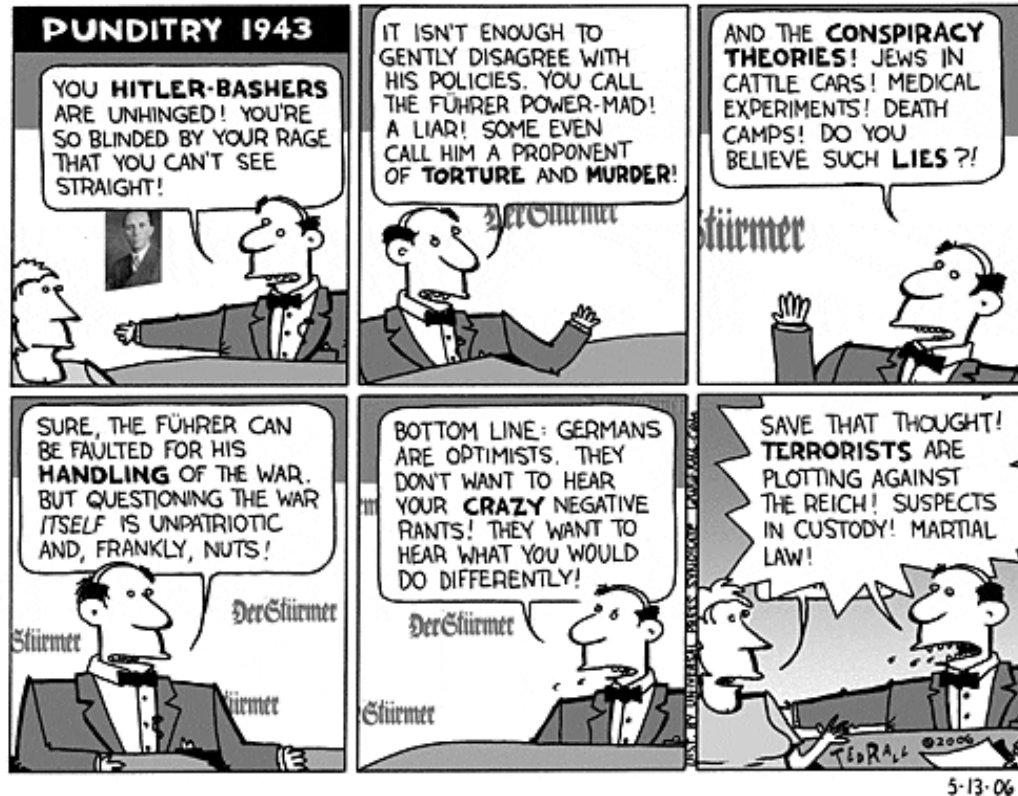


GI SPECIAL 4E19:



[Thanks to David Honish, Veterans For Peace, who sent this in.]

Return To A Bad Place: **Has Anything Really Changed at Fort Sill?**

“I’ll go a long period of time forgetting about that place”, he wrote me, “but then something small will remind me of things such as how the commanding officer threatened to shred medical files, how a drill sergeant cracked a private’s ribs by jumping on him as a joke, how crippled people got to spend their evenings washing government vehicles and staring at walls, and how I was relegated to doing one-armed pushups for an hour because someone fell asleep while we were assigned to stare at a wall all morning (my other arm was out of service due to a severe shoulder dislocation).

From: JoAnn Wypijewsk
To: GI Special
Sent: May 18, 2006
Subject: Fort Sill redux

May 17, 2006 By JoAnn Wypijewski, CounterPunch

When I first wrote my story “Malevolent Power at Fort Sill: The Army Slays Its Own”, which appeared in the CounterPunch newsletter in late March and on the website a couple of weeks later, I had this notion that there was something scandalous about abuses of GIs by their own command in a program for injured soldiers on a US Army post.

A 21-year-old soldier, PFC Matthew Scarano, had died in his bunk at Fort Sill, in Lawton, Oklahoma.

A little over a year earlier he had badly injured his shoulder in the course of basic training there, and by March 19, when he died, he was no closer to healing but had spent months so doped up on painkillers that sometimes he could barely make it to formation.

The latest drug prescribed for him by Army doctors, Fentanyl, is described in medical literature as an analgesic patch 80 times more potent than morphine. Earlier during his confinement in Fort Sill’s Physical Training and Rehabilitation Program (PTRP), Scarano reported in a letter home that “the Army has me on Ambien, seroquel, tylox and oxycontin. I also get trazadone to take the edge off.”

I imagined that death, on top of other soldiers’ allegations of torment, assault and a regimen of systematic humiliation and neglect, would be meat for the likes of Congressman John Murtha and for mainstream journalists carefully trying to balance their bosses’ fealty to power and their own desire for good copy.

I personally handed the article to Murtha and sent it to every mainstream journalist I knew, suggesting they follow up on it.

It was also sent to television and radio reporters.

Some readers wrote telling me they’ve forwarded it to their Congressional representatives, urging an inquiry. CounterPuncher Greg Arnold of Danville, California, has written Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer every week for five weeks, getting a pro forma “thank you” from Boxer and not a word from Feinstein.

Pat deVarenes, the injured soldier’s mother whose blog first alerted me to PTRP’s cruelties, had prophesied for months that something terribly bad could happen there and fought like hell to get anyone interested, but after Scarano’s death she told me, “The silence has been thunderous.”

It used to be that an American life counted for far more than any other, so the cynic might say this nonchalance is a sign of progress at a time when an American war has taken the lives of more than 100,000 Iraqis without too much discomfort in this country.

“Heal and Ship” is the PTRP motto, after all; ship to kill or be killed, maybe both. The rough economy of war will shake out who is an asset and who a loss.

Naturally, the Army prefers assets, even broken ones like the soldiers in PTRP, to outright losses.

At least there’s a chance the broken may mend enough to be sent into battle; the discharged are like the dead, useless.

The Army began an inquiry into Scarano’s death.

And thanks to another CounterPuncher, who nudged my story toward Ralph Blumenthal of the New York Times, silence from the big media has not been complete. On May 12 the Times published Blumenthal’s story (which credited CounterPunch for its early reporting) on the front page.

