

GI SPECIAL 5G17:

WHO PAYS THE PRICE FOR IMPERIAL ARROGANCE?



REUTERS/Atef Hassan



Nationalist fighters take up position behind a garbage bin as they engage British troops in central Basra July 16, 2007. (AP Photo/ Nabil al-Jurani)

COMMENT: GARETT REPPENHAGEN, IVAW

7.17.07: Garrett Reppenhagen, Chairman of the Board, Iraq Veterans Against the War, Washington DC: www.ivaw.org

Looks like a sniper observer team.

I think it is sad that many of our highest level military refuse to believe that the Iraqis are smart enough to develop tactics of modern day warfare.

Our lowest level troops are paying for it.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Daily Attacks In Iraq Hit New High In June

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

20 Jul 2007 By David Morgan, (Reuters)

Attacks in Iraq last month reached their highest daily average since May 2003, showing a surge in violence as President George W. Bush completed a buildup of U.S. troops, Pentagon statistics show.

The data, obtained by Reuters from the Defense Department, showed an upward trend in daily attacks over the past four months, when U.S. and Iraqi forces were ramping up operations against insurgents and militants, including al Qaeda, in Iraq.

Pentagon officials were not immediately available to comment on the statistics.

The June numbers showed 5,335 attacks against coalition troops, Iraqi security forces, civilians and infrastructure.

June's total was 2.5 percent below an October 2006 peak of 5,472 attacks and slightly lower than the 5,365 attacks in May.

But because June has only 30 days, the average daily number of attacks was 177.8, higher than the 176.5 last October and 173.1 in May.

The June 2007 statistics confirmed a significant decline in the targeting of Iraqi civilians, with such attacks falling 18 percent to 763 from a 2007 high of 932 in May.

Attacks on Iraqi security forces fell to 889 in June from 987 in May, while attacks on coalition forces rose about 7 percent to 3,671 from 3,423.

Three British Occupation Troops Killed In Basra

19 Jul 07 Ministry of Defence

It is with profound sadness that the Ministry of Defence must confirm the deaths of one serviceman from 504 Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force and two servicemen from 1 Squadron RAF Regiment on Thursday 19th July 2007.

They were killed in an indirect fire attack on the Contingency Operating Base in Basra, Iraq.

Baghdad IED Kills U.S. Soldier

July 20, 2007 Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory RELEASE No. 20070720-02

BAGHDAD – One MNC-I Soldier died of wounds suffered when an explosive device detonated next to the Soldier's vehicle during combat operations in eastern Baghdad July 19.

U.S. Soldier Killed, Another Wounded In Baghdad Province

July 20, 2007 Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory RELEASE No. 20070720-04

TIKRIT, Iraq – One Task Force Lightning Soldier died as a result of injuries sustained from an explosion near his vehicle while conducting operations in Baghdad Province, Thursday.

One other Soldier was injured during the incident and was transported to a Coalition medical facility for treatment.

Dover Man Killed In Iraq

07/20/2007 The Evening Sun

A 19-year-old York County man has been killed in Iraq, according to WHTM-TV.

Zachary Clouser, 19, was killed on Wednesday.

“Zach was killed by an IED,” said family friend Stephanie Wright on the report. “He was one of four killed with his sergeant. He was very good friends with the sergeant.”

According to the report, Clouser graduated from Dover Area High School in 2005. He returned to the area during the Easter holiday and visited some of his former teachers and the students at the school.

The station also reported that Clouser’s mother was told Wednesday morning that her son was expected to leave Iraq in a month. Hours later, she learned of his death. He served in Iraq nearly 13 months.

Fallen Soldier Had Found New Life With U.S. Army

July 12, 2007 JULIA O’MALLEY, Anchorage Daily News

ANCHORAGE - For most of her short life, Michelle Ring was chasing a fresh start.

After seeing her boyfriend killed in an Anchorage parking-lot fight, she moved to Tennessee.

Five years later, with a crumbled marriage and two young boys, her job in a sweltering small-town factory could barely keep the lights on.

On her lunch break two years ago, she looked up and saw a highway sign: the Army.

Ring was a single parent and the country was at war, but she needed to start again. She enlisted and went to boot camp. Late last year, she shipped out from Fort Benning, Ga., to Baghdad, Iraq.

Her family said she’d finally found her place in the world.

The Army brought structure and purpose, but in recent months she told her family that the violence around her seemed to be getting worse. She said she worried she wouldn’t make it back to her children.

Then last week two soldiers drove up the rocky driveway of her sister’s house in Wasilla. Ring, 26, had been killed July 5 by mortar fire while taking a break from a patrol, they said.

Spc. Ring was the second female soldier with Alaska ties killed in a week’s time. Fort Richardson Sgt. Trista L. Moretti, 27, of South Plainfield, N.J., died June 28 when she was hit by a mortar shell while sleeping in a trailer.

Ring grew up in Chugiak, the youngest of three sisters. She met her best friend, Chrystle Lyon, at Gruening Middle School.

“We got along well. Even when we didn’t get along, we made up,” said Lyon, who lives in Peters Creek. “We could read each other’s minds.”

The girls liked to play rough - four-wheeling, driving cars off-road, camping. Studying wasn’t their thing. Lyon ended up in military school. Ring dropped out. At 17, she quickly fell for Marc Hopfenspirger, a 21-year-old soldier from Fort Richardson.

On a June night in 1999, the girls were out with Hopfenspirger when he got tangled in a late-night parking-lot fight outside a grocery store. Someone threw a beer bottle, a shard broke, it bounced off his Jeep and sliced his throat.

“We had gone to go get a soda,” Lyon said. “We came back around, and he was lying on the ground bleeding to death.”

Hopfenspirger died at the scene. It wasn’t until last summer that police arrested Esau Fualema for throwing the bottle. He was charged with second-degree murder.

After Hopfenspirger’s death, depression overtook Ring. She began putting on weight and wearing baggy clothes.

That fall, as Ring was trying on a dress for her sister’s wedding, her mother discovered that underneath her sweat shirts, Ring was eight months pregnant with Hopfenspirger’s son. She hadn’t told anyone, even Lyon.

“When it all came out that we all knew, she was happy, but I think she was really confused in the beginning. She didn’t know what to do,” said her sister in Wasilla, Karen Harbuck.

After the baby, Marc, was born, Ring got her GED and moved to Tennessee, where her parents lived. She took a job at a Tyson chicken processing plant. Things started to settle down. She met the father of her second son, Brandon. They married briefly, but it didn’t work out. She had another relationship, but it ended before a year’s time.

