

GI SPECIAL 2#C41



In Defense Of The 343rd Combat Refusal: Letters To The Army Times

December 06, 2004 Army Times

In October, 18 soldiers with the Army Reserve's 343rd Quartermaster Company refused a fuel convoy assignment in Iraq, citing contaminated fuel, ill-equipped vehicles and lack of armed escorts.

[The Dec. 6 issue of Army Times carries a whole page of letters to the editor about that event.

There are the usual demands that the soldiers be thrown in prison as "borderline traitors," blah blah blah.

And, surprisingly, Army Times also carries letters in defense of the 343rd combat refusal.

Here they are.]

Letter To The Editor:

I'm a member of a small joint military team that has been working in Baghdad for the last several months. **We have to travel into the "Red Zone" two or more times a week. Our policy is that we absolutely will not perform any mission in the "Red Zone" without Cav support — armed escorts.**

Baghdad averages more than 30 attacks a day. It is common knowledge that insurgent forces are expected to increase the level of violence through the Iraqi elections, and the terrorists want desperately to get their hands on a U.S. service member.

It is amazing to me that anyone would order a fuel convoy to travel over 100 miles through Baghdad without an armed escort. Convoys are rocket-propelled grenade magnets to start with — an unarmed fuel convoy is an insurgent's dream come true. **I can't think of any way to fill out a risk assessment for that mission that doesn't scream doom.**

I wonder what was so important about that mission, with all the potential to create another Jessica Lynch situation (or worse).

Sgt. 1st Class John Giersdorf
Sierra Vista, Ariz.

Letter To The Editor

Finally some soldiers put their heads together and said we're not going to stand for this.

I was happy to see some unity. If every soldier in Iraq stood up and said, we're not doing this anymore, maybe this thing would end.

I am the spouse of a deployed soldier in southern Baghdad.

If these guys were not used and abused and stretched so thin, they may actually be able to accomplish their mission.

My husband is doing patrols and guard duty for so many hours a day he is usually lucky if he gets two or three hours of sleep each night. He is often required to work 48 hours straight. He is allowed one day off every 21 days. On that day off, he is required to go to re-enlistment briefings and classes.

He is down to eating once a day. He tries to stay out of the dining facility because it is hit so frequently with mortars. For the same reason, he is reluctant to go to the phone center very often.

I am proud of the soldiers for standing up for themselves and the safety of their unit. And let us not forget, those ordering and scheduling never leave their forward operating bases.

Crystal Luker
Fort Hood, Texas

Letter To The Editor

It seems to me that when the soldiers followed orders without question at Abu Ghraib prison, they got into horrible trouble.

I have three sons serving in the military. One of my boys is in Iraq. He is not one of these soldiers, but if he were, I would be 175 percent behind him.

Would the men who wanted the soldiers to perform these duties under these conditions have sent their children to deliver contaminated fuel to their other children?

They might have done the job themselves and that is understandable. After all, I would gladly go in my son's place.

Put ourselves in the places of these soldiers and surely we can find fault, but put the faces of our children on these soldiers and we would think differently.

Maybe instead of charging at these soldiers with hate and contempt, we should hope that, next time, conditions will be a little safer in an already unsafe country.

Patricia Petersen
Luling, La.

Letter To The Editor

The soldiers who refused were definitely in the right.

Those soldiers in the convoy suicide mission had to contradict orders in order to do the right thing. If anything, it could be irresponsible leadership.

If I were the commander, I wouldn't send soldiers on a mission more dangerous than it needs to be. You don't play with people's lives.

Besides, dead soldiers will not get the job done.

I'm sure the mission had good intentions originally, but planning needs to be more realistic.

I know that armoring all the vehicles will take time, but that's something that should have been done before the war, or at least much earlier.

Reserve Spc. Bill Lugo
Ridgefield Park, N.J.

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.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS:

How Bad Is It? Australian Defense Minister Turned Back At Baghdad Airport; Can't Get To Green Zone!

December 6, 2004 By Patrick Walters, The Australian

Instead of making the hazardous run into the city, Senator Hill travelled in an armoured convoy to the US-run Camp Victory, a short distance from Baghdad airport.

ROBERT Hill has learnt first-hand the new perils involved in visiting strife-torn Baghdad.

Such has been the escalation of violence in the run-up to the January 30 elections that for the first time in four visits, the Defence Minister could not make it to the centre of the Iraqi capital last Friday.

So dangerous has the main highway to and from the airport become, with daily suicide bomb attacks, he did not visit the Australian embassy or the Green Zone that comprises the headquarters of the US-led coalition forces in Iraq.

"This is the first time I've been unable to do that. It's very dangerous - a number of countries are no longer travelling along it," Senator Hill told *The Australian* yesterday.

"I would have (travelled into central Baghdad) if we'd had a helicopter, but they were being used for more important tasks."

Senator Hill acknowledged Iraq's central area, including Baghdad, was going through a "very difficult phase".

"I would say it's more violent than on any of my previous visits," he said.

"It's a more dangerous place than it's been since the downfall of Saddam's regime. The insurgency is really quite intensive and extensive."

Instead of making the hazardous run into the city, Senator Hill travelled in an armoured convoy to the US-run Camp Victory, a short distance from Baghdad airport.

IED Wounds 3 U.S. Troops Near Miqdadiya

12.5.04 Aljazeera

Three US soldiers were wounded while on patrol on Saturday, but returned to duties, after their Humvee was attacked by a roadside bomb near Miqdadiya, about 90km north of Baghdad, according to 1st Infantry Division spokesman Master Sergeant Robert Powell.

