

GI SPECIAL 3D6:



Fighting The System: “We’re Here, We’re Not Going Away”

[Staff Sgt.] Dean Witt’s family says faulty medical care caused his death. Now, they want to change a 55-year-old ruling that bans malpractice suits.

October 24, 2005 By Nicole Gaudiano, Army Times staff writer [Excerpts]

Alexis Witt awoke to a strange phone call at 2:30 a.m.

“Get to a fax machine,” the secretary on the other end told her. There was paperwork to sign to medically retire her husband.

She felt confused. Her husband, Air Force Staff Sgt. Dean Witt, had his appendix removed several hours earlier. He was 25 and otherwise healthy. Surely, he was just sick from the operation. Why would he need to be medically retired?

After arriving at her brother's house, she pressed the woman for an answer.

"Your husband isn't expected to live more than 12 hours from now," the woman said.

Dean Witt's death on Jan. 9, 2004, happened in the David Grant Medical Center at Travis Air Force Base, Calif., after a successful appendectomy.

"Negligent postoperative care and supervision" when his throat closed left him in a persistent vegetative state for three months before the family made a Terry Schiavo-like decision and removed his life support, according to a claim Alexis Witt recently filed.

Among the allegations: Hospital personnel, in their failed attempts to pump air into his lungs, used the wrong equipment — pediatric equipment. They say he went for several minutes without oxygen, leaving him with serious brain injuries.

If this had happened to a civilian, the family might expect to see millions with a ruling in their favor. That's not the case for Dean Witt's family, and the reason affects every member of the military.

The government is not liable under the Federal Tort Claims Act for injuries military members sustain while on active duty and which result from the negligence of others in the armed forces.

This hurdle has been insurmountable for scores of claimants since the Supreme Court's 1950 decision in *Feres v. United States*, known as the "Feres Doctrine." But Alexis, working with her family, has filed her \$5 million claim in protest.

"I hate to think that he died in vain," said Alexis, 25, of Sandy, Utah. "Maybe it just takes this one terrible death to change people's minds up on the Hill about what to do about the law."

In addition to the claim, the family has three goals. They are seeking "uncensored" copies of the two investigations of the hospital, one internal and the other by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, which the Air Force says are confidential.

They want Dean's service recognized with a medal or other commendation.

And they want the law amended to hold military medical personnel financially responsible for gross negligence in hospitals outside combat zones. The amendment would require such personnel to carry malpractice insurance. It would be a limited change they hope might be easier for Congress to digest.

“You can’t abolish this law,” said Carlos Lopez, Alexis’ brother. “I don’t think it’s right that someone should be able to sue the government if they’re killed in combat or the line of duty. That’s just silly.

“What I’m suggesting is that people who have been injured or killed ... should have the ability to sue the malpractice insurance of these doctors, not necessarily the government itself.”

Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., has tried nine times to amend the U.S. Code to let service members sue for damages for certain injuries caused by improper medical care. It passed the House of Representatives four times, only to fail in the Senate. His latest unsuccessful attempt was in 2003.

Military law expert Eugene Fidell, who has testified before the Senate on Feres, said it would take a “legislative bunker buster” and “regime change” on Capitol Hill to dislodge the doctrine.

While the Pentagon could argue that the Witt amendment may lead to unforeseen problems for the military, Fidell called it “clever.”

“The idea of confining it to gross negligence is at least one way of softening the blow,” he said.

Dean could be goofy at times, but surprised Alexis with his intelligence, recalling obscure mathematical and historical facts from high school, she said. He won leadership awards — such as the “John Levitow,” an award named for the Medal of Honor recipient and presented to the top professional military education graduate from Air Force Airman Leadership Schools — and awards for photojournalism. And he had big dreams of one day becoming a legendary actor — or a real estate investor.

“He wanted to be a mogul,” Lopez said.

His childhood in Oroville, Calif., was described as difficult, and so he helped others with difficulties, mentoring a boy through the Big Brother program and organizing food donations at the food bank.

He loved snowboarding, country music, boating and the Tennessee Titans, and apparently had a streak of idealism when it came to the Air Force.

“It’s important for us to know what patriotism is,” he wrote in a May 2001 commentary for the Air Force Web site. “It’s important for everyone in the Air Force to know. Every time we put on this uniform we are saying that no one is going to hurt us or our families or the freedom by which we live.”

Dean was stationed at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, working in the 368th Recruiting Squadron public affairs office, when he met Alexis in an acting class at Salt Lake Community College in 2001. Six months after meeting, they were dating. Three months later, they eloped in Las Vegas.

“We knew we didn’t have a lot of money,” she said. “I borrowed a dress and he had a tux because he was going to be in another wedding that weekend.”

Dean soon became a father with the birth of Hannah and, a year later, Noah, who arrived just before Dean was due to leave for Travis — just before his surgery.

He visited hospitals three times with abdominal pain before he left, once at Hill and twice at civilian facilities. Each one misdiagnosed his early symptoms of appendicitis, family members said.

He and Alexis agreed he would go first to California, and she would follow a few weeks later with the children. Sick as he was, he moved every piece of their furniture into their duplex. The pain in his abdomen persisted.

He went to David Grant Medical Center on Oct. 8, 2003, and left with pain pills and antibiotics, which were used to treat him for a viral syndrome, according to a physician’s narrative summary.

Two days later, he was admitted and scheduled for surgery. “I just thought, ‘Oh, It’s his appendix,’” Alexis said. “I just wasn’t really concerned about the surgery.”

“You know I love you,” she told him. “I’ll talk to you when you get out.”

They never spoke again.

Dean “underwent the appendectomy without difficulty,” the narrative summary states. It was outside the operating room where the problems began.

