

GI SPECIAL 2#B19

**NOT A GOOD DAY:
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW!**



Former Bradley armored vehicle on Baghdad's airport highway July 29. (Ceerwan Aziz/Reuters)

**“Stop This Madness.
Stop This War”
A Letter From Baquba**

From: <http://www.bringthemhomenow.org/sound/main.html> Check it out.

June 5, 2004

Everyday, soldiers all over Iraq roll outside of their barbed wire perimeters and go out to look for trouble. The problem is that the soldiers usually find it. **It is to go unsaid that not only do we face stressful situations from within our own organization, but from outside our camps as well. On a day to day basis we concern ourselves with death by IED (Improvised Explosive Device).**

Every soldier dreads these phantom killers found on the side of the road. Unfortunately, 9 out of 10 times they are not found until they explode into someone's windshield. Of course we also worry about ambushes, another one of the insurgents' favorite pastimes. At the time of attack, the sound of bullets passing by your ears and rocket propelled grenades exploding in front of you hypes you up on adrenaline.

However, after the initial attack, when given the chance to think it over, you dwell on how close you came to being sent home in twenty pieces, and how it looked to cut an Iraqi militant in half with a .50 caliber machine gun.

The concerns for personal safety and that of your comrades are too many to ponder, but not enough that they can't subconsciously float through your head during a patrol. **You find yourself wondering, "What hand could I live without?", or, "Would it be worth living as a burned up vegetable for the rest of my life?"**

I myself have determined that i could live happily the rest of my life as long as I had my eyes and ears, so I could see and hear the beauty.

It's a lot to lay on an 18 year old kid who is fresh out of high school, like some of my friends are, but to others in our mid-twenties, like myself, the whole thing is just weird and disgusting.

It's hard to fight in a war that you cannot in good faith support, to fight for an army that involuntarily extended your departure from the war machine, and to fight for the cheap and greedy values that started this bloody debacle. More importantly, i simply could not imagine the pain i would be inflicting on my family by not coming home alive.

It's tough to describe the stress level of being involved in this war in Iraq. Eventually one gets used to having his/her life endangered 14 times a day, and the sounds of mortar rounds hitting the camp only makes for a humorous situation.

It has been said that war is hell, who could not agree with that?

However, of all the hopelessly stressful aspects of our lives here, at least we DON'T have to worry about those pesky threats of instant and painful death that weapons of mass destruction can afford. There's something we can be thankful for, one less atrocity to worry about.

Stop this madness. Stop this war.

hEkLe
Baquba, Iraq

Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward this E-MAIL along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the war, at home and in Iraq, and information about other social protest movements

here in the USA. Send requests to address up top. For copies on web site see: <http://www.notinourname.net/gi-special/>

“The Morale Is As Low As Vietnam”

From: <http://www.bringthemhomenow.org/sound/main.html> Check it out.

June 6, 2004

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter on behalf of my fiance, who is presently serving this country in the U.S. Army—serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom 1 and now 2.

He is a 36 year veteran, and I've never met anyone whose heart and soul supports the call to protect this great nation more than his. He was in Tikrit, Iraq and is now in Kuwait waiting to be sent home. It is also for ALL of the brave men and women who are serving this country with him. He is with the 846th Transportation Company, and they have been there since April 12, 2003 for total of 421 days. **He was sent to Kuwait, because after a year they were told they were coming home. The day they were supposed to leave for home, they were informed their time had been extended.**

I saw on the news that these extended soldiers wanted to stay were happy in fact to do so. I don't know where they received that information, as the information I get—directly from the soldier—is that they feel like they are in "jail".

The very worst part however, is that nobody can or will give them a reason for being kept there. They no longer have jobs to do. **Some of them no longer have weapons.** The brass are trying to make it so they can't even leave the camp, on emergency leave or otherwise. I'm told since they were extended they have only been given meaningless missions.

Did these people do something wrong? Or, was their only mistake believing in those who are in command? There appears to be no viable reason for their forced, prolonged presence in Kuwait. **I refer to them as being hostages, and very sadly, that's how they feel.**

I used to have the utmost respect for the military, but when you hear the one you love, who willingly went to fight this war, refer to his situation as being on "lockdown"...it makes one wonder. If their presence is so very important, why are there other transportation companies being sent home? Why are these soldiers being kept when their replacements are there? Why are they not even being told what the purpose in their time being extended is for? Why is it that we, as Americans, would want to push our soldiers to the very edge mentally and emotionally, and their families as well?

I have a son who is working vigorously to be able to serve in our military as best he can. However, after seeing firsthand how we treat our soldiers, I will do my best

to discourage it. That is a very sad stance for me to take, as I previously thought serving one's country was the most honorable thing a person could do. It's heartbreaking to lose faith in this wonderful country and its leaders, and I'm appalled that we as Americans would treat our soldiers in this manner.

What is truly heartbreaking, however, is that the soldiers have lost faith as well. I'm told that the morale of the troops is as low as it ever was in Viet Nam. That alone says so very much.

I'm sure this letter means very little to someone in your position. I'm just one person, one voice, one heart. But I think someone should realize, that before these men and women are soldiers, they are human beings.

They did their year, and they did a good job. Now they deserve to come home, or at the very least, they deserve a fair and reasonable answer as to why they are being detained. To hear the pain, sadness, hostility and frustration in their voices because of the situation is a crime.

These people put their lives on the line for us. They at least deserve to be treated with some degree of respect. Don't you think? Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

My best wishes go out to all of the men and woman who's time has been extended. May you return home safely, and quickly.

Sincerely,
Kristine Lyons
Las Vegas, NV

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to the E-mail address up top. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential.

