

GI SPECIAL 3A4

**HOW MANY MORE FOR BUSH'S' WAR?
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW, ALIVE**



Firefighters lower a casket from the back of a fire truck at the funeral for Maine Army National Guard Sergeant Thomas Dostie in South China, Maine, December 31, 2004. Sergeant Dostie was killed in Mosul. REUTERS/Brian Snyder

200,000 In Resistance: U.S. Forces Outnumbered

1/3/2005 BAGHDAD, Jan 3 (AFP)

Iraq's insurgency counts more than 200,000 active fighters and sympathisers, the country's national intelligence chief told AFP, in the bleakest assessment to date of the armed revolt waged by Sunni Muslims.

"I think the resistance is bigger than the US military in Iraq. I think the resistance is more than 200,000 people," Iraqi intelligence service director General Mohamed Abdullah Shahwani said in an interview ahead of the January 30 elections.

Shahwani said the number includes at least 40,000 hardcore fighters but rises to more than 200,000 members counting part-time fighters and volunteers who provide rebels everything from intelligence and logistics to shelter.

A senior US military officer declined to endorse or dismiss the spy chief's numbers.

"As for the size of the insurgency, we don't have good resolution on the size," the officer said on condition of anonymity.

Defense experts said it was impossible to divine the insurgency's total number, but called Shahwani's estimate a valid guess, with as much credence, if not more, than any US numbers.

"I believe General Shahwani's estimation, given that he is referring predominantly to active sympathizers and supporters and to part-time as well as full-time active insurgents, may not be completely out of the ballpark," said defense analyst Bruce Hoffman who served as an advisor to the US occupation in Iraq and now works for US-based think-tank RAND Corporation.

Compared to the coalition's figure, he said: "General Shahwani's -- however possibly high it may be, might well give a more accurate picture of the situation."

Anthony Cordesman, an Iraq analyst with the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, put Shahwani's estimates on an equal footing with the American's.

"The Iraqi figures do... recognize the reality that the insurgency in Iraq has broad support in Sunni areas while the US figures down play this to the point of denial."

Insurgents have gained strength through Iraq's tight-knit tribal bonds and links to the old 400,000-strong Iraqi army, dissolved by the US occupation in May 2003 two months after the US-led invasion, he said.

"People are fed up after two years, without improvement. People are fed up with no security, no electricity, people feel they have to do something. The army was hundreds of thousands. You'd expect some veterans would join with their relatives, each one has sons and brothers."

The rebels have turned city neighborhoods and small towns around central Iraq into virtual no-go zones despite successful US military efforts to reclaim former enclaves like Samarra and Fallujah, he said.

"What are you going to call the situation here (in Baghdad) when 20 to 30 men can move around with weapons and no one can get them in Adhamiyah, Dura and Ghazaliya," he said, naming neighborhoods in the capital.

The spy chief also questioned the success of the November campaign to retake Fallujah, which US forces have hailed as a major victory against the resistance.

"What we have now is an empty city almost destroyed... and most of the insurgents are free. They have gone either to Mosul or to Baghdad or other areas."

Asked if the insurgents were winning, Shahwani answered: "I would say they aren't losing."

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER

Telling the truth - about the occupation, the cuts to veterans' benefits, or the dangers of depleted uranium - is the first reason Traveling Soldier is necessary. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance - whether it's in the streets of Baghdad, New York, or inside the armed forces. Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties working-class people inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize resistance within the armed forces. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers. <http://www.traveling-soldier.org/> And join with Iraq War vets in the call to end the occupation and bring our troops home now! (www.ivaw.net)

IRAQ WAR REPORTS:

Roadside Bomb Wounds Two Soldiers In Northern Baghdad; Green Zone Under Multiple Attacks

01/03/05 CJTF7 Release #050103I, Baghdad, Iraq & 1.4.04 Aljazeera

Two Task Force Baghdad Soldiers were wounded by an improvised explosive device detonation at approximately 10:30 a.m. in northern Baghdad today.

A humvee was damaged in the attack. The wounded were evacuated to a military medical treatment facility.

Violent clashes later erupted between US forces and fighters, using rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns. Captain Mitch Zorn also confirmed that the Green Zone had come under multiple attacks.

U.S. Armored Vehicle Damaged In Samarra

1.4.04 Aljazeera

A US military armoured vehicle was damaged when an explosive device detonated in al-Mutasim neighbourhood in central Samarra city, sources told Aljazeera.

Four Mercenaries Killed In Baghdad

04/01/2005 Reuters & 01/03/2005 AFP

Three British nationals died in an explosion in Baghdad on Monday, the Foreign Office said when a car bomb which exploded close to a four-wheel-drive vehicle of the type used by foreign security contractors.

A spokesman for Kroll Associates in New York told Britain's domestic Press Association that at least two of the men killed were Britons employed in the Iraqi capital by the security firm.

A BBC correspondent in Baghdad reported that a total of four people were killed -- three Britons and one American. He said they were all were civilians working for "consulting companies ... not all the same company".

Soldier With Beaverton Roots Dies In Baghdad



Sgt. Damien Ficek (AP Photo/Courtesy Washington National Guard, file)

January 03, 2005 STEVE MAYES, The Oregonian

Damien Ficek and Brian Lynott, best friends since their days at Beaverton's Highland Middle School, signed up for military service as teenagers.

Lynott served in the National Guard and now is raising a family in Aloha.

Sgt. Damien Ficek dreamed of having children in the not-too-distant future.

But that dream died Dec. 30 when Ficek was killed while on foot patrol in Baghdad -- two days before his 27th birthday, according to an Associated Press report.

