

GI SPECIAL 3A76:



Homeless Veteran

Iraq veterans are on a collision course with reality when they come home. After awhile, most Americans will forget this war, forcing veterans to be stuck in time. --- Mike Hastie, Vietnam Veteran

Photo and caption from the I-R-A-Q (I Remember Another Quagmire) portfolio of Mike Hastie, US Army Medic, Vietnam 1970-71. (Contact at: hastiemike@earthlink.net) for more of this outstanding work. T)

It Is With My Deepest Regrets, That I Thank You All For Your Service

From: Mike Hastie

Sent: March 15, 2005 8:24 PM

Subject: Emotional Silence No More

To G.I. Special

Ladies and gentleman, may I please have your undivided attention.

I regret to inform that everything in Iraq is falling apart, just like I saw in Vietnam.

You cannot win a war when the insurgent population is embedded in the civilian population. (They are one in the same.)

58,000 dead in Vietnam, and 300,000 wounded is proof of that strategy.

Will the last American leaving Baghdad, please close the helicopter doors.

There will be parades across the United States in ten years to welcome you home for good.

That will give the Bush Administration time enough to jump ship.

It is with my deepest regrets, that I thank you all for your service.

This administration can fool some of the people some of the time, but it cannot fool all of the people all of the time.

Mike Hastie

U.S. Army Medic

Vietnam 1970-71

Psychiatric admissions X 3

**Marriages, children, buddies,
and dreams blown away.**

PTSD--the wounds that don't limp.

**"If you hide your limp, someone
else has to do your limping."**

Michael Meade

PS: Larger print for the seeing impaired.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

SOLDIER DIES OF INJURIES SUSTAINED FROM IED EXPLOSION

March 16, 2005 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS
RELEASE Number: 05-03-12C

LSA ANACONDA, BALAD, Iraq – A 1st Corps Support Command Soldier died March 16 of injuries sustained from an IED explosion. The explosion occurred on a road south of Baghdad.

The Soldier was evacuated to a combat support hospital and later died of his wounds.

U.S. Loses First Burmese-American Soldier

March 16, 2005 Broadcast Interview Source, Inc.

WASHINGTON—Wei Pyoe Lwin has become the first Burmese-American soldier killed in Iraq, just two weeks after he refused an offer of home leave to attend the funeral of his well-known Burmese grandfather.

Army Spec. Wai Pyoe Lwin, a naturalized American and member of the Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment, died with another soldier, Pakistani-American Azhar Ali, on March 2 when an improvised bomb tore apart their Humvee near Baghdad International Airport, the Pentagon said

TROOP NEWS

“Bad Weather My Ars”

[This is from Rose Gentle in Scotland. Her son was killed in Iraq. She leads a powerful campaign to bring all the Scots and other troops home from Iraq, now. Her words are poetry. T]

From: Rose Gentle

To: GI Special

Sent: March 15, 2005 5:48 AM

Subject: Re: GI Special 3A74: **General Says Marine Recruiting Failure Due To Bad Weather**

BAD WEATHER MY ARS, THE RECRUITING HAS WENT DOWN IN
SCOTLAND TOO,
TO WHICH HAS THE ARMY SED ITS MY FOLT FOR THE CAMPAIGN I AM
DOING GOOD,

ITS NOT ITS BLAIR, AND THE SHITE, HE TELLS US

I NO JUST IN MY STRET 4 BOYS AND THAY WILL NOT GO BACK AND
MOOR.

ITS OUR YOUTH THAT ARE DYING FOR THE SAKE OF BUSH
AND BLAIRS CRAZY CRUSADE TO CONTROL, IRAQ OIL, THE AMOUNT
OF TROOPS WHO ARE GOING AWOL IN THIS WAR,

ITS OUR CHILDREN WHO WILL BE CONSCRIPTED INTO THE ARMD
FORCES

IN THE NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE, NOT BUSH OR BLAIRS KIDS ARE IN
THE FORCES,

I WOULD LOVE TO SEE BLAIR EYE TO EYE BUT HE IS
A COWERD HE WILL NOT SEE ME,

CAMPAIGN, JUSTICE FOR GORDON GENTLE, [IT WILL GO ON [BLAIR BUSH
SEE

YOUS AT THE G A,

ROSE GENTLE, NO MORE LIES . NO MORE LIVES.

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK OUT 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)

Nations Leaving Iraq Amid Anti-War Gains

[Thanks to PB who sent this in. He writes: Instead of army of one, the slogan will be, coalition of one.]

Mar 15, 2005 By WILLIAM J. KOLE, Associated Press Writer

ROME - Italy said Tuesday it will start drawing down its 3,000-strong contingent in Iraq in September, putting a fresh crack in President Bush's crumbling coalition.

Bulgaria also called for a partial withdrawal, and Ukraine welcomed home its first wave of returning troops.

The moves come on top of the withdrawal of more than a dozen countries over the last year.

Two years after the U.S.-led invasion toppled Saddam Hussein, the coalition is unraveling amid mounting casualties and kidnappings that have stoked anti-war sentiment and sapped leaders' resolve to keep troops in harm's way.

Thirty-eight countries have provided troops in Iraq at one point or another. But 14 nations have permanently withdrawn since the March 2003 invasion, and today's coalition stands at 24. Excluding U.S. forces, there are 22,750 foreign soldiers still in Iraq.

The scramble to get out has taken the multinational force from a high of about 300,000 soldiers in the region early in 2003 to 172,750 and falling. About 150,000 U.S. troops shoulder the bulk of the responsibility and suffer the most casualties.

Berlusconi To Pull Out Troops From Iraq:

PM Forced To Pledge After Outrage At Killing Of Italian Officer

March 16, 2005 John Hooper in Rome, Ewen MacAskill and Richard Norton-Taylor, The Guardian

Italy's prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, yesterday announced that he would begin withdrawing his country's troops from Iraq in September under pressure from public opinion.

"I've spoken to [Tony] Blair about this," he told a TV interviewer. **"We've got to construct a precise exit strategy. Public opinion expects it, and we shall be talking about it soon."**

Mr Berlusconi, who is among President Bush's closest allies, has been under huge domestic pressure over Italy's staunch support for US policy in Iraq. Early next month, he faces a test of electoral strength and in recent weeks he has felt the full force of Italians' misgivings.

