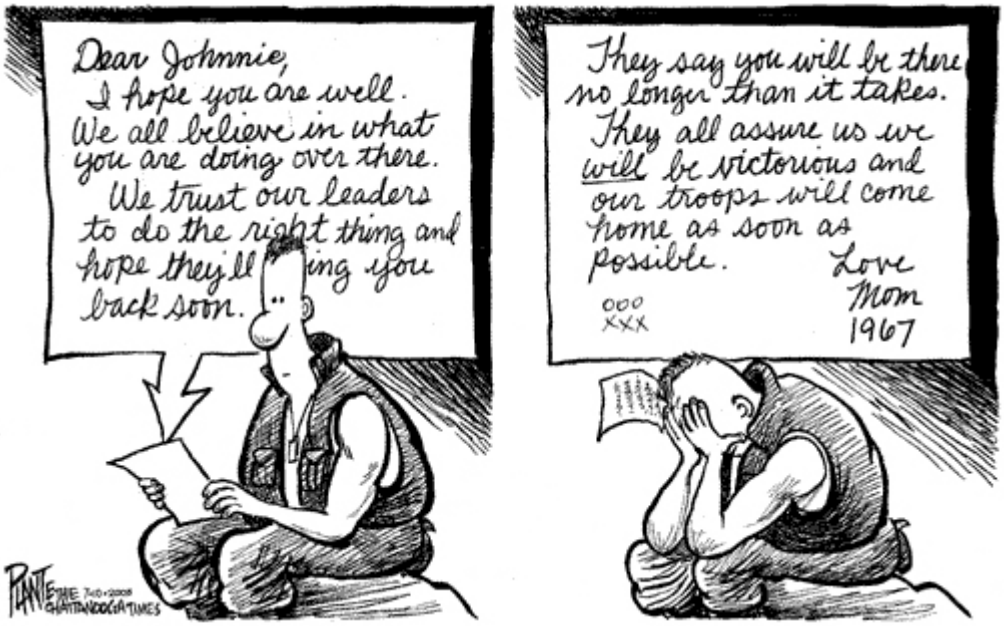
GI SPECIAL 3A27:



IRAQ WAR REPORTS:

"The Deadliest Day" 31 Killed In Copter Crash; Six More In Combat

30 Camp Pendleton-based Marines and one Navy sailor were killed [in the copter crash]

Six other troops died in insurgent ambushes in the deadliest day for Americans since the Iraq war began nearly two years ago. The U.S. military has not seen such a high loss of life in one day in 15 years — since an explosion ripped

through a gun turret on the USS Iowa during a training exercise in the Caribbean in April 1989, killing 47 sailors.

Jan 26 AP By TERENCE HUNT, White House Correspondent & By JASON KEYSER & SAMEER N. YACOUB, Associated Press Writer & NBC4.tv

A U.S. military helicopter crashed in Iraq's western desert Wednesday, killing 31 Camp Pendleton-based troops, base officials said.

Army Gen. John Abizaid, chief of U.S. Central Command, said the helicopter was on a routine mission. It went down about 1:20 a.m. near the town of Rutbah, about 220 miles west of Baghdad, the military said.

Lt. Gen. John Sattler, the top Marine commander in Iraq, said in a videotaped statement from his headquarters in Fallujah, west of Baghdad, that 30 Camp Pendleton-based Marines and one Navy sailor were killed.

Six other troops died in insurgent ambushes in the deadliest day for Americans since the Iraq war began nearly two years ago. The U.S. military has not seen such a high loss of life in one day in 15 years — since an explosion ripped through a gun turret on the USS Iowa during a training exercise in the Caribbean in April 1989, killing 47 sailors.

Sattler identified the aircraft as a CH-53E Super Stallion, which is the largest helicopter in the American military. He said the victims were members of the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing and 1st Marine Division but was not more specific.

The Super Stallion is operated by a crew of three and can be configured to carry as many as 55 people. It normally carries 37.

The CH-53 is a mainstay of the Marine Corps for ferrying equipment and troops in western Iraq. Officials said it was flying over the desert.

The Marines fly two main variants: the CH-53D Sea Stallion, which dates to the Vietnam war period, and the newer, more powerful CH-53E Super Stallion, which has three gas turbine engines. Both are made by Sikorsky.

The U.S. military has lost at least 33 helicopters since the start of the war, including at least 20 brought down by hostile fire, according to a study by the Brookings Institution.

Marine From Canyon Lake Among 31 Killed In Crash: “I Just Wish We Could Get Those Kids Out Of There."

January 26, 2005 WorldNow and KGBT & By MICHELLE MORGANTE, ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

CANYON LAKE, Texas A 22-year-old Marine from the Hill Country town of Canyon Lake was among the 31 service members killed in today's helicopter crash in western Iraq.

The crew chief onboard the helicopter, Lance Cpl. Tony Hernandez, deployed to Iraq last summer and was scheduled to return to Camp Pendleton in March, said his father, Leroy Hernandez, of Canyon Lake, Texas.

He said he last spoke with his son on Sunday.

"He said it was cold, that he didn't like the weather, that he was working his butt off - the usual gripes," Hernandez said. "He didn't say a lot because he didn't want anyone to worry."

Leroy Hernandez, says he was working the overnight shift at the Comal County jail early today when his daughter called to say two Marines were at their house.

When his daughter told him, he says he knew his son had died.

Hernandez spent the afternoon sitting outside his home in a small grove of trees.