No doubt, the Army hated Blumenthal’s prying, but its flack at Fort Sill did his best to make a young man’s suffering and death a case study of what the military loves to call “lessons learned”: something freakish, isolated, ultimately edifying, proof that the system works, the program works, the process of self-criticism and reform may grind slow but it grinds steady.

I hadn’t known, when I wrote my story, that Matthew Scarano is not the first soldier to have died in Fort Sill’s PTRP.

In July of 2004, 22-year-old Pvt. Jason Poirier expired in the same barracks as a result of “acute methadone intoxication”, according to an Army autopsy.

It was an accident, Army officials told Blumenthal, just like Scarano’s death.

On May 17, the Army called Christen Scarano Bailey, Matthew’s mother, to tell her that the toxicology reports were in and that the official investigation has concluded that her son died of an overdose of Fentanyl.

Clearly, Pvt. Poirier’s death didn’t count for much, despite a supposed subsequent reform in how medications were dispensed, because it wasn’t enough to prevent Scarano’s.

Blumenthal reported that Fort Sill’s flack told him soldiers weren’t monitored while taking medication when Scarano was alive, suggesting the soldier had OD’d, but back in March, Pvt. Richard Thurman, deVarennes’ son, told me that PTRP soldiers couldn’t take an aspirin on their own without risking being found out and punished.

Thurman, who had stress fractures, said all medication was under the control of higher-ups, dispensed only at certain times by supervisors who watched while pills were swallowed.

Like buying cigarettes or candy at the PX, buying Tylenol was trading in contraband. Across a year Scarano had been dosed with prescription drugs, the result of decisions taken by Fort Sill's medical personnel. Those decisions may have been wrong; they weren't accidental.

Indeed, nothing happens by accident at PTRP, not in the ordinary sense of that word.

An environment of almost total control, it is defined by orders given or withheld.

Pvt. Poirier's death wasn't enough to rouse Fort Sill's commander to put a doctor or physical therapist in charge of the PTRP. It wasn't enough to order adherence to the Army's rule that no one may stay in PTRP, or at non-permanent party status, for longer than six months.

It wasn't enough to run the program the way anyone of common sense would envision a rehabilitation program running: with initial personalized medical consultations and consistent follow-up, personalized therapy regimens, classic Rest-Ice-Compression-Elevation treatments and schedules organized around healing.

It wasn't enough to spare future inmates from forced labor, mind-numbing boredom, do-it-yourself gym workouts, regular infantilization, denigration and despair.

And it wasn't enough to keep a crazed drill sergeant from abusing them collectively and assaulting one of them physically.

Fort Sill's flack told Blumenthal that an internal investigation has substantiated "misbehavior" on the part of Drill Sgt. Robert Langford.

In January Langford kicked 21-year-old Pvt. Damien McMahon in his injured knee after the latter said he couldn't genuflect.

If a GI had kicked Langford, he'd be in the brig for assault.

Langford was reassigned, and is now at home, under suspension.

It is not clear if any disciplinary action has been taken against the first sergeant.

Langford's superior, who witnessed the assault and ordered the other troops to turn away as their comrade cried out in pain on the floor, then warned them all that they'd seen nothing. Another drill sergeant, Troy Bullock, who once caught a soldier sneaking a cigarette and decided to punish the whole unit, forcing the inmates to assemble in formation and change uniforms every hour between 10 pm and 2 am, has also been suspended.

So, yes, there were abuses, the flack conceded, but as they weren't directed at Scarano per se, they had no bearing on the accident of his death. Scarano was on sleep medicine the night of Bullock's exercise in sleep deprivation.

He did worsen his injury by having to move heavy furniture and hand-scrape the barracks floor along with the other men under Langford's order, but that didn't kill him.

Now in the spirit of reform, Fort Sill officials say they will try their best to stick to the six-month rule they previously ignored, and the chain of command and the medical side will review soldiers' cases on a regular schedule.

A medical professional has been put in charge of the program (previously an artillery captain was), and yet another policy has been instituted for distributing medication.

Shortly before Scarano's death, as a result of deVarennes' tireless challenges, a medical advocate was assigned to review cases and intervene on the soldiers' behalf to get doctor's appointments.

The Pvt. 1st Class Scarano Fatality Review Board has thus done its job, and the command is proud, as its PR people wrote in a statement to the Lawton Constitution, that Fort Sill has a 75.7 percent success rate of returning soldiers to training following their injuries. That, they crowed, is "one of the best PTRP success rates within the Army's five (Initial Entry Training) sites".

Since writing that first story on Scarano and Fort Sill, I've heard from soldiers experienced with some of those other IET -- that is, basic training -- sites, the assumedly good ones whose PTRP units are not plagued by accidents and isolated incidents of abuse. Pat deVarennes has heard from even more. They deserve some airing.

"I would like to say that basic training is a bit like torture", a fellow named Eric wrote me. "I went to basic training at Ft. Benning, GA, in 2000. Men WERE subjected to sleep deprivation, verbal abuse, and overexertion during training. The drill sergeants who ran the basic training program were the same ones who ran the PTRP or equivalent programs."

The Army has since overhauled its basic training doctrine, officially chucking the old standard of "break them down to build them up", but a soldier who's been on medical hold-over status for about a year and a half at Fort Benning, wrote to say, "During my time here I have seen many abuses and I know many soldiers who have suffered the indignity of the hold-over or PTRP status."

Among the uninjured, PTRP is known mostly as a warning, "a bad place" you don't ever want to be in, where men languish cleaning the barracks, staring at walls, getting no rehab, being the butt of yelling, hazing, belittlement.

"The PTRP is a problem of the system", he said. "Once you're out of the training regime, you kind of drop off the face of the earth."

“There wasn't a minute that went by when the Drill Sergeants didn't make some type of verbal attack at (injured soldiers) or to the rest of us about them to make sure that they and we knew it”, an active duty soldier who'd trained at Fort Benning wrote to deVarences.

“With the exception of those that went AWOL, which as I learned when I had to go to the Infirmary happens with alarming frequency despite the warning that it's an offense punishable by 'death,' those guys didn't really deserve it.

“The stigma behind joining the group of 'flunkies' was such that a soldier in my platoon was so against being put in that group that he attempted to stay with us with a back problem so bad he could barely do anything at times. Not being recycled (forced to repeat training) is the only thing that keeps people from going to sick call sometimes no matter the pain.”