On March 4, a senior intelligence officer, Nicola Calipari, was killed by US troops in Baghdad after rescuing an Italian hostage. His death united right and left in appalled condemnation, with thousands of Italians turning out to pay their respects to the dead agent during a lying in state.

Mr Berlusconi dropped his bombshell last night hours after Italy's lower house of parliament, in which the prime minister's supporters have an outright majority, approved funding for its contingent in Iraq until the end of June.

Italian officials had already indicated troops would be withdrawn as soon as it was clear that Iraq could handle its own security. **But Mr Berlusconi went much further than before in defining the outlines of a timetable. He said: "A progressive reduction of the presence of our soldiers will start from September."**

Anti-War Sailor Coming Home: DREW PLUMMER DISCHARGED!!!!

From: Lou Plummer
To: GI Special
Sent: Wednesday, March 16, 2005 1:54 PM
Subject: DREW PLUMMER DISCHARGED!!!!

Former US Navy Petty Officer Andrew Plummer, charged in 2003 with "Disloyal Statements" by the Navy for criticizing the war is being discharged on March 17, 2005. He plans to board a Greyhound bus bound for his hometown of Fayetteville, NC to take part in the "Bring Them Home Now!" rally being held there on March 19.

Thanks to the support of GI Special readers and hundreds of others from the national antiwar movement, Plummer avoided a court martial following his arrest for unauthorized absence in early February.

His father, Lou Plummer, a member of Military Families Speak Out and Veterans for Peace expressed gratitude upon learning of the imminent return of his only son, "Yeah, I'm happy that Drew is on his way home. I know that there are more than 1500 families out there who will not get to welcome home their loved one. It makes this bittersweet. We've still got a war to stop and lives to save"

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.

How Bad Is It? "We're Graduating Them From Basic Even If They Fail," The Drill Instructor Said.

March 15, 2005 BY JAMES GORDON MEEK, DAILY NEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU

[Thanks to PB, who sent this in.]

FORT BENNING, Ga. - After two years of war, the Army is finding it harder to fill the ranks and is cutting corners on how it turns civilians into soldiers ready for war.

Although top brass insist that high standards are maintained, the gritty drill instructors and officers at this legendary post near the Alabama border bluntly disagree with their superiors about the quality of the raw recruits and their basic training.

"I won't lie to you - the Army is not being as picky as we used to be," said one ranking officer.

Instructors told the Daily News that the Army is recruiting more ex-felons, drug abusers and high school dropouts than in the past.

A burly sergeant in a felt Smokey Bear drill instructor's hat, who stood glaring at privates struggling with a Fort Benning obstacle course last month, said his recruits in the past year have performed poorly compared with those in previous years.

Yet, attrition in basic training hasn't fallen below the average 10% washout rate before the Iraq invasion.

"We're graduating them from basic even if they fail," the drill instructor said. "It wasn't like that two years ago."

The less-qualified graduates of the nine-week course "deploy to a unit and become their liability," he said.

Another drill instructor agreed, adding, "Even if they graduate, they may not have Army values."

General Confirms Amazing Discovery

March 16, 2005 By Robert Burns, Associated Press

Gen. Richard B. Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff added that the Saudis expressed an interest in organizing joint training exercises for U.S. and Saudi ground combat forces on Saudi territory. "That was one of the areas that was emphasized, is hopefully to have more interaction between U.S. and Saudi ground forces."

<p>Conducting land force exercises now, however, is "a little problematic for us" because virtually the entire U.S. Army is tied up in Iraq, Afghanistan and other commitments around the world, he said.</p>
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Officer Apologizes: He Killed Iraqis Not On The List To Be Executed; Gets 45 Days In Jail For Two Murders

March 16, 2005 By Angela K. Brown, Associated Press

FORT HOOD, Texas — An Army platoon leader apologized for his role in forcing three Iraqi civilians into the Tigris River, saying his actions eroded Iraqis' trust in the United States.

Army 1st Lt. Jack Saville, 25, was sentenced to 45 days in a military prison Tuesday as well as ordered to forfeit \$2,000 of his \$2,970 monthly pay for six months.

The charges carried a maximum 9½-year sentence, though a plea deal capped the sentence at 15 months. That part of the agreement was kept secret so military judge Col. Theodore Dixon would not be influenced, Army officials said.

In the Samarra incident, Saville ordered his soldiers to throw cousins Zaidoun and Marwan Hassoun into the river at gunpoint.

Saville said Capt. Matthew Cunningham, his company commander, gave him the names of five Iraqis who “were not to come back alive” if they were caught during a series of raids in Samarra on Jan. 3, 2004.

The Hassoun cousins were not on the list.

Psycho-World

Selby said Martin put his pistol “in Sgt. (Robert) Cureton’s face and told him to fire his weapon.”

March 16, 2005 By Robert Weller, Associated Press

FORT CARSON, Colo. — **An Army captain accused of terrorizing an Iraqi town under his supervision testified that he never threatened to shoot one of his men for refusing to fire at a detainee and never threatened Iraqi civilians with his pistol.**

Martin’s court-martial opened Monday with witnesses saying he ruled like a tyrant over Rutbah, a community of 25,000 in Iraq’s western desert, kicking and screaming at civilian detainees and pointing a pistol at them. The alleged attacks took place from May to July 2003, when Martin was the senior officer in the city.

Sgt. David Selby testified Tuesday that Martin forced another soldier to fire over the head of an Iraqi detainee. **Selby said Martin put his pistol “in Sgt. (Robert) Cureton’s face and told him to fire his weapon.”**

Civilian translator Laith Herbert testified that when an Iraqi detainee insisted he did not know anything about an attack on U.S. forces, Martin ordered a sergeant to beat up the detainee.

Prosecutors also said Martin poked Iraqis with an aluminum baseball bat and once fired his pistol at the feet of a suspect during an interrogation.

