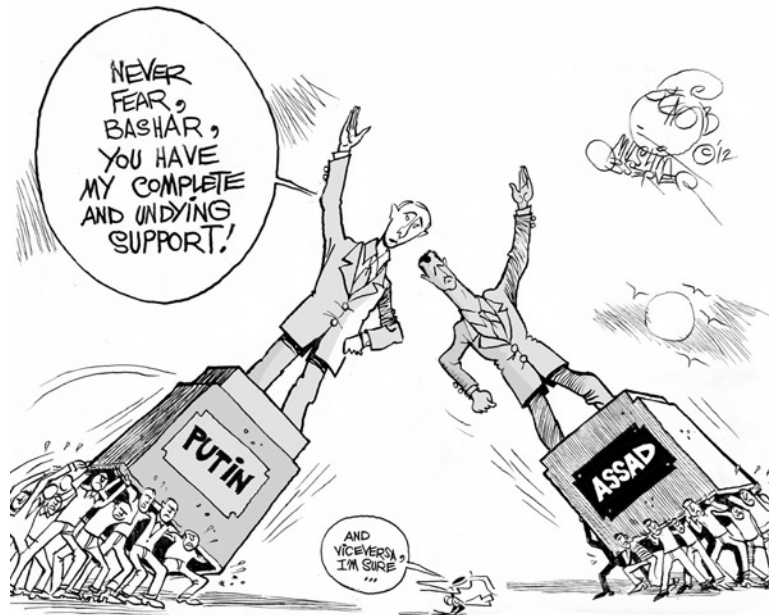


Military Resistance 10F15



“Most Of Our Lawmakers, Who Never Served, Want To Put More Of Our Benefits On The Chopping Block After A Decade Of War”

“Make The Soldier The Priority, Not The Problem”

Letters To The Editor
Army Times
June 25, 2012

The debate over Army standards of appearance is symbolic of what is wrong with our Army today. As the barrage of complaints over the black beret 11 years ago showed, we are soldiers and we will do what we are told.

For me, what might make this easier to accept is to see the same fervor being put into saving our ever-eroding benefits.

Tricare has become Tri-To-Care — no more free family dental, the PX is more expensive than almost everywhere, and most of our lawmakers, who never served, want to put more of our benefits on the chopping block after a decade of war.

How about living the Army values of loyalty and duty, and putting the same effort into saving us from Washington as what is being put into our sideburns and weekend shaving habits?

Make the soldier the priority, not the problem.

Sgt. 1st Class Stephen Rogers
Big Rock, Tenn.

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 email contact@militaryproject.org: Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Same address to unsubscribe.

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Foreign Occupation “Servicemember” Killed Somewhere Or Other In Afghanistan Friday: Nationality Not Announced

June 22, 2012 AP

A foreign servicemember died following an insurgent attack in southern Afghanistan today.

Another Foreign Occupation “Servicemember” Killed Somewhere Or Other In Afghanistan Friday:

Nationality Not Announced

June 22, 2012 AP

A foreign servicemember died following an insurgent attack in southern Afghanistan today.

Springfield Soldier Honored At Arlington Cemetery



June 21 By Luz Lazo, The Washington Post

When he was a boy and living in the Philippines, John C. Pratt's school bus drove by Clark Air Base twice each day. Captivated by the planes, he told his parents he'd someday pilot one himself.

"John said, 'I am going to fly,' and that's what he did," said his mother, Josephine Pratt.

Pratt, 51, an Army chief warrant officer 5, was aboard a helicopter in eastern Afghanistan when it crashed May 28, killing him and another person. On Thursday, Pratt was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery.

His wife, Nicola, 6-year-old daughter, Emma, and parents, John D. and Josephine Pratt, received a flag in a somber graveside service. Four Apache helicopters flew overhead to honor the decorated pilot. Soldiers fired three rifle volleys.

Friends and family remembered Pratt, who grew up in Fairfax County, as a man committed to each mission and to his country, a dedicated father and husband and a loved son. He served in uniform for 27 years.

Army officials said an initial report indicates there was no enemy activity in the vicinity at the time of the Memorial Day incident, and the cause of the crash remains under investigation.

Also killed in the crash was Capt. John R. Brainard, 26, of Dover-Foxcroft, Maine. Both men were assigned to the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade in Ansbach-Katterbach, Germany. Pratt was serving his third combat tour; he had twice been in Iraq.

A master aviator, Pratt grew up in Springfield, where he graduated from West Springfield High School and was captain of the school's "It's Academic" team. He played soccer in a youth club and later brought his love of the sport to the places he was stationed, assisting coaches of existing teams or starting new ones.

His main passion since childhood, though, was flying. He became interested in the early 1960s when his family lived in the Philippines because his father was in the Foreign Service, his mother recalled. And that interest never waned.

