

GI SPECIAL 7C13:



"THIS IS OUTRAGEOUS! THEY'RE BEGINNING TO FIGHT BACK..."

**“Nobody Wants To Tell
Us Anything”**

**The Battalion’s Efforts “Have
Been Met With Indifference, If
Not Downright Hostility”**

**“The Soldiers Had Hoped Their
Presence In The District Would Be
Welcomed By Residents”**

“But It Hasn’t Worked Yet” “They Don’t Really Want To Give Us Information.”

March 15, 2009 By Rajiv Chandrasekaran, Washington Post Staff Writer [Excerpts]

MAYWAND, Afghanistan -- Lt. Col. Daniel Hurlbut rolled into this dusty Taliban stronghold in September with a battalion of U.S. Army infantrymen and a detailed, year-long plan to combat the Taliban.

The first quarter was to be devoted to reconnaissance. The next three months would involve military operations to root out insurgents. By now, his unit should have been focusing on reconstruction and building up the local government.

But the battalion’s efforts to pry information about the Taliban from the local population -- by conducting foot patrols, doling out money for mosques to buy new prayer rugs and offering agricultural assistance to subsistence farmers -- have been met with indifference, if not downright hostility.

“Nobody wants to tell us anything,” Hurlbut said, sighing.

His initial plan, he has since concluded, was wildly optimistic.

“We’re still in the first quarter,” he said. “Our expectation for results is now a lot longer than we thought it would be.”

U.S. commanders regard Hurlbut’s battalion as a harbinger of the 17,000 additional Army and Marine troops that President Obama has ordered to southern Afghanistan this spring to augment NATO forces, which have been stretched thin by the Taliban’s growing strength.

The new U.S. troops will find themselves in a swath of the country that is the epicenter of opium poppy cultivation and where far fewer resources have been devoted to reconstruction and development. And they will be forced to deal with a deep-rooted, indigenous insurgency -- the Taliban got its start in the south -- that has mounted increasingly potent attacks on civilians [translation: Afghans working for the occupation] and security forces [translation: traitors killing other Afghans who are fighting for their independence.]

What the new strategy does not seek to do, however, is to borrow a page from the U.S. playbook in Iraq by creating tribal militias to fend off the Taliban. Commanders here said that approach could create even more warlords and new intratribal feuds. And the commanders see little benefit from negotiations with the Taliban right now, despite Obama’s support for such an overture.

Military officials regard the Taliban, composed largely of ethnic Pashtuns, as both too strong and too fragmented in the south to pursue an effective deal, although they remain

open to the possibility in the east, where some tribal leaders who have supported the insurgency could be persuaded to switch sides.

Senior officials at the NATO regional headquarters in Kandahar see the insurgency in the south as made up of a core of die-hard Taliban operatives and a much larger group of young freelance fighters who are motivated more by money than religious zealotry.

[They've been peddling this silly bullshit about the "core" and the naive young soldiers for seven years now. But it makes the command feel better to live in a dream world. While their soldiers die. The stupid fantasy continues in the next paragraphs, borrowed straight from the Russian occupation plan for Afghanistan, and everybody knows what a brilliant success that one was, right?]

NATO troops, as well as U.S. Special Forces teams in the region, have been seeking to target the operatives, hoping to stem the flow of funds and munitions to the low-level fighters.

[What the Special Forces death squads have done is massacre whole families in isolated villages in the middle of the night – oops – wrong target – recruiting thousands more Pashtuns to take arms against the occupation.]

The officials also believe that new economic development projects funded by international donors could help to lure some of the fighters to lay down their weapons.

[Yes indeed. The more Afghans who see the crooked war profiteers who get the "economic development" contracts stuffing their own pockets with money, which has only been going on since 2002, they more they will love the occupation. Of course.]

"With the new troops arriving, it will bring more people into contact with more Americans," said Philip Hatton, an adviser to [U.S. Brig. Gen. John Nicholson, a deputy commander of NATO forces in southern Afghanistan] on stabilization issues. "What will the result of that be? We don't know."

[You couldn't make this shit up. An "adviser" of unknown status is clueless as to what result it will have to load thousands more foreign occupation soldiers on the fiercely proud 50,000,000 strong Pashtu warrior nation, who have hated and killed foreign invaders for several thousand years now? The "result" will be endless flights carrying more U.S. dead into Dover until the soldiers have had enough and rise up to stop the war, as they did in Vietnam. And that day will come, not as soon as we might hope, but sooner than the Imperial filth running the government in Washington DC can possibly imagine. T]

When Hurlbut's battalion arrived in Maywand last fall, its first order of business was to encircle a swath of dusty plain with razor wire and erect an outpost.

It began as a makeshift effort, with tents and wooden latrines and meals in a bag, but Forward Operating Base Ramrod has since assumed the trappings of modern military life: a gymnasium, an Internet room and a chow hall run by the defense contractor KBR.

Although this district 45 miles west of Kandahar had long been regarded by the NATO-led military command in Afghanistan as a key infiltration route for insurgents, there were too few international forces to maintain a permanent presence here. The Canadian army, which has been responsible for the area since early 2006, came every few months to clear out Taliban fighters, but the insurgents would invariably crop back up as soon as the troops left.

Hurlbut's soldiers are trying a different tack and employing a counterinsurgency technique that has been used in the Iraq war. They are staying in Maywand.

Some bed down near the municipal building and the police headquarters. Another contingent patrols the highway.

Still others walk through villages every day, trying to convince impoverished farmers that they should cast their lot not with the Taliban but with NATO forces and Afghanistan's fledgling national government.

The soldiers had hoped their presence in the district would be welcomed by residents, who keep telling the troops that what they want more than anything is security -- and they will side with whomever can provide it.

