

GI SPECIAL 2#C14

**THE LOOK SAYS IT ALL:
BRING THEM HOME NOW!**



Navy hospital corpsman 3rd class Dennis Astor, 22, of Escondido, CA. at combat hospital near Fallujah. Astor suffered burns and other injuries in Saturday's car bombing near here that killed 8 marines and wounded nine. (AP Photo/Jim Krane)

**“The Army Does Not
Like To Pay”
Hurt Part-Time Soldiers Treated
Like Shit**

October 23, 2004 By MONICA DAVEY, NY Times

Specialist Keith Bond, another guardsman waiting at Fort Lewis, whose family lives near Sergeant Elliott's in Moses Lake, said he had considered going home. "I did the war," he said. "I got the T-shirt, you know? I've had enough. My family's had enough."

FORT LEWIS, Wash. - **Staff Sgt. Jeffrey A. Elliott returned to this country with a back injury after his unarmored truck hit a roadside bomb in Iraq. Yet 15 months later, he still has not made it home for good.**

A member of the Washington National Guard, Sergeant Elliott is hoping to finish whatever treatments may soothe the degenerating disk in his back and for the military to complete the paperwork for his case, now promised within weeks. **He is living out of a suitcase in a barracks while his wife and children wait, 220 miles away.**

Under a web of Army rules, Sergeant Elliott and thousands of other part-timers injured on duty are navigating a system suited to full-time soldiers. Most are required to stay on a military base to get government medical treatment, to collect their active-duty salaries and to finish military evaluations that will decide whether they return to duty or leave with severance or disability payments.

Recently, after The New York Times made inquiries about him, he learned that his discharge paperwork from the military had been completed and that he would be able to go home within weeks. **He said he feared that if he left before then, his family could not survive without his active-duty pay.**

Still, he said, the idea was oddly tempting, especially as strains at home mounted. He feels detached from decisions made in his own house, he said. His wife has come to rely on a girlfriend as her closest confidante.

"It feels not too much different than being deployed all over again," Sergeant Elliott said.

Many of the injured say they have grown embittered from being away from home so long. **Some see the extended separations as one more indication that military leaders consider the needs of part-time soldiers - once taunted as weekend warriors - as less important than those of the full-time troops.**

They view themselves as casualties not just of bombs and heart attacks and ankle twists, but also of poor planning for a war that is increasingly being fought by the nation's part-time military.

Sergeant Elliott's wife, Penny, is raising their three children, the youngest of whom **thinks anyone on the other end of a telephone line must be her father, because Sergeant Elliott has been calling home for most of her two years of life.**

"Having him in Iraq was hard enough," said Ms. Elliott, home in Moses Lake, Wash. "When he got hurt, I said, 'Well, at least he can come home now, and get better here with us.' But it's this strange thing. **He came home, but he's not home at all.**"

Officials at Fort Lewis say many of their injured part-time soldiers live near the base, which is 45 miles from Seattle.

But data from the office of the Army's surgeon general show that some Oregon guardsmen, for example, are recovering in Fort Bliss, Tex.; some part-time soldiers from Wyoming and Florida are on medical holdover in Fort Dix, N.J.; and a handful of New Jersey troops are at Fort Riley, Kan.

The loneliest and the impatient can elect to go home, even if they still need medical attention. But that can be an expensive trade-off; military rules dictate that they lose their active-duty salaries even though they may still be too injured or ill to return to their civilian jobs.

Someone who leaves active duty and seeks treatment from his own doctors qualifies for military medical insurance, known as Tricare, for only six months. **Advocates for the National Guard say one in five guardsmen lacks medical insurance from his regular job, leaving no room for health problems that may linger.**

Specialist Keith Bond, another guardsman waiting at Fort Lewis, whose family lives near Sergeant Elliott's in Moses Lake, said he had considered going home. "I did the war," he said. "I got the T-shirt, you know? I've had enough. My family's had enough."

Specialist Bond, 31, spent almost a year in Iraq before he came back to this country with pains in his foot and uncertainty about what they meant. Eventually, he said, military doctors found an unusual break in a bone at the top of his foot, a spot that had broken years ago.

Much as he wants to go home, Specialist Bond said he felt the Army was responsible for repairing his foot and worried that he could not handle his job mixing chemicals at General Dynamics while walking with a large medical boot that encases his leg.

He said he went home as often as he could slip away from Fort Lewis, but described the complications of cramming fatherhood into scattered weekend visits. His son, Dylan, 2, does not seem to recognize him. Specialist Bond's wife, Angelicque, described the look Dylan sometimes gives when seeing his father: "Who is this person? Why is he in my home?"

And their daughter, Alexa, 4, stopped eating after her father came home from Iraq but moved to Fort Lewis. "There was no explaining it to her why Dad was back, but living over there," Ms. Bond said. "She kept saying, 'No, the Army is going to keep him.' " Alexa had lost nine pounds by the time Ms. Bond took her to a doctor.

"There are the few people out there who aren't injured, but who are just trying to get out of the service and get into the disability system," Ms. Bond said. That may make doctors doubt the legitimate cases, she continued, adding: "But there's another factor, too, that makes them want to doubt, and that's this: **The Army does not like to pay.**"

Lingering just under the surface of these soldiers' complaints is a broader issue. They see a bias against part-timers, one that has seeped through everything over years of "weekend warrior" status.

