

Military Resistance 13L8

The Soldiers Truce: A Hidden History From The First World War



German and British soldiers fraternize – Christmas 1914

[Thanks to Dennis Serdel, Vietnam 1967-68 (one tour) Light Infantry, Americal Div. 11th Brigade, purple heart, Veterans For Peace 50 Michigan, Vietnam Veterans Against The War, United Auto Workers GM Retiree, in Perry, Michigan]

To many, the end of the war and the failure of the peace would validate the Christmas cease-fire as the only meaningful episode in the apocalypse.

It belied the bellicose slogans and suggested that the men fighting and often dying were, as usual, proxies for governments and issues that had little to do with their everyday lives. A candle lit in the darkness of Flanders, the truce flickered briefly and survives only in memoirs, letters, song, drama and story.

December 1, 2005 by John V. Denson, 2005 LewRockwell.com [Excerpts]

The Christmas Truce, which occurred primarily between the British and German soldiers along the Western Front in December 1914, is an event the official histories of the Great War leave out, and the Orwellian historians hide from the public.

Stanley Weintraub has broken through this barrier of silence and written a moving account of this significant event by compiling letters sent home from the front, as well as diaries of the soldiers involved. His book is entitled *Silent Night: The Story of the World War I Christmas Truce*. The book contains many pictures of the actual events showing the opposing forces mixing and celebrating together that first Christmas of the war.

This remarkable story begins to unfold, according to Weintraub, on the morning of December 19, 1914:

Lieutenant Geoffrey Heinekey, new to the 2ND Queen's Westminster Rifles, wrote to his mother, 'A most extraordinary thing happened. . . Some Germans came out and held up their hands and began to take in some of their wounded and so we ourselves immediately got out of our trenches and began bringing in our wounded also. The Germans then beckoned to us and a lot of us went over and talked to them and they helped us to bury our dead. This lasted the whole morning and I talked to several of them and I must say they seemed extraordinarily fine men It seemed too ironical for words. There, the night before we had been having a terrific battle and the morning after, there we were smoking their cigarettes and they smoking ours. (p. 5)

Weintraub reports that the French and Belgians reacted differently to the war and with more emotion than the British in the beginning. The war was occurring on their land and The French had lived in an atmosphere of *revanche* since 1870, when Alsace and Lorraine were seized by the Prussians in a war declared by the French. (p. 4).

The British and German soldiers, however, saw little meaning in the war as to them, and, after all, the British King and the German Kaiser were both grandsons of Queen Victoria. Why should the Germans and British be at war, or hating each other, because a royal couple from Austria were killed by an assassin while they were visiting in Serbia?

However, since August when the war started, hundreds of thousands of soldiers had been killed, wounded or missing by December 1914 (p. xvi).

It is estimated that over eighty thousand young Germans had gone to England before the war to be employed in such jobs as waiters, cooks, and cab drivers and many spoke English very well. It appears that the Germans were the instigators of this move towards a truce.

So much interchange had occurred across the lines by the time that Christmas Eve approached that Brigadier General G.T. Forrestier-Walker issued a directive forbidding fraternization:

For it discourages initiative in commanders, and destroys offensive spirit in all ranks . . . Friendly intercourse with the enemy, unofficial armistices and exchange

of tobacco and other comforts, however tempting and occasionally amusing they may be, are absolutely prohibited. (p. 6–7).

Later strict orders were issued that any fraternization would result in a court-martial.

Most of the seasoned German soldiers had been sent to the Russian front while the youthful and somewhat untrained Germans, who were recruited first, or quickly volunteered, were sent to the Western Front at the beginning of the war. Likewise, in England young men rushed to join in the war for the personal glory they thought they might achieve and many were afraid the war might end before they could get to the front. They had no idea this war would become one of attrition and conscription or that it would set the trend for the whole 20TH century, the bloodiest in history which became known as the War and Welfare Century.

As night fell on Christmas Eve the British soldiers noticed the Germans putting up small Christmas trees along with candles at the top of their trenches and many began to shout in English We no shoot if you no shoot.(p. 25).

The firing stopped along the many miles of the trenches and the British began to notice that the Germans were coming out of the trenches toward the British who responded by coming out to meet them.

They mixed and mingled in No Man's Land and soon began to exchange chocolates for cigars and various newspaper accounts of the war which contained the propaganda from their respective homelands.

Many of the officers on each side attempted to prevent the event from occurring but the soldiers ignored the risk of a court-martial or of being shot.

Some of the meetings reported in diaries were between Anglo-Saxons and German Saxons and the Germans joked that they should join together and fight the Prussians.

The massive amount of fraternization, or maybe just the Christmas spirit, deterred the officers from taking action and many of them began to go out into No Man's Land and exchange Christmas greetings with their opposing officers.

Each side helped bury their dead and remove the wounded so that by Christmas morning there was a large open area about as wide as the size of two football fields separating the opposing trenches.

The soldiers emerged again on Christmas morning and began singing Christmas carols, especially Silent Night. They recited the 23RD Psalm together and played soccer and football. Again, Christmas gifts were exchanged and meals were prepared openly and attended by the opposing forces.

