

## GI SPECIAL 2#91

**NO MORE! BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW!**



Wounded US soldier from Iraq, US Airbase Ramstein, Germany. (AP Photo/Michael Probst)

# “I Just Think It’s A Lost Cause”

**Soldiers' War Doubts Growing;  
Spc. Bromley Debates With Capt.  
O’Day (!!!)**

**"I just think it's a lost cause," said Spec. Will Bromley, a gunner who sits inside the turret of a Bradley Fighting Vehicle and mans a 25mm cannon whose rounds can blast walls to pieces. "This has become harder than we thought. Getting rid of Saddam Hussein, that's one thing. Getting Iraqis to do what we want is another. It's like we want to give them McDonald's and they might not want McDonald's. They have to want it or we can't give it to them."**

MAY 25, 2004 By Daniel Williams, Washington Post

KARBALA, Iraq: When the Army's 1st Armored Division arrived in Iraq 13 months ago, its job was to close out Iraq's past by wiping out remnants of former president Saddam Hussein's armed base of support. Now several of its units are confronting a new threat, Moqtada Sadr, a Shiite cleric who is leading an armed revolt in defiance of U.S. plans to sideline him in a new Iraq.

This shift in responsibility is hitting hard at soldiers who moved into this area south of Baghdad last Wednesday for a short mission to fight Sadr's militia. In the view of many troops in Company A of the division's Task Force 1-36, the old battle, though filled with hardship, was imbued with the optimism of liberation. **The new one is tinted by pessimism. Soldiers feel themselves mired in an effort to navigate the indecipherable intricacies of Iraqi politics.**

**"I just think it's a lost cause," said Spec. Will Bromley, a gunner who sits inside the turret of a Bradley Fighting Vehicle and mans a 25mm cannon whose rounds can blast walls to pieces. "This has become harder than we thought. Getting rid of Saddam Hussein, that's one thing. Getting Iraqis to do what we want is another. It's like we want to give them McDonald's and they might not want McDonald's. They have to want it or we can't give it to them."**

**Sgt. Jerry Sapiens, a specialist in nuclear, biological and chemical warfare, suggested there was no end in sight. "We're in the baby-sitting phase and my question is, how long can we baby-sit for the Iraqis? We want the Iraqis to change, to be like us, and to do this we will have to be here forever."**

"The enemy is not the same as before," said Spec. Matthew Aissen, a medic. "I fear that people who use religion as a power point are taking over the place. It's a power struggle. **Our weak point is they think we are evil and we're not so popular, so we become part of the mess.**"

**The 1st Armored Division was supposed to be out of the powdery sand, 100-degree heat and explosive danger of Iraq a month ago. After a year in the country, they were scheduled to be back in green and placid Germany, their home base.**

**Duty in Iraq was scheduled to end in April, but in a surprise decision, the Pentagon ordered the 1st Armored Division to stay on for another three months. The disappointment was evident among many of the soldiers here, and has sharpened their doubts.**

Capt. Andrew Lomax, Company A's executive officer, was scheduled not only to return to Germany, but also to end his Army service. He now worries that when he enters his post-service period as a member of the Army Reserve, he could be called back to active duty at any time. **"Some of us need to make life plans. We're obviously short of forces in Iraq.** Suppose the country just wants to split apart? Can we live with that? Or another dictator comes? Are we going to fix that? There are plenty of troublemakers and Iraqis who tolerate them. **You could have units here forever," he said.**

The soldiers have been told that Sadr and his Mahdi Army represent only a small fraction of Iraq's Shiite Muslim majority. Yet ripping Sadr posters off the walls of villages

in the south is proving at least as daunting a task as tearing down the once-ubiquitous portraits of Hussein.

**Some soldiers are convinced that political considerations might undermine tactical needs. For instance, Task Force 1-36 came to Karbala to invade the center of the city and drive out Sadr's militia. That complex operation was cancelled, but during the planning, commanders were told to limit the kind of munitions fired at either the Abbas or Hussein shrines in Karbala, the city's gold-topped Shiite mosques.**

**If someone was spotted shooting from the mosques, soldiers were to return fire with nothing larger than 7.62mm bullets, machine-gun ammunition.**

To Sgt. Maj. Robert Cormier, such decisions could complicate the soldiers' response to danger. "We definitely have political constraints. We have to watch that very closely," he said.

Cormier, a 19-year veteran, characterized as unwise a recent deal that ended heavy fighting between U.S. Marines and insurgents in Fallujah, a Sunni Muslim stronghold for Hussein loyalists. After intense fighting last month, Marine commanders brought in former officers of Hussein's army to take charge there. The city has since been quiet, yet Marines continue to take casualties in nearby areas, mostly from roadside bombs.

**"This was a defeat for the Marines," Cormier said. "They didn't resolve the problem."**

**In conversations with Company A soldiers, pessimistic outlooks appear to predominate, although some express positive views on the direction of the occupation. Frequently, opinions varied according to rank. The higher the rank, it seemed, the greater the tolerance for uncertainties in Iraq.** The more likely a soldier was to make a career of the Army, the deeper his expressions of enthusiasm and the more muted his criticism.

Lt. Col. Sexton, the battalion commander, is aware of the doubts and complaints of some of his troops, but regards them as misplaced.

