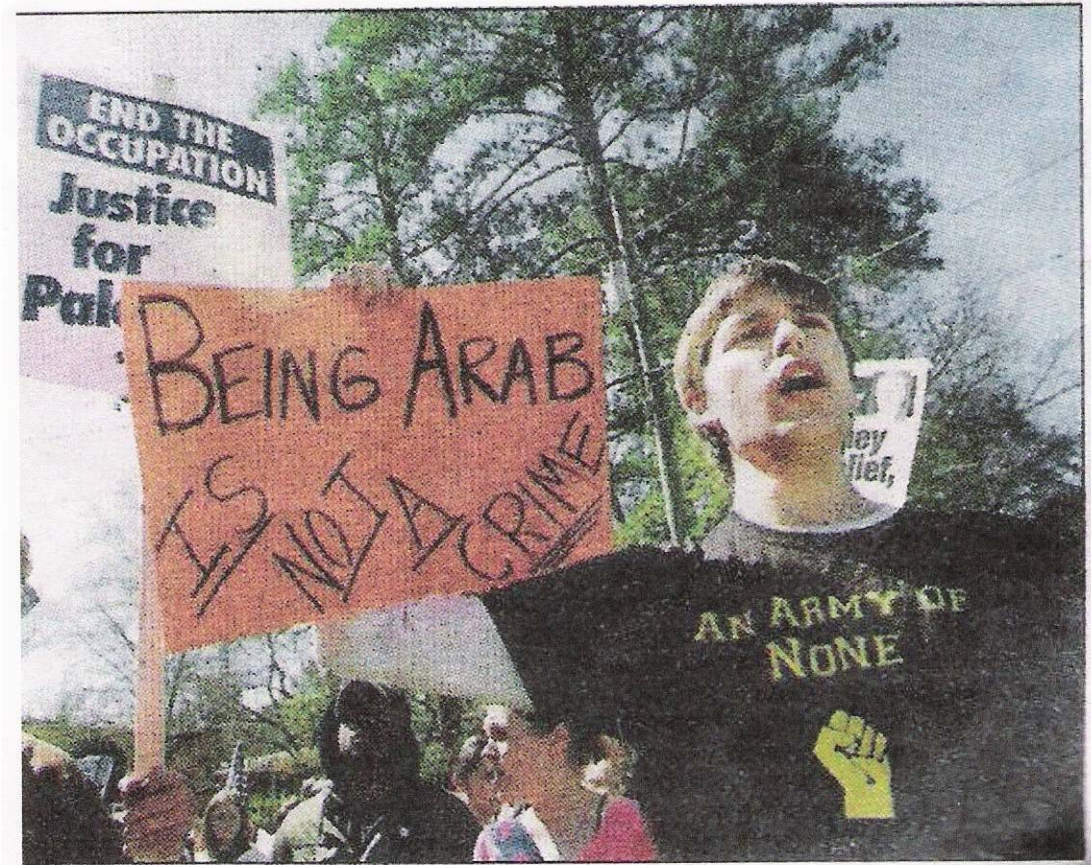


GI SPECIAL 4C18:



Ben Lassiter of Greensboro, N.C. at a rally demanding the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Iraq, organized at Fayetteville, North Carolina, home of Ft. Bragg and the Pope AFB, 3.18.06 (Photo David Smith, Fayetteville Observer, 3.19.06)

**“This Is Worse Than
Baghdad. What My
Country Has Become
Sickens Me”**

[Thanks to Ward Reilly, Veterans For Peace, and PB, who sent this in.]

March 20, 2006 by Christian Parenti, Common Dreams. Christian Parenti, a frequent contributor to The Nation on international affairs, is the author of *The Freedom: Shadows and Hallucinations in Occupied Iraq* (New Press).

A column of American military veterans of wars in Iraq, Vietnam and points in between, as well as parents and families of soldiers, marched into New Orleans Sunday chanting radical cadences and flying a 1776 version of the American flag.

Young Iraq vets led the column of roughly 250 through the grey wrecked landscape, many wearing their desert camouflage uniforms, with upside-down American flag patches on their shoulders, sporting shades, beards, kaffeeas, and chests full metals.

At night and along the roads the conversation frequently turns to PTSD, poverty, depleted uranium-caused cancer, unpaid student loans, Ramadi, Tikrit, IEDs and the intense camaraderie of this new movement.

Older veterans, mostly from the Vietnam war, who helped a younger generation of soldiers to launch Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) are still as angry as they were thirty years ago, but their once-youthful anger and grief has been tempered by a generation of struggle. And it is upon this platform that the young Iraq vets are now building their piece of the movement.

"Our motto is that never again will one generation of veterans turn their back on another," said Dave Cline a long-time activist and early member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

The column spent the six days prior to arriving in New Orleans tromping and caravanning from Mobile, Alabama through the devastation that is, still, the Gulf Coast. Along the way the vets and their supporters left teams to help "muck out" some of the trashed homes along the small towns of the Gulf Coast. But the protest's larger aim was to make the connections between the devastation here and the ruin of Iraq. The protesters say corruption, incompetence and inhumanity mark both.

"All the money that is going to Iraq could be going down here," says former Army sniper and IVAW member Garrett Reppenhagen.

According to the IVAW, the invasion and occupation of Iraq could cost \$2.65 trillion. Other numbers mentioned along the march were the more than 2,400 American troops and 100,000 Iraqis killed.

At times the connections between Iraq and the Gulf Coast became all too real, or even surreal. The ruined homes, lack of water and sporadic electricity along the way reminded many vets of the war zones in Iraq and Afghanistan that some had left only months before.

"In Gulfport I heard a pop or a snap and looked back and one of my guys took a knee," said Navy corps and combat vet Charles Anderson, referring to the

common military position of kneeling on one knee in preparation for action. "I went back to him, put my hand on him and told him: 'It's OK, we're in Mississippi now.'"

