

GI SPECIAL 4112:



[Thanks to Mark Shapiro, who sent this in.]

“I’d Like To Punch (Rumsfeld) In The Gut,” Says One Seasoned NCO

Some argue that the aim is only to make Iraq look good before the Nov. 7 U.S. elections - "fighting for the House of Representatives," as Sgt. Brian Patton describes it.

10 September 2006 By Michael Hastings, Newsweek. With Scott Johnson in Baghdad, Karen Breslau in Anchorage, John Barry and Michael Hirsh in Washington, Catharine Skipp in Alexandria and Margaret Friedenauer in Fairbanks. [Excerpts]

Toward the end of July, Capt. Brad Velotta began daydreaming a lot. He thought about making the summer's last run of salmon in Alaska's Russian River, where bears lumber

down from the woods and chase fishermen out of the water. He thought about getting a kitten for his 3-year-old daughter, Sophia.

Most of all, Velotta hoped to see his 83-year-old grandmother Mary one last time before she died of cancer. "She thought she could hold on," says Velotta's father, Albert, at the family home in Alexandria, La. Her grandson was supposed to leave Iraq on Aug. 2. "She thought it would only be a few weeks more."

But it wasn't.

On July 26, Velotta learned that he and his unit, the 172nd Stryker Brigade, were going not home but to the core of Iraq's sectarian blood feud: Baghdad. After a solid year of battling the insurgency, from Mosul to Tall Afar to the westernmost reaches of Al Anbar province, the 172nd has been extended until after Thanksgiving - if not later.

The wedding of Spc. Shawn Mott and Nina Herrera was set for Sept. 16. Eight hours after she mailed the invitations, he called to say he had to go to Baghdad instead of flying home. "I was so scared to call you," he told her afterward. "I thought you'd leave"

Capt. John Grauer, the 4-23's chaplain, describes the scene when the order came down: "There was a rush of soldiers trying to get on the phone to call home.

"Some literally threw up when they heard the news. Some were extremely angry ... Some went to sleep for a couple of days, hoping maybe it was all a bad dream." It was tough for Grauer to tell his wife, Tyra, and their two girls - especially Morriah, 9. "She started crying," he says. "That's when I put the sunglasses on." Behind the shades, he wept.

But at Fort Richardson, Alaska, the 4-23rd's home base, chaos erupted at the announcement of the extension.

Some wives had already packed up and shipped their household goods to their husbands' next duty stations. There were families without a place to live; children pre-enrolled in schools thousands of miles away; parents scrambling for winter clothing they had given away; household goods in storage; airplane tickets for vacations that could not be taken - not to mention thousands of broken hearts.

Grauer says soldiers have told him, "This has killed my marriage, It's been my third deployment in five years, and we've only spent 15 months together."

Staff Sgt. Chad Denton is on his second deployment. "It takes its toll," says his wife, Beth, back home in Anchorage. "You just don't know each other anymore." The Dentons have five children, 1 to 13 years old, and the two middle sons, 6 and 8, are having trouble.

"They need their dad," Beth says. "I keep telling him, 'I know you guys are getting blown up, but I'd rather be on that side, doing what you're doing, than on this side, being mom and dad'."

Telling her about the extension was "brutal," says Chad. "At first she said she couldn't believe it. I guess there are three stages: denial, shock ... " His voice trails off. He doesn't get to the third stage.

The Stryker teams are supposed to hold the line. They spend their days searching bad neighborhoods for weapons and evidence of death-squad activities.

But Baghdad, like much of Iraq, is suffering from "whack-a-mole" syndrome. The militias keep popping up elsewhere. "With two Stryker brigades, one on the east side, one on the west side, we could secure Baghdad," says a 172nd officer, who asks not to be named disputing Coalition strategy. Even then, he adds, it would take more than four months to finish the job.

As things stand, many 4-23 members say the sweeps are no more than a temporary fix.

Some argue that the aim is only to make Iraq look good before the Nov. 7 U.S. elections - "fighting for the House of Representatives," as Sgt. Brian Patton describes it.

Meanwhile, families are falling apart.

Back in Alaska, one 4-23 wife has a suicidal child in the hospital; another suffered an ectopic pregnancy and had to beg her husband's commander to let him come home to care for her. Another wife attempted suicide. Her husband was sent home, but his career, the other wives say, is over. Gossip is running wild: who drinks too much, who has a compulsive-gambling problem, whose kids are left untended.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld got a taste of this rage and frustration in August when he met with family members of the 172nd at Fort Wainwright, near Fairbanks, Alaska.

In a video of the meeting obtained by NEWSWEEK, one woman asked him why the 172nd was spending most of its time clearing houses, instead of patrolling the streets in the relative safety of the big armored vehicles. "My husband hasn't set foot in his Stryker since he arrived in Baghdad," she said.

"Over 90 percent of the house clearings are being handled by the Iraqis," Rumsfeld responded, whereupon women in the audience began shouting "No!" and "That's not true!"

Flummoxed, Rumsfeld shot back, "No? What do you mean? Don't say 'No,' that's what I've been told. It's the task of the Iraqis to go through the buildings."

The 4-23's soldiers say they, not the Iraqis, do 95 percent of the searches. "I'd like to punch (Rumsfeld) in the gut," says one seasoned NCO on his second Iraq tour. "He treats us like we're not human. He acts like he's not destroying families."

Baghdad in August breeds thoughts like that.

Outside it's 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Inside a Stryker armored vehicle it's 130, sometimes 140. Team members sweat more than seems humanly possible. Their mustaches leak with sweat.