#### **The Spc. And The Captain Debate The War (!)**

Capt. Buckley O'Day, the commander of Company A, said he was "willing to stay another three years" to stabilize Iraq. "The enemies of the future are the enemies of us. Making Iraq a democracy can change the whole Middle East," O'Day said.

**O'Day and Spec. Bromley, the Bradley gunner, share similar stocky builds and small home towns near Dallas, but their views on the prospects for success in Iraq are continents apart.** On Saturday evening, as they were loading up for a nighttime operation in a small village, the pair exchanged views. Sweating under the weight of flak jackets, helmets and rifles, the two comrades gathered close, a gesture usually reserved for the arrival of somebody's latest issue of Maxim magazine.

**"Last May, possibly, there was a chance for this thing to succeed. People were happy. Then we started arresting people" for carrying ammunition, said Bromley,**

**referring to operations to disarm Iraqis in Baghdad. "It's been easy for enemy recruiters. They just wait for something bad to happen, like if someone shoots up a family. They just have to wait, and the recruits come in."**

"They don't have to like us, they just have to want to succeed and make Iraq better," O'Day responded.

"The Iraqis don't trust us," Bromley went on.

"That's why we can't abandon the fight now," O'Day shot back.

**The debate ended with an order to roll the Bradleys out of the dusty lot.** The objective was the town of Husseiniya, where, Company A was told, insurgents and weaponry were sheltered in a cluster of houses.

Task Force 1-36 had traveled to Karbala from Baghdad last Wednesday. The trip was uneventful. **In Shiite towns along the route, some bystanders gave friendly thumbs-up signs, others gawked and still others glared. One boy in a bicycle called out, "Go back to where you came from."**

**At one point, a young sergeant from Company A dismounted from his Bradley to pull down a poster of Sadr that decorated a pylon at the head of a bridge. Weighed down with a heavy rucksack and M-16 rifle, the soldier was unable to leap high enough to grab it. "Just out of my reach!" he said. "Just out of reach."**

**The phrase turned out to describe the raid on Husseiniya as well. It was a bust.**

The column of Bradleys reached the hamlet late at night. "Ramp down!" came the order from O'Day, and a Bradley's back door swung to the ground like a drawbridge. Date palms appeared in the pale fluorescent lights from silent houses. Market stalls built of mud lined the dusty road. A dog yapped from afar.

Infantrymen scrambled from the Bradleys. The first report from a forward patrol crackled across O'Day's radio. Just a woman and 14 kids here, the voice said.

And so it went: no rebels, no weapons. "Looks like we got some bad information," O'Day said.

**The operation should have ended quickly, but early on, one Bradley had rolled into a canal. It sank until only its turret stuck above the water line.** Soldiers struggled out the back hatch and flailed to reach the shore against the force of the current and the weight of their flak jackets. They all escaped unhurt. "I can't even swim," said Spec. Edison Ybay. "I learned quick."

**Not long after, another Bradley that was going to check out a car spotted on a side road slipped into a shallow irrigation ditch. The soldiers inside waded out through knee-deep water.**

**It took about six hours for big, armored cranes to arrive and extricate the pair of stuck fighting vehicles.**

**The troops detained 13 Iraqi men, none of whose names matched those on a list of suspected insurgents provided to the soldiers. Nonetheless, the detainees were kept bound with plastic handcuffs for the entire 12-hour operation. The experience left the villagers unhappy. "You know, we used to like the Americans when they first came. How can we like this?" asked Kamel Alawi, one of the detainees.**

Sexton told the Iraqis that any property damage -- Bradleys burst through some walls marking off date groves to get to the houses -- would be compensated. He concurred with O'Day that the intelligence leading them to Husseiniya was faulty. He had sensed something was wrong early on, and told Bradley drivers not to ram any of the houses in efforts to ease soldiers' entry.

**"It just didn't smell right," he said explaining that decision. "If we had breached the walls, we would have had dead children. I'm just glad no one got hurt and we didn't have any drowned soldiers, either. Things could have been a lot worse."**

The unit returned to the barren field in Karbala early Sunday, then the same morning to their base in Baghdad to await another call.

## **Debate Leads To Rebellion: "The Revolt Of Alpha Company" (Vietnam 1969)**

From the book, **Flower Of The Dragon**, Richard Boyle, Ramparts Press, 1972, from page 85 forward. **Boyle was a reporter who traveled with front line soldiers in combat.)**

**They took a last look at the battalion officers watching the battle from a ridgeline higher up the mountain. "Those patriots are trying to get us all killed," sneered Pfc. Paul Snodgrass. "Tell the people back in the world to keep up their protests. Tell them we all support them."**

Rumors of troops quitting in combat were everywhere, but until September 1969 nothing could be verified—newsmen never happened to be in the right place at the right time. Then, during the battle for Queson, came the revolt of Alpha Company.

The battle for Queson started when the North Vietnamese Army launched a powerful offensive against the Americal Division guarding the northern coastal region of South Vietnam. The battle was a meatgrinder, with each side pouring in its best battalions to be chewed up. Alpha Company had been in the worst of it, the fight for AK Valley.