His wife, Evelyn, and other family members took turns holding a framed photo of his son in his formal Marine uniform.

Hernandez says he looks at the photography, and -- quote "I just look at the picture and I can't believe it happened. I just wish we could get those kids out of there."

Hernandez said his son tried to join the Marines after he graduated from high school but was rejected because he was too heavy. After visiting with a recruiter again, he was soon running hard and dieting to trim nearly 25 pounds off his frame. He had lost another 20 pounds by the time he finished Marine boot camp in California.

"We went to his graduation and we almost didn't recognize him," Hernandez said.

He said his own memories of fighting in the Vietnam War weighed heavily on him after his son deployed to Iraq.

"I knew (the war) was going to escalate - it was pretty much guaranteed," he said. "Unfortunately it's the young kids who end up paying the price."

Twenty-seven of the victims were based at Marine Corps Base Hawaii in Kaneohe Bay, which is under the operational control of the 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, near Oceanside. Some of the victims were also members of the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, based at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego.

Amber Warlock, 31, a former Marine whose husband is a Marine pilot stationed at Camp Pendleton, said she was stunned when she heard about the crash on television.

"You hear about people dying every day in ones and twos," she said. "But 31 is just too much to comprehend."

She sought solace at the beach with her 5-month-old daughter Heidi and a fellow Marine wife who cried at news of the deaths, even though she had confirmed her husband was OK in Iraq.

"You just know how every single woman sitting in her home feels, whether it's going to be yours or someone you know," Warlock said. "It doesn't matter who it is. It's a bad day for everybody."

1/3rd Tet Day 1

1.26.05 BY ALEXANDER COCKBURN, COUNTERPUNCH

From Saigon to Baghdad

Today, January 26, the US today lost a third of the soldiers it lost around Saigon on the first day of the Tet offensive thirty-six years ago.

Even as George Bush was giving jesting with a docile press corps this morning, the CNN newswire running under the images of President Mushbrain disclosed that 36 American soldiers have died this same day.

On January 30, 1968 the National Liberation Front launched its Tet offensive across South Vietnam. In the Tet assault on Saigon 110 US servicemen died, against 1,100 NLF. For a period the NLF took over large parts of the city and invaded the US embassy compound.

Four Marines Killed In Haditha Ambush, “Several” Wounded

January 26, 2005 Haditha, Iraq-WABC

U.S. forces suffered more losses today after insurgents ambushed a convoy in Iraq: A convoy our reporter Jim Dolan was a part of.

He's embedded with troops in Iraq, and was there as they took that hit from a rocket propelled grenade. It happened in the western town of Haditha..

Jim joins us via videophone from Iraq -- and Jim, you've always spoken of the danger our troops encounter daily. Unfortunately, several can't tell the story you're about to

Four more U.S. Marines killed here in an intense firefight.

The marines were going out on a raid, really a routine aimed at picking up some insurgents in a village nearby. They were told that insurgents were in a house there. But when they got there, the house was empty.

Eyewitness News photographer Joe Tesauro and I went out on that raid with them, and **just as the marines were starting top leave the town- you'll excuse the phrase, all hell broke loose.**

It went on that way for minutes: The convoy under intense attack by rocket-propelled grenades. Machine gun bullets ricocheted off of the armor of the vehicles.

The RPV's were stronger than the armor. One vehicle was hit. Two marines died in the field, two more on the way to a hospital. Several others were injured.

The marines unloaded with 50 caliber machine guns and automatic weapons fire laying down a deafening barrage of firepower until the enemy finally quieted and the injured could be removed for medical attention.

For every marine, there is a sadness over this base in Haditha.

They will hold a memorial service tomorrow in memory of their fallen brothers and continue the mission here.

Four dead, several others injuries, not a person here untouched though by the four young lives lost in a firefight overnight.

U.S. Patrol Attacked At Duluiyah, One Soldier Dead, One Wounded

1.26.05By JASON KEYSER, Associated Press Writer & CENTCOM Release Number: 05-01-34C

Wednesday, insurgents attacked a U.S. Army patrol with rocket propelled grenades at about 11:20 a.m. near the northern town of Duluiyah, killing one soldier and wounding two others. The Soldiers were evacuated to a Multi-National Forces medical facility for treatment. One Soldier is in serious condition; the other is in stable condition.

One U.S. Soldier Killed, 2 Wounded By Baghdad IED

1.26.05By JASON KEYSER, Associated Press Writer & CENTCON Release Number: 05-01-36C & (CNN) & Reuters

In the Baghdad area a roadside bomb killed a Task Force Baghdad Soldier and wounded two others about 4:30 p.m. in the southern Baghdad district of al-Rashid, according to the U.S. Army's 1st Cavalry Division.

West of Baghdad, Abu Ghraib prison came under mortar attack and sirens were heard from inside the prison following the incident.

Attacks In Tikrit And Baghdad: Airport Road Closed; 8 U.S. Wounded

An armored vehicle is removed following a roadside bomb attack on a U.S. convoy on the road to Baghdad airport Jan. 26, 2005. (AP Photo/Mohammed Uraibi)

1.26.05By JASON KEYSER, Associated Press Writer & CJTF7 Release #050126l

Four American soldiers were injured in a car bombing Wednesday in Tikrit, the U.S. command said.

In Baghdad, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated on the eastbound lane of the airport access road, wounding four U.S. Soldiers at approximately 10:25 on Jan. 26.

