

GI SPECIAL 3D40:

**REALLY BAD PLACE TO BE:
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW**



11.21.05: US soldiers on night patrol in central Baghdad. (AFP/Mauricio Lima)

The Political Lynching Of Captain James Yee: And How Stupid, Incompetent Psycho General Geoffrey Miller Led The Mob

Once "extracted," the recalcitrant prisoner was placed in isolation in an MSU (for "maximum security unit") until he was ready to accept a Koran. What are we to make of this struggle in which alleged Islamic "terrorists" refuse to accept Korans from their insistent captors until they've been pounded into submission? And how, the chaplain rightly asks, was it "good for the mission?"

After five days in solitary confinement, he was shown a memo signed by General Miller charging him with espionage. "Chaplain Yee is known to have associated with known terrorist sympathizers," it said. He was also said to have classified documents hidden away in his quarters at Guantánamo, along with a ticket to London, suggesting that he'd been preparing to flee. None of this turned out to be true.

December 15, 2005 By Joseph Lelyveld, The New York Review Of Books, Volume 52, Number 20 [Excerpts]

For God and Country: Faith and Patriotism Under Fire
by James Yee with Aimee Molloy
Public Affairs, 240 pp., \$24.00

Each time the Muslim prisoners held in open-ended preventive detention at the Guantánamo naval station in Cuba have to be moved from their cells to interrogation rooms, they're fitted in what their military police guards sardonically term "a three-piece suit," which consists of shackles attached by chains to a heavy belt: one shackle for each ankle, the third for the wrists.

Captain James Yee, a 1990 graduate of the US Military Academy at West Point, witnessed innumerable such fittings during the ten months he was a daily presence as a Muslim chaplain inside the cages of Camp Delta where supposed al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorists were dumped as a way of holding them beyond reach of any US court.

This might have prepared him for his own fitting in a "three-piece suit," which occurred at the naval brig in Jacksonville, Florida, shortly after his arrest in September 2003 on what he was eventually advised were charges of mutiny, aiding the enemy, and espionage, on any of which prosecutors could have demanded the death penalty.

Al-Qaeda, anonymous investigators suggested to the press, had infiltrated Guantánamo in the person of this West Point graduate, a third-generation Chinese-American from New Jersey who had made his first profession of faith as a Muslim at a Newark mosque, three months after completing his officers training.

James Yee's spiritual journey over the next decade, which eventually brought him to Cuba as the fourth Muslim chaplain assigned in less than a year to Camp Delta's detainees, seems to have begun almost casually.

At first, his conversion "did not feel particularly momentous," he tells us in his memoir *For God and Country*. In his description, it sounds more like a consumer than a theological choice: accepting the "simplicity" of Islam's belief in one God didn't require trading in Jesus for Muhammad, as he saw it, but putting them more or less on a par as prophets.

Although he had been raised as a Lutheran to believe in the Trinity, he had never considered religion to be a major factor in his life and didn't see why it had to become one as a consequence of his conversion. Islam, at this stage, was a more comfortable creed, not a way of life.

To his apparent surprise, its claim on his attention gradually deepened, particularly when he was assigned to Saudi Arabia, after the first Gulf War, as an air defense artillery officer in a Patriot missile crew. Yee, who professes to have felt entirely at home in the relatively homogeneous New Jersey suburb where he'd grown up as a member of an ethnic minority, found a kind of liberation in the "diversity" of Islam.

This was real multiculturalism, all those Asians, Africans, Iranians, and Turks mixed in with Arabs and praying on a footing of equality; this was indeed "momentous." Mecca, as he experienced it on this first of three trips (the first a mere visit, the second two a proper Hajj), was what his father had always taught him America was supposed to be. "The diversity of Islam," he writes, "was incredible.... I'd never seen anything as truly diverse as this."

So moved was he that within two years he'd resigned from the army with the aim of pursuing Islamic studies to qualify as an imam and immersing himself in Arabic; within three years, this Chinese-American West Point graduate from New Jersey was enrolled in Abu Noor University in Damascus where he stayed four years, returning home with a Palestinian wife who kept herself covered and spoke only limited English.

Captain Yee's story is remarkable even before he was recruited back into the army as a Muslim chaplain, even before he was sent to Guantánamo. His story up to this point, before it turns really dark, has strong interest as a narrative of one American's quest in the mall of religions, faiths, and cults that this country becomes for so many of its denizens.

Its subsequent episodes display the US military's profound confusion about Islam: its self-congratulation and religiosity, which lead it to boast that it provides Korans, chaplain services, and an opportunity to pray in the direction of Mecca to those it detains indefinitely as "terrorists"; while its overriding devotion to its mission leads it to interfere with the religious practice of those same detainees in order to pressure them psychologically, squeeze them for intelligence they may or may not have held back, and, generally, show them who's in charge.

It's asking a lot of the individual military policeman, not to mention the individual major general, to draw a fine line between the war on terror and a war on Islam, when Islam and their own misery are all that unite the inmates in the wire-mesh cages of a high-security prison. In this case, the major general was General Geoffrey Miller, who had been dispatched by Donald Rumsfeld to Camp Delta—and later Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq—with the specific charge of improving the "harvest" of what's known as "actionable intelligence."

Into this storm of cultural confusion and ruthless resolve walked the naive James Yee in November 2002, rendered even more so by his head-turning success in his first posting as a chaplain at Fort Lewis, Washington, where he'd won the warm approbation of his commanders who thus reinforced the conviction he'd formed in Mecca that there could be no conflict between service to Allah and service to America.

