

GI SPECIAL 4C13:

2003: SOWING THE WIND 2006: REAPING THE WHIRLWIND



US soldiers of the 1st Armored Division search an Iraqi driver in central Baghdad Nov. 11, 2003. (AP Photo/Pier Paolo Cito)

**“If You Want It, Buy It
Yourself”**

**“My Partner's Leadership Was
More Concerned With Protecting
Their Own Reputations, Ensuring
Their Own Promotions, Than With
The Safety Of The Men And
Women Serving Under Them”**

They have been conditioned not to complain, not to ask for common items that would protect them, not to raise a fuss about vehicles and supplies. When one renegade soldier decides to speak out, they live in fear they will face retribution and punishment from those higher up. Only then does the military act, and seemingly in order to avoid embarrassment, not because they really care.

01 March 2006 By Elizabeth Frederick, Truthout Statement [Excerpts]

Testimony provided to the House Appropriations Sub-Committee on Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs.

In May of 2004, my partner informed me his National Guard division was being mobilized to deploy to Iraq. Eight months later, his division finally deployed.

I assumed those in charge were making sure everyone had proper supplies and training. With eight months of preparation, I assumed my loved one was being sent to war with everything he would need to keep him safe. That assumption could not have been further from the truth.

When I finally had the opportunity to talk to my partner, I learned about the severe lack of equipment, armored vehicles, and body armor. I learned a lot about the so-called "farmer armor" he and his men were being forced to use.

I learned about the truck he was using in missions throughout northern Iraq. The truck lacked windows and bullet proof glass. The gun in the back had been welded onto an old oxygen tank. The makeshift doors would swing open unless they were secured with rope inside the cab of the truck.

The gun turrets on larger vehicles were completely open, leaving the gunner inside vulnerable.

The men duct-taped Kevlar blankets around the open spaces in an effort to give themselves protection during convoys. However, they were forced to stop this practice once they were told the cost of any lost blankets would come out of their pockets. They had to choose between paying for lost supplies and conducting missions with their entire bodies exposed.

It seems as though all the time that had passed since the war began was not enough to ensure each unit deploying to Iraq had armored vehicles. However, according to the division's leadership, only armored vehicles were being used on missions. The hundreds of other unarmored vehicles never left the base, and were never used during the trip from Kuwait to Iraq.

The soldiers who claimed to be using them on a daily basis, in cities like Tikrit, Mosul, and Ramadi, were apparently lying.

In addition to the armored vehicles, there was a shortage of common supplies like flash lights, goggles, warm gloves, ammunition pouches, and the list goes on. The most common line they were given by their supply clerk was, "If you want it, buy it yourself."

Apparently eight months of preparation was not enough for the division to gather enough supplies for all the troops.

For some unknown reason, the supply clerk rarely had anything to give the soldiers, but the PX on the same base was fully stocked. They could not get chest protectors from their unit, but they could order them from private companies and have them shipped to Iraq. They could not get gloves and winter clothing from their supply clerk, but they could walk to the PX and pay for it themselves.

The ironic thing is that the same supply clerk, the one who was unable to supply the soldiers more often than not and directed them to the PX, was given a bronze star for his service in Iraq.

The issue of supplies and body armor is not new, which is the very reason I feel obligated to raise it with you today. Years after this war first began, the same problems still exist.

Progress has been made, but not enough. I was fortunate enough to be living in Washington, to know how to contact my partner's representative and try to get help. I was fortunate to find a congressman to raise the issue in committee. Even with these efforts, the amount of change that occurred was minimal. So much effort for so few results.

I was fortunate: most people do not know how to go through this process. They chalk it up to another unfortunate aspect of military life. As Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said, "You go to war with the army you have, not the army you want."

They have been conditioned not to complain, not to ask for common items that would protect them, not to raise a fuss about vehicles and supplies. When one renegade soldier decides to speak out, they live in fear they will face retribution and punishment from those higher up. Only then does the military act, and seemingly in order to avoid embarrassment, not because they really care.

My partner's leadership was more concerned with protecting their own reputations, ensuring their own promotions, and earning their own medals, than with the well-being and safety of the men and women serving under them.

These soldiers, and their families who they left behind, deserve better than this. It is a shame that the only ones who receive help are those lucky enough to have an advocate back home.

Furthermore, it is a shame those soldiers who do speak out risk their own reputations and safety, only because they want the supplies and vehicles that may increase their odds of making it home alive.

Unfortunately, I have learned many of the same lessons apply when dealing with health care, disability services, mental health care, and just about anything else you can think of.

Those who have the knowledge and ability to figure out bureaucratic red tape are the ones who receive assistance. Those who have family members who can dedicate a substantial amount of time and effort to advocating on behalf of their soldier are the ones who are able to find a solution. Those who do not, and there are many, are left with the short end of the stick.

They become frustrated, and eventually give up.

They resign themselves to the fact that no one cares, because if they did, they would not be faced with these kinds of problems to begin with.

They feel let down and betrayed.

They feel disillusioned and disappointed in an institution they had so much respect for.

These are not isolated incidents; for every soldier who does take a risk and speak, there are many more who feel they cannot not.

I have learned many things since my soldier was first deployed, things I never thought I would have to learn.

I feel I was forced into this position because no one else was there to look out for him.