"John made up his mind when he was 3 years old, I am sure, that he wanted to fly, and that has been his main aim," Josephine Pratt said. "His life was flying. That was it. He loved flying."

Pratt was enrolled at George Mason University when he joined the Army in 1981, partly because he couldn't resist an offer to fly, his older sister Leslie McDunn said.

"He was hooked when the recruiter said to him, 'I can get you into a flight program, you can be a pilot.' And that was it. John was like, 'Tell me more,'" McDunn said.

He received an associate's degree in banking and finance from George Mason. While in the Army, he earned a degree in aeronautical studies from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

Pratt, who put in more than 10,000 flying hours in the service, spent much of his military career teaching others to fly. He recently told his father that he had no intention of leaving the Army as long as he could continue to fly.

Pratt was rated to fly on five separate airframes. He favored gunships, including the AH-64 Apache attack helicopter. His service awards include the Soldier's Medal, two Bronze Star Medals, the NATO Medal, the Air Assault Badge, the Master Army Aviator Badge and the Combat Action Badge.

This year, during his last visit to the Springfield home where he grew up, he helped his parents with household chores and joined relatives for dinner at his favorite restaurant, the Bonefish Grill in Centreville.

"He told stories about his daughter, who just learned to read. . . . It was a good evening," McDunn said. "My son was getting ready to go into basic training for the U.S. Army, so

my brother was consoling me and telling me that basic training would be a wonderful thing and that I would not recognize my son when he got out of basic. And that's true."

McDunn's son, William, now stationed at Fort Campbell, Ky., graduated from basic training a couple of days before his uncle was killed. "I really wished John had been there," said McDunn. "I know that John would have been a mentor to my son if he had lived."

MORENO VALLEY: Slain Marine Loved The Corps



Marine Cpl. Anthony R. Servin, 22, of Moreno Valley was killed in combat in Afghanistan last week. CONTRIBUTED IMAGE

10 June 2012 BY DAVID KECK, STAFF WRITER; Press-Enterprise

A Marine corporal from Moreno Valley killed in combat in Afghanistan last week loved the Corps and had just re-enlisted, his aunt said Sunday, June 10.

Cpl. Anthony R. Servin, 22, was about five months into his tour in that Central Asian country when he died in combat in Helmand Province on Friday, the Department of Defense told the family, Lupe Nava said.

Servin's mother, Leticia Gomez, and his younger brother, Juan Alberto Servin, who is also a Marine stationed in North Carolina, were in Washington D.C. on Sunday to bring his body home.

Helmand Province borders Pakistan to the south. It is one of the areas of heaviest fighting between NATO forces and the Taliban in the 11-year war in Afghanistan.

Servin was a 2008 graduate of Canyon Springs High School. He joined the Marines soon after graduation and was attached to the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force stationed at Camp Pendleton.

The last time Nava saw her nephew was in February, shortly before he went overseas.

“He was very proud of being in the Marines,” Nava said. “He was proud to wear that uniform. He loved doing what he was doing.”

Servin had a girlfriend, but Nava declined to give her name. Born in Riverside, Servin enjoyed playing video games and being with his friends, Nava said. He laughed easily and was friendly with everyone he met, Nava said.

“He was a very likeable person,” she said. “A lot of people will remember his smile and his laugh. He always thought of others first.”

A Moreno Valley Marine was killed Friday, June 8, in combat in Afghanistan, the Department of Defense reported.

A Department of Defense news release stated that the death of Servin is still being investigated.

Yucaipa: Local Soldier Killed In Afghanistan



Army Spc. Nathan Tyler Davis, 20, of Yucaipa was killed Saturday in Afghanistan.
CONTRIBUTED IMAGE

12 June 2012 BY MARK MUCKENFUSS, STAFF WRITER, Press-Enterprise

Desiree Davis said she will miss her son's "amazing" smile.

Army Spc. Nathan Tyler Davis, 20, of Yucaipa, was killed Saturday when a bomb exploded under the armored vehicle he was driving in Tore Obeh, Afghanistan. Three other soldiers were injured in the blast.

Desiree Davis said her son, who went by Tyler, was an outgoing, personable man.

“He has so many friends,” she said. “It’s been very touching and very heartbreaking, the people that are sending us messages and cards.”

Davis had a generous streak from the time he was a young boy, she said.

“When he was little and the ice cream man would come by, if he had three dollars in his pocket he would buy ice cream for all the kids in the neighborhood,” she said.

When he got older and was earning his own money by working, she added, it was not uncommon for him to treat his friends when they went for fast food.

The youngest of the family’s three sons, Davis was a 2010 graduate of Green Valley High School, a continuation school. Principal Corey Loomis said that when Davis arrived as a student during his junior year, he wasn’t much of a student.

“School wasn’t his most favorite thing,” Loomis said. “I had to ride him a little bit for attendance and tardies, but I also knew he was working, sometimes full time.”