For four days Alpha Company had assaulted the same North Vietnamese bunker system, and each time they suffered high casualties. Then the commander of the battalion and Ollie Noonan of AP, with whom I had flown into Ben Het, were shot down in a helicopter over the AK Valley and Alpha Company was ordered in to find their bodies.

The next day Lt. Col. Robert C. Bacon, the new battalion commander, ordered the company again to storm the North Vietnamese bunkers. **Two newsmen, Peter Arnett and Horst Fass of Associated Press, were with Bacon at his battalion headquarters at Landing Zone Center when a call came in. A nervous voice crackled over the radio receiver: it was Lt. Eugene Schurtz, Jr., the commander of Alpha Company:**

***“I’m sorry, sir, but my men refused to go . . . We cannot move out.”*** Bacon turned pale and fired back into his radio phone: **“Repeat that, please. Have you told them what it means to disobey orders under fire?”**

**“I think they understand,”** said the lieutenant, **“but some of them have simply had enough- -they are broken. There are boys here who have only ninety days left in Vietnam. They want to go home in one piece. The situation is psychic here.”**

Bacon ordered his executive officer, Maj. Richard Waite, and Sfc. Okey Blankenship to “go out there and give them a pep talk and a kick in the ass.” When they got there, Schurtz was crying, and the men poured out details of their five terror-filled days.

Blankenship told the men that another company, down to only fifteen men (“I lied to them,” he admitted later), was still on the move. An Alpha troop asked why, and the sarge sneered in contempt: “Maybe they got something a little more than you’ve got.” **With fists raised, the enraged soldier charged, shouting, “Don’t call us cowards, we are not cowards.”**

Somehow Waite and Blankenship managed to convince Alpha Company that the NVA had already left the bunkers (apparently this was true), and the men moved out.

**The revolt of an American unit was being reported all over America, and it was big news. Even the *Stars and Stripes* reported the story; it would have looked bad for the Army to ignore it.**

**Every GI in Vietnam who had ever considered opting out of the war must have been waiting anxiously for what followed. Would the Army throw the men of Alpha in Long Binh Jail—or would they let them get away with it? Or did they have something else in mind, something worse than LBJ or Leavenworth?**

I heard about the revolt while covering the battle of Queson with the Marines, who were coming to the aid of the bloodied Americal Division. Jumping on an Army two-seat observation chopper, I got a ride to battalion headquarters at Landing Zone Center.

When I arrived, Lieutenant Colonel Bacon, standing with his hands on his hips, was talking to the forty GIs of Alpha Company:

“Men, you have done a good job,” he said.

A black GI, also with his hands on his hips, was facing Bacon. Behind him, forty more men stared at the officer.

One of the men was Pvt. John Broskoff, one of the veterans of the company—a veteran of two months. Broskoff was the last man left from the squad he had joined two months ago. He had just come out of hell. When I talked to him later, he told me he had been so hungry he had eaten the bark off trees: his thirst was so bad he'd licked the sweat off his own body. At AK Valley the North Vietnamese had so many .51 caliber anti-aircraft guns the helicopters couldn't bring in supplies. One C-ration carton might have to be shared by two men for a day. Humping through a spiderweb of jungle with forty- or fifty-pound loads, the men of Alpha Company were near exhaustion. The North Vietnamese troops seemed to be everywhere, Broskoff said. They would pop out of holes, cut down a squad, then duck back in. Alpha Company never saw an NVA troop until it was too late. After five days, Alpha Company existed only on paper.

**The company had forty-nine men left, little more than a platoon. They weren't even a platoon, Broskoff told me, just forty-nine men trying to stay alive one day at a time. Most of them had raw, oozing scabs that festered in the rotting jungle. Some had heat rash that spread in red, crusty blotches all over the body. Nearly all had crotch rot.**

**Then came Bacon's order to attack the bunkers again.**

**Now Lieutenant Colonel Bacon was talking to the men of Alpha Company. But something strange was happening. Instead of threatening them with prison, Bacon was praising them. He continued talking in a dull monotone.** A light rain had begun to fall and the thunder of artillery fire sounded in the distance —towards AK Valley, where a fierce battle was raging. There was something worse than jail, and the men of Alpha Company could hear it; AK Valley. Delta Company was in trouble and somebody was going to be sent in to take those NVA bunkers.

"...and you men are going to get a three-day stand- down," concluded Bacon.

**Something strange was happening. Instead of being sent back into AK Valley, or to jail, Alpha Company was getting three days of rest, food, and sleep. Three more days of life.**

Bacon dismissed the men. Overhead I could hear a flight of jets coming in for an airstrike in AK Valley. Bacon told me Delta Company was pinned down and he was going to send in Bravo Company to relieve the pressure.

In about an hour a helicopter landed and about a dozen lifers ran over to the small pad to meet it. Out stepped Maj. Gen. Lloyd Ramsey, commander of the Americal Division, sporting a green baseball cap with two stars on it. Ramsey quickly went into a huddle with Bacon and a captain who had replaced Schurtz. Bacon seemed very nervous. **After a few moments I went over and asked the general for a statement on the revolt of Alpha Company.**

"It was a slight ripple on the water--it was settled in a few moments. The whole thing was blown out of proportion. Ask me if I want to go into combat and I'll answer no. But I damn well will go. You tell a soldier something and he may not want to go—but by God, he will go, and he'll do the finest job in the world."