Families of soldiers should not be in this position. We should be able to rest easy knowing our leaders, both elected and military, are doing everything in their power to protect the lives of our loved ones. We should be able to know once our soldiers come home, that our government will take care of them, and ensure they are getting the care and assistance they need to readjust to civilian life.

For whatever progress has been made, we still have a long way to go.

Military families need to know we have advocates in Congress, people who will look out for our loved ones and respect the sacrifices they have made.

We have been let down time and time again over the past three years and forced into situations we never thought we would find ourselves in. It is time for some serious changes to be made.

It is my hope you will be the ones to make those changes and create a better life for our soldiers. They have given everything to this country, and your promise to look out for their interests is the very least they deserve.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Full Military Honors For Utah Soldier Killed In Iraq



3/3/2006 by: Susan Wood, CLEAR CHANNEL BROADCASTING, INC.

The body of a Utah soldier killed in Iraq has been laid to rest. Staff Sergeant Gregson Gourley was killed in a roadside bomb attack on February 22 north of Baghdad.

He had just returned to Iraq for a second tour of duty four weeks ago.

He just happened to be home for a medical procedure at the time his three month old daughter was born.

Members of the military gave him full honors, escorting his body to Camp Williams for burial and giving their fallen comrade a 21 gun salute.

Staff Sergeant Greg Gourley leaves behind a wife and four children ranging in age from 3 months to 10 years.

Fallen Williamsville Soldier Remembered



3/2/2006 Claudine Ewing & Aaron Saykin, Reporters

A soldier from Williamsville lost his life in Iraq last week, and it appears he died shortly after he arrived there.

On Monday, Private First Class Benjamin Schuster was laid to rest in Forest Lawn Cemetery after a funeral service in the town of Wheatfield.

According to the funeral home that wrote his obituary, Private First Class Benjamin Schuster had only been in Iraq for two weeks when he was killed Saturday. Schuster was just 20 years old.

According to the Department of Defense, Schuster died from a gunshot wound in the city of Ar-Ramadi.

Schuster was a member of the Army National Guard's Second Battalion, 101st Cavalry Regiment out of Buffalo.

He attended school in both Amherst and later Grand Island, including Grand Island High School for a time.

A friend of the fallen soldier, Brandon Jones spoke at the funeral. He recalled Schuster's insistence on serving in Iraq, "either I'm going so you don't have to or I'm going so someone else can stay." It's what made Benjamin a "hero" said Jones.

A full military funeral was held Monday at Saint John Lutheran Church in Wheatfield. After the service he was buried at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Buffalo with full military honors.

He is now the 24th Western New York Marine or Soldier killed while fighting the war on terror.

Local Marine Killed “He Was Getting Ready To Come Home In About Two Weeks”



March 12, 2006 By ROSALIO AHUMADA, BEE STAFF WRITER

Friends stood on the small, dimly lit porch of the Long family home Saturday evening remembering a quick-witted and caring young man who always wanted to be a soldier.

Marine Lance Cpl. Bunny Long, 22, of Modesto, was killed Friday when a suicide bomber rammed a truck filled with explosives into a building he was guarding in Iraq, said his family.

Bunna Long, 31, said he was told by military officials that his brother was manning a tower in a building in Anbar province on Friday when the bomb exploded and the building collapsed.

Family members said they were notified of the death Friday morning by two uniformed Marine officers who showed up at their west Modesto home.

Long, a 2002 graduate of Modesto High School, arrived in Iraq for his tour of duty in September, and his brother said he couldn't wait to get home.

"He was getting ready to come home in about two weeks," said Bunna Long, who last spoke to his brother about a week ago. "But he just didn't make it."

He said military officials told him they didn't know whether the explosion or the building's collapse killed his brother. "My heart just dropped after they told me," Bunna Long said. "They only come for one reason."

He said his mother, 51-year-old Yen Chea, was taking the news hard, but was keeping busy to ease the pain of losing her youngest child. Bunny, pronounced "Boonie," always kept his family and friends in his thoughts, even in a combat zone halfway across the world, said his sister, Sokhom Long, 24.

The last time she saw him was right before he left for Iraq, where he drove eight-ton military trucks. She took a flight from her home in Seattle on Friday night to be with her family.

"He is a very warm and compassionate person," Sokhom Long said. "I would give anything to spend one more day with him." Bunny Long was the 13th area soldier to die in the war on terrorism. The last was Army Sgt. 1st Class Chad Gonsalves, 31, of Turlock, who was killed Feb. 13 in Afghanistan.

Nick Pulen, 22, first met Long when they sat next to each other in a science class during their freshman year at Modesto High.

The two became friends, and Pulen's mother would send Long care packages in Iraq filled with antibacterial wipes and cushioned sole inserts for his shoes because his feet would hurt after standing for hours on guard duty.

"He was probably one of the funniest guys I know," Pulen said about his friend.

Long's cousin, 22-year-old Thomas Yun, said he and Long were raised like brothers, with their birthdays a week apart. "We were in diapers together and we went to the same schools together," Yun said. "He was very protective of me."

Long's sister, 26-year-old Sokha Long, said friends and family have continued to arrive at the home. As her father, 60-year-old Sim Long, greeted people, Sokha Long noted her brother's kind soul.

