

GI SPECIAL 5B10:



29/01/07 Washington Rally Against The War;
Jon Flanders, Monthly Review

**“Maybe We Will Be
Greeted With Flowers
When We Stop Handing
Out Destruction, Death,
And Deflated Waste”**

[Thanks to J.D. Englehart, Iraq Veterans Against The War, who served in the 1st ID with Garrett Reppenhagen, for sending this in.]

Garett Reppenhagen's original report on the incident, which he sent to GI Special in 2005 and was published under the pen name "Soldier X" to protect him from retaliation from command, is just below this account by Mark Benjamin. T

Feb. 07, 2007 By Mark Benjamin, Salon.com

On a hot summer morning in 2004, Garett Reppenhagen dragged himself out of his cot at a rudimentary Army base, 40 miles north of Baghdad, for a briefing on the day's combat mission.

His battalion of the 1st Infantry Division was holed up in an abandoned warehouse and sleeping in steel trailers with sandbags stacked in the windows. They were stationed on the outskirts of Baquba, a city rife with insurgents in the violent Sunni Triangle. As the soldiers gathered around their Humvees, Reppenhagen, a scout and sniper, figured he knew what his lieutenant was going to say.

There had probably been another roadside bomb nearby. That meant Reppenhagen and his platoon, acting on intelligence that might be good or bad, would drive their Humvees into a nearby neighborhood, seal off entire town blocks, search houses and round up a bunch of men who might or might not have some tie to the insurgency.

What the lieutenant told them, however, had nothing to do with the enemy.

They were going to hand out soccer balls to Iraqi kids in the surrounding villages. Reppenhagen was surprised. "You do so much crappy shit over there that when you get a mission to actually help people, it's encouraging," he said.

Reppenhagen, now 31, has certainly seen his share of crappy missions.

During his 2004 duty in the Sunni Triangle, he was sent on countless raids. On nighttime patrols, when a muzzle flash appeared from a darkened building, he and his platoon would respond with the full force of .50-caliber machine guns mounted atop Humvees until the ammunition was spent -- even if that meant leveling a nearby building. If an insurgent was thought to be hiding in a house, they'd call in a tank to blow it up rather than do a risky search on foot.

As a member of a six-man sniper team, Reppenhagen was ordered to track down and kill insurgents in extremely dangerous areas. At other times, he and his battalion would cordon off streets, kick in doors on squat cement houses, and detain men 18 and over for minor offenses like being in a house other than their own or failing to show proper ID.

"Half of the time, we got the wrong damn house," Reppenhagen said.

At least handing out soccer balls, he thought, was one thing the Army could do right.

At Forward Operating Base Scunion, the camp's official name, the lieutenant told Reppenhagen and company to pick up the load of balls from Forward Operating Base Warhorse, which was close by. They would then drive around the towns of Al-Hadid,

Hib Hib and Kahlis and hand them out to the kids who often ran beside the Army Humvees and called out for candy, water or money.

Of course, there was an ulterior motive to the kindly gesture, as it behooved the Army to earn the sympathies of local Iraqis, who could aid them in the search for insurgents. The operation could be seen, in the parlance of the Army counterinsurgency manual, as maintaining "moral legitimacy" with the Iraqis.

After all, nothing is more popular in Iraq than soccer. "There are soccer fields everywhere," Reppenhagen said. "Mostly it is just dirt lots. They don't have goal posts and so use stumps. Sometimes the kids play in the street. I swear, all they do all day long is play soccer."

It wasn't clear who came up with the idea to win over Iraqis with soccer balls.

A March 2004 press report from the Pentagon describes a unit of the 1st Armored Division handing out soccer balls in the Karadah district of Baghdad. "The children were thrilled to receive new soccer balls as soldiers tossed the balls to the boys and girls," the report said.

In a December 2004 release, Kiowa helicopter pilots with the 1st Cavalry Division are described tossing soccer balls to grateful kids in an operation aptly dubbed "Operation Soccer Ball."

Spc. Thom Cassidy, who worked in the logistics shop in Reppenhagen's battalion, recalled that giving out soccer balls to the kids around Baquba was passed down from higher command to a battalion colonel at the base.

In any event, Cassidy said, "this was a very, very Army idea. This was the prototypical Army idea."

At Forward Operating Base Warhorse, Reppenhagen and his fellow soldiers encountered a five-ton truck stacked with large cardboard boxes. They began to unload the truck and open the boxes. There were maybe 50 soccer balls in each box.

But the balls had not been inflated. They were all flat. Reppenhagen scoured the boxes. No pumps. What was worse, nobody had bothered to pack the needles to inflate the balls.

Resourceful soldiers that they were, the men carried some of the balls to mechanics in the motor pool. "They tried to pump them up with tire pumps," Reppenhagen said. But the mechanics had the equipment to inflate Humvee tires, not soccer balls.

Frustrated, the soldiers asked their commanding officers what to do.

None were sure. They kept calling their own superiors.

Cassidy suggested that they order pumps and needles, which would arrive in about two weeks.

The battalion colonel quickly tired of the whole discussion and said he wasn't about to requisition soccer ball pumps.

