

GI SPECIAL 3B7:



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Casualties Of War

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

Dustin Howell would find out others are even worse off than him.

"There was a guy who was shot through the temple and both eyes. There was another guy, a quadriplegic, and they were trying to get him to write. The first thing he wrote was, 'Kill me.' He kept writing it over and over."

April 17, 2005 By Ted Roelofs, The Grand Rapids Press

Something told Marine Pfc. Dustin Howell he had to be there for the birth of his daughter. War could wait, if only for a day.

The 2003 Wayland High School graduate got there two hours after Amy Jo Howell was born at Mecosta County General Hospital in Big Rapids. He held her in his arms the

afternoon of Feb. 13, 2004, looking down at the miracle of this sight. Dark wet hair. Gray eyes.

After two hours with his newborn and his fiancée, Farenn Beaudin, he left for his base in California. Next day he shipped out for the Sunni Triangle in Iraq.

"I had to be there, just in case I didn't come back," Howell said.

The afternoon sun of May 28 pushed the temperature past 110 as Howell led a foot patrol 60 miles west of Baghdad. Sweating inside his helmet and body armor, Howell walked a dusty road by a reservoir in Ramadi, probing with a mine detector for roadside bombs. He was point man for the "route sweep," a group of Marines well to his rear.

He heard a click. Howell turned toward the Marine a few feet back as if to shield him. He figured he knew what was coming.

Several hundred yards away, Marine Staff Sgt. Patrick Coleman, 36, was rocked by a deafening boom. He looked up.

"I saw the two Marines. They were flying about 10 feet up in the air," Coleman said. "It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out they had found one."

By all logic, Howell should have died.

Howell stood a foot or two -- his left side exposed -- from a 155mm shell packed with plastic explosives when it detonated. Similar blasts will flip a truck upside down.

Shrapnel shredded his legs, obliterated his left kneecap, shattered his left hand and eye socket, and blew his left eye out of his head. It broke both cheekbones and his nose, blew out his eardrums and tore through his abdomen and lower intestine. Weeks later, he emerged from a coma.

That's when he knew he was blind.

Nearly 12,000 U.S. soldiers have been wounded in Iraq since the war began in March 2003 -- but the number fails to capture the lifetime of suffering many will face.

That Howell and others like him survived is testament to protective gear and better battlefield care. His bulletproof vest with ceramic plates and his Kevlar helmet shielded his body core and brain so he could live.

But there were days the 20-year-old Marine wondered what kind of bargain this is: He had to figure out if he wanted to live this way.

Howell was treated on the scene, scooped into a Humvee and carted to a waiting helicopter 10 minutes away, then taken to a hospital in Kuwait for emergency surgery. As soon as he was stable, Howell was on a five-hour flight to the massive U.S. military hospital in Landstuhl, Germany.

Sitting in his room at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Ann Arbor months later, Howell -- who has been promoted to corporal -- conceded he wrestled with depression and rage.

"There was a time when I would cry all the time," he said. "But crying isn't going to do anything. You can feel bad all you want."

And Howell, a smart, stubborn, proud young man with short brown hair and blue-collar ways, said the last thing he wants is your pity. With at least 34 operations behind him, he regards it as a waste of time.

"I was dealt a bad hand of cards and now I got to play it."

He left Ann Arbor this month to return to the Wayland home of his parents, Stephen and Brenda Howell. He is scheduled to go back in May for surgery to his left hand, after which he hopes to come home for good.

Howell, who followed the lead of a grandfather and other relatives to sign up for the Marines not long after graduation, also realizes there are blessings to count. He has a woman who loves him, now beginning to plan their wedding in June 2006. He knows he was lucky to set eyes on his daughter, to have that image in his mind.

"I think about that a lot," he said.

Michael O'Hanlon, a military analyst at the Brookings Institution, said it is good news so many soldiers are surviving battlefield injuries -- more than 90 percent, a historic high and well above the 75 percent in the 1991 Gulf War on much of the same turf.

But O'Hanlon said it is easy to overlook injured soldiers, given a focus on deaths as a gauge of sacrifice.

"Many, many of those injuries are very severe," he said. "How many can live a decent life?"

Robert Werner, chief of physical medicine and rehabilitation at the Ann Arbor Veterans Hospital, said medical science is doing more than ever to help wounded soldiers integrate back into society.

But Werner said medicine has its limits as well.

Attitude, he said, "is the critical component. When I run our amputee clinic, there are some people who are amputees and are coping wonderfully. Then there is someone else and their toe hurts. Some people don't cope well with any small challenge."

It was clear from the moment the bomb exploded Howell was up against much more than that.

Howell said he remembers the second or two before it went off, then fragments after that. He later learned two insurgents who detonated the bomb were killed by Marines.

"I knew it was going to blow," he said. "I remember flying in the air. They picked me up and threw me in the Humvee. The last thing I remember is getting thrown in the chopper."

Staff Sgt. Coleman reached the scene shortly after the explosion. He saw Howell and the other wounded Marine, Lance Cpl. Ryan Elkins, lying yards away from the bomb crater.

"I didn't expect to find anybody alive there. They were twisting around in pain. I could see his (Howell's) bones glistening in the sun."

Elkins came to about that time and saw Howell, too.

"He looked pretty bad," said Elkins, 23, who lost the sight in his left eye and suffered ear damage. He is now stationed in Washington state.

Hours later, Stephen and Brenda Howell got a phone call at home. Their son had been wounded in an explosion that possibly broke his leg.

By early June, Dustin Howell had been transferred from Landstuhl to Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland. His parents took emergency leave from their jobs at the Mead Johnson Nutritionals plant in Zeeland and flew out to be with their son.

