

Tim Walz and the National Guard controversy: Does it Matter?

By Gary Fouse

Among all the issues surrounding Tim Walz and his liberal policies as governor of Minnesota, the one issue I think really stands out is that of his reserve military service and the question of when he left before his unit was deployed to Iraq. JD Vance, who served a tour of duty as a Marine in Iraq as a correspondent or press officer, has also accused Walz of being guilty of stolen valor, that is, claiming military or other heroic achievements that are not factual, thus diminishing those who truly were in combat or similar situations. Some who were in the same unit as Walz have claimed that he ducked out of the reserves just before they were deployed. Others have disputed that.

Just what the circumstances were as to when and why he left the Army National Guard-to run for political office- are still being argued back and forth, and I am not going to judge until

everything is clarified on that point. Another aspect of this issue is when he was once talking about gun control, he referred to taking the weapons of war "that he carried in war" and make sure they were only for military use. Was he consciously trying to imply that he served in combat, or was it just a slip of the tongue? It brings back memories of when Connecticut Senator Richard Blumenthal was making reference to the bad way "we" were treated upon returning from Vietnam. Apparently, it hasn't hurt



Tim Walz in Ft. Benning, Ga., in the summer of 1981. He was in basic training in the United States Army.
▲ Courtesy of United States Army

his standing with the voters of Connecticut because he is still in the Senate. So the question is how much this issue will hurt the Harris-Walz ticket come November.

I think it is appropriate for all of us when we comment publicly about this issue to disclose what our own military record is. That includes many conservative TV commentators who are accusing Walz of cowardice and leaving his troops in the lurch while they (the commentators) have never served in the military, active duty or reserves. In my case, I am what people call a Vietnam-era veteran-as opposed to Vietnam veteran. I served in the US Army as a military policeman for three years 1966-68, which was during the Vietnam war. I am proud to be a veteran, however, I am always quick to add that while others were fighting and dying in Vietnam, I was in Germany. Looking back, probably the most dangerous thing about our job was breaking up fights in GI bars. Yes, there were the occasional serious incidents, but you get the point. To be in Germany during the Vietnam war was a picnic. Those who were in

Vietnam are much higher on the military totem pole than I. In fact, I would consider it a cardinal sin to ever claim that I served in Vietnam.

I also consider JD Vance to be higher on the totem pole than I am. That's because he did a stint in Iraq. Whether he ever was in a firefight or not makes no difference to me. Whether he was an infantryman or press officer makes no difference to me. Vance served in a war zone and I did not.

A note about being in the National Guard, in which Walz spent 24 years. During Vietnam, it usually took connections to get into the National Guard. That's because so many young men wanted to join the Guard, especially when we had the draft in effect. At that time, if you were in the Guard, you were pretty much assured you would not be deployed to Vietnam. Today, that is not the case. Many Guard units have been deployed to combat duty in Afghanistan and Iraq since 9-11.

As a side note, I note that at some point in Walz's career he was "deployed" to Vicenza, Italy. I know Vicenza well. Back in the 1980s when I was stationed in Milan with DEA, my family and I would make periodic trips to the Army base at Vicenza where, as US Consulate employees, we had PX privileges. I can assure you that there was no hardship involved in being deployed to Vicenza (other than the normal issues of family separation, etc). It was a pleasant little town about halfway between Milan and Venice. On a couple of occasions, we would overnight there, either on post or in a hotel.

None of this is to demean the reserves, especially now when reserve units are being deployed to combat zones. It is hardly a blot on Walz's resume-unless the worst accusations, outlined above, prove to have merit. But what if they do? If it turns out that Walz decided to get out because his unit was facing deployment to Iraq, and/or he deliberately misrepresented himself as having served in combat, I think that would be a big problem for him and the ticket. There are many reasons to

vote against Walz, most of which will not result in his having to withdraw from the ticket. This, however, has the potential, in my view, of forcing him to withdraw. I'm not making a final judgment, but I think it is a serious issue. If true, it matters.

And if that happens, will Josh Shapiro (with all those Jewish/Israel issues) get another bite at the apple? That would be interesting to watch.

But that's a topic for a different essay.