On Thursday, the thirty-eighth anniversary of the My Lai massacre, the marchers were camped deep in the wrecked bayou country east of New Orleans and the mouth of Lake Pontchartrain. In a clearing by a brackish creek, among a forest of dry, ashen-colored, half-topped pine trees, the vets listened to the stories of local residents who spoke from a small plywood stage about the horrors of the storm and the abandonment that followed. Bereft of state or federal aid, many of the people there were still in bare survival mode.

A local man named Raymond Couture broke down in tears as he told his story of finding thirty-four corpses in a local nursing home.

"They ain't done nothing for us here yet, so I know they ain't done nothing for them people in Iraq."

Then the vets and military families spoke. Tina Garnanez, a young Navajo, lesbian and vet, spoke of her experiences in Iraq. She described the track record of lies, broken promises and rising violence in Iraq as mirroring the history of broken treaties, genocide and poverty that shape reservation life in the United States.

Dinner in the broken forest was alligator gumbo; the IVAW kids partied out and then slept under the stars.

Later, in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, Demond Mullins, who returned from heavy combat in Iraq only five months ago, looked out at the ravaged, filthy wreckage in a quiet fury.

"I can't believe this. This is worse than Baghdad. What my country has become sickens me."

The march from Mobile to New Orleans marks a new stage in organizing among Iraq veterans and thus a new stage for the peace movement.

A year ago IVAW was, in reality, mostly just a good idea and a small speakers bureau.

Now it is a real organization and a key piece in the larger coalition of groups like Veterans for Peace and Military Families Speak Out that make up the heart of peace movement.

MORE:

“Millard Said He Did Not Feel He Was Defending The US

Constitution While Stationed In Iraq”

March 19 By Shannell Jefferson, Staff Writer, Atlanta Progressive News

“I signed up at age 17 to defend the US constitution,” for the military, “but this is the first time I feel that I’m protecting the constitution,” Geoff Millard, 25, US Army Sgt., said during his speech, in regards to his peace and justice activism.

Millard said he did not feel he was defending the US constitution while stationed in Iraq, and he thanked his “family,” meaning several of his fellow soldiers present, for being there for him.

Many organizations participated in the March, including Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), Veterans for Peace (VFP), Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Military Families Speak Out, Gold Star Families for Peace, Common Ground Collective, Save Ourselves (SOS), People's Hurricane Relief Fund, and United Peace Relief. Hurricane evacuees also participated.



www.ivaw.net

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.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Two Soldiers Killed By Indirect Fire At Operating Base Speicher

March 18, 2006 MULTI-NATIONAL FORCE-IRAQ COMBINED PRESS INFORMATION CENTER Release A060318a

TIKRIT, Iraq: Two Task Force Band of Brothers' Soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division were killed and another wounded in an indirect fire attack on Contingency Operating Base Speicher, northwest of Tikrit, March 16.

The wounded Soldier is being treated in a local military medical facility.

Airborne Soldier Killed At Samarra

3.17.06 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS RELEASE
Number: 06-03-01C

TIKRIT, Iraq: A Task Force Band of Brothers Soldier from the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division was shot and killed while manning an observation post in Samarra March 16.

THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO COMPREHENSIBLE REASON TO BE IN THIS EXTREMELY HIGH RISK LOCATION AT THIS TIME, EXCEPT THAT A CROOKED POLITICIAN WHO LIVES IN THE WHITE HOUSE WANTS YOU THERE, SO HE WILL LOOK GOOD.

That is not a good enough reason.



A U.S. soldier at the scene of a car bomb attack in Baghdad March 13, 2006. (AP)

Two U.S. Troops Wounded At Duluiyah

March 20, 2006 The Daily Herald Co

A U.S. military statement said American troops responded to insurgents in Duluiyah who opened fire with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades. Two U.S. soldiers were wounded, the statement said.

TROOP NEWS



Demanding troops be brought home now, marchers fill Times Square in New York March 18, 2006. Anti-war protesters marched through cities across the world, three years after the invasion of Iraq, calling for U.S. and British troops to pull out. REUTERS/Seth Wenig

“I Think It Cost Us More Than It’s Worth”

March 19, 2006 By Kristy Eckert, THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Courtney Kuhns, who has a 2-year-old daughter, Mackenzie, hopes that something good results from her husband’s death.

Army Sgt. Larry Kuhns Jr., an outgoing and outdoorsy man of 24, supported the war. He was killed in June in a grenade attack.

“I guess it’s something that has to be done,” said Mrs. Kuhns, who lives in the Youngstown area. “But I think it cost us more than it’s worth.”

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.

Father Avenging Son’s Death In Iraq Is Ready To Go Home: “I Shouldn’t Even Have Come,” He Now Says.

March 18, 2006 CHARLES J. HANLEY, The Associated Press

In the desert chill, on the lonely nighttime roads of Iraq, Joe Johnson looks out over his machine gun and thinks of Justin.

It was on Easter morning 2004 that a chaplain and a colonel appeared on Joe and Jan Johnson’s Georgia doorstep with the news. Justin, the boy Joe had fished and hunted with, the soldier son who’d gone off to Iraq a month earlier, was suddenly dead at 22, killed by a roadside bomb planted in a Baghdad slum.

Today it’s Joe who mans the M-240 atop a Humvee, warily watching the sides of the road, an unlikely Army corporal at 48, a father who came here for revenge, a Christian missionary on a crusade against Islam, and a man who, after six months at war, is ready to go home.

“I shouldn’t even have come,” he now says. And if he leaves bloody Iraq with no blood on his hands, he says, that’s fine, too.

The Johnson family story is unique, even strange. But in a war where soldiers have heard an ever-changing medley of reasons for fighting, Joe Johnson’s may be as simple and direct as any -- and to many, as troubling.