This soldier sent deVarences a card that he received upon entering basic training enumerating his rights, including “To be free to go on sick call when necessary”, “To be treated fairly and with the respect which all men and women deserve” and “To undergo no punishment which is degrading or harmful.”

A man named John who spent nine weeks, a relatively short time, at Fort Knox's PTRP in late 2004 said he witnessed two people openly threaten suicide and another go AWOL.

“I'll go a long period of time forgetting about that place”, he wrote me, “but then something small will remind me of things such as how the commanding officer threatened to shred medical files, how a drill sergeant cracked a private's ribs by jumping on him as a joke, how crippled people got to spend their evenings washing government vehicles and staring at walls, and how I was relegated to doing one-armed pushups for an hour because someone fell asleep while we were assigned to stare at a wall all morning (my other arm was out of service due to a severe shoulder dislocation).

“Sadly, this was all a proverbial 'tip of the iceberg.' I wrote Senator Cornyn's office about this matter and he surprisingly followed through with an inquiry. This was of no avail, however, as the chain of command took cheap shots and tried to call me a liar.”

From a soldier who'd been in the PTRP at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, in 2000, deVarences got a letter saying, “What happened while I was in PTRP was not military, it was hate, nothing less than hate for us.... While I was in we only had 2 books, our Army 'smart book' and our religious choice. No other reading was allowed. We were to read standing at the end of our bunks, we would go months without phone calls, we had to sneak body soap and writing paper from people who went to the hospital as the SGTs maybe took us to get stuff once a month....

“I have seen people forced to kneel on ACLs (torn anterior cruciate ligament injuries), forced to do 'front back gos' (an exercise involving the pushup position, the flutter-kick position and running in place) while they had stress fractures in their hips.”

While recycled for a second basic training, this soldier fell thirty feet. He has a torn rotator cuff and Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy with nerve damage, meaning he has chronic, searing pain. He is 32 now and says, "I am unable to do anything I did before the Army." He separated from the Army as a model soldier, he says, and is now fighting it for trying to cut his disability benefit.

Officers at Fort Sill told soldiers' families that PTRP is a "work in progress" when I was there in March. The program has been in place only since the 1990s, they joked, and given how long it takes the Army to do anything, such a time span is a mere bat of the eye.

Thus it was that later I could square accounts of contemporary horrors at Fort Sill and a letter I received from a woman named Lisa, who was in the Army from 1995 to 1998 and on hold-over status for more than a year.

"What was described in that article almost had me in tears", Lisa wrote. "I have so much suppressed how bad that time was for me. I got nearly suicidal -- I even intervened in one hold-over's attempted suicide (which was covered up by the Drill Sergeant).

"I had what I called my weekly nervous breakdown. I thought I was just weak. The descriptions in the article are spot on.

"Total despair...desolation...hopelessness...shame...and the feeling that you have been incarcerated."

So none should be surprised that, despite the brief, unflattering spotlight on Fort Sill and the vaunted reforms, the life of injured soldiers post-Scarano has not been governed by therapeutic priorities.

Immediately following the soldier's death, post psychologists met with his comrades for a little grief counseling but were taken aback by their anger.

Later the survivors were asked to sign a paper acknowledging a new warning that their taking any medication other than what was prescribed, without permission, could result in six months' imprisonment. They were ordered not to communicate with deVarenes but were allowed to have cell phones, which had to be surrendered to drill sergeants for all but the allotted post-dinner telephone hour.

Within a short time many of those who'd witnessed the corpse were disbursed to other posts. Maybe they were healed. Pvt. Thurman passed exactly the same alternative PT test that he'd passed last November, before a commander decided that he wasn't fully a soldier if he couldn't do the two-mile run and sent him to PTRP. Thurman still can't run and has flat feet, but he's regular Army now.

Pvt. Clayton Howell, who compiled abuses of a program he said could be summed up in the phrase "Malevolentia Imperium", from which I took the title of my story, is awaiting discharge for a psychological disorder. He went into PTRP with gall bladder problems.

After he found his friend lifeless in his bunk, Howell reminded investigators with the Army's Criminal Investigation Division that well before the fatality he had

registered his concern about Scarano's drugged-up state with Fort Sill's Community Mental Health Service, which was administering Scarano's meds.

On April 17, Pat deVarenes received a letter from the Army TRADOC command Surgeon's Office, which has responsibility for all the PTRPs, thanking her for her efforts, which "have had a positive impact on how the PTRP system is run across the entire army".

On April 21, she received a letter from another Fort Sill PTRP mother named Jacqi, reporting that her son, in with a knee injury, had a fifty-pound weight dropped on his head during physical therapy. He got eight staples in his scalp, Jacqi wrote, "and since has been suffering with crippling headaches that drop him to his knees". No further tests or a CAT scan had been ordered, and he was eager to recycle to training just to get out of PTRP.

On May 3, Jacqi wrote again saying, "He is still being denied the CAT scan as they 'feel there is probably nothing wrong' although they still cannot explain the excruciating headaches just gave him aspirin. I have written and paid for delivery of letters directly to the President, and every member of Congress as well as the first lady. The last batch of letters were done on the 24th of April and still not even an acknowledgement."

Certainly, not all soldiers who've ever experienced PTRP have been mistreated, just as not all soldiers sent to Iraq are killed.

A soldier named Danny told me he spent three months at Fort Leonard Wood's PTRP in 2004 and "met some of the best NCOs (noncommissioned officers) I've known in the Army, both on the medical treatment side, and the majority of the cadre (Drill Sergeant types)". And certainly many in the command who are in the business of reviewing doctrine, putting out brushfires and establishing new protocols truly believe in the salve of reform.

But as Danny went on to observe, by way of putting the PTRP abuses in perspective:

"The Army, especially in 'Combat Arms' specialties, which categorizes the majority of the trainees at Sill/Knox/Benning, there is a macho mentality. You have to be tough.

"The reason for that is obvious, combat arms soldiers are the likely trigger pullers. The Army kills people, as a profession. If you aren't pulling the trigger, you're helping the trigger puller in some way.... There's no way to dance around it, the Army kills. The difference between civilian bosses, and military leaders, is that a directive from a military leader is LAW. A military leader can issue an illegal order, and do illegal things. It's everyone's responsibility to stop that activity however they can."

