

AWOL: THE UNEXCUSED ABSENCE OF AMERICA'S UPPER CLASS FROM MILITARY SERVICE—AND HOW IT HURTS OUR COUNTRY¹

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*[W]e need a strong military and it is the duty of all classes to be involved in making it so.*³

AWOL: The Unexcused Absence of America's Upper Class from Military Service—and How It Hurts Our Country, attempts to provide a critical analysis of the diminishing relationship between the upper classes and the military, and the alleged detriment resulting from the weakening relationship. The end result, however, is merely the collective penance or catharsis of two writers thrown together, who willingly discuss their self-enlightenment concerning today's modern military.⁴ As appropriately described by General Tommy Franks (Retired), *AWOL* is, above all else, “a love story.”⁵ And while love stories have their place as a literary genre, *AWOL*'s use as an analytical tool for today's military is probably misplaced.

AWOL is the collaborative effort of Kathy Roth-Douquet⁶ and Frank Schaeffer.⁷ Roth-Douquet, “a former agitator, feminist, Ivy Leaguer,” and Clintonite has led a life of political activism and democratic service.⁸ While serving in the White House she learned first hand the role of the military in world affairs.⁹ Eventually, she married a Marine officer and became, in her words, a “Marine Wife.”¹⁰ Through her husband's service, especially his deployments in support of the war effort, Roth-Douquet began to develop a different view of the military: the view of a family member forced to live with and accept her loved one's service.

Frank Schaeffer is the product of a “British boarding school” education. He, like Roth-Douquet, had no connection to, much less an understanding of, America's military.¹¹ Schaeffer was born, raised, and lived in the world of the well-to-do. He wrote books, raised his children as he had been raised, and lived in “a very me-centered quest for fulfillment.”¹² Never did it occur to him that his youngest son would do something as “insanely self-destructive” as join the military.¹³ While first ashamed of his son's choice of profession, Schaeffer ultimately began to understand the “brotherhood of pride” that his son had entered.¹⁴

It is through their collective experiences, both as the wife of a servicemember and the father of a servicemember, that Roth-Douquet and Schaeffer began to believe that not everyone was pulling their fair share in the defense of the country. More than anything else, *AWOL* is the authors' attempt to set the record straight. Providing a bit of first person authenticity, both writers readily admit they come from the very social class their book attempts to expose: the upper class.¹⁵ Both were

¹ KATHY ROTH-DOUQUET & FRANK SCHAEFFER, *AWOL: THE UNEXCUSED ABSENCE OF AMERICA'S UPPER CLASS FROM MILITARY SERVICE—AND HOW IT HURTS OUR COUNTRY* (2006).

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³ ROTH-DOUQUET & SCHAEFFER, *supra* note 1, at 183.

⁴ *Id.* at 2.

⁵ *Id.* at xi.

⁶ “Roth-Douquet is a veteran of every presidential campaign of the past twenty years and has served in the Clinton White House and the Department of Defense. . . . At the Pentagon, she served in the Office of the Secretary of Defense primarily on defense-reform issues.” About Kathy Roth-Douquet, <http://www.roth-douquet.com/about.shtml> (last visited Mar. 8, 2007) [hereinafter About Kathy Roth-Douquet].

⁷ “Frank has written for *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, *Reader's Digest*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Baltimore Sun* and many other publications on topics ranging from his critique of American right wing fundamentalism to his experiences as a military parent and novelist.” The Official Website of Frank Schaeffer, <http://www.frankschaeffer.com/> (last visited Mar. 8, 2007).

⁸ See ROTH-DOUQUET & SCHAEFFER, *supra* note 1, 12-14.

⁹ *Id.* at 13.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 14.

¹¹ *Id.* at 21.

¹² *Id.* at 19.

¹³ *Id.* at 22.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 23.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 1 (“We were raised in a culture, a privileged culture, that misunderstands and underestimates the meaning of military service.”).

also forced to accept the realities of military service not by a personal choice but because of the service of loved ones: a husband for Roth-Douquet¹⁶ and a son for Schaeffer.¹⁷

The simple premise of *AWOL*, as described by the authors, is:

We believe that the increasing gap between the most privileged classes and those in the military raises three major problems: It hurts our country, particularly our ability to make the best policy possible. It undermines the strength of our civilian leadership, which no longer has significant numbers who have the experience and wisdom that comes from national service. Finally, it makes our military less strong in the long run.¹⁸

While most readers will agree with the authors' general assertion that there is an absence of America's upper classes from military service, the evidence presented in *AWOL* in support of the alleged ramifications of such absence falls short of convincing.