Representative Darlene Hooley, Democrat of Oregon, has criticized the military over the past year for **what she found when she visited Oregon guardsmen training to go overseas: mold-ridden barracks, faulty weapons and a lack of food, toilet paper, soap and hand-held radios.**

Even among the injured, some part-time soldiers insist there is a pecking order. When they go for appointments at the Fort Lewis medical center, they say, they are always asked which service they are in, Guard, Reserves or regular.

"Why would they need to know that? I thought we were an army of one," said Sgt. Jay Hemenway, a guardsman who went to Fort Lewis in March 2003 and whose family lives three hours away, in Salem, Ore.

Sergeant Hemenway said he went to the orthopedic department not long ago, and watched as another soldier walked in, identified himself as a full-time soldier and got an appointment right away. "If you're the National Guard, you're on the back burner, forgotten," he said.

Sergeant Hemenway is starting the process of being considered for discharge from the military. Before he was called up, he was a maintenance man in the apartment complex his wife manages, but he doubts he will ever be able to paint or plaster or move refrigerators again.

From her office in Salem, his wife, LoAnn D. Brandenberger-Hemenway, looked out at her gold Ford Mustang, its window papered with stickers: "Support Our Troops" and "Freedom Is Not Free." She said that she was proud of her husband when he was called to duty, but that was 19 months ago and he has lived at Fort Lewis ever since.

"This has gotten ridiculous," Ms. Brandenberger-Hemenway said.

When he visits home, she said, he sometimes seems impatient, frustrated, testy. "Don't they say a person heals better when they are surrounded by love?" she asked. "If anything, he's getting worse up there. By the time he comes to visit, we have to walk around on eggshells here."

When her husband left, Ms. Brandenberger-Hemenway decorated the outside of her office with yellow ribbons, but they grew dingy and frayed with passing months. Not long ago, she took them down.

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:

The Death Of Two Marines

November 5, 2004 U.S. Department of Defense News Release No. 1106-04 & By JIM KRANE, Associated Press Writer

The Department of Defense announced today the death of two Marines.

Cpl. Jeremiah A. Baro, 21, of Fresno, Calif.
Lance Cpl. Jared P. Hubbard, 22, of Clovis, Calif.

Both Marines died Nov. 4 from injuries received as a result of enemy action in Al Anbar Province, Iraq. They were assigned to 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Four were wounded.

ONE SOLDIER KILLED, FIVE WOUNDED BY INDIRECT FIRE NEAR FALLUJAH

November 5, 2004 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
Release Number: 04-11-04C

LSA ANACONDA, BALAD, Iraq -- A 13th Corps Support Command Soldier is dead and five are injured as the result of an indirect fire attack on a Multi-National Force military base near Fallujah at about 1:45 p.m. on Nov. 5.

The injured Soldiers were evacuated to a military medical facility on Camp Fallujah, one was returned to duty after treatment.

Two Buchanan High Grads Die; “They Said Things Over There Were Worse This Time”

November 5, 2004 By Tim Eberly and Marc Benjamin / The Fresno Bee

Buchanan High School was stunned Thursday when students, teachers and coaches learned that two former students were killed recently while serving in Iraq.

Jared Hubbard, 22, and Jeremiah Baro, both former Bears wrestlers who graduated in 2001, became the sixth and seventh service members from the central San Joaquin Valley to be killed in the Iraqi war.

According to former teammates, Hubbard and Baro were close friends who enlisted in the military together. Darrell Goodpaster, a 2002 Buchanan grad who wrestled with Hubbard and Baro, saw his former teammates when they were home on leave several months ago.

Brandon Sanchez, a close friend of both Marines, said they enlisted shortly before Christmas 2001. Baro had been planning to join the Marines since high school. Hubbard was working and attending Fresno City College when he decided to enlist with Baro.

While stationed at Camp Pendleton, Hubbard and Baro routinely drove up to Clovis together on weekends. They went to sniper school before heading back to the Middle East in September.

"They knew when they first came back that it was inevitable they would go back," Sanchez said.

The second time around, it was different. They had a harder time determining who their enemies were, Sanchez said.

"They said things over there were worse this time than before," Sanchez said. "They had been in some pretty bad gunfights."

Chris Hansen, Buchanan's athletic director and former wrestling coach, said **"It's always a shock to see all these young people dying, but it really hits home when you know the kids," Hansen said. "It sinks in a lot more."**

One Soldier Killed, One Wounded In Balad IED Attack

11/05/04 cjt7 Release #041105f

Tikrit, Iraq -- **One 1st Infantry Division Soldier died and one was wounded when their vehicle was struck with an improvised explosive device near Balad** at about 10:38 p.m. on Nov. 4.

The wounded Soldier was evacuated to Multi-National Forces treatment facility.

Abu G Prison Worker Killed

SPOTSYLVANIA, Va. -- A Spotsylvania County resident working in Iraq as a medic was fatally shot Tuesday, his family said.

Jeffery Serrett had called home that morning and left a message for his wife. She then got a call at work that he'd been shot, and he was dead by 10:50 a.m.

Serrett, 43, was employed by Halliburton and was working at the Abu Ghraib prison clinic, where he had been sent after the abuse scandal.

Serrett's family was told that someone knocked on the door at the clinic, and when Serrett opened the door, he was shot him in the stomach. He was flown by helicopter to Baghdad, but he died in surgery.

