

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

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THE CITIZEN-SOLDIER:  
THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE SOLDIER AND THE STATE

A BROOKINGS ESSAY CONVERSATION ABOUT  
MORAL RISK AND THE MODERN MILITARY

Washington, D.C.

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**Featured Speaker:**

PHIL KLAY  
Author; Hodder Fellow  
Princeton University

**Moderator:**

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SOLDIER-2016/07/12

## PROCEEDINGS

GENERAL ALLEN: Okay, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. Welcome to Brookings and Falk auditorium. I'm John Allen, General John Allen. I'm the co-director of the Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence. And it is a great honor for me this afternoon to have the opportunity to welcomed Phil Klay to Brookings for an afternoon conversation and with the help of some of your questions about his recent essay, "Citizen-Soldier: Moral Risk and the Modern Military."

First, I'd like to acknowledge that his family is on the front row here. And we hope that these questions, in fact, will reinforce your confidence and pride in Phil. But in the event that we run hard aground up here, you're welcome to ask any questions you want and we'll try to rectify the situation.

Let me just make one comment before we get started. In the back, outside, there's a table which has Phil's terrific book, "Redeployment." If you've not seen it, or if you've not read it, I certainly recommend it to you. It's available outside for a cost, but Phil has also said that he'd be very happy to stay for a bit and to sign some of them for you. It is a superb piece of work.

We have about an hour this afternoon. We started a couple of minutes early, and that's never enough time, but what I'd like to do is forge on and do so by highlighting some of Phil's career highlights. He's a graduate of Dartmouth, and is a veteran of the United States Marine Corps. Hoorah! (Laughter)

He served in Iraq's Anbar province -- and I'll come back to that in a minute -- from January 2007 to February 2008 and served, among other things, in the field as a staff officer, but as a public affairs officer. Coming back from Anbar, coming back from the war in Iraq, he would go on to Hunter College where he would receive a master's in fine arts, which I think is a fantastic degree, frankly, and I wish I'd had the opportunity to do that in my life, as well.

But his story, "Redeployment," was one of the first of his publications and would appear in something called "Fire and Forget: Short Stories from the Long War." And he has written for The New York Times, he's written for The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, Newsweek, Tin House, and elsewhere.

It's really important to understand just how prolific and how skillful a writer Phil is because "Redeployment" won the National Book Award for fiction. He was shortlisted for the Frank O'Connor

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

Prize and named a National Book Foundation 5 Under 35 honoree. And you might explain that here in a bit?

In 2015, he received the Marine Corps/Heritage Foundation James Webb Award for fiction dealing with U.S. Marines, and the life in the Corps.

The National Book Critics Circle John Leonard Award was the next of the awards that he has received for the Best Debut Work in Any Genre. And then the American Library Association's W.Y. Boyd Literary Award for Excellence in Military Fiction, the Chautauqua Prize, and the 2015 Warwick Prize for Writing.

This is a remarkable set of accomplishments for so young a writer, and it is a great honor and a pleasure to have you with us this afternoon.

Phil, your essay was superb. And from my perspective it demonstrated an uncommon, insightful understanding of some of the most fundamental aspects of the human dimension in combat, in war, and in conflict. And the inevitable aftermath that comes from this kind of a human experience, which many of us have had to deal with in the aftermath of conflict. Your exceptional writing style added dramatically to the substance of the article. And in that regard, I think you've done us all a great service by what you have written.

Were I still the commanding officer at the Basic School -- that should send a shutter down your back -- or the commandant of midshipmen at the Naval Academy, and there's some of my former midshipmen here today, I would make it required reading for the institution, not just for the students. I'd make it required reading for the faculty, as well, and we would discuss it in great detail in small group sessions.

For the audience this afternoon, let me also say one thing about Phil. We had not met before this afternoon, but we both served in the Al Anbar province in Iraq in 2007 and 2008, so we overlapped almost day by day in the same deployment. And I'll tell you that in the two recent wars in which the United States has been involved now since 2001 -- and the argument can be made that we're still, once again, fighting in Iraq and we're still involved in Afghanistan -- in those two wars there was no more violent a place, and no more violent a time than being in Al Anbar in 2007.

And I may not know a thing about a single person or an individual person except that they

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SOLDIER-2016/07/12

served in Al Anbar in 2007, and if I learn about that, they have my respect immediately and, pretty quickly thereafter, they're probably going to have my friendship. And so, Phil, it was an honor to serve with you, even though we didn't cross paths then. I know it was a very difficult time for all of us who were there. So what I'd like to do, though, is to drive on, ask some questions, we'll go for about 30 minutes up here on the stage or until we run out of steam here. And then I'd like to go to the floor and ask our guests this afternoon -- and it's standing room only, if you can find a seat you're welcome to take it, but this is an indication not just of this institution's willingness to hold this kind of an event. I think this is a direct indication of people's sense of the worth of your writing in general, and the worth of your writing for this essay.

So, Phil, let me just ask a few questions and then we'll invite our friends to come in from the floor. Other than, obviously, the request of Brookings to express yourself on this issue, what caused the interest? What brought you to write this piece, please?

MR. KLAY: Well, thank you so much, first of all. It's incredible to be here at Brookings. It's an honor to be on stage with you. We never actually formally met. I did once watch you deliver a speech to a group of Iraqi officers in Habbaniyah, and if you had told me then that one day I would be sitting on the stage with you, I would certainly not have believed it.

