

GI SPECIAL 4C15:

**THIS IS HOW BUSH BRINGS THE TROOPS HOME:
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW**



US soldiers help a comrade wounded from an IED that exploded in the vicinity of his convoy in Ramadi, February 2006. (AFP/File/David Furst)

***The Court-Martial Of
Willie Brand:
Prisoners “Pulpified” To Death:
“It Was His Training, Authorized
And Supervised By His Superiors”***

But Nobody In Command Charged; Especially Gen. Daniel McNeill, Lying Piece Of Shit

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

March 5, 2006 CBS Broadcasting Inc.

(CBS) You wouldn't figure Willie Brand for a killer. He's a quiet young soldier from Cincinnati who volunteered to be a guard at a U.S. military prison in Bagram, Afghanistan. But when 60 Minutes met him, Brand was facing a court-martial in the deaths of two prisoners.

The prisoners were found hanging from chains in their isolation cells. They had been beaten; one of them was "pulpified," according to the medical examiner.

Brand told correspondent Scott Pelley what he did wasn't torture, it was his training, authorized and supervised by his superiors. So how is it he was charged with assault, maiming and manslaughter?

"I didn't understand how they could do this after they had trained you to do this stuff and they turn around and say you've been bad you shouldn't have done this stuff now they're going to charge you with assault, maiming and 'unvoluntary' manslaughter, how can this be when they trained you to do it and they condoned it while you were doing it," says Brand.

"(The) Army says you are a violent man," Pelley said.

"They do say that, but I'm not a violent person," Brand replied.

But there was violence in the prison. A man named Habibullah and a cab driver called Dilawar died only days after they had been brought in on suspicion of being Taliban fighters.

"They brought death upon themselves as far as I'm concerned," says Capt. Christopher Beiring, who was Brand's commanding officer as head of the prison guards.

[Typical murderers' logic. "Yeah, I killed the 7-11 clerk. But he wasn't supposed to be there after they closed at midnight. He brought it on himself." "Yeah, I raped her. But she was wearing that short skirt, she was asking for it, she

brought it on herself.” Pieces of shit like Beiring have no honor, no conscience, and no justification for continued life.]

Beiring was charged with dereliction of duty, but the charge was later dropped.

Asked whether compared to other detainees Habibullah was more or less aggressive, Beiring says, "Yes, absolutely more. He was probably the worst we had."

What kind of prisoner was Dilawar?

"I wouldn't categorize him as the worst but he, but he definitely, several of my soldiers would say that he would test them, fight with them kick, trip, try to bite, spit. That's typically what a fighter does," Beiring recalls.

Dilawar was picked up outside a U.S. base that had been hit by a rocket. Habibullah was brought in by the CIA, rumored to be a high-ranking Taliban. Both of them were locked in isolation cells with hoods over their heads and their arms shackled to the ceiling.

Their shackled hands, according to Brand, were at about eye level. The point of chaining them to the ceiling, Brand says, was to keep the detainees awake by not letting them lie down and sleep.

Interrogators wanted the prisoners softened up.

Asked what the longest period of time Brand saw a detainee chained like that, Brand says, "Probably about two days."

"Two days? Without a break?" Pelley asked.

"Without a break," Brand replied.

Capt. Beiring says he doesn't know of prisoners chained that long. But in general, he had no problem with the procedure.

"They weren't in pain. They weren't, as far as I'm concerned they weren't being abused. It seemed OK to me. If I was a prisoner, I would think that would probably be acceptable," says Beiring. [If there is any justice in the world, he will have that opportunity. Soon.]

Brand says something else was thought to be acceptable in the prison: a brutal way of controlling prisoners: a knee to the common peroneal nerve in the leg, a strike with so much force behind it that the prisoner would lose muscle control and collapse in pain.

Brand says he vaguely remembers giving knee strikes to Habibullah.

How did the detainee react to that?

"The same way everybody else did. I mean he would scream out 'Allah, Allah, Allah'; sometimes his legs would buckle and sometimes it wouldn't," Brand explained.

It wasn't only Willie Brand. A confidential report by the Army's criminal investigation division accuses dozens of soldiers of abuse, including "slamming into walls (and a) table," "forcing water into his mouth until he could not breathe," giving "kicks to the groin" and once, according to the report, a soldier "threatened to rape a male detainee." Soldiers even earned nicknames including "King of Torture" and "Knee of Death."

Habibullah and Dilawar were found dead in their cells, hanging from their chains.

The military medical examiner says Dilawar's legs were pulpified.

Both autopsy reports were marked "homicide."

But the Army spokesman in Afghanistan told the media that both men had died of natural causes.

With two deaths in a week, the Army decided to investigate. But the facts only began to become public months later in an article in The New York Times.

"I could smell that I was looking at what I thought was a cover-up," says retired Army Col. Lawrence Wilkerson.

Back in Washington, Wilkerson smelled trouble, and so did his boss. Wilkerson was chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell. In 2004, during the Abu Ghraib abuse scandal in Iraq, Powell asked Wilkerson to investigate how Americans had come to torture.

"I was developing the picture as to how this all got started in the first place, and that alarmed me as much as the abuse itself because it looked like authorization for this abuse went to the very top of the United States government," says Wilkerson.

In 2002, the "top of the government" was divided over whether the Geneva Convention applied to prisoners in Afghanistan. The resulting presidential directive tried to have it both ways ordering that the "...armed forces shall continue to treat detainees humanely" but Geneva would apply only "to the extent appropriate and consistent with military necessity...."