Soon he was being sent to other military installations to make the same presentation and army publicists were arranging for him to be interviewed on National Public Radio and MSNBC. "I had become the US military's poster child of a good Muslim," he says.

He was so prized during this period that no one in the military seems to have raised questions about his long stay in Damascus, a line on his résumé that might have rung some bells during a security vetting, if there had been such a thing for chaplains assigned to Guantánamo.

It seems there wasn't, at least in the case of the one Muslim chaplain with a West Point diploma. If his Syrian connection was ever noted, it would have been only later when a cloud of suspicion had already settled over the heads of all the Muslim servicemen with access to this remote and heavily guarded prison.

Then the fairly striking (but easily explained) fact that he had tried placing phone calls from Guantánamo to Damascus—where his wife and daughter had gone for the duration of his stay in Cuba, in order to be with her family—may well have been added to the dossier being assembled for General Miller that depicted James Yee, grotesquely and implausibly, as an al-Qaeda ringleader.

Before the case against Chaplain Yee collapsed, Senators Charles Schumer of New York and Jon Kyl of Arizona, the columnist John Leo, as well as an array of conservative and Christian bloggers would seize on his arrest as evidence that radical Islamicists had taken control of the recruitment of Muslim chaplains into our armed forces.

They offered no evidence bearing on his recruitment back into the army, however; by his own telling, Yee was first approached by a Muslim African-American, an ex-marine, at a Ramadan banquet at that hotbed of Islamic ferment, that notorious madrasa, the Pentagon.

Yee had scant opportunity to offer a public rebuttal of the charges he faced, or the portrayal of him as a traitor by anonymous government leakers, or the further allegations the charges and leaks inspired.

First he was held in solitary confinement; then, on his release, placed under a gag order. "Speech that undermines the effectiveness of loyalty, discipline or unit morale is not constitutionally protected," he was warned. The gag order stayed in force until his separation from the military—on a hard-won honorable discharge—early this year. His book thus tells a story that reporters who followed his case never got to hear from the accused.

Actually, it appears, all Captain Yee had to do to attract suspicion was to intercede repeatedly at Camp Delta on behalf of the prisoners, as their chaplain, when he saw their guards being unnecessarily—and, he came to feel, deliberately—provocative: in handling Korans during cell searches, for instance, or taking detainees out of their cells in shackles for interrogation just as the hour arrived for prayer.

He had also begun to meet regularly with the forty or so Muslim servicemen on the base, for he was their chaplain, too. Since the mess halls didn't provide halal food, some of them found it convenient to gather in the captain's quarters for meals.

Among these American-born or naturalized Muslims were some who brought back stories of prisoner abuse from the interrogation rooms, where they were assigned as interpreters but which were off-limits to the chaplain, who soon began keeping a "personal journal of the atrocities that I was hearing about in the interrogation rooms and on the blocks."

Some of this abuse the interpreters not unreasonably took to be abuse of Muslims as Muslims—for instance, wrapping prisoners in an Israeli flag, or playing a compact disc of verses from the Koran to set the scene for an interrogation session, only to drown it out with screeching rock music. The prisoners were also left chained in a fetal position for hours.

In their second year of confinement, a significant proportion of the prisoners began to exhibit symptoms of depression. Some went mute; others seemed to be regressing to patterns of childish behavior, singing to themselves in thin high-pitched voices. About a third, Yee says, were on antidepressants; at any given time, roughly twenty were kept in a psychiatric ward.

In the claustrophobic circumstances of the American military enclave, Captain Yee's evening gatherings and services could be construed as alien, suspicious, not with the program, even mutinous.

We now know that the captain's quarters were searched. We don't know if they were ever bugged, a possibility that Yee doesn't raise in these pages. But it stands to reason that they may have been, in which case the investigators—inexperienced reservists who thought they were uncovering a plot—may have heard resentful talk that they took to be conspiratorial.

Such suspicions were apparently fanned by interpreters from non-Muslim backgrounds (who mostly learned Arabic in the military, where they would have achieved a level of proficiency that didn't begin to match that of native speakers). The idea that Camp Delta had been infiltrated by al-Qaeda was far-fetched from the start, but the prison was on a war footing since the day it was set up, patrolled as if attack from the sea by the nonexistent al-Qaeda navy were a real possibility; infiltration from within was not the least-plausible threat imagined by the command in training exercises designed to keep the prison's guards on constant alert.

Eventually Yee became such an object of suspicion that military policemen took to calling out "Chaplain on the block!" to warn guards inside that an intrusion was about to occur in the person of a US Army captain, or bar him till they were good and ready to let

him in, even though his orders gave him complete access to the prison and he outranked the enlisted men who stood in his way.

But this didn't happen until many months had passed. And, as a result, Yee is now able to give us the most coherent and detailed account that we've had of conditions inside the Guantánamo cages; he can also provide the context and narrative for bits of information about abuses of prisoners that had emerged earlier in a fragmentary way as a result of discovery motions brought by civil liberties lawyers. For instance, he makes it clear that an epidemic of suicide attempts in the summer of 2003 was an organized protest, not a collective nervous breakdown. He was often present when the prisoners erupted in fury, banging on the cages, shouting, and spitting at the guards.

Newsweek appears to have got it wrong last year when it reported that a Koran had been flushed down a toilet at Camp Delta (not an easy thing to accomplish, if you think about it). But abuse of the holy book that the command had so proudly installed in every cell, like a Gideon Bible in a hotel room, was a chronic issue, providing the kindling for most of these flare-ups. What he calls "the worst incident I was aware of" occurred in late July 2003 when, he tells us, an interrogator threw a detainee's Koran on the floor, "stepped on it, and kicked it across the room." When word of the incident spread through the cages, as it inevitably did, the prisoners tried to go on strike by vowing not to speak at all in the interrogation rooms.

