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Soldier Gets Medal For Initiative That Saved Lives: Sent To Prison For Initiative That Saved Lives

November 1, 2004 TRIBUNE-REVIEW

First the Army gave Chief Warrant Officer Darrell E. Birt a medal.

Then they handed the former Hempfield Township man six months behind bars.

Birt said the Bronze Star and prison sentence he received while serving in Iraq were his reward -- and punishment -- for plugging holes in a faulty supply network that even the military has painted as flawed.

"The supply system was broke," Birt said. "From the time we left Kuwait until the time we got into Iraq, it took two months to get the computer codes loaded for supply. So for two months, we couldn't get new supplies."

Short of vehicles and spare parts critical to his unit's ability to haul fuel to infantrymen and helicopter pilots, Birt said he and other high-ranking soldiers agreed to procure the needed equipment improperly.

They took tractor-trailers that belonged to other units, and they scavenged repair parts off abandoned vehicles.

Birt's Bronze Star citation commends the officer for demonstrating "initiative and courage" during the first four months of the war. His actions, according to the citation, "proved vital to successful combat operations in Iraq."

But the medal was authorized before a sergeant in Birt's unit reported the thefts, initiating an investigation that ended with the Army filing criminal charges against Birt and five others, including his company commander, Maj. Catherine Kaus.

Birt's 23-year military career was about to end:

Birt, 45, joined the U.S. Marines in 1978, a year after graduating from Hempfield Area High School. **He served 12 years on active duty before leaving the Corps in 1990 to spend more time with his wife, Janet, also a Hempfield Area grad, and their son, Jacob, then 9 months old.**

Birt enlisted in the Army Reserve before moving to Springfield, Ohio, with his wife and child. **He took a civilian mechanic's job and was reassigned to the 656th Transportation Company, a fuel-support reserve unit based in Springfield.**

Birt was called to war in January 2003, when he and the 656th were ordered to prepare to deploy to Iraq. **Just two months later, the unit was at Camp New York, in Kuwait, awaiting the go-ahead to haul its initial load of 300,000 gallons of fuel to Tikrit, Iraq.**

The 656th was eager to proceed, Birt said, but supply problems were immediately evident: For starters, he said, the unit was missing eight ring mounts needed to attach machine guns and grenade launchers to 10 of its 70 vehicles.

Then, just days before they were to make the "jump" into Iraq, higher-ups told the soldiers they would have to go without most of their tools, spare parts, machine guns, chemical protective gear, night-vision goggles, tents, computers and personal belongings.

The reason: None of the vehicles belonging to the unit were capable of towing shipping containers that held their gear.

"So you have a dilemma," Birt said, during a recent visit with his parents and in-laws in Hempfield Township.

"You have to make a choice," he said. "You either go forward without your stuff and not be able to support yourself, or you refuse to go until you get support. The third is to find something to move your stuff." [Obviously, after what happened to Birt, combat refusal is the preferable choice. Lesson learned.]

Birt said equipment the reservists needed was readily available at the camp. Trucks belonging to active duty units that had already pushed into Iraq sat idle, but the 656th lacked authorization to use them.

With the unit poised to move into Iraq, Birt said, he and the others took possession of four unclaimed vehicles and loaded them with their gear.

Birt said he wasn't entirely comfortable with his actions, but with orders in hand to enter the fight, he felt he had no other choice.

"I don't know how else we would have moved all those night-vision goggles and crew-served weapons," Birt said, referring to the machine guns. "It all belonged to the Army. As far as borrowing, we didn't like it, but we figured when we were done we would bring it back and drop it off."

The Army, in paperwork supporting criminal charges of conspiracy, larceny and destruction and abandonment of government property, laid out a far more incriminating scenario.

According to a stipulation-of-fact document introduced at Birt's court-martial, Birt admitted to conspiring with Kaus and other high-ranking members of his unit to acquire trucks and equipment by any means.

When another warrant officer told Kaus he knew where to obtain vehicles, Kaus, according to the document, allegedly replied, "Do what you've got to do to make it happen. I don't want to know about it."

According to the document, Birt took Kaus' comment "to mean that if he or anyone else at this meeting had to steal a vehicle/transportation to facilitate the move, then he should do it."

Kaus, who was court-martialed and sentenced to six to nine months in prison and dismissal from the Army, could not be reached for comment.

In all, according to a criminal charge sheet, Birt and the others stole two tractors, two trailers, a five-ton truck and a parts van. The soldiers kept some of the vehicles for nearly a year, despite repeated admonitions from a "nervous" Kaus to "get rid of these vehicles/equipment."

Most of the vehicles eventually were abandoned at military bases in Iraq and Kuwait. On some, bumper numbers used to identify the units owning the vehicles had been sanded off and repainted.

The frame of another -- stripped bare for its parts -- was buried.

Birt doesn't deny any wrongdoing.

"I did what they said," he said. "I'm not denying that. "But it wasn't for me to have my own truck. It was not for personal gain.

"It was to put us in the fight, to complete the mission at all costs." [Next time, fuck the "fight." Lesson learned.]