"My brother knew how to live life, and there was never a dull moment," Sokha Long said. "The pain is really sharp right now, and I'm sure years from now it will still be the same. He was a good little brother."

And This Shows Just How Much The U.S. Media Really Care

3.12.06 By Richard Boudreaux, LOS ANGELES TIMES

One U.S. soldier was wounded by a roadside bomb in Baghdad, the American military said. **[The average want-ad is about twice as long.]**

U.S. CASUALTIES EVACUATED: NO FURTHER REPORT



A U.S. helicopter evacuates the wounded during a fierce battle between U.S. soldiers and Iraqis in west Baghdad March 12, 2006. It was not known what prompted the fighting [Well, you could consider that a foreign army invading and occupying somebody else's country might "prompt fighting" by the citizens who live there. Often the term, "war" is used to describe such events. T] nor if there were any dead.

An AP Television News cameraman reported that a U.S. helicopter landed nearby to remove casualties. There was no comment from the U.S. military. (AP Photo/Asad Muhsin)

REALLY BAD PLACE TO BE: BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW



U.S. soldiers change the punctured tire of their Humvee, as it ran over the pieces of a car bomb explosion, in Baghdad March 9, 2006. (AP Photo/Hadi Mizban)

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Four U.S. Service Members Killed In Pech Valley IED Strike

March 12, 2006 COMBINED FORCES COMMAND, AFGHANISTAN COALITION PRESS INFORMATION CENTER, KABUL, AFGHANISTAN; Release # 060312-02

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan: Four U.S. service members were killed in an improvised explosive device attack today.

The service members were traveling in an up-armored, high-mobility, multipurpose wheeled vehicle in the Pech Valley, Kunar Province, when the incident occurred.

TROOP NEWS

2,600 Minnesota Guard Members Sent To Bush's Imperial Slaughterhouse: "There Are Local Signs Of Dissent"

Every precinct in Martin County voted to reelect President Bush in 2004.

"Maybe people are little more reticent to (oppose the war) here or they're not going to say it out loud or write a letter to the editor or hold a protest," said Lee Smith, editor of the Fairmont Sentinel.

"They're trying to be supportive of their president ... but they would like to see things change."

March 11, 2006 Mark Brunswick, Star Tribune

FAIRMONT, MINN. Church bells tolled in this quiet farm town near the Iowa border at 11 a.m. Saturday, a tribute to all the soldiers it is about to send off to war.

More than 2,600 members of the Minnesota National Guard are bound for Iraq this week on a yearlong tour of duty. The contingent includes 126 members from Fairmont and scores more from other similar towns, some of which also rang bells at the same time Saturday. Fairmont plans to toll its bells once a month until its soldiers return.

The deployment that begins this week is the Minnesota Guard's largest overseas mission since World War II.

Specialist Benjiman Lehman's family business is in trouble. He and his father, Dave, co-own Pest Pro, a pesticide and exterminating business in Madelia, 30 miles north of Fairmont. Both Dave and Ben put in 60-hour weeks during their busy season in the summer. It is difficult to find a replacement for Ben because of the complexities of the job and licensing requirements.

He enlisted in the Guard in high school. Now 25, he had put in six years and did not intend to reenlist.

But he has been put on "stop loss," meaning his service in the Guard was extended through his deployment to Iraq.

Ben's wife, Julie, is eight months pregnant with twins.

"Ben was accepting, but he's very concerned about whether he will have a business to come back to," said Julie, a teacher in the Madelia School District.

Vince Forstner admits that events in Iraq since the deployment of T.J.'s unit was announced have raised his concerns. At first, he said, he hoped that December elections in Iraq would mean that by the time the Minnesotans arrived tensions there would be easing.

"You see that they're not," Forstner said, "and now you think they're getting into more of a hornet's nest."

There are local signs of dissent. The small Fairmont Peace Group, which has been gathering for 40 years, has new vigor, said member Judi Poulson.

At a DFL Party precinct caucus last week, about 80 people gathered at the Holiday Inn in Fairmont. A resolution urging the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. military troops in Iraq passed unanimously.

But Fairmont and the surrounding area is traditionally conservative territory. Every precinct in Martin County voted to reelect President Bush in 2004.

"Maybe people are little more reticent to (oppose the war) here or they're not going to say it out loud or write a letter to the editor or hold a protest," said Lee Smith, editor of the Fairmont Sentinel.

"They're trying to be supportive of their president ... but they would like to see things change."

MILITARY LUNACY

By Russell Mokhiber and Robert Weissman, Corporate Crime Reporter [Excerpt]

By 2007, U.S. spending is expected to constitute more than half the total global military expenditure.

There are roughly 300 million people living in the United States. There are about 6.5 billion people on the planet, meaning the U.S. population is about 4.6 percent of the global total.

One half the world's military spending. Under 5 percent of the world's population.

Crazy.

Blasphemy In Action:

Recruiters “Use Jesus Christ As A Recruiting Tool”

3.10.06 USA Today

A vocal critic of Pentagon policies on religion in the ranks filed court papers alleging that an Air Force recruiter in New Mexico was asked "to use Jesus Christ as a recruiting tool."

Michael Weinstein, a 1977 graduate of the Air Force Academy, and four other plaintiffs complaint that illegal proselytizing by evangelical Christian chaplains, officers and cadets takes place at the academy and throughout the service.