That might be difficult, he noted, because a private may not understand the chain of command. Clearly, having been drilled for obedience, the private may also not recognize when defiance rather than falling in line becomes his duty.

"Second", Danny went on, "the Army culture discourages being injured".

Put another way, it has contempt for the weak.

It has to; the weak won't kill and won't necessarily be there sharply at the point of crisis where every soldier depends on every other one to keep from getting killed.

The weak, the sick, hinder the mission.

As it's one of the entitlements of power to see that the needs of the mission supersede those of the lone soul, the mission will define the cure.

No tinkering, no reform or adjustment of the regs could be expected to make so fundamentally indecent a system decent. The good commander or drill sergeant, like the good prison guard, makes a difference, as anyone who's been in combat or under lock will testify. But ultimately even the best of them are worked by orders beyond their control.

Two days after the Times ran Blumenthal's story, the Hartford Courant reported that the Army has been sending Iraq veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder back into combat, sometimes for second and third deployments.

Officially that is disapproved, and medically deplored, as is sending schizophrenics or other mentally ill people into combat, but they go, all of them, many pumped with Zoloft, Wellbutrin, Prozac, Trazadone or other psychotropics that the Army made more widely available in the combat zone as of 2004.

Antidepressants are contraindicated for people with PTSD, but the reigning philosophy appears to be, Drug 'em up and hope they tough it out. There is little or no monitoring of medication use or mental health counseling in the combat zone.

In 2005, the Courant's investigation revealed, twenty-two soldiers committed suicide in Iraq, about one in five of all non-combat deaths there last year, the highest rate since the war began. At least eleven of those who killed themselves were kept on duty despite showing signs of psychic distress, and in seven of the cases superiors knew of the problem.

"The Army has a mission to fight", the Army's top mental health expert, Col. Elspeth Ritchie, told the Courant, "and, as you know, recruiting has been a challenge." So sick men are sent into war.

As Bob Johnson, a psychologist who served as chief of combat stress control for the Army's 2nd Brigade last year, told the paper, "You have to become comfortable with things we wouldn't normally be comfortable with. If there were an endless supply (of troops), the compassionate side of you just wants to get these people out of here. They're miserable. You can see it in their faces. But I had to kind of put that aside."

In the end, it was foolish of me to think that the death of PFC Scarano should have caused much of a stir.

Death has lost its weightiness, and suffering become a banal acquaintance.

So many killed in Iraq, what's one more soldier?

So many civilians snuffed in an instant, forty here, fifteen there, three, two, twenty-five, men and women, children, Iraqis, Afghanis, terrorists, real and imagined, daily, who can keep up?

So many maimed, mad, scrambled from the killing and the fear, so many tortured or taken in binds, how incidental, how trivial it is that one young man in pain, one damaged Army asset, should die in his sleep.

It was all too standard for scandal.

JoAnn Wypijewski can be reached at jwyp@earthlink.net.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

4 MND B SOLDIERS & LOCAL NATIONAL KILLED BY IED NORTHWEST OF BAGHDAD

5.18.06 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS RELEASE 06-05-01C

BAGHDAD, Iraq: Four Multi-National Division Baghdad Soldiers and an Iraqi interpreter died at approximately 2:30 pm May 18 when a roadside bomb struck their vehicle northwest of Baghdad.

U.S. Sailor Killed In Anbar

5.18.06 The Associated Press & HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND NEWS RELEASE 06-05-01CE

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq: A Sailor assigned to Regimental Combat Team 5 died due to enemy action while operating in Al Anbar Province May 17.

Anbar province is an area of the country where many insurgent groups are based and there is frequent fighting between them and coalition forces.

Sailors often team up with U.S. Army and Marine forces in Iraq, sometimes serving as medics or in other support roles.

Bryan Quinton And A Fellow Soldier Die In A Roadside Bombing



Bryan Quinton

5/6/2006 By MANNY GAMALLO, Tulsa World Staff Writer

SAPULPA: A Sapulpa soldier who was eager to return home to his wife and young daughter was killed Thursday when a roadside bomb exploded in Baghdad, Iraq.

Army Spc. Bryan L. Quinton, 24, was one of two soldiers killed when the bomb went off near their RG-31 mine-protected vehicle, according to the Department of Defense.

The department identified the other soldier as Army Sgt. Gavin B. Reinke, 32, of Pueblo, Colo. Quinton and Reinke were attached to the 5th Engineer Battalion, 1st Engineer Brigade out of Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

Creek County Commissioner Dana Hudgins, a longtime friend of the family, knew Quinton virtually his entire life and described him as "very energetic, inquisitive and outgoing."

"You could always trust him to have fun, no matter what was going on," Hudgins said. "He loved his family, and his family was very proud of his accomplishments."

Quinton and his wife, Cyndi, who has been staying with her mother in Sand Springs, have a daughter, Piper. The girl turned 3 this week.

He was the son of Tim Quinton, a Creek County employee, and Kristy Quinton, who works for FedEx in Sapulpa. The couple have two other sons, Brent and Garth.

Hudgins described the parents as close friends.

The commissioner described Tim Quinton as a man who wears many hats in his Creek County position, working with computer technology, safety and personnel issues.

"Tim and Kristy have a lot of friends and community support" during this time of sadness, Hudgins said.

"Sapulpa has a lot of young men and women serving overseas in the military, and all of this has been tough for the community, especially for the families with children overseas."

The Quinton family attended Open Door Fellowship Church in Sapulpa, and the young soldier frequently would call his parents from Iraq and catch them while in church, pastor Steve Farmer said. That was the case Sunday afternoon, when Quinton called from Baghdad to talk to his parents during a church dinner, Farmer said.

"I talked to him Sunday," Farmer said. "He said he was ready to get home with his wife and baby. That was his big thing.

"He said he was doing fine, but anxious to get home."

Farmer then told Quinton "your church family wants to give you a message." He said he held up the cell phone, and the congregation shouted in unison, "We all love you. Hurry home."

Funeral arrangements for Quinton are pending.

Soldier Sees Wife Graduate; Dies In Iraq Bombing The Next Day

5.17.06 Long Island Newsday

Army Chief Warrant Officer John Engeman watched with pride from Iraq as his wife, Donna, received her college diploma, thanks to an Internet feed set up by Concord University in West Virginia. "He told me afterward that I looked great," she said.

