

GI SPECIAL 4D14:



Iraq Veterans Against The War (www.ivaw.net)

Veterans-Survivors March: Mobile To New Orleans, March 14 - 19, 2006

Photo © 2006 Ward Reilly, Veterans For Peace

“I’m Scared And I’m Sick Of Being Here” New Hampshire Soldier Dead At 21

Sarah Roehl said she's frustrated that the war in Iraq is still going on and she's disappointed that her brother sacrificed his life for it. "I was like, 'Don't go,'" she said. "Is it really worth it?"

A New Hampshire soldier was killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq Tuesday.

Pvt. George Roehl, 21, of Manchester, was riding in a convoy south of Baghdad when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle, relatives said.

Roehl had been in Iraq for five months, but in recent calls to family members he said he was scared and wanted to come home, said his sister, Sarah Roehl.

"I'm over here trying to help them and they're shooting at me," Roehl told his sister's fiancé in a recent phone call home. "I'm scared and I'm sick of being here."

Roehl's mother, Betty Vezina, said Roehl was a cavalry scout, riding at the front of convoys to make sure the road was safe. A call to Army public affairs was not returned last night.

Roehl lived most of his life in Manchester with his mother and four siblings, but he attended Franklin High School in his late teens, according to family. His mother said Roehl graduated from Franklin High School in 2003, though his photo did not appear in a school yearbook from that year.

Roehl took some college courses at Hesser College in Manchester and New Hampshire Community Technical College, but he couldn't settle into studies, relatives said. About a year ago, Roehl looked to the military, a path his father, grandfather and cousin had also taken.

"He got stuck," said Sarah Roehl. "School was just tired, everything was just tired."

Vezina, 40, said she tried to support her oldest son's decision, but she wasn't happy about it. Sarah Roehl tried to talk her brother out of it, telling him about a friend who worked as a medic in Iraq and saw injured and dead American soldiers every day.

But Roehl, who relatives said was a father figure to his younger siblings, wasn't worried at first about getting shot or killed. But once he arrived in Iraq, his attitude changed, she said.

Tuesday evening about 9 o'clock, Roehl's brother Steven, 15, answered the door of their Lenox Avenue home and found two Army officers standing outside. They asked to speak with Vezina, who had gone to pick up one of her daughters. One of the men offered Steven Roehl his cell phone and told him to call Vezina right away. The men waited until Vezina arrived to tell the family that Roehl was dead.

Roehl liked to play video games and rough house with his younger brothers Ben, 17, and Steven. He often sent money to his mother to help her take care of his siblings, including the youngest of the family, 11-year-old Brianna.

Sarah Roehl said she's frustrated that the war in Iraq is still going on and she's disappointed that her brother sacrificed his life for it.

"I was like, 'Don't go,'" she said. "Is it really worth it?"

As of last night, the family had not yet made arrangements for a funeral or memorial service.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

MULTI NATIONAL DIVISION BAGHDAD SOLDIER KILLED BY IED

4.13.06 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS Release
Number: 06-04-01C

BAGHDAD, Iraq: A Multi-National Division Baghdad Soldier was killed at approximately 11:30 a.m. when his vehicle was struck by an improvised-explosive device southwest of Baghdad April 13

MARINE DIES DUE TO ENEMY ACTION NEAR BAGHDAD

HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS RELEASE
Number: 06-04-01C

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq: A Marine assigned to Regimental Combat Team 5 died due to enemy action while operating near Baghdad April 12.

Lansing Soldier Killed

April 13, 2006 North West Indiana Times

LANSING

Lance Cpl. Philip John Martini, of Lansing, died Saturday by sniper fire in Iraq, according to his family.

He was undergoing a combat operation and was in route to help another platoon.

Martini, 24, graduated in 2000 from Thornton Fractional South High School. He joined the military in Fall 2003 and was member of the U.S. Marine Corps.

His service will be 2 to 9 p.m. Tuesday, April 18, at Drumm Funeral Home, 1200 E. 162nd St. in South Holland. A mass will be 10 a.m. Wednesday, April 19, at Holy Ghost Catholic Church, 700 E. 170th St. in South Holland.

He will be taken to Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood, Ill.

Alaska Stryker Unit Loses Many Dead And Wounded



Spc. Shawn R. Creighton died when an improvised explosive device detonated near his Stryker vehicle Saturday in Rawah, Iraq. (AP Photo)

April 13, 2006 By MARGARET FRIEDENAUER, Staff Writer, The Fairbanks Miner

Bombs killed two Fort Wainwright Army Post soldiers and injured two others over the last five days in separate incidents in Iraq, according to military officials.

Four soldiers with ties to Alaska have been killed in the last week.

A suicide bomber killed one soldier and injured two others Tuesday while soldiers with the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team were on a foot patrol in Rawah, Iraq.

Officials also announced Wednesday that Spc. Shawn R. Creighton, 21, died Saturday when an improvised explosive device detonated near his Stryker vehicle while he was on patrol in Rawah. No other soldiers were injured in the incident.

Creighton was assigned to the Stryker Brigade's 4th Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment.