Rape At The Naval Academy: “Any Girl At Our School Who Turns In A Guy Is Gonna Be Crucified”

3.1.0.6 Washington Post

A female midshipman at the Naval Academy testified that making sexual assault accusations can get a student ostracized. "Any girl at our school who turns in a guy is gonna be crucified," said Midshipman Elizabeth Burnett, a friend of a student who has accused Midshipman Lamar S. Owens Jr. of rape.

"He was Midshipman Owens. He was quarterback of the football team, a very good football team. He leads Bible study. This was a terrible position" for the alleged victim to be in, Burnett testified at a preliminary hearing to determine whether Owens should be court-martialed.

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK OUT THE NEW ISSUE OF TRAVELING SOLDIER

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 RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

ARMED DEMONSTRATION AGAINST THE OCCUPATION



Iraqis march against U.S. occupation in Baghdad March 12, 2006. They were protesting against the detention of an Iraqi woman by U.S. forces, after raiding her house on March 11, 2006. (AP Photo/Khalid Mohammed)

Half Of Calls To Iraq Anti-Resistance Hotline Are Insults

4 March 2006 Khaleej Times, (AFP)

BAGHDAD:- Half the calls to a telephone hotline set up by the government to fight the Iraqi resistance are insults, Iraq's Interior Minister Bayan Jabr Solagh complained on Saturday.

Speaking at a news conference, he also bemoaned the fact the emergency line was often out of order.

State television daily broadcasts ads urging citizens to dial "130" and report suspicious activities.

"I'm not at all pleased with this service when out of 15 lines, eight are down. We've tried to repair them, but I still don't know if they are working," he said.

"Police officers answering the phones also say that half the calls are from people who want to insult them," he added.

Television spots have depicted Iraqis from all walks of life phoning the hotline to report a kidnapping in progress, the discovery of an arms cache or the placing by Iraqi resistance fighters of a roadside bomb.

Assorted Resistance Action



An Iraqi police vehicle burns March 11, 2006, after their convey was ambushed by guerrillas in the Jamiah neighborhood in western Baghdad. Three policemen and two civilians were reported injured, police said. (AP Photo/ Asad Muhsin)

March 12, 2006 The Associated Press & By Richard Boudreaux, LOS ANGELES TIMES & (Reuters) & By ALEXANDRA ZAVIS, Associated Press Writer

A roadside bomb targeted a police patrol in the Qadissiyah neighborhood. Three policemen were among the dead and three were injured.

Another bombing near the Mustansiriyah University in east Baghdad injured five policemen, said police 1st Lt. Mohammed Khaiyoon.

Two soldiers were killed and four wounded when a roadside bomb went off near their patrol in central Baghdad, police said.

Drive-by attackers fired on a car in the western Biyaqa neighborhood, killing a member of President Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party, police 1st Lt. Muataz Salaheddin said.

Attackers killed the director of Iraq's public television channel and his driver Saturday, the second slaying this month of a figure who shapes broadcast news coverage of the country's sectarian strife.

Al-Iraqiya, indirectly controlled by the Shiite Muslim-led [translation: collaborator] government, suspended regular programming and aired verses from the Quran after reporting the news of his death.

Authorities reported the shooting death Saturday of a police lieutenant colonel in the capital. In another incident, another police was killed.

Guerrillas killed two army officers who work in the Joint Coordination Centre in Dhuluiya, 40 km (25 miles) north of Baghdad.

In Mahmoudiya, about 20 miles south of Baghdad, insurgents ambushed and killed a police major as he headed to work, police said.

A roadside bomb also hit a police convoy in Baquouba, 35 miles northeast of Baghdad, killing one patrolman and wounding four others, police said

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

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

**“Just Can't Say It Loud Enough
For The Peace Community To
Hear:
“It's The Troops That Will Stop
This War Not The Protestors!!!!”**

From: Alycia A. Barr
To: GI Special
Sent: March 12, 2006
Subject: Arrest of Cindy Sheehan at the UN

[Alycia Barr is the mother of a soldier who served in Iraq. T]

As usual some pretty important details were left out of this issue.

The US Mission to the UN spokesman Richard Grenell verified that Sheehan's group was given permission to deliver the petition and enter the building but without the presence of the press. "We invited them into the US Mission in a small group. They were NOT willing to separate themselves from the media," said Grenell. This was not

acceptable to the group who didn't want to go anywhere cameras weren't flashing and that's why access to the building was denied and no representative of the Mission came down to meet them.

The thing most offensive about this whole ordeal is that during the scuffle that ensued with the police one of the Iraqi women in attendance was inadvertently punched in the stomach.

These Iraqi women have suffered abuse in their own country. They should not have been put in a position to endure it in the US because someone wanted media attention. Who's injuries (which were reported as minor) acquired in this fiasco were more widely publicized? Why Ms. Sheehan's of course.

What's more the petition itself with several thousands of signatures (among those was mine) didn't get delivered because of this same single minded and self serving desire to be picked up by the press that seems to take precedence over every thing and everyone else in this effort. It's running rampant and accomplishes nothing to bring our troops home and has now succeeded in inflicting further physical trauma on Iraqi women here in America.

