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IRAQ WAR REPORTS:

U.S. Soldier Killed In Talafar, Two Wounded

05 January 2005 Aljazeera

An American soldier was killed and two others were wounded when their patrol came under fire in northern Iraq, the US military said on Wednesday.

It said armed fighters attacked the patrol with guns and rocket-propelled grenades in Talafar, near the northern city of Mosul, at about 2pm (1100GMT) on Tuesday.

US Helicopters Bomb University In Arbil

05 January 2005 Aljazeera

Four Iraqis have been injured after US helicopters bombed residential buildings in the northern Iraqi city of Arbil, Aljazeera has learned.

Aljazeera's correspondent in Iraq's Kurdistan, Ahmad al-Zawiti, said **the bombing on Wednesday damaged the building where students of Salah al-Din University live, in the Sidawa neighbourhood.**

He said the building and other nearby houses were set ablaze, adding that some nearby cars were also damaged.

Four students were injured in the two-hour-long strike, officials said. The attack came after a US helicopter had come under fire from the same area, witnesses said.

Fighting In Ramadi

05 January 2005 Aljazeera & By DUSAN STOJANOVIC, Associated Press Writer

An exchange of fire in central Ramadi city came after a US military patrol came under rocket-propelled grenade and machine gun attacks by unidentified fighters, Aljazeera learned.

Dr. Riyad al-Hiti at the hospital in Ramadi, 60 miles west of Baghdad, said four Iraqi civilians were killed and two injured when U.S. soldiers opened fire after rebels detonated a bomb near a convoy and opened fire.

Notes From A Lost War:

Disaster; "When We Do This," He Said, "We Lose."

With insurgents reported to be dispensing criminal justice and levying taxes, some American officers say they run a "parallel administration". Last month in Mosul, insurgents are reported to have beheaded three professional kidnappers and to have manned road checkpoints dressed in stolen police uniforms. In Tal Afar, farther west, insurgents imposed a 25% cut in the price of meat.

Dec 29th 2004 The Economist

THERE is only one traffic law in Ramadi these days: when Americans approach, Iraqis scatter. Horns blaring, brakes screaming, the midday traffic skids to the side of the road as a line of Humvee jeeps ferrying American marines rolls the wrong way up the main street.

Every vehicle, that is, except one beat-up old taxi. Its elderly driver, flapping his outstretched hand, seems, amazingly, to be trying to turn the convoy back. Gun turrets swivel and lock on to him, as a hefty marine sergeant leaps into the road, levels an assault rifle at his turbanned head, and screams: "Back this bitch up, motherfucker!"

The old man should have read the bilingual notices that American soldiers tack to their rear bumpers in Iraq: "Keep 50m or deadly force will be applied".

In Ramadi, the capital of central Anbar province, where 17 suicide-bombs struck American forces during the month-long Muslim fast of Ramadan in the autumn, the marines are jumpy.

Sometimes, they say, they fire on vehicles encroaching within 30 metres, sometimes they fire at 20 metres: "If anyone gets too close to us we fucking waste them," says a bullish lieutenant. "It's kind of a shame, because it means we've killed a lot of innocent people."

And not all of them were in cars. **Since discovering that roadside bombs, known as Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), can be triggered by mobile telephones, marines say they shoot at any Iraqi they see handling a phone near a bomb-blast.** Bystanders to an insurgent ambush are also liable to be killed. Sometimes, the marines say they hide near the body of a dead insurgent and kill whoever comes to collect it. According to the marine lieutenant: **"It gets to a point where you can't wait to see**

guys with guns, so you start shooting everybody...It gets to a point where you don't mind the bad stuff you do."

Since September 1st, when the battalion's 800 men were deployed to Ramadi, they have killed 400-500 people, according to one of their senior officers. A more precise estimate is impossible, because the marines rarely see their attackers. When fired upon, they retaliate by blitzing whichever buildings they think the fire is coming from: charred shells now line Ramadi's main streets.

"Sometimes it works in the insurgents' favour," admits Rick Sims, a chief warrant officer. "Because by the time we've shot up the neighbourhood, then the guys have torn up a few houses, they're four blocks away, and we just end up pissing off the locals."

In Ramadi, the marines have rewritten their training manual for urban warfare. Having been taught to seize towns methodically, block by block—a method more appropriate to Stalingrad than Baghdad—they have learned to patrol at high speed and on foot, sending snipers on to the rooftops ahead, along streets littered with bomb debris and daubed with hostile slogans: "Slow Daeth [sic]" and "America down".

In Fallujah, 40 miles (64km) east of Ramadi, the marines who survived the fierce assault on the town in November have a sardonic acronym for the skills it taught them: FISH, or Fighting In Someone's House. FISH involves throwing a hand grenade into each room before checking it for unfriendlies, or "Muj", short for mujahideen, as the marines call them.

Yet armies can be good at war-fighting or good at peacekeeping but rarely good at both. And when America's well-drilled and well-fed fighters attempt subtler tasks than killing people, problems arise. At peacekeeping, peace-enforcing or policing, call it what you will, they are often inept. Even the best of them seem ignorant of the people whose land they are occupying —unsurprisingly, perhaps, when practically no American fighters speak Arabic. **And, typically, the marine battalion in Ramadi has only four translators.** Often American troops despair of their Iraqi interlocutors, observing that they "are not like Americans".

American marines and GIs frequently display contempt for Iraqis, civilian or official. Thus the 18-year-old Texan soldier in Mosul who, confronted by jeering schoolchildren, shot canisters of buckshot at them from his grenade-launcher. "It's not good, dude, it could be fatal, but you gotta do it," he explained.

