

“Fighting with Another Purpose”

Interview with Army Captain Paul Chappell on the workings and options to war. New thinking on the politics of fear. From: **The Sun**, April 2011, p. 4-14

See **The End of War**
<http://paulkchappell.com/>

LESLEE GOODMAN

Paul Chappell was born in 1980 and raised in Alabama, the son of a Korean mother and a half-white, half-African American father who'd served in Korea and Vietnam. Though Chappell had seen how his father was troubled by his war experiences, he chose to pursue a military career himself, graduating from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 2002 and serving in Iraq as an army captain in 2006 and 2007. But even as he signed up for a tour of duty, Chappell was starting to doubt that war was ever going to bring peace in the Middle East, or anywhere else.

A year later, while still an active-duty officer, he published his first book, *Will War Ever End? A Soldier's Vision of Peace for the 21st Century*. “I am twenty-eight years old,” he writes, “and I have been obsessed with the problem of war for most of my life.” He went on to write *The End of War: How Waging Peace Can Save Humanity, Our Planet, and Our Future*. Both books are written in a direct, accessible style that avoids blaming the Left or the Right, and his arguments for peace have appealed to people of all political persuasions.

Chappell now works at the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and travels the country talking about the necessity of ending war and “waging peace.” He has a website (www.paulkchappell.com) and is involved with the American Unity Project (www.americanunityproject.com), which features a free online series of documentaries about waging peace. He also trains peace activists — a pursuit he believes should be undertaken with at least as much forethought and strategy as training soldiers for war. He emphasizes that activists must learn to be persuasive, to control their emotions, and to empathize with their opponents. Finally they must take their calling seriously — as seriously as soldiers going into battle. In *The End of War*, Chappell quotes civil-rights activist Bernard Lafayette: “Nonviolence means fighting back, but you are fighting back with another purpose and other weapons. Number one, your fight is to win that person over.”

Chappell teaches through example. I met him at a weekly

peace vigil on a downtown Santa Barbara, California, street corner, where he demonstrated how to engage even strident opponents with empathy and respect. I had lost patience with one such person after ten minutes of unproductive dialogue. Then Chappell showed up. He respectfully engaged my critic for a full forty-five minutes. Their conversation ended with the man thanking Chappell for listening to him and accepting a copy of *The End of War*. A few weeks later Chappell ran into the man and learned that he had read the book and had changed his mind about war as a means of ending terrorism.

Goodman: Your father was traumatized by his experiences in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Given that knowledge, why did you pursue a career in the military?

Chappell: Growing up, I was taught that you must wage war to end war. Comic books, action movies, video games, politicians — all said that if you wanted to make the world safe, you needed to use violence to defeat the bad guys. War was presented to me as the price you had to pay for peace, and I thought that peace was a goal worth fighting for.

My father didn't talk much about his wartime experiences, but I do remember him telling me about the suffering children he saw during the Korean War. The message I got was that if soldiers had to be traumatized to save children in Korea, or to save the Jews in Europe, or to protect innocents elsewhere, that's a sacrifice they were prepared to make. I saw soldiers as people who are willing to give their lives in order to protect others.

I think a lot of people join the military believing they're going to make the world safer. In the abstract the idea makes sense, because if you had a murderer in your home, of course you'd want an armed police officer there to protect you. But war is a completely different matter. It creates massive casualties — mostly civilian. It wasn't until I got to West Point that I learned war isn't the best way to make the world safe.

Goodman: This is something they taught you at West Point?

Chappell: Yes, West Point teaches that war is so dangerous, it should be used only as a last resort. I learned that the United States needs to rely more on diplomacy; that politicians don't understand war and are too quick to use it as a means of conflict resolution. West Point also teaches that if you want to understand war, you have to understand its limitations and unpredictability. World War I and World War II both started out as limited conflicts and grew into global blood baths. War is like a natural disaster. You can't control it.

Propaganda has made the word *war* synonymous with *security*, but in fact *peace* is synonymous with *security*. In the twenty-first century war actually makes us *less* secure. The United States has military bases in about 150 countries; we spend more on war than the rest of the world combined; we have the most powerful military in human history; and we're some of the most terrified people on the planet. War and military occupation haven't made us more secure. They've made us more hated in many parts of the world.

Goodman: Some say we're hated because we're free.

Chappell: If that's the case, then how come the terrorists aren't attacking the many other free countries around the world that *don't* have soldiers deployed in the Middle East? How come they're focusing so much on us and, to some extent, our NATO allies? Look who Osama bin Laden was fighting before he fought us: the Soviets. They weren't free. Moreover, when bin Laden was our ally, he apparently didn't care that we were free.

