

# Opinion

## Mandatory volunteer work — does it make sense?

American idealism, patriotism, and a new interest in volunteer service is spreading across the country. That's the good news. The bad news is that some of the nation's leaders want to make service mandatory. They have called for the creation of a system of national service that would summon American youth to do socially useful work such as preserving the environment, caring for the elderly and assisting the poor. Sounds like a great idea unless you're a young American.



Jo Streit

If for one do not want to spend a year of my life picking up beer cans in our national forests. Call me selfish.

The beauty of volunteer work is that it is voluntary. The individuals who give of themselves freely will do a better job than those who are forced to do the same work. Be assured, volunteer work is helpful and has an important place in our society, but forcing young people to do such work is wrong. This is a free country. Each individual has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I want to pursue my happiness without the federal government making career decisions for me.

The idea of national service is not

new. In 1906, American philosopher William James saw the need for the "moral equivalent of war." In other words, James wanted an equal alternative to military conscription as a means of national service. The notion has since then taken many forms and attracted many idealists, including several U.S. presidents.

In 1961, President Kennedy urged Americans to ask not what their country could do for them, but to ask what they could do for their country. Six weeks later, he established the Peace Corps to tap the immense reservoir of men and women eager to "sacrifice their energies and time and toil to the cause of world peace and human progress." But the Vietnam War brought disillusionment and a decline in Peace Corps volunteers. It also changed the attitudes of many Americans. Many began to think that the nation and its government weren't deserving of such personal sacrifice and service of its citizens.

Today, American idealism is making a comeback. On college campuses, there seems to be a new interest in volunteer community service. A few years ago, 75 university presidents announced the formation of a coalition to encourage students to take part in community service. Brown University offered fellowships to students who spent a year in public service. According to the university's 1985 estimate, one-fourth of Brown undergraduates were involved in community service. I know several

friends who have applied for the Peace Corps as well as other people who have worked in Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA).

These organizations do great work, but making participation in such groups mandatory is not only unjust, it's impractical. The sheer scope and cost of any genuinely national system of service prohibits the idea from becoming reality. The fact that in America about 4 million people turn 18 every year suggests that establishing a workable system of national service would not be easy. A compulsory system would somehow have to deal with that staggering number of youths. This would probably mean the creation of another govern-

ment agency requiring federal funding. Just what our financially-strapped government needs — another mouth to feed.

Of course, we have to consider how the American public, especially its young people, would react to such a system. We all know what a big hit talk of a draft was and I find it hard to believe the public would embrace any type of mandatory social service, either. National service is seen by some as a way of making a draft more acceptable and less unfair.

Despite the fact that social work may be desirable, the number of people who have actually volunteered their time and energy has been small compared to the

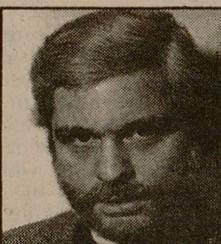
total population. The Peace Corps, since its founding, has sent more than 120,000 Americans to work in 94 countries. But the most volunteers it has had any one year was 15,556 (in 1966). The modest VISTA program has never had more than 5,000 volunteers in any year. These numbers suggest that, though people in our country will volunteer for social work, they will do so on a limited basis, not full time.

It's a good idea to infuse American youth with a purpose and the desire to help others. But mandatory national service will create more problems than its advocates claim it will solve.

Jo Streit is a senior journalism major and a columnist for The Battalion.

## Holocaust may become more than just a memory

The former death camp of Treblinka is now a memorial park set in a Polish forest. Unlike its more notorious counterpart, Auschwitz, the barracks and crematoriums are gone and idyllic forest has reclaimed the land. A long road leads to memorial stones which in various languages — Russian, French, Polish, Hebrew — say that in 13 months 900,000 persons were killed there. Most of them were Jews.



Richard Cohen

Now, in Israel, John Demjanjuk, a retired auto mechanic from Cleveland, is on trial. He is accused of being the notorious Ivan the Terrible, the bloodthirsty Ukrainian who operated Treblinka's gas chamber. If true, his crimes are almost beyond imagination. The Ivan of Treblinka was a sadist who delighted in murder and who, unlike his more fastidious and distant superior, Adolf Eichmann, enjoyed doing the job personally.