Ramsey compared the whole thing to a football game. "A fullback may try to hit the center of the line and be clobbered. Back in the huddle he will tell the quarterback, 'I can't hit there again, I'll be killed.' But the quarterback doesn't go running to the coach, he simply calls time out to discuss the problem."

The GIs in Vietnam, Ramsey went on, were the "best soldiers we ever had. I fought in World War II for three and a half years, but I'll take these men. They are real red-blooded Americans, and I'm proud as hell; right down through the ranks, they did a magnificent job-" **Morale, he said, was "great, amazing."**

After the last Alpha Company troop walked past, Bravo got the word to move in. The closer the men got to the steady thuds of artillery bursts, the more bitter they became.

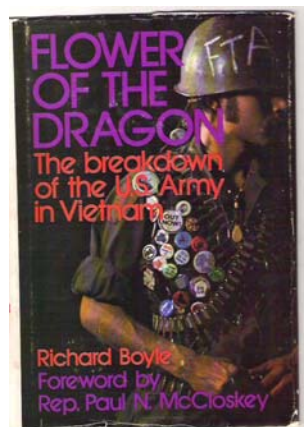
**They took a last look at the battalion officers watching the battle from a ridgeline higher up the mountain. "Those patriots are trying to get us all killed," sneered Pfc. Paul Snodgrass. "Tell the people back in the world to keep up their protests. Tell them we all support them."**

The hot sun beat down on their backs and beads of sweat dripped off their faces. A young machine gunner, belts of ammo crisscrossed over his chest, vowed he would quit then and there if not for the fear of going to Long Binh Jail. "I wouldn't even mind doing two years, but they would probably send me right back here after doing my time." He expressed the thought that has kept others from rebelling—time in Army jail is not counted as time in the service, and the Army can send a man right back into combat after he gets out.

"Men, you ain't getting enough body count," said a staff sergeant sarcastically.

"Yeah, that's all the bastards are after, body count," said one of the GIs.

**Many of the men in the company wore peace symbols, and nearly all had something written on their helmets. "Re-up, I'd rather throw up;" read one.**



**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/qi-special/>

## **IRAQ WAR REPORTS:**

### **THREE MARINES KILLED IN ACTION**

May 29, 2004 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND, Release Number: 04-05-47C

**CAMP FALLUJAH -- Three Marines assigned to I Marine Expeditionary Force were killed in action May 29, in the Al Anbar Province while conducting security and stability operations.**

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### **SOLDIER KILLED BY MORTAR ATTACK, NINE WOUNDED**

May 29, 2004 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND, Release Number: 04-05-46C

BALAD, Iraq - An 81st Brigade Combat Team Soldier assigned to Task Force 1/185 was killed on May 25 in a mortar attack at a base south of Baghdad.

Nine Soldiers were also injured in the attack.

Eight were taken to the 31st Combat Support Hospital in Baghdad for treatment and one was treated at the forward operating base.

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### **Six Soldiers Wounded By Attack Near Talafar Base**

May 30, 2004 (AEST)

**Six soldiers have been wounded in a car bomb attack at a coalition base east of Talafar, the name of the American military base in the northern city of Mosul.**

The US Army says the bomb went off at 8:00am (local time).

The wounded have been treated at a military hospital. Four later returned to duty, while the status of the remaining two is unclear.

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## One Wounded By Mosul Convoy IED

5/30/2004 By MARIAM FAM, The Associated Press

One soldier was slightly wounded Saturday when a roadside bomb exploded near a U.S. convoy in the northern city of Mosul, the U.S. military said.

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## STRYKER BRIGADE SOLDIER DIES FROM NON-HOSTILE INCIDENT

05/29/04 Centcom: [A Stryker Brigade Soldier, under the operational control of Task Force Olympia in Mosul, died Friday, May 27.](#)

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## Foreigners Killed And Captured In Baghdad Attack On Three SUVs

May 30, 2004 BAGHDAD (Reuters) & The Associated Press

**Gunmen attacked three civilian sport utility vehicles carrying foreigners in northwest Baghdad Sunday, killing two Westerners and seizing three others, witnesses and police at the scene said.**

The vehicles, which had bullet holes in them, crashed against highway barriers and burst into flames on the road leading to Taji, 10 miles north of Baghdad.

**Police and fire trucks rushed to the scene as Iraqi civilians fired weapons into the air and cheered jubilantly.**

Two of the four-wheel-drive vehicles, of the type used by foreign contractors, employees of the U.S.-led administration and some media in Iraq, appeared to have collided after coming under fire on a main highway, and two bodies could be seen at the site in the flaming wreckage.

**Locals and police said the attackers had dragged away three survivors of the attack. Their fate was unknown.**

In one of the cars, a dark-colored sports utility vehicle, both front airbags had inflated and were stained red with blood. Bloodstains were also soaked into the back seat.

Nearby, a white four-wheel-drive vehicle had its front staved in by the force of the collision.

After the attack, locals set the two vehicles ablaze, and later shooting erupted between resistance fighters and police at the scene.