The attack temporarily closed the airport road, one of the country's most dangerous.

Second Attack On Airport Road Wounds 3 More U.S. Troops

CJTF7 Release #050126m & By Gordon Trowbridge, Army Times staff writer

A second vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated Jan. 26 on the road leading to the Baghdad International Airport, damaging one Task Force Baghdad vehicle and wounding three Soldiers.

This is the second such attack on the airport road today. This attack took place at about 2:35 p.m. An up-armored humvee was damaged in the incident.

All three wounded were evacuated to a military medical facility.

About 10 minutes after the second blast Wednesday afternoon sent a ball of gray smoke mushrooming into the sky, soldiers already had evacuated wounded troops from the scene, leaving behind a Humvee wrecked by the explosion.

The front section of the vehicle had been destroyed, its hood blown off by the blast and wheels burned off. Bits of metal parts lay on the highway, mixed with bottles of Diet Pepsi apparently scattered by the blast.

Two U.S. Soldiers Wounded In Riyadh

1.26.05 SAMEER N. YACOUB, (AP) & (Reuters)

Insurgents set off three car bombs in rapid succession in the town of Riyadh, north of Baghdad, killing at least five policemen.

The car bombs in Riyadh exploded at a police station where three Iraqi police officers were killed and three civilians injured; in front of the mayor's office, killing two Iraqi soldiers; and along a road used by U.S. troops, police said.

The US military said that about 10 minutes after the initial blasts, a US combat patrol heading to the scene came under small arms fire and two US soldiers were lightly wounded.

Car Bomb Injures Australian Troops;

"Baghdad Is A Very Dangerous Place"

January 27, 2005 By David Crawshaw and Paul Osborne, The Australian

SEVERAL Australian soldiers were injured in a suspected car bomb attack near their patrol vehicle in Baghdad, the Defence Department said.

The department issued a statement overnight saying the Australian light armoured vehicle was targeted by insurgents while on a routine patrol in the Iraqi capital.

Two of the injured soldiers were today undergoing surgery, the department said, but there was no immediate word on their condition or details of injuries to any other soldiers involved in the attack.

In an earlier incident, insurgents fired on Australian forces near the Australian embassy in Baghdad. No Australians were hurt.

The attacks followed the reported death of a man shot by Australian soldiers on Monday and found to have been carrying several fuel drums in his car.

Australia's Middle East Task Force Commander Greg Evans said yesterday he had received unconfirmed reports the man had died.

In reporting the most recent attack, the Department of Defence said "a number of soldiers" were injured, with two requiring surgery, when the bomb exploded during a routine patrol.

The statement said "an Australian Light Armoured Vehicle (LAV) patrol was engaged by a suspected vehicle borne explosive device".

In the earlier attack, "the ADF Security Detachment was engaged with small arms fire in the vicinity of the Australian Embassy" while on "a routine task" in Baghdad.

Earlier last night, Air Commodore Evans said the feeling in Baghdad was tense in the lead-up to elections on the weekend.

"Baghdad is a very dangerous place," he told Channel Nine.

"We are seeing a number of attacks continuing. The insurgency has attacked the coalition.

"It continues to attack the Iraqi police service and it attacks any part of the Iraqi government which has anything to do with running the elections."

U.S. Patrol Attacked In Ramadi

Jan 26 SAMEER N. YACOUB, (AP) & By Joseph Giordono, Stars and Stripes

RAMADI, Iraq — A joint patrol of American and Iraqi troops skirmished Monday with insurgents in downtown Ramadi, underscoring efforts to provide election security in the capital of Anbar province.

Soldiers from Company D, 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment — conducting a cordon-and-search operation with a platoon of Iraqi Special Police commandos — traded fire with insurgents.

For the better part of an hour, gunshots and loud explosions echoed through the streets as both sides ducked into alleyways and courtyards amid the exchange. Orange-tinged skies from a brief sandstorm and competing calls to prayer from local mosques added to the eerie scene. Neither U.S. nor Iraqi units reported any casualties.

The fighting erupted when militants attacked a U.S. patrol with rocket-propelled grenades, the residents said. One Iraqi was killed and two were wounded, doctors said.

When the patrol arrived just before noon, it was immediately apparent that Ramadi is unlike other towns in the area. As soldiers began their mission, everyone on the streets went into their homes. Shopkeepers closed up their businesses and none of the crowds of children that usually follow U.S. soldiers in other towns came out. [Get the message? We do NOT want you here.]

"That's pretty normal for this part of town," said 1st Lt. Larry Chappell, an Arabic speaker who directed the Iraqi platoon.

In another courtyard, 1st Lt. Baudelio Arias, a 2nd Battalion, 17th Field Artillery member attached to Company D as a civil affairs officer, handed out election information and pieces of candy to children.

During Monday's patrol, the soldiers faced many of the same problems they have encountered before. **Few of the local residents — who almost unanimously expressed a strong desire to vote — offered information on insurgents in the area.**

"This is a safe neighborhood," one older resident, who said he has lived in the same house since 1960, told the soldiers in one of the first houses they visited.

Unknowingly foreshadowing the firefight ahead, a U.S. soldier replied to the man in disbelief.

"There has not been a day when we come to this street and don't take contact from insurgents," he told the man. "So please explain to me how you consider this a safe neighborhood, or at least, how you can think it's free of insurgents?"

