

**GI SPECIAL 4J31:**

# The Homecoming:

**“Now I Am Crying Out To All Of You,  
Do Not Send My Son Back To Iraq!”  
“Not One More Mother's Child, Please”**



October 28, 2006 by Elaine Brower, Opednews.com

Elaine Brower is an anti-war Mother of a Marine Corps. Sgt. just back from Iraq.

She has appeared in the NY Daily News, NY Times, Good Morning America, and was interviewed by Pacifica Radio in Los Angeles. She is an outspoken anti-war, anti-Bush Military Mom; and a spokesperson for the "World Can't Wait, Drive Out the Bush Regime."

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After almost a year of my son serving in Fallujah, Iraq, the day came when he returned home. Or should I say the night.

The military, in all their glory, decided to have a "Heroes Homecoming" at 1 AM or 1300 hours. The plane landed in Philadelphia 12 hours after they left California. From there

the Marines were transported by a Yellow Bus for another 3 hours to Picatinny Arsenal, New Jersey, in the dead of night.

About 200 family members with signs, flags, buttons, t-shirts and pictures, eagerly awaited the return of their loved ones, in the cold and dark.

Those of us who worked all day and had to go to work the next day, tried to enjoy this Homecoming. We all shared stories, laughed, cried and drank coffee.

**Of course none of us wanted to complain about the fact that in the entire United States of America they could not transport our loved ones home in the daylight.**

Those of us who planned dinners, or had posted welcome home banners on the overpasses of our small towns, did not express our dissatisfaction with this turn of events.

We just stood there waiting. Most of us waited for 4 hours, during which time the very stern Marine Captain would announce their anticipated arrival time. "Our Heroes are on their way!" "Our Heroes will be here in 2 hours!" "Our Heroes will be here in 1 hour!" So we waited.

**It occurred to me that I had become a casualty and prisoner of this war and occupation of Iraq.**

**I was being held captive, awaiting the return of my son.**

**I was told for the last year how to behave, how to conduct myself as a military mother, how to speak to my son on the phone when he called, what his behavior would be like when if and when he returned home, and now, where, when and how long to wait for his return.**

My anger grew, even when I tried to "behave" properly around these war-loving family members, and I just kept smiling at them.

I wanted him to come home in the daylight, when I could stay awake and spend time just looking at his face, and listening to his voice. So by 1 AM, my smile faded.

The last announcement came "Our Heroes are at the front gate!"

The bus finally pulled up in front of the large Homecoming crowd and there they were.

Battle-hardened, straight as arrows, tight-lipped Marines stepping off the transportation on their home soil where they would stay, for now.

Not only did my smile return, my heart and soul ached. It is a feeling that I cannot put into words. The very next thing I knew I was running toward the bus and I saw him.

My son was carrying 4 bags, 2 large backpacks and 2 duffels that each weighed more than me. I jumped into his arms and smelled his neck.

At that point, I didn't realize what time it was, what day it was, or the fact that I was freezing. I couldn't let go of him. Nothing else mattered now. He returned. I felt very foolish and selfish to think about the time and weather. How dare I when here I was holding my son in my arms and other mothers would not be experiencing that feeling.

**The floodgates opened and I just cried. I cried for those who did not return and for the family's grief; I cried for those who are still there; I cried for those who will be going to fight endlessly; I cried for all of us who stood in that parking lot feeling guilty and happy at the same time.**

**I cried for our Country and our children.**

**Now I am crying out to all of you, do not send my son back to Iraq!**

**Do whatever you can to end the death and destruction NOW!**

**Not one more mother's child, please.**

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## **Back From Iraq**



From: Mike Hastie  
To: GI Special  
Sent: October 26, 2006  
Subject: Back From Iraq

## **Back From Iraq**

The welcome home will be very private, and personal.  
It will have absolutely nothing to do with the government.  
My mother met me when my military flight landed from  
Vietnam.

It was very quiet.

I was grateful there were no flags.

George Bush and Dick Cheney  
were no where to be found.

They had other priorities.

I did too...

Helping keep American soldiers alive in Vietnam.

Mike Hastie  
U.S. Army Medic  
Vietnam 1970-71

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

## **IRAQ WAR REPORTS**

### **One Marine Killed In Al Anbar**

30 October 2006 Multi National Corps Iraq Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory RELEASE  
No. 20061030-02

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq: One Marine assigned to Regimental Combat Team 5 died Sunday from injuries sustained due to enemy action while operating in Al Anbar Province.

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### **89th MP Killed By Sniper**

Oct. 30, 2006 Multi-National Corps Iraq PAO RELEASE No. 20061030-03

BAGHDAD: An 89th Military Police Brigade servicemember died of wounds sustained due to small arms fire Oct. 30 at approximately 9:31 a.m. in east Baghdad.

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### **FUTILE EXERCISE:**

## **BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW!**



A U.S. soldier guards the scene of a car bomb attack in Baghdad October 21, 2006. (Mohammed Ameen/Reuters)

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## **Sumner County Marine Killed In Iraq**

10/27/06 By Brandon Puttbrese and Katrina Cornwell, The For Star News

Gallatin native Lance Cpl. Tyler Overstreet, 22, was killed in Iraq during combat operations Sunday, when an explosive device hit his vehicle, according to the military.

The 22-year-old Marine was a passenger in an armored truck that was targeting anti-Iraqi forces in Fallujah. About 4:41 p.m., the vehicle was struck by an improvised explosive device, military officials stated in an announcement given to Overstreet's family Monday night.

Overstreet enlisted 16 months ago, his mother, Jana Mertens, said.

"No one forced him to go; he volunteered," said Mertens, surrounded by family and friends remembering her son at her home just north of Gallatin. "He went to fight for his country."

Overstreet was deployed to Iraq on Sept. 25 - three days after his 22nd birthday - and was killed less than a month later. Through the summer, he had been stationed at Camp Pendleton, Calif., and trained for four weeks in the Mojave Desert.

Family and friends, some still in shock from the horrific news, gathered at Overstreet's family home Wednesday to mourn the loss of a "proud Marine" and "true family man."

Overstreet never met his three-week old son, Ashton Allen.