"The first thing that happened was the Marine Corps liaison met with me," said Stephen Howell, 44. "He took me and my wife off to the side and basically said, 'Don't be frightened. You're going to see pretty horrific stuff. He's alive and he's got a lot of work to do.' "

Doctors kept Howell in a coma for three weeks as a means of coping with the pain. As he regained consciousness, they kept him hooked to a respirator for a few more days.

Stephen Howell said he broke down, just one time, then resolved to rise above it. "When I first saw my son, I'll be very honest, I had a few tears. I made a decision -- your son is in really terrible shape. You've got to be strong for him."

The father remained at Bethesda more than three months. He was coming to grips with what had happened to the 6-foot-2, 195-pound soldier who went to Iraq a few months before.

Dustin Howell would find out others are even worse off than him.

"There were guys that were brain-dead," he said. "There was a guy who was shot through the temple and both eyes. There was another guy, a quadriplegic, and they were trying to get him to write. The first thing he wrote was, 'Kill me.' He kept writing it over and over."

In an attempt to repair the flesh around his knees, doctors transplanted some of his calf muscles. They amputated fingers, rebuilt his face, repaired broken bones. They did a bone graft on his left ring finger. They did surgery on his eyes.

With much of the surgical work done, Howell transferred to Ann Arbor in September for rehabilitation.

Life there was a series of medical appointments, hours of daily physical and occupational therapy and visits to the "smoke shack" just outside the door for cigarettes. He listened to books on tape by Tom Clancy, John Grisham and Dean Koontz. He made his way past the men of other wars, men missing one or both legs, or an arm, some staring into space.

A couple of months ago, doctors told Howell what he had long feared: There is nothing they can do to restore sight in his right eye, in which he gets occasional flashes of light.

That's still the hardest blow.

"I don't care about all those injuries. I just want to be able to see," Howell said. Because the optic nerve was only partially damaged, he holds out hope that technological advances might someday restore some sight.

There are other regrets, but ones he will verbalize only if pressed. He now weighs 170, about 25 pounds less than in Iraq. Chunks of flesh are missing from his thighs, and the skin above both knees is red and blotchy from grafts. He can only bend his left leg about 15 degrees.

That's been hard to accept for someone who loved to hunt and fish and snowboard.

Howell lives with constant pain radiating from his knees. He takes methadone, synthetic heroin, for that. He gets occasional migraine headaches he describes as incapacitating. Months of physical therapy improved his ability to walk, slowly, as he learns to use the long tap stick the blind employ to avoid objects in their path.

As he adjusts to the idea of home, Howell has begun to sketch an outline for what comes next. He and Beaudin are looking for a house to buy, with his general guidelines that it be in the country near Wayland, on 10 acres, with a pond. That just happens to be like his grandfather's place -- where he and Beaudin went on their first date, to fish for bluegill and bass.

Howell hopes to use grants for wounded soldiers to pay some of the cost. Once he is discharged, Howell estimates he will qualify for about \$2,300 a month in Marine disability pay. He also is entitled to disability pay from Social Security.

The money should help, but "I'd give it up in a heartbeat," he said.

In the near future, Howell says, he likely will attend a school for the blind in Chicago to learn navigation skills. He talks of starting a home business. He muses he might be able to hunt someday, perhaps using a friend to tell him where to aim. He will continue to play this hand.

Packed away in a box at his parents' home are some photos bound for a scrapbook. One shows Howell in Iraq with a group of fellow Marines.

There also is an autographed picture of Miss Michigan and the words she wrote to Howell on a visit to the hospital in Ann Arbor: "God bless you and thank you for being a hero."

Given all he's been through, that seems a reasonable assessment. Hero?

Howell cocked his head to the side as he considered the question.

"Nah, I'm just doing my job."

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Telling the truth - about the occupation or the criminals running the government in Washington - is the first reason for Traveling Soldier. 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

Eleven Dead As Resistance Shoots Down Defense Department Helicopter



CNN PHOTO

[Thanks to Des, PB and CS for sending this in.]

04-21-2005 (AFP) & AP & CNN & Novinite Ltd & Reuters & By THOMAS WAGNER, AP

Insurgents in Iraq downed a Russian-built Bulgarian helicopter with a missile strike, killing all 11 occupants.

Military officials said the helicopter was doing work for the Defense Department. The Americans were assisting the Bureau of Diplomatic Security in protecting U.S. diplomats in Iraq.

The Mi-8 helicopter, which has both commercial and military use, was flying near the town of Tarmiya, about 25 miles north of Baghdad, when it was hit.

The twin-engined Mi-8 has been in operation for more than 30 years and can carry up to 24 passengers.

A US Embassy spokesman said 11 people were killed in the Bulgarian helicopter crash, among them six Americans, three Bulgarians and two mercenaries from Fiji.

The six US citizens worked for Blackwater Security Consulting, which provides security for the embassy and other clients, the spokesman said. The North Carolina-based firm provides security for State Department officials in Iraq.

"Six passengers who died were Blackwater. They were Americans," the embassy spokesman said.

An official at the Bulgarian company that owned the helicopter said at least one surface-to-air missile hit the chopper.

The Mi-8 helicopter was shot out of the air as growing numbers of contractors, diplomats and other civilian officials are turning to aircraft to avoid insurgent attacks on Iraq's roads.

Personal belongings scattered across a wide area at the crash site. Television footage received by Reuters showed mangled and burning wreckage, including rotor blades, in a deserted area.

At least two charred bodies could be seen near the site. The bulk of the aircraft was burnt almost beyond recognition, although what appeared to be two engines were also visible.

Lyubomir Kostov, Georgi Naydenov and Stoyan Anchev were the three Bulgarians killed in the Thursday Iraq helicopter crash.