"Then he said, 'I'll call you tomorrow for Mother's Day.'"

The call never came. Engeman, 45, was killed Sunday when his Humvee hit a roadside bomb, exploded and flipped over, his family said.

Southside Graduate Wounded In Iraq

May 6, 2006 By RIC ROUTLEDGE, The Star Press

MUNCIE: A former Muncie resident injured this week in Iraq when his Humvee was rocked by an explosive device is expected to return to regular duties as soon as next week.

Marine Lance Cpl. Joshua K. Thomas, who graduated from Southside High School in 1994, suffered flash burns and a mild concussion Wednesday, according to an e-mail he sent to family members.

Thomas's unit was on a routine patrol out of Camp Fallujah when his Humvee, the last one in a convoy, was hit by the explosive device, according to his father-in-law, John Cowan.

"They took evasive action, but it blew up as they went by it," Cowan said.

Thomas was the only crew member injured. He was sitting on top in the gunner's position.

His wife, Leah, who also graduated from Southside in 1994, said from their California home that she was "very relieved."

"I talked to him today (Friday morning), and he was laughing and joking. He's fine," she said. "He's wonderful.

"I knew he was OK when he said he told the doctor to fix his million-dollar face. That's a private joke between us," she added.

He has five days of rest and then will be right back at it, according to Leah. The major medical concern was his concussion and his eardrum, which did not burst.

Thomas was on active duty with the Marine Corps from 1994 to 1998, according to Leah. He enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserves in April 2005, and was deployed to Iraq on March 9.

He expects to return to the couple's home in Temecula, Calif., in October or November.

Leah Thomas said she and her husband had recently been on a "pretty good routine" in terms of Iraq-to-California communications.

"We (had) been talking on the phone about every two days," she said. "But when something happens in his area, they take the phone lines and e-mail down. In the last couple of weeks, I've only spoken to him twice, not including today.

"Not talking to him for a while makes me a little nervous because it's always the unknown, but I just have faith. I guess that's the best I can describe it."

In civilian life, Joshua Thomas is a material scheduler for San Diego Gas & Electric. Leah works for the city of Temecula in the finance department.

The couple still has strong ties to Muncie.

"All of our family is in Muncie, so we come back frequently," she said.

**REALLY BAD IDEA:
NO MISSION;
HOPELESS WAR:
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW**



A U.S. soldier inspects the scene of a bomb attack near a courthouse in Baghdad May 4, 2006. (Ceerwan Aziz/Reuters)

Local Soldier Injured

May 16, 2006 The Cullman Times

A Cullman County man was wounded in Iraq when the humvee he was riding in ran over a roadside bomb more than a week ago.

Marine Cpl. Zane Burney, 20, of Good Hope, suffered wounds to his hands, face, neck and eye in the incident, which occurred on May 6 near Fallujah. One of the soldiers in the humvee was killed, while another was also wounded. Four soldiers were riding in the vehicle.

Zane's mother, Becky Burney, said the bomb was in the middle of the road. Her son was a gunner on the humvee and was thrown from the vehicle in the explosion.

She said the soldier who was killed was his best friend.

She said her son has had eye surgery and surgery on both of his hands, but has since been released from the hospital near where the incident occurred.

"He's doing better," she said.

He has been serving in Iraq since March.

Mercenary's SUV Attacked

5.18.06 AFP

In Abu Skher, a village south of Najaf, an AFP correspondent saw what appeared to be a sports utility vehicle typical of the kind used by US contractors burning fiercely after it was hit by a roadside bomb.

US soldiers were securing the area

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Army Pilot Who Grew Up In Minnesota Killed

May 09, 2006 (AP)

A St. Paul native joined the Army shortly after graduating from high school because he wanted to do something more with his life after losing a close friend to drugs and suicide, an older brother said.

Chief Warrant Officer Eric W. Totten, 34, died Friday with nine other soldiers when a helicopter fell into a ravine during a mountaintop landing in Kunar Province in Afghanistan, the Department of Defense said.

His death brings to 36 the number of people with close Minnesota ties to have died in connection with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Totten was a career Army pilot who had been in Bosnia and Iraq and was on his second tour in Afghanistan, his brother Noel, who lives in Bloomington, said Wednesday.

Noel Totten said there was a major change in his brother's life after his friend died.

"He said, 'I don't want to go that way -- I want to make something of myself,'" Noel Totten told the St. Paul Pioneer Press. "And he did. We're very proud of him."

Eric Totten, who enlisted in the army in August 1993, would have celebrated his 35th birthday on Wednesday. He became a qualified CH-47 pilot in 2000 and was sent to Afghanistan in February 2006.

Totten was raised by his father after his parents were divorced when he was 4. He grew up in St. Paul and attended Ramsey Junior High School before his family moved to Golden Valley, then to Oklahoma and later to Texas.

"I never really worried about him because he was so intelligent and competent and because he wasn't cocky," Noel Totten said. "I worried about the younger ones, the 19- and 20-year-olds, but not Eric."

Noel Totten said his brother, the youngest of six siblings, was a bachelor who recently had been living at Ft. Campbell, Ky. In Afghanistan, he was with the 3rd Battalion, 10 Aviation Regiment of the 10th Mountain Division.

"He loved the military," Noel Totten said. "He could fly jets and helicopters and he had great computer skills. But he also was a great musician; he knew how to play piano, guitar, clarinet and trumpet. He was a peach of a guy."

In addition to his siblings, Totten is survived by his stepmother, Tommie Totten. His father married Tommie when Eric was 16, and they moved into her home in Dallas, where he attended Art Magnet High School.

Tommie Totten told the Star Tribune of Minneapolis in a telephone interview that she and her stepson were very close. When military officials knocked on her door Saturday night, she said she knew they had bad news.

"I cried all night," Tommie Totten said. "I didn't go back to sleep. I'm OK. Being 81, I've got to be OK."

Noel Totten, who last saw his brother in August, said Eric had expressed some concern about going back to Afghanistan. He said Eric had rewritten his will and put all of his personal belongings in storage.

"He said everything was taken care of," Noel Totten said.

In addition to his brother in Bloomington, his other surviving siblings are sisters Thais Hinz, of Duluth, and Judi Jackson, of Oklahoma City, and brothers Jim, of Tallahassee, Fla., and Ottis, of New Orleans.