But it hasn't worked yet.

"The local people are completely sitting on the fence, and they're content to stay on the fence," said Hurlbut, who commands the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Infantry Regiment.

"They don't really want to give us information."

The Taliban, however, has taken the 2-2 Infantry's presence in the district seriously. Insurgents mined the roads with scores of improvised explosives devices, more than 150 of which have hit the battalion's patrols and convoys.

In some parts of Afghanistan, police regularly patrol roads and interdict people planting bombs.

But in Maywand, the police spend more time in the district capital.

Although they have been through a new U.S.-led training program and have been assigned a team of civilian and military mentors, the police officers generally cannot be bothered to walk the beat.

And they have little interest in solving crimes.

When a man came to police headquarters recently to complain that his motorcycle had been stolen, the police refused to act without a bribe.

"Fine," he said, according to soldiers who witnessed the encounter. "I'm going to the Taliban. At least they'll take me seriously."

Even efforts to hand out money here have not been without peril. Last month, Hurlbut said he sought to win over a local mullah by outfitting his mosque with new prayer rugs and a loudspeaker system.

But after three weeks, the Taliban stole all of it.

“The progress here has been slow,” Hurlbut said. “We shouldn’t kid ourselves into thinking that everything will change when we get 17,000 additional troops in the south.

“They’re going to be moving into places like this, where there haven’t been any foreign forces for a long time. **[Not since the Russian army anyhow.]**

“And they’re going to discover that it’s going to take a while to accomplish our goals.” **[Yes. Some of the Russian soldiers are still there; the pieces of them they couldn’t find that is. Buried in the dirt beside the roads and the wrecks of their destroyed armor.]**

Four U.S. Soldiers Killed By IED In Bati Kot; U.S. Officer Says Resistance Troops “Are Deeply Entrenched With The Population”

[Clueless still doesn’t get it. The resistance fighters are the local population. Duh.]

3.15.09 KABUL (AFP) & AP

Hundreds of U.S. soldiers recently deployed near the Afghan-Pakistan border have seen clashes and attacks double in early 2009 compared with 2008, U.S. officials said.

Underscoring the danger, a roadside bomb Sunday in the same region killed four U.S. troops. The U.S. Central Command confirmed that one of the four was a U.S. airman assigned to the 755th Air Expeditionary Group.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the blast that killed the four in the eastern province of Nangarhar, on the border with Pakistan.

“It was an IED,” an ISAF spokesman at the force’s Kabul headquarters told AFP.

A statement said that two were killed immediately and two died later from their wounds.

The US military said the four were from the United States, which has about 38,000 soldiers in war-plagued Afghanistan.

An Afghan media officer in the province said the bomb had been remotely detonated to hit a convoy in Bati Kot district.

Clashes and attacks in the eastern province of Kunar surged 131% in January and February from the same period in 2008, said Lt. Col. Rumi Nielson-Green, a U.S. spokeswoman.

Bomb and gunfire attacks are up in part because 700 10th Mountain Division soldiers were deployed to Kunar in early January, putting more soldiers in harm's way.

Many of those areas are likely to have conditions similar to Kunar, where "the enemy that has a traditional hold in the area are deeply entrenched with the population," Nielson-Green said.

Two More Foreign Occupation Soldiers Killed In Afghanistan; Nationality Not Announced

15 Mar 2009 Reuters

SOUTHERN AFGHANISTAN - A soldier from the NATO-led force was killed during an attack of the insurgents on Saturday in an area of southern Afghanistan, the alliance said in a statement.

EASTERN AFGHANISTAN - Another soldier of the force lost his life the same day in a similar incident in an eastern region, it separately said.

<p>IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE END THE OCCUPATIONS</p>
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Afghan Occupation Supply Terminal Attacked In Pakistan; "The Charred Wrecks Included Several Humvees"



Burnt trucks carrying supplies to Afghanistan occupation forces on the outskirts of Peshawar March 15, 2009. REUTERS/Ali Imam

03/15/09 By RIAZ KHAN, Associated Press Writer

PESHAWAR, Pakistan – Suspected militants attacked a Pakistani transport terminal from which supplies are sent to NATO troops in Afghanistan, burning dozens of vehicles and shipping containers, police said.

About 40 assailants struck the Pak-Afghan Container Terminal near the northwestern city of Peshawar before dawn Sunday, police and witnesses said.

Mohammad Asif Khan, an assistant to a driver whose truck was parked at the terminal, said armed men scaled the back wall of the compound and tied up the guards.

“I was hiding in a corner, and I saw them throw petrol bombs and fire rockets and shots” at the parked vehicles, he said.

Police official Ejaz Khan said the attackers burned dozens of vehicles and shipping containers.

An Associated Press Television News cameraman who visited the depot said the charred wrecks included several Humvees.

Afghan-based U.S. and NATO forces get up to 75 percent of their supplies via routes through Pakistan.

Suspected Taliban militants have repeatedly struck transport depots near Peshawar in recent months, destroying scores of military vehicles, while attacks on the road through the Khyber Pass to the Afghan border have repeatedly forced its temporary closure.

Stupid In Sarobi:

Huge French Armored Column Drives Stupidly Back And Forth Accomplishing Nothing At All: [The Same Stupid Tactic They Used In Vietnam]

**“Here The People Are All Against Us,
Says 20-Year-Old Policeman
Nasratullah”**

**“Without The Planes Of The International
Forces, They Would Have Ambushed
Us”**

Mar 15 by Thibault Malterre, AFP

SAROBI, Afghanistan

It is still night when the convoy moves off, winding through hills like a huge snake: around 100 French armoured vehicles descend into a valley east of Kabul, their lights lacing through the darkness.