It's Wilkerson's opinion that the Army chose to ignore Geneva when it issued new rules for interrogations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"That essentially says to the troops at the bottom of the rung that you have a new game," Wilkerson says. "You can use the methods that aren't in accordance with Geneva. You can use methods that are other than when you've been taught, trained and told you could use. That, that is an invitation, a license to go beyond that, especially when you're also putting on them tremendous pressure to produce intelligence."

Capt. Beiring acknowledges that there was some confusion. "Because a lot of people didn't really know, what are their status? Who are these people? Did they sign the

Geneva Convention? Who are they and what do we do with them? So there was some confusion," he says.

"Can you tell me whether anyone up the chain of command above you was aware that the prisoners were being shackled with their hands up about shoulder high?" Pelley asked.

"Absolutely," Beiring said.

"Who knew?" Pelley asked.

"Several of my leaders knew because we had them like that, you know, there was probably one or two like that any given day. And we didn't change the procedure if someone came through whether they were a colonel or a general, we left them the same. They seen what was going on there," Beiring answered.

Pelley asked Brand if other leaders knew what was going on.

Gen. Daniel McNeill, the top officer in Afghanistan, said "we are not chaining people to the ceilings."

Brand disagreed. "Well, he's lying obviously. I mean because we were doing it on a daily basis," he says.

"Gen. Theodore Nicholas, he was the top military intelligence officer in Afghanistan said that he did not recall prisoners being shackled with their arms overhead. Is that reasonable?" Pelley asked.

"No," Brand replied.

"Lt. Col. Ronald Stallings told investigators, quote, 'he had no idea,' end quote, that prisoners were being chained overhead for 24 hours and more. What you seem to be saying is that it was common knowledge," Pelley said.

"Yes," Brand said.

"It wasn't being kept a secret from the chain of command?" Pelley asked.

"No," Brand replied.

We don't know whether Gen. McNeill toured the prison, Brand doesn't specifically remember him there.

But Gen. Nicholas and Lt. Col. Stallings were there. 60 Minutes wanted to speak with all three, but they declined.

There were inspection tours at the prison, run by the Red Cross. But the Red Cross didn't see everything. For example, it didn't see the instructions written on a dry erase board that told the guards how long prisoners were to be chained.

"We didn't want them to know; we didn't think they had an operational reason to know," says Capt. Beiring.

"It also had other things on there like if a detainee was fighting or being punished for doing stuff wrong or if he didn't eat his food or he wasn't drinking, but yes, we erased that board so the ICRC we didn't think they had the need to know."

There was a lot the Red Cross didn't know.

Medical experts say that Dilawar's injuries were so severe that, if he had lived, both his legs would have required amputation. Even worse, one soldier testified that most of the interrogators thought Dilawar had been arrested only because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. They had come to believe he was just a cab driver.

"And so we killed an innocent man, and that's something else that got me as I went through this, got me very concerned as to not just what we are doing to perhaps al Qaeda or al Qaeda-like terrorists or even insurgents when we come to Iraq, but what were doing to innocents," says Wilkerson.

Wilkerson says the Secretary of State, who devoted much of his life to the Army, was enraged. As the Abu Ghraib torture scandal was breaking, Wilkerson says his boss snapped up the phone and called Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

"And he essentially said, 'Don, don't you know what you're doing to our credibility around the world don't you know what you're doing to our image?' And for Secretary Powell to raise his voice that way was quite extraordinary. I've only heard him do it maybe five times in 16 years," says Wilkerson.

"What do you mean he raised his voice?" Pelley asked.

"I'm sure Secretary Rumsfeld was probably holding the phone away from his ear," Wilkerson replied.

In August, Willie Brand faced court-martial. Prosecutors said he and other guards had struck the prisoners dozens and dozens of times.

"People watching this interview are thinking, 'Look, this guy came into this facility, he was there five days and he was dead. He died in five days' time,' How did that happen?" Pelley asked.

"I don't really know how that happened," Brand replied.

"You hit him, you hit him numerous times. Did you think it was you?" Pelley asked.

"No," Brand replied.

"The Army would have us believe that you were operating outside the rules," Pelley said.

"This is what we were trained to do, and this is what we did. And not only that I was not the only one, there were many other people hitting them; and this was going on on a daily basis and nothing was said about it," Brand said.

But Capt. Beiring says those were not his orders. He says those knee strikes were to be used only for self-defense.

"You've read the Army investigation, and in it some of the witnesses say one of the soldiers was nicknamed the 'King of Torture' another one had quote the 'Knee of Death.' You were there; were you not seeing this?" Pelley asked Beiring.

"No, I was not," Beiring replied. "Some nicknames, as a commander you are fairly removed from the junior soldiers, so nicknames could have occurred that I did not know about."

"It's not the nicknames, it's how they got the nicknames that matters," Pelley said.

"I can't say for sure, I can only say I never witnessed any of my soldiers do anything that was out of line," Beiring said.

Still, a letter of reprimand has been written that blisters Beiring. It says his "command failures enabled an environment of abuse."

But the charges that could have brought court-martial against him were dropped.

An investigating officer said that Beiring "may not have done his duty perfectly, but he did it well." Beiring is appealing the reprimand.

Asked if he, in retrospect, has any sympathy for Habibullah and Dilawar, Beiring says, "Sure, I have some sympathy. I wish they were born Americans."