“She was always looking for Marc, the one that she lost, and she never found him,” Lyon said.

Being a soldier changed Ring, her family said. It gave her confidence and direction she never had, they said.

“Finally, she was someone and she was doing something,” said Harbuck. “She wanted her boys taken care of, was her major thing.”

She loved boot camp, the tanks, the guns, the exercise, and the people, her mother said.

She didn’t like Baghdad. Shelling woke her at night, and everything seemed to be deteriorating. She couldn’t tell that they were making a difference.

“She said the air just stinks and it’s healthier to smoke a cigarette than to breathe,” Harbuck said.

Her family communicated with her in brief phone calls, e-mails and on MySpace.com. Her profile page is bathed in purple and decorated with pictures of her sons, her tattoos, and herself, in uniform, leaning on a tank.

In one blog entry, in March, she wrote: "I feel so lost. I don't know what I'm doing anymore. Every day it's the same thing and the same people tell me what I need to do. It has just put me here in this place where I am lost. No way out."

Another sister, Marilyn Haybeck, responded:

"Shell, it will be all right, just give them a piece of your mind like you do to everyone else. You don't have to much longer."

When she came to her parents' house on leave for the last time at the end of April, she didn't want to go back.

"She was scared, she didn't think she was going to make it - it was just getting too bad over there," Harbuck said.

On July 5, back in Baghdad, some friends brought Ring dinner while she was on a patrol at Camp Liberty, her sister said. She had been training to become a military police officer. Rockets screamed into their compound and exploded. A piece of metal hit Ring in the chest. She died almost immediately. No one else was hurt.

Ring was born in Oregon. Her parents, John and Shirley Stearns, and her sister Haybeck live in McMinnville outside of Portland. Marc's been with them since she was deployed. Brandon, 5, lives with his father in Tennessee. A funeral service will be held Saturday in Portland. An Alaska memorial hasn't yet been planned.

“Rockets And Mortar Bombs – So- Called Indirect Fire Attacks – Pounding The British Airbase In Basra Up To Ten Times A Day”

July 21, 2007 By Catherine Philp, London Times

I was wandering over to the condiment table in the mess hall in search of a sachet of tomato ketchup when the siren sounded: a long, low wail. In a split second my fellow diners – camouflaged soldiers and civvy-clad contractors – had flung themselves to the floor or crawled under the nearest table, their arms held protectively over their heads.

A day earlier I had been talking to two medics as they relaxed under a camouflage net waiting for their next emergency call. As the siren came, they threw themselves on the

ground with military precision while I clumsily fell off my chair and on to a pile of cigarette ash.

The scenes can appear a little comic.

But there is nothing funny about them for the soldiers who live day in, day out with rockets and mortar bombs – so-called indirect fire attacks – pounding the British airbase in Basra up to ten times a day.

The first that anyone on the base usually knows about it is from the siren, by which time the rockets or mortar bombs, mostly leftovers from Saddam's looted arsenal, are already well on their way from their launch several miles away.

Their target is the air traffic control tower, the only structure tall enough in a sprawling base as big as a small city to be seen from miles away.

A sophisticated warning system picks up tremors created by the launch and triggers the alarm a couple of seconds before impact. Sometimes, though, the missile is quicker and you hear its whistle, or the "crump" of the rocket landing, before the alarm breaks into a wail.

The drill is taught to everyone, military or civilian, who comes to the base. Throw yourself to the floor, and if separated from your body armour or helmet, wait three minutes from the last explosion before crawling to them, putting them on and seeking hard cover. Then you must wait it out, in armour, for the siren to sound "all-clear".

On the base you are never far from your body armour: during my week's visit I had to take it with me everywhere, even when I was not wearing it. Even on a 30-yard trudge to the lavatory block in the middle of the night.

Everything comes to a halt the moment an attack strikes. One day we were aboard a helicopter about to land at the Contingency Operating Base when the airfield came under attack. The pilot was forced to circle until the all-clear siren sounded.

Mealtimes and the night are favourite times for attacks – just when soldiers are trying to relax.

Some sleep in hardcover cabins, most in tents, where each of their beds is protected by a little pen of breeze blocks inside which they live.

Some are lucky enough to have the new "Baghdad Bed", a bunk bed with a bulletproof top where the upper bunk would be. Others with camp beds simply put their mattress on the floor so that they do not have to roll out of bed every time the alarm goes off.

It gets tiring, mentally and physically. But the soldiers' tireless discipline is exemplary. While The Times photographer and I sigh and clamber off our chairs, they throw themselves down flat in the blink of an eye, even for the seventh time in a day.

"It's Pavlovian now," a soldier tells us as we sprawl on the – pleasantly carpeted – floor of a temporary building.

Everyone from general to civilian must follow suit – except Tony Blair, who, with foresight, remained upright under mortar attack on a visit to Baghdad for fear that the press would snatch a shot of him sprawled on the ground and under fire in the country that he had helped to liberate.

Our driver, Radders, pulls out a notebook and starts scrawling down the date and time, and the number of missiles that have landed. How many have there been?

“Have a look for yourself,” he says, flipping through the densely packed notebook filled with dates and times, appended with little notes on particularly inconvenient moments: “In the shower”.

The military does not release official figures of the number of attacks.

In Radders’s time here, the highest daily count has been 26 attacks, each comprising an average of three or four missiles.

Most say that this month has been quiet but Christy Hooson, a medic, notes how much the attacks have increased since last year.

“On my last tour I had three rockets and they were always a bit of a joke,” she says. “Now these aren’t a joke.”

It is perhaps miraculous that the missiles do not more often cause the tragedy that they did this week, when three British servicemen were killed. A small crater in the concrete close to the helicopter launch pad, and the holes that shrapnel has dug in the blast walls and nearby corrugated iron roof, demonstrate what they could do to human flesh.

The military is highly adept at locating the firing sites. But launchers are often put on timers, so that by the time they fire, the assailants are long gone. And they are often fired from sites at which the attackers know the British will not retaliate, such as a football field where children play.

There is little to suggest that these circumstances will improve. Soon British troops will withdraw from Basra Palace, the main city base, and an even greater magnet for indirect fire attacks, to hand it over to Iraqi control.

That will leave the Contingency Operating Base as the only target remaining for those who want to drive the British out.