"He decided this was a waste of time," Cassidy said. "His thought was, 'Iraqis should be grateful.' Not, 'They will be grateful' -- 'They should be.'"

Finally, the lieutenant commanded the troops to deliver the balls to the children. "He was pretty much like, 'Shut up and hand out these soccer balls,'" Reppenhagen said.

It seemed crazy. "We were so pissed," said Reppenhagen. But orders are orders.

When you are told to hand out flat soccer balls, you hand out flat soccer balls.

So the soldiers who served in 2nd Battalion, 63rd Armored Regiment piled the flat soccer balls into their Humvees. Driving through the Sunni Triangle's war-torn towns, they tossed the deflated balls to children, who crowded the sides of the roads, running beside the canals and lush greenery that lined the banks of the Diyala River.

"Kids were swarming us," Reppenhagen said. "We went to a couple of schools and delivered stacks of them. Everybody we saw got a flat soccer ball."

Which, of course, the kids quickly figured out.

Pretty soon, Reppenhagen recalled, "They were like, 'What are you doing? What are we supposed to do with this?'"

When the Humvees began to retrace their route back to the base, the futility of the operation was becoming painfully clear. "Kids were wearing these soccer balls as hats," Reppenhagen said. "They were kicking them around. They were in trees. They were floating in canals. They were everywhere. There were so many soccer balls."

Today, Reppenhagen still cringes when he recalls the soccer ball operation, which to him says so much about the entire U.S. occupation in Iraq.

He recently left his job at Veterans for America, a veterans' advocacy group, and currently serves on the board of Iraq Veterans Against the War.

A spokesman for the 1st Infantry Division, Lt. Col. Christian T. Kubik, said Reppenhagen's battalion commander does not recall the soccer ball operation. In an e-mail, he took issue with the characterization of soldiers blindly following orders when they handed out the deflated balls.

"America is filled with veterans who know that this comic view of soldiers dumbly following orders is completely without basis and almost laughable in its propagation of stereotype," Kubik wrote. "Soldiers are Americans, not automatons." He added: "To focus on the air in the balls, or lack thereof, undermines the American spirit of generosity and completely misses the point of giving."

Reppenhagen said he certainly knows what he and his platoon got when they drove to the base: The Iraqi kids were expressing their hearts and minds with rocks and stones.

"On the way back, kids were throwing rocks at us," he said. "I assumed it was because we gave them deflated soccer balls.

Maybe if we had given them inflated soccer balls, they would have been out playing soccer."

GI Special: thomasfbarton@earthlink.net 4.28.05 Print it out (color best). Pass it on.

GI SPECIAL 3B13:



Tactical Painting
From Soldier X 4.25.05

You Can't Eat A Soccer Ball

From: Soldier X [Garett Reppenhagen]
To: GI Special
Sent: April 25, 2005
Subject: You Can't Eat A Soccer Ball

In the Autumn of 2004 in Baqubah, Iraq we made a lot of effort after the razing of Fallujah to win back some support of the Iraqi people.

A general distrust grew among the local nationals and it was important to not lead into the elections with negative backlash. There was a surge of insurgent recruiting due to the injustice of destroying Fallujah and we wanted to take the wind out of it.

One of the officer think tanks perched high above real action in Iraq, and high above any common sense, decided it would be a great idea to hand out free soccer balls to the towns in the area.

I thought it was a strange idea from the start.

When we arrived in Iraq we were never greeted with flower baring women and showered with thanks. What we encountered when we confronted the Iraqi people were beggars and peddlers. The kids would approach us with offers on knives, old Iraqi money, whiskey, hashish, bootleg porn, and even prostitution.

Most would beg. First for money. They could buy anything they wanted with an American dollar. Then they would beg for food. It was obvious they were starving for something more nutritious than what their diet allowed.

Then they would beg for clothes, shoes, and school supplies.

I even asked to look in one child's backpack to cure a curiosity on what the school supplies he owned and what the schools were teaching him.

He explained that his father burned the books because it was getting cold outside. Coal is expensive and the Iraqi desert is not in abundance with wood.

After these questions were exhausted they would settle for anything they could see and ask for. All day it was "Mhister, mhister, gimmie mhister" and "for you one dollar mhister". Never once was I begged for a soccer ball.

Alas here we were with an entire train car full of soccer balls, however the one missing ingredient was a pump to inflate them.

Thousands of deflated soccer balls.

You would think that someone would raise a stink about it and get some way to inflate the balls, but not in this army.

This army is commanded by fear.

No one was willing to explain to higher that shit was all fucked up. That would mean it was either their fault or the person they are complaining to. And since the person they complain to is of higher rank, it means that the person complaining is responsible.

But an order is an order and "You will hand out those fucking balls!"

So here we are, a group of sixteen soldiers with deflated soccer balls piled up so high in the humvees we couldn't get to our ammunition.

We drove through the canal crossed Iraqi villages handing out useless sagging plastic to a bunch of hungry children. At first they were grateful. Then some confusion set in. Some tried to play with them by kicking them around and into the sky. They threw them like frisbees and wore them like hats. We shrugged and moved on to the next town away from the pleas "Mhister, fooood mhister"

As we completed our trip and ran out of balls we had to drive through the same towns on the way back.

