

## GI SPECIAL 5H15:

Civilian Control of the Military



# **Lying Rat Generals: As Betrayus And Others Babble Stupid Bullshit About "Success" In Anbar, U.S. Troops Getting Slaughtered: "The Deadliest Province After Baghdad"**

August 19, 2007 By RICHARD A. OPPEL Jr.

The gains in Falluja, neighboring Ramadi and other areas in Anbar Province, once the most violent area in Iraq and the heart of the Sunni Arab insurgency, are often cited as a success story, a possible model for the rest of Iraq.

**Twenty-five service members have been killed in Anbar Province since the beginning of July, according to [icasualties.org](http://icasualties.org), making it by far the deadliest province after Baghdad.**

Most of the fuel, ammunition and vehicle maintenance for the Falluja police is still supplied by the American military, said Maj. Todd Sermarini, the Marine officer in charge of police training here.

Some police officers have been forced to buy gasoline from black-market roadside vendors. "Ammunition is a big problem, weapons are a problem, and wages are a problem," said Capt. Al Cheng, 34, a company commander working with the police here.

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## IRAQ WAR REPORTS

### **Wilberto Suliveras Dies 'Of Wounds Suffered From Enemy Small Arms Fire'**



August 02, 2007 [Iraqnam.blogspot.com](http://Iraqnam.blogspot.com)

Wilberto Suliveras, a Puerto Rican sergeant who was killed Sunday in Iraq, died six months after his mother and two months after his maternal grandmother.

The three deaths in such a short time have devastated the family, said Wilma Suliveras, sister of the soldier.

"It leaves us with an enormous vacuum because he was the joy of the family. He was the one who called and talked to everyone. The loss is going to be immense," added Suliveras, who was with her father when she was speaking by phone with the media.

U.S. Army island spokesman José Pagán said Tuesday Suliveras died from enemy fire in the city of Taji, Iraq.

“The family requested he be buried here,” said Pagán.

The woman said her brother, 38 years old, would be buried in the Bayamón National Cemetery, but before that the body would be sent to Fort Hood, Texas, where there would be a ceremony. Neither she nor Pagán knew when the body would arrive in Puerto Rico.

A member of the active Army, Wilberto was assigned to the First Cavalry Division at Fort Hood.

At least 60 soldiers of Puerto Rican descent have died in U.S. conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Kuwait.

The Suliveras family is originally from Guayama, but the father of the soldier, Wilfredo Suliveras, resides in Humacao.

The father, 66 years old, found out about the death of his son on Sunday, while he was visiting the home of another son in Houston, Texas.

“I was spending some time in the home of my children in Houston. We found out at the home of my other son,” he said.

Hipólito Suliveras, an uncle of Wilberto and a resident of Caguas, began to cry when he spoke of his nephew.

“He was my favorite nephew, he was very friendly with everyone... Several months ago he was here and I gave him a sweater. He was very appreciative, he put it on right away and everything,” he said between sobs.

The last time Wilberto was in Puerto Rico was for the funeral of his mother, Carmen Delia Ortiz, who died suddenly in January of a major heart attack. She was 61 years old.

In May, the family suffered the loss of its maternal grandmother, Carmen Sánchez, who was 80 years old.

The last time Wilberto saw his mother alive was in October, 2006, when she was in Texas to say goodbye to him before he went to Iraq.

“We have cried and we have suffered, but we have a great strength, which comes from God. He has helped us overcome these three deaths,” Wilma commented.

The sister told of how, before joining the military 12 years ago, Wilberto was involved with race cars.

“He always liked cars, he sold parts. He even had race cars, and he liked to have his car very nice and all fixed up,” Wilma explained.

Wilberto also liked to share with other family members. “He was helpful, funny, happy... His favorite meal was fried pork chops with rice,” she remembered.

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## **REALLY BAD PLACE TO BE: BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW**



U.S. soldiers from the 2nd battalion, 32nd Field Artillery brigade as shots were fired in Baghdad August 9, 2007. REUTERS/Damir Sagolj

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## **Rowan Soldier Wounded In Iraq**



Wound: Pvt. Joshua Karnes was injured by a bullet or shrapnel in Iraq. It took nearly 100 stitches to close the wound.

Aug 16, 2007 By Steve Huffman, Salisbury Post

Karri Karnes got a call earlier this week from her son, Joshua, an Army private stationed in Iraq.

“Mom,” he said, “I don’t want you to get upset and I don’t want you to get excited, but I’ve been wounded.”

The wounds, he continued, while not life-threatening, were fairly serious. And gruesome to look at. Joshua e-mailed his mother a photograph as proof.

“Oh, I got a big, beautiful picture,” Karri said Wednesday, managing to laugh about it all.

Joshua was struck in his left cheek by a bullet or piece of shrapnel. The wound extends back in a straight line, stretching under Joshua’s left ear. It took almost 100 stitches to close.

The incident happened last Thursday when members of Joshua’s infantry unit were going from building to building in one of Baghdad’s seedier neighborhoods. They were searching for insurgents. Joshua is a SAW gunner. As Karri explains it, “He carries a giant gun.”

Joshua and other members of his unit began taking fire as they approached a building. Karri said Joshua told her he knew immediately that he’d been hit.

Joshua initially thought his injury was more serious than it was. He told his mother that he thought he’d been hit in the neck and that the wound would kill him.

And so, in what Joshua believed would be his dying move, he tried to protect a comrade, throwing himself across a fellow soldier to shield him from bullets.

It was a noble gesture.

The fight continued for several minutes. Though another member of Joshua’s unit was also wounded, everyone survived.