Their soaked pants leave damp marks where they sit. The sweat collects in the protective goggles they wear, pouring off the eyebrows and into the lenses.

Each soldier has to wear 15-pound side plates, 20-pound body armor, and a three-pound helmet that feels like it's baking the brain.

When the vehicle stops, the teams dismount and go to work, climbing stairs, scaling walls, breaking down doors - always watching out for snipers and booby traps.

The unit has had plenty of close calls. Capt. Benjamin Nagy, who goes by the nickname Ox, has been hit by 15 IEDs.

Chaplain Grauer has been IED'd seven times. Strykers routinely drive away unscathed from explosions that would kill everyone in a Humvee.

Sometimes Velotta's men, sick of the drudgery of house searches, say things like: "Please, can someone just shoot at us?"

But a single call over the radio can turn the tedium into something far worse.

In the Adamiyah neighborhood, a soldier from another 172nd unit, the 4-14, recently became the extension's first loss. He was shot in the face by a sniper and died a week later after being evacuated to a hospital in Germany.

Postscript: Mary Velotta died on Aug. 19. Her grandson missed the funeral.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

U.S. Soldier Killed North Of Baghdad

Sept 10, 2006 Multi-National Division Baghdad PAO RELEASE No. 20060910-06 & 9.11.06 AP

Monday comes word of the death of another U.S. soldier. A Multi-National Division Baghdad Soldier died at approximately 6:45 p.m. Sunday. His patrol came under small arms fire north of Baghdad on Sunday night.

Missouri Soldier Killed

9.9.06 AP

CAPE GIRARDEAU, Mo.

A Missouri native stationed in Hawaii has been killed in Iraq.

Pfc. Jeremy R. Shank, 18, of Jackson, Mo., died Wednesday in Balad from wounds suffered in Hawajah when he encountered small-arms fire, the Defense Department said.

Marine, Hurt In June In Iraq, Dies

Sep. 11, 2006 BY LESLIE BROOKS SUZUKAMO, Pioneer Press

Cpl. Johnathan Benson, of North Branch, lay in his Texas Army hospital bed, his left leg gone, most of his left arm, too, from midway between his elbow and shoulder.

The 21-year-old Marine had been wounded by a roadside bomb June 17 during his second tour of duty in Iraq. He was in rough shape and feeling down one day, uncharacteristic for the usually upbeat young man, his family said.

One of his superiors visiting him that day asked him, "John, are you still a Marine?"

"Sir! Yes, sir! I will always be a Marine!" he responded. "I will live as a Marine, and I will die as a Marine!"

His mother, Marjorie Benson, recalled that scene Sunday as she and her husband, Steve, reminisced about their son. Johnathan Benson, the youngest of their six children, died from his wounds Saturday at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio.

His family is making arrangements to bring his body home later this week for burial in his hometown, where friends and family remember an enthusiastic young man with an infectious smile, a prankster's heart and a love for adventure.

"We're extremely proud of him," Marjorie Benson said from the Army hospital residence Sunday night. "He's our hero, he's North Branch's hero, he's Minnesota's hero, and he's the world's hero."

Benson, who served with Company K, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Division, was injured nearly three months ago when a bomb exploded under his vehicle near Habbaniyah. He lost his left leg and part of his left arm and was paralyzed from the waist down, according to the CaringBridge Web site created for him. After he was hospitalized, Benson had a stroke on both sides of his brain.

He was awarded a Purple Heart, which was pinned on him by a Marine commandant while he was at the hospital.

While hospitalized, many relatives and friends, including his Marine comrades, visited him. His birth mother, Dawn Schubert, whom he sought out after high school, had visited him as well, his family said.

When Benson was injured, he was two months away from completing his second tour of duty in Iraq. He joined the Marines in 2003 after graduating from North Branch Area High School.

"He was a good guy, a good friend. He always wanted to help people out," said Brian Meskimen, a high school classmate of Benson's.

Meskimen described Benson as someone who liked to have fun but was "very excited" about joining the Marines as a young man.

He played sports and acted in high school plays, strummed a guitar well and knew how to make people laugh, his parents said. He joined the Marines, his father, Steve, said, "because he saw them as the best."

"Johnathan liked adventure," his mother said. "He was what you call a 'point man,' it was a very dangerous job, but it was a very adventurous job."

Family members were planning a funeral service for next weekend in North Branch, with burial in Fort Snelling National Cemetery.

Benson was the second man from North Branch, about 40 miles north of the Twin Cities, to die during the war in Iraq.

Benson is the 44th person with close Minnesota ties to die in connection with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Four U.S. Military Vehicles Burnt In Ramadi; Casualties Not Announced

9.11.06 Reuters

Up to four U.S. military vehicles were found burnt out in the Sunni Arab city of Ramadi, 110 km (70 km) west of Baghdad, local residents said. Details of what caused the damage were unclear. There was no immediate U.S. comment.

**REALLY BAD IDEA:
NO MISSION;
HOPELESS WAR:**

BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW



U.S. soldiers inspect one of their damaged and burnt armored vehicle after a car bomb attack, in Baghdad Sept. 9, 2006. (AP Photo/Karim Kadim)

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Oregon Guard Member Killed

September 11, 2006 AP

Taliban militants killed an Oregon National Guard soldier patrolling Afghanistan's Zabul province this weekend.

Sgt. Nathaniel Brad Lindsey, 38, of Troutdale was with U.S. troops and members of the Afghan National Army on Saturday when the militants struck with either improvised explosive devices or rocket propelled grenades, plus small arms fire, said Capt. Mike Braibish of the Oregon National Guard.

