

GI SPECIAL 5C2:



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

“The Army Is Deliberately Shortchanging Troops On Their Disability Retirement Ratings To Hold Down Costs”

Feb 24, 2007 By Kelly Kennedy & Feb 23, 2007 William H. McMichael, Army Times Staff writers [Excerpts]

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

The Army is deliberately shortchanging troops on their disability retirement ratings to hold down costs, according to veterans' advocates, lawyers and services members, and the Inspector General has identified 87 problems in the system that need fixing.

"These people are being systematically underrated," said Ron Smith, deputy general counsel for Disabled American Veterans.

"It's a bureaucratic game to preserve the budget, and it's having an adverse affect on service members."

The numbers of people approved for permanent or temporary disability retirement in the Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force have stayed relatively stable since 2001.

But in the Army — in the midst of a war — the number of soldiers approved for permanent disability retirement has plunged by more than two-thirds, from 642 in 2001 to 209 in 2005, according to a Government Accountability Office report last year.

That decline has come even as the war in Iraq has intensified and the total number of soldiers wounded or injured there has soared above 15,000.

The Army denies there is any intentional effort to push wounded troops off the military rolls.

But critics say many troops being evaluated for possible disability retirement accept the first rating they are offered during their first informal board — but that if they were to request a formal board, and then appeal the decision of that board, they would receive higher ratings.

The system is complicated — "unduly so," the Rand Corp. think tank said in a 2005 report — and the counselors who advise troops often have insufficient training or experience.

Service members also assume that after months spent in a war zone, the military will look out for them, critics say.

Those who try to navigate the process beyond their initial evaluation — to include hundreds of combat veterans in limbo at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington — face long waits, lost paperwork and months or even years away from home as they try to complete the process.

If they receive a rating of above 30 percent, they receive disability retirement pay, medical benefits, and commissary privileges. Those rated under 30 percent receive severance pay and no benefits.

Many eventually give up and take their chances with the Department of Veterans Affairs, which may give a higher rating for the same disability.

But under the separate disability payment systems of the Defense Department and the VA, a higher VA rating does not necessarily translate into more money — and forgoing military disability retirement also means giving up lifetime commissary and exchange privileges, military health care and other benefits.

While the number of soldiers placed on permanent disability retirement has declined in the past five years, the number placed on temporary disability retirement — with medical conditions that officials rule might improve so they can return to work over time or worsen to the point that they must be permanently retired — has increased more than fourfold, from 165 in 2001 to 837 in 2005.

Troops on temporary disability leave convalesce for 18 months while receiving reduced basic pay. After 1½ years, they are reevaluated and either returned to duty, or rated for separation or permanent disability retirement, or sent back to temporary disability for another 18 months — up to five years.

Along with paying them reduced wages during that time, the eventual reevaluation often leads to downward revisions in their disability ratings — and lower disability payments.

Service members' conditions must be deemed stable before they receive a permanent disability rating, unless they are rated at less than 30 percent.

In that case, they are discharged with severance pay — whether they are in stable condition or not. If their conditions then worsen, they'll receive no more money from the military.

Compared to the overall size of the defense budget, disability retirement costs are relatively small. In 2004, the military paid more than \$1.2 billion in permanent and temporary disability benefits to 90,000 people, the GAO said.

Smith said he began hearing tales about two years ago of service members who said they were not getting proper disability ratings based on the VA Schedule for Rating — the document used by both the military services and the VA to determine percentage ratings for disabilities, which in turn sets compensation rates.

"I finally decided to take on a case myself," Smith said. "It's been a while since I took a case."

He found an Army captain whose radial nerve in his right arm had been destroyed in Iraq — the same injury that has left Bob Dole, the World War II veteran and former Kansas senator, unable to use his arm to do more than hold a pen.

Smith followed the captain through the physical evaluation board process. He said that under the ratings schedule, this was an easy call: 70 percent disability. But at his first informal medical evaluation board, the captain initially was offered just 30 percent, and he had to fight to raise it to 60 percent through a subsequent formal evaluation board and then a final appeal.

“His first offer ... I couldn't believe it,” Smith said. “I was just incensed.”

Many troops accept the first rating offered them at their initial informal evaluation board, Smith said. “Soldiers are trained. When the evaluation board says, ‘This is what you get,’ the soldiers say, ‘Yes sir.’ A lot of people don’t appeal.”

Dennis Brower, legal advisor for the Army's Physical Disability Agency, acknowledged as much, saying only 10 percent of soldiers request a formal board.

But when the Army wouldn't budge on raising the captain's rating above 60 percent, Smith took the case a step beyond where most soldiers can go.

“I called the adjutant general and said I wanted a meeting,” Smith said — and added that if he didn't get one, he was “going to Congress.”

That was in January. He got his meeting. He has demanded that the Army's Physical Disability Agency look for patterns of incremental increases in disability ratings as troops move through the process, and how closely their ratings match what the VA schedule mandates.

Smith is still waiting to hear back, but suspects the pattern will show that a large proportion of troops with less than 20 years of service — who don't already qualify for retirement — are rated at under 30 percent, the threshold for being considered for disability retirement pay and all other military benefits that come with it.

Many of those troops instead receive one-time, lump-sum disability severance pay that is much lower in value than lifetime retirement compensation.

Army Lt. Col. Mike Parker was diagnosed with reactive arthritis, which causes painful swelling and eventual calcification of the joints. He was put on drugs that suppress his immune system, but kept on active duty — even though his medication must be refrigerated and he must remain near specialized medical care.

Without a suppressed immune system, there is no chance of him being deployed, much less to a combat zone. “If I get shot, it's not good,” he said.

