

GI SPECIAL 2#20

THIS IS HOW BUSH BRINGS THE TROOPS HOME



Relatives and friends participate during the funeral of U.S. Army Spc. Gabriel de Jesus Palacios, killed in Iraq Jan. 21, in Mateares, 19 miles west of Managua, Nicaragua, Feb. 1, 2004. Palacios, 22, born in Nicaragua, was a combat engineer with the U.S. Army 4th Infantry Division based in Fort Hood, Texas. (AP Photo/Esteban Felix)

January: Second Deadliest Month For U.S. Soldiers: Brig. Gen. Shtbrn. Kimmitt Caught Lying Again, This Time About Casualties

By TOM LASSETER, Knight-Ridder Newspapers, January 31, 2004

BAGHDAD - January was the second deadliest month for U.S. soldiers in Iraq since President Bush declared the end of major combat operations in May, according to a review of military and news reports.

The high death toll came in spite of a decline in the frequency of attacks on U.S. troops, suggesting that insurgents have improved their targeting abilities.

The continuing high casualty count brings into question Bush administration assertions that conditions in Iraq are improving,

U.S. Army and civilian officials in Iraq recently have begun citing a reduction in the number of attacks against soldiers as a sign of progress in the war.

During November, the high watermark for soldier deaths when 69 were killed, there were 40 to 50 attacks a day, a figure that has plummeted to about 20, according to military officials.

The attacks, however, are growing more deadly. Roadside bombs in October, November and December, for instance, tended to kill one soldier at a time. In January, there were four instances in which one explosive device killed three soldiers, the highest such totals for any month since May, according to military reports.

The top Army spokesman in Iraq, Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, acknowledged that trend in a briefing Tuesday, saying, "The overall number of attacks is going down. That is not, sadly, stopping the number of casualties."

But when asked about the subject again Friday, Kimmitt seemed to reverse course. "As we've had a corresponding reduction in attacks, there has been a corresponding reduction in killed in action as well," he said.

Told that the numbers in January suggest otherwise, Kimmitt disputed that finding, saying: "I'm not going to get into a debate about the numbers."

In fact, an analysis of combat-related deaths showed that 40 U.S. soldiers were killed in January, second only to November's total of 69. The November numbers were inflated by the downing of three helicopters with heavy casualties, which added 39 deaths.

If not for the catastrophic nature of those crashes, January would be the deadliest month since May.

Another U.S. military spokesman in Baghdad, Col. Bill Darley, said earlier this week that the smaller number of attacks has not correlated to fewer body bags.

"Here's the bottom line. There's a decrease in attacks, but I think it's fair to say that the effective potency of the attacks that are going on has been maintained," he said. "We have observed the same number of coalition casualties as before."

While U.S. officials have continued to say publicly that the country is headed for success, the concrete walls and concertina wire have been rising higher and higher, especially in the capital. The entrance of the headquarters of the U.S.-led coalition, which was recently bombed, now has two new guard towers and an even more complex set of barriers.

Bush Approval In Army Hits New Low; Soldier Harassed For Wife's Opposition To Iraq War

by Kerry Taylor, War Times, Feb.-March 2004

President Bush's war in Iraq faces growing opposition from those who are on the front lines: soldiers, their families and veterans, including high-ranking officers.

A bipartisan poll published by *Business Week* in December showed approval for the president at a mere 36 percent among soldiers, their families and veterans.

"Reserve members can't possibly keep this pace up," warned Master Sgt. C.J. Nouse, who has spent just four months with his family since Sept. 11, 2001. "With deployments to Bosnia and for homeland defense, our families are continuing to suffer. Does anyone care? **This is totally unacceptable. Bring us home or suffer mass exits soon.**"

But resistance can come at a cost to GIs and their families.

After Jari Sheese of Indianapolis participated in several peace demonstrations and a Paris television program, her antiwar activities were noted in a general's report. Then her soldier-husband in Iraq was transferred on two hours' notice to a remote base with restricted access to the Internet and telephone. *Yet he supports Sheese's continued vocal opposition to the occupation as the only way to end the war and bring him home.*

IRAQ WAR REPORTS:

One U.S. Soldier Killed, 12 Wounded By Missile Attack In Balad

AP Feb. 1, 2004

TIKRIT, Iraq - An American soldier was killed and 12 wounded in a rocket attack Sunday on an Army base in central Iraq, the U.S. military said.

The rocket landed inside a logistics support base of the 4th Infantry Division in Balad, 50 miles south of the division's headquarters in Tikrit, an Army statement said.

It said two of the injured soldiers were in serious condition. After the attack, troops detained 16 people including four women for questioning, the statement said.

British Soldier Killed In Accident

Ministry Of Defense, London, 2.1.04

It is with very deep regret that the Ministry of Defence has to confirm that Sapper Robert Thomson was killed in a tragic accident in Basrah on 31 January 2004.

Aged 22, Robert Thomson was unmarried and came from West Lothian. He was serving with 35 Engineer Regiment, normally based in Paderborn, Germany.

