

GI SPECIAL 2#B75



US marines in a Light Armour Vehicle (LAV) at Al Waleed.(AFP/Jewel Samad)

16,000 U.S. Casualties At Landstuhl: The Troops: Burned, Blinded, Or Sparring With Death: The Staff? "George Bush Is An Idiot"

September 27, 2004 BY MATTHEW MCALLESTER, STAFF CORRESPONDENT,
Newsday.com

Since Sept. 11, 2001, more than 18,000 military personnel have passed through the hospital from what staff refer to as "down range": Iraq and Afghanistan. Of those, *nearly 16,000 have come from Iraq.*

In private, some hospital workers said they wished they could openly air their feelings about the war. *And if reporters could somehow quote people's facial expressions, a number of those staff members would probably be facing*

disciplinary hearings. Only one staff member interviewed expressed solid support for the war.

LANDSTUHL, Germany -- The medical team that accompanied the soldier on the Thursday morning flight from Iraq had worked the whole way to keep him alive, his body burned and lacerated by the fire and metal of a roadside bomb.

They were low on oxygen by the time the green military ambulance reached the front door of the hospital.

"Get me more O2," shouted out a visibly upset nurse, Maj. Pat Bradshaw. She had been up and working for 28 hours, ferrying the wounded out of Iraq.

"She's stressed," said Capt. George Sakakini, a physician in charge of the team that greets the wounded. He watched from the curbside through the early-morning drizzle, keeping an eye on his highly trained squad of doctors, nurses and chaplains. "Someone's trying to die on her."

Full green oxygen tank in place, its contents filtering into the unconscious man's lungs, the team lowered the soldier on his stretcher to the ground. His scorched face was a painter's palette of the colors of pain: yellow, mauve, bright red.

In the intensive care unit, nurses quickly worked to make sure his wounds were as clean as possible. An infection could kill him. A couple of rooms over, more nurses worked on another young soldier, also unconscious, burned and sparring with death. Another roadside bomb victim. Dabbing gently, they spread thick white antimicrobial cream on the raw flesh of his forearms. Twenty percent of his body was burned.

It was an average morning at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, which has become the American military's museum of pain and maiming, doubt and anger. The planes from Iraq land every day, sometimes two or three of them.

Nowhere is it less possible to escape the horrors of the war in Iraq for American soldiers than Landstuhl. Nestled among the tall trees of a forest on the outskirts of this small town in southwestern Germany, the largest American military hospital outside the United States is the first stop for nearly all injured American personnel when they are flown out of Iraq or Afghanistan. Dedicated and compassionate doctors, nurses and support staff push aside curtains of fatigue and what the hospital's psychologists call "vicarious trauma" to patch up and tend to soldiers before they fly to the United States for longer-term care.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, more than 18,000 military personnel have passed through the hospital from what staff refer to as "down range": Iraq and Afghanistan. Of those, nearly 16,000 have come from Iraq.

Last month, 23 percent of those were casualties from combat, slightly higher than most months; the rest had either accidental or disease-related complaints.

Thirteen have died at the hospital.

Each day, an average of 30 to 35 patients arrive on flights from Iraq. The most on a single day was 168.

More than 200 personnel have come in with either lost eyes or eye injuries that could result in sight loss or blindness.

About 160 soldiers have had limbs amputated, most of them passing through the hospital on their way home to more surgery.

And it's not just their bodies that come in needing fixing. More than 1,400 physically fit personnel have been admitted with mental health problems.

Then there are the Pentagon's figures that touch on all casualties from the war in Iraq: 1,042 dead; 7,413 injured in action, including 4,026 whose injuries have prevented them from returning to duty. In Afghanistan, there have been 366 injuries and 138 deaths.

One other number tells a slightly different tale, a story of selflessness in the face of suffering: one third. That's about how much money surgeons at Landstuhl make compared to what they could make if they chose to work in the civilian world.

"There is nothing more rewarding than to take care of these guys," said Place, the skin around his eyes reddening with the tears that he failed to hold inside. "Not money, not anything."

Every day starts in the same way at Landstuhl. The staff get up early to greet the buses and ambulances that come from nearby Ramstein air base, where the planes from Iraq touch down as early as 6 a.m. Most soldiers can walk off the buses, with broken bones or noncombat illnesses. But those who come in ambulances, like the two blast-injured soldiers, go straight to the ICU.

On Thursday morning, the 20-bed ICU was a busy, but not rushed, place. As so often these days, the staff there were dealing with the effects of roadside bombs rather than bullets. That means taking care of scorched, lacerated bodies that may have less obvious internal injuries.

Col. Earl Hecker sat outside the room where nurses were applying the white antimicrobial cream to one of the burned soldiers.

Hecker, at 70, is a few generations older than his patient. A surgeon who had retired from the Reserves but recently rejoined, he has forsaken his private practice in Detroit for now to help at Landstuhl, working past his assigned 90-day tour to stay nearly 150 days.

This experience "has changed my whole life," he said, his jovial demeanor fading to introspection. "I'm never going to be the same."

The day before, Hecker had been taking care of an 18-year-old soldier who, thanks to an Iraqi bullet, will forever be quadriplegic.

Hecker sat gazing through the window at the burned soldier and thought of the kid he had sent off to the States the day before. "Terrible, terrible, terrible," he said, staring into the distance. "When you talk to him he cries."

A month ago, Hecker took four days off to fly home to see his family. He needed a break. They went out for dinner at a nice restaurant. Hecker realized during dinner that he was suddenly seeing the world differently. He looked around at the chattering people, eating their fine food, drinking good wine and he thought to himself: "They have no idea what's going on here. Absolutely none."

He doesn't think people want to see it. He thinks the nation is still scarred by Vietnam and would prefer not to see the thousands of injured young men coming home from Iraq.

"I just want people to understand - war is bad, life is difficult," he said.