Roth-Douquet and Schaeffer provide a wealth of statistical data demonstrating the truly astonishing historical decline of the presence of upper classes in America's military. According to the authors' research, "[s]eventy percent of Congress were veterans in 1969. Twenty-five percent were veterans in the Congress of 2004."¹⁹ Additionally, this apparent generational decline in the motivation to serve does not bode well for the future where "[o]nly slightly more than one percent of members of Congress [presently] have a child serving."²⁰ This lack of service is not reserved to only the political elite, though. The upper class, in general, seems to have dismissed the idea of military service as even a possibility. As the authors point out, "[a]bout half of the graduating classes of Princeton and Harvard entered the service for a tour of duty in the fifties. Today, less than one percent do."²¹

While the statistics alone are staggering enough to the common reader, the authors miss an important opportunity to personify the politically elite's desire to avoid military service outright by relegating Vice President Dick Cheney's "legal draft dodging" to a mere footnote.²² This relegation is surprising considering Roth-Douquet's democratic leanings.²³ There simply can be no argument, at least based on historical percentages, that today's upper classes are woefully underrepresented in today's military. Such absence alone, however, does little to support the authors' overall contention that the military, and the country, are being significantly impaired by that absence.

In claiming that the absence hurts the country by preventing the elected officials to make the best policy decisions possible, the authors base their proposition primarily on the model set during World War II.²⁴ The authors show clear reverence for the unique situation that was presented in the 1940's where the child of a sitting president actually served in the military during a time of war.²⁵ Such a situation would, according to Roth-Douquet and Schaeffer, provide a leader with an "intimate connection to active duty—and to the personal consequences of his foreign policy decision making[:]"²⁶

This human dimension of Roosevelt's and Churchill's wartime lives has largely been forgotten, but the safety of their children was always on their minds, and they often asked after each other's broods. . . .

¹⁶ *Id.* at 14.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 20.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 10.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 7 n.2 (citing Donald N. Zillman, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone II: Military Veterans in Congress and the State of Civil-Military Relations*, 58 ME. L. REV. 135 (2006)).

²⁰ *Id.* at 7.

²¹ *Id.* at 10.

²² *Id.* at 111 n.14 ("Vice President Richard Cheney explained the eleven deferments he sought and received from the Vietnam draft as simply a matter of having 'other priorities' than military service at that time in his life. Quoted in an interview by George C. Wilson in the *Washington Post*, 1989, as quoted by Timothy Noah 'How Dick Cheney Is Like Dan Quayle.'" See Timothy Noah, *How Dick Cheney is Like Dan Quayle*, SLATE, July 27, 2000, <http://www.slate.com/id/1005761/>).

²³ See About Kathy Roth-Douquet, *supra* note 6.

²⁴ See ROTH-DOUQUET & SCHAEFFER, *supra* note 1, at 10.

²⁵ *Id.* at 109.

²⁶ *Id.*

Those pins [marking the position of troops] in the map rooms, from London to Washington, had faces attached to them—and some of those faces were their own children’s.²⁷

Ultimately, Schaeffer argues that political leaders having a personal stake in the military, through their children’s service, “will keep us out of stupid elective wars.”²⁸ Such a conclusion begs several questions, however, and perhaps suggests that the author has not abandoned all of his liberal-elitist leanings in the interest of objectivity. For example, who will decide which wars are “stupid” or “elective”? Will personalization of the military inadvertently keep the United States out of “important” wars, to the detriment of the country and the rest of the world? Finally, is it truly best for “the country” if decisions concerning war and foreign policy are based on the number of children of elected officials who may be impacted? Regrettably, these questions are left unanswered. Had Schaeffer or Roth-Douquet been able to provide concrete examples of actual poor foreign policy decisions being based on an absence of America’s upper class, perhaps the overall theory would not sound so “utopian.”

