

GI SPECIAL 5D10:

**NO MORE;
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW, ALIVE**



The labeled coffin containing U.S. Army soldier Jason Nunez, shortly before his funeral, at the military cemetery in Bayamon, Puerto Rico, April 4, 2007. Of the 82nd Airborne Division, Nunez was killed last week in a bomb attack against his convoy near Baqubah, Iraq. (AP Photo/Brennan Linsley)

**“Leadership Doesn’t
Care About Us”
“They Don’t Give A Shit About
Us. We’ve Been Shorted
Everything We Needed”**

“You Told Us If We Helped You, The Americans Would Not Harm Us. We Are Prisoners In Our Villages Now!”
“They Know Who Is Ambushing Us And When It’s Going To Happen, But They Won’t Tell Us. They Have Us By The Balls And They Know It.”



A soldier sleeping in Kamdesh, Nuristan, Afghanistan. Photo: Sergio Caro

“Leadership doesn’t care about us,” said one officer, who requested that his name be withheld to avoid punishment for his comments.

“We’ve gone on mission after mission after mission where we’ve gone black (run out) on food and water. They tell us, ‘Pack light, your mission will only be four days tops.’ But then we end up stuck on a mountaintop for two weeks. We didn’t have anything, not even tents. If you can’t get us off a mountain, don’t put us on there.”

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

Feb. 27, 2007 By Matthew Cole, Salon.com [Excerpts]

At 9 p.m. on my first night at the U.S. Army base in Kamdesh, I was shaken awake by a 105 mm howitzer round. Then a symphony of incoming and outgoing fire sounded. BO-OM! BO-OM! BO-OM! Tat! Tat! Tat! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop!

From the pine- and cedar-lined mountain slope that loomed over the base, several insurgents were firing down on us with rocket-propelled grenades and AK-47s. The line of Humvees ringing the base spotted the insurgents and began shooting back. For 10 minutes U.S. forces blanketed the ridgeline above with machine-gun and rifle fire and RPGs. A soldier manning a thermal-imaging device (LRAS) spotted the silhouette of Afghans and began pulling the trigger of his machine gun.

After the first round of fighting, the soldier yelled that he had confirmed at least one death. "I saw that motherfucker through the LRAS!" he screamed, breathing heavily, his adrenaline high. "I saw him explode into a bunch of pieces! Parts were everywhere!" He smiled.

As the volleys began to subside, Sgt. Matthew Netzel guessed aloud that roughly five insurgents had been killed. "I think there are more up there, but we're not certain yet, 'cause we don't know how many there were to begin with," he said.

As they fired, U.S. forces launched slow-falling flares that lit up the wooded area they were firing upon, hoping to illuminate the insurgents' positions. But there were no more insurgents to be seen. The echo of automatic-weapons fire stopped bouncing through the valley and most of the soldiers went back to sleep.

It was just another night in Kamdesh. The base averages three attacks per week.

The next morning, a group climbed up the mountainside to look for casualties but found none.

"They usually clean their bodies up before we can get to them," Lt. Benjamin Keating, a 27-year-old from Maine, told me. "They will pull the bodies, scrub bloodstains, and sometimes they pick the shells up too.

"We never know how many we killed or who they were. They're like ghosts."

The inability to know how many and who was killed has made it hard for U.S. forces to identify whom they are fighting -- Arabs, Afghans or other groups. When they can, a confirmed kill requires a digital photo of the dead man's face. But those are few and far between.

In November, I traveled with the Army's 10th Mountain Division to Afghanistan's Kunar and Nuristan provinces, the region where Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri have been sighted over the past three years, to see how American forces were fighting the "other" war.

What I learned is that the war in Afghanistan is going badly.

Three years after U.S. forces secured much of the country and helped 10 million Afghans vote in a presidential election, the country has slid back into a dangerous power

vacuum, with the Taliban again competing for control of significant sections of the country.

Our gains, once held firmly, have been lost and the coming year may portend Afghanistan's future, with ominous rumors floating down from the mountains about a spring offensive by insurgents.

The region is one of the most wild and ungoverned areas of Afghanistan. The Americans pushed north last summer, part of Operation Mountain Fury, trying to seal off the Pakistan border and find al-Qaida's Arab forces. The border's invisible line, soldiers say, allows high-value targets, like bin Laden, to find sanctuary and a base of operations.

What I saw was a skilled but unprepared U.S. force battling literally uphill against an unidentified enemy. 2006 was the deadliest year for coalition forces since the war began, with 191 dead.

The Kamdesh base is the northernmost American outpost in Afghanistan, in an area of Nuristan so remote that local villagers asked American troops in August, when they arrived, if they were Russian.

The base itself is not more than a quarter-mile wide, on a valley floor, next to a clear, trout-filled river. Three-thousand-foot mountains rise above the base on both sides of the river. A row of Humvees, all mounted with grenade-filled Mark-19 machine guns, face the closest mountain, which nearly hangs over the front of the base.

When I was there the soldiers hadn't yet named the base, and had made up their own name, Warheight, for the imposing peak. From Kamdesh, a small outpost near the Pakistani border, to Naray, a larger base 25 miles south, to another border outpost called Camp Lybert, the 10th Mountain Division's 3rd Squadron, 71st Cavalry -- the so-called 3-71 -- was supposed to control a 220-square-mile triangle of territory.

The U.S. forces in Nuristan have a multipart mission. First, they are supposed to seal the province's border with Pakistan, an invisible 1,500-mile line that crosses peaks topping 15,000 feet. Second, they are to create security village by village by rooting out insurgents. Third, they are supposed to provide Nuristan with potable water, electricity, schools, passable roads and bridges.