Though pleased that he could continue to serve, he wondered how a medical evaluation board could find him fit. After he talked to a dozen other service members from all branches with similar diagnoses of reactive arthritis or ankylosing spondylitis, he realized they were all evaluated based on different criteria. He produced hundreds of pages of medical records, letters and rulings to support his claims.

Some were handed disability ratings that would provide them with the \$20,000 in drugs that they would need for the rest of their lives, while others were told they had preexisting conditions and given no benefits.

Still others — including some with medical evidence proving otherwise — were told that because their diseases had improved and would not worsen, their

disability ratings were based on the idea that they had improved from chronic illnesses that, in reality, could worsen.

Parker began making calls — to lawmakers, doctors, veterans' groups and the media. He sought out troops having problems and offered to help them through the process, piecing together medical paperwork to make sure people got what they deserved.

He said he has seen case after frustrating case of the services ignoring their own rules. For example, an evaluation board is supposed to provide “clear and unerring evidence” for a ruling that a particular condition was preexisting — but Parker said that often does not happen.

He cited a Marine who had received a 10 percent disability rating for post-traumatic stress disorder from a Navy physical evaluation board — and was later rated at 50 percent for the same condition by the VA, using the same ratings schedule and the same medical records.

In May 2003, Army Cpl. Richard Twohig was thrown from an armored personnel carrier in Iraq. The 82nd Airborne Division paratrooper landed on his head, said his lawyer, Mark Waple, of Fayetteville, N.C.

Twohig suffers headaches at least once a week that last up to 14 hours, as well as short-term memory loss, and is dependent on pain medication.

“This is well substantiated by his doctors — Army medical doctors,” Waple said.

But his physical evaluation board rated him only 10 percent disabled for another injury because he had no substantive proof the headaches were a result of the accident — even though regulations call for evaluation boards to give troops the benefit of the doubt in such instances.

“I believe it is budget-related,” Waple said. “I believe that there is a feeling the service member should turn to the VA for both their health care and their veterans' benefits.”

Twohig can't work because of the disabling headaches, and even if he receives VA benefits, his family has lost its medical insurance.

And if a physical evaluation board rules that injuries are not related to service or were preexisting conditions, troops are not eligible for VA benefits, either.

Waple said he began helping soldiers through the physical evaluation board process in the 1970s while he was still an Army lawyer, and he said he has watched the system change since the wars began in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The system “has become less friendly toward service members with compensable decisions on disability” in the past few years, especially since the war in Iraq began, Waple said.

“I think there is a definite bias on the physical evaluation board to medically separate service members with a zero-, 10- or 20-percent disability rating when it ... should be medical retirement.”

Waple said he has about a dozen cases out of Fort Bragg, N.C., similar to Twohig's.

Army Spc. Ruben Villalpando, who was featured in the Military Times coverage of the problems at Walter Reed, said that since the stories were published, contractors have fixed the elevator in Building 18 — the facility where troops on “medical hold” are housed — and have inspected each room to determine what needs to be fixed.

But more importantly to him, a Judge Advocate General lawyer looked at his case after he filed a complaint that he received no disability rating because his depression was ruled to have existed prior to his enlisting.

Villalpando said he became depressed because his cousin, a Marine, was electrocuted while they were both serving in Iraq. He has been at Walter Reed for just over a year.

“The JAG wanted to know how they knew it was existing prior to service if they didn't have my medical records,” Villalpando said.

He has appealed that decision, and his appeal is still pending. “I'm keeping my fingers crossed,” he said.

Spc. Nick Helffarich, 22, is intimately familiar with both of the Army's new concerns at Walter Reed. Helffarich was injured in Mosul, Iraq, during a midnight roadside bomb sweep. The March 7, 2006, explosion left him with a lacerated liver, a broken pelvis, vertebrae and wrist, and lung and ear damage. He's been at Walter Reed for nearly a year.

For months, he lived where most recovering vets live at Walter Reed: in the on-campus Mologne House, with its curtained, well-appointed lobby, wall sconces and housekeeping service. Both Mologne and Building 18 were once hotels, but clearly from different sides of the tracks. Helffarich moved into Building 18, across the street and south of the main gate, two months ago.

In one respect, he said, the accommodations are “exceptional. ... It's not Iraq.” But he suddenly found himself in a room with a broken shower, no trash can and a cockroach problem. He's seen mice running in the building.

He's also just started his medical review board process, and although he's just a few weeks into it, it already seems slow. “We have a medical board counselor,” he said.

“Mine, personally, is really hard to get hold of. I've had appointments where I've talked to the head manager over there, and she's like, come in at this time and see your counselor.

“And I'd go in for my scheduled appointment, and she's not even there.”

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Marine Killed In Anbar

03/01/07 Multi National Corps Iraq Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory: RELEASE No. 20070302-01

A Marine assigned to Multi National Force-West was killed Feb. 28 while conducting combat operations in Al Anbar Province.

Bay City Marine Dies In Iraq; “A Shot Went Right Through His Armor”

Mar. 01, 2007 Associated Press

BAY CITY, Mich. - A Marine from Bay City was shot and killed at a checkpoint in Iraq, his mother said.

Pfc. Bufford "Kenny" VanSlyke, 22, was slain Tuesday night in Fallujah, said his mother Cindy L. Fisher, 44, of Bay City.

"Kenny did the checkpoints and he had all his gear on, but (a shot) went right through his armor," Fisher told The Bay City Times for a story Thursday.

"He was my hero. He was so young and his wife just had a baby, and he'll never get to see him again," she said.

Along with his mother, father and two stepparents, VanSlyke leaves behind a wife, Kortni, and the couple's 4-month-old son, Kaiden, in Bay City.

