

## RAMBLIN' WITH SUSAN

Susan R. Harris

### It hit me right between the eyes

Many written words come across my desk each week, and many more pass my eyes through email.

One that came recently in the New Hope United Methodist Church newsletter touched my mind and my heart. It was submitted to the newsletter by Rena Mitchell Gaston and it really hit me between the eyes.

"Heavenly Father, Help us remember that the jerk who cut us off in traffic last night is a single mother who worked nine hours that day and was rushing home to cook dinner, help with homework, do the laundry and spend a few precious moments with her children.

"Help us to remember that the pierced, tattooed, disinterested young man who can't make change correctly is a worried 19-year-old college student, balancing his apprehension over final exams with his fear of not getting his student loans for next semester.

"Remind us, Lord, that the scary looking bum, begging for money in the same spot every day (who really ought to get a job!) is a slave to additions that we can only imagine in our worst nightmares.

"Help us to remember that the old couple walking annoyingly slow through the store aisles and blocking our shopping progress are savoring this moment, knowing that, based on the biopsy report she got back last week, this will be the last year they go shopping together.

"Heavenly Father, remind us each day that, of all the gifts you give us, the greatest gift is love. It is not enough to share that love with those we hold dear. Open our hearts not to just those who are close to us, but to all humanity. Let us be slow to judge and quick to forgive, show patience, empathy and love."

Did it hit you between the eyes, too?

I read in a book once that there were four children cutting up to beat the band on a crowded subway car. Other passengers grew very annoyed, even more so because the father of the children laid his head back on the seat and said nothing.

Finally, someone suggested that perhaps the man should get a handle on his wild kids. He answered that he knew he should, but he just didn't have the strength or the heart since they had just left the hospital where their mother had died only a few minutes earlier.

It seems that sometimes we want others to be patient or kind to us because we've had a bad day or week or a hard life or sickness or sorrow. But how often are we willing to extend that patience and kindness to others?

Most of the time, we don't know the true troubles of others. And, to be honest, we're sometimes so wrapped up in our own lives that we don't care.

That's a shame.

I am going to try to keep the prayer shared with the congregation by Ms. Gaston in my mind so that on those days when others cut me off in traffic or can't seem to count back change or think very differently from me or slow me down as I rush from here to there, I can remember that they, too, may be dealing with problems I can't even imagine having to deal with.

The world would probably be a better place if we all would.



### Gephardt's gaffe

DR. EARL TILFORD

Amid the several contortions in logic apparent in presidential candidate Representative Dick Gephardt's (D-Missouri) July 22 presentation to the San Francisco Bar Association was the contention that the operational and tactical successes achieved by American forces in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in their 26-day drive to Baghdad resulted from the "Clinton-Gore military."

I served as director of research for the U.S. Army's Strategic Studies Institute from 1993 to 2001, a period encompassing the "Clinton-Gore military" era. Charitably, the best thing I can say about the Clinton administration's Department of Defense is that cuts in force structure and resources compelled us to develop innovations focused on leveraging communications technologies and developments in precision strike capabilities to compensate for drastic reductions in manpower.

The personnel cuts, however, were significant. During the Clinton administration, the Army shrank from 20 to 10 divisions. There were similar cuts in the Air Force and Navy. Thank goodness the Iraqi forces our troops faced in OIF were less capable than those of 1991 because they outnumbered coalition ground forces by about four-to-one.

Contributing to the ongoing problem with guerrilla warfare in Iraq today is the fact that sufficient ground forces needed to

find, fix and annihilate the Saddam Fedayeen and Republican Guard could not be deployed without jeopardizing commitments in the Balkans and retaining enough forces to counter the threat from North Korea.

Accordingly, thousands of committed Saddamites took their weapons and simply faded away to fight another day. They comprise the current cohort of guerrillas now plaguing — and killing — our troops.

Quantity has a quality all its own and thanks to the Clinton-Gore era, the numbers needed for a truly decisive victory were not available. Arguably, it was the remnants of the Reagan-Bush military that prevailed in OIF. The ground and air forces used in Operation Iraqi Freedom, with notable advances in digital and communications technologies, were largely a "legacy force" resulting from the Reagan era.

The Army's "Big Five" weapons acquisitions, to include the M1A2 Abrams tank, the M24 Bradley fighting vehicle, the Multiple Launch Rocket System, the HU-60 Black Hawk transport helicopter and AH-64 Apache attack chopper, were all procured during the Reagan buildup of the 1980s.