American Soldier In Fatal In Accident

2 Feb 2004

One soldier was killed and two others hurt in a vehicle accident, when their Humvee overturned near the town of Haditha, 175 kilometres west of Balad, the military said. It said the condition of the two injured soldiers was not known

Attacks On Kurds Kill Governor, Other Officials

By Shamal Aqrabi, Reuters & SCHEHEREZADE FARAMARZI, Associated Press
Feb. 01, 2004

ARBIL, Iraq (Reuters) - Two bombers strapped with explosives blew themselves up in nearly simultaneous attacks on offices of two Kurdish parties in Iraq Sunday, killing and wounding as many as 200 people, officials said.

"According to what I have been told the number of wounded and martyrs at the two headquarters may approach 200," an official of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) said.

Among the dead were the deputy governor of Arbil province and the city's police commander, witnesses said. Party sources said at least some of those killed were senior officials.

The blasts hit the headquarters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the PUK, the main factions in Iraq's Kurdish north, at about 10:30 a.m. (0730 GMT) as officials received visitors for a Muslim holiday.

"The bodies are in pieces, they are trying to collect them ...people are in shock," Peter Galbraith, a former U.S. diplomat with long experience with the Kurds, told Reuters by telephone from Arbil. ***"The significance of this is devastating to the leadership of the Kurdish Democratic Party, one of the U.S.'s biggest allies in the war."***

Many senior officials of the KDP, which controls a part of Iraq bordering Turkey, and the PUK, controlling the east of the region, were present when the bombers struck.

Witnesses said the attackers made their way through checkpoints outside the party offices, where dozens of people had gathered to celebrate the first day of the holiday.

The KDP and PUK ran an enclave of northern Iraq as an autonomous zone under U.S. protection following the 1991 Gulf War. Peshmerga fighters from the two groups fought alongside U.S. soldiers in the war that ousted Saddam Hussein.

The targeted sites were the parties' branch offices, about eight miles apart.

A state of emergency was declared in the Kurdish area, and doctors have been asked to return from vacation. An urgent appeal has been issued to residents to donate blood.

A state of emergency was declared in the Kurdish area, and doctors have been asked to return from vacation. An urgent appeal has been issued to residents to donate blood.

Although the final death toll was unclear, the attack was a devastating blow to the political leadership of the Kurdish minority, the most pro-American group in Iraq.

The dead include Irbil Gov. Akram Mintik, Deputy Prime Minister Sami Abdul Rahman, Minister of Council of Ministers Affairs Shawkat Sheik Yazdin and Agriculture Minister Saad Abdullah, Ihsan said. Irbil is about 200 miles north of the capital, Baghdad.

Thousands of people crowded outside Irbil's hospital looking for loved ones but were kept out by police.

Officials said the top Kurdish leaders were greeting people when the attacker approached them and detonated the explosives strapped around his body. Security guards for both parties said they did not search people entering for the ceremony because of the tradition of receiving guests during the Eid festivities.

Hours after the attack, a mangled head believed to be that of the bomber lay on the floor of the Kurdistan Democratic Party office. Blood and bits of flesh were spattered on the walls and ceilings.

The attacks coincided with a visit to Baghdad by Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, who arrived on Saturday to boost the morale of troops.

(THANKS TO B WHO E-MAILED THIS IN: B WRITES: HOPE WOLFOWITZ BROUGHT A LOT OF PRETZELS)

“A \$50 RPG Took Out One Of Our \$43 Million Aircraft”

By Bruce Rolfsen, Army Times Staff Writer, Jan. 26, 2004

A long string of attacks and accidents has seen about 30 planes and helicopters brought down inside Iraq, Kuwait and adjacent waters, killing nearly 100 servicemen. Ten of the strikes came after President Bush declared an end to major combat operations May 1.

For Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Pakistan, there has been a lesser threat from missiles and rockets. But harsh flying conditions have taken their toll. For Enduring Freedom, 16 aircraft and 43 lives have been lost for reasons ranging from hostile fire to mechanical failure to bad weather.

A reporter from Time magazine was with insurgents when three missiles were fired at Baghdad International. The attackers carefully staked out their launch site to make sure it wasn't under observation and used different teams to set up and fire the missiles.

The number one threat to Army aviation....is small arms,” said Col. Andrew Milani, commander of the Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment based at Fort Campbell, Ky. **“A \$50 RPG took out one of our \$43 million aircraft.”**

Soldiers Loaded Down Like Mules

By Megan Scully and Matthew Cox, Special to The Army Times, Jan. 26, 2004

What does a US. infantryman carry into combat? Way too much, according to the first Army wartime study on loads carried by ground troops.

Infantrymen are heavy packers, traveling with water, radios, batteries and other supplies to last several days. **Loads hauled on long marches can exceed 150 pounds**, while soldiers typically lug more than 60 pounds into combat.

This load is “far too great and considerably exceeds the upper envelopes established by Army doctrine,” according to the Center for Army Lessons Learned, which released its report, “Modern Warrior’s Combat Load — Dismounted Operations in Afghanistan,” to the military last month.

The blame for overdoing it does not rest with the troops, the study says. They carry into combat what they need to survive and win. Instead, the study concludes, the individual items filling their rucksacks are too bulky.