An Internet statement by a group identifying itself as the Islamic Army in Iraq was accompanied by a video showing the repeated shooting of a man who was found in tall grass and forced to stand up and walk. The video showed burning wreckage just before the shooting.

"One of the crew members was captured and killed," the statement said.

The man who was shot to death in a grassy field spoke English with an accent and was wearing a blue flight suit, indicating he was one of the three Bulgarian crew members.

The Islamic Army statement said it killed the survivor "in revenge for the Muslims who have been killed in cold blood in the mosques of tireless Fallujah before the eyes of the world and on television screens, without anyone condemning them."

It was apparently referring to the shooting by an American soldier of a wounded Iraqi in a Fallujah mosque on Nov. 13 during a U.S. offensive in the city.

Embassy officials said the MI-8 helicopter was contracted from SkyLink Air and Logistic Support, a Washington-based company.

Blackwater USA includes five companies: Blackwater Training Center, Blackwater Target Systems, Blackwater Security Consulting, Blackwater K-9 and Blackwater Air, the company's Web site says.

Blackwater, headed by former U.S. Navy SEALs, was founded in part to take advantage of business opportunities created by the downsizing of the U.S. military.

"It pays quite well. There's a lot of contracts that pay anywhere from \$350 a day to \$1,500 a day," said Chris Boyd of Kroll-Crucible Security.

Thursday's crash raises questions about the vulnerability in Iraq of commercial craft, both private planes and helicopters, which don't have the same defense capabilities as military aircraft.

There have been hopes that some of the transport work in Iraq could be shifted to commercial aircraft. [Kiss that goodbye.]

TWO MARINES KILLED IN AR RAMADI

April 21, 2005 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS
RELEASE Number: 05-04-22C

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq – **Two Marines assigned to the 2nd Marine Division, II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward), were killed April 20 when an improvised explosive device detonated while they conducted combat operations in Ar Ramadi, Iraq.**

Military Mercenary Killed In Ramadi, Four Wounded

April 21, 2005 (CNN)

A Blackwater employee died when a roadside bomb detonated next to one of the company's armored personnel carriers near Ramadi. Four Blackwater employees were wounded in the Ramadi attack. All were working under contract to the U.S. military.

U.S., Canadian, Australian Mercenaries Killed On Airport Road

21 April 2005 ABC & Anatolia.com Inc. & (CNN) & The Daily Telegraph & Reuters

An American, a Canadian and an Australian were killed Wednesday on the route between the Green Zone and the airport in Baghdad

They were identified as James Hunt, from Kentucky, United States; Chris Ahmelman, from Queensland, Australia; and Stefan Surette, from Nova Scotia, Canada.

Insurgents using small arms attacked their convoy.

The Australian Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, says the 34 year old had been travelling in a convoy on its way to the airport when the vehicle was hit by cross fire.

Two other foreign nationals have also died in the attack.

The man, from the southern Australian state of New South Wales, had been working as a security officer with the British firm "Edinburgh Risk and Security Management".

He had previously served with the Australian Army.

A Canadian security specialist was also killed when vehicles in their convoy came under small arms fire, the employer said.

A Department of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman said "Security in Baghdad remains very dangerous, particularly on the road to the airport." [Duh.]

<p>The inability to secure the airport road, an essential link for military and civilian supplies, has come to symbolise the difficulty U.S. forces have in taking on the insurgency.</p>
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Two More Mercenaries Killed On Airport Road

21 April 2005 VOA & (AFP) & Reuters & Aljazeera

A bomb blast hit a convoy carrying foreign contractors on the road to Baghdad's airport, killing at least two people and wounding several others. Nationalities of the victims were not immediately known.

One employee from the British-based Aegis defence services company was killed and another injured when a bomb exploded as their car headed from the capital towards the airport, company spokeswoman Sarah Pearson said.

"Aegis defence services ltd. can confirm that one member of staff was killed in the line of duty in Baghdad today and another person sustained injuries", she said. She gave no details as to their identities.

Aljazeera reported that the explosion was caused by a car bomb targeting a US convoy near al-Amil neighbourhood.

No other casualties were immediately reported, but one of the vehicles was consumed by flames, and white smoke rose from another one, police Captain Hamid Ali said.

All three vehicles appeared to have been blown off the road by the impact of the explosion, witnesses said.

The road to the airport is only a few kilometres long and flanked by US military bases.

Al-Matar (airport) Road was known as "Death Road".

One U.S. Soldier Wounded Near Ramadi

4.21.05 Anatolia.com Inc. & By THOMAS WAGNER, AP

In Ramadi, a roadside bomb wounded one soldier in a U.S. convoy.

Another American soldier fired his machine gun at a suspected Iraqi ambush site, killing a female Iraqi civilian, U.S. officials said in a statement. Soldiers found an electronic device near the woman that may have been used to trigger the explosion, the statement said.

Hours later, gunfire erupted downtown, and an Associated Press photographer saw the body of a young boy in a street near three smoldering cars.

Sporadic gunfire continued for about two hours, said the photographer, Bilal Hussein. When it subsided, Iraqis pulled the charred body of an adult from one of the burned cars, Hussein said. It was not clear how the two were killed.

**"It's Just The Worst Feeling"
"You're Just Helpless. You Can't
React."
"These Guys Have Done A Good
Job Sucking It Up, But They Can't
Suck It Up Forever"**

On Sunday, Caldwell and McMaster were on a mission to prepare plans to strike back against insurgents, who have stepped up their attacks in the triangle in recent days, wounding or killing about a dozen U.S. soldiers in complex ambushes and roadside bombings.

So far, attempts at counterstrikes have been hampered by a shortage of U.S. forces - as well as a lack of local Iraqi police or functioning governments.

The local government council has been in disarray since its leader was assassinated this month, and there are no Iraqi police officers in the town, Seagreaves said. His snipers and tank patrols are growing exhausted from spending days at a time on the streets and in observation posts watching for insurgents - the only way soldiers can keep them at bay.