Once Again, Clark High Is Hit By The Death Of A Graduate In Iraq

02/15/2007 Scott Huddleston, Express-News

For the second time in less than three weeks, a San Antonio high school has lost one of its graduates to the war in Iraq.

Pfc. Nickolas Aaron Tanton, 24, died Tuesday from unspecified "noncombat" injuries, according to the Defense Department.

Suddenly, with the war near the end of its fourth year, administrators, teachers and students at Clark High School have been stung by the deaths of two former graduates.

On Jan. 27, Cpl. Timothy A. Swanson, 21, a 2003 Clark graduate, was one of three soldiers who died in Taji, Iraq, after an improvised explosive device detonated near their vehicle.

Tanton, a 2001 Clark graduate on his first tour of duty in Iraq, is the 25th San Antonian to die there.

"Our hearts go out to his family," Clark Principal Stan Laing said Thursday. "Unfortunately, this is not the first time we've had to deal with this, this year.

"This certainly is a tight community," he said. "We're going to be looking at a campus that's going to be mourning one of our Clark members that we've lost."

Tanton's family declined interviews, but released a statement describing him as a loving, caring son and brother who relished music and laughter.

"Nick was a family guy with a big heart and always knew how to have a good time, whether it was at home or out with his buddies," the statement said.

His life was never "lived as a political statement," the write-up said, adding, "He was an individual who believed that life was meant to be lived, and he meant to live it."

Born on Jan. 20, 1983, Tanton joined the Army on Jan. 13, 2005, and graduated from basic training at Fort Jackson in Columbia, S.C. He received further training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., and Fort Sam Houston.

Tanton was serving with the 25th Infantry Division, based at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, and operating out of Kirkuk as a chemical, biological and high explosive identification and defense specialist.

The Defense Department did not specify the nature of Tanton's death, but said it is under investigation. "We haven't gotten any information on that yet," said Donna Klapakis, spokeswoman with U.S. Army Garrison Hawaii at Schofield Barracks.

No funeral arrangements have been announced.

Regardless of the cause of death, Laing said his school and others in the Northside Independent School District likely will fly the U.S. flag a half-staff on the day of Tanton's funeral, as it did with Swanson. Though it's been several years since Tanton sat in the school's classrooms and walked its halls, some teachers remember him and were saddened to hear of his death, he said.

In just 17 days, with the deaths of Swanson, then Tanton, Clark went from being a local high school with no casualties in Iraq to one of a select few, including MacArthur, Jay and Churchill, that have lost two former students who served there.

"We're involved in all our kids' lives," said Laing. "Any time a tragedy like this takes place, it hits home. It makes you realize how fragile life is."

Decorated Wichita Guardsman Dies In Iraq

February 23, 2007 The Wichita Eagle

A Wichita man who once was awarded the highest peacetime honor a soldier can receive was killed this week while fighting in Iraq.

The Kansas Army National Guard said Staff Sgt. David Russell Berry, 37, died Thursday after he was wounded by an improvised explosive device.

Berry, who grew up in Anthony, had more than 16 years of military service and leaves behind a wife, Kathleen, a stepdaughter and two step grandchildren.

Holli Gill, his step daughter, said her family has received few details about Berry's death, but she said they do know he was killed by an improvised explosive device.

'The only thing that we know is that there was some sort of mortar attack, and they were the response team that went out to the site,' she said. 'We just know that it was an IED that did it.'

Gill said that one of her step father's best friends, Jerrod Hays, was critically wounded in the attack but is expected to survive.

Gill said her stepfather liked to hunt and was an avid Wichita Thunder hockey fan.

'He was a very shy and quiet guy when you didn't know him,' she said. 'But when you did, he was very loving and very patriotic. He was wonderful.'

Maj. Gen. Tod Bunting, the state's adjutant general, said Berry was awarded the Soldier's Medal shortly before his deployment to Iraq.

The medal is awarded to soldiers whose heroism in noncombat situations would have resulted in the awarding of a Distinguished Service Cross had it occurred in battle.

Berry received the award for pulling a driver from a burning car after it had crashed in Kingman County. Rescue workers at the scene credited Berry with saving the driver's life.

The accident occurred while Berry was on active duty at Fort Leavenworth during Operation Enduring Freedom.

Two Injured In U.S. Kiowa Crash Near Kirkuk

March 01, 2007 Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory RELEASE No. 20070301-06

KIRKUK, Iraq – A U.S. Army OH-58 Kiowa helicopter mostly used in surveillance and light attacks, performed a hard landing south of Kirkuk this morning.

The two injured pilots onboard were evacuated to a military treatment facility in Kirkuk.

FUTILE EXERCISE: BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW!



A U.S. soldier from 1st cavalry, 3rd Brigade, 1-12 combined armed battalion, during operation Rabbit Hunter in the west of the city of Baquba on 03 December 2006. (AFP/File/Patrick Fort)

**“Checkpoints Can Intercept Armed
Groups”
“But They Cannot Intercept Or Stop Car
Bombs, Because Car Bombs Are
Looking For Checkpoints”**

Mar. 01, 2007 By Christian Berthelsen, Los Angeles Times

BAGHDAD, Iraq - U.S. and Iraqi officials announced Wednesday what they said were tangible signs that the latest joint security crackdown launched here more than two weeks ago is working -- even as car bombs, mortar attacks and shootings continued to claim lives.

The announcements came as many Iraqis have begun expressing frustration with the nascent security push. Multiple daily attacks have continued in their neighborhoods, they say, even as they have put up with repeated raids, house-to-house searches and vehicle stops by government security forces.