His larynx began to spasm shut and he turned blue. The doctor’s summary states his lungs began to fill with fluid and he showed signs of severe brain damage. In the intensive care unit, his gaze was fixed, the doctor wrote. His pulmonary status worsened through the night. His prognosis was “poor.”

Based on records and the family’s interviews with hospital sources, Alexis’ claim states that Dean was left in the care of student nurses who failed to get him breathing after his throat spasms.

The claim states that hospital personnel failed to call for help quickly enough and used pediatric equipment when adult equipment was available. They failed to use an oral airway device, incorrectly placed an endotracheal tube, and failed to establish alternative airways, the claim states.

Elaborating in a statement, the family wrote that a certified registered nurse anesthesiologist had removed Dean’s endotracheal tube and allegedly left him with a student registered nurse anesthesiologist. She noticed he was turning blue while moving him and took him to the nearest recovery room, a room used for children, they wrote.

She tried to revive him with pediatric equipment, but it was too small to clear his airway. The certified nurse heard the code blue and rushed to help with other staff members. ***She tried to reintubate him, but incorrectly placed the tube into his esophagus, they wrote.***

A doctor finally placed the tube in his trachea, but no other forms of airway management had been performed, according to the family statement.

Alexis had picked up signals there might be some postoperative problems. She received a string of calls earlier in the day from the base. Dean's first sergeant was trying to arrange flights for her. A doctor told her they were "observing" Dean because he went without oxygen for "a while." A casualty officer, whose title did not quite register with her, discussed logistics of her trip.

But it was only when she spoke with the secretary, who told her Dean's lungs were filling with fluid and he was drowning, that she realized the severity of the situation.

"It didn't hit me because Dean had always said if something happened to him on duty, someone would show up in uniform," she said. "I didn't expect to hear it over the phone from a secretary. I expected to hear bad news like that from an officer."

Dean never recovered from his anoxic brain injury and lapsed into a persistent vegetative state, the claim states. His eyes would follow shadows on the walls, but it was just reflexive, Alexis said.

She read the book "Tuesdays with Morrie" to him during hospital visits as his athletic frame shrank to less than 100 pounds. Family photos show his calf pictured next to his sister-in-law's hand, which was double the size.

Part of the reason Alexis continued to wait for a miracle was because doctors originally told her he had gone without oxygen for only about three or four minutes, she said. He had always been the type of guy to surprise everyone. At the worst, she thought, he would end up like the character in the movie "I Am Sam" — mentally challenged, but interactive.

But three months later, a doctor told the family a different story — that he had gone without oxygen for up to 15 minutes, she said. "I just knew at that point there was definitely no chance of recovery for him," she said.

According to a 60th Air Mobility Wing statement, the hospital could not disclose the results of its investigation into "the serious adverse outcome suffered by SSgt Witt" because they are, by law, confidential. A spokeswoman also cited privacy concerns in response to questions about the family's claims and would not provide comments from staff members who treated him. She wrote that organizational policy and procedural changes are made "when appropriate."

When Dean Witt told Alexis' father of their plans for marriage, he wore his informal blue Air Force uniform. He thought it would help show that he would always provide for her.

Ironically, if Dean had not been in the Air Force, Alexis could have received millions if a judge ruled in her favor, lawyers said.

Even if Alexis had been the one in the military instead of Dean, she could have sued on his behalf without fear of Feres. Attorney and physician Michael Archuleta said he has settled four such claims against the military for \$10 million and above.

In one 2001 case against the Air Force, a family received a judgment of \$44.7 million after the hospital did not transfer a pilot's wife for a Caesarean section, leaving the baby with spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy from lack of oxygen, he said. An appeals court reduced the judgment to \$20 million.

Archuleta said he knows of no reliable study gauging the quality of military medicine versus civilian medicine. But after handling cases in both systems, he said, "The military cases are worse. They're more aggravated."

Indeed, there are other cases like Dean's, according to Barbara Cragnotti, who has compiled case studies of military members for the past four years as legislative coordinator for Veterans Equal Rights Protection Advocacy Inc.

The group wants to abolish Feres and allow service members to file civil claims for crimes, human experimentation, medical malpractice and reprisals for fraud, waste and abuse.

Those who have reached her through the group's Web site, www.verpa.us, have made 22 allegations of medical malpractice at military hospitals. Seven of those cases she cited ended with the service members' death.

Cragnotti's own son, Joseph, now suffers brain damage after his pneumonia went untreated by a Navy doctor, she said. She believes holding the military accountable would actually save the government money by halting negligence.

"Thirty dollars in antibiotics would have prevented \$110,000 in surgeries," she said. "That doesn't count therapy. Now he's damaged for the rest of his life and the country's paying for his benefits through taxes."

On the Air Force's recruiting Web site for physicians, a woman in scrubs smiles with a stethoscope slung around her neck. If the quality of life that Air Force physicians enjoy isn't enough, the Web site boasts, there are other benefits. Topping the list: "No malpractice premiums or business hassles."

Alexis and her family know the arguments against them and are ready for a long battle. For the legislative part of their campaign, they have asked Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah, to push their amendment. His office is researching their request.

Meanwhile, Alexis said, she is prepared to take her case where others have failed — the Supreme Court. If the Air Force denies her claim, which is expected, she will have to file a federal lawsuit and follow it through the court system, just like the others.

The family announced the legal action with a protest outside a federal building in Salt Lake City in August.

“We’re just trying to get it out there that we’re here, we’re not going away,” said Alexis’ sister, Carmen Voegeli, a former Marine. “We’re not just one voice. We’re voices for everyone.”

Feres was reaffirmed by the Supreme Court in 1987 in United States v. Johnson. But four justices dissented, including John Paul Stevens and Antonin Scalia, who wrote that Feres “was wrongly decided and heartily deserves the widespread, almost universal criticism it has received.”