Insurgents also attacked buildings linked to Sunday's national elections. Two schools slated to be used as polling stations were bombed overnight, and a bomb was found in a third school but defused.

A ground floor classroom in one of the buildings, a preparatory school for girls, was littered with shattered glass and its main entrance was blackened and clogged with debris.

Spc. Rodney Beasley from the 2nd Battalion of the 325th Airborne lays in pain after being shot during a patrol. Undisclosed location. Newsday Photographer Moises Saman

---

Area Soldier Killed; "He Said It Was Getting Crazy"

January 26 By Bob Reynolds, WorldNow and WNEP

A soldier from Northumberland County was killed Monday night when a bomb went off when he was on patrol.

Sergeant Brett Swank, 21, an Airborne Ranger, graduated from Shikellamy High School in 2001. He was on foot patrol in Baghdad when he was killed.

"Brett took a wound, a laceration to his neck and by 7:00 p.m. he was pronounced dead. He bled to death and I asked if he could have been evacuated and they said there was nothing that could have been done," said his father, Daniel Swank.

Sergeant Swank volunteered to go to Iraq. He had one year left. "He said it was getting crazy with the election coming up. They were running 12 hour patrols. He said it was really starting to pick up and get crazy. The bad guys were getting around again," Swank recounted.

"He died for our country. It just seems a shame, such a young life," said his mother Deb Santucci of Northumberland. She treasures the pictures taken of her son when he was home over the Thanksgiving holiday.

"It really hits close to home. It's really close to home. There are so many things in the future that won't be there anymore," she added through her tears.

Funeral arrangements have not been made yet.

Local Soldier Wounded

1.26.05 By MIKE KRINGS, Times News Editor, The Leavenworth Times

Lansing resident Shirley Gustafson is always glad to hear from her son who's serving in Iraq. However, Monday she wasn't glad to receive a call telling her he had been wounded.

While the news was hard to take, she said she's just glad it wasn't worse.

"We are rejoiced in the fact that it wasn't more serious and that he's coming home," Gustafson said.

Her son, Sgt. Timothy Gustafson, 27, of the Tennessee National Guard, was wounded Monday when a Humvee he was riding in was struck. Shirley said she didn't know many details about what happened, but her son wounded his foot.

She spoke to him by telephone Monday.

"He told me (Monday) that he would lose part of his foot and they might have to amputate more," she said.

Tuesday, she said she learned he was listed in serious condition and was being taken to an Army hospital in Germany.

Gustafson has been serving in Iraq since early November. A 1996 graduate of Lansing High School, he had served in the U.S. Army before becoming a member of the Tennessee National Guard.

"Tim was out of the Army about a year before this war started," Shirley Gustafson said.

His brother, David Gustafson, was also in the Army. At one point, both Gustafsons were stationed at Fort Campbell, Ky. David had served in Iraq as well, but is back home now.

Shirley said that in the time since the brothers were stationed together, it has been hard for them to see one another. Last July, however, David was able to make it home for one day to be at Timothy's wedding. He had been stationed in Korea, but made it back to the states, and was able to arrange a trip home for one day to attend the wedding.

TROOP NEWS

General Says Troops To Stay In Iraq

January 26, 2005 By Sally Buzbee, Associated Press

The U.S. Army's top operations officer, Lt. Gen. James J. Lovelace Jr., said this week that the service assumes it will keep the current level of 120,000 soldiers in Iraq for at least two more years.

---

951 More National Guard And Reserve For The Imperial Slaughterhouse

January 26, 2005 U.S. Department of Defense News Release No. 074-05

This week, the Army announced an increase, while the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps had a decrease in the number of reservists on active duty in support of the partial mobilization. The Coast Guard number remained the same. **The net collective result is 951 more reservists mobilized than last week.**

US Marine Andres Raya Awarded "The Aztlan Medal of Valor"

1.26.05 aztlan.net

The USA does not appreciate the sacrifices that US Marine Andres Raya made in the war against Iraq.

There is now a great effort in the US mainstream media, especially the Modesto Bee, to denigrate, demean and demonize the US Marine of Mexican descent. **Andres Raya was awarded four medals and ribbons for his meritorious service in Iraq by the US Marine Corps yet the Chief of Police of Ceres, California is now labeling Raya a "gangbanger" and worst a "terrorist".**

There is no question that Andres Raya was suffering from the "Iraq War Stress Syndrome" which has also victimized other soldiers resulting in their suicides. Andres Raya's life was just as valuable as that of the police officer that he killed.

The Bush Administration does not care and is not adequately addressing the problem of returning soldiers who need intensive support.

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK OUT THE NEW TRAVELING SOLDIER

Telling the truth - about the occupation or the criminals running the government in Washington - is the first reason for Traveling Soldier. 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)

OLD GUYS AT THE FRONT

From: RS
To: GI Special
Sent: January 26, 2005
Subject:

Your latest on the major who will refuse call-up brings to mind a proclamation issued by Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia in the mid-1930's just after Mussolini's Italy launched its invasion of the country. It went something like this: All males between the ages of 16 and 60 are hereby immediately called to arms. Anyone refusing to appear will be hung.

If we adjust the age spread from 18 to 60, and substitute for the old guys death from natural causes in the combat zone, the Emperor and Rummy's Pentagon are not too far apart. If the major served in the first Gulf War nearly 15 years ago, I would guess he's now at least in his mid to high 50's, maybe even 60. We do know that his situation -- advancing age and various ailments -- is not without precedent.