Ficek spent more than a year in Iraq and was scheduled to return home in March.

Ficek, a resident of Pullman, Wash., was serving in the Washington National Guard. He served four years in the U.S. Army before signing up with the Guard. In civilian life, he was a sports massage therapist for the Washington State University athletic department.

His wife, Kyla Ficek, and his mother and stepfather, Donna and Danny Vian of Tualatin, declined to comment Sunday night.

Ficek and Lynott enlisted together -- Ficek in the Army, Lynott in the National Guard. **"They recruited us right out of the (high school) library," Lynott said.**

In a Dec. 16 e-mail to Lynott, Ficek said he was looking forward to returning home -- perhaps as soon as March -- and starting a family.

But with the Iraqi national election coming up, **Ficek said, his tour probably would be extended.**

Concerned that Ficek might not have adequate body armor, Lynott and others offered to send him the best protection available.

"We made it clear to him from Day 1 we'd get him whatever he needed."

Death's Dominion

January 03, 2005 By Spc. James King, Army Times

The writer, an infantryman in the Oregon National Guard, is attached to a 1st Cavalry Division unit at Camp Volunteer in Baghdad. He has been in Iraq since March.

It was just a typical Saturday. I was up earlier than usual, but we were tasked with the same run we had been doing for the last six months. Our security element has gone from point A to point B 147 times with no more than a scratch from bumping another vehicle.

Up at 4 a.m., I went to the motor pool and picked up my Humvee. I parked it outside our barracks and waited for the "TC" (actually tank commander, but we use it synonymously with truck commander) and my gunner. On this vehicle, we were using a squad automatic weapon for our gunner. I fill that position when I am not driving as we switch around in positions from day to day.

We left from the barracks around 5 a.m. for the trailer filled with ice. We have coolers in the trunk to fill with water, Gatorade and soda and then ice to keep it cold. We then stopped by the chow hall to stand in line until it opened. I ate breakfast.

Our typical pre-convoy brief was held at the staging area at Camp Taji. "Roads are clear" was reported.

A new convoy commander was in charge today and harassed me about being a CLS — a combat life saver. "I have my bag," I reported. Inside are bandages, gauze, an intravenous fluid kit and other things for nerve agents and stuff.

I start up my vehicle. I am the second to last in this convoy of 14 vehicles. I drive out the gate at 6 a.m. and follow a typical route. It was still dark out. The trip is about 20 miles. The first 19 miles go smoothly.

BOOM!

Instantly, I know a roadside bomb has gone off. I thought it hit my vehicle.

I yell to the gunner, "Are you all right?" No answer.

"Are you all right?" I yell again. No answer.

He looks OK, but worry goes through me. I hit him in the leg and yell his name again. No answer.

I hit him again, harder.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes, I am fine," he says, finally.

Suddenly I change the focus of my worries.

"What about the vehicle behind us?" I yell. The gunner is wearing ear plugs. I hit his leg, hard. "How's the other Humvee?"

"It's stopped."

My TC shouts to me to stop. "I should turn around," I yell back.

"No stop, wait here," my TC says.

I wait. I don't want to go back. There might be a daisy chain of improvised explosive devices. Stopping is no better. "Where is the Humvee?" I yell to the gunner.

"It's stopped back there. I think it was hit," the gunner reports.

"I should turn around," I plead to the TC. I don't want to, but I must get back. They may need me for security, CLS or to tow them.

"I need a medic, I need security, where is my security?" a frantic, scared voice screams into the radio.

I take off into a U-turn. "Go now," the TC yells. I jump the curb and speed on the opposite side of the road toward the Humvee.

"Stay in the middle of the road," a passenger yells. "Get off to the side," the other yells. I stay in the middle. I am not going IED hunting on the side of the road, no matter who tells me to do it.

I stop diagonal to the damaged Humvee. My door is open when I hear the TC yell: "Gunner, is it clear?" I hesitate.

"Uh, yeah," the gunner blurts. My foot is out the door and I hear the TC yell, "You are CL ..." He drops off, realizing I am already out the door. I grab my SAW, sling it on my back, grab my CLS bag and run to the vehicle.

The Humvee is turned around backward. A guy is lying on the seat, feet on the other seat, head hanging low out the door. He looks puffy. I don't recognize him.

I support his head. There is a pool of blood on the ground. His eyes are so cloudy, I barely see his pupils. His eyes look as if they are going to pop out of his head. His head is huge, and I realize it's swollen. Then I realize I know this guy.

I look for bleeding from his body. I see no wounds, but another pool of blood is in the center of the Humvee. I need to find where this blood is coming from and stop it. I start to remove his helmet, but the top of his head is coming off with his helmet. I hold his helmet in place. I see a laceration on the side of his head.

I see his brain.

Meanwhile, the TC of the damaged vehicle is pulling at the door to get the driver out. The door opens. The driver steps out and falls to the ground. "Are you all right?" the TC asks the driver.

"Uh, hummm," the driver responds. The driver climbs back into the vehicle and takes the gunner's pulse. "His pulse is weak!" he yells to me.

I nod, knowing there's no way it would be strong. I yell to the TC, "Get a medevac and get a medic!"

He heads to the side of the Humvee where he can get to the radio. "He's not moving!" the driver yells. I yell the gunner's name. He struggles to take in air and exhales blood. Again he goes still.

I just know he needs to keep breathing until the medics get here. I yell his name. He gurgles in air and blood — he exhales blood. He gets still again. I yell his name. He gurgles in air and blood — he exhales blood. Again and again.