There were rumors to the effect that NYC police cited a change of plan from "higher up" and attempted to deter the protestors from delivering the petition by arresting them. But even that could have been averted by the by the group immediately agreeing that the press remain outside.

I will be one of the last individual to say that press coverage is not an important component when the mission is to relay the truth of this crazed administration's actions and it's policies against Iraqi and US citizens.

But again, wouldn't a better way have been to have had an Iraq Veteran standing along side of the Iraqi women delivering the petition and have gained access to the building and Mission representatives without the press?

Then 2 strong voices speaking to the atrocities in Iraq and the US could have been heard to say "get the troops out of there now" in interviews after they came out.

I'd say that would have been a far bigger bang for our buck than what occurred, wouldn't you?

Just can't say it loud enough for the peace community to hear: it's the troops that will stop this war not the protestors!!!!

In Peace and Humanity, Alycia A. Barr

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to thomasfbarton@earthlink.net. Name, I.D., address withheld unless publication requested. Replies confidential.

“We Would Fall Out For Morning Formation In Tie-Dyed T-Shirts, For Example, Just To Piss The Lifers Off”

We didn't know what the fuck was going on, but there we were, 100 grunts being ordered to strip naked. We were all joking about "when are they going to turn on the gas?" They searched our cloths and bodies, and even our assholes, in case we were hiding something there, and I'm dead serious, it was insane.

From: Ward Reilly
To: GI Special
Sent: March 11, 2006
Subject: Mother Jones article

[These are excerpts from an interview of Ward Reilly, Veterans For Peace, by David Enders, in preparation of an article Enders wrote in the new issue of Mother Jones magazine about the growing opposition to the war among members of the armed forces.

[Thanks to Ward Reilly for sending; there is good stuff here. T]

DE: Here are the questions (might send a couple more later):

DE: Your activism began with Vietnam. When/why did you decide to begin speaking out about Vietnam and what is the thread between activism then and activism today? I think most people have a notion that anti-war movements go away between wars, but I know many vets have remained active in Vietnam in the decades after the war. What else has been going on between then and now?

WR: The VN war certainly dominated my teen years, as it did most of the youth during the late 60s, but it was living with combat vets that had been there in Viet Nam that turned me into an activist.

I was in the First Infantry Division from 1971 to 1974, and 1971 was a banner year for Vietnam Veterans Against The War, with Dewey Canyon 3, Kerry speaking in front of Congress, the takeover of the Statue of Liberty, and the Winter Soldier Investigation testimony, in Detroit.

The biggest irony of my life was volunteering for the Infantry at 17 and getting sent to Germany, while the Draft was forcing everyone that wanted nothing to do with the Infantry, into becoming Infantry riflemen and sending them all to Viet Nam.

The Army fell apart during the 3 years I was in it, and David Hackworth said so in his book "About Face", and life in the Army was insane during that time. It became a "witch-hunt" by the lifers trying to bust us, for anything and everything.

The last straw for me came in 1972 when the C.O. of my company marched our whole company into a hut and ordered us to strip naked.

We didn't know what the fuck was going on, but there we were, 100 grunts being ordered to strip naked. We were all joking about "when are they going to turn on the gas?" They searched our cloths and bodies, and even our assholes, in case we were hiding something there, and I'm dead serious, it was insane.

I said "screw this" and from that point on, I became a "trouble-maker."

We would fall out for morning formation in tie-dyed t-shirts, for example, just to piss the lifers off.

Truthfully, I joined VVAW in `72 just to piss off my C.O. and First Sergeant.

I put the VVAW pin I got when I joined in the middle of a poster hanging in my room. The poster had 2 doves fighting each other, with the words "The Paris Peace talks begin, 1967, The Paris Peace Talks continue, 1968, the Paris Peace Talks continue, 1969, the Paris Peace Talks continue, 1970". The lifers HATED that poster with the little VVAW pin stuck right in the middle.

So, VVAW continued to work for Agent Orange recognition, Veterans Rights, and PTSD awareness after the war ended in 1975. That work was done by the core of VVAW leadership, more recently, my friend Bob Smith, also of VVAW, who did 3 combat tours as a Green Beret in VN, and I, testified in front of Louisiana House and Senate committees to spearhead a Depleted Uranium Testing Bill for our returning troops, and that Bill, "Act 69", became law in 2005, making Louisiana the first state in the union to mandate DU testing for our troops.

Now we feel a strong bond between us and Iraq veterans, especially the national organization "Iraq Veterans Against the War."

They are coming home by the thousands, and according to the VA, 103,000 of them have turned to the VA for help, be it mental or physical. THAT is the truth about the number of casualties. 30% have come for help because of PTSD. That is a staggering number, and the long term cost is incalculable.

When the President tells the world that "Jesus told me to invade Iraq", then we are all in deep shit. How can anything you do be wrong, in the eyes of a "christian nation", when Jesus is telling you what to do?

DE: Somehow, the parallels between Iraq and Vietnam remain a matter of great debate in the US. What are your thoughts as far as similarities/differences between then and now, both with regards to the war and the response to it? Are there any similarities in the ways people (esp vets) have been mobilizing?

WR: After 9-11, the membership in VVAW and VFP skyrocketed, mainly because we all foresaw the imminent war-orgy on the horizon, and we (again) knew that it was time to act.

