

GI SPECIAL 3A40:

**THIS IS HOW BLAIR BRINGS THE TROOPS HOME:
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW, ALIVE!**



British military personnel carry the coffin of one of 10 Royal Air Force servicemen repatriated in Wiltshire, south-western England. The 10 were killed while serving in Iraq. Reuters

Defend Sgt. Kevin Benderman: Soldier Charged With Desertion

"I've received e-mails from people who said that I was a coward for not going to war, but I say to them that I have already been, so I do not have anything to prove to anyone anymore. What is there to prove anyway - that I can kill someone I do not even know and who has never done anything to me? What is in that concept that anyone could consider honorable?" Statement, Sgt. Kevin Benderman, 2.8.05

February 08, 2005 Associated Press, SAVANNAH, Ga.

A soldier seeking conscientious-objector status has been charged with deserting his fellow troops when they deployed for Iraq.

Sgt. Kevin Benderman, 40, a Bradley Fighting Vehicle mechanic and training supervisor, will now simultaneously have to support his application for the status, while defending himself against the Army's desertion charges.

Benderman began his application process Dec. 28, but when his 3rd Infantry Division headed out for Kuwait en route to Iraq on Jan. 7, **Benderman stayed home after receiving vague orders to think about his application, his defense attorney said.**

The noncommissioned officer is now charged with desertion to avoid hazardous duty and missing movement.

The presiding officer over the hearing, Lt. Col. Linda Taylor, has 10 business days from Monday to decide whether to pursue, modify or drop the charges. It will be the Army's decision whether to accept her recommendation.

Maj. S. Scott Sikes, Benderman's defense counsel, said Monday that Taylor should remove herself from the proceedings because she faced Sikes during her days as a prosecutor. The presiding officer must be impartial, Sikes said, but Taylor decided she would keep her seat on the bench.

Prosecutor Capt. Jonathan DeJesus said Benderman's application for conscientious-objector status was "suspect," and that it was a ploy to avoid deployment. Proceedings for the application were scheduled to begin Tuesday and to run concurrently with the desertion proceedings.

"His unit knew it was deploying to Iraq months ago," DeJesus said in his closing statement. "He knew how dangerous it was in Iraq. He deserted his unit."

Sikes argued, however, that Benderman was uncertain whether he needed to deploy or handle the application after speaking to Command Master Sgt. Samuel Costen, who testified by phone that he released Benderman the night of Jan. 7 to think things over, but told him to come back after dinner.

Costen and others said they tried to reach Benderman by phone that weekend, and testimony showed he got a call to report for duty at 9 a.m. the following Monday.

"He was there at the precise hour," Sikes said, adding that his client's actions were atypical of a deserter.

Benderman said last month he never grasped the brutal reality of war until he saw it for himself. He told of bombed-out homes and displaced Iraqis living in mud huts and drinking from mud puddles, as well as mass graves in Khanaqin near the Iranian border where dogs fed off human corpses.

He recalled his convoy passing a girl, no older than 10, on the roadside clutching a badly burned arm. Benderman said his executive officer refused to help because the troops had limited medical supplies.

[In case you don't remember it, here again is Sgt. Benderman's magnificent letter to George W. Bush. Sgt. Benderman needs every bit of support he can get. If you run into anybody who says they are against the war, but who turn their back on Sgt. Benderman and refuse to help him, publicly name them for what they are: cowards in the face of the enemy.]

“A Domestic Enemy Of The United States”

[When the history of the movement that finally stopped the war in Iraq is written, this letter will have a very special place. Coming from a serving soldier, and a Sgt., who feels a special responsibility to the troops that serve under him, it is a declaration of principle and allegiance to the liberties of the people of the United States in the spirit of Tom Paine and Patrick Henry.

[Read it with loving care, consider carefully what it means, carry it with you, and draw strength from it. And if you come across one or some of our troops, have spare copies to pass along. T]

November 20, 2004
To: George W. Bush
From: SGT Kevin M. Benderman

When are you going to tell the truth to the people of the United States?

Why don't you tell them why you want to be in Iraq so bad?

I was there for six months and I did not see the first weapon of mass destruction. I did receive orders from the company commander to shoot children if they threw small rocks at us and that was when I figured out that the entire thing was way over the line.

Over 1200 soldiers have died in Iraq so that you can have a couple billion more dollars, that should make you feel very good about yourself.

The soldiers that have died for this sham that you have put over on the American people are so much more deserving than that. You are not worth the dust off of their boots.

If you truly had respect for the military and the people that serve then you would not continue to kill them in your war.

I joined the Army to protect my country and not to be a mercenary for a political despot.

If you wish to put me in prison because of my views then you should make room for about 75% of the military.

And while you are at make some room for yourself and about half of your administration. You are responsible for what happened at Abu Gharaib and you are shirking your responsibility.

The commander in chief is not above the UCMJ, as you would like to believe.

I want to fulfill my contract that says I joined the Army to protect my country against all enemies foreign and domestic, and as far as I am concerned you are a domestic enemy of the United States.

You care nothing for this country; you just care about the profits that are to be made from the oil in Iraq. That much is evident to me from the way the contracts were passed out to Halliburton and KBR. It must be nice to have the deck stacked in your favor by the president of the USA.

Since your are raising the debt ceiling of America so that we can pay the bills that you have run up, why don't you forgive the debts of every one in the armed forces since they are the ones that are making it possible for you to make billions from the oil from Iraq.

