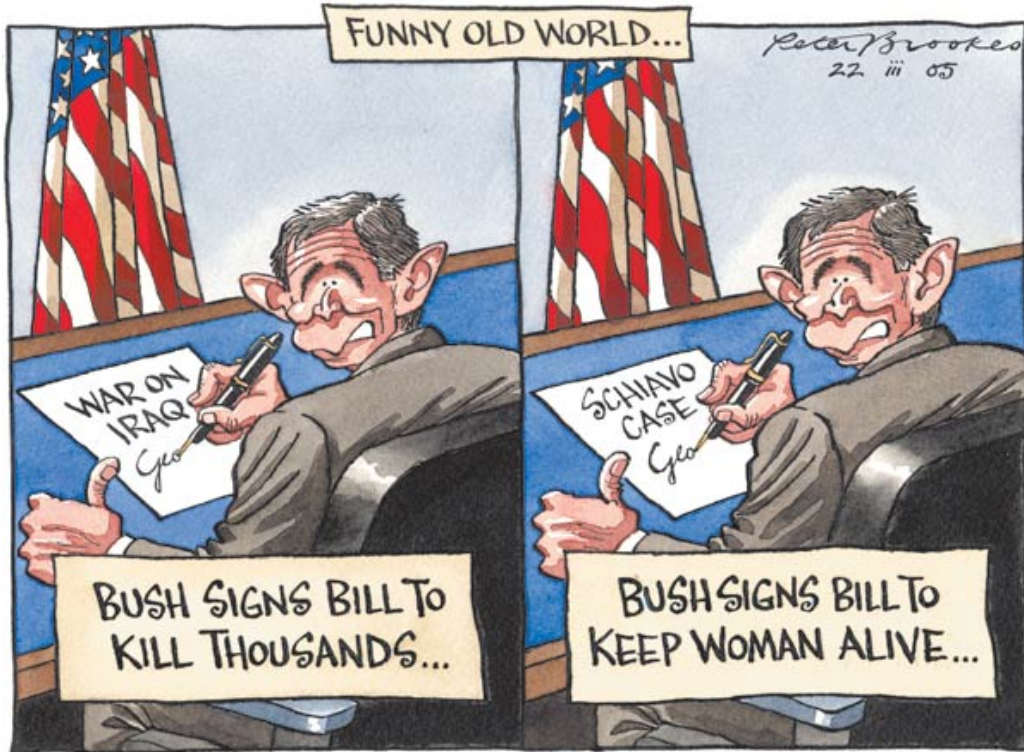


GI SPECIAL 3A77:



**The New Majority:
51% Now Say War A
Mistake:
53% Think War Not Worth
Fighting:
70% Say Casualties
Unacceptable**

“While 43 percent believe the administration deliberately misled the country, for the first time in a Post-ABC poll, a majority (51 percent) called the war in Iraq a mistake.” 53% of Americans surveyed thought the war was not worth fighting.

Two years after the US-led war on Iraq, a majority of Americans called the war a mistake and believed that their troops were bogged down in the Arab country as the US-led “coalition” started shrinking after close ally Italy decided to begin troops pullout in September.

A new Washington Post-ABC News poll showed Wednesday, March 16, that 57 percent of the Americans disapproved of President George W. Bush’s handling of Iraq, and 70 percent said the number of US casualties, including more than 1,500 deaths, is an unacceptable price.

“Over the past two years, Americans rallied around Bush in the initial stages of the war but grew increasingly disillusioned,” the Post commented.

“While 43 percent believe the administration deliberately misled the country, for the first time in a Post-ABC poll, a majority (51 percent) called the war in Iraq a mistake.”

On the day Baghdad fell in April 2003, just 16 percent called the war a mistake and 81 percent said it was the right thing to do.

53% of Americans surveyed thought the war was not worth fighting.

“Plurality of Americans said the war has damaged this country's standing around the world, with 41 percent saying the US position is weaker, 28 percent saying it is stronger,” showed the survey.

Two years ago, 52 percent said the war had made the US position stronger, vs. 12 percent who said it was weaker.

Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward this E-MAIL along, or send us the address if you wish and we’ll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the war, at home and inside the armed services. Send requests to address up top.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Camp Lejeune Marine From Ohio Killed

03/23/05 By The Associated Press

Military officials say a Camp Lejeune Marine from Ohio was killed in Iraq.

Lance Corporal Kevin S. Smith, 20, of Springfield, Ohio, died Monday as a result of hostile action in Al Anbar Province, which includes the hot spots of Fallujah and Ramadi. No other details were given.

Smith was assigned to Third Battalion, Second Marine Regiment, Second Marine Division, Second Marine Expeditionary Force at Camp Lejeune

Soldier From 2nd Brigade Combat Team Dies

Mar 23, 2005 FORT CARSON, Colo. (AP)

Enemy small-arms fire killed a 2nd Brigade Combat Team soldier in Tamin, Iraq the 50th fatality there for the Fort Carson-bound unit.

Spc. Francisco G. Martinez, of Fort Worth, Texas, died Sunday, the Department of Defense announced Tuesday. The 20-year-old was assigned to the brigade's 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment.

The brigade went to Iraq in August from bases in South Korea and was assigned to Fort Carson for its return this summer. Its death toll has exceeded all other Fort Carson units combined.

Two Tennessee Soldiers Hurt In Attack That Killed 278th Member

3/23/2005 WBIR-TV Knoxville

During the convoy attack that killed a Jefferson County member of the 278th in Iraq, two other Tennessee soldiers were injured, one seriously.

A chairperson for a family readiness group says Specialist Tony Lambert of Mosheim in Greene County received spinal and facial injuries.

She says he is on a ventilator and has a blood clot in his brain. He is expected to arrive in Washington, DC today for treatment.