Maybe it was the stress, maybe it's because Hecker has no military career to mess up by speaking out of line, but it just came out: "George Bush is an idiot," he said, quickly saying he regretted the comment. But then he continued, criticizing Bush as a rich kid who hasn't seen enough of the world. "He's very rich, you'd think he'd get some education," Hecker said.

"He's my president. I'll follow him in what he wants to do," he continued, "but I'm here for him."

Hecker leaned forward and pointed through the glass at the unconscious soldier fighting for his life 2 yards away. 'It's just not right'

Not all of the staff can get away with criticizing their commander-in-chief or his decisions, but many use more opaque ways of communicating their unease.

"It's not right," said Maj. Cathy Martin, 40, head nurse of the ICU, when asked how she felt seeing so many soldiers pass through her unit. She paused. "It's just not right."

She declined to elaborate on what exactly she meant. Comments such as Hecker's about the president can lead to severe consequences for those with careers ahead of them. But Martin did add: "People need to vote for the right people to be in office and they need to be empowered to influence change."

What she did feel comfortable saying, echoing the head surgeon, Hecker and others, was that people back home just don't get it.

"Everyone's looking but no one's seeing," added Staff Sgt. Royce Pittman, 32, who works with her. "I had no idea this was going on. ... What we see every day is not normal. There's nothing normal about this."

In private, some hospital workers said they wished they could openly air their feelings about the war. And if reporters could somehow quote people's facial expressions, a number of those staff members would probably be facing

disciplinary hearings. Only one staff member interviewed expressed solid support for the war.

Is it all worth it? the head surgeon was asked. "That's not for me to say, but I'll be here for them," Place said.

The staff do talk among themselves, said Maj. Stephen Franco, chief of the clinical health psychology service at the hospital. He recalled one doctor's comments after attending a memorial service for a young soldier who had died. "I wish some of the lawmakers could attend some of these more often so they can think a little more about their decisions," Franco recalled the doctor telling him.

But like all the staff in the hospital, politics comes second to healing with Franco. He has a lot of it to do.

Soldiers come in carrying guilt about leaving their unit behind, haunting visions of seeing friends dying, nightmares, frayed nerves and deep anxieties about their future, Franco said. Place noted that for a single man facial disfigurement, for example, can be particularly traumatizing. Who's going to want someone with a face like this? the young men wonder.

Franco and his colleagues - the number of psychologists and psychiatrists has doubled since the Iraq war began, reflecting large staff increases throughout the hospital - make a point of visiting all new patients to see how they're doing.

"We provide assurance, look to the future," he said. "We're careful not to sugarcoat anything."

Franco doesn't attempt quick miracle fixes for traumatized soldiers, most of whom are flown to the United States after a few days. "When your world is rocked like that it's not a smooth process necessarily to get that to make sense," he said.

On Sept. 18, Army Sgt. 1st Class Larry Daniels' world was rocked. So was his wife's.

With other men from his platoon, Daniels was standing on a bridge over a highway near Baghdad International Airport while an Iraqi contractor fixed a fence by the side of the road. Daniels, 37, was waving Iraqi vehicles past the three American Humvees while the contractor worked as quickly as possible to fix the wire fence.

An orange and white Chevy Caprice, a type of car usually driven as a taxi in Baghdad, veered toward the soldiers. It exploded; a suicide car bomb.

"I felt my body went up in the air," said Daniels, in his Texas drawl. "I was upside down looking back at where the car had been and landed on the ground. Three seconds later it hit me what happened."

Lying on the pavement, Big Daddy Daniels, as his men call him, had the presence of mind to keep ordering his soldiers around, even though he couldn't move. Another unit arrived soon and ferried the survivors to safety. Two were dead.

Two days later, Daniels was flown to Landstuhl. Both of his arms have multiple fractures. Steel pins and thick casts keep his bones in place. Part of his hand is missing. And as he puts it, he's got "holes from my ankle to my ear." The doctors have taken some of the shrapnel out. Some fragments are still there.

Daniels is an experienced, professional soldier. He's been in the Army for 17 years. His dad was a draftee in the Vietnam War. He can trace his family's military history back to the Civil War. So perhaps it's not surprising that he says he wishes he were still in Iraq with his men.

His wife, Cheryl, has had enough. While the staff at Landstuhl move the injured on, usually after five days, the families of the wounded have to face up to the long-term consequences of the violence in Iraq. Many are embittered.

From a military family herself, the mother of two had been changing her mind about a lot of things even before her husband became so badly injured that he can't do even the most basic of tasks for himself.

She supported the war and voted for Bush. Now, she says, she wants to pull the troops out of Iraq. "I will vote for Kerry. Not because I prefer Kerry over Bush but because I don't want Bush back in office."

Her 12-year-old son has been saying he wants to go to West Point. Her 8-year-old daughter wants to be a military veterinarian. She's stopped encouraging those ambitions.

Speaking alone, without her husband, she said she knew that the Army wasn't going to like what she had to say. Like Hecker, she hasn't got much to lose by speaking her mind, which she did, calmly and thoughtfully.

"I don't feel we have any business being there," she said Friday. "I think this is an area of the world that has been fighting for thousands of years, and I don't think our presence will change anything. If anything, we've given them a common target to focus on. Rather than fight each other, they're fighting us. I don't see why my husband has to lose two soldiers or question why he's here or see his other guys that are hurt. The minute we pull out, things will go back to the culture that is established."

Cheryl Daniels is looking at a tough future. She has to parent her kids, hold down a job at Fort Hood Army base in Texas, where the family lives, and finish the management degree she is studying for at night. Soon her disabled husband will be home, and she finds it hard to believe, as the doctors have told her, that "in a year or two he's going to be back to normal. I can't see that right now because he's got nerve damage in his arms."

She doesn't feel that her country, her military, is giving her enough support. She had to pay her own way to Germany and her own way back. The Army was doing almost nothing for her, she said.

"I feel like we've paid our dues," she said. "And I'm done."