At his court-martial, Willie Brand was convicted of assault and maiming. He faced 16 years. But the jury of soldiers had it both ways. They convicted him and let him go with a reduction in rank, nothing more. So far, 15 soldiers have been charged in the Bagram abuse. The sentences range from letters of reprimand to five months in jail. No one above the rank of captain has been charged.

Retired Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, after serving 31 years in the Army, has drawn his own conclusions about how interrogation procedures were changed in Afghanistan and later in Iraq.

How did it go wrong?

"It went wrong because we had a secretary of defense who had never served on the ground a day in his life, who was arrogant and thought that he could release those twin pressures on the backs of his armed forces, the twin pressures being a wink and a nod, you can do a lot of things that you know don't correspond to Geneva, don't correspond to your code of conduct, don't correspond to the Army field manual, and at the same time I want intelligence, I want intelligence, I want it now," says Wilkerson.

While Secretary Rumsfeld never served in combat, he was a Navy aviator and retired from the reserves as a captain.

60 Minutes wanted to talk with Secretary Rumsfeld, but the Pentagon declined our requests.

Since the deaths at Bagram, chaining from the ceiling has been banned. The number of prisoners there has increased fivefold, to roughly 500.

The prisoners don't get lawyers, and they can't appeal their detentions.

But, the military tells 60 Minutes, it reviews each prisoner's file for release at least *once a year*.

MORE:

Officers In Command Of Killing Prisoners By Torture?

“No Officer Above The Rank Of Major Has Been Charged In Any Detainee Death”

“Even If You Get Caught, If You Have Enough Rank, It Won't Matter”

“As someone who voluntarily spoke at length about my actions in Iraq to investigators, without a lawyer present, I can't have a favorable opinion of General Miller. “By 'taking the Fifth,' he's decided to protect himself, apparently happy to let two dog handlers take the fall, a stunning betrayal of his subordinates and Army values.”

04 March 2006 By David R. Irvine and Deborah Pearlstein, The Salt Lake Tribune

Brig. Gen. David R. Irvine, (Ret.), is a former Army Reserve strategic intelligence officer who taught prisoner interrogation and military law for 18 years with the Sixth Army Intelligence School. He currently practices law in Salt Lake City.

Although Abu Ghraib triggered several investigations, their common thread has been limited scope, lack of authority to follow the evidence wherever it might lead, and no prosecutorial mandate.

It can fairly be argued that the object of these investigations was to shift the focus away from senior officers and civilians in the military chain of command.

Retired Army Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, who was Secretary of State Colin Powell's chief of staff, put it bluntly: "The military has thwarted investigation every step of the way ... Vice Admiral Albert Church (who led one such investigation) more or less stonewalled me. Others stonewalled me. There's been an awful lot of coverup."

Indeed, of the 98 deaths documented in "Command's Responsibility," more than two-thirds were in U.S. custody in places other than Abu Ghraib.

Four years since the first known death, only 12 detainee deaths have resulted in punishment of any kind for any U.S. official.

For the torture-related deaths; cases where people were suffocated, beaten to death, or, as in at least one case, effectively crucified; the highest sentence anyone has received is five months in jail.

Critically, no officer above the rank of major has been charged in any detainee death.

The system of military justice is supposed to reflect and give force to America's values, even in wartime. The uninvestigated, unpunished homicides committed by U.S. personnel against prisoners says a good deal about what has changed in today's military.

It suggests that a new "anything goes" ethic has replaced the older, morally driven, Army "values" ethic. In the new ethic, the constraints of law can be set aside whenever expediency or whim demand.

Because there is no top-driven command accountability for senior officers, there are no operational boundaries at the bottom of the chain of command.

Even if you get caught, if you have enough rank, it won't matter.

The starkest illumination of this corrosive new Army ethic was stated this past week by former Army interrogator Anthony Lagouranis: "Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller (who 'took the gloves off' at Guantanamo Bay) has denied recommending the use of guard dogs to intimidate prisoners during interrogations in Iraq.

"He also recently said he would not testify in the courts-martial (of two Army dog handlers), invoking his right to avoid self-incrimination.

"As someone who voluntarily spoke at length about my actions in Iraq to investigators, without a lawyer present, I can't have a favorable opinion of General Miller. "By 'taking the Fifth,' he's decided to protect himself, apparently happy to let two dog handlers take the fall, a stunning betrayal of his subordinates and Army values."

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Honolulu Marine Killed



Lance Cpl. Kristen Figueroa, 20, of Honolulu, was killed in Iraq March 12, 2006, during combat operations in the Al Anbar province. Figueroa was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force. (AP Photo/U.S. Marine Corps)

TWO SOLDIERS KILLED IN AL ANBAR PROVINCE

3.14.06 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS RELEASE
Number: 06-03-01C & AP

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq: Two Soldiers assigned to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania Army National Guard died due to enemy action while operating in al Anbar Province March 13.

Wild Rose Grad Injured

March 14, 2006 Waush Argus

A Wild Rose High School graduate was injured in Iraq on March 9.

Ruben Macias, a 2002 graduate, was injured by a roadside bomb attack.

Macias, 23, is a medic in the 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry with the Army National Guard, which is based in Appleton. He was deployed to Iraq in August.

Wisconsin Army National Guard Lieutenant Colonel Tim Donovan issued a press release on March 9 saying Macias and two other soldiers were injured during a convoy security mission. The other soldiers injured by the bomb included Kevin Roland, Howard, and Brent Stelzer, Plover.

Macias lost his right pinkie finger and broke a leg in the attack. He was hospitalized in Germany and was then flown to Atlanta or Kentucky.