Specialist Shawn Hall of Johnson City received a concussion and needed stitches.

Paul Thomason died when his convoy was attacked in Kirkuk.

He was the first Tennessee 278th soldier killed in action in the Iraq war.

The military posthumously promoted him to Sergeant on Monday.

Hardin Native Wounded In Roadside Attack; Family Gets No Help From Army To Visit Him



3.23.05 By CASEY EHMTSEN, The News-Enterprise

Kurt Buchanan's 18th birthday was unforgettable.

Except that his mom forgot — at least momentarily. Buchanan turned 18 on Sept. 11, 2001.

"I called Kurt and told him to turn on the TV," Janet Buchanan said Tuesday. "I had to call him back later because I had forgotten to tell him 'Happy Birthday.'"

That day, Kurt Buchanan, then a member of the Air Force ROTC at the University of Kentucky, knew it wouldn't be long before he was on active duty in a war.

His tour, however, ended early. Buchanan, 21, a specialist for the Kentucky National Guard, was injured last Saturday when the humvee he is believed to have been driving as part of a convoy outside Baghdad International Airport was struck by a roadside

bomb, Janet Buchanan said. The explosion killed the other occupant of the humvee, Spc. Jonathan A. Hughes of Lebanon.

Both were assigned to the Kentucky National Guard's 1st Battalion, 623rd Field Artillery Regiment, based in Campbellsville.

Buchanan suffered major damage to his right hand, his mother said. He was transported to a military hospital in Baghdad, where he was stabilized before being transferred to another hospital in Germany.

He could be on a plane headed back to the states as early as Friday, his mother said. He is expected to be immediately admitted to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., where he will undergo reconstructive surgery on his hand.

Janet Buchanan has spoken to her son twice since the attack. "He said 'I can wiggle my fingers, mom,'" she said. "He said it happened so quick."

Janet Buchanan said military officials contacted her by phone Saturday to tell her of her son's injury.

"I thought that was a good thing because I'm wasn't getting a knock on the door, and a knock on the door is a bad thing," she said.

Kurt's sister, Brenna, answered the phone. She knew right away something was wrong.

"As soon as I answered, I knew something was going on," Brenna said. "They call us once a month and it's always the same guy. This time it was someone else."

Kurt's service to his country won't come as a shock to those who know him, Janet said. He attended Rineyville Elementary School and J.T. Alton Middle School and graduated from North Hardin High School in 2001. He was an Eagle Scout with Troop 676 out of Christ Episcopal Church, his mother said.

"Kurt is one of those people that can charm anyone," Janet Buchanan said. "If they know him, they like him. He's always helped people, (he's) done farm work for people in Rineyville who needed some help."

The youngest of three, Kurt signed up with the Air Force ROTC when he started college at UK in part because of the influence of his older brother, Kevin.

Kevin Buchanan was an Air Force survival equipment specialist who recently received a medical discharge after suffering a broken leg. Kevin, 25, was stationed in Kuwait twice prior to the start of the Iraq conflict.

"They have always been really close," Janet Buchanan said. "That's why Kurt got into the Air Force ROTC. He was following in (Kevin's) footsteps, to the degree that he could."

Kurt left the Air Force ROTC after switching majors from civil engineering to business management, but later signed on with the Kentucky National Guard to help cover college tuition costs.

Janet Buchanan said she doesn't know when the family will be able to travel to Washington to see Kurt. Money is tight.

"We were hoping maybe they could get him to Louisville," she said. Louisville is home to some of the premiere hand surgery specialists in the world.

"We didn't think the Army would go for that."

TROOP NEWS

Fayetteville: “The Largest Anti-War Protest Ever In This Heavily Military Town”

20 March 2005 By Scott Galindez, t r u t h o u t Report

Fayetteville, NC -- The second anniversary of the war was the impetus for major demonstrations throughout the world. In the United States, over 800 communities held events calling for an end to the occupation.

CNN, however, reported that in the United States "barely a ripple was made while large protests took place in Europe." The New York Times reported that protests in the United States ranged from 350 people in Times Square to thousands in San Francisco. Later in the same story, the Times reported that several thousand marched from Harlem to Central Park. If thousands marched in New York, why did the Times highlight the 350 in Times Square?

CNN's report was worse ... nothing about US protests.

While they only saw a ripple, a huge wave passed them by. If CNN had been in Fayetteville, North Carolina, they would have seen what could be a major turning point in the anti-war movement. The largest Anti-war protest ever in this heavily military town took place.

The march was led by two banners carried by family members of soldiers who died or served in Iraq.

The first banner said "The World Still Says No to War" and the second banner was "Bring the Troops Home Now."

A few feet behind was a banner carried by Veterans of the Iraq War. One of those veterans, Sergeant Camillo Mejia, recently served 9 months in jail for refusing to return to Iraq after leave. Mejia told the crowd: "After going to war and seeing its ugly face, I could no longer be a part of it."

Following the Iraq Veterans was Military Families Speak Out. "I can't remain silent on these issues, slap a yellow ribbon on my car and call it supporting our troops," said Kara Hollingsworth, the wife of a soldier serving his second tour of duty in Iraq. "I support our troops by making sure they are not put in harm's way unless absolutely necessary."

Many veterans of past wars were also among the ranks. Sections of the march resembled army units marching in formation calling cadence.

Speaker after speaker told stories of loved ones they had lost during the war and the now 2-year-old occupation of Iraq. Flag-draped mock coffins were carried by many.

The March was part of a series of events aimed at breathing new life into the anti-war movement. The first-ever Iraq Veterans Against the War national conference is also taking place, along with a Conference of Military Families Speak Out. A third major conference of Southern anti-war organizers is also taking place in Fayetteville.

CNN missed the boat ... perhaps a good thing for them, since they were only prepared for a ripple and not the giant wave that formed in Fayetteville.