British Army Covered Up Soldiers' Murders: Claimed They Were Suicides



15 March 2005 By Kim Sengupta, The Independent (UK) & Richard Norton-Taylor, The Guardian

[Thanks to Artisan, who sent this in. He writes: "majority of army recruits came from a broken home, or deprived background, or left school with no qualifications"....there's probably some similarity with the background of some of those whose circumstances 'force' them into prostitution (?)]

The 20-year-old, from Hastings, East Sussex, was found dead with five gunshot wounds in June 1995 while on guard duty. The Army said he committed suicide and this was upheld at an inquest.

The committee also criticised the MoD for the "insensitive" way it returned the belongings of dead soldiers to their families. Elaine Higgins, whose son died in Germany, found a box containing her son's possessions on her doorstep with personal items such as his wrist-watch still missing.

The army is under pressure to implement radical reforms after facing criticism over "serious failings" in its treatment of young recruits.

In a scathing report by a parliamentary committee, MPs declared that only sweeping reforms would re-establish the Army's credibility over its care of young soldiers. **The practice of the military conducting its own investigations over abuse allegations**

had failed abjectly, and an independent complaints commission with retrospective powers must be put in its place, they said.

The report, by the Commons Defence Committee, also urged a review of the policy of recruiting 16- and 17-year-olds and asked the Ministry of Defence to consider whether the age of joining should be raised to 18. The committee accused the military of a "serious failing" by not drawing up guidelines for those younger than 18, while acting "in loco parentis".

There are some 6,700 under-18s in the armed forces, more than 3% of the total.

The committee called for instructors in charge of teenage soldiers to be subjected to criminal record checks, and said young recruits should be put in separate accommodation. It also recommended that they should not be issued with firearms while on guard duty.

The inquiry, among the longest held by the committee, was set up in response to the deaths of four recruits at Deepcut Barracks in Surrey. MPs said that the bereaved families, who had long campaigned against army verdicts of suicide, were treated "absolutely appallingly" and the MoD was "absolutely guilty of maladministration" towards them.

But, the report rejected the demand by the families for a public inquiry, saying the matter should be investigated by the independent complaints commission which would have the power to make binding recommendations.

Kevan Jones, a Labour member, said some of the bereaved families had been treated "appallingly, in a way verging on cruelty". In the army, he said, there was an "arrogant view that the chain of command was sacrosanct". The army had a "huge credibility problem to get over".

The committee said its report went beyond Deepcut, and had discovered "shocking and worrying" experiences suffered by recruits elsewhere.

A young female was intimidated when she reported being raped by a senior male colleague, said MPs. A recruit had his jaw broken, but nothing was done about it. In another case a young soldier was put through strenuous exercise, against medical advice, and died.

The report warned that a "culture change" was needed in the forces - especially the Army - if bullying were to be tackled. As long as complaints were regarded as a "sign of weakness", victims would be reluctant to come forward.

"In the past, insufficient weight had been given to the issue of bullying, which led to a tolerance of, or at least insufficient action being taken against bullying," said the report.

"In recent years, attempts had been made to implement what had been called 'zero tolerance'. But much bullying by both superiors and peers will continue to go unreported unless the culture changes."

The committee also criticised the MoD for the "insensitive" way it returned the belongings of dead soldiers to their families. Elaine Higgins, whose son died in Germany, found a box containing her son's possessions on her doorstep with personal items such as his wrist-watch still missing.

Diane Gray, whose son Geoff, also 17, died, said: "The report is good. But it does not answer our questions about what happened there."

Her husband, Geoff, added: "What we will do with today's report is take it forward and use it as yet more ammunition that there was something desperately wrong, not only at Deepcut but beyond Deepcut as well."

THE VICTIMS

Private Sean Benton

The 20-year-old, from Hastings, East Sussex, was found dead with five gunshot wounds in June 1995 while on guard duty. The Army said he committed suicide and this was upheld at an inquest.

Frank Swann, a ballistics expert, insists it was impossible for Pte Benton to have killed himself. He suggests the soldier was shot four times from a distance and once from close-up.

Trevor Hunter, a friend of Pte Benton, said the young soldier had been the victim of abuse and ritual humiliation. "He was an easy target because he had a croaky voice and insisted on speaking his mind." It was claimed Pvt Benton was attacked as he slept one night by a gang wearing gas masks. He was also thrown through a window after answering back to a sergeant.

Pte Benton's mother, Linda, is certain he did not take his own life.

Private Geoff Gray

He was found dead with **two** gunshot wounds to his head while on guard duty in September 2001. **The Army said that Pte Gray, 17, from Seaham, Co Durham, had committed suicide** but a coroner recorded an open verdict.

A ballistics expert investigating the death initially for the police, and then the families, Frank Swann, said it was "highly unlikely" that Pte Gray had killed himself. **There were reports that someone was seen running from the scene, and suggestions that the body was moved.**

Geoff and Diane Gray have called for a public inquiry. Mr Gray said: "The Army have failed in their duty of care not only to the young soldiers who have died, the young soldiers who were bullied, but they have also failed in their duty of care to us as parents, who have lost children within the armed forces." The Grays insist their son was murdered.

Private Cheryl James

The 17-year-old, from Llangollen, north Wales, was found dead with a bullet through her forehead in woodland near the barracks in November 1995. An inquest returned a open verdict after the Army insisted that she had committed suicide.

Frank Swann, the ballistics expert, concluded that it was "highly unlikely" that she had taken her own life. He maintained that she was probably trying to push the gun barrel away from her face in panic when she was shot. The bullet, removed during an army post-mortem examination, is missing.

Pte James' parents, Des and Doreen, believe their daughter was subjected to sexual harassment and intimidation at the barracks. **A friend said she had been tearful after being forced to have sex with a soldier at the base. Mr and Mrs James have called for a public inquiry.**

Private James Collinson

The 17-year-old from Perth was found dead with a single gunshot wound to his face while on guard duty. The Army said he had committed suicide. An inquest has still to be held.

The ballistics expert Frank Swann said it was "unlikely" the bullet wounds to the underside of Pte Collinson's chin and head were self-inflicted, but it was possible that they were the result of an accident.