4.21.05 By ANN SCOTT TYSON, Los Angeles Times

LATIFIYAH, Iraq - Sgt. Joshua Haycox steered our Humvee forward at a slow march, carefully keeping his distance from the vehicle ahead and scanning the road for possible bombs as the Army convoy pushed deeper into the chaotic region known to soldiers as the Triangle of Death.

The largely ungoverned swath of farmland and villages south of Baghdad is cluttered with old munitions factories and compounds of elite Iraqi army units that once formed the military-industrial base of ousted president Saddam Hussein.

Today, these backlands are also called the "throat of Baghdad" by the military, because a paucity of U.S. and Iraqi forces here has allowed insurgents to take root and stage attacks on the capital.

"Hey, see that town on your left? That's a real bad place," said Col. H.R. McMaster of Philadelphia, commander of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment. "Keep a sharp lookout," he told his men as the convoy approached the dusty, seemingly deserted outpost of Mullafayad.

Within seconds, a powerful blast ripped into the Humvee a few yards ahead of us, shooting a cloud of debris high into the air.

McMaster swore loudly, then yelled, "Stop!" We braced for additional blasts. When they didn't come, McMaster ordered Haycox to pull forward away from the area where the bomb went off and get into position in case of more attacks.

The bombed Humvee swerved off the shoulder into a ditch and jolted to a halt. Two soldiers staggered out, one covered with blood. Seeing the men's shocked faces, I instantly realized theirs was the vehicle I had been riding in 10 minutes earlier. The Humvee's right rear door was ripped off, the surrounding metal burnt black, and the gunner was sprawled face down on the side of the road.

"Look for the triggerman! Where's the triggerman?" shouted McMaster's gunner, Cpl. Thomas Dillard, 26, of Beeville, Texas.

Bursts of rifle fire rang out. The injured soldiers opened up with M-4 rifles; Dillard fired in the direction of the shooting with his .50 caliber machine gun.

Haycox jumped out, fired back to keep the insurgents down and sprinted to the disabled Humvee. Back a few minutes later, he brought bad news. "Roger, we got casualties, sir. Sergeant major's hit and the gunner's hurt real bad."

Before the attack Sunday morning, we had all gathered round and bowed our heads while the chaplain, Maj. David Causey, of Fort Carson, Colo., prayed to God to keep us safe. "Lord, we're not so naive as to believe we'll go through war unscathed, but we pray again for a safe mission."

Then he reached into a cardboard box and pulled out plastic bags filled with lollypops, chocolate bars and sheets of paper bearing inspirational stories. To those who reached out their hands, he offered another bag, this one holding a small metal and wooden crucifix.

I gave the bag of candy to a soldier who didn't get any, and kept the one with the cross.

We climbed into four armored Humvees and rolled down a dusty gravel road, pausing at the gate to the men's camp while they loaded their weapons with a sharp click-clack. We then headed onto the main highway leading south from Baghdad.

"Fasten your seat belt so you won't get thrown if we roll," Sgt. 1st Class Donald Sparks, 38, told me. The amiable native of Houston advised against using the combat lock on the door, a metal rod that keeps the door shut during fighting. "I want to be sure that if I have to, I can get out real fast," he said.

Soldiers here have refined the deadly calculus of traveling Iraqi roads. They know the rear seat on the driver's side is the safest in a Humvee. They know the lead vehicle in a convoy is often the least likely to get hit. They have memorized the worst stretches of highway, and the twists in the road that leave them vulnerable by forcing them to slow down. They also understand that no matter how hard they try, any mission could be their last.

"Stay down real low" in the turret, Command Sgt. Maj. John Caldwell, of Elba, Ala., called to the gunner, Pvt. Joseph Knott. "Just stick your head out high enough so you can see."

"Roger, sir," Knott said. A gung-ho private fresh out of training, Knott, 21, had fought for the gunner's job. Eager to prove himself, he often asked the more experienced gunner, Dillard, to watch him on missions and point out what he did wrong. Known among his peers as a gentleman, the native of Yuma, Ariz., aspired to join the Special Forces.

Caldwell, 43, an imposing former linebacker from Alabama State who nevertheless has a soft touch, seemed almost fatherly toward his young charge.

"Watch out here. This is the mixing bowl right here. This is a big, dangerous area," he called to Knott as we moved farther south to a tangle of highways.

Soon, we entered the town of Mahmudiyah, in the so-called Triangle of Death. The town lies in a stretch of northern Babil province bordered by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

The area courses with a loosely allied web of insurgents as complex as the network of canals that make this terrain so hard to navigate for U.S. forces. Ten-foot-tall reeds grow in the waterways, offering hiding places for triggermen. Yet relatively few American troops have been dispatched to the region, one of several critical gaps between major U.S. commands in Iraq.

"Already there were a large number" of insurgents in this region, McMaster said. "Then over time, as the insurgency coalesced, it moved its base to areas where there were not significant coalition forces. So I think that's one of the reasons why this area is a problem."

On Sunday, Caldwell and McMaster were on a mission to prepare plans to strike back against insurgents, who have stepped up their attacks in the triangle in recent days, wounding or killing about a dozen U.S. soldiers in complex ambushes and roadside bombings.

So far, attempts at counterstrikes have been hampered by a shortage of U.S. forces - as well as a lack of local Iraqi police or functioning governments.

A Fateful Decision

On the southern edge of the triangle, Capt. Ryan Seagreaves, of Allentown, Pa., told McMaster that he needed engineers to reinforce and expand his austere base so that there would be room for more Iraqi forces. He said he also needed dirt to fill protective barriers.