That didn't get them the apology from General Miller they were seeking so they escalated their protest, orchestrating a series of suicide attempts. It started with a detainee using his bed sheet to hang himself from the wire mesh in his cage while prisoners nearby raised a storm of noise. The guards then came stomping into the cell to cut him down, holler for medics, and transfer him in shackles to the infirmary. No sooner was this done than another prisoner would be found hanging by a sheet and the same cycle, with all the yelling, banging, and stomping, would be repeated. Over several days, twenty-three prisoners tried to hang themselves in protest over the incident and the general hopelessness of their situation.

The struggle over Koran abuse reached such a pitch that the Muslim chaplain actually recommended to his superiors that the books be removed from the cells and placed in the prison library for safekeeping. He'd gotten the idea from detainees with whom he'd been speaking, but the colonel who served as Camp Delta's warden wouldn't consider it. "Every cell gets a Koran," he's quoted as saying. "That's not an option." In effect, the chaplain was being told that we would respect Islam in our own way, giving as much offense to its practitioners as we wanted.

In an effort to end this ugly farce, Captain Yee drafted a military SOP (standard operating procedure) on how to avoid incidents over the Koran that was accepted by the command and read out to the prisoners in Arabic, on General Miller's order, over the public address system. Guards were told never to touch the book and to call on the chaplain or a Muslim interpreter to handle it if they felt one had to be moved or searched.

If Muslim servicemen were not readily available, the guard was to put on clean gloves. Surgical masks were provided to each cell to serve as little hammocks in which Korans could be safely deposited, high off the floor and away from toilets.

The surgical masks proved to be no solution. On their daily inspections, Captain Yee says, MPs would not infrequently manage to tug on the masks so that the Korans fell out.

According to him, the 344 MPs Company from Connecticut stood out for its adeptness at mask tugging. They knew they weren't supposed to touch the Korans, its members told him when he remonstrated with them, but they'd been instructed that the masks were not off limits.

Finally, to his disgust, the use of force was allowed to resolve the issue. A detainee who refused to accept a Koran in his cell would be subject to what was known as "a forced cell extraction" by an IRF (for "initial response force")—six to eight MPs in riot protection gear (plastic masks, chest protectors, shin guards, shields) who would burst in on a cell to subdue a problem detainee in what was commonly known as an IRFing.

Here is Yee's description of these stampedes:

“After they suited up, they formed a huddle and chanted in unison.... Then they rushed the block, one behind the other.... The sound of their heavy boots hammered down the steel corridor and their chants ricocheted off the tin ceiling.... The IRF team stopped at the detainee's cell.... The team leader in front drenched the prisoner with pepper spray and then opened the cell door. The others charged in and rushed the detainee.... The point was to get him to the ground as quickly as possible, with whatever means necessary.... When it was over, there was a certain excitement in the air. The guards were pumped.... They high-fived each other and slammed their chests together, like professional basketball players...an odd victory celebration for eight men who took down one prisoner.”

Once "extracted," the recalcitrant prisoner was placed in isolation in an MSU (for "maximum security unit") until he was ready to accept a Koran. What are we to make of this struggle in which alleged Islamic "terrorists" refuse to accept Korans from their insistent captors until they've been pounded into submission? And how, the chaplain rightly asks, was it "good for the mission?"

James Yee couldn't easily ignore the fact that Muslim servicemen were becoming objects of hostility and suspicion; he was a little slow to recognize that he himself was now regarded as a suspicious case.

(Perhaps he derived a false sense of security from his obvious usefulness, for he was still being trotted out for visiting congressmen and journalists to give a rosy picture of all that was being done to attend to the spiritual needs of the detainees.)

He'd heard that Muslim servicemen had been collectively nicknamed "Hammas" by members of the Joint Task Force responsible for interrogations.

And once General Miller himself, on a visit to Camp Delta, took the chaplain for a stroll on the gravel path inside the fence; the general said friends of his had died in the attack on the Pentagon and confided that he'd sought counseling from a chaplain to deal with the anger he felt against "those Muslims" responsible for the attack. "I appreciated his candor," Yee says, "but sensed ...there was a subtle warning behind his words."

At about the same time, he noticed plainclothesmen on the periphery of services he conducted and wondered if they were FBI agents. Several Muslim enlisted men, he heard, had been detained on their return to the mainland. Finally, on September 10, 2003, a day before the second anniversary of the September 11 attacks, Yee found himself taken into custody by agents of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, shortly after landing in Jacksonville on leave.

After five days in solitary confinement, he was shown a memo signed by General Miller charging him with espionage. "Chaplain Yee is known to have associated with known terrorist sympathizers," it said. He was also said to have classified documents hidden away in his quarters at Guantánamo, along with a ticket to London, suggesting that he'd been preparing to flee. None of this turned out to be true.

But before the military prosecutors started to backtrack, they put Captain Yee through many of the experiences his fellow Muslims had endured at Camp Delta. Not only was he shackled and held in solitary confinement, he was strip-searched and made to wear blackened goggles and earmuffs as he was shifted from the naval brig in Jacksonville to the one in Charleston, South Carolina.

This was where the authorities stashed terrorist suspects who could advance some slight claim to ordinary legal rights, where Yasser Hamdi and Jose Padilla—two "enemy combatants" with US citizenship, whose right to due process was now being contested by the government— were held.

"Was I in fact being considered an enemy combatant?" Captain Yee wondered. The obvious answer was yes, even if no such formal classification had been made.