Down here in south-Louisiana, we organized 15 street demonstrations against the war BEFORE it even started on March 19th, 2003. We did teach-ins at Louisiana State University, we conducted educational forums, and we started a writing campaign in hopes of preventing the invasion of the Middle East, an invasion that we knew would be the disaster that it has become.

Iraq is worse than Viet Nam in many ways.

Almost 50% of our troops are NG`s and Reservists, which means that they signed up to serve this country for 38 days a year ONLY: 2 days a month, and 2 weeks in the summer, yet now they are full-time soldiers, MANY serving more than one tour overseas, and they have been ripped away from their families, jobs, and the lives that they thought they had chosen to live as civilians, doing a minimum of military service.

During VN, "only" 100 National Guardsmen gave their lives, compared to 58,000+ full time soldiers.

Getting into the National Guard guaranteed that you would NOT go to war. Just ask unCurious George Bush about that. Now all they are getting, is screwed.

There are also many, many women dying, and during Viet Nam "only" 7 were KIA in 10 years.

If you think about it, the fact is that NG`s and Reservists signed to serve ONLY 38 days a year, and in return they would get health or education benefits.

Now they are riding around in Iraq or Afghanistan, praying that they don't get blown up in a war that was lost before it even started.

82% of the Iraqi people polled AFTER the "democratic" elections say they want the U.S. out, so why aren't we leaving? O peration I raqi L iberation (OIL), that's why.

The other HUGE difference is that the Neocons have turned this into a "holy war." In VN, it was the "godless commies", but we have sent a "christian army" into the most religiously extreme part of the Islamic world.

Our guys are living in sand-and-heat hell, in a land where nobody wants them to be, except for the Neocons and multi-national construction and oil companies.

They are suffering horribly, with Halliburton serving them rotten food and poison water at bloated cost to us all.

DE: What has it been like working with Iraq vets? How does their activism differ from what went on during Vietnam?

WR: "Iraq Veterans Against the War" held their first national meetings at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina during the weekend of March 18-20, 2005, and I was privileged to sit in during those meetings. We also had a large demonstration that weekend, which was the second anniversary of Iraq.

They are a dedicated and brave group of women and men, dealing with the same problems that Viet Nam era vets did. They are bright, and they are hurt, and they know the truth about what is happening in the Middle East.

In some ways it is painful, because I feel a certain sense of responsibility for having allowed them to be sent into an unjust war, as should ALL U.S. citizens.

The VA is not prepared to handle such a massive influx of new veterans, vets that are screwed up in one way or another because the Neocons sent them into a no-win situation.

The big difference between now and the VN era is that we have the internet. There was a HUGE antiwar movement in place BEFORE the Iraq war even started, truly remarkable.

The power of digital cameras and laptop computers were the one important factor that the Neocons overlooked as they prepared to overthrow the world.

DE: One of the big things that mobilized people against Vietnam was the draft. Can a strong anti-war movement be built without the threat of conscription?

WR: Actually, there is a "draft" of sorts, one that we call the "back-door draft." That is programs such as "Stop Loss" and the call up of the IRR forces.

The "stop loss" situation is horrid. The military, by way of small print on contracts, is able to, and is in fact, forcing GIs to stay in the military after their active duty enlistment ends. Right now, there are about 50,000 GIs being forced to stay in the military beyond the day they thought they would get out.

Likewise with the IRR call-up. The IRR, or Individual Ready Reserve is being called up by the thousands, and the IRR is made up of troops that already finished their agreed-upon active duty, but are being forced back into active duty, again because of the small-print in their original contracts.

VERY FEW soldiers are told about the fine print in their contracts.

It is a HUGE misconception that we have an "all-volunteer" army because of Stop Loss and the IRR situation, but the average joe on the street does not know about these programs forcing men and women to stay on active duty, or forcing them back on to active duty, is hardly a volunteer situation.

It is a form of slavery, with a jail sentence hanging over your head if you don't comply.

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.

Shut Down the Prisons and Shut Up the Warmongers: News Story About Abu Ghraib Closing Was Bullshit

From: Ron Jacobs
To: GI Special
Sent: March 12, 2006

Remember those big headlines last week about Abu Ghraib? According to the media splash, the US was preparing to close those notorious chambers within three months. That would mean by June 2006.

Well, guess what?

Those stories were just another piece of disinformation.

According to the US Department of Defense news service DefenseLink, "News reports that the U.S. military intends to close Abu Ghraib within the next few months and to transfer its prisoners to other jails are inaccurate."

Like everything else in Iraq, the actual timetable for any closure of the prison will be based on "the readiness of Iraq's security forces to assume control of them" and some kind of infrastructure improvements at other facilities. (DefenseLink 3/12/06)

If previous reality holds true in this instance, that means that the Abu Ghraib facility will not be closing any time soon.

Just like the reports of soon-to-come troop withdrawals rumored every few months, the stories of the closure of Abu Ghraib are just one more part of the government's attempts to keep us hopefully confused. Whether the media's intention is to deceive or clarify by reporting these statements, the objective reality is the former.

Once again, it becomes clear that the only way the troops will come home alive is by consistent and loud popular demand. Polls showing that such a withdrawal are obviously not enough. Neither are votes for antiwar legislators. More is needed.

