

GI SPECIAL 5K16:



"SUPPORTING THE TROOPS"

[Thanks to Mark Shapiro, who sent this in.]

“Got To Pull Out Of There Fast”

From: Alan Stolzer, Military Project, New York City

To: GI Special

Sent: November 18, 2007

Subject: Another Penn Station tale

Today I met a soldier (National Guardsman) headed for Afghanistan in January. It's a war he agreed with and said he was glad to go since he was single and replaced a family man. "It's bad to have a family and be over there," he said.

“But Iraq, that’s something else again. What is it, 3,700 or 3,800 guys we’ve lost? Hell, it’s turning into another Vietnam. Oh, not that many yet but it’s the same thing. Got to pull out of there fast. Don’t serve anybody or anything to be there.”

Find the troops and talk to them.

Some just enjoy being acknowledged, others have more to say.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

U.S. Soldier Killed In Mosul



Army Pfc. Casey Mason, 22, was killed Tuesday, Nov. 13, 2007 when enemy forces attacked his unit with small arms fire in Mosul, Iraq. (AP Photo/Lux Funeral Home via The Mt. Pleasant Morning Sun)

Decatur Man’s Elation To Meet Daughter Turns To Sorrow With Her Death In Iraq

November 13, 2007 By HUEY FREEMAN, H&R Staff Writer

DECATUR - Jerry Smith was excited when he received a phone call from his then-teenage daughter 15 years ago.

Carletta Davis, who grew up mostly in Alaska, had no memory of her father, who was just a teenager himself when Carletta was born in Louisiana.

“I saw her once as a child,” Smith recalled. “She was a baby, just born.”

After the initial phone call, there were many more long distance conversations, during which Smith learned that Davis joined the Army and served two 11-month tours in Iraq as a medic. He told her how he had moved north to Decatur, later landing a maintenance job at the airport.

Smith was glad they were no longer strangers, but there was still a longing in his heart.

"I asked the Lord in my prayers: Please let me see her once before I die," Smith said.

When Smith was pleading for the opportunity to spend time with his daughter, he had no idea that her time on earth would run out before his.

Staff Sgt. Davis, 34, was killed Monday, Nov. 5, when a roadside bomb detonated near her Humvee during combat operations in Northern Iraq, according to the Department of Defense. Three other soldiers were also killed in that attack.

Funeral services are planned for Saturday, Nov. 17, at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Fairbanks, Alaska.

Early this year, Davis, a medic in the New York-based 10th Mountain Division, called Smith to tell him she wanted to visit him during a cross-country trip.

'I was kind of afraid'

On Tuesday, April 3, the same day Smith was admitted to St. Mary's Hospital for treatment for high blood pressure, his daughter arrived in Decatur.

Smith looked forward to the visit, but wondered if his grown daughter harbored bitterness toward him.

"I was kind of afraid she would have some condemnation because of my not being around," Smith said.

But Staff Sgt. Davis, who spent much of her four days in Decatur visiting her father at St. Mary's, quickly put his fears to rest.

"She said she didn't regret anything," Smith said. "When she was younger she did, but after she got older she understood. She just wanted to see her dad."

Smith and his loved ones were bowled over by her beauty, friendliness and brilliant smile, which never left her face.

In September, Smith was deployed to Iraq for her third tour.

One day in late October, Staff Sgt. Davis called from Iraq.

Smith's fiancée, Ruby White, answered the phone.

"She asked me, 'Can I speak with Carletta?'" White recalled. When White asked who it was, she admitted it was Carletta. "She was joking, teasing me, because I knew where she was. We didn't talk long, then we got disconnected."

Staff Sgt. Davis told White her duties in Iraq included training other medics and picking up dead and wounded soldiers. She said she was in a relatively safe area.

Two weeks later, Staff Sgt. Davis's mother, Lavada Napier, called from Alaska in the middle of the night. Smith realized that nothing but bad news comes at 2:30 a.m.

'Let's go see my dad'

While Staff Sgt. Davis was in Decatur in April, she won the hearts of many people who met her.

White said she was a very tender, sweet girl, who loved meeting family members and friends of the family. But her main focus was being with her father.

"She would get up early and say, 'Let's go see my dad,'" White recalled.

She stayed at the hospital with her father as much as visiting hours allowed during her four day visit. Smith was in the hospital during her entire visit, going home the day she left town.

Before she left Decatur, Staff Sgt. Davis said she wanted to return someday with her husband and three children.

Those four family members traveled from Alaska to New York City last week to meet with Staff Sgt. Davis, who had planned to meet them during a scheduled leave from Iraq. She was killed shortly before her leave began.

Smith said he is thankful that God answered his prayer in such a timely fashion.

"I'm so proud I got a chance to see her and hold her and hug her, to remember her that way," Smith said. "Every night, when I go to bed, I close my eyes and hear her saying, 'My Dad.' I can see her face. I'm glad she came into my life all the time. She will be missed. I hold in my heart that I seen my daughter."