Loomis said that during Oak Glen’s apple growing season, Davis would get up at 4:30 a.m. to load and unload trucks before coming to school. Even though he wasn’t much interested in spending time in class, Loomis said, the young Davis was always more mature than his fellow classmates.

“He was a clean kid, and he was always focused,” he said.

During the summer between his junior and senior year, Davis met with a recruiter and decided he wanted to enlist in the Army. His recruiter told him he had to graduate from high school.

Loomis said Davis returned to school determined to earn a diploma. “He really hammered out his credits,” he said. “He actually graduated early.”

Desiree Davis said her son loved being a soldier, putting in extra work to get the positions he wanted. Even during rough training, she said, he would put a positive spin on the challenges he faced.

Except for a few comments about the early summer heat in Afghanistan, she said, “he never really complained about anything.”

He was a SAW gunner with his unit in Afghanistan, a job he had to fight to get, his mother said. Based at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Alaska, Davis was a member of 1st Battalion (Airborne), 501st Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division,

“What really keeps me positive is knowing that he died doing what he loved,” Desiree Davis said. “That has given my husband (Kirk) and I both comfort.”

Davis’ Hometown Hero banner at Fifth Street and Wildwood Canyon Road in Yucaipa will be replaced with a memorial banner during a ceremony at 6 p.m. Sunday, June 17.

Final Good-Byes To Fallen Marine

11 Jun 2012 By Krista Henery, (WLF1)

COVINGTON, Ind.

23-year-old Lance Corporal Joshua Witsman of Covington was laid to rest Sunday.

Witsman was killed in the line of duty on May 30, 2012, during his second tour in Afghanistan.

Those who knew Lance Corporal Joshua Witsman described him as a leader. But most of all, a true American hero.

"He had a lot of pride in his family, in his school, the athletic teams, his community," Witsman's former coach, Marilyn Hankins said. "So when I found out that he was going to be a Marine that didn't surprise me at all. I knew the kind of pride Josh would show in the work he did."

Marilyn Hankins was a former high school coach of Witsman. She said she never stopped thinking about the 23-year-old Covington native since the day he left for war.

"Each day, I drive the same route to school and, when I pass his home, there's a banner that talks about Josh and each day, I would pray for Josh and his family," Hankins said.

But on May 30, Hankins' prayers turned to tears when she heard that Witsman was killed in Afghanistan while fighting for his country's freedom.

"I just finished praying for him that day, and about two minutes later, I got a text from my sister and she said she just heard that Josh wasn't living now and I really found that hard to deal with. It broke my heart," Hankins said.

While those who knew Witsman mourned the loss of their hometown hero Sunday, hundreds of others who were complete strangers to Witsman came to honor the fallen hero and to pay their respects.

"I know there's a possibility someday that it could be my family in there sitting in that gymnasium watching my casket be shut and it hurts me to think about that," U.S. soldier, Zach Shireman said.

"It's just important for me to come say thank you and to show my support and pay my respect for an American soldier," Covington resident, Jamie Lopez said. Hundreds of Patriot Guard riders also lined the outside of Covington Community High School Sunday, holding American flags high in honor of Witsman.

"We love our soldiers and our Marines," Ron Coleman said. "Regardless of our view points on the war, we're here because we had a fallen hero."

"Hopefully, it will ease some of that pain to know that they are well loved by us. That's why we're here to show our honor and respect," Dale Ready said.

And now as Covington community members say good-bye to their fallen hero, they said through memories, they'll always keep Joshua Witsman's spirit alive.

Witsman was married the week of Thanksgiving last year.

He leaves behind a wife and two step-children.

“The Number Of US Military Deaths In The Afghan Theater Officially Passed 2,000 Last Week”

June 22, 2012 www.michaelmunk.com [Excerpts]

The number of US military deaths in the Afghan theater officially passed 2,000 last week.

AFGHANISTAN THEATER: US forces suffered 165 combat casualties between June 12-21 in the week ending June 12 raising the total to 34,728.

This includes 18,107 dead and wounded from what the Pentagon classifies as "hostile" causes and 16,621 dead or medically evacuated (as of May 7) from what it calls "non-hostile" causes.

US media divert attention from the actual cost in American life and limb by reporting regularly only the total killed (6,494: 4,489 in Iraq, 2005 in Afghanistan) but rarely mentioning those wounded in action (48,754: 32,228 in Iraq, 16,526 in Afghanistan).

They ignore the 58,948 (42,752 in Iraq; 16,196 in AfPak (as of May 7) military casualties injured and ill seriously enough to be medevac'd out of theater, even though the 6,494 total dead include 1,388 (963 in Iraq, 425 in Afghanistan) who died from those same "non hostile" causes, including 314 suicides (as of May 7) and at least 18 in Iraq from faulty KBR electrical work.