Of course, if one listens to Alexander Haig and Henry Kissinger, two architects of the last major US foreign disaster in Vietnam, they might think that the only way to get out of Iraq is by blowing the country and its inhabitants to hell.

Indeed, Mr. Haig, who was a general, Secretary of State under Reagan, and an advisor to Richard Nixon (even serving as his Chief of Staff during the final months of Nixon's presidency), told an audience of a conference on the Vietnam War at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "Every asset of the nation must be applied to the conflict to bring about a quick and successful outcome, or don't do it."

This is from a man, who helped engineer (among other things) the Christmas bombings of 1972, the mining of Haiphong harbor and the bombing of Hanoi and the dikes of northern Vietnam, and the invasion of Cambodia. What does he suggest the US do in Iraq? Break out some tactical nuclear weapons?

His fellow panel member, Henry Kissinger, would probably like that idea. After all, it was Mr. Kissinger who considered the use of nuclear weapons against northern Vietnam in 1969, but was convinced such an idea might be a bad move after hundreds of thousands of US residents filled the streets of DC and several other cities on November 15, 1969 in a national mobilization to end the war in Vietnam.

Both of these men should be in adjoining cells in the Hague.

Instead, they are guests of honor at the JFK Library.

It's not that they were besmirching Kennedy's legacy by being there. Indeed, Mr. Kissinger said he admired the Kennedys--a statement that should not surprise any serious student of US history given Kissinger's tenure as a consultant on security matters to various U.S. agencies from 1955 to 1968. Indeed, Kissinger's treatise on nuclear weapons and foreign policy was a major influence on the strategic policies of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Given that treatise's emphasis on the use of tactical nuclear weapons together with conventional forces and the current discussion of just such a policy, one could say that Kissinger's influence continues to steer US war policy.

According to a report on Boston TV station Channel 4 of the conference attended by Haig and Kissinger, he was met by antiwar protestors on his way to the meeting. In addition, during the question and answer session Mr. Kissinger was asked if he wanted to apologize for the hundreds of thousands of deaths in Vietnam. His answer was typical Kissinger, arrogant and dismissive: "This is not the occasion," he said. "We have to start from the assumption that serious people were making serious decisions. So that's the sort of question that's highly inappropriate." (CBS4boston.com 3/12/06)

When asked about the possibility that the US bombing of Cambodia helped create the Khmer Rouge and the ensuing killing that followed, Mr. Kissinger dismissed the

possibility. In fact, he minimized the extent of the US bombing, telling the audience that it only took place along a "five-mile strip" of that country.

According to Globalsecurity.org this is simply not true: "Many of the bombs that fell in Cambodia struck relatively uninhabited mountain or forest regions; however, as declassified United States Air Force maps show, others fell over some of the most densely inhabited areas of the country, such as Siemreab Province, Kampong Chhnang Province, and the countryside around Phnom Penh.

Deaths from the bombing are extremely difficult to estimate, and figures range from a low of 30,000 to a high of 500,000. Whatever the real extent of the casualties, the Arflight missions over Cambodia, which were halted in August 15, 1973, by the United States Congress, delivered shattering blows to the structure of life in many of the country's villages."

It wasn't all warmongering at the conference. Former aide to Lyndon Johnson, Jack Valenti told the audience that Washington has forgotten the major lesson of Vietnam. That lesson, said Valenti, who is retired from the presidency of the Motion Picture Association of America, "No president can win a war when public support for that war begins to decline and evaporate."

Of course, this fact didn't stop Messrs. Haig and Kissinger from trying their damndest and it doesn't seem to be preventing their modern-day incarnations from doing the same.

Back to Abu Ghraib.

It is public knowledge that this prison has been the site of torture and murder of prisoners by the US military and intelligence agencies. It is also public knowledge that Abu Ghraib is but one of several such prisons operated by the US government around the world, with the one at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba being the most (in)famous.

Back in 1970, the US public was told about similar prisons in Vietnam.

These were known as tiger cages and were used to hold and torture so-called enemy no-combatants and political prisoners.

Despite the fact that the tiger cages were exposed and decried by human rights organizations and some US congressmen, the cage were not shut down until the United States military and its southern Vietnamese cohorts were defeated in May 1975.

How long will it be before today's cages are closed?

**“You Would Want Them Out
Immediately”**

March 09, 2006 Troops Out Now Coalition [Excerpt]

It is critical that the antiwar movement steer clear of taking any position that condones the continuation of the criminal invasion and occupation of Iraq for even another hour.

If an armed gang invaded your home, destroyed much of the furnishings and tortured and killed members of your family--the idea of asking them to hang around with their guns to help fix up the place would be absurd.

You would want them out immediately; not on a timetable, not when they decided that they had trained you in how to put your house in order, not when they had finished robbing you, but immediately.

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



OCCUPATION REPORT

U.S. OCCUPATION RECRUITING DRIVE IN HIGH GEAR; RECRUITING FOR THE ARMED RESISTANCE THAT IS



An Iraqi boy looks at what's left of his room after a raid by occupation troops in Baghdad March 11, 2006. (AP Photo/Hadi Mizban)

“In the States, if police burst into your house, kicking down doors and swearing at you, you would call your lawyer and file a lawsuit,” said Wood, 42, from Iowa, who did not accompany Halladay’s Charlie Company, from his battalion, on Thursday’s raid. “Here, there are no lawyers. Their resources are limited, so they plant IEDs (improvised explosive devices) instead.”