Weintraub quotes one soldier's observation of the event: Never . . . was I so keenly aware of the insanity of war. (p. 33).

The first official British history of the war came out in 1926 which indicated that the Christmas Truce was a very insignificant matter with only a few people involved. However, Weintraub states:

During a House of Commons debate on March 31, 1930, Sir H. Kinglsey Wood, a Cabinet Minister during the next war, and a Major 'In the front trenches' at Christmas 1914, recalled that he 'took part in what was well known at the time as a truce. We went over in front of the trenches and shook hands with many of our German enemies. A great number of people (now) think we did something that was degrading.'

Refusing to presume that, he went on, 'The fact is that we did it, and I then came to the conclusion that I have held very firmly ever since, that if we had been left to ourselves there would never have been another shot fired. For a fortnight the truce went on. We were on the most friendly terms, and it was only the fact that we were being controlled by others that made it necessary for us to start trying to shoot one another again.'

He blamed the resumption of the war on 'the grip of the political system which was bad, and I and others who were there at the time determined there and then never to rest . . . Until we had seen whether we could change it.' But they could not. (p. 169–70)

Two soldiers, one British and one German, both experienced the horrors of the trench warfare in the Great War and both wrote moving accounts which challenged the idea of the glory of a sacrifice of the individual to the nation in an unnecessary or unjust war.

The British soldier, Wilfred Owen, wrote a famous poem before he was killed in the trenches seven days before the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918.

He tells of the horror of the gas warfare which killed many in the trenches and ends with the following lines:

***If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues – My friend, you would not tell with
such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.***

(The Latin phrase is translated roughly as It is sweet and honorable to die for one's country, a line from the Roman poet Horace used to produce patriotic zeal for ancient Roman wars.)

The German soldier was Erich M. Remarque who wrote one of the best anti-war novels of all time, entitled *All Quiet On The Western Front*, which was later made into an American movie that won the Academy Awards in 1929 as the Best Movie of the year.

He also attacked the idea of the nobility of dying for your country in a war and he describes the suffering in the trenches:

We see men living with their skulls blown open; We see soldiers run with their two feet cut off; They stagger on their splintered stumps into the next shell-hole; A lance corporal crawls a mile and half on his hands dragging his smashed knee after him; Another goes to the dressing station and over his clasped hands bulge his intestines; We see men without mouths, without jaws, without faces; We find one man who has held the artery of his arm in his teeth for two hours in order not to bleed to death.

I would imagine that the Christmas Truce probably inspired the English novelist and poet, Thomas Hardy, to write a poem about World War I entitled *The Man He Killed*, which reads as follows:

*Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!*

*But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.*

I shot him dead because – Because he was my foe,

*Just so: my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although*

*He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,
Off-hand like – just as I – Was out of work – had sold his traps – No other reason
why.*

*Yes, quaint and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
Or help to half-a-crown.*

Many leaders of the British Empire saw the new nationalistic Germany (since 1870–71) as a threat to their world trade, especially with Germany's new navy.

The idea that economics played a major role in bringing on the war was confirmed by President Woodrow Wilson after the war in a speech wherein he gave his assessment of the real cause of the war. He was campaigning in St. Louis, Missouri

in September of 1919 trying to get the U.S. Senate to approve the Versailles Treaty and he stated:

Why, my fellow-citizens, is there (anyone) here who does not know that the seed of war in the modern world is industrial and commercial rivalry? . . . This war, in its inception, was a commercial and industrial war. It was not a political war.

Weintraub alludes to a play by William Douglas Home entitled A Christmas Truce wherein he has characters representing British and German soldiers who just finished a soccer game in No Man's Land on Christmas day and engaged in a conversation which very well could represent the feelings of the soldiers on that day.

The German lieutenant concedes the impossibility of the war ending as the soccer game had just done, with no bad consequences – Because the Kaiser and the generals and the politicians in my country order us that we fight.

So do ours, agrees Andrew Wilson (the British soldier)

Then what can we do?

The answer's 'nothing.' But if we do nothing . . . like we're doing now, and go on doing it, there'll be nothing they can do but send us home.

Or shoot us. (p. 110)

The Great War killed over ten million soldiers and Weintraub states, Following the final Armistice came an imposed peace in 1919 that created new instabilities ensuring another war, (p. 174). This next war killed more than fifty million people, over half of which were civilians. Weintraub writes:

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It belied the bellicose slogans and suggested that the men fighting and often dying were, as usual, proxies for governments and issues that had little to do with their everyday lives. A candle lit in the darkness of Flanders, the truce flickered briefly and survives only in memoirs, letters, song, drama and story. (p. xvi).

He concludes his remarkable book with the following:

A celebration of the human spirit, the Christmas Truce remains a moving manifestation of the absurdities of war. A very minor Scottish poet of Great War vintage, Frederick Niven, may have got it right in his 'A Carol from Flanders,' which closed,

*O ye who read this truthful rime
From Flanders, kneel and say:
God speed the time when every day
Shall be as Christmas Day. (p. 175)*

MORE:

British And German Soldiers Arm-In-Arm



The Illustrated London News of January 9, 1915 [Thanks to June VI, who sent this in.]