Or the marines in Ramadi who, on a search for insurgents, kicked in the doors of houses at random, in order to scream, in English, at trembling middle-aged women within: "Where's your black mask?" and "Bitch, where's the guns?" In one of these houses was a small plastic Christmas tree, decorated with silver tinsel. "That tells us the people here are OK," said Corporal Robert Joyce.

According to army literature, American soldiers should deliver the following message before searching a house: "We are sorry for the inconvenience, but we must search your house to make sure you are safe from anti-Iraqi forces [AIF]." In fact, many Iraqis are probably more scared of American troops than of insurgents.

With insurgents reported to be dispensing criminal justice and levying taxes, some American officers say they run a "parallel administration". Last month in Mosul, insurgents are reported to have beheaded three professional kidnappers and to have manned road checkpoints dressed in stolen police uniforms. In Tal Afar, farther west, insurgents imposed a 25% cut in the price of meat.

American military-intelligence officers admit their assessments are often little better than guesses. They have but a hazy idea of when and by whom the insurgency was planned, how many dedicated fighters and foreign fighters it involves, who they are, or how much support they command.

In bold contrast to his masters in Washington, General George W. Casey Jr, the commander-in-chief of coalition forces in Iraq, credits foreigners with a minimal role in the insurgency. Of over 2,000 men detained during the fighting in Fallujah, fewer than 30 turned out to be non-Iraqi.

It is impossible to measure the insurgents' power with much accuracy. Official American reports are absurdly sunny, prone to focus on deliveries of footballs to Baghdad's slums rather than attacks on army patrols. American figures for reconstruction projects are often exaggerated. A huge hitch is that diplomats and non-Iraqi journalists can travel freely hardly anywhere in Iraq outside the Kurdish north for fear of being kidnapped and killed.

Midway through the past year—in July, in Ramadi—the insurgents began increasingly to seek softer targets, especially Iraqi security forces, Iraqis working for coalition forces, American supply convoys and the oil infrastructure.

In November, one in four American supply convoys was ambushed.

Three months ago, American officials overseeing reconstruction in Mosul were lobbied by 30 Iraqi contractors in an average day; now, they struggle to find even one brave enough to accept their dollars.

A low helicopter flight over the Kirkuk oilfield, Iraq's second-biggest, presented a scene from the Book of Revelation: each of seven oil wells was marked by a tower of orange flame, meeting in a canopy of dense black smoke.

Barely six months ago, Mosul was one of the most tranquil spots in Iraq. Now it is one of the most violent, and least policed. It may be no coincidence that, until last January, around 20,000 American troops were billeted in and around the city. **With troops urgently required elsewhere, they were replaced by 8,500 soldiers, around 700 of whom were diverted to Fallujah and Baghdad.**

Thus harried, American commanders have abandoned the pretence of winning the love of Iraqis ahead of the scheduled vote. "Our broad intent is to keep pressure on the insurgents as we head into elections," **says General Casey. "This is not about winning hearts and minds; we're not going to do that here in Iraq."**

In Ramadi, for example though the city has more than 4,000 police, they refuse to work alongside American forces. According to the marines, the police's sole act of co-operation is to collect wounded insurgents from their base.

For most of the past four months, Anbar has had no provincial administration, since the governor resigned after his children were kidnapped. Elsewhere, America's forces are incapable of giving Iraqis the security they crave because, quite simply, there aren't enough of them.

Consider western Ninewa, a vast desert area dotted with fiercely xenophobic towns and ending in over 200 miles of unfenced border with Syria. America has 800 soldiers there. Yet they are barely able to subjugate the town of Tal Afar, outside which they are based.

In September, American forces fought a battle (in style, a prelude to the retaking of Fallujah) to wrest it back from insurgent control. Over 80 civilians were killed in the crossfire and 200 buildings flattened. In November, insurgents blew up the town's police stations. The local police chief and his bodyguards are the only police still working; he changes his disguise several times a day.

Little surprise that the Americans had not visited the nearby town of Baij in force for three months, until they rode there one recent night in a convoy of 1,000 troops, with Apache attack helicopters flying overhead.

The target was three houses in the town centre which signal intelligence had linked to Mr Zarqawi's group. The Americans had no further intelligence to support their mission except that provided by an informant from the local Ayzidi tribe, America's main ally in the area. This source claimed there was a wounded Yemeni rebel in the town. **“I think it should be a great operation,” said Colonel Robert Brown, beforehand. “I think a lot of folks from Fallujah have gone there and we need to go there.”**

There was no one in the three targeted houses bar women and children. Baij's police station had been blown up and its police had fled.

The town's English-speaking former mayor, Abdullah Fahad, was frank about the town's allegiances. “There are terrorists here, not from Syria, not from Mosul, but from Baij. Some are Baathists and some are Islamists and before they hated each other but now they work together, and they tell people that if they don't work with them they will kill them.”

Mr Fahad, who claimed to have survived several assassination attempts and whose son had been kidnapped, refused to help the Americans on the grounds that he would be murdered if he did. When the American commander offered to protect him, he replied: “Thank you, but you are not always here. This is the first time I have ever seen you.” Whereupon the American troops labelled Mr Fahad a “bad guy”, and debated whether to detain him.

Instead, they detained 70 men from districts identified by their informant as “bad”. In near-freezing conditions, they sat hooded and bound in their pajamas.

They shivered uncontrollably.

One wetted himself in fear.