"Checkpoints can intercept armed groups," said Adnan Ubaidi, the editor of Al-Istiqama, a newspaper published by the leading Shiite voting bloc in the Iraqi Parliament. "But they cannot intercept or stop car bombs, because car bombs are looking for checkpoints."

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Roseville Soldier Among 8 Killed In Afghanistan Crash

February 22, 2007 ROSEVILLE, Calif. (AP)

Kristofer D.S. Thomas was so eager for a career in the military that he graduated from high school a semester early to join the Army before his 18th birthday.

Pfc. Thomas' dedication paid off, and he was sent to Afghanistan as a member of the elite Army Rangers. But the 18-year-old's first tour of duty was cut short when he was killed in a helicopter crash in the southeastern part of the country, the Department of Defense said Wednesday.

Thomas, of Roseville, was one of eight soldiers who died Sunday in the CH-47 Chinook crash, the deadliest incident in Afghanistan this year. A total of 22 service members were on board at the time.

Thomas was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, based at Fort Benning, Ga.

Those who knew Thomas described him as an outgoing teenager who initially struggled at Roseville High School, but turned his grades around once he decided to join the Army.

"He became focused and decided, 'Hey, I'm going into the military,'" Principal Brad Basham said. "He went from a tough kid to a model student in the time he was here."

Neighbor John Young said his two young sons looked up to Thomas and would write to him while he was away at basic training.

"He was a real good influence on my boys and a great kid," Young said. "He really had a desire to serve his country."

TROOP NEWS

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



The casket of Marine Cpl. Thomas E. Saba after his funeral service at the St. Theresa's church, Feb. 16, 2007 in the Staten Island borough of New York. Saba died Feb 7, 2006 when the helicopter he was flying in crashed while supporting combat operations in Al Anbar province, Iraq. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)

**Officers Advising U.S.
Commander Petraeus Have
Concluded The U.S. Has Six
Months To Win The War In Iraq -**

**Or Face A Vietnam-Style
Collapse:
“But They’re Still Trying To Figure
Out What’s The Plan”
“Morale Is Another Key Concern In
The Green Zone Headquarters As US
Forces Prepare For A Rise In
Casualties”
“The President Is Expecting Progress.
But They’re Thinking, What Does He
Mean?”**

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

According to the US military’s revised counter-insurgency field manual, FM 3-24, authored by Gen Petraeus, the optimum “troop-to-task” ratio for Baghdad requires 120,000 US and allied troops in the city alone. Current totals, even including often unreliable Iraqi units, fall short of that number. The deficit is even greater in conflict areas outside Baghdad.

February 28, 2007 Simon Tisdall, Guardian Unlimited [Excerpts]

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

An elite team of officers advising US commander General David Petraeus in Baghdad has concluded the US has six months to win the war in Iraq - or face a Vietnam-style collapse in political and public support that could force the military into a hasty retreat.

The officers - combat veterans who are leading experts in counter-insurgency - are charged with implementing the “new way forward” strategy announced by president George Bush on January 10. The plan includes a controversial “surge” of 21,500 additional American troops to establish security in the Iraqi capital and Anbar province.

But the team, known as the “Baghdad brains trust” and ensconced in the heavily fortified Green Zone around the US embassy, is struggling to overcome a range of entrenched problems in what has become a race against time, said a former senior administration official familiar with their deliberations.

“They know they are operating under a clock. They know they are going to hear a lot more talk in Washington about ‘Plan B’ by the autumn - meaning withdrawal. They know the next six-month period is their opportunity.

“And they say it’s getting harder every day,” the former official said.

“The scene is very tense. They are working round the clock. Endless cups of tea with the Iraqis,” the former senior administration official said.

“But they’re still trying to figure out what’s the plan. The president is expecting progress. But they’re thinking, what does he mean? The plan is changing every minute, as all plans do.”

The team comprises an unusual mix of combat experience and high academic achievement. It includes Colonel Peter Mansoor, Gen Petraeus’s executive officer and a former armoured division commander who holds a PhD in the history of infantry; Col H R McMaster, author of a well-known critique of Vietnam and a seasoned counter-insurgency operations chief; Lt-Col David Kilcullen, a seconded Australian army officer and expert on Islamism; and Col Michael Meese, son of the former US attorney-general, Edwin Meese, who was a member of the ill-fated Iraq Study Group.

Their biggest headache was insufficient numbers of troops on the ground despite the increase ordered by Mr Bush, the former official said.

“We don’t have the numbers for the counter-insurgency job even with the surge. The word ‘surge’ is a misnomer. Strategically, tactically, it’s not a surge,” an American officer said.

According to the US military’s revised counter-insurgency field manual, FM 3-24, authored by Gen Petraeus, the optimum “troop-to-task” ratio for Baghdad requires 120,000 US and allied troops in the city alone.

Current totals, even including often unreliable Iraqi units, fall short of that number.

The deficit is even greater in conflict areas outside Baghdad.

“Additional troops are essential if we are to win,” said Lt-Col John Nagel, another Petraeus confidant and co-author of the manual, in an address at the US Naval Institute in San Diego last month.

One soldier for every 50 civilians in the most intense conflict areas was key to successful counter-insurgency work. Compounding the manpower problems is an apparently insurmountable shortage of civilian volunteers from the Pentagon, state department and treasury. They are needed to staff the additional provincial reconstruction teams and other aid projects promised by Mr Bush.

The recent British decision to reduced troop levels in southern Iraq, coupled with the actual or anticipated departure of other allies, has heightened the Petraeus team’s worries that the international coalition is “disintegrating” even as the US strives to regain the initiative in Iraq, the former official said.

American and Iraqi forces entered the militant Shia stronghold of Sadr City today for the first time since the surge began.