**About 66 Tennessee servicemen have died in military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to the Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs.**

**Sumner residents have mourned the loss of at least three in the last three years.**

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# ***“It ‘Was Just Terrible There; It Wasn't Getting Any Better’”***

## **Just Weeks After Marriage, Marine Killed In Iraq:**

Oct 24, 2006 By DIANA DILLABER MURRAY Of The Oakland Press

LATHRUP VILLAGE - Marine Lance Cpl. Nicholas J. Manoukian 22, had been back in Iraq only one month before he was killed in Anbar province when the Humvee in which he was riding drove over an improvised exploding device.

Manoukian, son of Mary Manoukian Calhoun of Lathrup Village, married his junior high school sweetheart while he was home on leave.

The young couple had one month and one week together before he was deployed to Iraq in September, said his wife, Danielle Manoukian, 22.

A radio operator, Manoukian was one of four Marines based at Camp Lejeune, N.C., to die in the explosion Saturday and one of two from southeastern Michigan, the Pentagon said Monday. The Defense Department identified the others as Lance Cpl. Clifford R. Collinsworth, 20, of Chelsea; Lance Cpl. Nathan R. Elrod, 20, of Salisbury, N.C.; and Cpl. Joshua C. Watkins, 25, of Jacksonville, Fla.

"He was my only child," Calhoun said, describing how her son loved to draw, loved playing drums, enjoyed ice hockey and snowboarding, loved to cook and was a giving person.

The 2003 Royal Oak Kimball High School graduate was to come home on leave in July. Shortly before that, he called his mother to let her know he and Danielle, whom he met when they were 14, had decided to get married while he was home.

"We had 10 days to plan a wedding, and her mother and I pulled it off in 10 days," his mother said.

The two got married at Shrine of the Little Flower Catholic Church in Royal Oak, and Manoukian was baptized and had his first Communion that day, as well, she said.

"If there were two people meant for each other, it was Nick and Danielle," his mother said. "They'd been together a long time. Then they drifted apart. But they knew they'd end up together.

"I got to dance with my son at his wedding," she said, gratefully, between sobs. "I was looking forward to having a granddaughter," Calhoun said. Manoukian had planned to

adopt Danielle's 2-year-old son, Nico, and they planned to buy a house and have a child after he came home from Iraq.

Then the doorbell rang Saturday.

"I never even questioned or imagined it would just be a month, and that was it," said Danielle, who lives in Royal Oak.

"I'm happy that I got to live with him. He was a person who would give and give. He was the first to volunteer. I just feel so privileged that I got to love somebody so much and he loved me so much."

Growing up, "Nick was the love of his dad's and my life," Calhoun said. "He lost his dad (Isaac Manoukian) at 12 and after that several other family members. He was a strong kid. I used to tell him we were the survivors. I want people to know he was a vibrant young man. He loved his family and was so giving," said Calhoun, who is now married to Manoukian's stepfather, Gary Calhoun.

The family also celebrated Manoukian's 22nd birthday while he was home. He spent his 20th birthday in boot camp and his 21st birthday in Iraq. He and Danielle also celebrated all of the holidays he would miss while in Iraq, including Halloween. He gave her an engagement ring in an Easter basket she made for him when they were in high school.

Before Manoukian was recruited into the Marines, he took art classes at Oakland Community College and worked part time at the Evergreen Nursing Home, where he was the cook.

"He loved to cook," his mother said. "He was fabulous drummer. He used to play from the time he was little. He got a beautiful set of drums when he was 12.

"My dream for Nick was college," his mother said. "He had such a kind, generous heart, and he gave the tightest, best hugs in world. I can't imagine living the rest of my life without him," Calhoun said.

Danielle said she and her new husband had met at 14 and started dating at 15.

"We had always planned to marry. We would talk on the phone eight hours and fall asleep while we were talking. Then we would talk while we were getting ready for school in the morning."

Describing their love as like that portrayed in the movie "Notebook," she said, "He loved me like that. I loved him like that."

**Manoukian called her when he could from Iraq and said it "was just terrible there; it wasn't getting any better.**

"I always started to cry at the end of calls. I said, 'You are coming home.' And he would say he was. I felt like he knew he was coming home, and it made me feel like he was," she said.

Services for Manoukian are pending the return of his body to the United States.

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## Three Mercenaries Killed Near Basra

October 30, 2006 The Associated Press

A roadside bomb killed three people traveling in a private security company convoy near Basra on Monday, police and the British military reported.

Following the blast, the convoy came under heavy attack from gunmen and an Iraqi girl was killed in the ensuing gunbattle, said Maj. Charlie Burbridge, a spokesman for British forces in Basra, the southern city that is headquarters for Britain's 7,200 soldiers in Iraq.

**Burbridge said no British or other international troops took part in the fighting, but said British forces who set up a security cordon around the disabled vehicle were struck by stones and bricks thrown by local children.**

Basra police Capt. Mushtaq Khazim said rumors quickly spread that the convoy belonged to the British intelligence service and that British troops had killed the local girl.

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## The Bomb Squad

[Long, but a close look. T]

October 29, 2006 By Whitney Terrell, The Washington Post Company

Their job: Hunt down and disarm the explosive booby traps that kill more Americans than any other weapon. Try not to die doing it.

1ST LT. NATE RAWLINGS IS STANDING IN THE CAMP LIBERTY MOTOR POOL, just west of Baghdad, trying to figure out why a NASCAR track dryer should be welded to one of his minesweeping trucks.

In such situations, Rawlings -- who is 6-2, 230 pounds -- resembles an offensive lineman who has been asked to dance ballet. His brow furrows, his comic-book square chin dips with respectful curiosity. But he'd like to make sure that this step is really necessary. "What happens if [it's] hit with shrapnel?" he asks the Asymmetric Warfare Group man.

The Asymmetric Warfare Man -- who has what I can only hope is an irrational fear that if I use his name, insurgents will go to America and hunt down his family -- bites his lip. A retired officer, he has his web belt cinched so tight that it acts as a corset, flaring out his rib cage.

He's here to help the Army combat unconventional weapons by inventing contraptions such as the dryer, which is supposed to blow dirt off of buried bombs. Also, his wife



kicked him out. ("Go!" is what he remembers her saying. "You've been wanting to since Day One of the war. You'll hate yourself if you don't.")

"This gas can, okay, it sits right here?" The Asymmetric Warfare Man squats beside the dryer, which resembles a lawn mower engine bolted to a jet turbine bolted to an elbow of air-conditioning duct. He taps its exposed gas can, and continues.