Deflated soccer balls littered the ground, some were thrown onto houses and in palm trees.

The children at first were not to be seen. But around one corner we were welcomed by the grateful Iraqi children with a rain of rocks.

Many of the soldiers get upset and angry at the kids. They point weapons at them and some even fire off warning shots to scare them.

I just shrink into my turret and let the stones fall about my helmet and weapon shield.

I never blamed them.

Maybe we will be greeted with flowers when we stop handing out destruction, death, fear and deflated waste.

Soldier X

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

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Three U.S. Soldier Killed In Anbar

09 February 2007 Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory, RELEASE No. 20070209-01

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq – Three Soldiers assigned to Multi-National Force-West were killed Thursday from wounds sustained while conducting combat operations in Al Anbar Province.

British Soldier Killed, Five Wounded In Two Prong Basra Resistance Attack

February 09, 2007 Richard Beeston of The Times in Basra, and Devika Bhat

A British soldier has been killed and five more injured after two near-simultaneous attacks today occurred in Basra, The Times has learnt.

One incident involved a roadside bomb striking a British convoy south of Basra at 2.30pm local time (1130am GMT). A spokesman for the Ministry of Defence told Times Online that four soldiers were injured in the attack, with one later dying after being evacuated by helicopter to hospital. He added that one of the three remaining wounded soldiers was in a critical condition.

“Four soldiers were injured, but one subsequently died after evacuation by air to a field hospital,” he said. “Another soldier is in a critical condition.”

The other attack was a rocket strike on the Basra Palace complex, which is the base for several hundred British troops as well housing the British Consulate General and a US consulate. Two British soldiers and an Iraqi civilian were seriously injured in the strike, according to the MOD spokesman.

The spokesman added that all casualties had been taken to the military medical facility based in Basra airport. A Times reporter in Basra witnessed a medical helicopter flying from the city centre to Basra airport.

Usually, military helicopters do not fly in Basra in daylight as it is too dangerous – a rule which is only broken in emergency situations.

Macomb County Marine Dies In Iraq

February 08, 2007 SHELBY TOWNSHIP, Mich. (AP)

A 19-year-old Marine from Macomb County died in Iraq, his father said Thursday.

Tarryl Hill of Shelby Township was killed Wednesday when a bomb exploded under his vehicle, according to Detroit-area television stations WXYZ and WJBK.

“He was proud to be a Marine,” said his father, George Hill.

Hill was a graduate of Southfield-Lathrup High School in Lathrup Village.

St. Mary Central Graduate Dies In Blast In Iraq



Jon B. St. John II

January 30, 2007 Wausau Daily Herald

A Neenah-area soldier who was based with the 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, Texas, was killed Saturday in Iraq.

The parents of Jon B. St. John II, 25, said Monday night their son apparently was killed by an explosive device, although they did not know the exact circumstances.

Jon St. John Sr. said the family, which lives in the Town of Vinland southwest of Neenah, was notified of the death Sunday and was told his body would be returned home within a few days.

St. John was a 1999 graduate of St. Mary Central High School, which at that time was located in Menasha.

St. Mary Principal Sister Rochelle Kerkhof said St. John, an honor roll student, lettered in football and tennis and took part in school plays.

He also attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison, UW-Fox Valley and UW-La Crosse.

In a statement issued this morning, St. John's parents said they supported their son's decision to enter military service. "Our dear son Jon was killed in Iraq on Saturday, January 27th," the statement said. "It was with great pride he was a member of the 1st

Cavalry Division at Ft. Hood, Texas. His family supported his decision to join the Army and finds great comfort in knowing he found military life so gratifying."

Former St. Mary principal Sue Simonsen was saddened and surprised to learn of St. John's death this morning. She hadn't realized he had entered the Army.

"That's Jon," she said. "When he finally decided on a goal, he really went after it."

Simonsen, principal at Holy Spirit School in Kimberly and Darboy, remembered St. John for his easygoing personality. He took life day to day, but challenged others and worked hard at what he wanted to accomplish.

Former St. Mary teacher David Meixl, who now is at Appleton North, remembered St. John as an average student, but above average in his ability to make friends.

St. John had a dry sense of humor and large circle of friends. He could get along with most everyone, Meixl said.

"He was a very nice student," Meixl said. "He was respectful of teachers and others."

Funeral arrangements are pending at O'Connell Funeral Services in Little Chute and will be determined once the family finds out when St. John's body will be returned to the United States.

St. John's parents own a business in Neenah.

St. John is the 69th Wisconsin resident to die as a result of service in Iraq. Six others have died as a result of service in Afghanistan.

Marine From Ballwin Killed In Iraq

2/9/2007 KSDK

A U.S. Marine from Ballwin has been killed in Iraq.

Lance Cpl. Matthew Pathenos, 21, was killed in action earlier this week.

His family issued the following statement:

"The Pathenos & Erney families wish to thank everyone for their thoughts and prayers on behalf of their son Matthew, a U.S. Marine who was killed in Fallujah, Iraq, on February 7, 2007.