BRITISH AND GERMAN SOLDIERS ARM-IN-ARM AND EXCHANGING HEADGEAR: A CHRISTMAS TRUCE BETWEEN OPPOSING TRENCHES.
DRAWN BY A. C. MICHAEL

SAXONS AND ANGLO-SAXONS FRATERNISING ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE AT THE SEASON OF PEACE AND GOODWILL: OFFICERS AND MEN FROM THE GERMAN AND BRITISH TRENCHES MEET AND GREET ONE ANOTHER - A GERMAN OFFICER PHOTOGRAPHING A GROUP OF FOES AND FRIENDS.

The spirit of Christmas made itself felt in at least one section of the trenches at the front, where British and German soldiers fraternised, and for a brief while, during an informal and spontaneous truce, there was peace on earth and goodwill towards men among those who a few hours before had been seeking each other's blood, and where bound to do so again after the truce was over.

The part of the British lines where these incongruous scenes occurred, was, it is said, at a point where the enemy's trenches, only about eighty yards away, were occupied by a Saxon regiment. Further along the line, where Prussian troops were said to be stationed, there was a certain amount of fighting.

It was apparently towards the British left that the friendly truce was observed, while officers and men from both sides left their trenches and met in No Man's Land between, where, as a rule, no man dares to show so much as the top of his head.

British and Germans met and shook hands, exchanged cigars and cigarettes, newspapers and addresses, and wished each other the compliments of the season, conversing as far as possible with the aid, as interpreter, of a German soldier who had lived in America.

A group of British and German soldiers, arm-in-arm, some of whom had exchanged head-gear, were photographed by a German officer.

The figure on the extreme left in our drawing, for instance, is a German soldier in a British service-cap, while the fourth figure from the left is a British soldier in his goat-skin coat wearing a Pickelhaube, or German helmet.

Some of the British, it is said visited the German trenches and an Anglo-German football match was even played. The dead who lay in front of the trenches were buried, and a party of German brought back the body of a British officer.- [Drawing Copyrighted in United States and Canada.]



German and Russian soldiers fraternize on the Eastern Front

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

**Key Afghanistan Strategic Town
On Verge Of Falling To Taliban:
“Military Planes Dropped Food And
Ammunition To Besieged Afghan
Forces In Sangin”**

“All But Two Of Helmand's 14 Districts Effectively Controlled Or Heavily Contested By Taliban”

23 December 2015 By South Asia correspondent James Bennett, wires; ABC Radio Australia

The Taliban is on the verge of seizing control of a key strategic town in southern Afghanistan, despite international efforts to support the Afghan National Army.

After months of sustained combat and several days of fierce fighting, the Taliban now controls most of Sangin district in Helmand province in the south-west of the country.

If the insurgents take over the town of Sangin itself, they would gain control of the region's lucrative opium crops and deny the Afghan National Army (ANA) an important supply route.

Military planes dropped food and ammunition to besieged Afghan forces in Sangin and British military advisers have been sent to the region, the same area where British troops sustained heavy casualties during the war.

The Islamists broke through the frontlines of the strategic district on Sunday and fleeing local residents reported bloody gunfights as the Taliban advanced on the district centre.

"We are air-dropping food supplies, military equipment and ammunition to support our forces in Sangin," Afghan Defence Ministry spokesman Mohammad Radmanesh said.

But he rejected reports of high military casualties and said the district had not fallen to the Taliban. "Sporadic fighting is going on around the district," he said.

A resident who fled Sangin said insurgents had publicly executed at least three security officials after storming government buildings. "Only the governor's compound and the police headquarters are under government control — the rest have been overrun by the Taliban," Haji Abdul Qader said.

Highlighting the gravity of the situation in Sangin, both Britain and the United States have increased their support. A statement from the British defence ministry did not specify the number of advisers sent but it insisted they would play an "advisory role" and not engage in combat.

Earlier this week, a senior Western official confirmed that US special forces had also been sent to Helmand to help Afghan forces.

Sangin is at the centre of Afghanistan's lucrative opium trade, which funds the insurgency, and has been the scene of fierce fighting for years.

British troops fought deadly battles in Sangin for four years to little effect, before US Marines replaced them in late 2010 and finally themselves pulled out last year.

In a highly unusual Facebook post, Helmand's deputy governor desperately pleaded with Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani for help, warning that the entire province was at risk of falling to the Taliban.

Officials said all but two of Helmand's 14 districts were effectively controlled or heavily contested by Taliban insurgents.

MORE:

Kabul Regime Surrenders Sangin To Taliban: “District Governor Airlifted Out”

December 23, 2015 ABC Radio

Kabul, Afghanistan has effectively surrendered Sangin to the Taliban.

Tribal elders confirmed to ABC News that the deadliest place for US Forces in the deadliest province in America's longest war is now back in the hands of the Taliban.

The district governor was airlifted out of Sangin and Afghanistan's acting Defense Minister Masoum Stanikzai described the situation in Helmand as "manageable" and says fresh support troops have been sent in.