He wasn’t there that day the tragic news arrived in Rome, Ga. Instead, the self-employed house-builder was in Fort Lewis, Wash., trying to qualify for a place in a Washington National Guard unit ticketed for Iraq.

With six years of long-ago Army and Navy service, Johnson had joined the National Guard in 2003, wanting to serve his country again, this time in combat, and to go to Iraq

while his son was there. A year with both husband and son at war would be easier on Jan than two years separately, he reasoned.

The death of Justin, a 1st Cavalry Division machine gunner, stunned his parents with a shock that lingers still.

“What were the odds, of thousands of people here, that somebody in my family would get killed?” the grieving father asked.

At that point, Johnson said, “I decided it was too soon to leave home.” Jan was too distraught.

But last April 11, a year and a day after his son was killed, Johnson told his Iraq-bound Georgia National Guard unit, the 48th Infantry Brigade, he was ready to join them. They ended up at this dustblown base in Iraq’s far west, pulling escort duty for fuel convoys on the bomb-pocked desert highways from Jordan.

Why did he do it? The wiry lean Georgian, an easy-talking man with a boyish, sunburned face, tried to answer the question that won't go away.

“It’s a lot of things combined,” he said. “One, a sense of duty. I was pissed off at the terrorists for 9/11 and other atrocities. Second, I’d only trained. I wanted combat.” And then, he said, “there’s some revenge involved. I’d be lying if I said there wasn’t.”

But there was more on the mind of this man who has done Church of God missionary work as far afield as Peru and the Arctic.

“I don’t really have love for Muslim people,” Johnson said. “I’m sure there are good Muslims. I try not to be racist.” Although he hasn’t read the Quran, or spoken with Muslims, he has “heard” the Islamic holy book “teaches to kill Jews and infidels. And it’s hard to love people who hate you.”

He could love Iraqi children, though, and said he’d hoped “to see them grow up to know right and wrong.”

Somewhere along the way, however, the righteous passion cooled, as the over-aged corporal, like tens of thousands of other American soldiers here, faced the reality of Iraq.

Was it last Christmas morning, when roadside bombs rocked his convoy one after another, and Johnson thought he was next? Or was it when speeding civilian cars passed the Americans’ Humvees and Johnson failed to level his gun and open fire, which “I think anyone else,” fearing car bombs, “would have done.”

“I really don’t want to kill innocent people,” he now says. “I don’t want to live with that the rest of my life.”

Most of all, it might have been the telephone calls home to Jan, who was dealing not only with depression and other health problems, but also with the prospect that their elder soldier son, Josh, 26, might be sent to Iraq or Afghanistan.

"I don't like that Joe's there," Jan Johnson said when called by satellite telephone from al-Asad. "But it's something he felt he had to do. People heal in different ways. This is how he heals after Justin's death."

"She's ready for me to come home," Joe Johnson concludes.

He will. His battalion exits Iraq in early May, when Johnson's own enlistment term, coincidentally, expires. "That's it," he said, no re-enlistment for him.

But what about revenge?

"If I go home and didn't kill a terrorist, it's not going to ruin my life," he said. "Maybe I'd just as soon not. I don't know what it would do to my head."

Once back home among the northwest Georgia pines, he has one last ceremonial act in mind, removing the silver-toned bracelet he's worn on his right wrist throughout his deployment, bearing Justin's name and date of death. Joe Johnson's mission will have been accomplished.

Whatever it was, he said, "I got it out of my system."

Got That Right: Bring Them All Home Now



Imad Khadduri, Free Iraq March 15, 2006

The New Issue Of Traveling Soldier Is Out!

This issue features:

1. "We definitely needed something more, more armor than just plywood and sandbags because that wasn't really going to stop much" says Iraq vet Joseph Woods in the first installment of a three part interview with Traveling Soldier's T Barton.

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/2.06.woods.php>

2. "I have not heard a worthwhile nor just reason for staying the course" says Iraq veteran Captain Justin Gordon.

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/2.06.gordon.php>

3. "The government had a plan, but it did not include the poor black people of the south" An active duty soldier speaks out about the war on Iraq and the abandonment of Katrina victims.

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/2.06.soldiermedic.php>

4. Media Chatter Ignored Soldiers for Cindy Sheehan

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/2.06.sheehan.php>

5. How the Soldiers Stopped the Vietnam War: a book review of the newly republished classic, *Soldiers in Revolt*.

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/2.06.cortright.php>

6. **Download the new Traveling Soldier to pass it out at your school, workplace, or at nearby base.**

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/TS12.pdf>

A Disillusioned American Soldier's Return From Iraq

18 March 2006 By Corine Lesnes, Le Monde

One thing has become intolerable to him: fatty food. French fries, hamburgers. Since he's been back from Iraq, soldier Erik Bunker hasn't been able to go into a fast-food restaurant, although before he went to them "all the time."

He can't bring himself to watch television. "There are lots of things about Western society that don't work for me any more," he says.

At 23, Erik Bunker has already spent three years in Iraq and Afghanistan with the parachutists of the 82nd Airborne Division.

He signed up in order to pay for his studies. Now the Army is financing his tuition at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota at the rate of \$1,000 a month. He has begun to let his beard grow, a sign of recovery far from the Army. The Democrats have tried to enroll him as a candidate in the next elections, but he has resisted.

"I am sorry for whoever is the next president," he says. "The situation in Iraq can't be fixed."

Three years after the start of the war, two thirds of Americans think as he does, according to the latest polls. "The clan culture has gotten the upper hand," the soldier explains.

But Erik Bunker also deplores the prejudices that are rife and hardy in the United States: "There are a pile of stereotypes about Muslims. People think they're the same as terrorists."

On the ground, the young soldier never received any psychological support.