Maybe if Rawlings mounted some fire retardant next to the gas can, it would powder in a blast? Render the fuel inert? And then act as a fire retardant for the whole thing? "That's not too bad," the Asymmetric Warfare Man declares, gaining momentum. "Whaddya think?"

"I don't like it," Rawlings says.

Neither do I, given that I'm going to be riding in one of these minesweeping trucks tomorrow. The shrapnel Rawlings mentions is an all-too-likely possibility, considering the 25,000 improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, that have been aimed at American troops since the war in Iraq began, severing limbs and crushing the skulls of U.S. soldiers and journalists alike.

It doesn't help that Rawlings's soldiers -- with whom I am embedded -- are the leading edge of a \$6.1 billion Pentagon effort to win the war against roadside bombings in Iraq.

They're IED hunters. It's their job to find the bombs that the insurgents plant. It's Rawlings's job to make sure they don't get blown up trying.

"When I first started," Rawlings shouts as the dryer revs up for a demonstration, "I used to sit by the radio 14 hours a day. I'd stay till 4 in the morning, whatever it took, listening to my guys out on patrol until I was sure they'd made it home okay."

Rawlings isn't supposed to worry this much. Part of the Pentagon's spending has paid for specially armored trucks -- such as the RG-31 we've been inspecting -- designed to protect his soldiers from IED blasts.

On the other hand, as we drive back to his headquarters, we pass another unit's RG-31: Its engine compartment and four-foot-tall front tires are gone; the ballistic windows in its cab and armored bed are spiderwebbed from an IED attack that wounded two.

"Yeah, well," Rawlings says. "That vehicle looked a lot better when we first towed it in. People have been stripping parts from it."

It's hard to tell whether he's reassuring himself or me.

It's even harder to try to bridge the gulf between Rawlings's language -- this war's now-familiar lexicon of "flaks" and "mortar pits" and scouts who disappear in a "fine red mist" - - and what I know of his life as a history major at Princeton University, where he graduated in 2004.

A "big, beefy rigger player from Chattanooga" -- in the words of his writing professor, John McPhee -- Rawlings was the kind of romantic enthusiast that I remember emulating when I attended Princeton in the early '90s. In addition to rugby, he wrestled and acted

as the social chair of Tiger Inn, a notoriously rowdy club, while at the same time studying with historian Sean Wilentz and researching a thesis on a Confederate ancestor in Tennessee.

Rawlings also considered military service a family responsibility, and, following in the footsteps of his uncle and grandfather, who fought in Vietnam and WWII, respectively, he joined ROTC three weeks before 9/11. That decision has led him to a desk in this plywood-floored tactical operations center, or TOC, surrounded by soldiers from E Company, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry's Ironclaw team.

His deployment didn't kill his romantic streak -- in an e-mail last winter, he described his first firefight by writing, "Teddy Roosevelt would have found that engagement rather sporty" -- but after six months in Iraq, that part of him seems to be struggling against the messiness of the fight against IEDs.

Until recently, he tells me, most IED patrols were done on foot -- a process that often involved uncovering bombs by hand. When I express disbelief, Rawlings cites the experiences of Sgt. Willard Peterson, who is sitting in a dusty leather chair five feet away from us.

"Effective but dangerous" is Peterson's verdict on this method, delivered in the same tone that he has already used to tell me that Army life is "slightly incompatible" with his Mormon upbringing.

"I lost a lot of friends like that," Peterson says, describing how, during a foot patrol, one friend decided to search for bombs beside a wall covered with anti-American graffiti. He found one. "It was an ambush," Peterson explains. "Blew that wall up and killed him."

Despite his Ivy League background, Rawlings is clearly at home in the ramshackle confines of the TOC, which serves as a clubhouse for the soldiers who live in rows of blindingly white trailers out back.

He can be found there at all hours, and is always willing to stop what he's doing and engage in discussions on the value of the energy drink Rip It ("That stuff will keep you up forever"), evaluations of insurgents' seized weapons ("What's that, a flintlock musket?") or mildly didactic history lessons ("What is unique about Harry S Truman's name?

His middle initial doesn't need a period after it"). The prevailing mood of the place is a half-goofy, half-gallows humor -- for platoon assignments, Rawlings has written FIND BOMBS, BLOW UP BOMBS on the dry erase board behind his head -- that I recognize from the hunting clubs I grew up with.

This afternoon, as Peterson calmly recites the multiple ways that an IED can be triggered and, thus, kill, Rawlings launches into a spirited defense -- against withering remarks from skeptics -- of a French movie whose director, he claims, "is supposed to be the next Hitchcock."

Meanwhile, he's fixing a torn cardboard cutout used to stencil E Company's numbers on the Ironclaw vehicles, and shouting modifications to Peterson's lecture -- "The worst thing the insurgents do is put the bombs out right after our trucks go by" -- through its panels.

Then a call crackles over the radio, and its 20-year-old operator shouts out: "Hey, they found a cache -- the infantry patrol. They got anti-tank mines, rockets, ball bearings, cellphones!"

All the makings for an IED.

And that, of course, is where my hunting club analogy fails. Because Ironclaw teams are really being hunted, every bit as much as they are doing the hunting.

The company's commander, Capt. Samuel Olan, strides out of his office to plot the weapons caches on a glossy aerial map of western Baghdad, where E Company began patrolling a month ago.

Things have been pretty quiet. But the discovery of these new weapons stockpiles, combined with a recent order to repaint his Ironclaw trucks -- and thus cover the markings of the more experienced unit his men have replaced -- tells Olan that the honeymoon is about to end.

"They're going to give us a welcome party," he says. "Because they know -- especially now that we're putting new numbers on the vehicles. They think, 'These guys are here from the States. They don't know anything.' It's like in high school -- you see the new kid and say, 'Let's go fight him!'"

Fortunately, the man who ushers me out of Camp Liberty's gates the next morning hardly qualifies as a new kid. At 24, Sgt. Kristopher Tate is on his second tour in Iraq, and yet his face remains fresh and animated -- a young Sugar Ray Leonard, if the champ had also fancied gold teeth.

Tate's looks have gotten him a lot of attention from women who work at the bases surrounding E Company's headquarters. But what he'd wanted to be was a ballplayer, a center fielder. "My dream stopped because I went to a small school," he told me. "LaPoynor High School in Larue, Texas. Nobody scouted me."

Now a career soldier, Tate leads the RG-31 in which I've been assigned to ride -- and the convoy behind it -- with the casual confidence of the athlete he used to be. "You got something?" he shouts up at his gunner, whose tan boots are dancing nervously on the gunner's platform beside my seat.