Demjanjuk's trial began in a 300-seat movie house, but was moved, out of popular demand, to a larger Jerusalem theater. There are elements of a show trial to the affair — an attempt by Israeli authorities to educate a whole new generation, and a changed culture, into the realities of the Holocaust. It has been 26 years since Eichmann's execution and much of Israel's population now consists of Oriental Jews from Africa and the Middle East — peoples untouched by the Holocaust.

But everything seems out of sorts. The trial of a Ukrainian-born Cleveland resident is taking place in a country that did not even exist at the time of his alleged crimes. Unlike Eichmann, who clearly was who he was, Demjanjuk says he is not Ivan the Terrible. Barring a confession on his part, not even a guilty verdict will put all doubts to rest. For some Americans, just the fact that the Soviet Union supplied evidence against Demjanjuk is enough to taint the case while, to still others, the anti-communism of Ukrainian collaborators with the Nazis forgives or explains everything. The present danger excuses past crimes.

Moreover, it has been almost 50 years since the Polish forest at Treblinka was cleared for the industrial murder of hu-

man beings, and time raises crucial questions: Can the witnesses really remember with any accuracy? Is the old Demjanjuk really the young Ivan the Terrible and, if he is the same person, is he really — in the truest sense of the word — the same man?

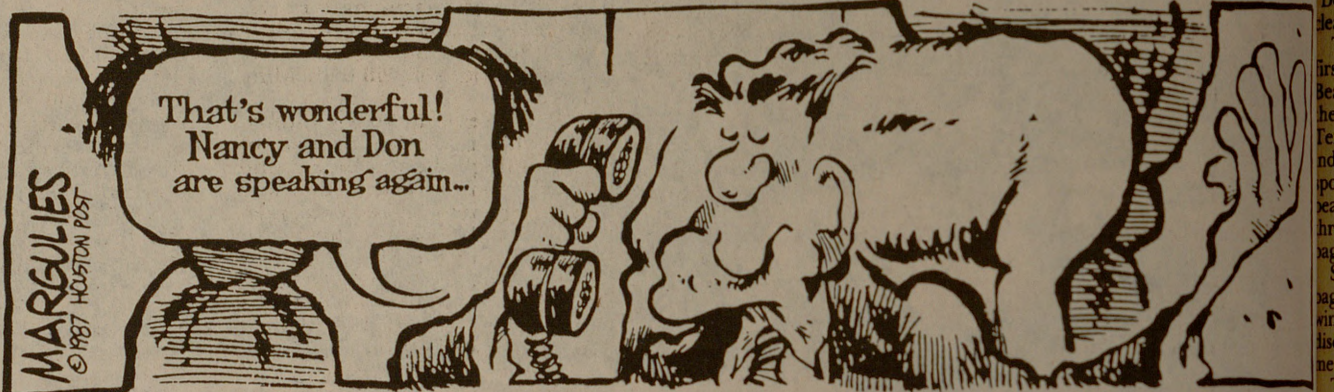
Does time and distance matter any: Is a young Ukrainian peasant infected with the religious and ethnic hatred of that region the same person as an elderly Ohio auto mechanic? Can the avuncular Demjanjuk, who burst into the courtroom shouting "Good morning" in Hebrew, be the same man who ordered a Jew to rape a 12-year-old girl and who, when rebuffed, shot them both?

Demjanjuk's culpability is hardly beside the point. But his larger historical function is to announce that the Holocaust was not just the work of Germans or Nazis and their hideous racial theories, but of ordinary people and their quite ordinary — but just as hideous — racial and religious prejudices. He is a symbol of cruelty and hatred of which the Holocaust is a unique example but which, even in our own time, can be found in Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Cambodia. Neither an ideologically crazed Nazi nor an SS officer under orders, Demjanjuk nevertheless could have been a sadistic killer under certain conditions and an amiable auto mechanic under other conditions.

It's always comforting to think of the Holocaust as a phenomenon that just happened and whose meaning cannot be applied elsewhere. It is reassuring to think of it as something that evil Nazis did to exotic Jews and leave it at that — assign it a place usually reserved for cataclysmic natural phenomena such as volcanic eruptions or floods in China from which we can take no lesson. But the reality of Ivan the Terrible and the alleged guilt of the plain Demjanjuk asserts otherwise. The killers were our neighbors.

Like the symbolic, if not the actual Demjanjuk, Treblinka is now what it was before the war. Except for the memorial stones, nothing announces that almost one million persons were murdered there — an ordinary place used, just briefly, for an extraordinary purpose. Each year, the forest encroaches on history and dims memory. The trial of Demjanjuk may clear a few trees.