Another factor to consider is that wars are now fought on CNN, Fox News, Al Jazeera, and the Internet as much as they're fought on the battlefield. Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said recently that the future of war is about perception, and that how we are perceived in the Middle East is vital to American security. It's just common sense that the more we are in the news for invading Muslim countries, the less safe we are, because terrorism is not a government we can overthrow or a country we can occupy. Terrorism is an idea, a way of thinking. A terrorist can plan an attack from New York or San Francisco or Miami. Terrorism is a transnational criminal organization, and you cannot defeat it by invading a country. In fact, when you invade countries, you make the problem worse, because you kill civilians and create more resentment, more hatred, more enemies. I am increasingly of the mind that there are always preferable alternatives to war. Even if war could be justified, it's just not effective.

Goodman: Why do politicians miss this point?

Chappell: When you have the strongest military in history, you want to use it. That's our country's strength, and people tend to rely on their strengths. Diplomacy puts us on more of an equal footing with other countries, and we don't want to give up our advantage. Another reason is that there's so much money to be made from war. In wartime the few make huge profits at the expense of the many. Major General Smedley Butler, a veteran of World War I, said, "War is a racket. It always has been. . . . It is conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many."

Goodman: But don't we all benefit from our military securing the world's resources?

Chappell: I'm not sure that the Iraq War is *just* about oil, but I think most people will agree that if there were not a single drop of oil in the Middle East, we would not be over there. It's a strategic economic interest, but only a very small group of people benefit from it.

It's not about Americans having access to oil. The primary reason we want to control the oil tap in Iraq is because we know that China, Russia, India, and other emerging industrialized nations need oil, and we want to be the ones who sell it to them. The problem is how much these wars cost. Consider what President Eisenhower said about all the other things we could invest in — schools, hospitals, highways, houses, food — if we weren't spending so much money on the war machine, and you realize that the majority of the population is hurt by



PAUL CHAPPELL

war. General Douglas MacArthur said that if humanity abolished war, the money could be used to wipe poverty from the face of the earth and produce a wave of economic prosperity around the world.

It's not just the ones who go into battle who are harmed. We're all hurt by mounting national debt and lack of funding for social programs and infrastructure, while most of the people who benefit from military buildups are already rich. You and I are not getting rich off the war in Iraq.

Goodman: You've said that the military is a "socialist" organization. How so?

Chappell: The military gives you three meals a day, pays for your healthcare and your college, and even pays for your housing. On an army field exercise, the highest-ranking soldiers eat last, and the lowest-ranking soldiers eat first. Leaders are supposed to sacrifice for their subordinates. In civilian society we're told that the only thing that makes people work hard is the profit motive. The army's philosophy is that you can get people to work hard based on the ideals of selflessness, sacrifice, and service. It demonstrates that people will even sacrifice their lives for the sake of others. The military also has a motto: "Never leave a fallen comrade."

If I said to most Americans that we should have a society that gives everyone three meals a day, shelter, healthcare, and a college education, and that it should be based on selflessness, sacrifice, and service rather than greed, they'd say, "That's socialism." But that's the U.S. military. A lot of conservative Republicans who think socialism is the ultimate evil admire the military.

Goodman: What do they say when you point out to them that the military is socialist?

Chappell: I don't usually use the word *socialist* with them. When I try to persuade people that America should have universal healthcare, I say, "You know, in the military we have universal healthcare, and the military believes that you should never leave a fallen comrade behind. You take care of everyone." They usually agree that this makes sense.

Goodman: When did this idea first occur to you?

Chappell: When I was at West Point. I don't think I really knew what socialism was at that point, but I knew that West Point was different from how I'd grown up. You have a sense in America that you're all alone. It's survival of the fittest. But at West Point they have a saying: "Cooperate and graduate." Your classmates will tutor you in chemistry, physics, calculus — whatever you need. If anyone fails a class because of not understanding the material, his or her fellow students are partly responsible, because they didn't aid a classmate who needed help. Every professor has to give you his or her home phone number and allot two hours a day to additional instruction for any students who need it. So you feel as if people care about you. There's a sense of camaraderie and solidarity. Your classmates aren't trying to get a better grade than everyone else; they'll actually help you excel and graduate.

that the injustice was instantly grasped by millions. Did Great Britain own the oceans? Of course not. Gandhi carefully chose the right battle.

Goodman: What kind of training do you give peace activists?