**POLITICIANS REFUSE TO HALT THE
BLOODSHED**

**THE TROOPS HAVE THE POWER TO STOP THE
WAR**

Australian Chopper Makes Hard Landing In Afghanistan

June 23, 2012 ABC Home

An Australian soldier suffered minor injuries after a helicopter made a hard landing during combat support operations in Afghanistan on Friday.

The incident involving an Australian Ch-47 Chinook helicopter occurred at the Coalition Force Patrol Base in Kandahar province, while the aircraft was transporting personnel and equipment.

Joint Task Force 633 Commander Major General Stuart Smith said the wounded air crewman has informed his next of kin and is likely to return to work in the coming days.

"One of the aircrew was injured and has been treated on site," he said.

"All other personnel onboard underwent precautionary health checks following the incident."

Major General Smith said a damage assessment and recovery team went to the site of the hard landing.

"The teams have secured the Chinook in its location and an investigation into the hard landing is underway," he said.

"Extent of the damage to the aircraft is being assessed.

"The Chinook will be moved to Kandahar Airfield by the safest and most economical means."

An investigation is underway but Defence says it does not appear the incident was caused by enemy fire.

Insurgents Storm Government-Resort: Taliban Say "It Was Timed To An Event In Which Diplomats And Senior Afghan Officials Took Part"

“The Insurgents Held Off Scores Of Afghan Forces For About 12 Hours”



A foreign soldier, center, is seen outside the Spozhmai hotel on Lake Qargha where Taliban insurgents have killed almost two dozen people in an attack that began before midnight, just north of Kabul, Afghanistan, June, 22, 2012. (AP)



Afghans hide from militants outside of the Spozhmai hotel on Lake Qurgha June, 22, 2012. (AP Photo/Musadeq Sadeq)

June 21, 2012 By HABIB ZAHORI and JAWAD SUKHANYAR, New York Times & 06/22/12 AP [Excerpts]

KABUL, Afghanistan - Heavily armed Taliban insurgents killed 18 in an attack Friday on a lakeside hotel just north of Kabul, Afghan officials said.

The insurgents held off scores of Afghan forces for about 12 hours.

Qarga's lakeside compound was once used by the royal family and has since been converted into a government-owned resort.

The lake is also a favorite spot for young Kabul residents who buy illegal alcohol and drink it in the picnic areas.

Foreigners also take day trips to the lake, but rarely stay overnight.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it was timed to an event in which diplomats and senior Afghan officials took part.

The Taliban said the hotels in the area were “usually used for immoral and unethical purposes both for the foreigners and their puppet colleagues, and that the resort area included “prime places in Kabul for prostitution and parties.”

Three security guards and an Afghan police officer died in the attack, said Mohammad Zahir, criminal director for Kabul police.

Insurgents first killed the security guards at the hotel, then stormed inside it and began firing at guests who were dining.

Amid the attack, some terrified hotel guests jumped into the lake, which is near the hotel and deep, but because they could not swim, they were still clinging to a decorative sea wall built into the water more than six hours later.

As the morning wore on, it was increasingly clear that security officials still knew relatively little about what was going on inside the hotel, including the number of hostages or the number of attackers, where they were positioned and whether they were wearing explosive vests.

Some of the guests escaped while others were held hostage as the attackers battled Afghan security forces who rushed to the scene for the next 12 hours. Kabul police said all five attackers had been shot and killed by midday Friday, ending the standoff.

M. Sharief Alokozai, 24 years old, said he was inside the resort when he saw three armed men, including one wearing an Afghan police jacket, take over the facility.

The strike at the hotel, about a half-hour drive from the capital, was a reminder that the Taliban can still hit very close to the seat of the Afghan government.

"The hotel was crowded. Some of the guests jumped from the window into the hotel yard. They were hiding under trees or any safe place they could find.

Kabul Police Chief Mohammad Ayub Salangi said the five attackers — armed with machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades and vests laden with explosives — stormed the Spozhmai hotel at Qargha Lake before midnight on Thursday.

By midmorning Friday, militants were still fighting Afghan forces, supported by foreign troops. Gunfire pierced the quiet surroundings of the lake area. Black smoke was rising from the two-story hotel in a wooded area on the bank of the lake. Helicopters circled overhead.

A security official at the scene said the hotel and its setting presented a daunting layout.

“There are lots of trees; it’s like a jungle, which makes it difficult for us to spot the attackers,” said the official, who would speak only on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the news media.

Another senior police official said that as best they could tell the attackers had brought a lot of ammunition and, because they had occupied a hotel on the eve of the weekend holiday, would have plenty of food at their disposal.

“It was around 11:20 p.m. last night when it all started,” said Mohammad Ghani, who was at the scene. “It got quiet for a couple of hours and then the fighting started again.”

The hotel, situated on a man-made lake, is a popular place for well-to-do Afghans to spend Thursday night — the beginning of the Afghan weekend — or for picnic excursions on a Friday when paddleboats and horse rides are on offer.