Creighton was an indirect fire or motor infantryman from Windsor, N.C., who joined the Army in July 2003 and was assigned to Fort Wainwright in December 2003.

The two soldiers injured in the suicide attack were classified as very seriously injured and seriously injured. Both were evacuated to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany for treatment.

The Army does not release the names of injured soldiers. But family members in Kingsport, Tenn., told WEMT-TV in Bristol, Tenn., that 25-year-old Capt. Mark Brogan was one of the injured soldiers.

Brogan's MySpace.com Web site also has a posting saying he has been seriously injured in Iraq. He and his wife reside in Fairbanks.

The first soldier with Alaska ties killed this month was Spc. Dustin James Harris, 21, a Maine native serving at Fort Wainwright, who died when a bomb detonated about 150 miles north of Baghdad while he was on patrol April 6, the Army said.

Pfc. Joseph I. Love-Fowler, 21, of North Pole died when a roadside bomb detonated near his Humvee in Balad on Saturday, the Department of Defense said.

Reality

4/12/2006 By Randy Beamer, News 4 WOAI [Excerpt]

I talked tonight with a young soldier who lost his best friend in a roadside blast. He called that friend his mentor. He said they talked just yesterday about plans for life after Iraq. Now his friend is gone.

A San Antonio nurse overseeing his ward tells me this survivor's physical wounds aren't that bad compared to many others hit by IED's. Some shrapnel in his leg will send him to Germany for some surgery and recovery time.

The other wound, the loss of his friend? That will be more difficult.

Another young soldier down the hallway tells me, "I guess I just didn't see the tripwire (of the roadside bomb)."

It's the same story from two American contractors who were wounded when they hit a roadside bomb.

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Names Of Occupation Spies And Informers For Sale In The Bazaar

4.13.06 Los Angeles Times

A computer drive sold openly at an Afghan bazaar outside the U.S. air base at Bagram holds what appears to be a trove of potentially sensitive American intelligence data, including the names, photographs and telephone numbers of Afghan spies informing on the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

TROOP NEWS

“Get Them All Home Now”

12 Apr 2006 Veterans For Commonsense.org

From: DMD
Too Little, Too Late

I'm a gold star father.

I lost my Marine son in Iraq in October 2005.

I'm also a former Marine Corps officer.

I will echo DK's comments above: pull our people out of that country now.

It wasn't worth the price or common sense to go to war in 2003 and it certainly is not worth the cost to remain today.

Get them all home now.

<p>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.</p>

“We Are Witnessing The Rumbblings Of An Officers’ Revolt”

April 12, 2006 By Fred Kaplan, Slate [Excerpt]

It's an odd thought, but a military coup in this country right now would probably have a moderating influence. Not that an actual coup is pending; still less is one desirable.

But we are witnessing the rumbblings of an officers' revolt, and things could get ugly if it were to take hold and roar.

The revolt is a reluctant one, aimed specifically at the personage of Donald Rumsfeld and the way he is conducting the war in Iraq.

It is startling to hear, in private conversations, how widely and deeply the U.S. officer corps despises this secretary of defense.

The joke in some Pentagon circles is that if Rumsfeld were meeting with the service chiefs and commanders and a group of terrorists barged into the room and kidnapped him, not a single general would lift a finger to help him.

Some of the most respected retired generals are publicly criticizing Rumsfeld and his policies in a manner that's nearly unprecedented in the United States, where civilian control of the military is accepted as a hallowed principle.

Gen. Anthony Zinni, a Marine with a long record of command positions (his last was as head of U.S. Central Command, which runs military operations in the Persian Gulf and South Asia), called last month for Rumsfeld's resignation.

Army Maj. Gen. Paul Eaton, who ran the program to train the Iraqi military, followed with a New York Times op-ed piece lambasting Rumsfeld as "incompetent strategically, operationally and tactically," and a man who "has put the Pentagon at the mercy of his ego, his Cold Warrior's view of the world, and his unrealistic confidence in technology to replace manpower."

Another General (Ret'd) Says Rumsfeld Must Go: “Rumsfeld And His Advisers Have Made Fools Of Themselves”

“Everyone Pretty Much Thinks Rumsfeld And The Bunch Around Him Should Be Cleared Out”

April 13, 2006 By Thomas E. Ricks, Washington Post Staff Writer

The retired commander of key forces in Iraq called yesterday for Donald H. Rumsfeld to step down, joining several other former top military commanders who have harshly criticized the defense secretary's authoritarian style for making the military's job more difficult.

"I think we need a fresh start" at the top of the Pentagon, retired Army Maj. Gen. John Batiste, who commanded the 1st Infantry Division in Iraq in 2004-2005, said in an interview. "We need leadership up there that respects the military as they expect the military to respect them. And that leadership needs to understand teamwork."

Batiste noted that many of his peers feel the same way. "It speaks volumes that guys like me are speaking out from retirement about the leadership climate in the Department of Defense," he said earlier yesterday on CNN.