Serrett had been overseas before. He spent most of 2002 in Saudi Arabia working for the Vinnell Corp., a Fairfax company that provided fire and rescue services there. He served in Germany with the U.S. Army, shortly after graduating from Caroline High School in 1980.

Ex-Cop Mercenary Killed At Baghdad Airport Checkpoint

5 November, 2004 BBC News

A former police officer from Kent, who was working as a security contractor near Baghdad, has been killed in a car bombing in Iraq.

John Barker, from Leeds, near Maidstone, was working on a project at Baghdad Airport on Wednesday when he was killed in the explosion.

An Iraqi national also died when a bomber detonated his car at a busy checkpoint being manned by both men.

Mr Barker was employed by the private security firm, Global Risk Strategies.

The family of Mr Barker, who left Kent Police 14 years ago, were informed of his death on Thursday.

Falluja Already Costing 20 Casualties A Day!

“Devastating Wounds” U.S. Military Gets Morgue Ready For The Offensive

November 5, 2004 Associated Press, NEAR FALLUJAH, Iraq

Preparations are in place for the dead and wounded expected from a U-S-led assault on Fallujah, Iraq.

The combat hospital on the chief U-S base nearby has set up a morgue and doubled medical staff and supplies.

A Navy doctor says there are at least 20 casualties on any given day. The doctor says the number could double when things get "serious."

The hospital daily work is grim.

Patients arrive with devastating wounds. Common procedures include amputations or stabilizing broken bones or torn organs. The surgeons and staff say they cope, knowing the soldiers need them to be steady in the face of shocking carnage.

The base hospital is a low concrete building with a sign that says, "Cheaters of Death."

“Racks Of Body Bags” Arrive For U.S. Troops At Falluja

Washington Post, November 5, 2004, Pg. 18

The Bravo Surgical Company field hospital near Fallujah is preparing for the Marine invasion. **A few days ago, Marines unloaded racks of body bags**, and the staff has more than doubled so it can handle one of the few near certainties in any upcoming operation: There will be casualties.

Rickety Cars Vs. Tanks

(San Diego Union-Tribune, November 5, 2004)

The Marines preparing to assault Fallujah in some of the most powerful tanks ever made are feeling increasingly helpless in the face of suicide bombers in rickety cars.

The War In Ramadi: Marine Officer Doubts Win By January Elections

**“Hey, let’s get the fuck out of here and head for home!”
(That's about how we feel.)**



Ramadi. (AFP/Patrick Baz 11.2)

November 6, 2004 Iraq Occupation Focus

Agence France Presse reports: **“The bomb blast lifted the armoured vehicle into the air and sent flames licking around it. The US marine yelled ‘push, push’ and accelerated the Humvee, named Whiskey Six, down war-torn Ramadi’s main boulevard.**

The vehicle raced past a mural of a US flag, emblazoned with a swastika instead of stars, and a caption ‘This is the true America.’

Ramadi has been torn by almost daily street battles since April, reducing parts of the city to rubble. **Neither side appears closer to a decisive victory today than they did seven months ago.**

A high-ranking American official in Baghdad said a key indicator for the US military that they are beating the insurgency will come when Sunnis finally start to provide significant intelligence on the resistance. **This clearly is not happening in Ramadi.**

Marine officers are skeptical that they could deliver a knockout blow to insurgents before the January elections. One called the poll date ‘stretching it’. ‘It may take a little longer,’ said another. The two officers seemed certain the insurgency will rage on well into 2005 and thought its outright defeat was not yet in reach.”

THE LOOK SAYS IT ALL: BRING THEM HOME NOW!



US Marines of the 1st Division raid the house of a city council chairman in the Abu Ghraib district of Baghdad. Nov. 2, 2004. (AP Photo/Anja Niedringhaus)

TROOP NEWS

Dead British Soldier Said Iraq War For “Money And Oil”

November 6, 2004 Iraq Occupation Focus

“I think they should just get them all out of there now, because if not we are going to lose a lot more like this,” said Craig Lowe, a serving soldier and the brother of one of the three British soldiers killed on Thursday by a suicide bomber near Baghdad.

He added that his brother had blamed Bush for “starting a war over nothing, trying to get money and oil. That’s what we all thought.”

British Opposed To Moving Troops Into Resistance Area

2 November Electronic Iraq

'An ICM survey of 1,001 adults for the Guardian... found that 61% disapproved of the decision to send the Black Watch in support of US operations against 30% who approved, with 55% of Labour voters opposing the decision.' (Richard Norton-Taylor, Guardian, 28 October 2004, p. 4)

The Army: Burnt Out And Broke Down

Nov 5, 2004 By David Isenberg Asia Times Online Ltd

The 1st Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division was sent to Iraq in January this year, even though it had returned from Afghanistan only five months before.

Meanwhile, the 3rd Infantry Division, which liberated Baghdad in early April 2003, has had its tour in Iraq extended at least five times.

In mid-July 2003, Lieutenant-General John Abizaid, the head of US Central Command, announced that all army units would have to spend a full year in Iraq, double the normal tour for peacekeeping [**translation: war**] duties.

Meanwhile, several National Guard and Reserve units have been mobilized without reasonable notice, kept on active duty for longer than anticipated and sent overseas to Iraq and Afghanistan without effective training.

Members of the Michigan National Guard, for example, were sent to Iraq with only 48 hours notice.

