

GI SPECIAL 5F1:

NO MORE: BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW



A wounded U.S. soldier, Taji airbase May 9, 2007. (AP Photo/Thomas Wagner)

The Alamo:

“I Sometimes Worry That This Period Will End Up Going Down Here As Their Surge, Not Ours”

“It’s Not Getting Any Better, And I Don’t See When It Will”

“Three Of The 16 Soldiers In Williamson’s Platoon Always Stay Behind Because They No Longer Patrol”

“Soldiers Here Now Openly Declare Pessimism For The Mission’s Chances, Unofficially Referring To Their Splinter Of Heavily Fortified Land As ‘The Alamo’”

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One lashed out against Williamson, another reported he couldn’t do the job anymore, and a third went home on leave and “couldn’t act right,” Williamson said.

[Thanks to Michael Letwin, NY City Labor Against The War, who sent this in.]

May 23, 2007 By Garrett Therolf, Los Angeles Times [Excerpts]

BAGHDAD — The 16-man platoon from Ft. Hood, Texas, uses a decrepit Iraqi national police compound for its outpost. Chickens, turkeys and sheep laze on the lawn, drenched by an overflowing septic tank. Each day, the soldiers venture out for a few hours onto the dangerous streets of what was once a fashionable Sunni Arab neighborhood.

Led by a 24-year-old West Point graduate, the Americans weave their Humvees among villas commandeered by fighters who snipe at them from rooftops, bury bombs in the streets and evade searches with the help of two men dubbed the “moped twins,” who relay the platoon’s position by walkie-talkie at nearly every turn.

The troops stay overnight in makeshift quarters, nursing their wounds and attempting to hold onto any gains they’ve made through the day in the now-downtrodden Amiriya and Khadra districts.

The latest U.S.-Iraq security plan, based on occupying neighborhood bases and having close contact with the community, is nowhere more intense and focused than here in west Baghdad, where Iraqi forces battle daily with homegrown Muslim insurgents.

Five U.S. soldiers have died this month in Amiriya, victims of improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, and snipers.

Since the arrival of additional troops in February, the square-mile area patrolled by 1st Lt. Schuyler Williamson’s platoon and others from the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry, has been the site of 300 IEDs buried in or alongside the road.

An Army intelligence map uses small red blast symbols to mark bomb sites. The symbols obscure entire thoroughfares.

Soldiers here now openly declare pessimism for the mission's chances, unofficially referring to their splinter of heavily fortified land as "the Alamo."

"Sometimes," said Brendan Gallagher, the captain who oversees Williamson, "we like to comfort ourselves when we are taking a lot of IEDs and casualties by saying that the enemy is desperate, they are doing this because they are scared.

"But how many times can they actually be desperate?"

"I sometimes worry that this period will end up going down here as their surge, not ours."

The 'Texan Militia'

The soldiers in Williamson's platoon have patrolled Iraq elbow-to-elbow in Humvees since November. Among them is Sgt. Andrew Zamacona, nicknamed "Tackleberry" after the character from the movie "Police Academy" who is always gung-ho for a fight.

And there's Pfc. Alonzo Duncan, a former mechanic who reenlisted two years ago, at 40. They labeled him "Blue" after a character in the film "Old School" who wants to join the college fraternity in his old age.

Williamson calls himself the governor of Texas as he patrols Khadra. He refers to his soldiers as the Texan militia.

Over the course of four recent days, his soldiers were struck repeatedly by IEDs, one of which blasted a hole through an Army medic's foot, requiring him to be sent home. The platoon was also attacked by snipers; a bullet ripped through the fingers of an Iraqi national police captain accompanying the Americans on a joint patrol.

Checkpoints operated by Iraqi police at two entry points into Khadra came under gunfire several times a day, and a desecrated corpse suspected to be that of an Iraqi policeman was found hanging May 15 from a lamppost in Amiriya.

For their sacrifice, the troops here have been able to make minimal gains in increasing contact with the Iraqi populace and helping with trash collection, fuel delivery, sewage repairs and the delivery of other essential services.

They have also continued to be diverted by tedious, largely fruitless searches for their attackers. Williamson said they find about one suspect for every 15 explosions.

On May 14, a Monday, the soldiers began such a search from Camp Liberty, where they had been spending a break from their Khadra outpost, enjoying lattes and cheese grits at the sprawling military base near Baghdad's airport.

A Bradley fighting vehicle earlier in the day had struck a bomb buried in a road in Amiriya 15 minutes away, and the platoon was assigned to a door-to-door search for those responsible.

Before leaving Liberty, the men formed a circle in the midafternoon heat, their arms wrapped around one another's shoulders, and recited: "Please bring us home to our families, Lord, in your strong name we pray."

In the Bradley's cramped quarters, 20-year-old Pfc. Optaciano Araujo carried his M-4 with 210 rounds of ammunition and a picture taped on the gun's stock of the 4-month-old daughter he'd never met.

He said he had twice been in vehicles when they were hit by IEDs, and his convoy had been hit eight times more.

"We're about to get shot standing in the middle of the street again," he said.

Once in Amiriya, the soldiers knocked on a door. A woman answered with a smile, her hands covered in cookie batter. She was followed by five young children, including a naked toddler.

Inside the two-story villa, the floors were covered with unwashed clothes. The woman and her husband said they baked cookies for a living, and cookies were strewn amid the clothes.