Batiste's comments resonate especially within the Army: It is widely known there that he was offered a promotion to three-star rank to return to Iraq and be the No. 2 U.S. military officer there but he declined because he no longer wished to serve under Rumsfeld. Also, before going to Iraq, he worked at the highest level of the Pentagon, serving as the senior military assistant to Paul D. Wolfowitz, then the deputy secretary of defense.

Batiste said he believes that the administration's handling of the Iraq war has violated fundamental military principles, such as unity of command and unity of effort. In other interviews, Batiste has said he thinks the violation of another military principle -- ensuring there are enough forces -- helped create the Abu Ghraib abuse scandal by putting too much responsibility on incompetent officers and undertrained troops.

Another retired officer, Army Maj. Gen. John Riggs, said he believes that his peer group is "a pretty closemouthed bunch" but that, even so, his sense is "everyone pretty much thinks Rumsfeld and the bunch around him should be cleared out."

He emphatically agrees, Riggs said, explaining that he believes Rumsfeld and his advisers have "made fools of themselves, and totally underestimated what would be needed for a sustained conflict."

Also, the generals themselves may be partly to blame for the situation in Iraq, along with Rumsfeld and the White House, said Michael Vickers, an analyst at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, a Washington think tank.

"It's just absurd to lay the blame on Don Rumsfeld alone," he said.

British Air Force Doc Who Refused To Go To Iraq Again Gets Letters Of Support “Including Some From Serving Members Of The Armed Forces”



Flt Lt Dr Malcolm Kendall-Smith was based at RAF Kinloss in Scotland

[Thanks to Phil G, PB, NB, JM and Clancy S, who sent this in.]

Apr 13, 2006 (Reuters) & BBC & Richard Norton-Taylor, The Guardian

A British air force doctor who refused to go to Iraq was jailed for eight months on Thursday after being found guilty by a court martial of disobeying orders.

Australian-born Malcolm Kendall-Smith refused to go to Iraq in 2005, arguing the war was a crime. The judge ruled that the British presence in Iraq was legal and told the five-officer panel acting as a jury to ignore the officer's arguments.

The case is the first of its kind in Britain over the war in Iraq.

Kendall-Smith sat motionless as the president of the panel pronounced him guilty of five counts, one for refusing to go to Iraq and four for refusing to train and prepare.

Kendall-Smith's lawyer Philip Sapsford described him to the court as "a man of great moral courage".

He said Kendall-Smith had received nearly 500 messages of support, including some from serving members of the armed forces.

The judge ruled that orders for British troops to deploy to Iraq in 2005 were legal because the British presence was covered by a United Nations Security Council resolution passed after the fall of Saddam Hussein.

If an officer disagreed with the moral position of the government, the judge said, the honourable thing to do would be to resign. Kendall-Smith should have done that in 2004 after deciding the presence of British troops in Iraq was illegal.

The judge continued: "Obedience of orders is at the heart of any disciplined force. Refusal to obey orders means that the force is not a disciplined force but a rabble." A non-custodial sentence "would send a message to all those who wear the Queen's uniform that it does not matter if they refuse to carry out the policy of Her Majesty's government".

Dr Kendall-Smith will serve half of his sentence in a civilian prison and the remainder on licence. He was also ordered to pay £20,000 in costs.

Dr Kendall-Smith's solicitor, Justin Hugheston-Roberts, told BBC News the doctor was "upset yet resilient" and would be appealing.

"Now, more so than ever, he feels his actions were totally justified and he would not, if placed in the same circumstances, seek to do anything differently."

In a statement read by his solicitor, Dr Kendall-Smith said: "I would wish to thank all those people from all over the world and from all walks of life for their good wishes, their kind thoughts have helped sustain me through the past months.

"I would wish to restate that I have two great loves in life, medicine and the Royal Air Force.

"To take the decision that I did caused me great sadness, but I feel I had no other choice."

Outside court, Stop the War coalition national organiser Chris Nineham called the decision "a travesty of justice".

Dr Kendall-Smith had taken "a very courageous stand" and "paid a very high personal price for the lies of Tony Blair and his government", he said.

Dr Kendall-Smith, who holds dual British and New Zealand citizenship, had served twice in Iraq before he refused to train for his deployment last year.

In mitigation, his lawyer Philip Sapsford described the doctor as "an officer of impeccable character" with an "exemplary record".

"He is a man of great moral courage," Mr Sapsford said.

He was found guilty of refusing to attend equipment fittings and a training course as well as one count of failing to obey an order to attend a deployment briefing.

The Stop the War Coalition said Kendall-Smith had acted on his conscience, adding: "In doing so, he acted on behalf of many people in this country."

Highly Decorated Air Force Nurse, Trashed By Command Over Lesbianism, Fights Back



Maj. Margaret Witt told a news conference Wednesday, "My objective is to go back to my unit and serve my country."

April 13, 2006 By MIKE BARBER, P-I REPORTER

In 1993, Maj. Margaret Witt was a poster woman for the Air Force's flight nurse recruiting program.

In her career of 18-plus years, the decorated operating room and flight nurse from McChord Air Force Base earned stellar reviews for her work, which included helping to evacuate the nation's wounded troops and humanitarian missions to aid civilians.