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)

Former Marine Stands Strong Against The War



Mike Hoffman

http://homepage.mac.com/union_county_labor/Veterans_for_Peace/PhotoAlbum89.html

March 20, 2005 By JOHN A. ZUKOWSKI, The Express-Times

Mike Hoffman seems to be an unlikely anti-war leader.

He was a lance corporal in the Marines who invaded Iraq two years ago as part of the "Shock and Awe" sweep into Iraq.

Hoffman doesn't have the background of an activist.

He was the son of a Bethlehem Steel worker.

He cheered on American troops in the first Gulf War.

He admired Lehigh Valley relatives and friends who served in the military.

And Hoffman didn't spend his time while attending Emmaus High School going to peace rallies.

"I always grew up believing America would always do what was right," he says.

Hoffman's hangouts were diners, malls and going to screenings of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show."

"When the last 'Rocky Horror' showing happened a few years ago at the Lehigh Valley Mall, I had people mail the newspaper article about it to me overseas," the former Marine says.

But he's now perhaps the Iraq War's most visible opponent.

The seeds of his activism started when he returned to his parent's home in Macungie after being honorably discharged.

One night he went to a tavern in town.

Soon word got around.

The muscular guy in the bar had just served in Iraq.

People came over and slapped Hoffman on the back. Smiled at him. Told him he did a great job.

Hoffman felt uncomfortable.

"I didn't think I did a great job," he says. "I didn't feel great about what went on over there."

Hoffman was compelled to do something. That feeling was there after he went to see Michael Moore's anti-Iraq War movie "Fahrenheit 911."

When the movie ended he was speechless.

Many images in the film triggered nightmares for him. One image, more so than all the others, still haunts him.

An elderly Iraqi woman stood in front of a bombed-out home of a relative, looked into the camera and cursed America.

"She may have been talking about me," he says. "Remember Shock and Awe? When they talk about that, they're talking about me. I was Shock and Awe."

The facts, and why they infuriate him

Hoffman was part of the invasion of Iraq two years ago this weekend. It was the beginning of a war Americans are deeply divided about.

Fifty percent of Americans believe Iraq wasn't "worth it" compared to 48 percent who do, according to a February 2005 Gallup Poll.

More than 1,500 Americans have been killed in Iraq, according to an Associated Press count. More than 11,220 U.S. troops have been wounded in action, according to the Pentagon.

More than 18,000 Iraqi civilians have also been killed, according to Iraq Body Count, a Web site which lists civilian deaths based on media reports. But the actual number of Iraqis killed may be as high as 100,000, according to a Lancet study.

At the start of the war officials estimated the war would cost from \$100 billion to \$200 billion. But if Congress approves Bush's request for another \$81 billion, the cost of the war could reach \$300 billion, according to the Associated Press.

These facts infuriate Hoffman.

And his anger is often directed at one person.

"I'm better now than I used to be, but it's tough for me to hear Bush speak about the war," he says. "There was one State of the Union speech where I was just screaming and crying at the TV because of the audacity at what Bush said about supporting the troops in Iraq."

That anger has led him to speak out against the war since returning to the Lehigh Valley from Iraq.

It's a role that's made Hoffman controversial and so popular that one veteran's group called him "a rock star in the anti-war movement."

Hoffman now finds himself the country's most visible Iraq veteran opposed to the war.

Filmmaker Michael Moore is one of Hoffman's fans. He invited him to speak at several appearances on Moore's pre-election "Slacker Uprising" tour, including the stop at Lehigh University.

Hoffman has traveled over much of the United States and to England. He's appeared on "The O'Reilly Factor" and "The Tavis Smiley Show." Occasionally he's stopped by someone who recognizes him from a photo on a magazine cover.

Hoffman, 25, is quickly becoming an important figure in the opposition to the war.

That's because of the credibility he says he often receives because he's an Iraq War veteran.

He calls it his ace-in-the-hole.

And he uses it as a trump card.

Sometimes when people hear him speak he sees them glaring at him. As if he's a tree hugging peacenik.

But then he says he's an Iraq veteran.

That usually silences them. Even the cantankerous Bill O'Reilly, host of Fox-TV's "The O'Reilly Factor."

Hoffman thought he might be the target of an O'Reilly trademark tongue lashing when he was on his show. But O'Reilly went easy on him, Hoffman says.

"If he started beating up on me, I would have just asked him one question:

""Were you there?""

On a recent afternoon at the Philadelphia office of Iraq Veterans Against the War -- a group Hoffman founded and is president of -- Hoffman repeated that being a high-profile anti-war speaker isn't something he planned on.

A "stop loss order" sends Hoffman to Iraq

Hoffman's time in Iraq almost never happened.

He was just two days away from never going to Iraq.

When he enlisted in the Marines it was for four years.

During the end of his stint he was stationed in Japan.

Just 48 hours from getting on a plane to come back to the Lehigh Valley he received a notice.

It was a Stop Loss Order.

That meant his discharge was postponed.

Hoffman had some training in chemical weapons. And he was specially trained in desert warfare.

So he was deployed to Kuwait near the Iraqi border, a cog in a looming invasion.

The troops knew about the groundswell of worldwide opposition to the impending attack, he said.

On Feb. 15, 2003, massive demonstrations against an impending war took place around the world.

The numbers were staggering. More than a million people marched in Rome. About 1.3 million in Spain. And in England one million people marched in the largest demonstration in that country's history.

The Marines preparing for war were glued to the television.

"We hope you win, but we're not holding our breath," he says someone said aloud to the images of protesters on television.

But there was other speculation.

"You don't think we're going to bring all of these people and equipment out here and not go through with it," Hoffman recalls someone else saying.

So Hoffman waited for a war he felt was inevitable.

Gripping nightmares born on the battlefield

What followed in Iraq would later give him gripping nightmares and flashbacks. He was a long way from the small town he called home.