You may recall a Times story last year about 8 or 10 NCO's in their mid- or high 50's who either volunteered or were called up for Iraq, a number of whom died of natural causes from pre-existing conditions while serving in desert conditions.

Conversely, my father who had a fractured skull from a car accident in his 20's tried to enlist in WWII in his early 30's for a rear area MOS for which he was highly qualified, but got turned down because of the injury. Even pulling political strings couldn't get him in, to his keen disappointment.

I'm no doubt considerably older than the major and I can only imagine my reaction if I were a reserve officer or NCO.

And, hell I'm in good shape although primarily thanks to periodic check-ups by various health providers.

In similar circumstances, the only way for me to ship out safely (to Iraq, or the Ethiopian front) would be if accompanied by my medical platoon of doctors, dentists, ophthalmologists and of course their nurses, lab techies, and insurance clerks.

I could then say to Emperor Rummy, sorry I can't make it, Drs. X and Z say Hell no, we won't go.

Hang in

War Profiteer Picked As New Secretary Of Army

January 24, 2005 By Jim Tice, Army Times staff writer

As the Army's senior civilian, Harvey will head a work force of more than 1 million active and Reserve soldiers and 220,000 civilian employees, and oversee a budget of $98.5 billion.

A former senior executive with Westinghouse Corp., Francis J. Harvey, 19th secretary of the Army, has a doctorate in metallurgy and materiel sciences and many years of experience in defense-related businesses.

As secretary, Harvey has statutory responsibility for all matters relating to Army manpower, personnel, Reserve affairs, installations, environment protection, **weapon and equipment acquisition and financial management.**

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Four Allawi Soldiers Captured In Western Iraq

Jan 26 (AFP) & Aljazeera

Four Iraqi soldiers were captured Wednesday in the Ramadi as they were leaving a US military base, police said.

"The four soldiers were captured between the towns of Baghdadi and Hit," some 100 miles west of the capital, a local police officer said on condition of anonymity.

Assorted Attacks On Collaborators

1.26.05 By JASON KEYSER, Associated Press Writer & SAMEER N. YACOUB, (AP) & (CNN) & AFP

At least 15 people were killed and 30 wounded in a truck bomb Wednesday outside the headquarters of a major Kurdish political party in the northern Iraqi town of Sinjar, the local council chief said.

"The truck, packed with one ton of TNT, exploded outside the local offices of the Kurdistan Democratic Party at 2:30 pm (1130 GMT)," Dekhil Qassem Hassoun told AFP.

Sinjar, 310 miles north of Baghdad, lies in the province of Nineveh.

Earlier in the day, gunmen opened fire with machine guns on the local headquarters of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Communist Party in the city of Baqouba, north of Baghdad, killing a traffic policeman and four others wounded -- three of them working as guards for the parties. The KDP and PUK are the two largest Kurdish groups in Iraq and have formed a coalition along with other Kurdish groups to run in the election.

The resulting battles lasted two hours.

In al-Nahrawan, a southeastern suburb of Baghdad, city council leader Karim Sarhan was gunned down Wednesday morning in a drive-by shooting on his way to work, Iraqi police said.

Three Baghdad schools to be used as polling centers in Sunday's election were attacked Tuesday night, an Iraqi police officer said. A bomb planted at a fourth school was defused.

About 8 p.m. (noon ET), Salah al-Deen school in northern Baghdad was damaged when insurgents threw a grenade at it, authorities said. Thirty minutes later, a bomb exploded near the main gate of Al-Fursan school in southeast Baghdad, causing damage, police said.

About 10:30 p.m. (2:30 p.m. ET), Al-Balquees school in northern Baghdad was damaged when it was hit by a rocket, police said.

About 90 minutes later, experts defused a bomb planted near al-Yemen school in al-Gazaliyah neighborhood in western Baghdad.

IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE
END THE OCCUPATION

Car Bomb Attack In Kirkuk

26 January 2005 Focus 1 News, Kirkuk

At least 7 people have died in the car bomb attack in Kirkuk, DPA announced. **Three police officers, two Iraqi police officers and two civilians are among the victims, a spokesperson of the police informed.**

Election Workers Captured In Mosul

Jan 26 SAMEER N. YACOUB, (AP)

Al-Arabiya television broadcast a videotape showing three men identified by insurgents as election workers who were captured in the northern city of Mosul.

The satellite station said the three were abducted by the Nineveh Mujahedeen, which threatened to attack polling stations on election day.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

"I Will Continue To Speak Out Until The Last Soldier Leaves Iraq": Interview With Antiwar Veteran Of The Iraq War

Let me break it down for you real easy: most of the kids dying in Iraq, and they are kids, are between 18 and 22. These kids will never go to college, never get married, never have kids, never have grandchildren, never retire, and never get to enjoy life. They leave behind children that will never know their fathers and widows that will never know peace.

In my oath I swore to defend the Constitution and the people of America, clearly that is not what I did in Iraq. ***In fact, if the Constitution needs defending anywhere it is in Washington, DC.***

Patrick Resta, Specialist/E4 Interviewed by Derek Seidman, Left Hook

Patrick Resta, Specialist/E4, served as an Army medic in Iraq with the 30th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division. He was stationed in Iraq for eight months in 2004, returning home just about two months ago. He has recently begun speaking out against the war and occupation, and he is involved with Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Thank you for doing this interview Patrick. Can you begin by telling us when you were in Iraq? Where were you and what were you doing?