Totten's funeral will be Saturday in Augusta, Kan., where he will be buried in a family plot.

US Anti-Drugs Agent Killed In Herat

May 18, 2006 (AFP) **[NOTE WELL: Story below re mercenary may be about the same event, although the “facts” are wildly different. T]**

HERAT, Afghanistan

An attacker rammed a bomb-filled car into a vehicle in Afghanistan's main western city of Herat on Thursday, killing a US anti-narcotics advisor, the US embassy and police said.

An Afghan interpreter was also wounded in the attack, a spokesman for the interior ministry said.

Herat police chief Mohammad Ayub Khan said U.S. soldiers on guard at the blast site later shot dead a driver who refused to stop.

"We can confirm that a US citizen working as a contractor with the state department bureau of international narcotics and law enforcement who was working on a police training programme has been killed," a US embassy spokesman said.

The interior ministry said the attack took place at around 9:00 am.

Witnesses saw the burnt-out wreckage of an SUV that appeared to have been the target of the attack and the mangled remains of a smaller vehicle that may have been the car bomb.

There were chunks of human flesh near the smouldering vehicles including two legs scattered close by, an AFP correspondent said.

One U.S. Soldier Wounded Near Ghazni

May 18 By Mirwais Afghan, Reuters

A bomber attacked a U.S. military convoy near Ghazni town, 125 km (75 miles) southwest of Kabul, killing himself and a man on a motorcycle, an Afghan army officer said. A U.S. soldier suffered minor wounds, a U.S. spokeswoman said.

U.S. Mercenary Training Police Killed Near Islam Qala; Two More Wounded

May 18, 2006 CHARLES WILSON, Associated Press & By Mirwais Afghan, Reuters

CONNERSVILLE, Ind.: A former eastern Indiana police officer was killed in Afghanistan when a car bomber hit his vehicle while he was on a U.S. State Department police training project, his family said.

Ron Zimmerman, 37, of Glenwood, had been working as a contractor for DynCorp International, headquartered in Irving, Texas.

Greg Lagana, a spokesman for DynCorp, said Ron Zimmerman was killed near Islam Qala, near the border with Iran and Turkmenistan, as he and other employees were traveling to work training local police officers.

Two other American contractors and three other people were wounded, he said.

Zimmerman had been with the company since March and was helping train officers to combat the illicit drug trade of opium poppies, among other tasks, Lagana said.

For the past week, Zimmerman had been going out in convoys with the officers he had trained, his brother said.

Lagana said Zimmerman had been in Afghanistan since early April training officers.

"He was watching them on the job, seeing how they functioned and advising them," he said. "He apparently had some experience doing border police training in Kosovo. So he was well-qualified."

Lagana said the company, which employs about 14,000 in 35 nations, provides security, aviation services, logistical support, infrastructure development and maritime services.

"It was a suicide car bomber who attacked the convoy, and then there was some small arms fire as well," Lagana said. "So it was set up."

Resistance Offensive In Force Opens In Helmand Province: Battle At Mosa Qala Goes On "For Hours"

May 17, 2006 Washington Post & May 18 By Mirwais Afghan, Reuters & Times Newspapers Ltd. & BBC News

Afghanistan saw one of its bloodiest days since the 2001 overthrow of the Taliban on Thursday as hundreds of insurgents attacked a southern town and fighting flared across the country.

The fighting in Helmand began on Wednesday when Taleban forces stormed the town of Musa Qala.

Fighting was continuing on Thursday in the village of Sar Besha, about 20km (12 miles) north of the town, a spokesman for Helmand's governor told the BBC.

Fighting raged for more than nine hours as hundreds of enemy fighters attacked Musa Qala, a former rebel stronghold 470 km (300 miles) southwest of Kabul, in Helmand province, late on Wednesday. Government officials said 13 policemen and at least 40 Taliban were killed, taking the death toll across the country to about 100.

A Taliban commander, speaking by telephone, said 30 policemen had been killed in Helmand. Taliban spokesman Qari Mohammad Yousuf told the Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press news agency Taliban had captured the town but later withdrew.

The assault by hundreds of enemy fighters was one of the largest attacks by militants since 2001 and marked another escalation in the campaign by supporters of the former Taleban regime to challenge the US-backed government of President Hamid Karzai.

A senior security official said that the fighting began yesterday afternoon when Taleban commanders contacted local police claiming that they had seized the town.

Authorities responded, triggering a series of heavy clashes which raged until the early hours. Government offices, shops, police stations and market stalls were set on fire.

In Helmand, Afghan forces battled the insurgents after they withdrew from Mosa Qala, Akhundzada said. There had been civilian casualties but he said he did not know how many.

The town is 40 km (25 miles) north of the province's Sangin district, scene of frequent clashes between Taliban and foreign and government forces.

The Taliban have stepped up attacks on foreign and Afghan government forces in recent months as thousands more NATO peacekeepers arrive in the country.

Helmand's deputy governor Amir Mohammad Akhundzada said it was the biggest attack in the province by the hardline Islamists since they were driven from power more than four years ago.

"Thirteen policemen were killed and six were injured," Interior Ministry spokesman Yousuf Stanizai said.

Three policemen and an intelligence official were killed and six policemen wounded in other attacks in Ghazni, the province's governor said.

Insurgents attacked an Afghan police post and a government office near the Pakistan border, killing four people, officials said.

Just Like Iraq: **Bush Buddies Loot Reconstruction Money, Leave Worthless Shit Behind**

Teachers there say the Americans did little more than add a coat of paint on the one standing building, and replace the roof of makeshift huts. The new roofs are already leaking, and in the courtyard hundreds of girls are still being taught in tents. The school looked like an emergency had just hit.

18 May 2006 By David Loyn, Belfast Telegraph Home [Excerpts]

Ashraf Ghani, who was Finance Minister in the first year after the Taliban fell, and is now chancellor of Kabul University, says the international community has failed Afghanistan. Rather than build up the government, it has created a parallel system that has actively weakened the capacity of Afghanistan to run its own affairs.

Mr Ghani's greatest fear is that by failing to empower the Afghan government, the world could be helping the Taliban to regroup, as they feed on the resentment of people at the slow pace of change. He says "The cheapest way of bringing development and security is government."