This kind of attack, although rarely fatal, is a source of significant stress for troops. The enemy is faceless and distant. They cannot fight back. “It is frustrating,” one soldier tells me, with a grimace of understatement.

For many, the effects of being under constant attack last long after they leave the base. Craftswoman Hooson’s tour will end in a month but the effect of the attacks will go on much longer.

“My birthday’s on Bonfire Night and I am absolutely dreading it this year because I’ve had about 500 rockets on my tour, and one hit ten metres away, and that really wasn’t nice,” she says. “I hate feeling scared.”

As I wait in a tent for the Hercules to take me out of Basra to rocket-free Qatar, there is one last attack.

Beside me a civilian contractor sighs and climbs slowly down, putting on his helmet before continuing with his crossword on the floor.

"I've been here too long," he says.

**FUTILE EXERCISE:
ONLY 15 MILLION MORE TO GO:
COME ON HOME NOW!**



A U.S. soldier uses a chemical spray to test if an Iraqi man has had contact with explosives during a night patrol in Baghdad July 15, 2007. **[Everybody in the fucking country “has had contact with explosives,” a highly significant proportion used on them by the occupation forces. There’s a fucking war on. Duh.]**
REUTERS/Nikola Solic

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

**More Foreign Occupation Personnel
Taken Prisoner;**

Two Germans & 23 Christian Propagandists

July 20, 2007 AFP & Associated Newspapers Ltd

KABUL. Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan have captured two Germans and their five Afghan colleagues, provincial officials said yesterday.

The Germans and Afghans were taken prisoner on Wednesday on the highway linking Kabul with Kandahar in the south, when militants stopped their car in central Wardak province, police said.

“Armed men took over their vehicle, disarmed the police and drove away the seven, leaving the empty-handed police in the area,” the deputy police chief of neighbouring Ghazni province, Mohammad Zaman, said.

Taliban insurgents also captured 23 Korean Christian missionaries from a bus in Afghanistan, the biggest group of foreigners taken prisoner so far in the militant campaign to oust the government and its Western backers.

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

TROOP NEWS

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



Andre Craig Jr.'s casket at Immanuel Missionary Baptist Church in New Haven, Conn., July 6, 2007. Craig, 24, a private first class, was killed in Iraq on June 25 by a roadside bomb. (AP Photo/Bob Child)

Burmeister's Mother "Worries That Her Son Will Never Be Able To Come Home" "But She's Proud Of His Decision To Leave The Army" "I Don't Know Anybody Who Supports What's Going On In Iraq"

After being wounded by a roadside bomb, he was sent to Germany to recover. In May, on the eve of being sent back to Iraq, Pfc. Burmeister went AWOL -- absent without leave -- taking his family to Ottawa.

July 16, 2007 MARK LARABEE, The Oregonian [Excerpts]

James Burmeister worked at Wal-Mart and in pizza joints in Eugene until he joined the U.S. Army 18 months ago because he wanted to make a difference.

His recruiter told him a tour in Iraq would give him the opportunity to build schools and support war-weary Iraqis, so against the advice of his parents, he signed up.

But once in Iraq, he was assigned to a "small kill" team that set traps for insurgents.

They'd place a fake camera on a pole with a sign labeling it as U.S. property, giving the team the right to shoot anyone who messed with it. Burmeister, who provided perimeter security for the team, said he could never get over his distaste for the tactic.

After being wounded by a roadside bomb, he was sent to Germany to recover. In May, on the eve of being sent back to Iraq, Pfc. Burmeister went AWOL -- absent without leave -- taking his family to Ottawa.

Burmeister wrestles with the thought he may never get to go home again.

He was born in Portland and grew up in Eugene. After high school, he played bass, saxophone and bass clarinet in bands and worked in dead-end jobs. But he wanted to do something “big in my life.”

Army recruiters capitalized on that sentiment, he said.

“They drove it into my head that I would be doing so much to help, building power plants and schools and handing out school supplies to kids,” he said.

After basic training at Fort Knox, Ky., his first assignment was with the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, a mechanized infantry battalion based in Schweinfurt, Germany. He met his wife, Angelique, there. They have a son, Cornell, 2.

Burmeister said he started having doubts about going to Iraq when his training focused on combat tactics, how to kill and how to raid buildings. By August 2006, he was a gunner atop a Humvee in Baghdad, about 15 miles south of the fortified Green Zone.

When the team wasn’t setting traps, it patrolled areas hoping to draw out the enemy. Burmeister says he hated when they would set out the fake camera.

“As soon as anyone would mess with it, you were supposed to lay waste to them,” he said. “I completely disagreed with that tactic. I can’t see how that’s helping anyone whatsoever.”

On Feb. 15, his Humvee hit a bomb, knocking Burmeister unconscious. He lost hearing in his right ear; shrapnel embedded in his face. He was sent to Germany to recover. On May 4, on the eve of being sent back to Iraq, he and his family boarded a plane for Canada.

“I kind of felt stuck,” he said. “I thought people needed to be free there. But when I went there it was all about captures and kills and it felt like we messed things up over there.

“This felt like my last option.”

Burmeister’s mother, Helen Burmeister of Cheshire, Ore., worries that her son will never be able to come home for a visit. But she’s proud of his decision to leave the Army.

“I don’t support the war,” she said. “I don’t know anybody who supports what’s going on in Iraq.”

She said representatives of the Army twice called her at work to tell her that her son was making a mistake and should turn himself in.

“It took guts for him to do what he did,” she said. “I told them I hadn’t heard from him.”

The Traitor Odierno Defies Congress Again; Says He Will Not Perform “Good Assessment” Of Surge In September; “I Need At Least Until November”

July 20, 2007 AP

WASHINGTON - For months September has been cast as a pivotal time [translation: decided by Congress to be a deadline] for determining the course of the war in Iraq

Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno told reporters after a Senate hearing Thursday that he would need beyond September to tell if improvements in Iraq represent long-term trends.

“In order to do a good assessment I need at least until November,” said Odierno, a deputy to Gen. David Petraeus, the U.S. military commander in Iraq.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

**“It Just Gets Frustrating,”
Specialist Reppenhagen Said:
“Instead Of Blaming Your Own
Command For Putting You There
In That Situation, You Start
Blaming The Iraqi People....”**

[Thanks to Elaine Brower, The Military Project, who sent this in.]

July 30, 2007 by CHRIS HEDGES & LAILA AL-ARIAN, THE NATION [Excerpts]

PART 2

[Continued from previous GI Special]

Two dozen soldiers interviewed said that this callousness toward Iraqi civilians was particularly evident in the operation of supply convoys--operations in which they participated.