U.S. Command Admits Falluja Out Of Control: Can't Protect Relief Agencies; Mission A Failure

Dec 05, 2004 By PAUL GARWOOD, Associated Press Writer & CNN & AFP

Officials had hoped the Fallujah assault would put the rebels on the defensive throughout Iraq. But the latest attacks showed they remain capable of hitting where they choose.

The Iraqi Red Crescent Society withdrew its relief mission from the battleground city of Fallujah on Sunday at the request of the U.S. military amid concerns over continuing insecurity, the organization's chief said.

Saad Hakki said there had been recent skirmishes near the Red Crescent's base in the city, 40 miles west of Baghdad.

When the organization set up about a week ago, it did so in a neighborhood that was not entirely secured.

On Friday, an intense firefight raged for hours about 300 meters (1,000 feet) from that headquarters. One insurgent was killed and two others were later detained and identified by Iraqi forces involved in the firefight.

"Multinational forces asked the IRC to withdraw from Fallujah for security reasons and until further notice," the organisation's spokeswoman Ferdus al-Ibadi told AFP.

Ibadi, speaking in Baghdad, had said earlier that the agency left of its own free will, but she said she was only informed after the IRC left the city that it had been told to do so by US marines.

Security operations **[translation: war]** in northeast Falluja continue.

The U.S. military launched a massive offensive to break the guerrillas' hold on Fallujah last month. While most of the city is under military control, **U.S. and Iraqi troops have been fighting holdouts for weeks.**

Some 1,500 protesting Fallujah residents displaced by the fighting demanded Sunday that the government return them to their homes.

Resistance Attack In Mosul Kills Two U.S. Troops On Patrol



U.S. Army soldiers in Mosul December 5, 2004. **[This photo is of a Stryker "Rolling Coffin." The slats around the sides are supposed to protect the crew from RPGs. Which might work, if the opponent is standing in a hole.]** (U.S. Army/Reuters)

Dec 05, 2004 By PAUL GARWOOD, Associated Press Writer

Two American soldiers with Task Force Olympia were killed and four wounded when their patrol came under attack in the turbulent northern city of Mosul.

The two soldiers were killed during a patrol in Mosul's Palestine neighborhood Saturday, when they came under fire from insurgents shooting from two mosques and other buildings in the area, according to spokeswoman Capt. Angela Bowman. The U.S. military later returned to the area and detained three suspects.

CARE TO GUESS WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?



Resistance troops wave to supporters on a street in Mosul. REUTERS/Stringer

“To plunder, to slaughter, to steal, these things they misname empire; and where they make a desert, they call it peace.” Tacitus, Rome, 54-119 A.D.



An Iraqi Red Crescent worker in Falluja before kicked out by U.S. command.

Commanders Say U.S. IED Dead And Wounded “A Nuisance”

December 5, By Alastair Macdonald, CENTRAL IRAQ (Reuters)

A convoy of troop trucks and Humvee patrol vehicles speed for safety across an arid stretch of Iraq under a hot sun, wind whipping past their windows.

Then BANG. A plume of black smoke and arid earth. Trucks grind to a halt and Marines open fire with their rifles.

The Improvised Explosive Device, or makeshift roadside bomb, is probably the biggest single killer of U.S. soldiers in Iraq.

Though far from new in concept nor even as a piece of military jargon, the IED has taken on new significance.

If anything might sap the public's will to keep U.S. troops in Iraq, it could be these primitive contraptions, which kill or wound dozens each week -- relative pinpricks but which ramp up the cost of keeping a huge, high-tech army supplied and mobile.

"It's a classic insurgent tactic. Bleed us and live to fight another day," said Major Clint Nussberger, intelligence officer for the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), which polices the area of central Iraq immediately south of Baghdad.

On the front line, they put it more bluntly: "These roadside bombs are killing us," said Navy medic Seamus Marron, whose platoon lost the two Marines to an IED last week, leaving their young comrades rattled and frustrated by a hidden enemy.

"They won't come out and fight like men," said a Marine in the unit. Given the U.S. firepower, that is hardly surprising. **[Neither did the Americans who fought the British at Lexington and Concord. The Minutemen hid behind trees, stone walls, and any other concealment they could find, and ran when the British troops tried to find them. Then they came back and did it again. They were fighting a revolutionary war for independence against the greatest Empire in the world, and they only cared about one thing: winning the war. And His Majesty's troops made the same complaint: those Americans won't stand and fight. Of course not. It was about winning. Hoping the other side in any war will behave in a suicidal fashion is a famous sign of troops who are losing, and, at some level, know it. Duh.]**

Roadside IEDs may account for a third of the U.S. casualties in Iraq, U.S. officers in Baghdad estimate. Nearly 1,000 soldiers have been killed in action, **and almost 10 times as many wounded, many maimed for life.**

U.S. officers concede there is an all but inexhaustible supply of hidden explosives in Iraq.

Commanders view the IEDs as more nuisance than threat to their supremacy but daily attacks test troop resolve and mean soldiers can travel only in heavily armoured convoys. **[Perhaps a few hundred more commanders missing their arms, legs, and other body parts, and/or coming home in body bags, would change their dismissive view that the growing numbers of dead and maimed soldiers are merely "a nuisance."]**

The bombing last week was typical of two or three blasts a day to hit the 24th MEU in the north of Babil province, home to a million people and which Nussberger called "the IED capital of Iraq". Two or three more devices are defused daily.