No more major operation have yet been attempted there but “we or the Iraqis are going to have to fight them”, one American officer said.

According to a British source, plans are in hand for the possible southwards deployment of 6,000 US troops to compensate for Britain’s phased withdrawal and any concomitant upsurge in unrest.

Morale is another key concern in the Green Zone headquarters as US forces prepare for a rise in casualties as the security crackdown gathers pace.

Despite progress this week on a new law sharing Iraq’s oil wealth, continuing Shia and Kurdish opposition to measures to ease the post-invasion de-Ba’athification policy that excludes Sunnis from many senior posts is proving intractable. The Petraeus team believes the government is failing to work hard enough to meet other national reconciliation “benchmarks” set by Mr Bush.

Yet it is accepted that the US is asking the Iraqi prime minister to do what most politicians in normal circumstances would refuse to contemplate. “What we’re doing is asking Maliki to confront his own powerbase,” one officer said.

Possibly the biggest longer-term concern of Gen Petraeus’s team is that political will in Washington may collapse just as the military is on the point of making a decisive counter-insurgency breakthrough.

Steven Simon, the national security council’s senior director for transnational threats during the Clinton administration, said a final meltdown in political and public backing was likely if the new strategy was not quickly seen to be working.

“The implosion of domestic support for the war will compel the disengagement of US forces. It is now just a matter of time,” Mr Simon said in a paper written for the Council on Foreign Relations.

“Better to withdraw as a coherent and at least somewhat volitional act than withdraw later in hectic response to public opposition... or to a series of unexpectedly sharp reverses on the ground,” he said.

“If it gets really tough in the next few months, it will throw fuel on the fire in Washington,” the former official said.

“Congress will be emboldened in direct proportion to the trouble in Iraq.” If the policy was not judged to be working by Labour Day (the first Monday in September, which marks the start of the new political year), Mr Bush could lose control of the policy to Congress and be forced to begin a phased pull-out, he suggested.

But this week's US decision to join a dialogue on Iraq with Iran and Syria, after previously refusing to do so, is nevertheless seen as an indication of growing administration alarm over the possibility of an historic strategic failure.

Iraq Veteran Helps Anti-War Activists Serve Arrest Warrant On Senator In A Room Full Of Cops

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

February 24, 2007 Occupation Project in Seattle

The next day [February 19th] Stand Up! Seattle and the Green Party of Washington State traveled to Bellevue, Washington to deliver an arrest warrant to Senator Murray for crimes against humanity.

The Senator was participating in a round table discussion about crime with law enforcement officials in Bellevue when Vietnam War veteran Mike C. stood and challenged Murray on her participation in ongoing funding for the war.

He told the Senator that there was enough money in the pipeline to bring the troops home now.

As Mike C. was removed by security, the warrant was read aloud by Karen Jones and Dianne King.

A copy of the warrant was handed directly to Senator Murray by Linda Jansen.

Members of S.U.S. and GPoWS petitioned law enforcement officials to arrest Senator Murray.

While the Senator voted against authorizing President Bush to start the war in Iraq in 2003, Doug Nielson, also present, stated, "This would seem to indicate that she knew it was wrong from the start. Her previous votes for funding would seem to indicate a criminal intent to do it again."

Noting her presence at a local law forum, Nielson also challenged Murray's reluctance to follow international law with regards to war in Iraq.

Eight of the 30 people at the meeting were ultimately escorted out following their statements to the Senator.

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, inside the armed services and at home. Send email requests to address up top or write to: The Military Project, Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657

“Troubling Details Not Previously Made Public - Details Which Belie The Army’s Assertion That The Young Florissant Native Died By Her Own Hand”



Private First Class LaVena Johnson

[Thanks to Phil G and Katherine GY, Military Project, who sent this in.]

Reporter Matt Sczesny spoke with LaVena’s father and examined documents and photos sent by Army investigators. So far from supporting the claim that LaVena died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, the documents provided elements of another scenario altogether:

February 22, 2007 by Philip Barron, alternet.org [Excerpts]

There once was a young woman from a St. Louis suburb. She was an honor roll student, she played the violin, she donated blood and volunteered for American Heart Association walks. She elected to put off college for a while and joined the Army once out of school. At Fort Campbell, KY, she was assigned as a weapons supply manager to the 129th Corps Support Battalion.

She was LaVena Johnson, private first class, and she died near Balad, Iraq, on July 19, 2005, just eight days shy of her twentieth birthday. She was the first woman soldier from Missouri to die while serving in Iraq or Afghanistan.

The tragedy of her story begins there.

An Army representative initially told LaVena's father, Dr. John Johnson, that his daughter died of "died of self-inflicted, noncombat injuries" and initially added it was not a suicide -- in other words, an accidental death caused by LaVena herself.

The subsequent Army investigation reversed this finding and declared LaVena's death a suicide, a finding refuted by the soldier's family.

In an article in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Dr. Johnson pointed to indications that his daughter had endured a physical struggle before she died -- two loose front teeth, a "busted lip" that had to be reconstructed by the funeral home -- suggesting that "someone might have punched her in the mouth."

A promise by the office of Representative William Lacy Clay to look into the matter produced nothing. The military said that the matter was closed.

Little more on LaVena's death was said until St. Louis CBS affiliate KMOV aired a story on Thursday which disclosed troubling details not previously made public - details which belie the Army's assertion that the young Florissant native died by her own hand. The video of the report is available on the KMOV website.