But a month after his arrest, the charge of espionage and other serious charges were abruptly dropped. Though Captain Yee had been branded a traitor and was still being held in solitary, a navy lawyer said the government lacked the "prosecutorial resources" to continue the case; also, the lawyer said, it needed more time to investigate his "misconduct."

Nothing more was ever heard of that investigation. The only interpretation that fits the known facts is that the military lawyers assigned to the case found that there was nothing there to support the extreme charges.

So now Captain Yee was left to face two relatively minor counts of mishandling classified documents. (He insists he never had any.) Still, he was held in solitary

confinement for seventy-six days and shackled whenever he was taken from his cell.

As the charges against him dwindled to nothing, the conduct of the prosecution became, if anything, more relentless, vengeful, and ugly.

Yee's wife had returned to their home in Olympia, Washington, where she was visited by a female Defense Department investigator who showed her pictures of the chaplain with other women, and told her that he'd been having affairs.

When, finally, the prosecution was unable to produce any evidence of his ever having possessed classified documents, let alone of having mishandled them, the criminal case collapsed. Far from acknowledging a miscarriage of justice, the prosecution said it couldn't disclose its evidence because of national security concerns. And still Yee wasn't in the clear. With the criminal charges erased, the chaplain was made to face administrative charges of adultery and downloading pornographic matter onto his laptop.

Someone's obsession was driving this vendetta. Circumstantial evidence points to General Miller, the commander of the Camp Delta operation, who showed up to personally conduct the administrative hearing in Arlington, Virginia, on the adultery and pornography charges he had set in motion. Not surprisingly, he ruled against Yee, who then appealed to the US Southern Command.

There General James Hill, the commander, took the remarkable step of throwing out another general's ruling but then, gratuitously, blamed Captain Yee for "misconduct." The chaplain was getting off on all charges, the general said, only because he'd suffered enough—not so much in solitary confinement in navy brigs as at the hands of the press, which had reported sensational charges that Hill's own subordinates had made and couldn't support with evidence.

Even before the prosecution invaded Chaplain Yee's private life— and by doing so, he acknowledges, wrecked his marriage—this was a sordid tale in the sordid saga that has unfolded at Guantánamo.

James Yee arrived believing he could be useful to the military's mission by showing a concern for the well-being of detainees who were held in small cages that they never got to leave for days on end unless they were summoned by an interrogator. He then concluded that the mission was actually to break their spirits, that his mediation was at best tolerated and more often resented. He made himself even more suspect when he addressed supposed "terrorists" as "brethren" and withdrew from the social circle of his fellow officers into the fellowship of other Muslims.

It's heartening that several senior officers from Fort Lewis and Guantánamo supported him, writing to General Miller on his behalf.

But what is telling is that there hasn't been a Muslim chaplain assigned to Camp Delta's detainees over most of the two years since Yee's arrest and there is none now.

A spokesman for the Joint Task Force that runs the prison assured me that a chaplain is "on call"; and that the commanding general now has an "Islamic adviser" on his staff, an Arabic speaker originally from the Middle East who sometimes talks to the prisoners. The guards, said the spokesman, are "sensitive to all the detainees' religious practices."

Of course, this is the same line that Guantánamo spokesmen have been offering since the first prisoners landed in shackles in early 2002, and in all these months and years no independent observers, no journalists, no outsiders have been allowed inside the cages to make their own assessments, with the exception of representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, whose continued access depends on their keeping their findings confidential.

The official line sounded slightly more plausible when there was a Muslim chaplain on hand, rather than "on call," to vouch for it.

Now who gets to make the call?

Certainly not the five hundred or so prisoners remaining where once the masterminds of the "war on terror" expected to open new cellblocks that would enable them to raise the capacity to more than two thousand.

Next year will be the fifth for those who remain.

The Supreme Court ruled last year that federal courts do have some jurisdiction over detainees, after all.

But no court order has affected the life of a single prisoner and now—in view of the moves underway in the Senate to limit the jurisdiction of the courts in Guantánamo cases—it's far from clear that any ever will.

Nor has any detainee been convicted of anything, by a military commission or anyone else.

We didn't need Chaplain Yee to remind us that Guantánamo has become an embarrassment. What this former insider shows us is that it's a place of misery day in day out, year in year out.

We shouldn't be surprised. But we can be sure the prisoners still have their Korans.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

SOLDIER KILLED BY BAGHDAD IED

12/10/05 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS
RELEASE Number: 05-12-15C

BAGHDAD, Iraq — A Task Force Baghdad Soldier was killed when a patrol struck an improvised explosive device in the Adhamiyah district of north Baghdad Dec. 10.

TWO U.S. SOLDIERS KILLED IN YUSUFIYAH

12/10/05 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS
RELEASE Number: 05-12-17C & (PG)

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Two Task Force Baghdad Soldiers were killed by small-arms fire in the Yusufiyah district southwest of Baghdad Dec. 10.

"They were at a traffic control point, when they took fire from one terrorist in a vehicle," said US military spokesman Sergeant David Abrams.

U.S. SOLDIER KILLED, 11 WOUNDED BY ABU GHRAIB CAR BOMB

(AP) By ELENA BECATOROS & HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL
COMMAND NEWS RELEASE Number: 05-12-14C

A car bomb attack in the Abu Ghraib district of west Baghdad Dec. 9 on a U.S. army unit killed one soldier and wounded 11 others, as well as wounding an Iraqi civilian, the U.S. military said Saturday.