But with two new justices on the bench, a second look is possible, Fidell said.

“The Feres Doctrine was created by judges, the Supreme Court, and it could be uncreated by them,” Fidell said. “When you see two seats changing hands, you would have to think this may be an opportunity for the court to revisit the question.”

On a memorial Web site, there are close to 40 tributes written about Dean Witt. His recruiting instructor talked of how he “always had something to offer any conversation” and how he “blew out the competition” in every area of study.

A technical sergeant wrote about Dean’s crazy ideas for extra cash, from real estate to satellite dishes to installing peepholes in people’s doors.

Alexis receives monthly Dependency and Indemnity Compensation payments, a pension for Dean’s seven years in service and scholastic funding for herself and the kids. But there are times she falls short, such as when the car broke down and when the plumbing needed fixing, that force her to dip into Dean’s life insurance payment.

She would like to remarry one day, but that means an end to the benefits, something she considers “an extra knife in your back.”

She hates that she had no choice in becoming a single parent and that there is no one in bed next to her.

“I’m mad he can’t be here for his son,” she said. “His son only knows a 16-by-20 [inch] picture on the wall. I’m mad that at the age of 3, my daughter says, ‘My daddy died, huh, Mom?’

“Most parents have a chance to talk to their kids about death when their hamster dies.

“I didn’t have that chance.”

MORE:

The Feres Horror Show History

October 24, 2005 Army Times staff

The legal precedent known as the Feres Doctrine is based on three cases that were rolled into one Supreme Court ruling on Dec. 4, 1950.

The main case involved Lt. Rudolph Feres, an Army officer who died in a barracks fire at Pine Camp, N.Y. It later was determined that the building had a faulty heating plant and no fire watch when the blaze began.

The other two cases involved active-duty members, one of whom died, who were victims of medical negligence. The second had undergone abdominal surgery by Army doctors, who left an 18-by-30-inch towel inside him that was not discovered until eight months later, when the soldier experienced severe stomach pain and had to have surgery again.

Feres has been challenged many times in the past 55 years under a variety of circumstances. A number of cases have made it to the Supreme Court, which has consistently reaffirmed the 1950 ruling. Among them:

- In 1977, the court rebuffed a lawsuit by an Air National Guard officer who was permanently injured when the ejection seat of his fighter aircraft malfunctioned in flight. He had sued the government and the seat manufacturer for negligence.
- In 1983, the court rejected a suit by five sailors who alleged they had suffered racial discrimination by the officers and senior enlisted members in their ship's chain of command in making their duty assignments and writing their fitness reports.
- In 1985, the court ruled against the mother of an Army private who was kidnapped and murdered by another service member with a known history of violence. The mother claimed the Army "negligently and carelessly failed to exert a reasonably sufficient control" over the killer.
- **In 1987, the court rejected an appeal from a former soldier who in 1958 had volunteered for what he thought was a test of chemical protective clothes and equipment. Without his knowledge, he was dosed four times in one month with LSD under a secret Army program to test the drug's effects on humans. He did not find out until 1975, six years after he left service, when the Army sent him a letter seeking his cooperation in a study of the long-term effects of LSD on the "volunteers" who took part in the 1958 tests.**

The only victory by a service member over Feres came in 2002, when former Navy Lt. Mary Louise "Missy" Cummings sued the Navy for improperly allowing her pilot training and medical records to be leaked to an author who later published the material.

Her claim was upheld by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, which ruled that Feres does not apply in cases of Privacy Act violations. The

Navy chose not to push the case to the Supreme Court — creating, at least for now, a narrow exception to the Feres Doctrine on privacy issues.

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.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

TASK FORCE BAGHDAD SOLDIER KILLED

November 5, 2005 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS
RELEASE Number: 05-11-10C

**BAGHDAD, Iraq -- A Task Force Baghdad Soldier was killed by small-arms fire
Nov. 4 south of Baghdad.**

SOLDIER ASSIGNED TO II MEF DIES AFTER HABBANIYAH MINE STRIKE

November 5, 2005 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS
RELEASE Number: 05-11-10C

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq – A Soldier assigned to the 2nd Marine Division, II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward), died of wounds after his vehicle hit a mine near Habbaniyah, Nov. 4.

ONE U.S. SERVICEMAN KILLED, THREE INJURED IN TRAFFIC ACCIDENT NEAR TALLIL

November 5, 2005 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS
RELEASE Number: 05-11-12C

TALLIL, Iraq – One U.S. service member was killed and three others were injured in a non-combat related vehicle accident near Tallil, Iraq at approximately 1:49 p.m. Nov 5.

The three injured service members were evacuated to a Combat Support Hospital at Tallil Air Base for further treatment.

The service members are all assigned to the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq in support of its mission to rebuild, train, equip and mentor the Iraqi security forces.

Ohio Sgt. Dies In An Nasiriyah

November 5, 2005 U.S. Department of Defense News Release No. 1152-05

Sgt. 1st Class Daniel J. Pratt, 48, of Youngstown, Ohio, died in An Nasiriyah, Iraq, on Nov. 3, from a non-combat related cause. Pratt was assigned to the Army National Guard's 211th Maintenance Company, Newark, Ohio.

Soldier From Beatrice Dies From Injuries



Howe

November 5, 2005 By The Associated Press

An injured soldier Army Infantryman from Beatrice has died, one week after he was injured by a roadside bomb in Iraq.

Spec. Darren Howe died in Texas on Thursday, said Paul Fox, owner of Fox Funeral Home in Beatrice, which is handling arrangements. Howe, a 2003 graduate of Beatrice

High School, was injured last week northeast of Baghdad. He was then taken to Texas, where his family met him, Fox said.