Born in Allentown, he grew up in the tiny village of Zionsville. His family later moved to Macungie and Hoffman graduated from Emmaus High School in 1997.

"The only classes I ever got good grades in were history classes because I always liked history," he says.

His father was a longtime employee at Bethlehem Steel.

About the time Hoffman graduated from high school, his father fell victim to a round of layoffs.

Things got tight financially.

After graduating, Hoffman worked at several different stores in the Lehigh Valley including Walden Books and K-B Toys.

"I was basically a mall rat," he said.

At age 19 he wasn't sure what to do with his life.

Then a friend signed up for the military.

There was a buddy system. The friend encouraged him to join.

A recruiter came and talked to Hoffman.

It was a salary. There were benefits. He would travel. And it was just four years.

Maybe joining the military would pay for college if he ever wanted to go, Hoffman thought.

After a bad day at the toy store he had had enough of dead end jobs.

So he signed up to be a Marine.

After the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, something changed.

"I remember hearing guys saying 'we've got to go kill the guys who knocked down the towers.' Of course we had to do something, but I wanted to find out more about why something like that happened."

That journey led him to read history and politics.

He devoured books by Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn.

He also became interested in Daniel Ellsberg, a high-profile anti-war figure during the Vietnam War.

Ellsberg was also an ex-Marine. He became an activist against the Vietnam War when he photocopied a top secret study called the Pentagon Papers and leaked it to

newspapers. Later, felony charges were dropped against Ellsberg when it was found out the Nixon administration was involved in misconduct against him.

"One of the highlights of all the people I talked to after I got out of the military was getting to talk to Daniel Ellsberg one-on-one for two hours," Hoffman says. "It was kind of like passing the torch from one generation to another."

Some of Hoffman's interest in politics and history went back to his high school history teachers in Emmaus.

"They planted something in me that made me want to learn more," he says.

He continued to read while in the Marines.

And when he heard rumblings of an impending war in Iraq, he was skeptical.

He wondered about the justification for the war that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction.

"Weapons of mass destruction aren't little things you can hide under someone's bed," he says. "And the whole idea of a pre-emptive war didn't make any sense to me."

"Take Baghdad and you go home."

On March 20, 2003, Hoffman crossed into Iraq.

He was part of the 5th battalion of the 11th Marine Regiment in the First Marine Division.

It was all part of a march to one city.

"Take Baghdad and you go home," was a familiar refrain repeated through the ranks.

Hoffman was part of an artillery outfit. His unit protected forces advancing in front of them.

Hoffman was an artilleryman who used a 155mm Howitzer that fired 10 to 15 miles ahead of the advancing lines, he said.

But Hoffman couldn't see what he was firing at.

"That's one of the worst things about the whole thing that still really bothers me," he says. "I don't know what I did."

But he did see the effects of war.

Shell-shocked Iraqi civilians. Decimated vehicles. Poverty-stricken villages.

Mostly he remembers fear and avoidance.

"It was basically 'you don't trust us and we don't trust you' so we basically avoided each other," he says.

One day he came across some military vehicles that were still sealed.

There was an awful smell.

He soon realized what he smelled was burning flesh.

"I've talked to World War II veterans about that," he says. "They said it was the same smell there was at the death camps."

Conversations about the war while it was going on were scarce. That's because of the military buddy factor; a promise to keep each other alive was the main focus.

One time, a conversation did start, Hoffman said.

He and another Marine were standing side by side with guns.

They started talking about why they were there. Hoffman told him about some of the books he was reading. Suddenly the conversation ended.

"He said 'you know this really isn't the time for this kind of conversation,'" Hoffman recalls.

One of the things Hoffman finds most difficult to understand is comments from some Bush administration officials that they didn't expect such a vicious insurgency from Iraqis after the invasion.

Iraq had been at war with Iran for years. Iraqi men had compulsory military service. So the Iraqis would likely put up a fight, Hoffman thought.

Finally, the Marine unit rolled into Baghdad. But Hoffman spent just a few hours there.

Instead, his unit was sent to Saddam Hussein's palace in Saddam's hometown of Tikrit.

He and his unit stormed into the palace. Hoffman still has a photo another soldier snapped of him sitting in Saddam's chair behind his desk.

Because Hoffman was overdue serving out his time in the Marines, he was one of the first in his unit to be discharged

Just off the plane, back in the United States after two months in Iraq, he says he signed a paper that he wasn't suffering from any psychological aftereffects from the war.

"They get you to sign it when you're psyched to go home and drink all the beer and meet all the girls," he says. "But anyone who has been through it knows the nightmares and problems come later."

Bringing the war back to the Lehigh Valley

Back in Macungie he spent some time at his parents' home. And going out to bars.

"I think I was drunk every night for about two months," he says.

Eventually, he got out of that habit; moved out of his parents' home. He started dating a teacher in Bucks County and moved there. He later married.

But he still wondered what he'd do about taking action against the war.

One day he went to an anti-war seminar in Philadelphia. When people there found out Hoffman was an Iraq War veteran, he was immediately swarmed by activists.

"It verified what they were saying about the war," he says.

His first speech was at a Philadelphia rally. The only previous experience he had was taking a public speaking course at Emmaus High School.

Nevertheless he received a rousing reception, and has since become comfortable speaking.

But it's not always easy.

He has a special folder on his computer set aside for hate mail.

And he found out in England how painful public speaking can get.

There's a sizable Iraqi population in England, he says.

He remembers an older Iraqi man who stood up and asked him, "Why are you and your friends killing my friends and family?"

That man and that question still bothers him, he says.

Hoffman says he continues to speak out against the war because he says he has an insider's perspective on Iraq. That's something he says many journalists in Iraq aren't getting.