Officers did not encourage consultations. They gave a name to those who sought help: "psychos."

After leaving the Army, Erik began to have panic attacks: "That happened to me whenever people began to argue." He's had nightmares, suffered from anxiety: classic symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The trauma has decreased since he began to militate with other veterans.

They are campaigning against the administration's plan to revise the criteria to define PTSD in order to limit reparations.

"In Vietnam, there were secure zones where people could recuperate," indicates Steve Robinson, director of an association that advocates for veterans in an interview with the Washington Post. "That doesn't happen in Iraq; every place is a war zone."

“The Nine-And-A-Half-Year Veteran Was Considering Deserting The Army And Claiming Refugee Status In Canada”



Sergeant Patrick Hart strikes a pose on top of a tank, as part of the army's 541st Maintenance Battalion. The parts lying in the background are tank tracks.

[Thanks to Clancy Sigel, who sent this in.]

“It’s more important for me to raise my son right than to have a boxed flag on the wall and a picture I can show my son and say, ‘This was Daddy.’

“We both strongly believe that if he were to deploy that would’ve been it. I know that Rian’s terribly proud of his father, as I am proud of my husband. We definitely did the right thing.”

By Peter Koch, Buffalo Artvoice's 2006 [Excerpts]

Sergeant Patrick Hart spoke calmly into the receiver. “Honey, I’m not coming home,” he told his wife, Jill. “It’s okay, I’m with friends. I’ll contact you in a few days.” And then he hung up the phone.

Jill Hart sat dumbfounded in the couple’s Fort Campbell, Kentucky home, knowing she was supposed to pick up Pat from the Clarksburg Greyhound station later that day. He’s such a practical joker, she thought after a while, he’s probably coming home early to surprise me with Ozzfest tickets or something like that.

But Pat Hart wasn’t joking, and he didn’t come home, not that night or the next. As it turned out, he was 800 miles away, in another country, where in two days he would officially be AWOL from the United States Army.

Four days earlier, on a Thursday, Pat had boarded a bus for Buffalo, his hometown, where his parents still live. He was on a four-day pass, his “last little fling” up in Buffalo before deploying to Iraq.

He planned to see a Bills preseason game with his parents, Jim and Paula, “To see if J.P. Losman is the real deal or not,” he told his company commander, and to visit the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto.

But Pat had other plans in Toronto, too. Unbeknownst to anyone save his parents, the nine-and-a-half-year veteran was considering deserting the Army and claiming refugee status in Canada.

Pat doesn't look like one might expect, or at least he didn't look like I expected him to. When I visited the Harts in Toronto on a misty gray Thursday last month, I was expecting a thin, tightly wound, clean-shaven guy with a high, short crew cut. Though he still has the bulldog build of a career soldier and an Army crew cut that's growing in, Pat has allowed his goatee to grow long and bushy, and he wears a Nike t-shirt that exposes his heavily tattooed arms, everything from an anarchy symbol to Jill's name.

As he told me the story of how he and Jill and their three-year-old son, Rian, ended up in Toronto, he smokes cigarettes like a chimney, sometimes setting the ashtray right on his lap. He and Jill are good storytellers—honest, clear and plainspoken—often finishing each other's sentences, quirky details and irregularities cropping up here and there. What they say is both significant and relevant in our war-weary times.

“My Heart Just Wasn't In It No More”

It's impossible to pinpoint the exact moment when Pat, previously a mild-mannered, loyal soldier, decided he would risk everything to start a new life in a new country.

One critical moment that Pat does recall, however, was during some down time spent a world away, in the middle of a forsaken Kuwaiti desert.

He was stationed there in 2003 with the Army's 541st Maintenance Battalion, ordering supplies for vehicles—Humvee tires, track shoes for tanks and the like. “I was like the Pep Boys of the Army,” he says. He also guarded the gates at several camps, Wolf, Arifjan and the Kuwaiti Naval Base, from behind a .50-caliber machine gun.

It was there in Kuwait that some of his friends, returning from a deployment across the berm in Iraq, told him horrific tales, shared with him grisly photographs and made disturbing remarks about what they'd seen and done there.

“One of my buddies is telling me that he has a six-year-old daughter,” Pat says, “but now he sees the faces of these Iraqi kids that he's run over every night before he goes to bed.”

Because of the increasing number of ambushes on convoys, an order was passed down early in the war that convoys were not to stop for anything. And Iraqi children, accustomed to convoys stopping and handing out food and candy, started getting run over.

Pat continues, “His buddy standing next to him says, ‘I don't know how many Iraqi kids I've pulled out of the front grill of my truck. Ain't nothing but speed bumps to me.’”

The grisly photographs Pat's friends snapped in Iraq began to haunt him. One series shows what happened when a truck failed to stop for a checkpoint that his friends were working: The truck is absolutely riddled with bullet holes, including about two dozen in the windshield. “They killed everyone inside, except for one,” Pat says. The sole survivor is being treated for bullet wounds in some of the

pictures. Apparently, he says, the medics were angry that the guards didn't kill him, too, for security reasons.



A bullet-riddled truck that failed to stop at an American military checkpoint. All but one of the occupants was killed.

Another series shows two children who appear to have been burned by explosions or chemicals. Pat tellingly describes the first boy as being “about my son’s size.” Neither child can be more than three years old, and it’s impossible to look at their pained expressions and call them “collateral damage.”

A third series, by far the most disturbing, shows corpses of mostly Iraqi soldiers, though some of the dead are conspicuously noncombatants. They have either burned to death or been killed by large-caliber machine guns. One dead Iraqi soldier’s index finger has been shoved up his nose by American soldiers, and the caption reads, “This is what happens when you’re picking your nose instead of watching your sector.”