“The excessive weight that U.S. Army light infantry forces are carrying on their backs in Afghanistan are neither the fault of poor unit discipline nor soldiers taking too much gear into operations,” the study found.

The fault lies in the fact that these soldiers are carrying mission-essential equipment that simply weighs too much.”

The Army center gathered its data last spring in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

During one two day operation last April the average soldier carried 101 pounds which, coupled with desert temperatures and bright sunlight, “quickly wore out the physically fit paratroopers,” the study said. Soldiers carry 284 ounces of water and drank most of it within 12 hours.

“The combined effects of the heat and the weight of the soldier’s combat load during this operation made moving even relatively short distances of a few kilometers on roughly flat terrain ... a challenge,” according to the study.

Meanwhile, squad automatic riflemen carry 79 pounds into combat, one of the heaviest fighting loads of any soldiers in the task force. For long marches, their carrying loads exceed 140 pounds, roughly 80 percent of the average soldier’s body weight.

Plus, there is 800 rounds of ammunition and the 16-pound Interceptor Body Armor vest.

“The weight and bulk of the IBA wears down on the soldier, exhausting him, abrading him, overheating him,” the study said.

Soldiers long have suffered from the “Christmas tree effect,” in which combat equipment is strung on them like ornaments, said Dutch DeGay, an equipment specialist for Objective Force Warrior.

Dutch Christian Organization Attacked

The Associated Press, 31 January 2004

In the southern Iraqi city of Basra, a remote-controlled bomb hit a car belonging to a Danish relief organization Danchurchaid on Saturday, wounding two aid workers and several Iraqis, according to the Danish group and military officials said.

Munitions Dump Explodes

The Associated Press, February 1, 2004

WARSAW, Poland - About 20 Iraqis were killed in an explosion at a munitions dump in Iraq on Sunday, a spokesman for Polish-led soldiers was quoted as saying.

The blast occurred after midnight about 112 miles southwest of Karbala in the desert when Iraqis broke into the storage site, military spokesman Col. Robert Strzelecki told the Polish news agency PAP.

He said it was unclear what caused the blast. The dump, formerly used by Saddam Hussein's army, consists of about 100 bunkers spread over a wide area and contains munitions such as artillery shells and rockets, the spokesman told PAP.

TROOP NEWS

“Bring Them Home Now” Stickers Blanket Ft. Riley; Vets’ Son Has No Body Armor

From the bulletin board at <http://www.bringthemhomenow.com/> Check it out!
January 26, 2004

Like many of you, I have a son in Iraq. A week ago I drove 580 miles to Fort Riley in Kansas to see him for a couple of days before he shipped out. Less than a month before, he had returned from a 2 year tour of duty in Europe which included being a scout radio man in Kosovo.

As a veteran myself, I have never seen morale this bad since the Vietnam war. Every other car seems to have a number of "bring them home" stickers and ribbons. Over 85% of the base is deployed. I just ordered 3 stickers for both my cars and my sister's.

I spent '62 to '65 serving with security forces in the Far East. **I remember when they came to us in early 1963 and asked us to volunteer to join a "funny little war in a**

funny little country that would be over in six months." I had a top secret clearance and in the following years I worked on the bi-weekly reports going to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the President. **I would see one thing in the reports and hear the President claim the opposite a few days later. We were being systematically lied to then and are being lied to again.**

This administration claims to be backing the troops, but my son tells me they have no ceramic plates for their bulletproof vests, which don't work worth a damn without them.

Military families have had their support systems and financing cut, a registered vet has to wait six months for an appointment at the VA, and I nearly died because they waited 13 months to give me a glucose tolerance test. When I showed up in the emergency room hours away from death, they asked me if I knew I had diabetes. This was after 13 months of telling them I had it. The doctors at the VA are good, but they are underfunded and overworked. Guess it is more important to give tax breaks to George's buddies.

The sad thing is that I am now thinking maybe we will be lucky, maybe my son will just get wounded.

D. J.
posted 29 Jan 2004

Iraq Troops Killed By Shortage Of Bomb Jamming Devices; Press Lies About Body Armor

January 30, 2004, By John J. Lumpkin, Associated Press

Soldiers riding in convoys in Iraq are relying on electronic "jammers" to help protect against the roadside bombs insurgents have used to deadly effect.

Rep. Gene Taylor, D-Miss., suggested few are being used.

"The Iraqis have figured out if they hit that detonator enough times, they're going to kill a vehicle that does not have a jammer," Taylor told Schoomaker.

"The percentage of vehicles that have some form of electronic jammer — it is minuscule, and I know it, you know it, and the Iraq insurgents know it."

In Iraq, employing the jammers is one of a number of steps the military is taking to protect vehicles and soldiers. **Others include deploying a more heavily armored Humvee and giving soldiers improved body armor.**

(What a marvelous example of how the press lies. Huge numbers of troops don't have any body armor at all, let alone "improved" body armor. And soldiers desperate for armor on their Humvees have been buying their own, only to be forced by the officers to take it off because it doesn't come from a defense contractor. Can't have them losing their profits!)