Reporter Matt Sczesny spoke with LaVena's father and examined documents and photos sent by Army investigators. So far from supporting the claim that LaVena died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, the documents provided elements of another scenario altogether:

Indications of physical abuse that went unremarked by the autopsy

The absence of psychological indicators of suicidal thoughts; indeed, testimony that LaVena was happy and healthy prior to her death

Indications, via residue tests, that LaVena may not even have handled the weapon that killed her

A blood trail outside the tent where Lavena's body was found

Indications that someone attempted to set LaVena's body on fire

The Army has resisted calls by Dr. Johnson and by KMOV to reopen its investigation.

We have seen in other military deaths, most infamously that of Army Ranger and former professional football player Cpl. Pat Tillman, that the Army has engaged in an insulting game of deny and delay when it comes to uncovering embarrassing facts. Only when public and official attention is brought to bear on the matter - as happened, eventually and with great effort, with the case of Cpl. Tillman - do unpleasant truths come to light.

Astonishing as it seems, it takes that level of outrage to compel the Army to find the truth and tell it, to honor its own soldiers.

The mother of Pat Tillman put the matter in stark and honest terms: "This is how they treat a family of a high-profile individual," she said. "How are they treating others?"

In the case of Private First Class Johnson, we know the answer.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Assorted Resistance Action

3.1.07 Xinhua & Mar. 01, 2007 By Christian Berthelsen, Los Angeles Times & Reuters & BBC

In downtown Baghdad, two police officers were killed and four injured in a gunbattle after a bomber tried to drive a pickup truck loaded with propane tanks into a police station.

Insurgents continued attacks on police and military installations, striking a security checkpoint near Al-Hillah with mortar rounds that critically wounded two police officers.

A police chief of Iraq's northern city of Mosul survived a roadside bomb attack.

"A roadside bomb went off near my convoy while we were passing an intersection in southern Mosul, killing one of my bodyguards and wounding another," Major General Wathiq al-Hamdani told Xinhua by telephone.

Al-Hamdani said that he was heading to the western part of the city to oversee a search operation in the southern neighborhood of Hai Sumer.

Several police vehicles were also damaged in the powerful blast, he said.

Fierce clashes between insurgents and police force in Iskandariyah wounded at least three people, including a policeman

A car bomb targeting a convoy of cars carrying guests at the wedding of an Iraqi officer of police killed five people and wounded 10 in the western city of Falluja, a police source said. Lieutenant Naim Jumaili and his bride survived the attack, but several guests are reported to be missing.

Falluja, in Iraq's western Anbar province, is a hotbed of insurgents opposed to the Iraqi security forces.

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

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

**Happy Anniversary: March 2, 1955:
She Made History:
Others Got The Credit**



Claudette Colvin [Montgomeryboycott.com]

Carl Bunin Peace History

Nine months before Rosa Parks made headlines, teenager Claudette Colvin was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white person.

**“The Democrats Are Interested In
Saving The War On Iraq From The
Bush Administration’s Disastrous
Mistakes, Not Ending It”**

February 23, 2007 Socialist Worker, Editorial [Excerpts]

LAST NOVEMBER, the congressional elections sent a clear message that a majority of people wanted to see an end to the U.S. war on Iraq. Four months later, and the new Democrat-controlled Congress hasn't managed to get all its members to cast a vote about the most pressing political issue of the day.

The House of Representatives at least managed to pass a nonbinding resolution disapproving of the Bush administration's plans to send 21,500 additional troops to Iraq.

But last weekend, with the Senate called into a special Saturday session, Republicans used undemocratic procedural tactics--the same ones they railed against the former Democratic minority for even mentioning, much less using--to block a vote on a similar measure.

In October 2002, within hours of the House approving a resolution giving Bush the authority to declare war on Iraq, the Senate took no time whipping up a resounding yes vote. Four years later, with Iraq occupation spiraling into ever-deeper crisis, the "world's greatest deliberative body" can't muster enough votes to bring a nonbinding resolution to the floor.

But even if the Senate could manage a vote on the nonbinding resolution passed by the House, there's another problem with it. It's nonbinding.

The question now is if the Democrats who talk a good game when it comes to criticizing Bush's escalation in Iraq will do something concrete to challenge the administration's war policy.

A good place to start would be the almost \$100 billion in emergency supplemental funding for the war in Iraq that Bush needs Congress to approve in the coming months.

But weak-in-the-knees Democrats have already been bowing before the complaints of Republicans accusing them of "not supporting our troops." "They've denounced the surge," accused Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) "The question is, are they going to fund the troops?"

As if the goal of those who want to end the occupation is to withdraw all the bombs and warplanes and supplies from Iraq--but leave U.S. soldiers.

If any of the politicians really cared about "supporting our troops," they would fight to bring them home right now.

SOME DEMOCRATS are putting forward proposals on Iraq that go beyond nonbinding resolutions.

But a "campaign to stop the war without cutting off funding" is in reality a campaign to stop the war without stopping the war.

It makes about as much sense as an antiwar group calling itself "Win Without War"--especially four years after the war has started.

The toughest proposal on Iraq from a Democrat--House Resolution 508, introduced by Reps. Barbara Lee, Maxine Waters and Lynne Woolsey--would set a six-month deadline for the withdrawal of all U.S. troops within six months.

The bill isn't unconditional. It calls for an "international stabilization force" to stay in Iraq for up to two years after the end of the U.S. occupation--if "requested" by an Iraqi government.

But the worst thing about this legislation is that it doesn't stand a chance of passing--and its liberal sponsors know it. It amounts to an attempt to show that antiwar forces have a voice in the halls of Congress--while the "real" debate takes place among "pragmatic" Democrats whose concern isn't ending the occupation, but deciding how best to manage it.

The Democrats are interested in saving the war on Iraq from the Bush administration's disastrous mistakes, not ending it.