His parents, Elias and Anne, live in the Town of Menasha with their 17-year-old son Rey. Another brother of Macias, Elias Jr., is currently serving in Afghanistan with the 10th Mountain Division.

Notes From A Lost War With Fools In Command:

**U.S. Military Airstrikes
Significantly Increased In Iraq:
“Now The People Of Karabilah
Want To Join The Resistance
Against The Americans For What
They Did”**

Mar. 14, 2006 By Tom Lasseter, Knight Ridder Newspapers

BAGHDAD, Iraq: American forces have dramatically increased airstrikes in Iraq during the past five months, a change of tactics that may foreshadow how the United States plans to battle a still-strong insurgency while reducing the number of U.S. ground troops serving here.

A review of military data shows that daily bombing runs and jet-missile launches have increased by more than 50 percent in the past five months, compared with the same period last year. Knight Ridder's statistical findings were reviewed and confirmed by American Air Force officials in the region.

The numbers also show that U.S. forces dropped bombs on more cities during the last five months than they did during the same period a year ago.

Air strikes a year ago struck at least nine cities, but were mostly concentrated in and around the western city of Fallujah. This year, U.S. warplanes have struck at least 18 cities.

Airstrikes also risk civilian casualties, driving a wedge between American forces and Iraqis, Iraqis say.

Osama Jadaan al Dulaimi, a tribal leader in the western town of Karabilah, a town near the Syrian border that was hit with bombs or missiles on at least 17 days between October 2005 and February 2006, said the bombings had created enemies.

"The people of Karabilah hate the foreigners who crossed the border and entered their areas and got into a fight with the Americans," al Dulaimi said.

"The residents now also hate the American occupiers who demolished their houses with bombs and killed their families ... and now the people of Karabilah want to join the resistance against the Americans for what they did."

Knight Ridder compiled the statistics from about 300 daily press releases provided by the U.S. Central Command's air forces unit, which describes itself as the "predominant owner of air assets in the region."

The releases detailed bombing activities, but they didn't include actions of Marine Corps units, so the number of bombings probably is higher.

The statistics show that U.S. and coalition planes dropped bombs or missiles on Iraqi cities on at least 76 days from Oct. 1, 2005, through Feb. 28, 2006 - or one out of every two days. During the same period a year earlier, bombs or missiles struck on only 49 days, the tabulation showed.

Bombs were dropped on more days in each of the last five months than they were for the same months the previous year. For example, the U.S. military launched bombings and missile strikes on 20 days in December 2005, compared with 12 in December 2004, and 10 in January 2006, compared with five in January 2005.

Stories of American missiles hitting the homes of innocents are passed between Iraqi men at teahouses and during Friday worship services.

"Residents worry that their homes will be bombed at any time," said Hussein Ali Jaafar, who owns a stationery shop in the town of Balad, north of Baghdad, which was targeted by bombs or missiles at least 27 times between October 2005 and February 2006.

"Most of the bombing is unjustified and random. It does not differentiate between militants and innocent people."

A tribal sheik who lives on the outskirts of the troubled Anbar town of Ramadi, who asked that he be identified as Abu Tahseen instead of by his full name out of fear of possible retribution, said that the strikes create more insurgents than they kill because of the region's tribal dictates of revenge.

"They (the Americans) think: `As long as there are resistance fighters operating in this spot, we will wipe it out entirely,'" Abu Tahseen said, using the term for insurgents favored by Iraqis sympathetic to their cause. "As you know, our nature is a tribal one, and so if one from us is killed, we kill three or four in return."

Comparing the total number of bombs and missiles dropped from one year to the next isn't possible because the Central Command releases began late last year to refer to "precision guided bombs" or "precision guided munitions" instead of the actual number and type of bomb used.

"The change in nomenclature reflects internal angst about whether or not it is appropriate to give the specific types of ordnance dropped," said Air Forces spokesman Maj. Robert P. Palmer in an e-mail exchange.

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION FUTILE EXERCISE BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW!



A U.S. soldier walks at the scene of a car bomb attack in Baghdad March 9, 2006.
REUTERS/Ali Jasim

TROOP NEWS

More Of Rumsfelds' Stupid Lies Blown Away:

US Military Study Finds Saddam Hussein Did Not Plan Any Insurgency

[Remember all that raving Rumsfeld did back in 2003 about “Saddam Hussein remnants”? Guess what. The resistance wasn’t some plan. Now it’s official. The resistance is just that: resistance by patriotic Iraqis who don’t want their country occupied by a military dictatorship commanded by George W. Bush. Which means Iraqis are have an excellent grip on reality, and are motivated to fight for their country. How about you?]

March 15, 2006 Daily Times

WASHINGTON: Ousted president Saddam Hussein did not plan the insurgency in Iraq because he thought the United States would never invade the country, a US military history has concluded.

“As far as can be determined from the interviews and records reviewed so far, there were no national plans to embark on a guerrilla war in the event of military defeat,” it said.

“Nor did the regime appear to cobble together such plans as its world crumbled around it,” it said.

“Buoyed by his earlier conviction that the Americans would never dare enter Baghdad, Saddam hoped to the very last minute that he could stay in power,” it said.

Excerpts of the partially de-classified study for the US Joint Forces Command are being published in the May/June edition of Foreign Affairs, the journal of the Council on Foreign Relations. The study was written by Kevin Woods, James Lacey and Williamson Murray.

MORE:

Gotcha

13 March 2006 BBC

Cleric Moqtada Sadr has appealed for calm among Iraqi Shias following bomb attacks in Baghdad which killed about 50 people on Sunday.