The attack took place during the mid-afternoon near the town of Shajoy, Braibish said.

Lindsey leaves a wife, Joyce; a daughter and three stepchildren. The Oregon National Guard and Lindsey's family plan a news conference today.

Lindsey was assigned to the 205th Regional Corps Advisory Group, a U.S. detachment with headquarters at Kandahar Airfield. The group is part of the larger U.S. Joint Task Force Phoenix, which is assigned to help train the Afghan military and is commanded by Brig. Gen. Douglas A. Pritt of Salem.

More than 900 Oregon soldiers are part of the force, Braibish said. It is the largest wartime deployment of the Oregon National Guard since World War II.

Lindsey was the 72nd member of the military with ties to Oregon or Southwest Washington to die in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Top Soldier Quits As Blundering Campaign Turns Into ‘Pointless’ War: “All Those People Whose Homes Have Been Destroyed And Sons Killed Are Going To Turn Against The British” “I Certainly Would”

“Now the ground has been lost and all we’re doing in places like Sangin is surviving,” said Docherty. “It’s completely barking mad.

“We’re now scattered in a shallow meaningless way across northern towns where the only way for the troops to survive is to increase the level of violence so more people get killed. It’s pretty shocking and not something I want to be part of.”

September 10, 2006 Christina Lamb, The Sunday Times Britain

THE former aide-de-camp to the commander of the British taskforce in southern Afghanistan has described the campaign in Helmand province as “textbook case of how to screw up a counter-insurgency”.

“Having a big old fight is pointless and just making things worse,” said Captain Leo Docherty, of the Scots Guards, who became so disillusioned that he quit the army last month.

“All those people whose homes have been destroyed and sons killed are going to turn against the British,” he said. “It’s a pretty clear equation: if people are losing homes and poppy fields, they will go and fight. I certainly would.

“We’ve been grotesquely clumsy: we’ve said we’ll be different to the Americans who were bombing and strafing villages, then behaved exactly like them.”

Docherty's criticisms, the first from an officer who has served in Helmand, came during the worst week so far for British troops in Afghanistan, with the loss of 18 men.

They reflected growing concern that forces have been left exposed in small northern outposts of Helmand such as Sangin, Musa Qala and Nawzad. Pinned down by daily Taliban attacks, many have run short of food and water and have been forced to rely on air support and artillery.

"We've deviated spectacularly from the original plan," said Docherty, who was aide-de-camp to Colonel Charlie Knaggs, the commander in Helmand.

"The plan was to secure the provincial capital Lashkar Gah, initiate development projects and enable governance . . . During this time, the insecure northern part of Helmand would be contained: troops would not be 'sucked in' to a problem unsolvable by military means alone."

According to Docherty, the planning "fell by the wayside" because of pressure from the governor of Helmand, who feared the Taliban were toppling his district chiefs in northern towns.

Docherty traces the start of the problems to the British capture of Sangin on May 25, in which he took part.

He says troops were sent to seize this notorious centre of Taliban and narcotics activity without night-vision goggles and with so few vehicles they had to borrow a pick-up truck.

More damningly, once they had established a base in the town, the mission failed to capitalise on their presence. Sangin has no paved roads, running water or electricity, but because of a lack of support his men were unable to carry out any development, throwing away any opportunity to win over townspeople.

"I felt at this stage that the Taliban were sitting back and observing us, deciding in their own time how to most effectively hit us."

Eventually the Taliban attacked on June 11, when Captain Jim Philippon became the first British soldier to be killed in Helmand. British troops have since been holed up in their compound with attacks coming at least once a day. Seven British soldiers have died in the Sangin area.

"Now the ground has been lost and all we're doing in places like Sangin is surviving," said Docherty. "It's completely barking mad.

"We're now scattered in a shallow meaningless way across northern towns where the only way for the troops to survive is to increase the level of violence so more people get killed. It's pretty shocking and not something I want to be part of."

Assorted Resistance Action

2006/09/11 BBC NEWS:

At least five people have been killed in an attack at the funeral of assassinated Afghan provincial governor Abdul Hakim Taniwal, who was killed in a suicide attack on Sunday.

A number of cabinet ministers were believed to be attending the ceremony.

Mr Taniwal is the highest-ranking Afghan official to die in Afghanistan's renewed violence.

Police say a bomber blew himself up as the funeral was taking place in the Tani district of Khost, a neighbouring province to Paktia.

A hospital doctor told the AFP news agency that the five dead were police officers, and 30 people had been injured.

An Associated Press Television cameraman at the scene said the blast happened as an official delegation from Kabul was leaving the ceremony and heading towards for a helicopter that had flown them in.

It is unclear if anyone in the delegation was hurt in the blast.

Notes From A Lost War:

**“Is This A Government?” He
Thundered;
“Anyone Other Than Me Would
Join The Taliban”**

But over time, the lack of construction in rural provinces fueled Taliban propaganda claims that Americans were enriching themselves and bringing only corruption to Afghanistan.

In addition, a popular perception took hold that after foreign contractors and subcontractors took their cut of aid money, little cash was left for average Afghans. And local residents grew suspicious of the foreigners who lived in heavily guarded compounds with electric generators and satellite televisions while they lacked regular running water and electricity.

September 5, 2006 By DAVID ROHDE, The New York Times Company [Excerpts]

LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan

It began last summer.

This spring and summer, the slow and methodical siege of this southern provincial capital intensified.

The Taliban and their allies set up road checkpoints, burned 20 trucks and slowed the flow of supplies to reconstruction projects. All told, in surrounding Helmand Province, five teachers, one judge and scores of police officers have been killed. Dozens of schools and courts have been shuttered, according to Afghan officials.

