

GI SPECIAL 4E16:

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



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

Sgt. Says: “We Are Truly Ruled By Idiots”

[These are some comments generated by a story that a maimed soldier back in hospital in the USA was being forced to pay for combat gear left behind when he was blown up. T]

May 15, 2006 by Douglas Herman, Strike-the-root.com [Excerpt]

Here are just a few remarks from servicemen who expressed a measure of disgust not usually found in letters to your average mainstream newspaper media.

US Army captain Thomas Pallardy:

“This is just another example of what has happened and is happening with the Armed Services since this stupid downsizing began.

When my son returned from Iraq , he was flown back on a military flight to the East Coast. From there he had to purchase a ticket to Denver and then to the local airport near his Duty Station.

He was never reimbursed for something he never should have had to pay for in the first place.

The real kicker was when he finished Basic, the cost of the uniforms he was issued was deducted from his final pay before leaving Boot Camp. Just what are these people thinking at Foggy Bottom. These types of individuals shouldn't even be working for us, period.”

Sgt Leroy Farmer, from Arizona, offered something from personal experience:

“I was lucky that my troops took care of me when I was hit in Iraq . My troops gathered all of my gear, even the gear cut off during medical treatment and stuck it in a couple bags. It was easier to declare a loss because I had remnants of the equipment.

That is not the case for most troops.

The Department of Defense dishonors itself by allowing its Departments to recoup money from combat wounded troops for equipment they can no longer be responsible for.”

Sgt. Frank Scaletta added:

“While our grandstanding politicians are hoodwinking the public about oil prices and the evil oil companies, these kids are being left out to dry. Disgraceful!! ”

US Navy petty officer Joel Jenkins wrote:

“TYPICAL GOVERNMENT ACTION, It doesn't matter that the 19 year old kid from NC will never walk again, or the 21 year old that that eats through a straw because

his jaw got shot off. As long as Uncle Sam still gets paid, they don't care. And I say this after having serving for going on 8 years . . . and still in this clusterfuck.”

Sgt. Dana K. Beausoleil also offered something from his own experience:

“While in Iraq my unit suffered several casualties. One soldier, an E-7, had his face literally smashed in. Almost all the bones in his face were broken and he lost three teeth.

“We MEDEVAC'd him out . . . 6 months later he was still on medical hold. He'd lost like 40 lbs and looked pretty rough but was fighting mad.

“It seems the Army doesn't want to replace his teeth that he lost in combat.

“So no it doesn't surprise me that this is happening in the army.

“They're the only service I know of that makes you pay for military issued equipment if you make a human error and break something that belongs to the US government by accident . . . but every other night I watched us lob 155 mm shells into the desert to "fire for effect" at no particular target just to let them know we were out there.

“We are truly ruled by idiots.”

Truly.

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 DIE IN HELICOPTER SHOT DOWN AT YUSIFIYAH

5/15/2006 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS
RELEASE Number: 06-05-01CJ

BAGHDAD, Iraq: Two Soldiers died May 14 when their helicopter was shot down during fighting in Yusifiyah. Names of the deceased are being withheld pending notification of next of kin.

TWO MARINES DIE FROM ENEMY ACTION IN AL ANBAR

5/15/2006 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS
RELEASE Number: 06-05-01C

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq: Two Marines assigned to Regimental Combat Team 7 died due to enemy action while operating in al Anbar Province May 14.

Hundreds Mourn Local Soldier



Teodoro Torres Sr. and Carmelita Torres, weep on the coffin of their son U.S. Army Reserve Spc. Teodoro Torres Jr. on Saturday in Rochester. MAX SCHULTE staff photographer

[Thanks to Anna Bradley, who sent this in.]

May 14, 2006 Fernando Diaz, Staff writer, The Rochester Democrat and Chronicle

Carmen Figueroa could barely walk to the steps of St. Michael's Church just before 11 a.m. Saturday.

"Oh, Father, I can't," she wailed as Father Laurence Tracy and another man helped her.

Moments later, pallbearers carried Figueroa's grandson's flag-draped, light blue coffin into the church.

"How I wish I could have kissed him and I couldn't," she lamented, sobbing inconsolably.

The family and friends of Teodoro "Tito" Torres Jr. expected to celebrate his homecoming from Iraq last week.

Instead, hundreds gathered to mourn his death.

The U.S. Army Reserve specialist was killed in Baghdad on May 5, along with two other soldiers who were assigned to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, when a bomb exploded near their vehicle.

Spc. Torres was 29.

"He was supposed to come back alive," said Domingo Martinez, one of the mourners who filled the large church at North Clinton and Clifford avenues.

Tracy said during the bilingual Mass that while certain deaths are simply tragic and others devoid of meaning, Spc. Torres' was neither.

"If the tragedy of his death moves us in some way," said Tracy, it should be "to take action to advance the end of the war so that never again will a family have to suffer the loss of another young man like Tito."

Spc. Torres' friends and a cousin shared warm memories about riding bikes and getting into trouble and how Tito was less than a phone call away no matter where he was.

"He is a hero in more ways than one. Please don't forget that," said Jorge Olmeda, a cousin, who also served as a pallbearer.

Many of those who attended the Mass also paid their last respects at Spc. Torres' interment at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery on Lake Avenue.

The color guard of Fort Drum's 10th Mountain Division fired a 21-gun salute, and Olmeda gently kissed the coffin after he and others placed it above the grave.

Army representatives presented Spc. Torres' parents and his wife, Yarissa Torres, with the numerous medals he was awarded posthumously as well as folded flags. Spc. Torres' five sisters and brother looked on.

Along with their memories and his things, it is all they have left of him.

His parents, Teodoro Torres Sr. and Carmelita Torres, wept through most of the solemn graveside service.