Most had been detained at random; several had been held because they had a Kalashnikov rifle, which is legal.

The evidence against one man was some anti-American literature, a meat cleaver and a tin whistle. American intelligence officers moved through the ranks of detainees, raising their hoods to take mugshots: “One, two, three, jihaaad!” A middle-tier officer commented on the mission: “When we do this,” he said, “we lose.

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.

TROOP NEWS

U.S. Troops Prefer Indonesian Aid To Iraq War: "At Least Here We Know It's For A Good Cause.”

[Thanks to John Gingerich, Vets For Peace, who sent this in.]

Jan 4 By Jeff Franks ABOARD THE USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN (Reuters)

U.S. military crews are launching more than 100 helicopter flights a day from the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln ferrying food, water and medicine to tsunami victims, a task they say is far more satisfactory than the Iraq war that seems only to destroy.

"Oh yeah, no doubt," said U.S. Navy helicopter pilot Rachel Brainard. "Here we're helping people, not destroying things."

War supporters predicted Iraqis would be so happy to get rid of Saddam they would greet U.S. soldiers as conquering heroes, but instead violent Iraqi resistance has bogged down the U.S.-led effort.

"At least here we know it's for a good cause. In Iraq we don't know what the outcome is going to be," said Airman Kimberly Kolar.

"I don't feel like I've done anything this meaningful in my life," said Airman Carlos Lobo after a day working onshore in Indonesia to deliver aid.

Army "Medicine"

From: Allan Zirlin, Morton Grove IL
To: GI Special
Sent: Wednesday, January 05, 2005 3:21 PM
Subject: Army "Medicine"

The story about the soldier with the injured knee being forced to serve in Iraq reminded me of what happened to me during my time as a draftee in the Army in 1957-59.

After many trips riding in the back bed of a pickup truck, I developed a pilonidal cyst, a very painful swelling at the base of the spine near the tailbone. I went to sick bay and they decided to open it up and drain it. Minor surgery as surgeries go.

The problem was that the doctor who wielded the scalpel did so without the benefit of anesthesia. He just told me to hold on real hard to the table while he made his incision. It was like being hit by lightning. After that I had to go at least weekly to have an orderly re-open the wound for further draining.

The icing on the cake was when I asked why they couldn't operate and remove the cyst. The doctor flat-out told me it was because I was a draftee and not regular army and the army didn't want to invest time and money on someone who was going to leave shortly.

This all happened at White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico, which only had rudimentary medical facilities. Serious medical problems were sent to nearby Fort Bliss, Wm. Beaumont Army Hospital.

At the time I could scarcely believe it, but as it fades with the passing of time I understand the small-mindedness of the military.

I guess nothing much has changed.

Witless Assholes In Command Censor Marez Doc

[THANKS TO B WHO E-MAILED THIS IN: B WRITES: Brass trying to cover its ass.]

PHILADELPHIA - **A military doctor whose Web site chronicled the bloody aftermath of the suicide bombing of a mess tent in Iraq has shut down the site after being told his postings violated Army regulations.**

In an e-mail from Iraq on Tuesday, **Maj. Michael Cohen, a doctor with the 67th Combat Support Hospital unit, said he received a written warning but was not told which Army regulations were being violated. [Hey that's easy; the regulations against telling the truth.]**

A short notice replaced the account on Cohen's site, www.67cshdocs.com.

"Levels above me have ordered, yes ORDERED, me to shut down this website. They cite that the information contained in these pages violates several Army Regulations. I certainly disagree with this," it said.

On his Web log, Cohen had described the chaotic scene after the Dec. 21 mess hall bombing in which 22 people died. **He reported that eventually there were more wounded than emergency room beds.**

Lt. Col. Steven Boylan, a spokesman for coalition forces in Iraq, said he could not confirm the investigation into Cohen's blog.

He said the Pentagon allows blogs that do not disrupt unit discipline, make statements on behalf of commanders or the Army, or reveal details that could aid attackers.

"Sometimes a blog might contain subtle nuances from which you can put together a complete picture of our operations, which insurgents can use to attack us," Boylan said.

[This shit-brained asshole is apparently unaware that with millions of Iraqis hating the occupation of their country by Bush, and giving every scrap of information they can to the resistance, the idea that anything at all is secret about occupation operations is drooling idiocy.

[And wow, what a secret it is that the dining tent at Marez got wasted! "Hey, my brother, did you ever find out how we did on that Mosul dining tent attack?" "Why no, Rashid, those clever Americans closed down the blog we depended on for our information, especially those subtle nuances!" "Curses, foiled again!" This command is too stupid to run a clown show. Their only talent is for slaughtering their own troops, in this instance, by not dispersing troops at meal time.]

Since his blog went off-line last week, Cohen, 35, said he has received about 150 e-mails urging him to restore his account of his year as a surgeon at Forward Operating Base Marez.

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER

Telling the truth - about the occupation, the cuts to veterans' benefits, or the dangers of depleted uranium - is the first reason Traveling Soldier is necessary. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance - whether it's in the streets of Baghdad, New York, or inside the armed forces. Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties working-class people

inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize resistance within the armed forces. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers. http://www.traveling-soldier.org/ And join with Iraq War vets in the call to end the occupation and bring our troops home now! (www.ivaw.net)

Army Hands Out $100 Million To Ad Agency For Six Months Work

[Families have to mail socks, toothpaste, etc. etc. to soldiers in Iraq, while the Army tosses out $100 million to an ad agency. Who is the enemy? Where is the war? Three guesses. And "Iraq" is the answer only for the few remaining dimwits. Bring the war home now.]

