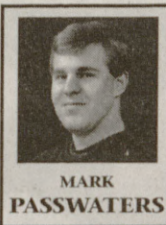


Collateral damage

Government should allocate more money to pay soldiers' wages

The enlisted personnel of the United States Armed Forces are facing a crisis the likes of which have not been seen since the Vietnam War. Enlistment totals are below desired levels, and those that are in the military are very unhappy. It is not because they lack the confidence of the nation. In fact, recent polls show that three-fourths of those polled support them very strongly. In spite of the support they receive from the public, many enlisted personnel are dismayed at the lack of support they receive from their employer, the federal government.



MARK PASSWATERS

Most of America's enlisted soldiers are woefully underpaid. Privates in the Army make so little money (less than \$18,000 yearly, or about \$9 per hour) that they are eligible to collect welfare and food stamps while on active duty. This is a disgrace to the nation and a searing indictment of the Clinton administration's lack of concern for those who have the courage to wear a uniform. During Clinton's tenure, American forces have been dispatched to such exotic locales as Haiti, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. This is not to mention Clinton's decision to change President Bush's humanitarian mission to Somalia into "nation building," which cost the lives of over two dozen soldiers. Intervening in such areas means that soldiers run the risk of paying the ultimate price in the line of duty. It is only fair that they, in turn, are paid a respectable wage.

It is little wonder people are not interested in joining the armed forces. The military used to be a solution for those who had little chance of improving their lives by staying where they were. Why would people want to risk their lives for less money than they would make bagging groceries?

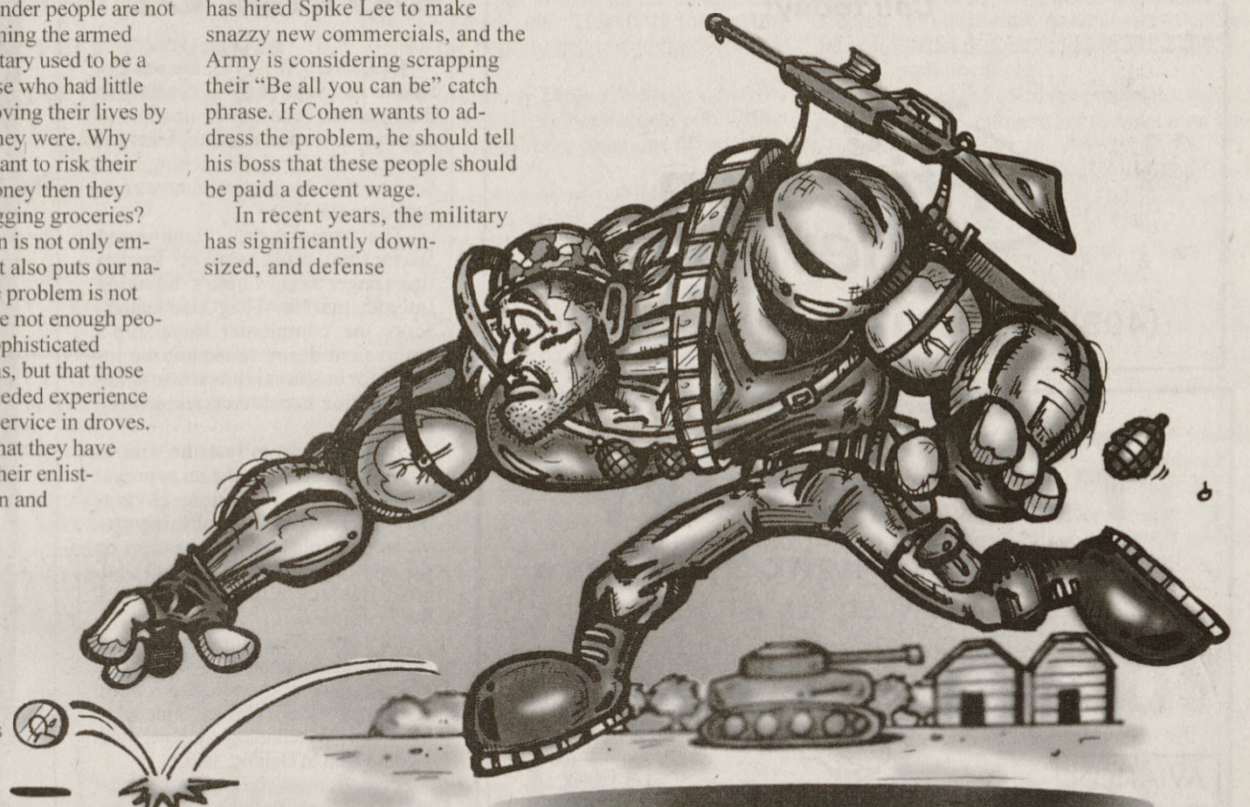
This situation is not only embarrassing, but it also puts our nation at risk. The problem is not just that there are not enough people to run our sophisticated weapons systems, but that those who have the needed experience are leaving the service in droves. With the skills that they have learned during their enlistments, these men and women can make much more money in the civilian sector than by staying in the service.