Iraqi contractors are so terrified to work in the area that a convoy of 10 earth-filled dump trucks recently refused to travel south to McMaster's base. One driver fainted when told the destination, he said.

The local government council has been in disarray since its leader was assassinated this month, and there are no Iraqi police officers in the town, Seagreaves said. His snipers and tank patrols are growing exhausted from spending days at a time on the streets and in observation posts watching for insurgents - the only way soldiers can keep them at bay.

"These guys have done a good job sucking it up, but they can't suck it up forever," Seagreaves said. McMaster promised to ask for reinforcements. [From where? Iowa?]

Our convoy stopped at a spartan U.S. sniper outpost overlooking a bridge spanning the meandering, jade-green Euphrates. Both American forces and insurgents seek to gain advantage by blocking or destroying bridges and roads. Currently, U.S. troops have barred all traffic on three nearby bridges including this one, which is laced with barbed wire. Soldiers recently shot an Iraqi man who ignored warnings and attempted to cross.

As we prepared to leave, I switched to McMaster's Humvee, trading places with a lanky, gray-bearded interpreter from Michigan nicknamed "Uncle," who declined to be identified further.

Life Fades Away

Ten minutes later, we were hit. McMaster radioed the regiment: "Rifle X-ray, this is Rifle Six," he said. "We have contact IED (explosives) and small arms fire. Request aviation immediately. I need medivac and air support," he said, his tone measured but urgent.

He looked up at his gunner: "Focus on security, Dillard!"

Two Bradley Fighting Vehicles carrying reinforcements came roaring down the road toward us and dropped their rear hatches. The infantrymen rushed out and crouched alongside a wall to direct their fire at a farmhouse adjacent to the bomb crater. One Bradley fired a few rounds, and the infantry squad swept into the house and detained five men.

Within 15 minutes, two Apache attack helicopters were swooping low overhead, their crew looking for fleeing insurgents.

Uncle, his face and uniform heavily splotted with blood, sat down and looked at me.

"You were lucky," he said, his first words to me after the ambush.

"I am so sorry," I said, offering to clean his wounds and feeling an intense wave of what soldiers call "survivor's guilt." I thanked God that Uncle had suffered only cuts and a broken hand. As it turned out, it was Uncle's second bombing in Iraq. The first was in 2003 when the native of Mosul worked with U.S. Army Rangers. Even after this close scrape, he said he planned to stay.

"You're very courageous," I told him.

"I'm an old man," he replied.

Back at the mangled Humvee, an urgent effort was underway to save Caldwell.

Trapped and slumped over in a pool of blood in the front seat, he was floating in and out of consciousness. The driver, Spc. Kanai Thiim, 28, of Honolulu, his face and neck peppered with shrapnel, was desperately trying to open Caldwell's door, punched inward by the explosion. Haycox, 22, of Choctaw, Okla., ran over with an ax and began swinging it hard at the lock. When that and then later a hammer failed, the men tried to pull off the roof, but it was too heavy. Finally, they used a metal rope and winch attached to another Humvee to rip the damaged door open.

All the time, Sparks was calling to Caldwell by his nickname, urging him to hang on. "Come on, Battle. Talk to me, Battle," he said. "Stay strong, Battle." At a loss at one point, Sparks started singing one of the favorite tunes of his beloved sergeant major, an aficionado of classic jazz. For a moment, Caldwell weakly tried to sing along. Sparks was ecstatic.

But a few yards away, life was draining out of Knott. Blasted from the Humvee along with the gun turret, he had suffered severe head trauma. His jugular vein cut by shrapnel, he was losing copious amounts of blood. Soon, a medic at the scene said Knott was gone.

Staff Sgt. Matthew Hodges, Knott's platoon sergeant, took out a wooden cross with rosary beads and laid it on the fallen soldier's chest. As Sparks rubbed the back of Knott's head, the soldiers bowed their heads. Huddled together in the dirt, they said the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father, who art in Heaven," Hodges began.

Beyond them in the nearby village of Mullafayad, people began stirring. As they watched Knott's body being placed in a bag and carried away, Sparks, Thiim, and others felt a growing sense of rage. They tried to wash the blood off the road with water, then shoveled dirt over the spot. "I don't want the guys who did this to have anything to celebrate or dance over," Sparks said. "Not today. Not ever."

As his platoon grappled with the loss of Knott, the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment's first soldier to be killed in action during this tour in Iraq, Thiim voiced a deep sadness, mixed with frustration over insurgent tactics. "It's just the worst feeling" to get hit by a road bomb, said Thiim, his neck bandaged and uniform bloodied. "You're just helpless. You can't react."

This time, I knew exactly what he meant.

TROOP NEWS

5th Injured Guardsmen Moved To Germany, Fights For Life

April 21, 2005 By Holbrook Mohr, The Associated Press

A Mississippi Army National Guard soldier severely injured in an explosion in Iraq has been stabilized enough to be transported to an Army hospital in Germany but is still fighting for his life, his family says.

Lt. Col. Tim Powell, a Mississippi Army National Guard spokesman, said five members of the 155th Brigade Combat Team were injured Tuesday when a roadside bomb exploded near their vehicles.

Powell said Sgts. Terrance A. Elizenberry of Clinton and Wyman H. Jones of Columbus were injured along with Staff Sgt. Tommy S. Little of Aliceville, Ala., Pfc. Stephen B. Brooks of Columbus, and Sgt. 1st Class Grayson "Norris" Galatas of Meridian.

The other soldiers were flown to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany on Wednesday. Galatas, who suffered the worst injuries, stayed behind an extra day to be stabilized for the flight.

"Norris (Galatas) was cut all to pieces — his buttocks, his back, he has a big slice on his belly and shrapnel all in him," his mother-in-law Marlene Williams said today from the soldier's Meridian home. "As of early this morning, he's in that German hospital."