“It’s just the disregard for a human being, you know...it’s a dead body.” Pat takes a long pause before continuing. “So I’m thinking, ‘If I go over there, am I going to come back mentally screwed up like those two guys? Am I going to be able to interact with my son properly?’ I love my son, I don’t want to do anything to hurt him.”

Then, in May of last year, Pat watched British Member of Parliament George Galloway fillet the US Senate, who’d fingered him in the United Nations Oil-for-Food scandal.

In Galloway’s prepared statement, he turned the tables on the Senate, famously saying, “I told the world that Iraq, contrary to your claims, did not have weapons of mass destruction. I told the world, contrary to your claims, that Iraq had no connections to al-Qaeda. I told the world, contrary to your claims, that Iraq had no connection to the atrocity on 9/11/2001. I told the world, contrary to your claims, that the Iraqi people would resist a British and American invasion of their country, and that the fall of Baghdad would not be the beginning of the end, but merely the end of the beginning. Senator, in

everything I said about Iraq, I turned out to be right and you turned out to be wrong, and 100,000 people paid with their lives; 1,600 of them American soldiers sent to their deaths on a pack of lies; 15,000 of them wounded, many of them forever disabled on a pack of lies.”

At that same time, Pat says, younger soldiers, 18- and 19-year-old kids, were asking him questions about the war because he'd been to the Middle East before.

“‘What’s it like, Sergeant Hart?’ ‘Why are we going over there? There’s no weapons of mass destruction, and Saddam Hussein’s out of power two years now.’ ‘Osama bin Laden’s in Afghanistan, he ain’t in Iraq, Sergeant Hart. What the hell?’”

He found that he didn’t have any good answers for his men. “What could I tell them?” Pat says. “‘Shut up and do your job, because I’m an NCO and you’re a private, and you’re going to listen to me?’ That doesn’t hold much water when people’s lives are at stake.”

After hearing Galloway speak, Pat says, it was clear that his heart just wasn’t in it anymore, and that’s when he started thinking about desertion.

Watching Pat and Jill interact, it’s easy to imagine that this is how it has been all along: Pat making his decision to leave the Army and Jill standing steadfastly beside him. Both speak adamantly and easily against the war and against the Bush administration’s motives for waging it.

But there are clues scattered around their simple apartment that things were once different. On the couch, two pillows brightly display the red, white and blue of the American flag. A homemade scrapbook sits on the coffee table, meticulously put together while Pat was in Kuwait. The pictures show a trim, tanned Pat Hart wearing fatigues and goofing with fellow soldiers, posing behind machine guns and on top of tanks.

But it’s what lies between the photographs that reveals the most. Each photograph is dressed up patriotically, with a border of stars or American flags. One page says, “My Husband, My Hero,” along with the definition of “America” and “freedom.” Another lists the seven values of the Army: duty, loyalty, respect, selfless service, integrity, honor, personal courage.

This scrapbook was not assembled by someone who was ambivalent about the military.

In fact, if you asked Jill how she felt about Pat’s decision to leave the Army, decision made, incidentally, on her birthday last year, she’d tell you that she “couldn’t even grasp how to support what he was doing.”

Jill Hart is a straightforward, cut-through-the-bullshit kind of person, reliable and strong. Over the years, she’s worked hard to help Pat advance his military career, partly for his own good, of course, but mostly for the good of their young son, Rian. When Pat decided to desert without consulting her, he turned Jill’s life completely upside-down.



A Humvee destroyed by a roadside IED

“I remember thinking, ‘I don’t know what he’s doing, but this is my life and I’ve dedicated the last eight years to the Army and being an Army wife and helping Army families,’” Jill says. “I can’t walk away from this. I do a good job, I sleep really well at night. I’m a red, white and blue, flag-waving Army spouse. I don’t care what he’s doing, I can’t support this.”

She is being quite literal about the red, white and blue; she decorated their house in Kentucky in those colors. The wallpaper borders were red, white and blue; the sofas were blue; and a huge picture of Rosie the Riveter hung on the wall next to the famous Time magazine cover of a sailor kissing a girl in Times Square on V-E Day.

“Our lives were, ‘Let’s hang our flag the highest, let’s wave it the proudest,’” she says.

If it’s true that there’s a woman behind every successful man, Pat couldn’t have had a better woman standing behind him. Besides being the head of the company’s family readiness group, which helps spouses prepare when their husbands or wives are deploying overseas, she also worked in the company commander’s office. She made sure everything was square for Captain James Pierce, made sure he always looked good.

“He referred to me, way up the chain of command, as his ‘efficiency expert,’” she says. “This was all a political maneuver. It wasn’t because I enjoy helping people, though I do, but it was all about how I could get myself between the command and my husband to ensure that he’d have the best career possible.”

She collected recommendations from officers for Pat to go to Warrant Officer Candidate School and made sure he was a “golden boy,” Jill says. “Anybody will tell you, they couldn’t touch Pat, because I did so much and he was so squared away.” Then he decided to desert.

On the day he went AWOL, Wednesday, August 24, Pat put in an afternoon call to Jill. “I think for the first 45 minutes of the phone call, I was ranting like a lunatic,” Jill says. “I wouldn’t even let him answer. I’d ask questions and just keep on talking.”

Finally, though, she ran out of steam, and Pat got a word in edgewise: “This is how I feel, this is how I believe,” he told her. “I’m not asking you to believe in it. I’m asking you to believe in me.”

That was too easy, though, Jill says. “I hadn’t made any decisions yet.”

She was worried that he was endangering Rian by defecting. Rian has epilepsy, and his medication, four pills a day, is expensive.

Jill was worried, rightfully so, that Rian would lose health coverage when Patrick deserted, and the medicine would be unaffordable. In fact, that health care was the main reason that Pat kept re-enlisting in the Army, against what he calls his “better judgment.”