A New Organization Is Born: Iraq Vet Says "We've Got To Bring Our Troops Home Now"

Truthout, By William Rivers Pitt 24 July 2004 & New York Daily News Wednesday, July 28th, 2004

When I got to the Vets for Peace convention, there was a barrel-chested man absolutely collapsing with laughter in the lobby outside the speaking hall. "You won't believe it!" he

shouted to a friend by the door. "I got promoted! I got a letter in the mail! I'm a corporal now!"

I didn't get the joke at the time, but that was because I had not yet been properly introduced to Michael Hoffman, the barrel-chested newly-minted corporal, who is a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and now the founder of Iraq Veterans Against the War (<http://www.ivaw.net>). I was able to speak with Mr. Hoffman later in the afternoon.

PITT: First off, what is your name?

HOFFMAN: My name is Michael Hoffman.

PITT: You were involved in the most recent invasion of Iraq?

HOFFMAN: Yes. I crossed into Iraq in March 2003, when the invasion began, and left Iraq at the beginning of May.

PITT: What branch of the service were you in?

HOFFMAN: I served with the United States Marines, in the 1st Marine Division. I was part of an artillery battery.

PITT: And now you're a corporal.

HOFFMAN: (laughing) Yes. Surprise, surprise.

PITT: Tell me why you are here at the Veterans for Peace convention in Boston?

HOFFMAN: I'm here representing the Iraq war veterans. Myself and five other Iraq war veterans are here to represent to people what the war was about, to tell the truth about what was going on over there.

PITT: What is the truth, from your experience?

HOFFMAN: The truth, from my experience, is that the war was based on lies.

PITT: Did you know that when you were over there?

HOFFMAN: I did. I looked at the reasons for the war, I looked at the proof, and what was coming out in the press, and by that time I had educated myself about what was going on in the world. I didn't just look at the U.S. press, I looked at the international press, and I looked at the independent media. I felt the reasons for war weren't there.

PITT: Was it tough for you to go, knowing what you knew?

HOFFMAN: It was. It was really tough. And it wasn't just me. My own battery first sergeant - someone with 20 years experience in the Marine Corps - knew what this meant. He'd been in the first Gulf War also.

Before we went to Iraq, he addressed all the enlisted men in the unit, about 100 of us. He said, "Don't think you're going to be heroes. You're not going over there because of weapons of mass destruction. You're not going there to get rid of Saddam Hussein, or to make Iraq safe for democracy. You're going there for one reason and one reason alone: Oil."

PITT: How did the men react?

HOFFMAN: It was interesting. The new guys kind of sat there slack-jawed, like "What did he just say?" Guys like me who have been around for a while...in the military,

especially in the Marine Corps, you tend to get a strong sense of cynicism. We kind of nodded our heads like, "Yeah, that's right."

What really hit me, and the reason I went over, was when my sergeant said, "But you're gonna go anyway. You signed a contract that said you would do as you're told. Even more importantly, you're friends are going over. Because they are going, you've got to go over and watch their backs and make sure they come home alive." **That is the exact reason I am here now, because the only way to make sure these guys come home alive, to make any good out of what has happened, is to get our troops out of Iraq. They're not doing a bit of good over there. They're causing the problem, not solving it.**

PITT: Tell me about Iraq Veterans Against the War.

HOFFMAN: Iraq Veterans Against the War is a group we just founded for exactly the same reasons. Just like I said, we've got to bring our troops home. We're here. All the guys who are here, we can speak and they can't. We've got to speak for them and tell their story, so the public really knows what's going on over there and what the troops over there are facing. No one can tell them that like the guys who are here right now. On top of that, the guys coming back need something to go to.

PITT: Are you working with Military Families Speak Out?

HOFFMAN: Yes, very closely. They actually helped get the whole idea for this thing going. They're going to be the people who help tell the people serving in Iraq that we are here. Every single member of Military Families Speak Out is in contact with someone in the military.

PITT: Who else is here with you?

HOFFMAN: It's me and several others. Jimmy Massey is here, and he is just incredible. He was a staff sergeant with the 7th Marines, and served in the same areas I did during the initial invasion. He was part of a unit that killed civilians. Mistakes, miscues, itchy trigger fingers, he saw what was going on, what was really happening, and said "I am not doing this anymore." He told his officers that, and he was discharged. They put up a fight, tried to get him a BCD (Bad Conduct Discharge), but he wouldn't take it. He finally got a medical discharge, and he is fighting his own demons now, but he is doing the right thing.

PITT: Are you in a position where they can call you back?

HOFFMAN: Yes I am. I am currently designated Individual Ready Reserve, which is why I got promoted, because I'm still on the books. If they wanted to, they could call me back.

PITT: What are you going to do if that happens?

HOFFMAN: I don't like to say too much on the record about that, but I've still got my own free will.

Hoffman heads a group called Iraq Veterans Against the War, officially formed Friday at historic Faneuil Hall in Boston. The organization is modeled on Kerry's Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

The man who survived to become a senator voted to authorize Bush to unseat Saddam Hussein, but the man who is the Democratic candidate for President has termed the war a mistake. Kerry gets fuzzier concerning those who continue to die fighting Iraqi insurgents while Al Qaeda is so dire a menace that you cannot bring water into the convention hall.

"My biggest fear is if he gets elected, it's not going to be all that much different," says 24-year-old Mike Hoffman of Pennsylvania, who saw combat in Iraq with the 1st Marine Division.