Williams said her 42-year-old son-in-law had to receive 55 units of blood since the explosion ripped through his heavy vehicle. She said the improvised explosive device exploded directly under Galatas' seat.

"He's not out of the woods yet but if we can get him home we've got plenty of people who can take care of him," Williams said. "Norris is in bad shape but he's one tough cookie."

Williams said doctors had flushed out Galatas' wounds on Wednesday to assess the extent of his injuries.

Local Soldier Receives Purple Heart: "You Don't Know If They're Coming Back"

April 21, 2005 By Kelly Hessedal, WQAD, GALESBURG

A Galesburg soldier received a purple heart during a 7-month tour of duty in Iraq.

Private First Class Tony Rench says he joined the Army to change his life. He's part of the 1st Cavalry Division based in Fort Hood, Texas. He'd only been overseas for a few months when the impact of his decision became very real.

"It just hit me really fast. I was just worried if he was okay, if he was going to come home or not," said his wife, Michele Rench.

"I'm very lucky, I count my blessings every day that he lived," said his wife. "They go over there you don't know if they're coming back, or if they're gonna come back missing an appendage or something, so definitely don't take things for granted - be happy you're alive."

Australian PM Says No Troops "Concerned" About Going To Iraq

21 April 2005 ABC

The Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, says he's convinced Australia's troops in Iraq are well equipped, and will be well supported by their British and United States allies.

Mr Howard made his remarks after the Commander of Australian forces in Iraq, told reporters that insurgents could single out Australian troops.

Mr Howard says he spoke to most of the latest batch of Australian troops before they left last Sunday and none had expressed any concern to him. [Were they invited to express their objections to his face? Silly question.]

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

One day while I was in a bunker in Vietnam, a sniper round went over my head. The person who fired that weapon was not a terrorist, a rebel, an extremist, or a so-called insurgent. The Vietnamese individual who tried to kill me was a citizen of Vietnam, who did not want me in his country. This truth escapes millions.

**Mike Hastie
U.S. Army Medic
Vietnam 1970-71
December 13, 2004**

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.

Same Old Same-Old: Kenya Then; Iraq Now

[Thanks to Max Watts, who sent this in.]

It's impossible to read these harrowing accounts without noting some striking parallels between the British response to Mau Mau and the American response to the threat of terrorism: the torture and humiliation of prisoners at Abu Ghraib; the denial of basic rights to Al Qaeda suspects at Guantánamo Bay; the confusion of insurgency, rebellion and terrorism; and the ongoing assaults on Iraqi civilians in the name of democracy.

These two substantial books not only offer an important corrective to the long-distorted story of the end of British empire in Kenya but also serve as a stark reminder of the cynical justifications that fear can foster and that history eventually lays bare.

2.21.05 By Daphne Eviatar, The Nation

Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya, by Caroline Elkins

Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire, by David Anderson

In the 1950s in Kenya, British settlers lived in terror of an "evil" that was sweeping the country, threatening to wipe out their aristocratic enclave: Mau Mau.

In reports to the Home Office, colonial authorities described a satanic primitive religion that was turning previously content and compliant servants and laborers into bloodthirsty butchers wreaking havoc across the land.

But for Africans, Mau Mau was the sound of liberation.

Although there's no expert consensus on its origins, a Ugandan writer I know who spent twelve years in Kenya tells me that in Kiswahili, Mau Mau is recognized as an acronym: it means "British go back to Europe; African gets Freedom." As a child, he and his friends would whisper it at baffled white visitors.

Whatever its origins, Mau Mau was a cry of political rebellion. And it was the inevitable outgrowth of a half-century of repressive rule by the British in Kenya.

By the 1950s, the British "civilizing" mission had ejected Kenyans from their land, destroyed their communities and transformed them into squatters, tenant farmers or low-wage laborers. It's hardly surprising that some of those Africans had grown restive, and that most thought it was time for the British to go home.

But for the British, the sinister pall cast over Mau Mau served an important purpose: It justified the hidden torture and brutality they used to retain their grip on power long after the myth of benevolent empire could possibly be sustained.

Two new books--Caroline Elkins's *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* and David Anderson's *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire*--cast the notorious Mau Mau uprising and the British response in a new light, revealing the astonishing lengths to which the British went to forestall the inevitable demise of their imperial enterprise.

Most Mau Mau leaders were drawn from the ranks of the Kikuyu, one of Kenya's leading tribes. The Kikuyu had long been the country's most prosperous farmers, until the British arrived in the late nineteenth century and white settlers began to appropriate their most fertile lands. Over time, the Kikuyu were forced onto tiny "reserves" that couldn't possibly sustain them. The lucky ones were allowed to squat on settlers' farms but were forbidden from growing the most profitable crops or owning more than a paltry amount of cattle. Mechanization and a rapidly intensifying land grab soon drove many off even these meager plots.

Recognizing that the deteriorating situation could explode, the British named Kikuyu "chiefs" to lord over their neighbors, handing them power, money and arable land in return for their loyalty.

Chiefs enforced the colonial government's strict tax laws and rules requiring all Kikuyu to carry identification and employment cards.

So as African nationalism fostered calls for decolonization across Africa in the 1950s, it's no wonder that in Kenya, where Africans were denied even the vote, those with the least land, education and prospects decided to take matters into their own hands. Reviving an old Kikuyu solidarity oath, they added a commitment to band together to eject the British and win their freedom.

The picture the British have painted of Mau Mau is one of striking brutality, of men who, via magical oath-taking ceremonies, were transformed into monsters who hacked their victims to pieces and displayed the remains for all to see. No doubt, many of the murders were gruesome and spread understandable alarm among Kenya's white elite.