When Brookings asked me, I sort of -- I'm a fiction writer, I wondered if they had the wrong guy. But really, the essay came out of watching what is happening in Iraq now. And I think that it's something that every veteran who served there has to come to terms with in some way because it's such a horrible catastrophe. The people there meant a lot to us, right? It's not abstract to me. I remember I was talking to a veteran who had served in military intelligence and she worked a lot with the Yazidi population. And when there was this genocide happening and she was reading news, she started just breaking down in her office in tears.

GENERAL ALLEN: Yes.

MR. KLAY: And her colleagues weren't unsympathetic, but it was sort of, well, this is Iraq. That's what happens there. And to her, that's not what happens there. And it's also the result of policy decisions; not just one policy decision, but many over the course of years, some good, some bad. And so I was trying to come to terms with how do I not just make sense of this, but figure out what do I do

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

from here, right?

What is my relationship to this as a veteran? And what's my relationship to it as an American citizen? And asking myself those questions brought me back, actually, to the beginning of the piece, thinking about this one sergeant instructor at OCS who would ask these really different questions when we were in inspections. It was sort of, why are you here to lead Marines, and all of this kind of really rah-rah stuff.

And the history lessons we got were a little bit -- I remember at OCS one of the history lessons that we received was that the U.S. involvement in Cuba early in the 20th century, that the United States was like a mama bird trying to help a baby bird fly to freedom. (Laughter)

GENERAL ALLEN: Okay, romanticized, right. (Laughter)

MR. KLAY: Yes.

GENERAL ALLEN: I'll grant that. Go ahead.

MR. KLAY: And I'd never heard it put that way before. And then he was asking us questions, the ground contract guys, do you think you could order your Marines into a house knowing that some of them are going to die? And asking the air contract guys if they think they could deal with the collateral damage that might happen, the women and children that they might kill inadvertently. And appreciating what he was trying to prepare us for, which was that -- I think that every young person who signs up for war, the trials that they imagine that they're going to be dealing with are like, am I going to be enough of a man, right?

And a lot of the things that are deeply important to people afterwards are deeper moral questions. And they're moral questions that don't just concern the individual, but they concern the entire society.

GENERAL ALLEN: Your family is on the front row and I don't think any of us who ever wore the uniform could have put that uniform on without the boost of the guidance of our families, and the presence of them in our lives. With that in mind, what equipped you emotionally and intellectually and philosophically to write this piece? What were the foundational elements that gave you these insights that, in my mind, you seldom see in the literature of war and we need to see much more of it. What equipped you intellectually to write this, do you think?

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

MR. KLAY: As far as my family background, well, the family dinner table discussions would be free rein. I'm one of five boys, so there's an --

GENERAL ALLEN: Well done, Mom. (Laughter)

MR. KLAY: Both intellectual and physical combat was a part of my upbringing. (Laughter) But when we did MCMAP training, I remember the sergeant saying, oh, you're pretty good at this, you --

GENERAL ALLEN: What's MCMAP?

MR. KLAY: Oh, Marine Corps martial arts. You're getting pretty good at this, did you do Jiu-Jitsu, and did you do wrestling? I'm like, no. Older brothers? Yeah.

But also my family had a strong respect for service. My grandmother is here; my grandfather was a career foreign service officer. My grandmother was with him in every post. Actually, when I was in high school I thought I was going to become a foreign service officer, like my granddad. My father served in the Peace Corps. It's sort of strange, three of my brothers ended up joining the military, even though neither of my parents served. But I think that the same ethos and the kind of same commitment and moral questions that our parents taught us to ask ourselves are part of why we joined in the time of war.

And so that's, I think, a really important part of it. And then just -- I was Jesuit educated, and I think for me a lot of the moral questions about how an individual, especially an individual within an institution, reconciles himself to the moral choices that he's making. And your commitment to the group broader than you as a whole were things that were critical to me.

GENERAL ALLEN: That's a serious beginning. It's a serious foundation from which then you could make these unique and important observations. You know, I've had the chance in my own career to both command and lead coalitions, so I've seen internationally a lot of different kinds of troops, soldiers, airmen, Marines, sailors. I've seen a lot of different ones, but I still come back to my own experience and my bias towards the uniqueness of the American fighting person. The individual American who today -- the draft was still on when I was a youngster in uniform -- who today gets up from their home and goes forth to join the service and ultimately -- at least during the last 14 years or so -- with a very good likelihood that they were going into combat, if not a certainty.

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

So to me the American individual who puts on the uniform today is still, in my own judgment -- and I think it's pretty well-informed -- unique in the world. But you use a term in your wonderful essay, "the citizen-soldier," and it's one we've heard frequently, but use it in a context that's really important, and could you tell us what that term means to you and who is the citizen-soldier today?

MR. KLAY: Well, I didn't think I could get away with calling it the citizen-Marine.

(Laughter) So, you know, it's a term that I have a kind of complicated relationship with because, on the one hand, as I was going through these questions, one of the things I felt that I had to do was I kept a kind of situational awareness and understanding of the context in which you're operating in order to understand the choices that you make. Part of that means going through the history. What is the nature of this organization and its relationship to the society and how has it changed and morphed over time?

And so there's this always kind of odd tension or back and forth in the American mind between the citizen-soldier ideal, you know, the person who signs up out of pure patriotic zeal. He's an amateur. I think of Tom Hank's character in "Saving Private Ryan," who is competent, but he's really yearning to be the school teacher back home versus the professional military, which at times has been slighted, including by people like Ulysses S. Grant, which was surprising to me to see.