His mother, Yvonne, said she would press on with her demand for a public inquiry: "Obviously, today's report is very welcome. However, we await several other reports from other bodies. We hope that if they are as negative as this one, the Government will have to bow to our demands for a public inquiry."

The defence committee said the Ministry of Defence must show more transparency over investigations into deaths such Pte Collinson's.

Fund-Raiser Of The Week: Giving Snipers The College Try

March 14, 2005 Army Times

A recent fund-raising effort by a student club at Marquette University, a Catholic school in Milwaukee, was canceled because its goal was to raise money for a program run by a nonprofit support group for military snipers in Iraq and Afghanistan. The program, "Adopt a Sniper," solicits donations to buy gear that sharpshooters need in their specialized line of work.

The College Republicans set up a table on campus to sell bracelets and other trinkets provided by Adopt a Sniper, including items featuring the slogan: “One Shot, One Kill, No Remorse, I Decide.”

University officials, who said the initiative did not fit in with the school’s Jesuit sensibilities, were not amused and quickly shut down the fund-raiser.

Officials with the nonprofit group that promotes Adopt a Sniper (motto: “Assistance From a Distance”) decided not to take sides in the fray.

“George Bush Killed My Son”

[Thanks to Katherine G who sent this in.]

If Brian had lived, I think he would have continued to please both of his parents. He wasn’t supposed to be frozen as one thing or the other at the age of thirty. He was supposed to live long enough to define himself rather than to be defined by his mother or his father. Parents aren’t supposed to have to decide on a headstone for their child.

2005-03-14 by CALVIN TRILLIN, The New Yorker

This happened on Interstate 78, in New Jersey, in November of 2003: While listening to a story on NPR’s “Morning Edition” about a National Guardsman who’d been killed in Iraq, I found myself in tears. At the time, I was driving from Manhattan to visit my younger daughter and her new baby, Tobias, who was then about three months old.

Because my daughter’s husband had to be away from early morning until late in the evening on Tuesdays, I’d been going to New Jersey once a week to keep her company and do a bit of babysitting; we called the arrangement Tuesdays with Toby. The birth of a grandchild is an event that tends to push emotions toward the surface, and that may have been particularly true in my case.

My wife had died in September of 2001. The delight I took in Toby’s arrival—and in the arrival of my older daughter’s baby, Isabelle Alice, who’d been born in the spring of 2002—was sometimes difficult to uncouple from the way I felt about my wife’s not having lived to enjoy her grandchildren. So you could say that my emotional defenses were not fully in place. Still, I was astonished that my response to a story about a young man I’d never heard of, a thirty-year-old helicopter pilot from northern Illinois named Brian Slavenas, was to weep.

First Lieutenant Slavenas, I was informed by the voice of Bob Edwards, had been in command of a Chinook helicopter that was brought down by a missile as it ferried soldiers on the first leg of their trip out of Iraq for leaves. Sixteen people were killed and twenty injured—one of the first big casualty reports in the period when Donald Rumsfeld was still saying that the continuing violence in Iraq was being caused by a few dead-enders. Brian Slavenas had been a member of an Illinois National Guard unit that was deployed in April of 2003, just a couple of months after he got his degree in industrial

engineering from the University of Illinois. “Morning Edition” ran a segment on him by Susan Stephens, of Station WNIJ, which is affiliated with Northern Illinois University, in DeKalb.

He had been “physically huge,” Stephens reported—six feet five, two hundred and thirty pounds. But from her first couple of interviews, with a high-school buddy and with a teacher whom Brian had worked for during the summer as a furniture mover, it was apparent that he wasn’t the sort of big man who used his size to intimidate. The teacher, Lance Gackowski, talked about how, in pickup basketball games, Brian would cheerfully continue to concentrate on putting the ball in from under the basket while a couple of opposing players hung off him. The high-school buddy, John Rossi, said, “He wouldn’t hurt a fly.”

Something else that Rossi said was not the sort of thing you’d expect to hear about a young man who’d just been described in terms of his size and strength: “We’d get into conversations and, say, if we couldn’t get a conclusion to something, the next day he’d go to the library or go on the Internet and look up the information and call back and go, ‘O.K., I figured out what we were trying to figure out.’ He just wanted to know.” His step-mother, Christi Slavenas, said something similar.

Barely keeping her voice under control, she said that Brian was “very self-disciplined and studious and interested. He liked history. He liked reading, he liked talking to people about ideas.” Susan Stephens’s segment had lasted only two or three minutes, but it left a clear impression of Brian Slavenas: a powerful but good-natured young man with intellectual curiosity. He sounded like the sort of young man you’d want your son—or, yes, your grandson—to emulate. I don’t know whether it was that thought or the cracking of Christi Slavenas’s voice or John Rossi’s statement “He was the best friend you could have” that triggered my response, but for a moment or two I had to consider pulling off the road.

I have to get on the record something else that happened while I was listening to that segment from Illinois. I said—out loud, I think, even though I was the only person in the car—“What a waste!” From the start, I’d believed that the war in Iraq was unconnected to defending ourselves against terrorism, and I’d been particularly disturbed by the unfairness of who bore the burden of fighting it. Brian Slavenas sounded like someone who had gradually made his way through college by availing himself of the tuition help offered by the National Guard.

I was angered that he had been sent to die by policymakers whose own sons were perfectly safe and who themselves, almost to a man, had evaded serving in Vietnam. By the time I reached my daughter’s house, I had more or less calmed down, but in the months that followed I never quite got Brian Slavenas out of my head.

I felt terrible about saying that his death had been a waste. Even though nobody in his family had been in the car to hear it, I felt that it had been disrespectful to them. I couldn’t make the case to myself that Brian had literally died defending his country—soon Rumsfeld himself began denying that he’d ever called Iraq an immediate threat to the United States—but I sometimes tried to see his death in ways that gave it some nobility.

I told myself that it's not the soldier's place to choose the war or the battle. Defending the country requires a ready supply of young people who are willing to go where they're sent and do their duty, even if, inevitably, there will be times when they're sent to fight an ill-conceived battle or even an unnecessary war. Were the soldiers who stormed Gallipoli any less heroic or patriotic than the soldiers who stormed Iwo Jima?