Local Soldier Wounded In Iraq

November 19, 2007 WJAC-TV

Family members say Army Specialist Jacob Whippley of Boswell was shot several times. The squad leader was shot five times in the chest, but a bullet proof vest saved him from serious injury. He was also shot several times in the arm.

Whippley is in a military hospital in Germany. He is scheduled to have surgery either in Germany, or at a hospital in the United States. His family in Somerset County asks for your prayers for his recovery.

ENOUGH OF THIS SHIT; COME HOME NOW



U.S. soldiers in front of their base after a patrol in Baquba June 26, 2007. (Goran Tomasevic/Reuters)

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

After Cheating Death, He Fell In Afghanistan

November 15, 2007 By Ann Marie Bush, The Capital-Journal

A bullet from a sniper's gun in Iraq didn't stop Sgt. Jeffery S. Mersman from serving his country.

Mersman, 23, of Parker in the eastern Kansas county of Linn, was one of five soldiers killed last week in Aranus, Afghanistan, when they were attacked by direct fire from enemy forces, the U.S. Department of Defense said.

The soldiers were assigned to the Army's 2nd Battalion, 503rd Airborne Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade Team, Vicenza, Italy.

This was Mersman's fourth deployment overseas, said his uncle Mark Mersman, who spoke on behalf of the family Wednesday evening.

During Mersman's third tour in Iraq, he was shot by a sniper, said Mark Mersman, of Garnett. The bullet penetrated the young man's bulletproof vest and lodged between it and his fatigues.

"He was bruised very bad," Mark Mersman said of his nephew.

It didn't stop Jeff from answering the call of duty again.

He joined the Army during his senior year at Prairie View High School in LaCygne, Mark Mersman said. While other classmates were enjoying the latter part of their senior year, Jeff Mersman was attending boot camp. He re-enlisted while in Iraq in 2005.

"Jeff knew at a very young age he wanted to be in the service," he said. "His grandfather served. He (Jeff) loved it. He chose it as his career. He was a lifer."

At the time of his death, Jeff Mersman was preparing to test for the rank of staff sergeant, Mark Mersman said, which made the family very proud.

"He looked up to family, just like the family looked up to him," Mark Mersman said. "Right now, we're probably past the shock part of it. The family is anxious to get Jeff back to Kansas so we can move forward with the healing process. He'll never be forgotten."

Jeff Mersman's wife, Lynn, was notified in Italy about the death of her husband, Mark Mersman said. She immediately called Jeff's family in Kansas.

Prairie View Unified School District 362 superintendent Chris Kleidosty confirmed Jeff Mersman graduated from Prairie View High School in 2002.

Although Kleidosty didn't personally know Mersman, he said many district teachers and staff members remember him. The high school's auditorium will serve as the setting of a funeral service at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday.

Burial will be at St. Boniface Cemetery in Scipio.

To know that Mersman will be buried in Scipio means a hero is coming home, said Ben and Katie Rockers, of Scipio.

"He meant the world to all of us," said Katie Rockers, who knew Jeff Mersman's family and watched him grow up. "We, as a couple, have been impressed with his goodness, kindness and strong sense of patriotism — his passion to serve in the military. He felt it was his honor and his duty to his country. He was a fine example of today's youth.

"Jeff cared for his friends and his family with the same intense passion that he felt for our country. The memory of his smile we will always treasure and cherish. This true American hero will never be forgotten."

Resistance Action

Nov 19 By NOOR KHAN, Associated Press Writer

A bomber struck outside a governor's residence in southwestern Afghanistan on Monday, killing six policemen and wounding 14 people, an official said.

The bomber in southwestern Nimroz province detonated the explosives strapped to his body outside the governor's house in the town of Zaranj as people were traveling to work, said the provincial deputy governor Maluang Rasooli.

Six officers were killed and 14 other people, including nine policemen, were wounded, Azad said. The bomber was also died.

In southern Helmand province, Taliban militants attacked a police checkpoint on Sunday, killing two officers and wounding four others, said provincial police chief Muhammad Hussein Andiwai.

A bomber attacked a NATO patrol yesterday in Gereshk district, damaging a vehicle but causing no casualties, said provincial police chief Mohammad Hussein Andiwai.

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

TROOP NEWS

“Get Your Barf Bag Handy” State Department Handing Out Huge Pay “Incentives” For Going To Green Zone

[Via RC, Firebase News, 11.19.07. RC writes: More proof that Washington bureaucrats care only about the care and feeding of each other... get your barf bag handy... you're going to need it. Semper fidelis, RC]

October 27, 2007 By Karen DeYoung, Washington Post Staff Writer [Excerpts]

The number of diplomatic positions in Iraq has increased every year since the embassy was opened in 2004. The expansion of Provincial Reconstruction Teams -- made up of diplomats who work with local communities outside of Baghdad -- from 10 to 25 last summer as part of President Bush's new strategy added another 30 Foreign Service personnel and many more outside contractors.