January 05, 2005 By Jane McHugh, Army Times staff writer

The Army has put off deciding whether to retain its advertising agency for another year and instead signed the firm on for another six months. The Army will pay Leo Burnett USA $100 million for that six-month stint, Army Public Affairs announced Monday.

Grieving Families With Unanswered Questions; "I Don't Trust Them At All Anymore"

[PART 2 Thanks to John Gingerich, Vets For Peace, for sending this in.]

12/10/04 By Russell Carollo, Mike Wagner, Mehul Srivastava and Ken McCall, "Dayton Daily News"

Cpl. Kenneth J. Bergin was on his way to tell another Marine about a movie when he heard a gunshot and rushed into the barracks room near the Iraqi city of Najaf.

"I saw shocked Marines standing inside," Bergin said in a handwritten statement to investigators about the death of 19-year-old Pfc. Ryan R. Cox of Derby, Kan. "I saw Cox lying on his side on the floor. I then yelled out (to) get a corpsman, then proceeded to find out what had happened.

"I then jumped down to my knees and asked Cox what happened. He didn't really give an answer. All I saw was a look of pain on his face. Then, all of a sudden, Cox spit blood out of his mouth."

A lengthy investigative report provided to the Cox family says he was shot by another soldier. The Daily News examination found that three other cases termed noncombat deaths by the military involved soldiers shooting soldiers. In those cases, as with the Cox case, Department of Defense press releases don't identify a specific cause.

Asked to confirm that Cox was shot by another soldier, Capt. Chad Walton, a Marine spokesman, said he couldn't confirm a cause of death until the investigation is complete. Told that the father confirmed the cause and that the death occurred nearly 18 months ago, Walton said, "Sometimes even though it seems like it's been awhile, the things they tell the parent are not the things that they are going to officially release."

The Naval Criminal Investigative Service report says that Cox hit another Marine, Pfc. Jeffrey S. Kenyon, with a fly swatter as the two were "joking around."

The report says Kenyon, a friend of Cox's, then picked up his M-16 rifle, which did not have a magazine in it, pointed it at Cox, turned off the safety and pulled the trigger. In a written statement to investigators, Kenyon said he thought the chamber was empty and expected to hear a "click."

Instead, the report says, a bullet hit Cox in the abdomen.

"I dropped the weapon and ran outside the room," Kenyon told investigators. "People were running around getting higher-ups and medical staff. I sat there in shock."

Kenyon pleaded guilty to charges of involuntary manslaughter, dereliction of duty, failure to obey a lawful order and negligent discharge of a firearm, and was sentenced to three years in prison.

A pretrial report says that Kenyon "has shown little to no remorse."

"I would not expect this type of response from anyone who just ended the life of a good friend," the report says.

In virtually all cases examined by the Daily News, the causes of the noncombat deaths were directly or indirectly linked to the unusual circumstances and pressures created by the war.

Army Sgt. Linda C. Jimenez, 39, of Brooklyn, N.Y., died Nov. 7, 2003, at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., but the chain of events that led to her death began thousands of miles away in Iraq.

Jimenez, taking a break from her duties in Iraq, was shopping with a couple of friends when she fell into a bomb crater, according to her father, Angelo Cruz.

"Her friends got too far ahead of her or something and she went rushing to catch up with them, and she didn't see the hole," Angelo Cruz said.

She broke her nose and injured her knee. Her injuries weren't serious, but while getting medical treatment in Germany, she developed a blood clot that caused her to lapse into a coma.

"That blood clot should not have happened," Angelo Cruz said. "The doctors were incompetent. They should have prevented it with blood thinners or caught it right when it happened."

The military told Angelo Cruz to come to Walter Reed immediately because his daughter had 72 hours to live. He stayed with her until she died.

"It's been a year now, and I just want to try to move forward," Angelo Cruz said. "I miss her."

In Iraq, where as much as 40 percent of the deployments are National Guardsmen and reservists, more than a third of the noncombat deaths involved soldiers 21 and younger. At least 85 deaths, or three in 10, were soldiers 30 or older. About 2 percent were 50 or older.

During the Vietnam War, when hundreds of thousands of teenage draftees were sent to Southeast Asia, more than 60 percent of all deaths involved soldiers 21 and younger, and only one in 10 was a soldier 30 or older. Less than one-quarter of 1 percent were 50 or older.

"I think the reality is that a large percentage of people serving in Iraq never thought that they would have to go to war, didn't prepare to go to war or go to war for so long," said Jonathan Becker, dean of international studies at Bard College in Annandale, N.Y.

"And the effects of that are tremendous in terms of whether they can handle the military engagements in Iraq or the domestic pressures caused from their absences. It all adds to the pressure of what is happening in Iraq."

Lisa Ann Sherman blames the heat, lack of good nutrition and other pressures in Iraq for the death of her husband, Lt. Col. Anthony L. Sherman, 43, who died of a heart attack.

Sherman, who had been in the military since he was 18, controlled his high cholesterol in the United States through diet and exercise. During his eight months in Iraq, the weather made it difficult for him to exercise, and he was forced to eat a diet loaded with high sodium and fatty foods.

Those conditions along with the high temperatures and high stress, Sherman said, combined to cause her husband's heart attack. An autopsy found three of his major arteries fully blocked.

Poor decisions, made under the pressures of war, and carelessness caused other deaths.

Nina Schrage said her son, 20-year-old Cpl. Dustin H. Schrage of Brevard, Fla., should never have been sent on the mission that caused his drowning and that of another Marine.

