

A Veteran of Violence

by Bob Williams

Air Force Veteran, 1980's

Before I enlisted into the Air Force in February 1980, I was already a seasoned veteran of violence. My Dad was in the Navy and my Mom was a military brat - they both met in Naples in the Second Sicily where I was conceived. My Mom's stepdad was a career man in the Air Force and survived WW2, the Korean War, and later the Vietnam War. I was born in Elyria in 1957, another of the many descendants of Sameul F. Williams who had fought against the British in the War of 1812 under the command of Major McClung. I don't know if any of my ancestors had fought against the British in 1776, or if they had helped to exterminate the First Americans - the Native Americans. But the violence of the two wars no doubt contributed to Samuel F. Williams's violent approach to farming the 800 acres in Virginia that the government gave him as payment for his military service. The enslavement and cultural genocide of Africans left many carrying the same Welsh surname of Williams that I carry. For that matter, I don't know that I am not a descendant of the domestic violence that no doubt occurred on the plantation of Samuel F. Williams and that carried many of his later descendants to the mountains that later came to be known as West Virginia.

When I was a year old, I encountered violence early thanks to my Dad – Orville Vondon Williams. My Dad came home on leave and punished me for crying to be next to my Mom. A black-and-white photograph shows strap marks across my back. Later, my younger sister suffered abuse of the worst kind. I was 9 years old when my mother was able to get my abusive Dad away from me and my two younger sisters.

I encountered lots more violence in addition to my Dad's alcoholism and domestic violence. I grew up during the '60s when our government was frightening us and the world - when three great American leaders were killed - during the Vietnam War when the Ohio National Guard killed four students at Kent State, and when Lt Calley shot 30 babies in a ditch in Vietnam. When the news wasn't spewing out violence, there were plenty of cartoons and westerns to teach violence. I was taught that after my often violent twelve-year sentence in government schools, I would be drafted into the military to frighten and kill innocent rice farmers in a small country on the other side of the world. That was the violent future I looked forward to, growing up in violent America. So I just sort of lived for the moment, playing violent sports at school like wrestling or going to the boxing gym and learning how to defend myself. My high school was built to house 1800 students, but there were over 3,000 when I attended. So boxing and wrestling were quite useful in keeping myself from falling between the many cracks at my overcrowded school.

Before I graduated Elyria High School in 1975, the Great Refusal had given fruit - the Vietnam War had ended and so did the draft. Peace was cool. You had created a better world - a world with no more war and no more draft slavery. America had become better. The radio waves sang peace - Rock, Motown, Psychedelic, Nashville, Soul - all seemed to respond to John Lennon's "Give peace a chance" and had climbed aboard Cat Stevens's "Peace Train" rather than be derailed by endemic violence as in the film "Easy Rider".

By 1980 it seemed safe to follow in my ancestors' footsteps and attempt to use military service as a springboard to further and higher education. I joined the Air Force. My first tour of duty was a one-year remote tour on Shemya Island, the second to last Aleutian island, more than a thousand miles west of Anchorage. A special surveillance station was there called the Cobra Dane, and we watched the Soviets. A special plane stood by, called the Cobra Ball, to follow up on things the Cobra Dane detected, like Soviet launches. My cultural programming taught me that the Red Threat was no joke and required constant vigilance to defend America. So I sort of felt important there keeping America safe from the Baddies. But I did notice that the Soviets seemed to be surrounded by our military, which had bases in Alaska, Far East, Middle East, Europe and Iceland and technologically they weren't as advanced, so they weren't the BIG threat that Reagan and Daddy Bush were making out.

Then there was Neil Bush, the brother of Marvin Bush who later oversaw security at the Twin Towers in 2001. Reagan got shot by Neil Bush's high school buddy, and Neil's dad had to run the country while Reagan was on the mend. We would cut jokes that Vice-President Bush tried to bump off President Reagan much like we cut jokes today about Marvin Bush planting bombs in the Twin Towers. Surely it's just coincidence that Neil and Marvin are connected to these tragedies.

My next tour of duty was in an AWAC Squadron at Tinker AFB, Oklahoma. That was when my eyes were opened to the reality, which is the opposite from the rhetoric. I was the assistant squadron historian and I learned to read and write Arabic. I compiled the histories of our sorties, but only those sorties that had been preapproved for public consumption. I don't know who wrote the histories of the omitted sorties or where those histories are kept. Nonetheless, I did manage to earn an Airman of the Quarter award for my exemplary performance.

But then I began to question the reality that stood in contradiction to the rhetoric. For example, why was AWACS providing support to Iranian F4 fighters against Iraqi MIGs during the 1980-88 Iran/Iraq War? Today the media tells me that Uncle Sam helped the Iraqis, but that is NOT what I saw. In the air, we helped Iranians. At the time, Ayotollah Khomeini was quoted in the media as saying the U.S. was an evil Satan, so why was he saying that while the U.S. was providing AWAC support to his air force?