GET SOME TRUTH: CHECK OUT NEW FEB. 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/>

Army Ignores Warnings; Won't Review Medication Linked To Troop Suicides

[UPI.com, January 29, 2004]

The Army has not investigated to determine if a malaria drug it developed could have triggered suicides by soldiers in Iraq, despite a new government warning and complaints from soldiers.

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/>**

Fresh Meat For Bush's Imperial Slaughterhouse 82nd Airborne Soldiers Going To Iraq

About 2,000 soldiers from the Army's 82nd Airborne Division are headed to Iraq.

"We've set up 250 cots in the base fitness center," Staff Sgt. Jason Smith, a spokesman at Charleston Air Force Base— from where the soldiers will fly out — said Jan. 12. The center will serve as a temporary barracks if soldiers need to stay overnight.

The deployment will take a few weeks as C-17 cargo jets pick up the soldiers at Pope Air Force Base. Air Force spokesman Mark Voorhis with the Air Mobility Command in Illinois said once the soldiers arrive in Charleston, they will wait for the next available cargojet. Army officials said the deployment, which started Jan. 7, should last about a month. Once complete, the 82nd Airborne will have more than 12,000 soldiers on the ground in Iraq.

Families Tell Wolfowitz Soldiers Need More Rest Time; "We Don't Want To Keep Going Through This"

Jan. 31, 2004 WURZBURG, Germany (AP)

Soldiers' spouses complained to the Pentagon's second-in-command Saturday that American troops need time to rest between their frequent missions.

Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz spoke to soldiers of the Army's 1st Infantry Division and their families as the division prepared to go to Iraq beginning next week.

Family members of the soldiers told Wolfowitz they needed more stability in their lives.

Bonnie McCarty said her husband is preparing for a yearlong tour of duty in Iraq. **"When he comes back, does this mean in another year he's going to go back again because the size of the Army isn't big enough?" McCarty asked Wolfowitz. "We don't want to keep going through this."**

BRAVERY IN THE FACE OF THE ENEMY; SOLDIER AGAIN REFUSES ANTHRAX VACCINE

Army Times Jan. 26, 2004

An Ohio National Guard member again refused an anthrax vaccine Jan. 14, an action that could trigger his court-martial, his lawyer said.

Spa Kurt Hickman, 20, currently stationed at Camp Atterbury, Ind., with the 196th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, was convicted in December of disobeying a direct order by refusing to be vaccinated.

A military judge recommended he serve 40 days in jail, be demoted to private and receive a bad-conduct discharge. Hickman's penalty was put on hold after US District Judge Emmet Sullivan ruled that the military could not force troops to take shots without an order of the president. Sullivan recently lifted the ban, saying the vaccine was safe.

MORE:

Make Anthrax Vaccine Voluntary

Editorial, Army Times, Jan. 26, 2004

Five years after the Defense Department began forcing service members to roll up their sleeves for the anthrax vaccine, the battle over whether the shots are safe, effective or even legal still rages. But **there's another question that gets far less attention: Has anyone reassessed the potential threat that prompted the vaccine program in the first place?**

More than eight months after major combat operations ended in Iraq, U.S. officials have failed to find a single drop of the thousands of gallons of anthrax supposedly stockpiled by Saddam Hussein. In fact, the teams charged with searching for anthrax and other weapons of mass destruction in Iraq were pulled out and sent home Jan. 7. The Army said then that anything worth finding had been found and, if necessary destroyed.

Surely, if the legions of enemy combatants still fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan had such weapons, they would have used them against U.S. troops by now.

So why does the Defense Department continue to force this vaccine on troops and to destroy their careers if they refuse? Is it fear that admitting there is little or no threat now might invite embarrassing questions about whether the threat ever existed?

Three years ago, when anthrax vaccine shortages forced defense officials to stop inoculating troops going to South Korea, they conveniently dropped that region from the list of "high-threat" areas. After that, the Pentagon stopped publicly identifying regions as being on its "high-threat" list.

The Pentagon doesn't say what the threat is. Rather, officials say, in effect, "Take our word for it." If only the Defense Department had a better track record on such matters of troop health and safety.

If defense officials can't or won't make a clearer case for why mandatory anthrax shots are necessary, a fundamental revision of the program — starting with making it voluntary — is in order.

Iraq "Ugly For The Reserve Component"

By Jim Tice, Army Times Staff Writer

FORT BLISS, Texas — The third rotation of troops into Iraq — in the spring of 2005 — will be particularly challenging for the Army Reserve. **At any given time in the foreseeable future, more than one-third of its soldiers will be on active duty.**

Brig. Gen. Gary Profit, deputy-chief of the Army Reserve, said the Reserve has 211,000 soldiers, with 67,000 of those mobilized. The component's end strength, which was calculated Dec. 31, is 265,000, 6,000 more than budgeted.

Of the 67,000 reservists who are on active duty, about 31,000 are in the Middle East, 30,000 in the United States and the remainder in Europe, the Pacific, South America and Central America.