Her son was one of six Marines sent on a covert mission to swim across a channel to a tiny island in the Euphrates River. Intelligence reports warned that insurgents were using islands in the area to hide weapons and as mortar firing positions, according to a Marines report obtained by the family.

Because they were so close to the island, Schrage's mother believes the Marines could have used boats instead. In addition, she said, the swim fins the Marines used in training weren't shipped to them in Iraq, they hadn't had swim training in a year, their swim vests weren't working properly and they had never trained to swim across a river, especially one with such unusual currents.

"They weren't prepared for it," she said. "My son got completely sucked down.

"The only thing I want right now is for them to tell me, 'You were right.' I want them to tell me they learned something from this. But to do that, they would have to admit they were wrong, and they're not going to do that."

In suicide cases, too, the pressures caused by the war appeared to play a role.

Sgt. Landis W. Garrison, 23, of Rapids City, Ill., died April 29, not long after learning his Illinois National Guard unit's deployment had been extended for up to six months.

"They were in Kuwait waiting to come home when they were extended, and it happened only two days after they arrived back to the post where they were going to be," said his mother, Leah Garrison, who said the family is not convinced it was suicide.

"They were all very upset (about being redeployed)," she said. "They had already been gone for over a year."

Sandra Shull thinks the pressures of the deployment played a direct role in the death of her son, Capt. James. A. Shull, 32, of California.

Capt. Shull had stayed up all night Nov. 16, 2003, helping one of his soldiers cope with marital and other personal problems, she said. The next day, that same soldier forgot to put the safety on a .50-caliber machine gun that was pointed in Shull's direction. The gun went off accidentally, striking Shull in the head, his mother said.

"And just like that, we lost our James, and three beautiful children lost their father," she said.

Like a number of relatives of soldiers whose deaths were listed as "noncombat," Shirley Bates of Bellaire has had trouble getting answers.

"I don't think the Army is being honest with us," said Bates, whose grandson, Spc. Todd Bates, died Dec. 10, 2003, when he and another soldier from the 135th Military Police Company of Cleveland went overboard in an Iraqi patrol boat.

As with other families, the Bates family has heard several accounts of the events leading up to Bates' death. One account says Bates dove into the Tigris River to save Staff Sgt. Aaron Reese, who also drowned.

In another, a witness alleged he heard three gunshots around the time the men were in the water. In still another, the Iraqi boat driver, the only other person in the boat, saw Bates resurface as he held onto something in the water, only to drop down after the boat driver's glove slipped off as he tried to pull him on board.

Adding to the family's suspicion, Shirley Bates said, was the fact that her grandson's body wasn't found until 13 days after he apparently drowned and that a military escort refused to allow family members and even the funeral home director to see the body after it was flown back to Ohio.

"It wasn't right for them to do that," Shirley Bates said. "It made it seem like they were hiding something.

"I am going to find out what really happened to him no matter what."

In a number of cases, families said, the military did little to ease the additional suffering caused by the uncertainty of what happened to their loved ones. Several families said the military never told them that they could make official requests for records under the Freedom of Information Act, a federal law requiring agencies to release records, and that they only learned they could do so from reporters.

Like Bates, Kim Jordan of Idaho has heard different and conflicting stories about how her husband died.

First, she was told that her husband, Sgt. Curt E. Jordan, 25, died of inhaling fumes from a mine-sweeping operation. Then, she said, she was told that he might have inhaled ammonia fumes. Eventually she got the official version: He choked on a cookie and became asphyxiated. As with other deaths, the official news release issued by the military is less detailed, stating only that Jordan "died of noncombat injuries."

Doris Normandy of Eden, Vt., suspects that the military is hiding something about the death of her son.

Sgt. William J. Normandy, 42, died March 15 during physical training at Camp Virginia, Iraq, just north of Kuwait City. Normandy said the military told her that he died of a heart attack, but she has asked for a complete investigation.

Like other families, Normandy has been waiting months for an official report on the death of her son, a school bus driver and custodian who was sent to Iraq with his National Guard Unit from Vermont.

"I wanted a complete investigation, which I had been promised and promised and promised, and it never arrived," she said. "I don't know why they're keeping that investigation from me.

"If they're not hiding anything, what is the problem?"

Domenica Columbus of Carriere, Miss., said she waited 16 months to get the Army's report on the apparent drowning of her son, Spc. John K. Klinesmith. The report finally came, Columbus said, after she contacted Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y.; her own senator, Trent Lott, R-Miss.; her state representative; and a private organization for families of deceased military personnel.

Columbus said her son returned from a mission in 130-degree heat in Fallujah on June 12, 2003, and decided to go for a swim. He wasn't noticed missing for nearly six hours, and his body wasn't found until the next day.

"I have found all I will find out because the Army will not say otherwise," Columbus said. "Once they have put something on ink, I can't go over there and investigate. I wouldn't know how."

The family of 18-year-old Matthew G. Milczark of Kettle River, Minn., is still waiting for information about his death.

His uncle, Scott Milczark, said Matthew died March 8, 2004, about two weeks after arriving in Kuwait, and the family was initially told he likely committed suicide.

More than half of the soldiers sent to the Iraq war who took their own lives did so within the first 90 days in the war area — 25 percent within the first 30 days, the Army surgeon general's report found.

Milczark said the family still doesn't know what specific type of gun was used.

"I understand that they would investigate no matter what, but I don't understand why it would take six-to-eight months or whatever to come up with a conclusion of suicide," he said. "We're at a point now where I don't know that we'll believe what we hear anyway.