For now, the loss of Sangin represents one of the biggest setbacks for the US in Afghanistan since 20,000 US Marines were sent to Helmand as part of President Obama's surge in 2009/2010.

POLICE WAR REPORTS

LAPD Officers Shoot and Kill Unarmed Mentally Ill Man in His Hospital Room

December 21, 2015 By Matt Agorist, The Free Thought Project

Torrance, CA — Ruben Jose Herrera, 26, whose mother says is bipolar, was killed Saturday afternoon by LAPD officers in his hospital room after a violent arrest.

On Saturday, police responded to a call of a man throwing bottles and fighting with neighbors at an apartment complex off West 207th street. When officers arrived, they found Herrera, whose mother and another witness say was not the man throwing bottles.

His mother, Graciela Herrera, and a neighbor stated Ruben Herrera was fixing a flat tire on a bike when officers approached.

As officers approached Herrera, they said he fought by kicking and punching. According to police, Herrera knocked the stun gun out of an officer's hand.

A portion of the arrest was captured on video which does not show this struggle. However, you can hear Herrera's mother telling police that her son is bipolar.

Herrera was then placed under arrest and brought to Harbor-UCLA Medical Center where he was treated for injuries sustained during the arrest. None of the officers involved in the arrest or shooting were injured, according to police.

According to police, after Herrera was treated for his injuries, he was unshackled from the gurney and became violent.

Police say Herrera picked up a stool and was swinging it at officers. When officers attempted to subdue Herrera, he allegedly "reached for an officer's gun."

Fearing for his partner's life, the other officer fired one fatal round into Herrera. The shot was so well placed that in spite of already being in a hospital, the medical staff was unable to save Herrera's life.

It is important to note that had Herrera become "combative" without police being there, that this incident would have likely been resolved without excessive violence.

Unarmed hospital staff deal with violent and mentally ill individuals on a daily basis in hundreds of hospitals across the country.

Amazingly enough, they resolve these situations on a regular basis without killing anyone.

However, police lack the training to deal with the mentally ill and their only solution, when such instances present themselves, is to put a bullet in it.

This shooting comes just one day after a video was released showing two LAPD officers murder a man in cold blood. Police accused Noel Aguilar of having a gun after they shot him in the back at point blank range multiple times.

The trigger happy cops were so overzealous that Albert Murade was shot in the stomach during the melee by his partner Jose Ruiz.

NYPD Cop Tries To ‘Cop A Feel’ On Woman: Her Friend Tries To Film It, So They Assault And Arrest Him; “Police Claimed That He Lunged At The Officers And Attempted To Punch Them” “Blatant Lies By The NYPD Officers Disproved By Three Security Cameras That Captured The Incident”

May 6, 2015 by By Cassandra Fairbanks, TheFreeThoughtProject & April 29, 2015
NBCUniversal Media

Jason Disisto and his friends were hanging out on a sidewalk on March 12, 2014, when Officer Jonathan Munoz walked up to Disisto’s female friend, grabbed her wrist, and began to put his hands inside her sweater.

Concerned about what he is seeing, Disisto borrows a cellphone and attempts to begin filming the interaction. This is something that we are all well within our rights- and frankly morally obligated- to do.

Seeing that he is about to film, another officer on the scene, Edwin Flores, confronts Disisto. The situation escalates very quickly as two officers are seen assaulting the man and attempting to steal his phone.

Disisto is then arrested, as the police claimed that he had lunged at the officers and attempted to punch them with a closed fist.

The blatant lies by the NYPD officers are completely disproved by three security cameras that captured the incident from multiple angles.

After the officers handcuff Disisto and put him in the back of the police vehicle, they throw the cellphone out of the window and break it.

He was charged with obstructing governmental administration, disorderly conduct, and resisting arrest.

"I was shocked. I was scared, shocked. I had a whole bunch of feelings all mixed up," Disisto said.

Criminal charges against Disisto were ultimately dropped, yet no charges seem to have been filed for the officers who assaulted, kidnapped, and destroyed the property of an innocent man.

On Tuesday, a civil rights law firm, Rankin and Taylor, filed a lawsuit against Officer Munoz, Officer Edwin Florez, a third unidentified officer, as well as the NYPD on behalf of Disisto. The firm is also representing six other cases of police misconduct in response to being filmed.

The lawsuit accuses the department of having a "de facto policy" of "making retaliatory arrests against people who lawfully photograph, document or record police activity."

"The ability to record their conduct to create objective evidence of what our government is doing is absolutely essential for the safety of all New Yorkers," Rankin told NBC.

MORE:

Dozens Of New Yorkers That NYPD Officers "Lashed Out At Them" After They Pulled Out Video Cameras To Record Police Search Or Confrontation

April 29, 2015 NBCUniversal Media [Excerpts]

Dozens of New Yorkers complained last year that NYPD officers lashed out at them after they pulled out video cameras to record a police search or confrontation despite their legal right to do so, according to data obtained by NBC 4 New York's I-Team, prompting a review by the independent agency overseeing police misconduct claims.