Sincerely,
SGT Kevin M. Benderman

MORE:

February 7, 2005 By David Zucchino, L.A. Times Staff Writer

Kevin Benderman looks and talks like a soldier. Tall and solidly built, with close-cropped brown hair, he speaks with a Southern drawl in the jargon-laden argot of a career soldier.

His father served in World War II, his grandfather in World War I. Members of his family served on both sides in the Civil War, and one ancestor, William Benderman, fought in the American Revolution, Benderman said.

Raised in a Southern Baptist family in Alabama and Tennessee, Benderman grew up wanting to be a pro football player, not a soldier. At age 22, Benderman decided he wanted to follow family tradition and join the Army. He served four years, then worked laying hardwood and tile flooring. In June 2000, feeling patriotic, he decided to reenlist.

Benderman said several soldiers who served with him in Iraq shared his views. Two members of his battalion attempted suicide after being ordered to return to

Iraq, he said, and several more have gone AWOL to avoid deployment. A specialist from the division has been charged with having a friend shoot him in the leg as part of a staged armed robbery in an attempt to avoid returning to Iraq.

Antiwar groups that offer counseling to soldiers say opposition to the Iraq war among soldiers is higher than the Pentagon acknowledges. The GI Rights Hotline, run by a consortium of antiwar groups, received 32,000 calls last year, many from soldiers who have gone AWOL or complained of psychological or emotional problems after serving in combat. About 15% of the calls were from soldiers considering conscientious objector applications, said Steve Morse of the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors.

Benderman said he believed he would prevail at today's hearing, and insisted that he had not deserted his unit.

"I didn't go anywhere. I didn't run to Canada," he said. "I'm still right here."

If his application is denied and he is ordered back to Iraq, he said, he would refuse to go. He has turned a corner, he said, and he will not turn back.

"I've already refused once," he said. "I will not change my mind, no matter what."

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.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS:

“Two Days Before He Died, Daniel Torres Found Out He Was Going To Be A Father”

He Sometimes “Wondered About The Reasons For The War” Sister Says



February 8, 2005 nbc5i.com

Sgt. Daniel Torres, 23, was an Army scout and was killed last week while patrolling a town in northern Iraq. Military officials said that a remote-controlled bomb went off at about 4:30 p.m. on Friday, killing Torres and another soldier while injuring seven others.

Now, Daniel Torres' family is left with only his memory and his sister Christina Torres is struggling to come to terms with her brother's death.

"As a brother, he always knew what to say," said Christina Torres. "I still don't believe it. I don't know. It still hasn't clicked yet. I do think he's still going to walk through that door or he's going to call soon."

Daniel Torres, who attended Fort Worth's Southwest High School, had recently started his second tour in Iraq after spending a few months at home with his family. **Cristina Torres said her brother sometimes wondered about the reasons for the war**, but was committed to helping the children of Iraq.

"What saddens me most is he's not the last one. He was just 23 ... there's going to be more. It doesn't matter if they were 40. They are somebody's brother, somebody's dad," Christina Torres said.

Daniel Torres had hoped to become a police officer after he left the Army, but also confided to his family that he didn't believe he would make it home alive from Iraq.

Two days before he died, Daniel Torres found out he was going to be a father and his family said the news made him as happy as ever.

[If Vietnam rules were being followed, he'd be alive. Nobody there ever had a compulsory "second tour." One year, and out forever. But the bloodthirsty empire builders who launched this war for oil will keep sending the troops back forever, unless the soldiers do what the troops in Vietnam finally did to stop that war: rebel against the officers, the government and the war. And that was that. Game over, war over, everybody went home.]

TROOP NEWS

RESERVIST WINS FIGHT; WON'T GO TO IRAQ

2.8.05 New York Times, Julia Preston

José Meñdez, who resigned from the Army Reserve after serving his required eight years and was then called up for duty in Iraq, dropped a federal lawsuit against the Defense Department yesterday and confirmed that the Army had granted him an honorable discharge.

Mr. Mendez, a physician's assistant who runs the Greenpoint Pediatric Center in Sunnyside, Queens, had argued that the clinic would close if he were sent to Iraq last Oct. 10, as the Army ordered.

That was four months after his resignation. He had not been called to duty during his eight-year tenure. **He also challenged the Army's contention that a state of emergency was in effect that justified the mobilization of reservists whose terms had ended.**

***"Don't Get Back On That Plane"* U.S. Troops Offered Asylum In Ireland; Irish Peace Movement Encourages Desertion**

[Thanks to z who sent this in. He writes: Ireland in spring must be very pretty! In solidarity, z]

February 8, 2005 By HARRY BROWNE, Counterpunch

The chain of violence and corruption that connects the United States with Iraq includes an airport in the west of Ireland. For more than two years, as reported previously in Counterpunch, the Irish peace movement has been trying to break the chain. Having failed, so far, to do that, campaigners now hope to turn Shannon Airport into the weakest link.

A group of activists, including several of the 'Pitstop Ploughshares' who face trial next month for their 'disarmament' of a US Navy plane in 2003, have called for American military war resisters to seek official refuge while their planes refuel and they are let wander through the lounges of this relatively small civilian airport.

Last year, 158,549 US troops passed through the airport on 1,502 flights - mainly civilian charter aircraft. Those troop numbers were 26 per cent higher than in 2003. In addition, Irish officials granted permission for 753 military aircraft to land, and 816 aircraft carrying munitions.