GET SOME TRUTH: CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER

Telling the truth - about the occupation, the cuts to veterans' benefits, or the dangers of depleted uranium - is the first reason Traveling Soldier is necessary. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance - whether it's in the streets of Baghdad, New York, or inside the armed forces. Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties working-class people inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize resistance within the armed forces. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers. <http://www.traveling-soldier.org/>

IRAQ WAR REPORTS:

Kennewick Guardsman Killed

July 10, 2004 By Lynne Miller and Laurie Williams Herald staff writers, Tri-City Herald, Washington

A 20-year-old Army National Guardsman from Kennewick died Thursday in Iraq from wounds he received in an attack on his patrol near Baghdad.

Jeremiah Schmunk's family was notified Friday morning when National Guard commanders from the Moses Lake unit came to the Kennewick home of his mother, Shirley Schmunk.

Jeremiah's uncle, John Daly, said Friday afternoon that the morning he died, Schmunk had been thinking of his mother.

He picked up a phone to call her to let her know that he was OK, Daly said. He said he loved her, but couldn't talk long. He was her only child.

Spc. Schmunk is the first National Guardsman from the Mid-Columbia to die in Iraq. He was a member of the Moses Lake-based Company C, 1st Battalion, 161 Infantry.

At home and in the Warden area where Schmunk grew up, friends and family were shocked and saddened.

"You know, but you don't quite believe it yet," said Rick Bowers, Schmunk's wrestling coach at Warden High School.

Wrestling was a big part of Schmunk's life throughout high school, and he placed sixth in the state as a senior in 2002.

What stands out in his mind is the night the 135-pound senior beat the defending state champion from Royal City before the state competition began. On that winter night in January, the Warden gym was packed with people wanting to enjoy a good match.

"He beat the best when he was at his best," Bowers said. "That was an inspirational moment for all the kids on the team."

Bowers described Schmunk as "really friendly, sociable and a good friend of my youngest daughter. He would do just about anything for anyone.

"He's going to be missed, and I'm sorry it had to happen," Bowers said.

Before his deployment late last year, he was living in Kennewick and attended Columbia Basin College. He was born in Moses Lake and would have turned 21 next month.

His mother lives in Kennewick and works as a bus driver trainer for the Kennewick School District. Schmunk's father, Wesley, died in 1996.

A memorial service is planned at 8 a.m. today at the new veterans' memorial in Columbia Park. An American flag will fly there at half staff in his memory. Funeral services are pending.

Schmunk was part of the largest deployment of National Guardsmen from the state since World War II, involving about 3,300 soldiers statewide.

Soldiers Keeping Low Profile--Like A Herd Of Elephants

July 12, 2004 By Gina Cavallaro, Army Times staff writer

BAQUBAH, Iraq — With the pomp and circumstance of the political transfer of power complete, troops here are sorting through how that plays on the ground.

There is a concerted move to give the Iraqi police the lead; however, the police rely heavily on the strong numbers of U.S. troops it takes to do a cordon and search. They also don't have anywhere near the level or quality of equipment of their American counterparts.

According to police, however, when maneuver units rumble into sleepy villages at midnight with a column of Bradley fighting vehicles, humvees and possibly close

air support, the guys they're looking for have plenty of warning to beat it out before the soldiers and police get there.

Shove It Where The Sun Don't Shine



An insurgent rips up a leaflet in Falluja July 31 dropped by U.S. aircraft in stating that 'terrorists' are using civilian houses as bases for their 'criminal acts.' (Mohammed Khodor/Reuters)

It's Not A War Movie Or A Video Game

July 12, 2004 By Karl Nugent, Army Times

(The writer, a Marine master sergeant, is an infantry small-unit leader deployed to Iraq with a wing support squadron.)

Convoy operations are the means by which the majority of supplies reach forward operating bases in Iraq.

The sheer weight of the supplies required to keep everyone fed, keep equipment running and keep vehicles fueled prevents us from relying solely on air deliveries.

But these convoy missions are not lazy drives along a tourist route.

Every day, soldiers and Marines climb aboard vehicles and run a gantlet of improvised explosive devices, explosives-laden vehicles and armed individuals intent on killing them.

The IED is, by design, a device that blends in with garbage on the side of roads. Everything that can go boom has been found on roadsides — the 155mm howitzer round is the explosive of choice — and anything that can send a signal, including garage-door openers, cell phones and car alarms, has been used to detonate these devices.

If you can imagine it, it has been tried.

The vehicle-borne IED is an emerging threat. Insurgents load a car with explosives and wait for a convoy to break down or come to a stop. Then, as the convoy sits by the side of the road letting other vehicles pass, the explosives-laden car swerves out of traffic and rams into a stopped vehicle.

So as we ride in our vehicles, we look for IEDs on the side of the road and for vehicles that look as though they are carrying an exceptionally heavy load. These are the most deadly threats while we are executing supply runs and conducting our daily business.

But one of the biggest causes for concern is the level of general resentment among some of the locals.

While traveling on several convoys and escorting explosive ordnance disposal teams on IED runs, I have noticed a general attitude toward us from the local populace that makes me nervous.

Children stand 10 feet away from my moving vehicle and hurl rocks against the door.

Not long ago, we were maneuvering through traffic with an EOD team. As I watched my assigned sector, I noticed a farmer with a shovel and a child sitting in a field. As we passed them, the farmer lifted his shovel to his shoulder as if to simulate a rocket-propelled grenade attack.

When I was assigned duties as a detachment commander, this would have been identified as surveillance and rehearsal for a future hostile act.

Each time we react, we have to consider what impact that response will have on the civilian community. **The possibility of more hidden IEDs and ambushes grows every time we lose the faith of another Iraqi.**

TROOP NEWS

First Teamster Killed In Iraq; “My Son Was Betrayed By The Bush Administration...”