"I'm getting the feeling that we're not going to get the truth."

The minute Gary Coleman spotted the car carrying men in uniform pulling into his driveway in Pikeville, Ky., he knew what it meant.

"Two officers got out, one on each side of the car," said Sandy Newsom, who is dating the father of Army Cpl. Brent Coleman. "They came to the door, removed their hat and said, `We regret to inform you that Gary Brent Coleman was killed in duty.'

"Gary knew what it was as soon as he saw the car coming. He said, `Oh my God, it's Brent.' "

For families already devastated by the loss of a loved one, the uncertainty of not knowing what happened thousands of miles away, the struggle for answers and the inability to do anything about it can bring additional pain.

A military news release says Coleman, 24, was killed when his Humvee flipped over into a canal, trapping him inside.

The family still isn't sure exactly what happened, whether he was in pursuit of another vehicle at the time, whether rain played a role in the crash, whether the darkness contributed to his death.

"I still don't think anyone really knows what happened with the accident," Newsom said. "This has been so, so hard for the family."

As a high school football player in Kentucky, Coleman shot through opposing defenses so quickly he earned the nickname "Rocket." He enlisted in the Army, at his dad's insistence, following a brief stint at Marshall University.

Three weeks before leaving for Iraq, he married Kirsten Stinley without telling his family beforehand. The accident occurred six days before he was scheduled to come home, and the family had already put out welcome home banners.

"We talked just a few days before he died," his father said. "I told him to just slow down over there and keep his head down. All I cared about was just getting him back alive.

"My life just doesn't mean much anymore with Brent gone. I can't tell you how hard it is to know my son is not going to be with me anymore."

Gary Coleman said he hasn't been able to work in the year since his son died. He's living on disability.

"Losing Brent has darn near killed Gary," Newsom said. "It's so sad."

Crystal Ware, 19, of Bellaire knew when she was pulled out of her high school classroom and saw her mother waiting that something had happened to her boyfriend, 20-year-old Spec. Todd Bates.

"I just started crying, and I couldn't stop. I couldn't believe it," Ware recalled.

Ware and Bates had dated for four years, dreaming of one day escaping the poverty in the Ohio River town just west of Wheeling, W.Va.

"He was the kind of guy any girl would dream of having as a husband," said Ware, who became engaged to Bates as a freshman in high school. "He was good-looking, smart, loved his family and would do anything for anybody.

"He didn't have much, but he made the best of what he did have."

They planned to have children together. "I just wanted to have a little boy that was like Todd," Ware said.

Before he left for Iraq, Bates insisted that he and Ware watch We Were Soldiers, a Mel Gibson movie about a fierce battle during the early days of the Vietnam War.

"It made me scared, and then the nightmare happened to my Todd," Ware said, crying on and off during the interview.

Ware, like Bates' family, is suspicious about the circumstances and the uncertainty surrounding his drowning.

"He was in a dangerous place and something else could have happened that the military doesn't want us to know," she said.

Joseph Maglione Sr. of York, Pa., remembers the day his ex-wife called to tell him the Marines were on their way to her house. They both knew it was about their son, 22-year-old Lance Cpl. Joseph B. Maglione, and they knew the news wasn't good.

"It was so shocking," Maglione recalled. "The pain is just unbelievable."

Maglione and his wife learned that their son committed suicide on April 1, 2003.

An investigative report found that he had showed signs of emotional problems before, and the parents couldn't understand why the Marines still gave him a choice to stay with his unit.

"Even the investigating officer said the situation was handled very, very poorly," Maglione said. "I don't understand why they would give him the choice to go or not, especially if he is showing the signs. I can't tell you the devastation that this puts us through. I cried for a year."

Daughters Miss Their Dad; Wounded Penobscot Soldier Still Unconscious

01/05/05 Ellsworth American, Inc

PENOBSCOT — The condition of Sgt. Harold Gray of Penobscot, who is in the intensive care unit at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, is unchanged.

Gray was flown to the Washington, D.C., hospital last Wednesday after he was wounded in Mosul, Iraq, when a roadside bomb hit a convoy in which he had been riding. The soldier suffered injuries to his head and arm.

“According to the neurosurgeon, his condition is unchanged,” said Jessica Gray, Gray’s former wife and the mother of his three daughters.

An operation on Gray’s arm was successful but he has since developed an infection, according to Jessica Gray.

Gray is no longer in an induced coma but has been medicinally sedated, she said.

“We really, really love him,” Natalie Gray said Tuesday. She will turn 8 on Sunday.

“And it’s hard because he’s in a really, really bad situation,” said Mercedes Gray, 5.

The girls, along with youngest daughter Isabelle, 3, have had lots of fun with their dad.

Gray would take them on walks in the woods. They said he had shown them how to raise geese, pigs and chickens. Once, the family rescued a baby turkey found at a ballfield.

“He used to read us ‘Blueberries for Sal,’” Natalie said.

The girls last spoke to their father about a month ago, said Jessica Gray.

They last saw him last fall when he was home for a two-week leave.

“We had a lot of fun when he came,” Natalie said. The girls did not know he was coming home and were overjoyed at the surprise.

Sgt. Gray surprised Natalie at Penobscot School, where she is in the second grade.

He surprised Mercedes and Isabelle at home.

“I almost started crying,” Mercedes said. “But when I saw him I was quite happy. Isabelle was shy because he didn’t look like himself.”

Sgt. Gray did not look like himself with a close-cropped military haircut.