And, in fact, there's a kind of pragmatic meeting place because you need a professional corps, but one that's instilled with a kind of deep commitment to the American ideals, and that's sort of what guides you. It gives what you're doing purpose and meaning and a context in which it can be just.

GENERAL ALLEN: To that extent, of course, we've heard a lot and we continue to hear in news coverage sometimes -- in news that is both good and news that is not so good -- about the emergence of something that we call a victimization narrative.

MR. KLAY: Uh-huh.

GENERAL ALLEN: Our troops are inherently victims of some unfair system because they served. Do you have a sense, Phil, on where that came from? What prompted that stipulation? And in your own view, both from your own service, but also from your scholarship, are our veterans acting like victims? Or are they acting in some other way?

MR. KLAY: It's kind of interesting to me. I think it's changed over time and when I first joined the Marine Corps, I think it was a little different. We forget how things were in 2003 and 2004 and

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

2005. Oftentimes I'd meet people who find out you're a Marine, they assume that you're a bad ass, or I bet you could kill me 13 times before I hit the ground, somebody told me. And I thought, probably not.

At a certain point I realized that I kept running into people who assumed I was broken. I met a guy in a bar who told me, not in an unkind way, but he just wanted me to know that all Iraq vets are going to snap after 10 years, and I'd been back for three years at that point. So I had seven left, and I should make them good ones, I guess. And part of it is coming from a good place. There are really severe challenges that a portion of the veteran population is facing, right?

There's a lot of talk about PTSD and, in some ways, it's very good because it's a subject that needs studying and people who are injured should be afforded help and social recognition for the fact that they're injured and that means something. But at the same time, I'm deeply uncomfortable with this notion of veterans as victims or even this assumption that if you served, it must have been a uniformly negative experience. Or rather probably the dichotomy that either you were like a Navy SEAL superhero or a passive, traumatized victim, when, in fact, that's not the case.

A lot of people that I know loved being Marines. Most veterans do not regret the decision to join, even though they might disagree with the war that they end up serving in, in retrospect. And I think it's very important to think about that. I remember talking with one veteran, a Marine veteran, who actually had PTSD. And he said to me, I don't tell war stories because people only want to hear about the worst things that ever happened to me. They don't want to hear about the guys that I loved in my unit, the good times we had, or even, hell, what the biggest barracks rat I ever saw was, right?

And I think that if we're going to understand the military, we need to have a much more robust way of understanding it. And I think that it's in some ways safer for us to section it off. Elizabeth Samet, she's at West Point, says that it's easier to pathologize our veterans than take them seriously. So I think there is a victimization narrative. I think that some veterans do play into it, right? Veterans are as guilty as anybody else of contributing to false narratives sometimes, but it's one that -- you need to acknowledge both extremes.

And also, the other important thing for me is that when there are bad feelings or bitterness, a lot of times the discussion gets flattened to trauma, right? And yet, if somebody came back and feels as though -- you know, there's a line in the essay where I say, serving in the military is an act of



SOLDIER-2016/07/12

faith. It's an act of faith that your country will use your life well. And if somebody came back and they do not feel that that's happened, their problem -- they may have trauma or they may not. They may have psychological trauma or they may not. But that problem is not a problem that can be solved with a pill that will make them feel better.

That feeling that they have is actually a demand to the society as part of what they may feel is, as Nancy Sherman talks about, a broken contract, that we need to use our soldiers and Marines and sailors and airmen better.

GENERAL ALLEN: And that broken contract can often be nearly as traumatic as the experience in the battle space, frankly.

MR. KLAY: Right.

GENERAL ALLEN: The sense of betrayal, the sense of having been left alone after having put your soul, really, on the line --

MR. KLAY: Yes.

GENERAL ALLEN: -- as someone who has committed themselves to an ideal and a principle, which is, again, what makes us unique in the U.S. military. And I, frankly, don't agree with the victimization narrative, but it is emerging. We have folks in here who I know personally who are active duty, some who have recently left the service. Some I've served with personally, but I would simply ask, if you are confronted with the victimization narrative, that veterans are victims as opposed to veterans are experienced citizens, I would ask you to think very hard about that narrative.

I like to ensure that I've put a lot of analysis into it before I'm willing to sign up to that victimization narrative because I think it just gives people a bye.

MR. KLAY: Uh-huh.

GENERAL ALLEN: And we need to not do that.

You really made a profound observation in the essay, which I would ask you to talk about here. You know, we often hear about the veteran or those in service existing at great distance from those that they serve, this gap between the civilian and the military. And, in fact, in terms of percentages, we fought basically two wars. We maintained a very robust presence in the Persian Gulf, a very robust presence in east Asia, and we did all of that on the strong shoulders of the men and women who totaled

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

roughly less than 1 percent -- slightly less than 1 percent of the population of the United States.

Now, when you think about how few those men and women are and how much we have asked of them over time, it's really a significant ask of this republic of its citizens. And it's really remarkable. And sometimes a lot of people worry about this gap between the military and the civilian sector. And I thought that I'd never seen this before, expressed this way, Phil, you talked about it. Could you give us your thoughts and what you discovered as you did the research on this?

MR. KLAY: Are you talking about the tail end of the essay?

GENERAL ALLEN: Yes, the oath of office.