The gunner, Pfc. Jeffrey McGorvin drops down in a squat. He's about 5-4 -- too short to use the .50-caliber's sling seat -- Jersey-accented and apple-cheeked.

"There's this white rock with wires coming off the top," he says.

"Keep going," Tate tells his driver who has (in my opinion) reasonably hit the brakes. "Even if that is an IED, we got to set up security. Gonna have to pass it, anyway." Until this moment, I've been using Tate's vehicle as an armored tour bus and gawking at the Iraqi countryside.

That's what the RG-31 is designed to be. From the outside, it resembles a cross between a covered pickup and a Land Rover. But its great tactical advantages are the

spacious, shatterproof windows that wrap the cab and the armored back bed, where Tate and I sit in air-conditioned comfort next to a cooler of Gatorade.

The soldiers inside -- the "window lickers," as they're called -- have a 360-degree view of the roadway, marred only by the matte black circles of gun ports and the occasional divot left by an AK-47 round.

The day is sunny and beautiful, the roads are clear, the soldiers seem relaxed (though later they explain that they were unnerved by the lack of traffic, which often precedes an IED attack) and, as I gawk, I've been trying to describe the territory that my country is spending more than \$300 billion to pacify.

If you ignore the palm trees, much of it resembles western Kansas -- dry, distant plains, fields of irrigated corn and wheat, white-green stands of trees shimmering along the waterways -- which is a disappointment, because, for that kind of money, I think Kansas would've come along quietly.

But that's just in the rural areas. The rest, the gutted industrial ruins, the cinder-block strip malls, the apocalyptic fields of pureed brick where U.S. forces have bombed something, all of this is much more difficult to define.

From house to house the scenery radically shifts, as if someone were channel-surfing through different worlds. Shaded, landscaped mansions bunkered with parked Mercedes share blocks with goat herders and thatch-roofed huts; in the towns, the Iraqis stare poker-faced, dressed in white robes and oil-stained mechanics' jumpsuits alike.

For the last half-hour, I've almost forgotten about IEDs. "That's what we're looking for," Tate says. "Something different. Something that doesn't fit."

Tate points over my shoulder to a mundane landscape of dusty grass along a highway that is backed by a canal and then a raked hayfield in which a flock of pigeons has landed to eat. No ominous music plays; there's no sound, beyond the grind of the RG's transmission and Tate's measured breathing.

And then I notice a tiny white rock with a pair of wires drifting out of it and burrowing into the grass. "All right, let's do an interrogation," Tate says as the RG-31 speeds up, fleeing the object's theoretical blast range. In Army-speak, bombs are interrogated just as insurgents are; the difference is that everybody hopes the bombs stay quiet. "Go on and bring the Buffalo up here."

The Buffalo is the star of the Ironclaw program, and, like any star, it has its own press kit, music video, theme song and testimonial page. These are all available at the Web site run by its producer, Force Protection Inc., which describes its product as "able to withstand bomb blasts that would shred a lesser vehicle" and "a regular truck but on steroids."

The 27-foot-long machine comes equipped with a mechanical arm and claw (thus the "Ironclaw" team), five-inch-thick windows and steel-lined, blast-proof tires. But its secret weapon is the revolutionary "V-shaped hull design" that will part the shock waves and shrapnel column of an IED just as a boat hull parts water.

That's what I'm told, at least. But to me, the Buffalo looks like a phone line repair truck.

Accompanied by a young pair of fruit stand vendors and an Iraqi in a melon truck, my RG crew watches from a safe distance as the Buffalo, operated by Sgt. Brett Eggleston and three other soldiers, creeps a mere 10 feet from the potential IED and unfolds its mechanical arm to interrogate. Eggleston can park that close thanks, in part, to the "electronic countermeasures" that many Army vehicles carry and which are designed to block the cellphone calls that frequently trigger IEDs.

Still, cellphones aren't the only way to detonate surplus artillery rounds -- the favored payload for these weapons. Some insurgents tape frayed wires inside a cardboard tube (called "crush wires"); when a Humvee runs this over, the wires complete a circuit, ignite a blasting cap and, thus, detonate the bomb.

Even IEDs with cellphone triggers include a washing machine timer as a backup; when it winds down, the rounds blast off. This tends to make interrogations a nerve-racking ordeal. "We don't know what it feels like in here" when an IED goes off, one Buffalo crewman, Spec. Brendon Croteau, has acknowledged to me. "We haven't been blown up yet."

**And this is where the whole expedition turns . . . well, into a "Wizard of Oz" moment for me. Because as I peer through the haze of the Iraqi noon, the Buffalo's claw ponderously raking the grass beside the road, I realize that the heart of the Pentagon's program for defeating IEDs is: 1) buy some armored trucks with big windows; 2) send young soldiers out to drive up next to bombs; 3) investigate with a phone truck.**

As Tate points out later: "I've seen tanks destroyed. I've seen Bradleys destroyed . . . There's only so much armor can do."

Fortunately, this particular wired rock turns out to be an irrigation pump. After another hour or so, I'm dropped off at a nearby patrol base.

Fifteen minutes later, Tate's RG-31 nearly runs over an IED.

McGorvin -- dubbed "the Jedi master" by his fellow soldiers for his ability to, as they put it, "detect ordnance" -- tells me about it the next day as he fidgets on a torn couch behind the TOC. He explains that he sensed the bomb a mile before he reached it -- noticing first the grinning face of a taxi driver who squatted down behind his cab to key a Motorola phone. A few minutes later as the convoy rumbled through a small town, McGorvin felt it again outside a cluster of mud wattle shacks, their yards suspiciously empty.

Then, all at once, his RG-31 passed a mound of dirt with a cone of rusty metal showing through its side. McGorvin's gaze locked on a sliver of blue plastic tucked behind the mound. "I got something!" he yelled. "I don't know what it is, but it's got a cellphone on it!"

The RG-31's armor wouldn't protect McGorvin standing in his gunner's nest, so, as radios barked and the convoy scattered, he tucked his thighs against his chest and squatted.

"McGorvin -- good looking," Tate shouted as their truck finally jolted to a stop outside the bomb's blast radius.

"My gunner's got two rounds on the left side," Tate radioed to Eggleston, who was waiting in the Buffalo. "I'll walk you to it."