The base in Kamdesh was installed in August 2006 as a provincial reconstruction team, one of 12 in Afghanistan.

As soon as I arrived on the base, a soldier warned me not to talk openly or loudly about incoming or outgoing convoys. "The workers here are listening," he said. "They don't know much English, but they're reporting troop movements."

Just before I got to Kamdesh, the insurgents had nearly killed several soldiers at the base, including the commanding sergeant major from the 3-71's forward operating base in Naray. He had flown in by Chinook helicopter.

After a five-minute tour of the base, during which his Chinook never slowed its rotors or refueled, the sergeant major got back on the chopper. As soon as it lifted off the ground,

a rocket erupted from a nearby ridge and hit the spot where the helicopter had been idling. The air shook, concrete and rock flew into the air, but the Chinook, after wavering, didn't come down.

The attack injured no one, but was successful nonetheless.

In a guerrilla war, where the measure of victory can simply be preventing the occupiers from winning, an attack like the one in Kamdesh can have far-reaching effects on how the U.S. military operates.

The near downing of the sergeant major's helicopter was too close for the Army's comfort.

The brass immediately issued an order that helicopters would no longer be allowed to land at the base.

The supplies and equipment that the soldiers in Kamdesh needed would now have to travel the 25 miles from Naray via Humvee and truck, a six-hour drive. The insurgents hadn't killed anybody with their rocket, but they had further isolated an already isolated base, limiting how quickly buildings could be built, money distributed and local projects completed.

When I first arrived in Kamdesh, I came by Chinook, but I wasn't allowed to fly directly to the base either. I had to land at night at another location and walk three hours through the darkness down dusty ravines.

The Americans believe the forces attacking the base are a combination of local militias and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami fighters, estimated at 300 strong. Hekmatyar, the CIA's leading recipient of mujahedin funds during the 1980s, has since aligned himself with bin Laden and become a "high-value target."

The U.S. believed the attacks on the base were being mounted and organized by Hezb-e-Islami cell leaders Abdul Rahman and Abdul Haq. A few nights before I arrived, U.S. forces planned and executed a raid in the neighboring village of Kamdesh, where they killed Rahman and three others and captured Haq. The mission, according to Army officers apprised of the operation, was a success.

Showing me around the Kamdesh base was Ben Keating, a blue-eyed tree trunk of a young lieutenant on his first foreign deployment. Keating was proud of the 3-71's mission, but thought time was not on the Americans' side.

"We've been up here for less than seven months," he told me. He held up a thick book on Alexander the Great's travails in the Hindu Kush mountains. "We have a couple of thousand years of history against us. You do the math."

Keating was a history and political science major in college. "I'm not saying we're not doing any good -- we are -- but how long do we plan on staying? And what is the 82nd going to do with the progress we've made? How do you maintain the successes we've achieved?"

On my first night came the attack that left no bodies.

On my second night in camp, half a dozen Afghans were preparing a rocket to fire at the base when U.S. soldiers spotted them. The Americans fired at them for five minutes, then the insurgents climbed the mountainside and retreated into Kamdesh, a village of 20 homes and a mosque several thousand feet uphill.

The U.S. troops called for helicopter backup and an Apache arrived within 10 minutes.

As the insurgents took cover in a village home, several women and children fled the house, knowing the Americans would likely attack. The Apache, nearly invisible against a starlit sky, flew toward the village, its nose pointed downward a few degrees to get a better aim. For 45 seconds the Apache fired several hundred 30 mm bullets into the house, a steady barrage that lit up the darkened village.

The shots killed all the insurgents and also injured six of the fleeing women and children.

In a five-day span, U.S. forces had killed roughly 15 insurgents and injured several more.

Local villagers, however, including several I spoke to, believed the Americans had killed an innocent man in the earlier Rahman and Haq raid.

“Ahmed was a good man,” said a 30-year-old man named Khalil Nuristani. “He was not al-Qaida.”

In Afghanistan’s north, locals use al-Qaida to refer to any anti-U.S. insurgent, a name that came to them by way of the Americans. Nuristani said the innocent man had a childlike intelligence and had been taken advantage of by the insurgents, followers of Rahman and Haq who used his house for operational planning. They had tried to hide there during the raid, which cost Ahmed his life.

An intelligence officer on the base disputed Ahmed’s innocence, but declined to give an explanation.

The villagers were further incensed when the second Apache raid injured women and children. The afternoon after the raid, they called a shura, or tribal council, with Lt. Col. Feagin and a CIA officer to discuss the security and operations conducted in the valley.

The Americans had been feeling good about their progress. But it was clear that all the collateral damage had further strained a relationship with the locals that was already tense.

The shura, a collection of middle-aged men from all the nearby villages, arrived complaining of the deteriorating situation. Forty strong, in stained salwar kameez and flat hats, they sat in rows of white plastic chairs inside an uncompleted building on the base.

One man after another stood up to direct his anger, through a translator, at Feagin and the CIA officer. “You told us when you came here that you would not hurt

innocent and peaceful people,” said a man with an ink-black beard stretching to the middle of his chest.

“You have big guns and helicopters with good technology, surely you can tell the difference between those who are innocent and those who are not.

“You told us if we helped you, the Americans would not harm us. We are prisoners in our villages now!” Several of the men nodded their heads as the man sat back down.

Lt. Col. Feagin, whose chest seemed to point upward, sat still on an unfinished stone wall facing the shura. “There was no intent to target anyone but our enemy,” he told them. “If the enemy continues to fight us, many more will die. I am certain.” A few gunshots echoed in the valley.