But the image of Mau Mau has also overshadowed its reality: During the eight-year war, Mau Mau warriors killed only thirty-two European civilians and fewer than 200 British soldiers and police.

Mau Mau violence was far more lethal to the Kikuyu who refused to join the cause: Mau Mau assassinated close to 2,000 Kikuyu civilians.

Far from representing all Kikuyu, the movement began as a militant fringe, its terror tactics against its fellow tribesmen a response to the hierarchies the British themselves had created. But it is the British response to Mau Mau, which likely left more than 20,000 Africans dead (there is still no accurate count), that will most shock readers familiar with the official story.

This is the focus of Elkins's *Imperial Reckoning*, which provides a painfully thorough catalogue of previously unknown atrocities by the British.

Elkins, an assistant professor of history at Harvard, says she began her project expecting to tell a British success story.

But after a decade combing through British archives and interviewing some 300 survivors of the war, she discovered that what had long been depicted as a laudable withdrawal and "rehabilitation" by the British was actually a cover-up of unimaginable proportions.

In 1952, a week after one of Mau Mau's more notorious strikes--the murder of a prominent chief by attackers dressed as policemen--the British declared a state of emergency and rounded up prominent Kikuyu leaders, including Jomo Kenyatta, who would later become Kenya's first president. Although Kenyatta was a widely respected leader of a moderate Kikuyu-led political party, the British deemed all Kikuyu suspect and so assumed Kenyatta was leading the Mau Mau revolt. His subsequent show trial and seven years' imprisonment removed a prominent voice of progressive reform and created a rallying symbol for the radicals' cause.

This was indicative of the course of the war. Instead of understanding Mau Mau as a radical movement among a population with legitimate political grievances, alarmed white settlers viewed each Mau Mau attack as a sign that an inhuman viciousness had seized the entire Kikuyu population. Their smiling servants had inexplicably become violent savages.

As the hysteria mounted after each attack, the British imposed harsher and harsher emergency measures.

Thousands of suspected Kikuyu were rounded up, interrogated, beaten and humiliated, detained without charge, denied access to the evidence against them, convicted merely for suspected association with Mau Mau, and--since the British never declared the conflict a real war--denied the rights of prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions. Reports of abuse and human rights violations from the International Committee of the Red Cross were ignored, as were complaints from representatives of the opposition party in London.

It all sounds eerily familiar: The British colonial government believed it was under siege from "evil"--an incomprehensible force beyond its control. There were meager attempts to win the "hearts and minds" of the Kikuyu behind barbed wire.

The renowned archeologist and ethnographer Louis Leakey insisted Mau Mau must "confess" their oath and take a counter-oath to cure them of its powers. But any real

attempts at "rehabilitation" of Mau Mau were quickly overwhelmed by the deprivation and brutality employed to extract confessions.

Not surprisingly, the British actions only drove more into the Mau Mau fold. Under the banner of a state of emergency, the colonial administration imprisoned innocents and punished entire villages when terrified residents refused to testify against their neighbors.

Fearful settlers fired their Kikuyu laborers and ejected squatting farmers. And the administration closed Kikuyu schools, leaving more newly idle and angry Kikuyu with nothing to do but join the rebels.

Although tens of thousands were imprisoned without trial, some suspected Mau Mau were arrested, charged and tried for their alleged crimes.

But as David Anderson, a lecturer in African studies at Oxford University, reveals in a vivid and comprehensive new account of the war, *Histories of the Hanged*, the trials testify as much to the brutality of the British counteroffensive as to the Mau Mau crimes themselves. Anderson, whose book is based largely on the documentation of 800 capital cases of accused Mau Mau that survive in the British archives, acknowledges the huge challenge the British faced trying to uphold justice when terrified witnesses recanted their testimony and the courts were overwhelmed with the volume of cases.

But he also finds strong evidence of severe brutality by police against prisoners in 80 percent of those cases. The pressure to convict led to a complete abandonment of the most basic British principles of justice.

More than a thousand men were sent to the gallows as convicted Mau Mau terrorists, many on the flimsiest of evidence. "In no other place, and at no other time in the history of British imperialism," writes Anderson, "was state execution used on such a scale as this."

What happened at the settlement at Lari was emblematic. One night in March 1953, the British-trained African vigilante force known as the Home Guard came upon the mutilated remains of a Kikuyu loyalist nailed to a tree. Then, they noticed fires breaking out in the direction of their own homes back in town. They raced back to find 120 of the leading male elders, their wives and their children either dead or seriously wounded in the ruins of fifteen homesteads. It was the largest-scale attack by Mau Mau to date.

The response was not mourning but vengeance. That night, with the apparent complicity of European commanders, the Home Guard murdered some 200 suspected Mau Mau in an orgy of beatings and summary shootings, the mangled bodies left in the bush to be picked over by stray dogs for days afterward.

Eventually, more than 300 men gave confessions to the Mau Mau killings at Lari. But as Anderson documents, it's impossible to know what sort of coercion might have extracted them. Recognizing that their statements would be suspect, police encouraged traumatized survivors to corroborate their testimony. Anderson finds that unreliable testimony provided the basis for eighteen hangings. Still, in the end, after appeals through the British legal system, acquittals in the Lari cases outnumbered convictions, and outraged settlers pressed for and won even harsher measures and more summary

justice. The story of the countermassacre and the increasing use of systematic state counterterror, meanwhile, was buried.

With outrage growing, the British stepped up their assault, now taking it to the urban centers. During two weeks in Nairobi in 1954, the government imprisoned more than 20,000 suspected Mau Mau and sent them to screening camps, deporting another 30,000 to Kikuyu reserves. By the end of Operation Anvil, as it was known, nearly half of all Kikuyu in the city had been imprisoned without trial.