Those who are ordered to Baghdad as part of the new call-up will receive incentives, known as the Iraq Service Package, already offered to volunteers.

It includes additional pay of about 70 percent for most mid-level officers, plus another 20 percent of basic salary to compensate for long hours.

[What kind of “incentives” should troops receive for serving outside the Green Zone? How about a one way all expenses paid travel ticket home? T]

**NOT ANOTHER DAY
NOT ANOTHER DOLLAR
NOT ANOTHER LIFE**



Photo by Nahrawan [Thanks to Kevin Ramirez, CCCO, who sent this in.]

**“Shrapnel Tore Through His Head
And Body. He Lost His Right Arm”
“The V.A. Initially Rejected His Claim,
Saying His Severe Shrapnel Wounds
Were Not Service Connected”
“I’m Ready To Beat Down The White
House Door If I Need To”**



The VA initially told Garrett Anderson that his wounds sustained in Iraq weren't "service connected."



Ty Ziegel, a Marine, was badly wounded in Iraq. He battled the VA over disability benefits when he returned.

November 16, 2007 From Emily Probst, Cable News Network [Excerpts]

WASHINGTON, Illinois (CNN) -- Ty Ziegel peers from beneath his Marine Corps baseball cap, his once boyish face burned beyond recognition by a suicide bomber's attack in Iraq just three days before Christmas 2004.

He lost part of his skull in the blast and part of his brain was damaged. Half of his left arm was amputated and some of the fingers were blown off his right hand.

Ziegel, a 25-year-old Marine sergeant, knew the dangers of war when he was deployed for his second tour in Iraq.

But he didn't expect a new battle when he returned home as a wounded warrior: a fight with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"Sometimes, you get lost in the system," he told CNN. "I feel like a Social Security number. I don't feel like Tyler Ziegel."

In Ziegel's case, he spent nearly two years recovering at Brooke Army Medical Center in Texas.

Once he got out of the hospital, he was unable to hold a job. He anticipated receiving a monthly VA disability check sufficient to cover his small-town lifestyle in Washington, Illinois.

Instead, he got a check for far less than expected.

After pressing for answers, Ziegel finally received a letter from the VA that rated his injuries: 80 percent for facial disfigurement, 60 percent for left arm amputation, a mere 10 percent for head trauma and nothing for his left lobe brain injury, right eye blindness and jaw fracture.

"I don't get too mad about too many things," he said. "But once we've been getting into this, I'm ready to beat down the White House door if I need to."

"I'm not expecting to live in the lap of luxury," he added. "But I am asking them to make it comfortable to raise a family and not have to struggle."

Garrett Anderson with the Illinois National Guard, for example, has been fighting the VA since October 15, 2005. Shrapnel tore through his head and body after a roadside bomb blew up the truck he was driving.

He lost his right arm.

The VA initially rejected his claim, saying his severe shrapnel wounds were "not service connected."

"Who would want to tell an Iraqi or Afghanistan soldier who was blown up by an IED that his wounds were not caused by his service over there?" said Anderson's wife, Sam.

After pressure from Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, the VA acted on Anderson's case. He has since been awarded compensation for a traumatic brain injury.

"It upsets me that the VA system operates in a way that it takes people of power -- and who you know and what you know -- to get what you want," said Anderson, who is now retired.

Ziegel eventually won his battle. Still he feels for so many others he believes are getting cheated by the system.

“We’re feeding the war machine, but you never think of the war machine that comes home and needs, you know, feeding back home,” he said.

His family hopes they don’t have to fight the VA again.

In August, Ty Ziegel’s brother, 22-year-old Zach Ziegel, was deployed to Iraq.

“I want to make the VA system better because if he has to go through anything I went through, that’s really going to upset me. That’ll make my fuse real short and hot,” Ty Ziegel said.

MORE:

Chewed Up And Spit Out By The War Machine; “While Veterans Constitute Just 11 Percent Of The Population, They Are 26 Percent Of Homeless People Nationwide”

Just in time for Veterans’ Day, the Washington, D.C.-based National Alliance to End Homelessness released a report documenting that, while veterans constitute just 11 percent of the population, they are 26 percent of homeless people nationwide.

November 16, 2007 By Sharon Smith, Socialist Worker

AT LAST weekend’s official Veterans Day celebrations, some vets were obviously more welcome than others.

In Boston, the crowd at an American Legion-sponsored event turned hostile when a dozen members of Veterans for Peace refused to move away from a podium while protesting their exclusion, leading to their arrest.

In Long Beach, Calif., the local Veteran’s Day parade committee barred members of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), Veterans for Peace and Military Families Speak Out—simply because their organizations oppose the Iraq war.

The Long Beach parade committee accused the antiwar vets and their families of promoting a “political agenda.”

But parade coordinator Martha Thuente unwittingly betrayed the committee's own political agenda, telling the Long Beach Press-Telegram, "We do not want groups of a political nature, advocating the troops' withdrawal from Iraq."