Another CLS shows up. He hands me gauze, and I put it on the gunner's head, mostly to appease the other CLS, who moves in and takes over supporting the gunner. I step back

as a third CLS gets to the scene. My TC calls me. He tells me I need to get back to the truck; we are going to move the convoy.

“No, I can’t leave, I’m CLS,” I plead.

“There’s enough CLSs here,” he says. Makes sense, but anything and nothing make sense. I don’t want to go until the medics show up. My TC asks a captain to drive so I can stay. The captain agrees.

Turning back to the gunner, one of the CLSs walks past me. He says: “I see his brain.”

“I know, I know,” I whisper, panicked. “We need to keep his head elevated!”

“We should get him out of there,” I add.

“No. Don’t move him,” another CLS suggests.

“Yes, get him outta there,” someone important-sounding says. I never noticed, but it was a medic. How long he had been there, I don’t know.

The captain pulls the stretcher off the Humvee. I thought he had left, but that’s not important right now. The captain breaks the Humvee headlamp pulling the stretcher off. No one cares. The stretcher is placed. We pull the gunner out and onto the stretcher.

“Keep his head up,” I yell. I run to the Humvee, grab a backpack and place it under the stretcher to prop the gunner’s head up.

“Maybe we should start an IV,” one of the CLSs says. I open my bag and pull out the IV. I start to get it ready. I look at the medic for confirmation.

The medic looks at me with compassion, as if I am the only one who doesn’t know.

“No,” he says softly. I give him a bewildered look as I realize what his next words are: “He’s dead.”

I get a sudden feeling of emptiness. No tears. No confusion. No need to think.

I pack my IV back in the bag. I pick up my SAW, grab my bag, walk over to my Humvee and throw the bag in it. No anger. No remorse. Just sudden clarity and emptiness.

“Are you OK?” my TC asks.

I saw all the blood drained from a soldier’s head, one I knew. I saw his head, no hair, no skin, no skull, I saw straight through to his brain. I saw life leave someone I have lived with for 10 months. I have never seen anyone die before and only one dead person in my life.

“I’m fine,” I respond. Another Humvee hooked up to the damaged Humvee, and we were ready to finish our trip to camp.

Walking to the vehicle, my TC again asks me, “Are you OK to drive?”

"I'm fine," I lie.

TROOP NEWS

One In Five Iraq Troops Will Be North Carolina Military

January 3, 2005 AP, RALEIGH, N.C.

North Carolina's military will dominate the conflict in Iraq this year, with about 8,000 soldiers from Fort Bragg's 18th Airborne Corps and 14,000 Marines from bases in the state about to take over two of the most crucial roles in the fight.

The task force led by Camp Lejeune's 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force will take over the war's toughest front-line assignment: security in Anbar Province, the region that includes Fallujah.

The 18th Corps, under Maj. Gen. John Vines, will have an even bigger responsibility: taking command of day-to-day operations of the U.S.-led military coalition.

All told, about one of every five soldiers will be from North Carolina bases.

Pentagon Pukes Trying To Force Anthrax Shots On Troops *Again?*

We have noted before that no other nation in the world forces its military to take the anthrax vaccine — including some who have troops working side by side with U.S. service members in “high threat” areas.

What is less well known is that even the U.S. State Department — part of the same government as the Pentagon — has a voluntary anthrax vaccine policy for its personnel overseas.

January 03, 2005 Army Times Editorial

Pentagon officials have portrayed the Oct. 27 ruling by a federal judge that shut down the military's mandatory anthrax vaccine program as hinging on a minor regulatory procedural oversight that can be easily rectified by the Food and Drug Administration.

Yet almost eight weeks after the judge's ruling, the Pentagon still hasn't announced whether it will appeal the ruling or ask the FDA to revisit its process for approving the vaccine as protection against inhalation anthrax.

Instead, defense officials are pursuing a curious alternative course: On Dec. 10, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz sent an urgent request to the Department of Health and Human Services seeking emergency authority under the homeland Project BioShield law to continue giving anthrax vaccine to U.S. troops.

Here's the rub: Under Project BioShield, individuals must give informed consent before the government can administer any vaccine. But the federal judge, in his Oct. 27 ruling, also said the Defense Department could continue its vaccination program — as long as it first gets informed consent from troops.

Thus, on the surface, at least, the Pentagon seems to have nothing to gain from petitioning the Department of Health and Human Services for emergency authority to administer the vaccine.

But lawyers for the six anonymous service members and Defense Department civilians in the federal lawsuit offer one theory: By gaining “emergency” authority to continue anthrax vaccinations of the troops under Project BioShield, the Pentagon could be laying the groundwork for a presidential waiver of informed consent.

The emergency ruling would, the theory goes, give President Bush some cover from the political outcry that could follow such a move.

This is another in a long series of missteps on this program since it began in 1998. Despite reports of possible links between the vaccine and illnesses suffered by many veterans of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, as well as hundreds of troops who have taken the shots since 1998, **the Pentagon repeatedly has asserted that the FDA has declared the vaccine to be safe and effective.**

The fact is, the FDA did not issue its final, formal rule on the safety and efficacy of anthrax vaccine to protect against inhalation anthrax until December 2003 — almost two decades after first proposing its final rule — and just eight days after the federal judge shut down the vaccination program for the first time.

The timing was highly suspicious — *especially coming from an agency that recently was publicly blasted by one of its own senior science officials for allegedly playing too loose with regulatory approval for a number of high-profile drugs already on the market.*

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The much-hyped threat of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq has utterly failed to materialize. But even if insurgents somehow did manage to stage a weaponized anthrax attack, it likely would come not in an open-space battlefield setting but in a crowded urban area — which means State Department personnel are at least as much at risk as American troops. So why the government double-standard?