BAGHDAD SOLDIER KILLED BY SMALL-ARMS FIRE

12/10/05 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS
RELEASE Number: 05-12-16C

BAGHDAD, Iraq — A Task Force Baghdad Soldier was killed by small-arms fire while on patrol northwest of Baghdad Dec. 10.

II MEF SOLDIER DIES OF SUSPECTED HEART ATTACK AT FOB KALSU

12/10/05 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS
RELEASE Number: 05-12-13C

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq – A Soldier assigned to the 155th Brigade Combat Team, II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward), died of a suspected heart attack while on guard duty at Forward Operating Base Kalsu, Dec. 8.

Marine Killed, Two Marines Lose Legs

12/9/2005 BY TERRY KATZ, STURGIS JOURNAL

A Sturgis Marine on his third tour of duty in Iraq was severely injured when a bomb exploded Dec. 7.

Jordan Pierson was in Ramadi where there have been several offensives the past few weeks.

Family members were notified early Thursday. He has been transported to Germany for treatment and will be en route to the United States next week once his condition is stabilized.

Pierson has lost part of his leg. Other details of his injuries are sketchy.

There are unconfirmed reports that one Marine was killed and two others lost both legs in the explosion.

Pierson attended Sturgis High School and the Michigan Youth Challenge Academy in Battle Creek. He turns 22 on Dec. 26.

Eric Pierson said his son made a visit home over the summer.

His mother, Candace Pierson, the former admissions director at Thurston Woods, recently moved to Tampa Bay, Fla.

Jordan made Journal headlines in April 2003 when he appeared on the CBS Evening News. Jordan's battalion was featured in special segment titled "From Boys to Men."

At age 19, Jordan was part of the Weapons Company of the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines. He was the youngest soldier in his unit. He was promoted to Lance Corporal on March 1, 2003, and had three more years to serve. He would have finished his tour of duty in 2006. Candace Pierson said her son wanted to be a Marine since he was 8.

Blackhawk Medevac Down In Tarmiyah

Dec. 09, 2005 Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Iraq - A U.S. military medical evacuation helicopter made a hard landing north of Baghdad on Friday.

The military confirmed a report on an incident involving a Blackhawk helicopter in Tarmiyah, 30 miles north of Baghdad.

"What we can confirm right now is the medevac Blackhawk made a hard landing, but did not crash. At this time, there are no injuries reported," the military said.

Car Bomb Attack On U.S. Convoy At Tal Afar Destroys Two Humvees: Casualties Not Announced

12.10.05 Reuters

TAL AFAR - A car bomber struck a U.S. convoy in Tal Afar in northern Iraq on Saturday, destroying two Humvee vehicles, witnesses and police said.



U.S. Marine reads mail from home and then burns it to prevent insurgents from collecting personal information about him, at his base in Karabilah, Iraq, seven miles from Syria, Dec. 9, 2005. (AP Photo/Jacob Silberberg)

[Yeah. Right. Makes perfect sense. "Hey Ahmed, were you able to find any of those letters from home the Marines get?" "Yeah, I got one right here. Why, they just scatter them around all over the place. All about deer hunting in

Pennsylvania, and who came over for Thanksgiving dinner.” “Praise Allah, get it to the commander right away. This will prove of decisive importance during our next offensive!!” And whatever idiot thought this one up sits safe someplace in Washington DC, daily facing imminent peril from being stabbed with a fork in the Pentagon dining room.]

TROOP NEWS

Good News From Canada

December 09, 2005 Gerry Condon, Soldier Say No

Although U.S. war resister Jeremy Hinzman was initially denied refugee status by a single member of Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board, the Canada's Federal Court has agreed to hear Jeremy's appeal, based largely on the fact that he was not allowed to present information about the illegality of the U.S. war in Iraq under international law.

The appeal hearing will take place on February 7, but a decision is not expected until later in 2006.

Because the Federal Court has deemed his arguments worthy of careful scrutiny, he will be allowed to appeal all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, if necessary.

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.

“A Troop Commander Expressed Frustration”

December 10, 2005 Ryan Lenz, The Daily Herald

Cpl. Jimmy Lee Shelton, 21, from Lehigh Acres, Fla., died Saturday in a mortar attack that came moments after a call to prayer.

Capt. James Turner, a troop commander in the division's 33rd Cavalry Regiment., who notified Shelton's parents with a telephone call, expressed frustration with efforts to help the Iraqis establish a democracy.

"How do you give a group of people freedom when they don't understand what freedom is?" Turner asked. "Is it my responsibility to teach them what freedom is? I just don't know."

ACU Doesn't Live Up **“Do Not Say You Are Listening To The Soldiers, As That Is Just A Lie”**

Letters To The Editor
12.5.05
Army Times

Reading the article “Battle worn” [Oct. 17] on the ACU defects hit a raw nerve.

The person in the story said, “We are listening to soldiers.” That is not true.

Let's begin with the whole Velcro issue. Did they not ask any of the Army aviators about how crummy Velcro is after a short while? If they did, was anybody listening and taking notes?

Why would I want my nametapes and patches Velcroed? To remove them before I launder them?

I washed my BDUs for years with all my stuff sewn on and had no problems.

Is it so I can get my uniform confused with another soldiers when we are doing a bulk load in the field? Sewing is the fix, not Velcro.

As for pin-on additional skill identifiers versus sewn-on ASIs: Ask any soldier which they prefer, and it will be sewn-on, hands down.

Do not say you are listening to the soldiers, as that is just a lie.

Sgt. Andrew Kovacsy
Camp Speicher, Tikrit, Iraq

MORE:

“Don’t Even Get Me Started On How Noisy Velcro Is”

I’m concerned about what the designers of the Army Combat Uniform were thinking when they came up with this uniform.