IRAQ WAR REPORTS:

TWO 1ST ID SOLDIERS KILLED, ONE WOUNDED NEAR BALAD

September 27, 2004 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
Release Number: 04-09-31C

TIKRIT, Iraq –**Two 1st Infantry Division Soldiers were killed in separate incidents Sept. 27, near Balad.**

At about 8:30 a.m., a 1st Infantry Division patrol encountered an Iraqi national truck being driven erratically. **The driver of one of the patrol vehicles swerved to avoid a collision, but the vehicle overturned, injuring two Soldiers. The Soldiers were evacuated to a local Multi-National Forces medical facility where one of the Soldiers later died from injuries sustained as a result the incident.**

In a separate incident, a 1st Infantry Division Soldier was killed at about 10 a.m. when a patrol returning from the scene of the first incident was attacked with small arms fire. The patrol returned fire.

Portland Soldier Killed; "You're Vulnerable All The Time."

September 27, 2004 HELEN JUNG, The Oregonian

BAGHDAD -- An Oregon Army National Guardsman from Portland has been killed by a roadside bomb near Camp Taji, northwest of Baghdad. **He is the third soldier with the 2nd Battalion, 162nd Infantry to be killed in less than two weeks.**

Spc. David W. Johnson, 37, of Portland was riding Saturday morning in the turret of the last Humvee in a 14-vehicle convoy headed from Patrol Base Volunteer to Taji in a routine supply run.

The convoy was about two miles south of Taji when a bomb -- called an improvised explosive device or IED -- was detonated by remote control on the driver's side of the Humvee, killing Johnson and slightly wounding the driver.

Saturday's blast threw the 5-ton Humvee into the air and spun it around, said Sgt. John Larsen, 36, of Drain, who was sitting in the front passenger seat of the vehicle. The explosion destroyed a door and threw shrapnel at the three people inside.

At first, Larsen said, he didn't think anyone was injured. Johnson was slumped in the turret, his arms braced against the sides.

When Larsen climbed out and opened Johnson's door, he realized Johnson had sustained a head wound and was not breathing, he said.

As the other vehicles swung back to the bombing site, soldiers secured the area and medics worked on Johnson. He was declared dead shortly afterward.

"He was one of the nicest people you will ever meet," Larsen said. "He didn't deserve to die in this place."

The driver, Spc. James Richmond of Springfield, sustained swollen ears from the noise of the explosion and a burn from hot shrapnel that landed inside the collar of his body armor.

The scene was hard to take in, said Spc. Derek Rabacal, 39, of Beaverton, who was in the fourth vehicle in the convoy.

Cars were piling up behind the site. Dozens of people, gathered outside shops along the road, watched as smoke rose from the Humvee and medics worked on Johnson. The soldiers were unable to determine who set off the IED.

The random nature of IEDs -- and not being able to discern who is setting them -- has been a growing frustration for soldiers.

"Thirteen vehicles passed the site, and the 14th got hit," said Sgt. James Korpi, 42, of Forest Grove.

"Here you don't know who (the enemy) is, where they are, what's going to happen next," said Sgt. 1st Class Ron Van Vlack, 59, of Myrtle Point. "Especially if you're out on the road, you're vulnerable all the time."

Stumbling In The Dark

9.27.04 By DENIS D. GRAY, Associated Press Writer. Denis Gray spent a week with U.S. troops inside Sadr City.

Six months after Sadr City erupted in rebellion, U.S. forces are launching a renewed campaign to wrest control of the vast Baghdad neighborhood from radical Muslim cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's forces. **[Read below. They are certainly not "launching" anything of the kind. They're sticking a toe in the water, and hoping a fish will bite, but carefully avoiding the key areas held by the resistance.]**

The most recent attack came before dawn Monday, with U.S. jets pounding suspected militant positions. **Dr. Qassem Saddam of the Imam Ali hospital said the strikes killed at least five people and wounded 46 - including 15 women and nine children.**

U.S. officers on the ground, although still expressing optimism, say they're faced with a "hard nut to crack" both militarily and in winning hearts and minds across 23 square miles of concrete jungle. **[Butchering women and kids really scores big in the hearts and minds category.]**

Mortar attacks against Fort Eagle, the U.S. base astride Sadr City, have increased.

"We can go anywhere we want to go in Sadr City. *But there are places we don't go into without considerable combat force,*" says Capt. Steven Gventer, commander of the 2nd Battalion's Charlie Company, which conducted the night operation. **[Think that one over.]**

The Americans claim that only some 10 percent of Sadr City's residents are hostile. But only a small southern corner of the city, Jamilah, could be classed as relatively safe.

Beyond, to the north, across what U.S. troops call the "no smile line," lies a battleground in which scores have been killed and hundreds wounded, many of them civilians, since al-Sadr and his Shiite followers rose up in Baghdad and elsewhere against the American occupation.

"It's tough," Gventer, of Grapevine, Texas, says. "A guy will shoot a weapon at you, hand it to someone and then run into his cousin's house to wave at passing U.S. troops. **They have a great ability to melt into the neighborhood.**" **[Sort of like Americans in 1776.]**

How tough is reflected in the 20 purple hearts awarded Charlie Company, some 150 strong, during the past two months of Sadr City duty. Gventer, a burly, energetic officer, was shot through the lower leg and must still have shrapnel removed from his right arm. His battalion commander was evacuated to Germany after sustaining wounds.

And the fighting has not yet escalated to a house-by-house, street-by-street intensity, often being reactive.

"We let the al-Mahdi army choose the time and place they want to attack us," said Lt. Tye Graham, a platoon leader of the battalion's Bravo Company, on an earlier patrol. The battalion had previously staged its own ambushes of the insurgents, but these were called off and Graham doesn't know why. **['Let" the al-Mahdi army choose the time and place? Let, hell. In a war between an occupied people and an occupying army, you can't do anything else. That's what guerilla war is all about. They hit when, where, and how they please. It's their country. They live there. That's why they're winning, and will keep on winning.]**

Increased violence in early September forced the military to suspend two-thirds of its aid projects in the slum, telling the Iraqi contractors to go home for the time being. Work on five vital sewage pumping stations had to be shut down, but Lucitt said they could be restarted overnight **if a cease-fire is worked out.**

Hence the military pressure on the militia, or in the words of McGloin, the operations officer, a "synchronized ballet of combat power." **[More like a confused stumble in the dark from this report: see how the story ends, below.]**

The night's expedition is actually a feint rather than an attack, with planners hoping the oncoming eight tanks and 17 Humvees will draw out the militia to lay roadside explosives and otherwise expose themselves. Spotted from the air, the deadly accurate gunship can then destroy both the explosives and the fighters.