More than 500 French soldiers and 300 Afghan police and soldiers, as well a handful of men from the Norwegian Special Forces on all-terrain quad bikes are on the ground for “Operation Three Valleys” in the district of Sarobi.

Above, reconnaissance drones and helicopters watch over the only route, a difficult and dusty road that is vulnerable to ambushes.

It was just a few kilometres (miles) from here that the French military last August suffered its heaviest loss in 25 years when 10 soldiers were killed in an insurgent attack.

“We want to show the people and the insurgents that the French army is not here for revenge but that we will go where we want to and when we want to,” says Colonel Franck Chatelus, who commands the French battalion in Kabul.

The Afghan forces lead this push into a sometimes hostile area.

"This is also the time to show that the Afghan army today is not the same one of a few years ago, when it looted the country and maltreated the population," Chatelus adds.

The area, about 60 kilometres (37 miles) from the capital, is austere, stoney and mountainous; in the valley, small villages of mud-brick houses suddenly appear alongside a few fields.

French soldiers take position on the ridges while Afghan troops cover the police as they enter a village called Washa Kalay with a hostile reputation.

A quick search of some houses reveals nothing of interest but there is a field of opium poppies -- a lucrative crop that officials say finances some of the insurgents.

Police unenthusiastically uproot some of the shoots with a wooden spade, stamping on others.

"The insurgents who were in the village have gone to the other side of the mountain in Laghman province," says Mohibullah Babakar Khel, from the Afghan intelligence service.

Later the French colonel addresses elders in the village: "We offer our hand to the insurgents who agree to give up and cooperate with us."

"Give us your mines and bombs so that we can destroy them otherwise they risk killing or wounding your children."

The impoverished residents demand a well, electricity, a school.

"If a school is built, this area has to be secure. And a school would have to be for boys and for girls," says a French officer, referring to a tendency to prevent girls getting an education.

The French put on an impressive security cover for a visit the next day to the village of Siri Kalay but wait an hour for the police to arrive -- enough time for any insurgents to hide arms or ammunition.

This time only Afghan police enter the village, making for an unoccupied house that is said to belong to a "Commander Rostam," a member of the radical Hezb-e-Islami faction who has fled to Pakistan.

The raid nets police and military uniforms as well some electrical components, perhaps used for detonators.

"Here the people are all against us," says 20-year-old policeman Nasratullah, who earns just 120 dollars a month.

"Policemen have been killed close by. Without the planes of the international forces, they would have ambushed us."

The rebels may have been silent but the area is still dangerous: on the first day of the operation, mine clearers destroyed three rockets already in their launchers.

But the foreign troops -- part of a steadily expanding NATO-led International Security Assistance Force that now numbers about 62,000 across Afghanistan -- believe they have made an impression.

"The outcome of the operation is not material but psychological and moral. Little by little we are gaining the confidence of the population," says Chatelus, the French colonel.

"The insurgents were unable to do anything, they have been discredited in the eyes of the people," he says. **[Right. Just like Ho Chi Minh.]**

Resistance Action

11 March 2009 By VOA News & 15 Mar 2009 Reuters

HERAT - Six Afghan army personnel were wounded by heavy arms fire from militants on Saturday, the defence ministry said.

Security officials in Afghanistan say seven Afghan soldiers were killed and two wounded Wednesday when their vehicle hit a roadside bomb in the southeastern province of Khost.

A bomb exploded in the southern city of Kandahar as the mayor, Ghulam Haidar Hameedi, drove past, police said. "There was no harm to the mayor except his vehicle was damaged a bit," police said.

A suicide bomber blew up an explosives-laden vehicle in the capital Kabul as a foreign military convoy passed, the interior ministry said.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Resistance Action

03/14/09 Xinhua & Reuters & March 15 (Reuters)

An Iraqi soldier was killed and two others were wounded in a bomb explosion in the volatile province of Diyala on Saturday, a provincial police source said. The blast hit an Iraqi Army foot patrol near a village, some 30km east of the provincial capital city of Baquba, the source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity.

A Katyusha rocket hit a storage unit in an oil refinery in Baghdad's southern Doura district, police said, causing a fire. Local guards managed to put it out.

A bomb attached to a car killed the brother of the U.S.-backed neighbourhood patrols leader in northern Baghdad on Saturday, police said. Four members of his family were wounded in the blast.

Two Iraqi soldiers were wounded on Saturday when a roadside bomb exploded near an Iraqi army patrol in the Mansour district of western Baghdad, police said.

Insurgents in a car opened fire and killed an off-duty lieutenant colonel officer in central Mosul, 390 km (240 miles) north of Baghdad, police said.

THIS ENVIRONMENT IS HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH; ALL HOME, NOW



2.14.09: US soldiers at the scene of a twin bombing close to a bus station in the district of Bayah in western Baghdad. (AFP/Ali Yussef)

TROOP NEWS

**“Our Services Continue To Twist Earned
Benefits And Limit Them Unfairly
Without Publicly Debating The Issue”**

3.16.09
Army Times
Letters To The Editor

Alex Keenan's article ("Retirees' families deprived of GI Bill benefit," Feb. 16) hit the nail squarely on the head on this issue.

I urge all veterans to write their congressmen to get this bill changed to allow all honorable veterans who have earned their educational benefits to transfer them to their dependents if they so choose.

In these difficult financial times, it can be very hard to send our children to college, and the ability to transfer some of our earned monies to them for this important lifelong building block is critical.

Benefits like these were earned by the service member and should not be held hostage as if they do not even belong to the veteran to use freely.

This benefit could ultimately encourage more members to join or stay in longer, so they can use this later if they so choose.