On the advice of his military attorney, Capt. John A. Heath, Birt said he pleaded guilty to the charges. In exchange, he said, the maximum amount of time he faced in jail was reduced to 16 months.

"I didn't want to," Birt said. "But (the attorney) insinuated that they had a lot of evidence on me, and that they would convict me. At that point, it was damage control. It was, how best can I support my family?"

Birt said he also felt he stood little chance of proving his innocence at trial, because many of the soldiers he believed would testify on his behalf had been returned stateside.

Birt was sentenced to six months of confinement and forfeiture of all pay and allowances, including retirement benefits. He also was dismissed from the service.

When asked for comment on the case from the Army, Maj. Richard W. Spiegel, a public affairs officer, said he could speak only on behalf of the 13th Corps Support Command, a combat-support unit in Balad, Iraq. **He pointed out that Birt entered a guilty plea at his court-martial and signed a document acknowledging he violated several provisions of the Uniform Code of Military Justice.**

His time served, he now is awaiting word from the Army on a request for clemency.

Birt said he feels clemency is warranted because his actions were a direct result of the Army's faulty supply channels. He helped to take the trucks, he said, only because he wanted to ensure that everyone in his unit had the weapons and tools they needed to survive.

A 500-page study of the war commissioned by the Army, "On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom," lends credence to Birt's assertions. The report, on several occasions, notes delays in delivery of equipment to soldiers in the field.

"More than enough parts reached the theater and were duly processed, but almost none reached the intended customers during the fighting," the report states.

"Forward, the troops made do by cannibalizing broken-down equipment and towing what they could not repair."

If his clemency request is granted, Birt said, his career still will be over, but his retirement benefits will be reinstated.

If not, he said, "They won't bury me. I won't get a flag. I won't get VA benefits."

But the veterans benefits, Janet Birt said, aren't her husband's greatest loss.

"It's a shame, all the years he was in the service," she said. "That's the worst part. He gave up his life for the service."

[He took some shit to use in fighting. He saved lives. He goes to prison. These assholes below have stolen millions, and not one has gone to prison. But hey, they stole for themselves. That makes a real difference. The free enterprise system is sacred.]

MORE:

While Birt Goes To Jail, Big Thieves Run Wild: Report Cites Fraud, Abuse Cases In Iraq Rebuilding

Nov 1, By Sue Pleming WASHINGTON (Reuters) & 2nd November, 2004, Big News Network.com

U.S. investigators this year opened more than 100 cases involving alleged abuse of some of the billions of dollars in U.S. and Iraqi funds to rebuild Iraq, U.S. Inspector General Stuart Bowen said on Monday.

In his latest quarterly report, Bowen said allegations have surfaced of large-scale embezzlement, robberies perpetrated by Iraqi police **and even payoffs to U.S. military personnel who aided in theft**, the Washington Post reports.

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER

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

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/> And join with Iraq War vets in the call to end the occupation and bring our troops home now! (www.ivaw.net)

IRAQ WAR REPORTS:

Car Bomb Hits Baghdad Patrol, One U.S. Soldier Wounded

November 2, 2004 (CNN)

The U.S. military reports that a Task Force Baghdad soldier was wounded Tuesday "when a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated" on a patrol in western Baghdad.

The soldier was treated at the scene for wounds, and a truck was damaged in the explosion.

POINTLESS EXERCISE, HIGH RISK: BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW



A U.S. soldier secures the scene of a car bomb attack in Baghdad, November 2, 2004. (Ali Jasim/Reuters)

The Last Outpost

Oct. 31 By Jackie Spinner, Washington Post staff writer

NEAR FALLUJAH, Iraq -- The road, sticky with mud from an overnight downpour, passed through a narrow alley of blast walls and into a heavily guarded U.S. military

compound. **Inside, a battle-worn Marine staff sergeant pruned the miniature roses that ringed a small grassy courtyard, where a fountain burbled in the middle.**

This is the last military outpost on the violent frontier that surrounds insurgent-held Fallujah, a city about 35 miles west of Baghdad that the U.S. Marines last entered six months ago. Since pulling back, the military has approached only to within about a mile of the city limits, to this secure zone. It feels like a small oasis -- until a mortar round explodes outside, as it did on Saturday morning, sending everyone running for their battle gear and, once it is donned, raising their eyebrows in that universal sign of relief: *Whew. Still here.*

It was the second close call of the day. A mortar shell whizzed between two military vehicles on the ride to the outpost earlier that morning, landing in a cloud of sand and dust a short distance away.

"It's our only window into the city," said Lt. Col. Leonard Defrancisci, a civil affairs officer assigned to Regimental Combat Team 1 of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force. "It's our glimpse of what's going on."

Cpl. Andrew Carlson, a Marine reservist from the 4th Civil Affairs Group, based in Washington, a bartender at Portner's in Old Town Alexandria, stood at the front gate, nicknamed the lemonade stand, when a rocket recently was launched from a truck stop next door. It narrowly missed the compound.

"We've got suicide bombers, snipers driving by, mortars," he said. "But we still have to be smiling. They know this is the place you're supposed to come if you have a problem or you know someone who has disappeared."