Saddam Hussein's main munitions factories were in the area. Most were looted after the war.

In the desert west of the Euphrates, silence follows the blast, broken by the sound of Marines in the convoy racking rifles for action. A burst of M-16 rifle fire goes out at a possible target.

Machine gunners spin their armoured turrets above the cabs of the trucks. A heavy cannon round goes out. More anxious waiting.

In 10 minutes, the sight of a Huey helicopter, door-gunner at the ready, appears above the convoy to bring some relief to those sitting immobile below. Two patrol vehicles have also taken off in pursuit of two men seen running away.

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER IED

Most roadside bombs in Iraq are triggered from a distance by wireless switch or a cable. That means the bomber must be able to see the convoy, though the reverse is rarely true.

For the bomb squad in north Babil, the constant attacks are exhausting: "We trained for it and everything. But we didn't expect as much as this," said Staff Sergeant David Webb of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal team.

"Most of the time it's real simple ... But it works."

Troops have become fairly adept at spotting traces of buried explosive and conduct regular sweeps on foot along roads. But they cannot staunch the flow of explosives in their path.

"We don't expect at all that we're anywhere near exhausting their supply," said MEU spokesman Captain David Nevers.

The Marines' commander, Colonel Ron Johnson, sees the only solution in painstaking efforts to crack guerrilla networks. **[Only one problem. Millions support the resistance war for national independence.]**

"The guys who place the IEDs are not really the bad guys. We have to connect the dots," he said.

Until then, the U.S. military's normally unsung transport corps has had to get used to being in the front line.

"You just go out there every day," said Corporal Tim Sove, a truck driver who reckons he has survived 10 bombs in six months and spotted a further five before they went off.

"You get good at spotting them. But we never catch the guys."

TROOP NEWS



“We Have No Reason For Being Here”

High Tech Soldiers Thinking And Speaking For Themselves; Burnt-Out Lifers Can’t Handle It

December 2, 2004 by Brita Brundage, New Mass Media

Proud to serve in the military, but conflicted by having to participate in a war he finds irresponsible and wrong, McNutt hopes he can just move forward and continue college at Fitchburg State, where he’s majoring in education and minoring in political science.

He’s hoping against hope, like so many in the National Guard, that he won’t have to return to Iraq. “I don’t believe in the war I went to,” he said. “It won’t be like my high school football story. I’m just trying to quietly put it behind me.”

The e-mail came from 27-year-old soldier Ryan McNutt, who returned from Iraq last April. In plainspoken language, it voiced his support for the troops in the 343rd Quartermaster Company.

In mid-October, 18 reserve soldiers in that company refused orders to transport fuel down dangerous Iraqi roads from the Tallil Air Base to Taji, north of Baghdad, because their trucks were not properly armored, the fuel was contaminated and they had no armed escorts.

McNutt spent a year on the same air base, working with the 110th Maintenance Unit. He knew what kind of sorry shape those Humvees were in because he was one of the guys improvising ways to armor them. As far as he was concerned, the 343rd Quartermaster should never have been sent on one of Iraq’s most dangerous stretches unprotected in the first place.

“The National Guard,” he wrote, “is often given hand-me-down equipment from the regular Army after they phase it out... to have to run combat missions with no escort and with unreliable trucks is, as these soldiers felt, a suicide mission. I don’t approve of disobeying orders, but I can sympathize with what is a poorly planned situation... the fact is he [President Bush] rushed to send us in without the proper supplies in the first place.”

Soldiers aren’t supposed to question their command, let alone their Commander-in-Chief. But today’s soldiers, many of them college educated, politically savvy, and connected via e-mail and cell phones to the outside world, even in the field, are beginning to take an active role in how this war is perceived.

Like the American public, they're divided over the war's necessity, torn by the nonexistent Weapons of Mass Destruction, and are registered Democrat and Republican. **These troops are armed with digital cameras, laptops and writing blogs; they're alerting the media and forming organizations, flexing a new kind of military power.**

The administration and upper-level military commanders have been caught off guard by the recent spate of embarrassing photos and revealing e-mails that are broadcasting the internal problems in an unpopular war.

In the wake of the leaked Abu Gharib prison scandal photos, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, at a May 7 hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, said, "People are running around with digital cameras and taking these unbelievable photographs and then passing them off, against the law, to the media, to our surprise." [It's not just Rumsfeld. The old timers at the Pentagon can't handle it either. Soldiers aren't supposed to be smart enough to blog about the U.S. Empire and the rich elites who run it without some "advanced" genius holding their hands and spoon feeding them. What lame, condescending, arrogant, elitist bullshit. If DoD knew how many troops get started read Chomsky, Zinn and more on their own, they'd really shit their pants. Sorry, the world has changed.]

The National Guard and reservists, some 55,000 of whom have been deployed to the region, have access to computers, cell phones and cameras. **Yet they are forced to fight a war with Vietnam-era flak jackets and unreliable, unarmored vehicles. Add to that mix the psychological stress of unexpected, extended tours, a shortage of troops and a widespread belief that the Iraq war is a mistake, and it's a recipe for resentment and seriously poor morale.**

McNutt returned to his hometown, Fitchburg, Mass., in late April after serving nearly a year at the Tallil Air Base southeast of Baghdad. His tour in Iraq was full of internal conflict. Like many in the National Guard, his reasons for joining the part-time military—to pay for college and to fulfill his childhood idealization of GI Joe style heroism—did not reflect reality. It's not that McNutt took issue with putting college on hold to fulfill his duty, including deployment, if a necessary war were to arise. The problem was, the Iraq war wasn't it.