I believe the more people who know about this the better, because I do not believe the average citizen would see the current law as the right way to handle this.

I believe they would be appalled at what lengths our services continue to twist earned benefits and limit them unfairly without publicly debating the issue.

Maj. Michael Consiglio (ret.)
Evans Mills, N.Y.

Troops Invited:

Comments, arguments, articles, and letters from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Write to Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or send email contact@militaryproject.org: Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Same address to unsubscribe. Phone: 917.677.8057

V.A. Staff Member Harassed Out Of Her Job For Helping Suicidal Iraq Veteran:

“If I Wouldn’t Have Talked To Her, Yeah, I Probably Would Have Shot Myself”

“They Didn’t Want It To Get Out That, In Fact, I Did Feel My Rights And The Rights Of This Veteran Had Been Violated And That Perhaps Crimes Had Been Committed”

[Thanks to James Starowicz, Veterans For Peace, for posting.]

Soon after Ornduff’s reassignment, scores of veterans, including Rhine, protested outside the hospital, wrote letters to the governor and requested meetings with top hospital officials. “We told them how much we needed her,” said Vietnam veteran John Brown of Memphis. “We told them they were making a big mistake in taking her away from us.”

February 1, 2009 By Kristina Goetz (Contact), Memphis Commercial Appeal [Excerpts]

Hours before dawn, Iraq war veteran Jared Rhine dressed in his desert uniform, ready to fight. The Army specialist wanted a one-way ticket to Baghdad to kill Iraqis.

Combat fire and smoke seemingly flooded his bedroom in the small town of West Plains, Mo. His only company: the smiling faces of his daughters tattooed on his forearms -- and two guns, a .22-caliber small-game rifle and a high-powered 7mm rifle near his bed.

As he sat alone, feet propped in a chair, it was as if someone turned a slide projector on overdrive behind his eyes. Flashbacks -- images of dead bodies and the fireball from a roadside bomb -- came in rapid fire.

In the early morning hours of April 2, 2007, Jared Rhine had a choice: Pick up a gun and end it all, or pick up a phone. He chose the phone.

Rhine dialed the number for the Memphis Veterans Medical Center and demanded to speak to clinical psychologist Sidney Ornduff, who was at home, asleep.

He refused to talk to a crisis intervention counselor.

After some argument, a medical administrative assistant patched Rhine through to Ornduff.

The patient and psychologist talked for more than two hours. Rhine cried, yelled, swore. But he finally agreed not to hurt himself and to go to bed and keep his appointment with another psychologist the next day.

“She was tellin’ me it ain’t my fault, that I wasn’t goin’ back; I already done my job,” Rhine said. “She always got through to me.”

All was not well, however.

A tangle of questions and conflicting stories about the early morning events surrounding that phone call would, over the next year and a half, alter Rhine’s life and wreak havoc on Ornduff’s career.

It would leave veterans wondering what happened to the popular doctor removed without explanation.

And it would spur one congressman to take the case all the way to Washington.

After agreeing to go to bed, Rhine hung up the phone, took off his uniform and fell asleep. The next thing he knew, police officers were in his bedroom.

“I was looking down the barrel of nine guns and had two Taser marks in my back,” Rhine said.

At Ornduff’s home, the phone rang again. The administrative assistant who’d patched Rhine through was on the line, Ornduff recalled. The West Plains police wanted to speak to her.

“She told me she had listened in the entire time, and not only that, but that she had also patched in members of the police department in the small community in which this veteran resided,” Ornduff said.

When Ornduff found out police had taken Rhine to the emergency room, she called the attending physician, who said the veteran was calm and cooperative and allowed to go home.

The psychologist, known to veterans as “Dr. O,” taught coping skills as part of the residential program for combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder she created in 2005, when the hospital hired her. Rhine had completed the program two days before the predawn phone call.

The next day, however, Ornduff was reassigned to another department and told she could have no patient contact.

Shortly thereafter, Ornduff requested a meeting with Memphis VA director Patricia Pittman.

“I had no idea that people were literally, what I consider eavesdropping on my private home line,” Ornduff said. “By sharing my concerns with the director of the hospital, I believe that set in motion the eventual outcome.”

“They didn’t want it to get out that, in fact, I did feel my rights and the rights of this veteran had been violated and that perhaps crimes had been committed.”

Soon after Ornduff’s reassignment, scores of veterans, including Rhine, protested outside the hospital, wrote letters to the governor and requested meetings with top hospital officials.

“We told them how much we needed her,” said Vietnam veteran John Brown of Memphis. “We told them they were making a big mistake in taking her away from us.”

The office of U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Memphis, fielded calls from veterans who wanted to know why Ornduff had been moved and whether the congressman could help. Neither the veterans’ questions nor the congressman’s inquiries yielded public answers.

The hospital had launched an internal investigation into the handling of the phone call, and Ornduff was put on paid leave, where she stayed for roughly five months.

In September 2007, Ornduff was fired and soon after invoked federal arbitration proceedings to fight for her job, a process that lasted a year.

Details of the arbitrator’s opinion, dated Sept. 19, 2008, show conflicting testimony of the events that early April morning about who called whom and how police got involved.

To complicate matters, phone records provided by the hospital were “inadequate, full of gaps and at best piecemeal,” the opinion said.

Ultimately, the arbitrator called Ornduff’s termination “totally unreasonable,” adding that she should be suspended, receive back pay and be restored to her position as program coordinator.

The hospital had claimed Ornduff exhibited questionable clinical judgment, in part, because she failed to ask whether anyone else was at home during the phone call.

Officials also accused her of violating patient confidentiality after she spoke to other psychologists for peer review.