Though international workers do go to Qargha lake, Afghans make up the majority of the clientele at the hotels and kebab shops along its shore.

Security at the lake is light compared with targets inside the Afghan capital.

While hotels at the lake have armed guards, there are no massive blast walls and security cordons that surround government and military buildings in Kabul. Zahir said only two of the three guards killed at the hotel were armed.

Resistance Action

23 June 2012 TOLONews

An Afghan local police (ALP) officer opened fire on his fellow policemen on Friday, killing at least one and wounding three others, local officials said. A Taliban spokesman Qari Yousuf Ahmadi claimed responsibility for the attack saying that the infiltrator was a member of the hardline militant group.

The attacker fled the scene immediately after the incident which happened in the Char Chino district of southwestern Uruzgan province, and has not been apprehended.

Missing Afghan Army Night-Vision Goggles May Aid Taliban

Jun 19, 2012 By David Lerman, BLOOMBERG L.P

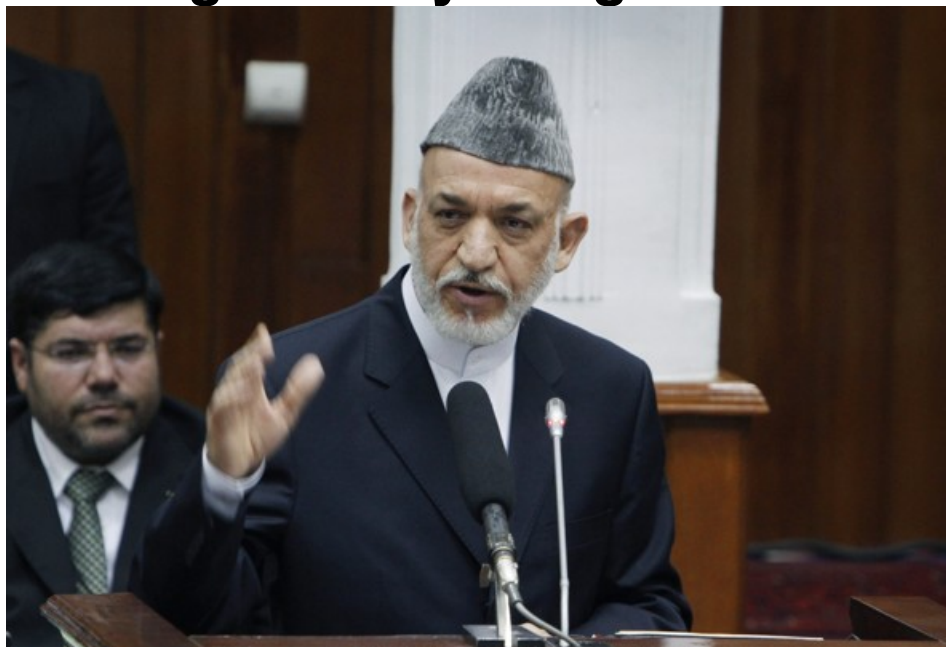
U.S. and Afghan forces have lost track of hundreds of night-vision goggles used to hunt the Taliban, raising the odds of the high-technology eyewear falling into enemy hands, according to the Pentagon's inspector general.

A lack of adequate supervision of the goggles, which were purchased for the Afghan Army and police, means U.S. and Afghan soldiers "may be at greater security risk during night missions in Afghanistan," according to a report from the inspector general dated June 18.

Defense and NATO officials, Afghan security forces and defense contractors "did not maintain complete accountability" for 7,157 night-vision goggles and spare parts purchased for Afghan forces, the report found.

The report cited hundreds of missing serial numbers, 518 "discrepancies" and 75 goggles that were "unaccounted for during our physical inventory."

A New Act Opens In Kabul: "He'll Sing A Pretty Song On Thursday"



Afghan President Hamid Karzai speaks to lawmakers at parliament in Kabul Thursday. He called on both Afghan lawmakers and international allies to do more to stamp out the corruption that pervades the country's government. Musadeq Sadeq/AP

June 21 By Joshua Partlow, The Washington Post [Excerpts]

KABUL — Ahead of an international conference aimed at collecting billions more in foreign aid for Afghanistan, President Hamid Karzai on Thursday urged his government to step up the fight against the corruption that has eroded his administration's credibility over the years.

Skepticism among the international community here remains high.

"He'll sing a pretty song on Thursday," one NATO official said before the speech.

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

SOMALIA WAR REPORTS

Insurgents Blow Up Government Officials And Army Commanders

23/06/2012 Mareeg.com

QANSAH DHEERE - At least three Somali army commanders have sustained injuries after a coffee shop in southwestern Somalia hit by a coordinated bomb attack, according to witnesses and a hospital official.

Eyewitnesses said many people were drinking tea at a popular cafe in the heart of Qansah Dheere district, when the bomb exploded. Three Somali government officials, Hussein Isac, Garabey, and Hussein were killed in the attack.