“Our government is weak,” said Fowzea Olomi, a local women’s rights advocate whose driver was shot dead in May and who fears she is next.

The government of President Hamid Karzai, hailed as Afghanistan’s eloquent new leader in 2001, has increasingly been criticized for indecisiveness, corruption and inaction.

The return of more than three million Afghan refugees and the arrival of some foreign aid turned the country’s main cities into boom towns.

But over time, the lack of construction in rural provinces fueled Taliban propaganda claims that Americans were enriching themselves and bringing only corruption to Afghanistan.

In addition, a popular perception took hold that after foreign contractors and subcontractors took their cut of aid money, little cash was left for average Afghans. And local residents grew suspicious of the foreigners who lived in heavily guarded compounds with electric generators and satellite televisions while they lacked regular running water and electricity.

By the spring of 2005, the stepped-up American effort in Helmand was showing signs of being overmatched by the rising violence.

On a May morning, gunmen stopped a vehicle carrying five Afghans working on the program to clean irrigation canals. In broad daylight a few miles outside Lashkar Gah, they shot the workers dead. The following day, gunmen followed six relatives of one of the victims as they drove his body back to Kabul. Just off the main highway, they executed all six.

Days later, the canal cleaning project, perhaps the Americans’ most successful undertaking in Helmand, was shut down over lack of security. Thousands of farmers were immediately out of work. Attacks also slowed repairs to the Kajaki dam.

Security had emerged as the largest single impediment to developing Helmand, but the country’s nascent army and police force were unable to deliver it. The first units from the new, American-trained Afghan National Army arrived in Helmand in 2005, but they comprised only several hundred soldiers and carried out few operations, according to local Afghan officials.

Officials said vast numbers of weapons remain in Helmand and are being used by the Taliban and drug traffickers.

By mid-2004, the centers were operating two- to four-week training classes across Afghanistan. European officials said the training should be at least three months long, and one derided the classes as “conveyor-belt courses.”

“I had 15 days’ training in Kandahar,” said Mr. Shakoor, the police lieutenant. “The things that they were teaching me I already knew.”

The United States, meanwhile, expanded DynCorp’s police training contract, increasing basic courses from two to eight weeks, and sent two DynCorp contractors to important provinces to serve as advisers.

Two retired American sheriff’s deputies were sent to Lashkar Gah, to cover all of Helmand. Jesse Valdez, 55, from Santa Cruz, Calif., had trained police officers in Bosnia, Indonesia and the Philippines. Steve Rubcic, 58, from Wyoming, had never been east of Wisconsin.

When they arrived in October, security was so bad they could not visit any of the province’s 13 districts.

Six weeks after they arrived, a small car bomb detonated outside the governor’s office several minutes before they arrived for a meeting.

In June, American officials dispatched an eight-man DynCorp “saturation” training team to Lashkar Gah. Brent Thompson, a 33-year-old former police officer from Dallas who heads the team, said American officials calculated that six Afghan policemen were dying for every soldier in the National Army who was killed.

Mr. Thompson, who trained the police in Iraq for DynCorp, said the Afghan police were more poorly equipped than their Iraqi counterparts. In one recent Afghan class, he said, 40 police officers shared 15 rifles.

As of early July, the training segment that involved police firing their rifles was on hold. Security problems had delayed the delivery of ammunition to Lashkar Gah, according to Mr. Thompson.

During the training, Afghan officers pull the triggers on their rifles and pretend to fire.

On July 10, Helmand’s senior government officials, tribal elders and community leaders gathered for a public forum in Lashkar Gah entitled “Security, Reconstruction and Official Corruption.”

For the next hour, the locals heaped scorn on the Afghan government. Speaker after speaker talked of dashed hopes.

The leader of the newly elected provincial assembly said that “in a country where there is no security, there is nothing.” A teacher who had received death threats from the Taliban warned that Mr. Karzai’s government could collapse. An enraged tribal leader in a white turban said the police released the murderers of his sons and brothers after receiving bribes.

“Is this a government?” he thundered. “Anyone other than me would join the Taliban.”

The violence has continued to hamper reconstruction. The canal cleaning project has resumed, but on a much smaller scale, and with many fewer local workers, than originally planned. Some road work is proceeding. But all repairs on the hydroelectric dam were suspended in July amid rising attacks.

Mr. Afghani, the province’s chief judge, said Taliban attacks this spring have shut down courts in 11 of the province’s 13 districts. In June, he found an unexploded bomb in his car. In July, a suicide bomber killed four people in a Lashkar Gah court office.

“Nowadays, no one is taking care of judges in our government,” he said. “We are helpless people. We don’t have any power. We don’t have any police.”

TROOP NEWS

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



The coffin of Staff Sgt. Angel D. Mercado Velazquez arriving from Iraq, at Muniz Air National Guard Base, in Carolina, Puerto Rico, Sept. 9, 2006. The 24-year-old Velazquez had been a squad leader and paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division serving in Yusifiyah, Iraq, where he died last week from wounds sustained from mortar fire. (AP Photo/Brennan Linsley)

**“I Was Having A Really Hard Time
Finding Anything About Iraq That
Was Honorable”
“I Will Not Let The Military Destroy
Me Again”**



AWOL Army Spc. Mark Wilkerson announced Aug. 31 that he was turning himself in at Fort Hood. Photo By Eileen Kelley

September 8, 2006 By Diana Welch, Austin Chronicle [Excerpts]

When Spc. Mark Wilkerson enlisted in the U.S. Army, he thought he knew who he was. "It's like most 18-year-olds," he explains. "You think you know who you are, but it changes."