The Maryland National Guard's 115th Military Police Battalion, meanwhile, has been mobilized three times in the past two years, and by the end of its last tour will have remained on active duty for 18 months.

This is all despite the fact that a reserve soldier should be given at least 30 days of notice before being mobilized and should not be kept on duty for more than nine to 12 months in a five-to-six-year time frame.

According to an analysis by Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution published this past June, deployment demands are likely to remain great.

As a result, the typical active-duty US soldier in a deployable unit could literally spend the majority of the next three to four years abroad. In 2004 alone, 26 of the

army's 33 main combat brigades in the active force will deploy abroad at some point; over the course of 2003 and 2004 together, virtually all of the 33 brigades will be deployed.

The typical reservist might be deployed for another 12 months over the next three to four years. As one example, all 15 of the Army National Guard's enhanced separate brigades are to be deployed at some point by 2006.

But the greatest problem is with units that have to be mobilized more than once. To date, somewhat less than 40,000 reservists have been involuntarily mobilized more than once since September 11, 2001, not an enormous number, but one that is continually growing.

According to Larry Korb, a former assistant secretary of defense in the administration of president Ronald Reagan, and one of the speakers at the SPWG forum, **"The Guard and Reserve missed their recruiting goals, because people getting out of active service are not joining up. They know that if they do they will get called up again.**

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP



(Graphic: London Financial Times)

Resistance Blows Up Gas Pipeline

Nov 5 By YAHYA BARAZANJI, Associated Press Writer & November 6, 2004 Iraq Occupation Focus

KIRKUK, Iraq - An explosion Friday damaged a gas pipeline in northern Iraq, police and oil officials said.

Police Col. Mohammed Ahmed said the blast hit a pipeline that connects the Baba Gurgur fields near the northern city of Kirkuk with the North Gas Company, affiliated with the state-owned North Oil Co.

The pipeline's damage is likely to affect several power stations, including the Beiji power station but it wasn't immediately clear by how much, the official said.

The government is already struggling to build up stocks of refined oil products before winter.

Shipping sources in Turkey said some crude still appeared to be flowing to Ceyhan, but at a reduced rate.

The oil is probably coming from smaller fields further north of the blast via the pumping station at Tikrit but it is unclear how long this can be sustained.

"The pumping has been sort of sporadic in the past week. It is down to about 140,000 bpd today," one shipper said.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

Nixon Wins In A Landslide; McGovern And Democrats Crushed; Moaning Pundits Say Vietnam War Will Go On Forever

Comment:

My, all the whining out there. It's to be expected from posturing political commentators and over-inflated intellectuals who thought Kerry was worth spending time on, but some of the bullshit is even coming from pundits who spent the last three months talking about how Kerry and Bush are both Imperial warriors, and now they're pissing themselves in horror that Bush got all those votes. I seem to remember Kerry proudly running as even more bloodthirsty than Bush, not only about Iraq, but about Iran, North Korea and Venezuela as well, although you'd never know it reading the noxious effluvia clogging the world of political commentary.

Compared to Kerry's' foaming at the mouth, Bush was a peace candidate, a term that in this election lost all meaning. Any candidate with name recognition opposed to Bush, regardless of how long he wanted U.S. troops to keep on killing Iraqis and dying themselves, was magically transformed into a "peace candidate" by one of the more remarkable denials of reality witnessed since the Catholic Church declared the world was flat. Case in point: Ralph Nader, implacably opposed to the immediate withdrawal of U.S. soldiers from Iraq, was so described.

None of the pundits moaning about the Bush win discuss the huge number of people who rejected the election entirely by not voting, probably because of their customary condescending elitist sneering at people who think U.S. elections are for shit. The snotty chattering class tends to dismiss those millions as irresponsible stupid trailer-trash.

Those many millions concluded that this election meant nothing in their lives important enough to waste time and energy participating in. They were 500% right about that. And the left, obsessed with posturing in electoral fantasies, simply turned its back on them, instead of confirming as right and true their view about the uselessness of the election, and offering them an organized way forward from their conclusion, grounded in the material reality of their lives. The non-voters are overwhelmingly working class, but they can come later: most of the left had other priorities.

Fact: 40% of the eligible population didn't (or, as with most former prisoners couldn't) vote. **Bush's vote total was less than 27 percent of the electorate, even with the record turnout.** (Mark Weisbrot, Center for Economic Policy Research, 5 Nov. 2004)

It never ceases to amaze me how somebody can argue vehemently that elections are a rigged ruling class game, and then, after one like this, howl about "the nation moving to the right." Idiocy. Fuck em.

The real tragedy is the huge amount of time, money and human resources pissed away uselessly in the 2004 electoral farce on behalf of this or that candidate --- time, money and human resources that could have been usefully employed doing something constructive and productive that would have lasting consequences in the real world. For instance, strengthening the movement against the war, at home among working class people, who were the backbone of the opposition to Vietnam, and especially reaching out to offer aid and comfort to the growing number of anti-war soldiers in the armed services.

That's what stopped Vietnam. Provided people turn their attention to the work at hand, Bush and the rest of the bi-partisan Imperial politicians can be brought to their knees.

Time for the real work to begin. Kerry, Nader or none of the above doesn't matter now, only where we go from here.

Which side are you on?