The Civilian Complaint Review Board investigated 42 cases over a six-month span in 2014 where civilians videotaped police, according to a meeting report. In 27 of those cases, the complainant accused police of acting inappropriately in response to being videotaped.

The investigation was prompted primarily by a rash of similar anecdotes, and no historical comparative data exists.

The law is very clear that officers should not interfere with a person videotaping a police interaction, as long as the individual is not hindering their law enforcement work. Officers also may not deliberately block the person's view of what's happening in order to obstruct the recording.

Cop Punches Homeless Man In The Face For No Apparent Reason: “Timing Of His Reaction Suggests That The Named Employee’s Actions Were Pre-Meditated”

December 18, 2015 By Johnny Liberty, The Free Thought Project

Seattle, WA – After an extended investigation, dash cam footage was recently released, thanks to the work of a police accountability activist, showing an 11-year veteran cop violently assaulting a 21-year old homeless man.

On the evening of Saturday, January 3, Seattle police officer, Clark Dickson was dispatched as a backup officer to a homeless encampment, where officers were checking for men with outstanding warrants.

After officers had arrested one man without incident, they approached 21-year-old Christopher Tavai.

The officers walk Tavai to the front of their vehicle and begin to question him about his identity.

Dickson immediately postures himself in front of the homeless in an intimidating fashion and after a brief conversation Dickson, seemingly for no reason, rears back and proceeds to viciously punch the unsuspecting man directly in the face. He attempted to justify this assault by claiming that Tavai had spit on him.

In the video, Tavai can be seen leaning his head in a slightly downward angle just prior to the punch.

However, an investigation conducted by the department’s civilian-led accountability arm, which included a detailed analysis of the video, couldn’t definitively prove that the homeless man ever spit in the first place.

Even though he had committed no crime, Tavai was arrested and booked on charges of assault. The county attorney’s office later declined to file any formal charges against him.

Over a month after the incident, South Precinct Chief David Proudfoot watched the video and ordered an investigation.

The Office of Professional Accountability (OPA) investigation took several months and found Dickson’s behavior escalated the situation.

“‘Stare down’ behavior combined with the body posturing, tone and tenor of the words exchanged between the Named Employee (Dickson) and subject escalated the interaction. While not rising to the level of a taunt, the conduct lead to the Named Employee being close enough to the subject to be spat on. The resulting punch was immediate and occurred even before the partner officer began reacting to the spit. Timing of his reaction suggests that the Named Employee’s actions were pre-meditated.”

The OPA recommended Dickson be suspended for two days without pay and undergo retraining. However, Dickson’s superiors downgraded his suspension to a single day without pay, which he served just last month.

Two months after one of his officers was caught on video attacking an innocent man, Chief Proudfoot was demoted and moved to a training unit, as reported by the South Seattle Emerald.

Sadly as we see all too often, many officers seem more interested in acting like paid bullies than public servants.

Just one month after Christopher Tavai was assaulted, 19-year-old Antonio Moore was punched in the face by yet another officer who then lied to try and cover up his actions.

The savage violence enacted by so many “peace officers” is in no way limited in its scope of victims. Just this year, police have been caught on video beating teenagers, pregnant women, and even their own k-9’s.

How many more horrifying police brutality videos will it take for people to stop looking towards the system that has created this problem to solve the problem?

MILITARY NEWS

The Federal Government Has Acknowledged That It Wrongly Declared More Than 100 Veterans Dead: “Suspended Their Benefit Payments”

December 22, 2015 By Tamara Lush, The Associated Press

SEMINOLE, Fla. — The federal government has acknowledged that it wrongly declared more than 100 veterans dead and suspended their benefit payments, and says it is changing its policy of confirming deaths.

Mike Rieker, a 69-year-old Vietnam War Navy veteran who was among those wrongly declared dead, said his situation turned serious when he realized he might go weeks or more without a benefits check while the situation was ironed out.

"I spent five minutes arguing on the phone with a lady about me being dead," he said with a wry smile at a news conference Tuesday. Eventually, "I started looking around the house for things to sell," he added.

Republican U.S. Rep. David Jolly of Florida brought the issue to the Department of Veterans Affairs' attention in a November letter. In response, the VA acknowledged that it had erroneously stopped benefits to 115 people from July 7, 2014, to April 1, 2015, because officials believed they were dead.

Now, the department is "updating its process to request further confirmation of the beneficiary's death before it terminates payments," VA spokesman Randal Noller said in a statement to The Associated Press.

When officials think a veteran is dead, the department will send a letter to his or her address and request confirmation of the death from a surviving family member, according to a Dec. 10 letter from the VA to Jolly's office. If the VA doesn't hear from the family — or from a veteran erroneously believed dead — only then will the department terminate payments, according to the letter.

Jolly said that he's grateful the department took action and that VA blamed the problems on computer and human error.

The VA verifies its beneficiaries' entitlement through an automated match with the Social Security Administration's Death Master File, Noller said.

"Although these types of errors are a small percentage, we sincerely regret the inconvenience caused by such errors," Noller said in his statement.

In Rieker's case, under the new rules he would have had a 30-day period to present evidence that he was alive and well, Jolly said.