In 2003, President Bush awarded her the Air Medal for her Middle East deployment and, later, the Air Force Commendation Medal, for saving the life of a Defense Department worker.

Less than a year later, after an Air Force investigation, Witt, a reservist, was drummed out.

Her offense: a committed relationship, but with another woman, a civilian, from 1997 to 2003.

On Wednesday, Witt, 42, challenged her forced discharge in a lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Tacoma against Air Force officials and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

The lawsuit, filed with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington, seeks to prevent Witt's discharge, citing her First and Fifth amendment protections of free speech and due process.

"I've been a proud Air Force nurse and officer for the past 19 years" mostly with the 446th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron at McChord, Witt said, appearing in uniform in Seattle. She was flanked by her lawyers, ACLU staff attorney Aaron Caplan, and Jim Lobsenz, an ACLU volunteer lawyer from the Seattle firm Carney Badley Spellman.

"My objective is to go back to my unit and serve my country and help the injured troops - - who need me at this time," Witt said, her major's oak leaves, blue and white chief flight-nurse wings displayed on her uniform, along with a small insignia on her left sleeve that read "Sept. 11, 2001."

Lobsenz in 1990 successfully took the case of openly homosexual Army Staff Sgt. Perry Watkins of Tacoma to the U.S. Supreme Court, forcing the Army to re-enlist Watkins. He said he is optimistic about Witt's case.

Overall discharge rates for homosexual conduct in all branches of the military have declined from 0.6 percent in 1998, or 1,145 of 192,382 discharges, to 0.3 percent in 2004, or 653 of 196,993 discharges, according to Pentagon figures.

No one has a definitive reason for the decrease, the spokesman said.

Congress, in enacting the 1993 law that President Clinton called the "don't ask, don't tell" policy, claimed that gay and lesbian service members would hurt unit cohesiveness and readiness.

However, 24 other nations allow openly gay soldiers, including such close U.S. allies as Australia, Israel and Britain, as well as other NATO nations, Lobsenz said. U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan routinely serve with those nation's gay troops, he said.

Witt had kept her private life private. Or so she thought.

"Some allegations were made and an investigation was started," Witt said flatly. "I certainly didn't tell them."

Witt, who in civilian life works as a physical therapist, nurse and volunteer firefighter, said she was stunned when suddenly confronted in November 2004 following an Air Force investigation begun that summer into her relationship.

The officer who was ordered to tell her broke down and cried, she said. Witt was ordered to go, keep quiet and not tell anyone why.

"I couldn't even say goodbye," she said.

After 18 years of service, Witt was told she could no longer report for duty, no longer be paid and no longer earn points toward retirement. Her promotion to lieutenant colonel was moot.

Last month, the Air Force, which has unfilled positions of flight nurses, sent her final discharge papers.

All that, court papers say, despite performance reviews that lauded how she stepped up to many and new responsibilities and was an excellent mentor often sought out by students and peers.

One review called her an "outstanding squadron and Air Force representative -- hand-picked to coordinate humanitarian mission and patient transport with multiple civilian, military, government and DOD agencies assuring continuity of care."

Her citation for the Air Medal, signed by Bush, notes that "her commitment to mission readiness and unrivaled clinical skills ensured the delivery of outstanding medical care to 140 patients during 18 sorties on C-130, KC-135 and C-17 aircraft while operating in an austere, hostile environment."

In 1993, the Air Force used her photograph in brochures used to recruit nurses.

Caplan, her lawyer, said indications are that many of Witt's troops are with her still.

"We know from people we have talked to in her unit that she is known as a superb officer, nurse and leader," Caplan said. "Even if she had to wear a patch saying her sexual orientation to get back in, they want her back."

Witt said she never wanted this attention but decided to sue after receiving her discharge letter March 6.

"I'm a very private person. I did my job to the best of my ability. I did it well. I don't think of the big picture," she said.

"It's just a waste of a good nurse, particularly now."

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to thomasfbarton@earthlink.net. Name, I.D., address withheld unless publication requested. Replies confidential.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Assorted Resistance Action



A burning office building at a grain storage facility April 13, 2006 in Baghdad. A Mortar shell hit, injuring seven, and triggering a huge fire, police said. (AP Photo/Samir Mizban)

Apr. 13, 2006 SINAN SALAHEDDIN, Associated Press & Aljazeera & (KUNA) & Deutsche Presse-Agentur & AFP

A Foreign Ministry worker was captured Thursday and three Health Ministry officials were wounded in a shooting that killed their driver.

A Housing Ministry employee was also wounded, in a drive-by shooting, police said.

A soldier wearing civilian clothes was killed near his home in Dora.

In the northern city of Mosul, resistance fighters killed a policeman.

An Iraqi police commando was killed and another wounded in a roadside bombing, about 20 miles south of Baghdad in Mahmoudiya.

Late Wednesday, two Iraqi contractors who supply the army with food were killed by guerrillas who stopped their car about 28 miles south of the northern city of Kirkuk.

Unknown guerrillas abducted Shehab Ahmad, a health center official in Ghayda village, Daqq district, taking him to an unknown destination, said the source.

