

Military Families SPEAK OUT

**Support our troops,
bring them home now,
and take care of them
when they get here.**

FEBRUARY, MARCH, APRIL, 2016

MFSO STEERING COMMITTEE REPORT

No Boots on the Ground - Really?

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This makes me furious! Sounds like a cover up- a way to placate the public. But, tell a parent whose son or daughter is in a Special Forces unit that they are not “boots on the ground!” Special Forces ARE “boots on the ground!” They are in combat zones. They are combat troops - they are fighting – being shot at and shooting; they are in harm’s way. Isn’t that the very definition of combat? Saying that they are just training others is also part of that deception.

Military Families Speak Out renews our call for all U.S. troops to leave Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria now. We will continue to speak out against unjust military interventions. MFSO supports policies that utilize diplomacy over military force. We support the troops and work hard to ensure that their needs are met while deployed and when they return home. By Paula Rogovin, MFSO Bergen County, NJ

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Any military family, like mine, with a young son who is a disabled veteran suffering from PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury and other combat related injuries, couldn’t help but be moved by hearing from a mother from the national stage whose son, she admitted, was also a young veteran suffering with PTSD. That mother is the famous and infamous Sarah Palin. There is no reason to question the suffering and fear she must be facing because my wife, Laura, and I know firsthand what happens when our loved ones return from war with such devastating injuries we call the invisible wounds of war.

What I couldn’t quite wrap my head around was that she was announcing this tragedy on national television, the day her son was arrested for assaulting his wife and having a weapon. I’m not sure what political privileges she was given, but I know where I would have been for the next two days, (at least), had my son been arrested for

something like that. It wouldn't be a political rally, that's for sure. Certainly not thousands of miles away. But let's say Ms. Palin had decided to use the opportunity of being on the national stage to bring light to the issue of the countless tragedies that are caused by PTSD and that we should support our troops. After all, this was a huge newsworthy event. Did she do that? No. Instead, the public got the old "Kick their asses", tried and true "rile 'em up" campaign rhetoric that seems to fly well during wartime campaign season. Remember 911? Did that benefit our troops in any way?

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By Tim Kahlor, MFSO, Southern CA



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Having the greatest support group in the world, and my antidepressant dose tripled, is what keeps me going. My time as an anti-war activist has put me in contact with wonderful people on several continents and all the time zones here back me with calls, messages and the invite to call them at any time day or night if I need to talk. My life-long friends and home town of Williamstown, WV, along with many from the Mid-Ohio Valley have been the anchor/the rock/the strength that has helped my family start putting the pieces of our shattered lives back together. For this outpouring of love and support I am humbled and forever grateful.

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Peace today and all days,

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"Republican candidates and governors have said we don't want refugees from that region, but U.S. policy has actually created a lot of the refugee crisis," said Paula Rogovin, co-founder of the weekly vigil, which marked 539 consecutive weeks on Wednesday. She added, "It's a terrible thing to say that your country is responsible for creating such a crisis, but it's true and we have to take responsibility."

The vigil was held outside the Teaneck Armory... The vigil participants included members of the Bergen County chapter of Military Families Speak Out and Veterans for Peace, Chapter 21....."



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MFSO, Long Beach, CA, holds a Meet a Muslim event. Photo by wayne@xandian.net

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Military Families Speak Out renews our call for all U.S. troops to leave Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria now. We will continue to speak out against unjust military interventions. MFSO supports policies that utilize diplomacy over military force. We support the troops and work hard to ensure that their needs are met while deployed and when they return home. By Paula Rogovin, MFSO Bergen County, NJ

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MFSO, Long Beach, CA, holds a Meet a Muslim event. Photo by wayne@xandian.net

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Military Families Speak Out renews our call for all U.S. troops to leave Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria now. We will continue to speak out against unjust military interventions. MFSO supports policies that utilize diplomacy over military force. We support the troops and work hard to ensure that their needs are met while deployed and when they return home. By Paula Rogovin, MFSO Bergen County, NJ

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Military Families Speak Out renews our call for all U.S. troops to leave Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria now. We will continue to speak out against unjust military interventions. MFSO supports policies that utilize diplomacy over military force. We support the troops and work hard to ensure that their needs are met while deployed and when they return home. By Paula Rogovin, MFSO Bergen County, NJ

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Military Families Speak Out renews our call for all U.S. troops to leave Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria now. We will continue to speak out against unjust military interventions. MFSO supports policies that utilize diplomacy over military force. We support the troops and work hard to ensure that their needs are met while deployed and when they return home. By Paula Rogovin, MFSO Bergen County, NJ

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MFSO, Long Beach, CA, holds a Meet a Muslim event. Photo by wayne@xandian.net

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BY HANNAN ADELY, STAFF WRITER | THE RECORD

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Military Families SPEAK OUT

**Support our troops,
bring them home now,
and take care of them
when they get here.**

FEBRUARY, MARCH, APRIL, 2016

MFSO STEERING COMMITTEE REPORT

No Boots on the Ground - Really?

