

WOULD I ENCOURAGE MY GRANDSONS TO GO TO WAR?

Willis Forrester is a regular reader of this space and a frequent critic. He, like many others, does not approve of the Iraqi war. I, on the other hand, would nuke anybody in the Middle East who even looked cross-eyed at us, until somebody apologized for what happened on 9/11 and promised to help us catch the scumbags responsible. Clearly, Mr. Forrester and I are not on the same page about the war.

Recently he asked, if I am so gung-ho on the war, would I encourage my grandsons to go fight in Iraq — Mr. Forrester's implication being that it is easy to be hawkish when someone else's son or grandson is being shot at. I briefly considered the kind of glib reply he has come to expect from me, but he asked a good question, and since it involved my grandsons he deserves a sincere response.

If my grandboys were pondering military service and asked if our country was worth going to war for, I would say yes. It is the greatest country on earth. No other country enjoys the freedoms we do. But I would remind them that our unique freedoms allow a despicable pile of dog doo like University of Colorado professor Ward Churchill to publicly disparage the innocent people killed in the World Trade Center attacks and be treated like a hero by his smug supporters. Our unique freedoms mean that our citizens can treat the American flag like a cheap dishrag and burn it whenever they are feeling cranky. The boys must be willing to put their lives at risk for people who think publicly trashing our country and its leaders is an act of selfless patriotism. It might make them wonder if we are worth the effort.

Should they ask about the War on Terror, I would tell them it is a very frustrating war for all Americans. The terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, were as reprehensible as Japan's unprovoked attack on Pearl Harbor 60 years earlier. But it was easy to identify and punish the perpetrators then. Today, terrorists lurk throughout the Middle East and beyond. President Bush evidently thought Afghanistan and Iraq were good places to start weeding out terrorists, and he knows more about the situation than I do or Mr. Forrester or even the New York Times, for that matter. Maybe the president got bad advice and weapons of mass destruction didn't exist in Iraq. Or, maybe because of this war, democracy will take root in the Middle East and the world will change for the better. History will make that final judgment.

If the boys did decide to join the military, I would pray harder than I have ever prayed in my life that they be kept from harm's way. I would remember that almost 1,700 young people have died so far in the war. I'm sure their families prayed for them, too. I would think of 1st Lt. Tyler Brown, killed by a sniper in Iraq last November. He was graduated from Woodward Academy, where both my kids went to school, and from Georgia Tech, which everybody south of the Arctic Circle knows that my grandson, Zack, will be attending this fall. Lt. Brown's death hit close to home.

If my grandsons were to show up at my house in their uniforms, I would be so proud I would pop my buttons. When they left, I would cry a river. If something bad happened to them, I don't think I could survive.

Would I encourage my grandsons to go to war? Never. But neither would I encourage them to run off to Canada to avoid military service or to desert if things got rough. There is nothing noble about cowardice, and I wouldn't want them to have to live with that feeling for the rest of their lives.

What my grandsons decide to do with their lives is not up to me. It is up to the boys and to their parents. I hope going to war is a decision they never have to face. War is hell. On that, Mr. Forrester and I can both agree.