Guerrilla Warfare Classic: The Occupiers Rule By Day; The Resistance Rules By Night

Nov 1 By Julian E. Barnes, BAQUBAH, IRAQ

For now, the city remains divided by day and night, between the sun-drenched days, when the beginnings of local control [translation: Occupation control] have taken root, and the nights, where the Americans continue the fight.

At night, the tension in this city is reflected in the glares that shoot back and forth between the American soldiers on patrol and the Iraqis on the side of the road. After dark, 1st Lt. T. J. Grider patrols the streets. The mission is what the military calls "movement to contact."

Grider puts it more bluntly: "We are trying to get attacked so we can find the enemy and kill him." [Old Vietnam idea; it really worked too: take a look at the Vietnam Memorial in DC for proof of that. It worked about 55,000 times.]

Nearly every night, Grider's platoon, Punisher, goes out looking to get shot at. The most recent fight was October 22 in Buhriz, a suburb of Baqubah. Teenagers, and even a kid as young as 12, were firing rocket-propelled grenades at him. Grider has been in 15 firefights since he came to Iraq last March. And that doesn't count the little stuff. Like two nights ago, when he was driving through the Tahrir neighborhood and someone started firing rocket-propelled grenades and AK-47s at him. **Grider's rule: If a fight doesn't last 30 minutes it, doesn't count. [Very nice boast for an epitaph.]**

American military officers say they have never lost control here.

This night, Grider is back in Tahrir. Ostensibly, his mission is to collect information about who was behind the attack in Buhriz.

But when he stops his humvee and gets out to talk to residents, Grider's questions seem a bit halfhearted--he knows the response before the translator starts. "Same answers as always: 'The attackers are from out of town,' " he says as he walks back to his humvee. "They are always from out of town."

American military officers say they have never lost control here.

As dawn breaks, another patrol, the Ghost platoon, heads out on the streets of Baqubah, this one looking for improvised explosive devices, the dreaded roadside bombs. **"Come on," says Staff Sgt. Richard Strum, "I am ready to find some bombs." "Or," answers Staff Sgt. Tim Funston, "have the bombs find us."**

So far in its eight months in Iraq, the Ghost platoon has been hit 18 times with roadside bombs. **Indeed, to the soldiers who conduct the IED sweeps, it seems as if their job is to set off the roadside bombs so they don't hit a supply convoy. [No way, no commanding officer would have anything like that in mind, human mine detectors. Would he?]**

While night patrols frequently crawl around the city slowly, the bomb sweeps move quickly, looking less to spot the bombs than to prevent an inviting, yet hopefully elusive, target.

"Every time we used to drive real slow and scan, we got hit," says Spc. Stephen Cordial. Cordial's humvee bears the scars from being struck in October: several gashes along the hood and an armored window cracked like thick ice on a lake. Cordial's gunner, Spc. Daniel Hoffman, says when a humvee hits an improvised bomb the cabin fills with pressure, ripping equipment from the ceiling and slamming the troops around. "You can taste the gunpowder in the air," he says.

American military officers say they have never lost control here.

The sweeps for roadside bombs are often quick; by breakfast, Baqubah's streets are the responsibility of Maj. Gen. Waleed Khalid Abu Salam, the city's chief of police. **Many of**

the American soldiers here do not think much of the Iraqi police. Some suspect they aid the insurgents; others complain they mostly stand around.

On this day, Salam has gathered the local representatives of the various Iraqi government agencies in his office. He stands before the seated officials, juggling two cellphones and two desk phones, as he conducts the meeting.

Two council members were assassinated recently, after his police force had been drawn south by the report of a roadside bomb. The assassinations prompted calls for Salam's removal, and today he is trying to outmaneuver those on the council who want him ousted.

American military officers say they have never lost control here.

"The resistance is different than the insurgents, the terrorists," says Salam. "Before, the coalition forces called everyone terrorists."

For now, the city remains divided by day and night, between the sun-drenched days, when the beginnings of local control have taken root, and the nights, where the Americans continue the fight.

American military officers say they have never lost control here.

Marines Slated To Attack Fallujah Have No Urban Warfighting Experience

(San Diego Union-Tribune, November 1, 2004)

Marine Corps tank crews face an unfamiliar urban battleground of tight alleyways and cramped neighborhoods in their expected assault on an estimated 2,000 guerrillas and foreign militants in Fallujah. The Marines who previously fought in the city have since rotated out, and the crews that replaced them have only engaged in light battles in surrounding desert areas where guerrillas firing rocket-propelled grenades can be spotted easily.

Resistance Mortar Expertise Earns Praise From U.S. Side

11.1.04 James Janega, Chicago Tribune staff reporter

Nov 01, 2004 - **A battle is being fought with high explosives and wits on the outskirts of Ramadi.**

On one side is an American artillery platoon and light infantry, with all the latest technology the U.S. Army can bring to bear. On the other is a team or teams of Iraqi mortar men--probably working from the back of a car.

There were no casualties in sporadic exchanges of mortars and howitzer fire Sunday at Camp Ramadi, the sprawling Army and Marine compound just west of this capital of Al Anbar province.