Howe had a strong desire to pursue a career in the military, said Jason Sutter, principal of Beatrice High School.

Sutter said last he heard, Howe's condition was improving. "We were very grateful he was OK, and that he was back and safe," he said.

Fox said a funeral would take place sometime next week.

Donnelly Hurt

November 5, 2005 GREGG SARRA, Newsday Inc.

Ryan Donnelly, Newfield High School's 2002 male athlete of the year, was severely injured in Iraq, while on patrol Oct. 5.

Donnelly, a U.S. Marine corporal, was a standout baseball and football player at Newfield. He was injured when the vehicle in which he was a passenger was hit by a rocket-launched grenade. Donnelly, a platoon leader, was forced to have his right leg amputated above the knee after weeks of infection.

Donnelly was moved from Landstuhl, Germany, to Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, D.C., for rehabilitation.

The Newfield football program and booster club are accepting donations for Donnelly's care at Saturday's regular-season finale against West Babylon at 2 p.m.

"He is a wonderful person and a tremendous athlete," said Pat Keeshan, who is helping with the fundraising. "We're going to do everything we can to ease the burden on his family."

Abingdon Guardsman Wounded

November 5, 2005 BY KEVIN SAMPIER OF THE JOURNAL STAR

ABINGDON - An explosion in Iraq that killed one Illinois Army National Guard member from Galesburg also broke the leg of an Abingdon Guard member who was driving their armored vehicle during a mission.

Sgt. Timothy Frainer, 32, remains hospitalized in Germany with a broken right leg and is expected to undergo a second surgery today to remove any remaining shrapnel, according to Frainer's wife of nine years, Tiffany Frainer.

Frainer said Friday her husband will undergo skin grafts but is in good condition and is expected to make a full recovery.

Timothy Frainer managed to place a phone call to his wife so she wouldn't be worried about his condition.

"He called me first before the Army did," she said.

"He said they hit a bomb and that his commanders helped him get a phone call so I wouldn't be scared," she said of the five-minute conversation.

After talking with her husband, Tiffany Frainer had to explain the situation to their 5-year-old daughter.

"I just keep her informed and keep reassuring her that Daddy's OK," she said.

Timothy Frainer is expected to return to Fort Dix, N.J., early next week.

“There's Not The Slightest Sign Whatsoever That These Deaths Have Weakened The Insurgency”

[Thanks to Don Bacon, the Smedley Butler Society, for sending this in.]

November 01, 2005 By Billmon.org

The enemy's Kill Ratio Per Improvised Explosive Device Effective Attack -- the all-important KRPIEDEA factor -- is going down!

Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff . . . said that while the number of IED attacks has risen, the number of casualties per effective IED attack is going down.

As of Tuesday, the U.S. military death toll for October was at least 93, bringing the total number of military deaths to at least 2,026 since the war in Iraq began.

Of course last month's casualty count was the highest since January -- making October the 4th worst month for U.S. combat deaths since the war began.

And this year's butcher's bill (ours) is running about 9% ahead of last year's -- although God willing that will change this month, when the first anniversary of Shrub's post-election assault on Fallujah rolls around.

And of course there's not the slightest sign whatsoever that these deaths have weakened the insurgency or brought the war within a measurable distance of its end.

But goddammit, it's taking the terrorists more IEDs than ever before to blow up a given number of American soldiers. And that's progress.

How come we don't read more positive stories like that in the mainstream media?

REMIND ME AGAIN WHAT THE FUCK ARE WE DOING HERE?



US soldiers from Bravo Company 1-87 Infantry 10th Mountain Division 1st Brigade Combat Team, climb between rooftops during a patrol of western Baghdad. (AFP/David Furst)

TROOP NEWS

64% Of Americans Say Iraq War Not Worth It

[Thanks to D & Don Bacon, the Smedley Butler Society, for sending this in.]

November 5, 2005 (Angus Reid Global Scan)

Many adults in the United States believe their federal administration should not have launched the coalition effort, according to a poll by CBS News.

64 per cent of respondents believe the result of the war with Iraq was not worth the loss of American life and other costs.

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.

Army Negligence Murders A Soldier: Fake "Investigation" Lies About It; Other Soldiers' Testimony Ignored



Betsy Coffin, shown here with her husband, Christopher Coffin. COURTESY OF COFFIN FAMILY

During that phone call in June 2003, Christopher Coffin was agitated. If anything should happen to him and Army explanations didn't make sense, he wanted his wife to find the truth even if she had to ask Maine's congressional delegation for help.

Betsy Coffin is left to choose between the official findings, and the statements of four soldiers who were there when her husband died.

October 5, 2005 By Hal Bernton, Seattle Times staff reporter

Almost every night, Betsy Coffin of Kennebunk, Maine, thinks about that day her husband died on a Baghdad highway in summer 2003.

Army 1st Sgt. Christopher Coffin was riding in a truck that swerved to avoid two Iraqi vehicles. The truck plunged into a deep pit, where a dying Coffin was swarmed by Iraqis who stole his wedding ring. For the widow, more than two years later, the questions aren't settled.

Was it an accident turned ugly, as the Army initially found — and the Department of Defense Inspector General concluded earlier this year in another review? Or was the truck forced off the road by insurgents, as asserted by the truck's driver and three Pacific Northwest soldiers who rushed to the crash site?

"It was flabbergasting to me that they just can't accept what I say," retired Spc. Dan Wight, the truck's driver, said in a recent interview.

In a war that has killed more than 1,900 U.S. soldiers, nearly 1,600 in action, the difference between an accidental death and a combat death might seem insignificant. But the difference consumes Betsy Coffin, because a combat death would mean her husband's sacrifice and the efforts of soldiers who risked their lives to try to save him have never been properly recognized.

