

What interests me most in current attempts to come up with an answer for Iraq is the notion that the war must continue, in some form at least, so that those who have died thus far will not have died in vain.

At first glance, this may seem a noble sentiment. To pick up the banner of those who have gone before and finish what they have started.

The magnificent vision is begun, and the final touches are applied by persons its originators could not have known.

The Wright brothers give up bicycles and Neil Armstrong jumps down onto the moon.

Martin Luther King resigns his day job and one of the hottest names in the new presidential tournament has an African-American heritage.

And even if you don't think of it in that way, there's that good old American virtue, persistence. If at first, you don't succeed . . .

Pick up a "How To" book on any subject you can identify and somewhere between the front and back covers you will be instructed that the surest way to fail is to quit before you succeed.

Woody Allen says that 95 percent of life is just showing up.

Besides, it's always darkest before the dawn. And you want to be there to see it, don't you?

Trouble is, not everything succeeds. No matter how long you stay at it.

For quite a while yet, there will be high-speed chatter about whether Iraq can be fixed, about what fixing it would look like, and how long we should wait to see whether it could happen.

More and more faces will appear behind microphones, each earnestly seeking a position distinct from all the other positions. As if they were all standing around a gargantuan jigsaw puzzle shuffling pieces at such a clip that nothing can be fitted together.

It won't do for anybody to fantasize that opposition to the president's "surge" initiative will take us back to October of 2001, so we can send all those troops to Afghanistan and actually find bin Laden.

Choose your cliché. The milk has been spilled. The barn door was left open. The genie (perhaps the most suitable image for our



Musings

By Robert Morton-Ranney

current adventure) is out of the bottle.

Still, though a consensus may be growing, there is not yet unanimous agreement that it is absolutely too late.

But what we must not allow is the use of American servicewomen and servicemen as a device for recalibrating public sentiment.

The notion that if we stop, those who have died thus far will have died in vain is misguided at best, and demeaning and dishonorable at worst.

To have acted in vain is, according to the dictionary, to have done so "without result or success."

You see can that, in its most simplistic form, the widespread application of this notion is entirely useless. Because we would all have to wait to see how our actions turn out before we take them.

More to the point, it simply cannot be applied to men and women in uniform. They didn't decide to go to war. Their government did.

They didn't decide how to fight this war, how many troops to use, what the rules of engagement would be, or what the occupational strategy would be. Their leaders did.

What American women and men in uniform have done is to try to be loyal to the values they espouse and the commands they have been given. And, with very few exceptions, they have accomplished this.

Many argue that in Vietnam, the American government made the mistake of going to war against an enemy they did not understand in a setting that they had not sufficiently investigated.

The mistake made by the public was blaming returning troops for the actions of their leaders. Surely

this is on the list of the great errors the American people collectively have made.

If every soldier, sailor, Marine, and airman left Iraq tomorrow, none will have died in vain.

For the result they sought was acting according to the values they held closest, and they achieved that.

They were asked and they went.

If their nobility was abused by political leaders, it is those political leaders who will need to answer for it.

And, if we who inhabit that great sea of humanity so often referred to simply as 'the public' cannot see this, it is only our own lives that will be diminished.

Book group reads 'Cane River'

The Afternoon Book Discussion at the Jamestown library continues on Feb. 13, the second Tuesday of the month from 1 to 2 p.m. with "Cane River" by Lalita Tademy.

"Cane River" was an Oprah's Book Club Selection. The author researched the genealogy of her own family to create this novel about four generations of African-American women as they faced life with courage and fortitude in the deep South of Louisiana.

This book may be obtained through the Jamestown library by placing holds on one of the many copies in the state available through the Cooperating Libraries Automated Network (CLAN). The meetings are free and open to the public and new members are encouraged to join. For more information, call the library at 423-7280.

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LEGAL TIP

The assumption of the risk doctrine does not bar a man's claim against a golf partner who allegedly struck the plaintiff with a ball when teeing off, the California Court of Appeal has ruled.

The two golfers were on the thirteenth hole when the injury occurred. The defendant took a practice shot. He then stepped forward, focused on the ball for 15 to 20 seconds and struck it. When he looked up, he saw the plaintiff lying on the ground approximately 25 to 35 feet away. The ball had hit the plaintiff in the head.

The court said the victim did not assume the risk of being hit in this case and was not at fault. The fault was with his golf partner who failed to realize where the victim was.

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