An individual can enlist in the armed forces for as little as two years. It now takes almost a full year to train a soldier not only in the fundamentals, but also in a specific skill area. Armed with a viable skill but still being paid horribly, many do not re-enlist. As a result, the turnover in certain areas is almost continuous. Such a lack of experience is potentially disastrous considering that these areas include missile maintenance, Patriot air defense systems and radar operators on naval vessels.

Defense Secretary William Cohen has ordered the creation of several committees to discuss how to increase enlistments. The Navy

has hired Spike Lee to make snazzy new commercials, and the Army is considering scrapping their "Be all you can be" catch phrase. If Cohen wants to address the problem, he should tell his boss that these people should be paid a decent wage.

In recent years, the military has significantly downsized, and defense



RUBEN DELUNA/The Battalion

budgets have increased. The Air Force gets new planes, the Army new tanks and the Navy new submarines - yet the people that would service and operate these systems get pay raises that do little but offset inflation. Considering that inflation has risen at an average rate of 2.2 percent in the past three years and the enlistee's pay has increased 3 percent for the lowest ranks, this is a staggering insult.

Many of these weapons systems are ones that have not been asked for by the armed forces but have been put in the budget by the

president and Congress in order to gain votes in crucial political areas. If defense spending was done more prudently, there would be enough money for the weapons and the warriors.

Much has been made of Bill Clinton not serving in the military during a major conflict. Perhaps if he had, he would not have been so quick to sign budgets that neglect enlisted military personnel. If Clinton and members of Congress do not understand that these men and women are not simply working-class individuals, but also people who run the risk

of losing their lives, they should be ashamed of themselves. When the president looks to the military, he should be certain he commands a group that will successfully defend the nation and provide comfort where it is needed. The military should be able to look to its commander in chief and know that he, in turn, will make sure that they can provide for themselves financially. It is good to know that at least one side is getting a bargain.

Mark Passwaters is a senior electrical engineering major.

Corrupt police get off too easily

The crime scene is typical: it is 2 a.m., and a driver with twice the legal blood alcohol level veers out of his lane and crashes into oncoming traffic. The police and ambulances arrive, the victims are rushed to the hospital and the drunken driver is taken to jail. But what if, when asked for license and registration, the driver hands over something much more powerful — a police badge? Then, all of a sudden the routine is altered and the rules that are black and white are now streaked with blue.

On Nov. 28, 1999 Houston police officer Matthew Michna's vehicle crossed the center line on FM 2978, crashing into another car. The car, driven by Leonard Foyt Jr., contained three other passengers who each suffered serious injuries in the accident.

Foyt claims that upon arrival at the scene, the police treated him and his friends with a complete lack of respect.

The problem of drunken driving should not be overlooked, but the fact that this case is being taken so lightly is equally inexcusable. Why has there been hardly any action taken in the investigation of this crime? Most likely, for the same reason that cars with "Backing the Blue" or "100 Club" bumper stickers are rarely seen pulled over on the side of the road.