He grew up in Colorado Springs, Colo., part of a conservative, Christian family with a military history: His father and grandfather were military, his grandmother was a Marine, and he was an active member of the Junior ROTC throughout high school. Enlisting seemed like the next logical step.

Plus, he was a firm supporter of George W. Bush, for whom he rallied during the 2000 election. And, though he had enlisted before September 11, he says the attack only strengthened his resolve; when he was deployed to Iraq in March 2003, he felt that he "would somehow be avenging the deaths of those people."

When he was actually on the ground, however, his feelings started to change. "When we went, our general mission was to win the hearts and minds of the people," he recalls. "But when I got there, and I saw the people and how we were treating them, I thought, 'We're doing exactly the opposite.'"

At the time, what bothered him most were the raids he and his unit conducted in the homes of Iraqi families. Though Wilkerson is quick to say that his unit was professional, something felt wrong. "I don't want to say that every single raid we did was random, but an alarming number of them were.

"We would be bored and looking for something to do, so they would order us to go conduct these raids. It bothered me to see that there was no paperwork on these people who we were rounding up and throwing into prison."

It wasn't until he returned to Fort Hood in Killeen in March 2004 that things started to come together for him. Suddenly, he had access to media other than Stars and Stripes, the military magazine that he calls an "army propaganda stunt."

When he read how much money "certain individuals were making on this war, how much money the corporations like Halliburton were making" in Iraq, it all clicked into place: He had been lied to by his commander in chief, on more than one count.

"He told us they had weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. We didn't find any. We were told we were there just to get rid of Saddam Hussein. But we're still there now, even though he's in court. We were told this was part of a global war on terrorism. None of that was true."

When he confided in some noncommissioned officers that he felt he had been deceived, one of them suggested he apply for conscientious objector status.

"I think that what we are doing there is wrong. There is a very human toll that's happening in Iraq. I know a lot of people look at it this way: The United States has only lost 2,639 soldiers, and they've lost 100,000 Iraqi civilians, so we're winning.

"That's not how it is at all. Not everyone who dies over there is an insurgent," he says. "That's hard for me."

So, within a month of his return from Iraq, he filed as a CO. It wasn't until November, after eight months of review during which Wilkerson met with a military investigator, a chaplain, and a military psychologist, that he was told he didn't qualify as a CO. And meanwhile, he had learned that his unit was going to be redeployed in January. He had two months. "Right away, I filed a rebuttal," he says, "and was told it wouldn't even be considered until after I returned from my second deployment."

Up until that point, Wilkerson says, he never considered going absent without leave. "It was my last resort because I'm just not going to kill anybody or be killed for reasons I don't believe in, and I was having a really hard time finding anything about Iraq that was honorable."

So, he left.

But after 19 months of working odd jobs and crossing his fingers that he wouldn't get pulled over, Wilkerson grew tired of life on the run. A couple of months ago, Cindy Sheehan announced that she intends that Camp Casey III – land she recently purchased in Crawford – serve as a refuge for soldiers seeking CO status.

Wilkerson took her up on her offer. There, this past Thursday, onstage with Sheehan, Col. Anne Wright, and anti-war veterans Chas Davis, Geoffrey Millard, and Charlie Anderson, Wilkerson made the announcement that he was turning himself in at Fort Hood.

The punishment Wilkerson faces is unknown, as the length of prison time depends on the type of court-martial: A special court-martial maxes out at one year, a general at seven.

"There's a small chance that I could be discharged, but it's very small. They say I'll probably get a special court-martial, but I could get a general," Wilkerson says. "I'll serve (whatever) time they give me."

All of those who were onstage, save Sheehan, accompanied Wilkerson on the 40-mile drive to Fort Hood. Upon arrival, Wilkerson became a soldier again: straight-backed, hands clasped behind his back, he ended every sentence with "Sir."

He was greeted by Maj. Joe Edstrom, the base's public affairs officer, who explained to Wilkerson what would happen next: He was to be returned to his unit, which had been notified of his arrival. "Once he processes with his unit, it's up to his chain of command what, if anything, would be pending as far as the charges," explained the major.

As Anderson and Davis helped Wilkerson carry his bags onto the base, a supporter yelled, "We support you, Mark!" To a smattering of quiet hand-clapping, Wilkerson turned the corner without looking back.

"Tomorrow is a long day, and tomorrow is going to be a hard day," he had written on his blog the night before, "because this shaved, short-haired guy you see in front of you is not the guy I have been the last year and a half, and they can take my body, and they can do with it what they want, but my spirit is whole and it will be intact, and I will not let the military destroy me again and take away who I am like they did during the first two and a half years in the military.

"They are not going to win."

British Soldiers Risk Death For Less Than The Minimum Wage

[Thanks to Z who sent this in. He writes: Brit soldiers bleeding for peanuts.]

11 September 2006 By Kim Sengupta, Independent News and Media Limited [Excerpts]

British soldiers risking death in Afghanistan and Iraq are being paid about half the national minimum wage. The troops, facing daily attacks in Helmand and Basra, and suffering a rising toll of dead and injured, are among Britain's lowest paid workers.

The discontent over pay comes amid growing concern about casualties being suffered, especially in Afghanistan from a resurgent Taliban.

The average salary of a newly qualified soldier is £14,300 before tax - compared with about £20,000 for a police officer.

In a combat zone, being on duty for a minimum of 16 hours gives the troops an hourly rate of £2.45. There is also a longer service separation allowance of about £6 a day, but this only applies to those who have served at least 12 months away from home.