First, it doesn’t blend in at all in a woodland environment. Actually, it makes a soldier stick out.

The uniform is very bright, like it’s “turned on” compared to soldiers wearing Battle Dress Uniforms. If the Army wanted to come out with a digital uniform, they should’ve digitized the current BDU and Desert Combat Uniform.

Furthermore, anything pinned on makes absolutely no sense for a combat uniform. Pin-on items have the potential to get hung up on anything and can tear the uniform. Not to mention the fact that backings wear out and the pins will stick the soldier.

And don’t even get me started on how noisy Velcro is.

A combat uniform is supposed to give our soldiers the maximum advantage on the battlefield. The senior leadership needs to address these issues and make our new combat uniform what it was meant to be — a combat uniform.

Sgt. 1st Class Ron Fergeson
St. Joseph, Mo.

MORE:

“Why Doesn’t The Army Issue Everyone Two Uniforms?”

Why is the Army making some soldiers buy the ACU while others don’t have to?

You may have some soldiers that will spend three years in the Army, deploy to Iraq or Afghanistan and get the new uniform issued to them free of charge — and get out after they return.

Other soldiers will never deploy to Iraq or Afghanistan and have to shell out over \$400 to get the uniform, but they will end up staying in the Army.

Why doesn’t the Army issue everyone two uniforms?

Master Sgt. Joseph Hawkins Jr.
Hanau, Germany

MORE:

“The ACUs In Iraq Stood Out Like A Bull’s-Eye”

How much money did the Army spend on the development of the ACU?

The ACUs in Iraq stood out like a bull’s-eye. The Velcro is the worse thing I have ever seen. Pin-on badges — another poor idea by someone who more than likely never earned a skill badge — look bad.

I don’t know how much money went into the development of the ACU, but I am sure it could have been better used elsewhere.

I love all the new pockets, but they are not really new. The Stryker uniform is almost identical, and aviation BDUs have similar-styled pockets.

How much did the ACU cost the taxpayer for someone to repackage existing uniforms into something “new”?

And whose idea was it to put the rank on the chest?

The Army could have taken the Marine Corps design and changed the colors to fit the Army. I think the Corps had it right with two separate uniforms; “one-color-fits-all” sells well, but is not practical.

Capt. John Green
Fort Bragg, N.C.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Assorted Resistance Action

December 09, 2005 Sapa-AFP & Reuters & Dec. 10 (Xinhuanet) & (AP) By ELENA BECATOROS & Reuters

In the southern Baghdad neighbourhood of Dura, a roadside bomb detonated next to an Iraqi patrol, killing an interior ministry commando and wounding two.

Another bomb killed a policeman and a civilian in Saydiya, in southern Baghdad.

BALAD - Iraqi police found the body of an intelligence officer on Friday. He was shot dead the previous day after resistance fighters ambushed his car, they said.

An Egyptian contractor, kidnapped in Tikrit, some 170 km north of Baghdad, was found dead on Saturday, a police source told Xinhua. Hilali, a contractor working for the American military, was abducted on Friday night when unknown insurgents in two cars raided his house in Tikrit and took him away.

The bullet-riddled body of Ibrahim al-Seid al-Hilali, 46, was found on the roadside in northern Tikrit, the source said, without giving further details.

Insurgents also killed Ali Omeir, an official at a local non-governmental aid group, in northern Mosul's Sukar neighborhood as he was heading for work, al-Bakri said.

"One soldier was killed and seven others seriously wounded when a makeshift bomb detonated near their vehicle while patrolling the al-Rawashed area near Balad," said Col. Ahmed Hassan from Tikrit police.

NAJAF - Former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's party headquarters in Najaf was hit by mortar rounds on Saturday, injuring two party members and causing damage to the building, police said.

NAJAF - Adnan al-Zurfi, a former mayor of Najaf, survived a roadside bomb attack on his convoy, Zurfi and police said. Three of his guards were injured. Zurfi is contesting next Thursday's election as head of the Faithful to Najaf Party.

BALAD - One Iraqi soldier was killed and 9 others were wounded, in a makeshift bomb attack on their patrol in Balad, 90 km (55 miles) north of Baghdad on Friday, police said.

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

RESISTANCE SCARES OFF BIG OIL: "The Attacks Have Made It All But Impossible"

The attacks have made it all but impossible to attract foreign expertise needed to rejuvenate Iraq's rusty oil infrastructure, drill new wells or take any number of steps toward increasing production or exports. Legal disputes between Iraq's provinces and central government about ownership of oil is also keeping investors away, said Jamal Qureshi, an oil analyst with PFC Energy in Washington.

December 8, 2005 By: JIM KRANE - Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates -- Despite President Bush's optimism on Iraq's reconstruction, the country appears set to pump less crude in 2005 than last year's disappointing showing and far less than under Saddam Hussein.

The only bright spot for Iraq's oil sector, hampered by unrelenting insurgent attacks on its infrastructure, is that near-record oil prices have softened the blow by boosting export earnings.

The attacks have made it all but impossible to attract foreign expertise needed to rejuvenate Iraq's rusty oil infrastructure, drill new wells or take any number of steps toward increasing production or exports.

Legal disputes between Iraq's provinces and central government about ownership of oil is also keeping investors away, said Jamal Qureshi, an oil analyst with PFC Energy in Washington.

"Iraq has a lot of potential, but lots of things have to go right," Qureshi said. "We see no sign of that happening."

"It's another disappointing year," said Sharif Ghalib of Energy Intelligence Research in New York.

"There's nothing on the horizon that suggests things are going to calm down," he said.