The invitation for some of these troops effectively to desert comes from members of the Irish parliament and even a former Irish army commandant, Ed Horgan -- who made it clear he wouldn't make such a suggestion lightly. And those making the call realise that it is not abstract rhetoric: it is estimated that more than 5,500 soldiers have left their 'duties' in the current wars, including highly publicised cases like the imprisoned Camilio Mejia, the exiled Jeremy Hinzman (seeking refuge in Canada) and Kevin Benderman, seeking conscientious-objector status after 10 years in the army because of what he witnessed on his first tour of duty in Iraq.

Irish and international law on refugees makes it clear that soldiers are not excluded from making asylum applications, which can be made to any Irish police officer (Garda) or immigration official. Soldiers who face being forced to obey "unlawful orders" are explicitly mentioned in the refugee statutes. The Geneva Conventions state that soldiers need not perform duties that offend their political, religious or moral principles.

"American soldiers are being required to commit acts so gratuitously offensive to themselves and their families that they will never be able to speak of them," said activist Michael Birmingham, who has spent much of the last two years in Iraq, as well as meeting soldiers who have returned home to the US.

The activists are working to ensure that the 'invitation' to Ireland becomes widely known among US soldiers -- and that Irish officials at Shannon Airport perform as the law requires them to do in giving individuals the right to have their asylum claims heard. **Any soldiers who do make a claim will find a supportive network of legal and logistical support in Ireland.**

Damien Moran, one of the Pitstop Ploughshares, said: "The offer of sanctuary in Ireland is deeply rooted in our traditions of neutrality and hospitality."

“Hometown Hero” A Fake

2/8/2005 Dan Viens, KUSA-TV

GRAND JUNCTION - The story about a soldier from Colorado who was said to have died in Iraq in January appears to have been a hoax.

The soldier's story was originally reported to the group Homefront Heroes by a woman claiming to be Jonathan Kenney's wife.

Phyllis Derby, President of Homefront Heroes sent out a press release to Grand Junction media outlets.

Kenney reportedly died after being shot in the heart while trying to save an Iraqi girl.

People became suspicious about Kenney's story when several facts did not add up. The soldier's wife was said to be Amber Kenney. However, there is no record of an Amber Kenney ever existing.

In addition, the military said it has no record of the death of a Jonathan Kenney. Also his reported unit, the 144th Air Defense Artillery Battalion, is not currently serving in Iraq.

Grand Junction Free Press reporter Josh Nichols spoke with the woman who reported the soldier's death to Homefront Heroes. She admitted to Nichols that the whole story was made up.

The woman who originally said she was Amber Kenney turned out to be named Sara Kenney.

When asked by Nichols why she made up the story, Kenney said she was doing it for a friend whose husband may have died in Iraq.

When pressed as to how her actions would help her friend Kenney had no answer.

An added wrinkle to the story is that the group Homefront Heroes has been collecting contributions in Kenney's name. It is not known how much money has been collected on behalf of Kenney.

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)

Staff Sgt. Punished By Command For Refusing To Falsify Records

[Washington Times, February 8, 2005, Pg. 16]

Marine Staff Sgt. Michael Lott, with his attorney, is making the case that he was not promoted to gunnery sergeant because of good old-fashioned bureaucratic bungling, and not because he lacked experience and requisite skills.

Lott refused an order to falsify attendance records at an instruction facility, and was written up three times by the officer who demanded the falsifications. He is set to retire in three months. It would be a travesty if he isn't promoted before leaving the service he has served well for 20 years.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Military Says 13,000 – 17,000 Active In Resistance; Reporters Confirms Commanders Complete Idiots

February 8, 2005 From Barbara Starr, CNN Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- The U.S. military faces between 13,000 and 17,000 insurgents in Iraq a senior military official said Tuesday. **[If they're willing to admit that many, double it.]**

The numbers are considerably higher than the 5,000 fighters that Gen. John Abizaid, head of the U.S. Central Command, estimated in November 2003. [Yes. It's growing. Duh.]

The official who provided Tuesday's estimate said the U.S. military believes it killed between 10,000 and 15,000 guerillas in combat last year -- perhaps as many as 3,000 during the November push to retake the western Iraqi city of Falluja from insurgents. **[Meaning they have no trouble making up their losses, and growing bigger while they do it. And guess what. They don't have stop-loss. And anybody can quit the resistance any time they get tired of fighting. So, just to make things even, apply the same rules to U.S. troops in Iraq.]**

But because others join the insurgency to replace those killed, Pentagon analysts have difficulty matching the current number against previous assessments. [Hey, no problem. The polls showed a majority of Iraqis support armed attacks on Bush's occupation forces. So just figure a few million ready to fight. See, that wasn't so hard, was it?]

In the wake of the elections, in which Iraqis turned out to vote for a transitional parliament, U.S. commanders expressed hope that Iraqis will rethink their commitment to the insurgency. ["In the wake of Valley Forge, British commanders hope that Americans will rethink their commitment to the insurgency." Yeah, right. As long as the occupation is in their country, the only thing getting "rethought" is how, where, and when to launch the next attacks.]

Baghdad Bomb Hits Occupation Recruiting Center: 21 Dead, 27 Wounded; Fighting Spreads In Capital

Feb 8, 2005 Reuters & Focus 1 News & (AP)

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - A bomb attack at an Iraqi army recruitment center in west Baghdad killed at least 13 people and wounded at least 11 on Tuesday, hospital officials and the U.S. army said.

