

GI SPECIAL 5L18:



David Dees: www.deesillustration.com

Imperial Business As Usual: Fuck What Americans Demand: Democrats Vote \$70 Billion To Keep On Killing U.S. Troops & Iraqis

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

December 22 / 23, 2007, ANTHONY DiMAGGIO, CounterPunch [Excerpt]

The Democratically controlled Senate has voted to grant another \$70 billion in funding toward the Iraq war without imposing any concrete conditions or legal stipulations requiring a timetable for withdrawal.

MORE:

Democrats Have Enough Votes To End The War Now [If They Choose To Do So]

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

Sep 13, 2007 FAIR [Excerpts]

Following a pattern set when Congress passed supplemental funding for the Iraq War last May (FAIR Media Advisory, 6/1/07), major media outlets continued to “explain” the politics of the war in incomplete and misleading ways.

The point made by these media outlets again and again is that the Democrats have little power to affect policy in Iraq because it would be difficult to pass legislation over a potential Republican filibuster, and even harder to pass a bill over a presidential veto.

This sentiment is also voiced by many Democratic politicians, many of whom consider themselves opponents of the war.

But passing a filibuster- or veto-proof bill is not their only option.

As the Washington Post’s Shailagh Murray and Dan Balz (9/10/07) put it: “Because of a Senate rule requiring 60 votes to shut off debate and 67 votes to overturn a veto, (Senate Majority Leader Harry) Reid faced an almost impossible challenge. Even if all his troops stood together, he started with just 49 votes.”

Newsweek’s Howard Fineman declared that the Democrats’ powerlessness was built into the constitutional system on NBC’s Chris Matthews Show (9/2/07):

“Politically, what the president has been trying to do is to keep discipline among the Republicans because as long as he can keep most of the Republicans in the Senate, in the House with him, there’s no way to overturn the policy because of the way the Constitution reads....

“I hate to keep coming back to the Constitution. Sixty votes to stop a filibuster, 67 to overturn a presidential veto in the Senate.”

This sort of analysis was used to explain the Democrats’ need to compromise with Republicans, watering down a firm withdrawal date in the hopes of winning bipartisan support.

This approach was endorsed in an Associated Press report (9/11/07) by Matthew Lee:

“If Republican support for the war holds, as it might for now, Democrats would have to soften their approach if they want to pass an anti-war proposal.

“But they remain under substantial pressure by voters and politically influential anti-war groups to settle for nothing less than ordering troop withdrawals or cutting off money for the war--legislation that has little chances of passing.”

The problem with all these accounts is that Congress does not have to pass legislation to bring an end to the war in Iraq--it simply has to block passage of any bill that would continue to fund the war.

This requires not 67 or 60 Senate votes, or even 51, but just 41--the number of senators needed to maintain a filibuster and prevent a bill from coming up for a vote.

In other words, the Democrats have more than enough votes to end the Iraq War--if they choose to do so.

The Democratic leadership may believe--rightly or wrongly--that such a strategy would entail unacceptable political costs.

But that's very different from being unable to affect policy.

To insist, as many media outlets have, that the Constitution makes it impossible for Congress to stop the war obscures the actual choices facing the nation--by confusing “can't” with “won't.”

MORE:

The Democrats Have The Plan! “Continuing The Apocryphal ‘War On Terror’ Into Infinity”

12/21/07 By Mike Whitney, ICH [Excerpt]

The Democrats have become the party of traditional imperialism spearheaded by Brzezinski, Holbrooke, Albright and the other guardians of Empire.

These are the master-puppeteers who operate behind the scenes for their well-heeled benefactors.

Their focus is mainly on Central Asia; controlling resources from the Caspian Basin, “pacifying” Afghanistan, rallying the EU to a greater role in NATO, and continuing the apocryphal “war on terror” into infinity.

MORE:

Funding This War Is Killing Our Troops: “Congressional Leaders And Members Continue To Betray Our Troops, Their Families, This Nation And The People Of Iraq”

17 Dec 2007 Military Families Speak Out [Excerpt]

Over the last week, Congressional leaders and White House officials have been negotiating a budget deal for the 2008 federal budget that is expected to include funding that President Bush requested to continue the war in Iraq.

Those seeking funds to continue the war once again used the “emergency” card, claiming that without new funds, our troops would suffer.

What we know is that funding this war is killing our troops.

And once again, Congress is failing to use its “power of the purse” to end the funding for the war, and appropriate all funds needed to bring our troops home quickly and safely, and give them the care they need when they get home.

Not only that, but some Members of Congress who helped craft this spending package will be voting against it, knowing that there will be enough votes in Congress to ensure its passage. They will then claim that they voted against funding to continue the war in Iraq.

In fact, all who had a hand in this budget deal, and did not try to prevent it, are Congressional leaders and members who continue to betray our troops, their families, this nation and the people of Iraq.

Congress is wrapping up this budget deal this coming week so they can go home to their families for the holiday recess, at the same time that many military and Gold Star families will have absent seats at our holiday tables.

When Congress comes back to Washington, D.C. in 2008, we expect them to begin debating yet another funding measure to supply more funds for the war in Iraq. We expect the “emergency” card to be played once again.

What we know is that war in Iraq – it’s continuation, and the continual killing and maiming of our loved ones and the loved ones of others, is the REAL emergency.

MORE:

The Worst Betrayal Of All:

[The politicians in DC are doing their jobs, defending the Empire, and by now it takes real blind stupidity not to understand that, and keep whining about it.