The C-130 rakes an area around the Jolan Club, a ramshackle, abandoned sports complex said to be a favorite al-Mahdi hangout, but radio reports indicate no targets have been hit. Meanwhile, Humvee-borne soldiers search a five-story building to find a smiling man guarding chickens stacked in freezers. They talk to a shopkeeper who agrees that violence in Sadr City is bad for business.

It appears that no fish have been netted tonight. [And that says it all.]

TROOP NEWS

For 1,000 Troops, There Is No Going Home

September 9, 2004 By MONICA DAVEY, New York Times

During special training at a base in Texas before he left for Iraq, Specialist McKinley told his father that his Guard unit was getting only two meals a day, while regular units ate three. And in Iraq, on the day of his death, Specialist McKinley's fellow guardsmen said he was in a Humvee reinforced with plywood and sandbags, not real armor.

"It was deplorable. They were treated like slaves in some respects."

Dixie Codner had a question for the marines who came down her gravel road, past the rows of corn and alfalfa, to tell her that her 19-year-old son, Kyle, had been killed in Iraq. Should she bring them the dress blues, still pressed and hanging neatly in his closet, for his funeral?

No need, she recalled them answering. They had dress uniforms from all the services, all sizes, waiting back at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, where the bodies of American service members come home.

"What does that say?" Ms. Codner asked, as she sat at her kitchen table in Shelton, Neb., on a recent morning, fingering a thick stack of photographs that her son had sent from the desert. "How many more are they expecting? All I know is

that there are 1,000 families that feel just like we do. We go to bed at night, and we don't have our children."

Like Lance Cpl. Kyle W. Codner, each of the more than 1,000 marines and soldiers, sailors and airmen killed since the United States sent troops to invade Iraq leaves behind a grieving family, a story, a unique memory of duty and sacrifice in what has become the deadliest war for Americans since Vietnam.

As has often been true in the United States' wars, small towns like Shelton and other rural areas suffered a disproportionate share of deaths compared with the nation's big cities. More than 100 service members who died were from California, the most for any state, but the smaller, less-populated states, many in the nation's middle - the Dakotas, Wyoming and Nebraska - recorded some of the biggest per capita losses.

More than 70 percent of the dead were soldiers in the Army, and more than 20 percent were marines. **More than half were in the lowest-paid enlisted ranks.** About 12 percent were officers. Three-quarters of the troops died in hostile incidents: most often, homemade-bomb explosions, small-arms fire, rocket attacks. A quarter died in illnesses or accidents: truck and helicopter crashes and gun discharges.

On average, the service members who died were about 26. The youngest was 18; the oldest, 59. About half were married, according to the death roll, which does not include a handful yet to be identified by the Defense Department and three civilians who worked for the military.

Part-time soldiers, the guardsmen and reservists who once expected to tend to floods and hurricanes, were called to Iraq on a scale not seen through five decades of war. Increasingly, Iraq is becoming their conflict, and in growing numbers this spring and early summer, these part-time soldiers died there. Ten times as many of them died from April to July of this year as had in the war's first two months.

American women, too, have quietly drawn closer to combat than they had in half a century. At least 24 female service members died in Iraq, more than in any American conflict since World War II, a stark sign of a barrier broken.

Many Hispanics, once underrepresented in the armed forces, have fought and died in striking numbers. At least 122 Hispanics have died in Iraq, meaning that they died at a rate disproportionately high for their representation in the active forces and among the deployed troops. Among the dead were 39 service members who were not American citizens, significantly more than had died in Vietnam or Afghanistan, according to Defense Department records.

Eric S. McKinley was a baker and a part-time soldier. He dyed his hair strange colors and pierced his body in places his mother sometimes wished he had not. His six-year stint in the Oregon National Guard was supposed to end in April, but it was extended, and Specialist McKinley died June 13 when a bomb blew up near his Humvee near Baghdad.

Specialist McKinley's father, Tom, said he was left with a haunting conviction: that guardsmen and reservists are now being asked in record numbers to fight the

same lethal wars as full-time soldiers, but without the same level of training, equipment or respect.

Dozens of parents and spouses of guardsmen - some who died and others still serving in Iraq - said they shared Mr. McKinley's worries as they wrestled with what the role of the nation's 1.2 million part-time service members once was and what it was becoming.

"They are not prepared for this, not emotionally and not with their gear and equipment," said Mr. McKinley, of Salem, Ore. "There's this opinion that these guys are just 'weekend warriors,' and we'll have them do all the things the regular army doesn't have time to do. But these guys are being asked to put their lives on the line just as much as everyone else. These guys are yanked from their lives, and yet they aren't treated the same."

During special training at a base in Texas before he left for Iraq, Specialist McKinley told his father that his Guard unit was getting only two meals a day, while regular units ate three. And in Iraq, on the day of his death, Specialist McKinley's fellow guardsmen said he was in a Humvee reinforced with plywood and sandbags, not real armor.

Cecil Green, a spokesman at Fort Hood where Specialist McKinley's unit trained before it left for Iraq, said all soldiers - regular and part time - were fed equally.

But Col. Mike Caldwell, deputy director of the Oregon National Guard, said his troops had complained about unequal conditions during training there in months past. "There were a lot of problems in their treatment," Colonel Caldwell said. "It was deplorable. They were treated like slaves in some respects."

No one can be sure what role the deaths in Iraq will play in this election season. Nebraska has been more reliably Republican through five decades of presidential races than any other state. Still, Democrats in Nebraska say the war and the death toll of 14 is stirring political discussion.