And Joshua is now being hailed as a hero. “They say he’s up for a medal,” Karri said. The medal, she said, is for disregarding one’s own safety and striving to protect others.

Karri said Joshua is restricted to his Baghdad base until his wounds heal. She said he had his stitches removed Wednesday and will find out Friday when he’ll be allowed to return to duty.

He’s anxious to do so, Karri said.

She said her son downplayed any mention that he was a hero. “He said he didn’t do anything big,” Karri said, “but I disagree.”

Joshua, 20, graduated in 2004 from North Rowan High School. He tried a semester at Western Carolina University, but didn’t find it to his liking.

Joshua has been in the Army for two years and in Iraq for a little more than a year. His unit, which is based in Schweinfurt, Germany, is scheduled to return to the United States in late November.

Joshua was a member of the wrestling team at North Rowan. His mother said she's not surprised that, even in the midst of combat, he tried to do all he could to help others.

"He's always looked out for the underdog," Karri said. "Even when he was young, he didn't let bullies pick on anyone when he was around."

Joshua's father is Toby Karnes. In addition to Joshua, the couple have one other child, a 19-year-old daughter, Amanda. Joshua's grandparents are Glenn and Glenda Haviland and Sonny and Judy West.

Karri said Joshua stays in touch with family members regularly through e-mails and use of his cell phone. She said he's not allowed to say a great deal about exactly what it is his unit is doing in Iraq.

"He'll be glad to get home," Karri said.

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## **AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS**

### **Roadside Bomb In Afghanistan Claims Liberty Soldier**



(MSMCC101) McComb, MS Sgt. Taurean Harris of Liberty, Mississippi is seen in this undated family photo. Harris, with the U.S. Army based out of Fort Gordon, Georgia, was killed on August 2, 2007 in Afghanistan. (AP Photo, The Enterprise-Journal, Aaron Rhoads

08/04/07 By Todd Harrell, Enterprise-Journal

Yolanda Wagner lost who she calls the perfect son on Thursday, when U.S. Army Sgt. Taurean Travanti Harris of Liberty was killed by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan.

“Ever there was such a thing I had it,” Wagner said Saturday from Chicago.

The Department of Defense announced Saturday that Harris, 22, died in Kala Gush from wounds suffered from an improvised explosive device.

Wagner, who was visiting her mother in Chicago when she heard the news, said she had just talked to her son on the phone the day before. Harris reminded her to buy gifts for his daughter, who turned 22 months old on Friday.

“Everything he did was for her,” she said.

The news has devastated her family.

“I’m not doing good at all. All I can do is cry and it hurts so bad. But I’ve got to be strong because I have three other kids and three other grandkids,” she said.

Wagner said she knew few details surrounding her son’s death.

The Department of Defense said Harris was assigned to the 202nd Military Intelligence Battalion, 513th Military Intelligence Brigade based at Fort Gordon, Ga.

Harris’ unit left for Afghanistan in early December and was due back in March 2008. Wagner said he had only been home once since he left, around his birthday, April 29.

Although Harris had initially been trained in electrical engineering, Wagner said she was unsure of her son’s exact duties in Afghanistan. She said her son talked little about what he did, and she figured he was trying to prevent her from worrying.

But she still worried, especially when he first deployed.

“I was very upset,” she said.

Throughout her son’s military career he always told her not to worry about him, saying “You know your son’s a soldier.”

The last time she saw him, when he briefly returned home, she said he had looked so good and sounded so positive that she convinced herself that he was going to return home safely.

She said it seems unfair that when she felt the most optimistic, the worst has happened.

To Wagner, her son was as close to perfect as possible.

“I want the world to know what I lost, because I lost a beautiful child,” she said.

She said Harris’ level head always kept him from trouble, and he stayed motivated throughout school. “He was never a problem,” she said.

He excelled in JROTC at Amite County High School, racking up scores of achievement certificates and earning its highest honors before graduating in 2003.

Maj. David Terrell, who instructed Harris for four years, said Harris was one of the finer men in Amite County, and Terrell keeps wishing the tragic news was just a nightmare.

"You just don't find too many young men like him," he said.

He said Harris was the type of student who always answered "yes sir" or "no sir," and he was a great role model. "I got in ROTC just to be in there with him," his brother William Harris said.

Wagner said her son could never keep his hands off the appliances around the house and he tinkered with anything electrical, from ceiling fans to televisions.

"He always thought he could hook up everything," said Wagner.

He enlisted in the Army right after he graduated from high school.

In 2004, Harris graduated from a utilities equipment repair course at a Maryland base. His mother said he later repaired electrical equipment, including air conditioning and refrigeration systems at a base in El Paso, Texas.

"I was very proud," Wagner said, adding that her son's discipline was fit for the military.

In 2005, his daughter Tiana was born. Wagner said Tiana's mother, Joni Poleder of Lake Charles, La., who is also stationed overseas with the Army, will attend the funeral.

Arrangements are incomplete at Craft Funeral Home of McComb.

Wagner said after her son was stationed at Fort Gordon for a matter of weeks before he received word of his deployment to Afghanistan.

Despite the distance, she said she kept in regular contact with Harris by phone or e-mail. Harris told her he'd be back home in four months, Wagner said.

"He told me he was going to be home for Christmas," she said.

Wagner said Harris had plans to buy a home in Augusta, Ga., where he was going to raise Tiana and take electrical engineering classes after his discharge.

Harris also leaves three siblings, William, 20, Justin Davis, 17, and Tara Cockerham, 25, all of Liberty. Harris' father, Cecil Harris, lives in Tucson, Ariz.

She said his body should arrive in the United States by this week.