[Here's true betrayal: a stab in the back by supposed allies who won't lift a finger to reach out to the men and women of the armed forces, who have the power to stop this war, as they stopped the Vietnam War. T]

"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

"The military are the final, essential weak point of Bush and Cheney." David McReynolds 9.29.07

MORE:

“The Message She Hears From Voters Is They Want The War Ended, And They Want The Needs Of Military Veterans To Be Met”

18 December 2007 By Michael W. Drudge, USINFO Special Correspondent [Excerpt]

San Antonio -- The political season has kicked off in southwest Texas as those seeking election announce their candidacies, raise funds and take the pulse of the region.

Southwest Texas has a long tradition of military service, and the region hosts several Air Force and Army bases.

Bexar County Democratic Party Chairwoman Carla Vela told USINFO she hears from many constituents about the Iraq war and the toll it has taken.

"Texas has more soldiers wounded, disabled or killed than any other state," she said. "And most of them are Hispanic from the (Rio Grande) valley. These are proud people and they believe in their country and they want to serve."

Vela says the message she hears from voters is they want the war ended, and they want the needs of military veterans to be met.

MORE:

“Our Democratic Party Pretends It Has To Pass A Bill In Order To End The Funding Of An Occupation That Can Be Ended By Refusing To Pass Any Bills”

DEC 17, 2007 BY DAVID SWANSON, AFTERDOWNINGSTREET.ORG [EXCERPTS]

In America we sometimes like to imagine that a third political party would solve our problems, but Italy has some 15 significant political parties, and essentially the same problems we do. They're told that if they don't settle for the current government they'll end up with a worse one. They're told that if they aren't happy with Prodi they can have Berlusconi back.

They're told that if they can't be happy with a government that says it is for peace and progress while doing the exact same things the previous government did, well then they can have the previous government back again, or something even worse.

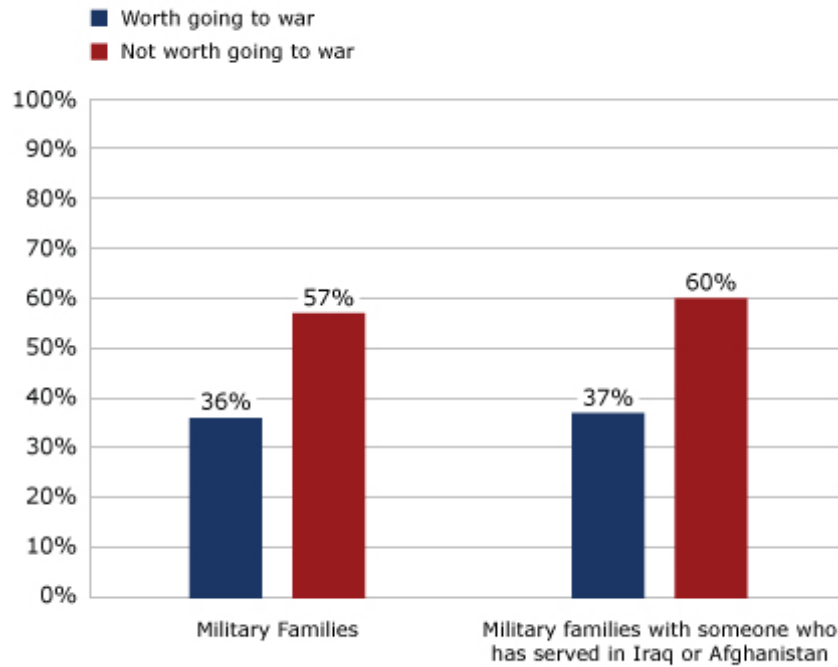
And so, as change becomes possible, the activism that could force it is drained away by partisanship and the sensation of being in power for power's sake. Italy even has a new party that goes by the name Partito Democratico.

While our Democratic Party pretends it has to pass a bill in order to end the funding of an occupation that can be ended by refusing to pass any bills, Italy's leftists propose a doomed vote for a moratorium on bases rather than adding the measure to a larger bill and risking the collapse of the current coalitions.

MORE:

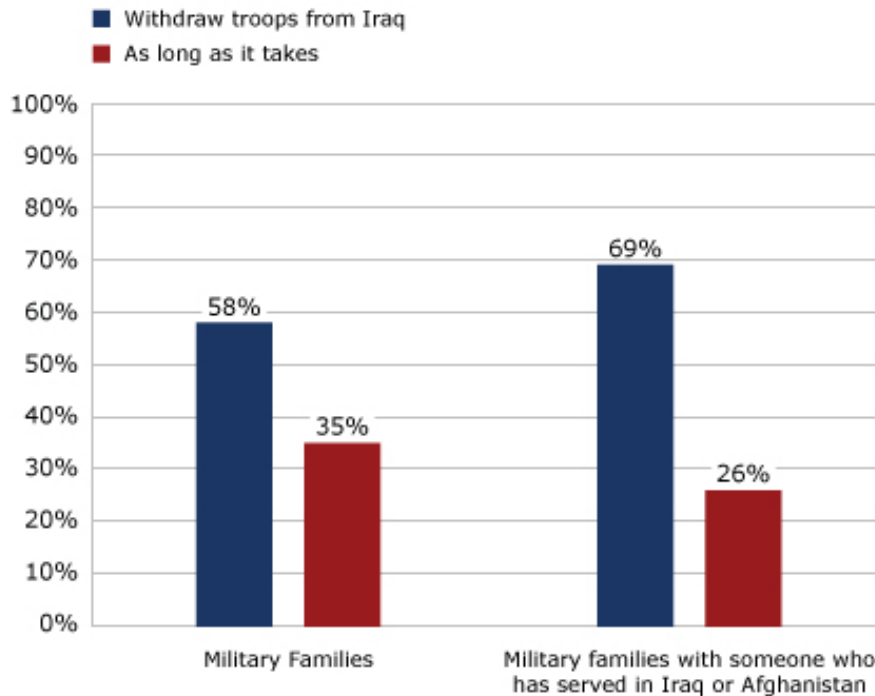
**Disrespectfully Dedicated To All
Those Shit-Eating Rats In
Congress Who Say Opposing The
War Isn't Supporting The Troops:
IF YOU SUPPORT BUSH'S WAR, WHY
ARE YOU STILL HERE?
SHUT UP AND SHIP OUT**