French soldiers sang "The Soldiers' International" in June 1871:

No more deluded by reaction
On Tyrants only we'll make war
Soldiers too can take strike action
We'll break our ranks and fight no more

The rich oppressors keep on trying
To sacrifice us for their pride
They soon will feel the bullets flying-
We'll shoot the generals on our side

This will be our final battle

**Stand together, hold your place
The international working class and soldiers
Will free the human race!**

(Thanks to Max Watts for reminding of this good old song.)

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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.

OCCUPATION REPORT

Worms Turn: Collaborator Politicians Slap Bush

Nov 4, 2004 By Khaled Yacoub Oweis, BAGHDAD (Reuters)

Leading Iraqi politicians called on re-elected President Bush on Thursday to rely more on talks and less on the gun to solve Iraq's problems.

The United States should stop acting like an occupier, hand more control to Iraqis and stop backing a security apparatus that could start resembling that of Saddam Hussein, they said.

"American use of unchecked force will not work. Look at the security forces that have multiplied in the past few months. The result has been less security, not more," said Haidar al-Ubadi, a senior official in the Shi'ite Al-Dawa party, which worked with U.S. and British forces after last year's Iraq war to peacefully stabilize several Iraqi cities.

Iraq's Deputy Foreign Minister Hamid al-Bayati said the insurgency was partly due to mistakes Bush made earlier.

"Using force that kills civilians on a large scale is a mistake.

"The resistance operations were seen coming as soon as the United States kept acting as an occupier. The solution now must include the Americans lessening their presence on the streets."

OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION

BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME NOW!

Use Of Civilian Contractors In War Zones At Record Levels

10/19/2004 By DEBORAH HASTINGS, The Associated Press

(AP) — The war against terror constitutes the greatest use of civilian contractors in American history. They do everything from serving chow to armed combat, **some of them earning salaries of \$200,000 a year or more.**

There are an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 in Iraq — more people than any American ally has in the country, including Britain. It is a profitable business for employee and employer. Many of the former are retired military members from elite groups including Special Forces and the Green Berets.

In August, Virginia-based CACI International Inc. posted a 56 percent increase in fourth-quarter profits — from \$13.3 million to \$20.7 million — a boost the company's chief financial officer publicly attributed to increased demand for homeland security and intelligence services. More than 90 percent of CACI's revenues come from the U.S. government.

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

Outrage in Ohio: Angry Residents Storm State House

November 3 By David Solnit, Toledo Ohio (From Veterans for Peace list)

Hundreds of angry Ohio residents marched through the streets of Columbus, Ohio's Capital, this evening and stormed the Ohio State House, defying orders and arrest threats from Ohio State Troopers.

"O-H-I-O, Suppressed democracy has got to go," they chanted. **After troopers pushed and scuffled with people, nearly a hundred people took over the steps and entrance to the State's giant white column capital building and refused repeated orders to disperse or face arrest.**

People prepared for arrests, ready to face jail, writing lawyers phone numbers on their arms, signing jail support lists and discussing non-cooperation and active resistance (linking arms, but not fighting back).

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.

Received:

The Bloods Of The Nam¹

By Martin Smith (USMC ret'd)

"Why should I come over here when some of the South Vietnamese live better than my people in 'the world'? We have enough problems fighting white people back home."
Black Marine interviewed by Wallace Terry²

The Vietnam War was the first fully integrated war fought by the United States. Though some integrated units fought in Korea, Vietnam was the first time Blacks fought side by side extensively with Whites since the Revolutionary War.³

Black, Chicano, Chinese, Guamanian, Filipino, Hawaiian, Puerto Rican, Japanese, Native American, and "White" ethnicities all fought and served together. Thus, the story of the soldiers' experience could be told from many different perspectives. Soldados by Charley Trujillo, for example, is an oral history of Chicanos whose perspective is rarely acknowledged as unique and is a welcome addition to the complex story of how race impacted the lives of soldiers.⁴

In this chapter, I will focus on the African American experience, not because the vantage of other ethnicities or discussions of other manifestations of racism in the war are less important, but due to the unique resistance that was present amongst the Black troops who served during the war. Calling themselves "Bloods," African Americans soldiers fought back and resisted the war, exposing the intersectional of race and class.

¹ Blacks referred to themselves as "Bloods" in Vietnam. See "The Bloods of 'Nam"; Wallace Terry, *Bloods* (New York: Random House, 1984), xvi.

² Wallace Terry, "Black Power in Viet Nam," *Time*, September 19, 1969, 23.

³ Herman Graham III, *The Brothers' Vietnam War* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 1.

⁴ Charley Trujillo, *Soldados* (San Jose: Chusma House, 1990).

At home, racial tensions were exploding, and the civil rights movement pushed northward as the demand for black power came to the fore. Ghetto uprisings shook the U.S from Newark to Watts.⁵ Black Nationalism spilled over into the labor movement as the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) threatened corporate America at its Achilles Heel, the auto industry.⁶ DRUM pitted black militants against both the bureaucratized white United Auto Workers (UAW) and Dodge Main, where “niggermation”⁷ had relegated blacks to the dangerous and unhealthy work in the foundries and paint shops since the 1930s.