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## Collaborator Cops Run Away As Fighting Reported In Kufa, Najaf: Two U.S. Soldiers Wounded



Mehdi Army militiaman in the Valley of Peace cemetery, in the holy city of Najaf..(AFP/Ahmad Al-Rubaye)

May 30, 2004 (AP)

Two American soldiers were wounded in the clashes around the holy city, Najaf, the military said. Fighting erupted Sunday night in Najaf's twin city Kufa, and Shiite militiamen accused the Americans of firing near the main mosque, damaging its outer wall.

**About 150 policemen sent from Baghdad to replace local policemen who deserted returned to the capital, ostensibly because of a lack of accommodations.**

That threatens to delay the start of joint patrols considered key to shoring up security as al-Sadr's militiamen return home.

**In a report from Kufa, CNN, which has a reporter embedded with 1st Armored Division troops there, said a "major firefight" broke out late Sunday when soldiers**

**tried to secure a police station. CNN quoted soldiers as saying it was the most intense fighting in the area in the past six weeks.**

On Sunday, U.S. troops and al-Sadr's fighters exchanged gunfire near Najaf's Valley of Peace cemetery - the world's largest Muslim burial ground. **Puffs of white smoke rose above the tombstones as Shiite gunmen fired rocket-propelled grenades at U.S. tanks.**

One Iraqi was killed and four were wounded, hospital officials said.

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## **Two Blasts Hit Center Of Baghdad**

May 30, 2004 The Associated Press, BAGHDAD, Iraq

Two explosions were heard near the U.S.-led coalition headquarters in central Baghdad on Saturday, witnesses said.

**The first explosion occurred near "Assassin's Gate," which is one of the main entrances into the so-called Green Zone, where the U.S. coalition is based.**

**The other occurred on the roof of a bank, which is near the old Information Ministry building, said one witness, Kerim Nemea.**

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## **TROOP NEWS**

### **Who's Dying**

5/31/2004 by Philip Weiss, The New York Observer.

The Austin American-Statesman. undertook a study of the numbers and found that while one in five Americans live in non-metropolitan counties, nearly one out of three casualties in Iraq have come from these counties.

These are places that do not have a city over 50,000 people and are not within commuting distance of a big city. **The paper's interviews with enlistees from these places have shown that they can't find good jobs in their communities and feel that a university education is out of their reach; they couldn't afford to move to a community near a state school.**

Representative Ike Skelton of Missouri, the ranking minority member on the House Armed Services Committee, was even more emphatic. **Last fall he stated that 43.5 percent of the soldiers killed in Iraq came from rural cities and towns with a population below 20,000.**

These kids tend to be rural white. The others who have been disproportionately affected are blacks and Hispanics from the inner city.

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## **Iraq Vet & Soldiers' Mom Condemn War; Want Troops Home Now**

May 25, 2004 By AMY KUPERINSKY, Trenton (NJ) Times

TRENTON - As President Bush told the country last night about what he deems to be a clear strategy for Iraq, skepticism reigned among peace activists gathered for a forum here.

**"We've already destroyed our reputation," said Michael Hoffman, an ex-Marine from Morrisville, Pa., who is now an outspoken critic of the war.** "This administration has destroyed any good feeling toward the U.S. that was out in the world."

**Hoffman and two parents of soldiers serving in Iraq called for the president to bring troops home at the forum,** called "The Toll of War," sponsored by Trenton Peace Action in its peace center at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral.

**Mildred McHugh of Pennington, a member of Military Families Speak Out, has a son, Steven, 21, an Army soldier who is stationed north of Baghdad. She recalled her son's voice when she talked to him a little more than a month ago. It was "a voice with no spirit, one who had lost all hope," she said.**

Hoffman echoed her impression. He was in Iraq about two months last year, providing fire support for the infantry during the first wave of the invasion in March 2003, crossing the Kuwait border and moving north to Tikrit before coming home that May.

He said he was shocked by the images of prisoner abuse that have surfaced from Abu Ghraib.

He said soldiers treated prisoners so horribly for the same reason they lack direction in their current missions. "There's really nothing left for them to fight for," Hoffman said.

He said Iraqis become "less than human" in the eyes of soldiers left with little purpose, having to face a lack of equipment and continuing opposition from militants. "They're simply the enemy," he said.

**"I've been there, I've served with them, they don't want to be there," Hoffman said of the American soldiers. "They think the war is wrong."**

Hoffman said he didn't want to go to Iraq and that he disagreed with the administration on military action, but he had already enlisted along with some friends.

After coming home last spring, he decided to speak out against the war with the help of Veterans for Peace.

**While the June 30 deadline for the handover of sovereignty to Iraqis approaches, Hoffman only sees the situation getting worse if U.S. troops remain. "As long as there is an occupation in Iraq there will be a resistance," he said. "He has no choice but to end this war and to end it on a good note, not like Vietnam."**

**Pat Gunn, a Navy veteran who said her son Jason was wounded in Iraq and later sent back to combat despite his injuries, said her son told her that he had to use equipment completely different from his training materials. "Why is our military so ill equipped?" she asked.**

**While her son was supposed to return home in April, his duty has been extended three months with a possible further extension, a common situation for many soldiers.**

"We need to send a clear message to Washington," Gunn said.

"It's going to be the people that are going to do it," Hoffman said. "We need to keep the pressure on to get the troops out and give Iraq what it's due."