Staff Sgt. Saul Astrada of Calexico, Calif., asked the woman for papers showing she had the right to be in the house.

The Iraqi interpreter working with the patrol asked Astrada why, since only Iraqi officials had the power to evict squatters.

"Just so that we can kill some time," Astrada, 23, replied, adding in reference to the day's heat: "You want to be in the back of the Bradley?"

The children huddled in the corner, their eyes flicking across the room, watching the soldiers as they searched through cabinets for papers.

Fifteen minutes later, the papers had not been found and the soldiers left without making any arrests. "Bullshit search," Araujo mumbled.

The tank convoy continued to the site of the morning's blast, and the soldiers fanned out to conduct more searches.

For hours, they detained most people walking in the street on suspicion that they might be trying to evade other American soldiers.

Some residents invited the troops into well-tended homes, one with faded red velvet couches and portraits of children on the refrigerator. More of the homes were spartan carcasses occupied by people who said they had lived there for only a few weeks, sometimes three families to a residence. None were able to provide rental papers.

As the sun set and the soldiers tired, many sat in chairs in the courtyard of an old man who had offered them tea and dragged his couch onto the lawn within the villa's walls for their comfort.

When they finally returned to Camp Liberty at 11:30 p.m., the platoon decided to let all its detainees go because there was no evidence they had done anything other than walk down the street.

Despite the friendly welcome from all residents interviewed, only one told the troops where they might find an IED, and that tip proved incorrect. No one said they knew where the soldiers could find a weapons cache, a suspect or a witness.

All Thoughts On IEDs

Since the security plan was launched three months ago, the troops have tried to protect government and contract workers delivering gasoline, picking up trash and making sewer repairs. But all three services remain broken.

The effort to fix potholes backfired by making it easier for insurgents to disguise the placement of IEDs as road repairs.

It was IEDs that were on the mind of the soldiers when they headed out again Tuesday morning.

"Everybody have their game face on?" asked Sgt. Stephen Cyr as he steered a Humvee toward Khadra. "Do your thing, Martinez."

"Big money, big money, big money. No whammies, no whammies, no whammies," Spc. John Martinez said into his headset as the soldiers passed the place where they'd been hit by an IED the previous day and using a saying from the old television game show "Press Your Luck" as their daily rosary.

After 15 minutes, they arrived at the national police outpost where their company had established camp.

The base can house 50 soldiers at a time, although the numbers are less than half that because of staffing shortages. It features a large wall topped with concertina wire and is closed to the public.

The downside of the security plan is that one of the three platoons that share the outpost must be stationed inside 24 hours daily. As a result, the company's captain said there were fewer patrols in Khadra than before the security crackdown.

When the troops moved in to establish their quarters, they learned that their old outpost, a less fortified Iraqi police station, had come under attack

The Iraqi police “reported firing from 360 degrees each of the four days since we left. I don’t have much hope for them,” said Staff Sgt. Mike Perez, second in command of the platoon.

It wouldn’t be the first time that the “clear, hold, build” strategy of the security plan didn’t move beyond the clear stage.

Perez put it this way: “They tell us to come here and do a job. But we’ve got a pregnant beast and it’s opening up on us.

“It’s not getting any better, and I don’t see when it will.”

Dreams Of Home

On Wednesday, an IED detonated during patrol. Gunfire erupted and an Iraqi police captain was wounded. The next day, another patrol in Khadra was hit by two IEDs in close succession — a daisy chain.

Williamson’s soldiers went in search of the perpetrators and spotted the “moped twins” again, the two gap-toothed men who raised walkie-talkies to their mouths while following the platoon at a distance as the troops patrolled.

The soldiers were happy to see one of the men point to a rooftop and then to the U.S. convoy. That overt act gave soldiers license to take a shot. The man cartwheeled over the front wheel, smacking the asphalt.

Just as quickly, he jumped up and fled into a house. The soldiers gave chase, but he escaped, jumping from roof to roof.

“I miss when the worst thing we had to do is go around this neighborhood picking up dead bodies,” said Cyr, the sergeant. “It’s sick, but true.”

Back at the outpost, the soldiers kill time with James Bond movies, computer war games and a bootlegged copy of the film “300.” In conversation, they return again and again to an itch for leaving the military.

“The only mission here is to get everybody out alive,” Sgt. Zamacona said.

“I have lack of motivation,” Sgt. Adrian Uresti said. “I’m overweight. I can’t be promoted, I can’t receive any commendations. To me, it’s time to move on.”

“We don’t want any medals anyway,” Spc. Martinez said. “It’s a hell of an honor, but most of the guys don’t get to walk around with them.”

The Iraqi forces join the Americans for joint patrols. And at the outpost, an Iraqi and American soldier teach each other the Arabic and English words for “hot.” A few of the Iraqis approached American soldiers with computers and asked, “Sex pictures?”

Sometimes, though, the Americans and Iraqis squabble over TV rights and retreat to separate sides. A U.S. soldier guards the door to make sure no Iraqi police officer enters American sleeping quarters.

Three of the 16 soldiers in Williamson's platoon always stay behind because they no longer patrol.

Their mental health is in tatters. One lashed out against Williamson, another reported he couldn't do the job anymore, and a third went home on leave and "couldn't act right," Williamson said.

On the hot vinyl couches, the conversation rarely strayed from Iraq, and Martinez and Uresti talked about the defining dates of their tours when best friends were killed or maimed.