"The Republican voting bloc is persuadable here, especially when you're talking about sending your sons and daughters to war," said Barry R. Rubin, executive director of the Nebraska Democratic Party. **"One thing about Nebraska is we are very independent-minded people, and people are seriously questioning the merits of this war."**

About eight miles away, back at Ms. Codner's kitchen table, the Codners said they would vote against President Bush, one of the many people Ms. Codner describes as "someone without skin in the game."

She and her husband go to sleep thinking of the boy in the circle of class pictures on their living room wall, she said, and then they wake up thinking of him. In the moments when other thoughts crowd out those memories, Ms. Codner said, something always brings him back. On Friday, it was the mail. Four packages that had been sent to her son in Iraq were returned to her, unopened. A yellow form on the front of the boxes gave a curt explanation in the form of a checked box: "Deceased."

A few days before Corporal Codner died, he sent home a roll of film. His family developed it, then waited, hoping he would call, so he could tell them exactly what they were seeing.

The mysterious stack of pictures still sits on the kitchen table. One shows Corporal Codner, with a wide smile, beside an Iraqi child. In another, a thick automatic weapon dangles around his neck, seeming to dwarf his slim frame. Another shows just a sleeping bag and pad, arranged carefully on a concrete block. This is probably where he slept, his parents surmise, but they will never be sure.

NEED 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/> And join with Iraq War vets in the call to end the occupation and bring our troops home now! (www.ivaw.net)

Two Points Of View: **Disobey War Orders?**

1. Yes

Friends at "GI Special"

I have put together a list of public military refusers to the war in Iraq. You can see it here: <http://www.tomjoan.org/WarHeroes.htm>

I would be interested in hearing of those I have not yet listed. Please spread the word.

I cannot say enough about the importance of refusal, and any way one chooses to do it, publicly or privately, it is to be respected and honored. It is crucial if humanity is to survive to keep one's ability to say "NO", to refuse illegal, immoral, insane orders. Those in the military owe their greatest allegiance not to the "President" but to all people and our highest values.

Thanks for your GI special newsletter. I hope lots of GI's are reading it.
Jim

2. Organizing More Effective

Dear Jim:

The growing list of military resisters that have refused to serve in the current unjust and immoral war in Iraq are true heroes. All Airmen, Marines, Soldiers, and Seamen must decide to follow their own conscience in how they might choose to oppose the war.

The military hierarchy, however, easily isolates and cracks down on individual resistance, either by locking such a person in the brig or stockade or by charging that person under the UCMJ. Yet when troops begin to act in concert and think of means to oppose the war collectively, their power and threat to the war machine increases significantly.

During the Vietnam War, members of the Armed Forces turned against the war in large numbers, leading to creative means of collective resistance. Troops formed "rap groups" within their platoons that discussed the immorality of the war; they used graffiti and sabotage to deadline military vehicles; soldiers led mutinies that included whole companies; and many engaged in "fraggings," the use of smoke or fragmentation grenades to warn NCO's and officers that were either too strict in their enforcement of Mickey Mouse regulations or too gung-ho in their prosecution of the war.

Acts of resistance became so widespread that the military often failed to punish the offenders out of fear that retribution might incense the troops and lead to even greater discontent. **Overall, the collective action by troops opposing the war was a significant factor in bringing an end to the ground war in Vietnam.**

Therefore today, we must allow the troops stationed in Iraq to decide for themselves what the best means of opposing the war are, in accordance with their own unique circumstances.

However, rather than allowing yourself to be locked up by the military for refusing to serve, consider the more powerful position you might occupy by organizing against the big green machine from within.

FTA/FTUSMC/FTUSN/FTUSAF,

Martin Smith, Sgt. (Retired) USMC

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to contact@militaryproject.org. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential.

Concord-Based Guards Off To Bush's Slaughterhouse

September 26 The Associated Press

The 1159th Medical Company is scheduled to leave in early December.

About 110 New Hampshire Army National Guard troops received mobilization orders last week, bringing the number of state Army Guardsmen deployed overseas to more than 1,000.

Members of the Concord-based 1159th Medical Company are scheduled to mobilize in early December.

The mobilization shouldn't surprise the unit, Guard spokesman Capt. Greg Heilshorn said.

The unit includes pilots, crew members, mechanics and logistics specialists. Several have received training in emergency medicine.

Heilshorn said the New Hampshire Army National Guard has about 1,700 members. Most of the organization's more than 1,000 deployed troops are in Iraq. Some are in Afghanistan.

Guard Closes Office

September 24, 2004 By Justin Mason, Reformer Staff

BRATTLEBORO -- The Vermont Army National Guard has closed its downtown recruiting office.

High costs and a lack of people interested in enlisting in the Guard were the reasons for the office's closure.

"We were unable to justify further expense based on what the office was offering us," said Sgt. Major Larry Simmons of the Guard's Recruiting and Retention Command. "It was fiscally wise to close the storefront."

By Thursday afternoon, the Guard had removed everything from the office except its red, white and blue sign, which still hangs over its Elliot Street entrance.

Simmons said there are no plans to open an office anywhere else in the Brattleboro area, once the Guard's lease runs out on Monday, at the close of its fiscal year.

Since opening, the office has often been a hot-spot for anti-war demonstrations, and has on several occasions, drawn the ire of local peace advocacy groups.

In March 2003, a group of eight area residents calling themselves the "Peace Guard" were arrested for at the office, when they refused orders by Brattleboro Police to leave.

All eight are expected to go to trial in Windham District Court next month on misdemeanor trespassing charges.

"I'm very pleased that they're leaving the office and town," said Putney resident Leo Schiff, who was arrested at the office during the demonstration.

Schiff said military recruiters typically don't provide the full truth to the people they are trying to sign up. But not having an office won't stop Guard recruiters from using other tactics to wrangle in new recruits, he added.

"People who are concerned about the lack of truthfulness in military recruiting need to stay active and vigilant," he said. "The recruiters, even without an office, do remain active in their solicitation of local youth."