The rotation plan for Operation Iraqi Freedom 2 calls for a force of 105,000 soldiers, down slightly from the 120,000-member force now in theater. **Officials here said 40 percent of them will be reservists**

Operation Iraqi Freedom 3s looks pretty ugly for the reserve component, Profit said. "We're going through enhanced brigades pretty fast."

Vet Says Iraq Like Vietnam Mess

Letter To The Editor
Army Times Jan. 26, 2004

In reference to the article "We asked, you answered" [Jan. 5], it was very interesting that the president got as high as marks as he did. **My war has passed, it was called "Vietnam," and our leader got in us in a mess and then didn't know how to get us out of there.**

A lot of things are the same with the Iraq war: Civilians are running it, and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld mirrors the administration policy. He has no exit plan for you and shortly about 40,000 will receive extension order to stay longer.

But the problem this veteran has is that the president and his administration have cut benefits all over the place.

A lot of you active-duty people will be leaving the military shortly, and you'll find out that the Veterans Affairs Department is funded at only about 40 percent of what it should be.

If you are disabled, it gets worse: long waiting for care at VA medical centers, a backlog on paperwork for disability claims. Retirees have been fighting for benefits that you guys will need when you get out.

We have had bills in Congress close to being approved, and then the administration steps in and tells us- that if these bills go forward, the president will veto them.

You can vote for whom you want to, but before you do, check out what I have said, think about how this is going to affect you down the road and make your choice.

Master Sgt. Edwin Milligan (ret)
Dilworth, Minn.

Fiancée Fed Up With Run Around; Soldiers Feel “As If They Will Never Get To Come Home”

I am the fiancée of a soldier who is fighting for our country in Iraq.

Why does the government keep family members on edge? **I was OK with the extension until April, but to get word it might be June or July before my fiancé is actually out of the country?**

I understand they have a job to do, but the worst part is commanders keep giving our guys hope they're going home in less than a year. Then it was a year, then a few months later and now it's going to be almost a year and a half.

Why keep doing this to our soldiers? It's not making them more productive over there; it's just giving them false hope. **Some feel as if they will never get to come home.**

I am 100 percent supportive of my country but why make things worse than they have to be?

Kim Bishop
Freeport, Ohio
Army Times Jan. 26, 2004

Anti-Gay Raving Refuted

In Army Times' Dec. 29 Letters section, a reader asserts that the ban on gay service members is justifiable because all gay people, like Jason Tiner of the TV show, “Boy Meets Boy,” are self-serving people whose loyalties reside with themselves rather than with their country

Given this erudite analysis, I propose that we also ban all straight women from the military, given the clear evidence provided in the reality TV show “Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire” that straight women are interested only in marrying rich men, and not in sacrificing for their country.

Further, I recommend we ban all straight men, as ‘The Bachelorette’ reality TV show clearly shows straight men are interested only in themselves and their own sexual gratification and cannot be trusted with matters of national security

For that matter, hasn't U.S. Marine and "American Idol" finalist Josh Gracin already proven that given a choice between military service and a chance at fame and fortune, straight men will choose the latter?

Thank heavens the letter writer has pointed out the insights reality TV offers our understanding of what makes a good soldier, sailor, airman or Marine. Perhaps we can enlist the services of American eunuchs to fill out the gaps in our armed forces created by our new bans on straight men and women, as no reality show has, as yet anyway, shown us that they're trustworthy.

The Army Times should be ashamed of itself for printing such a reductionist viewpoint based on nothing more than stereotypes. Your coverage of this issue to date as been even-handed, but this letter is nothing more than an epithet. Substitute "African American" or "Jewish" for the term "homosexual" in his letter. Would the editors have printed it?

Sharon E. Debbage Alexander
Silver Spring, Md.
Army Times Letter To The Editor
Jan. 26, 2004

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.

Who Knew?

Army Times, Jan. 26, 2004
From interview with former Sgt. Major of the Army Jack L. Tilley:

"..for years, enlisted soldiers have not been paid very well."

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Protests in Nasiriyah Demand Elections, Removal Of Provincial Council

[Washington Post, January 30, 2004, Pg. 18]

Nasiriyah's provincial governor operates like a man under the gun. **He has surrounded himself with well-armed guards after a protest by 4,000 people demanded that he resign and make way for elections.**

SOC Workers Win Their Fight for Higher Wages! Bremer's Orders Defied!

Ewa Jasiewicz, Occupation Watch, Occupied Basra Jan. 26, 2004
<http://www.occupationwatch.org/>

Southern Oil Company workers won their three month struggle, underpinned by the threat of an armed strike, for higher and fairer wages this month. All oil sector workers in Iraq will now be receiving the SOC's negotiated wage table. **The unity, solidarity and support of oil sector workers in the central and northern fields in Kirkuk, Baaji and Baghdad's Daurra was key in achieving this victory. Plus the fact that the CPA/GC is heavily dependent on oil production and export from SOC, Iraq's biggest and most lucrative oil company, following the inoperability of Iraq's northern fields due to continuous attacks on pipelines and stations.**

The only Oil Companies exporting crude oil from Iraq right now are SOC and Basra Oil Company.