This has gone on for far too long. The simple solution to the debacle is to move ahead with an informed consent — that is, voluntary — anthrax vaccination program. If the evidence in favor of getting the shots is so overwhelmingly supportive, most troops will take their chances and get them. **If it isn't, maybe the program isn't so safe — or necessary — after all.**

Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward this E-MAIL along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the war, at home and inside the armed services. Send requests to address up top.

Blast In Iraq Injured Bernal Heights Native; "It's Not Worth It."

1.3.04 By Marisa Lagos, Staff Writer, The Examiner

Marine Cpl. Jason Schreiber almost died last month when a bomb ripped through his camp in western Iraq, killing his roommate and another Marine.

Schreiber, who grew up in The City, was injured Dec. 3, when a water truck ran through the compound gates at his camp near the Jordanian border and detonated a bomb.

"I heard gunshots and grabbed my rifle," explained Schreiber, who will receive a Purple Heart for his service. "I looked up and saw a flash, and all of a sudden I was 10 or 15 feet away from where I had been standing. The guy who was behind me before was in front of me, bleeding."

Shreiber's roommate was one of two Marines killed in the blast; another six, including Schreiber, were injured.

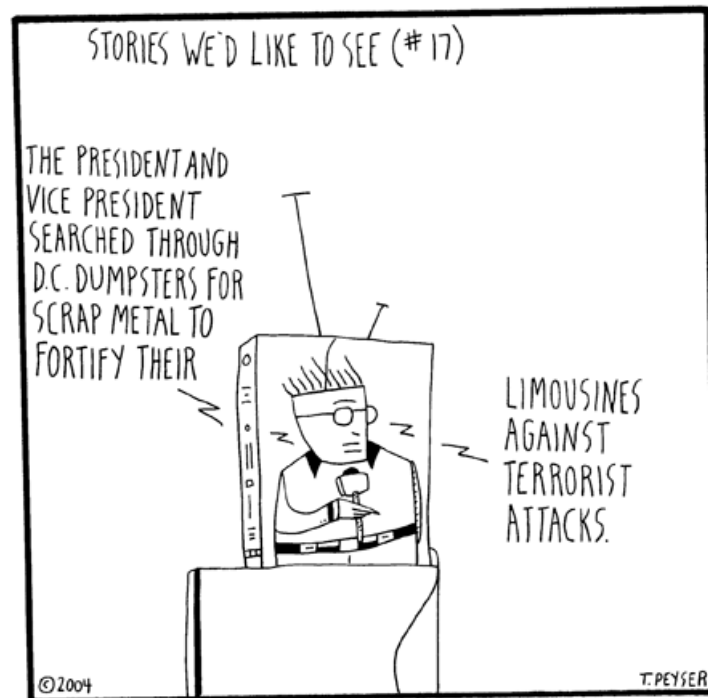
A month later, the Phillip and Sala Burton Academic High School graduate is home and recovering. Schreiber suffered internal bleeding when his kidneys were bruised in the blast, which also threw shrapnel into the back of his neck and arms, pinching a nerve.

He walks a little hunched over now, often has shooting pains and numbness down his left leg, and still has muscle spasms in his back.

Although he narrowly escaped death, Schreiber insists that he wants to return to the war zone. With elections slated for Jan. 30, attacks against coalition troops and Iraqi forces are increasing. Sunday, insurgents killed 29 people.

Schreiber says he would return to his unit in a second if the Marine Corps would let him. But when his time is up in July, he will not reenlist.

"Then I'm done," he said. "It's not worth it."



Soldiers Lost In Medical Limbo At Fort Knox

1.3.04 Associated Press

FORT KNOX, Ky. -- **Eighteen months after hurting his back while unloading a truck at Fort Campbell, Staff Sgt. Christopher Goodin is still assigned to medical holdover status at Fort Knox.**

Sgt. Terry Underwood is still waiting for surgery to repair an Achilles' tendon he ruptured in 2003 while deployed to Bosnia by the National Guard.

They are among nearly 150 sick and injured soldiers at Fort Knox who are lingering in a medical limbo created when the military found itself unprepared for fallout from the war with Iraq.

Several ailing soldiers at Fort Knox, including Kentucky natives, agreed that conditions have improved but expressed frustrations over delays in their treatment.

The toughest part is being in limbo, several soldiers said.

Sgt. Todd Clites, 31, sustained two fractures in his back in Baghdad on Easter Sunday 2004 when a roadside bomb detonated. **A Pennsylvania native, he's been at Fort Knox in medical holdover for six months.** He is eager to return to his unit in Iraq.

"Send me back to Iraq or send me home," he said. "The military needs a better system. The time span between appointments is too long."



Caldwell Soldier Back Home After Being Hurt

January 03, 2005 By Jessica Burchard, Marietta times

U.S. Army Reservist Eric Marshall returned to the United States in early December from his service in Iraq, and he immediately was treated at the Fort Knox medical unit in Kentucky.

Since then, Marshall, 26, has returned to Caldwell to recover from injuries received on Dec. 8. He was hurt when a roadside bomb detonated next to the truck he was riding in. He served as a gunner who assisted with fuel delivery throughout Iraq. The bomb caused a piece of shrapnel to become lodged in Marshall's upper arm bone, breaking it.

"I've gone through six surgeries," Marshall said during an interview last week. "I've had two major surgeries. The first one to try to fix the bone and the other to fix the break. The others were to clean the area."