A police source said the blast detonated next to a truck carrying recruits into the base. The blast occurred near the old Muthana airfield in the heart of the capital. A U.S. army spokesman said the bomber had been on foot.

Fighting erupted elsewhere in the Iraqi capital Tuesday, as militants battled Iraqi security troops and explosions sounded over the city.

Three police officers were killed in clashes that broke out in Baghdad's western Ghazaliya neighborhood.

At least one explosion rattled central Baghdad, and a U.S. military spokesman said that blast might have been caused by a mortar round. There was no immediate word on casualties.

Occupation Truck Driver Killed Near Tikrit

ZAGREB, Feb 8 (AFP)

A Croatian truck driver working in Iraq has been killed in an attack on a convoy of trucks working for US troops, the foreign ministry said here Tuesday.

The driver, whose identity was not disclosed, died late Monday when his truck was hit by a rocket near the northern town of Tikrit, national Croatian television said, quoting the ministry.

Pro-Israel Collaborator Survives Assassination Attempt But Loses Sons

8 February 2005 (Reuters)

BAGHDAD - Guerillas ambushed the convoy of an Iraqi politician in western Baghdad on Tuesday, killing two of his sons, police said.

They said Mithal al-Alusi, secretary-general of the Democratic Party of the Iraqi Nation, had survived the attack.

Alusi is a controversial figure in Iraq -- he has been a vocal critic of Syria and Iran, and was widely criticised in Iraq for visiting Israel last year.

After his visit he was expelled from the Iraqi National Congress party led by Ahmad Chalabi.

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

Basra Airport Under Mortar Attack

BAGHDAD, Feb 8 (KUNA)

Unidentified resistance soldiers fired on Tuesday two mortar shells at Basra airport.

Eyewitnesses told Kuna that the first shell fell in the airports surrounding, the second close to the rear gate. There were no reports on casualties.

Basra airport was open for airlifting pilgrims to Saudi Arabia, but came to standstill on Sunday after turning it into a military airport.

Chef Killed

February 08, 2005 By Jason Keyser, Associated Press

On Monday, gunmen killed an Iraqi chef employed by American forces at Baghdad International Airport, hospital officials said Tuesday. [This time the reporter doesn't claim it was the resistance. Was it the cooking?]

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

“We Were Throwing Our Dirty Uniforms In Burning Barrels, Along With Our Burning Disgust.”

From: Mike Hastie
To: GI Special
Sent: February 08, 2005
Subject: No Mercy

To G.I. Special:

When I came home from Vietnam, if I had seen yellow ribbon magnets on cars that read, "Support Our Troops," I would have removed as many of them as I could have put my hands on.

I recently saw a Hummer H2, with a yellow ribbon magnet near the gas tank outlet. I'm sure someone else put it there, without the owner being aware of it.

This war is about OIL, not about democracy. The American soldiers returning from Iraq will eventually see this horrible truth. And when this betrayal awareness kicks the door down to their belief system, all hell will break loose.

As a Vietnam veteran, who spent time in a VA psychiatric ward, and several visits to the emergency department for panic attacks, I know this sudden death feeling well.

When I left Vietnam, soldiers in my unit were shooting heroin, they were shooting each other, and they were shooting themselves.

The hatred most of us had toward Richard Nixon was vile. When I was processing out of Vietnam, the graffiti was everywhere. We were throwing our dirty uniforms in burning barrels, along with our burning disgust.

I could see the anguish in so many young faces. The lies surrounding Iraq are worse than Vietnam. Eventually, American soldiers returning from Iraq will spare George Bush no mercy.

As Malcolm X once wrote, "The only thing worse than death is betrayal." When it comes to war, business has no conscience.

Mike Hastie
U.S. Army Medic
Vietnam 1970-71

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.

The Iraqi Ballot, Translated

January 31, 2005 by Hawra Karama, anti-war.com

I had the opportunity to participate in the long-awaited Iraqi elections this weekend. Contrary to popular belief, this was not the first time my opinion has mattered to the Iraqi state. It was actually the third. Saddam Hussein had asked us Iraqis in both 1995 and 2002 if we wanted him to be our leader.

The question sounded rather silly, considering the amount of Iraqi, Iranian, and Kuwaiti blood on his hands. Nevertheless, in both referenda, Saddam's approval ratings exceeded 99 percent. That statistic could not have been accurate, could it? Did the Iraqis really want even more years of crushing tyranny, war with neighbors, and ethnic cleansing?

In retrospect, I could come up with dozens of theories on the shocking outcome of the two referenda. Maybe only Ba'athists participated in the polls. Maybe people were too afraid to say they didn't want Saddam. Maybe the chads of those who did cast a "no" vote were hanging.

In any case, I shouldn't waste so much time analyzing the past. The bottom line is that there is no such thing as democracy under dictatorship. My time today is better spent taking advantage of democracy under foreign occupation.

I hesitated before voting for reasons familiar to anyone who follows the news. But then I thought of the disappointment on the faces of my American guests if I did not accept the democracy they brought me. I didn't want their feelings to be hurt. I didn't want them to think that the residents of the Cradle of Civilization are not civilized. So I mustered the courage to go to the voting site nearest my house in Baghdad.

Initially, I thought I was at the American embassy because there were so many American soldiers standing outside. I checked my registration slip. I did in fact have the correct address. So I took a deep breath and walked in. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that Iraqi authorities had requested American troops' presence because they

needed help making Iraqi tea for the voters. Their desire was to make the democratic process feel as close to home as possible.