The Seattle Times first chronicled Betsy Coffin in April 2004 as she got in touch with Sgt. Dana Kohfeld, a Portland-based Army reservist who gave first aid to the dying Christopher Coffin. Since then, Betsy Coffin has continued to search for answers, reaching out to soldiers who were there that day and pushing for additional Army reviews.

"It's hard to find peace when you don't know what really happened," Coffin said. "I know I may never get the truth, but I also know that if I am to live with myself, I must try everything that I can to try to find it."

As the Iraq war drags on, Betsy Coffin's quest is shared by a growing circle of families unsatisfied with official military accounts of the deaths of their own loved ones. Some hunger for more details to help them through their grief. Others are concerned the official accounts omit information that might cast the military in an unfavorable light.

Brian Hart of Bedford, Mass., for example, has tried for nearly two years to obtain official details about the October 2003 death of son Pfc. John Hart. A letter from a unit commander said John Hart — a gunner on a Humvee — was caught in an ambush and died after exhausting his ammunition.

But Brian Hart has heard from other soldiers that his son was sent on patrol with only one-third of the standard ammunition issue for his machine gun.

"I just want to know what really happened," Hart said.

Betsy Coffin, 43, said her search is an attempt to fulfill a promise she made to her husband in a troubling phone call two weeks before he died.

The Coffins had been together for 25 years, and Betsy's 51-year-old husband, a police officer and Army reservist, called home often during his three months in Iraq.

During that phone call in June 2003, Christopher Coffin was agitated. If anything should happen to him and Army explanations didn't make sense, he wanted his wife to find the truth even if she had to ask Maine's congressional delegation for help.

"It was really out of character for him to say something like that," Betsy Coffin recalled. "And he was really adamant and would not let it go."

A shaken Betsy Coffin didn't ask her husband why he was so worried. She now thinks he was concerned about convoy security.

First Sgt. Coffin was a stickler for preparations and keenly aware of insurgent attacks in Iraq. He believed convoys were too often poorly prepared and understaffed, said retired Spc. Wight, who often rode with Coffin in the 352nd Civil Affairs Command.

"We discussed a lot about convoy procedures, and he thought that anything less than three vehicles, you are just asking to invite trouble," Wight said, in his first public interview. He has spent two years recovering from a broken back and other injuries suffered in the crash that killed Coffin.

On July 1, 2003, the day of the crash, Coffin had unsuccessfully tried to muster a three-vehicle convoy from the short-staffed unit, Wight said. So Coffin and Wight did something they had never done before, Wight said. They ventured out in a two-vehicle convoy.

According to Army reports on the incident, the two-vehicle convoy met the minimum standard for convoys on that highway. But Kohfeld, the reservist from the Portland unit, said her unit required at least four vehicles to travel together.

Coffin rode with Wight. A Humvee with two other soldiers followed as the convoy moved south along a divided highway.

Wight told The Seattle Times that two Iraqi vehicles — a white truck and a Volkswagen bus — darted across the median directly in front of him. Wight said it appeared they were trying to hit his truck, or cut it off.

Wight said he swerved to the right, to the left and lost control. The truck landed upside-down in an 8-foot-deep construction pit in the median, the only such highway hole for miles around.

The two soldiers in the Humvee, identified in investigative reports only as Spc. Orzol and Spc. Williams, stopped to help.

But, as Army investigators later concluded, the convoy was "woefully unprepared," lacking radios and an adequate first-aid kit.

The investigators also found the Iraqi crowd was increasingly unruly, putting the soldiers' lives at risk. The initial investigating officer, citing "extreme and hostile conditions," even recommended that the two soldiers — as well as Wight and Coffin — be awarded the Bronze Star, which honors service against an armed enemy, according to a report obtained by Betsy Coffin.

Reinforcements arrived from a nearby convoy organized by the 671st Engineer Company of Portland. They included Sgt. David Biehl of Spokane, 1st Sgt. Perry Burkholder of Tacoma and Sgt. Kohfeld, all of whom told Betsy Coffin that her husband appeared to have died in a trap sprung by insurgents.

Biehl, first on the scene, told The Seattle Times that about 10 Iraqis had climbed into the pit to steal gear from the wounded Wight and Coffin.

Biehl and Kohfeld also said they were subject to AK-47 fire. Then they were startled by explosions as the Humvee from Coffin's convoy burst into flames, setting off ammunition inside. "It was a hostile action," Biehl said. "We were taking fire from the tree line. ... But we never got a thank-you from their unit. Nothing."

Last fall, Kohfeld was called to Washington, D.C., to be interviewed by two Defense Department investigators who, at the prodding of Maine's congressional delegation, were again reviewing Coffin's death.

Kohfeld said she was surprised and angered by the interview. "It was like something out of the movies, they were just flat out trying to second-guess me," Kohfeld said. "They tried every which way to make me say it was an accident, and I said it absolutely was not. They were very aggressive — and very hostile."

The final Defense Department Inspector General's report acknowledged it was "relatively impossible" to determine the intent of the Iraqi drivers who veered toward the convoy because they were never questioned and there were no other witnesses to support Wight's account of the crash.

But in a letter to Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, that accompanied the report, Assistant Inspector General John Crane offered no such hedge. He declared that "witness testimony and later our own inquiry, established that Sgt. Coffin died as a result of a traffic accident, not hostile activity."

A spokesman for the Inspector General said the office stands by Crane's letter.

Betsy Coffin is left to choose between the official findings, and the statements of four soldiers who were there when her husband died.

She has chosen the soldiers' version. Still, she keeps looking for more answers. "There is nothing in the world that is more important to me than keeping this final promise to my husband," she said.