"I worry about you guys," Perez told them.

"When I went home between tours, I forgot all about Iraq. I turned it off like a light switch. I wanted to get laid, get paid and get drunk. I didn't worry about what I did, what I didn't do — and that's what I'll have to do again."

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Tinian Soldier Killed In Iraq



VICTOR FONTANILLA 1984 - 2007

May 22, 2007 By Gaynor Dumat-ol Daleno, Pacific Daily News

Victor Michael Fontanilla joined the Army less than two years ago as a step to pursuing his dreams for his young family.

In almost-daily e-mails to his mother in Saipan, the young soldier shared some of those dreams: He would build his dream house on Tinian where he grew up and graduated from Tinian High, said his stepfather Ramon Quichocho, an attorney.

And in that house, Fontanilla said he would provide for his wife Noel, who is eight months pregnant with their second son. Fontanilla also was thinking of his 2-year-old son's future.

Now the soldier's wife will have their baby in about a month without him. And their 2-year-old will never see his father again.

Fontanilla died May 17 in Iraq, his family and the Military Veterans Affairs Office in the Northern Marianas confirmed yesterday. He died in a bomb blast, his family said.

He was 23.

Fontanilla died about six months into his deployment there, where he became the 20th casualty from the Northern Marianas, Guam and the rest of the Micronesia region to die in the war.

Ramon Quichocho said Fontanilla had been diligent about sending daily e-mails to his mom, Frances.

"My wife normally receives an e-mail from him every day -- until May 17," according Quichocho.

In his e-mails, Ramon Quichocho said Fontanilla would share his dream of building a home for his family and relocating them to Tinian once the house is built. This was his plan after his Iraq duty was completed.

"He wanted to move to Tinian. That's where he graduated, and he grew up there, too," Quichocho said.

And in the e-mails, Fontanilla would ask, according to Quichocho, about details of his childhood.

"He would be asking his mom about how he was when he was a kid," Quichocho said.

On Tinian, Northern Marianas historian Don Farrell, an Air Force veteran of the Vietnam War, said it's difficult to put into words his reaction to the loss of yet another life in Iraq.

"It's a real shame to have it come so very close to home. It's impossible to express ... How do you express something like that?" he asked.

Farrell said with the limited economic opportunities in the Northern Marianas, more and more high school graduates from the commonwealth have chosen to join military service.

“Without ... jobs available, there are few choices left,” Farrell said of Northern Marianas youth’s lack of career or job prospects at home after high school.

He said his granddaughter enlisted almost a year ago with the Air Force after having graduated from Tinian High.

And a grandson of Farrell, who is graduating from Tinian High in weeks, plans to join his sister in the Air Force.

“My grandson is following in his sister’s footsteps,” Farrell said. “And they’re not the only ones.”

Fontanilla will be buried in Stockton, Calif., where most of his relatives on his mom’s side live, Quichocho said. “He told his wife if he dies, he would like to be buried in Stockton,” Quichocho said.

Quichocho said he and his wife are now waiting for a flight to California, where Fontanilla moved in from Tinian in 2001.

“We deeply miss him. We are very proud of him. We know that he died defending our country,” he said.

He said his family would remember Fontanilla for being a respectful man.

“He was an honest boy. I call him ‘boy’ because for me he will always be my boy,” Quichocho said.

A nightly rosary is being held at Fontanilla’s aunt Lysia Cantoria Espinosa’s residence in Stockton. There will be a special memorial service for Fontanilla in Sacramento. Mass will be held at St. George’s Church and interment will follow at the San Joaquin Cemetery, also in Stockton.

Fontanilla was born Aug. 26, 1983, in French Camp, Calif.

He graduated from basic training with high honors, completed the Army’s Airborne School in April 2006 and was deployed to Iraq in October 2006, according to his family.

Fontanilla’s death adds to the Northern Marianas’ list of casualties from the war in Iraq.

Sgt. Yihjyh “Eddie” Chen, Staff Sgt. Wilgene Lieto, Cpl. Derence Jack, Lance Cpl. Adam Quitugua Emul, and Cpl. Lee Roy Camacho also died in Iraq.

Baghdad Blast Kills Sumter Soldier

May 23, 2007 Stephen Hudak, Sentinel Staff Writer

Though their military schedules and assignments conflicted, brothers Sean and Joseph Gilmore tried to talk once a month.

“He was ready to come home and see his family. It was rough out there,” said Sean Gilmore, an Alabama National Guard member, recalling the last chat with his brother, formerly of the small Sumter County community of Webster, about 60 miles west of Orlando.

A combat medic who met and married his wife in Sumter, Spc. Joseph Gilmore was among six soldiers killed Saturday in Iraq when a roadside bomb exploded near their vehicle, the Department of Defense said Tuesday.

Gilmore, 26, was the father of two children, ages 5 and 3.

“He’s a hero, and I hope to someday be the man he was,” his younger brother said in a phone interview from Alabama. “Everything he did was for somebody else.”

One of seven boys, Joseph Gilmore was born and reared in Hartford, Ala., but relocated after high school to Bushnell, where he lived with his grandmother, Bonnie Clinton. She died in 2001.

Gilmore and five other soldiers from Fort Hood outside Killeen, Texas, died in the blast Saturday during combat operations in Baghdad.

He joined the military in August 2005, earning a marksmanship badge and other honors.