Typically, according to these interviewees, supply convoys consisted of twenty to thirty trucks stretching half a mile down the road, with a Humvee military escort in front and back and at least one more in the center. Soldiers and marines also sometimes accompanied the drivers in the cabs of the tractor-trailers.

These convoys, ubiquitous in Iraq, were also, to many Iraqis, sources of wanton destruction.

According to descriptions culled from interviews with thirty-eight veterans who rode in convoys--guarding such runs as Kuwait to Nasiriya, Nasiriya to Baghdad and Balad to Kirkuk--when these columns of vehicles left their heavily fortified compounds they usually roared down the main supply routes, which often cut through densely populated areas, reaching speeds over sixty miles an hour.

Governed by the rule that stagnation increases the likelihood of attack, convoys leapt meridians in traffic jams, ignored traffic signals, swerved without warning onto sidewalks, scattering pedestrians, and slammed into civilian vehicles, shoving them off the road. Iraqi civilians, including children, were frequently run over and killed.

Veterans said they sometimes shot drivers of civilian cars that moved into convoy formations or attempted to pass convoys as a warning to other drivers to get out of the way.

"A moving target is harder to hit than a stationary one," said Sgt. Ben Flanders, 28, a National Guardsman from Concord, New Hampshire, who served in Balad with the 172nd Mountain Infantry for eleven months beginning in March 2004. Flanders ran convoy routes out of Camp Anaconda, about thirty miles north of Baghdad.

"So speed was your friend. And certainly in terms of IED detonation, absolutely, speed and spacing were the two things that could really determine whether or not you were going to get injured or killed or if they just completely missed, which happened."

Following an explosion or ambush, soldiers in the heavily armed escort vehicles often fired indiscriminately in a furious effort to suppress further attacks, according to three veterans. The rapid bursts from belt-fed .50-caliber machine guns and SAWs (Squad Automatic Weapons, which can fire as many as 1,000 rounds per minute) left many civilians wounded or dead.

"One example I can give you, you know, we'd be cruising down the road in a convoy and all of the sudden, an IED blows up," said Spc. Ben Schrader, 27, of Grand Junction, Colorado. He served in Baquba with the 263rd Armor Battalion, First Infantry Division, from February 2004 to February 2005.

"And, you know, you've got these scared kids on these guns, and they just start opening fire. And there could be innocent people everywhere. And I've seen this, I mean, on

numerous occasions where innocent people died because we're cruising down and a bomb goes off."

Several veterans said that IEDs, the preferred weapon of the Iraqi insurgency, were one of their greatest fears.

"The second you left the gate of your base, you were always worried," said Sergeant Flatt.

"You were constantly watchful for IEDs. And you could never see them. I mean, it's just by pure luck who's getting killed and who's not. If you've been in firefights earlier that day or that week, you're even more stressed and insecure to a point where you're almost trigger-happy."

Sergeant Flatt was among twenty-four veterans who said they had witnessed or heard stories from those in their unit of unarmed civilians being shot or run over by convoys.

These incidents, they said, were so numerous that many were never reported.

Sergeant Flatt recalled an incident in January 2005 when a convoy drove past him on one of the main highways in Mosul. "A car following got too close to their convoy," he said. "Basically, they took shots at the car. Warning shots, I don't know. But they shot the car. Well, one of the bullets happened to just pierce the windshield and went straight into the face of this woman in the car. And she was--well, as far as I know--instantly killed. I didn't pull her out of the car or anything. Her son was driving the car, and she had her--she had three little girls in the back seat.

"And they came up to us, because we were actually sitting in a defensive position right next to the hospital, the main hospital in Mosul, the civilian hospital. And they drove up and she was obviously dead. And the girls were crying."

On July 30, 2004, Sergeant Flanders was riding in the tail vehicle of a convoy on a pitch-black night, traveling from Camp Anaconda south to Taji, just north of Baghdad, when his unit was attacked with small-arms fire and RPGs (rocket-propelled grenades). He was about to get on the radio to warn the vehicle in front of him about the ambush when he saw his gunner unlock the turret and swivel it around in the direction of the shooting. He fired his MK-19, a 40-millimeter automatic grenade launcher capable of discharging up to 350 rounds per minute.

"He's just holding the trigger down and it wound up jamming, so he didn't get off as many shots maybe as he wanted," Sergeant Flanders recalled. "But I said, 'How many did you get off?' 'Cause I knew they would be asking that. He said, 'Twenty-three.' He launched twenty-three grenades....

"I remember looking out the window and I saw a little hut, a little Iraqi house with a light on.... We were going so fast and obviously your adrenaline's--you're like tunnel vision, so you can't really see what's going on, you know? And it's dark out and all that stuff. I couldn't really see where the grenades were exploding, but it had to be exploding around the house or maybe even hit the house. Who knows? Who knows? And we were the last vehicle. We can't stop."

Convoys did not slow down or attempt to brake when civilians inadvertently got in front of their vehicles, according to the veterans who described them. Sgt. Kelly Dougherty, 29, from Cañon City, Colorado, was based at the Talil Air Base in Nasiriya with the Colorado National Guard's 220th Military Police Company for a year beginning in February 2003.

She recounted one incident she investigated in January 2004 on a six-lane highway south of Nasiriya that resembled numerous incidents described by other veterans.

"It's like very barren desert, so most of the people that live there, they're nomadic or they live in just little villages and have, like, camels and goats and stuff," she recalled. "There was then a little boy--I would say he was about 10 because we didn't see the accident; we responded to it with the investigative team--a little Iraqi boy and he was crossing the highway with his, with three donkeys.

"A military convoy, transportation convoy driving north, hit him and the donkeys and killed all of them. When we got there, there were the dead donkeys and there was a little boy on the side of the road.

"We saw him there and, you know, we were upset because the convoy didn't even stop," she said. "They really, judging by the skid marks, they hardly even slowed down. But, I mean, that's basically--basically, your order is that you never stop."

"We're using these vulnerable, vulnerable convoys, which probably piss off more Iraqis than it actually helps in our relationship with them," Flanders said, "just so that we can have comfort and air-conditioning and sodas--great--and PlayStations and camping chairs and greeting cards and stupid T-shirts that say, Who's Your Baghdaddy?"