This is well below the current national minimum wage of £ 5.05 an hour, which is due to rise to £5.35 next month. In reality the figures for soldiers' earnings are even worse.

In Helmand, where British forces are involved in some of the heaviest fighting in the Army's recent history, there is little respite from incessant attacks and they are, in effect, on duty all the time.

Lt-Gen David Richards, the British commander of Nato forces in Afghanistan, said soldiers were enduring "days and days of intense fighting, being woken up by yet another attack when they have not slept for 24 hours. This sort of thing has not happened so consistently, I don't think, since the Korean War or the Second World War. It happened for periods in the Falklands, obviously, and it happened for short periods in the Gulf on both occasions. But this is persistent, low-level dirty fighting."

The soldiers get free accommodation and food while based in combat positions such as Helmand. But they still pay council tax on their barracks rooms in Britain, and, back home, they also pay for food and board.

A British officer who has recently returned from Helmand said: "The wages paid to the privates is well below the minimum wage. Frankly, they would make more money emptying dustbins. They are being treated appallingly. It is not, of course, just what they undergo in combat, but the after-effects from these places as well. With our men it took a few weeks to get over what they experienced in Northern Ireland. After Iraq it took more than a year for many of them."

Anthony Bradshaw, who saw combat as a private in the Pioneer Regiment during the Iraq conflict in 2003, said: "Our take-home pay during training was £650 a month after the deductions. When we were in Iraq it rose to £800 a month. No one can say that the pay of a private soldier is good. It certainly does not lend itself to any luxuries." Pte Bradshaw, 22, was injured in Iraq and now receives a war pension and income support. "This does not add up to much either. Being a current or ex-soldier hardly makes you rich," he said.

The armed forces were to be brought into the minimum wage structure by the incoming Labour Government in 1997. But the idea was dropped after pressure from the then

Defence Secretary, George Robertson, who claimed it would put the military into a financial and legal straitjacket.

Bush Buddy War Profiteers Served Spoiled Food To U.S. Troops. “Workers Were Told To Pick Out The Shrapnel, And Then Serve The Food”

[Thanks to Mark Shapiro, who sent this in.]

Sep 8 By DEBORAH HASTINGS, AP National Writer & HalliburtonWatch.org [-Excerpts]

Halliburton subsidiary Kellogg, Brown & Root charged millions to the government for recreational services never provided to U.S. troops in Iraq, including giant tubs of chicken wings and tacos, a widescreen TV, and cheese sticks meant for a military Super Bowl party, according to a federal whistle-blower suit unsealed Friday.

Instead, the suit alleges, KBR used the military's supplies for its own football party.

Filed last year in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., by former KBR employee Julie McBride, the lawsuit claims the giant defense contractor billed the government for thousands of meals it never served, inflated the number of soldiers using its fitness and Internet centers, and regularly siphoned off great quantities of supplies destined for American soldiers.

The Super Bowl incident occurred in January 2005, the suit said. "McBride witnessed a large amount of food that was ordered specifically for a Super Bowl party for the military" taken instead to the company's lodgings.

"About 10 large metal tubs full of tacos, chicken wings, (and) cheese sticks were taken from the military party site to a KBR camp for a KBR Super Bowl Party for KBR employees," according to the complaint. A widescreen TV was also removed.

McBride worked 12-hour shifts, seven days a week, at Camp Fallujah's recreation center, where the government was billed according to the number of soldiers using the contractor's facilities, which included a weight room, video games, Internet cafe, a library and phone bank, the suit says.

She alleges that KBR deliberately overstated the number of military personnel using its services by counting the same person several times. For example, a person who used a computer was counted as one. If that person went on the weight room, another count was added to the list of patrons.

"It wasn't double-dipping, but triple dipping or even quadruple billing," the suit claims.

Attorney Alan Grayson, who represents McBride, said "millions of dollars have been submitted by Halliburton for recreational services" not provided.

McBride is not the first Halliburton employee to allege fraudulent billing practices. The company has steadfastly denied wrongdoing.

Rory Mayberry, who worked for KBR in 2004, testified from Iraq via videotape to a group of Democratic members of Congress investigating contractor fraud.

As food manager at another military camp in Iraq, Mayberry said he witnessed KBR employees serving spoiled food to American troops, including food from trucks that had been bombed and shot at. Workers were told to pick out the shrapnel, and then serve the food, Mayberry testified.

McBride was fired for lodging several complaints about KBR's accounting practices and was kept under guard until she was escorted to an airplane and flown out of the country, the lawsuit says.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Assorted Resistance Action



Wreckage of a mini-bus destroyed in a bomb attack in Baghdad, September 11, 2006 killing 12 on a minibus full of army recruits in Baghdad. REUTERS/Thaier al-Sudani (IRAQ)

September 11, 2006 The Associated Press & Solomon Moore, Los Angeles Times & Aljazeera & Reuters

A bomber killed 16 people and wounded seven as he boarded a minibus full of army recruits in Baghdad, police said.

Two employees of a Baghdad telephone exchange center were killed when gunmen opened fire on Monday morning.

In Baquba, the resistance killed a pair of brothers who were police intelligence agents.

An attack on a police station near the southern city of Amara left one police officer dead and five others injured by gunfire.

