



(Translated from German)

Out of Afghanistan

Kyle Bibby was 15 years old when Islamist terrorists abducted several planes on 11 September 2001 and flew into the towers of the World Trade Center.

He remembers the fear that seized him then and never let go. The fear that such attacks would happen again and again. The fear that next time, his family and friends might meet him.

When Bibby was 17, he joined the military. "That was my way to get that fear under control," he says.

He went through the Nvy officer school and was sent to Afghanistan in 2010, where the U.S. and its allies had entered after 9/11 to overthrow the Taliban government.

But what Bibby encountered there was not what he had expected.



"We were better patrolmen," recalls veteran Kyle Bibby.

Although his unit was based in the restless province of Helmand, he was spared heavy fighting. The problem he and his comrades had was rather another: boredom.

"We were better patrolmen," he says, "and we were occupiers. We came flying in our helicopters, armed to the teeth, and asked people if they did not like school in their village."

At the same time as Bibby was serving in Afghanistan, US special forces in Pakistan killed Osama bin Laden, the 9/11 seizure master. "I was sure our mission would soon be over. One more year, then we would all be out of Afghanistan. "

It came differently. Many veterans call the deployment in Afghanistan the "forever war", the endless war. There are meanwhile U.S. soldiers who were not born on September 11, 2001. In any case, the war is the longest in U.S. history.

Veterans Day today commemorates the soldiers who served there. They and all the others who once wore the uniform of the armed forces. There will be speeches, services, and parades. Veterans receive special discounts in the shops and free meals in restaurants, just as on every November 11th. Yet for many of them, it will not be an ordinary Veterans Day. For the day after, protests are announced in Washington -- by the veterans themselves. They want to remind Washington that the war in Afghanistan is still going on.

20 suicides every day

One of them is Dan McKnight. He served for 13 years as a soldier in the armed forces, including more than a year in Afghanistan. The mission there haunted him even when he was long back in the state of Idaho.

"I was always on alert, always had the feeling that something was wrong," he says.

In front of his house, neighbor children were waiting for the bus to take them to school. One morning, McKnight saw from the window a backpack lying in front of his house. It belonged to one of the schoolchildren who had forgotten it, but McKnight was not clear at that moment.

Suddenly he was no longer in Idaho in his head, but back in Afghanistan -- and the backpack was a booby trap on the roadside. He panicked. "It took hours for me to calm down," he says.

Today McKnight runs a small organization called Bring Our Troops Home (BringOurTroopsHome.US).

That was not only his wish, but the desire of many veterans. According to a poll by the Pew Institute in July, 64 percent of veterans now believe that the war in Iraq has not been worthwhile. 58 percent say the same about the fight in Afghanistan. "It's our soldiers who pay the price," says McKnight.

"In the military, the principle is: we leave no one behind. But in truth, we have left far too many people behind." He refers to the 7,000 U.S. soldiers who have been killed since 2001 in the so-called war on terror. He means the tens of thousands of soldiers who have returned injured and traumatized. And he means the 20 or so veterans who kill themselves every day.

"Trump is the first president to have the right instinct for these wars, he's our hope," said McKnight.

For Tuesday, the day after Veterans Day, McKnight organized a rally of veterans in Washington. They will move to the Congress to demonstrate for an end to the armed operations abroad. Some high-ranking former military officials will also speak, including Don Bolduc, a former brigadier general who served 66 months in Afghanistan.

Many of these people are followers of Donald Trump. McKnight also supports him. "Trump is the first president to have the right instinct for these wars. He is our best hope that we stop being the world police. "

Trump's promise to stop waging wars brought him many voters in 2016. Especially in poorer areas, which have many war victims to complain, the President did well. But although Trump vented his displeasure about the U.S. operations in the Middle East regularly, his previous record in this area is thin.

The *New York Times* has recently estimated that 10,000 U.S. troops were stationed in Afghanistan during Trump's inauguration. Today, it is again 13,000, and the peace negotiations with the Taliban, which should have led to a retreat, have burst. Also in the Persian Gulf, the U.S. has expanded its military presence in response to Iranian provocations and sent an additional 14,500 troops.

Retreat - but how?

Even in Syria, where Trump, with the hasty retreat of troops from the north, cleared the way for a Turkish attack on the Kurds, the *Times* estimates that they will be about the same number of soldiers as before -- only now they will relocate to the oil fields on the border with Iraq. And finally, the president also overruled a Congressional resolution calling for a majority of both parties to end U.S. involvement in the Yemen War. The president is just a "wildcard," says McKnight. At least he did not lead the U.S. into a new war, for example, against Iran.

But other veterans do not trust Trump. "He only made

empty promises," says Perry O'Brien. He served as a paramedic in Afghanistan in 2003 and today is an activist at Common Defense, an organization of 20,000 veterans who are politically leftist. O'Brien also hopes for an early end to U.S. operations in the Middle East. But the way in which the withdrawal took place in Syria was wrong. Trump betrayed the Kurdish allies and wreaked havoc, serving opponents of a U.S. withdrawal ammunition. "It must be possible to end our engagement in a responsible manner," says O'Brien.



Veteran Dan McKnight still suffers from the consequences of the war.

In their opinion of Trump, the veterans may be divided, but their various organizations from left and right are united in one goal: The Congress should withdraw its consent, which it gave after 9/11 to the armed operations. To do so, they'll approach delegates from both parties. The Republicans are cared for by the Concerned Veterans for America group, which is part of the Koch family's influential network. By contrast, Common Defense has persuaded some Democratic presidential candidates to commit to a "reasonable and timely" end to the stakes. Among them are Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders and Cory Booker.

All this is new. Only a few years ago, not many former soldiers would have been critical of the stakes, says conservative Dan McKnight. Either one stood unreservedly behind the troops, or one was considered unpatriotic. That's over. "Everyone sees what a mess these are, the areas we've been in for so many years."

But what if the mess after the withdrawal of the United States gets bigger? Who cares about order and stability?

For McKnight the answer is clear. American soldiers have been trying long enough to pacify countries where they were not welcome: "Should others do it?"

For more information: www.BringOurTroopsHome.US