All in all, do you think the situation in Iraq was worth going to war over, or not?



Source: December 2007 *Los Angeles Times* poll.

In your opinion, should the U.S. withdraw troops from Iraq right away, or should the U.S. begin bringing troops home within the next year, or should troops stay in Iraq for as long as it takes to win the war?



Source: December 2007 *Los Angeles Times* poll.

DO YOU HAVE A FRIEND OR RELATIVE IN THE SERVICE?

Forward GI Special along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the war, inside the armed services and at home. Send email requests to address up top or write to: The Military Project, Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

A Salute To Bush's Dog, Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki! Thanks For Making It Clear What The Fucking War Is All About

[And thanks to Pham Binh, Traveling Soldier & Military Project, for catching this one.]

December 21, 2007 By Hamid Ahmed ASSOCIATED PRESS

New Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd met with [Prime Minister Nouri] al-Maliki on Friday during a surprise visit to Baghdad.

Rudd, who was elected in November, has pledged to pull his country's 550 combat troops out of Iraq by mid-2008. He said that after the troops withdraw in June, Australia will continue to help train the Iraqi police force and army.

The new government plans to leave several hundred other Australian forces in and around Iraq in non-fighting roles.

"I am happy that the (Australians) were a partnership in success," al-Maliki said at a joint news conference with Rudd.

"Also, the June deadline for withdrawal will be for part of the troops and not for the forces protecting Iraqi oil exports."

UNREMITTING HELL ON EARTH;

BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW



U.S. army soldiers from Blackfoot Company, 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, take defensive positions during a firefight on the outskirts of Muqdadiyah, Diyala province, Dec. 23, 2007. (AP Photo/Marko Drobnjakovic)

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Eagle Butte Man Killed By IED In Afghanistan



Tanner O'Leary (Photo by Submitted photo)

December 13, 2007 By Ben Shouse, Argus Leader

Friends and family remember Spc. Tanner O'Leary as a trickster who balanced his sense of humor with a sense of purpose.

O'Leary, 23, of Eagle Butte died Sunday in Musa Qal'eh, Afghanistan, of wounds suffered when an improvised explosive device detonated, according to the U.S. Department of Defense. He was stationed in Kandahar with the 82nd Airborne Division of the U.S. Army.

"He was our pride and joy," his grandmother Arlene O'Leary said Wednesday. As a boy, "he was a very happy little clown, a real trickster."

O'Leary was a linebacker and fullback at Timber Lake High School, where he graduated in 2003. He also was a dedicated student, winning high honors for a science fair project on the effect of creatine on muscle mass in rats.

Chris Bohlander was O'Leary's science teacher at the time and now is principal at Timber Lake Elementary. "I can picture his face with that smirk, because I knew something was coming. But I knew with all his smart-mouth comments, he had a question, he had a ponderance: 'How does this work? How does that work?' Geez, Tanner, I don't know."

Once, Bohlander noted in anatomy class that the human heart pumps five liters of blood per minute. "He said, 'What does five liters a minute look like?'" Bohlander said. So the class went to the sink and ran the faucet until they got it to that rate of flow.

"That's the type of learning he wanted. He wanted to know what things look like."

Bohlander said the last time he saw O'Leary was at a Mobridge gas station late at night.

"It struck me I was looking at a soldier. He had turned from a happy-go-lucky kid to a soldier," Bohlander said. "I have some peace in that he was ready: 'I'm going, I'm ready. This is what I'm going to do; this is what they've trained me to do.'"

Frank Seiler, school superintendent in Timber Lake, said there have been no formal events yet to remember O'Leary. But as in any small town, almost everyone knew him.

"It's kind of a shock, kind of brings war more home when you know someone personally," Seiler said.

In a news release, Capt. Thomas Renner, commander of O'Leary's unit, said the South Dakota native was an outstanding soldier.

"We will always remember Tanner O'Leary for the upstanding commendable paratrooper he was and the sacrifices he made for his country," he said.

O'Leary joined the Army in January 2005. He graduated Infantry One Station Unit Training in May 2005 and the Basic Airborne Course in June 2005 at Fort Benning, Ga. He arrived to the 82nd Airborne Division in August 2007 and was assigned to 1st Battalion, 508th PIR as an infantryman.

“His death was tragic and premature, but the impression he made on his fellow brothers and paratroopers will last forever,” Renner said. “His death reminds us of the honor and selfless service that he embodied.”

O’Leary’s awards and decorations include the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, the Army Good Conduct Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, the Army Service Ribbon, the Overseas Service Ribbon, the Combat Infantryman Badge and the Parachutist Badge.