(June 8, 2004 This leaflet has a statement from the family of a Teamster member (and Pennsylvania MH/MR caseworker) who is a soldier recently killed in Iraq. It looks to have been circulated by members of IBT Local 705 in Chicago, who work for United Parcel Service. John Lacny, Pittsburgh, PA)

Written & distributed by concerned members of Teamsters 705 at Jeff. St.

From:

http://www.bringthemhomenow.org/images/pics04/letters_040627_teamster.pdf?id=10428

Sgt. Sherwood Baker is the first member of our union to die in Bush's war in Iraq. He was a member of Teamsters' Local 401 and the Pennsylvania Army National Guard.

Sherwood worked as a case worker for the Pennsylvania Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. He was killed in Iraq on April 26 and was 30 years old. Sherwood Baker left behind a wife and a nine year old son.

Sherwood Baker's adoptive parents Alfred and Celeste Zappala, veteran peace activists, spoke to the independent radio program Democracy Now about the death of their son and against the policies of the Bush administration on May 8. Here are some of their comments: "It was a senseless death, just like all those other boys...and the 10,000 plus Iraqi citizens that got killed in Iraq."

“My son was betrayed by the Bush administration. This whole war—you know, people make analogies with Vietnam with Vietnam and Iraq, and I think that the big difference is that it took years to find out the lies in Vietnam. We discovered the lies in less than a year.”

“He was everybody's soldier. He was everybody's son and I cannot, cannot and will not, stop trying to speak the truth and get other people to speak the truth.”

Bring the Troops Home Now!

<p>OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME <u>NOW!</u></p>

More Troops As Guinea Pigs;

Anthrax Shots Draw Fire

July 12, 2004 y Deborah Funk, Army Times staff writer

More soldiers will be rolling up their sleeves under an expansion of the military's mandatory anthrax and smallpox vaccination programs.

Tens of thousands more service members — primarily in the U.S. Pacific Command, but also in additional areas under U.S. Central Command control — will be vaccinated against anthrax and smallpox, said Dr. William Winkenwerder Jr., assistant secretary of defense for health affairs.

Mark Zaid, a Washington attorney representing six service members and civilian defense employees suing the government over the mandatory anthrax vaccine program, criticized defense officials for their plans, particularly in light of their acknowledgement that the threat of biological warfare has not increased.

It seems officials are “simply flexing their muscles because they can,” Zaid said.

“All these decisions to expand ... [are] nothing but an attempt to create evidence to self-justify the existence of the program in the first place,” he said.

The lawsuit seeks to end mandatory anthrax vaccinations. **The plaintiffs say there is no evidence the vaccine protects humans against inhalation anthrax, the type that would be used as a germ warfare weapon.** The case is pending in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

Reservists Cite Service As Reason For Being Fired; Waiting Years For Justice

July 12, 2004 By Karen Jowers, Army Times staff writer

Two reservists fired from their civilian jobs in 1999 and 2000 are still awaiting official resolution of their complaints of wrongful termination because of their military duties.

That does not bode well for the increasing number of other reservists who have served in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere and have filed similar complaints with the Labor Department.

Federal law expressly prohibits job discrimination against people due to military duty in the reserve, National Guard or other uniformed services.

But the number of complaints filed under the law, the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, has jumped 45 percent since massive reserve mobilizations began after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, a Labor Department official recently told Congress.

Lawmakers at the June 23 hearing found the cases of the two reservists who testified especially disheartening because both were federal employees.

Judith Hanover Kaplan said a decision was made to fire her from the VA Medical Center in San Diego on Dec. 7, 1999, one day after she gave her military orders to her supervisor.

“The reason given ... was ‘unavailability,’” she said. “The reason for my unavailability was military service.”

Kaplan, a nurse with 37 years of civilian experience, joined the Air Force Reserve in 1990. She rose to the rank of colonel and separated in 2003 after 12½ years under mandatory age limits. **She is disabled as a result of her service in the 1991 Persian Gulf War as a battlefield and aeromedical staging nurse.**

The incident that triggered her termination at the VA center, she said, was receipt of orders for an “unexpected, critical and military-essential mission” to Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii, for one week in December 1999.

She said her termination was especially disturbing because her supervisor was a Naval Reserve officer. “I expected her to have tolerance and understanding of my military responsibilities,” Kaplan said.

Army National Guard Cpl. Jason Burris said he was fired from his job with the U.S. Postal Service in Woodburn, Ore., due to a “non-Postal Service injury.”

Burris said he injured his shoulder during a weekend Guard drill in the fall of 2000.

“What’s disturbing is that this is a federal law and these are federal agencies,” said Rep. Susan Davis, D-Calif., whose district includes the VA medical center where Kaplan worked.

The main reason their cases have taken so long has been a large backlog in that office.

Army Surrenders To 'Coward' GI; Command Liars Fake Medical Records

By Mark Benjamin and Dan Olmsted, United Press International, 7/15/2004

WASHINGTON, July 15 (UPI) -- The Army has dropped all legal action against a soldier who was charged with cowardice in Iraq, apparently because an Army malaria drug made him sick.

The case of Staff Sgt. Georg-Andreas Pogany drew national attention last year because he was the first soldier charged with cowardice -- an offense punishable by death -- since the Vietnam era. Pogany countered that his only offense was asking for help after suffering a panic attack caused by mefloquine, an anti-malaria drug that lists "panic attacks" as a side effect.

Special Operations spokesman Blake Waltman told United Press International Thursday "Additional information became available over time that indicates that Staff Sgt. Pogany may have medical problems that require treatment. Our primary concern is the health of Staff Sgt. Pogany."

A number of soldiers at Fort Carson in Colorado, where Pogany is based, have also claimed the drug caused severe mental and physical problems -- including suicidal feelings and homicidal rage.