The fight involved scores of American troops, disrupting meals as multiple explosions silenced conversations and drew heated responses from an Army field artillery unit on base.

The Americans didn't lose, but it isn't known whether they won.

"What we've learned about the mortar men is they're very good. In fact, they're experts," said Army Capt. Andre Takacs, 29, who at 3 a.m. Sunday was briefing a dozen members of Alpha Company of the 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment about trying to catch the Iraqi mortar men. The mission would last from before sunup until after sunset. It is next to impossible to catch them, he said.

"They know exactly when to fire," and move quickly afterward, Takacs said. They have accomplices who spot American troops and sometimes delay them, "to prevent us from intercepting the mortar teams, which makes the quick-response team ineffective in getting the mortar team."

Attacks on U.S. supply routes and installations in the area have been relentless. Nearly every day--often several times a day--that has meant mortar attacks on Camp Ramadi.

For only the second time ever, Takacs on Sunday led a quick-response team from the base into the farmland and urban sprawl outside city limits. **The mortar teams have been firing from grassy areas or among crops, at least 150 yards from buildings, so that counterfire from the Americans doesn't destroy civilian structures.**

"So they don't lose the local support," Takacs explained. "Just like we are, they're trying to win the hearts and minds of Iraqis." **[Takacs doesn't get it. They are the Iraqis.]**

TROOP NEWS

Northglenn Marine Killed

11-02-04 (AP)

A recent high school graduate from this suburban Denver city has been identified as one of eight Marines killed when a car bomb exploded in Iraq, Pentagon officials have confirmed.

Pfc. Andrew G. Riedel, 19, died over the weekend.

Riedel was a 2003 graduate of Northglenn High School.

"Three years ago he's sitting in my science class as a junior, and a couple of years later he's over in Iraq, fighting for his country," said Ryan Fox, a science teacher at the school.

"Just goes to show you how fast kids are growing up," Fox said.

Riedel was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, III Expeditionary Force at Marine Corps Base Hawaii at Kaneohe Bay in Windward Oahu.

The unit had arrived in Iraq only last month. The deaths of Riedel and the seven other Marines came just six days after the unit suffered its first casualty.

Funeral services for Riedel were pending.

Georgia Marine Killed; "He Knew That He Was Going To Die"

11/1/2004 MACON, Ga. (AP)

A Marine from Georgia who was among eight Marines killed in Iraq outside the city of Fallujah The Macon Telegraph reported.

"Don't tell Mom, but I'm scared," Sgt. Kelley Courtney said in his last e-mail to his older brother, Joey Fernandez, in Macon. "We are about to stir up a hornets nest here shortly and I'm going to be right in the middle of it."

Courtney apologized for any past disagreements with his brother, the newspaper reported in its Tuesday editions.

"I thought he was homesick," Fernandez told The Telegraph. "But he knew that he was going to die."

Courtney, 28, and his wife, Cindy, had been sweethearts since fourth grade. They were married in 1999 and had two children, Kellie Marie, 4, and Logan, 1. They all joined him in March when he was stationed in Japan. She will return to Macon this week after a memorial service in Okinawa.

Courtney dropped out of high school and completed his GED. He worked as a tire retreader and attended Central Georgia Technical College before enlisting in 1998.

Brother Donny Courtney, 26, joined the Marines days later, their mother, Gena Courtney, said. **Donny is stationed in Maryland and does not expect to serve abroad,** said his father, Bob Courtney. **[Do not count on that.]**

Gena and Cindy Courtney e-mailed each other Saturday night after learning that Marines had been killed in Iraq.

"I said, 'We just have to pray,' but I started crying and I could not stop," Gena Courtney said.

Fernandez said he never believed his brother would be among those killed.

"We think: This is our turf. That is theirs. Like it's so different," he said. "But it's really just a walk across the railroad tracks."

95 Guards Leave LaPorte "They Should Just Bring Our Troops Home."

November 2, 2004 By STAN MADDUX, Tribune Correspondent

LAPORTE -- Especially from the children, it was raining tears as they exchanged hugs and kisses with their fathers Monday.

Other loved ones threw up a shield, but their broken hearts showed through faces racked with worry and pain.

The 95 soldiers assigned to the LaPorte National Guard Armory kept more poker-faced as they bravely waved goodbye en route to Camp Atterbury near Indianapolis to prepare for 15 months of active duty in Iraq.

"Taking care of the mission and the soldiers comes first. But, at night, I know that I'll talk to the Lord and think about my family and hope for the best," said 1st Sgt. Daniel Ronay, a resident of Westville and one of leaders of the squadron deployed from the LaPorte National Guard Armory.

He'll join his wife, Lisa, who's already in Camp Atterbury getting ready for Operation Iraqi Freedom. The couple's 16-year-old son is living with a best friend of Ronay's until he and his wife return home.

"My biggest fear is that I don't see a military car come into my driveway because then I know they're OK," said Kathleen Proffitt, a Michigan City native with two sons on active duty in the war.

Her 41-year-old son, Sgt. James Swanson of Michigan City, often held his 10-year-old daughter, Kristin, in the moments leading up to his departure.