The attack is the latest of a series of attacks staged by the insurgent group in Bay region – after being pushed out recently several strategic towns in Bay and Bakol regions by the Somali government and Ethiopian troops.

Security forces have reached the bomb site and conducted a manhunt operation, killing four people in suspicion of the attack

MILITARY NEWS

Troops Should Not Have To Choose Between Serving Their Country And Keeping Their Children:

“A New York Appeals Court In 2008 Ordered A Divorced Soldier To Give Up Full Custody Of Her Son To Her Ex-Husband Simply Because She Was Deploying To Iraq”

“She Had Remarried And Her 12-Year-Old Son Had Formed A Strong Bond With His Stepfather”

July 25, 2012 Editorial, Army Times

Each year for the past seven years, the House has passed legislation that would prevent state courts from penalizing troops in child custody cases simply because they are in the military and may be deployed.

Each year, the legislation has died in the Senate, which has consistently held that the federal government should not step on states' rights on this issue.

Sadly, the same pattern is set to repeat this year.

The Senate Armed Services Committee is balking at approving the Servicemember Family Protection Act sponsored by Rep. Mike Turner, R-Ohio.

Instead, the committee wants to survey the Council of Governors, in part out of concern that Turner's legislation might create new procedural standards in which custody cases could be fought in federal courts.

That's a flimsy and specious argument.

Countless federal laws trump the states, many of them specifically affecting service members in a wide variety of areas, including consumer protections, absentee voting, driver's licenses, divorce cases and more.

There's no indication that child custody problems for troops is epidemic. But there have been enough anecdotal reports over the years to validate the need for Turner's legislation.

In one of the most egregious cases, a New York appeals court in 2008 ordered a divorced soldier to give up full custody of her son to her ex-husband simply because she was deploying to Iraq — even though she had remarried and her 12-year-old son had formed a strong bond with his stepfather.

That ruling was as ridiculous as it was cruel.

The Senate needs to stop stonewalling on this issue.

Troops should not have to choose between serving their country and keeping their children.

DO YOU HAVE A FRIEND OR RELATIVE IN THE MILITARY?



U.S. soldier in Beijia village Iraq, Feb. 4, 2008. (AP Photo/Maya Alleruzzo)

Forward Military Resistance along, or send us the email address if you wish and we'll send it regularly with your best wishes. Whether in Afghanistan or at 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, inside the armed services and at home. Send email requests to address up top or write to: Military Resistance, Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657.

**Rebels Wonder If Syrian Troops’
Poor Use Of Tanks, Helicopters Is
Intentional:
“Hundreds Of Soldiers Have Joined
The Rebel Cause”
“Sustained Attacks Against A
Concentrated Force Of 600 Or More
Fighters Resulted In Only Two Rebel
Casualties, One Killed And The Other
Wounded”**



A destroyed tank overlooks the main highway on June 17, 2012, running through Rastan, Syria from Damascus to Aleppo. | Austin Tice/MCT

June 21, 2012 By Austin Tice, McClatchy Newspapers [Excerpts]

Tice, a McClatchy special correspondent, served seven years in the U.S. Marine Corps as an infantry officer.

NEAR HOMS, Syria — The Syrian military, whose advantage in heavy equipment has been emphasized repeatedly by critics of the government of President Bashar Assad, rarely uses its tanks and helicopters effectively in combat against rebel forces, a shortcoming so consistent that it raises the question of whether some pilots and troops may be intentionally missing when they target rebel positions.

Weeks of observation of Syrian military operations while traveling with rebel forces leave the impression that the Syrian army is unfamiliar with modern military tactics.

It rarely engages rebel forces directly and appears instead to rely on poorly aimed and random fire to intimidate its opponents.

Helicopters observed in northern and central portions of the country fly at an altitude that prevents their effective tactical employment.

On Thursday, a Syrian air force pilot, reportedly on a training mission, flew his MiG-21 jet fighter to Jordan and asked for political asylum.

It was the first high-profile defection from the air force, though hundreds of soldiers have joined the rebel cause. The pilot, who was identified as Col. Hassan Hammadeh, made no public statement after his defection.

There is no way to know whether the inept use of heavy weaponry is the result of poor training, incompetence or intentional.

The Syrian military's advantage in heavy equipment – tanks, armored personnel carriers and helicopters – has been a persistent theme of rebel sympathizers for months as they sought international agreement to impose a no-fly zone over Syria and provide weapons and ammunition to the rebels.

As recently as March, the Syrian military seemed to be able to use its better equipment to gain an advantage over the rebels, pushing them out of the Baba Amr district of Homs in February and from many other urban areas in a fierce campaign undertaken before a U.N.-brokered cease-fire was scheduled to go into effect April 12.