Pogany fought the cowardice charge, which later was downgraded to dereliction of duty. **Last month a Navy doctor diagnosed Pogany with brain-stem and vestibular problems likely caused by the drug, which is also known as Lariam.** He received treatment at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington and returned to Fort Carson last Saturday.

Pogany was attached to 10th Special Forces in Iraq when he suffered a panic attack last year after seeing a dead body. For months Pogany was caught in legal and medical limbo, waiting for the Army to pursue charges against him and evaluate a list of mental and physical symptoms that started when he took mefloquine in Iraq.

Pogany's tests last month by a Navy doctor at the Pentagon's Spatial Orientation Center in San Diego showed eye and ear abnormalities and balance problems consistent with reported side effects of the drug, his medical records state. **He is one of 11 service members diagnosed in the past few weeks with damage to the brainstem and vestibular, or balance, system after being given the drug while serving in Iraq or Afghanistan.**

Last summer the Food and Drug Administration took aggressive steps to make sure patients taking mefloquine are warned in writing of the possible side effects, including anxiety, hallucinations, paranoia and suicidal thoughts.

<p>While the military is required by law to record the use of mefloquine in soldiers' medical records, none of the soldiers diagnosed at the San Diego center had the drug included in their records, according to Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif.</p>

The Army developed mefloquine in the 1970s and it was cleared for use in the United States in 1989, It has been taken by 5 million Americans. **Two years ago, UPI reported that mounting evidence suggests it has caused mental problems so severe that in a number of cases it has led to suicide.**

Pogany, 33, said he had just taken his third weekly pill when he suffered the attack after seeing the body of a mangled Iraqi. He raised the issue of mefloquine after news outlets including UPI asked if he had taken it.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Resistance Forces Fake Election Cancellation

Wall St. Journal 7.30.04

Iraq put off until Aug. 15 a conference to choose an interim legislature after Wednesday's frightening tattoo of insurgent attacks.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

The Rough Guide to Baghdad

(If this doesn't get a Pulitzer, he's been robbed.)

By Christian Parenti, July 19, 2004 The Nation

A young white South African pilot leans in the cockpit doorway of a small NGO-chartered prop plane and gives his ten passengers the pre-flight pep talk: "At 10,000 above Baghdad International Airport, we will begin our descent in a spiral dive. **This avoids surface-to-air missiles and ground fire, we hope. But don't worry, the maneuver is well within the technical capacities of the machine.** Enjoy the flight to Baghdad."

The flight is fine--but the dive is fast, steep and scary.

Since April most roads into the capital of Iraq have been closed by sporadic combat and marauding gangs of looters. Westerners are special targets. Some elements in the resistance are said to pay \$20,000 a head for hostages. **The only truly open road is the heavily patrolled route north through Kurdistan to Turkey or Iran.**

So now journalists fly in. It's the "safe" way to reach this politically diseased metropolis, which after fourteen months of US occupation and alleged reconstruction is tormented by a fever of violence, social breakdown, administrative anarchy and economic decline.

The crisis now seems to feed on itself in an epidemiological fashion, with symptoms reinforcing root causes in a downward spiral. Lack of security--the central issue--means lack of electricity, which means no work, which means more violence, and so on. **In response, Iraqis either cling to a blind faith that America will sort things out, or they turn to tradition, self-organization, Islam and armed resistance.**

At the 1970s-style passenger terminal where we land, the long hallways and lounges are empty. Outside I find some Kroll security men headed to Baghdad and bum a ride. **The twenty-kilometer dash from here to the city is called "RPG alley." This, despite the airport being contained within a huge US military base.**

"This road is ridiculous," says the flak-jacketed Brit riding shotgun. He chambers a round in his short Heckler and Koch assault rifle. Recent ambushes have hit several convoys here. The only one that made the news ended with four more dead mercenaries from Blackwater USA, their SUV in flames. "The First Cav should have checkpoints every few clicks. And they should clear all surrounding areas," says the Brit. "I have no idea how they think this is supposed to work without a secure airport."

June was a bad month. The malady of occupation was in full recrudescence: car bombs killing scores each week, assassins culling the political class, routine but underreported sabotage. In the slums of east Baghdad--Sadr City--the newly arrived First Cavalry Division has almost nightly shootouts with Muqtada al-Sadr's Jeshi Mahdi, or Mahdi Army.

Ten days to sovereignty--the city waits. I awake, as usual, in a sweat to the sound of a rumbling boom. The big explosions are usually in the morning. This one sounds close. "Car bomb!" yells a colleague down the hall. Four of us are bivouacked in a cheap, almost empty Baghdad hotel run by a friendly but thuggish man from Falluja. The accommodations--along with our recently grown beards, dark tans, locally purchased cloths and preference for beat-up old cars--are all part of a low-tech "security strategy." If most Western journalists live in walled compounds with armed guards and still get kidnapped or shot up, we figure, do the opposite. Go local, blend in, try to pass as Iraqi, to the extent we are able.

"Abu Talat called," says my colleague. "The bomb was right by where his wife works. He's headed over. We're outta here in five minutes." At al-Rashid Street, in old Baghdad, blocks from the Central Bank of Iraq, we find the aftermath. It wasn't a car bomb, just a big IED (improvised explosive device) set to hit a money truck. But the timing was off by a few seconds--commuters took the blast instead. Four are wounded, one may have already died.

Iraqi cops and bank security men with Kalashnikovs mill around a shattered wall and some twisted metal gates, while two Arab TV crews shoot video. Thirty feet away sits a victim's shattered car. Looters are already at work stripping the salvageable parts. The cops pay no attention.