Terrell, now principal of Amite County High School, said there will be a moment of silence on Monday, the first day of school, and other memorial plans are pending.

A Fort Gordon spokesman said there also would be a memorial for Harris at the base.

Harris was the second sergeant in his unit to die in combat in Afghanistan. In 2004, Sgt. Carri Gasiewicz was killed by an improvised explosive device.

As of Saturday, at least 353 members of the U.S. military had died as a result of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001, according to the Defense Department.

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## Hundreds At Funeral For Soldier

08/05/2007 By Andrea Bennett, Staff Writer; Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

LOS ANGELES - It was ceremony fit for a hero on Saturday when hundreds gathered in honor of the Ontario High School star varsity wrestler who devoted the past seven years of his life to the Army.

Sgt. Travon Travis Johnson, 29, of the 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne), was killed by a roadside bomb on July 23 while on tour in Afghanistan.

"I want to say we are celebrating a hero," said Pastor Claude Pickens to mourners at the service at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Los Angeles. "He was a young man willing to go forth and do what he had to do," Pickens said. "Obedience and sacrifice. ... He sacrificed his life for you and I, just like Jesus. We thank God for him today. He was a hero." To this, many in the chapel burst into applause and "yes, sirs."

Behind Pickens was Johnson's casket - draped in the American flag - and a photograph of the soldier in uniform. Paul Mock, major general of the 63rd Regional Readiness Command, presented to both the grieving mother, Billie Shotlow, and widow Sara.

They included the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Iraqi Campaign Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Global War on Terror Expeditionary Medal and Global War on Terror Service Medal. An 18-gun salute, the playing of taps and a flag-folding ceremony followed the service.

Family and friends then headed to Ontario for a reception at the Westwind Community Center, where Johnson often had volunteered after school while attending Ontario High.

"It was a very befitting tribute to him," said Charlotte Tyson, one of Johnson's godmothers and a friend of his mother. Johnson's loyalty to his country and decision to keep returning to service overseas increased his family's patriotism in the end, Tyson said. "It was a situation we don't necessarily understand. However, we were respectful of his decision. That's what he wanted to do," she said. "We have always been prayerful women. Travon has now made us patriotic, prayerful warriors."

Johnson was a straight arrow from birth, and both lived and died with great honor and pride, said Cheryl Patterson, another godmother of Johnson. "What I want people to remember about my godson is he did it his way," Patterson said. "He was dedicated - that's why he went back for his third tour. He promised his men he'd come back."

Johnson's body was returned on a private Cessna jet in time for the service with the help of the Inspector General's Office and many friends and neighbors, his mother said.

“I’m just thankful my son is back on American soil and put to rest and in peace,” Shotlow said.

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## **Mercenaries Blown Up In Kandahar**

August 18, 2007 The Associated Press

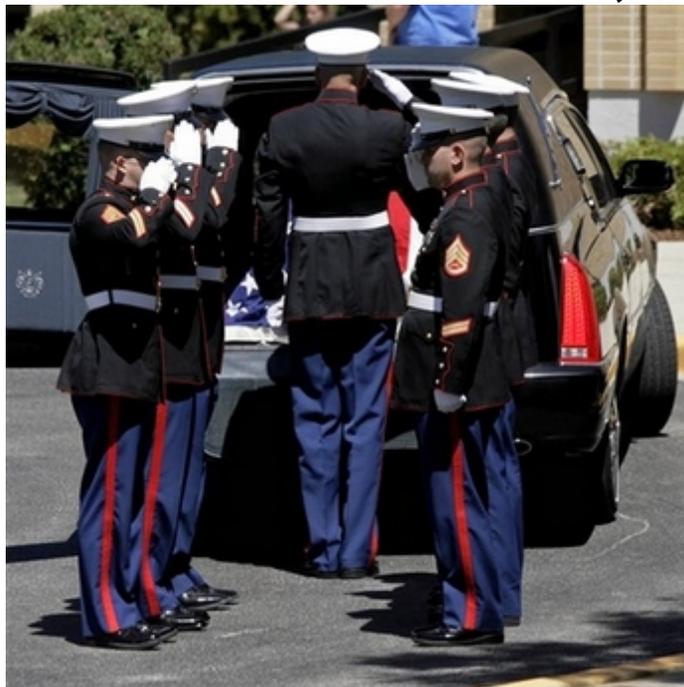
KANDAHAR, Afghanistan -- A car bomber detonated near a convoy of private security forces Saturday in southern Afghanistan, killing four Afghan guards and 11 civilians. The bomb went off west of Kandahar city and also wounded six other guards.

Saqib said the guards worked for the U.S. Protection and Investigations security firm, but USPI could not immediately be reached for comment or to confirm that their employees were attacked.

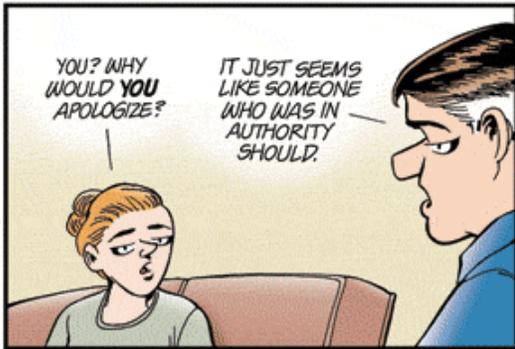
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## **TROOP NEWS**

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



The body of Marine Cpl. Matthew Zindars, after his funeral service Aug. 3, 2007, at the Lutheran Preparatory School in Watertown Wis. Zindars was killed by a roadside bomb July 24, 2007, during his second tour of duty in Iraq. (AP Photo/Darren Hauck)



**Ronn Cantu, Active-Duty  
Soldier:  
“None Of Us Felt That We Were  
Doing The Right Thing...”  
Jeff Key, Iraq Veteran:  
“They Are Not Insurgents, They  
Are Freedom Fighters”**



8.17.07 By Theresa Foster, Socialist Worker

LOS ANGELES--On July 13, the Los Angeles chapter of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) held its first public forum at the Venice Methodist Church.