**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.**

## **The Price of Death**

5.30.04 By Dante Zappala, Military Families Speak Out, From VETPAX, originally LA Times

*(Zappala, a Pennsylvania native, teaches history at Fremont High School in Los Angeles)*

**Not long ago, \$250,000 bought you a house, a car, started a college trust fund and still left you with enough for dinner at the Olive Garden. Today, \$250,000 gets you a dead soldier.**

**My brother, Sgt. Sherwood Baker, was killed in action in Baghdad last month. Before he left, he took out the maximum Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance: \$250,000.**

**His wife gets that money and a folded flag. It should come with note: "Thanks for doing business with Uncle Sam. The medals are on us." What I'm left with is a**

**dead brother, a fatherless nephew and a giant void where this giant man once stood.**

For a guy who never made a lot of money in his life--he was a front line soldier making \$2500 a month--Sherwood paid the highest price in the war, while companies and individuals in the war business are reaping maximum profits. Bush has dumped \$149 billion into this war. In what reservoir does the all this money rain? Certainly not the bank accounts of widows! Who is truly rewarded for their sacrifice? How about this: Halliburton has racked up billions in government contracts since the start of the war.

And then there's Ahmed Chalabi and the INC. His organization received \$39 million in 'aid' along with a fat \$340,000 a month stipend for the last 2 years.

**Sherwood had it all wrong. Maybe if he had helped to invent evidence to start a war, the Bush people would have been more rewarding. He certainly would have been on track to a safer and more profitable career path.**

What exactly is false information worth to Uncle Sam? So long as you don't become an Iranian spy, it seems, it keeps you in the Pentagon penthouse.

But that racket wouldn't suit Sherwood. **He did what most patriotic Americans do--he worked for a living. He knew he would never be rich from his job, but he wanted to help people. He was a county caseworker for the mentally handicapped. To supplement his income, he hired himself out as a DJ at local bars and clubs. Sherwood wasn't enough of an entrepreneur to make it into Harvard Business School. So, when George Bush told him to go to work with his Guard Unit in Iraq, he went willingly.**

**Sherwood never did own a Hummer; he was a gunner on a Humvee. Today, he's not lying on the couch in his remolded living room with a Big Screen TV and surround sound, playing video games with his son. He's lying alone in his grave.**

Sherwood worked until the very end--he died pulling perimeter security for the Iraqi Survey Group. This group has assumed the responsibility of finding those elusive weapons of mass destruction (WMD)--any WMD--with the high hopes of making an honest man out of the President.

Sherwood's death presents an amazing irony. Find WMD, Sherwood? No, brother, if you wanted to make money and be alive, you should have told everybody that they existed and you knew where to find them.

**Just before he died, Sherwood plainly illustrated where a life of hard work and dedication gets you--hungry and thirsty in the desert. In his last e-mail, he asked that we send him and his fellow soldiers food and water. As it turns out, the most powerful military machine in the world has its soldiers on rations.**

**How does this happen? I went to Halliburton's website to look for clues. After a dispute with the government over a few million dollars in overcharges, Halliburton stubbornly stated, "We may withhold all or a portion of the payments to our**

**subcontractors" who provide food services. Which basically means that U.S. soldiers in Iraq don't eat.**

**Despite its newfound billions in revenue, Halliburton has failed to fulfill its most basic responsibility--feed our troops. Our soldiers, on the other hand, have to do their job, no matter how hungry they are, or face courts-martial and time in Leavenworth.** Just ask Camilo Mejia, the conscientious objector who was sentenced to a year in jail.

I've come to believe that Sherwood died for everybody else. I've had countless people tell me my brother is a hero and died defending our freedom. They may be right.

**In a country that promotes the virtues of the Free Market, he died for the benefit of the war profiteers and for very little benefit to himself.**

**"George Bush said we need to finish the work of the fallen, so I wrote an open letter inviting him to my brother's grave site. I said, 'My brother's work was not in Iraq; it was taking care of his family. If you want to see unfinished work, come and see my nephew.'"**

### **GET SOME TRUTH: CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER**

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

## **IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP**

### **Najaf: "Yes To Armed Resistance"**

5/30/2004 By MARIAM FAM, The Associated Press, NAJAF, Iraq

U.S. soldiers clashed with Shiite Medhi Army soldiers in this holy city on Sunday, further eroding an agreement to end the bloody standoff with followers of resistance cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

Later Sunday, an explosion rocked the center of the city, sending a ball of black smoke over 1920 Revolution Square. Gunfire immediately broke out, wounding two people fleeing the scene.



Explosions were heard Saturday in the center of Kufa, where al-Sadr's fighters took up positions in the streets surrounding a mosque. **Militiamen manned checkpoints, standing near concrete barriers including one with a graffiti that read "Yes to armed resistance!"**



**Welcome To Kufa. Have A Nice Day.**



Shiite Muslims Iraqi fighters of the Mehdi Army militia stand close to the Abbasiyah Bridge leading into the town of Kufa.(AFP/Ahmed al-Rubaye)

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## Unconquered Cities

5.27.2004 METAFILTER

After witnessing the Pentagon's inconclusive retreat from both Fallujah and Najaf without achieving the "success" of pacification or elimination of the local resistance, it seems that apart from incidentally killing several thousand Iraqis, causing lots of property damage, uniting Shias and Sunnis, and promoting minor clerics into major resistance leaders, today's Pentagon forces are quite ineffectual within dense urban areas.