Notwithstanding this idealistic view of the preferred paternalistic relationship between America’s leaders and America’s military, it is unabashedly obvious that both authors possess a profound affinity for the men and women in uniform. At a minimum, the reader will come away with a better, and probably more positive view of the armed services, which is most likely one of the unstated goals of Roth-Douquet and Schaeffer. For example, in taking the media to task for the lack of positive coverage of military personnel,²⁹ the authors attempt to shine a contrasting positive light on the military by devoting a significant number of pages to anecdotal evidence of heroism and bravery.³⁰ They also provide several testimonials from current military officers who graduated from the same Ivy League schools that the authors chastise for being anti-military.³¹ These testimonials do an admirable job of extolling the overall virtues of military service and act as a calling to the upper class elite to take responsibility for their citizenship. In the end, however, they do little, if anything, to support the authors’ overall thesis.

It is this lack of substance that undercuts the authors’ final claim that the lack of upper class participation in the military makes our military less strong.³² The biggest danger the authors forecast for the military—based on this lack of upper class participation—is a revolt and mass exodus of military members based on dissatisfaction that they are carrying too much of the service burden.³³ The major problem facing the authors with this theory is that their forecast is based on faulty assumptions. For example, Roth-Douquet and Schaeffer believe that “at some point military personnel will ask: ‘why should I fight and perhaps die for a bunch of rich and powerful people who never send their own sons and daughters to serve with us?’”³⁴ It is this class jealousy, this “lack of solidarity between all classes of Americans [that] lies at the heart of the threat of a mass departure from military service.”³⁵ Unfortunately, statistical data shows just the opposite is true. Not only is there no present threat of a mass departure from the military; present servicemembers are continuing their service in steady numbers.³⁶ In fact, the director of Military Personnel Management, Major General Sean Byrne, recently pointed out that: “The Army has met its retention goals for the past nine years in a row . . . , [and t]he Army reenlistment rate remains high. Two out of [three] Soldiers eligible to reenlist do.”³⁷ The complete lack of statistical data in support of the authors’ claims is a glaring omission that detracts from the credibility of their argument. The authors do provide one anecdotal example of eight helicopter pilots who left the service after the mid-point of their careers because “they saw no end in site to what the county was asking them

²⁷ *Id.* at 110 (quoting JON MEACHUM, FRANKLIN AND WINSTON: AN INTIMATE PORTRAIT OF AN EPIC FRIENDSHIP 176 (New York: Random House) (2003)).

²⁸ *Id.* at 231 (advocating for the institution of a mandatory draft to ensure participation by the upper classes).

²⁹ *Id.* at 51 (“In conversation, magazine editors almost without exception are hostile and contemptuous of the military.”) (quoting WILLIAM V. KENNEDY, THE MEDIA AND THE MILITARY: WHY THE PRESS CANNOT BE TRUSTED TO COVER A WAR (1991)).

³⁰ *See id.* at 54-59.

³¹ *See id.* at 77-84; *id.* at 44 (“At the university level, some of the outright hostility toward military service, particularly from the faculty, is focused on ROTC.”).

³² *Id.* at 10.

³³ *Id.* at 169-70.

³⁴ *Id.* at 169.

³⁵ *Id.* at 170.

³⁶ Donna Miles, U.S. Dep’t of Defense, *Five Years After 9/11, Recruiting, Retention Remain Solid* (Sept. 12, 2006), <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=823> (“[R]etention remains solid across the board, with all services expected to meet their retention goals for the fiscal year.”).

³⁷ Army Public Affairs, Army News Service, *Army Reaches Retention Goal with Fort Campbell Soldier* (Aug. 31, 2006), http://www4.army.mil/ocpa/read.php?story_id_key=9493.

to do”³⁸ This lone example of mass exodus, however, is unpersuasive considering the unusual marketability of the servicemembers in question.