Thirteen members of IVAW were in attendance, in addition to a large and enthusiastic crowd. The meeting was moderated by Tim Goodrich, one of the founders of IVAW.

Jeff Key spoke about his experiences having rejoined the Marine Corps in his thirties due to economic conditions.

**“They (the Iraqi people) are not insurgents, they are freedom fighters,” Key explained to the audience.**

**“How would you feel if someone invaded your country for no reason? Even my mother would be up in a tree with a rifle.”**

**Ronn Cantu, an active-duty soldier currently facing a 15-month redeployment back to Iraq, recalled that once there, “None of us felt that we were doing the right**

**thing...Soldiers just ride around with their fingers crossed praying that they don't get blown up."**

Darrell Anderson, who went AWOL and fled to Canada after serving in Iraq, spoke about the conditions that made it impossible to remain in the military. "I saw us destroying a culture, and it's not right--it's just not right," he said, adding that he is no longer eligible to receive Veterans Administration medical care due to being given a less-than-honorable discharge, despite his health problems.

The final speaker of the evening was Jabbar Magruder, who presented a new petition called the "Appeal to Conscience" that will be distributed to military members and the general public. Magruder also spoke about the way the media is manipulated by the corporations and the government.

"We must use the same approach to get our message across." Magruder said, explaining that military support, public opinion, schools and the media need to be targeted by antiwar activists.

**"These are the pillars of support for the Iraq war that have to be removed."**

**"The single largest failure of the anti-war movement at this point is the lack of outreach to the troops." Tim Goodrich, Iraq Veterans Against The War**

**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**

**U.S. Military Practices Genetic  
Discrimination In Denying Troops'  
Benefits:  
Soldiers Double-Fucked;  
Can't Get Tested For Deadly  
Diseases Without Risking Incomes;**

# “If You Happen To Have A Disease Where There Is An Identified Genetic Contribution, You Are Screwed”

**For more than 20 years, the armed forces have held a policy that specifically denies disability benefits to servicemen and women with congenital or hereditary conditions. The practice would be illegal in almost any other workplace.**

**Military doctors now discourage their patients from getting potentially life-saving genetic tests, undermining their ability to provide top-notch care.**

August 18, 2007 By Karen Kaplan, L.A. Times

While genetic discrimination is banned in most cases throughout the country, it is alive and well in the U.S. military.

**For more than 20 years, the armed forces have held a policy that specifically denies disability benefits to servicemen and women with congenital or hereditary conditions. The practice would be illegal in almost any other workplace.**

There is one exception, instituted in 1999, that grants benefits to personnel who have served eight years.

“You could be in the military and be a six-pack-a-day smoker, and if you come down with emphysema, ‘That’s OK. We’ve got you covered,’ “ said Kathy Hudson, director of the Genetics and Public Policy Center at Johns Hopkins University.

“But if you happen to have a disease where there is an identified genetic contribution, you are screwed.”

**“It seems particularly draconian to say, ‘Well, you’re out with no benefits,’ whereas another person with the same injury gets the coverage simply because we don’t know there’s a gene in there that’s causing this,” said Alex Capron, a professor who studies healthcare law, policy and ethics at USC.**

The fear of genetic discrimination coincides with early efforts to decode the human genome more than 25 years ago.

It took no great insight to realize that a complete inventory of life’s building blocks would not only revolutionize the practice of medicine, but also mark individuals whose genes put them at risk for myriad diseases.

**Congress took action in 1996, banning genetic discrimination in group health plans, and in 2000, President Clinton signed an executive order forbidding the practice against the federal government’s nearly 2 million civilian employees.**

**Similar laws against genetic discrimination swept through 31 states.**

Congress is working to extend the federal law with the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act, which would protect people with individual medical policies. The act has passed the House and awaits a vote in the Senate.

**Even if it becomes law, it will not apply to military personnel.**

The Defense Department's original policy did not consider genetics when determining whether a soldier deserved medical retirement, assuming that any disease discovered during service had been incurred in the line of duty.

There was little reason to consider genetic mutations, since few were known. But by 1986, as scientists associated more sections of DNA with particular diseases, the military declared that it was not responsible for soldiers with "congenital and hereditary" conditions.

At the urging of the National Human Genome Research Institute, the Defense Department proposed in 1999 that anyone who had served for 180 days be eligible for medical retirement, even if their health problem had a genetic component, said Barbara Fuller, assistant director for ethics at NHGRI, part of the National Institutes of Health.

But the Office of Management and Budget decided on the longer, 8-year term to conform with other military health and retirement guidelines, according to an OMB official.

Some genetic discrimination is unavoidable given the demands of military service, said Nunes, now a geneticist at Ohio State University.

"If you have achondroplasia -- if you're a dwarf -- you're not eligible for military service," he said. "If you have hereditary hearing loss, you're not eligible for military service. If you have color blindness, you're not eligible to fly an airplane. Obviously, there's genetic discrimination in the military, for good reason."

But Nunes said the armed forces' disability policy was flawed by a fundamental misunderstanding about the biology of inherited diseases.

Only in a few cases, such as Huntington's disease, does a specific mutation in a particular stretch of DNA guarantee the onset of illness.