Sean Gilmore, 24, an Alabama Guard member who was furloughed from duty in Kuwait for his brother’s funeral service, said his brother enlisted to make a better life for his family.

“That was his No. 1 concern,” he said. “He loved his kids.”

His widow, Eve Gilmore, 32, would not comment.

A MySpace page belonging to Eve Gilmore in Fort Hood, where the family resides, showed a picture of a soldier Tuesday with the caption: “R.I.P. Joseph Gilmore. Gone But Never Forgotten.”

The Department of Defense has identified 3,424 service personnel who have died since the war began in March 2003.

The total includes 136 Floridians.

**NOT ANOTHER DEATH! NOT ANOTHER
DOLLAR!
NOT ANOTHER DAY!**

Desilets Family Says It Is Proud Of Ben



Benjamin Desilets

May 23, 2007 By Nishi Gupta, HOI 19

ELMWOOD -- As word of a Marine's death continues to spread, a heart of Illinois town is dealing with the loss of a native son killed in Iraq on Monday.

According to his mother Lance Corporal Benjamin Desilets, 21, died when a bomb exploded near his Humvee.

Ben Desilets family issued a statement saying, "Our family is very proud of Ben for this, and we will cherish the memory of his willingness to serve, his bravery, and his sacrifice." Family members asked the Marines to act as their representatives as they grieve.

Homes lining both sides of Elmwood's Freemont Street mark a quiet tribute. "We put this flag out here special just for him. It's our recognition of his sacrifice for our country," Elmwood resident Paul Schauble.

Neighbors who live near the Desilets say nothing else feels quite right.

"How do you walk up to these people and say that you're sorry? That your son died or your husband died. How do you talk to these people? You just put a sign of respect out and let it go at that," said Schauble.

The mood was just as somber at Elmwood's school building- the red, white and blue flew low in deference to the former student turned American soldier.

His sixth grade teacher remembers a get-in-the-game attitude.

"He would much rather be outside building things being active doing other things rather than sitting inside the classroom," said Chris Herridge.

And that personality trait continued as he grew.

Ben's history teacher remembered he never shied away from a friendly political debate- especially about the war.

“He stayed with his convictions. He wanted to be involved, he wanted to help. He just wasn’t talking about it, he walked the walk,” said Phil Johnson.

Both teachers saw Ben months ago and say he was no longer a child.

“He was just had a different look about him he was a man,” Herridge said.

“He seemed to be doing really well and proud of himself - as he should have been,” said Johnson. “It’s shocking right now to have everything come to an abrupt end when he was doing so well.”

As many stars and stripes will continue to dot the tiny community, the flag in Ben’s family’s window will soon have to change.

The blue star representing an active service member will have to be covered with a gold star, showing that he was killed serving his country.

Ben graduated from Elmwood High in 2004.

He was born in Michigan.

School staff say several other graduates are serving overseas.

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THIS ENVIRONMENT IS HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH; COME HOME, NOW



U.S. soldiers combat insurgents in the neighborhood of Al-Jamia in Baghdad May 27, 2007. REUTERS/Eduardo Munoz

TROOP NEWS

Georgia Attorney General Tells DoD Rats To Quit Fucking Over Members Of Reserves and National Guard; Demands A Stop To Blackmailing Them Into Staying In Service, And Cheating Them Out Of Education Benefits If They Leave

Despite federal law that allows veterans who have served on active duty to receive financial assistance after their departure from the Reserves or National Guard, the Defense Department has refused to certify qualified veterans as eligible for the benefits and has advised reservists contemplating leaving the military that their ability to receive educational benefits would terminate as soon as they left service.

5/24/2007: Georgia Attorney General

Georgia Attorney General Thurbert Baker has asked Robert Gates, United States Secretary of Defense, to quickly remedy a situation that has seen members of the Armed Forces Reserves and the National Guard denied benefits to which they were entitled by federal law.

In a letter to Gates, Baker, President of the National Association of Attorneys General, joined with 42 other Attorneys General in calling on the Defense Department to honor the commitments made to the men and women of the Reserves and National Guard.

Despite federal law that allows veterans who have served on active duty to receive financial assistance after their departure from the Reserves or National Guard, the Defense Department has refused to certify qualified veterans as eligible for the benefits and has advised reservists contemplating leaving the military that their ability to receive educational benefits would terminate as soon as they left service.

This position is directly contradicted by federal law, which extends the eligibility period for reservists to receive educational benefits by the amount of time that they were on active duty plus an additional four months.

The benefits - in particular Chapter 1606 educational benefits - provide financial assistance of approximately \$300 per month to any eligible veteran who is a full time

student. The Defense Department, in recent Congressional testimony, appears to have conceded that the Department improperly denied benefits to many reservists and National Guard called to active duty.

“On the eve of Memorial Day, when we remember the sacrifices of those who have served in our nation’s military, it is extraordinarily unjust that individuals who have put their own lives on hold to serve on active duty should be denied benefits guaranteed to them by federal law.

In breaking its promises to our nation’s veterans, the federal government has shortchanged the sacrifices that these men and women have made in defending our nation,” Baker said.

“Ensuring that these veterans receive the educational benefits that they were promised for their service is essential.

“Their service and sacrifice - risking their lives, serving the call of our nation, and leaving their families behind - demands no less.”

A reservist normally must use his 1606 benefits within a 14-year period while still actively enrolled in the reserves.

