

**Let's send old people off to war**  
**Element of surprise -- humvee jockey, 85**

- Gordon S. Livingston  
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With the war in Iraq not going all that well, it is apparent that a primary strategy of the insurgents is to erode our will to fight by inflicting casualties on our troops until the whole undertaking becomes sufficiently expensive in lives that we simply give up and leave.

Most of these casualties are being produced by improvised explosive devices commonly known as roadside bombs. These fiendishly clever explosives are usually triggered remotely, often using garage door openers or high-definition TV remotes stolen from Officers' Clubs throughout Iraq.

Many Americans are becoming impatient with this sacrifice of the young people who comprise our combat forces, soldiers with their whole lives ahead of them. I think the public attitude toward casualties could be changed by the simple expedient of extending the age of eligibility for military service to, say, 85. Think about it. How much strength or physical fitness is required to drive a vehicle down the road?

What if, rather than pester high school students (and their parents) about enlisting, military recruiters focused their efforts on nursing home residents? Sure, many with advanced Alzheimer's or hooked up to Foley catheters might be unenthusiastic about military service, but I guarantee you that some World War II vets who haven't really felt significant since 1945 would be happy to make use of their still-valid driver's licenses in the service of their country.

Imagine these guys -- or women -- at the wheel of a humvee in Fallujah or Kirkuk. The insurgents would have no idea what to make of it. ("Hang on Achmed, I think he's turning left. No, wait, he just put on his right directional.") You don't have to throw their timing

off by much to make them miss.

Just when you thought the greatest generation was about to pass into history (after making the rest of us feel like wimps), here's a whole new opportunity for them to demonstrate heroism. Polls show heavy support among elderly veterans for whatever war we happen to be in at the moment. This is their chance to translate their beliefs into action and accumulate a new set of war stories.

There would definitely be fewer surviving wounded to burden the military medical care system. If a healthy, fit 25-year-old loses an arm, he may well survive and live for 60 years with this handicap. If a 75 year-old sustains a similar injury we can be fairly confident that he will not require medevac to Germany.

In our daily lives we're accustomed to seeing people die full of years, having finished most of life's assigned tasks. We couldn't possibly feel the same sense of loss as we do when a young person is taken in the flower of life. This would achieve an important Bush administration objective and result in increased public tolerance for casualties.

Which would you choose? A glorious death on the field of battle or a slow wasting away in a nursing home. See. It's a win-win proposition.

It also might serve as an opportunity for some elderly members of the current national leadership to shed their "chicken hawk" label. People like Dick Cheney or Dennis Hastert could at last have a crack at the combat that eluded them during the 1960s. Since there is no apparent end in sight to the war on terror, President Bush himself might eventually "age in" to the geezer brigade. With his driving record, he might even be eligible for a waiver to join immediately on leaving office.

We are constantly told how thinly spread our combat forces have become. Why require second and third tours of duty from our youth when we could simultaneously reduce out-of-control Medicare expenses and deal with the loss of personal significance that afflicts many elderly members of society? And, if by some remote chance we lose the war, hey, who would the insurgents have defeated? Just a bunch of old guys.

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