In December, union representatives told Occupation Watch that they had been telling workers since last month to save some of their wages in the event of strike action. When SOC workers saw that their wages were being decreed by the Occupation Administration (OA) as signed by Paul Bremer III in Order 30 on Employment Conditions of State Employees and that the wages were lower than the emergency payments the OA had been paying post regime fall, they decided to form their own wage scale based on market prices - including the price of fuel, gas, rent and foodstuffs, work location, and level of risk.

The OA's wage table slashed all family, risk and location payments workers survived on under the regime. In every workplace OW visited, workers were frustrated with their low, late and fluctuating wages, as well as the axing of all their 'survival' payments and subsidies which sustained workers and their families.

The SOC union's wage table demanded the minimum wage for an Iraqi oil worker be set at 155,000 ID (\$100) per month - more than doubling the Occupation set 69,000 (currently worth \$50-55) and a rise of 84,000 ID. SOC's table also cut out two whole levels and 20 positions of the CPA's 130 position, 13 level wage table. The Union persuaded their management and General Director to support their demands for the homemade scale following two days of meetings last month. **The union reinforced their demands by declaring that workers would join the armed resistance if their demands were not met. This prompted the minister of oil to travel to Basra himself and begin negotiations with union reps immediately.**

The result was that the lowest minimum wage for the generators of Iraq's wealth, the heart pumping its' economic lifeblood, is now 102,000 ID per month - a rise of 33,000 ID. The whole wage table now starts at level nine and all those meant to receive level nine wages will now be moved up to level eight, which starts at 120,000 ID (\$85) and ends at 155,000 ID(\$110). The maximum level an unskilled worker can earn is 328,000 ID (\$250) per month - the end of level five. Five upwards deals with technicians and workers with diplomas. Level four refers to workers with over 30 years of experience and upwards is reserved for senior technicians and engineers and management.

But why the concession for the lowest paid? Why not push for the 155,000 minimum? 102,000 is barely a life supporting wage. The lowest rent in Basra is 25,000 per month (most people s is 50,000), that leaves just under 20,000 per week (approx 3000 ID per day) to spend on food, schoolbooks, gas, fuel, car maintenance, clean water, cigarettes and any other unexpected necessities.

A full UN plastic 4-5 litre carrier of drinking water costs 250 ID. A small chicken costs 3,500 ID, 1 kg of apples or oranges (6) is 750, potatoes (6) is 500, a bag of bread (5 pieces) is 250, tomatoes (6) is 500 (in Baghdad due to transportation costs up from the more fertile if DU radiated south, a kg is 2000 ID); a canister of gas is approx 2000 ID. A pair of adult leather shoes is 20,000 ID, a pair of socks 500 ID, cheapest family shampoo 750 ID. A family can just about survive eating basic simple, rations bulked food, but it is nearly impossible to save or find the money for a gift or journey or new item of clothing. Life is hand to mouth for the vast majority of Iraqi people and that's just for those lucky enough to have work - the estimated 70% or 10 million unemployed have even more of a struggle on their hands.

According to the occupation wage scale over a third (35%) of the Iraqi public sector workforce is on 69,000 to 155,000. 10% - managerial and administration levels receive 574,000 to 920,000.

So why the compromise? In fact it's not. Risk and location payments have also been taken into account and a further 18-30% payment is included on top of the tabled figures. This means that all the wages detailed on the table are potentially 30% higher according to a worker's location, i.e. dessert, remote area, dangerous position. Whether North Rumeilla, contaminated by Depleted Uranium during both Gulf Wars is included as a risky location is yet to be seen but the danger presented to workers breathing in the tons of radioactive nuclear waste used by invading US/UK troops is immediate, severe and life-threatening.

Of the victory, Hassan Jum'a, Head of SOC Union said: 'This is something we were sure of. Our sector is the most organized in Iraq and we were elected by the workers themselves'.

On the effect of the victory on the swelling struggle in the Electricity sector, Jum'a said, 'It's the oil section first, then the other sectors will follow, soon, soon, it will change, the influence will be felt'.

Samir Hanoon, Vice President of the Federation of Iraqi Trade Unions said he was thrilled by the result and that it was 'all good' and was already having a positive impact on the electricity unions' negotiations for higher wages. 'Soon we'll be next. Our negotiations have been helped by this and they are going well' he told

OW. The rise for Iraqi workers means a cutback for the exploitative ambitions of the Occupation Administration and a blow to the logic and regularly heard corporate boast of Iraq now possessing some of the cheapest labour in the middle east.

The regional Occupation Administration, CPA South, claimed ignorance of the wage table, confusing SOC workers' new wage table with the September CPA Ordered one now printed up in December into color booklets for workers to read and understand why its natural for them to be paid slave wages.

All in all, the courage of Iraqi oil workers in recognizing and affirming their power as the sector capable of commanding GC ministers to attend to their demands and breaking the perceived 'last word' authority of the Occupation Administration, shows that social resistance to the occupation and its dictates is alive and on fire and ready to strike for justice in Iraq.