Without a base of operations in Brattleboro, Schiff noted that recruiters would likely target area high schools instead, which is why the activist group, Alternative to Recruitment to the Military, is running a counter-program in all four Windham County high schools.

But for the meantime, Schiff said the closing of the Guard office will serve as a small victory for people against the military recruitment efforts in the Brattleboro area. "I'd like to hope that Brattleboro isn't that hospitable of a town for militarism," he said.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Car Bomb Kills Four Occupation Guards At Saqlawiya

Sep. 27, 2004 Associated Press & (CNN)

FALLUJAH, Iraq - A suicide attacker exploded a car bomb at an Iraqi National Guard checkpoint near the insurgent stronghold of Fallujah on Monday, killing at least four guard members, police said.

The attack happened in the morning at Saqlawiya, 12 miles northwest of Fallujah, police Lt. Zeidan Mustafa said. A number of people were also injured, said Ahmed Saleh Sarhan, who witnessed the explosion.

Three Occupation Guards Killed By Mosul IED, One More At Baquba

Sep 27 Reuters & (CNN) & AP

A car bomb killed three Iraqi National Guards in Mosul.

Insurgents detonated the bomb near a National Guard patrol in Mosul, 240 miles north of Baghdad. **The blast also wounded five National Guards** and three civilians, and punched a crater in the street.

Resistance fighters followed up the blast with a burst of automatic weapons fire before fleeing the scene, said Lt. Col. Saleh Jamer, the patrol's commander.

Near Baquba, outside the town of Moqtadiye, a roadside bombing left an Iraqi National Guard soldier dead, U.S. military sources said.

In a separate attack, insurgents fired several mortar rounds that struck a police academy on Palestine street in east Baghdad early Monday, said Interior Ministry spokesman Col. Najah Shakre. **There were no immediate reports** of injuries.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

America Still Condemns The Vietnam War: Talk Of “Split” Just Bullshit

10.02.04 By Michael Tomasky, executive editor of The American Prospect.

Around about the third week of the “Swift”-boat controversy, commentators began to note, in a tone of disapproving sadness, that the firestorm created by the accusations against John Kerry proved that three decades later, the nation was still hopelessly divided over the Vietnam War.

But the story line overlooks an important fact, a fact that the right, with an assist from an astoundingly complacent media, has successfully obscured in this campaign. And that fact is this: America is not -- emphatically not -- divided over Vietnam.

The Gallup Organization has taken care to track American public opinion on this question every few years since the Vietnam War ended. The results are beyond dispute.

By overwhelming margins, Americans have always believed -- and continue to believe -- that the Vietnamese conflict was wrong.

Gallup has asked two questions over the years. First, did the United States make “a mistake in sending troops to fight in Vietnam, or not”? Second, was the war (and were other wars in U.S. history) “just” or “unjust”?

In both cases, the pro-war position comes up very short.

Gallup began asking a version of the “mistake” question in 1965. The first majority calling the war a mistake appeared in August 1968, after the Tet Offensive and Walter Cronkite’s famous anti-war editorial at the end of his newscast on the night of February 27 of that year.

After the war’s 1975 conclusion, Gallup has asked the question five times, in 1985, 1990, 1993, 1995, and 2000.

And all five times -- over that 15-year period that saw vast social change, the raging of the culture wars, and dramatic shifts to the right in American public opinion on several issues -- respondents were consistent in calling the war a mistake by a margin of more than 2 to 1: by 74 percent to 22 percent in 1990, for example, and by 69 percent to 24 percent in 2000.

Similarly, vast majorities continue to call the war “unjust.”

While substantial majorities retrospectively support World War II (90 percent), the Korean War (61 percent), and the Gulf War (66 percent), **fully 68 percent of Gallup respondents in 1990 considered the Vietnam War unjust, and 25 percent thought it just.**

Four years later, the numbers were 71 percent to 23 percent. Only in 2004 -- after September 11, with American soldiers engaged in combat on two fronts, and with martial rhetoric from the incumbent administration a daily feature of national life -- did the numbers change. *But even then, they changed just a little: 62 percent still consider Vietnam unjust, while 33 percent defend it.*

Another 1995 Gallup question even found a majority of 52 percent agreeing with the assertion that the war was “fundamentally wrong and immoral,” as opposed to the 43 percent who called it a “well-intentioned mistake.”

Looking For Something Good?

www.ftssoldier.blogspot.com

Victims Of A Lie

09/27/04 By Thomas M. Braun "ICH" (Excerpts) (For full article, go to Information Clearing House)

After the loss of 57,000 American lives, the United States did finally wake up with regard to the war in Vietnam. But it was the people who forced that war to end, not the politicians.

I am a Vietnam veteran who served honorably for my country. I was an air operations supervisor in the US Air Force, and served on Temporary Duty status at Vietnam's Bien Hoa Air Base and Tan Son Nhut Air Base. I have great compassion and love for every single military person now serving in Iraq. I know the horrors they wake up to each day.

I was the victim of a lie. They are victims of a vast lie also. I was not in combat in Vietnam, but the experience changed me and affected me deeply. I had an epiphany one day when, looking out onto the tarmac from base operations, I saw a pallet of coffins being loaded onto a cargo plane. The ties did not hold and the coffins fell out onto the ground. At that moment I left my duty station with the permission of my supervisor as I felt a deep and personal trauma.

I saw the madness and the surreal nature of that war. I did not accept this. Upon returning to the states I joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Like Senator John Kerry, I experienced the horror --saw the insanity --and I decided to do everything I could to stop further deaths and murders in Vietnam. Like Senator John Kerry, I had no choice. It was the only honorable thing to do.

I worked tirelessly, and continue that fight to this day. The Swift Boat Liars have caused me to wake up again -- and to fight again. The war in Iraq is an illegal and immoral war. It violates international law. **Under the guise of bringing "freedom" to Iraq, my government is killing innocent Iraqi women and children for oil.**

My government has caused the needless deaths of more than 1,000 U.S. military members. **My government has launched this insane war causing thousands of maimed and wounded U.S. military personnel, not to mention the tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians injured and maimed.**

All of this is based on a lie.