Responding to his exclusion from the Long Beach parade, Jason Lemieux, a 24-year-old Marine who served three tours of duty in Iraq before joining IVAW, said, "I wanted to march like the rest of the Iraq veterans."

Certainly every soldier has earned that right--along with the right to oppose the war aims that U.S. troops are being sent to fight and die for.

This point was illustrated vividly by seven active-duty troops who authored a New York Times op-ed article on August 19 called "The war as we saw it." The soldiers, expressing their views "at the tail end of a 15-month deployment" with the 82nd Airborne Division, exposed the "farfetched" goals of the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

"We see that a vast majority of Iraqis feel increasingly insecure and view us as an occupation force," they wrote, adding that Iraqis "will soon realize that the best way to regain dignity is to call us what we are--an army of occupation--and force our withdrawal."

As they were writing the article, one of its authors, Staff Sgt. Jeremy Murphy, was shot in the head and flown to a military hospital in the U.S.. Three weeks later, two more of the authors, Sgt. Omar Mora and Sgt. Yance T. Gray, were killed in a vehicle accident in western Baghdad--just as Gen. David Petraeus was readying his upbeat report on the troop surge to Congress.

Already, 2007 has broken records as the deadliest year for U.S. troops in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

This fact isn't lost on the troops themselves.

The Los Angeles Times reported that a mental health survey of U.S. troops serving in Iraq, released in May, showed that 45 percent of soldiers surveyed ranked morale in their unit as low or very low, while only 7 percent ranked it high or very high.

As Guardian reporter Peter Beaumont reported from Baghdad on August 12: "[T]hese days, the war in Iraq is defined by different ways of expressing the idea of being weary. It is a theme that is endlessly reiterated as you travel around Iraq. 'The army is worn out,' says a soldier working for the U.S. Army public affairs office, who is supposed to be telling me how well things have been going since the 'surge' in Baghdad began."

NOT SURPRISINGLY, soldiers who have endured multiple Iraq deployments, now the norm, are 50 percent more likely than those with one tour to experience acute combat stress.

But on returning home, they face a new battle to return to civilian life, confronting endless bureaucratic red tape at every turn.

The Veterans' Administration (VA) admits it has a backlog of 600,000 disability claims--including 250,000 from veterans of the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Paul Sullivan from Veterans for Common Sense explained that returning vets seeking help “run into a 26-page claim form, a bureaucracy completely overwhelmed, and at hospitals, if the vets show up suicidal, in some cases, they are turned away.”

Income limits for VA benefits instituted in January 2003 leave many thousands of vets uncovered. In many regions of the U.S., a veteran earning as little as \$24,000 doesn't qualify for VA health coverage.

Just in time for Veterans' Day, the Washington, D.C.-based National Alliance to End Homelessness released a report documenting that, while veterans constitute just 11 percent of the population, they are 26 percent of homeless people nationwide.

Vietnam vet Arthur Williams, a homeless Vietnam vet from New York, told Voice of America, “My problems (are) related to my experiences in Vietnam, and all the carnage and the mayhem and the suffering that I've seen...And it has a profound effect on my head. I killed and maimed.”

Indeed, as IVAW member Jeff Englehart wrote in the GI Special on November 9, “For some of my closest friends and me, Veterans Day is every day, and it is a fact that cannot be so easily praised and cheered with the enthusiastic waving of an American flag.

“Many of us live through life in the solitary confines of our experiences, walking amongst the living, while holding hands with the dead...”

“But if we truly believed in recognizing the services of our veterans, we as a people would honor our vets by removing them from the immorality of a criminal war, and demand an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of American troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.”

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

Chief Of General Staff Says British Army Fucked: “Level Of Operations Is Unsustainable” “There Is A Growing Problem Of Troops Going Sick To Get Out Of The Army” “The Tank Of Goodwill Now Runs On Vapour; Many Experienced Staff Are Talking Of Leaving”

11/18/2007 By Sean Rayment, Defence Correspondent; Telegraph Media Group Limited

General Sir Richard Dannatt, the Chief of the General Staff, reveals in a top-level report that the present level of operations is “unsustainable”, the Army is “under-manned” and increasing numbers of troops are “disillusioned” with service life.

Gen Dannatt states that the “military covenant is clearly out of kilter”, and the chain of command needs to improve standards of pay, accommodation and medical care.

The report, a copy of which has been seen by this newspaper, reveals for the first time the general’s concerns on virtually every aspect of the Army, from levels of pay to the quality of food in canteens.

In the new report, he says that operations on the two fronts of Iraq and Afghanistan are putting soldiers and their families under “great pressure”, and that the long-term impact of operations is “damaging” and is “mortgaging the goodwill of our people”.

In terms of “overstretch”, the report says, “the tank of goodwill now runs on vapour; many experienced staff are talking of leaving”.

The report adds:

- Poor food quality is creating a “pot-noodle and sandwich” culture among junior soldiers
- Work-life balance is an increasing concern
- Soldiers are “going sick” to get out of the Army

- Leave is often cancelled or constrained because of operational overstretch
- Harmony guidelines - the time between operational tours - are becoming meaningless
- Fitness in the Army is tailing off and more soldiers are medically downgraded

The report's findings follow months of interviews with thousands of soldiers and their families from 47 units.