No one is taking this as a final result, but as a first win in a journey of many, making up for the decades of silencing, violence and murder by the Baath dictatorship. **And it's also the first move in a social battle waged more than anything to raise the consciousness and confidence of workers, so broken by the Baath, to realize that they themselves are a weapon against the injustices and exploitation of the Occupation.**

http://www.cpa-iraq.org/regulations/20030909_CPAORD30.pdf - OA Order 30 on Reform of Salary and Employment Conditions of State Employees. The OA wage table is at the very end

OCCUPATION REPORT

Occupation Solves Problem Of Cop Desertions; Stick Recruits In Desert In Foreign Country

By Nicolas Pelham, Financial Times January 30, 2004

-DynCorp, the US contractor, has transformed the bleak, stony outpost of Muwaqqar, Jordan, into one of the Arab world's largest police training camps, erecting giant hangars and shooting ranges to train an expected 32,000 police cadets over the next two years.

Organisers say the location will also lessen the problem of desertion that has dogged recruitment of the new Iraqi army. Police cadets are penned inside the camp and banned from leaving the premises - 30km east of Amman, Jordan - in their eight-week course.

They have also had to defend themselves from criticism that the money could have been better spent in Iraq. Last December, the Washington Post claimed that \$800m (£475m, ?640m) had been allocated to pay for courses, and that trainers would cost \$240,000 each a year. Two-thirds of the 350 trainers are American and British, but non-coalition states have also contributed, including Canada, Austria and Sweden. Western diplomats in Amman say the cost of the first three-month phase amounts to some \$60m.

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

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

War Profiteers Gold Mine

Bob Herbert [New York Times, January 30, 2004]

Iraq has been a gold mine for Halliburton. Check out Halliburton's filing with the SEC over the past several years, and **you will find a company that goes to great lengths to escape paying its fair share of taxes to the government that has been so good to it. The country is at war, and Halliburton won't even attempt to pay its fair share of that taxes needed to support our military.**

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Panic In Kabul; Occupiers Shunned As Resistance Closes In On Capitol

BY LIZ SLY, Chicago Tribune, Jan. 31, 2004

KABUL, Afghanistan - (KRT) - The sight of NATO peacekeepers making their daily patrols through the crowded city streets had always made taxi driver Shah Mahmood feel safe.

That was until two suicide bombers attacked two of the patrols on consecutive days last week, killing two peacekeepers.

Since then, whenever he encounters a patrol, he feels a jolt of fear and abruptly changes course.

"All my passengers are also scared," Mahmood said. "When they see foreigners, they shout at me, 'Pull over, turn left, turn right, turn around.' Anything to get away."

The bombings have raised jitters throughout Kabul, which had until recently been considered one of the most tranquil places in Afghanistan - largely because of the stabilizing influence of the 5,900-member NATO-led International Security Assistance Force.

Now there are concerns that a rejuvenated Taliban movement, whose activities previously had been concentrated in their strongholds in the south and east of the country, is taking its campaign against foreign forces and the U.S.-backed government of President Hamid Karzai to the heart of the Afghan capital, putting at risk the most visible and enduring success story so far of the U.S.-led Afghan war.

Restaurants that cater to foreigners have emptied, Internet cafes are deserted and fears are widespread that the city's mini-economic boom - fueled by the influx of foreign aid workers, peacekeepers and civilian contractors helping with the reconstruction effort - may be about to end.

"Business is down dramatically," said Hayatullah Qaneh, proprietor of Popolano's, a pizza and pasta restaurant that largely serves foreigners. "A year ago, people were queuing at lunchtime for a table. In these past days, we have had almost no customers at all."

The attacks, one Tuesday and one Wednesday, were well-planned and efficiently executed, and there is every reason to believe the Taliban's claim of responsibility, said Lt. Col. Joerg Langer, spokesman for the international force.

Langer said, "both of these attacks show us that this threat is serious, and that this could be a new strategy of suicide bombings."

The latest attacks also punctuated the fact that despite more than two years of uninterrupted U.S. military operations in Afghanistan, the Taliban threat still has not gone away, and it appears to be getting worse.

"It's a last, desperate attempt," one military official said. The Taliban poses no serious military challenge to the U.S.-led coalition, and it is considered highly improbable that it would ever be in a position to return to power, observers say. (Speaking from the roof of the U.S. embassy in Saigon, General Westmoreland said the Tet Offensive was "a last desperate attempt." He added that "It is highly improbable that the National Liberation Front would ever be in a position to return to power.")

Nevertheless, the Taliban's low-level guerrilla tactics are highly destabilizing and are jeopardizing plans to hold elections next summer and expand the reconstruction effort, said Nick Downie, security coordinator for the Afghanistan Non-Governmental Organization Security Office, which advises aid agencies on security.

"I don't feel it's a physical threat," Downie said. "It's more of a psychological threat. The fear that this has spread is pretty massive." (Wonder what the 100+ dead American soldiers would say about that, if they could be asked.)

The Struggle Goes On, Vow Prisoners Freed From Pest Hole

News.telegrkaph.co.uk 2.1.04

Taliban fighters have vowed to continue their "holy war" against the American-led coalition in Afghanistan after they are freed from a notorious prison in the north of the country.