Overseas, Blacks were in a similar location of inequality in the military. Mimicking civilian life, African Americans were given the most degrading and hazardous work as soldiers.⁸ From Boot Camp, where black’s swept the barracks while whites got easier chores, to Vietnam, where Blacks disproportionately served in combat roles while whites were often assigned to the rear, race was a factor in promoting the segmentation of military labor.⁹

Blacks assigned as cooks or supply clerks often served in the field instead and when they came out “got the jobs burning shit in these 50-gallon drums”¹⁰. Most of the white dudes got jobs as supply clerks or in the mess hall,” Specialist 4 (Sp/4) Haywood T. Kirkland points out.¹¹ And according to Sp/4 Robert E. Holcomb, “[Blacks] were put in the jobs that were the most dangerous, the hardest, or just the most undesirable. A white soldier would probably get a better position. And Hispanic soldiers and Jewish soldiers and Polish soldiers would catch some flack, too. But not as much as a Blood.”¹²

The most perilous assignment in Vietnam was the job of a grunt, and as one advanced closer to the front, the color of the troops often changed. In Guillermo Alvidrez’s Third Marine unit, “60 per cent of the troops were either black, Puerto Rican or Mexican/Chicano.”¹³ Similarly both Mike Soliz recounts, “It seemed like it was the minorities who were always the infantry guys,”¹⁴ and Private James Barnes felt that “it’s always the negro who’s waling [sic] point (up front). That means he’s the first to get [hit].”¹⁵

The government’s own statistics expose the reality of racism. According to David Cortright’s research, in 1971, Blacks, who made of 12.1 percent of all enlisted, engaged in 16.3 of all combat job assignments and in some infantry units were 20 percent and

⁵ Over 200 uprisings occurred between 1965-1968, according to Geier, 39.

⁶ See Dan Georgakis and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1998).

⁷ Georgakis, x.

⁸ Stapp, 21, 89.

⁹ Terry, *Bloods*, 245. Blacks were treated similarly in the Navy, see Herman Graham III, *The Brothers’ Vietnam War* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 122

¹⁰ On many posts, there were no traditional latrines, and human waste was burned. Few other tasks were hated as much in the rear.

¹¹ Terry, *Bloods*, 103.

¹² Terry, *Bloods*, 219.

¹³ Trujillo, 61.

¹⁴ Trujillo, 84.

¹⁵ Graham, 91.

even 50 percent of paratroopers.¹⁶ In fact, there were so many Blacks assigned to the field that it was often called, "Soulsville."¹⁷

Beyond the racialized division of job assignments, other forms of racism were a common experience as well. After Martin Luther King's assassination, whites burned crosses at Da Nang and Cam Ran Bay, and confederate flags were rampant, worn on patches by white troops and hung from barracks.¹⁸

Such overt expressions of discrimination only mimicked the institutionalized racism that denied Blacks promotions and advancement.¹⁹ In the Marine Corps in March 1972, for example, Blacks represented 13 percent of enlisted personnel but made up a staggering 17.9 percent of privates, E1, the lowest rate for enlisted personnel.²⁰ And in 1974, Blacks made up only 4.2 percent and 2.0 percent of the officer class in the Army and Marine Corps respectively.²¹ As one black Marine put it, "Just like civilian life, the white doesn't want to see the black get ahead."²²

Fierce debates have raged about the death rates of African Americans and whether they were used as "cannon fodder," as Sp/4 Kirkland suggests.²³ While it is true that Blacks did not die at disproportionate rates when examining the entire period of the Vietnam war. However during the beginning years of the war, African Americans deaths approached 21% of the total in both 1965-66 and died at 25% in many front-line units in 1968.²⁴ These rates expose how Blacks died at stark rates of disproportion through periods of the war and depending on which units they served in. But there's more to the narrative than these statistic at first suggest.

Outrage at the disproportionate death rates in the early years of the war by civil rights leaders in turn created an anti-war critique that examined the role of race. Many, including Stokely Carmichael, charged blacks were being used as "mercenaries" and exposed to "racial genocide."²⁵

Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell spoke up, "First we provide an inferior education for black students. Next we give them a series of tests which many will flunk because of an inferior education. Then, we pack these academic failures off to Vietnam to be killed."²⁶ In fact, In The Brothers' Vietnam War, Herman Graham III suggests a positive correlation between the civil rights movement's criticism of the war and the equalization of African American death rates, as the Department of Defense began

¹⁶ Cortright, 203-04.

¹⁷ Graham, 21.

¹⁸ Terry, *Time*, 23.

¹⁹ Captain Utermahlen points out that "blacks generally do not get their share of promotions," see Saar, 34. Terry, *Time*, 23.

²⁰ Cortright, 204.

²¹ Cortright, 205.

²² Terry, *Time*, 23.

²³ Terry, *Bloods*, 112.

²⁴ Graham, 21. In 1969, "some 13% of battle deaths are black, while Negroes make up...9.2% of the military," see Terry, *Time*, 23.

²⁵ Graham, 27.

²⁶ Graham, 27.

reducing the commitment of Black troops to the front lines during the latter years of the war.²⁷

While the movement for civil equality was expressed at home through an emerging anti-war critique, the struggle for social justice in the military was also being fought overseas. In fact, black protest in Vietnam may be a more likely direct cause for the withdrawal of Black troops from the front and the proportioning of death rates.

Blacks were not simply victims of a racist system but instead were active participants in the fight for equality in Vietnam. Yet, the story of black protest is complicated by the experience of troops in the rear versus that of the grunts in the field. There were, in fact, two broad narratives of black resistance during the war—one story of black consciousness and identity in the rear and another of solidarity between troops that reached beyond the color line “in the bush.”