During one of the major surgeries doctors implanted screws in Marshall's arm to encourage the bone to grow back together.

Marshall joined the Reserves in 1998. He served in Iraq from January until he was injured in December.

Marshall now is undergoing physical therapy for his injuries.

"It's just normal shoulder therapy at Marietta Memorial Hospital," said Marshall. "I go there three times a week. I try to get it stretched out."

Since coming home, Marshall and his fiancée Emma Archer have encountered plenty of feelings of good will. "It's been really nice. It's really nice to be home," said Marshall. "People stop in to talk with me. They've wished me well many times."

Archer also has maintained a positive outlook on the future.

Archer said she's committed to him no matter what happens.

"I wouldn't plan to leave him for anything," said Archer. "We're planning on getting married in October."

The couple have dated for three years and have been engaged for a year. They rescheduled the wedding to assure Marshall will be fully recovered for the big event.

Marshall has a plan if the recovery can't be completed.

"If my arm is not fully recovered, I'll leave active duty," said Marshall. "Then I plan on returning to my job. I work at a factory in Cambridge."

Objection Sustained: Maine Soldier Home From Afghanistan As Conscientious Objector

[Thanks to Phil G who sent this in.]

January 3, 2005 by Justin Ellis, Portland Press Herald Staff Writer

Perry O'Brien went to war.

Then he said no.

Perry O'Brien, 22, has the kind of background typical of soldiers in today's military: He's from a good family, is full of ideas and wants to serve his country.

In another way he's not so typical. Three years into a four-year enlistment in the Army, after a tour of duty in Afghanistan, he said no. Perry O'Brien became a conscientious objector.

"I had trouble justifying what we were doing in Afghanistan," he said recently.

He's back after being honorably discharged from the Army. Now life has returned to some kind of normal for the Peaks Island native. He is one of a relatively small group of people to ever ask for - and receive - conscientious-objector status.

It's more than the term used during the days of the military draft. It's a label that essentially means you do not believe in the use of force or even training for combat.

The simple history of O'Brien's life goes like this: Young boy grows up on the island, gets home-schooled for several years, meets future fiancée and enters the University of Southern Maine to study philosophy. But in 2001, things got complicated. He wanted a change.

So he enlisted in the Army to become a medic. It was two weeks before Sept. 11.

It's important to remember that life in the Army was much different prior to the terrorist attacks. O'Brien never believed he would be near the front lines of any combat.

"I wanted to expand myself in the most radical way possible," he said with a pause. "I think it was a naive plan . . . an instinctual decision."

Over the next two years he would cycle between basic training at Fort Benning, Ga., to medic training in Texas, until he was stationed with a unit in 2002. In January 2003 he was deployed to Afghanistan as a member of the 82nd Airborne Division.

Working in an old airport in the city of Kandahar, southwest of the Afghan capital, Kabul, O'Brien spent his days treating everyday illnesses as well as trauma injuries among Afghan and U.S. troops. The unit also traveled into rural areas, where they set up shop in the countryside to give villagers medicine and do simple dental work.

"At the time it was like the Peace Corps with guns," he said. "That's what it felt like."

But soon his questions began coming.

For every raid on suspect farmers and Taliban sympathizers, every bombing campaign, it seemed the Army had to try even harder to build better friendships with Afghans, he said. They would hold more free clinics and give away boxes and boxes of school books and crayons to kids.

Even O'Brien's responsibilities as a medic began to take a different perspective. "You didn't focus on the meaning, you just did the job," he said. "You get into a mode of doing your job, when working on people felt like working on machines."

It didn't help that he was receiving patients each day, some children, who may have been innocent victims caught in the middle of fighting.

And just like a small crack in an ice pond, his questions began to grow. A world of black and white started to bleed gray.

For answers he started to talk with the unit's chaplain, and fell back on philosophy. He read and re-read books on Eastern religions, studied ideas on the value of life and taking life.

O'Brien knew that being a member of the Army would be difficult both mentally and physically, but he never anticipated it would make him question his fundamental values.

His unit returned to the states in June, where O'Brien took on the difficult task of getting conscientious-objector status from the Army.

There are two types of conscientious-objector designations: one where you are removed from combat and put in another specialty field; or, as in O'Brien's case, discharged from the service entirely.

In 2001 there were nine approved. Last year there were 31 approved and 29 denied.

The process takes time and leads all the way to the Pentagon, where the final decision is made. Officers carefully check a person's history as far back as high school. Typically he or she will have shown signs either of support or questioning the Army, Robbins said.

Though the Army knows a change of mind is possible while in combat, it's also not common among the ranks. Now new recruits sign a statement saying they are not conscientious objectors. "It's extremely rare," said Robbins. "We're a large army with roughly upwards of a half million (soldiers) on active duty."

In O'Brien's case the process took five months. He returned home Nov. 22, just in time for Thanksgiving. O'Brien said he feels fortunate, if not lucky, to have been granted conscientious-objector status.

When it comes down to it, everyone has questions, O'Brien says. He knows not everyone will come to the same conclusions he did. He also knows that some people will disagree with his decision to leave the Army, and that's something he respects.

Juggling conflicting ideas about war, diplomacy and peace while fighting overseas is not easy, to say the least. He knows he is lucky to have been in war, survived and returned home in one piece.

Now he wants to work with groups like Veterans for Peace and the Maine People's Alliance to help those in or outside the Army who may be in a situation like his. "I don't just want to sit around and have conversations about these things," he said.

He plans to head back to college in the fall, studying political science and philosophy at Cornell University in New York.