And, several times, he comforted her in private when tears uncontrollably poured from her big blue eyes. **"That's her daddy. She's very close to her dad," said Proffitt.**

Her other son, Ronald, has been in Baghdad, Iraq, the past several months.

Louis Warner, of Valparaiso, Ind., was adamant in his desire for the troops to be pulled out of Iraq.

His son-in-law, Michael Klenk, 31, of Chesterton, Ind., won't get to see the birth of his twins.

"This shouldn't be happening. They should just bring our troops home. There's just too many lives being lost," said Warner.

Army At The Breaking Point?

(Miami Herald, November 2, 2004)

Experts say the service cannot keep so many people deployed without harming itself. **Questions remain about whether the Army is at the breaking point.**

Army At The Breaking Point: Airmen Heading To Iraq Brush Up On Shooting Skills

(Colorado Springs Gazette, November 1, 2004, Pg. 1)

Hundreds of airmen and sailors are learning how to counter an Iraqi ambush—like their comrades in green uniforms—under a new program that teaches soldiering skills at Fort Carson, Colo. A group of Air Force civil engineers, who completed the three-week course on Sunday, felt they had earned another job title: Air Force infantry.

Piss On What The Troops Need: Politicians Spend Billions On Useless Weapons System

(USA Today, November 2, 2004, Pg. 15)

The Pentagon is set to declare operational a multibillion-dollar system intended to defend the United States from attack by ballistic missiles, but which critics say will not work. The Pentagon has conducted no tests on the system since December 2002, and the eight earlier tests all were under contrived conditions, the critics argue.

A Soldier Speaks: Sean Huze: Betrayed

11/01/2004 Lakshmi Chaudhry , AlterNet

"Be it Operation Truth or Iraq Veterans Against The War, we're not lone voices. We're part of a gathering storm."

Editor's Note: *This is the last in a series of profiles of some of the tens of thousands of Iraq War veterans who have come home bearing the scars of battle – emotional and physical wounds that may never heal unless the nation pays them the attention and care that they deserve. We at AlterNet believe that in an election defined by a deep and bitter partisan divide, it is the one issue that can and must bring us all together as Americans.*

Sean Huze was once a true believer. The day after the Sept. 11 attacks, the actor walked into the nearest recruiter's office in Los Angeles and enlisted himself in the United States Marine Corps. Sixteen months later, he was headed for Iraq as part of the 2nd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, leaving behind his wife and young son.

The same idealism and belief in President Bush's war on terror that prompted Sean to enlist sustained him through a long and dangerous tour of duty. His first taste of battle: a 12-hour fire-fight just outside Al Nassiriyah. His unit – which was involved in battles from Al Kut to Baghdad and Tikrit – was recognized over and over again for its tenacity and courage. Sean's own list of combat achievements were just as long: a Certificate of Commendation citing his "courage and self sacrifice throughout sustained combat operations"; the Combat Action Ribbon; Meritorious Promotion for Corporal; the Presidential Unit Citation, the National Defense Service Medal, and on and on.

Sean Huze was one tough, committed Marine.

His first months back at home were blissful, spent reveling in the warmth of a hero's welcome. But then there was the discovery of internal nerve damage that had gone undetected in Iraq. **His terrible headaches were diagnosed as a post-concussive condition caused by injuries suffered during a truck accident.**

The pain of betrayal, however, would be far harder to bear. When he discovered that none of the reasons offered by his commander in-chief to justify the Iraq war were true, Sean found himself falling into despair. He started pouring his heart out in a journal, which would eventually become the basis for a play, "[The Sandstorm](#)." The Los Angeles Times praised "The Sandstorm" for its "shocking force and awesome honesty" in capturing the stark, terrible reality of war.

Sean sees the play as an affirmation of other veterans questioning the the war – be it the reasons for war or the way it's being fought. He says, "Be it Operation Truth or Iraq Veterans Against The War, we're not lone voices. We're part of a gathering storm."

As for making peace with his inner pain, Sean says the wounds may never heal. But that, he says, is a good thing: "When you're part of something that's wrong, I

don't know if you should feel okay about it. I don't know if it should heal. I hope it always hurts."

Sean spoke to AlterNet via phone from Los Angeles.

Is there one memory from the war that still stays with you?

There was a little Iraqi girl – probably four or five years old. I remember her giving me a peace sign. It was probably 10 or 15 miles south of Baghdad [during the invasion] when the kids would all come running out. She was just a beautiful little girl. What stays with me is her innocence.

I gave her the peace sign right back, of course. And her little face just lit up. But the difference was my lack of innocence. When I gave her the peace sign, well, it was just bad, I guess. It was not the road we were on – not the road we're on now. You could say my job as a soldier was the direct opposite of that – peace.

When you look back, how has this war changed you?

I can never be the man I was before I left for Iraq. I had a lot of faith. **I was a true believer in the administration's justification for the war – about the weapons of mass destruction and Iraq being an imminent threat. I believed in what we were doing when we were over there.**

That belief I had in the administration allowed me to balance what I was seeing, what I was experiencing, what I was a part of. With all that death and destruction – the deaths of soldiers and Iraqi civilians who were caught in the crossfire – it helped that I believed that it was all for a greater good.