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## Mail Call

### Band on the run

EDITOR:

In my recent letter concerning the solicitation of a local business by an Aggie Band member to raise funds for war games, my attempts to veil the incident with literary style were apparently insufficient. The band member recognized the business to which I was referring. In his understandable irritation, and his inability to locate my home phone number, he proceeded to contact one of the relatives of the owner of the business to tell her "what was what" in no uncertain terms. He then promised to withdraw all future business since my boss was responsible for my opinions.

Although this band member is a nice guy, concerned with protecting the image of the Corps and ensuring that the boys in the band have a good time while acting as ambassadors for the University, it's pathetic that actions such as his should make people afraid to express their opinions because of intimidation or possible economic reprisals on innocent parties. My boss has worked hard for years to establish a good working relationship with the Aggie Band, not just because she appreciates the business, but also because she truly admires and respects the image they present of the University. If the band members wish to retaliate, they should vent their frustrations against the person who expressed the opinion, not the unfortunate soul who happened to employ her. I should think that a blameless act could withstand any criticism.

Lynda Ward '87

### No problem here

EDITOR:

I am writing in response to the first letter submitted by Lynda Ward concerning donations for war games to the Aggie Band. Two weeks ago, I walked into a store of which Lynda Ward was a part-time employee. In the past two years the band has given this store a sizeable account, and being a student organization with a limited amount of funds, we often seek donations from merchants with which we do a significant amount of business. After explaining war games to the store owner and agreeing on a donation of \$25, she escorted me back to the accountant's office.

After drawing up the check to the Aggie Band, the accountant inquired as to the nature of the check. Having already explained this to the owner I simply stated "to just write donations." Ward, sitting at a side computer desk and unaware of my previous conversation with the store owner, decided that I was trying to deceive the accountant.

Later, after finding out what really happened and losing her job over it, Ward came to my dorm room and apologized. Since then, the owner and I have reconciled the situation. This letter is to clarify any misunderstanding of what actually happened. The reputation of the Aggie Band is one which all Aggie Bandmen cherish. I would hate to see the image tarnished.

Cody B. Hurd '87 accompanied by the signatures of the store owner and manager

### In search of new horizons

EDITOR:

I am one of the 19-year-old freshmen with a just-cleared-up face whom Lee Sullivan noted in his *Farmers Write* column Wednesday. I have three and a half years of structure and forced-academics left to endure at A&M for a degree. On my desk rests a college catalog mapping out an "acceptable" academic course. I stare out the window and wonder why I don't simply leave this town and the pile of required rhetoric behind.

With the money and time I'm spending here, I could see the world and study whatever I choose to think about. Then again, I'd not have a degree officially noting my intelligence, even though I'd surely know much more than the majority of the 22-year-olds sporting Aggie rings.

I am now termed a philosophy major, but one's specific major within the College of Liberal Arts doesn't really seem to matter. In this area, I find academia to be a mess of fine lines drawing vague divisions where there should be none. Liberal arts ought to be an area where a person can study on his or her own accord — as opposed to technical areas where structure is a must. I plan to leave A&M next semester and turn to a more liberal education at a small college in the Northeast. There, with the approval of advisers, liberal arts students may study what they please for the most part. I don't even know who or where my academic adviser is here at A&M. That's because no advice is needed. It's all laid out for us — no exceptions.

No wonder Lee Sullivan finds little student motivation. Students want only to get through the mess of requirements, not to impress a teacher often perceived as a functioning part of the rhetoric. I'll not allow myself to be 22, standing in the Brazos Valley holding a degree, looking for my place within a system — any reliable system where I can safely grow old and die — simply because order and structure are all I will have learned to understand at A&M.

Kevin Weaver '90

### Bad attitude

EDITOR:

I have seen something at our University that bothers me because it is typical, I believe, of the hypocritical attitudes and double standards that exist at Texas A&M. I noticed two University trucks parked by the Forestry-Science Building in two parking spaces clearly marked "visitor only." If the campus police do not consider off-campus students "visitors," I do not think that they should treat University vehicles as such.

I know it is necessary for a huge amount of bureaucracy to exist at a University of this size, but the size of A&M is no excuse for hypocrisy.

Thomas Burton '89

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the classification, address and telephone number of the writer.

## The Battalion

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