Feagin pointed to the direction of the noise and said, “This is part of the problem. The only thing the enemy can bring is fear, intimidation and death.” Feagin informed the shura that the injured villagers had been flown to Bagram Air Base to get “the best medicine and treatment the Army has to offer.” He then offered to hire more fighting-age men for the Afghan army unit that would soon be posted in the valley.

Lt. Dan Dillow, executive officer of the 3-71’s Bravo Company, later told me the counterinsurgency model was the only way to fight the war in Afghanistan. “I don’t like civil affairs” -- building roads and schools, offering jobs -- “but you need it out here,” he said. You have to give them something. You can’t defeat the Nuristanis.

“They know who is ambushing us and when it’s going to happen, but they won’t tell us. They have us by the balls and they know it.”

Next to speak was the CIA officer, a man I’ll call Arnold. He was dressed like a toy soldier, with black “Terminator”-style sunglasses and an Under Armour T-shirt that even with elastic was stretched to its limits by his muscle.

He looked like he should have been lifting weights in a gym.

He told the Nuristanis a convoluted story about a wild dog he had killed near his farm in the United States. He had asked the dog’s owner, his neighbor, to put the dog down.

After several attempts to reason with the neighbor, and with the dog still running amok, Arnold killed the animal. The Nuristanis, he said, were his neighbors, and the Pakistani-trained insurgents were the wild dogs. If the locals didn’t take responsibility for keeping insurgents out of their villages, he would be forced to kill the insurgents in their midst. “These (fighters) only know war in their heart,” he said, giving his left breast a double tap with a closed fist to make his point.

The shura members responded by looking at the translator quizzically. Later I asked the translator what the villagers had thought of the CIA officer’s comments. “They didn’t like it” was all he would say.

The 10th Mountain, meanwhile, has suffered its own losses to “wild dogs.”

Thirty-nine soldiers from the 10th have died since May 2006, 25 by enemy fire, making them the hardest hit U.S. division in the history of the Afghan theater. Camp Lybert is named for Staff Sgt. Patrick Lybert, who fell in combat.

But the troops in Nuristan have also suffered from sheer isolation and the topography of the Hindu Kush.

At Lybert (altitude 6,500 feet), the 3-71's Charlie Company had gone 70 days without a hot shower or a hot meal.

They have sustained deaths and injuries from hiking and falling.

Soldiers who have served in both Iraq and Afghanistan before said their current living conditions are much worse.

"Leadership doesn't care about us," said one officer, who requested that his name be withheld to avoid punishment for his comments.

"We've gone on mission after mission after mission where we've gone black (run out) on food and water. They tell us, 'Pack light, your mission will only be four days tops.' But then we end up stuck on a mountaintop for two weeks. We didn't have anything, not even tents. If you can't get us off a mountain, don't put us on there."

Several soldiers and officers I spoke with told me they were unprepared for their mission in the north of Afghanistan. No one, it seems, told them they would have to fight a Vietnam-style war at high altitudes.

One officer told me the 10th Mountain's limited resources and poor planning frustrated him. (He also asked that his name be withheld for fear of retribution.)

"Leadership has failed us," he told me. "They don't give a shit about us. We've been shorted everything we needed. Our training didn't prepare us for this terrain or this mission. We're doing the best we can but we're not getting support."

He said the summer of 2006 had been filled with air-assault missions in which Chinooks delivered 20 to 30 troops to a ridgeline with little food or water, and no plan to pick them up.

Adding to Charlie Company's frustration, it cannot go on manned patrols in the villages below. Capt. Mike Schmidt, the commanding officer, told me the location of the base and size of his troop limited how much he could do. "We depend a lot on locals walking up from the neighboring villages to give us information," he said.

Again and again soldiers referred to insurgents as "the enemy" or "the bad guys." But the lack of detailed knowledge about whom they were fighting, and why their adversaries were fighting in turn, is troubling.

In the north, for instance, the Taliban are weak and unwelcome. And while al-Qaida has local fighters in some valleys, their reach, according to U.S. intelligence officials, has

been diminished. Though Army officials quietly say the insurgents are religious fighters, some evidence shows the disputes are local and have little to do with jihad.

A translator named Abdul who has worked for the CIA and the Special Forces told me that the biggest threat to American troops in the north, a man named Haji Usman, had been nothing more than a rich timber smuggler before the war. "Now he's enemy No. 1," Abdul said. "He was not a nice guy, but he was not fighting a jihad. He wasn't fighting the Americans. But they took favor with his biggest smuggling competitor, and now he's the No. 1 enemy. I do not understand this."

Back at Kamdesh, the base was gearing up for an incoming convoy.

Humvees and LMTVs (for light medium tactical vehicle, a 2.5-ton truck) would be arriving from Naray, carrying ammunition, food, fuel and water along a winding, rock-strewn dirt road. In 2006, insurgents had ambushed many convoys with RPGs, light arms and improvised explosive devices, along a stretch that 3-71 had come to call "Ambush Alley." Several supply trucks driven by Afghans had been torched and pushed into the river. Some U.S. soldiers had been killed, and dozens had been injured in a three-month span. Sometimes security precautions meant it took nine hours, instead of six, to cover the 25 miles between bases.

Soldiers began to intercept radio communication between insurgents. A man speaking the local Nuristani language began to yell "Allahu akbar!" -- "God is great!" -- before directing his men to attack. "Do not miss. Be accurate. Do not worry, they don't have any planes."

He was right.

Close air support, the element that gives U.S. forces the biggest advantage over the insurgents, didn't seem to be nearby, and even if planes and choppers were on their way, the radio traffic didn't identify where the insurgents would fire.