I found myself hoping that Brian's parents were true believers in the war in Iraq, so that, unlike me, they didn't need to stretch to believe that he died defending his country. I thought I'd like to meet them someday. It's possible that I just wanted to offer my condolences and tell them that their son sounded like a splendid young man. Or maybe I wanted to find out if the impression I had of Brian from that brief radio report was a true impression. I felt uneasy being so upset about the death of someone I knew so little about. Finally, a year after the Chinook went down, I decided to go to Illinois.

Before I left, I discovered that there had been a brief stir in the press a week or so after Brian Slavenas died. A few stories were written about whether the Chinook had been shot down because it was inadequately equipped, but most of the coverage was about his family. Brian's father, Ronald Slavenas, a school social worker who was born in Lithuania and came to America as a teen-ager, had served in the 82nd Airborne Division between high school and college and had later joined the National Guard; in the days following his son's death, he told one reporter, "This country took us in very generously.

My philosophy is put your shoulder to the wheel." A son from Ron Slavenas's first marriage—Brian's half brother, Eric, who is forty—had been in the invasion of Grenada as a forward observer with the 82nd Airborne. Brian's older brother, Marcus, had been a marine in the Gulf War. Brian, like every other male in the family, had done a hitch in the military right out of high school—he was a paratrooper, based in Italy—and had later, for a time, served in the same Guard unit that his father was in. When reporters went to Ron Slavenas's home, in Genoa, Illinois—where Brian had lived until third grade, when his parents got divorced—they found a large American flag and a wreath bearing the words "America's All American Hero—We Will Never Forget You."

But Brian's mother told a different story. In the view of Rosemarie Dietz Slavenas, who'd just retired as an associate professor of early-childhood education at Northern Illinois, Brian never had any interest in being a hero and was under no illusions about the war in Iraq making the United States more secure.

In fact, she said, he had tried to resign his commission rather than go to Iraq.

Brian's family on his mother's side had, instead of a military tradition, a tradition of opposing wars. Rosemarie Slavenas had demonstrated against both of the wars her sons fought in; she is a longtime member of the DeKalb Interfaith Network for Peace and Justice, whose demonstrations tend toward silent vigils. Her older sister marched against the war in Vietnam. Their mother, now in her eighties, shares their views.

Brian's father had taken it for granted that there would be a formal military funeral, but Brian's designated next of kin—and thus the person entitled to make such a decision—was his mother. Rosemarie Slavenas said that it was her responsibility to give her son the funeral that was appropriate for his life.

The service she arranged, at the Faith United Methodist Church, in Genoa, was a civilian service, with flowers rather than an American flag on the casket, and no weapons in sight. Afterward, addressing some reporters and cameramen gathered outside the church grounds, Rosemarie Slavenas said, “George Bush killed my son. I believe my son Brian died not for his country but because of our country’s lack of a coherent and civilized foreign policy.”

Eric Slavenas, a strong supporter of the war, had said that not having “Taps” and a flag-draped casket at Brian’s service amounted to “spikes in my dad’s and my heart.” Many of those who had attended the funeral at Faith United Methodist later walked over to the Genoa Veterans Home, a few blocks away, for a ceremony that included some of the military elements that Ron and Eric Slavenas had counted on—an honor guard and a memorial rifle volley and helicopters flying overhead in a “missing man” formation and a bagpipe playing “The Caissons Go Rolling Along” and a display of Brian’s military decorations. Marcus attended both ceremonies, but in interviews he’d argued that American soldiers shouldn’t have been sent to Iraq in the first place. (“All of them should have been back here dating girls and working jobs.”)

On the Internet, the split in the Slavenas family generated considerable traffic, some of it ugly. One pro-war chat room had dozens of postings gathered under the heading “evil shrew loses hero son.”

So many people came to Brian’s funeral that the overflow had to be accommodated in the church basement. There were a number of military people attending in uniform, but there was no ceremonial military presence. The eulogies were about the civilian Brian Slavenas. From what was said at the funeral, it was obvious that Brian had an even broader spectrum of interests than I’d realized. He was a serious power-lifter, specializing in the bench press, but he was also a serious pianist, specializing in Chopin. He loved skiing, but he also loved chess. The friends who spoke said that despite Brian’s range of competence he was modest and self-effacing. He was, by all accounts, embarrassed by attention and quiet with people he didn’t know well. Jennifer Lasiowski, who had gone out with Brian for a year when they were at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, said in her eulogy that Brian was so shy it took him six dates to kiss her.

DeKalb County is a perfect rectangle of a county an hour or so west of Chicago. Parts of it—the patch north of Genoa, for instance—look like the sort of flat Illinois farmland that couldn’t have changed much in decades; the farmhouses resemble the picture that springs to my mind when I hear someone who’s from the rural Midwest talk about “the home place.”

Genoa (pronounced Juh-no-ah) is a town of four thousand where the main street is called Main Street and the newspaper is delivered by a boy on a bicycle. To the south, though, an occasional subdivision sits on former cornfields; DeKalb, a city of forty thousand people about fifteen miles from Genoa, has not only subdivisions but a strip of box stores and franchises that would make an urban planner of any sensitivity weak at the knees.

Rosemarie Slavenas began teaching at Northern Illinois not long after her divorce, so, in the days before most of the box stores and franchises arrived, Brian grew up in DeKalb and made regular trips to Genoa to visit his father. Wrestling is the big sport at DeKalb

High School, but Brian, who threw the discus for the track team and played the drums in the marching band, wasn't a wrestler.

For one thing, I was told by Lance Gackowski, who coaches wrestling among his other duties, Brian didn't really fill out until he had almost finished high school. Also, in Gackowski's experience, effective wrestlers tend to work off of some sort of anger. "Brian didn't seem to have that," Gackowski told me. "He was a very gentle person."

That's what I heard from Jennifer Lasiowski, a slim, direct young woman who works in a Head Start program, and that's what I heard from Ed Rubeck, a grade-school pal of Brian's who still moves furniture and looks like he doesn't need much help with the pianos: Brian was a very gentle person. Even Ron Slavenas, in describing a son who had died in battle, spoke of Brian as "a gentle giant."