As the Buffalo team prayed, Eggleston lowered its nine-pronged claw -- his "pooper scooper," as he calls it -- toward the buried IED. He followed his progress on a color monitor connected to a camera on the arm's first joint. Gingerly, he scratched the dirt, revealing two rusty 130mm artillery shells and then, zooming in, found a blue Nokia cellphone, battery and a washing machine timer that had been wired to a blasting cap in the nose of the first shell.

"What type of rounds you got?" radioed Sgt. Thomas Sutton, the leader of the Ironclaw team. "What kind of initiation system?"

Distracted and infuriated by this interruption, Eggleston -- who prefers to work in complete silence -- remembers quietly heaving a few empty water bottles around the cabin, then shaking his fists at the heavens. When he'd calmed himself, he returned to the controls, tangled the claw in the ignition wire and -- carefully, carefully -- lifted the cellphone, timer and battery clear of the charge, disarming the IED.

"For the third time," he radioed Sutton, "I've got two 130mm rounds." And then, having pawed around a bit more where the rounds were buried, he keyed his mike again. "No, check that. I've got three."

**McGorvin's IED was one of 2,625 such bombs found or detonated during the month of July: 959 of them were discovered, while 1,666 exploded.**

Numbers such as these have made IEDs the leading killer of U.S. troops in Iraq, which places McGorvin and his buddies squarely on the front lines of the war.

It also means their stories -- "Gets the blood flowing!" I hear McGorvin exclaim to Tate when he's finished -- carry an extra authority, one they seem acutely aware of.

Nearly all them instruct me, "Just tell people what it's really like over here." At first I assume this is a reference to the administration complaint that the war isn't going as badly as the media make it appear. And yet, the longer I stay with the unit, the less certain I am that their version of Iraq is meant to toe anybody's party line.

This is certainly true of Corbett Baxter, a sweat-soaked first lieutenant who has been doing eight- to 10-hour foot patrols every day.

"It's a [expletive] classic area," he says after Rawlings and I meet him in an empty briefing room. He gazes blankly at the far wall, perspiration still beading high up in the bluish skin of his shaved head, despite the icy air-conditioning. "A mixed Shia and Sunni population, everybody living together peacefully. But in the last few days, everybody, all the families I've got to know -- they've all left. Fled."

Baxter stops and stares at me. His eyes are dark and hollow.

**Most of the roughly 35,000 people at Camp Liberty never leave the gates, and those who do, including the Ironclaw teams, rarely leave the paved roads.**

**It is as if the New York police department patrolled only Broadway, First Avenue and Eighth Avenue, leaving the rest of the city in darkness.**

**Baxter, however, has seen that darkness.**

"I would walk through these neighborhoods where I had kids running all over," he tells me. "I'd sit down and have chai with them. As far as I can tell, they liked having us there, but they're gone. You know what I'm doing now? Now all I'm doing is waiting for the [expletives] who chased them out to come in."

Like the Ironclaw teams, Baxter has seen the center of the war.

**The facts he's returned with don't necessarily fit the Army's -- or, certainly, Washington's -- official version of the war's progress, but because they're true, he tells them to me anyway.**

I have a different experience the next day when Rawlings and I visit the 16th Engineering Brigade, which is the "executive agent" for the Ironclaw teams. Maj. Mitch Gargac, who greets us, is eager to talk about the showers, latrines, Hesco barriers (bags filled with sand) and concrete T-walls that his engineers build inside the wire.

**We sit in a video conference room whose stadium-style seats and blond wood furnishings are as nice as anything Rawlings saw at Princeton.**

**But when I ask about the Ironclaw program -- for instance, how many teams exist or how many bombs they've found -- Gargac admits, "Truthfully, I don't know if I can say."**

**Instead, he introduces me to the brigade's "Baghdad Is Beautiful" program.**

**Its chief, Lt. Col. Tris Cooper, has \$80 million to spend and flashes charts that say things such as: "Electricity: Goal: increase production." And "Health Care: Goal: construct facilities." They contain no statistics.**

**Even if I hadn't just read reports concluding that Baghdad residents get only five to eight hours of power a day and that the U.S.-based contractor, Parsons, has failed to deliver 130 of 150 promised health clinics, I would find this performance depressing.**

**After all, Rawlings and I have just been out driving around Baghdad.**

**Baghdad is not beautiful.**

**Baghdad is covered with trash and saturated with the ugliest kind of danger.**

**As we leave the briefing, Rawlings -- who is as optimistic an Army supporter as you can find -- looks as if he's seen a ghost.**

He hustles off for the reality of his Humvee while I snap pictures of Gargac, guarding the parking lot. My camera breaks.

Gargac is just doing his job, I understand -- which is, in part, to paint the war in as positive a light as possible, when dealing with the media.

(In September, six weeks after I leave Iraq, following multiple e-mail requests, he tells me that Ironclaw teams around Baghdad have found 1,247 IEDs since January, a number positive enough that I wonder why he didn't give it to me in the first place.)

But the meeting highlights the difference between the stories that the Ironclaw team tells about the war and those told by Army officials or politicians.

The soldiers know that Baghdad isn't beautiful. But neither is it completely accurate to call the varied landscape they drive through each day a "Dante-esque hell" or "nightmarish" -- two descriptions of Baghdad that I find in U.S. newspapers on my return.

And so, caught between opposing, abstract versions of the war, they refuse to simplify: This story means we're winning. This story means we're losing.

They live among facts too overwhelming to parse: Rawlings opens the door of a shrapnel-shredded truck on a highway south of Baghdad to find a beheaded child, on his dead father's lap, cradling a flat of eggs. Only one is broken.

Tate picks up a scrap of rubber on a roadway to find himself staring at an IED.

One night, during an ambush, a brave sergeant named Travis Parker sprints across 100 yards of open highway under fire, in the dark, to deliver ammunition to Rawlings's Bradley.

Peterson's friend is scraped up off the pavement after the graffiti-covered wall explodes in his face.

Or it's a good week, and they putter past verdant date groves undisturbed and, quite frankly, bored for hour after hour, day after day. McGorvin fantasizes about returning in peacetime and driving the same roads in a rental car. Rawlings blasts rock-and-roll under highway overpasses. Tate keeps track of which houses on their route have the best landscaping.