Thanks in part to police inaction, kidnapping, carjacking and murder have imposed an informal dusk-to-dawn curfew in many parts of this city. The director of the Baghdad morgue tells me that he sees an average of at least 600 unsolved murders every month,

adding, "There are many more cases we don't receive." In a city of roughly 4 million, this translates into a crime rate about ten or fifteen times higher than the most violent cities in America--and this has serious economic consequences.

"Little things create big economic problems," explains Asaad Witwit, an elegant but casual Iraqi burgher, who owns four factories, three of which are currently closed. "Security is the biggest problem." We're meeting in the riverfront offices of the Iraqi Federation of Industry, a lobby group for private-sector manufacturers. Witwit is a leading board member. As we speak in English, three of his colleagues are commiserating and working the phones in fast, angry Arabic. The federation just bought a new truck-sized generator for its building, but the machine was stolen before it was even delivered. (US contractors deal with such problems by giving their mobile phone numbers to local sheiks so they can have first dibs on buying back their gear.)

Iraq's badly battered infrastructure is another problem, explains Witwit. "For example, you cannot make paint if you do not have clean water. Salts and minerals in the water ruin the paint. Or to make ice, or to can food, or process meat, you need clean water. We don't have that," he says philosophically. Behind him his colleagues rage on in Arabic about the "son of a whore" who sold them the generator and then most likely stole it back himself.

Then there are the cheap imports that have flooded the country since the US invasion. Witwit's sole working factory is a plastics plant that makes thermoses and coolers, but he has laid off most of his thirty employees because Chinese and Iranian imports are driving down prices. To upgrade and retool requires capital. "We need loan programs, investment, but the Americans do nothing. They only talk about the free market."

If Iraq's social geography were reduced to political antipodes, one pole would be the fortified and manicured American-occupied Green Zone: a huge palace and office complex built by Saddam. The other pole would be the fetid, baking eastern Baghdad slum of Sadr City, also known as Al Thawra (the revolution).

To enter the Green Zone is to consume a thousand-milligram tablet of denial washed down with fresh-squeezed orange juice. The air conditioning here is superb; everyone looks happy.

David Bourne is working his laptop at the Iraqi Business Center, an empty, glass-walled subsection of the Convention Center. Bourne, wearing a crisp media-blue oxford shirt and dark slacks, exudes Ivy League confidence. **He is here to do good and to do well, at once.**

"When we get the business center running, local subcontractors will be able to network and learn about bidding," he explains, as if the occupation weren't already fourteen months old. "A lot of the reconstruction hasn't begun yet, and the center will facilitate capacity-building with local firms." He pauses and then adds with considered honesty: **"A lot of Iraqis think it's just about who you know. But government-funded work requires competitive bidding, transparency, quality control, all that."**

He won't comment on how Halliburton and Bechtel got their huge slices of the \$18.5 billion reconstruction pie. But that's already a matter of public record. Bechtel got the first installment of its no-bid billion-dollar contract on April 17, 2003, after secretive dealings with the US Agency for International Development. Halliburton also had an inside track.

On the other side of a glass wall, a uniformed janitor pushes a Zamboni-like buffer across a shining expanse of floor. Iraq seems a thousand miles away.

Now unplug from the Matrix, and the temperature suddenly soars to a brutal 115 Fahrenheit. The air reeks of sewage; hot, furnace-like gusts blow grit into your eyes. An urbanized plain of misery and squalor opens before you: the hyperviolent Sadr City.

The wide boulevards, laid down in the late 1950s by the optimistic planners of the Qasim regime, are now flooded for blocks at a stretch with ankle-deep pools of green, algae-rich sewage. Heaps of garbage smolder on the medians and in empty lots. Pirated electrical wires crisscross dense side streets of mud-brick homes. Small flocks of mangy goats and sheep, shepherded by women in flowing black *abayas*, forage in the trash.

The lumpen Shiites who live here are derided by Baghdad's more urbane Sunnis as *sharugees*--an insulting term meaning "easterners" but connoting ignorance and filth. Like the N-word among some African-Americans, streetwise young Shiites have defiantly appropriated *sharugee* for their own use.

The sewage problem in Sadr City is not merely unsightly; it is a major health threat. As the head of the local public works department, or Baladia, explained it, the sewers here were never great, but the constant backup and nauseating overflow is a new problem. First there was bomb damage and then, as garbage trucks were looted or destroyed, trash clogged the sewers. **Most of the special trucks needed to clear the backed-up lines were also looted. The last four were recently commandeered by US contractors for use all over Baghdad.**

Bechtel has the \$1.8 billion contract to rebuild Iraq's water, sewage and electrical systems. **Electrical clearance work and the rebuilding of water systems is also being carried out by a company called Washington Group International. Local engineers say the firm has done next to nothing.**

At Sadr City's Al Jawadir hospital the halls are crowded with worried-looking men and women. An emaciated, greenish man is wheeled by on a gurney. Here one clearly sees the social impact of the sewer problem and the general chaos of which it is a subset.

The hospital director, Dr. Qasim al-Nuwesri, explains that the hospital serves at least a million and a half people and sees 3,000 patients a day, but suffers for lack of adequate medicine, equipment, clean water and security. "We have to get clean water shipped in," he says. "A German NGO delivers it in a tanker truck." Typhoid is rampant, he adds, and an outbreak of hepatitis E is gathering momentum, with forty new cases a week. "The coalition promises money and supplies, but there is never enough," says the director. "I am forced to reuse needles and deny people anesthesia. We only do serious emergency surgeries."