“I like him when he’s bald, he looks like Major Payne,” said Natalie.

The girls say their dad likes to race cars at the speedway.

“When he comes home, I think he’s going to take us to the races,” Mercedes said. “He’s going to keep that promise. He told me he would.”

The Northern Bay Market in Penobscot is giving out yellow ribbons for Sgt. Gray.

Wounded Soldier's Family Glad To Have Him Home: He Doesn't Want His Little Brother In The Army.

Jan. 05, 2005 BY PHYLLIS JACOBS GRIEKSPOOR, The Wichita Eagle

It took a minute for Pfc. Anthony Thompson to realize what had knocked him off his feet.

"I just laid there. One minute I was patrolling this neighborhood, and the next I was laying on the ground," said Thompson, 22, who is home in Wichita on convalescent leave after being wounded in action near Ramadi, Iraq, on Nov. 27.

"Then I looked down, and I thought: 'It's gone. My leg is gone.' "

As it turned out, Thompson was lucky. The .30-caliber bullet that plowed through his leg shattered muscles, nerves and bone. But -- barring complications or infections -- he will keep his leg and even walk and run again.

"I owe a lot to science and what medicine can do these days," he said. "I've had five surgeries so far. It'll be four to six months before I can put weight on it and probably a year before I can walk normally. But they tell me it will get well."

More soldiers are surviving combat injuries in Iraq than have survived in previous conflicts. Only about 10 percent of wounds are fatal in Iraq, according to military statistics.

But the wounds are horrific, Thompson said, because the enemy has learned to shoot for parts of the body not protected by helmets and body armor.

"There's a lot of people losing arms and legs," he said.

Thompson, the son of Cassandra Hopper of Wichita, joined the Army in April 2003. He did basic training at Fort Benning, Ga., and shipped out to Korea. He was in Iraq almost three months before he was shot.

He's still on intravenous antibiotics to fight infection and gets regular visits from home health nurses. His wife, Amber, keeps his medication on track. His mom, who underwent back surgery on Dec. 8, helps as much as she can given her own disability.

"I'm just glad to have him home," said Hopper, Thompson's mother. "Having the leg, too, is a bonus."

She said the weeks between Nov. 28, when the family first got word of his injury, and Dec. 21, when he arrived home on leave, were hard to take, especially when he was still overseas.

"We didn't get a lot of information," she said. "We were told it was serious and that's about all. We didn't even know what 'serious' really meant. It was really hard, just waiting to know more."

For his part, Thompson said the hardest part has been the sudden change in his routine, moving from the fast-paced structure of Army life and combat operations to the "get a lot of rest, nothing to do" atmosphere of convalescence.

"I'm used to being busy. I find myself always wanting to do something," he said. "It just seems like I'm at loose ends. I don't have an appetite, but I'm not surprised because I'm not burning up any calories. I hate just sitting around."

Thompson said he also has been stressed by giving up cigarettes, something the doctors told him he had to do to have any hope of keeping his leg.

"They said smoking restricts the blood vessels and cuts off nutrition to the bone, and it just won't grow back if you smoke," he said. "I haven't had a cigarette since they told me that. I want to keep my leg."

He hopes that he has permanently kicked the tobacco habit.

"I guess it just depends," he said. "If I stay in the military, I don't know how bad the stress level will be."

Whether to stay in the Army is something he thinks about, but right now would rather not talk much about.

"It's hard," he said.

"Part of me feels like I've done my part and I just want to be home and get on with my life.

"And another part of me keeps thinking that I've never lost a fight and this isn't going to be the first. The Army needs experienced soldiers. We're in a tough fight over there."

But he does know one thing for sure: He doesn't want his little brother in the Army.

"No," he said, when his mother mentioned that his 15-year-old brother, Jamie, is thinking about joining the Army. "I'll have a talk with him. That's not going to happen."

Fresh Meat For The Imperial Slaughterhouse; 1800 More Called Up For Iraq

January 5, 2005 U.S. Department of Defense News Release No. 011-05

This week, the Army and Navy announced an increase in the number of reservists on active duty in support of the partial mobilization, while the Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard had a decrease. **The net collective result is 1,875 more reservists mobilized than last week.**

MORE

150 Marines To Iraq; Third Tour For J. Alvarado

Jan. 05, 2005 Associated Press, EL PASO, Texas

A West Texas Marine reservist is preparing to return to Iraq for a third time as more than 100 others from his unit gear up to accompany him.

Joaquin Alvarado completed his second tour about two months ago. His El Paso-based Marine reserve unit activated Tuesday.

About 150 Marines from the Delta Company, 2nd Battalion, 14th Marines, 4th Marine Division are scheduled to leave El Paso on Saturday for a yearlong activation.

"I know I've been lucky. I've been there twice and have never been wounded. I know you push your luck by going back a third time, but I can't let my unit go without me," said the 40-year-old staff sergeant.

"My family, they get nervous. They worry that I might not make it back," Alvarado said.

In November, he returned from the war-torn country after serving almost eight months as a military adviser assigned to train Iraqi soldiers. His first stint in Iraq was in 2003, when he served for six months with an artillery unit.

MORE

Texas Guard Deploys 3,000 To Iraq

[THANKS TO DAVID HONISH, VETS FOR PEACE, WHO E-MAILED THIS IN: HE WRITES:

[Not sure if the press covered this up there?

[The TX NG, one of only four states with a large enough force to be organized as a Division within a single state, went through some changes last AUG. The 49th Armor Division was inactivated, and became once again the 36th Infantry Division.