"I can't say I blame reporters because the few that venture out of their hotel in Baghdad end up being shot at or kidnapped," he says. "But now you have a situation where journalists are in a hotel in Baghdad and just go to press conferences to report on the war."

He's angered by the accusation that he's unpatriotic for speaking out. He rattles off a list of ways he feels the administration isn't supporting veterans, from salaries to providing information. No matter what some people may say, he believes something strongly.

"You can still support the troops and be against the war," he says.

Hoffman has returned to the Lehigh Valley a couple of times to talk about the war.

In addition to speaking at the Michael Moore rally at Lehigh, he also returned to his alma mater, Emmaus High School, to speak.

And his parents have supported his decision to speak out, he says.

His father is a member of the Lehigh Valley motorcycle club, ABATE. He says he wears the pin that advertises Iraq Veterans Against the War when he rides.

"He can't keep the pins because every time he wears it someone asks him for it," he says.

Since his discharge Hoffman has fought nightmares and flashbacks to his war service.

He says that's minor compared to what some other veterans go through.

He particularly remembers one crippling flashback.

It was of those military vehicles in Iraq -- the ones with the burning flesh inside. That came back to him while he was working at a Halloween store.

"I was working so I had to keep it together," he says. "So when I came home I just collapsed and cried."

The nightmares and flashbacks don't surface as often now, he says.

His focus is on keeping up with news in Iraq. He's disappointed an Iraq-fatigued media seems to be pushing the war more to the back pages.

But interest in Hoffman continues to rise.

Requests for him to speak come in often to the Philadelphia office. And he says he's encouraged by the e-mails he's received from other Iraq War veterans opposed to the war.

All of that has given him some renewed energy, he says.

That and the outrage he feels toward the man at the helm of the war he's seen firsthand.

"I want to make it as difficult as I can for Bush," he says. "I want him to be considered the worst president in history for getting us into this war."

For information about Iraq Veterans Against the War visit ivaw.net or call 215-241-7123.

Broke Down Army:

Running Out Of Troops, Armor, Supplies And Time; One Million Have Gone To War; “It Gets A Little Bit Worse Every Day”

Meanwhile, an estimated 30 percent of Marine Corps equipment and 40 percent of Army gear are in Iraq, wearing out at up to six times the normal rate. Battle losses are mounting; the Army has lost 79 aircraft and scores of tanks and Bradley Fighting Vehicles. "We are equip-stretched, let there be no doubt about it. ... This Army started this war not fully equipped," Cody said in recent congressional testimony.

03/23/2005 By Ann Scott Tyson, Washington Post

Unexpectedly heavy demands of sustained ground combat are depleting military manpower and gear faster than they can be fully replenished.

Shortfalls in recruiting and backlogs in needed equipment are taking a toll, and growing numbers of units have been broken apart or taxed by repeated deployments, particularly in the Army National Guard and Reserve.

Stretched by Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States lacks a sufficiently robust ability to put large numbers of "boots on the ground" in the case of a major emergency elsewhere, such as the Korean Peninsula, in the view of some Republican and Democratic lawmakers and some military leaders.

"If we don't get this thing right, the risk is off the scale," said Lt. Gen. Roger Schultz, director of the Army National Guard, the military's most stressed branch.

Increasingly, surveys show that the main reason young American adults avoid military service is that they — and to a greater degree their parents — fear that enlisting could mean death, injury or a war-zone deployment. One survey showed such fears nearly doubling among respondents from 2000 to 2004.

Shelley, for example, has signed up four people in nearly six months, despite working 16-hour days. **Asked why recruiting is so difficult, he has a quick reply: "The war."**

Since 2001, the U.S. military has deployed more than 1 million troops for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, with 341,000, or nearly a third, serving two or more overseas tours. Today, an entrenched insurgency in Iraq ties down 150,000 U.S. troops.

As it rounds up troops for deployments, the Army has had to allocate limited equipment. It has shuffled thousands of items from radios to rifles between units, geared up new industrial production, and depleted Army prepositioned stocks of tanks, Humvees and other assets to outfit units for combat.

Army stocks in Southwest Asia are exhausted, and those in Europe have also been "picked over," one U.S. official said. Roughly half of the Army and Marine Corps equipment stored afloat on ships has been used up, the official said. Refilling the stocks must wait until the Iraq war winds down, Army officials say.

Meanwhile, an estimated 30 percent of Marine Corps equipment and 40 percent of Army gear are in Iraq, wearing out at up to six times the normal rate. Battle losses are mounting; the Army has lost 79 aircraft and scores of tanks and Bradley Fighting Vehicles. "We are equip-stretched, let there be no doubt about it. ... This Army started this war not fully equipped," Cody said in recent congressional testimony.

Of all the military branches, the Army National Guard and reserves are suffering the most, as they provide between a third and half of the troops in Iraq, despite a legacy of chronic shortages in their manning and equipment.

"The real stress on the system was the fact that no one envisioned that we would have this level of commitment for the National Guard," which shipped seven combat brigades to Iraq and Afghanistan for the last rotation, Cody said.

Because the Army traditionally undersupplies Guard and reserve units, few had the troops or gear needed when mobilized. As a result, large numbers of soldiers and equipment were shifted from one unit to another, or "cross-leveled," to cobble together a force to deploy.

"We were woefully under-equipped before the war started. That situation hasn't gotten any better. As a matter of fact, it gets a little bit worse every day, because we continue to cross-level," Lt. Gen. Steven Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau, told Congress this month.

The widespread fracturing of units is making it increasingly difficult for the Army to assemble viable forces from the remaining hodge-podge — most of which have low readiness ratings, Army figures show.

"It's a little bit like Swiss cheese. We've taken out holes in the units," Lovelace said. "Those holes are a lot of times leaders, and they are hard to grow."

"Can we do this forever? No. We can't do this forever at current levels," the Army National Guard's Schultz said in an interview.