In the weeks since, however, rebel forces have received fresh weapons and ammunition and have established safe zones in northern and central Syria where they operate largely unimpeded by the Syrian military, whose lack of tactical knowhow is glaring, even in the face of rebel units whose own organization and coordination are poor.

The tactics employed by helicopters observed in the past few weeks are a case in point.

Identified from photographs by an experienced American attack helicopter pilot as Russian-made MI-17s, which are designed both for transporting troops and cargo and for use as an attack aircraft, the helicopters typically fly in slow circles at altitudes between 1,500 and 2,000 feet.

They fire unguided rockets and guns at apparently random or nonexistent targets and do not appear to employ guided missiles.

To hit either people or a moving target, a helicopter at high altitude must either enter a diving profile, or descend to a lower altitude of 300 to 800 feet, according to the American pilot who responded to questions by email but asked to remain anonymous because he was not authorized to discuss Syrian or American military practices.

The American pilot said that from altitudes above 1,000 feet, flying level, striking a moving target with rockets or guns would be a challenge, even for a pilot trained against moving targets. He doubted that Syrian pilots receive such training.

Remaining at such high altitudes does have one advantage: It puts the helicopters out of range of rebels trying to down them with rifle and machine-gun fire.

“On the first day of fighting, everyone shot at them, with Dushkas and rifles,” said Mohammed Fido, a rebel fighter who said he had participated in significant fighting two weeks ago in the city of Qusayr, near the border with Lebanon. A Dushka is a Russian-made heavy machine gun.

“On the second day, some of us shot at them, others did not. By the third day, nobody bothered to shoot at the helicopters. We learned.”

The Syrian military also deployed helicopters during four of five days of heavy fighting earlier this month in the northern town of Kafer Zaita.

But sustained attacks against a concentrated force of 600 or more fighters resulted in only two rebel casualties, one killed and the other wounded.

During the battle, a rebel commander named Shahm attempted to draw a helicopter away from the main rebel force by baiting it with a truck-mounted Dushka.

One helicopter gave chase, pursuing the black truck into the open countryside and expending significant machine-gun fire and at least three rockets. The truck traveled about six miles to the nearby town of Khan Sheikhoun, arriving unscathed before hiding in a garage.

Syrian military use of tanks and armored personnel carriers also lacks tactical skill.

Contrary to standard military doctrine, Syrian armor frequently advances into contested urban zones without the accompanying support of ground troops. This leaves the armor vulnerable to rebel gunners, equipped with rocket-propelled grenades, who fire at the tanks and then quickly retreat out of the tanks' line of sight.

Mohammed Idris, a rebel captain who said he battled government forces for nearly a month during the February assault on the Homs neighborhood of Baba Amr, said that the tanks sometimes advanced with infantry but more often advanced alone, or shelled contested areas from a distance of several kilometers.

He said that when tanks advanced alone the rebels were often able to destroy them using rocket-propelled grenades. T-72 tanks, the type predominantly used

by the government, are vulnerable to RPG strikes against the turret, treads and rear engine area.

During the Kafer Zaita fighting, unaccompanied armor was repeatedly driven back by barrages of RPG fire.

Two armored personnel carriers were observed parked alone in a vulnerable intersection, but they retreated before rebel fighters were able to react.

Fighters in Houla, the site of an alleged massacre on May 25, showed video they said was taken in the past week of two tanks firing shells at houses from a hill approximately half a mile outside the town.

Homes in the city near the remaining government checkpoints showed significant signs of damage that appeared to be from tank cannon and machine-gun fire.

But though the fighters said the shelling had killed nearly 40 people in Houla since the massacre, during that same time government forces have been driven from the town center and are now relegated to positions on the town's periphery.

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



The Obama Regime Says It Would Violate Your Privacy To Say If We Spied On You:

“The Surveillance Experts At The National Security Agency Won’t Tell Two Powerful United States Senators How Many Americans Have Had Their Communications Picked Up By The Agency”

June 18, 2012 By Spencer Ackerman, Wired.com [Excerpts]

The surveillance experts at the National Security Agency won't tell two powerful United States Senators how many Americans have had their communications picked up by the agency as part of its sweeping new counterterrorism powers.

The reason: it would violate your privacy to say so.

That claim comes in a short letter sent Monday to civil libertarian Senators Ron Wyden and Mark Udall.

The two members of the Senate’s intelligence oversight committee asked the NSA a simple question last month: under the broad powers granted in 2008’s expansion of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, how many persons inside the United States have been spied upon by the NSA?

The query bounced around the intelligence bureaucracy until it reached I. Charles McCullough, the Inspector General of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the nominal head of the 16 U.S. spy agencies.

In a letter acquired by Danger Room, McCullough told the senators that the NSA inspector general “and NSA leadership agreed that an IG review of the sort suggested would itself violate the privacy of U.S. persons,” McCullough wrote.