Police in Basra found the bodies of two men who had just been captured, an engineer and a translator working with British troops in the area. A navy officer and his friend were killed by drive-by shooters while walking downtown.

In Baghdad, Mahmoud al-Hashimi, whose brother heads Iraq's largest Sunni Arab political party, was slain along with a companion Thursday as they drove through a mostly Shiite area, the Iraqi Islamic [collaborator] Party said.

Tariq al-Hashimi is among the key players in negotiations over a new national unity government, which have stalled over the issue of who will be the next prime minister.

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

The Material Basis Of The Iraqi Resistance Movement

By Michael Schwartz March 28, 2006, Tomdispatch.com [Excerpts]

The claim that the war has an economic foundation may sound strange in the context of American media coverage, because it is so unfamiliar.

So let me begin by agreeing with two key points in the currently fashionable media analysis: The initial attack on Saddam Hussein's regime was a success and there was a moment -- just after the fall of Baghdad -- when the Bush administration might have avoided triggering a formidable armed resistance. The war and proto-civil war of the present moment were not the inevitable result of the invasion, but of Bush administration actions taken afterwards.

We do not remember much of this now, but just after Saddam was toppled the American victors announced that a sweeping reform of Iraqi society would take place. The only part of this still much mentioned today -- the now widely regretted dismantling of the Iraqi military -- was but one aspect of a far larger effort to dismantle the entire Baathist state apparatus, most notably the government-owned factories and other enterprises that constituted just about 40% of the Iraqi economy.

This process of dismantling included attempts, still ongoing, to remove various food, product, and fuel subsidies that guaranteed low-income Iraqis basic staples, even when they had no gainful employment.

Without going into the tortured details (forcefully described at the time by Naomi Klein in an indispensable Harpers article), this neo-liberal "shock treatment" was adapted from programs undertaken by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank all around the globe in the 1990s, including those that immiserated Russia after the USSR collapsed and that helped to bankrupt Argentina.

Because the privatizers of the Bush administration were, however, in control of a largely prostrate and conquered country, the Iraqi reforms were enacted more swiftly and in a far more draconian manner than anywhere else on the planet.

Within six months, for example, the American occupation government, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), had promulgated all manner of laws designed to privatize everything in Iraq except established oil reserves. (New oil discoveries, however, were to be privatized.) All restrictions were also taken off foreign corporations intent on buying full control of Iraqi enterprises; nor were demands to be made of those companies to reinvest any of their profits in Iraq.

At the same time, state-owned enterprises were to be demobilized and sidelined.

They were to be prevented from participating either in repairing facilities damaged during the invasion (or degraded by the decade of sanctions that preceded it) or in any of the initially ambitious reconstruction projects the U.S. commissioned.

This policy was so strict that even state-owned enterprises with specific expertise in Iraqi electrical, sanitation, and water purification systems -- not to speak of Iraq's massive cement industry -- were forbidden from obtaining subcontracts from the multinational corporations placed in charge of rejuvenating the country's infrastructure.

The elimination of all protections for local commerce quickly threw the market wide open to large multinational marketing companies.

This resulted in an immediate surge of sales to the Iraqi middle class of previously unobtainable goods like air conditioners, cell phones, and all manner of electronic devices.

Though few remember this today, many American journalists reported the influx of such goods as an early sign of coming prosperity -- and of how successful an economy could begin to be once freed from the oppressive binds of state control and state ownership.

As it happened, though, this surge did not last into the winter of 2003-4.

The problem, it turned out, was that the CPA-induced economic "opening" to multinational competition administered a series of death blows to locally based enterprises.

First of all, shops selling any item that could be imported by foreign companies found themselves in the unenviable position of competing with lower-priced goods that the multinationals could either provide at such prices or afford to sell at a loss to capture the market (i.e., run the local competition out of business).

So a depression swept through small business in Iraq, leaving neighborhoods without their normal complement of shops and without the income that they plowed back into communities.

Second, the demobilization of the army and the sidelining of state enterprises resulted in an almost immediate unemployment crisis.

Even though many state enterprises continued to pay employees (for doing nothing) and the Coalition Provisional Authority belatedly decided to pay Saddam's former soldiers (also for doing nothing), this money did not regularly reach the targeted groups.

The fragmentary administration set up by the occupation was monumentally inefficient at delivering any services, including paychecks, and significant sums were evidently simply gobbled up by increasingly corrupt remnants of the Baathist administrative apparatus. As a result, millions of unemployed workers and soldiers, lacking the money to feed their families, also lacked the money to support local merchants.

These depressed neighborhoods became incubators for ferocious criminal gangs, who sought to redress their own economic hardship by looting public buildings and private dwellings of anything that might yield a return on the black (or export) market. Looting, which began with the fall of the government, became a permanent feature of Iraqi urban life once the occupation dismantled the Iraqi police force. As time passed without the establishment of effective law enforcement, criminality became organized and systematic, targeting professionals and shopkeepers who had substantial assets or retained incomes; while kidnapping for ransom became a regular fact of life for prosperous Iraqis.

