NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://www.ncronline.org)

A look at the military from another angle

Mary Ann McGivern | Apr. 16, 2014 NCR Today

Last week, I reviewed *Breach of Trust* by Andrew Bacevich [1], an analysis of the impact of our failure to support our troops on the military and democracy. Then on Tuesday, I read George Packer's literary criticism of recent war fiction, "Home Fires [2]," in the April 7 *New Yorker*. Packer says the writing reflects the essential falseness of our claims of support of our volunteer army.

Packer writes: "The title of David Finkel's recent book about the struggles of soldiers returned from Iraq, *Thank you for Your Service*, captures all the bad faith of a civilian population that views itself as undeserving and the equivocal position of celebrated warriors who don't much feel like saying 'You're welcome.' "

The writing, all by men who served in Iraq, encompasses and builds on themes of chaos, seeking to be a man, and the irony of sacrifice that appears meaningless. But it is coming home that the Iraqi veterans write about. Poet and novelist Kevin Powers creates a character who recognizes how the war has damaged him, how angry he is at civilians and, at the same time, that he volunteered in the first place.

Brian Turner is a poet who cares about the Iraqi people, and he wrote a long poem about a thousand trampled to death in a religious procession from fear of a suicide bomber. Packer says, "It is improbably and moving that an American soldier should write a poem of such generous, Whitmanesque spirit about this one Iraqi disaster."

In his memoir, *My Life as a Foreign Country*, Turner writes: "Maybe it isn't that it's so difficult coming home but that home isn't a big enough space for all that I must bring to it. America, vast and laid out from one ocean to another, is not a large enough space to contain the war each soldier brings home. And even if it could -- it doesn't want to."

Phil Klay's *Redeployment* is a collection of stories about "the encounter between veterans and the people for whom they supposedly fought." Packer has high praise for Klay's writing, so complex I cannot quote the cream as I have done above. Indeed, Packer makes me want to read all of these authors. This Lent, I've written mostly about problems within the U.S. military. Maybe over this summer and fall, I'll read these war stories, laying aside facts to know the people who survived those facts. But for now, I'll turn to the joys of Easter, accepting God's healing grace.

Source URL (retrieved on *08/30/2016 - 01:13*): https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/look-military-another-angle

Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/node/74461
[2] http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2014/04/07/140407crbo_books_packer?currentPage=all