MR. KLAY: Right. Yes, that was something that I discovered to a bit of chagrin. For me one of the key things with that oath is that you're not simply signing up to defend the physical security of the country, right? You're committing yourself to the ideals of the American experiment. Protect and defend against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

And that oath meant a lot to me, and I think it should mean a lot to everybody who takes it. I was looking through the almanac for duties for new citizens, right? There's a section on your rights if you're an American citizen, right, who is going through the process of being naturalized, and then there's a section on your obligations. And I had always thought of my citizenship in terms of the rights, and right there at the very first one was, "To protect and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic."

It's a common obligation, right? And it's an obligation that I think is picked up by many civilians, whether they're working in the military space or not. But that there's often a real common cause that veterans, when they get out and they get involved in organizations -- and I'll give a couple of examples of organizations that veterans have started, like Team Rubicon, which brings veterans to areas after national disasters and trust to use their skills to help improve the situation.

Between people working in that space and people working in other areas, trying to strengthen American society and the institutions that make us great, and that that's the real commonality and the crucial piece, not so much whether you've seen war or not.

GENERAL ALLEN: You know, when we do swear an oath, my own experience and the one that you described in the essay, I can remember before I deployed as a battalion commander, which

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

would ultimately end up with me being in Sarajevo in '95, we went to the National Archive, my family, my wife and my daughters. And we went to the National Archive and I read the Constitution for the first time, the real document in the Archive.

And my daughters asked me, why are you so quiet? And I said, for the first time in my life -- because from the moment I had enlisted in 1971, I had sworn to serve the principles of the Constitution, and to protect the Constitution against "all enemies, foreign and domestic," which meant willingness to expend our lives -- your life, my life -- in that oath. And I'd never seen that document before I was a lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps.

And I think that the profound observation that you made, which is that when we swear an oath to protect the Constitution of the United States that it is an inherent responsibility of the average citizen to protect the Constitution of the United States, then this sometimes huge gap that is attributed to the difference between the military and the civilian sector, in fact, that gap shrinks very quickly because -- the vast majority of Americans may not know this -- but, in fact, we all are imbued by virtue of our citizenship with a requirement to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. And it doesn't require that you raise your hand and put on a uniform and march off to do that.

This is what Phil has made, in a very profound way, the point in your paper that we all have obligations as citizens, not just rights, but we have profound responsibilities and that first one, as you said, is to preserve and protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America.

What I'd like to do is, having worried him a bit with the couple of questions, what I'd like to do is go to the floor this afternoon. We'll go for about 30 minutes. I'd ask you to, as you can, keep your questions short, but you can also make comments here because this is not just about questioning this great writer, it's also about offering the opportunity to make your views known to us, as well.

We'll stop about five minutes out and I'll give Phil the opportunity to make any closing remarks, and I have one final question for him. So let me open the floor, please, if I may to anyone.

Yes, sir, on the aisle? We're going to bring you a microphone and we'll ask everyone to wait until they get that microphone, please. Go ahead, sir.

MR. WISNER: Professor Wisner (phonetic), I teach at George Mason University and I teach ethics and national security, and I fought in Vietnam and Cambodia in 1970. Now, in your essay,

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

which I think is excellent, you raised a very difficult issue that soldiers basically delegate their moral agency to whoever happens to be in power at that time in whichever war they choose. And so, basically, what you're doing is agreeing to kill people even if you think that this particular war is moral just or not moral just, or wise. How do you deal with that? How should soldiers deal with that issue?

MR. KLAY: Well, I think it's not a complete delegation of all moral responsibility, right? I think there's a tremendous amount of moral responsibility that the individual Marine soldier has and particularly in the kinds of wars we've been engaged in. The day-to-day questions and the moral consequences of those can be huge, right? But the crucial point is that it's not up to the 18-year-old who signs up to be a Marine to ensure that a couple of years later, when he's finished his training and work-up for deployment, it's not up to him alone to ensure that he is being provided with a thoughtful, sustainable military policy that will result in good outcomes, right? That is a collective responsibility, right?

And for obvious reasons, he's probably going to be focused on ensuring that he can do the tasks that will allow him to behave ethically and competently within the avenues that are most available to him. He also has broader responsibilities as an American citizen, but so do we all. And I think that there are many ways in which those of us back home have greater time and freedom to be able to focus on some of the big ticket items.

And one of the things that I have found sort of distressing is that over time, people's -- it's very easy if you didn't serve to wash your hands of it, right? There is a wonderful poll that Reason did in 2014, I think, where they asked people if they had supported or opposed the Iraq war in 2003. And they found that in 2014, a majority of Americans said that they had opposed the Iraq war in 2003, right? Which also seems to have happened to a presidential candidate. (Laughter)

I won't get into politics. But I think that when we're talking about these kind of broad global issues, I think it's really important for us to think about where is our place in it? Because I think it is far, far too easy for us to offload a significant portion of the moral burden of war onto that young lance corporal, who is already bearing the physical and emotional risks on our behalf.

GENERAL ALLEN: Let me make a comment on this, as well. There's a great book that was written that some of you, I hope, have read called "This Kind of War" by T.R. Fehrenbach. It's one of the best. And in a conversation I had with him a number of years ago, to the question that was asked

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

about being asked to kill on behalf of an objective, he was specifically asked that question: How do you square that?

And he said, my first view on the American service man and woman is that the Republic doesn't hire them to kill. The Republic hires them to be prepared to die for something greater than themselves to defend the Republic. Killing may come as a direct result of that commitment, but the larger preparation, the preparation to give your life for something bigger than yourself, to support and defend the Constitution of the United States; a set of principles, not a flag, not a piece of ground, not a person, but a set of principles. Be prepared to die as opposed to go to kill for that. There's a profound difference between the two and I think, Phil, you touched that very well in your work.