As this crisis deepened, multinational corporations found they had sold just about all the appliances the market could bear and were no longer making sufficient profits to continue their marketing efforts in much of Iraq. So they simply withdrew from now-unprofitable local markets, leaving communities already sprinkled with the empty shops of bankrupt local merchants bereft of needed products and services.

Those who still had incomes found it increasingly difficult to obtain needed resources.

A reverse multiplier effect began to take hold as Iraqis who remained prosperous were forced to shop, work, or live outside their former communities, only depleting and depressing them further.

Unemployment rates quickly exceeded 25% in many communities, and today -- as this process reaches its third anniversary -- nationwide unemployment estimates range from a depression-level 30% to a staggering 60%, depending on the source you consult.

A Response of Savage Repression

This economic debacle affected different parts of the country with differing degrees of severity. Containing a large proportion of the government apparatus and the commerce of the country, Baghdad, the capital, was hit with catastrophic force.

Previously favored Sunni cities outside Baghdad, where the largest proportion of state enterprises were located, were similarly devastated. In addition, it was from these communities that the bulk of demobilized government employees had been drawn.

The Shia cities in the South were strongly affected, but not as profoundly as the "Sunni Triangle." After 12 years of post-Gulf-War-I autonomy under the Anglo-American "no-fly zone," the Kurds were largely shielded from the economic destruction. In effect, their isolation from the Iraqi economy now insulated them as well from the neo-liberal depression wrought by the U.S. occupation.

Naturally, then, the discontent was most ferocious in Sunni areas, substantial in Shia areas, and relatively mild in the Kurdish ones.

By the fall of 2003, as anger mounted, so did the protests, with the largest and most insistent coming from Sunni cities and the Sunni areas of Baghdad. These protests were made more pronounced by the residual loyalty many Sunnis held for the Saddam regime and their greater sense of violation from the invasion.

At first, many of the protests were peaceful, focusing either on local economic issues, or on general conditions that were worsening, not improving, after months of occupation.

Typically, people demanded services and jobs from the CPA.

It is now lost to history, but the run-up to the ferocious first battle of Falluja in April, 2004, triggered by the mutilation of four private security contractors, actually began a full year earlier when American troops fired on a peaceful protest organized around a host of local issues, killing 13 Iraqi civilians.

It was exactly this sort of ferocious reaction to peaceful protest that made the U.S. military such a factor in the stoking of what would become an ongoing rebellion.

In fact, in 2003, the occupation response to protests was forceful, almost gleeful, repression.

Top officials of the CPA and the U.S. military command considered these demonstrations, peaceful or not, the most tangible signs of ongoing Baathist attempts to facilitate a future return to power.

They therefore applied the occupation's iron heel on the theory that forceful suppression would soon defeat or demoralize any "dead-enders" intent on restoring the old regime.

Protests were met with arrests, beatings, and -- in any circumstances deemed dangerous to U.S. troops -- overwhelming, often lethal military force. Home invasions of people suspected of anti-occupation attitudes or activities became commonplace, resulting in thousands of arrests and numerous firefights.

Detention and torture in Abu Ghraib and other American-controlled prisons were just one facet of this larger strategy, fueled by official pressure -- once a low-level rebellion boiled up -- to get quick information for further harsh, repressive strikes.

In general, the Iraqi population came to understand that dissent of whatever sort would be met by savage repression.

This policy might have worked if, as Bush administration officials regularly claimed, the resistance had indeed been nothing but remnants of the Saddam regime, thirsting for a return to power.

It might even have worked -- or at least worked somewhat better -- if the growing resistance had rested only on the anger people felt about the occupation of their homeland by an alien army. In these circumstances, protestors might have decided to bide their time in the face of overwhelming demonstrations of force.

It was, however, an unworkable policy in the face of a deepening disaster caused by the CPA's own economic nostrums which, by generating new problems, kept recruiting new protestors (and deepening the anger of existing rebels).

In this context, the CPA's heavy-handed responses were like oil to the flames.

The rear guard of a deposed regime was a tiny part of their problem when protest and rebellion were fundamentally being fueled by a rapidly growing economic depression endangering the livelihoods of a majority of the Iraqi population.

In such circumstances, each act of repression added the provocation of brutality, false arrest, torture, and murder to the economic crimes that triggered the protests to begin with.

And each act of repression convinced more Iraqis that peaceful protest would not work; that, if they were going to save their lives and those of their families, a more aggressive, belligerent approach would be necessary.

In this context, the American policy of repression backfired royally, stoking an ever angrier, more violent, more widespread, better supported resistance.

Eventually, in both Sunni and Shia areas, major uprisings occurred and, in the Sunni cities, these developed into more-or-less continuous warfare that, by November, 2005, resulted in about 700 small-scale military engagements per week.

Could the U.S. have suppressed even this economically driven rebellion, had it flooded the country with American troops (as General Shinseki recommended) and kept Saddam's army more or less intact, using it -- as Saddam had -- to suppress growing discontent?

Perhaps, but as long as American administrators were intent on privatizing the country, this too might have backfired.

As a start, the American Army was not trained or prepared to act as the sort of local police force that might have contained protests generated by economic discontent.

Even Shinseki's estimates rested on the existence of a viable Iraqi military to maintain law and order.