Area Soldier Recovering From Iraq War Injury

November 4, 2005 By Sharon Wolfe, Pantagraph Publishing Co.

BELLFLOWER -- A 28-year-old Bellflower man serving with the National Guard in Iraq lost his right arm below his elbow after a roadside bomb exploded near Baghdad.

But National Guard Spc 4 Garrett Anderson's spirits are high, and he is doing whatever it takes to get on with his life, said his stepfather Dave Vaughn of Bellflower.

Anderson's jaw was broken in four places, so he eats soft foods.

Anderson was driving a Humvee in full body armor Oct. 15 west of Baghdad when a roadside bomb sent a wheel through the floorboard, Vaughn said. No one else was seriously injured.

Anderson was initially treated in Germany, then transferred to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Washington D.C. He was released earlier this week to an adjacent guesthouse.

He faces intense rehabilitation, which involves being fitted with an artificial arm.

Small Town Honors Soldier Injured In Iraq



November 4, 2005 the wmur channel

RAYMOND, N.H. -- A small New Hampshire town is honoring a soldier who was seriously wounded in Iraq.

Army Sgt. Keith Gamble Jr., of Raymond, was on his fourth tour of duty in Iraq last month when the Humvee he was in drove over a roadside bomb.

"My brother was trapped," said Chris Gamble, Keith Gamble's brother. "He's the gunner. He was trapped underneath it. The driver never survived."

Chris Gamble said that his brother somehow managed to free himself, but the injuries were serious. He has already had six or seven surgeries.

"He's got three shrapnel wounds in his back close to his spine," Chris Gamble said. "Both legs were severely fractured from the knees down to his ankles. And he's got probably 30 percent of his body burned."

People throughout the town of Raymond heard about what happened.

"When it comes to issues like this, the outpouring of support from the community is just amazing," Selectman Frank Bishop said.

The community donated money to pay for their trip to Texas, where Gamble is recovering at an Army hospital.

Chris Gamble said that he thinks his brother will be encouraged by the show of support.

"I don't think he really expected it, but I'm sure he's going to be thrilled about it," he said. "He's going to be proud. He's going to be happy that people are thinking of him."

OCCUPATION REPORT

While Soldiers Die: Bush Regime Helped Halliburton Plunder \$208.5 Million From Iraq

[Thanks to JM, who sent this in.]

Kubba said Iraqis have been complaining for months about projects that should have cost \$5,000, such as painting schools, that ended up costing \$100,000.
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November 5, 2005 By JAMAL HALABY, Associated Press Writer & By James Glanz,
The New York Times

A U.N. auditing board has recommended that the United States reimburse Iraq up to \$208.5 million for contracting work carried out by KBR, a subsidiary of Halliburton, in the last two years.

The International Advisory and Monitoring Board of the Development Fund for Iraq said in a report that the work, paid for with Iraqi oil proceeds, was either overpriced or done poorly by the Virginia-based company.

The fund was controlled by the United States and Britain, Iraq's occupying powers, until the June 28, 2004, transfer of sovereignty to the new interim government, when it was handed over to Iraq's new leaders.

In Washington, U.S. Rep. Henry Waxman of California, one of the leading Democratic critics of Halliburton, said the international auditors ``have every right to expect a full refund of Halliburton's egregious overcharges."

“For more than a year, administration officials concealed Halliburton's overcharges from international auditors responsible for monitoring the use of Iraqi funds. The Bush administration repeatedly gave Halliburton special treatment and allowed the company to gouge both U.S. taxpayers and the Iraqi people.” "The international auditors have every right to expect a full refund of Halliburton's egregious overcharges."

Kubba said Iraqis have been complaining for months about projects that should have cost \$5,000, such as painting schools, that ended up costing \$100,000.

“Having too many middlemen doing contracts to too many subcontractors has wasted money and resulted in little return to the Iraqi people," he said.

The KBR contracts that have drawn fresh scrutiny also cover services other than fuel deliveries, like building and repairing oil pipelines and installing emergency power generators in Iraq.

"The international auditors have every right to expect a full refund of Halliburton's egregious overcharges."

Some of those contracts were paid for with American taxpayer money, but others were financed by Iraqi oil proceeds.

Other entries suggest the existence of \$600,000 in ghost payrolling in the Electricity Ministry and additional evidence of bribes.

The KPMG audits also show ample evidence of the chaos that permeated the early reconstruction effort in Iraq, with paperwork on hundreds of millions of dollars of contracts won by firms other than KBR that were lost or never completed, making it difficult or impossible to tell if the work was carried out properly.

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)

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



An Iraqi man ordered out of his vehicle to be searched by a US Soldier from the First Battalion, 17th Infantry, in Mosul. (AFP/Cris Bouroncle)

[Fair is fair. Let's bring 150,000 Iraqis over here to the USA. They can 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?]

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

OCCUPATION PALESTINE

“Israel Continues To Wipe What Is Left Of Palestine Off The Map”

2 November 2005 Hasan Abu Nimah, The Electronic Intifada [Excerpt]

A letter in The Independent succinctly states: "President Ahmadinejad [of Iran] calls for Israel to be wiped off the map, but Israel effectively wiped Palestine off the map 57 years ago, and where's the indignation over that?"

This is the question that millions of people in the region ask.

Israel continues to wipe what is left of Palestine off the map, while the world applauds Ariel Sharon and receives him at the United Nations as a hero.

[To check out what life is like under a murderous military occupation by a foreign power, go to: www.rafahtoday.org The foreign army is Israeli; the occupied nation is Palestine.]

