

This is a printer friendly version of an article from **thecalifornian.com**
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published Feb 11, 2008

BUSINESS: Ag Monday: Farm life soothes veteran

Dunlop, who saw action in Gulf War, part of program

By **MARÍA JOSÉ VNAS**
The Salinas Californian

Jim Dunlop may have brought some demons with him after serving as a Marine in the first Iraq war in 1990.

But he says he's worked them out raising free-ranging pigs and laying hens on a 20-acre farm in Las Lomas.

Dunlop is a living example of what the group Farms Not Arms wants to achieve. The farmers association has started a program, dubbed Swords to Plowshares, which aims to help veterans to overcome painful war memories by encouraging them to become farmers, in a literal interpretation of the Old Testament passage, "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks."

The initiative aims not only to offer veterans solace, but also the chance to switch careers. Farms Not Arms' co-founder Michael O'Gorman said a disproportionate percentage of soldiers' fatalities in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars have been young people coming from small, rural towns.

"The military is a job opportunity for people who had no opportunities on the land," O'Gorman said. "And we want to reverse that."

He spoke at the Eco-Farm Conference last month in Pacific Grove. Both O'Gorman and Dunlop participated in a panel that included three other veterans.

Dunlop, now 38, had just finished high school when he joined the Marine Corps.

"I wanted to be a tough guy, so I joined the Marines," he said. "I thought it would be good for traveling.

"I didn't have a good concept of what four years in the military would be like - I guess that when you're young, you don't have such a good concept of time."

Dunlop, an athletic man who had been a track star in high school, said he really liked being in the Marine Corps ... but only for the three-month duration of boot camp.

"I hated it when it became more like a job," he said.

After boot camp, Dunlop was sent to an artillery training school in Oklahoma, then spent one year posted on a Navy ship.

"It felt like prison," he said. He started running around in circles on the ship's deck at night; it took him 30 laps to complete a mile.

Afterward, Dunlop was sent to Camp Pendleton in Oceanside, where he started running "like crazy," about 20 miles a day, and joined the Marines' track team. He tried to get kicked out of the Marines; on one occasion he smashed his own hand with a rock and pretended he had broken it while running, so he could go visit his family in New York.

When he came back, he was deployed to the Gulf War. It was December 1990.

Dunlop and his fellow Marines disembarked in Saudi Arabia and moved very fast toward Kuwait. On one occasion, his group was trapped in a minefield, but managed to get out of it unharmed.

"Next day, two people died in there," he said. "I guess we just got lucky."

Dunlop spent only 10 days in Kuwait. He was then sent back to his ship in the Persian Gulf, where he stayed until August 1991. After he was discharged, he traveled in Australia, where he ran out of money and worked picking watermelons and tomatoes on a farm.

"I really liked the camaraderie and the hard work, and I realized I was good at it," Dunlop said.

When he came back to the United States, he obtained a bachelor's degree in biology and worked as a farmer in Mariposa, where he raised broilers, hens and vegetables and started a community-supported agriculture project. He moved to Las Lomas three years ago, after marrying Rebecca Thistlethwaite, director of programs at the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association in Salinas.

'It's good for people'

Dunlop said he agrees with the philosophy of Farms Not Arms, which believes that putting combat veterans in contact with nature will help heal the soldiers of mental or emotional problems associated with their service.

It is unclear how many of the military personnel deployed in the current wars will end up showing mental health problems. But according to a study published in 2006 in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 19 percent of the 238,938 soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who answered an anonymous survey reported suffering mental-health disorders, which included major depression, generalized anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Farms Not Arms is hoping that Swords to Plowshares can do its bit.

"Farming has been good for me," Dunlop said. "Whether it's the quiet, or the hard work, or being outside with nature, understanding the rhythms of the Earth - it's good for people."