In the meantime, adjusting to life back home hasn't been too hard. For all his adventures and experience, one thing still makes him like many other 22-year-olds in Maine.

"I'm looking for a job," he said.

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to contact@militaryproject.org. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential.



Source: Stupid Government Tricks, John I. Kohut/Pluma

The Air Force bought 173 custom fax machines at a cost of \$547,000.00 each; the faxes were specially designed to withstand a nuclear attack.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Interview With A Resistance Warrior: After Fallujah, Son Is Gone But Fervor Remains; Father Who Left Reluctantly Waits To Fight Another Day

[Thanks to Phil G. who sent this in.]

By Anthony Shadid, Washington Post Foreign Service, December 1, 2004

In a cramped room that has become his refuge, with walls of grimy plaster and sloppy brickwork, a man known as Abu Mohammed sat with his children.

It was evening in Baghdad, and the Muslim call to prayer wafted over the neighborhood that takes its name from its main avenue, Palestine Street. As the invocation became audible, scratchy but melodic, Abu Mohammed paused for a moment in respectful silence. Soon after, the electricity returned to his shack, powering a lone fluorescent light that offset the gray of dusk. He sipped his sweet, dark tea and dragged again from a locally made Miami cigarette.

Then, with humility and pride, 39-year-old Abu Mohammed began his story -- a tale of death, life and prospective martyrdom. Unlike so many accounts of a conflict that has reshaped Iraq, it came not from the U.S. forces prosecuting the war, but from among the ranks of the men they fought.

A blacksmith turned insurgent, Abu Mohammed undertook an odyssey this month that carried him from the battlefields of Fallujah, roiled with religion, to a harrowing escape across the Euphrates River and a lonely exile in Baghdad, where he waits to fight another day. It began with the death of his son, Ahmed, whose short life was ended by an American bullet.

"He was only 13, but he was the equal of a thousand men," Abu Mohammed said, in words that served as an epitaph.

His hard face, framed in short, graying hair, softened. Almost imperceptibly, a glimmer passed over his limpid eyes. Sitting on a thin, tattered mat with a floral design, he leaned his short, wiry body forward, his hands clasped at his waist.

"He had more guts than me, a hundred times more," the father said. "He was still a child, but he was a hero."

Mascot Becomes a Man

In the fervent streets of Fallujah before this month's U.S. assault, residents recalled, Ahmed was a mascot of sorts among the hundreds of men who called themselves mujaheddin, guerrillas fired by faith. He was shorter than his father and more conscious of his looks: He wore his dark hair fashionably long and, residents said, preferred shirts that showed off biceps built with a regimen of weights.

He spent his hours at the Hadhra Muhammadiya mosque, a gathering place for fighters, where he became familiar with insurgent leaders such as Abdullah Janabi and Omar Hadid. Abu Mohammed said Janabi gave Ahmed a bottle of fragrance -- a tradition of the prophet Muhammad, who adored musk and believed its aroma could awaken the spirit.

Ahmed joined the war early, becoming a fighter at 12. Residents said that in his first operation in March, he hung out at the mayor's office for days, selling candy on the street and joking with U.S. soldiers. Once his presence became familiar, he managed to leave a homemade bomb at the building, which detonated. Soon after, he joined his father as a fighter.

"I consider him a man, and I treat him as a friend," one resident recalled Abu Mohammed saying of his son.

Beginning in April, Fallujah became a virtually independent fiefdom of Iraqi and foreign insurgents, a redoubt where car bombings, abductions, beheadings and attacks on the U.S. military were planned and executed. U.S. forces put pressure on the city and the insurgents, gradually increasing it until, in the first week of November, artillery attacks and air raids signaled the ground assault that would follow.

"The Americans were testing us," Abu Mohammed said. "They wanted to see what kind of power we had."

He said Ahmed insisted on serving on the front line, donning a black tracksuit that an insurgent leader had just given him. The boy's mother was angry, Abu Mohammed acknowledged, but her protests were in vain.

On a clear day before the ground assault, guerrillas scurried around the narrow streets of the Shuhada neighborhood. A barrage of artillery and air raids lasted from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m., Abu Mohammed said. There was a break, then fighting resumed at 4 p.m. Abu Mohammed sent his son to fetch ammunition from among the rocket-propelled grenades, mortar shells, rockets and AK-47 assault rifles that he kept in a hole next to their one-room house.

The boy ran, crouching, about 600 yards down a street lined with ocher-colored buildings. As he did, he was struck about 6:10 p.m. by a bullet whose source his father did not see. It pierced the back of Ahmed's neck and tore through his chest. The boy was buried three hours later, at a cemetery next to the Farouk mosque, with four others killed that day.

The mystique of martyrdom prevented Abu Mohammed from mourning the death of his son. Ahmed died, as he put it, "in the path of God." But three weeks on, he allowed himself a moment of reflection: "He was one of my ribs," he said.

The boy's mother has yet to learn of her son's death. She thinks he is staying with relatives, Abu Mohammed said.

"I cannot tell her now," he said plaintively.

He thrust his hands forward. "She's a mother. What do you think her reaction will be?"

'Like Celebrating a Feast'

The battle for Fallujah began on Nov. 8 and, under cover of darkness, Abu Mohammed began fighting.

Residents said he already had a reputation as a fighter. **Before the war he was a blacksmith and a day laborer, making barely enough money to support two wives and nine children, all of whom slept in one room, with a kitchen adjoining it.** Months after the fall of Saddam Hussein's government in April 2003, he joined the ranks of insurgents. He said he worked as a scout, then ran weapons, then became a renowned sniper.