Rosemarie Slavenas has said that the last thing her son told her before shipping out was "Mom, I don't want to hurt anybody."

Among the people I talked to in Illinois, in fact, there was a remarkable consistency in how Brian was remembered. He was methodical, working slowly and patiently on whatever skill he was trying to acquire; at the gym used by the University of Illinois weight-lifting club, he didn't miss workouts. His passion for flying was so strong that, even after his engineering degree was in hand, he didn't completely rule out a career in aviation; for him, the practical appeal of the Guard had included not only tuition support but pilot training.

He was the sort of student who studied hard preparing for an exam, was always pessimistic about how he had done, and almost invariably turned out to have done very well. He was thoughtful—someone who would always insist on taking the most cramped spot in the moving van.

He had a modesty so profound that it sometimes seemed to shade into a shortage of self-confidence. His friends in the weight-lifting club didn't learn until after his death about the trophies he'd won in out-of-town tournaments. When I asked Jennifer Lasiowski why she and Brian had eventually broken up—I don't really know what made me think I had a right to ask that question—she said, "He thought I could do better."

From the way she'd spoken of him, I suspected that she didn't necessarily agree. Neither did I.

Modesty may be particularly becoming in the person of someone who could win benchpress tournaments and play Chopin and fly a helicopter and co-write a thesis called "An Economic Analysis of Combination Vaccines."

I grew up one state away from where Brian Slavenas grew up, and, as I spoke to his friends and family about all he'd accomplished in his short life, I could almost hear him mumbling what I've always treasured as the Code of the Midwest—"No big deal."

Brian's brother Marcus struck me as an engaging young man, but he is also someone who, at thirty-four, might be described by a school social worker as still trying to find himself; when I met him, at his father's house, Marcus was about to leave for Puerto Rico, where he hoped to acquire the credentials to become a scuba instructor in Belize.

In the divided Slavenas family, from what I could gather, Brian, the last born, played the role often associated with the first child—the dutiful child who tries to please his parents and keep the peace, the child who doesn't smoke or drink, the child who never gets into trouble.

Rosemarie Slavenas sometimes refers to him as “my wise child.” In Iraq, he wrote both parents regularly—devoting most of his last letters to his mother to the care that should be given an ancient family dog named Pepper and mentioning in one letter to his father that he was considering staying in the military as a chopper pilot. Lance Gackowski thinks that the breadth of Brian's interests, as well as his inclination to stay out of the limelight, had something to do with having parents who were divorced and held widely divergent views. “Some kids in that situation just shut down,” Gackowski told me. “He tried to fulfill both of their visions of what a noble man should be.”

Ron Slavenas, who retired last year, has spent a good deal of time travelling to military and community gatherings that honor his son. His house, whose front lawn is dominated by a pole that flies not only the American flag but the flag of the 82nd Airborne Division, has some elements of a military museum. Slavenas has on display the triangular box that was presented to him at the military ceremony, with a neatly folded American flag and his son's medals.

The walls hold, among other military mementos, a huge gold-star flag with Brian's name on it and, across from a pencil drawing of a Chinook helicopter, framed copies of resolutions about Brian from dignitaries and legislative bodies. The centerpiece of that display is the letter sent to the survivors of every fallen soldier by the President of the United States.

Rosemarie Slavenas has been to a gold-star mothers' event, but she's more likely to commemorate Brian among people who oppose the war. In her house—in Rockford, where she moved in 2003 after she retired—the only indication that Brian was in the military is that his high-school graduation portrait, on the wall next to a similar portrait of Marcus, has his dog tags hanging from the frame. A large picture of an Indian in a canoe, a picture Brian painted when he was eight, hangs on the wall above an upright piano.

The piano itself is a memento of Brian. In the two years that he attended Northern Illinois, before transferring to the Urbana-Champaign campus, she could tell when he got in at night because music would start wafting through the house—“Chopin that would break my heart.”

Rosemarie Slavenas displays no framed resolutions or official letters of condolence. She is still waiting for an answer from her own letter to the President, a letter that said, in part, “My beloved son Brian died for your red herring in the sand. . . . He did not give his life. It was cruelly taken from him by your rush to war.”

Neither Ron nor Rosemarie Slavenas likes to dwell publicly on their differences over their son's funeral, partly because they think it detracts from the memory of Brian. Maybe for the same reason, or maybe because the Midwestern instinct is to seek some common ground, I found myself looking for ways in which they are not as far apart in their views as they may at first appear.

Rosemarie Slavenas, for instance, is not automatically hostile to the military. She told me that Brian did value the organization and discipline of the Army and that the Army taught him important skills. She liked the casualty liaison officer sent by the Illinois National Guard; at the funeral, he walked by her side, in his dress uniform and his beret, from the Faith United Methodist Church to the graveyard nearby.

In the Slavenas family, the one person who impressed me as a true believer in the war was not Ron Slavenas but Brian's half brother, Eric, who operates a landscape-contracting service near Genoa. Eric, who says that he speed-reads a couple of hundred pages on current affairs every day, assured me that weapons of mass destruction and Saddam's links to September 11th have been found in Iraq but were suppressed by the liberal media.

Ron Slavenas, despite the military displays, does not have Eric's certainty. He's a cordial man who seems to try hard to see other people's point of view. Although he believes that the United States has to persevere in Iraq now that our troops are there, he has said that we went to war "a little too fast."

He told me that Brian, while being intent on doing his duty, was not "gung ho, not a muscle-flexing warrior." Ron Slavenas wouldn't say that his son tried to resign rather than go to Iraq, but he—and even Eric—would acknowledge that Brian went in to his commanding officer in order to "look at his options," eventually learning that resignation after deployment is not permitted. To me, trying to resign and looking at your options sound like they could be different ways of saying the same thing.

Among the people I talked to—the Slavenas family, the friends who visited Brian at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, just before his unit shipped out to the Middle East—there is agreement that Brian would have been delighted if one of his options had been to stay in Illinois.

After constantly shifting back and forth between college and the military, he'd finally received the degree he had sought for years; in Ron Slavenas's words, "The world was just opening up for him." On the other hand, there is agreement that, once it was clear that such an option didn't exist, Brian would have done what was expected of him, as he always had. The way Brian went about things, John Rossi said to me, was "If you're going to do it, you might as well do it full bore."