One of the military intelligence officers who helped relay the information to the convoy expressed frustration. "We know they're going to try to fire, but we don't know from where, so we can't help the convoy out much," he said.

Within a minute, the Americans were hit with several RPGs and rifle fire.

A Humvee flipped and was evacuated. A group of soldiers sat around the radio at the Kamdesh control post, listening, hoping the platoon could make it through the "kill zone" without taking casualties. They did. Hours later the convoy reached camp, and there had been only a few minor injuries.

However, the convoy had lost another vehicle in addition to the Humvee, and there were signs that the insurgents were trying new tactics.

For the first time, instead of one firing position, the ambush had come from three positions on a mountainside, creating more fire of longer duration and hitting more vehicles.

The insurgents had had another success, and had isolated the PRT base even further.

Lt. Ben Keating, for one, admitted a grudging admiration for his adaptable foes. "They're smart. They keep low, never expose themselves for more than 30 seconds to a minute, and then disperse. It's frustrating."

A few nights after I left Kamdesh, word came that a soldier had died in an accident.

A team was attempting a lights-out, nighttime convoy to return a truck. The 2.5-ton truck flipped off of a cliff, tossing its two passengers 300 feet down to a riverbank covered with boulders.

The Kamdesh soldiers knew the drive would be dangerous. The truck was large and unstable going over a poorly constructed road littered with rocks, boulders and craters.

It was the main section of Ambush Alley that Lt. Col. Feagin had ordered rebuilt. But four months later, it was still in bad shape.

By the time a group of soldiers got the injured back up the cliff and to a medevac helicopter, one of the passengers, Lt. Keating, had died from his fall, at the age of 27.

The men of the PRT base renamed it Camp Keating.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

First Quarter '07 Deadliest Of War For U.S. Troops

Apr 9, 2007 by Rowan Scarborough, The Examiner

The first quarter of 2007 marked the first time that 80 or more Americans were killed in action in each of three consecutive months.

January, February and March combined for the deadliest first quarter, with 244 deaths compared with 148 in 2006, 200 in 2005 and 119 in 2004, according to casualty counts by the Web site icasualties.org.

Local Soldier Killed In Iraq:

Kennedy Attended Xaverian Brothers High



April 9, 2007 WCVB-TV

BOSTON -- Army Sgt. Adam Kennedy, a rock climbing enthusiast and Norwich University graduate who began his first tour of duty in Iraq last fall, was killed by a blast from an improvised explosive device south of Baghdad, his family said Monday.

Family members didn't immediately know any additional details of the circumstances of Sunday's attack, his father, David Kennedy, and mother, Nancy Smyth, said by telephone from the family home in Norfolk.

Kennedy, 25, served in a 4th Brigade infantry division based in Fort Richardson, Alaska, and was sent to his first tour in Iraq in October.

"His lifelong ambition was to be in the military," his father said. "He really loved the discipline, and the physical conditioning."

Kennedy's unit provided security for an Army colonel, clearing hidden explosives and otherwise ensuring safe passage for convoys. The work frequently put Kennedy's unit in danger - a reality that became clear to his family when he returned for a 10-day leave late last year.

"He was obviously subdued, and changed by the danger," his father said.

David Kennedy said his son telephoned him last Thursday, and told him he would be on special duty requiring him to be out of contact for about a month.

Despite the risks, in December Kennedy made a commitment to remain with the Army for another six years, his father said.

Kennedy, who was single, graduated from Xaverian Brothers High School in Westwood in 2000. He graduated from Norwich University, a private military college in Northfield, Vt., in 2004, majoring in computer science, according to a statement from the university.

At Norwich, he spent time away from his studies rock-climbing in the Green Mountains, and participated in a cold weather rescue team, his parents said.

Although he had little background as a runner, last year he finished a marathon during a break from military training in Alaska.

“He ran a respectable time his first time out,” his father said.

Arrangements for a funeral in Norfolk were pending.

Norman Soldier Killed In Iraq



Spc. Ryan Scott Michael Dallam, 24, a third-generation Army soldier from Norman, Okla., died April 6, 2007, in Baghdad, Iraq, when the Humvee he was driving hit an improvised explosive device, his father Scott Dallam said Monday. (AP Photo/Dallam Family Photo)

April 09, 2007 Norman (AP)

The family of a Norman soldier says their son died Friday while serving in Iraq.

Scott Dallam of Norman says his son -- 24-year-old Army Corporal Ryan Dallam -- died in Baghdad along with two other soldiers.

Ryan Dallam grew up in Norman, but recently lived in Arizona, where he graduated from Show Low High School in 2002.

He also had attended Oklahoma City Community College.

He was a member of the Headquarters Company, 1st of the 18th Infantry, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division that was deployed to Iraq.

Dallam's father says his son was scheduled to come home on leave next week.

A memorial service for Dallam is planned for 4:30 p-m Thursday at First Christian Church in Norman.

Soldier, 22, Dies

“He Didn’t Believe The Military Presence Was ‘Doing A Lot Of Good’”

“Dad, I Feel Like We’re Fighting Ghosts. There’s Nobody Out There To Fight”

April 7, 2007 Henry K. Lee, San Francisco Chronicle Staff Writer

Pfc. James Coon was under consideration for a Bronze Star after risking his own life in an attempt to save two wounded Army buddies after their unit was hit by a bomb in Iraq. Now, the honor would have to be awarded posthumously.

Coon, 22, who grew up in Walnut Creek, died in Balad, Iraq, on Wednesday after an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle.

His death came less than three weeks after his unit was hit by a pair of bombs as it returned from a patrol in Baghdad. On March 15, he ran from his vehicle without protection or a weapon and put tourniquets on two wounded soldiers, but they and four others in the unit died.