At the time, the hospital had no procedures for such a crisis, the arbitrator wrote. The administrative assistant testified she hadn’t been trained. She gave police “a play by play description of what was going on ... according to the records provided by the VA,” the opinion stated.

The arbitrator said Ornduff used her clinical judgment, adding there is no single agreed-upon standard of care among psychologists.

The hospital’s allegations regarding patient confidentiality, the arbitrator explained, were “partially true” because the hospital’s policy is more stringent than the American Psychological Association’s code of ethics.

Maureen Holland, Ornduff’s attorney, disputed the charge in a written statement, calling it a “minor internal policy infraction.” She added that local and national mental-health professionals testified that her client handled the case appropriately.

In October, Ornduff returned to the hospital but was given administrative duties and no contact with patients. Within weeks, Ornduff said, she realized she'd never be fully restored as coordinator, as the arbitrator had awarded. She ultimately resigned.

Ornduff described the VA's actions as "shameful," and "politically motivated."

"I was vindicated," she said. "Do I feel vindicated? No. I was treated unfairly and wrongly by the administration of the VA.

"There has been a lot of criticism, a lot of second-guessing about the way the situation was handled. But I fully believe this man is alive today because I took that call."

Some veterans are still upset about losing Ornduff.

"These young men and women coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan need somebody like Dr. Ornduff," said Jack Anderson, a Vietnam veteran from Munford. "She has a way. You can be really hard core, but it's like she gets through that, and she reaches in and gets through to you to where you want to help yourself."

Ornduff has mixed feelings about leaving but no regrets about taking Rhine's call.

"If confronted with the same situation again, I would do it again -- even though the price I paid was great," she said.

Her decision to fight was about more than getting her job back: "It was something I did for myself and for the men I worked with and with some hope that the program would be restored."

Cohen said he's disappointed with the resignation and how the case was handled.

"I plan to take this issue up to Washington," he said, declining to elaborate. "This is troubling. When there's somebody that dedicated to ... their patients, and has got that much respect from their patients, that's a relationship that needs to be nurtured and used as an example to others."

As for Rhine, now 32, the events emanating from the phone call forced him into near seclusion. He socializes little and is apprehensive about talking on the phone.

Nightmares still make him edgy, and flashbacks thrust him into Iraq one minute and back to small-town Missouri the next. Though he left the wanton destruction of Baghdad in 2004, it's as if Baghdad won't leave him.

Twice married since returning from Iraq, he says his life's only bright spot is seeing his daughters every other weekend.

"The Memphis VA screwed up my world up here," Rhine said. "I'm just a veteran who was looking for help. ... I didn't do nothin' wrong. Dr. O didn't do nothin' wrong."

“She could have been like some of these other doctors and told me, ‘hey, call the suicide prevention line’ and went back to bed. But she didn’t. She talked to me all night.”

Reflecting on that call, he said simply: “If I wouldn’t have talked to her, yeah, I probably would have shot myself.”

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS



“At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. Oh had I the ability, and could reach the nation’s ear, I would, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke.

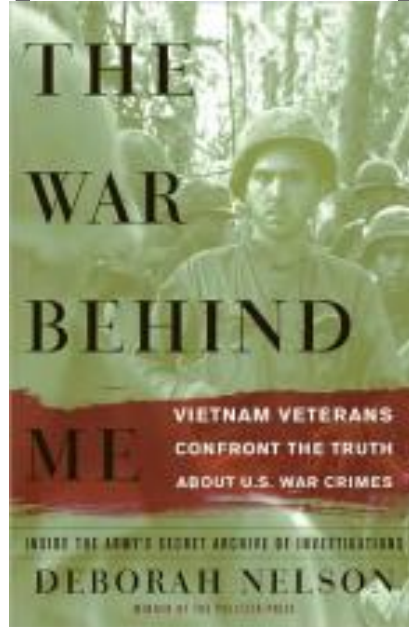
“For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder.

“We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake.”

Frederick Douglass, 1852

Deborah Nelson’s The War Behind Me:

Vietnam Veterans Confront The True About U.S. War Crimes [Book Review]



[Thanks to SSG N (ret'd) who sent this in.

[She writes: "The comments after the article are a hard read." Amen to that: see what a Vietnam Veteran has to say after the review ends. T.]

Nelson constantly and relentlessly digs beneath the surface statistics to pull into the light of day what lies beneath -- the complicated and dense web of victims and executioners, soldiers and civilians, ground-pounders in the bush and starved Generals in the Pentagon, courageous whistle blowers who tell the truth, and bureaucratic cowards who cover it up.

February 21, 2009 By Robert Steck, Firedoglake.com

"Henry peered over a short hedge, where women and children huddled as Carter and others took aim. Soldiers dragged a naked teenager from a hooch. 'She was brought out by two guys, and she was thrown into the pile ... There were babies in there too ... She was just thrown on the pile and they started shooting.'

"A farmer shot on the way home from market, a man on his bicycle, three farmers in a field, teenage brothers fishing peacefully on a lake, (all killed by American soldiers) – there are hundreds of such reports in the war-crime archive, each one dutifully recorded, sometimes with no more than a passing sentence or two, as if the killing were as routine as the activity it interrupted."

As Deborah Nelson makes clear in passages like the above, (from her new book *The War Behind Me*), chronicling a seemingly endless accumulation of war crimes can become monotonous. The evil can come to seem, in Hannah Arendt's term, "banal", and one is reminded of Stalin's cynical observation that one death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic.

But it is no small part of the genius of Nelson's book that she never lets the horror hide in the statistics. She never allows the banality to obscure the blood.