In a sign of deeper problems, career citizen-soldiers frustrated by broken units and long, grueling war-zone duties are increasingly leaving the Guard. Attrition of career guardsmen is running at nearly 20 percent, said Schultz, who expects that as many as a third of the members of some units rotating back from Iraq will quit.

Recruitment is sluggish, reaching just 75 percent of the target for the first quarter of fiscal 2005 — meaning that the Guard is unlikely to reach its desired strength of 350,000 soldiers this year.

MORE:

Army Raises Enlistment Age for Reservists To 39

Mar 21, 2005 (Reuters)

The U.S. Army, stung by recruiting shortfalls caused by the Iraq war, has raised the maximum age for new recruits for the part-time Army Reserve and National Guard by five years to 39, officials said on Monday.

Recruiters say the Iraq war is making military service a harder sell, and the Army has added recruiters and financial incentives for enlistment.

"Obviously, this decision is being made partly in response to the personnel shortfalls caused by the war in Iraq," said defense analyst Loren Thompson of the Lexington Institute. [Obviously it's panic time at the Pentagon.]

San Francisco Bay Longshore Workers Close Down Port To Protest War

March 16, 2005 By Jack Heyman, San Francisco Chronicle

[Thanks to Phil G, who sent this in.]

There's a rising tide of workers' anger against the war in Iraq and the cuts in government programs to pay for it -- in enforcement of worker- safety laws, health care, Social Security, education and jobs. The recent victory of the nurses' union over Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's attempt to deny adequate staffing ratios in hospitals shows that labor can turn the tide.

Last year, the Port of Oakland -- the fourth largest port in the United States, ratcheting Northern California higher up on the global economic wheel -- handled more than 2 million containers of cargo worth \$30 billion. Yet nearby Oakland schools are being closed for lack of funding. And although the surge of trade with China has boosted profits for shippers and jobs for port workers, it's accompanied by an increase in dockworker deaths from unsafe working conditions. Already this year, two longshoremen have died in California ports, according to CalOSHA.

The local International Longshore and Warehouse Union will protest the war in Iraq and the deadly cuts it has forced by holding a stop-work meeting, shutting down all Bay Area ports on Saturday, the second anniversary of the Iraq war. It will then lead the labor contingent in the anti-war march in San Francisco under its banner, "An injury to one is an injury to all."

A waterfront saying is "If you don't know your rights, you don't have any. And if you don't use 'em, you lose 'em." The ILWU has always led by example.

In 1978, for example, longshore workers in Oakland refused to load bombs for the Pinochet military dictatorship in Chile and later for the bloody Salvadoran junta.

The union also waged a relentless campaign against apartheid in South Africa, culminating in a 1984 ship boycott in San Francisco. Nelson Mandela credited the union with inspiring the protest movement that helped topple apartheid. In 1999, union actions demanded freedom for black death-row inmate Mumia Abu-Jamal and joined in solidarity with protesters at the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle.

Two years ago, police opened fire with so-called "less-than-lethal" weapons on peaceful anti-war demonstrators and longshore workers near the Port of Oakland. Scores were injured, some seriously.

A state agency, the California Anti-Terrorism Information Center, had falsely warned police that "terrorists" may be demonstrating.

Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown never anticipated the outcry that would follow. The bloody police attack was condemned by Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Oakland, Jesse Jackson, author Alice Walker, several British members of Parliament and union officials, who represented millions of transport workers internationally. The U.N. Human Rights Commission cited the attack as one of the worst acts of police violence.

Still, criminal charges were filed against 24 anti-war protesters and one longshore union official, only to be dropped a year later.

Police videos and TV footage refuted the government's case that demonstrators threw objects at police before they opened fire and were blocking terminal gates. The victims of police brutality are suing the Oakland Police Department. The case is scheduled for court in January. (Some victims settled out of court last month.)

Brown supported the police attack, though many were shot in the back as they fled. (He is now "law and order" candidate for state attorney general, but in 1997, Brown, the quintessential political chameleon, participated in a labor-solidarity picket line that blocked trucks in the port.)

The police "shock and awe" shooting in the Port of Oakland highlights the collusion between government and corporations in repression of civil liberties and workers' rights.

Then-Oakland Police Chief Richard Word admitted in a New York Times report that riot-clad police had been deployed at the behest of maritime employers, who acknowledged meeting secretly with police and port commissioners three days before the attack. Last month, the Oakland City Council "scolded" the Oakland Port Commission for yet another secret meeting.

Despite adversity posed by employers and the government, the ILWU has persevered in the struggle for justice for all workers. On Saturday, longshore workers are encouraging others to follow their lead in protesting the war and occupation and in defense of civil rights and social gains.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Iraqi Police Officer Killed At US Checkpoint

March 23 (Xinhuanet)

An Iraqi police officer was killed and two others wounded on Tuesday night at a US military checkpoint northeast of Baghdad, the Iraqi police said.

"The US soldiers in the checkpoint opened fire on a police vehicle after they failed to stop," said a statement issued by the joint command center for the Iraqi police and the US army in Tikrit.

The victim was seriously injured, and evacuated to a US field hospital, but he died later of his wounds, the statement said.

Collaborator General Killed

23 March 2005 Aljazeera

An Iraqi army general died of his wounds suffered in an attack on Sunday and seven bodies of executed Iraqi soldiers were found in the north and south, said police sources.

<p>IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE END THE OCCUPATION</p>

Seven Occupation Cops Killed In Samarra, Six Wounded

23 March 2005 Aljazeera

In Samarra, a unit from the Iraqi Ministry of Interior 1st Police Commando Battalion was attacked as they conducted a raid on a camp thought to house anti-US fighters near Lake Tharthar at about 11am (0800 GMT).