**In most cases, a faulty gene increases an individual's risk of developing a disease, but does not ensure it. Typically, an external event is necessary to trigger the onset of a medical condition.**

Such was the case with an Army helicopter gunship pilot who was reassigned to desk duty after she became too pregnant to fly.

Dr. Melissa Fries, an Air Force geneticist who became involved in the case, said the pilot developed a blood clot in her leg -- a typical complication of pregnancy that is exacerbated by inactivity.

She was diagnosed with chronic thrombophlebitis, a condition that disqualified her from flying. The pilot, who declined to discuss her case, decided to retire from the Army.

As part of her medical work-up, doctors discovered she had a genetic mutation for Factor V Leiden, which is found in 5% of Caucasians and increases their risk of developing blood clots.

**An Army physical evaluation board, which determines disability benefits, denied her claim because of the mutation.**

**Her military doctors were stunned since her thrombophlebitis was probably caused by her pregnancy and desk job. They downplayed the role of her mutation because 99% of Factor V Leiden carriers never develop blood clots.**

**Military doctors now discourage their patients from getting potentially life-saving genetic tests, undermining their ability to provide top-notch care.**

**“If someone called me up with regard to genetic testing, I had to say, ‘That might not be something you want to pursue,’” Nunes said. “That’s very hard to say.”**

**In her 26 years in the Air Force, Fries said she often dissuaded women from getting tested for the BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutations that dramatically increase their risk of developing breast cancer.**

She recalled counseling a 22-year-old soldier whose father had just been diagnosed with Huntington’s disease. The soldier had 50-50 odds of developing the disease.

A neurologist at Walter Reed Army Medical Center ordered a genetic test for Huntington’s, and it turned up positive.

“He was discharged from the military on the basis of the Huntington’s disease gene even though, at that level of gene expansion, there was expected to be another 25 years before he would display any symptoms,” said Fries, now director of genetics and fetal medicine at Washington Hospital Center in Washington, D.C.

**For many in the military, the best course is to simply refuse all genetic tests, even though they may be needed for an accurate diagnosis, she said.**

**Getting genetic tests through civilian channels is not an option because it would violate the uniform code of military justice.**

**“You could get court-martialed if it were revealed that you had sought medical treatment or testing outside the system,” Nunes said.**

Most soldiers have no idea about the genetic rule, much less have a reason to challenge it.

For those who choose to fight, it can be arduous process.

**No one contested the policy until Marine Gunnery Sgt. Jay Platt did in 1998.**

Platt had lost an eye and a testicle to Von Hippel-Lindau syndrome before doctors told him he had a malignant tumor in his left kidney and four benign tumors on his brain. He knew his 15-year Marine career was over.

“If you want to go ahead and medically retire me, I’m not going to fight it,” he told his doctors.

But the Marines refused. Instead, he was medically discharged without any benefits because his genetic disease was a preexisting condition.

A discharge have would cut Platt off from Tricare, which allows members to seek care from a large network of providers, just like a civilian HMO.

“That was my biggest thing,” he said. “I needed to have treatments for the rest of my life.”

With the help experts from NHGRI, Platt appealed his case to an physical evaluation board.

His doctors said that although the mutation predisposed him to Von Hippel-Lindau syndrome, some aspect of his service -- such as repeated exposure to the solvents used to clean weapons -- could have triggered the tumors.

Platt ultimately won his case and was granted disability payments of about \$2,000 a month.

The helicopter pilot with the Factor V Leiden mutation also appealed her case, going all the way to the Army surgeon general to win a medical retirement.

**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](mailto:contact@militaryproject.org):. Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Replies confidential. Same address to unsubscribe.

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

**OCCUPATION REPORT**

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



A frightened Iraqi child holds her father's hand after foreign occupation soldiers from the U.S. 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion, 32<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery brigade, invaded their home at gunpoint in the middle of the night to interrogate the family in Baghdad August 3, 2007.  
REUTERS/Damir Sagolj



An elderly Iraqi citizen is forced to lie on the floor of his own home after foreign occupation soldiers from the U.S. from the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion, 32<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery brigade invaded his house in Baghdad August 11, 2007. REUTERS/Damir Sagolj

**[61% of Iraqis say they approve of attacks on U.S.-led forces in their country, up from 47 percent in January. A solid majority of Shiite and Sunni Arabs approved of the attacks, according to the poll. 9/27/2006 By BARRY SCHWEID, AP & Program on International Policy Attitudes**

**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, by any means necessary. T]**

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## **U.S. Military Dictatorship Says It Can Hold Iraqi Prisoners Forever With No Charges Against Them: “I Have Been Jailed For Two Years And Have Never Been Put Before A Judge Or Court!”**

**Washington says its own prisoners are covered by U.N. Security Council resolutions which allow its forces to hold them without charge as long as they are deemed a threat.**

Aug 18, 2007 By Waleed Ibrahim and Peter Graff, Reuters & By KIM GAMEL, Associated Press Writer [Excerpts]

Rare footage from inside a Baghdad prison camp shows hundreds of inmates packed into wire-mesh tents, protesting their innocence.

**“I have been jailed for two years and have never been put before a judge or court!” one prisoner is shown shouting.**

**One inmate demanded to know his legal status, saying he was the director of a honey company and didn’t even know the charges against him.**

**“They stole my car and my wife’s jewelry,” he said. “They destroyed my life. I have been in here for two years now.”**

The video pictures were given to Reuters Television on Saturday by the office of Sunni Arab Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi, who visited the Rusafa prison compound in eastern Baghdad with his Shi’ite counterpart.

The footage showed row upon row of outdoor tents made of wire mesh and covered with white plastic sheeting, each about the size of a basketball court and housing dozens of inmates. "We are not asking for food or water. Just free us. We have committed no crimes," said one inmate.

