

 **[PRINT]** **ESPN.com:** Page 2



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When war drums roll

By Hunter S. Thompson
Page 2 columnist

Johnny Depp called me from France on Sunday night and asked what I knew about Osama bin Laden.

"Nothing," I said. "Nothing at all. He is a ghost, for all I know. Why do you ask?"

"Because I'm terrified of him," he said. "All of France is terrified. ... I freaked out and rushed to the airport, but when I got there my flight was canceled. All flights to the U.S. were canceled. People went crazy with fear."

"Join the club," I told him, "Almost everybody went crazy over here."

"Never mind that," he said. "Who won the Jets-Colts game?"

"There was no game," I said. "All sports were canceled in this country -- even 'Monday Night Football.'"

"No!" he said, "That's impossible! I've never known a Monday night without a game on TV. What is the stock market doing?"

"Nothing yet," I said, "It's been closed for six days."

"Ye gods," he muttered. "No stock market, no football -- this is Serious."

Just then I heard the lock on my gas tank rattling, so I rushed outside with a shotgun and fired both barrels into the darkness. Poachers! I thought. Blow their heads off! This is War! So I fired another blast in the general direction of the gas pump, then I went inside to reload.

"Why are you shooting?" my assistant Anita screamed at me. "What are you shooting at?"

"The enemy," I said gruffly. "He is down there stealing our gasoline."

"Nonsense," she said. "That tank has been empty since June. You probably killed a peacock."

At dawn I went down to the tank and found the gas hose shredded by birdshot and two peacocks dead.

So what? I thought. What is more important right now -- my precious gasoline or the lives of some silly birds? Indeed, but the New York Stock Exchange opened Monday morning, so I have to get a grip on something solid. The Other Shoe is about to drop, and it might be extremely heavy. The time has come to be strong. The fat is in the fire. Who knows what will happen now?

Not me, buster. That's why I live out here in the mountains with a flag on my porch and loud Wagner music blaring out of my speakers. I feel lucky, and I have plenty of ammunition. That is God's will, they say, and that is also why I shoot into the darkness at anything that moves. Sooner or later, I will hit something Evil, and feel no Guilt. It might be Osama Bin Laden. Who knows? And where is Adolf Hitler, now that we finally need him? It is bad business to go into War without a target.

In times like these, when the War-drums roll and the bugles howl for blood, I think of Vince Lombardi, and I wonder how he would handle it. ... Good old Vince. He was a zealot for Victory at all costs, and his hunger for it was pure -- or that's what he said and what his legend tells us, but it is worth noting that he is not even in the top 20 in career victories.

We are At War now, according to President Bush, and I take him at his word. He also says this War might last



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for "a very long time."

Generals and military scholars will tell you that eight or 10 years is actually not such a long time in the span of human history -- which is no doubt true -- but history also tells us that 10 years of martial law and a war-time economy are going to feel like a Lifetime to people who are in their twenties today. The poor bastards of what will forever be known as Generation Z are doomed to be the first generation of Americans who will grow up with a lower standard of living than their parents enjoyed.

That is extremely heavy news, and it will take a while for it to sink in. The 22 babies born in New York City while the World Trade Center burned will never know what they missed. The last half of the 20th century will seem like a wild party for rich kids, compared to what's coming now. The party's over, folks. The time has come for loyal Americans to Sacrifice. ... Sacrifice. ... Sacrifice. That is the new buzz-word in Washington. But what it means is not entirely clear.

Winston Churchill said "The first casualty of War is always Truth." Churchill also said "In wartime, the Truth is so precious that it should always be surrounded by a bodyguard of Lies."

That wisdom will not be much comfort to babies born last week. The first news they get in this world will be News subjected to Military Censorship. That is a given in wartime, along with massive campaigns of deliberately-planted "Dis-information." That is routine behavior in Wartime -- for all countries and all combatants -- and it makes life difficult for people who value real news. Count on it. That is what Churchill meant when he talked about Truth being the first casualty of War.

In this case, however, the next casualty was Football. All games were canceled last week. And that has Never happened to the NFL. Never. That gives us a hint about the Magnitude of this War. Terrorists don't wear uniforms, and they play by inscrutable rules -- The Rules of World War III, which has already begun.

So get ready for it, folks. Buckle up and watch your backs at all times. That is why they call it "Terrorism." *Dr. Hunter S. Thompson's books include Hell's Angels, Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72, The Proud Highway, Better Than Sex and The Rum Diary. His new book, Fear and Loathing in America, has just been released. A regular contributor to various national and international publications, Thompson now lives in a fortified compound near Aspen, Colo. His column, "Hey, Rube," appears each Monday on Page 2.*

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