Instead, Nelson constantly and relentlessly digs beneath the surface statistics to pull into the light of day what lies beneath -- the complicated and dense web of victims and executioners, soldiers and civilians, ground-pounders in the bush and starched Generals in the Pentagon, courageous whistle blowers who tell the truth, and bureaucratic cowards who cover it up.

Nelson's book raises such profoundly troubling questions in such a powerful way that its painful puzzles continue to pop up in readers' minds long after they have turned the last page. Secondary explosions.

Throughout her extraordinary book Nelson trains a cool, clear and carefully calibrated eye on realities that are as heated as napalm, as murky as the Mekong River, and as intense as a firefight. We are deeply in her debt.

Her method is simple and straightforward. She and Vietnam Scholar, Nick Turse, found out that at the time the Army launched its inquiry into the massacre at My Lai, it also launched a second inquiry into other war crimes.

That second inquiry was headed up by a team of officers who worked entirely in secret for more than five years.

The team assembled nine thousand pages of evidence chronicling a wide and hideous range of events when American soldiers perpetrated murders of civilians, committed atrocities, and in other ways systematically violated the laws of war and of the Army Field Manual.

Nelson and Turse set out to make their way through this staggering accumulation of reports which added up, in the words of one witness, to "a My Lai a month."

Most of the incidents in the nine thousand came to light because of 'whistleblowers' who wrote letters describing the crimes to political and military leaders, describing the event and naming the perpetrators.

After studying those files Nelson went to whatever lengths necessary to find and interview all the protagonists: whistleblowers, perpetrators, investigators, and, in a trip to Vietnam, surviving victims and the families of murdered victims.

As one might surmise, there is no lack of drama in these encounters, perhaps especially those who are politely asked about atrocities they committed decades earlier. Drama reveals character, and I was especially intrigued by one former soldier who, confronted with overwhelming evidence of his commission of war crimes thirty years earlier,

responded over and over, with increasing heat to Nelson's questions: "WHY DON'T YOU GET A REAL JOB!!"

Toward the end of her book Nelson interviews a few upstanding retired generals who worked both while in Vietnam and later to prevent atrocities in Vietnam and, later, to try to learn the lessons that might prevent them from occurring in any future war.

One of those generals, John Johns, is convinced that whenever American troops deploy against enemies who are mixed in with the civilian population atrocities and war crimes are inevitable.

Throughout, however, Nelson casts herself as a discoverer of facts, asking questions rather offering answers. The questions she poses are so compelling and consequential that today's on-line discussion should be especially lively.

Comment: Vietnam Veteran

mh February 21st, 2009 at 2:26 pm & 3:24 pm [Excerpts]

Thanks so much for doing this.

Ever since I started real (civilian) therapy about sixteen years ago I've been willing to talk to (some) people about the things I did and saw in Vietnam in the summer of 1970.

Interestingly, after bush and 9/11 it became much more common for people to either insist I was making up the atrocities or that my experience was an aberration and actually, American soldiers don't "do things like that".

It's also important to remember that some of the worst excesses weren't intentional.

I killed a woman and three children because I fired up a hooch that I was SURE we took fire from.

That one still tears at me, because there were no weapons or men in the hooch, just those four sad bodies.

Which doesn't excuse the ones that WERE intentional. I shot a teenage kid's foot half off and instead of trying to get him treated, turned him over to the ARVNs to interrogate.

Pretty sure he didn't survive it.

Anyway, thanks for once again reminding people that war is ALWAYS horrible, and there is no honor to be found amid the horror.

Honesty has been very good for finally figuring out how to live my life again.

As to courage, well, probably not so much.

I wasn't drafted, but I wasn't real happy about joining the army. I like motorcycles and surfing. But in those days, when you got in trouble you could choose the service over being prosecuted. One of a long string of bad decisions.

I turned 19 on the Cambodian border.

I actually found a home amid the savagery, as all you had to do to be accepted and even looked up to was to do stupid, brutal things.

I found I had it within myself to do those things.

When I got home I didn't have the courage to speak out, as others here did. I learned to cook crank, got on a scooter and ran for close to 20 years. Never had to learn to live, never had much in the way of a job, never had much of a relationship. When I wasn't in jail I got fucked up, and when I wasn't fucked up I was in jail.

Anyway, a good woman and an amazingly compassionate judge helped me find, if not my sanity, at least some peace.

That war robbed me of a lot of my humanity and a big chunk of my life, but I'm afraid I was a willing accomplice.

I never reported any of the crimes and atrocities I saw. And I would have stonewalled any investigation if I had been asked.

I can live with the man I see in the mirror these days, but I don't think he's earned any pats on the back...

**“The List Of Countries
Experiencing Civil Unrest Is
Growing By The Day”
“Once Stable Countries Have Seen
Millions Of Their Citizens Revolt -
Taking To The Streets”**

“As We Sit Here In The U.S. -- The Country With The Highest Inequality Of Wealth In The Industrialized World -- It Seems To Be Just A Matter Of Time Before All Hell Breaks Lose”
“In Preparation, The Obama Administration Has Recently Made \$2 Billion In Aid Available To Local Police Departments”

March 10th, 2009 Ampedstatus.com [Excerpts]

As the global economy continues its downward spiral, rioting due to this Wall Street led meltdown is spreading through the globe like wildfire.

The list of countries experiencing civil unrest is growing by the day, to name some recent hotspots: Bolivia, Bosnia, Brazil, Britain, Bulgaria, Cameroon, China, Egypt, France, Greece, Germany, Haiti, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Ivory Coast, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Philippines, Russia, Senegal, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine and Yemen.

UK Guardian news report ran with the headline: “Governments Across Europe Tremble as Angry People Take to the Streets.”