Both of these are organizations that benefit police departments and provide annual stickers for the supporter's donation. The stickers serve as a small but distinct expectation

for special favors. Police officers are putting themselves, and their donating friends, above the laws that they are in no way exempt from.

These men and women go through a great deal of training and receive a badge symbolizing their promise to protect citizens. But somewhere along the line, they seem to receive a "Get Out of Jail Free" card to protect themselves.

Officer Michna was not issued any tickets, has not served any jail time, and has been relieved of duty with pay from the Houston Police Department. It must be nice to sit at home waiting for the paychecks to roll in. That kind of punishment is hardly justifiable for the endangerment of four innocent lives, as well as setting an inexcusable example to the citizens he vowed to serve and protect.

It is one thing to get out of a speeding ticket, or to cleverly talk one's way out of a traffic fine, but it is another to knowingly drive drunk, nearly kill four human beings, and walk away with hardly a slap on the wrist. Not only should police officers be reprimanded for committing crimes the same way as ordinary citizens, but their role as an officer should definitely be re-evaluated — if not terminated — for such behavior.

When the rule-makers become the rule-breakers, they do not deserve to have any sense of authority or special treatment — they deserve to be punished like any ordinary citizen.

In the United States, Monopoly is just a game, every crime has its punishment, and no badge gets anyone out of jail free.

Melissa Bedssole is a sophomore general studies major.

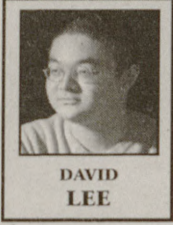


MELISSA BEDSOLE

Police officers are putting themselves, and their donating friends, above the laws that they are in no way exempt from.

Feminism leaves chivalrous males scratching heads

The male is completely egocentric, trapped inside himself... he is a half-head, unresponsive lump, incapable of giving or receiving pleasure or happiness. Consequently, he is at best a utter bore, an inoffensive blob. Falseness is a deficiency disease, and males are emotional cripples."



DAVID LEE

These are the kind words of Valerie Solanas, author of the Society for Cutting Up Men (SCUM) Manifesto.

Hold on a second, ladies. Before the cheers of approval set to a fever pitch, please reflect on the unfairness of Solanas' statements. Granted, most women do not always have these extreme feminist sentiments against men. However, it does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that most women harbor a great deal of latent animosity against men. Consider the popular phrase "All men are pigs." News flash: the male gender is not composed entirely of insensitive, pig-headed jerks. In a study published last year in *The Backlash*, it was found that less than 3 percent of adult males in the United States fit the feminist stereotype of men in general. That means the vast majority of men out there are unfairly accused of being chauvinists on a regular basis.

Considering this, it is no surprise that chivalry and gentlemanly behavior among men has been overwhelmed by "femi-nazi" pretenses. Should a man treat a lady as "one of the guys," even in social situations? Should he follow the traditional approach and be completely chivalrous to every female? The baffling thing is that men today are expected to be able to do both at the

Logic dictates that if women wish to be treated as equals in today's society, they should bear the same costs as men in all aspects of society, including socializing.

me time with relative ease and few mistakes. For goodness' sake, ladies, please be reasonable. Give the Y-chromosome a break for a change. Men are rightfully growing frustrated with having to flip-flop between the wildly unpredictable and irrational social sensitivities of women. By imposing these contradicting expectations on all men without exercising patience and understanding, women are putting at risk the very thing they desire: meeting a thoughtful and caring partner with whom they can spend the rest of their life.

Thankfully, the archaic notion of the woman's place in the home has been rightfully destroyed in the past century. Previously, men were viewed as the dominant gender — the wage earners. Accordingly, men bore the responsibility of "courting" and sheltering a female.

Today, women have ventured out of the household to work alongside men in places of equal power and influence. This advancement has succeeded in erasing many of the gender lines that unfairly shackled women.

But wait — logic dictates that if women wish to be treated as equals in today's society, they should bear the same costs as men in all aspects of society, including socializing. For some insane reason, that is not the case. Men are still expected to do most, if not all, of the work. For instance, it is extremely rare for a female to ask a guy out, offer to pick him up, plan the entire evening and pick up the entire cost. Meanwhile, men are expected to carry out all of these duties on a regular basis without any objection.

