



OPINION

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ESSAY PG. 2

Are your guns really worth it?

An editor's personal brush with the military's gun culture and why we need gun control legislation more than ever.





OPINION

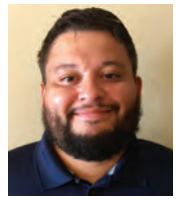
713-743-5304 thedailycougar.com/opinion opinion@thedailycougar.com Frank Campos, EDITOR

GUN CONTROL

We need gun control now more than ever

I'll never forget the day I finally decided to join the military.

At 19, I walked into a recruiter's office and started asking questions. A couple of weeks later, I was sitting in front of a man offering a six-year contract and bonus if I signed up to become an infantryman.



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For me, it was a no-brainer. No, not because I loved guns since my youth and my pappy took me hunting every year. Actually, I had only two choices after I took the Army aptitude test, and I couldn't see myself driving a truck for the military.

So, there I was, one year out of high school and raising my hand to join the Army. Just a young kid looking for fun and a little adventure. A few weeks later, I was handed an M4A1 semi-automatic assault rifle. I was also told that it would be there for me — as long as I treated it right and learned how to use it properly.

These weapons are nothing fancy, but are easy to use and maintain. They are perfect for a large military because they are deadly when used properly and don't need a lot of attention.

Now, more than 10 years later, rifles like the M4 Carbine have become some of the most popular guns purchased by consumers today. But they are also a staple for mass shootings in the United States.

Waking up

I started writing this right after the tragedy that happened in the engineering building on the University of California, Los Angeles campus. Right before I finished, I woke up on June 12 and put on the news to rumors and early reports of a nightclub shooting in Orlando.

I didn't realize it then, but I had just slept through the deadliest massacre in modern U.S. history.

At 2 a.m. Sunday morning, a shooter entered Pulse nightclub, a well-known establishment among the LGBTQ community, and committed an atrocious act. Forty-nine were killed and 53 were hospitalized.

As reports became clearer, the country realized this was not just a domestic dispute or a fight gone out of control. This was much worse — something that has become all too familiar in a supposedly civilized society.

Certain factions don't realize that access to and want for guns slowly kills us. The violence and death will continue until we drastically change our laws to reflect the time we live in today.

I headed to Baghdad, Iraq for my first deployment just a little more than a year after the Army first gave me my rifle. I spent a more than two years in Iraq during two deployments. Twice, I spent time in Baghdad and Sadr City patrolling the streets, conducting missions and spending almost every day outside "the wire," a phrase referring to soldiers leaving the safety of the base for a military operation.

My rifle became part of my everyday life, as danger and death felt constant out on the streets or when we raided houses. The necessity of a semi-automatic rifle and a 30-round magazine is unquestionable when you consider the dangers of a war zone.

Despite what fearmongers

"The necessity of a semi-automatic rifle and a 30-round magazine is unquestionable when you consider the dangers of a war zone."

may tell the country, we don't need easy access to guns like the ones used by soldiers in Iraq to feel safe. We are not in a war zone. We need to figure out a way to ensure firearms do not get into the wrong hands because of loopholes in the law and an outdated background check system.

The argument that we focus too much on gun control and too little on the actual issue of terrorism is the exact problem and a reflection of the National Rifle Association pundits' cowardice. They would rather distract you away from the topic of gun control and bring up



Successful lobbying from the National Rifle Association has led to a craze over firearms and heavy weaponry, especially among military personnel and veterans; as a result, many loopholes allow people on the no-fly list and at gun shows to get guns without a license. | Frank Campos/The Cougar

terrorism to feed on your fears.

The NRA and pro-gun lobbyists have placed this country into a political war. We are against each other when, together, we could save lives.

Too many times our president has stood in front of the nation begging for a change — not

not apply to people who buy, sell or trade guns privately.

Through tears, Obama called people to look past their political affiliations and concentrate on the innocent people dying across the country.

Obama also hosted a live town hall session to discuss

and a better safety mechanism on each weapon could do wonders to prevent countless gun-related tragedies.

Change of heart

The life I lived during my six years in the military was filled with guns. And I loved it.

When we were deployed, the relationship between soldier and weapon is obvious. Back in the States, it was all about who knew the most about guns, who had the most badass gun at home and who could shoot the best.

Back then, I was a staunch Republican who, at the time, hated the thought of Obama and his left-wing ideals like gun control. For so many years, I have lived hating the idea that someone would try to take away my guns or limit people from purchasing whatever they wanted.

Like many soldiers, my love for firearms extended past my service and into my daily life.