The faint notes of "Taps" mixed with the sounds of others crying or stifling the urge to.

Spc. Torres' parents then placed their heads on their son's coffin and clutched it as they cried.

"Hasta luego, quizás pronto," his father said, kissing the coffin. See you later, hopefully soon.

After countless people placed red and white roses and carnations on the coffin and said their last, long goodbyes, tears streamed down the face of Spc. Torres' young nephew, Victor Muñoz, who had remained quiet and brave through most of the service.

One of Spc. Torres' sisters, Rosalie Watts, said before the service that the family wanted to thank everyone "for the tremendous outpouring of support."

The thanks not only were for friends and neighbors in Rochester and elsewhere, but also for the politicians and people they'd never met before who joined in mourning Spc. Torres' death.

Illinois Soldier Killed In Iraq Roadside Bombing

May. 15, 2006 Associated Press, DELAVAN, ILL.

A 23-year-old U.S. Army platoon leader from central Illinois was killed in Iraq when the Humvee he was riding in was struck by a bomb, military officials said Monday.

Spc. Ron Gebur, a native of Delavan, died Saturday in the roadside attack in Baghdad, according to the Defense Department. Gebur was assigned as a sniper with the U.S. Army 4th Infantry Division, which is stationed at Ft. Hood, Texas.

Deborah Gebur said her son joined the military to follow in the footsteps of his grandfathers, who both served in Korea.

"He thought it was the right thing to do. He thought he could do some good over there," his father, Larry Gebur, told the (Pekin) Daily Times.

Gebur joined the National Guard in 2002 after graduating from high school in Delavan, a town of about 1,600 people south of Peoria, then enlisted in the Army about two years later, his parents said. He began his first tour of Iraq in December.

"He was very talented. He grew up learning to hunt with his grandfather, so that's how he learned to shoot. He was just so talented. He was a strong man. That's how I remember him," his mother said.

Other survivors include his wife, a U.S. Army medic, and a 9-month-old son. "He gave the ultimate sacrifice for us," his father said Monday, fighting back tears.

Wisconsin Soldier Killed By Roadside Bomb



Eric Clark, of Pleasant Prairie, Wis. AP Photo / Kenosha, The News

May 15, 2006 Star Tribune

PLEASANT PRAIRIE, Wis.: A 22-year-old soldier from Pleasant Prairie died when his Humvee hit a roadside bomb in Iraq, his family said Sunday.

U.S. Army Spc. Eric D. Clark died Thursday, his family said, although the U.S. Department of Defense did not formally announced the death.

He and another soldier were killed and a third was injured in the incident, said Joanne Marfechuk, Clark's mother.

"The world is not going to know what he could have done," she said. "He could have done miracles."

Marfechuk said the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks motivated Clark to join the Army.

He was looking for a way to help his country and to secure a better future for himself, she said.

Clark was due home in July and had already started counting down the days, Marfechuk said.

"He told me he would probably be leaving Iraq on his birthday, July 14," she said.

Marfechuk said she spoke with him last Sunday and everything was fine.

Clark's body was already back in the U.S. and was expected to return to Pleasant Prairie later in the week, she said. Funeral services were pending.

His 12-year-old brother, Evan Clark, said he wants to be just like his big brother when he grows up. He said his brother stood up for people and was known throughout the area.

Clark, the 54th victim of the Iraq war from Wisconsin, graduated in 2001 from Indian Trail Academy in Kenosha.

Clark's mother said her son described the part of Baghdad he was in as rather calm.

"He related it to Pleasant Prairie: it was away from all of the bad areas," she said.

But she said he knew he had to be cautious and he was.

Delaware Marine Killed Saturday

May 15, 2006 (AP)

SEAFORD, DE Family members say 20-year-old Marine, Rick James, from Seaford, Delaware, has been killed in Iraq.

He was killed Saturday while on patrol in the Al Anbar province. His mother—Carol James—says she was told that James was shot in the head by small-arms fire and died of his wounds in the city of Ramadi.

The grandson of two veterans, James signed up for the Marines the day after he turned 18.

He was serving in Iraq for most of 2005, and then returned to Iraq in March.

He is survived by his parents, two brothers and a sister.

Four British Troops Wounded By Amarah Mortar Barrage

5.15.06 By THOMAS WAGNER, Associated Press Writer

In southern Iraq, militants fired more than 30 mortar rounds at a British military camp, wounding four soldiers.

The mortar barrage came at about 4:30 a.m. Monday at Camp Abu Naji in Amarah, 180 miles southeast of Baghdad, said British spokeswoman Capt. Kelly Goodall.

One of the British soldiers received a serious leg injury, but the other wounds were minor, said Holly Wheeler, a Ministry of Defense spokeswoman in London.

Culloden Soldier Fights For His Life

May, 15, 2006 The Herald-Dispatch, HUNTINGTON

The Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, reported this morning that Marine Cpl. William Bradley "Brad" Fulks of Culloden remains in critical condition after being injured in Iraq.

WCHS Channel 8 reported last Wednesday that Fulks, 23, was severely burned when his patrol drove over a roadside bomb in Fallujah, on May 1. He sustained second- and third-degree burns over 60 percent of his body and lost a lung.

According to his family's Web site, Fulks was airlifted to Baghdad after the incident, then to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany before being stabilized and airlifted to Brooke. He faces several surgeries and a lengthy recuperation.

Fulks is a graduate of Cabell Midland High School and attended Marshall University until he enlisted.

Those who wish to help cover Fulks' medical expenses and his family's travel expenses can make checks payable to the William Bradley Fulks Benefit, in care of City National Bank's Teays Valley Branch, 100 Poplar Fork Road, P.O. Box 250, Scott Depot, WV 25560.