"My opinion," said McNutt, sitting across a small café table at Au Bon Pain in Boston's Harvard Square with his Polish girlfriend, Emilia, "was that [President] Bush wanted to fight this war as quickly and cheaply as possible. He didn't care about securing cities and ammunition dumps." McNutt has close-cropped sandy hair touched with gray and intensely focused blue eyes.

About the soldiers he served with, McNutt said, "I would say the majority are like, 'We have no reason for being here. But we broke it; we bought it.'"

Iraq was brutally hot, a steady 120 degrees or more, dusty and barren, when McNutt's group, the 110th Maintenance, arrived last spring. The base, some 26 square miles, formed its own crude city, but still lacked air conditioning in many sections, had few phone lines and was short on ice. Soldiers were required to burn their own waste.

McNutt and Sgt. and Squad leader Dan Landry, from Leominster, Mass., both acted as the “AAA” of Iraq, doing recovery missions for Army vehicles at all hours, clearing roads, armoring Humvees and keeping a huge power generator operational.

“When we first got there,” said 31-year-old Landry, who joined the military in 1996 and is a career soldier, “we didn’t know what was going on. We had the old flak vests; we didn’t have armored vehicles. It was just, ‘Oh, by the way, this is what you guys gotta do,’ no matter what time it was.”

When they first arrived, Landry says, their unit couldn’t keep up with the demand to armor vehicles because they were so short on supplies.

“We didn’t have any parts for any of the equipment that needed to be fixed,” he said. “We replaced an Army unit that had been there for a few months and they hadn’t stocked anything or really ordered anything.”

By the time their unit left, the improvised machine shop where soldiers welded Humvees with steel for extra protection was better equipped. “We had, I think it was like \$4,000 worth of inventory on the shelf waiting for the other unit to replace us,” Landry said. “We definitely left it better for the next group coming in.”

The hardest thing for these young soldiers to cope with was not so much imminent danger as constant uncertainty. McNutt’s long-term, live-in girlfriend broke up with him after his six-month tour was extended to a year. The troops live under constant stress knowing they might be forced to stay longer.

“That ambiguity makes you uneasy,” McNutt attested. “Especially when bad news comes from home. It’s a horrible, powerless feeling.”

Landry, also extended, had to endure a longer separation from his wife and three children, ages 13, 11 and 7. **His joined the military to support his family when he lost his job.** He depended on the biweekly phone calls he made from Iraq and CDs he sent home full of digital pictures to let his wife know, “Look, I’m still alive and I’m playing hockey or football.” Unlike McNutt, who will not reenlist when his remaining two years are up, Landry will be in the military at least another 13 years. “If we get activated again, knock on wood that we don’t,” he said, “I think it’d be another year.”

The wealth of communication opportunities available to today’s soldiers feeds their desire for contact with the outside world. They can sign up for 15- to 30-minute slots on the Internet to e-mail home or maintain Web diaries known as “blogs.” They can document their experiences with digital cameras, widely sold at the PX (Post Exchange), call home using cell phones and phone cards through a tent and satellite system set up by AT&T (for jackknifed rates).

They can also connect with one another: with other soldiers who are skeptical or downright outraged about the Iraq war and its failures. From swapping stories about improper equipment or bemoaning the lack of justification for the war, soldiers can use their experience online to alert the public and the media to the real effect this war is having on the troops.

The military has no official position on military blogs, except to require that they are not produced on government computers or government time. **Many soldiers home on leave are realizing that they can express themselves freely, become engaged in activism or speak to the press, even without hiding behind the anonymous cloak of blogging.**

The part-time National Guard and reserve units that make up approximately half of the troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, a number which is expected to rise, are those most likely to vent increasing frustration over the rising danger and extended duty. While Sgt. Landry says he's "split" on whether the war in Iraq is justified, he sympathizes with the part-time troops and their more vocal frustration.

"I don't believe it's only about oil," he said. "People like Rumsfeld and [Deputy Defense Secretary Paul] Wolfowitz did believe their own spin. We would bring democracy. They believed their own ideology so strongly they wouldn't listen to anyone who doesn't share their beliefs... They're so ashamed of themselves now that they refuse to admit they were wrong."

Proud to serve in the military, but conflicted by having to participate in a war he finds irresponsible and wrong, McNutt hopes he can just move forward and continue college at Fitchburg State, where he's majoring in education and minoring in political science.

He's hoping against hope, like so many in the National Guard, that he won't have to return to Iraq. "I don't believe in the war I went to," he said. "It won't be like my high school football story. I'm just trying to quietly put it behind me."

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)

**The V.A. Mission:
"To Fuck Over Him Who Shall Have
Borne The Battle"**

December 3, 2004 By Cheryl L. Reed, Staff Reporter, Chicago Sun Times

Some disabled vets have waited years for a ruling on their benefits. Some die waiting. Others press their appeals for decades.

Marine Lance Cpl. Andrew Derrig was fixing a dented .50-caliber machine-gun round outside one of Saddam Hussein's palaces when the bullet exploded. The blast cut through his hand, blew out an eye and scattered shrapnel over the 18-year-old.

Now, a year and a half later, the 2002 graduate of Luther North High School in Jefferson Park has another concern: How much money will the federal Veterans Affairs office in Chicago decide his injuries are worth? Disability benefits can range from \$109 to \$6,576 a month for an unmarried soldier.