YOUR INVITATION:

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.

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.”

“The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppose.”

Frederick Douglass, 1852

The Nixon administration claimed and received great credit for withdrawing the Army from Vietnam, but it was the rebellion of low-ranking GIs that forced the government to abandon a hopeless suicidal policy.

-- David Cortright; Soldiers In Revolt

US Not Sure Who It’s Fighting In Middle East, Bombs Israel ‘Just To Be Sure’



US officials are confident they understand the situation on the ground in Syria. (Duffel Blog photo.)

NOVEMBER 19, 2015 DUFFEL BLOG

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Pentagon spokesperson Col. Steve Warren announced US aircraft participating in Operation Inherent Resolve, the code name for the campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), struck targets in Tel Aviv today. When asked why US warplanes would attack a long-standing ally, Warren explained, “Look, guys, this all makes perfect sense,” pointing to a nebulous PowerPoint slide.

“This was all supposed to be a campaign to topple Bashar al-Asad in Syria, starting with the Arab Spring in 2011. Which, in turn, allowed us to get back at Iran and Russia, both of whom support Syria,” said Warren. “So the CIA considered arming the rebels in Syria, which kind of backfired, and now we have ISIS, a group we thought we had already defeated back when they were al-Qaeda in Iraq.”

Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter further explained, “Sure, we were a little worried when ISIS started running around the Middle East, chopping everyone’s heads off. But fortunately, Iran came to our rescue. Well, in Iraq, that is. We’re still fighting Iran in Yemen.”

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Joe Dunford stressed the contributions of America’s coalition partners.

Dunford explained how the US tried to empower allies among the Gulf States to take on ISIS, “which in turn sort of helps us get back at Iran.”

“Unfortunately, most of those states also covertly support ISIS, even though they’re nominally our long-standing allies. Whoops,” said Dunford.

“That’s not to say we don’t have some powerful allies in the region, though,” Dunford explained. “The Kurds have proven to be our greatest allies there, and the Turks are one of our longest-standing NATO allies. Unfortunately, they spend more time fighting each other than ISIS. That old saying, ‘nothing brings people together like a common enemy’ is completely useless here.”

Dunford concluded, "So, you see, ISIS is supported by Arabs, who are opposed by Iranians, who are both opposed and allied with the US, who is sort of allied with Turkey and the Kurds, who are opposed to each other. Since the enemy of my friend is now my enemy, it made sense for the US to bomb Israel, Iran's bitter adversary."

Events grew even more complicated in the wake of the deadly terrorist attacks in Paris last Friday. The attacks were reportedly the work of ISIS, who also claimed credit for the bombing of a Russian airliner earlier this month.

"France and Russia have formed an alliance, though in doing so, they automatically caused Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire to declare war in return," said Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook. "And, let's face it, this whole thing really is the fault of the Ottomans when you think about it."

The briefing then shifted to issues surrounding Afghanistan and Pakistan.

"There, the situation is much more simple," Cook continued.

"The US is fighting the Taliban by providing billions of dollars in military aid to Pakistan, which is supporting the Taliban. Basically, it's like that scene in The Empire Strikes Back where Luke Skywalker thinks he's fighting Darth Vader, only to find his own face in Darth Vader's helmet. That's pretty much what we've gotten ourselves into."

ANNIVERSARIES

December 26, 1971: Honorable Anniversary: Vietnam Veterans Against The War Liberate The Statue Of Liberty



Carl Bunin Peace History December 24-30

Two dozen members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War “liberated” the Statue of Liberty with a sit-in to protest resumed U.S. aerial bombings in Vietnam.

They flew an inverted U.S. flag from the crown as a signal of distress.

CLASS WAR REPORTS

**“A Wave Of Labor Unrest Is Roaring
Across Southern China”
“While The State Can Suppress
Individual Activists, The Consciousness
Of Workers Is Rising Too Fast For
Anyone To Contain It”**



Workers of Sui Bao Security Transport Company strike for higher salaries, blocking a road in Guangzhou, China, February 11, 2014. (Imaginechina via AP Images)

December 18, 2015 by Michelle Chen, The Nation

In an unprecedented crackdown on some of China's most effective independent labor organizations, known as worker centers, seven worker-activists have been detained and held virtually incommunicado in detention facilities in Foshan and Guangzhou.

The detainees include Panyu Dagongzu Service Center staffers Zeng Feiyang and Zhu Xiaomei; former Dagongzu staffers Tang Jian (a.k.a. Beiguo) and Meng Han; Peng Jiayong of the Panyu-based Laborer Mutual Aid Group; He Xiaobo, director of Foshan Nanfeiyuan Social Work Services Organization; and Deng Xiaoming of the Haige Workers Center. Beiguo reportedly remains detained, but his whereabouts are unconfirmed as of December 16.

The activists are reportedly being detained on grounds of "endangering national security," according to Amnesty International. It is unclear whether charges have been formally brought; earlier reports indicated Zeng and Zhu had been apprehended on lesser charges of "disrupting social order," and He charged with "embezzlement." Attorneys, restricted from communicating with them, have demanded clarification on the charges. The national-security charges, Amnesty reports, "could lead to a sentence of up to 15 years imprisonment."