Local Soldier Injured

May 04, 2006 Corsicana Daily Sun

Imagine your child is half-way around the world, hurt, and all you can do is wait for another phone call.

That is the heart-breaking reality Pam Davis of Blooming Grove is suffering through right now, her Marine son a wounded victim of the war on terror in Iraq.

Matt Davis, a 2004 graduate of Blooming Grove High School, was wounded Monday in Iraq. He is now in a U.S. Army hospital in Germany, suffering from a multiple shrapnel wounds and leg injuries. Late Wednesday, Davis received word that Matt had come out of surgery and was in "stable condition." His vital signs were said to be strong following the surgery.

"They called me on Tuesday and said that he had been hurt," Davis said. "Then they called back later and said that he was in a hospital in Germany. I guess the good thing is they said that they didn't think they would have to fly him out of Germany, that he was stable enough."

Davis was stationed in Twentynine Palms, Calif., and was assigned to Delta Company, 2nd platoon. He was deployed to Iraq on March 5. Davis said her son could not tell her exactly where he was in Iraq.

Matt joined the Marines on Valentine's Day, 2005 his mother said.

"His father passed away in 2004, and he waited to join the service because of me," Davis said. "He always wanted to be in the military. He talked about it as a little boy.

"He put it off for me. I finally told him if that was what he wanted to do, to serve his country, to do it."

Davis said she was told that if her son remained in the hospital in Germany for more than 10 days, that she would be flown overseas to be with him in the hospital. If the hospitalization is less than 10 days, and he is flown back to the U.S., she would see him stateside.

A family friend informed the Daily Sun that other soldiers who were also injured in the same incident are in the same hospital wing as Davis. The family is asking that those men and their families be remembered in prayer along with Matt.

"I just want to talk to him," Pam Davis said tearfully. "I need to hear from him, to know that he's OK."

REALLY BAD PLACE TO BE: BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW



U.S. Navy Corpsman Paul Jardine, of Fair Haven, Vermont, climbs through a hole in a wall during a patrol in Fallujah May 1, 2006. (AP Photo/Jacob Silberberg)

“We Cannot Kill All The People Here Who Want To Kill Us”



An insurgent with shoulder-fired rocket in Ramadi late 10 May 2006. (AFP/File)

May 12, 2006 (CBS News) RAMADI, Iraq [Excerpts]

U.S. Marines serving in the Iraqi city of Ramadi are attacked on average five times a day while defending an Iraq government center and battling insurgents in the most violence zone in the country.

CBS News correspondent Lara Logan reports.

The Marines of Kilo company are under attack yet again. They're on the roof of the government center, and the enemy has just opened up. Small arms fire came in first. The Marines have returned fire with everything they've got.

Three of their positions are taking fire simultaneously. That's something 21-year-old Lance Cpl. Jefferson Ortiz says the Marines quickly get used to.

“Every Saturday ... Saturday at the government center right here,” he says. “This is our weekend right here. No spring break for us. Just shooting.”

The deathly whine of incoming rounds is overwhelmed by the thunder of the Marines' guns.

On April 2 of this year, he lost three Marines and a sailor to a roadside bomb in Ramadi.

Kevin Johnson, a 19-year-old lance corporal, says for him, that was the day the war became real.

Says Johnson, “Every time I put on my gear, I pray over it: ‘Lord let me make it through this day, let my platoon make it through this day, let no more Marines have to die.’“

Incoming mortars, like a 60mm round that failed to detonate, remind Kilo company how close they come to death every day.

“It’s about 10 feet from our post over there — 10 to 15 feet,” says a Marine of the failed mortar round. When asked if he’d been lucky, the Marine replied, “Yeah ... countin’ the days — you gotta roll those dice, you know.”

The Marines face an average of five attacks per day. This time, muzzle flashes are seen from a deserted building repeatedly used to attack them.

The enemy moves in and out of these houses freely because they’re unoccupied. Lt. Carlos Goetz says it’s a constant battle to deny them safe haven.

This time, two 500-pound smart bombs slam into the back side of the building, followed by three more. The Marines estimate eight enemy dead, so it’s a victory of sorts.

But even they say “we cannot kill all the people here who want to kill us.” Their priority is keeping each other alive, and keeping the government center out of enemy hands.

Says Capt. Del Gaudio, “They’ll never take this building. We’ll die here before they’ll take this building from us.” **[This Capt. is insane. He is also an active threat to every troop under his command. He has no more knowledge of war than General Custer, and exactly the same kamikaze attitude. He looks forward to his own heroic death. He’d make a great suicide bomber, but as a troop commander, he’s lethal, to his own.]**

In less than nine months, that commitment has already cost 14 American lives.

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

French Soldier Killed By Mine

05.15.06 (AFP)

A French soldier was killed Monday in a blast during a mine clearance operation near Afghanistan's main international airport in the capital, the French military said.

The soldier, aged 22, was seriously hurt in the explosion and died later of his wounds, the military said in a statement.

Two Canadians Hit In Blast Near Kandahar

5.15.06 TERRY WEBER, Globe and Mail Update

Two Canadian soldiers were wounded Monday in Afghanistan when a roadside bomb exploded, striking their armoured vehicle as it travelled north of Kandahar.

The attack took place around 2:25 p.m. local time, National Defence spokesman Jay Paxton told globeandmail.com.

The soldiers were travelling between Kandahar and a small military outpost in Gumbad at the time of the blast. Both had been riding in a Nyala armoured vehicle when the strike occurred.

Gumbad is located about 75 kilometres north of Kandahar city.

The two soldiers were taken by a U.S. ambulance helicopter to the Canadian-led multinational hospital at Kandahar airport.

Both were in stable condition with non-life threatening injuries.

Major Mario Couture told CBC Newsworld from Afghanistan that the stretch of road where the attack happened is "extremely dangerous" and has earned the nickname IED - or improvised explosive device - alley.