A man not given to boasting, he said he had carried out 17 or 18 "operations" outside Fallujah, in the arid expanse of western Iraq. Since he began fighting, he said, 30 men he knew have died. After an operation this fall, when he fired rockets at a U.S. base in Habbaniya after sneaking past fortifications, residents said Janabi, the insurgent leader, nicknamed him wawi, or jackal.

"When I shoot a target with a rocket-propelled grenade, it's like celebrating a feast," he said.

While atrocities unleashed by the insurgents -- beheadings and bombings that have killed scores of civilians -- have at least anecdotally seemed to unleash popular revulsion, there remains a constituency in Iraq that celebrates the guerrilla war. Myths have grown up around it, all infused with religious imagery and notions of divine intervention. Residents trade stories: that the knights of the prophet Muhammad were seen riding through Fallujah's streets on horseback with their swords drawn; that birds guided by God cast stones at Apache helicopters; that a scented breeze descends on the fighters as they battle U.S. troops.

Abu Mohammed had his tale.

At a checkpoint this summer, he was stopped by U.S. and Iraqi troops with a rocket-propelled grenade and three hand grenades in his trunk. He said he beseeched God: "I am fighting for you." The troops opened the trunk, he said, and found nothing.

The fighting in Fallujah, though, was nothing like Abu Mohammed had seen. He recalled the battle in April, when U.S. troops first tried to take the city but brokered a truce that eventually put it in insurgents' hands. This month's battle, he said, was far more ferocious.

"Last April, they had specific targets. In this attack, there was nothing specific," he said. "They attacked randomly."

Abu Mohammed said he was one of a group of 60 fighters, part of a guerrilla force that he said numbered between 2,000 and 2,500. Of those, he put a specific number on foreign fighters with them: 416. He said most of them wore blue or black tracksuits.

In the four days he fought, he said, he saw nine of his colleagues killed. Throughout the fight, he said, they were well armed from ample stockpiles, but they were overmatched. U.S. air support and shelling overwhelmed them, he said, coming from "above, the side and in front of us."

"You could hide easier from the rain than from the shelling we saw," he said.

On one night, he said, the fighters were surprised by a tank that no one heard until it was 50 yards away. Two of his men were killed before he and six others managed to retreat.

"We never heard it," he said. "In a fight you leave your ears open, but we didn't hear anything."

He shook his head. "What kind of tank was that?" he asked.

In the propaganda that surrounds the insurgency, much of it on video CDs that can be bought for 50 cents in Baghdad, the images celebrate the technological divide. Footage of blasts from a tank barrel and fire from helicopter gunships shifts seamlessly to pictures of bloodied corpses and women in black, yelling.

The Americans, Abu Mohammed said, are "strong in their technology, but I've never seen cowards like them."

A hint of anger flashed across his usually calm demeanor. "Fifteen thousand Americans against 2,000 mujaheddin, with their technology and their firepower? They say they were victorious, but what kind of victory was that?"

"We have a principle: defending our country," he said. "Why are they coming here? For what?"

A Long, Fearful Crossing

The night of Nov. 11 marked Abu Mohammed's flight.

Some of the insurgent leaders, he said, decided to smuggle out families still in Shuhada, the last stronghold of the fighters in the southern part of Fallujah. U.S. forces had surrounded the city, blocking traffic in and out, leaving the Euphrates River that meanders alongside the western edge of the city as one of the few means of escape.

At every turn in the journey, time seemed to slow.

With about 80 others, Abu Mohammed's family left home at 11 p.m. The walk to the river usually takes 15 minutes, he said; with the thunder of artillery barrages, it took three hours. They walked past corpses in the street, some mauled by dogs, to an area

shrouded by pomegranate and orange trees and date palms that ran to the edge of the river's sandy bank.

"We took nothing, not even our clothes," he said.

Four boats awaited them, one with a motor. Fighters ordered women and children to split up, fearful that one blast might kill an entire family. The command ignited chaos, he recalled, as women began yelling for their children. Some of them groped in the dark to make sure they were safe.

"You can imagine when the shell lands in the water. It's like the river is burning," Abu Mohammed said. "I can't describe the fear. They were so scared. Only God kept the explosions away from us."

The winter is moderate in Iraq, but the water was chilly and the current was strong. The boats crossed gingerly to the far bank, taking his 15-year-old son, his 10-year-old daughter, a 7-year-old son and so on.

The hours passed. Worried that the sun would soon rise, Abu Mohammed said, he took his youngest son, 3-year-old Abdel-Qadir, and began swimming. Halfway across, one of the boats passed, and he put the boy inside and returned to the bank.

At 4 a.m., the shelling became so severe that the boats did not cross again, forcing those left behind to fend for themselves. One of his wives could not swim, so Abu Mohammed waded into the water with her. She struggled, almost choking him. Time again slowed; a swim he said usually took 10 minutes ended up lasting 45.

Dawn had broken as he stood on the other bank, a half-mile downriver. It was too dangerous to return to Fallujah in daylight.

"I wanted to go back, but the sun had already risen," Abu Mohammed said, his voice tinged with regret. "I was trying to find an eye of a needle to get back to Fallujah, but I couldn't find it."

'There Will Be Jihad'

More than two weeks later, Abu Mohammed sat in a home that friends had found for him in Baghdad.

A television set and satellite dish perched on a rickety wooden stand, donated by his sister. Mattresses were tossed over straw mats and a brown carpet given to the family by friends. A bouquet of pink and yellow plastic flowers decorated one wall. The others were bare but for a Koran wrapped in a blue bag that hung from a nail, higher than anything else in the room.