The Air Force's F-16 and F-15 fighters, now approaching obsolescence, were developed during the Nixon administration with full production and deployment over subsequent administrations. The B-2 and F-117 originated under Carter but were brought to fruition by Reagan who also revived the B-1 bomber

program after his predecessor killed it.

President Bill Clinton began his mis-administration of the Pentagon with a poorly conceived attempt to change Pentagon policy on gays so homosexuals could serve openly in the military. Worse, perhaps, after trying to change the policy Clinton backed off, in effect letting himself be "rolled" by his generals.

Drastic cuts in force structure followed, with the Army suffering more than any other service. Meanwhile, the operations tempo, the rate at which American forces were deployed to conflicts from Somalia to Haiti to Bosnia to Kosovo, increased by 300 percent without a concomitant increase in resources. Reductions in funding for research and development, maintenance and most significantly training covered the costs.

Perhaps the greatest "legacy" of the Clinton-Gore years concerned sagging morale.

Soldiers trained to fight and win the nation's wars were used in a string of "peacekeeping" missions, which atrophied their combat skills and wore out equipment. Operation Northern and Southern Watch, aerial patrols over Iraq which mostly entailed flying in circles wore out our aircraft while dulling the critical edge in combat skills, which results from realistic combat training.

Plummeting retention rates compelled the Air Force to institute a "stop loss" provision to stem the hemorrhage of pilots.

Worse, however, was the decline in respect Clinton's misbehavior fostered

among the men and women of the armed forces. Military personnel convicted of fornication, adultery, and lying are subject to expulsion with a less than honorable discharge, with a very real possibility of incarceration. Soldiers don't equivocate over "what the meaning of 'is' is" and they don't respect leaders who do.

The Clinton-Gore years presented our armed forces with significant challenges during a critical time of transition from Cold War force structures, doctrines and strategies to preparing for the very uncertain strategic paradigm of the 21st century.

The successes our armed forces achieved in Iraq came in spite of not because of the previous administration. President George W. Bush has restored a sense of mission and purpose to the armed forces. More importantly, this commander-in-chief has their respect.

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### Letter to the editor policy

The Perquimans Weekly welcomes the opinions of its readers. Letters should be limited to 300 words and should include the name, address and telephone number of the writer. Letters without signatures or telephone numbers will not be printed. Only the name and city of residence will be published with the letter.

The subject matter should be of interest to the community, not a personal gripe. Letters may be edited for clarity and space limitations.

Submit your letters to The Perquimans Weekly, P.O. Box 277, Hertford, N.C. 27944, or drop them off at our office at 199 W. Grubb Street. Call 426-5728 for more information.

## THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY

Established 1932

119 W. Grubb St., P.O. Box 277,  
Hertford, N.C. 27944

426-5728

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The Perquimans Weekly (USPS 428-080) is published each Thursday by The Daily Advance, 216 S. Poindexter St., Elizabeth City, N.C. 27909. Subscription rates are \$24.20 per year in-state, \$26.40 per year out-of-state, single copy rate 35 cents. Second class postage paid in Hertford, N.C. 27944.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to P.O. Box 277, Hertford, N.C. 27944.

### Letters

Dear Editor:

If we thought that sending our service men and women into two major battlefields in quick succession was a major undertaking for our nation, consider the world stage scenario for which our Navy is preparing. This image of the future calls for a "Fleet Response Plan" with continuous "surge capability" for our aircraft carriers to engage in ongoing conflicts around the world - as many as seven or more conflicts simultaneously.

If we accept this new military model of the future, an OLF in Washington County becomes a strategic requirement in order to schedule continuous pilot training operations.

Although this proposed OLF will not be completed until 2007 and the Atlantic Fleet has reduced its projection of the number of operations to be conducted at the field by nearly 38 percent, Admiral Natter, Commander of the Atlantic Fleet, has made this new OLF the centerpiece of the Navy's month-old "Fleet Response Concept."

In the DEIS the Navy did not make an effective case for the military need for an OLF. In the FEIS the Navy continues to acknowledge that facilities at Oceana/Fentress meet all the operational requirements for the reduced number of Super Hornets now on order for the entire Atlantic Fleet. Further, the FEIS states that facilities at Cherry Point are adequate for two

squadrons with no modifications. But the Navy has called out the spectre of global terrorism to intimidate all of us into accepting an OLF in order to enhance naval preparedness. Preparedness for unpredictable military actions around the globe to be launched by the President at a moment's notice.

Although the NEPA prescribed EIS process at this stage is not open to public comment, it is open by law for review and response from our elected representatives. As responsible Americans concerned for our nation's future, we must let our Senators and Congressmen know how we feel.

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Edenton

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