MR. KLAY: I think, just to touch on that, too, I think oftentimes in a kind of pop culture fascination with the military, there's a fascination with kill counts, right? The deadliest sniper or the most effective whatever.

GENERAL ALLEN: Right.

MR. KLAY: But in the context of the military, I think of the class example of a military hero, the guy who jumps on his hand grenade to save his buddies, right? Kills none of the enemy, but dies himself. That heroism means sacrifice.

GENERAL ALLEN: The gentleman in the middle with the excellent looking tie, if I may?

MR. HILL: Good afternoon, my name is Keith Hill. I'm with Bloomberg BNA, but I'm here as a private citizen. I heard the Army chief of staff talk about a month or so ago, and he said that the Army is the only branch of the service where over 50 percent of its members are in the Reserve and the National Guard.

And that was done on purpose. Creighton Abrams, when he was Army chief of staff, he said that he would put -- the Army would be made up of the Reserve and National Guard so that whenever America went to war, it would be America going to war rather than the Army going to war. My question is, what do you think of expanding that to the other branches of the service?

MR. KLAY: I mean, I don't know. I think that it's difficult to predict what will come, but it seems that rather than the military moving towards a large presence of troops in foreign countries, that we seem to be doing a lot more with less. I don't know. I think that when I was in, we were a fraction of

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

the country. We're still heavily engaged overseas, but we have an even smaller portion of that and so it seems like the lines are going in the opposite direction, where it's an ever smaller percentage of the American people operating with even less information about it, to the American people.

I like the idea. It sounds good, but I think that if we had that, would we be using them right now? Would it actually make a difference in terms of how we're actually engaged overseas? The general can probably answer that better than I.

GENERAL ALLEN: No, it's a very good question and it gets to the heart of, as you say, whether the Republic goes to war or do the professionals go to war? And the truth is, we do have a Reserve establishment. All the services have a Reserve establishment. Much of the Army's capabilities are either in the Guard or the Reserve.

But even if we mobilized every single person that could go into uniform, in the active Guard and Reserve, it's still 1 percent of the population. And so we all have to bear in mind the fact that by far the disproportionate amount of the sacrifice in uniform on behalf of the population of the United States of America is born by a very small number of men and women. But your point is very important.

Let me go over here. Yes, sir? In the checked shirt on the outside? I'll refrain from describing the fashions here, I'm not going to get it right no matter what I do. (Laughter) Go ahead, sir.

MR. RODDICK: Hi, my name's Colin Roddick (phonetic), Annapolis Class of '07 and a current MFA student in fiction.

MR. KLAY: Fantastic. (Laughter) All right, welcome.

MR. RODDICK: It's good to be here. In your essay you mentioned having the privilege of seeing war as a spectator. I was a naval flight officer for eight years in support of nuclear deterrence, so I can definitely relate to that separation from combat. It seems that currently a lot of the narratives about service are dominated, for very good reason, by combat veterans. What place, if any, do you think combat veterans have to describe -- excuse me, non-combat veterans have to describe their experience or do you think they will feel obligated somehow, rightfully or not, to look through the lens of those who have served in a combat zone?

MR. KLAY: I mean, I actually think it's very important, right? Look, there are a lot of different aspects of this sort of giant thing that we call the military that could really use more light shined

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

on them. And certainly, I mean, one of my favorite works to come out of World War I is Ford Maddox Ford's "Parade's End," which is a series of novels that deals a lot with staff work, and he pulls it off.

I think the experience of combat veterans is important and needs to be understood and should be understood by the broader population because right now we're dealing with the largest return of combat veterans back into the civilian sector. And I think that it really matters what type of narratives we have that are out there about war that they can come home to and how those narratives are going to shape those people's communities when they come home and allow them to talk about their experiences and come to terms with them.

But I think that understanding the other corners of experience within the military and how they relate to what we do because, look, we're Americans and the military is a huge part of what we do as a country. And there's huge parts of the military that are not just trigger-pullers, and those parts absolutely matter and shape a lot of what we do overseas and the ways that we influence.

So that's one the reasons that in my book a majority of the narrators are not combat ops. I didn't tell anything from the wing because I don't know that much about it. (Laughter) It's a gap.

GENERAL ALLEN: Yes, sir, about halfway back.

MR. HURLEY: Thank you. My name is Brian Hurley (phonetic). I appreciate this session greatly.

I just want to ask you a question about the flip side of victimization that you mentioned. And the general used a term that sometimes I hear and cock my head a little bit sideways and that is when we talk about the 1 percent who serve. And sometimes that's used to wall people off from a conversation who haven't served in the military. It's a little bit of military superiority in terms of our view of our perspectives and our life experiences, and I say that as a veteran myself. But what is your perspective on that issue of a little bit of high regard for our own service and whether there's other ways to engage people in service that make them part of the conversation that we're having?

MR. KLAY: Right. Yes, if you put yourself on a pedestal it's hard to reach out and actually communicate with other human beings. I mean, I think, as with all things, it's balance. I do think that the ground level of somebody joining the military is, at the very least, they signed a piece of paper that said they were willing to risk their life for an ideal, right?