[I suppose that infantry make better replacements for cannon fodder, and the TX NGs surplus tanks could be used to make up losses among the Regular Army units?]

Jan 1

Thousands of friends and family members of Texas National Guard troops came out Saturday for a sendoff ceremony for the soldiers, **who are headed to Iraq next week. It's the largest Texas Guard deployment since World War II.**

Governor Rick Perry and Senator John Cornyn were among those in Baylor University's football stadium to support the 56th Brigade Combat Team, 36th Infantry Division.

The unit, based in Fort Worth with soldiers from more than 20 cities, is scheduled to leave within the next few days and spend a year in Iraq. The crowd waived flags and gave standing ovations as the soldiers ran onto the field to start the ceremony.

U.S. General Warns Army Reserve “Degenerating;” Being “Broken”

[THANKS TO DAVID HONISH, VETS FOR PEACE, WHO E-MAILED THIS IN: HE WRITES:

[No surprise here.

[Former Army Chief Of Staff Gen. Shinseki was absolutely right when after 9/11 his PROFESSIONAL MILITARY ADVICE to the GW regime was that Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11.

[He also pointed out that an invasion of Iraq would violate international law and The Articles Of The Geneva Conventions On War, of which the USA is a signatory nation.

[He also pointed out that the post war occupation of Iraq would be never ending and require "several hundred thousand troops" to be done effectively with minimal casualties.

[GW fired him for being honest.

[The next six guys in line for the job turned it down, citing agreement with Gen. Shinseki. GW had to pull a guy out of retirement to find a yes man for the job.

[Now even the hand picked yes man publicly states the war in Iraq cannot be won.

[**Rummy's plan to go in on the cheap with not enough troops or armored vehicles has worked out exactly as Gen. Shinseki predicted. It should come as no surprise that there are many other professional officers that will honor their oaths and put the nation and the Army above GW's & Rummy's egos.]**

05 Jan 2005 By Will Dunham (Reuters)

The U.S. Army Reserve, tapped heavily to provide soldiers for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, is "degenerating into a 'broken' force" due to dysfunctional military policies, the Army Reserve's chief said in a memo made public on Wednesday.

These part-time troops comprise about 40 percent of the U.S. force in Iraq.

Some reservists and families have complained about frequent and lengthy tours in war zones, inferior equipment and scant notice before being pressed into service.

Helmly referred to "potential 'sociological' damage" to the all-volunteer military by paying inducements of $1,000 extra per month to reservists who volunteer to remobilize.

"We must consider the point at which we confuse 'volunteer to become an American Soldier' with 'mercenary,'" Helmly said.

Helmly said Pentagon reluctance to issue orders calling reservists to active duty "in a timely manner" resulted in more than 10,000 reserve soldiers getting as little as three to five days notice before being compelled back into uniform.

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 RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Car Bombing Kills 10 Occupation Cops At Graduation Ceremony

Jan 05, 2005 By DUSAN STOJANOVIC, Associated Press Writer & Aljazeera

BAGHDAD, Iraq - An attacker blew up an explosives-laden car outside a police academy south of Baghdad on Wednesday, killing 20 people.

Police Capt. Hady Hatef in Hillah said the blast occurred during a police academy graduation ceremony at the academy. **At least 10 policemen were among the dead and 41 people were wounded.**

Hussain al-Haidari, an Iraqi journalist, told Aljazeera a booby-trapped Daewoo car exploded.

Five Occupation Cops And Officer Killed In Baqouba

Jan 05, 2005 Associated Press Writer

In Baqouba, 30 miles northeast of Baghdad, an attacker rammed his car into a joint police and Iraqi National Guard checkpoint, killing five policemen and wounding eight others, a U.S. spokesman, Maj. Neal O'Brien, said. The driver was also killed.

In a separate attack, partisans killed police Col. Khalifa Hassan and his driver as they headed to work in Baqouba, said Dr. Ahmed Fouad at Baqouba General Hospital.

MOSUL: THE RESISTANCE RULES THE STREET

Insurgents patrol the streets of Mosul, on Dec. 29, 2004. (AP Photo)

05 January 2005 Aljazeera

Hashim Yihya al-Tai, an Iraqi political analyst told Aljazeera "The security situation in Mosul is difficult. We hear explosions or gunfire almost every two hours.

"There is no police, security or US force in the city."

IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE
END THE OCCUPATION

Eight Occupation Guards Blown Up In Baghdad; Three Mercenaries Killed; Six More Guards Dead In Samarra

(AP Photo/Asa'ad Muhsen)

1.5.04 AP & 6 January 2005 Gulf Daily News

In this photo, U.S. soldiers and members of the Iraqi National Guard inspect the scene of a car bomb blast in western Baghdad's district of Amrea, Jan. 5, 2005. **The car bomb attack killed the driver a civilian who was passing and wounded eight Iraqi guardsmen.**

In the same area, three contractors working for the US military were gunned down overnight, the interior ministry official said.

Another contractor was killed near Balad and an interpreter working for the US military was killed near Tuz, police said.

In Samarra, six Iraqi National Guards were killed when roadside bombs hit their vehicles, police said. Gunmen also ambushed and killed four contractors for the US military in the city.

OCCUPATION REPORT

Allawi Says Resistance Will Soon Crush Bush Occupation

Jan 05, 2005 By DUSAN STOJANOVIC, Associated Press Writer

Prime Minister Ayad Allawi said that **"there is no doubt we will crush these terrorists and we will guarantee security and stability for our people in the near future."**

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