A young soldier from Texas served me a cup of Iraqi hospitality. Then I nervously proceeded toward the voting booth. My heart was racing, and tears flooded my eyes as I thought of the price that was paid to make this moment happen. On a personal level, my niece had suffered severe burns on her arms and legs when bombs shook Baghdad in March 2003.

My backyard was converted into a parking spot for an American tank. More broadly, over a hundred thousand of my countrymen had to be killed, and many more had to be wounded and disabled. Many American families had to mourn the loss of their loved ones in the military.

The environment was sentenced to suffer for the next several centuries. Politicians in the White House and Parliament had gone out of their way just to ensure that my cup of tea had the right amount of sugar while I expressed whom I thought should hold the magic wand to make all my agony go away.

I wiped my tears, pulled myself together, sipped the last drops in my cup, and went into the voting booth. By taking one quick glance at the ballot placed in front of me, I could immediately tell that this experience was going to be different from its 1995 and 2002 predecessors. **On those two occasions, I was asked only one question about one tyrant. "Do you want Saddam Hussein to be your president? A) Yes. B) No."**

This election, on the other hand, gave me a variety of choices on numerous issues. Behold the multitude of questions I was asked:

- 1. *Do you prefer to be tortured by A) American soldiers or B) British soldiers?***
- 2. *When occupying soldiers stop you in the street, would you rather be strip-searched A) with blindfold or B) without blindfold?***
- 3. *When foreign soldiers enter your house in the middle of the night to arrest your husband and terrorize your kids, would you prefer that they A) knock or B) ring the doorbell? (This question seemed odd because I thought they knew we don't have electricity and therefore the doorbells don't work.)***
- 4. *Which of the following CIA-paid Iraqis should represent you? (The list is too long to reprint here.)***
- 5. *Do you want the foreign forces occupying your country to leave? A) No. (I imagine they had accidentally forgotten to print "Yes.")***

To make sure our voices were being fully heard, some of the questions were open ended. Voters were actually allowed to write in their opinions on a number of issues. Observe:

- 6. *Which media outlet should hold the copyright to the pictures of your torture?***

7. *The occupation has violated the sanctity of the holy sites in Najaf and Karbala and bombed many mosques in Baghdad and Falluja. Are there any other holy sites you believe the occupation has missed?*
8. *Which American company do you believe should be awarded a monopoly on Iraq's oil?*

After reading all the questions, I did the same thing I'd done in 1995 and 2002. I left the ballot blank and walked out.

On my way out of the voting site, an American soldier handed me a sticker with the words "I voted" printed on it. He looked perplexed as I stuck it on his rifle and left.

OCCUPATION REPORT

They Made A Desert, And Call It “The Safest City In The Country” But Liars Can’t Get Their Stores Straight



Fallujah Feb. 6, (AP Photo/Anja Niedringhaus)

February 08, 2005 By ANJA NIEDRINGHAUS, FALLUJAH, Iraq (AP)

Iraqis line up in straggling columns, waiting to pass through barbed-wire checkpoints that ring this former insurgent stronghold left battered by intense fighting three months ago. Men stand in one, women and children in another. The few cars form a third.

They are returning to a virtually empty city where the 1st Marine Division's rumbling tanks and patrolling riflemen are out in force making sure the guerrillas don't come back.

American officers say only about a tenth of the 250,000 residents have returned since fleeing the weeklong battle in November that drove out insurgents who had controlled the predominantly Sunni Muslim city.

Signs scrawled on some houses proclaim "Family leaves here" or "Family in the home," their inept English alerting the Marines that families have moved back in. White banners daubed with similar messages dangle from other homes.

Most buildings also have been marked by the Marines with map grid numbers and symbols denoting whether they have been searched.

With the electric grid still out, generators roar on every corner. Few shops are open. Some vendors sell fruit and vegetables from street stands, and kiosks offer gum.

Marines handed out military rations for weeks after the battle to help the few families in the city get by, but that stopped after the Jan. 30 national election. "They have to get back on their own feet," said 1st Lt. Sven Jensen, leading a patrol from the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines.

The heavily armed Marines do still hand out soccer balls and candy to children.

Checkpoints across Fallujah and around its edges control the flow of the city's people. **Many come back for just a day, to check that their property is still in good order or to inspect any damage.**

Marines are using some damaged buildings abandoned by families. The young Americans lift weights in one. In another, they have laid out a huge map of the city, using bricks to represent each house and building.

There is little activity on the streets. People sit outside their homes talking and watching. Bored Iraqis run outside to watch when tanks grumble past. Children cover their ears against the noise.

Marines patrol the streets constantly to reassure residents and to discourage insurgents. **[This is not a parody or satire. This is actually what this reporter wrote.]**

The Marines pay particular attention to young men who seem not to want to be noticed, pulling them aside to make quick mugshots in case of future troubles.

STUPID LIARS CAUGHT:

Jensen said the U.S. presence is paying off. After the battle, patrols often discovered big caches of weapons, he said. *The haul last week: one automatic weapon found in the trunk of a car.*

[Now check out what another reporter says, the same day, probably on the same little guided tour: "Marines are receiving more local tips about suspects and ordnance; one led to *the discovery last Friday of a hidden cache of mortar rounds, rockets, and 2,000 blasting caps - essential to making roadside bombs.*" Feb 8 Scott Peterson, Christian Science Monitor]

"This is probably the safest city in the country," says US Marine Lt. Col. Keil Gentry, executive officer of Regiment Combat Team 1 (RCT1), that controls Fallujah.