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to have my voice heard. I think it's vital that veterans of this conflict speak out about what it's really like out there.

I was at my camp in northeastern Iraq from March 12, 2004 to November 15, 2004. My camp was located in the Diyala province, the capital of which is Baqubah. To make that a little more understandable, we were about 100 miles northeast of Baghdad and roughly 30 miles from the Iranian border.

I was a medic, so that was my main focus. I would work shifts in our 3 bed ER sometimes, where we would see everything from the common cold to gun shot wounds and shrapnel injuries. I also accompanied patrols into towns and convoys to get supplies in case anyone was injured during the accomplishment of the mission.

When did you enter the military, and why did you join?

I joined the military shortly after high school. My main motivation was always money for college and to get some training in the medical field. **I was in a position where my parents had made it clear that they were not in a position to assist me with college tuition. I think that the vast majority of people that enter the military do it for the educational benefits.**

You said that you think it's very important that vets speak out about what it's really like over there in Iraq. What do you want people here to know about what's really going on?

There are …… troubling ideas the American public still harbors about soldiers in Iraq. A huge one is that most soldiers support the war and are happy to be there.

During my time in Iraq, "The Stars and Stripes", which is a military newspaper, released a poll that showed a clear majority of soldiers in Iraq as unsupportive of the policies. The paper also ran many letters to the editor that were critical of the administration and the war in general. The lack of armor on vehicles continues to be a problem that costs soldiers their lives and limbs. My unit had a huge problem with this issue. I have plenty of pictures of our vehicles with plywood "armor" being sent into combat.

(This was the seat that I rode in from Kuwait to my camp in Iraq. **I took out a loan to buy the body armor that you see pictured.** I knew I would find myself in a situation like this so I prepared the best that I could. **I decided to sit on part of it and place my feet on the other part of it. I felt that the bottom of the vehicle was the most vulnerable. My vehicle has absolutely no armor, not even plywood.)**

I feel that plenty of soldiers don't see the point of the efforts they're making in Iraq. As my time wore on in Iraq more and more people were getting increasingly frustrated with being there.

It becomes even more frustrating when you're getting attacked pretty frequently, having people get injured, and even members of other units get killed. For a while after I first got there I would try to think of a reason for being in Iraq before I went to bed every night. I couldn't think of one.

I finally saw two pictures in National Geographic that made it pretty clear why I was there, and I taped them above my cot as a reminder. The first picture shows about 30 Marines guarding the Ministry of Oil in Baghdad. The second picture shows Navy personnel escorting an oil tanker through the Persian Gulf.

Being placed in that situation is only made worse by the lack of equipment. I realized rather quickly what my life was worth to this administration and to the American public. That being said, we all took our mission seriously and tried to have some positive impact to make our time in Iraq worth something. However, this was made pretty difficult with the rules that were put in place, such as only being allowed to treat Iraqis that were in danger of losing life or limb.

It's depressing to realize that for the next several months or even year of your life you will be risking your life for nothing. Any rocket or mortar coming in could take your life, or arms, or legs and there is little point to it. The vast majority of the Iraqi people don't want you there, the reasons given for the war have proven false, and your continued presence only inflames the situation.

You mentioned the issue of the armor on your vehicles (or lack of). This has become a more prominent issue after Donald Rumsfeld's visit to Iraq several weeks ago, when he was confronted on it by a soldier. I read about this issue well before the Rumsfeld event-- soldiers and their families had been complaining about this for a while, to little avail. What's really going on? How do soldiers feel about all this, and why do you think the government has been so neglectful?

The lack of armor continues to be a problem that soldiers are paying for with their lives and limbs. It all goes back to this administration only listening to people that tell it what it wants to hear. Like Ahmed Chalabi's continuing assertions that Americans would be greeted as if they had just liberated Paris.

Part of it was wanting to keep the already ridiculous cost of this war down. Part of it was wanting to make sure as much money as possible went directly to corporations. Part of it was this administration sticking its head in the sand. To this day they still have not admitted or addressed the total lack of pre war, post war, and exit strategy planning. **Truthfully, this administration never wanted an exit strategy. A long occupation of Iraq had been planned from the get go. This administration has already drawn up plans to occupy Iraq that go beyond the summer of 2006.**

About a week after the story broke, one of the companies that makes the armor came forward and said that they hadn't even been asked to increase production.

I have included some pictures detailing the problem. My unit of 4,000 people rolled into Iraq with between 75% to 90% of our vehicles unarmored. To give you a rough idea of the number, it would be in the range of 500 to 700.

Once inside Iraq we slowly started to receive armored doors only for our vehicles. Even when I left after 8 months in Iraq we still had vehicles that were unarmored.

(Soldiers would be riding in the back of this vehicle as well. The only thing between them and a roadside bomb is the plywood that you see.)

My brigade lost its first soldier during the drive north from Kuwait. He was in an unarmored vehicle that was hit by a roadside bomb. My camp had a soldier lose part of his arm from riding in an unarmored vehicle that was hit by a roadside bomb. His arm was saved and after numerous surgeries he was told it would be a year before he would get most movement and sensation in his arm back. Situations like these are repeated daily through out Iraq.

What about the relationship between US soldiers and Iraqis? From your experience, what type of relationship exists? How were you and your fellow soldiers told to deal with people?

Most Iraqi's are not overtly confrontational with American soldiers. However, if you engage them in conversation and ask their opinion (as I often did) they will not hesitate to tell you that you are not wanted in Iraq by anyone.