"That's why we are using vehicles like this one to make sure that our soldiers are safe, and in this case it worked perfectly well," he said.

"Two of our soldiers came out of there alive, and for us, this is great news."

He said both have undergone testing to make sure they weren't more seriously injured.

"They're doing extremely well," he said.

"I mean, there is no physical injury that we know of right now...a blast of that magnitude is tremendous, so that's why we kept them in the hospital for now."

Assorted Resistance Action

May 15, 2006 Daily Times

A gun battle between suspected Taliban militants and police broke out Sunday after the law enforcement officials surrounded a small village in Kandahar, a government spokesman said. Four police and up to eleven militants were reported killed.

The four-hour gun battle also left four police officers wounded, said Dawood Ahmadi, spokesman for the provincial governor. He said the militants left three bodies behind and took eight with them when they fled the village in the Panjwayi district.

Also, a US military spokesman confirmed that a rocket had been fired late on Saturday at the main US base at an airfield in the Kandahar city, adding that no casualties had been incurred.

Elsewhere, two bombs exploded in northern Afghanistan near a vehicle belonging to NATO forces, injuring four policemen and five civilians, including a 9-year-old girl, officials said. The first blast, in Baghlan province, damaged the vehicle from NATO's International Security Assistance Force but caused no injuries, said Maj. Toby Jackman, an ISAF spokesman.

Soon after, a second bomb exploded nearby, injuring four policemen and five civilians who had gathered at the scene, said Mohammed Qassim Amirzai, the deputy chief of police.

Separately, a worker for the country's internal intelligence service was killed and a teacher was wounded in Helmand province when gunmen attacked them after they left a wedding party Saturday night, said provincial administrator Ghulam Muhiddin.

TROOP NEWS

Wounded Loudon County Soldier Coming Back

05-15-2006 By Tommy Millsaps, Loudon County News-Herald

A local soldier who was injured in Iraq recently was expected back in the United States this past weekend to recover and be reunited with his family.

SFC Heath Newlin Berry, 28, of Philadelphia, was injured when a roadside bomb exploded by the Humvee he was riding in near Baghdad May 5, family members reported.

Berry, a former Marine, was serving with the Army Reserve's 489th Civil Affairs Battalion. His mother and stepfather, Sue and Jim Bookout, said they were told the bomb killed four soldiers and another soldier was injured along with their son.

Berry had only been in Iraq less than a week when he was hurt.

His family said he lost his left hand and a portion of his left arm along with a couple of fingers on his right hand.

He also suffered shrapnel wounds to his arms and legs.

Sue described the phone call she received telling about her son's injuries as "very scary" but said Berry is in good spirits after talking to his family on the phone.

She said the Army had planned to fly Jim and her to Washington D.C. over the weekend to visit their son at Walter Reed Army Medical Center where Berry is expected to spend considerable time recovering.

He has been at a hospital in Germany since the attack.

Berry had just recently joined the Army Reserves and had spent five years in the Marines.

His family said he went to school in Sweetwater and Madisonville and graduated as salutatorian from Lenoir City High School in 1996.

Berry will be bolstered by support from his family, including brother Sean, 22, and sister Shannon Harvey along with stepsisters Erica Bookout and Dawn Nichols.

450 Arizona National Guard Troops Off To Bush's Imperial Slaughterhouse

May 15, 2006 Army Times

More than 450 soldiers from the Arizona National Guard have been told they could be on active duty for up to two years to support operations in Afghanistan, a Guard press release said.

For the first eight months, the soldiers of 1st Battalion, 285th Aviation Regiment, will learn to fly the AH-64D Apache Longbow helicopter at Fort Hood, Texas. The unit will have 15 Apaches.

The soldiers left May 3 for Fort Hood.

Pentagon Traitors Devise Exciting New Way To Kill More U.S. Troops: Part 2: MENTALLY UNFIT, FORCED TO FIGHT

**“The U.S. Military Has Knowingly Sent
Mentally Ill Troops To Iraq, In Conflict
With Its Own Regulations”**

**“They're Going To Take Whoever They
Can Get, And They're Going To Keep
Them If They Can”**



EDDIE BRABAZON, above, is seen a family photo the day he joined the Army, at age 18. (Mark Mirko) May 12, 2006. Hartford Courant

**“If you aren't using the form any better than you did when you deployed my son,
what makes anyone think you're doing it any better now?” she says.**

"And it's a piece of paper. It was useless."

May 15 2006 By MATTHEW KAUFFMAN And LISA CHEDEKEL, The Hartford Courant [Excerpts]

In the 17 months after their son, Eddie, announced he was heading off to fight the war on terror, Margaret and Edward Brabazon of Bensalem, Pa., had held their breath.

They were accustomed to holding their breath with the boy they had taken in as a foster child at age 3 and adopted at 12: the boy who had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and attention-deficit disorder by the time he was 10, and who had spent his early teenage years in a psychiatric hospital and group homes for the emotionally disturbed.

They watched with bewildered pride as the young man they had affectionately nicknamed "Crazy Eddie" was handed a uniform and an M-4 rifle and accepted into an elite fraternity - the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment based at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. Although Margaret protested, the 18-year-old soldier also had informed his parents that he had stopped taking his psychotropic medications because he "wanted to be like everyone else," Margaret recalled.

"We were surprised they took him, with the kind of mental problems he had, but we figured the Army must know what they're doing," Margaret said. "We didn't think they'd send him into combat."

Today, the Brabazons regret those assumptions.

On March 9, 2004, less than three months into his second deployment to the Middle East, Spec. Edward W. Brabazon shot himself in the head with his rifle at a palace compound in Baghdad, the Army has concluded. He was 20.