The disparate forces that make up the insurgency in Iraq are, in many ways, united by what they lack: a political program. In its stead, among many Iraqi guerrillas at least, is a visceral nationalism more and more reflected through the lens of religion, a force that has come to mold the insurgency. Islam provides the vocabulary, the imagery and the faith in death itself as a cause. There is little ideology beyond God, no prescription for a future government.

Before the war, Abu Mohammed called himself a sympathizer of Hussein. No longer.

In a conversation that lasted hours, he rejected the idea of muqawima, the Arabic word for resistance. The word is too secular. It is a jihad, he said, and the men who fight are mujaheddin, obligated by religion to fight non-Muslim occupiers.

"Until the day of judgment, there will be jihad," Abu Mohammed said, his words slow. "If something happened in Lebanon, I would find a bridge to cross and go there to fight." In a calm voice, he described his obligation as a matter of fact, a self-evident truth, and he quoted the Koran to illustrate his point: "And slay them wherever you catch them."

He clutched a pillow in his lap as he sat cross-legged. A tattered white curtain hung over the window, its pane broken.

"Jihad is not only against the Americans, it's also waged against the people who support them," he said. "They say the government is Iraqi, but it's really American. It's an Iraqi on the throne, but the throne itself is American."

Even among those sympathetic to the insurgency, some have denounced the beheadings carried out by the guerrillas. Abu Mohammed made exceptions: Foreign contractors, aid workers and journalists should not be killed. But no punishment, he said, was severe enough for traitors. He quoted Janabi, the insurgent leader: Killing a spy is the equivalent of killing 100 Americans.

"What is the penalty of being a spy?" he asked. "I swear by the holy Koran that no one is beheaded unless he confesses that he did this or that." He quoted another verse, looking again at the hanging Koran: "Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into the hearts of the enemies of God and your enemies."

His 3-year-old, Abdel-Qadir, played next to him, shining a flashlight in his father's eyes. Abu Mohammed ignored him, seemingly taken by his own words. He insisted he would return to Fallujah soon. Not to avenge his son, he said, but to prosecute the fight.

"I wish I could leave today," he said, shaking his head. "I will kiss your hand if you can show me the way."

**IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE
END THE OCCUPATION**

Allawi Office Attacked, Seven Occupation Cops Dead

04/01/2005 Reuters & 01/03/2005 AFP & AP & Aljazeera

A bomber posing as a taxi driver killed two policemen and a civilian near interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's party headquarters.

The blast targeted the headquarters of Allawi's al-Wifaq Party (Iraqi National Accord) in al-Zaitun Street in Baghdad on Monday.

Iraqi journalist Ziyad al-Samarrai told Aljazeera that the headquarters had previously come under repeated mortar attacks, but this time a bomber managed to break through the checkpoints of the headquarters and blow up his booby-trapped car.

Seven Iraqi policemen were killed, including an officer, and 23 others injured in the explosion which targeted a checkpoint near al-Wifaq Party headquarters, police sources told al-Samarrai.

The journalist reported that ambulances rushed to the explosion site and US forces and Iraqi police cordoned off the area, while helicopters hovered above.

The blast hit the checkpoint just minutes before leaders of Allawi's party had been due to hold a news conference to unveil candidates for a Jan. 30 election.

14 Occupation Guards Killed In Tikrit, Baiji And Balad; 12 Wounded

1.4.04 Aljazeera

Six members of the Iraqi National Guard were killed and four more wounded in two separate explosions in Tikrit, according to security forces.

And another car bomb has also exploded near a US military base near Balad, a town north of Baghdad. Six Iraqi national guards died and another eight were wounded.

Iraqi journalist Ziyad al-Samarrai told Aljazeera that the Iraqi National Guard headquarters in al-Ghazaliya area, west of Baghdad, came under heavy mortar attacks. "The attacks lasted for more than 20 minutes," he said.

"Violent clashes have also erupted in al-Adhamiya area and al-Shaab city," he added.

Gunmen killed two more officers manning a checkpoint in the town of Baiji, police said.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS



AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

One U.S. Soldier Killed, Three Wounded In Eastern Afghanistan

January 03, 2005 By STEPHEN GRAHAM, KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)

An American soldier was killed and three others wounded in a clash with militants in eastern Afghanistan early Monday, the U.S. military said. It was the second American fatality in as many days.

Spokesman Maj. Mark McCann said the firefight occurred near Asadabad in Kunar province after two homemade bombs targeting coalition forces went off.

Kunar is part of a swath of southern and eastern Afghanistan where insurgents continue to defy the 18,000-strong U.S.-led force.

Col. Gary Cheek, the commander of U.S. forces in the eastern region, said he recently sent additional troops to Kunar **to help persuade the local population to stop giving refuge to militants.** [Time for Plan B.]

The mountainous area next to the Pakistani border is viewed as a stronghold of renegade Afghan warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a former prime minister who has joined the Taliban in vowing to drive out foreign troops and topple the U.S.-backed government.

"I am confident they (residents) will deny the sanctuary to the insurgents and we will drive them from the Kunar area," Cheek told the news conference. **[Another idiot.]**

Also Sunday, unidentified gunmen robbed and tried to abduct an American aid worker in Kabul, but gave up when he resisted, the victim and Afghan police said.

About four men confronted the elderly American in a quiet back-street in the Afghan capital, snatching his bag and trying to force him into a waiting car, said local police official Sher Hussein.

The victim told an Associated Press reporter that the men "wanted to put me in the car." He said he was unhurt and that his bag contained only a few documents and some food, but declined to give his name or other details.

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