

“Too trapped in a war to be at peace”—the suicide of Iraq war veteran Daniel Somers

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On Tuesday, the *New York Times* published the suicide note of Daniel Somers, a 30-year-old war veteran from Phoenix, Arizona who shot himself in the head on June 10, four years after the end of his second deployment in Iraq. The young man is a casualty of an American war machine that has claimed the lives of over one million people in the last decade alone. Somers' note is a chilling indictment of the Bush and Obama administrations, which have waged a series of wars of aggression, devastating the lives of thousands of soldiers, having ordered them to commit unconscionable war crimes.

“The simple truth is this,” the note reads, “During my first deployment, I was made to participate in things, the enormity of which is hard to describe. War crimes, crimes against humanity. Though I did not participate willingly, and made what I thought was my best effort to stop these events, there are some things that a person simply cannot come back from... to move on in life after being part of such a thing would be the mark of a sociopath in my mind. These things go far beyond what most are even aware of.

“To force me to do these things and then participate in the ensuing cover-up is more than any government has the right to demand. Then, the same government has turned around and abandoned me. They offer no help and actively block the pursuit of gaining outside help... Any blame rests with them.”

The note describes in harrowing detail the effects of these wars on their participants:

“My body has become nothing but a cage, a source of pain and constant problems. The illness I have has caused me pain that not even the strongest medicines could dull, and there is no cure. All day, every day a screaming agony in every nerve ending in my body. It is nothing short of torture. My body is a wasteland,

filled with visions of incredible horror, unceasing depression, and crippling anxiety, even with all of the medications the doctors dare give.

“Simple things that everyone else takes for granted are nearly impossible for me. I cannot laugh or cry. I can barely leave the house. I derive no pleasure from any activity. Everything simply comes down to passing time until I can sleep again. Now, to sleep forever seems to be the most merciful thing... I have nothing left. Too trapped in a war to be at peace, too damaged to be at war.”

In the note, Somers points to the deep undercurrents of violence and suffering that plague American society. He issues a sharp rebuke to Barack Obama and George Bush, condemning them for overseeing a “system” predicated on high levels of misery, poverty and social inequality.

“Is it any wonder that the latest figures show 22 veterans killing themselves each day? That is more veterans than children killed at Sandy Hook, *every single day*. Where are the huge policy initiatives? Why isn't the president standing with those families at the State of the Union? Perhaps because we were not killed by a single lunatic, but rather by his own system of dehumanization, neglect, and indifference.

“It leaves us where all we have to look forward to is constant pain, misery, poverty and dishonor. I assure you that, when the numbers do finally drop, it will merely be because those who were pushed the farthest are all already dead.

“And for what? Bush's religious lunacy? Cheney's ever-growing fortune and that of his corporate friends? Is this what we destroy lives for?”

Towards the end of the note, Somers sums up his dilemma as being “Too trapped in a war to be at peace, too damaged to be at war.”

The questions posed in Daniel Somers' suicide note are being asked by increasingly wide layers of the American population. The same questions drove PFC Bradley Manning to turn over hundreds of thousands of documents detailing US war crimes to WikiLeaks at the cost of years of torture and decades in prison. The same questions pushed former NSA contractor Edward Snowden to risk his life in order to make available secret documents proving the existence of a vast and illegal international spying apparatus run by the US government and its allies.

The answers to these questions bear revolutionary implications. For this reason, the group "Tragedy Assistance for Survivors (TAPS)," a nonprofit veterans' organization with close ties to the military and the Obama administration, urged reporters to limit coverage of Somers's suicide note.

A press release published by TAPS two weeks after Somers's death attempted to muzzle news coverage of Somers's letter under the pretense that the note might drive other veterans to kill themselves. "While the note highlights important issues, portions of the note may also pose risks to vulnerable people who may be struggling with mental health fitness or post-traumatic stress," the organization wrote.

The press release continued: "TAPS encourages the media to pay attention to the important issues raised by the note about veteran health care, and also asks the media to consider carefully which portions of the note to publicize and how it is presented, so that risk can be minimized for others, in accordance with safe messaging guidelines."

TAPS's Board of Directors is dominated by corporate CEOs, defense industry executives, Wall Street bankers, high-ranking military officers and ex-senators.

Its chairman, John Wood, is a former investment banker and current CEO of Telos Corporation, a defense-contracting firm that provides the Pentagon with network security consulting assistance. Its vice chairman, Charlotte Tsoucalas, is a former Pentagon attorney and lobbyist, and currently the director of the Washington DC office of TriWest Healthcare Alliance, a company that oversees health benefits for nearly 3 million veterans.

Board member Mark Grier is the former chief financial officer of Prudential. Board member M.L.

Hefti was a lead lobbyist for both Honeywell International and Boeing.

In addition, TAPS lists among its "honorary board members" senators John McCain, Kit Bond, John Warner, Barbara Mikulski, Kay Bailey Hutchinson; former Senator Bob Dole; and former chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen, Richard Myers and Colin Powell.

This organization has sought to prevent Somers's note from reaching wider sections of the population because it is an unanswerable indictment of the US government, the Armed Forces and the American ruling class.

The note was written by a young man who felt an immense burden of guilt for having been a witness to and reluctant participant in the destruction of an entire nation and murder of large numbers of its people. Daniel Somers was also a husband and musician, a man who felt deep sympathy for the Iraqi victims of the war and kept himself alive with a strong desire to atone for his actions and share the love of his family and friends.

He is one of hundreds of veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars who have killed themselves since the wars began over a decade ago, and one of thousands whose cries for help are met with the callousness of the likes of US Army Maj. General Dana Pittard, who said in 2012: "I have now come to the conclusion that suicide is an absolutely selfish act... I am personally fed up with soldiers who are choosing to take their own lives so that others can clean up their mess. Be an adult, act like an adult, and deal with your real-life problems like the rest of us."

Pittard openly expresses the criminal outlook that pervades the American ruling class and its political and military executioners.



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