Yet, retaining an army after overthrowing a government and rearranging its economic foundations is quite a different feat from retaining one after a coup-d'état that changes little except the leadership.

CPA officials rightly feared major resistance from all the forces that served, and were served by, the old system, including the military, which in the Iraqi case benefited from government-controlled enterprises as much as any other part of the establishment.

Certainly, an alien army entered Iraq, destroyed that country's sovereignty, and stoked nationalist resentments.

But major media outlets in this country have lost track of the fact that what also entered Iraq was an American administration wedded at home and abroad to a fierce, unbending, and alien set of economic ideas.

By focusing attention only on the lack of U.S. (and Iraqi) military power brought to bear in the early days after the fall of Baghdad, they ignore some of the deeper reasons why many Iraqis were willing to confront a formidable military machine with only small arms and their own wits.

They ignore -- and cause the American public to ignore -- the fact that there was little resistance just after the fall of Baghdad and that it expanded as the economy declined and repression set in.

They ignore the eternal verity that the willingness to fight and die is regularly animated by the conviction that otherwise things will only get worse.

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)

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

“When It Comes To Atrocities, It Happened Everyday”



From: Richard Hastie
To: GI Special
Sent: April 10, 2006

During the Vietnam War, the United States dropped the equivalent of 1,000 pounds of explosives for every human being in Vietnam.

When it comes to atrocities, it happened everyday.

Any American who does not believe this, is guarding their belief system for dear life.

I keep pushing this truth, so people can connect the dots from Vietnam to Iraq.

People just don't believe the U.S. commits tons of atrocities.

Talk about having your belief system dismantled.

**Mike Hastie
Vietnam Veteran**

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

“Our ‘Democracy’ Is Revealed For What It Really Is, A Sham, A Cardboard Cut-Out”

April 11, 2006 William Bowles, I'n'I, www.williambowles.info [Excerpt]

For decades we have been conned into thinking that voting every few years is a sure sign that we have the governments that represent us but of course as most of us don't even bother to vote, and those that do, do it out of a reflex action, we have what might be called negative feedback.

Divorced from the political process, devoid of a genuine voice of opposition let alone a genuine alternative, only strengthens the state's control as the increasingly repressive laws demonstrate.

On the one hand it is argued that we have allowed this state of affairs to come to pass because the great majority genuinely believe that we are under attack from the 'forces of darkness', therefore such draconian repression is a 'necessary evil' if we are to protect 'our way of life'.

The paradox is not lost on me even if it is on those who accept such an argument—the killing us to save us syndrome—but on the other hand, it can be argued that we have gone along with the lie precisely because this is only explanation we are presented with.

Many of us find that the explanation, that we have a murderous and utterly ruthless ruling class, too outrageous to accept.

How can it be that allegedly civilised and educated people can perform such unthinkable acts? On the face of it, it seems impossible, we are, after all, the defenders of civilisation, we pride ourselves on our culture, our learning, our compassion.

But history reveals precisely this, literally millions of people exterminated, entire cultures wiped out, all to preserve the 'Western way of life', a way of life that is not only immoral and unjust but now obviously unsustainable no matter how many light bulbs you switch off.

And I argue that is precisely the unsustainability of 'our way of life' that has given rise to the current situation for it is simply inconceivable that those who rule us will alter their policies voluntarily, there is just too much at stake no matter that they're turning the planet into shit.

Thus the ante must be continually raised if the populace are to be kept in their place which explains the never-ending series of 'threats' to which our 'way of life' is continually subjected, with each successive 'threat' built on the one preceding it.

Note for example that prior to the invasion of Iraq we were told that once the tyrant Hussein was removed, peace and security would be restored (just as were told that once the 'Red Menace' was no more, we could sleep safe in our beds) yet the occupation has led to the emergence of even greater threats, now it's Iran and no doubt following Iran it will be North Korea, then China, then...?

Yet there is a great irony in the current situation for the ruling elites have created a paradoxical situation whereby having effectively disenfranchised the populace by gutting the political process, they have no means of achieving any kind of endorsement for their policies.

Thus the drive to create the necessary structures for 'Der Tag', that is, when it becomes necessary to rule by brute force or in cruder terms 'fuck the populace and just do as you're told!'

Our 'democracy' is revealed for what it really is, a sham, a cardboard cut-out, good as a point-of-sale device but even the advertising has worn thin.

Conceivably we'll stagger along for a few more 'elections' but eventually the entire house of cards will collapse, most likely not because of anything we do but because the rest of the planet will do it for us, and not to save our sorry arses but to save their own.

After all, USUK can only invade just so many countries before coming to even greater grief than they have already. This is after all not 1870 (or thereabouts) when all it took was a couple of gunboats, some redcoats and a couple of tons of opium.