“All that Senator Udall and I are asking for is a ballpark estimate of how many Americans have been monitored under this law, and it is disappointing that the Inspectors General cannot provide it,” Wyden told Danger Room on Monday.

“If no one will even estimate how many Americans have had their communications collected under this law then it is all the more important that

Congress act to close the ‘back door searches’ loophole, to keep the government from searching for Americans’ phone calls and emails without a warrant.”

The changes to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act in 2008 — which President Obama, then in the Senate, voted for — relaxed the standards under which communications with foreigners that passed through the United States could be collected by the spy agency.

The NSA, for instance, no longer requires probable cause to intercept a person’s phone calls, text messages or emails within the United States as long as one party to the communications is “reasonably” believed to be outside the United States.

The FISA Amendments Act of 2008, as it’s known, legalized an expansive effort under the Bush administration that authorized NSA surveillance on persons inside the United States without a warrant in cases of suspicion of connections to terrorism. As my colleague David Kravets has reported, Wyden has attempted to slow a renewal of the 2008 surveillance authorities making its way through Congress. The House Judiciary Committee is expected to address the FISA Amendments Act on Tuesday, as the 2008 law expires this year.

Longtime intelligence watchers found the stonewalling of an “entirely legitimate oversight question” to be “disappointing and unsatisfactory,” as Steve Aftergood, a secrecy expert at the Federation of American Scientists told Danger Room.

“If the FISA Amendments Act is not susceptible to oversight in this way,” Aftergood said, “it should be repealed, not renewed.”

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Egyptians Dismayed To Learn They Imported Democracy From Florida

June 20, 2012 The Borowitz Report

CAIRO – Just days after they savored their chance to vote in their first-ever democratic election, Egyptians awoke today to the brutal realization that their long-awaited democracy had been imported from Florida.

“When the United States started exporting democracy to the Middle East, we were naturally very excited,” said University of Cairo political science professor Amgad

Nasrallah. "I guess we should have checked to see exactly which part of the United States our democracy was exported from."

Dr. Nasrallah said that when the voting in Egypt was over and no clear winner was declared, "I began to fear the worst: that our democracy had come from Florida."

"Both sides started claiming victory, and then the government said it wasn't ready to announce a final result," he said. "If we find out that this thing is going to the Supreme Court, to borrow an American phrase, we're fucked."

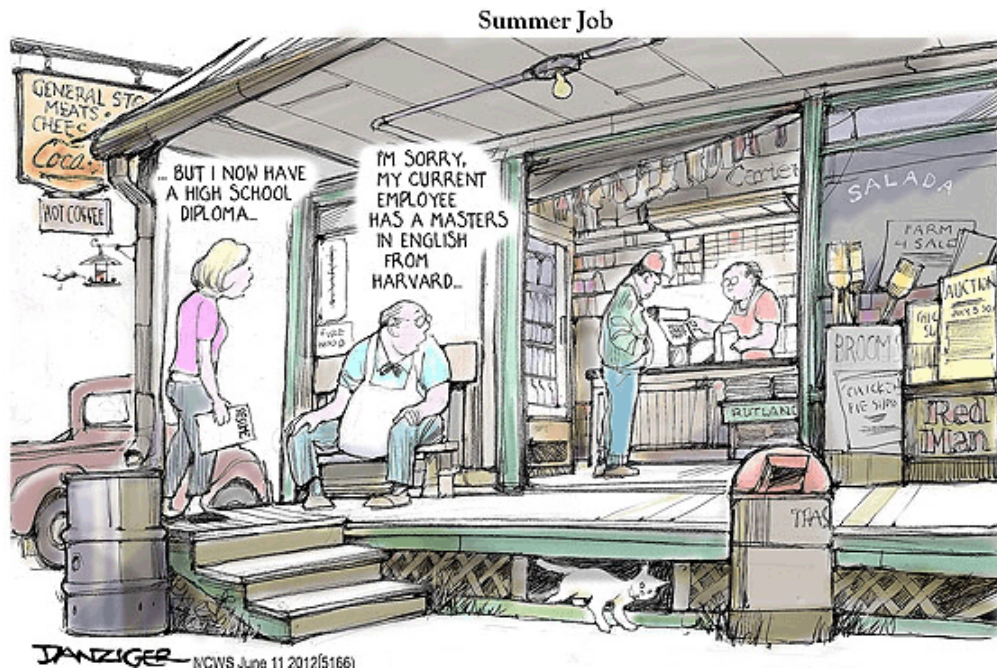
In Cairo today, protesters filled Tahrir Square, demanding that Egypt's new democracy be returned to sender.

But in Florida, Governor Rick Scott requested that the Coast Guard create a naval blockade around the state to prevent the Egyptians from returning its democracy to its place of origin.

"We exported democracy to Egypt because we wanted less of it in Florida, not more," Gov. Scott.

"I'll be damned if we're going to take democracy back. Not on my watch. Not on my watch."

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