Chappell: How to remain calm is important. And the key to remaining calm is to have empathy for your opponent. The more I empathize with you, the harder it is for me to get angry at you. If you get angry at me, I don't respond in kind, because I see how you are suffering. It takes years of practice — and getting tired of being angry — to master it, but it's such an important skill to have. Without empathy it's easy to become bitter and cynical.

Goodman: I have trouble identifying with the suffering of wealthy, white Americans who have more than anyone else on the planet and are fighting for their right to impose their will on the rest of the world. Sometimes I want to strangle them.

Chappell: [Laughs.] *It is* outrageous! But here's the thing: if you'd been born into their circumstances and had their life experiences, you'd probably be just like them. So what happened to them to make them like that? In the army there's a saying: "If someone goes wrong, you have to examine their training." So what did society and the educational system and these people's parents teach them that made them like that? It's easy to empathize with our friends, but the real test is to empathize with those we feel deserve our compassion the least.

Goodman: It's easy to empathize with the oppressed. It's hard to empathize with oppressors.

Chappell: I think being an oppressor is another kind of oppression. Mother Teresa called this the "poverty of spirit," the "poverty of lack of love." She said that there was no sickness in the world greater than that one.

Goodman: Yes, ultimately, but most political debate is not going to reveal the personal scars and wounds that are causing them to oppress others.

Chappell: I try to imagine them as children, before they became the way they are. I imagine them as three-year-olds. It's hard for me to hate even a horribly misguided three-year-old. I firmly believe that people can change, even when the chance of change is small. Also, you don't have to convince every single person for dramatic change to occur; you just have to convince enough people.

Goodman: I believe that too, but I think it will have to be life experiences that turn them around — not a conversation.

Chappell: A conversation can plant the seed. The right conversation creates tension in a person's mind, which can initiate change. Don't discount one-on-one efforts.

Goodman: What other skills do peace activists need besides the ability to remain calm?

Chappell: We need training in how to be persuasive and in understanding other people's worldviews, because if you attack someone's worldview, they are likely to react as if you are attacking them physically. It's part of who they are. When Martin Luther King Jr. challenged segregation, he was chal-

lenging everything that white Southerners believed: that black people were inferior; that racial harmony was impossible; that segregation was the only way the races could live peaceably together. So King took an innovative approach: he tied his ideas to his opponents' existing worldview by likening black Americans' fight for civil rights to the Hebrews' struggle for freedom from oppression in Egypt. This made the challenge to segregation less threatening. King also reminded Americans what the Declaration of Independence says: that "all men are created equal."

We need to learn to tie a new idea to a familiar one so that it becomes less threatening. For example, in the health-care debate some people on the Left said, "We should be more like Canada." But most Americans don't know much about Canada. Maybe they don't want to be like Canada. So when I talk to conservatives about healthcare, I talk to them about Jesus and the Good Samaritan. The Good Samaritan helped the stranger; he paid for his medical bills. I once saw a bumper sticker that said, "Jesus treated preexisting conditions." Jesus told his disciples to "go and do likewise."

When I'm talking about ending war, I quote Eisenhower or MacArthur, or I reference what I learned at West Point, because those are people and institutions that conservatives respect. For them to call me "crazy" would be like saying that Eisenhower and West Point are crazy. By quoting someone they trust, I'm also trying to circumvent their fear. The difference between manipulation and persuasion is that manipulation uses fear, which clouds the mind. It's difficult to think clearly when you're afraid. Persuasion appeals to people's reason, understanding, compassion, and conscience. If I'm trying to persuade you, I want you to be calm, rational. I want to give you all the evidence so that you can make the right decision.

Goodman: What do you say to people who consider peace a noble but naive ideal?

Chappell: Anyone who thinks ending war is naive hasn't put enough thought into it. What's naive is to think that wars can continue and humanity will survive. It's naive to think the planet is a limitless resource. It's naive to think that we can create ever more powerful means of killing each other and not destroy the planet.

Goodman: Still, we seem to be firmly in the grasp of the military-industrial complex. Can we really free ourselves?

Chappell: Think about the civil-rights movement. At that time the people who maintained segregation controlled the government, the news media, the universities, the military, and most of the money. What did the activists have? The truth. We now acknowledge that African Americans are not inferior to whites; that racial harmony is possible; that it's unnatural to keep black and white people separate. It was the same with the women's-suffrage movement: Women were denied the right to vote because they were thought to be intellectually inferior to men. And men controlled the government, the media, the military, and most of the money. But truth was on the side of the women's movement.

How will we win? We have the truth. ■

- women's rights (universal)
- civil rights (")
- peace rights - freedom to withdraw support for violence & war.