At least seven Iraqi commandos died during the raid with the backing of US troops, the US military said in a statement.

Six other commandos were wounded, the military added.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

The Future Of The Anti-War Movement

Jan. – Feb. 2005, By Meredith Kolodner, International Socialist Review (excerpt)

The war on terror has as its basis the idea that the U.S. is the victim of fundamentalist, mostly Muslim, often stateless forces, who seek to destroy the U.S. due to its egalitarian traditions and democratic form of government.

As the National Security Strategy of the U.S. outlines. "The United States of America is fighting a war against terrorists of global reach. The enemy is not a single political regime or person or religion or ideology. The enemy is terrorism."

The failure to challenge this framework endangers the future health of the movement. To the extent that the U.S. population accepts the idea that the U.S. was attacked because of its positive attributes, the movement will have serious difficulty explaining why the U.S. should not overthrow any number of backwards dictatorships or countries "proven" to support the "terrorists" (such as Iran). The war on terror is the short hand excuse for the U.S. to intervene when and where it likes.

Whereas prior to 9/11, some sort of "humanitarian" excuse was needed (to rescue poor Kuwait in 1991, to save starving Somalis in 1993, to free oppressed Kosovars in 1999), the U.S. now has a much freer hand to target any country that it accuses of supporting terrorism.

An explicit, or implicit, reference to the haunting image of the twin towers in flames is used to silence critics. Whereas democracy in the 1950s and 1960s was being threatened by the specter of Stalin, it is now Osama bin Laden who challenges the U.S. everywhere. The war on terror not only justifies bombs and bloated military budgets, it has been used to allow some of the most extreme restrictions on civil liberties since Cold War McCarthyism clamped down on dissent decades ago.

The war on terror is the parent company of all of the wars and provocations the U.S. will initiate, it is the mother of all ideologies, and it will be the undoing of all opposition if it goes unchallenged.

Although many Monday morning quarterback pundits tried to make the election into a referendum on “moral values,” it was the war on terror that dominated the national debate.

It has been widely emphasized that 22 percent of voters said that moral values were the number one issue in their decision, but little has been said about the 78 percent who said that Iraq, the war on terror, and the economy were the biggest factors. It was the issue of Iraq and its political backdrop of foreign policy and security that defined the 2004 election season.

The damage done by the hawkish Kerry campaign, however, was augmented by the fact that the antiwar movement for the most part ceded the public stage to Kerry willingly giving ground on the issues of occupation and the war on terror.

The so-called antiwar candidate could talk about “winning” in Iraq, and the antiwar movement simply failed to challenge him on it in any serious way. And even more tragically, this all played out as events in Iraq were opening huge questions around Iraq in the minds of Americans.

Indeed, the argument in UFPJ’s post-election assessment can’t have it both ways.

If a vote for Bush has lead people around the world to “see Americans as complicit in our government’s wars,” a vote for hawkish Kerry wouldn’t have sent a fundamentally different message.

The argument is wrongly posed because Americans are nor permitted to vote on wars—only on which candidate will carry them out.

Instead of using this opportunity to gain political ground and reach more people, shifting the climate of debate around the war leftward, the anti-war movement slipped backwards.

Kerry gave Bush a free pass on Abu Ghraib, and the Left gave a free pass to Kerry.

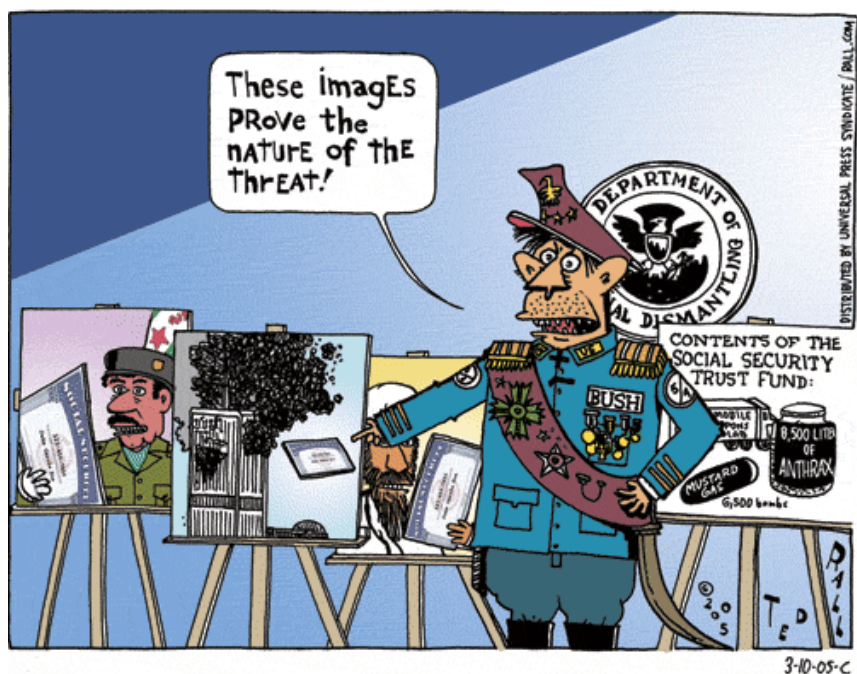
By backing Kerry, the antiwar movement got the worst of both worlds—it didn’t show itself in the streets or at the polls, and as a result, helped shift the political debate rightward.

With no platform from which to speak, the prowar candidate replaced the movement as the “liberal” position on the war.

[For more see the article at www.isreview.org/issues/39/antiwar_movement.shtml]

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.

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



Over A Barrel: Oil Industry Executives Know Iraq Is Only About Grabbing Oil

By Paul Roberts, November-December Mother Jones.

It's eight o'clock on a fresh summer morning in Denver, and I'm at a podium before a hundred executives from regional energy companies.