Have you noticed the renewed calls by President Obama and candidates for President for more American Special Operations troops in the Middle East and elsewhere? They do this at the same time they oppose having “Boots on the Ground.” It was reported in a NY Times article, “Even as Mr. Obama has repeatedly said that he opposes American ‘boots on the ground’ in far-flung parts of the world, his administration continues to carve out exceptions for Special Operations forces – with American officials often resorting to linguistic contortions to mask the forces’ combat role. President Obama said, “You know, when I said, ‘No boots on the ground,’ I think the American people understood generally that we’re not going to do an Iraq-style invasion of Iraq or Syria with battalions that are moving across the desert...” (Obama’s ‘Boots on the Ground’. NY Times. By Mark Mazzetti and Eric Schmitt. Dec. 27, 2015)

This makes me furious! Sounds like a cover up- a way to placate the public. But, tell a parent whose son or daughter is in a Special Forces unit that they are not “boots on the ground!” Special Forces ARE “boots on the ground!” They are in combat zones. They are combat troops - they are fighting – being shot at and shooting; they are in harm’s way. Isn’t that the very definition of combat? Saying that they are just training others is also part of that deception.

Military Families Speak Out renews our call for all U.S. troops to leave Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria now. We will continue to speak out against unjust military interventions. MFSO supports policies that utilize diplomacy over military force. We support the troops and work hard to ensure that their needs are met while deployed and when they return home. By Paula Rogovin, MFSO Bergen County, NJ

STOP EXPLOITING OUR VETERANS!



The exploitation of veterans by politicians to advance their own political agenda is nothing new, but this election season, marked by a striking amount of uncivil personal attacks and hostility, has lowered the bar and hits close to home for our military families.

Any military family, like mine, with a young son who is a disabled veteran suffering from PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury and other combat related injuries, couldn’t help but be moved by hearing from a mother from the national stage whose son, she admitted, was also a young veteran suffering with PTSD. That mother is the famous and infamous Sarah Palin. There is no reason to question the suffering and fear she must be facing because my wife, Laura, and I know firsthand what happens when our loved ones return from war with such devastating injuries we call the invisible wounds of war.

What I couldn’t quite wrap my head around was that she was announcing this tragedy on national television, the day her son was arrested for assaulting his wife and having a weapon. I’m not sure what political privileges she was given, but I know where I would have been for the next two days, (at least), had my son been arrested for

something like that. It wouldn't be a political rally, that's for sure. Certainly not thousands of miles away. But let's say Ms. Palin had decided to use the opportunity of being on the national stage to bring light to the issue of the countless tragedies that are caused by PTSD and that we should support our troops. After all, this was a huge newsworthy event. Did she do that? No. Instead, the public got the old "Kick their asses", tried and true "rile 'em up" campaign rhetoric that seems to fly well during wartime campaign season. Remember 911? Did that benefit our troops in any way?

And so, not long after this politically advantageous move, Donald Trump followed suit by skipping the Republican debate and then later shamefully announced that he was able to raise 6 million dollars for our veterans in one hour. Does anyone really believe that Donald Trump cares about our veterans? I do remember him stating early on the campaign that some veterans were holding a rally for him, but that fizzled when the word got out that that was a sham and there weren't really veterans behind this.

Trump and Palin actions and the use of our veterans to promote their own political agenda is another example of how our loved ones are consistently being used as marketing gimmicks to win political office and earn money for both profit and non-profit organizations. I am sick and tired of organizations, such as the NFL, that provide appreciation days for our veterans and then we find out it is being funded by the Department of Defense and not the NFL. I am also disgusted with profit and non-profit organizations that promote "Support Our Troops" or "Hire the Vet" programs that in reality are just a marketing tools and little or no funding is actually going to helping OUR VETERANS meaning OUR LOVED ONES.

I understand that we must tell our stories to make the public aware of the real journey and struggles we military families are dealing with every day after our loved ones return home and are often physically and mentally injured and homeless. But please, for the rest of you 98 percent who have no family in the military, STOP allowing the use of our loved ones for political gains and profit, and let's do the right thing. Give, if you can, without ulterior motives. Help a family who needs a break with daily caretaking. Volunteer at a rehab center or join the growing movement to stop these wars. Do what

needs to be done to help our veterans without exploiting them. And for God's sake, please work to help us bring all of our troops home now, so we can stop creating the wounded veterans that result from the continuation of these unjust wars.

By Tim Kahlor, MFSO, Southern CA



An Urgent Call from the Office of Congresswoman Barbara Lee

Congresswoman Barbara Lee stands firm in her commitment to stop endless war and we're proud to support this effort. **Do you stand with us?**

It's more important than ever to work for peace and diplomacy. The results of Monday's caucuses in Iowa were eye-opening. The GOP's three top candidates have all engaged in incendiary rhetoric promoting war - "carpet bombing" seems to be their favorite solution for dealing with foreign adversaries.