Upstairs on one of the wards we meet a 25-year-old internist named Ali Kadhem. Like many doctors, he speaks English. His face is open and boyishly innocent, and he possesses an understated yet intense personal charisma. When he talks, the other doctors and orderlies listen and watch.

Ali says gunmen enter the hospital demanding special treatment for relatives. Two weeks ago an addict pulled a pistol on him and stole morphine. One doctor was shot right in front of the hospital by thieves. He says that since April, US troops have raided the wards on three different occasions, looking for wounded Jeshi Mahdi fighters.

"They interrogated the wounded and searched in a very rough way and tore down religious posters," says the young physician. Several wounded Mahdi men, as well as civilians, have fled the hospital in fear of the raids.

"I know that some of these people died because they hid in their homes and we could not treat them," says Ali. "We could have saved them. The cause of all these problems is the Americans. We need for them to go."

The Mahdi's fighting in Karbala and Najaf, provoked in large part by US assaults, alienated huge swaths of the mainstream Shiite community--particularly the merchant class that depends on pilgrim traffic to the holy cities. But spend a day or two in Al Thawra and it's not hard to understand why people follow Muqtada al-Sadr. He is a junior religious scholar, unlike his father, who was an ayatollah, but Muqtada's leadership is primarily political, and his following, likewise, is Shiite but religiously diverse. **His power is rooted in his willingness to oppose the occupation openly, just as his martyred father opposed Saddam.**

More practically, he is followed because the branches of his organization deliver a slim modicum of order and stability to a few parts of Baghdad and cities farther south. In front of the hospital a man named Uda Mohame explains the logic: "Everyone cooperates with the Jeshi Mahdi. There are no police here, no government. The Mahdi direct traffic, they fix things, they do all the work."

At the Sadr office on one of Al Thawra's main streets, I try to meet Muqtada's local representative, a 29-year-old sheik named Hassan Edhary, but he is on the run. The First Cav wants him, dead or alive. His two predecessors are already in Abu Ghraib. A few weeks ago, US tanks blew up this office. Reconstruction started the next day at dawn.

"Little boys cleaned the bricks while men rebuilt," explains a local man named Samir.

Now the walled compound, draped in black banners mourning the dead and topped with big fluttering green-and-black flags, looks as good as new. The men here are all Mahdi but they are unarmed by day. There can be no formal interviews, I am told, without the sheik's permission.

For the better part of a week I return again and again looking for Sheik Edhary, but he's still on the lam. As I am leaving the office after one failed attempt, a young Mahdi man says to me, **"Look, the Americans attack us. That is why we fight. We have a right to respond."**

It's late afternoon, another trip to Sadr City. One of my colleagues from the dive hotel and our translator roll out determined to find the Mahdi in action. They're out here somewhere; we've already seen a US patrol of two tanks and three armored Humvees.

On one of the slum's main thoroughfares, al-Radhewi Street, are several walls marked with a message in English. Big block letters read Vietnam Street.

Farther on, a wall bears a crudely painted mural depicting a modified version of an infamous Abu Ghraib torture photo. It is the prisoner in the hood and cloak standing on a box, arms outstretched, electrical wires dangling from his limbs. Next to him in the mural is the Statue of Liberty, but in place of her torch she holds the lever of an electrical switch connected to the wires. Below is scrawled: The Freedom Form George Bosh. We snap photos and move on.

Then, before we find them, the Jeshi Mahdi find us. Two men in a sedan are suddenly next to us. "Pull over!" Now they are at our doors, hands on the pistols in their waistbands. "Who are you? What are you doing here? Why are you photographing things?"

"Sahafee canadee, sahafee canadee!" I show them my counterfeit Canadian press pass. Our translator is talking fast, explaining that we are anti-occupation, that we are trying to show the truth. He's naming his family, naming sheiks, naming Sadr men who are old friends. The undercover Mahdi fire back questions and suggest that we get out of the car. We show them the digital photos of the graffiti and offer to erase all the shots, but we ignore their request to get out. More fast Arabic goes on. Finally the Mahdi begin to relax.

"This is called Vietnam Street because this is where we kill Americans," says one of them. "We are in a war with them. That is why we stopped you. You understand? We have to protect our people. "

The man in charge adjusts his pistol one more time, looks around, then says, "You can go." We thank them profusely and then hit the gas. The hard spike of adrenaline in my chest releases in a warm wash of endorphins.

The next day I head back looking for Sheik Edhary, but he's still underground. On our way a pickup truck just ahead of us abruptly reverses into our taxicab with a slam, then does a fast three-point turn over the median. Suddenly everyone is backing up and turning around fast.

"Fighting ahead. We have to go!" says Hussein, a translator, journalist and computer hacker who hangs out with our ragtag crew. The next day Al Jazeera reports "around twenty Iraqi resistance fighters" killed or wounded in clashes all over Sadr City.

At the offices of the District Advisory Council, a body "elected" in a hasty, poorly publicized, US-managed referendum, there's more evidence of war. "Sorry, man. Nobody around. We're just here to secure the building," says Staff Sgt. Josh York. The twenty-five-member DAC dispersed several weeks ago after their leader was blown away in a political hit. Now the council's compound is a small US firebase.

"They've been hitting us with RPGs every night," says Sergeant York. "No casualties yet, but last night we took eleven RPGs, one at a time all through the night." The young soldier doesn't look nervous or afraid, just beat-down tired.

Finally Sheik Edhary surfaces; perhaps this has something to do with the Americans' new offer to allow Sadr's organization into electoral politics. (The Sadr people are still quite cagey about what they will do on that front.) Edhary grants an interview, but mostly we just sit and watch him in action, Hussein quietly translating the conversations around us.