Guerrillas killed policeman Hasan Radhi al-Azzawi when they attacked his house in the city of Kut, 170 km (105 miles) southeast of Baghdad

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

***A Question Of Class:*
“SCIRI Represents The Great
Merchants, Landowners And Clerics”
“The Sadrists Represent The Little
People, Who Wonder Where Their
Next Meal Is Coming From”**

Sep. 08, 2006 By Juan Cole, Salon.com [Excerpts]

Among the best-selling jewelry items in Iraq today is a pendant consisting of a whole map of the country. It's the symbol of a national unity many Iraqis see slipping away, because now even the majority Shiites are fighting among themselves.

The provincial elections of January 2005 brought Shiite religious parties to power in 11 of Iraq's 18 provinces. Nine of those provinces are dominated by the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq. SCIRI was formed in Iran in the early 1980s by Iraqi Shiite expatriates who had fled the repression of Saddam Hussein.

Its paramilitary wing, the Badr Corps, was trained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. Its leader, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, remains close to the hardliners in Iran, who were his generous hosts for more than two decades. He is dedicated to the creation of a huge, nine-province regional confederacy in the Shiite south, a super-province on the model of Kurdistan in the north.

But since the elections, the movement of Muqtada al-Sadr has spread like wildfire throughout the south.

The appeal of the beefy, strident young Shiite cleric is mysterious to most Americans.

In Iraqi terms, however, he has staked out a clear position as a champion of the poor and a nationalist.

He urges that local neighborhoods organize branches of his Mahdi army for self-protection from the depredations of the Sunni guerrilla movement. He has expanded from his initial base in the vast slums of east Baghdad, which were renamed Sadr City after the U.S. invasion in honor of his sainted father, into the small towns of the southern Shiite heartland.

A conflict is therefore brewing between SCIRI, which controls the provincial governments (including that of Baghdad itself), and the Sadr movement, which increasingly represents the current thinking of the electorate.

It is widely thought in Iraq that when new provincial elections are held, and they are already overdue, the Sadrists may sweep to power in the southern provinces.

That would be a clear political loss for the United States. SCIRI is cosmopolitan, willing to cooperate with the United States and close to Iran.

The Sadr movement is nativist, denouncing Iranian influence in Iraqi life, and it demands that the United States and other foreign troops leave on a specific timetable.

SCIRI represents the great merchants, landowners and clerics of the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala, who have dollar signs in their eyes at the prospect of the billions of dollars that the Iranian pilgrimage trade will bring in.

The Sadrists represent the little people, who wonder where their next meal is coming from and who suffer from lack of fuel, electricity and services. SCIRI represents the Shiites who can afford their own generators.

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

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

“A Defiant Anti-War Movement That Spread Among Soldiers Fighting In The Vietnam War”



April 21, 2006 Elizabeth Writzman (The Daily News)

Sir! No Sir!: Documentary about a defiant anti-war movement that spread among soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War. Directed by David Zeiger (1:24).

A vital new chapter in the book of protest, documentarian David Zeiger's "Sir! No Sir!" is a revealing account of the anti-war activities of soldiers on the ground in Vietnam.

Though their political defiance was eclipsed by civilian protests, thousands of American soldiers risked their careers - and, in some cases, their lives - to expose the truths of the campaigns they were ordered to fight.

Learning that their reality was far different from the one being presented to the American public, many G.I.s began contributing to underground newspapers, planning demonstrations and refusing to continue in battle.

Toward the end of the conflict, some even turned on their own officers, tossing grenades into their tents as they slept.

Melding historical footage with dozens of contemporary interviews from veterans (and a regrettably self-righteous Jane Fonda), Zeiger builds a poignant history of young men transformed from loyal soldiers to bitter activists nearly overnight.

Today, many of these men remain haunted, still unable to escape a war they never understood.

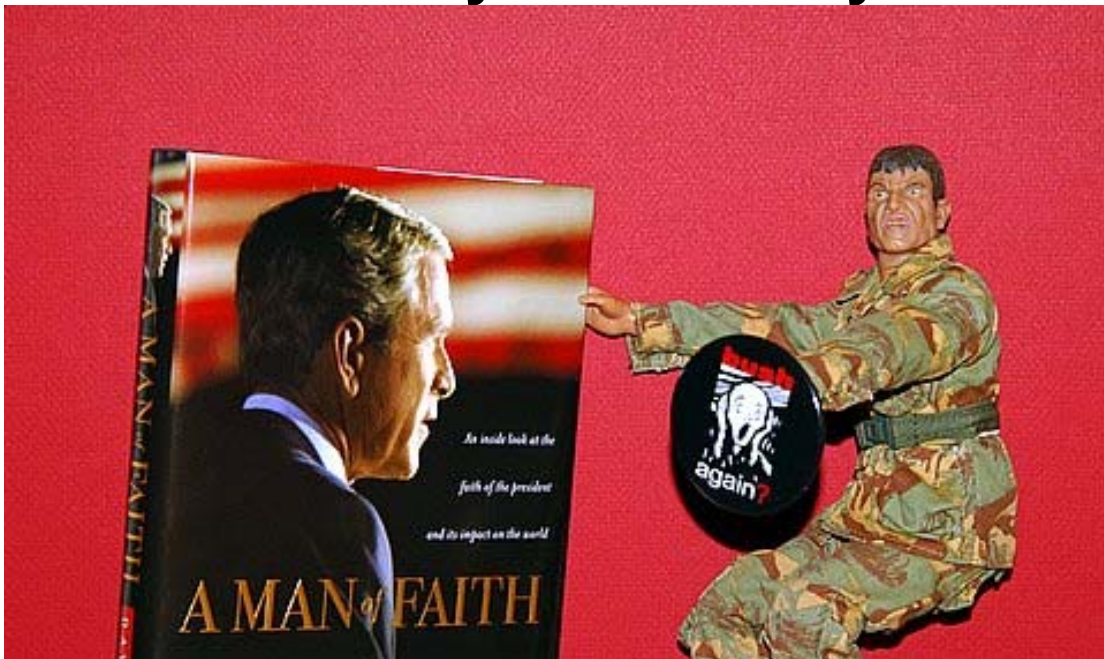
This is powerful stuff, offering us not only a new look at the past, but to the unavoidably relevant insights into the present.