Matthew, a graduate of Parkway South High School class of 2003 in Ballwin, was serving his first tour in Iraq. Like his brother Christopher, he was proud to be a Marine and volunteered to serve his country. Matthew paid the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom and the future generations of this country.

He loved his country and family and we will miss him terribly.

The family asks that their privacy be respected during their time of grief.

Services will be held at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church date and time to be announced."

El Pasoan Dies In Iraq 7 Days After Arriving

02/09/2007 By Chris Roberts, El Paso Times

An El Paso Navy corpsman who had been in Iraq seven days was killed Wednesday when the Marine CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter he was riding in crashed in Al Anbar Province.

Navy Hospital Corpsman First Class Gilbert Minjares Jr., 31, a 1994 Hanks High School graduate, died with six others in the helicopter crash. Before leaving for Iraq, Minjares told his brother that if anything happened to him, his children should know he served so they could grow up without fear in a free country.

"He gave me all his clothes and stuff, like he knew what was going to happen," Jose Minjares, Gilbert's brother, said Thursday evening. "He told me, 'If anything happens, I want you to let my kids know I did it for them.' "

Minjares is survived by his wife, a 2-year-old son and a 4-week-old baby who are living in North Carolina, said Eddie Pedregon, the seaman's cousin. Gilbert Minjares also worked as a recruiter in El Paso, Jose Minjares said.

"He always wanted to give to others before he gave to himself," Pedregon said. "His dream was to save Marines."

As a corpsman, the Marines' equivalent of an Army medic, that was his job.

At Hanks, Minjares was a starter on the football team who played both fullback and quarterback. And even as a young man, his brother looked out for friends and relatives, tending to minor injuries, Jose Minjares said.

"He (didn't want) to see anybody suffer," Jose Minjares said. "He just wanted the best for all of us."

Gilbert Minjares joined the Navy about a month after graduating from high school, his brother said. The seaman was happy-go-lucky, loved his family and his home and had no doubts about his service or heading to Iraq to do his duty, his brother added. "He said he'd rather go fight over there than have to fight (terrorism) over here," the brother said. "He was a brave, brave man."

When Jose Minjares went to see his brother off at the airport three weeks ago, he spoke words of support.

"I don't want you to worry about your kids," Jose Minjares told his older brother. "I'll take them under my wing."

Local Marine Seriously Injured In Iraq

2/8/2007 By Cordell Whitlock, (KSDK)

A local marine is headed to a German hospital after being seriously injured in Iraq. Sgt. Casey Helms is from Bismarck, Mo., about 65 miles southwest of St. Louis.

Diane Helms found out Thursday morning her son's platoon was targeted by a roadside bomber.

"I feel for everyone that has to go through this because last night was the longest night of my life," said Diane.

At first Diane only knew her son was injured by a roadside bomb in Iraq. At 6:15 a.m. Thursday, her phone rang and Casey was on the other line. "He said, 'Mom,' a couple of times and that he loved me. I told him I loved him and to hang in there," said Diane.

Then Casey's doctor gave Diane more information. "There were several casualties and Casey had been hit pretty good with a lot of fragments."

Shrapnel pierced Casey's face including an eye, his arms and legs and he suffered a punctured lung.

The 23 year old spent the night under observation, while waiting to be transported to Germany.

"I closed my eyes around 4:30 (Thursday) morning and all I could think was him lying in that hospital bed and nobody was holding him ... total strangers around him," said Diane.

Diane said Casey enlisted four years ago to earn money for college. The Marines called her Thursday night to let her know Casey was on his way to a German hospital.

Diane said during the next call she will ask when and where she can see her son.

"I probably won't let go of him for a long time. It's going to hurt because I probably can't hug him as much as I will want to when I see him," said Diane.

Casey is in stable condition. This is his second tour of duty in Iraq.

When he returns home, he plans on studying physical therapy at St. Louis Community College - Meramec.

Crockett Marine Killed In Iraq

01/27/07 by Larry Little, KTRE

Saturday evening, friends and family of Marine Corporal Jacob Neal gathered in Kennard, coping with their loss. Neal died last week in combat while serving in Iraq.

"It's been hard. It's been sad. We are going to miss our son. You know, we haven't seen him in a while," says Perry Neal.

"It is pretty hard. We were real close all my life. I just miss him," says Jason Neal, Jacob's brother.

Family members say Neal talked about joining the military after graduating from Crockett High, but 9/11 made Neal sure he wanted to serve his country.

"When 9-11 happened, he told me he really wanted to go over there. I went with him when he signed up. He wanted to go to Iraq," says Jason Neal.

Though saddened by his death, the family can smile through their pain, knowing Marine Corporal Jacob Neal died a hero. A funeral service will be held Monday at 2 p.m. at the Crockett Civic Center.

Traverse City Central Grad Wounded By Bomb In Iraq



Army Spc. Evan Cole, a graduate of Traverse City Central High School. Special to the Record-Eagle

02/03/2007 By Vanessa McCray, Traverse City Record-Eagle

TRAVERSE CITY — Evan Cole wanted to be a combat soldier since he was 6 years old.