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

That said, you know, I remember walking down the street with another Marine veteran and we saw one of those Support the Troops ribbons. And he looked at me and he goes, I support about 90 percent of the troops. (Laughter) A little bit of humility can be good.

But I think the other crucial part is that there are people -- and I talked at the beginning about how formative my family's experience was to who I was and what I was and why I did what I did and why my brothers did what they did, and there isn't necessarily a separation and that somebody who commits themselves to the same principles in the civilian sector, they're on the same page, I think. And that's finding that common ground and respecting it is crucial.

GENERAL ALLEN: Yes, sir.

MR. GAGLIANO: Lou Gagliano (phonetic), private citizen. First I want to thank you for your service to this country, both of you, and keeping us safe.

Having come home and spoken with other individuals who have served, how are we failing our veterans here in the United States?

GENERAL ALLEN: Thanks, Lou. Good question.

MR. KLAY: I will say there are many amazing things that we do for our veterans. That's important to realize. And I think one of the dangers, and this goes to what you say, if we constantly have a chip on our shoulder that we're not being honored enough, that can be a problem. I have had the opportunity to talk in various other countries and the experience of, for example, French veterans, recent, modern French veterans coming back or modern German veterans can be different. Other societies have maybe a different relationship to them. And, I mean, I went to school when the G.I. Bill was absolutely astounding, and there are a lot of veterans who have used the opportunities that that's afforded them and gone to do pretty remarkable things. I know a lot of them from the writer's space (phonetic).

But in terms of areas we can improve, right, there are sort of -- the reason (inaudible) my concern is kind of the ways we have of thinking about our relationship to war, right? How do you support the vets? You take some of that responsibility on yourself. You understand that the responsibility for war, the responsibility for the consequences of war, those are your responsibilities.

And then not falling into a trap of kind of easy and simplistic understandings of what the veteran experience is or what it must be or how it can be used for a particular political purpose that you



SOLDIER-2016/07/12

like.

GENERAL ALLEN: This gentleman just inside on the aisle. Yes. Okay, no, go ahead. You got the mic. The next gentleman next, please.

SPEAKER: Sorry about that.

GENERAL Allen: You'll hand that off.

MR. NASH: Bill Nash (phonetic), retired soldier. Just a comment first.

GENERAL ALLEN: Thank you.

MR. NASH: I'll take advantage of that about making a comment. And I, too, identify with the phrase "citizen-soldier." But I think today we need to talk about soldier-citizens, and it really carries to your point, Phil, about service after time in the military and the like. Because given the small percentage and given the relative isolation, if you will, of the military, we need to have our military, our soldiers concentrate on being citizens as well as that.

Now my question, and I go back to your points of ethical and moral standards and establishing and maintaining that. I'd like you, and, sir, I'd ask you also maybe to comment on the role of discipline in combat. And we can go from a variety of examples, from My Lai to Abu Ghraib to some incidents in Anbar province where discipline lacked and the United States embarrassed itself on a moral and ethical playing field. So would you talk about the role of discipline?

MR. KLAY: Ah, boy. Well, there's discipline and then there's policy. If official policy is degrading and humiliating the enemy, it's not that surprising that the junior soldier will do what happened in Abu Ghraib. I think that responsibility for leadership starts at the top. And if you allow yourself to do things which are so vile that the tapes need to be destroyed afterwards because the public reaction would never bear it, what do you think is going to happen? What expectations is that going to set up among the rank and file about what is morally permissible and what's not? So I think it's not just a question of discipline at the lower level, but accountability up top and keeping sort of firm ethical guidelines, which become more important when we're scared and feel the urge to bend the rules for short-term gain.

GENERAL ALLEN: There's really two kinds of discipline in the military. There's imposed discipline and then there's self-discipline. And the very best military units, I won't attempt to go through the various services and point them out, but when a unit is at its best it starts by imposing discipline on

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

individuals until they are willing to embody, to internalize the values of that organization, and then the process is animated by self-discipline.

And so, yes, we have had our spate of problems where discipline broke down, but it often was less a function of the individual discipline than it was the collapse of organizational discipline. And that's where the process of accountability must ultimately hold people accountable for what they have done.

But just as we've seen discipline break down in places like Haditha and other places, which I'm assuming you're referring to, I've had the chance to see the same exact kinds of discipline that broke down in one place, in fact, hold a unit together under the hammer blows of combat in another place. Because those individuals had ingested the very core essence and values of that organization and they would rather die than break faith with the man and woman on their right or their left. And that strength of self-discipline is very difficult to describe. It is, as a soldier yourself, you understand that it's something that is intangible.

And I think we've all seen, many of us have seen who've been in combat, we've seen troops that were willing to hold their fire when everything in their minds said they should be firing, yet the sense that they may harm a civilian or a non-combatant led them to discipline their willingness to fire and potentially give their very lives for that particular moment's experience in the battle space.

So discipline is extraordinarily important. It is at the center of the very heart of the cohesion of an organization. It must be exemplified by the non-commissioned officers and the officers of that unit. Because, in the end, war is a primordial act, and as we begin to strip the veneer of civilization in layer after layer off the troops that are in combat, it is the leadership of that organization, it is the values that that organization represents, and it is the self-discipline of the individual members of that organization that will carry it through the horrendous experience of battle. And then, frankly, when that organization comes home, if it has been well disciplined, the amount of trauma that is suffered by those who come back from that unit is typically far less than those organizations that had inherent problems in discipline and ultimately experienced organizational failure. There's a big difference between the two.