The relationship changed on the seventh month of my second deployment to Iraq. The crazy part was that it wasn't related with my tour of duty. Back in the U.S., on the same base I was assigned, Major Nidal Malik Hasan killed 13 and wounded more than 30 unarmed soldiers before their deployment.

JUMP HEADLINE

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ignore the children, who might injure themselves or just end up in the wrong place at the wrong time, on the mere principle of keeping gun laws unchanged.

An obvious change is needed. Although it won't fix the problem, adding an extensive background check, a complete mental health evaluation

While children suffer from gun violence, conservatives seem content with more death and pain as long as they can polish their guns at night. They

Unfortunately, this still does



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It was later discovered that Hasan had a documented history of red flags and odd behavior linked to radical Islam. Hasan, an army psychiatrist, was able to walk into Guns Galore LLC — a gun shop many soldiers frequented — and easily obtained the gun he used in the massacre.

Just eight months earlier, my battalion and I were in the same building and going through the same process as the unfortunate soldiers. One among the fallen was six-weeks pregnant and returning from a rotation to a foreign outpost.

This tragedy showed a lot of people just how vulnerable we were as a country. We were fighting two wars overseas; at home, another one brewed.

After finishing my second tour, I stayed in the Army for almost two more years, but the love I had built for guns started to fade away. I finished my second enlistment in May 2012, honorably.

Less than five years after the Fort Hood shooting, a soldier with mental and behavioral health issues walked into the same gun shop, purchased a gun and killed four people before military police ended his rampage.



The life of an infantryman is rarely glamorous. | Frank Campos/The Cougar

This is not isolated. Incidents like the ones in Aurora, Colorado; Newtown, Connecticut; and San Bernardino, California have reaffirmed my belief in the need for stricter gun laws.

I believe in the right to bear arms, but current gun laws should not stay the same. With so many men, women and children who have died at the hands of unlawful gun ownership, only change makes sense.

Even now as a veteran, I go to the shooting range for hours on the weekends. I'm usually

"This is not 1700, 1980 or 2000. It is 2016, and individuals trying to get their hands on guns and kill innocent people are running amok. Change the laws."



Opinion Editor Frank Campos, who toured twice as an infantryman in the U.S. Army, spent time in Iraq and, like most military members, learned to both love and respect firearms. | Frank Campos/The Cougar

cost consumers and might be a major hassle. I know that. Nonetheless, it would be worth it to save just one life.

It is also common sense. I don't get why changing policies to help protect law-abiding citizens is so hard for people to grasp. Changing laws that will lead to the same thing, gun ownership, does not equate to taking your guns away.

And it's not just a conservative thing. Marcus Luttrell, a known conservative and war hero whom actor Mark Wahlberg portrayed in "Lone Survivor," has a surprising reaction to the thought of stricter gun laws: He agrees with Obama.

Technology grows rapidly in the U.S. — including the gun industry. Almost daily, all types of cool toys are added to shelves. It's about time to call for a better safety mechanism for guns that are soon to be on the market.

If we can have a fingerprint scanner on our smartphones, there is no reason major gun manufacturers can't figure out similar technology to expand gun safety for owners and their children.

This technology could also deter criminals from stealing

guns — or make it at least a little harder for them to use one.

This is not 1700, 1980 or 2000. It is 2016, and individuals trying to get their hands on guns and kill innocent people are running amok. Change the laws.

We are so quick to respond to the tragic death of a gorilla, but, in Chicago alone, 69 people were shot over Memorial Day weekend. The shooting resulted



Campos changed his views on gun control after the Fort Hood Shooting, in which 13 servicepeople in Texas were killed. | Frank Campos/The Cougar

in six deaths, and yet there was almost no word from the media.

Now, with yet another tragedy happening, I wonder if this is the moment in our history that will get us all to realize that gun control isn't a farce. The real joke lies in thinking we are safe because we have access to guns. Those 69 people should be the last to die because of inaction on gun control.

Twenty children from Newton, Connecticut deserve these changes.

Thirteen soldiers from Fort Hood, Texas will never see their families again because nothing has changed.

Fourteen people from San Bernardino, California died because the NRA fought hard to keep gun laws the same.

And 49 people in Orlando have died at the hands of a man who walked into a gun shop and reveled at the easy access to guns.

It could be triple digits next time.

Sadly, this will likely not be the last time this year news outlets report on a heinous body count, innocents perishing and a country that remains divided, despite gun control being the obvious answer.

We need to realize that something must be done. Stop hiding behind the Second Amendment. This is more than politics. It's too important to be pushed off as a too polarizing issue that can't be solved.

It's time we prioritize human life and change laws to benefit society and discourage mass shootings around the country.

Opinion editor Frank Campos is a media production senior and may be reached at opinion@thedailycougar.com