The Brabazons say they have trouble making sense of the Army's investigation into his death, which notes his psychiatric past.

"They talked about how he had a history of mental problems," Margaret said. "I said, 'No kidding. If you knew he had mental problems, then why was he there?'"

Eddie Brabazon was there because the U.S. military has knowingly sent mentally ill troops to Iraq - in conflict with its own regulations - and turned a blind eye to the mental fitness of thousands of other service members, a Courant investigation has found.

Despite a congressional mandate to assess the mental health of every soldier sent to a combat zone, interviews and Defense Department records obtained by The Courant reveal a fractured pre-deployment screening process in which less than 1 percent of deploying soldiers ever see a mental health professional.

It is a practice that has put unfit service members in harm's way, increasing their risk for suicide and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The military's own studies suggest that as many as one in 11 troops is suffering from a major depressive disorder, anxiety disorder or PTSD that substantially impairs their ability to function at the time they are deployed to war. But military screeners have arranged mental health evaluations for fewer than one in 300 deploying troops,

according to a Courant analysis of screening data for more than 930,000 troops processed from March 2003 through October 2005.

And some troops have been sent to war in violation of military regulations, which bar the deployment of troops with mental disorders that can interfere with their duties.

In addition, despite the military's promises to pay closer attention to the mental health of service members following a spate of suicides in 2003, the data indicate that soldiers who report psychological issues are more likely to be deployed now than at the start of the war.

Overall, soldiers who screened positive for possible mental health problems were deemed fit for war 85 percent of the time, according to the data.

Those deployment decisions were made with more than 93 percent of troops who screened positive never receiving a referral for a mental health evaluation.

With the military scrambling to find enough combat troops, some soldier advocates say the reason for the inadequate mental health screening is evident.

"Command pressure to deploy their people has kind of swept away any efforts that might have been made to improve screening," said Kathleen Gilberd, who counsels service members in San Diego and serves as co-chairwoman of the Military Law Task Force of the National Lawyers Guild.

For some, that pressure may have proved fatal.

Defense Department records show that those who conceal past mental health care are almost never questioned about their mental fitness. Since the war began, service members who checked the 'no' box on the mental health question had a less than one in 1,000 chance of being referred for a mental health evaluation.

But there are deeper flaws. While many soldiers with mental illness opt to stay in the shadows, others, like Army Staff Sgt. Nathan Bailey of Nashville, had made no secret of their psychiatric problems before the military handed them the guns they used to kill themselves.

Bailey took powerful anti-psychotic medication, and most of the time, it was enough to keep him mentally even.

But not always.

In 2002, Bailey's sister and mother found him in a panicked sweat in his apartment, darting from place to place, telling his relatives that they were in danger, that they were being tracked through their cellphone signals. Doctors at a veterans hospital in Nashville eventually put him in a locked psychiatric ward for several days.

So a year later, when Bailey's unit was preparing to deploy in support of the Iraq war, his sister, Robbie Snapp, urged military leaders to leave him behind. But his commanders had other plans.

"The only thing they could tell him," Snapp said, "was that as long as you're on your medicine, you'll be OK."

He wasn't.

Seven months into his tour, military records show, Bailey placed the muzzle of his rifle under his chin, stretched one hand down the long barrel of the weapon, and squeezed the trigger.

A military investigation into Bailey's death confirmed his long history of mental illness, and revealed the Army was aware that Bailey had attempted suicide once before, Snapp said.

"If that really happened," Snapp wonders, "then why would you send somebody to war that has tried something like this?"

Bailey, Brabazon and other mentally ill soldiers were sent to war despite Army regulations designed to keep troubled service members away from the front lines.

The military has acknowledged that certain mental disorders are not compatible with service, and recruiting standards for all of the armed forces identify a number of disqualifying disorders, including a history of suicidal behavior, schizophrenia or post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as current treatment for bipolar disorder or major depression.

The standards for deployment to combat zones are even broader, barring soldiers with "any disorder that has the potential to prevent performance of duty, even if controlled by medication."

That leaves Patricia Powers of Skiatook, Okla., at a loss to explain how her 20-year-old son, Joshua, was on his way to Iraq barely six months after he enlisted with the Army.

"He did have Asperger's, which is a form of autism, and I just couldn't believe that the Army took him in. I just couldn't believe that," Powers said.

People with Asperger syndrome tend to be highly intelligent, but have trouble processing social cues, and are often, as Joshua was, quiet loners who have difficulty building relationships.

But Asperger wasn't Joshua's only neurological issue. Powers said she read through the medical records of her son's frequent visits to a base doctor, and "every one mentioned something about severe depression. Every time he went in, they marked that."

Less than two weeks after arriving in Iraq, Joshua helped find a large cache of weapons, and his mother said he sounded proud and happy in a telephone call.

But a week later - on Feb. 24 of this year - Pvt. Joshua Powers left his barracks after midnight and walked toward the latrine. When fellow soldiers found him, he was dead of a gunshot wound to the head.

Patricia Powers said she is now left with searing grief, and gnawing questions about how and why her son died. She's heard talk of a sniper targeting Joshua's base camp. But there are also indications that Joshua was having trouble coping soon after he arrived in the war zone.

At a memorial service in Iraq, Joshua's commander, Capt. Vaughn D. Strong Jr., told his troops that Joshua's death was a reminder of the importance of looking after each other.

"We must look for the indicators and signs of struggle within our ranks," Strong said, "so we can be there to help our comrades fight through their tough times ... so that we can all make it home alive and safe."

Patricia Powers fears her son was a victim of a severely strained Army fighting an unpopular war.

"They have an issue with trying to get people to sign up and to join," she said. "And I think in that case, they're going to take whoever they can get, and they're going to keep them if they can."