Derrig and other wounded soldiers returning from Iraq to Illinois have good cause to worry. The VA office here is one of the stingiest when it comes to deciding how much money a disabled vet's injuries are worth, a Chicago Sun-Times examination of federal records shows.

Even though the VA's mission statement -- "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan" -- comes from Illinois' own Abraham Lincoln, disabled vets here face a tougher battle to win benefits than those elsewhere.

Some disabled vets have waited years for a ruling on their benefits. Some die waiting. Others press their appeals for decades.

Federal authorities say the rules for deciding how much disability pay a soldier will get are clear. But they acknowledge that staffers in Chicago have consistently interpreted those rules more harshly than those elsewhere, creating a situation soldiers and their advocates say unfairly punishes them solely on the basis of where they live.

"The folks who do the adjudication in Chicago are pretty tough," said Ed Anderson, a senior analyst at VA headquarters in Washington. "Folks there really look at everything with jaundiced eyes, and they are rather stringent in their application."

According to the VA's annual reports, Illinois ranked dead last from 2000 to 2002 for payments to its wounded. Asked about this, VA officials in Washington produced a new set of figures this week that put Michigan last during those years and Illinois second to last.

The average waiting time for a claim to be decided in Chicago is 137 days. Typically, that's only the first step in a long process with the VA. **Veterans can spend decades unemployed or working at low-paying jobs before they get any substantial disability pay.**

Some die waiting for benefits

Even heroes can have trouble winning disability pay. Consider Jesus Lugo, 45. The soldier from Des Plaines was burned over 40 percent of his body when he pulled a fellow Marine from their burning barracks in Japan in 1979. The Marines honored him for his bravery. But Lugo didn't know he was entitled, by federal law, to disability pay until after his discharge, when a co-worker at McDonald's told him. **In 1982, he was**

awarded a 10 percent disability for his burns. He pressed his claim, and 16 years later the VA increased his burn disability to 80 percent.

"I hope the men and women coming back from Iraq now don't have to wait as long as it took me to get disability," Lugo said.

Korean War veteran James Gates' disability claims date to 1978. The VA didn't decide the South Side man was entitled to any disability pay until after he died in March of heart failure at age 69.

"He never received a dime from the VA," said Bob Hodge, Gates' Chicago attorney since 1989.

Gates joined the Army at 17 in 1951 and fought in Korea. In 1953, he was assigned to Camp Desert Rock in Nevada, **where the government secretly tested nuclear bombs. Blown out of a foxhole during a nuclear test, Gates ultimately lost his teeth and developed a lung disease that doctors linked to radiation exposure.**

The VA consistently rejected Gates' claims, ruling first that he couldn't prove he had served in Korea and then in Nevada. After Hodge dug up documents proving Gates' service record, the VA rejected Gates' doctors' diagnosis.

Like many other older veterans, Gates' fight with the VA was hampered by the military's own poor record-keeping. Most of Gates' military records were destroyed in a 1973 fire at a St. Louis VA records warehouse.

Had Gates won his second appeal, the VA would have owed him hundreds of thousands of dollars in retroactive disability payments, Hodge said. If a vet can prove an error was made in a decision or continuously fights a decision that ultimately is overturned, the VA has to provide retroactive disability pay. But if a single appeal deadline is missed, a veteran must start all over.

"They should have made his case a priority," Hodge said. "But they didn't. They never asked him to come in and give an account, and they never tried to find witnesses. We'll never know what happened out there. Most of the men are dead, and now so is Gates."

Veterans representatives who file claims say there is a great deal of subjectivity, especially involving post-traumatic stress disorder.

About three years after returning from Vietnam in 1968, Louis Vargas, of Crest Hill, a town near Joliet, started having violent nightmares as he relived being ambushed in the jungle, watching a soldier die and seeing the faces of the dead he carried, he said. He began drinking heavily and picking fights. Eventually, he couldn't stand to be in a crowd. He couldn't tolerate loud noises. He became emotional while watching war footage. One night, he recalls, his mother startled him in his sleep, and he pointed a gun at her.

In 2000, Vargas had a breakdown. **The chief doctor of the Post-traumatic Clinical Team at the VA's Edward Hines Hospital near Maywood diagnosed Vargas with combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder and told him not to return to his job**

as a mechanic at a nuclear power plant. Vargas never returned. He spends his days attending veterans meetings and group therapy.

But when Vargas applied for disability, using letters from a VA doctor that say Vargas is unemployable because of post-traumatic stress disorder, the Chicago raters told Vargas he couldn't prove he saw combat.

"They think it's a joke to hold someone's life in their hands," said Vargas, now 57. "At one point, they told me they would like me to prove that I was in Vietnam."

Much of Vargas' military record was destroyed in the St. Louis warehouse fire. Vargas has spent the past four years accumulating documents and pictures to support his account.

Vargas' family says battling the VA has worsened his condition. His wife, Bernice, recently quit her job. She's afraid to leave her husband alone.

"It's been four years of torment," Vargas said. "They get you so mad and so angry, and they just expect you to say, 'The hell with it, and I'm not going to do it any more.' "

Vargas is still waiting for a decision from the Board of Veterans' Appeals in Washington.