We cannot allow our country to write another blank check for war. It's cost far too many lives and billions of dollars. It is Congress's job to have a rigorous debate when considering entering into war, owing our country thoughtful discussion and consideration of all options. Barbara Lee has been steadfast in her work to ensure Congress is held accountable to the American people and demanding open discussion before authorizing the use of military force.

This is why people from coast to coast have signed on to tell Congress: **stop endless war**. We demand debate and an end to blank checks for war.

Go to: <http://stopendlesswar.com/>



Veteran's Day Parade in Long Beach CA

"Enough" Demo in Huntington Beach CA





My Thoughts on Veterans Day, 2015

Last year I wrote about feeling like a zombie because I was living the life of a three Blue Star mother with my baby deployed.

Today I write to you as a mother who has had one of those Blue Stars replaced with Gold. The piece of my heart that was deployed survived that tour and committed suicide at his home in Colorado Springs, CO, August 28, 2015. Sergeant First Class Tyler Milam Westbrook, 31, was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Fort Carson, Colorado.

There is nothing that prepares a parent for that call in the middle of the night. My worst nightmare has become my reality. I knew he was very troubled -- how could I not know??? I am his mother, he was part of me. Recognizing his struggle and not being able to do something was like watching a train wreck in slow motion. The intellectual me truly believes I was powerless over the path he chose. The mother in me wanted to intervene to protect my child.

Having the greatest support group in the world, and my antidepressant dose tripled, is what keeps me going. My time as an anti-war activist has put me in contact with wonderful people on several continents and all the time zones here back me with calls, messages and the invite to call them at any time day or night if I need to talk. My life-long friends and home town of Williamstown, WV, along with many from the Mid-Ohio Valley have been the anchor/the rock/the strength that has helped my family start putting the pieces of our shattered lives back together. For this outpouring of love and support I am humbled and forever grateful.

The eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month 1918 was the end to the fighting between the Allied Nations and Germany in World War I, "the war to end all wars". It was known as Armistice Day and was to be commemorated with thanksgiving, prayer and exercises designed to perpetuate peace. Nearly 100 years later our country is involved in wars/conflicts/military actions that result in 22 veterans a day committing suicide. This last Veterans Day I represented Military Families Speak Out at a memorial in

Parkersburg, WV. Friends stood with me as we tried to generate participation in a group that truly supports the troops.

At noon I saw my counselor and worked on preserving what is left of my sanity. After that, I went to the Williamstown American Legion to help serve potato soup and ham sandwiches to all the vets that visited. During, before or after these events, I cried.

Tomorrow everyone will be back to normal, back to work and school. The sun will come up and I anticipate my heart will continue to beat like it has every morning since August 28, 2015. With these constants in place, I have no other choice than to live my life. 22 families have been devastated every day since Tyler's suicide ripped the heart out the Westbrooks and Williamstown, WV. I wake up every morning and think about 22 more families and communities being torn apart like we were. I imagine each suicide as a ripple on water and the far reaching ripples overlapping as they spread out. Considering the number of people touched by each ripple, this statistic has to have a profound affect.

We, as a nation, need to stop asking generation after generation to do things under the guise of "protecting our freedoms" that they are not able to live with afterwards. The latest generation of military is a very small percentage of the population and has been asked to sacrifice more than any before. Never ending war is not the answer.

I will "Honor the Warrior, Not the War" along with my brothers and sisters in VVAW. I will support VFP in returning to Armistice Day and, as always, work to bring them all home.

Peace today and all days,

Marcia Westbrook, MFSO, WV

Photos from Veteran's Day Parade and Memorial Service, Parkersburg WV. Watch on youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQSIWk0i99U&feature=youtu.be>

Donate to the SFC Tyler Westbrook Memorial Scholarship. The funds will go to Tyler's son, Milam.

<https://www.gofundme.com/TylerWestbrook>



WARRIOR Writers

Warrior Writers workshops in New Jersey welcome veterans and military family members. This combination has enriched the discussions at these gatherings. Vets trying to deal with combat experiences and dismay, after coming home, hear mothers reveal their anguish over a child serving in a war. Parents hear about things in military life that they had no inkling of.

Everyone at these workshops--designed to provide a safe haven for sharing hard to discuss experiences—has witnessed a combat vet choke up while trying to describe something that happened long ago.

For more than a year, Warrior Writers NJ has held writing workshops in veterans' homes, informal gatherings that have attracted about a dozen vets and family members to monthly Sunday afternoon get-togethers. The format has also provided a support system for helping to organize poetry readings and art shows in conjunction with Combat Paper NJ, an art group for veterans that works with Warrior Writers on public events.

Since September, Warrior Writers NJ has also provided evening writing workshops once a month at the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation in Morristown, NJ. This arrangement grew out of Warrior Writers poets being invited to read at the Dodge Poetry Festival in October 2014 at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark, NJ.

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