Until very recently, the Defense Department failed to recognize that federal law extends that time period for members of the reserves called to active duty by the amount of time that they were on active duty plus an additional four months.

As a result of misinformation by the Defense Department, many former reservists were erroneously informed that they could not utilize their remaining benefits after they had resigned from the reserves.

Baker and the 42 Attorneys General who signed on to the letter also called for federal legislation that would restore any benefits that may have expired due to the Defense Department’s failure to certify former reservists as well as for any reservists who may have missed out on the educational opportunities available to them because they were erroneously informed by Defense Department employees that they were ineligible to apply for benefits.

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

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

GET THE MESSAGE?



Iraqi people throw an assortment of objects at a burning SUV after a roadside bomb exploded in central Basra, May 25, 2007. The roadside bomb targeted a SUV belong to a foreign security company, injuring 3 mercenaries. (AP Photo/Nabil al-Jurani)

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

The “Save Darfur” Crusade: “This Is Not A Noble Cause”

The list of key players in the Save Darfur crusade reveals organizations and individuals that are not known for a principled stand against genocide. Among them are: the National Association of Evangelicals; several pro-Israeli Zionist organizations; former FBI Director Louis Freeh; former CIA Director James Woolsey; Republican right-wingers Newt Gingrich and Gary Bauer; as well as neoconservative luminaries like Charles Krauthammer and Bill Kristol.

June 1, 2007 By Paul D’Amato, Socialist Worker. PAUL D’AMATO writes an open letter to Don Cheadle and other Hollywood figures who are concerned about Darfur.

Dear Mr. Cheadle and Co.,

I am writing to you in response to your decision to throw your celebrity status behind the crusade to urge U.S. intervention to save the people of Darfur in the Sudan.

Your recent column, co-written with John Prendergast, "Never again--again," reminds us that "(a) brutal campaign of state-sponsored violence in Darfur has led to the deaths of up to 300,000 people, and the lives of about 2 million displaced people hang in the balance."

I would like to take this time to tell you about an even worse crisis that is being perpetrated by the very government you urge to act in Darfur--the U.S. government.

According to a report published last year in the British medical journal the Lancet, the U.S. war was responsible for 655,000 deaths in Iraq since the invasion--and by now, that figure is probably closer to 1 million. Some 3.7 million Iraqis are refugees, 1.7 of them internally displaced. The UNHCR estimates that another 300,000 will be internally displaced by the end of this year.

This devastation, moreover, comes on the heels of more than a decade of U.S./UN-imposed sanctions that wreaked havoc on Iraq's people. A review of UN Population Division statistics by an Australian doctor found that there were 1.7 million excess deaths in Iraq--the majority of them children--during the 1990-2003 sanctions era in Iraq.

A recent Save the Children study ranked Iraq worst in the world in child survival rates, finding that the likelihood of an Iraqi living past age 5 has dropped faster than anywhere else since 1990.

Iraq, which had a standard of living equivalent to Greece in the 1970s, now falls below Burundi as one of the poorest countries on the planet. And the country is coming apart under the stress of a civil war that the U.S. orchestrated, by pitting Sunnis, Shia and Kurds against one another.

In short, the government to which you appeal for redress in Darfur is responsible for destroying an entire nation and killing almost 3 million people in the process--not counting the number of Iraqis killed by U.S. forces in the first Gulf War in 1991.

FORGIVE ME if I find it strange that you have failed to recognize the absurdity of your crusade--which is like asking the proverbial fox that, before your eyes, is busily tearing chickens apart in one henhouse, to stop what he is doing to rush over to "guard" another.

To put it another way: why ask war criminals to save others from war crimes? Doesn't it behoove you to focus your energy on the atrocities committed in your name by the country in which you live?

And yet, there are no letter-writing campaigns that I know of to get the U.S. out of Iraq and urge that the Bush regime be tried in the International Criminal Court (something that, in your article, you demand be the fate of the Sudanese government).

The record of the U.S. as a world economic and military power hardly recommends it as a savior of peoples in distress. To cite a few examples of U.S. crimes from a far longer litany, and in no particular order: the genocide against Native Americans; the killing of millions in Korea and Vietnam; the training of death squads in Latin America; the incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by nuclear bombs; the internment of Japanese during the Second World War; the forced enslavement of millions of Africans; and the upholding of legal racial segregation until fairly recently.

Is it any wonder that Martin Luther King once called the U.S. the “greatest purveyor of violence” in the world?

And should we be insisting that the “greatest purveyor of violence” intervene anywhere in the world to prevent violence?

It appears that cries for humanitarian intervention in Darfur, a region that is very important to the U.S., are meant to rehabilitate American global intervention at a time when its international credibility is at its lowest point since Vietnam.

Whether or not some participants, like yourself, are conscious of this motive, all signs point in that direction.

The list of key players in the Save Darfur crusade reveals organizations and individuals that are not known for a principled stand against genocide. Among them are: the National Association of Evangelicals; several pro-Israeli Zionist organizations; former FBI Director Louis Freeh; former CIA Director James Woolsey; Republican right-wingers Newt Gingrich and Gary Bauer; as well as neoconservative luminaries like Charles Krauthammer and Bill Kristol.

Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who once told a reporter that the deaths of half a million Iraqi children because of U.S. war and sanctions against Iraq were “worth it,” was the keynote speaker at a Central Park rally last September calling for UN troops in Darfur.