Advocates report that He and Zhu's lawyers, along with detainees' family members, have been arbitrarily barred from visiting.

And Zhu, a former migrant worker from Henan turned organizer, has been denied bail and is unable to reunite with the baby she is nursing. Authorities have also reportedly questioned and harassed dozens of relatives and affiliates of the detainees and their groups.

While the government remains mum on the detentions, the police sweep seems an unusually harsh crackdown on community-based groups that have long struggled to balance mutual aid and advocacy without courting controversy.

Working outside the international spotlight and concentrated in China's gritty southern manufacturing belt, organizers toil thanklessly each day on behalf of local workers: filing complaints, winning back wages, fostering collective bargaining, and occasionally mediating strikes and other workplace conflicts.

But this is not the first security clampdown these activists have experienced. The website China Change has detailed the activists' often tumultuous career as rank-and-file organizers.

Zeng, a former corporate lawyer turned grassroots labor organizer, was detained and threatened by police, and later attacked by unidentified assailants, after helping to coordinate a major strike at a Guangdong shoe factory in late 2014.

Peng Jiayong, a veteran labor activist who became a full-time grassroots rabble-rouser after he was fired for trying to organize coworkers at a foreign-owned company, was assaulted by "eight unidentified men and severely injured" last April, according to China Change.

But what makes these activists so dangerous?

Unlike the Ai Weiwei school of celebrity dissenters known worldwide for their subversive spectacles, Nee says, worker centers are comparatively low-key and pragmatic. They typically prefer to use arbitration and negotiation with management, rather than direct action like strikes, which they would generally treat “as a tactic of last resort.”

Coinciding with wider crackdowns on journalists and activist lawyers, the detentions might signal an effort to tighten the government’s stranglehold on civil society.

One veteran labor activist, commenting anonymously on a Hong Kong commentary site, explained that “the raids were well planned from a higher level of government,” and that facing an economic slump, by targeting activists who were “promoting a positive attitude to the workers’ collective bargaining,” the government was actively suppressing “the legitimate aspirations of workers.”

Meanwhile, a wave of labor unrest is roaring across southern China.

According to the watchdog group China Labour Bulletin, labor protest incidents in Guangdong have recently spiked, from 23 in July to 56 in November, mostly in manufacturing workplaces where workers protested over unpaid wages, “factory closures, mergers and relocations.”

Elsewhere in Guangdong, Walmart store workers are escalating their long-running struggle to defy the government-run union apparatus, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), by campaigning for independent candidates.

While their actions are not directly connected to the NGO crackdown, their struggle for independent unionization underscores the challenges of building autonomous rank-and-file power in China’s increasingly globalized and precarious workforce.

Both the silencing of worker centers and Walmart’s insurgent union drive point to growing tensions between independent labor activism and the management-aligned official union system. In many workplace disputes, according to CLB’s research brief on China’s labor movement, labor unrest has outgrown the ACFTU bureaucracy, which typically serves to neutralize disputes on management’s behalf. In recent years, workers “have been perfectly able and willing to bypass the trade union entirely and organize strikes and protests themselves in their pursuit of better pay and conditions.”

“The union doesn’t do anything” to promote workers’ interests, according to Hong Kong-based labor scholar Anita Chan. A lack of strong unions, she adds, is one reason groups like Dagongzu have approached labor relations through “legalistic” rather than militant means.

Over the past decade of reform-era union activity, Chan says, grassroots organizing has been impeded by an oppressive political climate.

Even in larger worker uprisings, such as last year’s massive Yue Yuen shoe-factory strikes, protests have been co-opted by union officialdom or quashed by authorities, and haven’t engendered sustainable autonomous organizing campaigns.

“All these strikes, they’re directed against management, not against the state,” she observes.

Still, though the targeted groups face challenges from the state and business, a global groundswell of solidarity has emerged to defend the detainees as symbols of a labor movement that is as vital as it is endangered.

In the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions’ online petition, signed by numerous human-rights groups and European and Asian labor organizations, the union’s globalization monitor, “The Chinese government purports to advance the ‘rule of law’ within its borders and promotes the idea of a civilized and peaceful rise internationally.

“However, local governments abuse their power, using violence and arrests to repress and intimidate labour organizations, preventing Chinese workers from pursuing fundamental labour rights.”

In Nee’s view, the support for the detained activists stems from solidarity as well as from gratitude for the role of the worker centers in movement building and training rank-and-file organizers.

“A lot of the reason why the strikes (and protests) have succeeded,” he says, “is because of worker solidarity and a new rights consciousness.... Once people are aware of their rights, it’s kind of hard to go back unless you permanently try to silence them.”

The persecution of Guangdong’s worker-activists exposes the hypocrisy of China’s “rule of law.” Nonetheless, it also reveals an emergent political landscape for labor:

While the state can suppress individual activists, the consciousness of workers is rising too fast for anyone to contain it.