The answer was that he had been the CIA's number two backup man in the event that Shah Pahlevi and his SAVAK lost their grip over the Iranian people. According to the French newspaper Le Monde, Khomeini had been stashed in France until he was called upon to do a "Ross Perot" on the Iranians, which means telling them what they wanted to hear. Khomeini the Wordpusher duped many Iranians with his Islamic rhetoric, but the socialists could not be duped, so he killed them by the tens of thousands. There is a resulting diaspora of socialist Iranians in the U.S., U.K., and continental Europe. In addition to providing AWAC support to Khomeini, the surveillance sites on the Iranian/Soviet border were maintained and the U.S. indirectly supplied the Iranian military - something that Colonel North took some heat for. The payoff for the Daddy Bush bunch was that Iranian oil continued to flow to Europe and Japan.

This Orwellian Iranian affair was personally troubling for me. I was feeling the pain of the tens of thousands of Iranians dying because of our CIA's agent - the Ayatollah Khomeini. He was no better than the CIA's previous dictator of Iran - Shah Pahlevi. And down the memory hole went the short-lived existence of a people's government during those few months between the Shah and Khomeini. And over in Iraq, those people were at the mercy of another CIA-installed dictator - Saddam Hussein. Both dictators seemed to play a game of conscripting their internal discontents into their respective militaries, and then sending those conscripted discontents to confront the other's army of conscripted discontents, so that the discontents were killing each other off instead of toppling their CIA-installed governments. In the Air Force, it is rare for airmen to entertain thoughts over their keyboard battlefields. But I was writing histories. I was reflecting. And I didn't like what I saw was happening.

Everywhere I looked, I saw my government installing and maintaining dictators, kings, generals, and even drug lords as leaders in the countries of other peoples around the globe. In Syria, Assad had killed over 20,000 resistance members, many of whom were students. In Saudi Arabia, a British-installed and U.S.-maintained king was ruling over a people whose religion, called Islam, demands that the leader must be chosen by the people. Muslims are forbidden by their religion to accept kings, generals, and other dictators but that is exactly what all Muslim countries have today except for perhaps Malaysia.

Only in Afghanistan did I think that our government was on the correct side of morality in helping the Afghan Freedom Fighters against the Soviet invaders. I even hung a poster on my wall at home at the time of an Afghan Freedom Fighter that I had purchased from a mail-order catalog from the Independent Institute in California. Today, it strikes me as nothing more than backstabbing, perhaps treasonous, that our military no longer defends the Afghan Freedom Fighters, but defends the ex-Soviet drug lord Hamid Karzai. Afghanistan has always been about Afghan opium, where 90% of the world's heroin comes from. Bolivia is a distant second. CIA cannot depend on taxpayers to fund its covert operations, so it is the drug-runner of the

world. I know because one of AWAC's remits is to catch drug-runners, who are never more than unordained upstarts who dare to compete with the BIG MAN.

Central America was another area of horrendous statist crime upon statist crimes, committed by our government and/or U.S. corporate armies. A certain banana billionaire in Cincinnati was not alone in helping Uncle Sam to wage state terrorism in Central America. When my fellow airmen began talking about going to El Salvador to defend the dictator from the Salvadorian people's desire for representative government, I balked loudly. I said I did not join the Air Force to defend dictators; I joined the Air Force to defend America FROM dictators. I was told "it's orders". I responded by saying "Then the Nazi must be the epitome of your morality". They said that was different. I said "How was that different? They were military men given military orders, how was that different?" I didn't get an answer, I got a discharge, which was honorable thanks to the efforts of my First Sergeant who said "I can't do anything about you being discharged, but I can see about how hard you fall". A few months after my discharge, he was literally in the dog house. He was no longer the First Sergeant but had been reassigned to the Base Veterinarian Office - and it stank.

I was some kind of underground hero - people like the character Klinger on the TV show Mash were coming up to me, shaking my hand, asking me how I did it? I said I didn't know. I wasn't trying to get kicked out. I had 11 months left on my enlistment and I expected them to honor the contract just as they had expected me to honor it. All I knew was that I had upset the commander. Fortunately, I was handed an honorable discharge just months before the U.S. invaded Grenada and overthrew their government for daring to practice democracy.

During the two and half decades since my discharge, I am repeatedly reminded that our nation is a nation on a war footing because that is how it was born. Since WWII, British Empire is now U.S. powered. My ancestors fought against them, but now we provide the brawn to their empire. You might believe that British empire is a now a footnote in a history book, but I don't. The British family of nations was everywhere I was 25 years ago. The Brits participated in our Red Flag exercises in Nevada and the Canadians in our NATO exercises at Geilenkirchen, Germany. We helped the Brits in their war against Argentina over the Malvinas, aka the Falklands War, and the British Commonwealth maintains a permanent foreign military presence in our country today. There are 4 Canadian AWAC squadrons permanently based at Tinker AFB, Oklahoma. All of the quagmires our military is bogged down in today are originally British ones. Pakistan, for example, was carved out of India by the British 60 years ago. Musharraf, the U.S. puppet dictator, met with Bush last month to plan Pakistan's current events while Bhutto was groomed in London before being sent back to Pakistan. Whether that country is led by Musharraf or Bhutto, it will be a puppet government of U.S.-powered British empire.

So here it is another Veterans Day, and I can only wonder why did our ancestors fight two wars against the British and against monarchy, to turn around and help the British do empire and to defend kings in places like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Morocco? When I was in the Air Force, what was I protecting America FROM? A contemporary American philosopher, Pogo, put it succinctly: "We have met the enemy and they are we". My government is violent because you and I are culturally programmed to be violent.