**For them, these stories are the war, period. They are not sound bites to be scooped up to justify some larger political narrative. Their attitude reminds me of the soldiers in Erich Maria Remarque's WWI novel All Quiet on the Western Front , which Rawlings says he's reading.**

**At one point, as the narrator watches a friend die, he notes: "We have lost all sense of other considerations, because they are artificial. Only the facts are real and important to us."**

Rawlings comes the closest to stating this outright. One night around 3 a.m. -- Rawlings's usual bedtime -- I push him to talk about politics and war. I tell him that if he



wants to be a writer (a profession he says he's considering), he's going to have to have opinions, to not worry too much about upsetting anybody.

**Rawlings, clearly uncomfortable with the topic, ends up surprising me.**

**He begins talking about seeing Ken Mehlman, the Republican National Committee chairman, on "Meet the Press" after the Valerie Plame scandal.**

**"It was like an opera," he says, in a tone that makes me feel this isn't a compliment. "Everything the guy says comes out in three's. Two good things for us, one bad thing for them. I went to work the next day, saw my guys getting ready to go to Iraq -- I hated the idea that while we were working, he's flinging around political stuff."**

I hear a conversation in Camp Liberty's posh, 1,000-seat cafeteria that crystallizes this thought for me.

A well-fed soldier is polishing the vocabularies of two foreign national workers. A severe over-cleanliness of uniform already defines him as a "fobbit," someone who never leaves his FOB, which stands for "forward operating base."

But he's well on his way to defining "vicarious," too. "Like, there are politicians who talk about this war 'vicariously,'" he says, his voice rising, indignant. "They don't know anything about the war because they've never been here. They just want to get their face on TV and make people think they're looking out for them, and so they say the war is bad, but they don't know whether it is or it isn't." **[And the well-fed fobbit might have a different view if he had to look for some IEDs himself.]**

It's a worthy question, whether the war is good or bad. But when the Ironclaw team is outside the wire, looking down on a bomb, it's too late to ask.

THE SECOND IED DIDN'T EVEN TICKLE MCGORVIN'S JEDI SENSE. Just a few hours after the first bomb they'd found, the soldiers were cruising down a hardball road, open scrub on the left, a canal on the right backed by corn stubble and the silver swoops of power lines angling through it, off to the horizon. Light poles, evenly spaced, dotted the road. As his RG-31 slowed for a speed bump, McGorvin heard a small pop, and a foot-high column of dust bloomed on the right shoulder of the road. It looked as if a bullet might have struck there.

"McGorvin -- did you see that?" shouted Spec. Jose Fuentes, 21, who rode in the RG's passenger seat. "What the [expletive] was it?"

"Incoming?"

"I don't know. It wasn't loud enough for incoming."

Tate, expecting an imminent attack, shouted to his driver, Pfc. David Griffin. "Hey, you got to go on past. Even if it is an IED, we got to get to the other side."

Griffin was a rookie, in country only a few weeks. But being a Missourian, he had plenty of experience on bad roads: He gunned the RG like a pro, slamming through potholes so hard that the crew nearly jolted out of their seats.

Once they were clear, Tate radioed the convoy they'd left behind, his voice quieter than usual: "Hey, an IED just went off. Everybody move up!"

This time the insurgents had timed the convoy's speed by the light poles along the road, which allowed them to set off their bomb just as the trucks arrived. The puff of smoke signaled the ignition of a blasting cap that had inexplicably failed to detonate two 130mm rounds. Otherwise, the RG-31 carrying Tate, Fuentes and McGorvin -- who was standing up, unprotected, in his gunner's hatch -- would've been hit directly.

McGorvin squatted down in the RG's cab and held his hands out, palms down. "Look at this, Fuentes," he said, as his fingers shook.

In the middle of the convoy, a soldier had seen three Iraqis emerge from some bushes and fold up a tripod -- a device they'd likely used to time the convoy's approach. Sutton backed his RG-31 past the unexploded rounds and, regulations be damned, left the pavement and hurtled down a dirt road after them.

Though the three triggermen escaped Sutton's wrath by crossing a canal, an infantry unit picked them up 30 minutes later.

Up at the lead vehicle, a curious kind of giddiness descended. It wasn't fear exactly -- there was constant chatter, constant activity. That's the strange thing about the front lines: There's a high.

Everyone, even a general, has to admit that you've visited a privileged place.

Which, in turn, makes it harder and harder to fit in anywhere else.

Other voices rehashed the luck of the near miss, the fizzle of the bomb.

"Damn, we almost died," someone said.

But Fuentes understood the paradox of this high: As good as it felt, it was also changing each one of them, in ways nobody could predict. Before the team dismounted to pull guard, he told McGorvin and Tate, "I love you guys."

Then he turned to Griffin, the new driver. "Welcome to the war," he said.

POSTSCRIPT:

Recently, E Company's patrol area expanded eastward into more urban areas of Baghdad, and attacks on their vehicles increased.

In an e-mail dated September 13, Rawlings reported that the lead RG-31 I'd ridden in had been hit by a bomb, which cracked but did not shatter its windows. McGorvin was struck in the face by shrapnel, the blast's only casualty. He returned to duty after three days' rest. The company is scheduled to return to the United States at year's end.

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## **AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS**

### **U.S. Soldier Killed In Uruzgan, Nine Wounded**

October 30, 2006 Lee Greenberg, CanWest News Service

Allied troops patrolling in Uruzgan province, just north of Kandahar, where 2,300 Canadian soldiers are stationed, came under attack Saturday from an estimated 125 insurgents, according to NATO spokesman Maj. Dominic Whyte.

An American soldier was killed soon after when a roadside bomb hit his convoy, officials said. The soldier's name has not been released.

Nine soldiers and two civilians were also reportedly wounded in the clashes, which follow close on the heels of an aerial bombardment in Kandahar that killed as many as 60 civilians and an estimated 45 insurgents.

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### **Three Occupation Soldiers Wounded In Kamdesh; Nationality Not Announced**

Oct 30 (KUNA)

Three NATO soldiers were wounded as Taliban fighters attacked their convoy in eastern Afghanistan, officials said on Monday.

Governor of Afghanistan's eastern Nangarhar province Tamim Nuristani told journalists the attack was carried out in the province's remote and mountainous Kamdesh district last evening.

He said a military vehicle was also damaged in the attack. But Taliban claimed they had destroyed six military vehicles and killed and injured several soldiers. Dr Hanif, who claimed to be speaking to the media on behalf of the ousted militia, said the military vehicles were hit with rockets and machine guns.