[More from Feb 8 Scott Peterson, Christian Science Monitor]

Among the sullen is Abdulwahid, a teacher who acknowledges that Fallujah is safer - perhaps even one of the safest places in Iraq though he detests the US presence. "We don't fear anything now, but I'll feel safer when the Americans end their occupation," he says in English. He returned three weeks ago to a house with little damage, but won't bring eight remaining family members until it is easier to enter, and the curfews ease.

Was the invasion the right choice? "I ask you the opposite question," says Abdulwahid, who would not give his last name. "If you are in America, and some foreign army comes in your country, are you happy? Can any citizen in the world support an attack on their city?"

Iraqi officials hand out staple foods.... [Oops. Didn't we just read this in the story above: "Marines handed out military rations for weeks after the battle to help the few families in the city get by, but that stopped after the Jan. 30 national election. 'They have to get back on their own feet,'" said 1st Lt. Sven Jensen, leading a patrol from the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines."]

"My children can sleep easier," says Malik Abbas Ali, a father of eight, whose wife stands half hidden at the metal door of their house, a section of white sheet hanging as a flag. "But there is no danger anymore. It is all finished. I am concerned that we still have soldiers around."

Seeing a marine interpreter, another Iraqi comes into the conversation. "Americans are sleeping (in a base) near our house - it's a problem," he says. "When will they leave?"

"You've just elected a new government," replies Capt. Tom Noel, commander of the 3/5 Weapons Company from Lenexa, Kan. "When they ask for US troops to leave, we will leave." [This is not a parody or satire.]

"We're keeping the insurgents out," Captain Noel says later. "(Residents) don't have to worry that someone will break into the house in the middle of the night and shoot them in the back of the head, or drag them off to one of their murder houses." [Repeat, this is not a parody or satire.]

[Famous military victories whose memory will never die and whose victorious commanders will be remembered forever:

Fort Pillow
Guernica
The Warsaw Ghetto
Nanking
Hungary 1956
Masada
Bataan
Falluja]

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

The Truly Incredible Shrinking Voter Turnout

New Statesman, 31 January, 2005

"They all celebrated the great turnout, yet from 95 percent it became 72 percent, then 60 percent, then it went down to 50 percent. **Now the word is that a 30 per cent overall turnout would be satisfactory**

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF AN INTERPRETER

1. LIFE

Coming of Age, From Baghdad to Amman

October 3, 2004 By Jackie Spinner, Washington Post Staff Writer

My American hips weren't cooperating. Iyad, the hunky Jordanian taking pity on me, could see this. My Iraqi translator could see this. In fact, I was certain that everyone in the downtown Amman disco could see that I was a dancing disaster, as Iyad tried to guide me in rhythm to the pumping beat of Arabic pop filling the dark, smoky nightclub.

Everyone else was swaying in graceful circles, shoulders and waists swinging melodically like wind chimes in a gentle breeze. See, like this, my translator instructed,

her body moving in a sensual blur of tight blue jeans and sleeveless black top. She placed my hands on her hips so I could feel the motion. No go. I was still somewhere between Michael Jackson and Doris Day.

My translator, Luma, whose last name is being withheld for her safety, had come with me to Jordan from Baghdad on the quintessential coming-of-age road trip. We were both on a Middle Eastern journey through Jordan for the first time. It was the kind of trip I had taken many times in the United States as a young adult. A friend in the passenger seat. A Big Gulp from 7-Eleven propped up against the gearshift. A bag of peanuts and a six-pack of beer in the back seat. I was 19 when I tasted freedom for the first time, riding off to college without a parent on a southern Illinois highway in my beat-up Honda Civic hatchback.

Luma had to wait until 28 to find her freedom in a rented Nissan on Wadi Araba Road to the Dead Sea.

Until last year, Luma, a vivacious hopeless romantic with an innocent smile, had known life only under deposed dictator Saddam Hussein, who restricted travel outside the country. She had never been on a trip without her mother or a male relative. She had never worn a bathing suit at a beach with both men and women. She had never been to a disco that served alcohol, never swapped telephone numbers with a dance partner, never cranked up the tunes in the car and wasted the cool air-conditioned air with the sunroof open, just because. She had never had a hotel minibar beer.

Taste of Freedom

The first night we were in the Jordanian capital of Amman, she opened the refrigerator of our 10th-floor room at the Four Seasons hotel and discovered a shelf full of beer. We should have one, she declared. No, no, no, I objected. Minibars are really expensive, and the accounting department will see this, and really, we just worked out in the gym. I looked at her eager face, a face that said, "But we're on vacation without our mothers!" We each grabbed a cold one, turned off the lights and sat on the floor to watch the moon rise over the twinkling city.

Jordan is about a four-hour flight from Paris, an easy trip into the well-worn but modern Queen Alia International Airport. In spite of post-9/11 fears about traveling in the Middle East, Jordan is still a welcoming place for Americans. Most young Jordanians speak excellent English, and cab drivers know enough to get you where you want to go. If you get lost in your rental car, however, and your Arabic-speaking translator is pretending she is from Spain and will not let you pull the car over to ask directions because there are religious-looking men on the sidewalk and she is wearing a revealing top, you might end up driving around for two hours in maddening, disorderly traffic unwittingly teaching your translator your best road-rage swear words.