"The single most important thing for me is to keep his spirit alive in my heart," I was told by Rosemarie Slavenas, who in her letter to George Bush had described her son as "an honorable, restrained, talented, caring man." I know that both of Brian's parents believe that he lived a noble life. They're left with differences in how he should be remembered.

On my last day in Genoa, Ron Slavenas took me by Faith Methodist, where the funeral was held, and by the church cemetery, where Brian's grave is still without a stone. What Ron Slavenas would like to see on the stone is something like "Brian Slavenas, 1972-2003, First Lieutenant, Illinois National Guard, Chinook Pilot, Operation Iraqi Freedom."

He assumes that his former wife would have different ideas, and so far he hasn't broached the subject. It's indicative of how different Rosemarie Slavenas's ideas would

be that when she heard of her son's death she said, "All the kindness has gone out of the world."

If Brian had lived, I think he would have continued to please both of his parents. He wasn't supposed to be frozen as one thing or the other at the age of thirty. He was supposed to live long enough to define himself rather than to be defined by his mother or his father. Parents aren't supposed to have to decide on a headstone for their child.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Resistance Shuts Down Northern Oil Exports: "Two Dozen Blasts A Day"

March 16, 2005 By JIM KRANE, Associated Press Writer

In the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, where the air smells of crude and bright gas flares illuminate the night sky, the vast potential of Iraq's oil industry and its failures are on dramatic display.

Ever since drillers unleashed a 50-foot oil gusher near the city in 1927, Iraq has been too unstable to take full advantage of its bounty.

This year, as happened last year, almost none of Kirkuk's oil will reach the international market.

Incessant sabotage of the northern oil pipeline by insurgents has all but sealed it off from its export terminal in Turkey. Before the U.S.-led invasion, the line handled around 750,000 barrels a day.

Across Iraq, insurgents have battered oil installations with an average of two dozen blasts a day.

Resistance Keeping Oil Vultures Away

14 March 2005 By Laurence Frost, The Associated Press

Paris - As Iraq's political factions move closer to forming a new government, the world's oil leaders are dusting off their Baghdad Rolodexes with an eye toward lucrative production agreements. Through 15 years of conflict and sanctions, major oil companies never lost sight of Iraq's massive proven reserves -- the world's second-largest after Saudi Arabia. Efforts to form the nation's first elected government in over half a century are making the prospect of major contracts more tantalizingly real, even if that government could still be more than a year away.

The accelerating numbers of Iraqi insurgent attacks are another problem.

Total sent officials to Iraq soon after the U.S.-led invasion, but has since stopped, de Margerie said. ConocoPhillips and BP also have acknowledged safety issues, and Royal Dutch/Shell, which currently has no employees in Iraq, said the company "would have concerns" about sending them there unless the security situation improves.

Car Bombing At Iraqi Army Checkpoint In Baquba Kills Five Soldiers

Mar 16, 2005 By RAWYA RAGEH, Associated Press Writer & Middle East Online

BAQUBA, Iraq - A car bomb exploded Wednesday near an Iraqi army post in Baquba, northeast of Baghdad, killing five Iraqi soldiers and wounding 12 people, police said.

"Five Iraqi soldiers were killed and 10 others were wounded, as well as two civilians, in a suicide car bombing at an Iraqi army checkpoint five kilometers (three miles) northwest of Baquba," a police spokesman said.

The bomber also died.

One of the wounded, Abdel Karim Jassem, said from his hospital bed that he heard a loud explosion just after 9:00 am (0600 GMT).

"I was in a car behind four vehicles that were headed towards the checkpoint when the explosion occurred," he said. Doctors said his life was not in danger.

The explosion happened in the northeastern Mafraq district, where attacks on the police and army are common.

Local Occupation Officer Killed

March 16 (KUNA)

Anonymous militants assassinated a major in the Iraqi police force in the northern town of Mosul, Iraqi police sources told reporters Wednesday.

Major Muhammed Hamdon was killed in his house in the eastern side of the city, the sources said.

Attacks “A Few Hundred Yards Away” Mar First Iraq Assembly Meeting

Mar 16, 2005 By RAWYA RAGEH, Associated Press Writer, BAGHDAD & Reuters

Iraq's first freely elected **[this is not a satire]** parliament in half a century began its opening session Wednesday after a series of explosions targeted the gathering. The opening marked a major milestone on the road to forming a new government in a country still beset by violence.

Minutes before convening, at least a half dozen explosions detonated a few hundred yards away.

Windows rattled and lights flickered in the building when mortars struck

“We Would Rather Live In Tents And In Liberty Than In Luxury And Under Occupation.”

Feb 26, 2005 Interview: Rüdiger Göbel, Junge Welt, Week final supplement. Translation by John Catalinotto, International Action Center, USA, who participated with Dr. Hadad and Mr. Awad in a public meeting in Heidelberg on Feb. 25.

Q: What is the mood today in Falluja? Are rage and hate against the occupier dominating or rather resignation and regret that there was resistance?

Haded: The population is full of rage. People hate the Americans - Americans generally, not only U.S. soldiers. They are occupiers, killers and terrorists. Almost every family in Falluja has to mourn a victim; how you can expect any other reaction there.

I say to you: Most of the (U.S.) soldiers feel fine about shooting Iraqis. They really believe all Iraqis are terrorists, as their government tells them. I saw soldiers who were laughing together in their unit, as if they were drugged. In a mosque they organized a carnival. The place of worship was transformed into a discotheque!

Even if it doesn't look that way at first sight, in the long run the Americans lost in Falluja. Which does it mean if an Empire uses all its power to attack what is a small city, without any morals, without scruples. That is the beginning of the end.

Q: The U.S. army offered at the end of its Falluja offensive to pay 500 dollar remuneration for each destroyed dwelling.

Haded: What is 500 dollars? That is not even enough to get rid of all the debris! The offer is a new sort of attempt to humble us. They want to make us into beggars. I do not want the money. We Arabs and Muslims believe in principles:

We would rather live in tents and in liberty than in luxury and under occupation.