"He would play with little Army men figures and set up all the battles," said his mother Shawn Burt.

The 2002 Traverse City Central High School graduate and U.S. Army specialist experienced that life and escaped several close calls during two tours of Iraq before being severely wounded in the war-torn country this week.

Cole, 22, was injured in Ramadi, family members said Friday. He fractured his pelvis, broke his right arm and leg in multiple places, suffered a laceration to his liver and superficial shrapnel wounds when his armored vehicle rolled over an improvised explosive device.

Family members said it appears Cole has a good chance to make a full recovery. Two of his companions on the patrol were killed, and the driver also injured, Burt said.

"Evan immediately lost consciousness, so he did not really see or really know what happened until he heard reports," she said.

The phone rang at 3:15 a.m. Wednesday at Burt's house. It was Cole, calling to tell his mother the news. She didn't get to the phone in time. He called his father Donald Cole in Elk Rapids, who already had heard from Evan's wife in Germany where he is based.

"When the phone first rang, I, of course, had this immediate sense of dread," his father said.

Donald Cole was filled with relief when he learned his son was alive but remains "very concerned" about the injuries.

Cole was flown to Baghdad where he twice underwent surgery. He was later hospitalized at Landstuhl, a military hospital in Germany where he is now. The family is waiting to find out where he will recuperate, and they plan to join him there.

Donald Cole said his son was awarded a Purple Heart for his injuries.

The two soldiers who died were "close friends" of Cole, Burt said.

"That is as difficult or more difficult to recover from than the actual physical wounds," she said.

Cole has long been interested in the soldier's life. By sixth grade, he was an "expert" in Civil War battles, his mother said. He read up on the Revolutionary War and battle strategies and enlisted in the service at 17.

"We had to sign for him," Burt said.

Supporting her son's dream took some convincing. Burt looked to God to provide protection and peace when her nerves were tested by Cole's dangerous circumstances.

"We just accepted it, the fact that he has always wanted to be a soldier," said grandmother Creta Vartti.

The Great Baghdad Surge Clusterfuck: "They Were All Dry Holes" As U.S. And Collaborator Commands Fight Each Other, Troops In The Field Find Nothing Much

Although Iraqi units have been arriving on schedule, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said last week that they were coming with only 55 to 65 percent of their intended troops.

[Thanks to Pham Binh, Traveling Soldier, who sent this in.]

Feb 9 By RYAN LENZ, Associated Press Writer

Iraqi commanders are urging the Americans to go after Sunni targets as the first focus of the military push to secure Baghdad, displaying a sectarian tilt that is delaying full implementation of the plan to drive gunmen from the streets, U.S. officers say.

American officers, interviewed at the sprawling Camp Victory base at the western edge of the capital, also acknowledge they are finding little in their initial searches of Baghdad neighborhoods — suggesting either they received faulty intelligence or that the massive publicity that preceded the operation gave militants time to slip away.

The chief military spokesman, Maj. Gen. William B. Caldwell, said Wednesday that the much-anticipated Baghdad security operation was under way.

U.S. officers told The Associated Press that the delays in implementing the plan were in part a result of disagreements between American and Iraqi commanders about what neighborhoods should be cleared first.

During joint planning sessions, the Iraqis have been urging U.S. officials to focus on neighborhoods believed to harbor Sunni insurgents, according to officers familiar with the discussions. They spoke on condition of anonymity because the subject is sensitive.

But one Iraqi general, speaking on condition of anonymity, acknowledged there were differences between U.S. and Iraqi planners on the best way to conduct the operation, with each side insisting on the final say.

The Iraqi said his colleagues have the feeling the Americans "don't trust us."

The U.S. officers said they had no intention of knuckling under to the Iraqi demands and were confident the Iraqis would come around in the end. But the dispute has resulted in delays, they said. [The nerve of those Iraqis. If they don't like it, why don't they go back where they came from?]

Those differences have also held up a final decision how to carve up the city into the nine zones and where to deploy Iraqi units that are being sent in for the operation, U.S. and Iraqi officials said.

Iraqi commanders are supposed to send about 8,000 mostly Shiite and Kurdish troops into the city from southern and northern Iraq.

Although Iraqi units have been arriving on schedule, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said last week that they were coming with only 55 to 65 percent of their intended troops.

This week, a joint U.S.-Iraqi force swept through Shaab, a largely Shiite neighborhood in northeast Baghdad where militiamen clashed with American soldiers last year.

The search was the largest so far since the new operation began.

But the troops managed to capture only 16 suspects and seize three Kalashnikov rifles in a neighborhood that intelligence said was a hotbed of bomb-makers.

"I don't know if it's bad information, bad intelligence, or if they knew we were coming and left," said Capt. Isaac Torres of the Army's 3rd Brigade Stryker Combat Team.

"They were all dry holes."

MORE:

Famous Last Words

A U.S.-Iraqi offensive against militants in Baghdad will begin within days and take place on a scale never seen during four years of war. Washington Times, February 5, 2007

Resistance Doubles IED Deployment

February 7, 2007 Washington Times

The enemy in Iraq has been able to deploy twice as many improvised explosive devices now than a year ago.