Military housing is an area singled out for criticism. "Estates are becoming less safe and more run down."

The report strongly criticises the "Pay As You Dine" policy of making soldiers pay for what they eat, which many in the Army call a "disaster".

It says: "There are real concerns about the new eating habits of some soldiers due to Pay As You Dine. A "pot noodle and sandwich" culture is being created and soldiers are cooking rations over gas burners in their rooms. There are apocryphal stories of soldiers flaking during PT sessions from a lack of nutrients".

The report adds: "Pay As You Dine was sold as a strap line of new restaurants, better choice and good quality. The reality is very different - for most, the only investment has been a till."

There is a growing problem of troops "going sick" to get out of the Army.

There is a lack of "training areas, range availability, shortages of ammunition, spares and manpower - which is limiting the amount of meaningful training that can be undertaken. There are insufficient serviceable aircraft for parachute training. Apache flying hours are limited by lack of serviceable aircraft".

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

“Basra Is The First Iraqi City To Be Liberated From The Occupiers”

Comment: T

While difficult to separate out reality from this reporters own political views and favorites in the struggle for power in Basra, it may be said with confidence that the fight against the Imperial Occupation is over within the city itself, and the fight for the spoils is out in the open now, in full flower.

Wealthy merchants, military commanders, the owners of businesses and corporations, religious frauds who use their powerful positions to heap up money and influence, politicians who care for nothing more than their own careers – in short, the scum of the earth – will all try to make sure they get their hands on the wealth of Basra, while the working class will find itself faced with fresh tyrants and exploiters, the most deceitful making their greed in Holy robes and mouthing assorted scriptures.

Why be surprised?

The same scum rule in Iran, next door, and lest anybody here think smugly about that, the same scum rule in the United States Of America too.

The point is not to bemoan, but for Iraqis and Americans to organize together, break them and their vicious grip on power, and drive them out.

Wherever these common enemies are found.

At home or abroad.

T

[Thanks to JM, who sent this in.]

November 17, 2007 Ghaiith Abdul-Ahad in Basra, The Guardian

Hayaniya Square in Basra is a busy intersection leading to a poor and run-down neighbourhood.

On one side of the piazza, sewage water flows through what was once a dried-up river bed, filling the air with an oppressive smell. On the other side, a pair of kebab stalls send columns of smoke from skewers of burning meat into the warm air. Two sheep, whose fate lies on those skewers, stand tethered to a nearby telegraph pole.

The square is dominated by a painting of six men dressed in casual trousers and jackets, behind whom loom the faces of Moqtada al-Sadr, the leader of the Mahdi army, and his father, Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr. The six men, described on the mural as martyrs, are Mahdi army commanders who were killed by the British.

At night, when traffic in the square slows, a group of men gather. These are the sakkaka, or assassins. Their Toyota saloons, chosen for the voluminous boots that can accommodate two bodies with room to spare, stand parked nearby.

The assassins chat, eat kebabs and stroll around in small groups, discussing their sinister trade. They buy and sell names of collaborators, Iraqis who worked for the British, as well as journalists and uncooperative police officers, businessmen and the footsoldiers of other militias.

Depending on the nature of their perceived crime, the price on a collaborator's head can vary from couple of hundred dollars to a few thousand.

The most valuable lives these days in Basra are those of the interpreters and contractors who were employed by the British before they withdrew from the city.

Local people lower their eyes when they drive through the square. Gunshots crackle all through the night.

Not far from Hayaniya I met the commander of the Mahdi army's security committees. A dark green liquid had flooded the street outside his house and rocks and bricks had been thrown into the pungent water to form stepping stones. A sheet of corrugated iron was placed in front of his door as a bridge and a doormat.

In the corner of the living room was a wooden table with a desktop computer, a laptop and piles of CDs and books. Behind it sat the commander, a cleric in his early 30s.

"We liberated the town from the British," he told me. "That is our victory, achieved with God's help. Basra is the first Iraqi city to be liberated from the occupiers."

He fiddled with the thick ring on his finger. In front of him on the table were two telephones. One, the "Najaf phone", was used only to call Moqtada's office, 250 hundred miles away in the holy city of Najaf.

"Now is not the time for to escalate the situation with the British," he said. "They retreated to the airport and that's fine, for now. Our goal is to get rid of the governor of Basra, consolidate our control over the city and finish with the collaborators."

The day before our meeting, the energetic Iraqi army commander in the region, General Mohan, whose 8th division is in charge of security in Basra, banned illegally imported right-hand drive cars from the streets of Basra. The Mahdi army controls the ports and the smuggling of these cars. The ban was aimed at draining a vital financial asset of the militia.