After the loss of 57,000 American lives, the United States did finally wake up with regard to the war in Vietnam. But it was the people who forced that war to end, not the politicians. Now, twenty-five years later, the people must again face their duty and demand an end to this lie, the war in Iraq. The war in Iraq is a vast and vicious lie.

There are those who tend to minimize this as failed policy or, like House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi said in her party's weekly radio address Sept. 25, "This war has been a grotesque mistake that has diminished our reputation in the world and has not made America safer."

Pelosi is right. **The quagmire in Iraq IS grotesque, but it is far more than a "mistake." It is a deliberate and calculated lie to trick the American people into a patriotic orgy of support for our current president.**

I cannot say how deeply ashamed I am of this war. I never supported George W. Bush. I voted against him because I saw his vacant and wild stare and heard his jumbled, chopped, and childish words. I knew he was inept and incompetent to serve, not only as president, but as commander-in-chief of our brave armed forces. I know he is a fraud.

The evil of this war has engulfed our country like a deep and smothering fog. **We who know the horror of a war based on a lie must do everything in our power to stop this madness.**

Thomas M. Braun resides in Tampa, Florida. He can be reached at tommyfocus2000@aol.com

OCCUPATION REPORT

WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS IN SADR CITY



Iraqis take part in a funeral procession in Baghdad's Shiite slum of Sadr City.

As they march, they shout their joy that George Bush and The American Empire has liberated them, and their humble gratitude for the daily bombings and strafings that are ridding their neighborhood of surplus mothers, fathers, wives, husbands and children. A simple, childlike, happy people, these Iraqis are eager to meet Americans, especially members of the Armed Forces stationed in Iraq. They want nothing more than to be occupied by an American army forever. (AFP/Ahmad al-Rubaye)

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

Iraq Aid Money Not Aiding Iraq; Government And U.S. Corporations Sucking It Up

26 September 2004 By Paul Richter, The Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON - **Less than half of the aid in the Bush administration's reconstruction package for Iraq is being spent in ways that will benefit Iraqis, U.S. government officials and independent experts said.**

Nearly a year after Congress set aside \$18.4 billion for the rebuilding, costs related to the insurgency in Iraq - such as security services, insurance and property losses - are consuming an increasing share of the money, analysts said. Another large chunk of the aid - contractors' profits and American and other foreign workers' salaries - winds up outside Iraq and doesn't help the Iraqi economy, they said.

U.S. officials, pointing to "unusually difficult" conditions in Iraq, acknowledged last week that security and other overhead in Iraq were a large expense. Some government analysts said those costs might eat up half or more of the rebuilding aid.

However, private analysts estimated that the "Iraq premium" meant that up to 75% of U.S. spending in the country provided no direct benefit for Iraqis.

"The central point is this money is not reaching the Iraqis," said Frederick Barton, co-director of the reconstruction studies program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank, and a former Clinton administration official in the U.S. Agency for International Development. **"We're spending a lot of money we believe is helping people and converting Iraq to a new kind of economy. That's where I think we're kidding ourselves."**

Barton and his organization estimate that less than 30% of the money spent reaches Iraqis. **Another 30% appears to be going to security, about 10% to U.S. government overhead, 6% to contractor profits, and 12% on insurance and foreign workers' salaries. The rest, perhaps 15%, may be lost to corruption and mismanagement, they estimate.**

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

Bush or Kerry: Who's Really Osama's Boy?

September 26, 2004 Michael Kinsley, L.A. Times

Where does Osama bin Laden stand on gay marriage? What are his views on the privatization of Social Security and stem cell research? Is he concerned about judges who place their personal opinions ahead of the Constitution? Or does he care more about corporations that outsource good American jobs to foreign countries?

As you may or may not have noticed, we're suddenly having a national debate about who Bin Laden and Al Qaeda support for president. Fair enough. Bin Laden's opinion, if only we could know it, would probably affect the judgment of fellow voters more than that of any other independent thinker except, of course, John McCain. So far, the Bin Laden debate has been pretty one-sided, with a string of Republican public officials claiming that terrorists are rooting for Kerry, and some bloggers and a columnist or two suggesting that he may prefer Bush.

My favorite among the Republican mind readers is House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, who said last week, "I don't have data *or intelligence* to tell me one thing or another," which is an assertion that no one will disagree with. But he continued, saying that Al Qaeda "would be more apt to go [for] somebody who would file a lawsuit with the World Court or something rather than respond with troops."

Like many Americans, Hastert seems to be confusing Bin Laden with Saddam Hussein. This is a confusion the Bush administration and his campaign wish to encourage, and the president himself may even share. **To describe John F. Kerry's position on Iraq as "file a lawsuit" is merely witless and unfair. To describe his position on Bin Laden that way is mystifying.**

In fact, the administration's response to Sept. 11 — focusing on Iraq, a country that had nothing to do with it — might well be a point in the president's favor as Bin Laden sits in his cave studying documents from the League of Women Voters and the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, trying to make up his mind.

If there is one thing we knew about Bin Laden before the start of the Iraq war, it was that he wasn't in Iraq. With the invasion of Iraq, Bin Laden got all the benefits of being America's public enemy No. 1, but none of the disadvantages.

He got an explosion of anti-Americanism around the world, potential recruits lined up out the cave door and around the block for future suicide missions, swell new opportunities for terror in the chaos of Iraq itself, and the forcible retirement of Hussein, whom he never cared for. He got more than 1,000 Americans dead and hundreds of billions of infidel dollars gone — results that would make any terrorist episode a huge success — without having to lift a finger. And

meanwhile, every bomb dropped on Iraq was a bomb not dropped on him. What's not to like?