TROOP NEWS

NOT ANOTHER DAY NOT ANOTHER DOLLAR NOT ANOTHER LIFE



Nov. 23, 2007 Peter van Agtmael, ABC News

Jason Thompson recovers in the 10th Combat Support Hospital Emergency Room in Baghdad after his vehicle was hit by an IED, or improvised explosive device. All three soldiers involved in the attack returned to their base in good spirits, although one complained bitterly that he was supposed to be home on leave when their truck got hit.

He was forced to take an emergency leave after the unexpected death of his father and was refused his regular leave after he returned from the funeral.

***A Distant War Comes Home To
Kansas:***

“You See Dead Bodies, Blown-Up Trucks, You Smell That Smell, You Realize What’s Going On Around You”

“I Am From A Guard Family And I Deeply Resent That A President Who Cannot Provide Evidence He Finished His Own Guard Commitment, Has The Nerve To Tell Others To Fight And Die For Manufactured Lies”



Kathleen Berry of Wichita, Kansas, holds the flag that draped the casket of her husband, David.

December 16, 2007 By David Goldstein, McClatchy Newspapers

Editor's note: Twenty percent of the U.S. troops fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan come from the Army National Guard. Many are from small towns, and go to war alongside family and friends. This is Part One of a four-part story about one of those units, Bravo Battery of the Kansas National Guard's 161st Field Artillery, and one night in Iraq that changed many lives.

The war in Iraq came home to Kathy Berry's front porch in south Wichita, Kan., one morning last winter.

It was just past 6 a.m. on Feb. 22, not quite dawn, when two soldiers in green dress uniforms stepped past the patriotic bunting that trimmed her home.

When the doorbell awakened her, Berry thought it was her son-in-law, who'd just left for work. He'd probably forgotten his keys. But when she opened the door, she felt a chill that had nothing to do with the early morning winter darkness.

Two solemn Army National Guard officers stepped inside.

"How bad?" she asked.

They hesitated. And Berry knew.

"There was a mortar attack," said one. "A response team was sent out, and there was one fatality."

Berry rocked slowly on the couch in her living room, her face in her hands, weeping uncontrollably.

Her husband, Staff Sgt. David Berry, had been part of the response team, and he'd been killed by a roadside bomb on a dark road 60 miles south of Baghdad.

It had happened 13 hours earlier and half a world away, but the shock wave reverberated around Wichita and much of Kansas.

Small towns — Derby, Hillsboro, Wellington — all would hear the bad news about their National Guardsmen serving in Iraq. So would Clearwater and Lancaster. They're still feeling it today.

Lives were disrupted, bodies were broken and dreams were shattered, and Berry's unit's extended family — soldiers, family members, friends, schoolmates — all took the hit.

Soldiers in active-duty units come from all over the country, but a National Guard unit is a microcosm of home.

"We're all small-town people," said Berry's stepdaughter, Holli Gill. "Just family."

David Berry was assigned to Battery B — Bravo — of the 1st Battalion, 161st Field Artillery, from Pratt and Kingman, Kan., out on U.S. 54 and U.S. 400 west of Wichita.

The 37-year-old foundry man was well liked and respected as a squad leader. In 2003, he won the Soldier's Medal, the country's highest peacetime award for valor, after he saved an unconscious man from a burning pickup.

"I think who he was as a man . . . didn't allow him any other course of action," Sgt. David Mugg said of his friend at a memorial service in Iraq.

Berry was close to his comrades. His family knew many of them, too. When he led a patrol, they had a good idea who was with him.

So in that sad south Wichita living room, Berry's family pleaded with the two officers to tell them, Who else?

Of Bravo's 127 men, only Berry had died that morning. But in the chaotic, terrible minutes after three sophisticated roadside bombs hit his patrol, it seemed that it could have been anyone.

Blood clogged the throat of Staff Sgt. Jerrod Hays, Berry's oldest friend. His face was shattered and his aorta lacerated.

"I knew I wasn't going to see my wife again, my kids . . .," Hays recalled of his desperate efforts to breathe. "I was never going to see Kansas again."

Medics worked frantically on the men who were pulled out of Berry's Humvee. Shrapnel had destroyed part of Spc. Johnny Jones' skull. Spc. Peter Richert's leg was severed except for a few tendons.

"The first one went off near the Hummer ahead of them; the second one came through the back door of their Hummer and got Richert and Hays," said Jones' wife, Laura. "The third one, that's when they got David and John."

Spc. Tyler Wing, 23, who drove up on the scene, said that when he joined the Guard, "What I knew about war was what I found in the movies. But you see dead bodies, blown-up trucks, you smell that smell, you realize what's going on around you."

As word of what had happened rippled through south-central Kansas, routine things — making lunch and dusting furniture — suddenly became weighted with an infinite sadness. An otherwise normal day was now a point of demarcation.

"We've grown up with them," said Maj. Gen. Tod M. Bunting, the Kansas adjutant general. "You know all their families, you know their hometowns, and everybody in that hometown considers them to be their soldier."

You won't find three sets of brothers in a regular Army outfit, but in Bravo you did. Some of their mothers met monthly for dinner to share news and companionship.

Bravo was led by an eighth-grade science teacher and football coach. Its ranks were filled with blue-collar workers and college men such as Richert, a 23-year-old physical education major at Tabor College in his hometown of Hillsboro.

The youngest was 20, the oldest, 43. Some were single, some were married. Richert had an infant daughter he'd never seen.