**FUTILE EXERCISE:
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW!**



12.3.06 US marines preparing to attach an M198 Medium Howitzer to an approaching CH-53 E helicopter at the al-Asad military camp in Ramadi. (AFP/USMC/Staff Sgt. Jim Goodwin)

TROOP NEWS

**South COM Traitors In Uniform
Threaten Honorable Marine
Corps Sgt. For Exposing
Violence Against Guantanamo
Prisoners;**

Her Commanding Officer Calls Faked Investigation Of Abuse “Outrageous” He Says Investigating Officers “Walked Straight Into Her Office With The Intent To Accuse Her Of A Crime”



Heather Cerveny, Marine Corps Sgt.

"The investigating officers, a colonel and a captain, walked straight into her office with the intent to accuse her of a crime before she even opened her mouth. The colonel already had the form in his hand to read her her rights and accuse her, before the interview started."

February 09, 2007 Vic Walter and Krista Kjellman Report, ABC News.com

An investigation by the U.S. Southern Command into allegations of prisoner abuse at Guantanamo Bay detention center has concluded that "insufficient evidence exists to substantiate the paralegal's allegations."

But Lieutenant Colonel Colby Vokey, the superior officer to the Marine sergeant who filed the allegations, called the investigation "outrageous."

"I am aware that the investigators interviewed only the suspects and some witnesses but did not interview any detainees or potential victims," he told ABC News. "Failure to interview those who may have been subjected to abuse is indicative of an incomplete investigation."

As first reported on "The Blotter" on ABCNews.com, Heather Cerveny, 23, a Marine Corps sergeant, who spent a week on the base last September working as a legal aide

to Lt. Col. Vokey, said she was "shocked" to hear several guards from different parts of the base openly speak of mistreating prisoners.

One said, "I took the detainee by the head and smashed his head into the cell door," she told ABC News in October after filing a sworn affidavit with the Pentagon Inspector General. Another "was telling his buddy, 'Yeah, this one detainee, you know, really pissed me off, irritated me. So I just, you know, punched him in the face.'"

The following investigation by South COM, which oversees military activities in the Caribbean and Latin America, looked into Cerveny's account and another filed by a civilian employee on the base that recounted a conversation between a female guard and a male interrogator on a training range.

After interviewing 20 suspects and witnesses and combing through "three JTF-Guantanamo records systems used to trace detainee-guard interaction," investigators determined, "The evidence did not support any of the allegations of mistreatment and harassment."

Amongst the recommendations issued by the investigating officer but ultimately rejected by the SouthCom commander following the investigation was "that disciplinary or other action be taken against Sergeant Cerveny," which Lt. Col Vokey says is the most "outrageous part of the investigation."

"The interview of her was ridiculous and oppressive," he said.

"The investigating officers, a colonel and a captain, walked straight into her office with the intent to accuse her of a crime before she even opened her mouth. The colonel already had the form in his hand to read her her rights and accuse her, before the interview started."

Lt. Col. Vokey says this investigation sets a dangerous precedent for all officers who find themselves in a position to report suspected criminal activity.

"This was outrageous and sends a dangerous message to all our service members: you'd better not report anything that goes on at Guantanamo Bay, or you'll be threatened or charged with a crime."

“Defense Budget Near Historic Highs, Even When Adjusted For Inflation” “A Future Of Even Larger Defense Budgets”

2.5.07 Los Angeles Times

The administration is expected to request a defense budget of \$481 billion — near historic highs, even when adjusted for inflation.

But if the military's top officers have their way, the budget proposal may be only a precursor to a future of even larger defense budgets.

[Well, who needed education, health care, and all that shit anyhow?]

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



Funeral services of Staff Sgt. Jamie D. Wilson, of San Diego, at Arlington National Cemetery, Feb. 2, 2007. Wilson died last month in Fallujah of wounds suffered in Karmah. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin)

U.S. AIR FARCE JUSTICE

2.9.07 from: Marc Liggin

Stars and Stripes (Feb. 8, 2007): Senior Airman Welland Wilkerson, an aircraft maintainer, was sentenced to reduction from pay grade E-4 to E-1, 30 days in jail and a reprimand. He was busted for having a film clip on his MySpace showing a person "throwing a frog into a running F-16 engine intake."

Officials said Wilkerson tried to throw a frog into the engine but missed...Another airman subsequently threw a frog into the engine.

Airman Wilkerson was removed from any duties that required him to perform aircraft maintenance. [YOU THINK?]

Stars and Stripes (Feb. 6, 2007): Meanwhile, at Aviano Air Base in Italy, Staff Sgt Forehand pleaded not guilty to indecent assault, house breaking and peeping. He pleaded not guilty at his general court martial.

Stars and Stripes (Oct 23, 2006): Also in Italy an Air Force staff sergeant received an Article 15...for signing a false official statement and procuring a prostitute.

The airman appears to be the only servicemember assigned in Europe who has been charged with the new violation. The offender was an Air Force staff sergeant assigned to the 725th Air Mobility Squadron at Moron Air Base, Spain.