Within a few hours of the ban, an Iraqi army checkpoint in Basra seized a smuggled car with some Mahdi gunmen inside. Half an hour later, the Mahdi army had detained 55 Iraqi soldiers, and paraded at least seven Iraqi army armoured vehicles in the street, eyewitnesses said.

"We didn't want that escalation, but this Mohan is an American agent and he is risking dragging Basra into open warfare," the commander told me.

The following day there was an assassination attempt against the police chief, an ally of Mohan.

The Sadr office in Basra has become the real centre of power in the city. Outside the large compound, dozens of cars were parked, white pick-ups with no licence plates, a few police cars and many of the assassins' Toyota saloons. Bearded men wearing the Mahdi army's colour of choice, black, came and went.

Behind a metal gate overshadowed by a big mural of Moqtada, were two separate doors, one for women and one for men.

In the men's waiting room, a young militiaman sat behind a pile of visitor's badges while men crowded around. To receive a badge, each visitor had to hand in his phone and his gun. An open drawer in the militiaman's desk was piled high with firearms and Nokia mobiles.

Although I arrived early in the morning, the waiting room was full. A man in white robes with papers in his hand stood in front of the desk. "What do you want, Haji?" asked the militiaman, who looked to be still in his teens.

The man replied in a pleading voice: "My daughter needs an operation," while pushing a handful of x-rays and medical reports into the militiaman's face. "Do you have a phone? No? Here is a badge. Go to the social services committee. May Allah heal her," the militiaman said.

The office is subdivided into committees, covering social services, security, culture and conflict resolution - the latter being a sharia-based tribunal. This is where most of the visitors went.

Inside, four clerics sat behind two low benches, their backs to the wall. The judge, a senior cleric, sat with a younger man who worked as clerk.

The judge explained how the system works. "Someone files a grievance against someone, we send an order summoning the accused here and they have to show up," he said.

What if they didn't show up?

"We send the Mahdi army, and then they usually show up immediately. No one says no when they get a letter from the Sadr office." A quick smile fell across his face. Once the accused arrived, he said, the judges conducted a hearing and justice was dispensed.

"Most of the cases that come are of a social nature, but there are some murders and financial cases," he said.

"If we look into a case, we send a letter to the civil courts and police telling them that it's not under their jurisdiction any more. We rule according to the sharia law. Once a verdict is issued then all parties have to adhere to the ruling."

And if they don't?

"We have our ways," he said.

The judge called on the case in front of him.

A woman named Sedeeqa accused her brother and uncle of beating her to force her out of their house. "They beat me, and they told me to leave the house or we kill you," she cried. She tried to pull her clothing aside to show the judge her bruises, but he turned his head away and told her to stop.

The uncle denied trying to force her from their home, but the cleric, after making the woman swear on the Qur'an that she was telling the truth, ordered the uncle to pay. A case that would have taken months in a civil court had concluded in a few minutes.

To reach Basra airport, the last remaining British base in Iraq, you have to pass through a series of Iraqi and British checkpoints. I took an official taxi, one that is permitted to drive into the airport.

At a British checkpoint, a young soldier with sandy hair and a dirty flak jacket stuck his head through the window and said: "Badges."

The driver handed over his ID badge and I gave him my passport. He handed the passport back and kept the driver's badge. "Money," he said to the driver.

"Me no money," the driver said in broken English, forcing a big smile on to his face. "Money, moneeeyy," said the soldier. He pointed at the driver's shirt pocket. "Me no money ... me badge please," the driver said, laughing.

"You give money, I give you badge," said the soldier. "Camera, camera," said driver, pointing at the nearby British watchtower. "Money, money," repeated the soldier.

The driver handed the soldier a 5,000 Iraqi dinar note, worth around £1.50.

The soldier tucked it in his pocket and said: "No, I want that." He pointed at a red 25,000 note in the driver's hand. The driver insisted, "No." After a bit of haggling, he was handed the badge.

"Fuck you, British," the driver said as he sped off. "Isn't it enough that I am paying at every Iraqi checkpoint? They all want money. My fare is 15,000 and by the time I pay everyone I am left with 5,000, and now you British. Fuck you. You don't even have a moustache on your face and you want money."

OCCUPATION REPORT

Good News For The Iraqi Resistance:

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



Foreign occupation soldiers from the U.S. check "a suspicious person" during a patrol in Baghdad November 11, 2007. REUTERS/Stefano Rellandini

Iraqi citizens are often forced to sit or kneel in the dirt while questioned by foreign occupation troops from the USA.

[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!**

This Is What A U.S. Military Dictatorship Looks Like: Command Won't Say Why Award-Winning AP Photographer Imprisoned For 19 Months

November 18, 2007 Internet Broadcasting Systems, Inc.

BAGHDAD -- The U.S. military is planning to seek a criminal case in an Iraqi court against an award-winning Associated Press photographer. But the military is refusing to disclose what evidence or accusations would be presented.

An AP attorney today strongly protested the decision, calling the plans a "sham of due process."

The journalist, Bilal Hussein, has already been imprisoned without charges for more than 19 months.