After the WMD story turned out to be a hoax the war was then sold as a humanitarian mission. Shortly after arriving in Iraq we were instructed that we could not treat Iraqi's unless they were in danger of losing life or limb. Basically, the local nationals had to be in danger of dying before we could treat them. This was the official guidance that we received in writing, repeatedly, from way up the chain of command. The excuses ranged from not having the money/supplies to wanting the Iraqi's to get used to using their own healthcare infrastructure. Why were we there then? It was little things like this that served to quickly turn our opinion about what this war was really about.

Most of the sentiment voiced publicly by the local nationals all focused on the same few ideas. The war was sold to them as a way to get rid of Saddam, which they favored.

But, it quickly became evident that that's not what this war was really about. They were lied to by this administration too. They are now being occupied and they know the war is all about oil.

Not only are they being occupied, but they still have no security. I was told again and again that at least under Saddam they didn't have roadside bombs littering the country and gangs of insurgents roving and ravaging the country with impunity. Again, I could talk about this for hours. I will leave my contact information (eosonifilic@aol.com) and people can contact me with individual questions and/or requests to speak about my opinions and experiences in Iraq.

One thing that doesn't get enough honest attention is the number of soldiers wounded in Iraq, and what this really means. So far, well over 10,000 soldiers have been "wounded". You worked as a medic, so you have a good idea of what this means.

One thing I want to make absolutely clear is my skepticism that this number is anywhere near accurate. An injury can be anything from eardrums ruptured in an explosion, gunshot wounds, shrapnel injuries, blast injuries, and on and on. Obviously, this number makes no accounting for those that are mentally traumatized by what they have seen, and the numbers that have substance abuse problems or even end up taking their own lives. Just as in Vietnam it will take years before the true effects of this conflict are known. They will continue to manifest themselves in increasing numbers of individuals as more people return home. Or more importantly, return home for the second or third time from Iraq. The VA was under manned and under funded well before September 11th, and is simply not equipped to deal with what is coming in the next few years.

When I joined the military I took an oath that I took seriously. I just wish that my elected officials took it as seriously as I did. But, why should they? Few if any of them have ever taken it before themselves.

In my oath I swore to defend the Constitution and the people of America, clearly that is not what I did in Iraq. In fact, if the Constitution needs defending anywhere it is in Washington, DC.

No one in the military signs up to die for nothing, I know I surely didn't. Soldiers aren't assembled at the Pentagon, they are real people with real families. Most come from poor and working class families and I believe that has something to do with the public's sick view that the life of a soldier is worth inherently less than the life of an average American citizen.

If you're going to commit hundreds of thousands of troops for something this ridiculous, at least equip them so they have a fighting chance of surviving and keeping all of their limbs. Supporting our troops? Hardly. Let me break it down for you real easy: most of the kids dying in Iraq, and they are kids, are between 18 and 22. These kids will never go to college, never get married, never have kids, never have grandchildren, never retire, and never get to enjoy life. They leave behind children that will never know their fathers and widows that will never know peace.

Too many people have suffered way too much already. I will continue to speak out until the last soldier leaves Iraq and the last veteran gets the care they are owed. Not another Vietnam

What made you decide to become active in opposing the war and occupation?

I think this will be my shortest answer. I don't want to see anymore of my fellow soldiers get killed, get maimed, or be mentally traumatized for nothing. I don't want to see anymore Iraqi civilians get killed or injured for nothing. This administration is just creating a new generation of insurgents. Mostly, I want to point out what our soldiers are being asked to do over there and how they are being asked to do it. I want to make it clear to the public that they aren't getting the full scope of what's going on in Iraq. Most of the reporters in Iraq are scared to leave the large camps they're in. They only report what they see from the camps or what the military reports to them. **None of the attacks in my area where ever reported.**

Can you briefly tell us about the organization your involved with, Iraq Veterans Against the War? Is the group growing? What type of activities do you do, and do you have any new future plans?

Iraq Veterans Against the War is a group of people who have been in Iraq since the current war began. The group is growing and in the process of setting up local chapters through out the country. The main focus of the group is to end the occupation of Iraq and make sure that the veterans of the conflict receive the care that they were promised and have earned. My main focus will be doing as many public speaking events as I can to get our message out to the public. I invite people to check out the web site, www.ivaw.net.

There's an organization of military family members who oppose the war and occupation, Military Families Speak Out (www.mfso.org). How has this group helped or affected you, and why do you think it's important?

My wife was involved with MFSO while I was in Iraq. They are actually the way that I first heard of IVAW. I think they are extremely important because they put a human face on what is happening in Iraq. They also point out that military members and families are not being taken care of the way they should be. Supporting our troops means a lot more than buying a $2 yellow magnet for your car and waving the flag. It means demanding answers and holding people accountable.

I think that obviously as veterans of this war we are the most qualified to speak out about the conditions in Iraq. We were in Iraq and we lived it. We were at places other than the hand picked sites that reporters and Congressmen are shown. We talked to lots of soldiers and not just those that pre rehearsed interviews so they'd tell the media what the military and this administration wants the public to hear. We let the public know that lots of soldiers don't agree with this war. They don't agree with the reasons that this war was sold on, the lack of equipment, the lack of planning, and the continuing lies about conditions in Iraq put forth by this administration.