I am reminded of the words of the ex-Deputy PM of Iraq, Tariq Aziz, on the eve of the US invasion of Iraq: **People say to me, 'You are not the Vietnamese. You have no jungles and swamps' ... I reply, 'Let our cities be our swamps and our buildings our jungles.'**

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## **OCCUPATION REPORT**



Faeza Hassan (R) kisses her 17-year-old son Mahmud Yassin Hassan, as other relatives hug him moments after US forces set him free in front of his home in the town of Abu Ghraib.(AFP/Roberto Schmidt)

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

## **FORWARD OBSERVATIONS**

### **Freedom And Fear Just Over The Hill**

May 28, 2004 By Clancy Sigal, Los Angeles Times  
Clancy Sigal is a novelist and screenwriter.

April was the deadliest month for U.S. forces in Iraq, with 137 killed and about 1,000 wounded. Some of the casualties were barely out of high school. Five pregnant wives were left behind. Thirty-six of the dead were fathers, and 60 children lost a parent. At least 21 American soldiers thus far have committed suicide in Iraq, not counting those who killed themselves after returning home. By all accounts, including the most recent survey by the Pentagon itself, troop morale is low.

At least two U.S. military deserters — Pvts. Brandon Hughey, 19, and Jeremy Hinzman, 25, — this spring crossed the border into Canada asking for sanctuary. A Quaker-aided Canadian "underground railway" was there to receive them.

**Here in the United States, well-established pacifist and "GI hotline" groups report escalating calls from soldiers actively seeking help to file for conscientious objection. A combat squad leader in Iraq, Staff Sgt. Camilo Mejia, was convicted this month by a military jury of desertion for leaving his combat unit in protest of the war.**

The number of deserters — that is, those absent 30 days "with intent to stay away" — is still small, nothing yet like the mutinous days of the Vietnam-era "GI resistance." But we can expect more, especially if a draft is revived.

**Desertion is the ultimate act of cowardice or defiance, depending on who is doing the deserting from what. The few Nazi soldiers who threw away their rifles and took off were considered "good," as were Saddam Hussein's troops who defected during Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom. But what about our own GIs who go AWOL from the no-exit Iraq war out of expediency or principle?**

In World War II, only one deserter, Pvt. Eddie Slovik, was executed. **During Vietnam, when I was a stationmaster at the London end of a worldwide underground railway for war resisters, the Pentagon's policy tended toward leniency, if only because there were so many runaways. Once, at U.S. naval headquarters in Grosvenor Square, London, I attended the court-martial of a sailor AWOL for five years but who got off as not guilty because he had taken his hat with him, thus "proving" he might one day return to duty.**

On the other hand, for AWOLs and their families, the act of desertion is usually life-changing, with profound and unpredictable consequences, aside from legal penalties.

It's tricky to draw parallels between Vietnam and Iraq, but there are certain similarities. As in today's army, most deserters were volunteers, not conscripts; most came from rural or small-town America; and in almost every case, the deserter's life changed forever.

**A decision to go "over the hill" might begin on an impulse resulting from a girlfriend's "Dear John" letter or a petty wrangle with a sergeant but end with the deserter, often for the first time, questioning the very purpose and meaning of his life. It could also mean years of hiding, and constant fear of being found. Some Vietnam deserters I know never got over the habit of running.**

Desertion is a hard road. To survive as an outcast, reviled as a traitor, supported perhaps by a few friends and an antiwar movement that itself was divided over desertion, took guts, guile and tenacity — just the qualities an army needs in war.

**The Vietnam-era deserters are not a faceless statistic to me. I've kept in touch with some of them. Legally they're in the clear, as a result of presidents Ford and Carter's amnesties, or because they made a private accommodation with the military. Those who survived life on the run are today's normal citizens. One is a nurse to terminally ill children, another an urban sociologist with a focus on air pollution, another a computer businessman overseas.**

For whatever reason, desertion is the ultimate rejection of war. It's an embarrassing, difficult subject, not least for the Pentagon, which keeps changing its policy from arresting and sending deserters back to their units for "rehabilitation" to discharging them in disgust to whatever the latest policy happens to be.

**In the past, the Pentagon just wanted the problem to go away. It didn't. And won't.**

**(For more on the trial of Camilo Mejia, see the article "Guys Like Camilo Expose The Truth" at [www.socialistworker.org](http://www.socialistworker.org).)**

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## **Truth That Cuts Like A Knife: A Vietnam Vet On "Supporting the Troops" War and Death In A Bumpersticker World**

May 25, 2004 By STEPHEN T. BANKO, III, Counterpunch

(Stephen T. Banko III was awarded two Silver Stars, four Bronze Stars, the Air Medal and four Purple Hearts. He has long been active in veterans' affairs. He can be reached at: [banko@counterpunch.org](mailto:banko@counterpunch.org))

**I came home from my war in 1970 with a body still riddled with shrapnel and mind still muddled with a toxic cocktail of rage and guilt and fear. I tried with every fiber of my being to become myself again but always knowing that I would never be that person again.** I would never again think the world would spin off its axis if Timon lost to Canisius. Nor would I ever again believe that a beer in the South Shore Beach Club in Angola would cure everything that ailed me.