Earlier this year, the Iraqi oil ministry predicted crude production would reach 2.5 million or even 3 million barrels a day by the end of 2006.

"That's pie in the sky," Ghalib said. "It's not going to happen."

Saboteurs have been able to keep Iraq's northern export pipeline to Turkey almost constantly shut since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. They have also occasionally halted exports from Iraq's two Persian Gulf oil terminals in the south.

Attacks and power outages have caused delays for tanker ships arriving at Iraq's Gulf terminals to take on oil, leaving the oil ministry paying as much as \$30 million in "demurrage" charges to shipping companies, Dow Jones reported.

On Thursday, nine tankers were anchored off Basra Oil Terminal waiting to take on crude, five of which had been waiting since late November, said Mohammed Hadi, head of Iraq operations for Norton Lilly International.

**“Our Union Has Organised Despite
The Threats Of US Forces, In Fact**

Under The Noses Of Their Tanks And Soldiers”



Hassan Jumaa Awad addressing a meeting in London

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

10 December 2005 Socialist Worker (UK) 1980

Hassan Jumaa Awad of the General Union of Oil Employees in Basra addressed a meeting organised by Manchester trades council and Greater Manchester Coalition to Stop the War on 24 November.

The union, which represents 23,000 workers, was set up in the wake of the US invasion of Iraq. We print an edited transcript of his speech.

I would like to talk about the main motives for the occupation of Iraq and how we are rebuilding our trade union in the face of US pressure.

The US claims that its motivation for the invasion of Iraq was to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein. But its real political goal was to seize control over the oil resources in the Middle East.

As you know Iraq has the third highest reserves of oil in the world, and the US has to keep control over this oil in order to maintain its position as an economic superpower. The main aim of their war is to control our oil and our economy.

It would have been easier to topple Saddam Hussein in 1991 after the US-led coalition had driven the Iraqi army out of Kuwait. After the withdrawal from Kuwait there was a popular uprising in 14 cities across the country. It was US policy during this time not to

remove the regime as it did not have an alternative to Saddam Hussein, so it abandoned the Iraqis and the uprising was crushed.

Instead the US took its time to prepare for the destruction of our poor country. It fabricated the case for invasion based on Iraq's supposed possession of chemical, nuclear and biological weapons. It also claimed that Iraq was harbouring terrorists, when in reality our country was never a base for terrorism. Terrorism became just another excuse by the US for its war.

The lies that were used to launch the war are now well known and deserve few words.

One of the main aims of the US today is to divide Iraq. The divisions and killings we are now witnessing are the result of this occupation.

The sectarianism that is pitting Sunni against Shia, Kurd against Turkmen and Christian, did not exist at such a level before the occupation of our country.

We see all the options presented to us, privatisation of the oil industry and the dominance of US companies over the industry.

The US has decreed that only its companies can bid for oil contracts, sidelining the companies of other countries, whether from Europe or elsewhere.

Only two months after their troops crossed the border, US companies — Kellogg Brown & Root and Halliburton — arrived to take control over our industry. These US companies are the real beneficiaries of the invasion.

For this reason many Iraqi trade union activists who had suffered under the previous regime came together to relaunch the oil workers' union.

Our union has two strategic considerations. The first is how best to protect the rights of the Iraqi worker in light of the laws brought in by the then US proconsul Paul Bremmer.

The second is how do we maintain oil production, which is the main source of income for our country.

The US has destroyed all the infrastructure of our country—the hospitals, schools, universities, factories and workshops.

The one type of infrastructure they did not destroy were oil facilities and pipelines. This is because they wanted to control our oil.

Our union has organised despite the threats of US forces, in fact under the noses of their tanks and soldiers.

We have been organising despite the ban on independent unions, and the ban on demonstrations implemented under the transitional administrative law imposed by the US in 2003.

Our union has six main objectives:

We demand the unconditional withdrawal of US troops from Iraq.

We want the freedom for Iraqis to decide our own future and set our own policies.

We denounce all acts of terrorism against the Iraqi people and hold the US responsible for these attacks.

We condemn the attempt by US companies to take control of our oil.

We support the Iraqi resistance in their campaign to drive the US occupiers out of Iraq.

We demand the cancellation of all debts incurred by the former regime.

Ordinary Iraqis did not benefit from these debts. All the money that was borrowed was not used to build Iraq. It was used to fund Saddam Hussein's military adventures that caused so much destabilisation in the region.

The Iraqi oil workers' union is determined to prevent any US company from taking over the oil industry.

Iraq exports up to 1.8 million barrels of oil a day, yet even with the present high oil price the people are living in poverty and misery.

There is little healthcare, no social welfare and the education system has collapsed. The Iraqi people are living under very difficult circumstances. This is the reality of life under occupation.

When we organised our first anti-privatisation conference in the southern city of Basra, many of our friends from the United States and Britain were able to see first hand the -poverty and misery of our people. Yet we live over a lake of oil.

Basra experienced deep suffering under the previous regime — more than any other city in Iraq—and suffered eight years of war against Iran from 1980 to 1988, the invasion of Kuwait and repercussions of that war in 1991.

Now we are suffering a new war caused by the US and its coalition. Up to 85 percent of the people in Basra are suffering in some way from the pollution caused by these wars — this pollution has been documented by the United Nations.

The effects of the weapons used on us are being felt by Iraqis across the country, whether in Basra, Amara, Nassiriya, Ramadi, Baghdad or any other city. It is only by god's will that we can survive the misery of this occupation.

George Bush and Tony Blair claim that they have brought democracy to Iraq, yet everyday we see this so called "democracy", with the military convoys that fire on innocent people and human rights violations.