And it's not so much necessarily in combat. It's in the aftermath. That's a really important question. Thank you.

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

There, yes, sir. Thanks. You've got the mic.

MR. ROUTT: The importance of being persistent.

GENERAL ALLEN: Yes.

MR. ROUTT: The Army taught me that. I'm Steve Routt from the Code of Support Foundation, and I'm a veterans advocate. I work with vets day-in and day-out. And I want to ask a question related to many of the questions that have already been asked related to the subjects broached.

GENERAL ALLEN: Thanks what you're doing for veterans. Thank you for that, Steve.

MR. ROUTT: Thank you. It's an honor. The idea or the concept of moral conflict, internal moral indignation, related to the changing political policies and the public perception of the wars that we've participated in as opposed to the idea of a blanket PTSD or post-traumatic stress diagnosis that's psychological versus emotional or internal, I was wondering if you could just speak to that or if you had any thoughts on that.

MR. KLAY: Yes, I mean, it goes to what I was saying before that I think oftentimes we use PTSD as a catchall for anything that we're uncomfortable with. Right? And, you know, I was reading a piece by the wife of a Navy SEAL whose friends seemed disturbed that her husband didn't seem more disturbed by his job. It'd be kind of like easier for them if he was a basket case, right, because they were uncomfortable with the work that he does.

Yes, and I think it's important to distinguish between the two because even though sometimes it may be -- you know, one is an injury that needs to be recognized and treated, and one is related to the kind of contract that we all share in as a society. And understanding where those lines of responsibility lie are kind of the first step to actually dealing with those feelings and find out a place to move forward as a nation.

MR. KLAY: Sir, please. Could I see the hands of additional questions? Because we've got just a couple minutes left. Okay, I'm going to go to the lady in the back in a moment and then I'll come back to you. Thank you.

Go ahead, sir, please.

MR. KRAVITZ: I'll cut one of my questions in view of the -- I'm Alexander Kravitz (phonetic). I worked as a civilian in Iraq. So I wanted to ask about the sacrifice of -- you know, pick up on

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

some of the questions before, the sort of the separation, the 1 percent. But what about sacrifices of the civilians on the home front?

I mean, one of the things one read at the time is there was never an increase in taxes, for example, to kind of make the population at large realize, look, we're all in this together. You know, we have to pay for that bill, somebody has to pay for it. And I wonder if you could sort of comment, that's kind of a larger issue.

And then a specific question, I'm just curious if you've spoken to the Marine instructor sergeant that you quoted now that you've written the essay. (Laughter) And if not, whether you might want to talk to him.

GENERAL ALLEN: Great question.

MR. KLAY: Oh, god, I can't -- I'd like to. I've got his name written down somewhere in my old OCS notebook. I've got a whole bunch of quotes from the sergeant instructor, some of which they might not want revisited. (Laughter) But, yes, I'm curious what he's doing now.

And then, yes, it's a great point. Speaking of the civilians I was thinking of a guy like Kael Weston, who just had a book come out, "The Mirror Test," who served with the State Department as long as anybody in Iraq and Afghanistan.

And yes, I think the American public hasn't been asked to sacrifice. We haven't really even demanded that much debate in Congress over the wars. I think a lot of what we do is, well, (inaudible) it's hard to get information out. You know, the nature of what we're doing now, a lot of it is obscured from the public view for a variety of reasons.

And I think that thinking about, you know, the way that we're waging war now is different than in the past and probably requires a new framework. There's actually a book coming out by Rosa Brooks, which I think is very smart on this, called "How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything," which is very much worth picking up. And thinking about how ensure that we have a structure in place to make sure that we as a society deal with it, not just, you know, attacks, but sort of should we still be operating on the same authorization of military force? I understand why no senator or congressman would want to vote that 10 years later they'd be the Hillary Clinton having to explain something that was popular at the time.

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

But, you know, I think that the policy that's not even subject to any kind of public criticism and debate is just less likely to be a vigorous and well thought-out policy, and also you're not going to do the work of actually getting the American people on board with what you're doing. Right? And also you're not going to do the work of actually getting the American people on board with what you're doing. Right? It's very easy for us if you don't like the policy, after the fact, well, it was the president's fault, not mine.

And I think that, you know, aside from just sort of having attacks or having more National Guard units, I think there's probably a lot of ways when we look at the -- and I'm probably not the person to talk to about it, I'm a fiction writer, okay, but I'm sure in this building there are people who know. And I think Rosa Brooks' book is good, but I think there's probably a lot of ways that we can look and see whether the structures that have served us in the past are serving us well for the kind of warfare that we do now and what we can do to make sure that there is more public accountability and public buy-in to the risks that we're asking of our young men and women.

GENERAL ALLEN: A very short amount of time left. Yes, ma'am.

MS. DARBY: My name's Jane Darby, and I'm a graduate student in Middle Eastern studies, currently working at the Pulitzer Center. And I wanted to get back to what you said in the introduction.

You introduced yourself as a fiction writer. And your book, it's tremendous. It's really, really wonderful and sort of falls into this rich literature of fiction and poetry that's been written about war that resonates both with people who have personally experienced it and with people like me who haven't. And I was wondering if you could talk about both why you decided to write about your experience and why you decided to write fiction.

MR. KLAY: Because I think that -- I mean, fiction allows you different tools and tools to ask the kind of questions that I wanted to ask. It's also an invitation to allow the reader to step inside the skull of another person, or 12 other people in the case of the book, and go through the kind of moral decisions that those narrators are making. It allows you to ask certain types of questions about, for example, the experience of killing in different variations and different ways.