Mr Sadr also criticised US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld who had said last week that Iraqi troops, not US forces, would intervene if civil war broke out in Iraq.

"May God damn you," Mr Sadr said of Mr Rumsfeld. "You said in the past that civil war would break out if you were to withdraw, and now you say that in case of civil war you won't interfere."

Domestic Enemies At It Again: As Thousands Of Troops Face Hearing Loss, Pentagon Gets Rid Of Military Audiologists

Mar. 08, 2006 BY RICHARD WHITTLE, The Dallas Morning News [Excerpts]

WASHINGTON; The Army's chief of staff, Gen. Peter Schoomaker, wears hearing aids. Asked why once, the crusty special operations veteran grinned and said: "Guns, helicopters, demolition - 36 years of it."

Schoomaker's faulty hearing is far from rare in the military. And experts say the war in Iraq has led to epidemic rates of hearing loss among troops.

Yet while all the armed services are scrambling to come up with better hearing protection, the Army is slashing its staff of military audiologists, the specialists who combat hearing loss, to make room for more "trigger pullers" at the front.

Only two military audiologists, for example, are at Fort Hood in Texas, home base for more than 40,000 soldiers.

"It's frankly alarming," Theresa Schulz, a former Air Force audiologist and incoming president-elect of the National Hearing Conservation Association, said of the reduction in military audiologists even as noise-induced hearing loss is on the rise.

Despite the evidence of rapidly rising hearing damage, the Army plans to cut the number of uniformed audiologists in its ranks from 36 to a projected 19. The Army had 70 uniformed audiologists in 1991, before a post-Cold War reduction in the Army's overall size.

The simplest form of hearing protection is earplugs.

But according to an article in the December issue of the American Journal of Audiology by three Army scientists, "there were not adequate supplies of earplugs to fit all deploying soldiers" in the months prior to the invasion of Iraq.

The Army and Marines have distributed thousands of pairs of an innovative device designed to overcome that reluctance: the Combat Arms Earplug, which blocks hazardous noise while allowing nearly normal hearing.

But audiologists and combat veterans say many troops who got the earplugs either ignored or misused them for lack of instruction.

The yellow and green earplug has been available since 1998. But [Sgt. Maj. Michael] Sienda said he was unaware of it when he went to Iraq with the 1st Armored Division in May 2003.

He could have used the earplugs that July, when a roadside bomb on notorious Haifa Street in Baghdad hit his Humvee, he said.

"I had not heard about it because the Army didn't do a very good job of getting the word out," Sienda said.

Recalling how his ears rang for days after the ambush, he said, "I definitely have some hearing loss, and I'm sure it was from that day."

Military audiologists focus on overcoming such ignorance, which is why Schulz calls the reductions "scandalous." Army leaders appear to be so eager to civilianize the service's medical care to create combat slots that they simply aren't "connecting the dots," she said.

Herbert Coley, manpower director for the Army Medical Command in San Antonio, said the cut in uniformed audiologists would cause no harm.

"We are not reducing the number of audiologists in the Army," Coley said. "We are reducing the number of military audiologists in the Army. Every (uniformed) audiologist who is designated a mil-to-civ conversion should be replaced" by a civilian.

Coley added that in addition to its current 36 military audiologists, the Army has 36 civilian audiologists, even though it calculates that it only needs one for every 18,000 soldiers on active duty, or about 33 in all.

Audiologists, however, say there is a qualitative difference between what the Army's military and civilian audiologists do.

All but one of the Army's civilian audiologists are focused on treating patients who already have hearing damage, not on preventing it, as military audiologists are by and large, experts said. That leaves the job of "hearing conservation" - educating troops to prevent hearing damage - almost exclusively to uniformed audiologists. And civilian audiologists can't be sent to combat zones such as Iraq, as military audiologists have been.

"If we can put that audiologist on the forward battlefield, as unusual as that may sound, talking to soldiers about hearing protection ... we're much better served than if we have that audiologist in a clinic," Maj. Eric Fallon, an Army audiologist who served two tours in Iraq, said while hosting a hearing conservation exhibit at a military convention. "Folks don't show up at a clinic to prevent something."

As it is, only about 20 of the Army's military audiologists work primarily in hearing conservation, said Lt. Col Kathy Gates, the Army surgeon general's top audiology adviser.

Those 20 are responsible for getting the hearing conservation message to about 324,000 soldiers - those routinely exposed to hazardous noise - out of the 600,000 regular Army, Army Reserve and National Guard troops on active duty.

Coley, a former helicopter pilot who retired from the Army as a colonel in 1998, said civilian audiologists could be trained to do what military audiologists do now.

"The civilians who come into the Army need to understand that their job is going to be hearing conservation," he said.

Douglas Ohlin, a civilian audiologist who has managed the Army's hearing conservation program for 26 years, said Coley's vision of reorienting civilian audiologists from treating patients to teaching hearing conservation was "either wishful thinking or he's blowing smoke, because that is not what has happened in the past."

"That isn't going to work and has not worked because they (civilian audiologists) are clinic-bound," Ohlin said. "The hospital commanders want them in the clinics."

"They could be possibly taught, but they not only have to learn hearing conservation, they have to learn military hearing conservation, and they have to learn the Army," Ohlin said.

IEDs, the bombs planted by insurgents in Iraq, have ruptured the eardrums or otherwise damaged the hearing of thousands of U.S. troops, by most estimates.