Once stable countries have seen millions of their citizens revolt - taking to the streets, disrupting public services, blocking roadways, participating in nationwide strikes, seizing shopping malls and engaging in many other forms of civil disobedience - as entire governments have fallen.

Government offices, public facilities, businesses, homes and cars have been vandalized, looted and burnt to the ground.

As positive an impact as Obama might have on governmental policy and national confidence, we can only escape reality for so long. In the words of Chris Hedges:

“It is only a matter of time. And not much time. When things start to go sour, when Barack Obama is exposed as a mortal waving a sword at a tidal wave, the United States could plunge into a long period of precarious social instability.”

Things have obviously been bad for the past year, but things are just beginning to get much worse.

As economic forecasters predict another two years of decline, the Associated Press reports: "The economy's downhill slide at the end of last year was likely much steeper than the government initially thought and it is probably doing just as poorly now — if not worse — as a relentless slew of negative forces feed on each other, pushing the country deeper into recession."

Danny Schechter, a journalist who was one of the first to sound the economic alarm and author of *Plunder: Investigating Our Economic Calamity*, explains: "It seems endless, and we are not even touching the surface of the real economic time bombs on the horizon from credit default swaps, derivatives and credit cards." A BBC report states: "There is now \$2.2 trillion of toxic bank debt worldwide, the IMF says, \$500bn more than it estimated a few months ago."

It was staggering in January when 655,000 people lost their job in the US, but this pace has continued with no signs of slowing.

The US economy is now shedding over 23,000 jobs every day. Since the beginning of the crisis, a little over one year ago, over 4.4 million jobs have been lost, with more than half of the cuts occurring in the past four months.

We haven't seen losses like this since World War II - over 60 years ago.

A record (and quickly increasing) five million US citizens now file for unemployment benefits. In the past month, 787,000 people had their work hours cut and now work part-time instead of full-time, bringing the number of underemployed people up to 8.6 million.

When you add in unemployed people and jobless workers who have literally given up looking for a job, you get a astounding number of over 22 million unemployed/underemployed people - that's a 14.8% rate - and climbing fast!

The International Labor Organization predicts there will be over 50 million jobs lost worldwide in 2009.

The world's largest credit insurer reports that 42,000 companies went out of business in 2008, a 45% increase over 2007, and they expect a stunning 62,000 to fail in 2009. Just think of what will happen when all these companies and people are added to the masses that already can't pay back loans and credit cards, let alone afford to keep their warehouses, stores, offices and homes.

The US government, which is about to pump another \$787.2 billion of tax payer funds into the dying economy, is already over \$60 TRILLION in debt - that's over \$500k per US household - owed before the new stimulus bill! On top of that, US consumers are already \$14 trillion in debt from credit cars and mortgages.

On the housing front things are in full-blown crisis mode. As Depression-era style tent cities spread throughout the US, Ariana Huffington writes, "we are facing nothing less than a national emergency, with 10,000 Americans going into foreclosure every day and 2.3 million homeowners having faced foreclosure proceedings in 2008.

When we put flesh and blood on these numbers, the suffering they represent is enormous and so is the social disintegration they entail.”

Salon writer Glenn Greenwald recently wrote about a Fox News interview that shows how much of a disconnect there is between large corporate news organizations and the obviously frustrated public:

“This Fox News interview with Virg Bernero — the Mayor of highly unionized Lansing, Michigan and himself the son of a retired GM worker — is, for several reasons, really worth watching....

“The glaring discrepancy he notes — between (a) the consensus of our political class that workers must endlessly give up wage, health and other benefits even as (b) we shovel trillions of dollars in government subsidies to Wall Street for ongoing massive executive bonuses and the like for the very people who caused the collapse — is one that... is rarely heard in our mainstream debate with such clarity and passion.

“Even more notable is the dripping condescension directed at him by the Fox personality at the end of the interview for having committed the sin of exhibiting genuine passion and anger over something as trivial as the disappearing middle class and the massive and growing rich-poor gap. That’s the crime of Shrillness, one of the prime hallmarks of Unseriousness — failing/refusing to suppress one’s anger towards our political and financial establishment.”

For another recent example of reality bursting through the numbing television set, former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski expressed his fears with MSNBC’s Joe Scarborough:

JOE SCARBOROUGH: You also talked about the possibility of class conflict.

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI: “I was worrying about it because we’re going to have millions and millions of unemployed, people really facing dire straits. And we’re going to be having that for some period of time before things hopefully improve.

“And at the same time there is public awareness of this extraordinary wealth that was transferred to a few individuals at levels without historical precedent in America....

“And you sort of say to yourself: what’s going to happen in this society when these people are without jobs, when their families hurt, when they lose their homes, and so forth?

“We have the government trying to repair: repair the banking system, to bail the housing out. But what about the rich guys?... Where is the monied class today? Why aren’t they doing something: the people who made billions, millions.... there’s going to be growing conflict between the classes and if people are unemployed and really hurting, hell, there could be even riots!”

Harvard economic historian Niall Ferguson adds:

“... this is a very unfair crisis. The epicenter is the United States... it’s an unfair world.... Here is the world’s biggest economy, which gave us subprime mortgages, rampant securitization, the collateralized debt obligation, Lehmann Brothers, Merrill Lynch....

There will be blood, in the sense that a crisis of this magnitude is bound to increase political as well as economic (conflict). It is bound to destabilize some countries. It will cause civil wars to break out, that have been dormant. It will topple governments that were moderate and bring in governments that are extreme. These things are pretty predictable.”

As Joshua Holland put it: “At least in Western Europe, cries of ‘burn the shit down!’ are being heard in countries with some of the highest standards of living in the world...”