“It really disturbed him,” his stepmother, Marie Coon, 46, whom Coon considered his mother, said Friday.

In an e-mail to his family a day after the incident, her son wrote, “Everyone is calling me a hero, but all I did was what I thought was right. I wanna come home so bad. I don’t wanna play Army any more.” But he added, “Ima do what I have to do to stay alive out here, but if I have to, I will risk everything for my buddies out here.”

Even before then, Coon had told his mother that he didn’t believe the military presence was “doing a lot of good,” she said.

Coon, a 2003 graduate of Las Lomas High School in Walnut Creek, enlisted in the Army before his 21st birthday and was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas. He was deployed to Iraq in October.

“I’m very proud of my son,” said Jim Coon, 49. “I would like everybody to support our troops.”

But he added, “I don’t support the government and what they’re doing with this war. I don’t believe the war is right.”

Coon said his son recently told him about what he regarded as an unseen enemy: “Dad, I feel like we’re fighting ghosts. There’s nobody out there to fight.”

The couple spoke at their Walnut Creek home Friday as their son's beloved rottweiler, Tyson, sat at their feet. When two Army officials came Wednesday to notify the family about their son's death, Jim Coon said he began shouting and crying, "No, this ain't happening." The dog, who has "not a mean bone in his body," growled menacingly at the men, Jim Coon said.

In high school and college, Coon enjoyed hip-hop music and dancing, but excelled in football and darts. He won a national steel-tip dart championship in Cleveland and went by himself to England shortly after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, representing the United States at the world tournament, his mother said. He placed fifth.

He loved to do wheelies on his Honda motorcycle, his father said.

Coon stood 6 feet 6 inches tall, wore Size 14 1/2 shoes and was a punter on the football teams at Las Lomas and Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill. His 2002 team at Las Lomas won the North Coast Section 2A championship game, Principal Pat Lickiss said Friday.

"He was a nice kid, well liked," Lickiss said. "Any time I have a student or graduate die for any reason, it hurts. Las Lomas is a close community."

Although he came from a military family -- his stepmother served in the Air Force and other relatives served in the Marines -- Coon enlisted primarily to save money to buy a home, his mother said. He had formerly worked for the Kelly-Moore paint company and at a Safeway store and wanted to be financially secure, she said.

On his MySpace page, Coon lauded his father. "My dad is for sure my hero," he wrote. "He is also my best friend."

"That just tore me up," Jim Coon said, his eyes glistening.

About a month ago, Coon sent his stepmother flowers. "I wasn't ready to give up my time with him," she said as tears fell.

Deer Park High Grad Killed In Iraq Days After Leave Ends



April 5, 2007 By RUTH RENDON, Houston Chronicle

Army Sgt. Robert M. McDowell wasn't present for the birth of his son, but a leave from his post in Iraq last month allowed him to visit with his newborn and wife.

After the visit, McDowell left his Fort Drum, N.Y., base to return to Iraq on March 23. Nine days later, an improvised explosive device exploded near his vehicle, killing him and three others.

McDowell, a 1996 Deer Park High School graduate, had been in the Army for nearly 10 years, having joined two years after graduating from high school.

McDowell enjoyed the Army so much that he questioned himself on why he waited and didn't join the Army right after high school, said McDowell's brother, Michael, of Pearland.

"He loved what he did. He always felt like he was doing the right thing. I don't think he would have done anything else. He loved the guys he served with," Michael McDowell said.

In high school, Robert McDowell wasn't in ROTC but got the military bug from his father, who was a Navy reservist, Michael McDowell said.

Robert McDowell, 30, died Sunday in Baghdad. He was assigned to the 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division in Fort Drum, N.Y.

Also killed were Staff Sgt. David A. Mejias, 26, of San Juan, Puerto Rico, Staff Sgt. Eric R. Vick, 25, of Spring Hope, N.C., and Spc. William G. Bowling, 24, of Beattyville, Ky.

McDowell was on his second tour of duty to Iraq.

His battalion deployed in September and is scheduled to return in August.

Aside from a wife and son, McDowell also is survived by a 6-year-old daughter and his parents.

His mother and stepfather live in Deer Park; his father lives in Mobile, Ala.

"It's still sinking in," Michael McDowell said. His mother and stepfather left earlier this week to be with his sister-in-law in New York, he said. McDowell said he has been searching the Internet and awaiting word from the Department of Defense for information on his brother's death.

"I haven't heard," he said. "That's all I've been doing the last couple of days, trying to find out what happened."

Funeral arrangements for Sgt. McDowell are pending.

Kentuckian Killed In Iraq Was Due To See Baby

April 6, 2007 Associated Press

BEATTYVILLE, Ky. -- Jennifer Bowling exchanged Internet messages with her husband a little more than a week ago, discussing plans for his return from Iraq and seeing his new baby.

But Sgt. William G. Bowling never made it home to Beattyville. He died Sunday with three others from his battalion when a roadside bomb exploded near their vehicle, the military said.

"I'm just trying to take it day by day right now," Jennifer Bowling said.

The four were assigned to the 10th Mountain Division based at Fort Drum, N.Y.

Jennifer Bowling said her husband was a sports fan who followed the Indianapolis Colts and NASCAR. He was a Dale Earnhardt fan until the race driver died in a crash, and then rooted for his son, Dale Earnhardt Jr.

The couple married in the spring of 2003, shortly after William Bowling finished basic training at Fort Benning, Ga. Joining the military was a decision made after some thought, Jennifer Bowling said.

"He was at a point in his life where he just felt like he needed to enlist," Jennifer Bowling said. "He thought about joining right after 9/11, and he thought about it some more after that. It was just something he thought he needed to do."