Imperialism and colonial powers have a long history of cloaking their predatory aims in humanitarian garb. King Leopold of Belgium plundered the Congo of its rubber--and murdered, starved or worked to death millions of Africans in the process--while claiming that his true goal was to rid Africa of slavery and make a “lasting and disinterested service to the cause of progress.”

If the “save Darfur” crusade has any success, it won’t be so much to save Darfurians as to make a “lasting and disinterested service” to the cause of rehabilitating U.S. imperialism.

This is not a noble cause.

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 damaged home after a raid by foreign occupation soldiers from the U.S. in Baghdad's Sadr City, May 30, 2007. REUTERS/Kareem Raheem

[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 British troops 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**

**“Someone Else’s War”
Film Reveals Horrors Of Contract
Laborers In Iraq;
“When You Don’t Provide Armor, Or
Kevlar, What Are You Saying Asian
People’s Lives Are Worth?”**



Chelsea Now photos by Lee Wan
Ailyn Mateo and Ramil Autencio (L to R), two of the Filipino laborers featured in Lee Wang’s documentary film “Someone Else’s War.”

“There are 300 men in a place that’s about half the size of a Wal-Mart parking lot, and they were living in shipping containers. No shower heads, often no shower water—there was often black water coming out of those Blackwater containers.”

May 25 - 31, 2007 By Chris Lombardi, Chelsea Now

On the screen, a young man with elfin eyes half-smiles as he tells the story of his escape from a foreign land where he was held against his will.

“I passed around a piece of paper that said, “If You Want to Escape, Write Your Name Here.” That night, he says, he and forty others were led to freedom by an American soldier.

That young man was not some refugee from long ago, from places like Nazi Germany or the Balkans. Ramil Autencio’s location was Iraq, and his captor was a Middle East construction firm, forcing him and his fellow Filipinos to do backbreaking work on a U.S. Army base.

After their escape, he and others sued the agency that hired them, and in 2005, a Philippine court ruled in their favor, saying that they had been trafficked in violation of international law. But the employer, a sub-contractor of Halliburton, remains untouched and is now worth \$2 billion.

The documentary film “Someone Else’s War,” which tells Autencio’s story and that of the other 100,000-plus Asian laborers in Iraq, was screened last Friday night in a midtown classroom on West 43rd Street, at the City University of New York’s Asian American Research Institute (AARI).

The audience of 40–50 people, mostly Asian-American, told filmmaker Lee Wang that they were both shocked and unsurprised by the film, since South and East Asia now supply so much labor for the rest of the world.

Wang, who made “Someone Else’s War” after years as a TV journalist, added that the role in Iraq of these third-country nationals (commonly known as TNCs) cuts straight to the heart of profound questions about labor, globalization, corporate accountability and who is paying the true costs of America’s wars.

A slender young woman of 29 who speaks with the calm diction of the television reporter she trained to be, Wang took the podium before the screening began.

She said that in 2003-2004, as the Iraq war began, she felt frustrated in the MSNBC newsroom, as newsfeeds and story pitches that showed negative aspects of the war were ignored and tossed aside.

For her first documentary, which she completed as part of a master’s degree in journalism from the University of California at Berkeley, she sought and found a gritty story almost completely untold—that of the 30,000 TNCs working for the U.S. military.

Wang told the AARI audience that she learned about these workers almost by accident. As she researched further, she said, “I learned so much else that was so surprising, about the military and privatization.”

According to experts, of the 250,000 or so “boots on the ground” in Iraq, roughly half are civilian contractors. Private companies now perform many of the tasks formerly performed by those in uniform — from supply to support to combat itself. “It’s a new industry, so it’s got everything from startups to big companies,” Peter W. Singer, of the Brookings Institution, recently told *Chelsea Now*. “These companies are not just supplying the goods of war but the services. They’re within the military, right in there next to the uniforms.”

According to Pratab Chatterjee of the think tank CorpWatch, who appears in Wang’s film, private military firms are evenly divided between mercenaries like Blackwater, a large, well-known firm that provides security and combat expertise, and companies performing more menial labor, such as cooking, hauling and construction.

All of these “support and logistics” services are provided, on paper, by Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR), a division of Houston oil services firm Halliburton, which for years employed Vice President Dick Cheney as its chief executive officer.

Cheney is the godfather of Wang's film in more ways than one, according to Wang, who told the audience that when Cheney was secretary of defense in the late 1980s, he commissioned a study on privatizing the U.S. military. The results were put into place afterward, and accelerated by the Clinton administration. "Halliburton's first big logistics contract was in the Balkans," said Wang, who added that in the post-September 11 wars, the corporate presence has ballooned.

"In the first Gulf War," said Wang, "one of every 10 'boots on the ground' was a civilian contractor. Now, it's closer to a one-to-one ratio."

As explained by experts and testimonies in "Someone Else's War," TNCs normally pay an initial fee of more than \$1,000 to contracting agencies in order to get these jobs, while future wages are withheld to cover additional "fees."

They therefore begin their stint in debt to their employers and remain that way for some time.

They work hard, often without helmets or body armor, and live in completely separate spaces from the soldiers they serve.

In the film, former Halliburton foreman Michael Lamb describes the living conditions of his construction crew.

"There are 300 men in a place that's about half the size of a Wal-Mart parking lot, and they were living in shipping containers. No shower heads, often no shower water—there was often black water coming out of those Blackwater containers."

