Bush Central American war after he traveled to Nicaragua and saw peasants being murdered by US-backed Contras (aka “freedom fighters”). Willson joined the antiwar movement in 1986 and has protested vigorously against America's aggressive war policies ever since.

But his real life change came on Sept. 1, 1987, in Concord, California, where Willson was part of a gathering of antiwar protestors that were symbolically trying to stop the transport of weapons from a U.S. Navy munitions base. The weapons were destined for Nicaragua and El Salvador as part of the U.S.-backed war in Central America.

As a Vietnam veteran, Willson understood well the satanic nature of America's perpetual wars against peasants, campesinos and other poor people in Third World countries who were unjustly accused of being “communists” as they were seeking relief from the tyranny of their ruling classes. He also knew about the poisonous realities of military toxins that are used in war that regularly poison innocent civilians, children, babies, villages, farm fields, water supplies and all the future inhabitants of the warzone.

Willson felt so strongly about the criminality of his country's foreign policy against militarily inferior countries, that he put himself directly in harm's way that day by lying down in front of the weapons supply train, expecting the engineer to stop. Instead of stopping, the engineer actually increased its speed above the speed limit and ran over him, severing both legs. The engineer later testified that he had only been obeying orders on how to deal with antiwar protesters.

Willson survived his near-fatal injuries, and he became a universally celebrated

near-martyr for peace. He has vowed to spend the rest of his life speaking out against war. The piece below was written on May 27, 2016, and published in CounterPunch.

The Vietnam War radically changed him from a conservative Republican who had been raised in a Christian fundamentalist household. In Willson's autobiography, titled *Blood on the Tracks: The Life and Times of S. Brian Willson*, he wrote about his war experience:

"in April 1969, I witnessed the incredible destruction that had just been inflicted (by aerial bombing and napalm 'practice') ... on a typically defenseless village about the size of a large baseball stadium. With smoldering ruins throughout, the ground was strewn with bodies of villagers and their farm animals, many of whom were motionless and bloody, murdered from bomb shrapnel and napalm. Several were trying to get up on their feet, and others were moving ever so slightly as they cried and moaned. Most of the victims I witnessed were women and children.

"At one dramatic moment I encountered at close range a young wounded woman lying on the ground clutching three young disfigured children. I stared, aghast, at the woman's open eyes. Upon closer examination, I discovered that she, and what I presumed were her children, all were dead, but napalm had melted much of the woman's facial skin, including her eyelids. As the Vietnamese lieutenant and I silently made the one-plus hour return trip to our airbase in my jeep, I knew that my life was never going to be the same again."

An eyewitness to Willson's 1987 act of resistance to the US War Machine wrote that Brian questioned "the lessons of 'patriotism' with which we so proudly indoctrinate our children, especially our boy children. ... Nearly twenty years later, I stood just behind Brian on a California train track in a well-publicized effort to block munitions trains carrying American weapons to kill other poor villagers in El Salvador and Nicaragua, thinking about the words he had spoken that morning, before one of those trains ripped his legs from his body. He said, '...each train that gets by us is going to kill people, people like you and me. ... And the question that I have to ask on these tracks is: am I any more valuable than those people?'"

Here is the latest, very powerful testimony about what he thinks of Memorial Day from the American antiwar hero, S. Brian Willson:

Remembering All the Deaths From All of Our Wars

By S. Brian Willson – May 27, 2016

Celebration of Memorial Day in the US, originally Decoration Day, commenced

shortly after the conclusion of the Civil War. This is a national holiday to remember the people who died while serving in the armed forces. The day traditionally includes decorating graves of the fallen with flowers.

As a Viet Nam veteran, I know the kinds of pain and suffering incurred by over three million US soldiers, marines, sailors, and airmen, 58,313 of whom paid the ultimate price whose names are on The Vietnam Wall in Washington, DC. The Oregon Vietnam Memorial Wall alone, located here in Portland, contains 803 names on its walls.