We call on all people who want peace and organisations which opposed the war to help in our struggle. Since we are struggling to oppose the forces of evil we need

all the support we can get. I thank you for all your support — and Iraq needs all the support it can get.

We will remember the real friends who stood by us during these terrible times, and hope that one day we can welcome you all to a free, democratic and united Iraq.

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

Get The Message? **U.S. Army Truck Burned In Ramadi: “An Iraqi Youth Flashes A 'V' Sign”**



An Iraqi youth flashes a 'V' sign while a U.S. military vehicle burns after it was hit by a roadside bomb in Ramadi Dec. 9, 2005. A roadside bomb exploded at the city center, targeting an American patrol, Al-Ramadi police said. (AP Photo/Bilal Hussein)

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

"Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress had been made, through disobedience and through rebellion." Oscar Wilde (1854-1900). [Thanks to Liz Burbank for posting.

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.

War Stories

[Thanks to KB, U.S. Army (ret'd) who sent this in.]

Have you ever wondered where the phrase, "You gotta be shittin' me!" came from?

Well, it just so happens to have originated through the Father of our Country, way back when George Washington was crossing the Delaware River with his troops. There were 33 (remember this number) in Washington's boat. It was extremely dark and storming furiously and the water was tossing them about.

Finally, Washington grabbed Corporal Peters (remember this name) and stationed him at the front of the boat with a lantern. He ordered him to keep swinging it, so they could see where they were heading. Corporal Peters, through driving rain and cold, continued swinging the lantern back and forth, back and forth.

Then a big gust of wind and a wave hit and threw Corporal Peters and his lantern into the Delaware. Washington and his troops searched for nearly an hour trying to find Corporal Peters, but to no avail. All of them felt terrible, for the Corporal had been one of their favorites.

Sometime later, Washington and his troops landed on the other side, wet and totally exhausted. He rallied the troops and told them that they must go on. Another hour later, one of his men said, "General, I see lights ahead."

They trudged toward the lights and came upon a huge house. What they didn't know, was that this was a house of ill repute hidden in the forest to serve all who came. General Washington pounded on the door, his men crowding around him.

The door swung open, and much to his surprise stood a beautiful woman. A huge smile came across her face, to see so many men standing there.

Washington was the first to speak, "Madam, I am General George Washington, and these are my men. We are tired, wet, exhausted, and desperately need warmth and comfort."

Again, the Madam looked at all the men standing there, and with a broad smile on her face, said, "Well, General, you have come to the right place. We can surely give you warmth and comfort. How many men do you have?"

Washington replied, "Well, madam, there are 32 of us without Peters."

And the Madam said, "You gotta be shittin' me!"

OCCUPATION REPORT

U.S. OCCUPATION RECRUITING DRIVE IN HIGH GEAR; RECRUITING FOR THE ARMED RESISTANCE THAT IS.



A U.S. soldier from Charlie Company 2nd Battalion 22 Infantry Regiment searches an elderly Iraqi man in Sadr City in eastern Baghdad December 8, 2005. Photo taken on December 8, 2005. REUTERS/Laszlo Balogh

[Fair is fair. Let's bring 150,000 Iraqis over here to the USA. They can fuck with senior citizens, kill people at checkpoints, bust into their houses with force and violence, overthrow the government, put a new one in office they like better and call it "sovereign" and "detain" anybody who doesn't like it in some prison without any changes being filed against them, or any trial.]

[Those Iraqis are sure a bunch of backward primitives. They actually resent this help, and consider it their patriotic duty to fight and kill the soldiers sent to occupy their country. What a bunch of silly people. How fortunate they are to live under a military dictatorship run by George Bush. Why, how could anybody not love that?]

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



[Thanks to David McReynolds]

More Silly Bush Bullshit Blown Up

December 8, 2005 By Robin Wright and Saad Sarhan, Washington Post Staff Writers
[Excerpts]

In a tale of two cities, President Bush yesterday heralded progress in northern Mosul and southern Najaf as new models for rebuilding Iraq.

But last Friday, Iraq's government imposed emergency law and a curfew in Sunni-dominated Mosul and throughout Ninevah province, and a senior U.S. official in Baghdad yesterday referred to the city of about 1.7 million as "nasty Mosul."

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Mosul last month to launch the first Provisional Reconstruction Team, the new interagency approach to reconstruction -- although the city is still so volatile that she flew by Black Hawk helicopter to the U.S. military headquarters and never got into the city.

Some Iraqis challenged Bush's assertions. In Najaf, Rafid Farhan, 33, said security is now controlled by Moqtada Sadr, a young cleric and militia leader, and not U.S. troops or the Iraqi government.

GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out
All GI Special issues achieved at website <http://www.militaryproject.org/> .

The following have also posted issues; there may be others:

<http://gi-special.iraq-news.de>, <http://www.notinourname.net/gi-special/>,
www.williambowles.info/qispecial, http://www.traprockpeace.org/gi_special/,
<http://www.albasrah.net/magalat/english/gi-special.htm>

GI Special distributes and posts to our website copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available in an effort to advance understanding of the invasion and occupation of Iraq. We believe this constitutes a "fair use" of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law since it is being distributed **without charge or profit** for educational purposes to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving the included information for educational purposes, in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107. **GI Special has no affiliation whatsoever with the originator of these articles nor is GI Special endorsed or sponsored by the originators. This attributed work is provided a non-profit basis to facilitate understanding, research, education, and the advancement of human rights and social justice** Go to: www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml for more information. If you wish to use copyrighted material from this site for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use', you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.

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