The possibility of galvanizing support for immediate withdrawal in Iraq is plain.

Take a recent petition issued by Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, Cindy Sheehan and others, which argued, "We call on the U.S. to get out of Iraq--not in six months, not in a year, but now." Or Vermont, where the state Senate and House passed a resolution calling for U.S. forces to "immediately withdraw" from Iraq,

Antiwar activists can set their sights on demonstrations called around the country for the weekend of March 17--the fourth anniversary of the invasion--to keep up the demand for immediate withdrawal.

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER

Telling the truth - about the occupation or the criminals running the government in Washington - is the first reason for Traveling Soldier. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance - whether it's in the streets of Baghdad, New York, or inside the armed forces. Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties working-class people inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize resistance within the armed forces. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers.

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/> And join with Iraq War vets in the call to end the occupation and bring our troops home now! (www.ivaw.net)

OCCUPATION REPORT

Good News For The Iraqi Resistance!!

U.S. Occupation Commands' Stupid Terror Tactics Recruit Even More Fighters To Kill U.S. Troops



An Iraqi family stands amid the wreckage of their home after it was raided by foreign occupation soldiers from the U.S.A. in Baghdad's Sadr City, Iraq, Feb. 27, 2007. U.S. forces took 16 Iraqi citizens prisoner and removed them from their homes. Iraqi citizens have no right to resist what the foreign soldiers do. If they resist, they can be wounded or killed. (AP Photo/Adil al-Khazali)

[Fair is fair. Let's bring 150,000 Iraqi troops over here to the USA. They can kill people at checkpoints, bust into their houses with force and violence, butcher their families, overthrow the government, put a new one in office they like better and call it "sovereign," and "detain" anybody who doesn't like it in some prison without any charges being filed against them, or any trial.]

[Those Iraqis are sure a bunch of backward primitives. They actually resent this help, have the absurd notion that it's bad their country is occupied by a foreign military dictatorship, and consider it their patriotic duty to fight and kill the soldiers sent to grab their country. What a bunch of silly people. How fortunate they are to live under a military dictatorship run by George Bush. Why, how could anybody not love that? You'd want that in your home town, right?]

“In the States, if police burst into your house, kicking down doors and swearing at you, you would call your lawyer and file a lawsuit,” said Wood, 42, from Iowa, who did not accompany Halladay’s Charlie Company, from his battalion, on Thursday’s raid. “Here, there are no lawyers. Their resources are limited, so they plant IEDs (improvised explosive devices) instead.”

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

How Do You Know Your War Is Lost? “Travel Outside The Green Zone Requires A Security Entourage And Involves Weeks Of Organization”

March 2, 2007 By Elizabeth Williamson, Washington Post Staff Writer [Excerpts]

The nerve center of Iraq reconstruction efforts, housed in an ornate former Saddam Hussein palace with soaring ceilings and its own espresso bar, the embassy in Baghdad is one of the largest foreign missions ever operated by the State Department. Its complexity and expense, some say, hampers reconstruction efforts and drains cash from diplomatic efforts worldwide.

Travel outside the Green Zone requires a security entourage and involves weeks of organization. The embassy is seen as a key target for violence, which, along with fear of reprisals, makes many Iraqis afraid to visit.

Consequently, Americans who work there see relatively few of the people they are there to help.

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

**FBI Scum Faked Evidence
Against Muslim Charity;**

Fraudulent Transcripts of Wiretapped Conversations Exposed In Court

“An Official Summary Of An FBI-Wiretapped Conversation Contains Anti-Jewish Slurs That Do Not Appear In The Actual Transcript.”

February 25, 2007 By Greg Krikorian, L.A. Times Staff Writer

When the Bush administration shut down the nation's largest Muslim charity five years ago, officials of the Dallas-based foundation denied allegations it was linked to terrorists and insisted that a number of accusations were fabricated by the government.

Now, attorneys for the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development say the government's own documents provide evidence of that claim.

In recent court filings, defense lawyers disclosed striking discrepancies between an official summary and the verbatim transcripts of an FBI-wiretapped conversation in 1996 involving Holy Land officials.

The summary attributes inflammatory, anti-Semitic comments to Holy Land officials that are not found in a 13-page transcript of the recorded conversation. It recently was turned over to the defense by the government in an exchange of evidence.

Citing the unexplained discrepancies, defense lawyers have asked U.S. District Judge A. Joe Fish in Dallas to declassify thousands of hours of FBI surveillance recordings, so that full transcripts would replace government summaries as evidence.

The demand could force government prosecutors to either declassify evidence it has fought to keep secret or risk losing a critical portion of evidence in its case.

In December, the judge denied a defense request to declassify the documents so they could be examined by defendants in the case. Seven former foundation officials, six of them U.S. citizens, have been charged with funneling money to overseas charities controlled by Hamas, which the U.S. has designated as a foreign terrorist organization. The defendants have denied the charges.

Though defense attorneys already have government clearances that allow them to review the material, under the federal Classified Information Procedures Act they have been prohibited from sharing it with their clients. And unless the act's rules are declared unconstitutional in the case, defense attorneys argue, the defendants will have no way of proving that the statements attributed to them were misconstrued or never made.

The recently declassified summary of surveillance on April 15, 1996, asserts that during a conversation wiretapped by the FBI, Holy Land's former executive director Shukri Abu Baker told two associates there was no need to worry about the foundation being unfairly targeted because U.S. courts were not under the control of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee or its sponsor, "the government of the demons of Israel."

The summary portrays Baker as raging against "the Jews of the world" and as claiming that Jews have no allegiance to anything but "their pockets and to preserving the illegal Zionist state of Israel."