The function of a memorial is to preserve memory. On this US Memorial Day, May 30, 2016, I want to preserve the memory of all aspects of the US war waged against the Southeast Asian people in Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia – what we call the Viet Nam War – as well as the tragic impacts it had on our own people and culture. My own healing and recovery requires me to honestly describe the war and understand how it has impacted me psychically, spiritually, and politically.

Likewise, the same remembrance needs to be practiced for both our soldiers and the victims in all the other countries affected by US wars and aggression. For example, the US incurred nearly 7,000 soldier deaths while causing as many as one million in Afghanistan and Iraq alone, a ratio of 1:143.

It is important to identify very concretely the pain and suffering we caused the Vietnamese – a people who only wanted to be independent from foreign occupiers, whether Chinese, France, Japan, or the United States of America. As honorably, and in some cases heroically, our military served and fought in Southeast Asia, we were nonetheless serving as cannon fodder, in effect mercenaries for reasons other than what we were told.

When I came to understand the true nature of the war, I felt betrayed by my government, by my religion, by my cultural conditioning into “American Exceptionalism,” which did a terrible disservice to my own humanity, my own life’s journey. Thus, telling the truth as I uncover it is necessary for recovering my own dignity.

I am staggered by the amount of firepower the US used, and the incredible death and destruction it caused on an innocent people. Here are some statistics:

–Seventy-five percent of South Viet Nam was considered a free-fire zone (i.e., genocidal zones)

–Over 6 million Southeast Asians killed

–Over 64,000 US and Allied soldiers killed

- Over 1,600 US soldiers, and 300,000 Vietnamese soldiers remain missing
- Thousands of amputees, paraplegics, blind, deaf, and other maimings created
- 13,000 of 21,000 of Vietnamese villages, or 62 percent, severely damaged or destroyed, mostly by bombing
- Nearly 950 churches and pagodas destroyed by bombing
- 350 hospitals and 1,500 maternity wards destroyed by bombing
- Nearly 3,000 high schools and universities destroyed by bombing
- Over 15,000 bridges destroyed by bombing
- 10 million cubic meters of dikes destroyed by bombing
- Over 3,700 US fixed-wing aircraft lost
- 36,125,000 US helicopter sorties during the war; over 10,000 helicopters were lost or severely damaged
- 26 million bomb craters created, the majority from B-52s (a B-52 bomb crater could be 20 feet deep, and 40 feet across)
- 39 million acres of land in Indochina (or 91 percent of the land area of South Viet Nam) were littered with fragments of bombs and shells, equivalent to 244,000 (160 acre) farms, or an area the size of all New England except Connecticut
- 21 million gallons (80 million liters) of extremely poisonous chemicals (herbicides) were applied in 20,000 chemical spraying missions between 1961 and 1970 in the most intensive use of chemical warfare in human history, with as many as 4.8 million Vietnamese living in nearly 3,200 villages directly sprayed by the chemicals
- 24 percent, or 16,100 square miles, of South Viet Nam was sprayed, an area larger than the states of Connecticut, Vermont, and Rhode Island combined, killing tropical forest, food crops, and inland forests
- Over 500,000 Vietnamese have died from chronic conditions related to chemical spraying with an estimated 650,000 still suffering from such conditions; 500,000 children have been born with Agent Orange-induced birth defects, now including third generation offspring
- Nearly 375,000 tons of fire-balling napalm was dropped on villages

–Huge Rome Plows (made in Rome, Georgia), 20-ton earthmoving D7E Caterpillar tractors, fitted with a nearly 2.5-ton curved 11-foot wide attached blade protected by 14 additional tons of armor plate, scraped clean between 700,000 and 750,000 acres (1,200 square miles), an area equivalent to Rhode Island, leaving bare earth, rocks, and smashed trees

–As many as 36,000,000 total tons of ordnance expended from aerial and naval bombing, artillery, and ground combat firepower. On an average day, US artillery expended 10,000 rounds costing \$1 million per day; 150,000-300,000 tons of UXO remain scattered around Southeast Asia: 40,000 have been killed in Viet Nam since the end of the war in 1975, and nearly 70,000 injured; 20,000 Laotians have been killed or injured since the end of the war