Hays, 38, had met David Berry in ninth grade, and they'd been fast friends ever since. They'd worked together at the iron foundry in Norwich. He once dated Gill, Berry's stepdaughter.

Johnny Jones, 35, a refrigeration technician for Farmland Foods, was a friend, too.

"Well, throw my name in the hat," he'd told them about going to Iraq. "Y'all ain't going nowhere without me."

One thing you don't want to hear on a moonless security patrol in south-central Iraq is a panicked policeman shouting: "Ali Baba! Ali Baba everywhere!"

To Bravo, that was one more bad omen on a night that already had had too many.

"After you're there for a while, you know what's normal and what's not," Wing said. "Right off the bat, we're getting warning signs that something's up."

Things had started on the wrong foot when a "Secret Squirrel mission" to the town of Shumali had to be scrubbed at the last minute.

The plan had been to pick up a bomb maker who was responsible for an IED — improvised explosive device — attack on a patrol weeks earlier. That one had been a close call for Spc. Curtis Turpin, who'd walked away with only a concussion and scratches.

Bravo had trained for the mission all that day and night. Geared up, trucks fueled, an Iraqi SWAT team standing by, the men were getting antsy. But the snitch who was supposed to follow the bomb maker had lost him in the town of several thousand.

The mission finally was called off. But since the squads were prepped, command decided to send some out on a "presence patrol," the rough equivalent of a cop out walking a beat.

The squads, Assassin 2-2 and Assassin 2-3, each had three Humvees, generally with four men in each. Bravo usually patrolled in the morning and at night, and the last-minute, six-hour assignment triggered grumbling and a nagging sense of unease.

"It was kind of an odd time to go," said Spc. Travis Waltner of Wichita, a 24-year-old member of Berry's squad. "It was put together real quick. You got a feeling that something was just not right."

Jones slid behind the wheel of Berry's vehicle. Up above, Richert checked the M240 7.62 mm machine gun in the Humvee's turret.

Hays tossed his gear in the back. As an assistant platoon leader, he didn't usually ride with Berry, his old buddy; and he could have sacked out instead. But this mission seemed a little like a "bum rap."

"If you guys have to be out, I'll be out," Hays said. "There's no reason for me to sleep, because everybody's bone-tired."

It was typical Hays.

"He's a guy you want to be like," said Sgt. Mike Seefeld, 26, who climbed into one of the Assassin 2-2 Humvees. He was a member of the Wisconsin National Guard assigned to Bravo.

"He would give you the shirt off his back and take the time to teach you something. He's just a man's man."

Outside the gate, the squads split up, with squad 2-3 going to Shumali, about five miles east. The town felt creepy. Not a single light was on. Then a patrolling Iraqi police car saw the Americans and flipped on its siren as some kind of message. To them? To the insurgents? Who knew?

The squad drove on, increasingly uneasy. "Keep your eyes open," the radio warned.

Assassin 2-2 rejoined them at a suspiciously undermanned police checkpoint outside the town. That's where they were when command called to report that their base, Convoy Support Center Scania, was under mortar and rocket attack.

Told to look for the launchers, the two squads headed west.

The attack on the base stopped, then started up again. Spc. John Duncan, a 2-3 gunner, saw the flashes through his night goggles.

"Hey man, it looks like they're hitting the base!" the 21-year-old University of Kansas student shouted to the others. "I'm counting. That's five, that's six. . . ."

The first barrage, at around 12:30 a.m., provoked little concern. Mortar attacks, probably by local Shiite Muslim insurgents, were pretty common. Only three rounds had ever hit inside the compound in the time that Bravo had been there. These missed, too.

"Another evening where it was business as usual," said Capt. Sean Herbig, 40, the commander of the 161st and a middle school science teacher and football coach. "We had patrols out and route security out. It wasn't anything for us to get mortared."

After half an hour, the all-clear sounded, and everyone left the safety of the bunkers and went back to what he'd been doing.

Sgt. Michael Miller, 43, was among them. A steelworker at a castings plant in Atchison, Kans., he'd served on active duty and in the reserves before joining the Guard.

"Ever since 9-11, I just wanted to get back in," Miller said. "I got tired of watching young kids get hurt. They need to be in school. Then what happens? I get hurt."

He was in the latrine when the plywood walls and PVC piping exploded into a fusillade of flying daggers. One found Miller, and the impact slammed him to the ground.

“It just felt like somebody had hit you in the back of the leg with a sledgehammer.”

His leg felt like it was on fire. Shrapnel had torn the calf muscle almost cleanly away from his leg.

“We need to get you out of here!” another soldier shouted.

They huddled by the doorway as another round hit. Angry and wanting revenge, Miller told a medic just to wrap duct tape around his wound so he could grab a gun and go after the enemy. The medic poured iodine on it instead.

“That’s a new level of pain for me,” Miller said. “I guess it’s a good thing I didn’t have my weapon because I probably would have shot the doctor right there.”

Lloyd Mattix, 42, the 2nd Platoon sergeant, had just finished accounting for all his men after the first barrage when the second one hit.

“I didn’t hear the one that landed on top of me,” he said. “I saw the flash before I heard the bang. It was like the biggest flashbulb you’ve ever seen.”

Mattix was an electrician who’d served on nuclear submarines in the Navy. He joined the Guard after being out of the service for five years. His family wasn’t thrilled about his going to Iraq, but he said his wife knew “that’s who I am, that if I hadn’t gone or refused to go, I wouldn’t be the person she married.”