Prostitutes at two brothels about a five-minute walk from Pulaski Barracks in Kaiserslautern, Germany, were asked about troops' recent behavior.

"We have about 10 to 15 per day or more," said one prostitute, who did not want to be named.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

Honorable Discard From The U.S. Military



From: Mike Hastie
To: GI Special
Sent: February 08, 2007
Subject: Honorable Discard From The U.S. Military

Honorable Discard From The U.S. Military

**Mike Hastie
U.S. Army Medic
Vietnam 1970-71
Two Psyche Hospitalizations
for suicidal behavior with plan.
Numerous trips to the VA Hospital
Emergency Dept. for panic attacks.
Diagnosis: Pure hatred for the
United States Government for
conduct unbecoming of a
country who betrayed its
sons and daughters in time of war.
Otherwise known as: PTSD**

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)

***Words Of Prophecy:* The Soldiers Will End The War**

From: Felicity Arbuthnot
To: GI Special
Sent: February 09, 2007 3:20 PM
Subject: Pilger: the soldiers will end the war.

I thought you might be interested in this quote from my friend John Pilger at the end of this article (I was looking for something and fell over it and had forgotten).

It is uncannily clairvoyant, re: it is only the soldiers who can do it - end the war - and they will.

[The article by Felicity Arbuthnot is "The Handover to the 'Sovereign' Iraqi Government, June 30, 2004, Global Research]

From 2004:

"Bremer's departure is in keeping with most colonial scuttles. The Americans believed they and their stooge regime would triumph in Vietnam, right to the bitter end and they were wrong.

"The Bremer/Bush project is no different.

"A chasm of bloodshed and failure awaits them.

"Perhaps only when American soldiers begin to mutiny openly, as they did in Vietnam, will the game be finally up.

"Unfortunately, that will not happen tomorrow, but it will happen."

Troops Invited:

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 email contact@militaryproject.org:. Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Replies confidential. Same address to unsubscribe.

**“I Failed To Disobey A Meritless
Order, I Failed To Protect A
Prisoner In My Custody, And I
Failed To Uphold The Standards
Of Human Decency”**
**“The Story Of Abu Ghraib Isn’t Over.
In Many Ways, We Have Yet To Open
The Book”**

February 9, 2007 By Eric Fair, Washington Post.[Excerpts]

The writer served in the Army from 1995 to 2000 as an Arabic linguist and worked in Iraq as a contract interrogator in early 2004.

A man with no face stares at me from the corner of a room. He pleads for help, but I'm afraid to move. He begins to cry. It is a pitiful sound, and it sickens me. He screams, but as I awaken, I realize the screams are mine.

That dream, along with a host of other nightmares, has plagued me since my return from Iraq in the summer of 2004.

Though the man in this particular nightmare has no face, I know who he is.

I assisted in his interrogation at a detention facility in Fallujah.

I was one of two civilian interrogators assigned to the division interrogation facility (DIF) of the 82nd Airborne Division. The man, whose name I've long since forgotten, was a suspected associate of Khamis Sirhan al-Muhammad, the Baath Party leader in Anbar province who had been captured two months earlier.

The lead interrogator at the DIF had given me specific instructions: I was to deprive the detainee of sleep during my 12-hour shift by opening his cell every hour, forcing him to stand in a corner and stripping him of his clothes.

Three years later the tables have turned. It is rare that I sleep through the night without a visit from this man. His memory harasses me as I once harassed him.

Despite my best efforts, I cannot ignore the mistakes I made at the interrogation facility in Fallujah.

I failed to disobey a meritless order, I failed to protect a prisoner in my custody, and I failed to uphold the standards of human decency.

Instead, I intimidated, degraded and humiliated a man who could not defend himself.

I compromised my values.

I will never forgive myself.

American authorities continue to insist that the abuse of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib was an isolated incident in an otherwise well-run detention system.

That insistence, however, stands in sharp contrast to my own experiences as an interrogator in Iraq.

I watched as detainees were forced to stand naked all night, shivering in their cold cells and pleading with their captors for help. Others were subjected to long periods of isolation in pitch-black rooms. Food and sleep deprivation were common, along with a variety of physical abuse, including punching and kicking.

Aggressive, and in many ways abusive, techniques were used daily in Iraq, all in the name of acquiring the intelligence necessary to bring an end to the insurgency. The violence raging there today is evidence that those tactics never worked.

My memories are evidence that those tactics were terribly wrong.

While I was appalled by the conduct of my friends and colleagues, I lacked the courage to challenge the status quo.

That was a failure of character and in many ways made me complicit in what went on. I'm ashamed of that failure, but as time passes, and as the memories of what I saw in Iraq continue to infect my every thought, I'm becoming more ashamed of my silence.

Some may suggest there is no reason to revive the story of abuse in Iraq. Rehashing such mistakes will only harm our country, they will say.

We have failed to properly address the abuse of Iraqi detainees.

Men like me have refused to tell our stories, and our leaders have refused to own up to the myriad mistakes that have been made. But if we fail to address this problem, there can be no hope of success in Iraq. Regardless of how many young Americans we send to war, or how many militia members we kill, or how many Iraqis we train, or how much money we spend on reconstruction, we will not escape the damage we have done to the people of Iraq in our prisons.