Additional anti-Semitic comments the FBI summary attributed to Baker or Ghassan Elashi, Holy Land's former board chairman, included:

"Their (Jews') only purpose here in the U.S. is to purchase as many politicians as possible and to warp the way the American Christians feel and think not just about the Christian religion but mainly about the Palestinian people ... and to rob as much money as possible from American taxpayers for the illegitimate excuse of protecting and preserving the chosen people of God."

"Even Jesus Christ had called the Jews and their high priests ... the sons of snakes and scorpions."

"I am confident that in the end justice, and not the Jews, will prevail. I believe that there is still justice in America."

None of those quotes was contained in a 13-page transcript of the conversation, defense lawyers said in their motion to expand access to classified evidence.

"Throughout the run-up to trial, the government has insisted that the defendants can learn what is contained in the intercepts by reading the so-called 'summaries' of those intercepts," defense attorneys said in their papers.

But the recently disclosed transcript, attorneys said, shows that "not only are the summaries so inaccurate and misleading as to be useless," but that the "author of the attached summary has cynically and maliciously attributed to the defendants racist invective and inculpatory remarks the defendants never uttered."

"It is appalling that such summaries even exist, much less that the government represented that this is all our clients need to know in order to defend themselves."

How the summary and transcript could be so different was unclear, though experts in the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act arena theorized that its top-secret nature may have led some analysts to believe that the work product would never be publicly disclosed, much less entered into evidence in a trial.

Other alleged discrepancies also have dogged the case. Holy Land lawyers challenged the accuracy of an FBI memo, for example, that quoted a foundation office manager as telling Israeli authorities that charitable funds were "channeled

to Hamas." But defense lawyers told the court the translation from Arabic to Hebrew to English distorted the official's original statement, and that he should have been quoted as saying, "We have no connection to Hamas."

The Holy Land Foundation was closed weeks after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon. The action followed years of efforts by Israel and many pro-Israeli groups in the U.S. to close the foundation on the grounds that it was a fundraising front for Hamas.

The former Holy Land officials facing trial are charged with conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists by sending money, goods and services to Palestinian charities controlled by Hamas, a U.S.-designated terrorist group since 1995.

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.



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

“The Governor Of Ohio Wants To Be First In Line To Say, “Keep Your Tired And Maimed. Don’t Burden Us” “What World Is This?”

Lord knows we’ve suffered enough already
Keep Them Out of Ohio!!

February 16, 2007 By Mike Ferner, Portside. **(Mike Ferner served as a Navy
Corpsman from 1969-73. He is a freelance writer from Toledo)**

The following news brief ran on the Associated Press yesterday:

“Strickland Doesn’t Want Overflow Iraqi Refugees”

**“Ohio Governor Ted Strickland has a message for President Bush: any plan to
relocate to the US thousands of refugees uprooted by the Iraq war shouldn’t
include Ohio.**

“The administration plans to allow about 7,000 Iraqi refugees to settle in the United
States over the next year, a huge expansion at a time of mounting international pressure
to help millions who have fled their homes in the nearly four-year-old war.

Strickland -- a Democrat who opposed the war as a US House member -- says Ohioans
can’t be expected to have open arms for Iraqis displaced by the war. More than 100
Ohioans have been killed since the war began. The governor says he has sympathy for
the refugees’ plight, but he won’t ask Ohioans to accept a greater burden.”

It is really all quite mad, isn’t it?

**That on top of the million or so Iraqis we’ve killed, and the four million we’ve
maimed, we’ve also created millions of refugees; that our Maniac-in-Chief now
decrees 7,000 refugees is a politically acceptable number we should allow into the
U.S. even as he continues the slaughter around the clock; that the governor of a
state, having absolutely nothing to do with immigration policy anyway, feels
compelled to protect the homeland (or would that be “homestate?”) by warning a
morbidly unpopular president, “Not in our backyard, pallie!”**

Something for people of good conscience to keep in mind: When we finally get our
troops out of Iraq, and our bases out of Iraq, and our mercenaries out of Iraq, and our
spooks out of Iraq, and Halliburton Corp., and Burger King Corp., and all the rest - when
the last U.S. helicopter flies off the roof of the world’s largest embassy and the American
Empire’s sorry, bloody, murderous adventure draws to a close - we owe these people.
Big time.

I don't know how many, or actually, why any of them would want to come live in Disneyland. But if some do, we should welcome them and the many lessons they could teach us about maintaining humanity in conditions of pure hell.

For the 99.9% of Iraqis who would rather stay home and rebuild their shattered lives, at the very least we owe them money. Lots of money. Multiple billions of dollars. And not to be administered by our military or our corporations or our mercenaries or our spooks.

No, we should have nothing to do with that money except deliver it to Iraq and let them decide what to do with it. I hope they can rebuild the hospitals and the electric and phone systems we bombed, and the water treatment plants we've destroyed, and the economy we've wrecked.

But frankly it doesn't matter if they want to insulate their attics with it, or mix it with mud and turn it into building material, or pile it up in the middle of the desert and fucking burn it all.

They can't possibly do any worse with it than we have.

And THAT is just the beginning of the magnitude of the dollar amount we owe Iraq.

What we do for all the pain and suffering and heartache and terror we've created, only God knows. Those things we carry on our conscience to our graves.

And the governor of Ohio wants to be first in line to say, "Keep your tired and maimed. Don't burden us."

What world is this?

GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out

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

The following have chosen to post issues; there may be others:

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

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

http://www.traprockpeace.org/gi_special/; <http://www.uruknet.info/?p=-6&l=e>;

<http://www.albasrah.net/maqalat/english/gi-special.htm>

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