Now his legs refused to get off the barracks floor. Shrapnel had sliced into his legs and hip.

“I’m hit!” Mattix yelled.

Spc. Simon Makovec, a 23-year-old mechanical engineer, heard Mattix. In Army shorts and flip-flops, he carried his sergeant over his shoulder to a bunker. That’s when he discovered that his leg was bleeding, too. Unlike the others, his wound wouldn’t require evacuation for surgery.

Shrapnel also gouged a 3-inch-deep gash in Curtis Turpin’s abdomen.

“They let us have our siren go off for the all-clear . . . and started again,” the 34-year-old truck driver said ruefully. “They knew what our signal was to get out of our bunkers. We’ve talked about it among ourselves. All they’ve got to do is just pay attention.”

Seven rounds hit targets inside the compound that night. They knocked out some of the power, broke water pipes and smashed some buildings.

Amid the smoke and shouting, medics patched up the wounded, then put them on helicopters to a military hospital in Baghdad.

Beyond the gates, two squads of Kansas Guardsmen drove warily through the darkness. Bravo Battery's bad night was far from over.

Reader's Comments:

09:12:59 12/17/2007 Impurlock

As I read this article, a sick feeling consumed my entire being.

National Guard was meant to provide safety and help for Americans on American soil.

These brave people are what around my town are called "weekend warriors", and we say that we great affection. You see, I live a few miles of the Avon Park Bombing Range, where alot of national guard and regular military training happens. In Florida, we would be lost without the National Guard when hurricanes rip us apart.

I will pray for all of the members of this extended family.

The wages of war is death, however, they forget to add the part about the "dead" parts in our hearts, mind and soul we are left with when our love ones don't come home.

09:12:27 12/16/2007 Prissy

Our National Guard folks are the cream of the military.

The truth is regardless how one feels about this war, the National Guard reserves should have never been used. Right now through spring is the largest call-up of National Guard since WWII, which McClatchy should be investigating...

If the surge is really over, ask yourself why our Guard is being sent out of the country.

This administration cannot be trusted with national security.

I am from a Guard family and I deeply resent that a president who cannot provide evidence he finished his own Guard commitment, has the nerve to tell others to fight and die for manufactured lies.

MORE:

Bravo Battery's Bad Night: "We've Got Two KIAs! Two KIAs!"

Dec 14, 2007 By David Goldstein, McClatchy Newspapers

This story was constructed from dozens of interviews with the soldiers of Bravo Battery and family members who were involved with the events of Feb. 22, 2007. The Star's Washington correspondent, David Goldstein, talked to the wounded at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, and visited several of their hometowns for interviews. The quotes are those recalled later by the participants after they returned home from Iraq.

Was it a goat carcass? A dead dog in the road?

The headlights only caught a dim shape.

Whatever it was, Spc. Travis Waltner swerved his Humvee to the left. Just as he did, two things happened.

The radio spoke: "Let's go blackout," he heard his squad leader, Staff Sgt. David Berry, say from the Humvee behind him. And ...

BOOM!

The blast lifted Waltner's Humvee half off the ground.

"IED! IED!" he radioed.

The squad of Humvees was called Assassin 2-2, part of Bravo Battery, which belongs to the Kansas National Guard's 161st Field Artillery. The battery left its 155mm howitzers behind when it was sent in April 2006 to Iraq

Its job: Patrol about 80 square miles around Convoy Support Center Scania in south-central Iraq; look for "bad guys."

Sixty miles south of Baghdad, Scania was a rest and refueling station for the convoys that rolled up and down Highway 1, also known as Main Supply Route Tampa. It was the link between the embattled Iraqi capital and Kuwait.

They were in Babil Province, the breadbasket of Iraq, with fields of wheat, alfalfa and other crops and a network of canals. It was like a Union 76 truck stop along I-70 back home - except for the high blast walls.

Units that had served there told Bravo that their tour would be "a cakewalk," and that was fine with them.

"You go there with the mentality that it will be all right," said 23-year-old Spc. Tyler Wing of Kingman, Kan.

But Bravo Battery didn't always play it safe.

Eleven months into a 15-month deployment, the unit had a reputation.

"We always wanted to go in and get after it a little bit more," said 33-year-old Sgt. Richard Kenmore of Wichita, Kan.

They never turned down a mission. They also prided themselves on finding IEDs, the deadly roadside bombs responsible for maiming scores of Americans troops.

Bravo squads would often leave their Humvees - something soldiers are warned against - to search for the bombs hidden along the cluttered roads.

But you would never find them all.

Intelligence had been warning about a nastier type of IED called explosively formed penetrators - EFPs.

EFPs contain a copper disc, which, when hurled by the blast, shapes itself into a molten missile that can pierce inches of tank armor.

Even Humvees with upgraded armor offer little defense.

Sgt. Nathan Reed wanted nothing to do with EFPs. "I'd take my chances with an IED any day over an EFP. Your chances of living are not very good. You're either going to be killed by the blast or shredded by shrapnel."

Although part of 2-2, the Mountainburg, Ark., man was not Guard, but Individual Ready Reserve - experienced soldiers who still owe time to the military and are sent to fill vacancies. "We didn't fear death," he said. "I just don't want it to hurt. I don't want to go home in parts."

The night was pleasant enough, a 60-degree gift, given the 60 pounds of body armor beneath their fatigues. But clouds covered the moon. The darkness was deep.