He spent his first stint in the military, from 1992 to 1995, in Germany as part of the 21st Theater Support Command. From Germany, he participated in Operation Provide Hope/Provide Promise, where he dropped food and medical supplies to war-torn Yugoslavia. After knocking around Buffalo for the next five years and finding nothing promising, he joined up again, and was assigned to the 541st Maintenance Battalion, which was deployed to Kuwait from 2003 to 2004. In Kuwait, he re-enlisted for three years, this time because he now had an epileptic infant at home, and no other prospects for a job with steady health care.

Surprisingly, it was the Army itself that, in the end, prompted Jill to cast her lot with Pat’s.

On Thursday, the day after Pat went AWOL, she was on the phone with Captain Pierce. She’d been keeping him informed about Pat’s whereabouts, forwarding him Pat’s e-mails and letting Pierce know when he called. Pierce asked Jill if there was any way she could get Patrick back.

“I’ve been racking my brain,” she told him, “and there’s no way to get him back here. He’s set in his ways, this is what he wants to do, there’s nothing I can do about it.”

What the commander said next shocked Jill, and again turned her world upside-down: “Next time you talk to him, tell him that you talked to me and we’re going to shut down your Tri-Care (the Army health benefit).”

Jill asked, “Why would that get him back here?”

“I hope Rian doesn’t have a seizure,” Pierce replied.

In the next split second, while Jill’s rage rose from her stomach, Pierce went on: “Also, I could arrange something with Blanchfield (Fort Campbell’s Army hospital) where they could contact your husband and tell him you’ve been sexually assaulted, and he needs to come back right away.”

Jill’s mind was made up instantly. “Sir,” she said, the first time she had addressed him so formally, “this conversation is over,” and hung up the phone.

“You can do whatever you want to me,” Jill says now, “but you will not attack my husband or my son, because then the lion comes out, and that’s it.”

And that was it. Within 24 hours, Jill had a check in hand to cover the cost of a moving truck and gas, and five soldiers at the house, packing up their belongings, relocation benefits which were owed to Jill, according to the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

Though he couldn’t tell Jill he was planning to desert; she acknowledges that she would’ve turned him in if she had known ahead of time; Patrick did have his parents’ support from the beginning.

It was actually his father, Jim, who made initial contact with the national Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors (CCCO) and the War Resisters Support Campaign in Toronto on Pat’s behalf.

“Leading up to Pat’s deployment, I had a real strong sense that the person who went, whether he survived or not, wasn’t going to be the person who came back,” Jim says. So when Pat, home on leave last June, told Jim he didn’t want to go back, his dad started making the necessary contacts.

Jim and Paula Hart are gentle, soft-spoken people. Sitting in their Riverside home, only five blocks from the Niagara River, it is clear where Pat gets his gentle-hearted parenting skills. They say that he was a friendly and happy-go-lucky kid growing up, loyal to his friends. Not much has changed.

Leading up to his four-day pass in August, Pat had his parents nervous and slightly confused. “Sometimes I would talk to him when he called on his cell phone, and he would be the Patrick who had reservations about going,” Jim says. “Other times he would be talking about what he was going to do with his hazardous duty pay, or talking about Warrant Officer School.”

“When he came up,” Paula says, “we really didn’t know if he had made a decision yet about what he was going to do.”

So they settled on the premise that Pat was simply coming up for a visit.

Pat was sick to his stomach for the whole 25-hour bus ride up from Tennessee. “I hadn’t made up my mind yet. After nine and a half years, to desert the Army, it was just tearing me up.”

The Bills game on Saturday was an amazing 27-7 preseason rout of the Green Bay Packers, but “there was this cloud hanging over us,” Paula says. The next day they visited the Canadian National Exhibition. As Pat waited to make contact with the War Resisters Support Campaign, he missed his bus, so Jim bought him a one-way plane ticket to Memphis, just in case he had a last-minute change of heart.

The next day, Monday, they met Michelle Robidoux from the War Resisters Support Campaign, and Pat decided he had all the help he needed to desert. It was then that he took a deep breath, picked up the phone and called Jill.

Life, Or 30 Years

Today the family lives in Toronto, and it's an uneasy existence at best. The high-rise where they make their temporary residence is much like any you'd see along Toronto's waterfront, pleasant and non-descript. Inside, the Harts' flat tells the same story; it's nice, with a view of Lake Ontario, but the place looks bare. Several months after they moved in, the white-painted walls are still mostly bare, and half-packed moving boxes lie stacked in the corners.

The television sits on the floor, and a strong wind off the lake; a wind that has transformed the lake into a sandy-brown, churning mess; blows through an open window, adding to the emptiness. The Harts have been slow to unpack because they still don't have any confirmation that they'll be able to stay in Canada. They've applied for refugee status through the Immigration and Refugee Board, but have yet to receive a hearing date.

There are other American deserters—although “war resisters” is the preferred term—currently living in Toronto. Two of them, Jeremy Hinzman and Brandon Hughey, have already applied for refugee status but were denied at their hearing last March. The ruling made very clear who qualifies for refugee status, and it seems that doesn't include war resisters.

Here's what the ruling said: “I find that the claimants are not (Geneva) Convention refugees, as they have not established that they have a well-founded fear of persecution for a Convention ground in the US. I also find that they are not persons in need of protection, in that their removal to the US would not subject them personally to a risk to their lives or to a risk of cruel and unusual treatment or punishment, and in that there are no substantial grounds to believe that their removal to the US will subject them personally to a danger of torture.”

Hinzman and Hughey have appealed their case in Canada's federal court, however, and nobody expects an official ruling on the appeal for months.

If no such provision is made, and Hinzman and Hughey lose their appeal, the Harts aren't sure what they'll do. If they go back to the US, Pat faces 30 years in federal prison. There's always the possibility of trying another country, but none of the Harts have passports. “I really haven't given it much thought,” Pat says. “I've got a positive feeling about his appeal in federal court.”