And, you know, I think when it's done right, with fiction it's assumed that it's not true,

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

these events didn't actually happen. So the only thing that matters is getting the emotional, sort of philosophical, moral truth. That's what matters. And so you just drill down and you take things from real life. You take things from thoughts or ideas or literature that you've read or literature that you've loved in the past and try and form a narrative that allows you to get down until you've put what matters to you most about these experiences under the most amount of pressure so that you can actually find out something interesting.

The example that I always give is if you were to resurrect or if there was like some sort of "Encino Man" situation with the veteran of the Trojan War -- everybody know "Encino Man? (Laughter) Yes, I figured Brookings would be a big movie here. And you're like, all right, you're a veteran of the Trojan War, here read "The Iliad." You would hate it, right? You'd be like this guy doesn't know how we use chariots, the armor's wrong. (Laughter) I'm going to write my memoir. I'm the one who killed Achilles, you know. No easy decade. (Laughter)

But since that poem was written down, pretty much every veteran of every war since then has read it and said this is it. This is the truth of war. Right? And so fiction offers you tools to chase that particular truth.

GENERAL ALLEN: Last question.

MR. COOPER: Good afternoon. Scott Cooper. I'm a retired Marine. I served on General Allen's staff in Anbar in 2007, and I am sure he would have preferred to see more often than he saw me as he did every day at the daily brief. Congratulations.

I'm at Human Rights First now, and one of the things that you hint at --

MR. KLAY: You would have found me, too, in person, by the way.

MR. COOPER: Of course, Phil, yes.

MR. KLAY: Thank you for the work you do.

MR. COOPER: One of the points that you hint at in the essay is this notion that when the veteran takes off his uniform that there's a continued requirement for citizenship, of citizen engagement, which might be something a little bit new, at least for this generation or from a previous generation. And I wonder if you can talk about that because it's something that you hint at in your essay, but I want to hear your next essay that talks about that. (Laughter)

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

MR. KLAY: I mean, one of the things that's really powerful about being in the military is you're with a group of people committed to something bigger than themselves. You're all a part of the same -- you're all moving towards the same goal. You know what you're supposed to do. You know what a good Marine is. Right? We have saints in the Marine Corps. They're Medal of Honor recipients, they're exemplars for you to look up to.

And then I think one of the things that can be strange about the transition to the civilian world -- and it can be strange even if you didn't go to war and I've talked about this with a lot of veterans who never went to war, but found it profoundly alienating to move back into a kind of very individualistic society where there's kind of, you know, where's your place, where's your tribe? Where's the kind of group that you can be a part of that actually -- where you can do work that means something, you hope?

So it's not just that it's an obligation, but it's an opportunity. Right? I think your organization's fantastic. You know, we talk about the broken contract and thinking about refugees, in particular translators. I think that for a lot of veterans that's one of those areas of a broken contract where we feel like we didn't live up to our obligations to some of the people who helped us out overseas.

GENERAL ALLEN: And that's another panel we need to have.

General Krulak, when he was commandant of the Marine Corps, used to say the Marine Corps does two things for America: it wins battles and it makes Marines. And his point when he said "makes Marines" wasn't about crossing the beach. It was making citizens. It is a fundamental and inherent responsibility of our services to turn out someone who's served in uniform who is ready now to be a citizen. I think that's a really important subject.

Phil, could you just -- and we're over, my apologies to everyone here. We're over by a couple of minutes. Could you give us a couple of seconds of closing remarks? And are there a couple or two or three points from your essay, such a rich essay, that you'd like everyone to take away with them this afternoon?

MR. KLAY: Well, you know, I think that the last point that Scott made, and that is the one that I keep thinking of, you know, what's the step afterwards? Right? And when I was kind of writing the essay and reaching that place, it kind of broadens out and becomes no longer really just about veterans. And I think that for me that's the most important thing.

SOLDIER-2016/07/12

And I guess the duties of citizenship is something I'm still trying to work out. And maybe you want me to write the next essay, but maybe somebody here in this room can write it for me because it's exhausting writing these things. (Laughter) But, yes, that's the piece that I keep thinking of and I look to organizations like yours that I think help show people the way.

GENERAL ALLEN: Thank you.

MR. KLAY: Thank you.

GENERAL ALLEN: Let me just make one comment. The point that I tried to make and I didn't make it very well in the question that I asked Phil, his answer was actually quite good, and the question that was generated from the middle back there about the 1 percent, the point is that, in fact, the obligations of Americans to the Republic are actually very similar whether you're the uniform or not. In fact, they're synonymous.

And let me just read the final paragraph of Phil's essay because we're in a moment of real political turmoil right now. And it only takes you about five minutes of watching each day's campaign to wonder what planet we're on probably in some respects. But this is really important and it's as profound as anything I've ever read.

"No civilian," this the final paragraph, "No civilian can assume the moral burdens felt at a gut level by the participants at war, but all can show equal commitment to their country and an equal assumption of the obligations inherent in citizenship and an equal bias for action. Ideals are one thing. The messy business of putting them into practice is another. That means giving up any claim to moral purity. That means getting your hands dirty."

I want to thank you for your time this afternoon. I want to thank you for this marvelous essay. (Applause)

Ladies and gentleman, thank you. My apologies for going over. And this book is available outside. Thank you very much. (Applause)



SOLDIER-2016/07/12

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