Of the 50,000 people working in Iraq under Halliburton, a full 80 percent are TNCs—employed by a maze of companies with names like Prime Projects International, Cerka and Gulf Catering, in addition to First Kuwaiti.

On average, the workers earn about \$300 a month—a fraction of the \$7,500-plus a month paid to American contractor employees, but far more than most could earn in their home countries.

First Kuwaiti had its workers lined up even before the invasion began, according to Ricardo Endaya, the Philippines envoy to Iraq in 2003, who Wang interviewed last year.

"He said that U.S. officials met with him and representatives of First Kuwaiti in January 2003, and asked for 20,000 workers," said Wang. At the time, the Kuwait company was valued at \$35 million, according to Washington journalist David Phinney; now it's closer to \$2 billion—including \$592 million to build a new U.S. embassy in Baghdad, a project for which it is again accused of trafficking TNCs.

Company insiders have admitted, to Phinney and other journalists, that they confiscate workers' passports: "All the passports are kept in our offices," Phinney quoted one as saying.

The Philippine government of Gloria Arroyo, which had initially trumpeted itself as a key member of the "coalition of the willing," has placed strict restrictions on its citizens' ability to work in Iraq, Wang told the AARI audience. "There's a famous case of a Filipino truck

driver who was kidnapped by insurgents, and his face was on Al-Jazzier — and there were massive demonstrations in the Philippines, so they had to.”

Wang’s film uses experts like Pratab Chatterjee, Filipino journalist Howie Severino and the former Halliburton foreman Mike Lamb to explain the dilemmas faced by three workers.

Ailyn Mateo’s sweet face opens the film in a still shot, as her mother, Mara, tells her story in rapid Tagalog, saying that her daughter was determined to go to Iraq: “It was her adventure.” Mateo, 30, has returned to Iraq twice, despite being seriously injured when a suicide bomber, dressed as an Iraqi soldier, pulled all his wires and blew himself up in the Marine Corps dining hall where she worked.

Ramil Autencio signed up with MGM Worldwide Manpower and General Services in December 2003, agreeing to work at the Kuwait Crowne Plaza for \$450 a month.

But when he got to Kuwait, he was taken by First Kuwaiti to Iraq, on threat of arrest or death.

He spent his days moving boulders to fortify the buildings of Camp Anaconda, the U.S. Army’s fortress near Tikrit, until a Filipino-American soldier helped him and 40 other Filipino workers escape in early 2005.

The workers then sued MGM and won, but the agency had already fled the country, with First Kuwaiti and Halliburton still untouchable.

Rodrigo Reyes is seen only in still photos in the film, holding his 5-year-old child. A stolid man with a beefy smile, he left his family behind to take a lucrative, if dangerous, job driving trucks for First Kuwaiti in Iraq.

“The trucks used to be driven by Americans, but when it started to get really dangerous, they started switching out and hiring TNCs,” said Wang at the AARI event.

Army veterans have told the press that they dreaded having to follow and protect the slow TNC convoys, which break down often. Reyes’ truck lacked armor, like most driven by TNC drivers in Iraq, and he ran out of luck on April 28, 2004, when his convoy was ambushed while delivering supplies to Camp Anaconda (the same base Autencio had helped build).

Wang told last week’s audience that as she spent time with Mateo’s, Autencio’s and Reyes’ families, she was struck by how so many Filipinos saw these Iraq jobs as their only way out of deep poverty. “Ailyn, she’s been through the wringer; she’s been through a suicide bombing. (If she’s able to return to Iraq), she’d have to leave her kids,” said Wang. “But she’ll keep trying (to go back).”

Wang then described for the AARI audience some of what she saw in Iraq in January.

The workers on three major U.S. bases, she said, live far from the bases’ creature comforts, like swimming pools, broadband and purified water. “Where they live—it’s kind of apart, behind concertina wire.” Wang and her crew tried to covertly interview some of them, “but it was hard.”

And the soldiers she met on the bases don't really see the TNCs, she added. "It's kind of like some very upscale restaurant, and all the Mexicans in the back no one ever thinks about. Except it's war."

The workers are visible enough to be barred from on-base shops and services, she added, with rules that varied at each base along with the ethnicity of the workers.

At Anaconda, whose TNCs came from India, Bangladesh and Uganda, only Ugandan workers were allowed in the sole store on the base. At QS, a smaller base near Mosul, most of whose workers came from the Philippines and Nepal, "It was the Turkish workers who were allowed, but no one else," said Wang.

The response of the group at AARI ranged from shock and anger to a kind of soft resignation. Anger was focused not just on the easier targets of the Bush administration, but also on the seeming complicity of Asian governments in the abuse of their workers.

"My poor, poor country," said one CUNY employee, native to the Philippines, who told Wang that the Philippine government takes a cut of each remittance before the worker sees a penny. "How will it end, this globalization?" Others asked why there were few Chinese workers among TNCs in Iraq.

"I think it has to do with which companies were already sending workers to the Middle East," said Wang. "This really is a story about globalization." Only now, she said, the logic of global markets, seeking low costs and high profits, is being used by the U.S. military.

Wang ended by asking Asian Americans to become informed, and to contact their elected representatives with questions like,

"If soldiers had to do what the TNCs are doing, what would the war really cost?" and

"When you don't provide armor, or Kevlar, what are you saying Asian people's lives are worth?"