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

Bush Has Lost

November 5, 2005 By Naomi Klein, Guardian Newspapers Limited [Excerpt]

Facing mass protests in Argentina yesterday during the Summit of the Americas, George Bush saw that the spirit of that revolt is alive and well.

And although Bush didn't take up Hugo Chávez's offer to hold an open debate on the merits of "free trade", that debate has already happened in the continent's streets and ballot boxes, and Bush has lost.

Consider this: the last time these 34 heads of state got together, it was April 2001 in Quebec City; it was Bush's first summit after his election, and he announced with great confidence that the Free Trade Area of the Americas would be law by 2005.

Now, four years later, many of the faces of his colleagues have changed and Bush can't even get the free-trade area on the agenda, let alone get it signed.

MORE:

South Americans Dumb And Unsophisticated

[Thanks to Don Bacon, The Smedley Butler Society, who sent this in.]

November 5, 2005 Fff.org/blog

In the wake of protests against President Bush in Argentina involving tens of thousands of people, undoubtedly U.S. officials will repeat their standard bromide — that people in Latin America, like people in the Middle East, hate America for its “freedom and values” and that they love the U.S. government for its decades of military intervention in Latin America, its support of brutal military and right-wing dictators, its School of the Americas that has taught torture tactics to Latin American militaries, its failed and destructive international drug war that has torn Latin America apart, its policy of assassinating Latin American opponents, its loans and grants (i.e. bribes) through the World Bank and IMF that are used to control Latin American regimes, its military invasions, its interference with Latin American elections, and its managed and regulated trade that it markets under the rubric of “free trade.”

Undoubtedly, after Bush's visit to Argentina federal officials will immediately dispatch recently appointed federal public relations director Karen Hughes to Latin America to explain to Latin Americans that, like people in the Middle East, they're just too dumb and unsophisticated to appreciate the wonderful benefits of a brutal and hypocritical U.S. foreign policy.

Kerry Wants 131,000 U.S. Troops To Keep On Killing And Dying In Iraq

John Kerry.com

America can no longer tolerate the Bush administration's failed "stay as long as it takes" approach to the war in Iraq. It is time for Congress to demand and for George W. Bush to deliver a clear, concrete plan.

As a first critical step in that direction, I am calling on the Bush administration to respond to the completion of December elections in Iraq by withdrawing 20,000 troops over the holidays. [Leaving only 131,000 still there. Big fucking deal.]

BUSH PROVES CRITICS WRONG!



President Bush at a press conference in Argentina said today that critics who say he has his head up his ass are wrong. “My head is right here, at the end of my neck, and as you see, I have my hand on my head. Now, if, as these critics contend, I had my head up my ass, how could I possibly have my head on my hand, or my hand on my head?”

Bush went on to accuse critics of giving aid and comfort to international terrorists who hate him because he does not have his head up his ass, and accused “Islam-Draavidian-Fascist trolls and transvestibues” of “a world-wide conspiracy to make Americans engage in depraved behavior,” such as “having sex with chickens infected with the deadly Asian bird flu.” He promised Americans, “On my stand, this will not watch.” November 5, 2005. (Carlos Barria/Reuters)

***All Heart:* Political Scum In DC Want Iraqis Butchered By NATO & U.N. Soldiers Instead Of U.S. Soldiers**

[As if that’s not putrid enough, the Quakers’ AFSC comes out for “cooperation” with the collaborator government of militia torturers and death squads in Baghdad.]

Nov. 4 CHICAGO, U.S. Newswire

Legislation introduced today by Rep. Jim McGovern (D-Mass., 3rd district) that would prohibit use of taxpayer funds to deploy United States Armed Forces to Iraq -- gained support from The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), an international social justice organization with regional offices in the Great Lakes Region.

The legislative initiative allows funds to be used for the safe withdrawal of troops, as well as for support for transitional security [translation from bullshit: occupation troops] provided by other countries -- including international organizations like NATO and the United Nations.

Three area legislators -- Carolyn Kilpatrick (Mich., 13th district), Dennis Kucinich (Ohio, 10th district) and Jan Schakowsky (Ill., 9th district) -- were among the 12 who joined Rep. McGovern in introducing this bill.

The bill would allow for continued support for Iraqi security forces [translation: collaborator death squads] and international forces in Iraq, as well as funding for reconstruction efforts.

Other Members of Congress who supported the legislation are Reps. Barney Frank of Massachusetts; Barbara Lee, Pete Stark and Maxine Waters of California, Lynn Woolsey of California; John Lewis of Georgia; Donald Payne of New Jersey; and Jose Serrano and Nydia Velazquez of New York.

"Working solutions for Iraq will be political solutions," Mary Ellen McNish, AFSC general secretary states. "Diplomacy and dialogue *in close cooperation with the Iraqi government* and broad sectors of Iraqi society are the way forward to peace and to rebuilding a strained U.S. relationship with the international community." [The only "government" in Iraq is composed of traitors put in place by George W. Bush. The stench of hypocrisy is overwhelming. Hey, we don't mind Iraqis being slaughtered, just please not by *our* troops.]

CLASS WAR REPORTS

**“France's Worst Civil Unrest
Since The 1968 Student
Revolts”
“Genuine Guerrilla Warfare”**

"Are the police overwhelmed?" France Soir asked, referring to what it termed the "genuine guerrilla warfare" faced by officers.

05 November 2005 Agency France-Press

Nearly 900 vehicles were torched and 250-plus people arrested as French police desperately battled the country's worst rioting for decades, which has now raged for nine consecutive nights.

Again, the bulk of the violence on Saturday hit deprived suburbs with large immigrant populations on the fringes of Paris, although rioting again spread to several cities elsewhere in France, following a pattern seen in recent nights.