In Bensalem, Pa., Eddie Brabazon was eager to sign up, so on his 18th birthday, he left the group home where he was living and headed straight for a recruiting office.

It wasn't a surprise to his parents - Eddie had always pretended to be G.I. Joe - but they weren't sure he had the emotional well-being to survive in the military.

From the time Eddie became their foster child at 3, the Brabazons worked to control his hyperactivity and deal with his short attention span.

By age 5, Eddie would fly into a rage each day at precisely 4 p.m. - an outburst that could only be controlled by a ritual in which Margaret would lift him up and plant him on top of the refrigerator, where he would calmly talk about what was bothering him.

In kindergarten, Margaret recalls, "They were glad when he didn't come to school, when he was sick or something."

By sixth grade, he was attending an alternative school, where he was an average student, the Brabazons said. Despite his strong build, he never excelled in athletics; in team sports, coaches would often find Eddie zoned out in the field, unable to concentrate on the game at hand.

Over the years, Eddie had taken lithium for bipolar disorder, the anti-psychotic drug Zyprexa and other psychotropic drugs. But shortly after graduating from an alternative high school for students needing education and emotional support, he was headed to Fort Bragg for basic training.

In Afghanistan and Iraq, Brabazon had gotten in trouble for mouthing off at superiors, and two weeks before his death, he was punished again after his weapon accidentally discharged.

While assigned to clean trash out of a Humvee, he told a sergeant how much he hated messing up. "When I let you down, I feel like going into a Porta-john and blowing my ... brains out," Brabazon said, according to a military investigative report.

The sergeant told investigators he talked with Brabazon for two hours until he was satisfied he was not going to kill himself.

Days later, the same sergeant became concerned that Brabazon was suicidal when he took his rifle with him into the portable toilets and stayed there for 45 minutes.

"No, sergeant, it's not like that. It's not like that," Brabazon told the sergeant, explaining that he just needed a peaceful place to think.

But on March 9, 2004, after returning from a night mission, Brabazon made a disparaging remark about a superior officer and was told that he - and his entire platoon - would be punished as a result.

Ninety minutes later, in the pre-dawn darkness, Brabazon's roommates heard a powerful blast. Turning on the lights, they found Brabazon face down on the floor, lying on top of his rifle, a gunshot wound running from below his left jaw out the top of his skull.

The Brabazons find it hard to believe that Eddie would kill himself. But they are equally perplexed that the Army would send him to Iraq at all.

"Didn't they look at his records?" Margaret Brabazon asks. "I mean, if you're flat-footed, you don't go in. So isn't there a clause in there if you had mental problems?"

The family of Army Spec. Michael S. Deem also questions the Army's decision to send the 35-year-old father of two to war.

When Deem transferred from Texas to Fort Stewart in Georgia in 2004 to be closer to his 7-year-old daughter from a previous marriage, he knew he was transferring to a unit that was facing deployment to Iraq, his wife, Lynn Deem, said.

Deem accepted the consequences of his decision, but after his Georgia unit was called up, his longstanding depression and anxiety deepened, Lynn Deem said.

In the weeks before deploying, Deem saw a military psychiatrist for help in handling his heightened stress, his wife said. She said the doctor gave him "multiple drugs," including "a year's supply of Prozac."

There was no discussion of his not deploying.

"The way he portrayed it," she recalled, "it was not negotiable."

The year's supply of antidepressants would be wasted. Less than a month after arriving in Iraq, Deem, an information systems operator in the Special Troops Battalion of the 3rd Infantry Division, was found dead in his bunk at Camp Liberty in Baghdad.

The Army determined that he died of an enlarged heart "complicated by elevated levels" of Prozac - the very drug that was supposed to help him through his tour.

Saying the Prozac alone did not kill him and that there was no indication of suicide, the Army has classified Deem's cause of death as "natural." But months after the military has closed its investigation, Deem's family still wrestles with questions.

"To know that he's got a history of anxiety and depression and to load him up on pills and send him to a war zone - how could they do that?" asks his aunt, Mary Ann Warner, of Lakeland, Fla.

"Michael is someone who was sent with them knowing he had some mental health issues," said Lynn Deem. "There's no way they can say they didn't know."

The mandate that troops receive a pre-deployment mental health evaluation grew out of the first gulf war, when returning service members reported mysterious illnesses that military officials insisted were unrelated to combat. In response, Congress in 1997 ordered the Defense Department to obtain a clear picture of the baseline health of all troops deploying to war zones, including an "assessment of mental-health."

To many members of Congress, that meant a face-to-face encounter with a mental health expert, in part to ensure that troops would be adequately screened for mental illness and would not pose a risk to themselves or others.

Instead, the military's assessment consists of the single yes-or-no question on a form filled out by deploying service members: "During the past year, have you sought counseling or care for your mental health?"

"There's a fair amount of deception," said David Rudd, former chief of psychology service for the Darnall Army Community Hospital at Fort Hood in Texas. "People simply don't report mental health problems if they're trying to get into the service."

Some suspect the military intentionally does a poor job of screening, in order to deploy as many soldiers as possible.

"It's still a numbers game," said Gerry Mosley, a retired Army Reserve first sergeant with the 296 Transportation Company who said medical screeners showed little interest in soldiers' health when his unit deployed. "I don't think they really want to know what your mental condition is."

Mosley, who called pre-deployment screening "grossly inadequate," said service members with serious mental illnesses are put at great risk when they are sent to war.

"One of two things is going to happen," he said. "They're either going to get worse in-country, or they're going to get a hell of a lot worse when they come home."

But The Courant found that even among the small fraction of service members who indicate a mental health issue, only a handful receive a full "assessment of mental health" from the military.

Answering yes to the mental health question typically triggers an interview with a medical provider - but it isn't with a mental health specialist.