The only option for civilians to fly out of Baghdad when we traveled last month was the expensive (\$1,100 round trip), twice-daily Royal Jordanian flight to Amman, 90 minutes away. (Iraqi Airways just began daily service to Amman for about \$750 round trip.) A week before we left, a plane was fired on by a surface-to-air missile, and the airline temporarily suspended flights. We were on the second flight out since the ban had been lifted. A passenger moving through the security screening banged a piece of luggage against a fiberglass panel. I immediately ducked, as did about five beefy contract

workers. Luma didn't miss a beat in the story she was telling. "Don't worry; it wasn't a mortar," she assured me before picking up where she left off.

This was Luma's first airplane ride, her first exposure to the indignities of the war-on-terrorism airport search. A week earlier she had bribed the woman at the checkpoint to our Baghdad hotel with diet pills to stop touching her "in a bad way." (She also asked her to "stop touching the little one, my friend, the one they call Jackie.") At the airport, Luma set off a walk-through detector. When a security worker asked her to take off her shoes, Luma wouldn't budge. "I know how it is," she told him. "First you ask for the shoes, then the pants! I will not." They waved her through.

In Jordan, I found myself reliving my youth through Luma. We hung out at the food court at the large Mecca Mall in downtown Amman, drank beer in the afternoon, danced until dawn. I indulged her need for Burger King and "American" experiences. She indulged my need for historic sites and the quiet countryside. The beauty of Jordan is that it offers all of the above.

By the Dead Sea

Our main destination in Jordan was the Dead Sea, a place where we could relax and forget about life in Baghdad: the violence, the kidnappings, the car bombs, the translators who have been targeted because they work for Americans. In Iraq, Luma is scared every time there is a knock at the door.

One night when we were hanging out in the swimming pool at our Dead Sea resort, Luma turned to me beaming and asked if I felt happy. "Happy? No, better than happy," I told her. "I feel safe." She nodded, and we leaned our heads back against the tiled pool wall and watched the sun drop behind the mountains in Israel.

We bade goodbye each night to the setting sun from the outdoor pool, which was constructed partially above ground, with water spilling over a back bowl, creating the illusion that you could swim right into the Dead Sea, the famously salty body of water that, at 1,373 feet below sea level, marks the lowest point on Earth not covered with water.

It's a 45-minute drive from Amman, a quick trip by taxi that costs about \$35 one way. We opted against hiring a taxi or a driver because we wanted to make it a true road trip, just two chicks and the open highway. Luma had arranged to borrow a car from an uncle living in Jordan, but the uncle ultimately decided against this because Luma did not have an international driver's license. Not to worry, Luma told me. Her Iraqi friend, Jamal, an engineer living in Jordan for three months, would find us a vehicle. Jamal had a contact at the Avis rental car agency, where we headed to get our wheels, no questions asked. (I didn't have an international driver's license either.) I couldn't understand exactly what was being negotiated at the Avis counter -- the conversation was in Arabic -- but whatever it was it took two hours, and I ultimately signed the contract and handed over my D.C. driver's license and credit card. I had no idea how much it would cost.

Luma plunged the Nissan into the chaotic traffic and we were off, weaving and dodging and honking through the streets of Amman. I crouched in the passenger seat while Luma piloted our great adventure in a vehicle I was responsible for, in a vehicle only I was licensed to drive. As the road opened, revealing the wide brown vista of the Jordan Valley on each side, I opened my eyes and saw that we were now barreling down a hill,

straddling the center lane. "Luma," I asked meekly, "is it difficult to get a driver's license in Iraq?"

"Oh yes," she said.

"The test is hard?"

"Test? There is no test. You pay a bribe. Twenty-five thousand dinars!" (About \$17.)

"Luma," I said quietly, pleading. "You know I never ask anything of you. You know this. But please, I don't care how long it takes us to get to the Dead Sea. Please, please drive the speed limit. . . . Do you know you're driving on the shoulder?"

"What's a shoulder?"

She eventually slowed down, cranked up the radio, and I sat upright again to watch our descent through the valley toward the Dead Sea. The sea is a remarkable place because of its geography and place in biblical history. We were within half a day of the ruins of King Herod's fortress in Machaerus as well as Mount Nebo, where, according to the biblical account, Moses climbed to see the Promised Land before his death.

Luma and I also made the 15-minute trip to Bethany, which claims to be where Jesus was baptized (Israel says he was baptized on the west bank of the Jordan River, within its territory).

My Muslim translator seemed as excited as her Catholic reporter to reach the river water, where we dunked our feet in the murky green liquid and looked out at a short tree line that marked the boundary with Israel. "Can't you just imagine Him walking to this very spot," she said eagerly. We both filled bottles of water to take to our mothers.

A Difficult Homecoming

The Dead Sea resorts are all fairly self-contained. This is not a place where you can walk out and mix with villagers. The other visitors were an odd mix of European travelers, a few stray Baghdad journalists like myself looking for a respite, Iraqi families on vacation out of their country for the first time and conservatively dressed Muslim women with their families.

Luma had her first hangover the next morning.

We spent three days at the Dead Sea, which turned out to be the right amount of time. We could have kept going south toward Petra, the ancient Nabatean city that is Jordan's most popular tourist attraction. Next time, we told ourselves. Instead, we decided to take the long way north back to Amman, up the winding, terrifyingly narrow highway to Mount Nebo and then on to Madaba, famous for its Byzantine mosaics.

As we drove into the city Luma immediately noticed that most of the women wore long dresses and head scarves. She was still in a spaghetti-strap shirt, appropriate at the Dead Sea and the disco in Amman but not Madaba, she concluded.