John Gomez was paralyzed from the neck down in March in an accident in Iraq. On Nov. 10, Gomez finally got his discharge. The VA initially awarded him \$5,734 a month, which didn't cover the cost of in-home medical care. Photo by Rich Hein/Sun-Times

Despite being paralyzed from the neck down in March after his tank rolled into the Tigris River in Iraq, Joel Gomez, 24, of Wheaton, had been waiting for the Army to decide that he was physically incapable of returning to duty. The delay has cost Gomez more than \$3,800 a month -- the difference between his military pay and his expected VA disability. VA pay doesn't kick in until a soldier is discharged.

"If I don't get discharged soon, I'm going to go Charles Manson on somebody," Gomez said, exhibiting his dark humor as a ventilator noisily pumped air into his lungs.

Gomez, who is largely cared for by his parents, also hasn't received his monthly military pay since April. Gomez received a \$7,000 Army check recently, but the military has to complete an audit to see how much it still owes him, said Daniel Howell of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, who is helping Gomez get VA benefits.

"There's a big part of me that feels let down," Gomez said in a slow, breathy voice that keeps tempo with his breathing machine. "It's like I've been cast in the wind - that the military just forgot about me."

A coughing spasm engulfed Gomez for several minutes as his father looked on with concern. When Gomez regained composure, his father placed a tube in his mouth, and Gomez sipped green tea.

"It's like I'm 6 years old again," he said, looking around the tiny room he first had as a child.

Gomez said he doesn't regret joining the military at 17. "I'd do it again," he said.

On Nov. 10, Gomez finally got his discharge. The VA initially awarded him \$5,734 a month, which didn't cover the cost of in-home medical care. To grant more, raters needed a doctor's letter saying Gomez was bedridden and needed skilled medical care. After Howell got a VA doctor to do that, the VA upgraded him on Nov. 23, to the highest rating -- \$6,576 a month.

"It's a slap in the face when a soldier has to come back and wade through all this bureaucratic red tape just to get benefits," Gomez said. "It's sad that Illinois is so bad to its soldiers."

Gang Rape, Psychopathic Sgt. & Mysterious Deaths At British Soldiers Training Camp

01 December 2004 By Terri Judd and Colin Brown, & By Andrew Johnson and Sophie Goodchild, 05 December 2004 Independent Digital (UK) Ltd

A "psychopathic" sergeant at the notorious Deepcut Army barracks threw one trainee soldier from a second-storey window and defecated on others after stripping them naked, according to a new account of abuses at the base.

In an exclusive interview with The Independent on Sunday, a former soldier who trained with one of the victims said life at the Surrey camp was dominated by a "climate of fear".

The former corporal was speaking on condition of anonymity. He claims he has been threatened with retribution should he ever speak out. His account comes amid fresh allegations of rape and beatings at the barracks, which the victims' parents say has created an "unstoppable" momentum for a full public inquiry.

The former corporal, 31, who has since left the Army, said the regime at Deepcut was dominated by "four or five" non-commissioned officers who had been rejected from other regiments.

He told how he and a group of recruits were tumbled out of bed at 3am one day in 1995, thrown down the stairs and forced to parade naked.

"The sergeant, who was drunk, threw darts at us and said 'you can go back to bed when three darts stick in your stomach'."

The soldier also corroborated the story of a recruit, which was published in The Sun yesterday, in which Scott Knowles claimed that Cheryl James was forced into sex by one of the NCOs. He said: "It was attempted rape but she managed to get away. [Cheryl] was humiliated in public, paraded in front of the squadron, thrown to the ground. They would make sexual innuendos and degrade her."

The families of teenage soldiers who died at Deepcut barracks accused the Government of a cover-up last night after ministers refused to order a public inquiry, despite an overwhelming number of claims of bullying and abuse.

Adam Ingram, the Armed Forces minister, conceded yesterday that an independent review was needed after a leaked report revealed a catalogue of alleged sexual and violent abuse as well as degrading treatment inflicted on Army trainees but defied mounting calls for an inquiry.

"How much more evidence, how much more grief do they want before they are going to give us a public inquiry? Is it going to take another death at Deepcut?" said Jim Collinson yesterday.

His 17-year-old son, Private James Collinson, was one of four young people to die of gunshot wounds at the barracks in Surrey between 1995 and 2002. "It is terrifying to think they are playing God with young ones' lives."

The day after details of a confidential report by Surrey Police exposed 173 allegations - including gang rape, bullying and racist assaults towards trainee soldiers - Mr Ingram made a statement before the Commons.

The parents of the four recruits said they waited with trepidation for the minister's statement only to be "absolutely gutted" that, once again, a public inquiry was not ordered.

Geoff Gray, who lost a 17-year-old son the year before Pte Collinson died, said: "We have 200 MPs backing us. Amnesty International is backing us. Surrey Police called for a broader inquiry and I can't walk down the street without people telling me there should be a public inquiry. How much more do they want? I am at a loss as to what to do.

"It is a scandal on a national level ... I think this is a mixture of a cover-up and a cock-up."

With Geoff Hoon, the Secretary of State for Defence, visiting the Balkans, Mr Ingrams was left to face furious criticism from all sides, including his own. **Paul Keetch, the Liberal Democrat defence spokesman, said: "If these allegations were made about a British Army camp holding Iraqi prisoners of war there would be worldwide condemnation. But this was a British Army training camp holding British Army trainees."**

Controversy has plagued Royal Logistic Corps Headquarters at the Princess Royal Barracks since Private Geoff Gray from Durham, Pte Collinson, from Perth, Private Sean Benton, 20, from Hastings, East Sussex, and Private Cheryl James, 18, from Llangollen, north Wales, were found dead. Their families have always insisted they did not kill themselves. Although Surrey Police found no evidence of foul play in its investigation, it did, however, condemn the Army's treatment of trainees.