"There were a lot of bad vibes," said Spc. John Duncan of Newton, Kan., a gunner with a second squad, Assassin 2-3, which also pulled out of the gate after midnight.

The squads were cautious. Their presence on the six-hour security patrol, Reed recalled, was to let the bad guys know "we're still out and about. ... Don't do anything stupid."

The squads had split up. But when 2-3 found an Iraqi police checkpoint outside Shumali manned by a lone officer, they radioed 2-2 to rendezvous. The policeman had frantically flagged down the Humvees to warn of "Ali Baba," insurgents, hiding behind the trees.

But just as Berry's squad arrived, mortar rounds and rockets exploded back near Scania. Command was on the horn: Find the mortars.

Staff Sgt. Jerrod Hays had doubts. Mortars rarely hit anything. Wasn't it more important to check out the policeman's warning? Why couldn't Scania just send out another patrol?

"Why are we chasing these ghosts?" he said

Hays pushed Berry to urge their “highers” into letting 2-2 and 2-3 remain at the checkpoint. But Operations Sgt. David Mugg at the command post wouldn’t hear it. Follow your orders, he curtly told the squad leader.

So the half dozen Humvees headed west toward coordinates for the mortars. After a few miles, Assassin 2-3 pulled over to set up an observation point in case 2-2 flushed out any insurgents. Berry’s squad turned down a curving, mostly paved two-lane road bordered by fields - a road known as “Wild West.”

Hays tried to lighten the mood at Berry’s expense.

“Oh man!” Hays laughed at how Mugg handled the suggestion. “He really spanked you!”

The EFP exploding near Waltner’s Humvee hurled Reed, in the passenger seat, headlong into the global positioning system.

The impact knocked Spc. Sean Wing hard against the turret. The bomb’s deadly projectile missed his head by inches. “I was shaking for the next month.”

Behind them, Spc. Johnny Jones slammed on his brakes. Berry called the command post to report the bomb.

“What do you want me to do?” Jones said quickly. “Go forward? Go back?”

Gunfire erupted from the vegetation next to the road. Spc. Peter Richert swiveled his M-240 machine gun and sent bursts toward the muzzle flashes.

“Let’s back up!” Hays yelled.

BOOM!

The second blast rocked the passenger side of Berry’s Humvee. Inside was all exploding metal, flesh and blood. Richert’s right leg was shredded from ankle to knee.

“I knew right then my leg was gone,” he said. “I could feel it dangling.”

Part of him was on fire, but he stifled his scream: “I didn’t want (the insurgents) to have the pleasure of me yelling.”

Shattered bone from his leg and scalding metal flew at Hays, slicing his hand, arm and face. The blast also damaged his eyes, and he could barely see or hear. What felt like rocks rolling around in his mangled mouth were his broken teeth.

And AK-47 rounds were still coming from the trees. “We need to return fire!” Berry yelled.

Dazed and hit by shrapnel in one hand, Richert couldn’t fire his weapon. Berry radioed for an evac chopper as Hays tried to tell his buddy that he was hurt. But all that came out was a painful moan.

“I had just looked at Dave,” Hays said ...

BOOM! Another flash, a split second of blinding whiteness.

“... and it popped, like being in front of a cannon.”

The third blast rained chunks of tire from Berry’s Humvee down on Reed and Waltner’s windshield.

“Turn around! Turn around!” Reed screamed.

The first Humvee in their line had already swung around, cautiously heading back toward them. If there were three IEDs, there could be four.

“Everyone’s yelling and screaming to get back there, but we had to take it slowly,” said Staff Sgt. Mike Seefeld, who was in the first Humvee. “It was just dumb luck that it didn’t blow up on us.”

Back at the observation point, Assassin 2-3 saw flashes above the palm trees, felt the ground tremble.

“Go! Go! Go! Get moving!” truck commander Tyler Wing told his driver, Spc. Jake Linn of Newton.

Tyler’s younger brother, Sean, was up there and he feared the worst.

Squad 2-3 hurtled down Wild West, trying to piece together events from the radio traffic. The silence from Berry’s crew was telling.

“All we could think about was Johnny and Berry and Hays and Pete,” said Duncan. “We have to get there. My buddies are down.”

The three minutes it took to get to their comrades “seemed like an eternity,” he e-mailed his father the next day.

As Duncan fought to keep his focus, he caught sight of medic Moses Parker in the rear seat. A former Army Ranger from New Mexico who had served in Afghanistan, Parker seemed an island of calm as he methodically checked his medical kit.

“He’d been to this rodeo before,” Duncan thought.

Then the radio suddenly spit out: “We’ve got two KIAs! Two KIAs!”

“Blacks Enlisting In The Army Remains Barely Half Of What It Was Eight Years Ago”

December 17, 2007 By William H. McMichael, Army Times [Excerpts]

The number of blacks enlisting in the Army remains barely half of what it was eight years ago and is down 31 percent across the military over that time span, the latest Pentagon statistics show.

In fiscal 2000, blacks represented 20 percent of all recruits. While fiscal 2007 statistics are still preliminary, the data show that just 13.8 percent of recruits were black.

"There's been a very dramatic downturn in black accessions," said David Armor of George Mason University's School of Public Policy.

In examining black enlistment trends over the past 24 years, Armor said downturns followed the first Persian Gulf War and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. "I don't think that's coincidence," he said. "It's hard not to interpret that as (a sign) that in the black community, there is an opposition to both these wars."