Prisoners, some stripped to their waists, pressed up against the mesh walls and shouted their innocence. Some chanted Saddam-era Iraqi nationalist slogans. Hashemi said: "We will not accept this injustice. It is a shame on all of us. Be patient. All of your cases will be heard."

At one point he added: "You are lucky to be here. At least you have security. Those outside do not even have security."

The U.S. military says it is now holding 23,000 Iraqis, 19,000 of them at Camp Bucca, a giant prison camp in southern Iraq.

Washington says its own prisoners are covered by U.N. Security Council resolutions which allow its forces to hold them without charge as long as they are deemed a threat.

## DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



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## **CLASS WAR REPORTS**



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### ***Cygnus Strike Report:*** **“We Made A Big Company Tremble And Move. This Victory Is For Us Workers, But Also For All The Working Class And For All The Community Groups That Were Here Supporting Us”**

[GI Special recently carried an appeal to help the Cygnus strikers. This is a report on the end of the strike. Thanks to Phil G, who sent this in. T]

August 17, 2007 By LEE SUSTAR and ORLANDO SEPULDEVA. Shaun Harkin contributed to this report on a victorious strike by immigrant workers in Chicago who walked out over threats to terminate them based on immigration status--and the implications of this struggle for the labor and immigrant rights movement.

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**THE REMARKABLE struggle of immigrant strikers at South Chicago's Cygnus Corp., a nonunion soap factory, ended August 10 as improbably as it began two weeks earlier--with dozens of workers jammed into a temporary staffing agency's office, voting on the spot to accept the agency's offer to send more than 100 back into the plant without penalty--and with the threat of termination withdrawn.**

The Mexican immigrant workers prevailed over a plant management backed up by its parent company, Marietta Corp., a large manufacturer of private-label soaps and detergents for huge retailers like Wal-Mart, Target and Walgreens. Marietta, in turn, is controlled by Ares Management, a private equity firm worth \$16 billion.

Striking Cygnus therefore meant striking Corporate America, a struggle with impossibly long odds.

Nevertheless, there was no hesitation when workers decided to strike over management's plan to terminate anyone whose immigration status couldn't be verified by August 10.

Cygnus had used Social Security "no-match" letters--notification from the government that the Social Security numbers on file don't match those given by employees--to threaten the jobs of Cygnus' few permanent workers.

For their part, the temps were told that the company was switching to a new agency, and workers would have to reverify their status. Similar threats loom for immigrant workers across the U.S., as the government implements new rules in which no-match letters can be used as grounds for termination of employment, or worse.

**Already, employers across the U.S. have begun using no-match letters as a pretext to fire workers. Cygnus management no doubt felt it could do the same, having long kept workers toiling for minimum wage or a bit more, and with no benefits.**

**Instead, the company faced a near-total strike, spirited picket lines and growing solidarity, including a promise of support from organized labor.**

**A strikebreaking operation fizzled, and more and more trucks left the Cygnus plant without loads. The handful of people still working inside the plant passed word to strikers about plummeting production.**

**So nearly two weeks after provoking the walkout, management invited permanent employees in for four hours of negotiations that ended in an offer: Would they come back to work for the old rates of pay, with all threats of termination withdrawn?**

**The workers didn't say yes.**

**After all, they weren't in negotiations for themselves, but as the chosen representatives of all the strikers. They told Cygnus boss John White that they'd get back to him once they reported to the rest of the workers.**

**Manuel, a permanent employee, proposed a meeting in a nearby public park to discuss the deal. There, Edith, a permanent employee and strike leader, put it this way: "There are no permanent and temporary workers -- we are all workers."**

**Martín Unzueta, the organizer of the Chicago Workers Collaborative and an adviser to the workers, proposed a solution: showing up the following morning at 7:30 a.m. at the temp agency, Total Staffing, to demand the same deal as the permanent employees had received. The workers would return to work together-- or not at all.**

**It turned out that the temp agency, Total Staffing, had prepared a letter offering individuals the opportunity to return to work at Cygnus. But for the temp workers--who comprised 110 out of the 118 workers in the plant, even though many had been on the job for years--the deal wasn't quite done. It had to be voted on first.**

As they made a unanimous show of hands in the office on Chicago's South Side, all a flustered Total Staffing manager could do was order reporters and solidarity activists to get out. The manager didn't dare ask the permanent Cygnus employees to leave, however. They remained to discuss the offer with the temps, vote on it, and, afterward, exchanged congratulations.

One striker, Julia, explained how unity among the Cygnus workers and solidarity from others led to victory. "We went on strike, you could say, with our eyes shut, but now we know that there are people who we can count on," she said. "Y que los demás no piensan que no se puede, porque si se puede--let no one think that it can't be done, because it can be done."

As Ignacio, a temp worker who'd been working in the plant for 11 months, put it, "One of the lessons is that unity makes us strong.

**"Even if we were simple employees, we made a big company tremble and move. This victory is for us workers, but also for all the working class and for all the community groups that were here supporting us."**

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IN FACT, community support for Cygnus workers first took shape more than a year before the strike, when they made contact with young immigrant rights activists in the South East Chicago Committee for Immigrant Rights (SECCIR).

One SECCIR activist, Olga Bautista, had worked in the accounting department at Cygnus in 2004. Two years later, she passed out leaflets in the parking lot to build support for the March 10, 2006, mass immigrant rights march that sparked a wave of similar mobilizations across the U.S.