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

"Remember, Bush Had Vetoed All Continued Funding For The War"

May 23, 2007 Via Alobar, NOLA_C3_Discussion@yahoogroups.com

Grackle note:

Remember, Bush had vetoed all continued funding for the war.

US troops, under the War Powers Act, would have begun coming home next week, but the glorious Democrats saved Halliburton once again.

Every single soldier that dies in Iraq now will have only the Democrats to blame. In other words, the 2008 election is over, and the Dems have already lost it all.

Oh, we got a minimum wage “increase” in return that remains well below inflation levels so it really amounts to a slightly smaller pay cut for minimum-wage earners. That ought boost voter turnout, too, you betcha!

CLASS WAR REPORTS

Illness And Inequality:
**“The Accumulation Of Profit At The
Top Of Society Creates An
Accumulation Of Sickness At The
Bottom”**

**“The U.S. Has The Worst Health
Statistics In The Industrialized World
Because It Is The Most Unequal Society
In The Industrialized World”**

Over the past 50 years, numerous studies have confirmed that social inequality is not only an independent factor in determining health, it is the most important factor. As social inequality increases, health deteriorates. This holds true for everyone living in an unequal society, not just those on the short end of the stick.

May 25, 2007 By SUSAN ROSENTHAL, MD, CounterPunch

The latest report by the Commonwealth Fund confirms what we already know; Americans pay more for health care and have poorer health compared with people living in nations that spend less on health care yet enjoy better health.

It is generally assumed that lack of access to medical care is to blame for America's abysmal health statistics and that improved access will remedy the situation. This is mistaken. Lack of access is just one indicator of the social inequality that is driving America's health crisis.

The myth that good health is a product of the health-care system was fueled by the expansion of the welfare state after World War II. The establishment of the British National Health Service (NHS) in 1948 was accompanied by improved population health and a reduction in the difference in death rates between the social classes.

Politicians claimed that the NHS had produced these benefits, but later studies revealed that improved health follows a rise in the general standard of living and a reduction in class inequality, as occurred in Britain after the war.

To investigate the link between health and inequality, researchers examined workers in the highly stratified British civil service.

Despite all the subjects enjoying decent pay and equal access to health care, the risks of illness and premature death increased as one moved down the social hierarchy. These health differences were significant and could not be accounted for by differences in smoking, diet or exercise.

Over the past 50 years, numerous studies have confirmed that social inequality is not only an independent factor in determining health, it is the most important factor.

As social inequality increases, health deteriorates.

This holds true for everyone living in an unequal society, not just those on the short end of the stick.

In 1998, the American Journal of Public Health published a study comparing income inequality with death rates in 282 American cities. Greater inequality was associated with higher death rates at all income levels. Areas with the greatest inequality suffered 140 additional deaths for every 100,000 people per year compared to areas with the lowest inequality.

The difference in death rates was comparable to the combined loss of life from lung cancer, diabetes, motor vehicle crashes, HIV infection, suicide and homicide.

There is no consensus on why inequality is so health-damaging, but there is no longer any question that it is.

Class inequality in the U.S. has risen steadily since the 1970s, when Corporate America pushed to raise productivity by driving down workers' living standards. The result has been growing inequality, deteriorating health and the emergence of poverty epidemics like HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis in the world's richest nation.

The U.S. has the worst health statistics in the industrialized world because it is the most unequal society in the industrialized world.

This inequality is the source of America's economic success and its continued position as global super-power. Forced to compete with the U.S., other industrialized nations including the U.K., Canada and the European Union are dismantling and privatizing their own national health-care systems.

Breaking The Stalemate

In matters of health, Corporate America is caught between a rock and a hard place.

Increasing productivity requires a basic level of fitness within the working class; however, paying for this in the form of higher wages, employee benefits or higher taxes decreases productivity. This conflict finds expression in the demand for a more effective health-care system and the failure to provide one.

Simply arguing that the current system is unfair, ineffective and overly expensive will not be enough to break this stalemate.

In the past, universal health care was won through mass struggle.

Germany established the first European national medical plan in 1883 to avoid a revolutionary upheaval like the one that shook France in 1871. In Britain, the 1911 National Insurance Act was rushed through Parliament during a mass strike wave. In 1943, a Conservative member of the British Parliament warned, "If you don't give the people reform they are going to give you revolution."

The British NHS was part of a social welfare program to stabilize relations between capital and labor after the war. Canadian unions won a national health plan in 1972, the year of the Quebec General Strike.

In the U.S., the Congress of Industrial Organizations and the American Federation of Labor pushed for a national health program after World War II.

The ruling class preferred to build the world's biggest military machine. America's Cold War with Russia provided the opportunity to attack the unions and gut them of militants. That defeat explains why there is still no labor party in the U.S. and no national health plan.

The accumulation of profit at the top of society creates an accumulation of sickness at the bottom.

No form of health-care system can reverse the health-damaging effects of rising inequality. The current debate on health-care must go beyond discussions of the best way to manage the carnage created by capitalism.

At the Cannes screening of Sicko, Michael Moore states, "The bigger issue in the film is, 'Who are we as a people?'"

Human health is not a commodity that can be churned out by the right kind of health-care system.

Human sickness is a product of sick social relationships, and human health is a product of healthy social relationships.

The quality of our medical system is a result and a reflection of those relationships.

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/)

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