Soldiers and marines who participated in neighborhood patrols said they often used the same tactics as convoys--speed, aggressive firing--to reduce the risk of being ambushed or falling victim to IEDs. Sgt. Patrick Campbell, 29, of Camarillo, California, who frequently took part in patrols, said his unit fired often and without much warning on Iraqi civilians in a desperate bid to ward off attacks.

"Every time we got on the highway," he said, "we were firing warning shots, causing accidents all the time. Cars screeching to a stop, going into the other intersection.... The problem is, if you slow down at an intersection more than once, that's where the next bomb is going to be because you know they watch. You know?"

"And so if you slow down at the same choke point every time, guaranteed there's going to be a bomb there next couple of days. So getting onto a freeway or highway is a choke point 'cause you have to wait for traffic to stop. So you want to go as fast as you can, and that involves added risk to all the cars around you, all the civilian cars.

"The first Iraqi I saw killed was an Iraqi who got too close to our patrol," he said. "We were coming up an on-ramp. And he was coming down the highway. And they fired warning shots and he just didn't stop. He just merged right into the convoy and they opened up on him."

This took place sometime in the spring of 2005 in Khadamiya, in the northwest corner of Baghdad, Sergeant Campbell said. His unit fired into the man's car with a 240 Bravo, a heavy machine gun. "I heard three gunshots," he said. "We get about halfway down the road and...the guy in the car got out and he's covered in blood. And this is where...the impulse is just to keep going. There's no way that this guy knows who we are. We're just like every other patrol that goes up and down this road. I looked at my lieutenant and it wasn't even a discussion. We turned around and we went back.

"So I'm treating the guy. He has three gunshot wounds to the chest. Blood everywhere. And he keeps going in and out of consciousness. And when he finally stops breathing, I have to give him CPR. I take my right hand, I lift up his chin and I take my left hand and grab the back of his head to position his head, and as I take my left hand, my hand actually goes into his cranium. So I'm actually holding this man's brain in my hand. And what I realized was I had made a mistake. I had checked for exit wounds. But what I didn't know was the Humvee behind me, after the car failed to stop after the first three rounds, had fired twenty, thirty rounds into the car. I never heard it.

"I heard three rounds, I saw three holes, no exit wounds," he said. "I thought I knew what the situation was. So I didn't even treat this guy's injury to the head. Every medic I ever told is always like, Of course, I mean, the guy got shot in the head. There's nothing you could have done. And I'm pretty sure--I mean, you can't stop bleeding in the head like that. But this guy, I'm watching this guy, who I know we shot because he got too close. His car was clean. There was no--didn't hear it, didn't see us, whatever it was. Dies, you know, dying in my arms."

While many veterans said the killing of civilians deeply disturbed them, they also said there was no other way to safely operate a patrol.

"You don't want to shoot kids, I mean, no one does," said Sergeant Campbell, as he began to describe an incident in the summer of 2005 recounted to him by several men in his unit. "But you have this: I remember my unit was coming along this elevated overpass.

"And this kid is in the trash pile below, pulls out an AK-47 and just decides he's going to start shooting. And you gotta understand...when you have spent nine months in a war zone, where no one--every time you've been shot at, you've never seen the person shooting at you, and you could never shoot back. Here's some guy, some 14-year-old kid with an AK-47, decides he's going to start shooting at this convoy. It was the most obscene thing you've ever seen.

"Every person got out and opened fire on this kid. Using the biggest weapons we could find, we ripped him to shreds." Sergeant Campbell was not present at the incident, which took place in Khadamiya, but he saw photographs and heard descriptions from several eyewitnesses in his unit.

"Everyone was so happy, like this release that they finally killed an insurgent," he said. "Then when they got there, they realized it was just a little kid. And I know that really fucked up a lot of people in the head.... They'd show all the pictures and some people were really happy, like, Oh, look what we did. And other people were like, I don't want to see that ever again."

Several interviewees said that, on occasion, these killings were justified by framing innocents as terrorists, typically following incidents when American troops fired on crowds of unarmed Iraqis.

The troops would detain those who survived, accusing them of being insurgents, and plant AK-47s next to the bodies of those they had killed to make it seem as if the civilian dead were combatants.

“It would always be an AK because they have so many of these weapons lying around,” said Specialist Aoun. Cavalry scout Joe Hatcher, 26, of San Diego, said 9-millimeter handguns and even shovels--to make it look like the noncombatant was digging a hole to plant an IED--were used as well.

“Every good cop carries a throwaway,” said Hatcher, who served with the Fourth Cavalry Regiment, First Squadron, in Ad Dawar, halfway between Tikrit and Samarra, from February 2004 to March 2005.

“If you kill someone and they’re unarmed, you just drop one on ‘em.” Those who survived such shootings then found themselves imprisoned as accused insurgents.

In the winter of 2004, Sergeant Campbell was driving near a particularly dangerous road in Abu Gharth, a town west of Baghdad, when he heard gunshots. Sergeant Campbell, who served as a medic in Abu Gharth with the 256th Infantry Brigade from November 2004 to October 2005, was told that Army snipers had fired fifty to sixty rounds at two insurgents who’d gotten out of their car to plant IEDs.

One alleged insurgent was shot in the knees three or four times, treated and evacuated on a military helicopter, while the other man, who was treated for glass shards, was arrested and detained.

“I come to find out later that, while I was treating him, the snipers had planted--after they had searched and found nothing--they had planted bomb-making materials on the guy because they didn’t want to be investigated for the shoot,” Sergeant Campbell said. (He showed The Nation a photograph of one sniper with a radio in his pocket that he later planted as evidence.)

“And to this day, I mean, I remember taking that guy to Abu Ghraib prison--the guy who didn’t get shot--and just saying ‘I’m sorry’ because there was not a damn thing I could do about it.... I mean, I guess I have a moral obligation to say something, but I would have been kicked out of the unit in a heartbeat. I would’ve been a traitor.”

The US military checkpoints dotted across Iraq, according to twenty-six soldiers and marines who were stationed at them or supplied them--in locales as diverse as Tikrit, Baghdad, Karbala, Samarra, Mosul and Kirkuk--were often deadly for civilians.

Unarmed Iraqis were mistaken for insurgents, and the rules of engagement were blurred. Troops, fearing suicide bombs and rocket-propelled grenades, often fired on civilian cars. Nine of those soldiers said they had seen civilians being shot at checkpoints. These incidents were so common that the military could not investigate each one, some veterans said.