"If you're wearing hearing protection, that's not going to happen to you," Ohlin said.

Lawmakers from both parties have asked the Army to do more to protect soldiers' hearing.

"If we are cutting back on military audiologists who can go out into the field and prevent loss of hearing, that would be unconscionable," said Rep. Chet Edwards of Texas, senior Democrat on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Quality of Life. "For the taxpayers, it makes a lot more sense to prevent loss of hearing than to provide a lifetime of disability payments."

The House subcommittee said in a report last year that "as a result of ongoing combat operations, one in three post-deploying soldiers report acute acoustic trauma and one in four report hearing loss and/or hearing complaints."

The percentage of troops whose hearing has been damaged in Iraq could actually be higher than one fourth, some experts said, for a soldier who loses an arm or leg in a roadside bomb blast often suffers hearing damage, too, but is listed as an amputee rather than a hearing casualty.

The Institute of Medicine study cited "reports of hearing loss among 62 percent of personnel with blast injuries who were treated at Walter Reed Army Medical Center from March 2003 through May 2005."

Whatever the actual number, the future cost to taxpayers will be billions, experts predicted.

"We know that it's a problem, and we expect to see a high incidence of hearing loss among returning veterans," VA audiology director Beck said.

That needn't be, hearing protection advocate Schulz said.

"People should be as militant about noise as they are about asbestos," she said. "It's the same kind of hazard. There's no blood, there's no pain. It's a slow, insidious damage.

"And 30 years later you're standing there like the chief of staff of the Army, wearing hearing aids."

Fucking Over The Vets, As Usual: Proposed V.A. Budget "One Of The Most Tight-Fisted, Miserly Budgets For Veterans Programs In Recent Memory"

Veterans who suffer disability from military service should not also have to needlessly suffer economic deprivation because of the inefficiency and indifference of their government. Once again, this year's budget recommendations fail to provide the necessary resources and, therefore, the timely adjudication of claims continues to remain at risk.

STATEMENT OF PAUL W. JACKSON NATIONAL COMMANDER OF THE DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS BEFORE THE COMMITTEES ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS UNITED STATES SENATE WASHINGTON, D.C. FEBRUARY 28, 2006 [Excerpts]

Within a month of the passage of the FY 2005 appropriations bill, stories began to appear around the country about the shortfalls in VA health care funding and its adverse impact on VA's ability to care for our nation's sick and disabled veterans.

In a December 20, 2004 story in a Mississippi newspaper, it was noted that although the VA medical center in Jackson, Mississippi, will receive a 6% increase in its health care system is straining under unprecedented demand and a budget shortfall" as reported in a December 23, 2004 article in the Denver Post. The system will get \$3 million less this year than expected. This 2% shortfall will mean

a hiring freeze and a likely return of waiting lists for medical care, according to the VA director.

Actually, according to the article, the FY 2005 budget is \$700,000 less than the FY 2002 funding levels-that's correct, \$700,000 less than the FY 2002 spending level.

In Pennsylvania, the Van Zandt VA Medical Center faces a projected \$5 million shortfall this fiscal year as reported by the Altoona Mirror. In a news story out of Augusta, Maine, it was reported that there is an initial \$14.2 million shortfall projected for the annual allocations at the VA Medical Center at Togus.

It was also noted that the annual deficit for the VISN was pegged at \$65 million; however, approximately \$30 million had been found to reduce that shortfall.

We have been told that the VA facility in Boise, Idaho, has an approximate \$2 million deficit in FY 2005. As a result of this deficit, no new programs will be started, there is a hiring freeze, and there will be no new growth in primary care patients. In New Mexico, there is a \$4 million budget shortfall. As a result of this budget deficit, the hospital will lose 60 employees who will not be replaced.

The Administration has proposed a fiscal year 2006 budget recommendation that is one of the most tight-fisted, miserly budgets for veterans programs in recent memory.

Instead of providing adequate funds for the VA medical system, the budget proposes to shift the cost burden onto the backs of veterans, making health care more expensive and even less accessible for millions of America's defenders.

The VA medical system has been strained to the breaking point over the years because its appropriation has failed to keep pace with the skyrocketing costs of healthcare and increased patient loads.

As a result, VA facilities across the country are cutting staff and limiting services even as the number of veterans seeking care is on the rise. Mr. Chairman, that was a year ago.

The hiring freeze is still in place. A review of the recently submitted Administration's budget proposal demonstrates unchanged employee levels for fiscal years 2005 and 2006.

It is our understanding that VA medical facilities are required to "pay back" a substantial portion of the money they received from VA Central Office for the shortfalls in funding for fiscal year 2005.

Some facilities are reporting that the increase they received in the fiscal year 2006 budget will help to pay for salary increases only. Others report continued deficits and backlogs.

Some are actually reducing non-VA health care. And some medical facilities are questioning how they will make it through the year.

Again, in light of last year's admonishment to not include such a proposal, the Administration wants to impose a new \$250 annual user fee on certain veterans who also would see their prescription drug co-payments almost doubled, from \$8 to \$15. Those veterans, some of whom are DAV members, already pay for the health care they receive from the VA. Adding to their out-of-pocket costs would force them out of the system and put even greater strain on resources needed to treat their fellow veterans.

One thing is clear—the shortfall in the fiscal year 2005 budget for VA medical care has had a sobering effect on local medical centers, as I noted earlier.

The Administration's initial budget recommendation for VA health care in fiscal year 2006 was a recipe for disaster. Backfilling these shortfalls does not have the same effect as providing VA with the proper funding levels at the beginning of each fiscal year.