Instead, troops are often questioned by physician's assistants or medical technicians, who, more than 93 percent of the time, conclude on their own that service members are mentally fit for deployment to a war zone, The Courant's review found.

Last week, the Government Accountability Office reported that among soldiers who screened positive for possible PTSD on a post-deployment questionnaire, only 22 percent were referred for a mental health evaluation. That figure - which caused outrage among some in Congress - is still more than three times as high as the percentage of soldiers referred to a mental health professional after self-reporting problems on the pre-deployment form.

Overall, from March 2003 to October 2005, the military processed 935,797 troops facing deployment. Of those, 2,538 were referred for a mental health evaluation - less than 0.3 percent. That amounts to an average of 18 referrals per week worldwide.

Some troops who have gone through the initial screening interview recounted being questioned briefly by a low-level medical provider.

"They didn't go into any depth. It was a few-minute, 'Why'd you check this? How's it going?' type of thing," said Paul Scaglione, an Army mechanic from Michigan who answered "yes" on the questionnaire before his second deployment to Iraq in November 2004, because he had been treated for depression during his first deployment.

"They don't go, like, 'Here's what you should do if you're having problems over there' or 'Are you feeling depressed now?' or anything," said Scaglione, 23. "I don't know if I'd really call it 'screening.'"

Army Sgt. Thomas J. Sweet, 23, of Bismarck, N.D., also answered "yes," to the mental health question, based on past diagnoses of attention-deficit disorder and generalized anxiety. But a physician's assistant ruled that Sweet was mentally fit for combat and that there was no need for a referral to a licensed mental health professional.

"How many hours of mental health training does a physician get, unless they're pursuing a specialty in psychiatry?" Sweet's mother, Elizabeth, asks. "Now how many hours in mental health training - in assessment - does a physician's assistant get? I think it's pretty negligible."

A month later, Sweet was sent to Iraq. And 2½ months after that, following a confrontation with a superior, Sweet was found sprawled in a stairwell, having

shot himself in the head, an Army investigation concluded. It was Thanksgiving Day 2003.

Years before a physician's assistant declared Thomas Sweet mentally fit for war, experts hired by the military had warned that pre-deployment mental health screening was inadequate.

And six months before Sweet deployed, Defense Department officials were summoned to Capitol Hill, where skeptical members of Congress berated them over flaws in the pre-deployment process.

But despite the tough talk, nothing changed.

At a March 2003 hearing of the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, members of Congress, including the subcommittee chairman, U.S. Rep. Christopher Shays, R-4th District, challenged the military's top health official on his interpretation of the law requiring a mental health assessment.

"Let me just tell you, from my standpoint, you're not meeting the letter of the law clearly, and I don't even think you're meeting the spirit of the law," Shays told William Winkenwerder Jr., assistant secretary of defense for health affairs. "So I'd like to know where it says that this examination should be a self-assessment. Where in the law do you read self-assessment?"

Col. Bruce Crow, an Army suicide prevention expert, told the military-run Armed Forces Press Service in 2004 that none of the soldiers who killed themselves early in the war had a history of mental health treatment, and none exhibited warning signs.

Bailey and Sweet, who had pre-existing disorders, were among those soldiers.

A month after the March 2003 congressional hearing, the military issued a revised health assessment questionnaire for soldiers, but only for those returning from war. The new form still relied on self-reporting, but added questions designed to evaluate the soldiers' mental state, not simply whether they had or had not sought counseling.

But the military never changed the pre-deployment form or screening process. And Congress lost the momentum for change.

Class, of the Military Officers Association of America, believes the Defense Department should at least expand the pre-deployment form, to include better diagnostic questions.

"If you changed the post-deployment questionnaire, then why didn't you make the same changes to the pre-deployment?" Class asked. "It would seem to me as if that would not be a hard thing to do."

Critics, including the GAO, say the military has been reluctant to offer clear and consistent guidelines on what medical and mental conditions ought to disqualify service members from being sent into battle.

Last year, for the first time, the Army identified broad medical conditions that could be incompatible with deployment to a war zone, including psychiatric conditions that might interfere with duty.

That still leaves broad discretion to commanders, and the GAO recommended more specific guidelines "so that in future deployments (the Defense Department) would not experience situations such as those that occurred with members being deployed into Iraq who clearly had pre-existing conditions that should have prevented their deployment."

The Defense Department rejected the recommendation.

Some family members of soldiers with psychiatric problems say that regardless of military rules on deployment, their efforts to convince officials that a loved one should not be deployed have been ignored.

Dee Bartlett of San Marcos, Texas, who served seven years in the Army herself, said she had tried to warn her husband's commander that he was mentally unstable and should not be sent to Iraq in early 2003. Her husband, Chris, an 18-year veteran who was assigned to special forces, had been treated for a back injury and depression and was taking painkillers and Xanax, she said.

"I sat down with his commanding officer about two weeks before they deployed and told him how bad Chris was, that he was just going up and down and using his pain meds to try to sleep," Dee Bartlett said. "I said, 'My concern is he's going to get himself killed or one of you guys killed.'"

Chris, 40, fell apart within weeks of arriving in Iraq and was evacuated to Germany, then back to the U.S., for psychiatric treatment, Dee said. She said he has been in and out of psychiatric hospitals ever since and has tried to kill himself three times. They are now divorced.

Even within the military, some health professionals have been perplexed by the deployment decisions made by medical screeners. At a hospital in Heidelberg, Germany, Army Col. Holly Doyne began receiving e-mails soon after the war began from the staff of a field hospital in Kuwait, complaining about newly arrived troops who were not fit for duty. Among them: a woman on lithium and Zyprexa who had been released just three weeks earlier from a psychiatric hospital.