“Most of the time, it’s a family,” said Sergeant Cannon, who served at half a dozen checkpoints in Tikrit. “Every now and then, there is a bomb, you know, that’s the scary part.”

There were some permanent checkpoints stationed across the country, but for unsuspecting civilians, “flash checkpoints” were far more dangerous, according to eight veterans who were involved in setting them up. These impromptu security perimeters, thrown up at a moment’s notice and quickly dismantled, were generally designed to catch insurgents in the act of trafficking weapons or explosives, people violating military-imposed curfews or suspects in bombings or drive-by shootings.

Iraqis had no way of knowing where these so-called “tactical control points” would crop up, interviewees said, so many would turn a corner at a high speed and become the unwitting targets of jumpy soldiers and marines.

“For me, it was really random,” said Lieutenant Van Engelen. “I just picked a spot on a map that I thought was a high-volume area that might catch some people. We just set something up for half an hour to an hour and then we’d move on.” There were no briefings before setting up checkpoints, he said.

Temporary checkpoints were safer for troops, according to the veterans, because they were less likely to serve as static targets for insurgents. “You do it real quick because you don’t always want to announce your presence,” said First Sgt. Perry Jefferies, 46, of Waco, Texas, who served with the Fourth Infantry Division from April to October 2003.

The temporary checkpoints themselves varied greatly. Lieutenant Van Engelen set up checkpoints using orange cones and fifty yards of concertina wire. He would assign a soldier to control the flow of traffic and direct drivers through the wire, while others searched vehicles, questioned drivers and asked for identification. He said signs in English and Arabic warned Iraqis to stop; at night, troops used lasers, glow sticks or tracer bullets to signal cars through. When those weren’t available, troops improvised by using flashlights sent them by family and friends back home.

“Baghdad is not well lit,” said Sergeant Flanders. “There’s not street lights everywhere. You can’t really tell what’s going on.”

Other troops, however, said they constructed tactical control points that were hardly visible to drivers. “We didn’t have cones, we didn’t have nothing,” recalled Sergeant Bocanegra, who said he served at more than ten checkpoints in Tikrit. “You literally put rocks on the side of the road and tell them to stop. And of course some cars are not going to see the rocks. I wouldn’t even see the rocks myself.”

At checkpoints, troops had to make split-second decisions on when to use lethal force, and veterans said fear often clouded their judgment.

Sgt. Matt Mardan, 31, of Minneapolis, served as a Marine scout sniper outside Falluja in 2004 and 2005 with the Third Battalion, First Marines. “People think that’s dangerous, and it is,” he said. “But I would do that any day of the week rather than be a marine sitting on a fucking checkpoint looking at cars.”

No car that passes through a checkpoint is beyond suspicion, said Sergeant Dougherty. "You start looking at everyone as a criminal.... Is this the car that's going to try to run into me? Is this the car that has explosives in it? Or is this just someone who's confused?" The perpetual uncertainty, she said, is mentally exhausting and physically debilitating.

"In the moment, what's passing through your head is, Is this person a threat? Do I shoot to stop or do I shoot to kill?" said Lieutenant Morgenstein, who served in Al Anbar.

Sergeant Mejía recounted an incident in Ramadi in July 2003 when an unarmed man drove with his young son too close to a checkpoint. The father was decapitated in front of the small, terrified boy by a member of Sergeant Mejía's unit firing a heavy .50-caliber machine gun.

By then, said Sergeant Mejía, who responded to the scene after the fact, "this sort of killing of civilians had long ceased to arouse much interest or even comment." The next month, Sergeant Mejía returned stateside for a two-week rest and refused to go back, launching a public protest over the treatment of Iraqis. (He was charged with desertion, sentenced to one year in prison and given a bad-conduct discharge.)

During the summer of 2005, Sergeant Millard, who served as an assistant to a general in Tikrit, attended a briefing on a checkpoint shooting, at which his role was to flip PowerPoint slides.

"This unit sets up this traffic control point, and this 18-year-old kid is on top of an armored Humvee with a .50-caliber machine gun," he said. "This car speeds at him pretty quick and he makes a split-second decision that that's a suicide bomber, and he presses the butterfly trigger and puts 200 rounds in less than a minute into this vehicle.

"It killed the mother, a father and two kids. The boy was aged 4 and the daughter was aged 3. And they briefed this to the general. And they briefed it gruesome. I mean, they had pictures. They briefed it to him. And this colonel turns around to this full division staff and says, 'If these fucking hajjs learned to drive, this shit wouldn't happen.'"

Whether or not commanding officers shared this attitude, interviewees said, troops were rarely held accountable for shooting civilians at checkpoints. Eight veterans described the prevailing attitude among them as "Better to be tried by twelve men than carried by six." Since the number of troops tried for killing civilians is so scant, interviewees said, they would risk court-martial over the possibility of injury or death.

Indeed, several troops said the rules of engagement were fluid and designed to insure their safety above all else. Some said they were simply told they were authorized to shoot if they felt threatened, and what constituted a risk to their safety was open to wide interpretation.

"Basically it always came down to self-defense and better them than you," said Sgt. Bobby Yen, 28, of Atherton, California, who covered a variety of Army activities in Baghdad and Mosul as part of the 222nd Broadcast Operations Detachment for one year beginning in November 2003.

“Cover your own butt was the first rule of engagement,” Lieutenant Van Engelen confirmed. “Someone could look at me the wrong way and I could claim my safety was in threat.”

Lack of a uniform policy from service to service, base to base and year to year forced troops to rely on their own judgment, Sergeant Jefferies explained. “We didn’t get straight-up rules,” he said. “You got things like, ‘Don’t be aggressive’ or ‘Try not to shoot if you don’t have to.’ Well, what does that mean?”

Some interviewees said their commanders discouraged this system of escalation. “There’s no such thing as warning shots,” Specialist Resta said he was told during his pre-deployment training at Fort Bragg. “I even specifically remember being told that it was better to kill them than to have somebody wounded and still alive.”

Lieutenant Morgenstein said that when he arrived in Iraq in August 2004, the rules of engagement barred the use of warning shots. “We were trained that if someone is not armed, and they are not a threat, you never fire a warning shot because there is no need to shoot at all,” he said. “You signal to them with some other means than bullets. If they are armed and they are a threat, you never fire a warning shot because...that just gives them a chance to kill you. I don’t recall at this point if this was an ROE [rule of engagement] explicitly or simply part of our consistent training.” But later on, he said, “we were told the ROE was changed” and that warning shots were now explicitly allowed in certain circumstances.