## **TROOP NEWS**

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



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

## ***“Something Seems To Be Very Wrong In Kashmir”*** **Indian Soldiers Killing Themselves; Officer Killed Also**

[Thanks to J, who sent this in. She writes: Something seems to be very wrong in Kashmir.]

10/29/2006 Gulf News

**Jammu: Yet another Indian Army soldier committed suicide by shooting himself with his service rifle in Jammu and Kashmir's border district of Poonch, the third such "distress" death in a week.**

According to officials, Sepoy P. John Thomas of 1 Bihar Regiment had recently got posted to the Patti Manga area of the mountainous district of Poonch, close to the Line of Control with Pakistan.

On Friday evening he shot himself with his Insas rifle all of a sudden. He was taken to hospital where he was declared brought dead.

The cause of his act was not immediately known. The army has initiated an inquiry. Poonch's Senior Superintendent of Police S.D.S. Jamwal said that the police have registered a case.

This is third incident of its kind in a week in this area in which soldiers have "opened fire in distress, killing themselves or their colleagues", police said.

**MORE:**

## **“The Guard Commander Fell Dead”**

10/30/2006 Gulf News

**Jammu: In the fourth such incident in just over a week, an Indian soldier shot dead a colleague and injured another with his rifle in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district.**

According to official sources, Satyam Kumar, a signalman, was on guard duty in Udhampur, 66 km north of Jammu, at the headquarters of the Northern Command late Saturday when he opened fire with his Insas rifle.

**The guard commander fell dead while a signalman, Balwan Singh, was injured.**

An inquiry has been ordered into the cause of the shooting. "It seems there was a tiff between them," an official said. **[No shit.]**

Satyam Kumar has been taken into custody.

**This is the fourth act "committed in distress" by Indian soldiers in Jammu region in the last eight days.**

A soldier shot dead three colleagues and injured another as well as himself in the border district of Rajouri on October 21.

In the same district two days later, a soldier shot dead two colleagues and then killed himself. On Friday night, a soldier committed suicide in neighbouring Poonch district.

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## **IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP**

### **Assorted Resistance Action**

30 Oct 2006 Reuters

A car bomber hit an Iraqi army checkpoint at a border pass near Syria, killing four soldiers and wounding one.

An attacker blew himself up inside a police headquarters in Kirkuk, killing two policemen and wounding 19, including 10 policemen. Police said the attacker was wearing a police officer uniform.

Gunmen attacked a police centre in the oil refinery city of Baiji 180 km (112 miles) north of Baghdad, killing two policemen and destroying a police car.

Mortar rounds slammed an electricity power unit in eastern Mosul wounding five people, police said.

Police retrieved the bodies of six policemen from a river in Suwayra, 40 km (25 miles) south of Baghdad, police said.

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

## **Unconquered, Unconquerable**

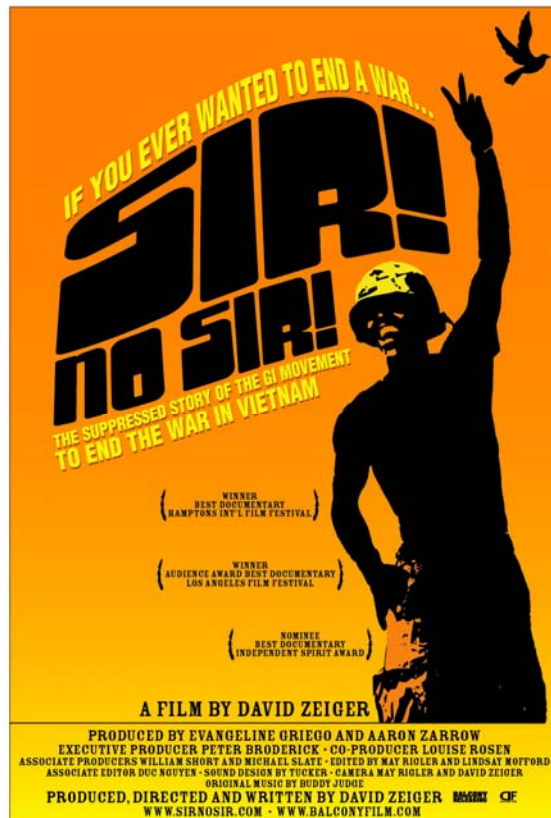


Iraqi youths pelt British armored vehicles after a British convoy was targeted by a roadside bomb in Basra Monday Oct. 30, 2006. One British SUV was damaged. (AP Photo/Nabil al-Jurani)

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

## FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

**“Large Numbers Of G.I.s Took Part In Sit-Ins, Marches, And, Especially Late In The War, Outright Refusal To Obey Orders They Considered Immoral”**



Erik Moe, Documentaries.about.com

During the Iraq War, much has been written about the responsibility of soldiers to relinquish their civilian freedoms in the name of military duty. Books, blogs, and opinion pieces by soldiers critical of the administration have been attacked not for their content, but for the appearance of aiding the enemy.

David Zeiger's documentary Sir! No Sir! offers a surprising parallel in the history of resistance to the Vietnam War from within the ranks.

Long before the internet and blogs, printed and mimeographed underground papers circulated in military barracks. Often filled with vulgar humor and lampoons of barking Sergeants and the hardships of military life, these papers were officially banned but universally available.

As more and more soldiers became disenchanted with the mission in Vietnam, the underground military press expanded in tandem with the civilian protest movement. G.I.s began to see that the civil rights movement's calls for equality were equally relevant in a military that had disproportionately few black officers. In the ideology of Black Nationalism, other soldiers began to see the Vietnamese people as fighting the same system of white oppression they faced at home.

Soldiers who took part in protests – either in uniform or civilian dress – were subject to detention and court marshal.

**Despite this risk, large numbers of G.I.s took part in sit-ins, marches, and – especially late in the war – outright refusal to obey orders they considered immoral.**

Zeiger interviews soldiers who were jailed for sit-ins and protests. A group of intelligence officers speak about their decision to supply inaccurate locations of villages when they realized that the U.S. bombing campaign would not sway a war that was already lost.

Figuring prominently in *Sir! No Sir!* is Jane Fonda – who became a face of the Vietnam protest movement. The breadth of opposition to the war within the ranks is apparent in footage of her "FTA" tour (officially "Free The Army," but soldiers knew the 'F' to stand for something else).