William Bowling, an only child, served as an infantryman in Iraq in 2004 and 2005. He re-enlisted in 2005 and joined the military police. He returned to Iraq last August.

"He loved the work he did," Jennifer said. "He supported the country, and he really believed in what he was doing over there."

The Bowlings had a 1-year-old daughter, Hannah, and their second child is expected in about two weeks. When the couple last exchanged messages, they talked about his returning home on April 29, a recent promotion to sergeant and the new baby.

"We just talked about everyday things," Jennifer said.

Attacks On Green Zone Increasing

Apr 9, 2007 By Erik Holmes - Staff writer, Army Times

BAGHDAD — Rocket and mortar attacks against Baghdad's Green Zone, or International Zone, have increased in the past three weeks after a period of relative quiet, two American military security personnel in the zone said recently.

Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Paul Riffle, the senior enlisted member of the International Zone Police, said there had been six or seven separate attacks on the heavily fortified area of central Baghdad in the previous 10 days alone, compared to an average of only one or two per week a month ago.

Each attack might include up to five or six mortars or rockets, he said.

The International Zone Police, in charge of internal security within the zone, comprises 45 Air Force Security Forces police officers. Hundreds of soldiers and contractors provide perimeter security and man internal checkpoints throughout the zone.

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



Foreign occupation soldiers of the U.S. Delta company, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment guard a suspicious Iraqi citizen in Baghdad's northwest neighborhood of Ghazaliya March 28, 2007. U.S. soldiers detained two Iraqi men during a traffic control because their car was on a list of suspicious cars, U.S. forces confirmed.
REUTERS/Fabrizio Bensch

“It’s Just A Really, Really Smart Mouse.”

April 09, 2007 By ALISSA J. RUBIN and EDWARD WONG, New York Times [Excerpt]

One American private in the First Battalion, Fifth Cavalry, who was working the overnight shift at a new garrison in western Baghdad, described the Americans’ fight this way: “The insurgents, they see what we’re doing and we see what they’re doing. Then we get ahead, then they figure out what we’ve done and they get ahead.

“It’s like a game of cat and mouse.

“It’s just a really, really smart mouse.”

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Bomb Kills 6 Canadian Troops In Afghanistan

April 8, 2007 KABUL, Afghanistan (Reuters) & The Australian

Six Canadian troops serving with NATO were killed in southern Afghanistan on Sunday when a roadside bomb struck their vehicle, the Canadian Defense Ministry confirmed. At least one soldier was wounded.

One vehicle was damaged in the blast.

The deaths bring the Canadian toll to 51 since Ottawa sent troops to Afghanistan in 2002. Canada’s main base is in the southern city of Kandahar.

Assorted Resistance Action

April 8, 2007 RAHIM FAIEZ, Associated Press Writer

In the eastern Paktika province, two Afghan guards were killed and five wounded during a four-hour firefight with Taliban militants near the border with Pakistan, according to the U.S.-led coalition, which is operating separately from the NATO-led force.

Militants fired mortars and a rocket on a coalition checkpoint in the village of Kakakhel. Troops returned fire and called in an airstrike, leaving two militants dead and three others wounded, the statement said.

“They’re Friendly To Us When We Are Here And When We Leave The Taliban Moves In”

Apr 8 By DENIS D. GRAY, Associated Press Writer [Excerpts]

Rarely do the insurgents take on American troops — few but formidable — in the Baylough Bowl. But in a gray world where allegiances are fluid and identities are closely guarded, the Taliban are always watching and waiting.

No sooner does a patrol leave its primitive mud fort on foot or wheels than the chatter on Taliban frequencies begins: “The Americans have just left. They’re coming this way. We will need more reinforcements if they approach any closer ...”

“They’re probably looking at us right now from one of those peaks,” says Abdul Farid, an Afghan interpreter and radio monitor as he leaves Forward Operating Base Baylough in the southeastern province of Zabul.

These almost daily patrols are the staple of U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan, coping with a rekindled Islamic insurgency more than five years after the Taliban regime fell to American and Afghan forces.

What all this expenditure of sweat, and sometimes blood, will do to win the war is difficult to gauge.

1st Lt. Jason Cunningham, who has logged more than 180 miles on foot over the past three months, explains the purpose of being on the ground, face-to-face with villagers: to keep the Taliban at bay, establish authority, and enable troops to take the local pulse and dispense aid to gain converts where loyalties are questionable and violence sometimes erupts.

“It’s very possible that I’ve had tea with the Taliban,” says Cunningham, who commands 50 U.S. Army soldiers.

The next day the 14-man unit — a platoon of B Company, 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment — launches a 9-mile patrol which eight hours later leaves the legs of even the superbly fit soldiers weak and rubbery.

The troops push through the basin, which measures some 6 by 8 miles — part moonscape of soaring rock piles, part idyll of blossoming almond orchards and grazing lambs, all girded by mountains capped with the remnants of winter’s snows.

The patrol stops villagers as they head to fields or the bazaar on donkeys or old motorcycles.

The Afghans seem bored by the routine searches, raising their hands high with little prompting.

Some checks turn farcical.

“Ask the guy why he’s jumping around,” a suspicious soldier tells the interpreter as he slides his hands up and down a farmer’s pants.

“He thinks you are gay,” the smiling interpreter responds.

The turnaround point is Sinan, a hamlet of low-walled compounds, each looking like a little medieval fortress of mud that seems as one with the dun earth. Children and veiled women peer from behind heavy, timbered doors.

“It’s sort of a gray village. They’re friendly to us when we are here and when we leave the Taliban moves in,” says Staff Sgt. Lukas Hearn, resting against a compound wall in the heart of the settlement.