The scale of the international machine has dwarfed the indigenous government. Large parts of the capital are closed to normal traffic because of security concerns. The remaining traffic paralyses the city for much of the day. To the east of Kabul the UN has built a headquarters, the size of a small town.

The Americans and the Japanese, both large donors to Afghanistan, are the two countries who are most responsible for spending money outside the government budget, and despite the claim of high standards in the village in Kunar, much of what they have built is sub-standard.

The American government's development arm USAID, boasts of the number of girls' schools it has built. I asked to see one in Kabul, and was shocked by the state of it. A plaque on the wall boasts of this as a gift from the American people, but the Lycée Mariam is nothing to be proud of.

Teachers there say the Americans did little more than add a coat of paint on the one standing building, and replace the roof of makeshift huts. The new roofs are already leaking, and in the courtyard hundreds of girls are still being taught in tents. The school looked like an emergency had just hit.

TROOP NEWS

**THIS IS HOW BUSH BRINGS THE TROOPS HOME:
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW, ALIVE**



U.S. Marine Corps pallbearers carry the flag-draped casket of Marine Corps Sgt. Matthew J. Fenton, who was killed in Iraq, to a hearse after funeral services at St. Margaret's of Cortona church Saturday, May 13, 2006 in Little Ferry, N.J. (AP Photo/Bill Kostroun)

Unparalleled Pentagon Stupidity

April 2006, Letter From the Servicemembers Legal Defense Fund [Excerpts]

“The United States has spent at least \$364 million since 1993 to fire lesbian, gay and bisexual Americans who want to serve in the Armed Forces.”

This sum of money would have purchased “enough body armor vests to outfit the entire American fighting force in Iraq.”

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.

Italian Government Getting Out Of Iraq: Invasion Called A “Grave Error”

May 18, 2006 By Fred Barbash, Washington Post Staff Writer

Another U.S. ally in the war in Iraq distanced itself from the U.S. led effort today when Italy's new prime minister, Romano Prodi, called the invasion and occupation a “grave error” and said he would propose a withdrawal of Italian troops.

“We consider the war in Iraq and the occupation of the country a grave error,” Prodi told the upper house of Parliament, wire services reported. “It has not resolved, but complicated the situation of security.”

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.

Injured Soldier's Mother Leaves For Texas



May 18, 2006 By Kathryn Sotnik News 8 WMTW

PORTLAND, Maine: Nearly two weeks after a Maine guardsman was injured by a roadside bomb in Iraq, his mother is flying to a Texas military hospital, where she will see her son for the first time since he was injured.

Spc. Christopher Fraser, 19, told his mother, Debra Gosselin, that he owes his life to two other soldiers in his unit who were killed in the attack.

According to Gosselin, Fraser told her that Staff Sgt. David Veverka, a University of Maine student from Pennsylvania, pulled him down in their truck as the bomb exploded. He also credited Sgt. Dale Kelly Jr., of Richmond, with teaching him and other soldiers how to administer their own intravenous medications, which he had to do after the attack.

"He just doesn't understand why he didn't die," Gosselin told News 8 in an exclusive interview. "And I'm very grateful for him and sad for the other families. You just thank them for helping to save his life."

JCS Chief Pace Publicly Confirms His Incompetence

May 18, 2006 By Liz Sidoti, Associated Press

Both Rumsfeld and Pace said Iraqi forces are making progress and increasingly taking the lead from U.S. and coalition forces as the new Iraqi government takes shape.

Gen. Peter Pace, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said 14 of the 18 Iraqi provinces are "essentially calm, secure."

Good News, For The Moment

5.18.06 Defense Daily

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld warned that the Pentagon is running out of money for fighting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

He urged Congress to pass an emergency spending bill by the end of this month.

[Given that both the Imperial Democrats and the Imperial Republicans want to keep the war going, they'll come up with the cash.]

National Guard To The Southern Border?

The Whole Thing Is About Handing Out More Billions To Bush Buddy War Profiteers, Of Course!

18 May 2006 By Eric Lipton, The New York Times [Excerpt]

WASHINGTON, May 17: The quick fix may involve sending in the National Guard. But to really patch up the broken border, President Bush is preparing to turn to a familiar administration partner: the nation's giant military contractors.

Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and Northrop Grumman, three of the largest, are among the companies that said they would submit bids within two weeks for a multibillion-dollar federal contract to build what the administration calls a "virtual fence" along the nation's land borders.

MORE:

Guess What? Bush Took The Money For The War Profiteers From The Money For The Border Patrol

5.18.06 USA Today

A key Republican leader said that President Bush is forcing lawmakers to choose between putting National Guard troops on the U.S.-Mexico border and giving the law enforcement officers already there the cars, planes and other equipment they need to do their job.

Delivering an unusual public critique of the administration's border-security priorities, Senate Budget Committee Chairman Judd Gregg said that \$1.9 billion the Senate approved last month for equipment is being diverted to pay for the deployment of up to 6,000 National Guard troops.

MORE:

Republican Governor Says Bush Border Patrol Plan A Stupid Goatfuck

5.18.06 Los Angeles Times

California's highest-ranking officials reacted with displeasure and exasperation to President Bush's plan to use thousands of National Guard troops to support border patrols and curb illegal immigration.

In a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger called the border security plan a "logistical nightmare" and questioned: Who determines when troops come home? What criteria would determine whether their mission was successful? And how would California handle the "staggering" job of providing support for the thousands of troops who will be cycled into the border region for two-week rotations?

Army Forced To Release Autistic Teen: But Lies Go On

May 12, 2006 (CBS/AP)

An 18-year-old Portland man with autism, whose recruitment renewed questions about Army practices, was released Tuesday from his enlistment contract.

Jared Guinther signed up for one of the Army's most dangerous jobs, cavalry scout, after being heavily recruited. He passed medical and other examinations. He was scheduled to leave for basic training in August.

The Army announced Tuesday that it decided he didn't meet enrollment criteria, two days after The Oregonian newspaper reported his parents' objections.

Gaylan Johnson, spokesman for the United States Military Entrance Processing Command, said Guinther's disability was not disclosed in the medical exam and information regarding his condition was not available to the command until after the enrollment process was complete.