Before long, Doyne also encountered troops who were evacuated to her medical center, and who never should have been sent to the Middle East in the first place. Doyne and a medical provider in Kuwait drafted and distributed a pointed e-mail, saying medical screeners were not doing their jobs, and too many unfit soldiers were being sent to war.

Doyne thought her criticism had chastened the screeners, but in 2004, a fresh round of soldiers rotated into the war zone - with some of the same problems she had seen earlier in the war.

Doyne, who returned to Germany after a tour in Kuwait, said she is not currently involved in evaluating troops and could not comment on whether mental health screening had improved.

But deployment statistics from the Defense Department indicate growing pressure to send troops into combat, and suggest that screeners are now more likely to deploy troops with possible mental health problems than they were at the start of the war.

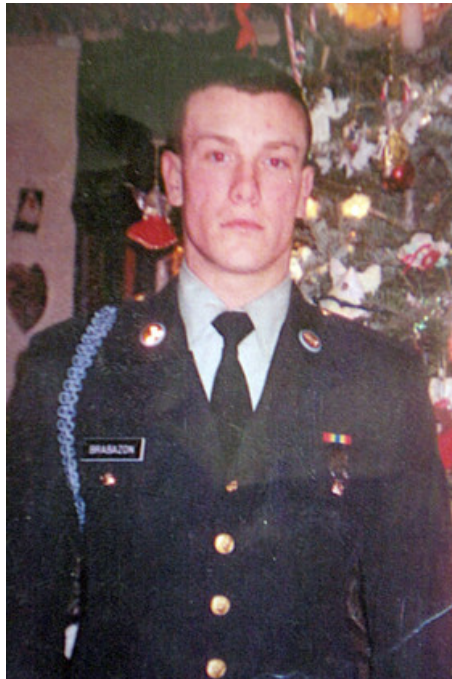
In 2003 and 2004, for example, fewer than 40 percent of service members who were given a mental health referral were ultimately deployed. In 2005, deployments jumped to 50 percent.

Among troops who reported receiving mental health care, 84 percent were ultimately deployed in 2003 and 2004. Last year, the number climbed to 88 percent.

With no change in the pre-deployment form and no apparent improvement in screening, Elizabeth Sweet fears that soldiers with mental health issues are being put in the same danger that led to her son, Thomas,' death.

"If you aren't using the form any better than you did when you deployed my son, what makes anyone think you're doing it any better now?" she says.

"And it's a piece of paper. It was useless."



EDDIE BRABAZON, dressed in full uniform, in another family photo taken during his last Christmas with his family, in 2003. Less than three months into his second deployment to the Middle East, Eddie shot himself in the head in a palace compound in Baghdad. (Mark Mirko) May. 12, 2006. Hartford Courant

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Assorted Resistance Action



Fire following a roadside bomb that hit an oil tanker Baghdad, May 15, 2006. (AP Photo/Mohammed Hato)

5.15.06 By THOMAS WAGNER, Associated Press Writer & Reuters

A roadside bomb hit an oil tanker, sending black smoke billowing over central Baghdad. "The explosion caused a huge fire," said police Capt. Ziyad Naji. One policeman was killed.

On Monday, tribesmen killed eight Iraqi police officers and injured another 10 in clashes just outside Basra. The clashes broke out when the tribesmen took over a police station just outside the city after a group of men wearing police uniforms allegedly gunned down a local leader from the Garmasha tribe, said police Cap. Mushtaq Khazim.

One policeman was killed and two were wounded when a bomb exploded near a house in the northern city of Mosul.

A roadside bomb targeting a police patrol exploded in the town of Mahaweel, 75 km south of Baghdad, killing one civilian and wounding three policemen, police said.

In Baghdad, a departmental director of the housing and construction ministry was killed.

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

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

Texas Etiquette

[This comment is about a report that a Bush guard pointed an automatic rifle at a group of anti-war protestors in Florida.]

From: David Honish, Veterans For Peace
To: GI Special
Sent: May 15, 2006

Texas etiquette states *that a gentleman does not shoot into crowds.*

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.

Received:

Kick-Ass Raging Grannies Invite You!

From: Betty "COQUI"
To: GI Special
Sent: May 13, 2006
Subject: THANK YOU

I JUST READ ABOUT WEST POINT AGAINST THE WAR-

I AM ONE OF THE 18 GRANNIES ARRESTED AND WAS ON TRIAL.

WE ARE PLANNING IF ALL GOES WELL A 10 DAY TRIP TO WASHINGTON.
STOPPING HERE AND THERE. MAYBE END OF JUNE ARRIVING JULY.

IT WILL TAKE SOME ORGANIZING. AND LOT OF FUNDS BUT ARE DETERMINED
TO GO.

SO I KNOW NO MATTER WHAT- WE WILL MAKE IT.

WE ARE A VERY DETERMINED GROUP-

I SAY " GOD DOESN'T CLOSE ONE DOOR WITH OUT OPENING ANOTHER DOOR,
BUT IT'S HELL IN THE HALL WAY.

AND THAT IS WHERE BUSH AND HIS ADMINISTRATION HAS THE "U.S.A. AND THE WORLD" IN THE HALL WAY WITH NO INTENSION OF LEAVING.

IF YOU WHISPER, NO ONE WILL HEAR YOU.

AND WE, ARE NOT WHISPERING.

AGES 59 TO 81 AND HATE WHAT IS GOING ON.

SO GLAD TO HEAR YOUNG PEOPLE COMING OUT.

**IF YOU ARE IN NYC ANYTIME –
WE MEET EVERY WED. 4:30P TO 5:30P AT 5 AVE. BET. 49ST & 50 ST**

BETTY "COQUI"
E-MAIL BCOQUI@AOL.COM

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK 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)

GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out

The following have posted issues; there may be others:

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

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