

GI SPECIAL 6A12:

**“Candid Photo, Or Subtle Metaphor? You Decide”
-- Alex, Army of Dude**



January 07, 2008 By Alex, Army of Dude

**The Traitor Bush At It
Again:
“He Is Open To The Possibility Of
Slowing Or Stopping Plans To
Bring Home More U.S. Troops
From Iraq”**

January 14, 2008 Associated Press

MANAMA, Bahrain - President Bush said Saturday he is open to the possibility of slowing or stopping plans to bring home more U.S. troops from Iraq, defying domestic demands to speed the withdrawals. Updated on war developments, Bush said the U.S. presence in Iraq will outlast his presidency.

Bush said any decision about troop levels “needs to be based upon success,” but that there was no discussion about specific numbers when he was briefed by Gen. David Petraeus, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, and Ryan Crocker, the U.S. ambassador to Baghdad.

With Petraeus at his side, Bush said, “My attitude is, if he didn’t want to continue the drawdown, that’s fine with me, in order to make sure we succeed, see. I said to the general, ‘If you want to slow her down, fine. It’s up to you.’”

Polls show people in the U.S. overwhelmingly oppose the war.

**LIAR
TRAITOR
TROOP-KILLER
DOMESTIC ENEMY
UNFIT FOR COMMAND
UNWORTHY OF OBEDIENCE**



(Jim Young/Reuters)

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

HELL ON EARTH; BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW



A U.S. soldier from 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment takes cover in the village of Abu Musa on the northern outskirts of Muqdadiyah, Diyala province, Jan. 10, 2008. (AP Photo/Marko Drobnjakovic)

San Marcos Soldier Killed In Iraq

January 11, 2008 By North County Times

SAN MARCOS -- An Army private from San Marcos was one of three soldiers who died Wednesday in Iraq from wounds he suffered during combat operations in the city of Samarra, the Defense Department said late Thursday.

Pfc. Ivan E. Merlo, 19, was a member of the 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment's 1st Brigade Combat Team assigned to the 101st Airborne Division based at Fort Campbell, Ky.

Also killed in fighting that day were Army Sgt. David Hart, 22, of Lake View Terrace, and Army Pfc. Phillip J. Pannier, 20, of Washburn, Ill.

A written statement released by Fort Campbell said Merlo joined the Army in October 2006 and arrived at the Army base in February. His awards and decorations include the National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and Army

Service Ribbon, the statement said. It also credited him with earning a weapons qualification as an M4 expert.

Merlo is survived by his wife, Nicole, of Vista, and parents Jose Merlo and Joanna Villegas of San Marcos, according to the statement.

The Army release included no other details, but Merlo's MySpace Web page described him as a 5-foot-11-inch Latino who was a "proud parent." More than two dozen people had posted "rest in peace" or goodbye messages on the page by 6 p.m. Friday.

One of the messages said Merlo's wife had been excited about a visit he was planning to make. Several of those who left messages also put photos of Merlo in his Army uniform, fatigues or civilian clothes on their own MySpace pages.

Attempts to reach Merlo's wife and parents Friday were unsuccessful. Calls to a telephone number for a Jose Merlo in San Marcos were unanswered.

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Hesperia Soldier Remembered As A Hero

01/10/2008 By Debbie Pfeiffer Trunnell, Staff Writer; San Bernardino County Sun

In a letter he sent to his mother-in-law from Afghanistan a few months ago, Army Sgt. James K. Healy wrote about people asking him what he does.

He said he replies that he works hard to save lives every second of every day that he is away from his family.

The 25-year-old soldier from Hesperia was doing just that in Afghanistan, thousands of miles away from his young wife and 13-month-old son, when he died Monday.

Now his family is left with many memories and the heartfelt words he sent home.

"I believe that quote is truly the quote of a hero," said Dave Olney, Healy's father-in-law.

Healy was also a wonderful husband and father, someone who was dedicated to two things: his family and helping others, Olney added.

Shannon Healy, his wife and longtime sweetheart - they both graduated from Hesperia High School in 2000 - was too upset to talk about the loss of her husband, said Olney.

"It is a very difficult time for her and the rest of the family," he said.

Healy died when the vehicle he was riding in struck an improvised explosive device in Laghar Juy, Afghanistan. Maj. Michael L. Green, 36, of Chagrin Falls, Ohio, was also killed in the explosion.

Capitol flags will be flown at half-staff to honor Healy's death.