Sir! No Sir!:
At A Theatre Near You!
To find it: <http://www.sirnosir.com/>

**The Sir! No Sir! DVD is on sale now, exclusively at
www.sirnosir.com.**

Also available will be a Soundtrack CD (which includes the entire song from the FTA Show, "Soldier We Love You"), theatrical posters, tee shirts, and the DVD of "A Night of Ferocious Joy," a film by me about the first hip-hop antiwar concert against the "War on Terror."

Over My Dead Body



From: Richard Hastie
To: GI Special
Sent: September 07, 2006
Subject: Over My Dead Body

Over My Dead Body

**"I'm the decider, and I decide what is best."
George W. Bush
Washington, D.C.
April 18, 2006**

**The Red background is there for a purpose, because
that is the blood the soldier sees.**

What George Bush sees, is cash register Green.

**That is the difference between
the soldier and the Bush Administration.**

The soldier went to Iraq thinking he or she was serving their country.

Bush went to Iraq to serve the corporate elite.

George Bush is not connected to American soldiers dying in Iraq.

He has not been to one funeral.

**I did not serve in Vietnam for the
cause of freedom, I served Big Business in America for
the cause of war profiteering.**

**There is a Crusade going on in the Middle East,
and the American people are bleeding to death
from ignorance.**

**Mike Hastie
U.S. Army Medic
Vietnam 1970-71
September 7, 2006**

**Photo and caption 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)**

**What do you think? Comments from service men and women,
and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to**

contact@militaryproject.org. Name, I.D., withheld on request.
Replies confidential.

OCCUPATION REPORT

Here He Is:
The Stupidest General Of 2006 So Far:
Maj. Gen. William B. Caldwell;
He's Busted Lying About Iraq Deaths To Make The Assholes In DC Looks Good

[With Generals like Caldwell in command, the resistance has an even bigger edge. He was so dim he thought nobody would catch on he was faking the numbers! You want progress in Iraq: assign this drooling idiot to fight for the other side.]

September 11, 2006 By Patrick Quinn, Associated Press

BAGHDAD, Iraq: The U.S. military did not count people killed by bombs, mortars, rockets or other mass attacks — including suicide bombings — when it reported a dramatic drop in the number of murders around Baghdad last month, the U.S. command said Monday.

The decision to include only victims of drive-by shootings and those killed by torture and execution, usually at the hands of death squads, allowed U.S. officials to argue that a security crackdown that began in the capital on Aug. 7 had more than halved the city's murder rate.

But the types of slayings, including suicide bombings, that the U.S. excluded from the category of "murder" were not made explicit at the time.

That led to considerable confusion after Iraqi Health Ministry figures showed that 1,536 people had died violently around Baghdad in August, nearly the same number as in July.

At the end of August, the top U.S. military spokesman in Iraq, Maj. Gen. William B. Caldwell, said violence had dropped significantly because of the operation.

Caldwell said “attacks in Baghdad were well below the monthly average for July. Since Aug. 7, the murder rate in Baghdad dropped 52 percent from the daily rate for July.”

Caldwell, however, did not make the key distinction that the rate he was referring to excluded a significant part of the relentless daily violence that tears through Baghdad. On Monday for example, at least 20 of the 26 people who died in the capital were killed in bombings.

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)

OCCUPATION PALESTINE/LEBANON

“They Killed One Of My Neighbors Who Was 56 Years Old And Just Went Out To Get Water”

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

September 7, 2006 By PATRICK COCKBURN, CounterPunch [Excerpts]

A whole society is being destroyed. There are 1.5 million Palestinians imprisoned in the most heavily populated area in the world. Israel has stopped all trade. It has even forbidden fishermen to go far from the shore so they wade into the surf to try vainly to catch fish with hand-thrown nets.

Many people are being killed by Israeli incursions that occur every day by land and air. A total of 262 people have been killed and 1,200 wounded, of whom 60 had arms or legs amputated, since 25 June, says Dr Juma al-Saqa, the director of the al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City which is fast running out of medicine.

Of these, 64 were children and 26 women. This bloody conflict in Gaza has so far received only a fraction of the attention given by the international media to the war in Lebanon.

Fuad al-Tuba, the 61-year-old farmer who owned a farm here, said: "They even destroyed 22 of my bee-hives and killed four sheep." He pointed sadly to a field, its brown sandy earth churned up by tracks of bulldozers, where the stumps of trees and broken branches with wilting leaves lay in heaps. Near by a yellow car was standing on its nose in the middle of a heap of concrete blocks that had once been a small house.

His son Baher al-Tuba described how for five days Israeli soldiers confined him and his relatives to one room in his house where they survived by drinking water from a fish pond. "Snipers took up positions in the windows and shot at anybody who came near," he said.

"They killed one of my neighbors called Fathi Abu Gumbuz who was 56 years old and just went out to get water."

[To check out what life is like under a murderous military occupation by foreign terrorists, go to: www.rafahtoday.org The occupied nation is Palestine. The foreign terrorists call themselves "Israeli."]

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



[Thanks to Mark Shapiro, who sent this in.]

Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward GI Special 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.

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