Emboldened by Muhammad Ali’s refusal to serve and angered by Martin Luther King’s assassination²⁸, Black power infected a significant number of troops, particularly in the rear, and raised Black consciousness above military identity.²⁹ According to Herman Graham III, “Black consciousness offered a way for racially ‘brainwashed’ GIs to deprogram their ingrained attitudes so that they could experience a sense of personal power through their own culture and their relationships with their black brothers.”³⁰

Bonding rituals provided a means to counter military ceremonial customs. Blacks formed “soul sessions” or rap groups and discussed their concerns in their tents. Such informal meetings later grew to become formal organizations and cultural awareness and political groups formed, such as the Better Blacks United, Black Liberation Front of the Armed Forces, Malcolm X Association, Unsatisfied Black Soldiers, and more.³¹

The dap, a complex hand-shake of grips and slaps that could last minutes, was also a form of bonding that was viewed with hostility by whites and even banned by the Navy.³² To express solidarity rather than the subservience associated with the military salute, the dap, also called “the power,” is Vietnamese for the word “beautiful.”³³ John Harrison described its significance, “It was a way to piss white people off, and any time we could do that, we felt good.”³⁴ In at least one incident, the dap led to a fight with Whites who retaliated to this bold act of Black counterculture.³⁵

Yet the dap was one of many forms of informal resistance that also included protest culture, such as the wearing of black sunglasses, armbands, shirts, and gloves.³⁶ In addition, some unfurled the Red, Black, and Green Flag, popularized by the Marcus Garvey movement, to counter the rebel flags popular with Southern whites.³⁷ At Da

²⁷ Graham, 21.

²⁸ To be footnoted

²⁹ Graham, 100.

³⁰ Graham, 100.

³¹ Cortright, 41; Graham, 100.

³² Graham, 104-08, 134; Terry, *Time*, 22-23.

³³ Graham, 105.

³⁴ Graham, 106.

³⁵ Graham, 106.

³⁶ Graham, 109.

³⁷ Graham, 109.

Nang, Black power members explained the significance of the flag: “red for the blood shed by Negroes in Viet Nam and at home, black for the face of black culture, and green for youth and new ideas.

Crossed spears and a shield at the center signify ‘violence if necessary,’ and a surrounding wreath ‘peace if possible’ between blacks and whites.”³⁸ In the Navy, Blacks also won the right to wear longer hair out of a demand to keep the Afro hairstyle, popularized during the period. Thus Black power in Vietnam encompassed both bonding rituals and cultural defiance.

Blacks also subverted language expressions. By claiming the words of the Black power movement, troops began to express new forms of solidarity and empowerment with each other. Raising consciousness through verbal expressions--“to blackenize”—allowed GIs to turn hegemony on its head.³⁹ As Reginald Edwards recalled:

When I went to Quantico, my being black, they gave me the black squad, the squad with most of the blacks, especially the militant blacks. And they started hippin’ me...[T]hey hipped me to terms like “exploitation” and “oppression.”...So then one day, I just told them I was black. I didn’t call them blanco, they didn’t have to call me Negro. That’s what started to get me in trouble. I became a target. Somebody to watch.⁴⁰

Other words such as “bloods,” “brothers,” “togetherness,” and “unity” were often spoken as affirmations of Black solidarity.⁴¹ Thus language became a form of informal resistance.

Black consciousness brought stinging criticism of the war, often on different terms than that of Whites. Many soldiers developed a third world analysis and expressed solidarity with the collective struggle by people of color against a dominant white power structure, calling Vietnam a “white man’s war.”⁴² In a *Life* magazine article, John Saar notes that half of Alpha Company’s Black soldiers are in agreement with Private First Class John Munn who states, “I have nothing against that little man out there. They’re fighting for what they believe in, and you can’t knock that...and I say what am I doing here? I can imagine a war back in the world that I’d fight and wouldn’t mind dying in—to keep your people free.”⁴³

Similarly Private First Class William C. Lewis explained in a *Vietnam GI* interview, “Before I went to Vietnam, white dudes were all right with me...But after Vietnam I didn’t care too much for them. I still don’t. I have no respect for the Man. What I’ve seen them do to the Vietnamese people, *my people*, to all people, I don’t like them. I hate them, you understand?”⁴⁴

In a shrewd strategic move, the National Liberation Front, realizing the tension between blacks and white U.S. troops, appealed to African American and posted signs urging

³⁸ Terry, *Time*, 22.

³⁹ Graham, 101.

⁴⁰ Graham, 101, Terry, *Bloods*, 10.

⁴¹ Graham, 101.

⁴² Terry, *Time*, 23.

⁴³ John Saar, “You can’t just hand out orders,” *Life*, October 23, 1970, 34.

⁴⁴ “Black GI Tells His Story,” *Vietnam GI*, stateside edition, September 1969, 2.

them to consider whom the real enemy was. One such sign read, "U.S. Negro Army Men: You are committing the same ignominious crimes to South Vietnam [word unreadable] that the KKK clique is perpetrating against your family at home."⁴⁵

Other troops simply felt it was the wrong war due to the plight of Black America at home. In a survey of 400 Black enlisted troops in Vietnam by Wallace Terry, "60% agreed that black people should not fight in Viet Nam because they have problems back home."⁴⁶ The growth of a conscious militant Black voice of the soldiers in Vietnam brought reaction.