The second part of the question is harder to answer. Personally, I'm not a pacifist and I've never felt I belong in the various peace groups. I'm just a veteran who understands all too well the sacrifices that are made. I can't sit and let it continue. Too many soldiers have suffered and will continue to suffer for years to come. Most of us just want to end this suffering.

I can't tell you how many times I'm asked ridiculous questions about Iraq.

If a veteran wants to speak about the war they will, when they are ready and able to do so.

The public can't possibly ever imagine what some people go through in Iraq.

Start by just introducing yourself and thanking them for coming out just like you would anyone else. A lot of veterans will never speak out against the war because they can be punished for doing so under military law. Other veterans don't want to admit that friends or family have been injured or even given their lives in an unnecessary war. They simply don't want to see it and will never admit it. I think that it is these veterans that have it the hardest.

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 inside the armed services. Send requests to address up top.

The Bush Iraq Policy Faces A Crisis Of Legitimacy.

January 21, 2005 Frank Brodhead, ZNet

The United States is in a military and political quandary in Iraq. It is apparent that it cannot "win" the war in any meaningful sense. The war is draining much of its economic strength and alienating traditional allies, and the Pentagon now finds itself constrained by a lack of resources from undertaking new military initiatives.

The number of Americans, and even congresspeople, supporting an early exit from Iraq has risen significantly.

The Bush Iraq policy faces a crisis of legitimacy.

Yet the Bush administration has never been deterred by handwriting on the wall.

To regain some of the legitimacy it has lost it will go ahead with the January 30th election despite the obvious risks and uncertain outcome. **The hazardous position in which it finds itself is the result of many factors, not least the worldwide opposition to the war.**

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

Occupation Command Wants Even More Dead U.S. Troops; Idiots Attack Al-Sadr Movement In Baghdad

Jan 26 SAMEER N. YACOUB, (AP) & 27 January 2005 By Faleh Al-Khattab, Aljazeera

US soldiers attacked the Al-Rasoul mosque in Sadr City in Baghdad, arresting 25 followers of a radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and violating the sanctity of the shrine, Iraqi sources said on Tuesday.

Police said the raid took place in the teeming Shiite quarter shortly before sunset Tuesday. **Officials gave no reason for the raid and it was unclear how many worshippers remained in custody Wednesday.**

Shaikh Abd al-Hadi al-Darraji, a top aide of the Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr, told Aljazeera.net that what happened in Masjid al-Rasul (The Prophet Mosque) reveals the real intentions of the US occupation forces.

He accused a US soldier of urinating on the Holy Quran and another of consuming alcohol within the chambers of the mosque.

"[This] is a great sin in Islam" al-Darraji said.

"The action of the US forces just days before Sunday's election is a serious provocation and it reveals that the US is serious in insulting the Islamic values and impose its culture on us" he said.

"They claim they are democratic people, but they are targeting us because we boycotted the elections and said it should not be held under occupation."

Another official in al-Sadr's movement, Naim al-Qaabi, too accused US and Iraqi forces of tearing Qurans during the operation and arresting 21 Sadr supporters.

An al-Sadr aide, Abdul-Hadi al-Daraji, denounced the raid as a "criminal act."

"This move by U.S. soldiers aims at provoking the al-Sadr movement in order to accuse us of sabotaging the elections and this is an ugly manoeuvre," al-Daraji said.

Al-Sadr has declined to run in the Sunday national elections, however some of his followers are running on tickets led by interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and one endorsed by the leading Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

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

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

New House Vets Committee Chair Has Message For Paralyzed Vets: "Stand Up"

"Paralyzed veterans to the disabled should stand up and cheer Buyer has arrived. I will defend the disabled and indigent and they come first." (Transcript of an interview 1.17.05 with Congressman Steve Buyer, Chair, House VA Committee, transcribed by Karen Hensel)

Received:

Back To Tsarism

From: B
To: GI Special
Date: 1.25.05

BACK TO TSARISM - THIS TIME WITH THE HELP OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY (they signed the letter below)

Russian Lawmakers Targets Jewish Groups

Jan 24 By STEVE GUTTERMAN, Associated Press Writer

MOSCOW - A group of nationalist Russian lawmakers called Monday for a sweeping investigation aimed at outlawing all Jewish organizations and punishing

officials who support them, accusing Jews of fomenting ethnic hatred and saying they provoke anti-Semitism.

In a letter dated Jan. 13, about 20 members of the lower house of parliament, the State Duma, asked Prosecutor General Vladimir Ustinov to investigate their claims and to launch proceedings "on the prohibition in our country of all religious and ethnic Jewish organizations as extremist."

The prosecutor general's office could not immediately be reached for comment on the letter, which the Interfax news agency said was signed by lawmakers from the nationalist Rodina and Liberal Democratic parties as well as the Communist Party.

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/gi-special/ ; www.gifightback.org ;
http://www.albasrah.net/maqalat/english/gi-special.htm,
www.williambowles.info/gispecial

GI Special distributes and posts to our website copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available in an effort to advance understanding of the invasion and occupation of Iraq. We believe this constitutes a "fair use" of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law since it is being distributed **without charge or profit** for purely educational purposes to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving the included information for educational purposes, in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107. Go to: http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml for more information. If you wish to use copyrighted material from this site for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use', you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.

If printed out, this newsletter is your personal property and cannot legally be confiscated from you. "Possession of unauthorized material may not be prohibited." DoD Directive 1325.6 Section 3.5.1.2.