In preparation for what many believe is going to be a tumultuous summer, the Obama administration has recently made \$2 billion in aid available to local police departments.

In Europe, Military Intelligence and police are bracing for the worst.

They have been preparing to suppress mass civilian disorder, as they fear a “summer of rage.”

A recent UK poll revealed, “More than a third of voters believe the Army will have to be brought in to deal with a ‘summer of rage’ on British streets as the recession bites...” Police and governments around the world know that it is now much easier to recruit “foot-soldiers” to take part in civil disobedience when you have so many unemployed and struggling to make ends meet.

Now that President Obama is off the campaign trail and settled into the oval office, his “Hope” seems to be fading fast as he sees the tidal wave heading for us. Just listen to the “hopeful” Obama in his first news conference as president:

“And if there’s anyone out there who still doesn’t believe this constitutes a full-blown crisis, I suggest speaking to one of the millions of Americans whose lives have been turned upside down because they don’t know where their next paycheck is coming from.”

Or, as George W. Bush said about the US economy just before leaving office: “This sucker is going down!”

So, as we sit here in the US, at the epicenter of the economic meltdown - also the country with the highest inequality of wealth in the industrialized world - it seems to be just a matter of time before all hell breaks lose.

Tick... tick... tick...

<p>DO YOU HAVE A FRIEND OR RELATIVE IN THE MILITARY?</p>

Forward GI Special 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 wars, inside the armed services and at home. Send email requests to address up top or write to: The Military Project, Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657. Phone: 917.677.8057

CLASS WAR REPORTS



[Thanks to SSG N (ret'd) who sent this in.]

South African Dockworkers Refuse To Offload Exports From Israel

“The Momentum Against Apartheid Israel Has Become An Irresistible Force”

“We Are Proud To Stand With The Millions Around The World Who Say ‘Enough Is Enough’”



Reuters

6 February 2009 Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC) & Mar 08, 2009 BY MIKE MARQUSEE, The Hindu

The Congress of South African Trade Union is pleased to announce that its members, dock workers belonging to the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) achieved a victory last night when they stood firm by their decision not to offload the Johanna Russ, a ship that was carrying Israeli goods to South Africa.

This, despite threats to COSATU members from sections of the pro-Israeli lobby, and despite severe provocation.

The Johanna Russ, flying an Antigua flag, is owned by M. Dizengoff and Co., an established “pioneer of the modern era of shipping business in the Middle East” and shipping agent for the ironically named Zim Israel Navigation Company. (Ironic because, last year, the same SATAWU members refused to offload the Chinese ship An Yue Jiang, which was carrying arms and ammunition destined for Robert Mugabe’s army.)

The worker action last night took place despite attempted subterfuge on the part of the owners of the shipping company.

There was an attempt to confound the plan by arriving earlier than originally scheduled, which was 8 February. Dates for the berthing of the Johanna Russ were changed constantly.

Yesterday morning, [5 February] SATAWU members were told that the ship would dock this morning (Friday) at 02:00. Thanks to the vigilance of the dock workers, SATAWU discovered that the ship had docked on Wednesday morning and was due to be offloaded last night at 21:00.

But the vigilant workers were on guard and immediately they realised that it had docked, they then refused to handle it, despite pressures from management.

SATAWU members maintained their refusal to offload the ship and also attempted to ensure that scab labour would not be used.

A few hours after berthing, at 23:00, the Johanna Russ sneaked out of the Durban Harbour.

From the beginning of this action, COSATU workers remained resolute about their position and were convinced that, following the recent Israeli massacres in Gaza, they will take determined action against Israel.

Israel's terror included flagrant breaches of international law, the bombing of densely populated neighbourhoods, the illegal deployment of chemical white phosphorous, and attacks on schools, ambulances, relief agencies, hospitals, universities and places of worship.

COSATU has now decided to intensify its efforts in support of the struggles of the Palestinian people.

The worker victory in Durban yesterday spurs COSATU members on to more determined action in order to isolate the Apartheid state of Israel.

Other COSATU unions are currently in discussion about how they might also give effect to COSATU resolutions on boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel, including a refusal to handle Israeli goods, and continuing pressure on our government to sever diplomatic and trade relations with Israel.

The momentum against apartheid Israel has become an irresistible force.

We are proud to stand with the millions around the world who say 'Enough is enough'.

They are doing what we asked them to do when we faced the apartheid regime in our own country.

COSATU and the PSC call on all people of conscience to join us in boycotting Israeli products and institutions until a just, democratic state, with equal rights for all comes into existence in Palestine.

This is just the beginning of a solidarity campaign which will continue until the demands of the Palestinian people have been won.

For more information, call:
Randall Howard (Satawu General Secretary) - 082 564 6298

Patrick Craven (Cosatu) – 082 821 7456
Melissa Hoole (PSC) – 073 906 0017
Bongani Masuku (Cosatu)– 079 499 6419
Salim Vally (PSC) – 082 802 5936
Na'eem Jeenah (PSC) – 084 574 2674

MIKE MARQUSEE:

There are many who think of international labour solidarity as something belonging to a distant past.

True, far too often it has amounted to little more than empty rhetoric.

But what we saw in Durban was international labour solidarity not as a slogan or admirable ideal or bit of wishful thinking but as a living practice, a pointer to the future. In a world of over-hyped spectacle, this was the real thing.

Most importantly, it is not an isolated event.

The Western Australian section of the Maritime Union of Australia endorsed the boycott and has urged its members not to handle Israeli goods.



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

**POLITICIANS CAN'T BE COUNTED ON TO HALT
THE BLOODSHED**

**THE TROOPS HAVE THE POWER TO STOP THE
WARS**

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