As Emmett T. Doe, Jr., a black combat veteran interviewed in *Vietnam GI*⁴⁷, explained: "Little by little, my black brothers in the center began to unite. But when this growing sense of unity became visible to the white officers, they sought to destroy it."⁴⁸ Troops of color were locked up and imprisoned in the stockades at disproportionate rates.

In a 1971 study by the Justice Department given to the House Armed Services Committee, Blacks were 30 percent of the Army and 53 percent of the Air Force prison populations.⁴⁹ Revealing the positive correlation between dissidence and military repression, the Army's prison population tripled during the war, and the Army's 1970 MacCormick Commission revealed that all its stockades were rife with "antiwar, anti-army prisoners" and "determined dissidents."⁵⁰

But the combination of Black resistance, overcrowded and dilapidated facilities, and poor training of staff guards exacerbated the situation; it was a tinderbox waiting to explode. In August of 1968, major prison rebellions rocked Da Nang and Long Binh, led by Black troops.⁵¹ According to *Vietnam GI*, 150 prisoners staged a demonstration on August 16, 1968 and took "virtual control of the brig," protesting overcrowded cells, cold food, standing at attention for excessive periods, and "the insulting 'lick-ass-or-else' attitude of the guards."

After four days, eight Marines were shot for participating in the rebellion in an attempt to quell future dissidence.⁵² A similar but bloodier uprising occurred at Long Binh Jail. According to David Cortright, overcrowded cells, no plumbing, and inexperienced guards led to a riot of over a hundred prisoners. From the clash, twenty-three soldiers were hospitalized and one Private killed. In response, over 200 blacks organized a no-work strike and a small group barricaded a part of the prison for over a month, reinventing the space as a free "liberated African state" which prided itself with "African dress and customs."⁵³

⁴⁵ See Dana Stone's photograph of the sign in Young, 243.

⁴⁶ Terry, *Time*, 23.

⁴⁷ No underground was produced in Vietnam and such newspapers were primarily a stateside phenomenon. However, *Vietnam GI* had a mailing circulation of 3,000 service personnel in Vietnam. See Cortright, 55.

⁴⁸ Emmett T. Doe, Jr., interview, "I would not fight two enemies at the same time..."
Vietnam GI, April 1968, 4.

⁴⁹ Cortright, 208.

⁵⁰ Cortright, 70.

⁵¹ Cortright, 40.

⁵² "Brig Riot," 8.

⁵³ Cortright, 40-41.

These two stockade rebellions are only examples of many similar uprising that occurred in the military prisons stateside. These rebellions may be linked to the civilian movement to free political prisoners, the Attica Correctional Facility rebellion on September 13, 1971 and the case of Angela Davis being the most famous. Therefore even when faced with extreme repression, Black troops found a means to resist and subvert the dominant power structure.

While Black Nationalism influenced a significant layer of Black troops, it is not the only story of the experience of the “bloods.” In fact in the front, in combat, multi-ethnic solidarity began to unite across the color line. One veteran explained in a *Frontline* expose how troops overcame the divide of race:

“There was an amount of prejudice in Vietnam, but when you got out in the jungle there was no room for prejudice, because you would want your enemy to see that other silhouette that’s standing beside [you] regardless of his color because he[’s] got more targets to shoot at.

“So, this is what taught me that this is just a tradition that was just passed down to us to be prejudice, to look upon people differently, because when your life is at stake, it doesn’t make any difference that the man to the left or the right of you is black, yellow, red, orange, it makes no difference as long as he perform[s] his duty and protects your back. Now this is what caused me to throw away to sit down and reanalyze a lot of concepts that I had, thoughts that I had...especially when I was in Vietnam I got...very militant--black power, brother and everything, but when I thought over my experience I came to [another]...conclusion.”

For this veteran, the hold of Black Nationalism fragmented when the struggle for daily survival came to the fore. A similar pattern of unity is told in the oral history collection Soldados. Miguel Lemus, who served in the 11th Cavalry, for example, explains, “As for the races bit, we had to learn to get along because in time of action there was no color. In action everybody works together as a team.”⁵⁴

Similarly Miguel Gastelo of the Americal Division, points out the sense of unity in the field, “At times the Puerto Ricans had some hassles with the negroes, and the Chicanos would back the Puerto Ricans. But I should make it clear that these types of problems usually occurred in the rear, in the bush everyone was much more together.”⁵⁵

Just as the working class back in the world during struggle, through strikes and grassroots organizing, often overcomes the division of racism, understanding their solidarities of sameness—so too did the troops in Vietnam realize that in combat—the divide of race had no place in their daily struggle for survival.⁵⁶

The bloods of Nam were not passive victims but fought back and resisted attempts to control their lives through the divide of race. In the rear, troops formed “rap groups” that grew into formal organizations.

⁵⁴ Trujillo, 34.

⁵⁵ Trujillo, 123-24.

⁵⁶ For an excellent study of multi-racial solidarity in the U.S. meatpacking industry, see Rick Halpern and Roger Horowitz, *Meatpackers* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999).

Cultural defiance brought unique clothing, symbols, and language that turned hegemony on its head, which in term often brought reaction by the military brass. The military stockades were disproportionately made up of people of color; however, these conditions often fueled rebellion, including riots at Long Binh and Da Nang. However, it was in the field that Black Nationalism had less weight and that troops began to see beyond the color line, and it was a unity of survival that would bring more threatening forms of rebellion.

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