Forcing VA to ration healthcare to veterans and then trying to play “catch-up” when much-needed funds are belatedly infused into the system is at cross purposes with providing quality health care in a timely manner.

Mr. Chairman, I will now focus on the benefits side of VA. A core mission of the VA is the provision of benefits to relieve the economic effects of disability upon veterans and their families. For those benefits to effectively fulfill their intended purpose, VA must promptly deliver them to veterans. The ability of disabled veterans to care for themselves and their families often depends on these benefits.

The need for benefits among disabled veterans is usually urgent.

While awaiting action by VA, they and their families suffer hardships; protracted delays can lead to deprivation, bankruptcies, and homelessness.

Disability benefits are critical, and providing for disabled veterans should always be a top priority of the government. VA can promptly deliver benefits to entitled veterans only if it can process and adjudicate claims in a timely and accurate fashion.

However, VA has neither maintained the necessary capacity to match and meet its claims workload nor corrected systemic deficiencies that compound the problem of inadequate capacity.

Rather than making headway and overcoming the chronic claims backlog and consequent protracted delays in claims disposition, VA has lost ground to the problem, with the backlog of pending claims growing substantially larger.

The claims backlog has swollen, and the appellate workload is growing at an alarming rate, suggesting further degradation of quality or at least continuation of quality problems.

Insufficient resources are the result of misplaced priorities, in which the agenda is to reduce spending on veterans programs despite a need for greater resources to meet a growing workload in a time of war and a need for added resources to overcome the deficiencies and failures of the past. Instead of requesting the additional resources needed, the President has sought and Congress has provided fewer resources.

Recent budgets have sought reductions in fulltime employees for the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) in fiscal years 2003 through 2006. Since fiscal year 2003, VBA has lost about 500 employees.

Such reductions in staffing are clearly at odds with the realities of VA's workload and its failure to improve quality and make gains against the claims backlog. The fiscal year 2007 budget submission again fails to provide sufficient resources to VBA to handle the claims workload.

The President's budget requests 9,445 FTE, which would reduce direct program FTE for handling compensation claims by 149 in 2007.

Even with ambitious assumptions of increased production during FY 2006 and FY 2007 despite this reduction in staffing and even with unsupported projections of slowed growth in the volume of new claims in both years, the budget concedes that the already unacceptable claims backlog would grow even larger in 2006 and 2007.

To knowingly request resource levels that will only make an intolerable situation worse, is indefensible, and we urge the Committee to recommend adequate staffing for C&P.

Only then can the claims backlog really be overcome.

Only then will the system serve disabled veterans in a satisfactory fashion, in which their needs are addressed timely with the effects of disability alleviated by prompt delivery of benefits.

Veterans who suffer disability from military service should not also have to needlessly suffer economic deprivation because of the inefficiency and indifference of their government. Once again, this year's budget recommendations fail to provide the necessary resources and, therefore, the timely adjudication of claims continues to remain at risk.

Why Are Military Bases Still Named For Slaveholding Traitors?

Letters To The Editor
3.13.06 Army Times

I find great irony in the fact that the Army continues to name some of its premier active installations after long-dead Civil War generals; Bragg, Hood, Lee, Jackson and Benning; who fought for the Confederacy, an organization that had as one of its principal tenets the right to keep individuals as slaves.

It is particularly significant this year, as we have the death of Mrs. Martin Luther King Jr., widow of the esteemed civil rights activist, timed with the celebration of the birth of President Abraham Lincoln.

Although one can make valid arguments for recognizing each of these individuals in terms of their relative greatness or achievements, either militarily or as civilian leaders within their native states, a different argument must be made on whether or not they deserve continuing recognition with what we know now about ethnic and racial issues.

Granted, some of these installations were founded and named at a time when gaining approval for use of the land from a state legislature brought with it the requirement for this curious naming convention. However, the continued practice seems a bit odd.

In fact, many state legislatures are facing similar dilemmas for changing athletic team names from potentially racist and ethnically charged titles of long standing.

Why should the Army maintain what appears to be a questionable practice?

The average reader can probably think of several other former generals who could lend their name to an Army post without baggage, for example, Pershing, Eisenhower, Bradley or Patton.

Jeff Parmer
Heidelberg, Germany

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.

OCCUPATION REPORT

***Good News For The Iraqi
Resistance!!***

**U.S. Occupation Commands'
Stupid Tactics Recruit Even**

More Fighters To Kill U.S. Troops



March 11, 2006: An Iraqi boy makes his way through the living room of his house after occupation troops trashed it during a raid on Friday night in Baghdad. (AP Photo/hadi Mizban)

[Fair is fair. Let's bring 150,000 Iraqis over here to the USA. They can kill people at checkpoints, bust into their houses with force and violence, overthrow the government, put a new one in office they like better and call it "sovereign," and "detain" anybody who doesn't like it in some prison without any charges being filed against them, or any trial.]

[Those Iraqis are sure a bunch of backward primitives. They actually resent this help, have the absurd notion that it's bad their country is occupied by a foreign military dictatorship, and consider it their patriotic duty to fight and kill the soldiers sent to grab their country. What a bunch of silly people. How fortunate they are to live under a military dictatorship run by George Bush. Why, how could anybody not love that? You'd want that in your home town, right?]

"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."

Electricity Supply At Lowest Point Since The Invasion: Resistance Attacks Cripple Production

In the first week of February, a busy maintenance period, output dropped to 3,750 megawatts, reports the joint U.S. agency, the Gulf Region Division-Project Contracting Office. That's a new low since the period immediately after the 2003 U.S. invasion.

