

Words Go To War

Does War Cause Substantive Word Change?

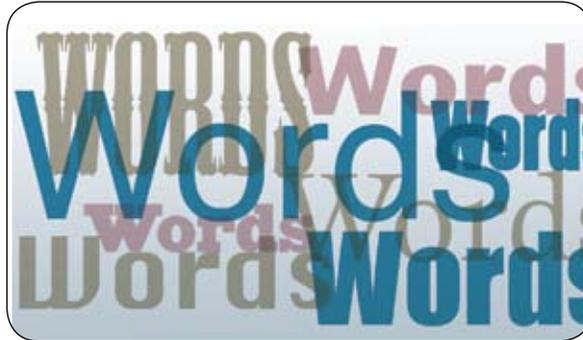
“We have not been able to fully *“RE-SOURCE”* our troops in Iraq. We must provide them with adequate resources.” Thus spoke NPR — National Public Radio. One wonders whether words themselves have become a resource for war. Warring states have often treated words essentially as weapons. True or not, I was taught as a schoolboy that when the First World War began, the British went fishing, fishing for the transatlantic cable to cut the information link — the word connection — between the enemy Central Powers and the then-neutral Americans. Control the flow of words or cut it off.

More recently I learned that my own government was rating reporters on how favorable (or unfavorable) their stories were about the Afghan war. The government information managers made pie charts for reporters “imbedded” with the troops. If stories were too negative, the reporter was barred from reporting on the troops; “out-bedded” you might say.

Beyond the effect of words on war, I wonder if the opposite could be true. I wonder whether war changes words in a way similar to the way it speeds up technology or accelerates changes in social relationships, e.g., between men and women, between rich and poor, between races and classes. Does war cause substantive word change or just make it more rapid and extreme?

Case in point, when I was growing up, I don’t remember people and things being “taken out,” at least not in the scary contemporary sense of the phrase. Peo-

ple were taken out to lunch or dinner, or taken out to the ball game. Good things, by and large, assuming you liked the takers. These days you DO NOT want to be taken out, because you may not be coming back. Towns are taken out by warplanes. Soldiers are taken out by snipers and “drone aircraft.” A more benign form of “taking out” comes from traffic



reports, but it is not all that benign. Accidents, road repair work, “police activity” and bad weather take out lanes on the expressway. “Taken out” no longer means what it used to, and war may be a big part of the reason.

Another phrase molded by war is the ominous “gone missing.” Maybe it began with lost crews of downed planes and unlucky members of patrols that disappeared. From there it took on civilian uses for lost children, wandering senior citizens, missing hikers and runaway brides. We may be ready for the phrase itself to go missing for a while.

Then there is “*collateral damage*” which has been worked and re-worked, analyzed and analyzed again. It’s a euphemism that often covers a horror: the killing of innocent civilians. Repetitions

notwithstanding, it may be worth another mention, another stare in the eye, if you could do that to a word. It highlights the dangers of what can happen when we allow language to be hijacked. One danger is that when words like “collateral” and “damage” are hijacked, they can cover ugliness and horror and help us tolerate the intolerable. Timothy McVeigh carried home the phrase from the first Gulf War to try to explain his mass murder in Oklahoma City. Collateral damage was his explanation — his justification — for the incinerated babies in the day care center in the federal building he blew up.

I am not the first to notice words going to war. Others have seen, spoken, and written about it. And not just any others. Giants. George Orwell in his essay “Politics and the English Language” raised the alarm more than half a century ago. He saw words being abused in defense of the indefensible: “Pacification” to describe people being driven from homes by bombs and machine guns; “Elimination of Unreliable Elements” applied to imprisonment, torture and execution without trial. Orwell believed that bending words helped people accept the unacceptable.

Talking about war in these times can lead to talk of torture, a topic that once did not flow naturally or inevitably from discussions of past American wars. Some think that torture is discussed too much. Others think it is unpatriotic to talk about it at all. Lawyer/Professor Alan Dershowitz spoke about allegations of torture of prisoners held by the U.S. military. He did not favor pretending that there was no problem. Dershowitz said that anything that “SURFACES” the issue of torture is a good thing. He apparently rejects the

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childhood delusion that closing your eyes makes you invisible. If “surfacing” is a creature of war, maybe it comes from the submarine service.