A public affairs officer yesterday notified the AP that the military intends to submit a written complaint against Hussein as early as November 29th.

The complaint would bring the case into the Iraqi justice system.

Under Iraqi codes, an investigative magistrate will then decide whether there are grounds to try Hussein.

He was seized in the western Iraqi city of Ramadi in April of last year.

Most Of Northern Iraq Without Electricity Due To Lack Of Fuel

November 18, 2007 By Ali al-Mawsai, Azzaman

Most of northern Iraq is without lights as two major power plants have been idled due to lack of fuel, a statement by the electricity ministry said.

The source said the plants feeding the northern cities of Mosul and Kirkuk are out of function as technicians failed to secure enough gas to run them.

The gas-driven plants are among the largest stations in the north which has been suffering from acute power shortages for years.

Electricity levels in Iraq as a whole are at all-time low. The average time power is on across the country has been almost reduced by two thirds since the U.S. invasion of 2003.

Major cities used to have an average of nine hours of electricity a day prior to the invasion. The average is currently 3 hours a day.

Iraq was generating nearly 5,000 megawatts before the U.S. invasion. But the generation capacity has slumped to less than 4,000 megawatts while consumption has soared.

Electricity ministry puts national demand at 7,000 megawatts. This means that the national grid is generating less than half the national demand judged by the average time Iraqis enjoy electricity.

Output has slumped despite massive investments. The U.S. alone has invested more than \$3 billion in the power sector.

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK OUT THE NEW TRAVELING SOLDIER

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

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

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

Admiral Says Bush Still Dangerous

November 18, 2007 By Doug Smith, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

"We are still in a fight with an enemy that is determined and has the capacity to conduct barbaric attacks," Rear Adm. Greg Smith said.

THIS IS THE ENEMY;

BRING THE WAR HOME NOW



(AFP/File/Mandel Ngan)

Not The News A Military Dictator Wants To Get

Man on Horseback



[Thanks to JM, who sent this in.]

November 18, 2007 Peter Beaumont in Islamabad, The Observer [Excerpt]

The bruises suffered by Hassan Tariq, a senior barrister in Sindh province, extend in large purple patches from his hip to his rib cage.

According to his own account, he was beaten with 'a hard object' and kicked and punched by officers for refusing to chant slogans in favour of Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf.

He was seized on 8 November, but it was five days later when police brought him to the hospital in Nawabshah where doctors found that he had fractured ribs and internal bleeding to his lungs.

After the operation to clear his lungs, he discovered the police who had been stationed outside his door had fled, leaving him a free man.

***The American Criminal Injustice
System At Work:***
**“Hundreds Sitting In Prisons Nationwide
Convicted With The Help Of An FBI
Forensic Tool That Was Discarded More
Than Two Years Ago”**
**“The FBI Lab Has Yet To Take Steps To
Alert The Affected Defendants Or
Courts”**

And in at least two cases, the bureau has tried to help state prosecutors defend past convictions by using court filings that experts say are still misleading.

November 18, 2007 By John Solomon, Washington Post Staff Writer

Hundreds of defendants sitting in prisons nationwide have been convicted with the help of an FBI forensic tool that was discarded more than two years ago.

But the FBI lab has yet to take steps to alert the affected defendants or courts, even as the window for appealing convictions is closing, a joint investigation by The Washington Post and “60 Minutes” has found.

The science, known as comparative bullet-lead analysis, was first used after President John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963. The technique used chemistry to link crime-

scene bullets to ones possessed by suspects on the theory that each batch of lead had a unique elemental makeup.

In 2004, however, the nation's most prestigious scientific body concluded that variations in the manufacturing process rendered the FBI's testimony about the science "unreliable and potentially misleading."

Specifically, the National Academy of Sciences said that decades of FBI statements to jurors linking a particular bullet to those found in a suspect's gun or cartridge box were so overstated that such testimony should be considered "misleading under federal rules of evidence."

A year later, the bureau abandoned the analysis.

But the FBI lab has never gone back to determine how many times its scientists misled jurors.

Internal memos show that the bureau's managers were aware by 2004 that testimony had been overstated in a large number of trials. In a smaller number of cases, the experts had made false matches based on a faulty statistical analysis of the elements contained in different lead samples, documents show.

"We cannot afford to be misleading to a jury," the lab director wrote to FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III in late summer 2005 in a memo outlining why the bureau was abandoning the science. "We plan to discourage prosecutors from using our previous results in future prosecutions."

Despite those private concerns, the bureau told defense lawyers in a general letter dated Sept. 1, 2005, that although it was ending the technique, it "still firmly supports the scientific foundation of bullet lead analysis."

And in at least two cases, the bureau has tried to help state prosecutors defend past convictions by using court filings that experts say are still misleading.

The government has fought releasing the list of the estimated 2,500 cases over three decades in which it performed the analysis.

Troops Invited:

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Write to Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or send email contact@militaryproject.org:. Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Replies confidential. Same address to unsubscribe.