March 14, 2006 CHARLES J. HANLEY and SAMEER N. YACOUB, Associated Press Writers

Electricity output has dipped to its lowest point in three years in Iraq, where the desert sun is rising toward another broiling summer and U.S. engineers are winding down their rebuilding of the crippled power grid.

"We're living miserably," said housewife Su'ad Hassan, a mother of four and one of millions in Baghdad who have endured three years of mostly powerless days under U.S. occupation. Her family usually goes without hot water and machine washing, she said, and "often my children have to do their homework in the dim light of oil lamps."

Deprived areas outside the Iraqi capital are doing better, with a nationwide average of 10 to 11 hours of electricity daily, compared with three to five hours in Baghdad.

Although the U.S. effort helped boost Iraq's potential generating capacity to more than 7,000 megawatts, available capacity has never topped 5,400, held down by plant breakdowns and shutdowns for maintenance, fuel shortages and transmission disruptions caused by insurgent attacks, inefficient production, sabotage by extortionists, and other factors.

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The Army engineers who rolled into Iraq in 2003 found power plants barely operating, lacking spare parts and suffering from years of neglect brought on by U.N. trade sanctions.

To battle the insurgency, U.S. authorities shifted more than \$1 billion from power projects to security spending.

Having planned to add or rehabilitate 3,400 megawatts' worth of power production, they settled instead for 2,000.

The lack of security also slowed work: Fewer than half the 350 local power-distribution projects planned by the Americans had begun as of early this year, the inspector-general reported Jan. 30.

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

**Welcome To Ramadi:
Have A Nice Day**



Resistance soldiers fire at a government building in Ramadi March 14, 2006. They fired three mortar rounds targeting a U.S. base and a government building and fought U.S. forces. (AP Photo)

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

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

Iraq Drives Bush's Rating To New Low

March 14, 2006 WASHINGTON (CNN)

Growing dissatisfaction with the war in Iraq has driven President Bush's approval rating to a new low of 36 percent, according to a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll released Monday.

Only 38 percent said they believe the nearly 3-year-old war was going well for the United States, down from 46 percent in January, while 60 percent said they believed the war was going poorly.

Nearly half of those polled said they believe Democrats would do a better job of managing the war, even though only a quarter of them said the opposition party has a clear plan for resolving the situation.

Bush's approval rating of 36 percent is the lowest mark of his presidency in a Gallup poll, falling a percentage point below the 37 percent approval he scored in November.

Sixty percent of those surveyed in the latest poll said they disapproved of his performance in office, the same figure as in the last poll.

The latest poll found 51 percent of Americans believed the administration deliberately misled the public about whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, while 46 percent disagreed. That question had a sampling error of 4.5 percentage points as well.

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK THE NEW OUT 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)

The Great Homeland Security Fiasco Strikes Again

Since September 11, authorities have thrown bodies and badges at the terrorism threat. And here we see the outcome: A couple of guys from the sheriff's department, who were writing citations for driving with bad registration tags a few years ago, visiting professors to slyly inquire if there are any foreign consulates in the area.

March 11, 2006 Chris Bray, us/blogs

Miguel Tinker-Salas, a professor of Latin American history at Pomona College, was visited this week by a pair of government investigators who "interrogated" him, more about that characterization in a moment, about his contacts with officials of the Venezuelan government.

The men identified themselves as detectives from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department who work with a joint anti-terrorism task force run by the FBI.

But what, exactly, was the nature of this "federal probe," and who were the official visitors?

Tinker-Salas told reporters that the sheriff's detectives who interrogated him asked such incisive questions as: Is there a Venezuelan consulate in the area?

The professor correctly noted that the detectives could have answered this question by Googling it, which suggests the possibility that what we have on our hands here are a couple of local cops who, not being perhaps the sharpest knives in the drawer, were fumbling helplessly with the task of protecting America against the, you know, Venezuelan terror threat.

Three years ago, working at a small local newspaper while I waited for my first year of grad school to arrive, I interviewed the head of another Los Angeles County joint police task force that had transitioned from narcotics enforcement to anti-terrorism investigations after the September 11 attacks.

He described their investigation of a suspected Islamic terrorist cell in the wilds of Whittier; some neighbors had reported having suspiciously Arab-looking neighbors who kept strange hours; and detailed the tools at the task force's disposal: Covert surveillance, wiretapping, and so on.

So I asked him what training his detectives had received in counter-terrorism investigations; they had none. I asked how many of his detectives were trained in Arabic language skills; you can guess the answer.

Since September 11, authorities have thrown bodies and badges at the terrorism threat. And here we see the outcome: A couple of guys from the sheriff's department, who were writing citations for driving with bad registration tags a few years ago, visiting professors to slyly inquire if there are any foreign consulates in the area.

I'm reminded of the agents in J. Edgar Hoover's FBI who were assigned to watch television, monitoring for secret signals from Maoist talk show hosts to communist viewers from their masters in Peking. Big brother is kind of lumpy and sad, close up, and not just in the war on terrorism.

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.

GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out

The following have posted issues; there may be others:

http://robinlea.com/GI_Special/, <http://www.williambowles.info/gispecial/2006/index.html>, http://www.traprockpeace.org/gi_special/, <http://www.uruknet.info/?p=6&l=e>, <http://qi-special.iraq-news.de>, <http://www.albasrah.net/magalat/english/qi-special.htm>

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