In a new interview, Fonda recalls the vast crowds of soldiers filling off-base auditoriums and amphitheatres despite the fact that they could be disciplined for attending such events. Between rousing jokes and songs, solemn moments reveal the young men and women to be filled with genuine concern for their country and a deep yearning to return to their families.

**During the 1960s and 70s, reporting on desertions, low morale, and opposition to the war among soldiers was common in the mainstream press. In the decades since, the cultural wound of the war has been patched over with stories that reframe opposition to the war as limited to long-haired drug users.**

***Sir! No Sir!* sets the record straight with first-hand accounts, press clippings, and remarkable footage from Vietnam and U.S. bases.**

As an example the film cites the ubiquitous story of soldiers being spit upon by protesters upon returning from fighting for their country in Vietnam. The story is so common that conservative and liberal commentators alike cite it when talking about the respect owed to our men and women in uniform. A researcher in Zeiger's film explains why this story is logistically unlikely and has found no evidence of it ever having happened.



The story illustrates how our understanding of Vietnam has been shaped by those who seek to gloss over the errors of the past to present an unblemished view of U.S. history.

Vietnam Veterans at the screening I attended were particularly thankful for the retelling of their struggles within a military machine that had so clearly gone off track.

**Sir! No Sir!** likewise offers much to the post-Vietnam generations who are struggling with conflicting loyalties to duty and country.

**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](http://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 about the first hip-hop antiwar concert against the "War on Terror."

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 or write to: The Military Project, Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657

## **OCCUPATION REPORT**

### **Sadr City Bomb Kills 29 Labourers: “The Responsibility For This Attack Lies With The Occupying Forces”**

Oct 30 by Hassen Jouni, AFP News

A deadly bomb attack has ripped through a crowd of Shiite labourers, killing 29 in the restive Baghdad suburb of Sadr City.

Since Tuesday, American troops hunting for a kidnapped comrade have operated road blocks and patrols around the fringes of Sadr City, and many blamed them for failing to prevent the attack.

"The responsibility for this attack lies with the occupying forces," said Hamdallah Rikabi, a spokesman for Sadr's movement.

"Everybody knows that before this, this was a secure city and deploying the occupier's forces is just harming our security," he said.



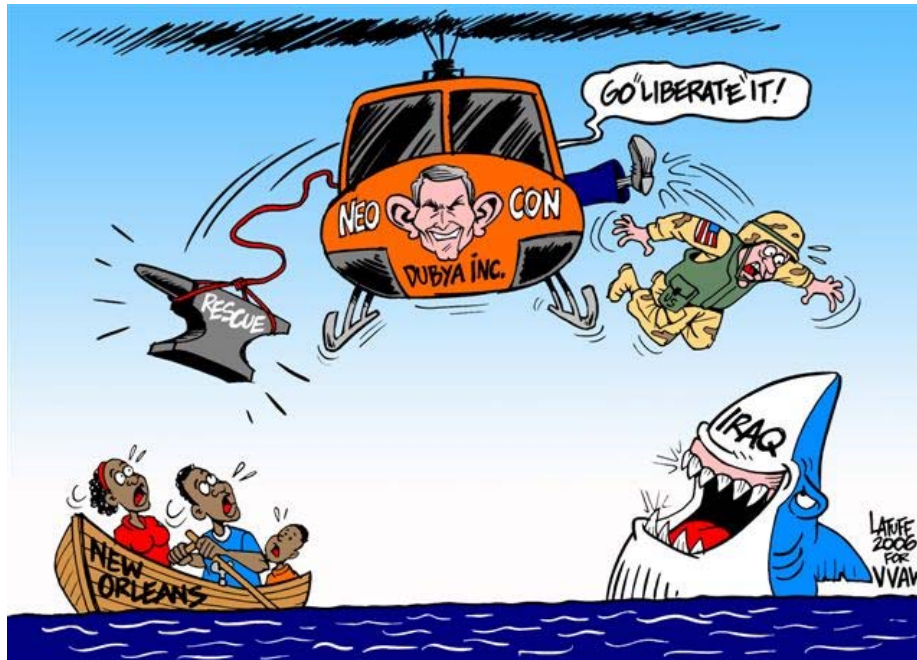
[Thanks to David Honish, Veteran, who sent this in.]

## 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](http://www.ivaw.net))

## DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



[Thanks to Ward Reilly, who sent this in.]

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Write to The Military Project, Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or send to [contact@militaryproject.org](mailto:contact@militaryproject.org):. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential. Same to unsubscribe.

## Cheney 'Furious' Over Release of Sex Tape; Calls Timing Politically Motivated

October 29, 2006 The Borowitz Report

Vice President Dick Cheney said today that he was "furious" about the release of a sizzling sex tape featuring him and his wife Lynne and called the tape's release on the eve of the midterm elections politically motivated.

The vice president and his wife appeared on CNN's "Larry King Live" to address the issue of the racy tape, which attracted millions of viewers on the website YouTube.com before being taken down by the site's operators.

"Larry, to release a tape that Lynne and I made for our own enjoyment smacks of the worst of Democrat dirty tricks," the vice president told Mr. King. "I really hope that the American people will see right through this."

Mrs. Cheney agreed with her husband, adding that the liberal media was making a "mountain out of a molehill" on the issue of the couple's torrid home video.

"Like most happily married couples, Dick and I have made hundreds, maybe thousands of sex tapes," Mrs. Cheney said. "This one is far from the dirtiest."

But even as the Cheneys were expressing their anger over the release of their white-hot tape, some Republican strategists were giving the vice president and his wife two thumbs up for their videotaped romp.

"I think this is the best thing that could have happened right before the election," said Clive McKeef, a G.O.P. operative in Scottsdale, Arizona. "The entire time I was watching the tape, I didn't think about Iraq once."

**Elsewhere, Iraqi Prime Minister Kamal al-Maliki denied that he was a puppet of the United States, adding that he wanted to become "a real boy."**

### **GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out**

GI Special issues are archived at website <http://www.militaryproject.org> .

The following have posted issues; there may be others:

<http://www.williambowles.info/qispecial/2006/index.html>;

[http://robinlea.com/GI\\_Special/](http://robinlea.com/GI_Special/); <http://imagineaworldof.blogspot.com/>; <http://qi-special.iraq-news.de>;

[http://www.traprockpeace.org/qi\\_special/](http://www.traprockpeace.org/qi_special/);

<http://www.uruknet.info/?p=-6&l=e>; <http://www.albasrah.net/magalat/english/qi-special.htm>

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