Having spent the last few years closely observing trends in the oil industry, I'm often asked to speak about the decline of global energy supplies, the way oil has corrupted U.S. foreign policy, and why the worldwide energy economy needs a radical transformation if we want to avoid catastrophic climate change.

Yet while these themes play well to liberal audiences in Boulder and Berkeley, I worry my reception here will be much cooler.

Most of these weather-beaten men (and a few women) spend their days squeezing hydrocarbons from the sand and stone beneath the Rockies; if my past observations of the energy industry are any guide, they voted for Bush, support the Iraq war, think climate change is a leftist hoax, and believe the main cause of America's energy crisis is that overzealous regulation keeps drillers like themselves from tapping the most promising reserves of oil and natural gas.

But as I finish my spiel and take questions, my initial assumptions vanish.

When I suggest that the Iraq war might not have been motivated *entirely* by America's thirst for oil, many in the room openly smirk, as if I've just suggested that the world is flat.

Oil markets are now so tight that even a minor disturbance -- accelerated fighting in Iraq, another bomb in Riyadh, more unrest in Venezuela or Nigeria -- could send prices soaring and crash the global economy into a recession.

Iran Government Tells Bush: Back Off Or We'll Cut Off Your Oil

March 07, 2005 AFP, Reuters

OIL-rich Iran has raised the stakes in the standoff over its nuclear program, warning that any attempt to impose sanctions on its activities would lead to an energy crisis in the US and Europe.

Referring the Islamist state to the UN Security Council, as the US had urged, would be "playing with fire", Iran's top nuclear official said yesterday.

"The first to suffer will be Europe and the US themselves," Hassan Rowhani said at a Tehran conference on nuclear technology and sustainable development. "(It) would cause problems for the regional energy market, for the European economy and even more so for the US."

He said Iran's leaders "could be called upon to make new decisions", but did not provide any details on what that would involve.

"The stability in the region would become fragile and the US would be the first to suffer," he said.

Venezuela Government Tells Bush: Back Off Or We'll Cut Off Your Oil: U.S. Empire Starts Military Buildup 50 Miles Offshore

Venezuelan Navy Cmdr. Armando Laguna said Venezuela was "taking precautions" and investigating just what U.S. ships and other military equipment are doing on the island, located fewer than 50 miles from Venezuela's coast.

3.10.05 World News, By CARMEN J. GENTILE, UPI Chief Latin America Correspondent & 09 March 2005 The Associated Press

Making no bones about it, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez made it clear that any act of aggression on the part of the United States would result in an immediate end to its bountiful supply of oil to its best customer in the north.

The world's 5th largest oil exporter, Venezuela has been the target of Washington's ire in recent weeks and months, causing the left-wing Chavez much dismay.

During his visit Friday to India -- where Chavez is hammering out the details of an oil agreement with the leading developing nation -- the Venezuelan leader made it very clear that if the United States "hurts" his country in any way, the oil values will be shut off.

"The United States government would very much like to keep all our oil for itself," Chavez said. "But our oil reserve does not belong to Mr. Bush. The oil belongs to the Venezuelan people."

"We are just waiting for the United States to announce next that Venezuela has weapons of mass destruction," Chavez said in a speech in the southern Indian city of Bangalore.

"If there is any aggression, there will be no oil," Chavez told reporters Friday.

"We want to supply oil to the United States. (But) we are not going to avoid this supply of oil unless the U.S. government gets a little bit crazy and tries to hurt us."

Chavez's caveat concerning the oil flow to its biggest and best customer comes amid a tense point in U.S.-Venezuelan relations.

On Thursday, Venezuela's Vice President Jose Rangel accused the U.S. State Department representative for the region of being out of touch with matters in Latin America. **According to Rangel, the U.S. government is "totally out of control in regards to Venezuela and doesn't have any idea what is happening in Latin America."**

The Bush administration has long been a critic of the politics and policies of Chavez, accusing him of attempting to create a Cuban-style dictatorship in the South American country and supporting Colombian leftist rebels intent on destabilizing the government of Venezuela's neighbor.

Both accusations Chavez adamantly denies, adding recently that he was concerned that the U.S. government was intent on overthrowing his administration.

Venezuelan Navy Cmdr. Armando Laguna said Venezuela was "taking precautions" and investigating just what U.S. ships and other military equipment are doing on the island, located fewer than 50 miles from Venezuela's coast.

In recent weeks, Chavez has accused the United States of trying to incite a war with Venezuela and went as far to allege Washington was intent on killing him.

"If something happens to me, there is only one person responsible for it, and his name is George W. Bush," said Chavez on Tuesday, echoing previous assertions that the White House had designs on assassinating him.

In the last year, Chavez has been balking more vociferously at alleged U.S. interference in Venezuelan affairs, accusing the White House of conspiring to gain control of its oil production.

The supposed pressure from abroad appears to have in part prompted Chavez to beef up Venezuela's defenses, a move that has caused concern from the State Department.

In 2004, Venezuela agreed to purchase an estimated 50 MiG fighter jets from Russia as well as other arms. **And earlier this month, Brazil said it would sell at least a dozen light attack aircraft known as Super Tucanos to Venezuela.**

State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said that the purchase from Russia had a potentially "destabilizing effect on the hemisphere."

Among Washington's concerns about a heavily armed Venezuela is the possibility of conflict between the leftist Chavez and neighboring Colombia, led by right-wing Bush administration ally Alvaro Uribe. Colombia has received some \$3.3 billion in arms and assistance from Washington in recent years to ostensibly fund the South American nation's war against drug cartels and left-wing rebel groups.

Chavez, however, has accused Colombia and the United States of conspiring together to remove him from power by funding improvements in the Colombian military.

And on Friday, Interior and Justice Minister Jesse Chacon announced that security would be beefed up along the dense forested border with Colombia and include flyovers by military helicopters.

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