Family and friends say anyone who reviewed the young man's medical or school records would know he was unfit for military service.

"Jared would play with buttons for hours on end," she told the Oregonian. "He'd play with one toy for days. Loud noises bothered him. He was scared to death of the toilet flushing, the lawn mower."

An investigation is under way into whether recruiters improperly concealed Guinther's condition. **[What bullshit. The family raised hell with a lot of other Army personnel too, and all ignored them until they went to the newspaper. So it's not just the recruiters. The point of the investigation is no doubt to hang the recruiters out to dry and protect those higher up the chain of command. As usual.]**

Guinther started talking about joining the military after a recruiter stopped him and offered him a \$4,000 signing bonus and \$67,000 for college, his parents say. His parents said he didn't know there was a war in Iraq until last fall, shortly after he spoke with a recruiter, and asked them about it.

When Guinther's parents found out he had enlisted, they contacted the Portland U.S. Army Recruiting Station where he signed up. His parents say the Army did not initially respond to their concerns.

***Universal Military Injustice:* Soldiers Sent To Prison On Fake "Evidence": 500 Cases Under Review**

5.17.06 Norfolk Virginian-Pilot

The Army is investigating allegations that a civilian scientist falsified DNA test results in 479 cases, including one in which a sergeant was sentenced to six years in prison for rape. The scientist, Phillip Mills, has been suspended from his post at Fort Gillem, Ga.

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)

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Assorted Resistance Action

5.18.06 Reuters & The Associated Press & by Kamal Taha, AFP News & United Press International

Four policemen were killed in clashes in Fallujah said Dr Mohammed Ismail of the western town's hospital. Clashes erupted after insurgents fired mortars at the US-protected seat of local government.

A policeman was killed and three wounded when a roadside bomb went off near a convoy of U.S. military and Iraqi police vehicles near the Shi'ite city of Najaf, 160 km south of Baghdad, police said.

In northern Baghdad's Waziriya neighborhood, four police were killed and four others wounded in a car bomb targeting vehicles from a public order brigade, three of which were set on fire.

In Basra, Iraq's second largest city, police chief Gen. Hassan Swadi narrowly escaped an assassination attempt when a roadside bomb hit his convoy as he was heading to work on Thursday morning, said police spokesman Karim al-Zeidi. The blast damaged one vehicle but caused no casualties, al-Zeidi said.

An police checkpoint in Baghdad's Dora neighborhood was hit by a single mortar round, killing four guards and wounding another, Baghdad police said.

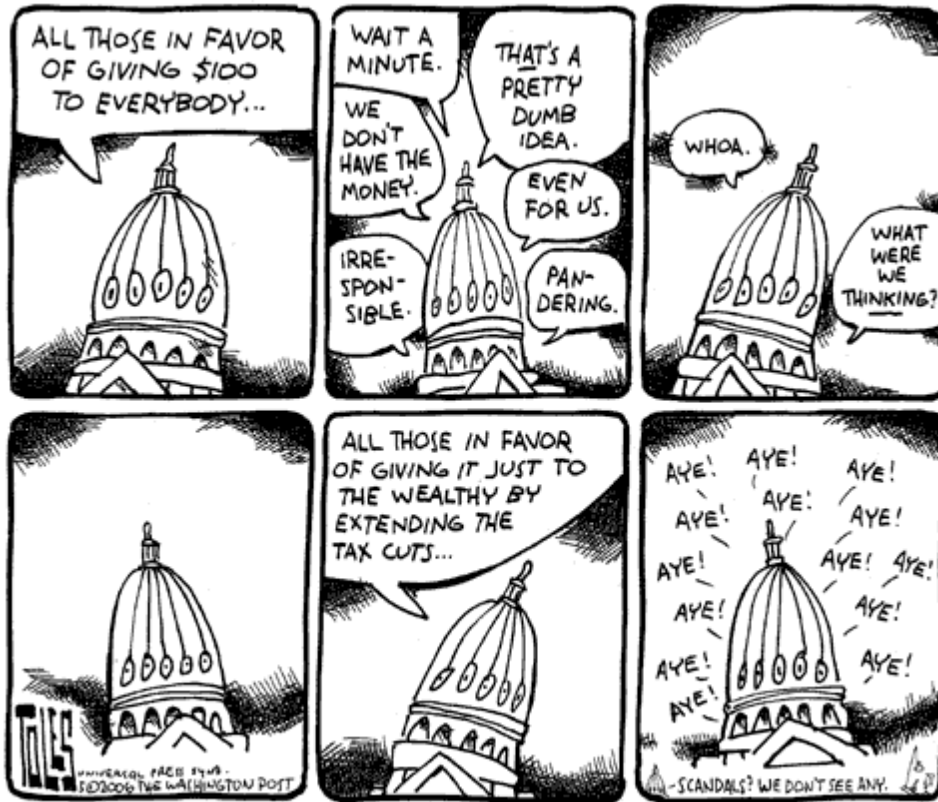
Resistance fighters wounded a military intelligence lieutenant- colonel along with his driver in the southern city of Basra, 550 km south of Baghdad.



A destroyed police car is towed away at the site where a roadside bomb that exploded in the Waziriyah neighborhood in Baghdad. (AFP/Ahmad Al-Rubaye)

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

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



5-11-06

[Thanks to David Honish, Veterans For Peace, who sent this in.]

**Bush Idiots Idea Of A Terrorist:
Blind, Deaf, With A Walker**

5.17.06 Baltimore Sun

He has a flowing white beard, can't hear or see very well and, according to his lawyer, uses a walker to hobble around the U.S. detention center at Guantanamo Bay. Haji Nasrat Khan is the oldest prisoner there, according to a newly released list of all those who have been held at the isolated prison.

Khan, an Afghan who the military says is 71 but might be several years older, exemplifies the striking diversity of Guantanamo detainees past and present as identified by the list, which the Pentagon released Monday.

GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out

The following have posted issues; there may be others:

<http://www.williambowles.info/gispecial/2006/index.html>;
http://robinlea.com/GI_Special/; <http://imagineaworldof.blogspot.com/>; <http://gi-special.iraq-news.de>; http://www.traprockpeace.org/gi_special/;
<http://www.uruknet.info/?p=-6&l=e>; <http://www.albasrah.net/maqalat/english/gi-special.htm>

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