Coming home, at first it was about being back with my family – y'know, the yellow ribbon around the tree, the flags, and the "Welcome Home" signs. **For a few months, I couldn't allow myself to believe that it was all for a lie.**

I know the real transition in me happened when my eyes were opened – when I realized that there were no weapons of mass destruction. I realized that Saddam Hussein was not a threat to not just the United States but to any of the countries on his borders. That there was no tie to Sept. 11. And these were what I now believe were intentional misrepresentations and manipulation.

When you realize this, then you don't have anything to balance everything you've seen and been through. You're just stuck with it. And it hurts. You have to deal with what you've already been through – the death and destruction that's haunting you.

But now you're also dealing with a sense of betrayal that you'd trusted most. That's what I was left with – what I'm still left with.

So in terms of change, I now don't have any faith in the policymakers of this administration. We all collectively as a nation allowed ourselves – and I was part of that – to fall for this "You're either with us or against us" and therefore "You're either a patriot

or with the terrorists" thinking. And if those are the only two choices, then of course I'm a patriot.

So one of the things that has changed for the positive is that it helped me realize that true patriotism is questioning our leaders. That's what our country is founded on. That's what men like me put our lives on the line to defend. So protesting the war does not equate with protesting those of us in uniform. It's not unpatriotic to want to get our guys home from the war zone.

Navy Wife Says Her Husband Against War Based On Lies

October 18, 2004

From: Bring Them Home Now. **Check it out at:**
<http://www.bringthemhomenow.org/sound/main.html>

My husband currently is serving in the USN. He is one of a few who speak out about how this war was not justified, and based on lies. Furthermore, I am enraged beyond words that we have men running this country who couldn't serve, yet demand that our men and women die for oil.

Today I found out that a very good friend of mine's son, a Ranger in the United States Army passed away. Bring our troops home now!!!! No more blood for oil. When Clinton lied, no one died!

Navy Wife
posted 22 October 2004

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. Send requests to address up top.

For Marines, Mission Takes Precedence Over Election

November 01, 2004 By Edward Harris, Associated Press

NEAR FALLUJAH, Iraq — As Americans head to the polls, Marines squaring off against Iraqi insurgents say they expect trouble in Iraq for years no matter who wins the White

House. **What they want is better equipment, more pay and a clear exit strategy from their next commander in chief.**

Many Marines fighting in Iraq's Sunni Triangle don't talk much about the race between President Bush and Sen. John Kerry.

But what really concerns them is the prospect of an open-ended mission lacking a final benchmark for victory.

Said Navy Hospital Corpsman Quinton Brown, a 24-year-old Chicagoan attached to the 1st Marine Division, **"Regardless, I want to see the next president give us an idea how we're going to end the occupation," he added.** "What are we doing while we're here? What's next? Bush has done that to some degree. But we need more."

Marine officers caution that even if U.S. forces overrun the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi, they don't expect the insurgency to evaporate. **And troops on the ground say they've heard nothing from either Bush or Kerry indicating Marines will soon leave Iraq.**

Marines say they need better equipment, particularly well-armored Humvees.

"I hope the Marine Corps gets more funding, for better weapons, better gear and better Humvees," said Lance Cpl. Jonathan Sandoval.

"You see those Humvees out there?" he added, gesturing at vehicles jerry-rigged with armor plating so heavy it bows the vehicles' axles. One of the Humvees, its top open to the elements, has been peppered by shrapnel from roadside bombs.

The Marines see their Army counterparts driving professionally armored, closed-back Humvees — provoking an old rivalry. "We work with the worst, but we do the best," said Sandoval, a 20-year-old from Los Angeles.

Marines say they would like a boost in danger pay, an increase in base salaries and better health benefits for their families back home.

"Pay should be better, that's for sure. It's a pride thing," said Sgt. Israel Sanchez, 27, also from Los Angeles.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Biggest Pipeline Attack Of War Closes The System Down:

Multiple Attacks Stop North Oil Flow



Flames following an explosion along a pipeline close to Kirkuk. (AFP/Marwan Ibrahim)

November 2 By Khaled Yacoub Oweis, BAGHDAD (Reuters)

Saboteurs have mounted the most massive attacks yet on Iraq's oil system, blowing up three oil pipelines in the north and halting exports to Turkey. The attacks, which were hours apart, sharply reduced crude oil supplies to Iraq's biggest refinery at Baiji.

Sabotage against oil facilities in north and central Iraq has intensified in the past few weeks as U.S. forces attacked Sunni Muslim cities where insurgents have support. Imports of refined products have been also disrupted.

The first pipeline attack on Monday night destroyed a section of the Iraq-Turkey export pipeline in the Riyadh area, 65 kilometres southwest of the oil centre of Kirkuk, officials at the state North Oil Company said.

It was followed by two further attacks, including one in the Qoshqaya region northwest of the city on a pipeline connected to the Bai Hassam oilfield and feeding the main export pipeline, officials said.

Reuters Television footage showed big fires in the pipelines **with no fire crews to be seen.**

"We cut off all flows for now. The Qoshqaya fire is covering around one square kilometre. The export pipeline fire is also big," one official said.