CLASS WAR REPORTS

Mississippi Hurricane Aid Goes To The Wealthy And Powerful: “Big Businesses Like Shipbuilders And Casinos And The Port” [The Poor Get To Eat Shit]



The Edgewood Manor housing project, above, has not had any repairs since it was damaged by Hurricane Katrina. Lee Celano for The New York Times

November 16, 2007 By LESLIE EATON, The New York Times [Excerpts]

GULFPORT, Miss., Nov. 14 — Like the other Gulf Coast states battered by Hurricane Katrina, Mississippi was required by Congress to spend half of its billions in federal grant money to help low-income citizens trying to recover from the storm.

But so far, the state has spent \$1.7 billion in federal money on programs that have mostly benefited relatively affluent residents and big businesses. The money has gone to compensate many middle- and upper-income homeowners, to aid utility companies whose equipment was damaged and to prop up the state’s insurance system.

Just \$167 million, or about 10 percent of the federal money, has been spent on programs dedicated to helping the poor, mostly through a smaller grant program for lower-income homeowners.

And while that total will certainly increase, Mississippi has set aside just 23 percent of its \$5.5 billion grant money — \$1.25 billion — for these programs. About 37 percent of the residents of the state's coast are low income, according to federal figures.

Mississippi is the only state for which the Bush administration has waived the rule that 50 percent of its Community Development Block Grants be spent on low-income programs, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which administers the program. It is also the only state to ask for such waivers.

[R]esentment at being left out of Mississippi's economic recovery has been stirring in poor communities along the coast, and nowhere more so than in this city, hit hard by Hurricane Katrina's storm surge, where the state plans to spend \$600 million of the federal money to repair and improve its shipping port.

Though the expansion will increase employment here, historically very few port jobs have gone to low-income residents.

Some critics contend that the main interest of state leaders in spending community development dollars is to help big businesses like shipbuilders and casinos and the port.

The state's spending plan "moves business to the forefront and forgets about the people on the ground," said Anthony Thompson, pastor at Tabernacle of Faith Ministries, whose spotless church (rebuilt by volunteers) is next to a moldering subsidized housing project that he says has not been touched since the storm.

In his mostly black neighborhood in west Gulfport, Mr. Thompson said, "I see a lot of people waiting on help; I see a lot of houses still damaged."

The nature of that program helps explain the unhappiness in some neighborhoods. It provided grants of up to \$150,000 to homeowners who lived outside of the federally defined flood plain and so did not have flood insurance to cover their losses when their houses were swamped by the storm surge.

To be eligible, families had to have carried regular homeowners' insurance, so that, as the governor said when he was selling the plan to Congress, "we're not bailing out irresponsible people."

But advocates for the poor said that requirement barred many of the least affluent, especially retirees and the disabled, who live on fixed incomes.

"The fact is, people who have no money choose food and medicine, and not insurance," said Ashley Tsongas, a policy adviser for the aid group Oxfam America. "That moral superiority doesn't recognize the reality people face."

Renters were also excluded from the program, as they were in Louisiana, and homeowners who had wind damage were also not covered.

Two-thirds of Mississippi's block grants have not yet been spent.

The port, at the foot of Gulfport's main street, flies a Chiquita banner under its American flag; fruit imports remain down but are bouncing back, though exports of frozen poultry have stopped since the storm destroyed the port's refrigerated warehouses. The state says that the expansion will add about 1,000 jobs over the next five years, and that many of those will be reserved for low-income residents.

But some community advocates are dubious, noting that before the storm only 10 percent of the port jobs went to low-income residents. They also think the cost per job will be too high.

And they note that the port's own master plan envisions a new tourist and casino development. "It's not all about bananas," said Reilly Morse, a lawyer for the Mississippi Center for Justice.

Mr. Morse and many others who oppose the port plan say the state should first ensure that all the families now living in more than 10,000 government trailers have a permanent place to live, that rental housing gets built and that all homeowners can repair their houses.

"I don't have any problem with economic development and expanding the port, but not at the cost of people," said James W. Crowell, president of the N.A.A.C.P. branch in Biloxi, just down the beach from Gulfport.

Dorothy J. McClendon fears that none of that money will reach her east Gulfport neighborhood, Soria City, where she leads a civic group with the modest motto, "Moving Toward a Drug-Free Community."

Because it is north of the railroad tracks which serve as a sort of levee, the neighborhood did not flood, so residents cannot get state grants, Ms. McClendon said.

Few had insurance to cover their wind-damaged roofs; she is sleeping on a couch in her living room because she fears that the water-damaged ceiling in her bedroom is going to fall.

Repairs to public works and economic development projects appear to happening elsewhere; Soria City's main business is a tiny shop selling sodas and snacks and 25-cent cigarettes.

Even the program to help small landlords does not apply to this neighborhood, Ms. McClendon said, because while there are plenty of properties that could be fixed up and rented out, few were occupied right before the storm, as the program requires.

"But we're here, we're hurting," she said. "We need help, too."

GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out

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

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