Awad: In my opinion the occupation forces must pay an appropriate remuneration for the physical and psychological damage, which the citizens of Falluja suffered - after the Americans have left our city and our country.

Our interviewees

Dr. Mahammad J. Haded belonged to the medical staff of the Central Hospital of Falluja, which was occupied in November 2004 by U.S. troops; in addition he works in a small hospital in the center of the city. He was one of the few physicians who remained during the attack on Falluja.

Mohammad F. Awad is a civil engineer and since 2003 has been president of the City Council of Zaqlawiya, a town nine kilometers north of Falluja. Since past year he is also director of the refugee assistance center supported by the Red Crescent in Zaqlawiya. He was one of the volunteers who gathered corpses of killed inhabitants of Falluja and brought them for identification to Zaqlawiya.

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

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

Assholes With Lapel Flags

3.14.05 Nicholas von Hoffman, The New York Observer

The burden of this war, which we hear spoken of so often, has been borne by my son and a few thousand other men and women.

They have made all the sacrifices that bombastic politicians so lightly speak of; they have borne all the risks, paid all the costs, while others have gotten rich off them, have gotten elected and re-elected off them—and, if not that, had the

pleasure of swaggering around with a bully-boy American flag in their lapels and a ribbon stamped "I Support the Troops" on the hoods of their \$45,000 automobiles and their pickup trucks.

Who Are The Terrorists?

March 15, 2005 Socialist Worker (UK)

Two years after the invasion of Iraq, writer and activist Tariq Ali spoke to Socialist Worker about US strategy in the Middle East and the growth of the Iraqi resistance to the occupation.

The Iraqi resistance is demonised by Bush and Blair as terrorists, supporters of Saddam Hussein, Islamic fundamentalists and so on. Tell us what you think of the resistance.

Every resistance movement against imperialism has been categorised as terrorist — the Mau Mau in Kenya were demonised and brutally tortured by the British; the Algerian FLN by the French; the Vietnamese by the French and the Americans.

Today Israel's Ariel Sharon refers to Palestinians as terrorists, Russia's Vladimir Putin crushes the Chechens in the name of fighting terror and Tony Blair is assaulting traditional civil liberties in this country in the name of fighting terror. It's hardly surprising that the Iraqi resistance is characterised in the same fashion.

Obviously the means used to drive out imperial occupiers are determined by the nature of the occupation. The brutality of the US troops and systematic torture they have used has been well documented. So how can the resistance be beautiful?

During the Algerian war a leader of the national liberation front, the FLN, was asked about using terror against French civilians in cafe bombings in Algiers. He replied, "If we had an air force I promise you we would only target French barracks, but till then..."

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to contact@militaryproject.org. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential.

OCCUPATION REPORT

108 Died In U.S. Custody

March 16, 2005 (AP)

At least 108 people have died in American custody in Iraq and Afghanistan, most of them violently, according to government data provided to The Associated Press. Roughly a quarter of those deaths have been investigated as possible abuse by U.S. personnel.

The figure, far higher than any previously disclosed, includes cases investigated by the Army, Navy, CIA and Justice Department.

The Pentagon has never provided comprehensive information on how many prisoners taken during the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have died, and the 108 figure is based on information supplied by Army, Navy and other government officials.

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

WHITE HOUSE REPORTER TURNS OUT TO BE CHENEY: Fake Moustache Falls Off Veep During Press Briefing

March 15, 2005 The Borowitz Report

The White House press corps was rocked by another scandal today as a man thought to be a professional journalist was revealed to be Vice President Dick Cheney wearing a fake moustache.

The shocking discovery took place during a daily briefing at the White House in which spokesman Scott McClellan took the following question from a reporter he referred to only as "Herb": "Wouldn't you agree that President Bush's plan for reforming Social Security totally rocks?"

Before Mr. McClellan could respond to the question, the reporter's moustache suddenly fell off his face, revealing him to be none other than Vice President Cheney.

Mr. Cheney, unaware that his disguise had fallen off and seemingly oblivious to the audible gasps of the journalists in the room, continued: "And wouldn't you agree that anyone who opposes it hates our country?"

After adding, "And isn't everything in Iraq going really well these days?" the vice president noticed that his fake moustache was on the carpet at his feet.

He then quickly excused himself and bolted out of the room.

Hours after the incident, the White House took great pains to explain Mr. Cheney's dual role as vice president of the United States and obsequious journalist.

"For the past three years, we have consistently stated that Vice President Cheney has been in a secure, undisclosed location," Mr. McClellan told reporters. "That location was, in fact, the White House press room."

Elsewhere, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that she would not run for president in 2008 "unless the Democrats nominate somebody really easy again."

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

One U.S. Soldier Killed, Four Wounded By Anti-Tank Mine; Silly General Says Security "Exceptionally Good"



Tomas Munita / AP Photo

March 16, 2005 By Stephen Graham, Associated Press

On Wednesday, a Humvee carrying U.S. military police near an American base in Shindand, in the west of the country, hit an anti-tank mine, killing one soldier and

injuring four more. Two of the wounded were in stable condition and two were treated and returned to duty. None of the soldiers were identified.

Another vehicle carrying Afghan civilians, apparently curious to watch the American rescue operation, struck another mine nearby, killing five people and injuring another six.

An Afghan soldier was killed and another wounded Tuesday when they triggered a mine while recovering bodies from an airliner that slammed into a mountain in the nation's worst-ever air crash, officials said Wednesday.

Gen. Richard Myers, the visiting chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said Wednesday that security in Afghanistan is now "exceptionally good" and the United States is considering keeping long-term bases in the country as it repositions its forces worldwide.

Received:

From Australia

From: nl
To: GI Special
Sent: March 16, 2005 6:53 PM
Subject: thank you

I'm not in the military but thank you for your courage in publishing GI special

In solidarity
NL
Newcastle NoWAR Collective
NL, M.Med.Sc., B.A., EN.
55 Fitzroy St
Mayfield NSW 2304
Australia

REPLY: The courage is that of the troops opposed to the war, and organizing against it within the services. That takes real heart. T

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The following that we know of have also posted issues: www.gifightback.org,
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