She reached into her bag to pull on a long-sleeve shirt, and I took off my fishing cap and threw it in the back of the car. "Get out of here as fast as you can," she instructed me, and I floored the Nissan and headed back to the modern city.

I was sun-kissed and rested when we touched down again in Baghdad five days later. I could never have imagined such a journey, this trip with Luma. I had seen the most beautiful sunsets, written in my travel diary by candlelight on a balcony where I could see the flickering lights of Jerusalem across the sea. I climbed Mount Nebo with my Muslim translator to one of the holiest places in Christendom, a place where both sought peace. I had watched Luma live.

"Welcome to Baghdad," the flight attendant chirped. Luma scowled. "Don't welcome me home," she said.

An hour later we climbed into the armored car that would take us back to our drab hotel. I sat in the back and watched the grim postwar landscape pass us by -- the wreckage, the dusty terrain, the garbage piled up against barbed wire. In the passenger seat, Luma blinked back tears.

"I hate this country," she said. "Look at the tanks. Look at the guard rails," which were mangled by roadside bombs. "I just want to close my eyes and someone will wake me up in the morning and say, 'Come on, here is your flight.' I don't want to be here. I just want to live normal."

On our last night in Amman, I had discovered Luma dancing in our hotel room, the curtains open, the sounds of the city filtering through the cracked window, the sound of a life she wanted. She looked so happy, so free, dancing in her jeans and baby blue T-shirt.

This had been a vacation for me, something altogether different for Luma. We had traveled the same road but we had not had the same journey.

Sometimes you go away and you disappear into a place until you feel so much a part of it that you don't want to come home. Sometimes you have no choice. I thought of this, as I listened to her cry. There was nothing I could say.

Epilogue: Two weeks after returning to Iraq, Luma quit her job as a translator. And just like that, she disappeared back into her mother's fold. She did not even call to say goodbye.

2. DEATH

Two Soldiers Sentenced In Interpreter's Death

January 23, 2005; Page A20 By Doug Struck, Washington Post Foreign Service. Correspondent Jackie Spinner contributed to this report.

BAGHDAD, Jan. 22 -- Two U.S. soldiers were sentenced to prison terms Saturday for the shooting death of an Iraqi interpreter in November at an army base in Baghdad. One of the soldiers said that he and his colleague had been "joking and horseplaying" with the translator when the trigger was pulled on a pistol pointed at her head. The soldiers said they did not realize the gun was loaded.

Spec. Charley L. Hooser, 28, of Midland, Tex., received a three-year term for involuntary manslaughter and filing a false report. Spec. Rami M. Dajani, 24, a Palestinian who attended school in the United States and served as an interpreter, was sentenced to 18 months for being an accessory after the fact and for filing a false report. Both men were ordered demoted to the rank of private and dishonorably discharged.

The soldiers had originally told investigators that the interpreter, identified in court as Luma Hadi, 28, had accidentally shot herself, according to testimony at a courts-martial Saturday at Camp Victory near Baghdad. Both men pleaded guilty to the charges in an agreement with Army prosecutors and offered tearful apologies for the incident before they were sentenced.

Hadi, who formerly worked as an interpreter for The Washington Post, was the mother of a 6-year-old girl. According to Edell, U.S. authorities paid the family \$25,000 in compensation for her death.

Hadi's family did not attend the court session because it was too dangerous to travel there, her brother, Ali, said. The family's name is being withheld to protect their safety. Families of Iraqis who work with countries that are part of the occupation are often the target of attacks in Iraq.

When Ali heard the news of Hooser's sentence, he broke down in tears and said he was surprised the soldier had been sentenced to time in prison. "I am happy, because he was punished by the law," he said, "but I am sad because I remember my sister."

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

U.S. Blasts Human Rights Panel Selection

[Thanks to PB who sent this in. He writes: Hey assholes, what about Saudi Arabia?]

Feb 8 By GEORGE GEDDA, Associated press Writer

WASHINGTON - The State Department denounced on Tuesday the selection of Cuba and Zimbabwe for a panel that will decide on the agenda for a meeting of the U.N. Human Rights Commission next month.

"The United States believes that countries that routinely and systematically violate the rights of their citizens should not be selected to review the human rights performance of other countries," State Department press office Tom Casey said.

Besides Cuba and Zimbabwe, the other members of the so-called "Working Group on Situations" are Hungary, the Netherlands *and Saudi Arabia*.

Inaugural Balls: "You're Out Of Here"

February 02, 2005 Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Forwarded from networker Ward Reilly to all on VVAWNET: [no publishing date provided...list moderator]

By Paul Farhi (c) 2005, The Washington Post

But now the art of press handling has evolved into actual manhandling. The Bush administration has expanded the use of "minders," government employees or volunteers who escort journalists from interview to interview within a venue or at a newsworthy event.

Several reporters covering the balls were surprised to find themselves being monitored Soviet-style by young "escorts" who followed them from hors d'oeuvres table to dance floor and even to the bathroom.

As I was dictating from my notes, something flashed across my face and neatly snatched my cell phone from of my hand. I looked up to confront a middle-aged woman, her faced afire with rage. "You ignored the rules, and I'm throwing you out!" she barked, snapping my phone shut. "You told that girl you didn't need an escort. That's a lie! You're out of here!"

No, the minders weren't there to monitor me.

They were there to let the guests, my sources on inaugural night, know that any complaint, any unguarded statement, any off-the-reservation political observation, would be noted.

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