One of Cygnus' permanent employees, Edith, took a flyer and asked for suggestions on how to deal with the no-match letters that the company had received a few months

earlier. Bautista put her in touch with Unzueta of the Chicago Workers Collaborative, which focuses on immigrant workers' rights.

Unzueta contacted the company and informed them that the no-match letters were not intended to indicate immigration status, and required no action on their part. Management let the issue drop.

Cygnus workers, meanwhile, began organizing.

Many attended the March 10 protest, and almost all of them turned out for the follow-up protest on May Day 2006, as Edith negotiated with management to give workers the day off in exchange for a Saturday workday to make up for lost production. "We even had a bus pick them up at the plant to take them to the march," Bautista recalled.

Over the next few months, workers discussed problems in the plant--not just low wages, but unsafe working conditions.

**According to one worker, management issues only gloves, but not masks or work boots, to workers who mix chemicals to manufacture detergents and soaps.**

**The unlabeled storage tanks outside the plant contain many toxic chemicals, which often spill out of vats and create noxious fumes and slippery floors. According to a report in the Chicago Sun-Times, six workers were taken to hospitals last December 18 after a hazardous material got on their skin.**

**Smaller-scale accidents are routine, a worker told reporters on the picket line.**

**He pointed to chemical burns not only on his forearms, but his chest and stomach, where acid had burned through his street clothes.**

**"They have the masks, but they don't give them out," he said. Another worker complained that only one person in management in the plant was authorized to call an ambulance in case of emergencies.**

**Another simmering grievance was racism and discrimination.**

Workers in the plant complain that Mexicans were treated badly by management and had to endure open racist abuse. One woman was demoted from a supervisory position because she couldn't speak English; her pay was cut.

So as this year's May Day protest approached, the mood at Cygnus was different. Workers were more confident, and they began asking for a raise. Management took a tougher line, saying no to any negotiated time off for workers to attend the march this year.

**A few weeks later, Cygnus' new human resources manager, Mary Ann Vasquez, told permanent employees that they would have to clear up the no-match letters. At the same time, she informed temporary workers that they'd have to switch from Total Staffing to a different temp agency, Staffmark, and verify their immigration status in doing so.**

**Anyone who failed to comply would be terminated by the August 10 deadline. The workers' response: an indefinite strike.**

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THE CYGNUS plant is an unlikely place to become a focal point of labor solidarity. Never unionized, it is located literally at the southern edge of the Chicago city limits, sandwiched between two highly active freight railroad lines that regularly back up local traffic.

Semi-trucks loaded with freight and cartage haulers on their way to nearby landfills are often forced to wait 20 or 30 minutes for trains to pass. When they're finally able to roll, the drivers, well behind schedule, hit the accelerator hard, kicking up great clouds of dust as they rumble past the plant without a glance.

**But on July 30, it all looked different. Surprised drivers looked down on an improvised picket line, with homemade signs and chants. Many waved and honked to show their support.**

Each day after, the picket line was better organized--a schedule worked out, donated food and drinks distributed, a bullhorn to amplify chants. Activists from a number of organizations walked the line--including the Chicago Workers Collaborative, SECCIR, the Juan Diego Community Center, the International Socialist Organization and individual immigrant rights activists.

The owner of the house next door to the plant, himself a Mexican immigrant and factory worker, allowed workers taking a break from the sun-scorched picket line to sit on his shaded front steps, store their supplies and use his bathroom.

Strikers soon produced a leaflet explaining to drivers who were delivering to Cygnus that a strike was on, and asking them not to cross the picket line.

**One nonunion driver, an African American, felt compelled to make his delivery. But he later came to walk the line and pledge his support, identifying the immigrant rights movement with the civil rights struggles of decades past. His presence had a visible impact on strikers, especially since Cygnus management had played the race card by hiring African Americans as strikebreakers.**

**In more than a few cases, however, Teamster drivers caught sight of the picket line, took a leaflet and drove on without making deliveries, to the cheers of strikers and their supporters.**

And on August 1, the second workday of the strike, organized labor appeared on the picket line itself in the form of four business representatives from International Association of Machinists (IAM) District 8. The union had gotten a call about the strike from Ramón Becerra, an official of the Chicago Federation of Labor, who is also a leader in the Chicago chapter of the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement.

Becerra learned of the strike from Jorge Mújica, a journalist, labor organizer and leading figure in Chicago's March 10 Movement, the coalition central to the area's mass

immigrant rights marches. Mújica, like Unzueta, had become an adviser to the strikers and moved to enlist union support.

The difficulty was that District 8 had no Spanish speakers on staff. But with Mújica interpreting, union business representative Karl Sarpolis made it clear that the union supported the workers. "We know how these companies discriminate against minorities," he said, leaving behind a petition to join the union. When he returned two days later, 90 workers had signed up.

In a picket-line meeting, the workers elected a provisional bargaining committee in case the union was successful in getting management to negotiate, and decided to hold a meeting with the union the following Saturday, August 4, at the Juan Diego center on the East Side.

Some 60 workers turned out to meet with IAM District 8's directing business representative Carl Gallman, along with Sarpolis and Armando Arreola, a business rep from IAM Local 701 and a native Spanish speaker who had been sent by his local president, Bill Davis, to provide additional support.

Gallman, a veteran of the IAM's glory days in the 1970s, recognized what was in front of him: a roomful of determined, militant strikers. The union was willing to try to organize the plant--permanent and temporary workers alike, he said. "We're going to help you, whether or not you join the union," he declared.

The union officials and the workers had independently come to the same conclusion:

First, negotiate to get everyone back to work, and leave wages and conditions for later.

After Gallman and the other IAM officials left, Mújica chaired the meeting, as workers discussed how to improve picket lines and organize support.