[H]e acknowledged that polls show particularly strong opposition to the war among blacks.

OCCUPATION REPORT

General Experiences Blinding Flash Of The Obvious: "If You Roll Up 150 Guys In A Village And You Don't Have Probable Cause, You've Just Created 150 Little Terrorists"

[Typical. Let him experience an IED up close and personal and then see how "little" he thinks the resistance fighters are. T]

[Thanks to Pham Binh, Traveling Soldier, who sent this in.]

Dec 20 By Gordon Lubold, Christian Science Monitor [Excerpts]

Washington - American officials have detained thousands of insurgents in the months since the surge of forces began this spring, in an effort that most agree has improved security in Iraq. But now the commander of the American detention facilities in Iraq is wondering aloud if holding all those detainees is breeding a "micro-insurgency" and asking whether it's time to begin releasing thousands of people.

The two main detention facilities operated by the US military in Iraq, at Camp Bucca near Basra and Camp Cropper in Baghdad, have swollen to hold nearly 30,000 detainees. But it may be too many, says Marine Maj. Gen. Doug Stone, who oversees detainees for the US-led force.

Holding thousands of "moderate detainees," marked by green jumpsuits at Camp Bucca, runs counter to the notion of winning over a population in a classic counterinsurgency, he says.

As the commander of detention operations, he can provide input on the release of detainees through a new board process, but the commanders in the field who send individuals to him have the ultimate input on whether someone should be held or let go.

But some commanders are resistant to letting detainees go.

He made an impassioned plea recently when Marine Commandant Gen. James Conway paid a visit to Bucca in November. General Conway came away impressed with the programs Stone has implemented there and is concerned that the growing number of detainees doesn't make sense anymore.

"If you roll up 150 guys in a village and you don't have probable cause, you've just created 150 little terrorists," says Conway, who says the US must review the process.

"I think there has to be more of a reason to hold a detainee or, send them away," says Conway.

But Bucca has had its problems, giving rise to Stone's concern that if not done right, a microinsurgency could be growing within the American-run facility, an irony that has emerged as the facility grows.

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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/)

Good News For The Iraqi Resistance!!

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



A Iraqi boy is ordered to get on his knees as a foreign occupation soldier from the U.S. army searches his belongings during a night home invasion on the outskirts of Muqdadiyah, Diyala province, north of Baghdad, Dec. 14, 2007. (AP Photo/Marko Drobnyakovic)

[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?]

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CLASS WAR REPORTS

Ford Auto Workers' Strike In Russia Ends:

“The First Stone Has Been Thrown Into The Water, And The Waves Will Continue Rippling Outward For A Very Long Time”

[Thanks to Dennis Serdel, Vietnam Veteran and UAW member (ret'd) who sent this in.]

December 20, 2007 by Boris Kagarlitsky, The Moscow Times Via futureoftheunion.com.

The strike at the Ford factory in Vsevolozhsk, located right outside St. Petersburg, ended on Dec. 14. It was the longest and most intense standoff in post-Soviet times.

The strike began on Nov. 20 and continued for three weeks. According to union activists, the plant's conveyors came to a full stop. Then management threw together one shift mainly composed of office workers and, toward the end of the strike, a second shift to keep the assembly line running. But the quality control department continued its strike, which means that cars produced in early December might not meet all of the technical standards.

During the strike, only a small number of cars came off the assembly line, and the company can expect to be counting its losses for a long time to come. The striking workers, for their part, are now morally and physically exhausted after fighting a long battle against management.

The labor union's strike fund was unprepared for such a protracted battle, OMON police forces harassed the picketers and the strike's organizers were threatened with prosecution.

In the end, a general meeting of striking Ford workers voted in a secret ballot to halt the protest, and the company's administration promised to raise their wages.

Both sides signed an agreement prohibiting punitive actions against the strike's participants.

The union and the company promise to settle all matters of dispute by Feb. 1. Union leader Alexei Etmanov said the Ford administration was already prepared to index salaries to keep pace with inflation and to provide additional pay for extra work and for length of service in the company. Etmanov characterized all of this as a victory, saying: "This strike turned out to be the most protracted in the past 10 years. I think the administration should agree to concessions. They would hardly want to see a new strike in the spring."

The union achieved much less than expected, however. In addition to the concessions obtained, workers had demanded a 30 percent wage increase, higher pensions and changes to the work schedule and the number of work hours per day.

It would appear that the confrontation ended in a draw. The management failed to break the union, and the striking workers walked away with only modest results, especially considering the tremendous effort and stress they went through to get what they wanted.

The conflict at the Ford factory took on significance far beyond the organization itself and even beyond the auto manufacturing industry in Russia. The media from all over the country covered the story extensively.

This was the country's first open-ended strike since the new Labor Code came into force several years ago.

It was also the first strike that the authorities did not squash and in which its participants obtained a guarantee that they would not be subjected to reprisals.

The strike once again demonstrated that the laws work against labor unions, but it also showed that strong workers' organizations can find ways to get around many of those restrictions.

Finally, the Ford conflict forced many people to acknowledge that factory workers are shamefully underpaid in Russia — not only in comparison to Western Europe, but also with respect to analogous car plants in Latin American countries.

Ultimately, the fundamental issues in this strike concern not only Ford workers and managers, but all of society. Although the Ford factory is working again and things seem to be back to normal, we must all draw these important conclusions from this strike and understand that serious labor problems still remain in the country. The first stone has been thrown into the water, and the waves will continue rippling outward for a very long time.



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