With authorities seemingly powerless to stem the tide of violence despite the mobilisation of hundreds of riot police, gangs of youths set cars on fire around Paris, especially in the northern suburbs where the trouble began.

A hundred people were evacuated overnight from two apartment blocks in one northern suburb after an arson attack set dozens of cars alight in an underground garage. Two textile warehouses and a car showroom were also torched to the northeast of the city.

A total of 253 people were detained for questioning, some of them minors caught with fire-bombs, police said.

Paris prosecutor general Yves Bot said that 897 vehicles had been burnt overnight Friday, including 656 in the Paris region.

Questioned on Europe 1 radio, Bot spoke of "organised violence" but did not say by whom.

"If I could give an exact answer, those people would already be under arrest," he said. "But we can see organised actions, a strategy."

Bot said that weblogs were asking other French cities to join the rioting in the Paris region. Incidents on a smaller scale were reported in the southern cities of Toulouse and Nice, and in Lille and Rennes to the north.

The increased arrests were in line with priorities laid down for police by hardline Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy.

However, the intensity of clashes with police was less than on many nights since the violence began on October 27, sparked by the electrocution of two youths in the suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois after they hid from police in an electrical relay station.

The renewed violence began just hours after Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin held a crisis meeting with Sarkozy to discuss a response to the riots, France's worst civil unrest since the 1968 student revolts.

Sarkozy, whose tough law and order policies some have blamed for worsening the trouble, later made a surprise visit to a police command centre west of Paris, telling officers: "Arrests -- that's the key."

He urged them to get more information on those causing the trouble "so we can better understand how they're organised, because they are organised."

Sarkozy, who is aiming at a presidential bid in 2007, has pledged to clean up the crime-ridden streets of France's deprived suburban housing projects "with a power-hose", controversially referring to trouble-makers as "rabble".

The seemingly uncontrollable violence has proved deeply embarrassing to the government, focusing global attention on the often terrible conditions in deprived suburbs, where largely immigrant populations complain of dismal economic prospects, rampant discrimination and heavy-handed policing.

French newspapers despaired on Saturday at the continued scenes of chaos.

"Are the police overwhelmed?" France Soir asked, referring to what it termed the "genuine guerrilla warfare" faced by officers.

Popular daily Le Parisien said many of those arrested were previously known to police, calling the youths burning cars "a mix of delinquents, recidivists and 'part time' rioters".

In contrast, Liberation, said the rioters were inspired by a combination of anger, urban deprivation, unemployment, policing and "their hatred of Sarkozy".

MORE:

11.05.05 By CRAIG S. SMITH, The New York Times Company

France's worst urban violence in a decade exploded for a ninth night on Friday as bands of youths roamed the immigrant-heavy, working-class suburbs of Paris, setting fire to dozens of cars and buildings while the government struggled over the violence and the underlying frustrations fueling it.

France reduced train service to Charles de Gaulle Airport after two trains became targets of rioters earlier in the week.

The violence has isolated the country's tough-talking, anticrime interior minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, whom some people blame for having worsened the situation with his blunt statements about "cleaning out" the "thugs" from those neighborhoods.

France has been grappling for years with growing unrest among its second- and third-generation immigrants, mostly North African Arabs, who have faced decades of high unemployment and marginalization. Critics say Mr. Sarkozy's confrontational approach has polarized the communities and the government.

"It's a game that has been started between the youth and Sarkozy," said a French-Algerian man wearing Chanel sunglasses outside Aulnay's mosque, in a converted

warehouse. He would give his name only as Nabil. "Until he quits," he said, "it's not going to get better."

The rioting began last week in Clichy-sous-Bois after two teenagers were electrocuted when they hid in an electrical substation from the police. Local youths, who believed the police had chased the boys into the enclosure, took to the streets, setting cars on fire in protest.

This came shortly after Mr. Sarkozy's populist anticrime campaign gathered speed when he declared a "war without mercy" on violence in the working-class suburbs, which were built up during the postwar period to move workers out of the city center and closer to the industrial zones that employed them.

Over the succeeding decades, North African and sub-Saharan immigrants replaced the working-class French who initially populated the neighborhoods. But jobs have dried up as the economy slowed - unemployment in some of the zones is as high as 30 percent - and the suburbs have become the French equivalent of America's inner cities.

Many in those neighborhoods say that they are being stigmatized by the interior minister's campaign and that the increased police presence results in harassment.

Even before the deaths that set off the unrest last week, Mr. Sarkozy was pelted with stones and bottles during a highly publicized visit to the Parisian suburb of Argenteuil, where he had gone to outline a new plan to fight crime.

But Mr. Sarkozy has refused to back down, calling for "firmness and justice" in the face of the violence.

"It's the police who are provoking us," said a bearded man in a white cap and North African robe in Aulnay who would give his name only as Mohamed. "They don't like foreigners."

He said he had moved to France from Algeria in 1971 and lived in the neighborhood for 30 years. All four of his children were born in France, and though he is unemployed, they have all found jobs.

"They say integrate, but I don't understand: I'm already French, what more do they want?" he said. "They want me to drink alcohol?"

Though France has a policy of officially ignoring ethnic differences in favor of French identity, its people have been slow to open their arms to newcomers who are told that they should enjoy the same rights.

"On paper we're all the same, but if your name is Mohamed, even with a good education, you can only find a job as a porter at the airport," said Kader, 23, who works at the airport. He complained that the immigrant suburbs had been neglected by the current government.

Manuel Valls, the mayor of Évry, where dozens of cars have been set afire, said the spreading unrest was more a game of copycats than coordinated action as young

people vie to make the evening news. "It's a kind of hit parade by the neighborhoods," he said.

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/gispecial,

<http://www.albasrah.net/maqalat/english/gi-special.htm>

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