On the patrol’s return leg, six soldiers are ordered to set up an observation post. It’s a heart-pounding clamber up a boulder-strewn cliff at 9,000 feet altitude, with each man carrying as much as 100 pounds of gear.

“Everybody in the bowl knows we’re up here,” says Hearn, of Moore, Okla., moments after his team begins to scan a vast, 180-degree panorama through sniper rifle scopes and binoculars.

Sometimes the Taliban — “dudes dressed in black carrying AK-47s” — can be spotted from such heights, the soldiers say. But it’s not easy to pinpoint them among the sea of rocks or mingling with the villagers in the fields and hamlets far below.

Even if they’re seen, “they all can run faster than we can,” he says.

TROOP NEWS

“While The True Magnitude Of The Army’s Equipment Disaster Remains Clouded In Classification, The Anecdotal Evidence Of Impending Collapse Is Anywhere You Choose To Look”

“Except For One Brigade Set In Korea, It’s All Gone. “We Emptied The Last Set In March”

April 9, 2007 By Robert H. Scales, Washington Times. Retired Maj. Gen. Robert H. Scales is a former commander of the Army War College.

During the Cold War the Army stockpiled thousands of weapons and vehicles in warehouses or aboard huge cargo ships in the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans. These trucks, humvees, tanks, artillery and armored personnel carriers constituted our national reserve of weaponry.

Soldiers depend on this equipment should we go to war against an enemy outside Iraq and Afghanistan.

Except for one brigade set in Korea, it’s all gone.

We emptied the last set in March.

In total, nearly half of the Army’s fighting equipment is wearing away in Iraq and Afghanistan or waiting forlornly for repair or disposal.

Unclassified sources put the total number of broken or destroyed wheels, tracks and rotors at about 6,000.

Most Army brigades are “not combat ready” in part because of equipment shortages.

Brigades consist of people and equipment, so the significance of “not combat ready” loses a great deal in translation. If an unready brigade were a ship it would be in dry dock. If it were an aircraft it would be undergoing a complete stripdown and overhaul.

Virtually all of our reserve brigades and most of the Army’s regular brigades outside of Iraq and Afghanistan fit into this category.

The bottom line is that virtually any brigade not in Iraq cannot be equipped for war for a very, very long time.

While the true magnitude of the Army’s equipment disaster remains clouded in classification, the anecdotal evidence of impending collapse is anywhere you choose to look.

For the first time in nearly half a century the 82nd Airborne Division cannot generate enough combat power to put one of its brigades on strategic alert.

A retired general friend visited a division at a very large post that has only 30 of its 240 tanks in working order.

One general who daily works on equipment issues in the Pentagon reflected on the past: “Remember, after the collapse of the Soviet Union how the Russians left mountains of junked equipment to rust away in Eastern European motor pools? Well, we’re nearly there now.”

The Army will continue to wear out its equipment at prodigious rates. The pace of this decline is painful to watch.

Usage rates for tanks during peacetime are about 550 miles per tank per year. Today in Iraq tanks average over 5,000 miles per year.

The heavily armored behemoths necessary for this style of war are not suitable for fighting the “long war.”

Yesterday’s tank weighs more than 70 tons. It cannot move great distances. It consumes a huge amount of fuel that must be transported by vulnerable unarmored convoys from Kuwait to Baghdad.

It cannot be easily transported by air. And it takes a multitude of repairmen -- many of them civilian contractors -- and a huge base infrastructure to keep it running in the punishing heat and dust of Iraq.

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



The coffin of Marine Pfc. Bufford ‘Kenny’ VanSlyke at MBS International Airport in Freeland, Mich. March 6, 2007. VanSlyke, 22, died Feb. 28 after being shot at a checkpoint in Anbar province, Iraq. (AP Photo/The Bay City Times, Kevin Hagen)

“One Guy Literally Chopped Off His Trigger Finger With An Axe To Prevent His Deployment”

April 8, 2007 By Paul von Zielbauer, International Herald Tribune

U.S. Army prosecutions of desertion and other unauthorized absences have risen sharply in the past four years, resulting in thousands more negative discharges and prison time for junior soldiers and combat-tested veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, military records show.

“They are scraping to get people to go back, and people are worn out,” said Thomas Grieger, a senior Navy psychiatrist.

Though there are no current studies to show how combat stress affects desertion rates, Grieger, cited several examples of soldiers absconding or refusing to return to Iraq because of psychiatric reasons brought on by wartime deployments.

At an army base in Alaska last year, for example, “there was one guy who literally chopped off his trigger finger with an axe to prevent his deployment,” Grieger said.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Assorted Resistance Action

Apr 9 (VOI)

Basra – Three Iraqi soldiers were killed in an explosive device attack in northern Basra, a police source in the province said on Monday

Guerrillas blew up the house of an Iraqi army officer in the city of Haditha, al-Anbar province, but caused no casualties, local residents in Haditha said

Five policemen were wounded when their patrol came under an armed attack in central Baaquba, an official Iraqi police source said.

Muthanna – A judge from the court of al-Samawa was killed by, while three policemen were slightly wounded in a hand grenade attack in the city, a security source in Samawa said.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

**“About Internal Resistance In The
Military...”**

**“Reilly Is Detrimental To The
Morale Of The Entire Infantry Unit”**

From: Ward Reilly, Veterans for Peace
To: GI Special
Sent: April 08, 2007
Subject: Resisting from within...

Hey Bro...\$20 in the mail coming your way for your current drive....wish it was more...keep up the GREAT work...

About internal resistance in the military...