"Technically, the system was shut down."

The Iraq-Turkey pipeline carried 300,000 barrels per day (bpd) before the attacks compared to 800,000 bpd before last year's Iraq war.

Roadside Bomb Hits Iraq Patrol

02nov04 From correspondents in Baghdad, Queensland Newspapers

ROADSIDE bomb exploded near an Iraqi National Guard patrol in Baghdad, the Interior Ministry said.

The attack on the outskirts of the capital near Abu Ghraib wounded two National Guardsmen, spokesman Colonel Adnan Abdul-Rahman of the Interior Ministry said.

Two Collaborator Politicians Killed

November 2, 2004 (CNN)

Two representatives for a pro-government Shiite group -- abducted over the weekend -- have been killed, the government said.

The Interior Ministry Tuesday identified two representatives of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq abducted Sunday and killed Monday.

They are Ahmed Juan and Kadhim Radhi Al-Oboudi.

Col. Adnan Abdul Rahman, the Interior Ministry spokesman, told CNN that the two SCIRI representatives had been working in the Al-Alam district of the capital.

SCIRI -- which is a Shiite political movement -- is a supporter of the interim government.

Car Bomb Strikes Government Building

November 2, 2004 (CNN) & By Mariam Fam, Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Iraq (CNN) -- A car bomb near a government building in Baghdad Tuesday killed at least 8 people.

29 others were wounded, the interim Interior Ministry said. The incident took place near the Ministry of Education building, the ministry said.

The blast in Baghdad's mainly Sunni Adhamiya district badly damaged the ministry building and destroyed half a dozen cars. The body of an elderly man lay on the ground on fire after the explosion, which scattered body parts across the street.

A car plowed into concrete blast walls and protective barriers surrounding the Education Ministry.



Members of the Iraqi National Guards force inspect the scene of a car bomb explosion outside a ministry in the capital Baghdad that killed at least five people, two of them women. REUTERS/Ceerwan Aziz

Abu G. Car Bomb: “A Dozen” Casualties

November 2 By Waleed Ibrahim (Reuters)

A roadside bomb exploded near a convoy of Iraqi National Guard vehicles near Abu Ghraib, in Baghdad's western outskirts, wounding two Guards, an Interior Ministry spokesman said.

Witnesses said a car bomb exploded near a patrol of U.S. soldiers and Iraqi National Guards on Monday night in Haditha, 200 km (125 miles) northwest of Baghdad.

A National Guard who was in the convoy but was not hurt said U.S. helicopters had taken away a dozen casualties.

There was no immediate comment from the U.S. military.

6 Occupation Guards Dead In Baghdad Blast

November 2, 2004 (AP) A suspected IED (Improvised Explosive Device) ripped through an Iraqi National Guard truck in Baghdad on Tuesday afternoon, killing six Iraqi soldiers and wounding four others, according to an eyewitness.

Two Iraqi Occupation Guards Killed In Mosul



A member of Iraq's rapid reaction force patrols the site of a car bomb attack in Mosul. REUTERS/Namir Noor-Eldeen

November 2, Reuters & Middle East Online & & By Mariam Fam, Associated Press & Aljazeera.Net

MOSUL, Iraq - At least two members of Iraq's specially trained rapid reaction force were killed and 11 others wounded in double car bomb attacks Tuesday in the northern city of Mosul.

One car exploded in the path of a national guard patrol in a southern district of the city, killing two members of the Iraqi national guard and wounding four others, an Iraqi police officer said.

A second car bomb blew up a few hours later in the path of a convoy of General Rashid Falih, a national guard commander, wounding seven of his companions, the officer added.

Feleih had arrived in the city several days ago to assist Iraqi police and was apparently on his way to a press conference to talk about the role of the task force, according to police and media reports. A doctor at Mosul's main hospital said four of the wounded were in critical condition.

In Basra, a roadside bomb exploded in the path of a convoy carrying the southern city's police chief General Muhammad Kadhim al-Ali. He escaped unscathed.

Three of his companions were wounded in the attack in the central Kut al-Hujaj neighbourhood.

Fallujah Militants Say They Have “Multinational Forces” Too

November 2, 2004 FREE PRESS FOREIGN STAFF

Suhail al-Abdali, a Fallujah fighter in his 30s who would not identify the militant cell he joined, said there were "absolutely" foreign Muslim extremists joining the fight. However, he emphasized, most Fallujah militants are Iraqis who are wary of the foreign extremist elements, but bound by custom to accept offers of battlefield help from men they consider brothers in Islam.

"Didn't the Americans bring with them the British and the Italians? Well, we have multinational forces, too," al-Abdali said with a laugh.

Al-Abdali, sporting the de facto guerrilla uniform of a bushy beard and long traditional gown, sat with other rebels in a mosque in north Fallujah. Many of the men said they started attending the mosque this week based on rumors that U.S. forces would invade from the northern city limits. They said they wanted to be in place, to be prepared.

"They might enter the city, but that would be just one battle, not the end of the war," al-Abdali said. "They will pay the price with the blood of American sons who came to occupy Iraq. They won't take Fallujah unless they fight street to street, house to house."