A few veterans said checkpoint shootings resulted from basic miscommunication, incorrectly interpreted signals or cultural ignorance.

“As an American, you just put your hand up with your palm towards somebody and your fingers pointing to the sky,” said Sergeant Jefferies, who was responsible for supplying fixed checkpoints in Diyala twice a day. “That means stop to most Americans, and that’s a military hand signal that soldiers are taught that means stop. Closed fist, please freeze, but an open hand means stop. That’s a sign you make at a checkpoint.

“To an Iraqi person, that means, Hello, come here. So you can see the problem that develops real quick. So you get on a checkpoint, and the soldiers think they’re saying stop, stop, and the Iraqis think they’re saying come here, come here. And the soldiers start hollering, so they try to come there faster. So soldiers holler more, and pretty soon you’re shooting pregnant women.”

“You can’t tell the difference between these people at all,” said Sergeant Mardan. “They all look Arab. They all have beards, facial hair. Honestly, it’ll be like walking into China and trying to tell who’s in the Communist Party and who’s not. It’s impossible.”

But other veterans said that the frequent checkpoint shootings resulted from a lack of accountability. Critical decisions, they said, were often left to the individual soldier’s or marine’s discretion, and the military regularly endorsed these decisions without inquiry.

“Some units were so tight on their command and control that every time they fired one bullet, they had to write an investigative report,” said Sergeant Campbell. But “we fired thousands of rounds without ever filing reports,” he said. “And so it has to do with how much interaction and, you know, the relationship of the commanders to their units.”

Probes into roadblock killings were mere formalities, a few veterans said. “Even after a thorough investigation, there’s not much that could be done,” said Specialist Reppenhagen. “It’s just the nature of the situation you’re in. That’s what’s wrong. It’s not individual atrocity. It’s the fact that the entire war is an atrocity.”

“Just the carnage, all the blown-up civilians, blown-up bodies that I saw,” Specialist Englehart said. “I just--I started thinking, like, Why? What was this for?”

“It just gets frustrating,” Specialist Reppenhagen said. “Instead of blaming your own command for putting you there in that situation, you start blaming the Iraqi people....”

“So it’s a constant psychological battle to try to, you know, keep--to stay humane.”

“I felt like there was this enormous reduction in my compassion for people,” said Sergeant Flanders.

“The only thing that wound up mattering is myself and the guys that I was with. And everybody else be damned.”

130th Anniversary: **The Great Railroad Strike Of 1877;** **In St. Louis “They Took Control Of** **The City In A Great General Strike”**



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July 20, 2007 By ELIZABETH SCHULTE, Socialist Worker [Excerpts]

“We eat our hard bread and tainted meat two days old on the sooty cars up the road, and when we come home, find our children gnawing bones, and our wives complaining that they cannot even buy hominy and molasses for food.”

THIS RAILROAD worker’s words give a glimpse of the conditions that prepared the ground for the first nationwide strike in U.S.--the Great Railroad Strike of 1877. The two-week strike spread like a wildfire, from Baltimore to Pittsburgh to St. Louis and Chicago, and was only stamped out with utmost brutality on the part of the federal government.

The strike took place amid an economic depression that had begun with the panic of 1873. At least a million people were unemployed at the time, with some estimates triple that number.

Wages for rail workers were low. In 1877, a brakeman made on average \$1.75 for a 12-hour day. On top of that, few rail workers could get enough hours to sustain a living. When they could find work, they were expected to wait for it or travel to it, spending their meager wages for travel to the next job and for board in a company hotel.

Working conditions were dangerous. In Massachusetts alone, 42 railroad workers were killed in accidents in one year. The railroad companies were under no obligation to do anything for their injured workers or for the families they left behind.

At the same time, the labor movement was on the decline, leaving workers with little organization to fight back with. Brotherhoods representing separate sections of rail workers--engineers, firemen, conductors--existed to aid workers who had been injured at work, but they were a far cry from the kind of organization needed to take on the rail bosses.

The employers’ greed and brutality knew no bounds--there was a reason that the term applied to the rail bosses in particular was “robber barons.”

WITH THE first modern track laid in 1830, railroads became one of the most important parts of the U.S. economy over the next few decades, replacing rivers and other waterways as a more efficient and profitable form of transportation. With this new innovation, growers and manufacturers could transport their goods anywhere there was a rail line. For that reason, every local government vied for a rail line in their city. State and federal governments spent millions investing in the railroads, offering charters, loans, subsidies and even free land. By 1900, there was 200,000 miles of track crisscrossing the U.S.

Corruption and graft came with the railroads. Owners like Cornelius Vanderbilt squeezed small businesses and farmers, while favoring wealthy companies like Rockefeller’s Standard Oil, which got an edge on their competitors.

But the rail tycoons were especially brutal toward their workforce. Knowing they could threaten workers with being replaced by any from the vast pool of the unemployed, the owners continued to cut living standards to the bone. In March 1877, four major rail

owners met to agree on further wage cuts and band together against the threat of a strike.

When the Pennsylvania Railroad made a second 10 percent cut in wages, some rail workers decided they needed to get organized and began forming the Trainmen's Union, which would bring together the different classifications of rail employees into one organization. While their attempt to form a union and plan for a general strike was aborted that month, the idea wasn't forgotten.

As radical historian Sidney Lens wrote in *The Labor Wars*, "Unionists claim that 'no strike is ever fully lost.' It softens employers for the next round and prepares a cadre of union leaders who will be heard from again." Among the workers who sparked the beginning of the national strike later that year were some of the workers who had hoped to form the Trainmen's Union.

The great railroad strike began in Martinsburg, W. Va., on July 16, with the demand that Baltimore & Ohio Railroad restore 10 percent in wages that had been cut. Workers stopped the trains and uncoupled the cars. After the company was unsuccessful in demanding that the police and mayor get the trains going, it got the governor to call in the Berkeley Light Guard.

When a striker died after a shootout with a soldier, the Guard's colonel sent his men back home. "The great trouble," reported the *New York Times*, "is that the people along the line of the road are thoroughly in sympathy with the strikers, and the military cannot be depended on to act against them in this emergency."

With sympathy for the rail workers (and hatred of the rail bosses) high, the strike spread from line to line. On the Pittsburgh division of Pennsylvania line, rail workers shut down the trains after the company announced it was going to run "doubleheaders"--two locomotives pulling twice as many cars, which effectively cut everyone's wages and threw half of the brakemen and conductors out of a job.