Iraq Executes 13 Militants

Mar. 9, 2006 UPI

Iraq Thursday executed 13 people accused of participating in the insurgency in the first execution of militants.

A Cabinet statement announced the executions but released only one name: Shuqair Farid, a former policeman, the BBC reported.

Come Fly With Us To Fiasco City

March 10, 2006 By SCHEHEREZADE FARAMARZI, Associated Press

BAGHDAD, IRAQ: The Iraqi Airways flight north to Sulaimaniyah is scheduled to depart at 4 p.m., and in line with the airline's instructions, I'm at Baghdad International Airport three hours early for the security drill. So far so good.

Except that instead of a security check, I and my fellow passengers are made to hang around the terminal for more than two hours, only to be informed that our flight has been canceled. Instead, we are told, there will be a 4 p.m. flight to Irbil, two hours' drive from Sulaimaniyah.

We decide to go for it. Our bags pass through an X-ray machine, we go through a metal detector and are then informed that passengers booked for Sulaimaniyah can't take the Irbil flight. Confusion reigns and the Iraqi Airways agent promises to call the station manager.

About 20 minutes later, the manager says there will be a flight to Sulaimaniyah after all. Maybe at 6 p.m.

Sulaimaniyah, like Irbil, is in the Kurdistan part of Iraq. I could drive it in five hours, but bombers, kidnappers and highway robbers lurk along the road, and I've already had a white-knuckle ride to the airport along six miles of highway that U.S. soldiers call "RPG Alley," the initials standing for rocket-propelled grenade.

The airport complex is so well-defended that Saddam Hussein and his top lieutenants are imprisoned there. But getting airborne is a different matter. To avoid missiles, pilots have to take off in a steep corkscrew maneuver at the risk of colliding with U.S. aircraft.

Still, I decide to wait for the promised 6 p.m. flight. I head to the departure lounge, which is spruced up with new potted plants and green carpet.

At 6 p.m., flights to Irbil and Dubai are ready to leave.

And our flight to Sulaimaniyah? No airline or airport official is anywhere to be seen. Uniformed men from Global Securities, a private company in charge of airport security, have no answers. All they know is that no flights operate after 6 p.m., and we may have to stay the night in the lounge.

At 7 p.m., an Iraqi Airways official emerges. Passengers swarm around him.

A plane is on its way from Istanbul, he says. It will land at 8:30.

We are skeptical. What time did the plane leave Istanbul? "We don't know."

How long is the flight from Istanbul? "I don't know."

So we wait.

At a little after 9 p.m. a Global Security official sheds some light; Iraqi Airways is determined to fly, but the Americans insist the passengers be searched.

But we have already been searched.

No matter, we're told; maybe one of us bought a sharp object like a pair of scissors in an airport shop.

A little while later, the flight from Istanbul lands. We wait to board. And wait, and wait.

We start boarding at 9:45, the repeat security checks having been waived.

We taxi on a runway lit by blue lights. A female voice over the loudspeaker welcomes us aboard the Iraqi Airways Boeing 737 under the command of Captain Adel Hassan en route to Sulaimaniyah. Flight time is 50 minutes.

There is no safety demonstration.

Just before takeoff, all lights are doused. It's pitch black, and totally silent.

The plane ascends in a spiral, circling four times. After the fourth circle, we head north into thick clouds.

At 10:20 the lights come on and the mood relaxes.

After 40 minutes the seatbelt sign comes on and we begin our descent to Sulaimaniyah. Then more bad news. Because of bad weather we are diverting to Irbil.

The passengers mockingly applaud.

MORE:

Baghdad Cut Off; Airport Closed To Occupation Personnel

03/12/06 WAVY & By ALEXANDRA ZAVIS, Associated Press Writer

BAGHDAD, Iraq Citing a "recent security incident," the U-S Embassy in Baghdad is barring government employees from using commercial airlines leaving the capital's international airport.

The "warden's message" distributed to the American community did not disclose the nature of the security incident that prompted the ban, which is in effect until further notice.

And U-S officials have not explained what happened.

The airport is virtually Baghdad's only link with the outside world because banditry and violence [translation: successful military operations by the Iraqi resistance movement] make road travel prohibitively dangerous *for foreigners*.

A spokesman for Royal Jordanian Airlines, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue, said two suspicious objects were found inside a cigarette package on the tarmac as passengers were going through a final security check before boarding a plane on Saturday. The flight left after a 3 1/2-hour delay.

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

The Commander And Thief Hard At Work

09 March 2006 By Sidney Blumenthal, The Guardian UK [Excerpt]

In a recently published hagiography on the theme of Bush-as-Prince-Hal, Rebel-in-Chief, written by the rightwing pundit Fred Barnes, Bush explained to him that his job is to "stay out of minutiae, keep the big picture in mind."

To illustrate his self-conception, he "called my attention to the rug" in the Oval Office.

Bush said that he wanted the rug to express that an "optimistic person comes here." He delegated the task to his wife, Laura, who designed a rug featuring bright yellow rays of the sun.

GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out

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