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

Two Veterans Debate: “I Want The U.S. To Lose In Iraq.”

11.1.04 Veterans For Peace Discussion Group, A Reply From M

[S D wrote about a the previous posting from Michelle. He starts with a one paragraph quote from her posting:]

“John Kerry says he wants to win in Iraq, send 40,000 more troops to Iraq, and double the number of special operations forces. Kerry says, he has "a better plan." I think he just might, as he defines it, and I won't support him for that reason alone. I want the US to lose in Iraq and leave and the sooner, the better.”

SD: This is the one point that really bothers me, I have many friends that I left behind when I got out of the army in the beginning of 2002 who are in Iraq.

To me as a soldier fighting is something that is done to save your friends and not really about the issues at hand. That is the coping mechanism I guess. My point is that I want everyone to come home as soon as possible and I fear that the outcome could be bad in Iraq.

I never wish for them to lose, because if it came to that situation the number of soldiers and Iraqis dying would increase. People would call for ridiculously drastic measures and we would end up with a bunch of veterans that no one wants to talk to or cares about for twenty years. At least that is what I think would happen in a situation like that.

As a former member of the 2/325th Infantry I know where my friends have been going and I have been tracking them from Afghanistan to Iraq and now home for a while, I never want them to lose because I want them to come home alive. And yes I am aware that everyone else on this list is a veteran and I hope to not offend anyone.

M: Stephen, I try to choose my words carefully and that is why I wrote, "I want the US to lose in Iraq and leave and the sooner, the better."

I do not want American troops in Iraq to be killed and maimed. I want the US--the nation-state, the government--to lose.

That is, I do not want it to achieve its political and economic aims in Iraq; I do not want it to reap the fruits of its illegal and immoral invasion.

Frankly, I think the US defeat in Iraq is only a matter of time. The question is when does the senseless carnage stop? The easiest way to safeguard the lives of American troops in Iraq is for them to leave Iraq and that is what they ought to do--with or without orders.

You wrote, "I never wish for them to lose, because if it came to that situation the number of soldiers and Iraqis dying would increase."

What do you wish for, then? American victory? Why? What does that mean?

I do not believe an American defeat would result in more dead and maimed Iraqis than the current (or Kerry's) policy. Should you or I esteem the value of American lives as greater than that of Iraqi lives? I think not.

Americans have now killed between 10,000 and 100,000 Iraqis--most of them civilians--since last year's invasion. This does not include the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who died as a result of twelve years of sanctions enforced by the US and UK. There ought to be a moral--at least--reckoning for that.

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to

contact@militaryproject.org. Name, I.D., withheld on request.
Replies confidential.

Lamentation

A mother stands at the foot of her son's
flag-draped coffin ...

with a vision of his tiny feet
as she put on
his first pair of shoes

not knowing where they might lead,
never imagining they would lead to this ...

double-knotting the laces
to keep him from falling.

Russell Cameron Perry

OCCUPATION REPORT

Iraqi “President” Ridicules Proposed Attack On Falluja

Nov 1 By Alistair Lyon BAGHDAD (Reuters) & (AFP)

U.S. forces battled rebels in Ramadi and pounded Falluja on Monday, but there was no sign that an all-out American-led offensive to retake the insurgent-held cities had begun.

Iraqi President Ghazi Yawar declared his opposition to a threatened assault on the rebel hotbed of Fallujah. "I totally differ with those who believe there is a need for a military solution to the (Fallujah) issue."

Yawar said he opposed any military solution to the situation in the rebel-held Fallujah city.

"The coalition's handling of this crisis is wrong. It's like someone who fired bullets at his horse's head just because a fly landed on it; the horse died and the fly went away," Yawar said.

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

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



“No matter who wins Mr. President, our troops will continue to die for oil. So you can get a good nights sleep tonight sir. Well let you know in the morning if we threw out enough black votes to win again.” [Thanks to PB for the caption.] (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

Not Much Choice In Plans For Iraq

(Los Angeles Times, May 14, 2004, Pg. 1)

No single campaign issue has defined the presidential candidates' differences more clearly than the war in Iraq. **Yet it seems that whoever wins Tuesday's election will steer a remarkably similar course in the troubled country.**

Marvelous News; HE Bush Lost Have Been Found! (In Car Bombs)

(New York Daily News, November 2, 2004)

Explosives used in some of Iraq's major terror bombings were the same type as those missing from a dump monitored by the United Nations, according to a U.S. government source. Forensic tests by a joint task force at the Quantico, Va., Marine base show the bombers who leveled the U.N. and Jordanian missions in

Iraq, and who staged other big attacks, used RDX and HMX military-grade high explosives.



AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Taliban Attack Kills U.S. Soldier

(Philadelphia Inquirer, November 2, 2004)

Taliban rebels attacked U.S. troops patrolling in southeastern Afghanistan, killing one American soldier and wounding two with gunfire and rockets, the military said.

Web Copies

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

The following that we know of have also posted issues:

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

<http://www.albasrah.net/magalat/english/qi-special.htm>,

www.williambowles.info/qispecial

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