–7 billion gallons of fuel were consumed by US forces during the war

–If there was space for all 6,000,000 names of Southeast Asian dead on the Vietnam Wall in Washington, DC, it would be over 9 sobering miles long, or nearly 100 times its current 493 foot length

I am not able to memorialize our sacrificed US soldiers without also remembering the death and destroyed civilian infrastructure we caused in our illegal invasion and occupation of Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia. It has been 47 years since I carried out my duties in Viet Nam. My “service” included being an eyewitness to the aftermath of bombings from the air of undefended fishing villages where virtually all the inhabitants were massacred, the vast majority being small children. In that experience, I felt complicit in a diabolical crime against humanity. This experience led me to deeply grasping that I am not worth more than any other human being, and they are not worth less than me.

Recently I spent more than three weeks in Viet Nam, my first trip back since involuntarily being sent there in 1969. I was struck by the multitudes of children suffering from birth defects, most caused presumably by the US chemical spraying some 50 years ago. I experienced deep angst knowing that the US is directly responsible for this genetic damage now being passed on from one generation to the next. I am ashamed that the US government has never acknowledged responsibility or paid reparations. I found myself apologizing to the people for the crimes of my country.

When we only memorialize US soldiers while ignoring the victims of our aggression, we in effect are memorializing war. I cannot do that. War is insane, and our country continues to perpetuate its insanity on others, having been constantly at war since at least 1991. We fail our duties as citizens if we remain silent rather than calling our US wars for what they are – criminal and deceitful aggressions violating international and US law to assure control of

geostrategic resources, deemed necessary to further our insatiable American Way Of Life (AWOL).

Memorial Day for me requires remembering *all* of the deaths and devastation of our wars, and it should remind all of us of the need to end the madness. If we want to end war, we must begin to directly address our out-of-control capitalist political economy that knows no limits to profits for a few at the expense of the many, including our soldiers.

Gary G. Kohls is a retired physician from Duluth, Minnesota. He writes a weekly column for the Reader, Duluth's alternative newsweekly magazine. His columns often deal with the dangers of American fascism, corporatism and militarism. Many of his columns are archived at http://duluthreader.com/articles/categories/200_Duty_to_Warn_and_at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/author/gary-g-kohls>.

In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in December addressed the dangers of global warming, the false narratives of the Mideast conflicts, and America's chaotic presidential politics.

["Near Boiling Point on Global Warming"](#) by Nat Parry, Dec. 1, 2015

["The US-Russia Proxy War in Syria"](#) by Ray McGovern, Dec. 1, 2015

["Obama Taunts Putin over Syria"](#) by Sam Hussein, Dec. 2, 2015

["Obama Ignores Russian Terror Victims"](#) by Robert Parry, Dec. 2, 2015

["The West's Deadly Mideast Fantasies"](#) by Mike Lofgren, Dec. 2, 2015

["NATO Picks a New Fight with Russia"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, Dec. 3, 2015

["Who Wants to Weaponize Outer Space?"](#) by Sam Hussein, Dec. 4, 2015

["Learning to Love the 'Drone War'"](#) by John Hanrahan, Dec. 4, 2015

["Suffering from Global Warming First"](#) by Dennis Bernstein and Andrea Carmen, Dec. 5, 2015

["PBS Joins the MSM's Syria-Russia Bias"](#) by Rick Sterling, Dec. 5, 2015

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[“A Call for Proof on Syria-Sarin Attack”](#) by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Dec. 22, 2015

[“The Grimmer Story Behind ‘Trumbo’”](#) by James DiEugenio, Dec. 24, 2015

[“A Christmas Message of Peace”](#) by Gary G. Kohls, Dec. 24, 2015

[“The Obsessive Putin-Bashing”](#) by Gilbert Doctorow, Dec. 26, 2015

[“The Misinformation Mess”](#) by Robert Parry, Dec. 28, 2015

[“One County’s Global Warming Failure”](#) by Robert Parry, Dec. 29, 2015

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