True, Bin Laden probably does hold it against Bush that, when not distracted by Iraq, the president has been trying to kill him. That kind of thing can't help but cloud a fellow's judgment. It is all very well for civics textbooks to tell us that, when voting, we should put selfish personal interests aside and think of the greater good. But it may well be difficult to concentrate on those frightening CBO projections of the structural deficit in 10 years when there is an even more frightening din of bombs exploding and there was just a direct hit on a cave three caves down and one to the right.

But Bin Laden cannot help but notice that so far, Bush has failed to kill him. And he has no reason to suppose that a President Kerry would enjoy announcing his death or capture to the world any less than Bush would. So for Osama — just as for many voters in this election — the choice comes down to the lesser of two evils.

The difference between Osama bin Laden's endorsement and John McCain's (well, one of many differences) is that McCain's presumably has a positive effect and Bin Laden's has a negative one. If Bin Laden wants to help his candidate, he must hide — or even disguise — his preference. This makes any argument or evidence about that preference inherently self-defeating. If he is honorary chairman of the annual "Kabul Salutes W" dinner and gala, does that mean he supports Bush or does it mean he wants people to think he supports Bush, which really means that he doesn't support Bush?

Deputy Secretary of State Richard L. Armitage said recently that terrorists in Iraq "are trying to influence the election against President Bush." In saying so, Armitage is trying to influence the election in favor of Bush. But he has no evidence other than their actions. And if their very actions send a clear message that they are trying to defeat Bush, then the effect of those actions will be to help Bush.

So even if Armitage is right, he's wrong.

At least Bin Laden is probably concentrating on what really matters in this election. He is not spending a lot of time comparing ancient typewriter fonts, or reviewing the circumstances of Kerry's third Purple Heart. In that sense — and only in that sense — he may be a good influence.

John Kerry's Real Record

9.7.04 By Marty Goodman, Local 100 Executive Board For Station, Transit Workers Union

* **THE IRAQ WAR:** Kerry supported Bush's Iraq war resolution, which defied the United Nations. As late as last fall, Kerry praised Bush for his evidence about Iraqi "Weapons of Mass Destruction" (WMD). Even after Bush's WMD lies were exposed Kerry called for 40,000 more U.S. troops to go to Iraq to die for Bush's oil buddies. Kerry also wants

UN troops to die alongside GI's — the same position taken by President Bush. Peace forces say, "Out Now!"

* **CIVIL LIBERTIES:** Kerry voted for Bush's Patriot Act, a major threat to civil liberties, including labor's. Kerry supported Clinton's 'Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act,' the predecessor to the Patriot Act. The law made death row appeals more difficult. It obstructed a review of evidence in the case of death row African-American political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal.

* **HEALTH CARE:** Kerry received more than \$500,000 from the health care industry. Kerry stood by as Clinton caved in to the health care industry when health care reform was hotly debated.

* **LABOR:** Like Clinton, Kerry supports NAFTA, an agreement that makes it easy to export jobs to U.S. sweatshops abroad. The AFL-CIO strongly opposed NAFTA. 700,000 US jobs were lost. In May, Kerry was campaigning during a critical vote on extending unemployment benefits to millions. It lost. Kerry also attacked teachers' unions.

* **TAXES AND GOVERNMENT SPENDING:** Kerry says he's "fiscally responsible." Translation? He'll slash services. In 1985, Kerry voted for a "balanced budget" law, a favorite of Republicans. In the 1990's, Clinton slashed more social services than the three Republicans before him. Where was Senator Kerry?

* **CAMPAIGN FUNDING:** Kerry is the richest member of Congress. He got more lobby money than any other Senator. His "Citizen Soldier" fund allows him to get larger individual donations than PAC laws allow.

* **RACISM:** In 2000, Congressional Black Caucus members needed just one Senator to co-sponsor a bill to stop Bush's racist vote fraud in Florida. Not one Senator, including Senator Kerry, signed-on. It failed.

Kerry supported the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, signed by Clinton. The real intent of the Act was a racist drive against African-Americans and Hispanics receiving public assistance. It devastated poor families. It also created slave-labor "Workfare."

* **WOMEN'S RIGHTS:** Kerry didn't challenge Clinton's refusal to attack the Hyde Amendment, which banned Medicaid funding for abortions. Clinton also never proposed the abortion rights law he promised. Where was Kerry?

* **FOREIGN POLICY:** Sounding like Bush, Kerry brags, "I have voted for the largest defense budgets in the history of our country." He's no peace candidate.

Kerry supports right-wing Israeli leader Ariel Sharon who is building a racist apartheid wall around Palestinian lands. The World Court ruled it should come down; Kerry called it "legitimate." Kerry also supported US/UN military intervention in Haiti in '94 and '04. Intervention kept Haiti an impoverished neo-colony.

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

The Twisted Farce Rolls On: American Guards Slap The “Minister Of Transportation”

Sep 27, Chicago Tribune, By Kim Barker Tribune foreign correspondent

The event was a run-of-the-mill photo opportunity: a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new road. But men with guns surrounded the tent, and a U.S. Apache helicopter hovered nearby.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who rarely attends such functions but is facing 17 candidates in the presidential election, came for a visit. On Sunday morning, for the first time since the start of the campaign, Karzai successfully traveled outside Kabul for a government event in Afghanistan, to a dusty spot about 270 miles northwest of the capital. A trip south to Gardez 10 days earlier was cut short after insurgents fired a rocket at Karzai's helicopter.

The difficulties of protecting Karzai were highlighted again Sunday, when a mob squeezed tightly around Karzai and the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad.

As people pushed closer, handing up gifts and rattling security officials, the country's transportation minister got into a shoving match with several American bodyguards. He was pushed back and slapped.

Shortly after his speech, Karzai was hustled back to Kabul. A pair of F-16 fighter jets briefly flanked his plane.

Before leaving the plane, Karzai said the trip was very good.

"Going to the countryside is always nice," he said.

Web Copies

For back issues see: GI Special web site at <http://www.militaryproject.org/>

The following that we know of have also posted issues:

<http://www.notinourname.net/qi-special/> ; www.qifightback.org ;

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