In the meantime, the Harts are basically living as though they're Canadian citizens. They have access to the Canadian health system and Social Services, which, Jill says, “is not a goal, not something I want to do.” Being a former social worker herself, she understands the stigma attached to Social Services, but the Harts are in the midst of a lengthy process to get working visas.

After arriving in the country, they had to get physicals, X-rays and blood work to apply as refugees. Once that paperwork came back from Ottawa, they had to send working visa applications off to Alberta. They finally got their work permits in January, but they still need SINs (the Canadian equivalent of a Social Security Number) before they can get work.

They receive help from the War Resisters Support Campaign, the group that initially assured Pat of their support should he go AWOL. The Harts also do speaking engagements around the country, where they pass the hat. “We kind of live off the donations of the Canadian people,” Pat says.

“That’s what’s most important”

The Harts expect to be able to work by the end of this month. “We want to contribute to Canadian society,” Jill says. “We’re ready to get on with our lives and live as a family. And that’s what’s most important to me, living as a family.”

While it was probably the hardest decision he’s every made, and certainly the hardest time they’ve ever faced as a couple, it seems neither Pat nor Jill is looking back. In fact, Pat’s parents say he’s fallen in love with Jill all over again since they moved to Toronto. Whatever the Harts encounter in the future, it’s clear that they have each other.

“I took a vow to stand by his side, through good times and bad,” Jill says. “I’m not going to leave him alone in Canada during his first bad time. That’s not me, that’s not us.

“If you ever get the opportunity to see my husband interact with my son, I don’t have to say anything. It speaks for itself.

“It’s more important for me to raise my son right than to have a boxed flag on the wall and a picture I can show my son and say, ‘This was Daddy.’

“We both strongly believe that if he were to deploy that would’ve been it. I know that Rian’s terribly proud of his father, as I am proud of my husband. We definitely did the right thing.”



(photo: Rose Mattrey)

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Military Retaining More Gays: “A Majority Of Military Personnel Felt Comfortable Around Openly Gay Colleagues”

March 19, 2006 By Bryan Bender, Boston Globe Staff

WASHINGTON: The US military allowed at least 36 gay soldiers last year to stay in uniform, despite efforts by their commanders or fellow soldiers to have them discharged under the "don't ask, don't tell" policy, according to a review of hundreds of cases in which soldiers sought to remain in uniform without denying their homosexuality.

The number of soldiers allowed to stay despite being identified as gay -- 36 of 120 contested cases -- was substantially higher than in 2004, when 22 of 125 soldiers prevailed, and three times as many as in 2003, when only 12 of 107 were able to persuade their commanders or a military review board to keep them in uniform, the data show.

The Pentagon declined to explain why more gay soldiers were being retained, but the lawyers who represent soldiers challenging cases under the policy say the Pentagon seems to have softened its stance on homosexuality.

The lawyers attributed the change both to a growing acceptance of gays within the ranks and to the military's need to keep more highly trained soldiers in the Iraq War.

"As the country has changed, so have the people in the military," said Sharra Greer, director of law and policy at the nonprofit Service Members' Legal Defense Network, which represents gay soldiers challenging their dismissals. "More commanders are not enforcing (don't ask, don't tell) strictly."

In several of the cases over the past year, service members who were found to have listed their homosexuality on Internet dating sites were reprimanded but returned to duty, according to the case files. In other cases, senior officers were swayed by a service member's strong performance reviews.

"The equations for commands have shifted," Greer said. "They are under enormous pressure to retain people. They do a cost-benefit analysis and we are hearing the same thing: 'I really don't care if you are gay and I am not going to kick you out.'"

Recent studies have shown that many soldiers dismissed in past years under "don't ask, don't tell" tended to be in highly trained specialties now in demand, including linguists and medical technicians.

Meanwhile, observers have noted that the Defense Department has recently softened its position on the "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

For many years the Pentagon's public position was that the policy was crucial to maintaining "good order and discipline" and that having gay soldiers serve openly in the ranks would harm unit cohesion.

But recently, the military has stopped defending the policy, and merely notes that it is the law.

Last fall, Bill Carr, deputy undersecretary of defense for military personnel policy, described the policy to the armed forces' press service as "a choice the nation has made about its military."

A Pentagon spokeswoman, Lieutenant Colonel Ellen Krenke, asked why the policy is necessary, responded by e-mail message Thursday, writing: "The Department of Defense policy on homosexual conduct in the military implements a federal law enacted in 1993 after extensive hearings and debate. The law would need to be changed to affect the department's policy. We are complying with this statute."

Overall, the number of soldiers facing discharge under the policy has dropped steadily, from 1,273 in 2001 to 906 in 2002 and 787 in 2003, the most recent year available.

Most soldiers do not try to contest their dismissal, except to seek an honorable discharge. In total, since the advent of "don't ask, don't tell" in 1994, 9,682 members of the military have been discharged for homosexuality, according to the most recent statistics.

The Pentagon says it cannot explain the downward trend in cases.

"Since total discharge numbers are a compilation of individual cases throughout the Department of Defense, we cannot definitively say what has caused the decrease," Krenke said.

Under the policy, any service member can initiate proceedings against any other soldier, based on evidence that the soldier is gay. The relevant command then opens an inquiry. The standard for evidence is low, according to legal specialists and military regulations, and cases can turn on one soldier's testimony.

The service members being targeted can challenge the allegations before a panel of three to eight service members of equal or higher rank.

In the cases handled by the Service Members Legal Defense Network, Greer said, the soldiers did not deny their homosexuality, but rather argued that it did not affect their performance or their units' missions, and that the grounds for their removal were not sufficient.