I am desperate to get on with my life and erase my memories of my experiences in Iraq. But those memories and experiences do not belong to me. They belong to history.

If we're doomed to repeat the history we forget, what will be the consequences of the history we never knew?

The citizens and the leadership of this country have an obligation to revisit what took place in the interrogation booths of Iraq, unpleasant as it may be.

The story of Abu Ghraib isn't over.

In many ways, we have yet to open the book.

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

OCCUPATION REPORT

Who Says It's Not Vietnam?
**Baghdad Warehouse Found Full Of U.S.
Uniforms And Equipment**

2.5.07 Colorado Springs Gazette

U.S. soldiers on a recent Baghdad patrol uncovered a huge stash of American uniforms and equipment at a warehouse that could have been used to disguise scores of insurgents in a sneak attack. **[And then there's the warehouses they didn't find....]**

***Winning Hearts And Minds:* Bush Regime Changes Passport Rules To Keep Iraqis Out**

February 7, 2007 Boston Globe

The U.S. government last month stopped accepting all but the latest version of Iraqi passports, effectively barring hundreds — potentially thousands — of Iraqis with valid U.S. visas from entering the U.S.

\$12 Billion Went Missing In Baghdad: “This Was Happening When American Soldiers And Marines Were Going Without Properly Armored Vehicles, Without Lifesaving Body Armor And Even Without Some Of The Weapons They Needed”

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

Perhaps we should let a no-bid cost-plus contract to Halliburton to construct large additions to the country club federal prisons to accommodate a population explosion in the years ahead. Or, for convenience sake, maybe we could just add a prison wing to the \$500 million George W. Bush Presidential Library at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

Feb. 07, 2007 By JOSEPH L. GALLOWAY, McClatchy Newspapers [Excerpts]

Show me the money, or at least some receipts scribbled on the backs of old envelopes and grocery bags.

This week, we were treated to the spectacle of the former U.S. civilian overlord of Iraq, Ambassador L. Paul Bremer, squirming in the hot seat as he attempted with little success to explain what he did with 363 TONS of newly printed, shrink-wrapped \$100 bills he had flown to Baghdad.

That's \$12 billion in cold, hard American cash, and no one, especially Bremer, seems to know where it went.

I can think of no period in American history when we sat idly by while \$12 billion just disappeared, poof, without a paper trail; without heads rolling; without someone going to prison.

And all this was happening at a time in the war when American soldiers and Marines were going without properly armored vehicles, without lifesaving body armor and even without some of the weapons they needed.

What does it take for the American people's gag reflex to kick in? When do we begin to realize that this is only the tip of an iceberg of fraud, waste, abuse and corruption perpetrated on a monumental scale by the Bush administration, its buddies among the military contractors and their handmaidens on Capitol Hill?

The cost of this war is swiftly building toward a trillion dollars. How much of that was siphoned off by crooked and incompetent contractors, greedy defense corporations and Iraqi crooks in a government that we created and installed?

No one in the congressional hearing has yet asked Bremer or the inspector general how much of that \$12 billion in cash was handed out to American contractors in Baghdad, although that question begs to be asked and answered.

We've wasted \$600 billion on a war that we're losing, day by bloody day, at a time when our president presents a federal budget that cuts Medicare to fund billions for more that war.

The Decider boasts that if we do things his way, America's wealthiest individuals won't have to pay even one dollar more in taxes.

Meanwhile, the people's representatives, on both sides of the aisle, round up the contributions they need for re-election by putting themselves in the pockets of the very robber barons they're supposed to be investigating, interrogating and policing.

Perhaps we should let a no-bid cost-plus contract to Halliburton to construct large additions to the country club federal prisons to accommodate a population explosion in the years ahead.

Or, for convenience sake, maybe we could just add a prison wing to the \$500 million George W. Bush Presidential Library at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



[Thanks to Pham Binh, Traveling Soldier, who sent this in.]

“I’m Disappointed They Don’t Immediately Stop The Troops From Going To Iraq. I Can’t Conceive That They Would Just Sit There And Talk”

[Thanks to Pham Binh, Traveling Soldier, who sent this in.]

Feb 9 By JIM KUHNHENN, Associated Press Writer

Three months after a power shifting election, a majority of Americans still disapprove of Congress — a sign of public impatience with the new Democratic majority even among party loyalists.

According to the poll, 65 percent of those surveyed disapprove of the way the president is handling his job, slightly up from his disapproval ratings last month. As for Congress, 58 percent disapproved of the work of lawmakers, a slight decrease from last month and a 14 percentage-point decrease from congressional disapproval last October.

Added Eleanore Putman, 86, of Deltona, Fla.: "The Democrats, right now, don't seem to be progressing well. They don't agree on much. I'm disappointed they don't immediately stop the troops from going to Iraq that Bush wants. I can't conceive that they would just sit there and talk."

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)

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<http://imagineaworldof.blogspot.com/>; <http://gi-special.iraq-news.de>;

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