Many of the 400 mostly Afghan prisoners to be released from Sheberghan jail, near Afghanistan's Uzbek border, under an amnesty offered by the country's president, Hamid Karzai, **say that they intend to return to the fray against the West**, according to prison officials and the word of the detainees.

"God created me a Talib," declared Khal Mohammad, 55, an Afghan Taliban commander freed under the amnesty. "He [a Talib] is one who struggles for the happiness of Allah. **This is the order of the Almighty Allah - to fight the infidel. It doesn't matter if they are American, Russian or British.**"

Sheberghan Prison is a bleak fortress on a dusty plain and holds the third largest contingent of al-Qaeda-allied prisoners in the world, after Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and Bagram airbase on the outskirts of Kabul. Most were taken there in December 2001 after the fall of the Taliban stronghold of Kunduz.

President Karzai, under election year pressure from elders of his own Pathan community, announced last month that the prisoners would be freed, despite the recent surge in Taliban-led resistance. In Kabul the prisoner offer is seen as a part of Mr Karzai's attempts to counteract the Taliban comeback by making concessions to the movement's less-extreme wings.

The prisoners are highly adept at tailoring their views with an eye on gaining release, presenting one view to Mr Karzai's envoys and the opposite to other visitors. Mr Hadi recounted: **"A few Americans were here recently and after they had gone these Talibs called them imperialists, and said that if they were released they would come back and kill Americans."**

When the Telegraph visited Sheberghan, support for the Taliban was strong among the inmates. Young fighters chimed in with the elders.

Abdullah, a 26-year-old from the southern province of Zabul - a hotbed of Taliban resistance - declared that he wanted the Taliban returned to power, to restore the stability in everyday life which he said was missing since warlords took control. "In Taliban times it was stable," he said. "There was no fighting, and our homes were not looted."

Sheberghan is a bleak place of incarceration for its 463 Pakistani and 437 Afghan inmates. **It was substantially rebuilt in the 1980s by the Soviets, but its cells feature lice-infested beds and crumbling walls.** Meals have improved following the intervention of the Red Cross, and prisoners now eat beef twice a week, rice every day and vegetables such as carrots and potatoes. **Despite this, most have scabies, gastritis and sciatica and at least 47 have tuberculosis.**

Blinding Flash Of The Obvious

Russian Information Agency (Novosti) January 31, 2004

BERLIN, January 31 (RIA Novosti correspondent Aleksander Polotsky) - **German Defense Minister Peter Struck described the situation in Afghanistan as unstable.**

CLASS WAR NEWS

Why U.S. Wages Continue Falling

By JON E. HILSENATH, Wall St. Journal 1.30.04

In a sign that worker wages were under pressure, the Labor Department said the cost to employers of retaining and hiring workers rose just 0.7% in the final three months of 2003.

The quarterly increase in the employment-cost index—which measures changes in wages and salaries in addition to health, pension and other benefits—was the smallest increase in a year. It translated to a 2.9% increase at an annual rate in the fourth quarter.

Mark Zandi, chief economist with Economy.com, an independent economic-research firm, said he estimates the productivity of workers rose faster than their compensation in the period, at a 5% annual rate. That means the labor cost to employers of every unit of output fell during the quarter.

“Overall labor costs are still falling and profit margins are still rising and corporate earning prospects are still very strong,” Mr. Zandi said.

For workers, the picture isn't as bright. Wages and salaries rose 2.9% from a year earlier, marking a slowdown from increases of closer to 4% before the 2001 recession. **Economists noted that the slowdown in wage growth reported yesterday wasn't as sharp as that seen in other government reports, such as the measure of average hourly earnings, which were up just 2% in December from a year earlier**

(Wage labor is a commodity, bought on the market. Increased production of goods per hour worked means the cost of reproducing labor [the worker who sells his or her labor power] has decreased. In a capitalist economy, that means real [inflation adjusted] wages will also decrease. It is inevitable. Even militant unions can only slow the rate of decrease, which is better than nothing, but are quite powerless to stop the process.

Whether bureaucratic or militant, union leaders who accept capitalism are presiding over a vanishing membership, since the failure to solve the problem within capitalism is self-evident, and they have nothing to offer their memberships as jobs leave for locations where the price of labor power is even lower than in the U.S.A.)

(For further explanation and discussion see the article "The German Ideology," by Phil Gasper at www.isreview.org. For tips on organizing to get rid of capitalism, check out "The Birth Of Bolshevism," by Paul D'Amato, same address.)

Record Number to Run Out of Unemployment Benefits; Worst Situation It At Least 30 Years

January 30, 2004, By Kirstin Downey, Washington Post Staff Writer

A record-high 375,000 jobless workers will exhaust their unemployment insurance this month and an estimated 2 million workers will find themselves in the same predicament during the first half of the year, according to an analysis of Labor Department statistics by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

The center's report said the 375,000 workers who will draw their last jobless check this month is the highest number for January in the three decades that the statistics have been tracked.

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