Greer is also representing 10 service members who have been discharged since 2001 for being gay, and are suing Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld in federal court in Boston to be reinstated. The court has yet to issue an opinion on a motion last July by the government to dismiss the case.

Representative Martin T. Meehan, a Lowell Democrat, has sponsored legislation to repeal "don't ask, don't tell," citing figures from the US Government Accountability Office reporting that hundreds of gay soldiers who have been dismissed in recent years were trained in specialties considered crucial in the war on terrorism.

Yet the number of instances in which gay soldiers and their lawyers have persuaded commanders to drop investigations indicates that the standards for discharge are being applied less stringently, according to the data.

"During wartime the military is always desperate," said Aaron Belkin, director of the Center for Sexual Minorities in the Military and a political science professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara. "There have been a declining number of discharges when the bullets start flying."

Meanwhile, there is a growing body of evidence that attitudes have changed within the ranks.

A recent study by the Naval Postgraduate School found that a majority of military personnel felt comfortable around openly gay colleagues.

"There is no doubt that the attitudes within the military have changed," said Belkin.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Assorted Resistance Action



Damaged occupation police vehicle, hit by a roadside bomb, in Baghdad March 20, 2006. (AP Photo/Khalid Mohammed)

21/03/06 VANESSA ARRINGTON (AP) & By SINAN SALAHEDDIN, The Associated Press & Reuters & Aljazeera & March 18, 19, 20, 21 Reuters

Five police were wounded in two separate roadside bomb attacks targeting patrols in northern and southern Baghdad early Tuesday, police said.

Roadside bombs -- one just a few hundred yards from an Interior Ministry lockup in central Baghdad and one in a farming area south of Baghdad -- killed at least seven police and one prisoner. Four more were wounded and a police vehicle was destroyed.

Another Iraqi police officer with a joint American-Iraqi patrol was killed in Baghdad during fighting with insurgents in the Amariyah neighborhood, police said. Two others, including a policewoman in civilian clothes on her way home, were seriously injured.

A car bomb targeting a police checkpoint exploded in Baqouba, 50 kilometres northeast of Baghdad, killing one policeman and wounding another, authorities said. Another roadside bomb exploded on a police patrol, killing one officer and injuring 10 others, the Iraqi military said.

Militants killed two oil engineers leaving work at the Beiji refinery north of Baghdad. An electrical engineer and technician were killed at the nearby power station, Beiji police Lieutenant Khalaf Ayed Al-Janabi said.

In Mosul, three separate attacks on police patrols killed one officer and wounded four others and two civilians late Sunday.

Guerrillas opened fire on a former Baghdad mayor as he left home in the southern Dora neighborhood, causing serious injuries, police said.

Assailants in a speeding car shot and wounded a city council member for Karradah, a downtown Baghdad district,

Insurgents killed Raad al-Asali, the director of oil products in Mosul, 390 km (240 miles) north of Baghdad, as he was leaving his home, police said.

Insurgents killed a prison employee in Mosul.

A car bomb wounded two policemen in Gayara, near Mosul, police said.

Insurgents killed two security force members protecting oil facilities in Jarf al-Sakkhar, 80 km (50 miles) south of Baghdad.

A Baghdad policeman driving on a rural road in Latifiyah, about 20 miles south of the capital, was killed by gunmen, police said. Four men riding in the car were wounded.

Near the southern city of Basra, two officials of the Iraqi Islamic[collaborator] Party were killed by four attackers.

In the northern region of Kirkuk, two Iraqi soldiers were found stabbed to death two days after they were reported captured.

Armed attackers in a car killed Khudr Abdaly, the former head of the municipality in Ramadi, police said.

The U.S. military said in a statement that the head of the Iraqi armed forces was in a convoy struck by a roadside bomb near Kirkuk on Thursday, but escaped injury.

In the initial report on Thursday, Iraqi police said General Babakir Zebari, Iraq's chief of staff, was not in the motorcade, although it was comprised of vehicles he normally used. Three Iraqi soldiers were wounded in the attack, the U.S. military said on Saturday.

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

**Resistance Attack In Force
Overruns Police Station;
33 Prisoners Freed**

21/03/06 VANESSA ARRINGTON (AP) Baghdad

Insurgents stormed a jail about dawn Tuesday in the Sunni Muslim heartland north of Baghdad, killing at least 17 policemen and a courthouse guard. Authorities said all 33 prisoners in the lockup were freed and 10 attackers were killed in the battle.

As many as 100 insurgent fighters -- armed with automatic rifles and rocket-propelled grenades -- stormed the judicial compound in Muqdadiyah, about 100 kilometres northeast of the capital.

The assault began after the attackers fired a mortar round into the police and court complex, said police Brigadier Ali al-Jabouri.

After torching the police station, the insurgents detonated a string of roadside bombs as they fled, taking the bodies of many of their dead comrades with them, police said. At least 13 policemen and civilians and 15 insurgents were wounded in the attack.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

Straws In The Wind

Wall St. Journal 3.17.06

On a voice vote, the House agreed to a Democratic-backed amendment barring any use of the funds to establish permanent military bases in Iraq.

But together with prior appropriations for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the bill now would bring total emergency spending for defense and intelligence agencies to about \$400 billion since the September 2001 terror attacks.

Bush has a net positive rating of six Percentage points in rural areas, but suburbanites and city dwellers are lopsidedly negative.

OCCUPATION REPORT

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

U.S. Occupation Commands' Stupid Terror Tactics Recruit Even More Fighters To Kill U.S. Troops



Relatives mourn near the bodies of the dead killed in a U.S. raid in Tikrit March 15, 2006. Eleven people, most of them women and children were killed when a house was bombed during a U.S. raid north of Baghdad early Wednesday, police and relatives said. REUTERS/Sabah Al-Bazee

[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."

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

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



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[Thanks to David Honish, Veterans For Peace, who sent this in.]

GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out

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