As much as I wanted to be me, the face staring back at me from the mirror was someone far different from what I saw before Vietnam.

**Lying in a hospital bed surrounded by boys whose bodies had been broken and battered will do that. So will lying in ambush and killing unsuspecting Vietnamese. So will the constant pain and the fatigue and the filth and the**

**loneliness of war. Once you've been exposed, you're a carrier of that virus forever. Innocence gets stripped away from your soul with all the pain of skin being peeled off your body. Any inherent goodness you might have possessed leaks out of your spirit.**

I tried to pray my way out of my confusion and my anger and my pain. But those prayers were more a nostalgic genuflection to simpler prayers that asked God for a new catcher's mitt or a new pair of Converse All-Stars. I didn't really believe God would answer a killer's prayers. I stopped when I became terrified that deafening silence that greeted my prayers might, indeed, be the voice of God.

One day a few weeks after I returned to be a civilian, a husband and a father in one fell swoop, the mail carrier showed up at my door with a package. In it was a Silver Star. The Silver Star is the nation's third highest award for heroism and it was awarded to me by a mail carrier. When I told my father, he was livid. If you got that in my war, he said, you'd have a parade down Main Street. But that was the kind of war we fought: individual battles where mean survival was victory. As much as I was counseled to forget about the war and get on with my life, and as much as I really want to do so, each of us who fought in Vietnam was spiritually captured by it, and most remain to this day prisoners of their own war. **In my eyes, the war was over. In my mind it was over too: over and over and over again in a continuous loop.**

**In all that confusion, I felt a need justify what I'd done.** You can't just walk away from something like that without some sense of ratification. We looked to our peers but found none. We looked to our country and found even less. So we were left to explain our sacrifice to ourselves.

**In that muddle, I latched on to the immutable notion that what I did was right and just because the cause was right and just.** I wrote angry essays defending American involvement in Vietnam. I castigated those who tried to cast aspersions on returning veterans. I engaged politicians who refused to vote for more jobs and more benefits for Vietnam veterans. I incurred the wrath of UB students and professors with my vigorous defense of the war. I made my support for the war literally who I was. So when public affairs television producers like Marilyn Stahlka were looking for hawks to take on the vocal left wing of the Vietnam veterans' movement, they found me lurking at every turn--only me.

I was trotted out with maddening frequency to engage two or three anti-war veterans at least once a month. Ms. Stahlka seemed more like my agent than a producer. I would take on Gail Graham on one program and go against an old St. Bonaventure classmate, Bob Godlove on another. I would rip into them questioning everything from their fidelity to fellow veterans to their loyalty to their country to their worth as human beings.

**I saved my most venomous vitriol for Robert Beyer, whose son Bruce had fled to Canada to avoid the draft. Bob Beyer was one of the kindest and gentlest human beings I would ever encounter before or after Vietnam and my attacks on him remain a humiliation to me to this day. I don't know whether I was more defeated by the simple soundness of Mr. Beyer's arguments or his gentle demeanor in the face of my terrible personal attacks on him.**

Many years later, when I admitted my alcoholism to myself and sought treatment, a psychiatrist asked me if I drank because of Vietnam or if I thought about Vietnam when I drank. Today, I ask myself a similar question: did I drink because of the guilt of surviving my war or did I drink because of the lies I was telling myself in defending the war?

Whatever the answer, sobriety and self-awareness helped me let go of my role as apologist for the Vietnam War. **To accept my role in the war, I recalled those wonderful kids turned into men by war and turned into heroes in death. I recalled all the things we didn't fight for and accepted how bravely we fought for each other. I recognized that I could hate the war and still love the warrior, even though many in my generation lacked the intellectual sophistication to do so.**

**I still wonder if I could have done things differently in Vietnam.** I wonder if I could have been better at protecting my men. But what I also wonder is how many kids died while I was promoting their need to be in Vietnam? Three long years passed while I was locked into the sad notion that we best supported the troops by being champions of their mission and cheerleaders for their cause. How many more boys were killed from 1970 to 1973? Did I have complicity in their deaths? These questions weigh as heavily today as did memories of the war yesterday.

**The rhetoric I hear today sounds like an echo from my painful past. We are being told that we have to 'stay the course.' It's necessary for some Americans to die for Iraqi democracy. The biggest lie of all is that it is unpatriotic to oppose further suffering, further maiming and further death in Iraq.**

We now live in a bumper sticker world where the only truths we accept are those simplistic enough to fit on an 18-inch adhesive placard. More and more I seem to be seeing 'Support Our Troops' stickers. That is advice well taken by me and by everyone. Support our troops indeed--bring them home now.

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## **Received:**

### **Comment on army banning camera phones in Iraq prisons:**

From DH:

**"I once knew of a battery C.O. in South Germany that liked to abuse his troops in the '70's and got in an EM's face one time too many. When he was killed on a field exercise with a bayonet, the Army's solution was not to provide better leadership, but to ban the issue of bayonets to the troops of the Lance missile battery. I see that it is still business as usual at the DOD, or if anything, changes for the worse."**

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