Edhary wears a white turban and flowing robes. His beard is full but short, like Muqtada's. He is dark, intense and very handsome. I can't help thinking that Edhary looks like a cinematically improved version of the real Muqtada, who is stooped, pudgy and frowning.

A stream of supplicants files through Edhary's little office, asking for advice, money and letters. One lives in an IDP (internally displaced people) camp and has no roof. Can the organization help? Edhary says, "I don't have enough people to go investigate your claim. But if you can find a religious sheik in your area to write a letter on your behalf, then come back."

A young doctor explains that a group of medical workers has some money and wants to open a free or low-cost pharmacy to serve the people. Can the office contribute some money? The sheik leans close and plays with his string of black prayer beads as the young man talks. Finally, he tells the doctor that Hussein, our hacker pal, can help the clinic with its computers. Hussein and the doctor exchange numbers.

Then come a few high-tension cell-phone calls. Some sweaty Mahdi men rush in. They've just busted looters with four stolen trucks full of sugar. It turns out the trucks belong to a European NGO, not the government or some rich company. The sheik wants the vehicles and sugar returned, via the police, to the NGO.

"We have the trucks in storage. Can we turn them over tomorrow?" asks the rotund Mahdi man in charge of the bust. He's wearing a dirty football jersey. "I am your servant. I have given my whole life to the religion, but I really cannot do this tonight."

Someone else bends over and whispers to the sheik. Edhary looks worried. There's more whispering. Edhary leans away from the men at his desk and snaps taut a section of his black prayer beads, then counts the little glass balls. He is "asking God" for advice. An even bead count means yes; odd means no.

"No! No! Absolutely not," the sheik bounces up from the desk, his outer black robe slipping from one shoulder. He's addressing the sweaty man. "The trucks must be returned tonight. If the trucks do not move now we will be blamed. Either you do it now, or just go and don't do it at all. I will find someone else." The sheik is electric with stress but dignified.

"I am your servant, as you wish," says the Mahdi guy, but he looks pissed as he and his posse sweep out to deal with the trucks.

If there is anything like "progress" in Iraq it takes place here, under the radar, in the rubble of occupation. Sadr's followers, despite many faults, including thuggishness and misogyny, are central to creating what order there is in this ravaged ghetto.

On the last Friday before the handover I go back to Vietnam Street for a mass prayer. This time, the Jeshi Mahdi are out in full force, armed with pistols and AK-47s. Line after line of them are politely and efficiently searching a crowd of more than 10,000 people who have come to lay their prayer mats in the street, worship and hear a political sermon. The Mahdi search me several times, and I am ushered to the front, walking barefoot across the solid field of prayer mats; some are mere towels, others are intricate, colorful carpets. The sermon, by a Sadr sheik named Ous al-Khafji, attacks the occupation but calls for calm. The Mahdi have declared a cease-fire.

Under a blazing sun, with squads of men and boys spraying rose water on the congregants, the crowd chants, "Ya Allah, Ya Ali, Ya Husein," meaning with Allah, etc., then "Muqtada! Muqtada! Muqtada!" At the end the worshipers all shake hands, then disperse.

Later I am granted an interview with some Mahdi fighters. They make sure I can't see where I am headed as we drive deep into the side streets of Sadr City. Our interview takes place in an abandoned shop; there are three fighters, two of whom were jailed and tortured under Saddam. They repeat the party line about wanting peace but add, "If the Americans arrest people we will strike."

One of them moves a tarp and reveals a huge 155-millimeter artillery shell and a long spool of wire. It's an IED. "If they attack, we have this rat poison, for the American rats," says the fighter pointing to the bomb. "But God willing, we will not be forced to use it." Time for me to go.

Clearly "sovereignty" remains fragmented, localized, ephemeral and mostly imaginary. Neither Iraqis nor the Americans have control. The new Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi, is threatening martial law. How he might impose this and how it would differ from the current methods of occupation are difficult to envision. In the new Iraq, only chaos is truly sovereign.

OCCUPATION REPORT

Collaborator Restaurants For The Rich Strike Back; Won't Serve Dinner

Jul 8th 2004 The Economist

This week restaurants in Baghdad's poshest district, Mansour, shut down in protest against the killing of three waiters at one of Baghdad's best eateries, apparently for serving American troops.

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

Ho Ho?

http://home.comcast.net/~tastwo/this_land_mov.swf

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

U.S. "Military Advisor" Dead

Wall St. Journal 7.30.04

Afghan police found bombs hidden on roads leading to NATO and U.S. bases. A U.S. military advisor and two Afghans were killed in Ghalmin.

Received:

Hi, my name is Dr. James Lewes and I am the researcher for a film, currently under production, about the (*American*) GI movement. I was hired onto the film because I published a book last year on the GI press/GI movement, ***PROTEST AND SURVIVE Underground GI Newspapers during the Vietnam War.***

What I am looking for is photographs, film and/or audio recordings from the Vietnam-era. I am especially interested in events at Fort Hood, Fort Jackson, Fort Dix, Fort Lewis, the Presidio, in Europe and Asia. Feel free to contact me by email at james_lewes@yahoo.com or by phone at (USA) (1) 215-472-6166.

The chap making the film - **David Zeiger** - worked at the Oleo Strut Coffee House from 1970-1972 and has already gotten over 60 hours of original interviews on film.

Thus far I have put together a timeline from 1965-70 that includes 908 entries, this will be extended to 1973. If anyone wants to send me moments of their dissent that they feel should be included in the timeline feel free to deluge me with data.

Yours
Dr James Lewes

If printed out, this newsletter is your personal property and cannot legally be confiscated from you. "Possession of unauthorized material may not be prohibited." DoD Directive 1325.6 Section 3.5.1.2.