I realized at some point in 1971 that prison would an UPGRADE in lifestyle to being in the Infantry, and from that point on I had the Army by the short hairs...

I TRIED to get thrown in prison, and they WOULDN'T FUCKING SEND ME, even though I deserted with 3 other platoon members for 45 days, went AWOL many times, missed countless formations, got busted ON PURPOSE for hard drugs, and refused MANY direct orders...guard duties, etc., as these documents show.

2 Pictures: [SEE BELOW]

How to resist from within... (and please note these are from AFTER my first “Special Court Martial” heading to my second SCM)....

...statements about me from my CO and Platoon LT...I love the lines; “Reilly refuses to obey orders and sometimes refuses to do ANYTHING”.... “Reilly has not rehabilitated himself”, and I also am very proud of the “Reilly is detrimental to the morale of the entire Infantry unit”...from my CO...yeah, bad for my Commanding Officer’s morale, maybe.

So, during my 3 years in the GI resistance, all war years, 71-74, I did 32 straight months in Germany... we took over the Army, the Draft ended, the ground war ended, and Nixon resigned in disgrace....did I do a good job, or WHAT?

REAL RESISTANCE, priceless. FTA. All The WaY

Peace from Ward

1/16 (Rangers) Big Red One... The First To Go And Last To Know!

PS...feel free to use these documents in the GI Special to teach those brothers and sister troops of ours over in Iraq and Afghanistan that they can tell an officer to FUCK OFF!

What are they going to do, SEND YOU TO IRAQ if you refuse?

They are already in hell

rwr

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
C Company 1st Battalion 16th Infantry
APO New York 09846

21 November 1973

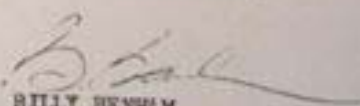
AETSORA-C REILLY, Robert W, . 433 84 2346 .

SUBJECT: Vacation of suspended confinement at hard labor.

THRU: CDR
1st Bn 16th Inf
APO NY 09846

TO: CDR
3rd Bde Div (Fwd)
APO NY 09846

1. I request the vacation of all the suspended confinement adjudged to private Robert W, Reilly on, 21 August 1973.
2. Private Reilly's performance of duty has only been marginal since my arrival in the unit. In the past two months his standards of apperance have dropped considerable. He React's to orders in an adverse manner and makes constant excuses for poor performance.
3. On 12 November, 1973, Private Reilly, failed to report to a mandatory 1300, Hour formation and remained absent until on or about 1000 hour 13 November 1973. On 16 November 1973, Private Reilly was absent for Battalion guard duty.
4. Private Reilly has failed to respond to constant counseling and his presence is having an adverse effect upon the morale of this unit.


BILLY BENHAM
CPT, Infantry
Commanding

STATEMENT

21 November 1973

Since his Court Martial, PV1 Robert Reilly has not performed according to minimum acceptable standards. He is in need of a haircut constantly, and when told to get one he creates excuses consistently as to why he does not have one. His uniform and general appearance is below standard. His attitude in regards to doing a good job is extremely poor. He does not make formations on time, and during training finds ways to do either a very sub-standard job, or will refuse to do anything at all.

Specifically, on 12 November 1973, he was informed by both his Commander of the Relief and his Platoon Sergeant that on 13 November, the day after his guard duty, he would be allowed only one-half of the day off. Reilly took the entire day off, and could not be located in his area until the following morning.

In a second instance, PV1 Reilly was absent from guard duty on Friday 16 November 1973. His Sergeant of the Guard reported the same, and could not find Reilly anywhere in the company area until the following day.

Overall, PV1 Reilly's performance has not indicated to me that he is attempting to re-habilitate himself, that is, to become a good soldier.

////////////////////////////////////
NOTHING FOLLOWS
////////////////////////////////////

Claude R. Parnsly
CLAUDE R. PARNSELY
2LT INF
PIT IDR

East Tennessee Report:
**“We Are Losing The War In Iraq And
Can’t Ever Win. We Need To
Withdraw Immediately”**
Upstate New York Report:
**“Most People Around Here Think
Anything The Administration Says Is
A Lie”**

What we have found in checking with brothers-in-arms around the country is antidotal evidence of complete dissatisfaction with the entire Washington establishment.

When R. L. Fisher retired from the Marine Corps and moved to Coalmont, Tennessee, it was to enjoy living in some beautiful country. Today his picture of Grundy County is not all that pretty.

“Things are Bad!” he says.”

He also reports,” They think Bush should be impeached. It was wrong to go to Iraq. Bush lied about everything and fabricated the reasons given. We are losing the war in Iraq and can’t ever win. We need to withdraw immediately. Military leadership is bad. It is getting lots of people shot up and killed for nothing. Troops are just terrorizing peaceful Muslim civilians.”

Bryan Whiting spent the Vietnam War years serving two Army tours in combat. Now living in upper New York.

He feels the general mood of the public in his area is “Blame every problem the state and the country has on George Bush. Most people around here think anything the Administration says is a lie. I personally don’t feel I can support either the GOP or the Democrat majority. One side is just as bad as the other.”

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

Troops Invited:

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

OCCUPATION REPORT

60% Of Iraqis Want U.S. Troops Dead: Big Surprise



A foreign occupation soldier of the U.S. Delta company, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment holds down a suspect Iraqi citizen in Baghdad early March 26, 2007. REUTERS/Fabrizio Bensch (IRAQ)

[U.S. sponsored polls reported recently that 60% of Iraqis favor killing U.S. troops. Iraqis feel about U.S. troops trampling them in the dirt the same way Americans felt about the British trampling them in the dirt in 1776. They are right to resist. T]

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

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

**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.org/)

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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