But it is the conditions of that imprisonment that reveal the depths to which the British sank to maintain the illusion of their great empire, and which would ultimately prove its undoing.

Elkins has bravely done justice to that history. Her book provides a painstaking and painfully detailed look at the British detention system in Kenya, a pipeline of overflowing prison camps where inmates routinely died of infectious disease, starvation and the harshness of forced labor--if they made it through the interrogations. Those "screenings" grew progressively harsher, with guards torturing inmates by using electric shock and fire, shoving broken bottles, snakes and scorpions into their private parts, and employing a range of other sexual and scatological humiliations and brutalities in a systematic effort to physically and psychologically break the Kikuyu population.

Elkins doesn't shy away from the survivors' stories, no matter how gruesome. One chapter opens with a man staggering to his feet with blood oozing from his mouth and nose, lifting his head from a bucket of urine, feces and sand only to see a double image of his torturer looming over him with a club, ready to strike another blow. A settler recalls taking a suspect to the Mau Mau investigation center, then sticking around to help "soften" him up: "By the time I cut his balls off he had no ears, and his eyeball, the right one, I think, was hanging out of its socket. Too bad, he died before we got much out of him." This book is not for the faint-hearted.

By the end of 1954 more than 52,000 Kikuyu were imprisoned in the growing British gulag.

But if the camps broke some into cooperating, they drove others further into the anticolonial resistance.

The only way Britain could hold on to its empire was through intensifying repression and brutality. "The hypocrisies, the exploitations, the violence, and the suffering were all laid bare in the Pipeline," writes Elkins. "It was there that Britain finally revealed the true nature of its civilizing mission."

And though the colonial authorities did their best to conceal the camps' conditions, by the mid-1950s their harshness was well known in London. When these abuses could no longer be denied, Anderson points out, the British government attributed them to poor judgment by a few misguided low-level individuals--another familiar story.

That story unraveled in March 1959, when eleven prisoners mysteriously died while digging ditches outside the Hola prison, home to many "hard core" Mau Mau. The official explanation was that they had accidentally died from drinking contaminated water. It took three separate investigations to reveal the truth to the British public: All eleven had been clubbed to death by African guards under the supervision of European warders. Britain's "civilizing mission" in Kenya was over.

In 1961 Jomo Kenyatta returned home to lead a bitterly divided country. Ever a moderate, he urged Kenyans to forgive and forget the past. "In Kenyatta's Kenya," writes Anderson, "there would be a deafening silence about Mau Mau."

It's impossible to read these harrowing accounts without noting some striking parallels between the British response to Mau Mau and the American response to the threat of terrorism: the torture and humiliation of prisoners at Abu Ghraib; the denial of basic rights to Al Qaeda suspects at Guantánamo Bay; the confusion of insurgency, rebellion and terrorism; and the ongoing assaults on Iraqi civilians in the name of democracy.

These two substantial books not only offer an important corrective to the long-distorted story of the end of British empire in Kenya but also serve as a stark reminder of the cynical justifications that fear can foster and that history eventually lays bare.

For the sake of unity, Kenya's leaders (which included many British loyalists) chose to bury the truth about the assault on Mau Mau, the methods used and the people ultimately responsible for the movement's violent suppression.

Given history's tendency to repeat itself, one must question the wisdom of such a path--then, and now.

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.

OCCUPATION REPORT

1000 Iraqis Dying Each Month

April 22, 2005 The Daily Telegraph

DESPITE a decrease in American deaths in Iraq, Iraqis continue to die and suffer under poor economic conditions, a foreign policy expert said today.

Between 500 and 1000 Iraqis would be killed each month in the war-torn country, the Washington-based The Brookings Institution foreign policy expert Michael O'Hanlon said.

**OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION
BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME NOW!**

Collaborating Thieves Or Thieving Collaborators?

April 21, 2005 By Yaseen al-Rubai'I, Environment News Service

An official from the Iraqi army's Border Forces 4th Regiment Command, which controls frontier crossings and the ports, claimed that some government officials had asked the authorities to turn a blind eye to oil smuggling.

"(We were ordered to) allow some citizens of a neighboring country to cross the border with the aim of visiting the holy shrines, without having official documents," the border official said.

"It appeared later on that they had something to do with oil smuggling operations."

OCCUPATION PALESTINE

Learning To Kneel: The Hard Way

19 April 2005 By Ghassan Andoni, International Middle East Media Center

First step: show no sign of resistance to any move by the controlling superpower, no matter how painful or unjust the move may appear to you.

Don't demand a return for any concession that you make. You need to learn how to fully trust and rely on the goodwill of superpowers.

You need to realize that justice is: what is possible to achieve. Knowing that in a crisis with a superpower nothing can be achieved, you can't make any claim that justice might be on your side.

You need to admit that emotions are primitive feelings. They don't suit the market norms. In a market economy, every thing has a price, including pride, self-respect, and emotions. Never react, never show emotion should become your golden rule.

You need to recognize your inferiority, to understand that it stems from your own deformed culture; religious beliefs and the sets of wrong values your nation has developed over the years. You need to always work hard to try to imitate the nations of superpowers.

You need to learn how to defend superpowers against the “terrorists”, how to stand with the good guys against the axis of evil.

You should be thankful if the “security” of the superpower requires restricting your movement, taking your family's land, or arresting your son. Sooner or later you will understand the wisdom behind each of these actions.

You need to become a true Christian and turn the other cheek, when your jacket is taken, give your shirt as well, and bless the ones who hurt you.

Anger is your biggest enemy. No matter what, you have to learn how to be patient, thankful, and cooperative.

If after all of this you still want to live, come and join us in Palestine.

[To check out what life is like under a murderous military occupation by a foreign power, go to: www.rafahtoday.org The foreign army is Israeli; the occupied nation is Palestine.]

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