With the Pittsburgh militia also too sympathetic to strikers for the bosses to trust them, Philadelphia guards were sent in. The ensuing bloodbath ignited protest from everywhere, with strike supporters rioting and setting fire to train cars and buildings. The newspapers invoked scenes of the Paris Commune, which had taken place six years earlier and was still fresh in the bosses'--and workers'--minds.

THE CHARACTER of the strikes from city to city wasn't the same. Sadly, in some incidents in California and New York, workers' anger was expressed in misdirected attacks against Chinese immigrant labor.

What carried the day in places where the strikes had the most success, however, was a common anger at the railway bosses and a sense of the need for solidarity among workers.

In some places, like Louisville, Ky., the demands of Black workers were taken up--especially significant since the old rail brotherhoods typically banned Blacks, who usually had the most dangerous and lowest-paying jobs.

In cities where tensions ordinarily existed among the immigrant populations, like Chicago, Czech workers marched alongside Irish workers.

Women played a significant role. "It is a noticeable fact," reported the Chicago Times, "to all who have taken more than a casual view of the crowd of 'strikers' that at least one-fifth of the gathering were women."

The Chicago Inter-Ocean, in an article headed "Women's Warfare: Bohemian Amazons Rival the Men in Deeds of Violence," told how when the men in the crowd became "demoralized," "hundreds of the Amazons came to replace them."

There were a few places where labor organizations existed to take the anger of the strike to the next step.

In Chicago, the socialist Workingmen's Party held support meetings.

When police attacked a peaceful meeting, anger erupted, with some 10,000 strike supporters beating back federal troops and police in the famous "Battle of the Viaduct."

In St. Louis, where the Workingmen's Party had about 1,000 members, they took control of the city in a great general strike.

Delegations of workers visited all the shops and mills, calling on workers to go out on strike and arguing that the choice was either total victory for the strike or total defeat.

Strikers marched to the levee where steamboat workers "of all colors" forced captains to sign a promise of 50 percent higher pay. At mass meetings, workers called for the eight-hour day.

Unfortunately, by July 27, the strike in St. Louis was isolated, since the strikes in other cities had not developed to this point, and fell to the threat of armed forces called out by city and state officials, and President Rutherford Hayes himself.

By August 1, the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 was over, but only because the federal and state governments had smothered it with armed force.

In one accounting, 10 states had mobilized some 60,000 soldiers with the goal of crushing strikers. Without a greater level of organization, strikers--no matter how angry--could not hold together.

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

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OCCUPATION REPORT

Good News For The Iraqi Resistance!!

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



A foreign occupation soldier from the USA forces his way into a *suspicious house* in the Dora neighborhood in southern Baghdad June 15, 2007. (AP Photo/Petros Giannakouris)

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

[Those Iraqis are sure a bunch of backward primitives. They actually resent this help, have the absurd notion that it's bad their country is occupied by a foreign

military dictatorship, and consider it their patriotic duty to fight and kill the soldiers sent to grab their country.

[What a bunch of silly people. How fortunate they are to live under a military dictatorship run by George Bush. Why, how could anybody not love that? You'd want that in your home town, right?]

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

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



7/21

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CLASS WAR REPORTS

General Strike Shakes Dominican Republic

By Emmanuel Santos, July 20, 2007, Socialist Worker Newspaper

A 24-hour general strike in the Dominican Republic July 9 partially halted public transportation and commerce in a protest against the neoliberal policies of President Leonel Fernández and his administration.

The “First General Strike for the Right to Live” was organized by the Alternative Social Forum (FSA), which is comprised of 200 grassroots, leftist and trade union organizations. It demanded lower food and medicine prices; an increase in salaries, including for members of the military and the police; an end to housing evictions; plus more structural demands, such as a new hydrocarbon law to quell rising gas prices.

Schools and stores were mostly closed. The exception was malls and supermarkets for the rich, zealously guarded by soldiers. But the chief of police failed to convince other storeowners to open their doors.

The FSA became the target of a propaganda campaign by the government, which threatened prosecutions if any acts of vandalism broke out. A countrywide witch-hunt against left-wing and labor activists resulted in the arrest of 50 people.

When five youths blew themselves up while making homemade bombs, the government tried to blame the FSA--which immediately repudiated any form of isolated, violent attacks carried out in the name of the popular movement. The injured were members of Struggle, Unity and Progress Front (FLUP), a small far-left organization.

In the northwestern city of Navarrete, a former activist was murdered in what seemed an attempt to provoke a violent reaction from a community that has seen some of the most militant protests in the past--and where the left-wing autonomist group, Broad Front of Popular Struggle (FALPO), is rooted.

In the Santiago province, a women’s collective holding a meeting was practically held hostage by heavily armed soldiers.

Army units patrolled the streets of deserted major cities and poor neighborhoods while helicopters hovered in the sky. But this didn’t deter peaceful marchers in the Capotillo neighborhood in Santo Domingo, the capital.

Chanting “Why planes, when there’s plenty of hunger” -- a reference to the recent purchase of nine Super Tucano planes from Brazil at a cost of \$40 million -- the protesters remained united in defiance of the hundreds of soldiers flanking their demonstration.

FSA spokesperson Victor Jeronimo characterized the strike as a “resounding popular referendum” that rejected the social and economic policies of the regime.

THE GENERAL strike came after a resurgence of protest in March--and a week after a combative popular movement in the working class community of Pedro Brand in Santo Domingo staged a two-day strike that paralyzed one of the most important highways in the country to protest the lack of basic services, such as water and electricity.

As protesters burned tires to block the highway, police and SWAT teams appeared on the scene. Tensions flared after a high-ranking police officer ordered the arrest of all Afro-Dominicans. But this attempt to racially profile and criminalize protesters backfired as chants got louder and a sense of collective unity was forged.

Within days, the government removed the officers in charge of this operation as a punishment for not firing on the demonstrators. But with business and tourist activity between the capital and the Cibao region disrupted--and millions in toll revenues going uncollected--the government sent out 80 trucks to distribute water.

The victory in Pedro Brand and the recent general strike illustrate the power that ordinary people in the Dominican Republic still have.

On July 28, the FSA will discuss the way forward. It is important for the movement to broaden the resistance by linking up with organized labor as a whole, and take up on the plight of undocumented Haitian immigrants, whose cheap wages are justified to lower the living standards of everyone.

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