Undeterred by the statistical evidence to the contrary, Roth-Douquet and Schaeffer take their theory a step further, positing that “[i]t is time for a midcourse correction in the policy of the all-volunteer military and how it recruits.”³⁹ Given the generational decline of military service among the leadership class, the authors believe “[i]f present statistical trends continue, we are fast approaching the day when no one in Congress and no president will have served or have any children serving.”⁴⁰ Interestingly, it is this one point where recent statistical data actually supports the Roth-Douquet and Schaeffer contention. While the Army met its 2006 recruiting goals, it did so with a much lower educated recruiting class.⁴¹ Obviously, socio-economic conditions play a vital role in this decline of high school graduates. And those who have the financial resources to attain a better education are apparently choosing not to join the military. Furthermore, while the various branches of service trumpet the fact that they are reaching their recruiting goals, they are also being forced to reach further and further down the educational food chain to attain those goals. Such a fact only heightens the distinctions between the haves and have-nots, makes our military less educationally balanced, and allows for the scenario that the authors predict.⁴²

While it is enticing to agree with the author’s view that “we need a strong military and it is the duty of all classes to be involved in making it so;”⁴³ it will be difficult for the reader to accept their final proposition of compulsory service—either military or civilian—for everyone. Specifically, it is difficult to accept because the authors do not provide a defense for the ramifications of such a program.⁴⁴ The primary consequence of compulsory service is that it would eliminate the enlistment tools and programs currently available to the non-upper classes. In essence, it would eliminate one of the main avenues through which the non-upper class has to improve its station in life.⁴⁵ In fairness, the authors do provide “the argument against broadening the spectrum of those who serve.”⁴⁶ A Marine Corps personnel officer succinctly identifies this issue as one of a cost-benefit analysis. By instituting a policy of compulsory service, “society would lose an important avenue for the lower classes. Any effort to increase representation of one class requires a reduction in representation of another class.”⁴⁷ Unfortunately, instead of addressing the legitimate concerns expressed by that officer, Roth-Douquet and Schaeffer dismiss the entire view as “nonsense in light of the very real sacrifices people in the military are asked to make.”⁴⁸ Interviews with senior military officials, either in support of or against the authors’ position, would have added a much needed dose of credibility and balance to the book.

It is hard to argue with the Roth-Douquet and Schaeffer’s position that military service, in general, would benefit everyone; specifically those who serve and society at large.⁴⁹ The authors make a compelling argument, if the argument is to

³⁸ See ROTH-DOUQUET & SCHAEFFER, *supra* note 1, at 170.

³⁹ *Id.* at 201.

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 206.

⁴¹ Ann Scott Tyson, *Army on Pace to Meet Year’s Recruiting Goal*, WASH. POST, Sept. 9, 2006, at A9 (“The Army . . . will fall short in the percentage of high-school graduates as the education level of enlistees dips below the norm of the past decade.”).

⁴² *But see* Joyce Howard Price, *Army Reaches Retention Goal Early; Guard, Reserve, West Point Also See Gains in 2006*, WASH. TIMES, Aug. 31, 2006, at A9.

The outlook also is good at West Point. As of Aug. 17, the academy had received 7,870 applications for the class that will report in June 2007 and will graduate in 2011. That is a 14 percent increase from the same time last year, according to West Point spokesman Mike D’Aquino.

Id.

⁴³ See ROTH-DOUQUET & SCHAEFFER, *supra* note 1, at 183.

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 231 (“Kathy and I agree that in some areas society has the right to compel people to do things. The only issue is what the circle of compulsion should include.”).

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 199 (“In other words you will end up refusing to allow certain people to join the service even though they are willing and perceive military service to be their best employment option.”).

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 197.

⁴⁷ *Id.* at 198-99.

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 200.

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 233.

be based solely on what Americans think is fair. Under the bright lights of statistical analysis, however, the authors' premise is less than convincing. Today's military is no less prepared than it was fifty years ago when the "elite" chose to serve in greater numbers. Military service was then and will always be for those select individuals who have the capacity to understand and appreciate what sacrifice is all about. If today's political and social elite do not understand that principle and choose not to serve; it is their loss and not ours. Our military will survive and prosper nonetheless. And that perhaps best explains General Franks' description of *AWOL* as "a hard hitting account of military life" and "a love story."⁵⁰

We both agree that the common shared experience of having a great deal expected of you, working to meet a physical and mental challenge, and the readjustment of one's mind from a me-centered universe to broad community awareness and the ideal of shared responsibility and teamwork for a cause greater than oneself would benefit future generations of Americans immeasurably. It would also create a better class of leaders.

Id.

⁵⁰ *Id.* at xi.