OCCUPATION REPORT

THIS IS NOT, NOT A SATIRE:
The Incredible Vanishing
Collaborator “Army”

“If Someone Punishes Them, They Can Throw Down Their Uniform And Say, ‘Have A Nice Day’” “They’d Rather Go To Jail Then Sit Out At A Hot Checkpoint”

April 13, 2006, By Antonio Castaneda, Associated Press, ABU GHRAIB, Iraq [Excerpts]

U.S. and Iraqi commanders are increasingly critical of a policy that allows Iraqi soldiers to leave their units virtually at will, essentially deserting with no punishment. They blame the lax rule for draining the Iraqi ranks to confront the insurgency, in some cases by 30 percent or even half.

Iraqi officials, however, say they have no choice but to allow the policy, or they may gain virtually no volunteers at all.

Most armies threaten imprisonment or fines for soldiers who abruptly leave their units, but the Iraqi army does not require its soldiers to sign contracts.

That allows them to quit anytime and casually treat enlistments as temporary jobs. Soldiers can even pick up their belongings and leave during missions, and often do without facing punishment.

In the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, the unit that oversees part of this district just west of Baghdad, U.S. trainers said only about 70 percent of Iraqis were present, attributing many of the 300 truant soldiers to the policy.

The commander said a shortage of troops is the unit’s biggest problem, and pinned the blame on both the policy and unmotivated troops.

“Under the military agreement, they can leave anytime,” said Col. Alaa Kata al-Kafage, while his troops waited for a roadside bomb to be detonated. “After (soldiers) get paid and save a little bit of money, they leave.”

[I]t’s unclear whether the Iraqi government, preoccupied with fending off insurgent attacks and containing sectarian violence, would even have the resources to locate or prosecute truant soldiers, if it changed the policy. Iraqi police have only recently hit city streets.

Some Iraqi officers believe the casual attitude toward unauthorized absences is a good thing because it helps morale among young soldiers who have never been away from home and joined mostly because they need money. Forcing them to stick to a rigid schedule would lead to poor morale, said an Iraqi colonel in Baghdad who refused to give his name for security reasons.

Added Maj. Gen. Jaafar Mustafa, an Iraqi army officer in Sulaimaniyah: “We do not want any soldier to stay against his will, because this will affect the performance and the morale of the Iraqi army. By giving the choice for the Iraqi members to stay or leave, more people will volunteer in the army.”

But al-Kafage and others argue the policy needs to be changed.

“All the soldiers now, they don’t care about the country. They care about the money,” al-Kafage said. “It’s too easy for them to quit. If someone punishes them, they can throw down their uniform and say, ‘Have a nice day.’”

U.S. trainers who oversee the battalion’s rookie soldiers, most from the Shiite areas south of Baghdad, echo the complaint. “They have serious problems with retention,” said Maj. Larry Daley. “That’s the hardest part, keeping guys here.”

U.S. trainers also frequently criticize the Iraqi army’s leave policy, which grants soldiers 10 days off a month and further trims the ranks of available troops.

Large-scale insurgent attacks have also intimidated many Iraqi soldiers into abandoning their posts. In the town of Adhaim north of Baghdad, Iraqi soldiers said two insurgent ambushes in December — one that killed 19 soldiers, and another that killed eight soldiers and wounded about two dozen more — cut their battalion of about 600 soldiers in half.

“We lost all together about half of our battalion,” said Akid, a 20-year-old soldier from Diwanayah, who was being treated for a gunshot wound at a U.S. military hospital in Balad at the time. “They gave up.”

Commanders in troubled Anbar province have cited the same abandonment concerns in even larger Iraqi units. In one brigade of Iraqi soldiers stationed in Habaniyah, U.S. officials said about 500 soldiers, or more than one-quarter, had quit and gone home.

It’s not just the policy or threats of violence that lead to waves of desertions: quality of life can also have an impact.

In the Qaim area near the Syrian border, dozens of soldiers complained last month that they hadn’t been paid in months. The Iraqi Ministry of Defense has struggled to build an infrastructure to both supply and regularly pay its troops. Iraqi soldiers also often live in dilapidated barracks that are slowly being refurbished.

U.S. trainers said some units have resorted to temporarily jailing soldiers who do not return from leave. But even these punishments have been manipulated by wayward but savvy soldiers.

“They’d rather go to jail than sit out at a hot” checkpoint, said Maj. Kenneth Wilson of Chicago, a trainer. [And the odds of survival are considerably better in jail too.]

2003: Sowing The Wind 2006: Reaping The Whirlwind



Former Iraqi soldiers and army officers chant anti-U.S. slogans and demand for payment of their wages for the past three months in Baghdad, June 2, 2003. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)

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

Another Blinding Flash Of The Obvious

April 13, 2006 By Sameer N. Yacoub, Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Iraq: U.S. troops have stepped up patrols in Baghdad by 45 percent since the spike in sectarian violence, a U.S. general said Thursday, raising questions about the capabilities of Iraqi forces.

With sectarian violence on the rise in Baghdad, the U.S. command boosted the number of armed patrols in the capital from 12,000 in February to 20,000 since the beginning of March, Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch told reporters.

That casts doubt on the capability of Iraqi forces to deal with sectarian violence, despite assurances from American officials that the new army and police forces were gaining steadily in professional skills.

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to thomasfbarton@earthlink.net. Name, I.D., address withheld unless publication requested. Replies confidential.

GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out

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