The Surrey Police report detailed 118 entries covering 173 allegations in 1995, 2001 and 2002 - when the four youngsters died. Recruits had complained of being urinated on, made to swim in a cesspool and being forced to parade naked or in their underwear.

Investigations to date have resulted in one known conviction and one case of gang rape is still being investigated by police.

Reaching Out To Soldiers At The Airport!

[If there were a couple thousand more people like this, or even a couple hundred, who would stop pontificating about how much they hate the war and the Empire, and actually reach out to the soldiers fighting it, we'd be about 200 miles further down the road towards ending it. Respect to you for putting yourself on the line instead of deluging the world with "the learned comments of passivity."]

From: D, Student, Georgia

To: GI Special

Sent: Saturday, December 04, 2004 8:11 PM

Subject: [To: CampusAntiwarNetwork] Reaching Out To Soldiers At The Airport

TALKING TO A SOLDIER BACK FROM AFGHANISTAN

Today, I saw a soldier at the ATL airport on my way to an antiwar rally. I stop by the airport every week to transfer from the bus line to the metro train system.

I often see soldiers waiting at the airport. **I usually just think to myself about how messed up everything is and go on my way. But I decided to stop and talk this**

time, especially since I had some flyers for Traveling Soldier in preparation for the rally.

The soldier was looking at a WWII display of fighter planes that the ATL airport had set up. I said, what's up and asked him if he was about to ship off. He said he was actually getting back to the States.

He had been in Afghanistan for 8 months. I asked him what he did in Afghanistan. He told me he was in the infantry. He said they basically go to a "bad hood" (as he called it, seemingly making a connection to the desperate situation in black working class communities in the US), and set up shop, and then, he said, people "start shooting at us."

I said, basically you're just going out to get shot at. He knew how pointless the mission was.

I gave him a small flyer with Traveling Soldier, GI Special, IVAW, and MFSO websites and e-mail contacts, and I told him it was legal for a soldier to possess a single flyer etc. as it is considered personal property, but if you have multiple copies of something, it could be interpreted as intent to distribute, which is illegal ([DoD](#)).

He said he only had 4 months left and then he's getting out.

I hope so.

MEETING TWO MORE SOLDIERS ON THEIR WAY TO IRAQ, WHILE ON MY WAY HOME

On my way back home from the antiwar rally, I talked to two more soldiers.

I asked one soldier whether was getting ready to ship out. He said he was going to Baghdad. His unit had been to Iraq before. We talked a bit about the Baghdad airport, how the road to the airport is one of the most dangerous places in Iraq.

He said, the airport is attacked all the time. He said was looking forward to getting out of the Army soon. Unfortunately, our conversation got cut short, but I managed to tell him about GI Special.

I also got to talk to his friend who also on his way to Baghdad. He had been to Iraq before, stationed at Camp Anaconda.

Like the two other soldiers, he couldn't wait to get out of the Army.

I gave him the same flyer with Traveling Soldier and the other contacts. He hopes this will be his last tour, but he worries that he could be called up again in 2006 or 2007.

Let's work our hardest to see that all the troops come home for good.

D, Georgia State U Students for Peace & Justice

Traveling Soldier www.traveling-soldier.org

GI Special www.militaryproject.org

Iraq Veterans Against the War www.ivaw.net

Military Families Speak Out www.mfso.org

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Falluja: “The Americans Just Don’t Get It,” A 50 Year Plan For Revenge

Dec. 5, 2004 By MARIAM FAM, The Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Iraq - According to Iraq’s government, people like Ismail Ibrahim should be glad Fallujah is all but rid of the insurgents accused of turning the city into a terrorist base and using its civilians as human shields.

But in a Baghdad school where Ibrahim and about 200 displaced Fallujans have been living since the latest fighting drove them out, the talk is of vendetta - not against the insurgents but against the Americans and the Iraqi government.

“I feel hatred. I hurt. This is my city and it has been destroyed,” Ibrahim said, sitting on a thin mattress on the floor of a room he shares with his wife, seven children and another family.

“The people of Fallujah are people of revenge. If they don’t get their revenge now, they will next year or even after 50 years. But they will get it.”

“The Americans just don’t get it,” Ibrahim said. “They think that they can use their muscles to subdue the resistance. On the contrary, it will increase.”

“I think the Americans have incurred a long-term feud with all the major clans of Fallujah,” said Juan Cole, an Iraq expert from the University of Michigan.

Many Fallujans trace their animosity to a night in April 2003, soon after Saddam was toppled, when U.S. troops fired into a demonstration, killing more than a dozen people.

Resistance Kills 17 U.S. Military Arms Staff In Tikrit, 13 Wounded

Dec 05, 2004 By PAUL GARWOOD, Associated Press Writer

Insurgents ambushed a bus full of Iraqis working for the U.S. military, killing 17 civilians and wounding 13 in Tikrit on Sunday,

They opened fire from two cars at the bus as it dropped off **Iraqis employed by coalition forces at a weapons dump** in Tikrit, 80 miles north of Baghdad, said Capt. Bill Coppernoll, spokesman for the Tikrit-based U.S. 1st Infantry Division.

Coppernoll said 17 people died and 13 wounded in the attack, which occurred at about 8:30 a.m.

Survivors reported that the partisans emptied their clips with a spray of gunfire into the bus, then fled, Coppernoll said. The survivors said about seven guerrillas were involved in the attack.