Even though these mostly minimum-wage workers had gone a week without wages, and of course had no strike benefits, no one complained. The highly focused discussion was all about how to take the struggle forward. Afterward, solidarity activists began to say out loud what they had barely begun to think: The strike could actually win.

**The victory, as it turned out, was not the result of organized labor's support. The following Monday, the IAM's Gallman called Cygnus to speak to management and claim the right to represent the workers. While this certainly added to the pressure on management, his message wasn't returned, and matters went no further.**

The Democratic presidential debates in Chicago, sponsored by the AFL-CIO, offered an additional chance to enlist labor support. AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Rich Trumka took a copy of the fundraising letter, expressed sympathy and said the federation's organizing department should follow up. Linda Chavez-Thompson, the federation's executive vice-president, said the same. Local Chicago labor leaders also showed interest.

In the end, however, the workers won without much material support from unions, where the organizing machinery is often rusty and, even in the best cases, takes time to gear up.

A notable exception was United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 881, which pledged \$500. In hindsight, solidarity committee members realized they should have taken up a collection directly from the 17,000 union members who attended the AFL-CIO-sponsored debates.

But while labor was slow to move, the workers' own organization developed daily.

Two days after meeting with the IAM, several workers rallied alongside Dunkin Donuts workers fired after receiving no-match letters; that evening, 30 turned out to meet with labor lawyer Chris Williams, who provides legal resources to the Chicago Workers Collaborative.

On August 8, workers' morale got a boost when the Chicago Tribune made their struggle the top story on its front page, adding to widespread coverage in the Spanish media. A delegation from the Juan Diego community center managed to get into the plant to demand negotiations with workers, succeeding where a previous attempt failed.

That same day, several workers joined dozens of supporters at a fundraiser organized by the Cygnus Workers Solidarity Committee, which had itself formed four days earlier. More than \$1,300 was raised, including the UFCW donation--money that was quickly turned into bags of groceries for hard-pressed strikers' families.

Just as notable, though, was the character of the event itself, which linked immigrant rights and labor activists in an evening filled with music and interspersed with emotional speeches by strikers and supporters. Performers included Chuy Negrete, a well-known singer; the dance group Azteca Nahuil; and Iván Resendiz, a young classical guitarist.

The event ran late as the crowd sang folk songs from the Mexican Revolution and the labor movement.

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THAT SAME evening, the workers' chosen negotiators sat down for several hours with a representative from Cygnus' parent company, Marietta Corp.

Edith, the strike activist, said he presented himself as a neutral arbitrator prepared to settle the dispute. But Edith and the rest of the workers didn't buy it. They said they would negotiate only in the presence of their attorney, Chris Williams.

At a picket line meeting the following day, the workers reiterated their demands: Everyone would come back to work, or no one. No agreements would be made in the bargaining sessions. Workers would vote together on whether to accept any management offer.

**“That’s the Mexican tradition,” explained Jorge Mújica. “A negotiating committee is not a signing committee. When there’s a strike, workers declare themselves to**

**be in permanent assembly,” voting on whether or not to accept management’s offer.**

**Although none of the leading strike activists had any experience in unions in the U.S. or Mexico, workers were acting in that tradition. “Everyone has an uncle, a brother, a cousin who has done this,” Mújica said.**

**As the ensuing four-hour negotiations wore on, it became clear that management was ready to throw in the towel. Loading docks were vacant, trucks left the gates empty, and a huge spill of dishwashing soap washed out into the parking lot, a mess that would cost at least a couple of hours of production, according to the workers.**

**The scabbing operation had descended into farce, with high-school aged youths swarming around a beleaguered Cygnus manager trying to sort out assignments during the afternoon shift change. Pallets loaded with dish soap had been dropped at crazy angles just inside the plant entrance, well away from the loading dock.**

**Security guards, who days earlier had blustered about arresting strike supporters, wandered about listlessly, ignoring two reporters who roamed the employee parking lot.**

Management capitulated, and Total Staffing fell into line. The only outstanding issue at press time was the status of a supervisor who had joined workers on the picket line.

Even so, workers had won a victory with far-reaching implications for both the immigrant rights movement and the unions. “The labor movement has a lot to learn from these workers, because the labor movement can’t be strong if it sets immigrant workers aside,” said Martín Unzueta, who has met dozens of workers in recent years who want to organize, but can’t find a union to follow up. “The immigrant workers are ready to be organized.”

Like Unzueta, Jorge Mújica thinks the Cygnus victory can inspire further advances.

“People remembered how to fight,” he said. “We’re used to having street demonstrations in Mexico all the time. But when people get here, they live hidden, very silent lives.

“But this whole process, from March 10 last year to May Day this year, is about showing that you can fight. It was after May Day this year that they asked for a pay raise. This wouldn’t have happened without the marches. If the workers hadn’t participated once or twice, they wouldn’t have gone on strike.”

Edith, the strike leader who organized workers to participate in the marches, said the struggle for better wages and conditions would continue.

**“I’m happy because while we started with fear, now we realize that we can do lots of things if we’re united,” she said. “If (the issue of the temporary workers) didn’t get resolved, we would have continued the strike, but with the help of everybody, because we have no union.**

**“The workers have to realize that they don’t have to be afraid, because here we taught them that unity is the way forward.”**

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

Cygnus workers are still in need of financial support after surviving their walkout without strike benefits.

Make out checks or money orders to the Chicago Workers’ Collaborative (with “Cygnus workers” in the memo line), and send to: Cygnus Workers Solidarity Committee, c/o Chicago Workers Collaborative, P.O. Box 08048, Chicago, IL 60608. Call 773-653-3664 for more information.

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