OCCUPATION PALESTINE

**Palestinian Dies After Being Shot By
Zionists, As Usual:
“Over 150 Palestinians Shot And Injured
By Live And Rubber-Coated Steel Bullets
During Friday's Clashes In Both The
Gaza Strip And The Occupied West
Bank”**



DEC. 19, 2015 Ma'an

RAMALLAH -- A Palestinian man succumbed to his wounds on Friday hours after he was shot and critically injured during clashes with Israeli forces in the village of Sinjil north of Ramallah.

Israeli soldiers shot Nashaat Asfour, 33, in the chest with an explosive bullet before he was evacuated to the Palestine Medical Complex in Ramallah, medics said.

Asfour went under operation at the hospital and was moved to the intensive care unit where he succumbed to his wounds hours later.

Locals told Ma'an that Nashat -- a popular resident of Sinjil and an avid fan of volleyball - would be laid to rest after midday prayers on Saturday.

The use of explosive bullets, also called expanding bullets or "dum dum" bullets, is illegal under international law due to the brutal damage inflicted on the victim, as the bullets are made to splinter apart and become lodged, instead of making a clean exit through the body.

Israel has repeatedly denied claims that its forces use such bullets, though Palestinian medical examiners have on occasion documented their use.

The 33-year-old was the third Palestinian to die on Friday.

Muhammad Abd al-Rahman Ayyad, 21, was killed also by Israeli forces after attempting to run over a group of soldiers with his vehicle in the Ramallah-area village of Silwad, Israel's army said.

Hours later, 20-year-old Mahmoud Muhammad Saed al-Agha was shot dead by Israeli military forces when clashes broke out near Khan Younis in southern Gaza, according to Gaza's Ministry of Health.

Friday's deaths brought the total number of Palestinians killed from direct confrontations with Israeli military forces and settlers since Oct. 1 to 126.

Nineteen Israelis have been killed in attacks carried out by Palestinian individuals in the same time period.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian affairs said in a report Friday that the circumstances of several Palestinian deaths remain disputed while citing “serious concern” for Israel’s excessive use of force and “extrajudicial killing” in many cases.

Over 150 Palestinians were shot and injured by live and rubber-coated steel bullets during Friday’s clashes in both the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank.

An increase in demonstrations against Israeli military forces has coincided with the escalation in violence that began across the occupied Palestinian territory in October that has continued through December.

While Middle East Quartet envoys and UN officials visited the area earlier this week in efforts to quell the ongoing violence, Palestinian leadership has remained markedly absent from the public domain in recent months.

Israeli leadership meanwhile has executed large-scale security measures in response to attacks carried out by Palestinians on Israeli military and civilians that international rights groups have labeled “collective punishment.”

Occupation Troops Forces Invade Homes And Threaten Families With Nine Children In Deir Istyia:

**“Often Women Are Alone With The
Children During The Day”**

**“Israeli Forces Have Chosen This
Time To Come To The Houses”**

**“One Of The Women Explained That
Soldiers Hit Her, Told Her She Was A
Terrorist, And That The Soldiers Would
Soon Come Back And Shoot Her”**



The 3 families are now the only Palestinians living on the west side of the road.

November 30, 2015 International Solidarity Movement with IWPS, Huwwara team

Deir Istyia, occupied Palestine

Deir Istyia, in Salfit district, is a village of 4000 inhabitants who mostly live on agriculture. The Salfit district has 19 villages and 24 settlements.

Land confiscation is ongoing in the area and many of the settlements are growing, as the road that connects them is widening.

Now three families, living in the outskirts of Deir Istyia (see photo), are under daily threats and harassment from the Israeli forces.

They don't know if the goal is to take over their land or just to try to make their lives so unbearable that they will themselves decide to move from the land on which they have been living peacefully for many generations.

It started in the beginning of October this year, where the soldiers started to come to the houses and harass the families, mainly at daytime.

Often the women are alone with the children during the day while the men are working. Israeli forces have chosen this time to come to the houses and scare the families. One of the women explained to us that the soldiers hit her, told her that the house wasn't hers and that she soon would have to move away. They also told her that she was a terrorist, and that the soldiers would soon come back and shoot her.

Over the last 4 days the Israeli forces have been there day and night, telling the families that they have permission to stay on the roof of one of the houses.

One night, they stayed all night and slept on the roof. They claim to have to watch the road and the surroundings, because of stone throwers, even though there hasn't been any stone throwing in that area.

Last Saturday, when the soldiers were there, they took pictures of the house and the yard.

Now, the children are very insecure, and their mothers don't leave the houses as they are afraid of leaving them alone, a situation that makes them feel, as they describe it, as in prison.

They can hear the soldiers walking around outside their houses and standing on the olive hill behind them at night.

Volunteers from International Solidarity Movement and International Women's Peace Service will follow up on the situation of these families.

To check out what life is like under a murderous military occupation commanded by foreign terrorists, go to:
<http://www.palestinechronicle.com/>
The occupied nation is Palestine. The foreign terrorists call themselves "Israeli."

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



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DO YOU HAVE A FRIEND OR RELATIVE IN THE MILITARY?



CHANGE WE CAN BEREAVE IN

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