Occupation Guard Commander & 6 Guards Killed In Baiji, Samarra & Latifiya Attacks

Dec 05, 2004 By PAUL GARWOOD, Associated Press Writer & Reuters UK & Reuters

In the guerrilla stronghold of Baiji, a car bomb attack killed the Iraqi National Guard commander and three of his bodyguards, and 18 were wounded. Then guerillas opened fire on the position.

National Guard officer Abu Bakr Salim said the attack targeted a convoy carrying Mohammed Jassim Rumaied, the local National Guard commander, who was killed.

Guerrillas also attacked patrolling guardsmen near Samarra, 60 miles north of Baghdad, early Sunday, killing one and wounding four.

Insurgents killed two National Guards and wounded four others in an attack near Latifiya, a town south of Baghdad

A truck travelling in a US logistics convoy was struck on Saturday by another improvised explosive device near Baiji, 145km south of Mosul, killing the driver who was a third-country national.



Iraqi fireman extinguishes the flames from burning vehicles that were destroyed when a massive car bomb detonated on the Damascus Interchange near a checkpoint to Baghdad's International Zone Saturday Dec. 4, 2004. **Six Iraqi policemen were killed and 10 injured, officials said.** (AP Photo/U.S. Army, Sgt. John Queen)

Knock, Knock

Dec 05, 2004 By PAUL GARWOOD, Associated Press Writer

In Hawija, rebels assassinated an official of the Kurdish party, Jalal Dawood, after knocking at the door of his house and shooting him in a hail of gunfire.

**IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE
END THE OCCUPATION**

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

**“We Knew What We Were Fighting
For”**

From: LEFT FACE: Soldier Unions and Resistance Movements in Modern Armies, by DAVID CORTRIGHT AND MAX WATTS: Contributions in Military Studies, Number 107, GREENWOOD PRESS, New York • Westport, Connecticut • London

The authors once asked a Vietnamese infantry captain how his NVA unit could mount concentrated attacks in the face of devastating B-52 bombardments. (The

B-52s' bombs were guided by seismic sensors that could detect the vibrations caused by any large walking group.)

Captain Ho Nam described it this way:

“The entire company, every soldier, studied a model of our objective for days. Then we dispersed and split up into 50 or 60 groups of three men each. Each group took a different route, walking the long way around—two or three days. Then, at the planned hour, close to the target, we met, attacked and immediately dispersed again. The B-52s got perhaps one or two of these three-man groups.”

Captain Ho was reminded that in the U.S. army at the time most such small groups, necessarily without officer leadership, would have “got lost” under way and avoided combat.

The captain responded: “But we knew what we were fighting for.”

“If War Is Hell For Privates, It Is Good For Generals.”

From: LEFT FACE: Soldier Unions and Resistance Movements in Modern Armies, by DAVID CORTRIGHT AND MAX WATTS: Contributions in Military Studies, Number 107, GREENWOOD PRESS, New York • Westport, Connecticut • London

The assumption that democratically elected civilian governments exercise absolute control over an obedient and neutral military apparatus is totally unreal.

The flow of power is not unidirectional. The secretary of defense may issue policy directives, but the parameters within which he can act are powerfully shaped by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, their allies, the arms industrialists, and dozens of military associations and lobby groups.

The leading general officers in the armed forces today wield enormous political influence.

Since World War II, as C. Wright Mills has shown in *The Power Elite*, the military chiefs have become a central element of the political establishment. As heads of the largest institutions in society, they inevitably exert vast sway over the direction of national affairs.

Through their political and public relations networks and their highly evolved system of dispensing weapons contracts according to political criteria, the Pentagon chiefs have established themselves as a formidable center of political power. Their fortunes with the top civilian leadership may ebb and flow (rising with Reagan, perhaps sliding a bit with Carter), but their institutional presence at the heart of political power in the United States remains constant.

The question is not whether the armed forces should be politicized— they already are—but whether they should be steered in elite or democratic directions.

Should the military serve the narrow interests of generals and arms industrialists, or the wider interests of civil society?

Unless one assumes an identity of interest between generals and privates, an illusion shared by few GIs, the emergence of soldier organizations can help to counteract the excessive power of top military officials. Through democratic organizing within the lower ranks, the power of generals to use the army against popular wishes can be lessened.

As is so often the case, the ordinary soldier often understands these issues quite clearly.

Many of the soldiers with whom we have talked support unionization precisely because they feel it will depoliticize the military.

They feel that one of the biggest problems with the army is its excessively political character.

They point not only to the sweetheart deals in Congress and elsewhere that rob them of their benefits, but to what they interpret as the overly political nature of the Vietnam War.

“If war is hell for privates, it is good for generals.”

They feel that the generals and politicians got into the Vietnam War to advance their careers and their own interests, with little thought for the costs of the war to soldiers and society. For these soldiers, union organization offers the possibility of ensuring a more accountable military policy.

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.

GIs Under Pressure

12.5.04 Excerpt From Fred Feldman, <http://www.columbia.edu/~lnp3/msg57698.html>

...so much of what is going on right now – the Fallujah battle, the obvious insistence on going ahead with the elections regardless of their international or Iraqi credibility -- seems aimed at keeping up the illusion in the home front that one victory is following another **while the rulers try to FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE MESS THEY ARE IN.**

They want to win the war, but they have not figured out how. Fallujah and the elections have turned out to be like things to do while they are thinking about it. And this lack of real direction must place the GIs under tremendous moral and psychological pressure, on top of the things they are expected to do, the extended tours, and so on.

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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