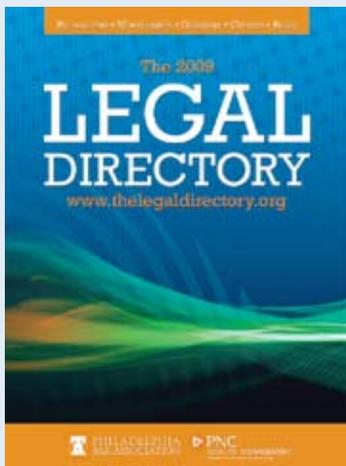
If you are having trouble with the word “torture” verbal assistance may be available. A former director of the Central Intelligence Agency talked about it without using its nasty little name at all. He referred to waterboarding as one of the “enhanced interrogation techniques.” A very creative use of words to help tolerate the intolerable. I am not sure whether this surfaces torture or submerges it.

As they used to say during the Second World War: “Don’t they know there’s a war on?”

And it is not just a war of words. ■

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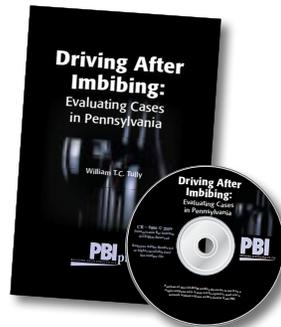
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Mr. Tully is a solo practitioner in Harrisburg, where he practices in the areas of criminal and motor vehicle law as well as juvenile and municipal matters. He also serves as solicitor for Dauphin County. Prior to opening his own practice in 2003, Mr. Tully was a partner in the Harrisburg firm of Mancke, Wagner, Tully & Spreha.

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Bart's experience includes nearly 30 years in the design, installation, testing, maintenance, modification and repair of marine and industrial machines and equipment. From highly specialized machinery to custom turn-key process systems, Bart has designed and engineered complete systems from the ground up. Bart is a Professional Engineer in ten states including New York, Ohio, Florida, Alabama and Kentucky. He has been conducting forensic investigations since 2001 and has testified extensively in cases across the United States.

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- Machine guarding & process hazards
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Ron has more than 30 years of insurance and industry experience along with 16 years of university teaching experience. He has conducted forensic investigations for over 27 years and has testified more than 84 times, including mass tort & multi-district litigation. He applies his OSHA and EPA expertise in industrial, commercial, educational, health care and residential settings involving exposure to chemical, machinery, ergonomic and pollution hazards.

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Expert: Michael J. McCabe Jr., Ph.D.

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- Solvents
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- Dioxins
- Pesticides

Dr. McCabe applies his expertise in toxicology to human health assessments involving environmental, recreational, and occupational exposures to potentially hazardous substances; he is an internationally trained and nationally recognized scientist with both research and teaching experience. Dr. McCabe has spent more than 24 years studying the adverse health effects of chemical, physical and biological agents on human and animal health.

Product Liability Expert

Expert: Harold Ehrlich

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- A wide variety of consumer products, including appliances, toys, power tools, power gardening equipment, playground equipment, etc.
- Commercial equipment in restaurants & hotels
- Workplace safety/machine guarding
- Warnings and safety instructions

Harry has worked as an Industrial Engineer since 1978. He has been responsible for the design and manufacture of consumer products, as well as commercial and industrial equipment. He is an active member of ASTM, where he sits on the F15.22 Subcommittee on Toy Safety. Harry analyzes products for compliance with OSHA regulations and applicable standards (UL, ANSI, ASME, ASTM, CFR). Harry's practice also includes investigations involving Intentional Tort/Willful Wrong with regard to employer liability.

Security Expert

Expert: Donald J. Decker

Investigates security measures related to:



- Parking Lots and Parking Garages
- Concerts and Sporting Events
- Apartment Buildings and Housing Projects
- Night Clubs and Music Venues
- Hotels and Conference Centers
- Crowd Control

Don's experience includes 18 years as a state trooper, 5 years as an organizer and manager of security details, 10 years as an investigator for insurance companies in liability and fraud claims, and 2 years as a private investigator. Don is well-versed in requirements to provide secure environments for people wherever they live, work or congregate. He has a degree in criminal justice, an accomplished police career, and a history of successful investigations.

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Expert: Brent R. Leisenring, P.E.

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- Crane & rigging failures
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Brent is a civil engineer with more than 30 years of hands-on experience. Brent has real-world experience as a general contractor, sub contractor, construction supplier, engineer, and owner's representative. He has worked in the commercial, heavy, highway, bridge, industrial, and residential construction industries. His experience ranges from that of a construction laborer to a construction manager. He is a P.E. in five states and has testified in several states.

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