Today men are sometimes confused and apprehensive in certain social situations with females because they do not know to which set of social rules they should conform. The fear of being misunderstood is all too real. A man's good intentions can be twisted and manipulated to an arrogant display of chauvinism easily by an opportunistic female.

For instance, Fish Jones finally works up the nerve to ask his lab partner to dinner. Unknown to him, his lab partner is a militant feminist with an ax to grind. At the restaurant, Jones graciously offers to take his date's coat and help her into her seat. What is Jones' reward for this act of sincerity? His date emits a rude laugh, tosses him her coat and seats herself.

After a painfully quiet meal, the check rolls around. What does Jones do? Does he do the equitable thing and pay for his half, or does he do the traditional thing and pick up the entire bill? Either way, Jones is in a no-win situation. He is the risk of being labeled as either cheap or arrogant.

How the female mind can come to either conclusion in day's society is downright frustrating for any level-headed guy. On one hand, females demand to be given the same opportunities and face the same adversities as men. In line with that philosophy, what is wrong with Jones expecting his date to pay her half of the bill? It is how he would treat any other guy.

On the other hand, men today are also expected to be gentlemen, to be chivalrous and gracious during the course of a date and relationship. So in line with that philosophy, what is wrong with letting Jones pick up the whole bill?

This scenario is a microcosm of the problem as a whole. Women are being too arrogant if they expect the male gender to be able to perform this endless juggling act without making an occasional mistake.

It must be accepted that men are unable to accurately judge the feminist sensitivities of every individual female without a few growing pains. Considering this, females as a gender need to exercise a little more patience and reason toward men. Is that asking for too much? Definitely not.

David Lee is a junior economics and journalism major.



MAIL CALL

Student defends passing out Bibles on campus

In response to Elizabeth Kohl's Jan. 25 column. "Howdy, I'm out here telling others about my faith in Christ and was wondering if I might have a few minutes of your time." Some people may find this introduction a nuisance. But there exist clear Biblical mandates and precedents behind this evangelistic behavior. Any offense taken from such encounters may not be the fault of the initiator of the conversation. Simply put, is it the act of having a friendly Aggie wanting to walk and talk with you on your way to class that outrages you, or is it simply the topic they wish to discuss? Be wary of the latter because it lies perilously close to censorship. As a Christian, I seek to passively share my faith by how I live.

Yet, it is less likely that anyone will learn about the free gift of salvation provided by Christ's death, burial and resurrection if I never actually tell them. Therefore, I share my beliefs not simply because Jesus told me to be His witness even to the ends of the earth, but because it is a longing, even a need, to "love away" some of the love and joy that spills out from God's heart. The apostle Peter encouraged Christians to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect... so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander" (1 Peter 3:15-16).

Tommy Medina Class of '01

Space exploration worth continuing

In response to Brienne Porter's Jan. 25 column. Space exploration is worth pursuing for many reasons. First, the economic payoff is very real. For example, the integrated circuit, the basis of every microchip, was a spinoff from the Apollo project. Who could have predicted the profound impact computers would have on our lives? Yes, it can be difficult to see the value of space missions, but there is clear pattern of unforeseen benefits that make space an excellent return on investment.

Besides, NASA doesn't exist to put more money in our pockets, or niftier gadgets in our kitchens. NASA's business is discovery, whose treasure of knowledge enriches all our lives in ways beyond the measure of money.

The exploration of Mars is worthwhile, and the recent probe failures don't change that. We need to demand that NASA get its act together and continue.

I understand claims that we should solve our pressing social problems first. But humanity's problems stem not from a lack of governmental funding, but from our own very human failings.

As such, they can never be completely solved by any level of funding. It therefore makes no sense to slash a program that has an economic payoff, inspires the next generation, and opens up the next frontier.

We are in the longest economic expansion in this nation's history. We are not in the middle of a war or any other crisis. Now is the time to invest in humanity's next great challenge. If we are not willing now, when will we be?

Mark Smith Class of '00