Healy was assigned to the 703rd Explosive Ordinance Detachment at Fort Knox since March 2005.

The 703rd EOD, which is responsible for finding, recovering and disposing of explosive devices, has been deployed three times since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. The unit deployed in 2003 and 2005 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The detachment's 24 soldiers deployed in August in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

Losing Healy has been hard on the detachment.

"The entire Fort Knox family mourns the loss and our thoughts go out to his family," said Ryan W. Brus of the Fort Knox Public Affairs Office.

According to information provided by The News-Enterprise in Elizabethtown, Ky., Healy was well liked by fellow members of the 703rd.

Sgt. Gregory Boyett of Baker, Fla., who met Healy when he was one class ahead of him in explosive ordinance detachment school, described him as a "Star Wars" fanatic who was nimble with a pen.

He loved to draw, and he designed the company coin and a T-shirt, Boyett said.

Boyett, who now serves in the unit at Fort Knox as a liaison for messages between his colleagues overseas and their families back home, also described his fallen friend as a fun-loving guy and family man.

"He was a great soldier, dedicated and loyal," he said.

Healy is the third soldier from Hesperia High School who has died in the ongoing conflicts overseas.

The others are Sgt. Armando Hernandez, who was in the same high school class and on the same page in the yearbook as Healy, and Lance Cpl. William "Willie" Wiscowiche, who attended Hesperia High for three years before graduating in 2000 from Victor Valley High School.

Resistance Attacks Occupation Luxury Hotel; Foreigners Killed, Wounded

Jan 14 by Waheedullah Massoud (AFP)

Taliban militants launched a brazen attack on the main luxury hotel in Kabul Monday, killing six people -- including at least one foreigner -- as the Norwegian foreign minister was inside, officials said.

Foreign Minister Jonas Garh Soere was unharmed in the attack -- which included a blast -- and took shelter with other guests in the basement afterwards, hotel and Norwegian officials said.

"The figures reported so far is that six people were killed and six were wounded," Afghan interior ministry spokesman Zemarai Bashary told reporters.

"The details of the killed people are not reported but among the six wounded there are two foreign nationals. They are not high-ranking officials," he said.

The Norwegian foreign ministry said that two Norwegian nationals, a photographer and a diplomat, were wounded in the attack. It was not clear if these were the same foreigners referred to by Bashary.

A Western security official said a Canadian was killed. This was not immediately confirmed by the Canadian embassy.

The Kabul Serena hotel -- popular with foreigners, several of whom live there -- said separately that two guests and two staff, both security guards, were killed.

Two other hotel guests and two members of staff were seriously wounded, it said in a statement that expressed "shock and outrage."

The hardline Taliban movement said its men, including a bomber, carried out the attack, which came as the Norwegian foreign minister was preparing for a dinner meeting.

"Four members of the Taliban, one of them wearing a suicide vest and all armed with Kalashnikovs (rifles), entered the Serena hotel and opened fire on foreigners," spokesman Zabihullah Mujahed told AFP.

"One of them exploded himself," he said.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force, which has 40,000 troops in Afghanistan, said hotel guards had shot dead one of the attackers but it was unclear what had happened to any others.

Asked about reports that some may still be there, Bashary said: "The hotel was checked and is still being checked."

The Western security official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said foreign soldiers had entered every room to search for any remaining attackers.

First there was an attack at the entrance of the hotel followed by a second explosion... Then there was gunfire.

He was not able to say if the second blast was also a bombing, or if the gunfire came from guards or the militants.

Nearly six hours later -- close to midnight -- no one was allowed to leave or enter the hotel, general manager Christopher Newbery told AFP.

The Serena, opened in November 2005, is the main venue for top-level functions of the government, foreign embassies and businesses in the capital.

It is heavily barricaded and reinforced because of security threats, with the Taliban-led insurgency at its peak in the country.

Resistance Action

Jan 13 By NOOR KHAN, Associated Press Writer

Taliban militants killed eight officers in an attack on a police checkpoint in Kandahar province, said Sadullah Khan, a police officer in neighboring Neven district. A

bomber killed another policeman and wounded eight other people when he blew himself up in a housing compound in the town of Lashkar Gah in neighboring Helmand province, officials said.

Guards challenged the bomber when he tried to enter the house of a regional police commander and the man detonated himself, killing the policemen and wounding two other police officers, provincial police chief Mohammad Hussain Andiwai said.

TROOP NEWS

**British Army Tells Soldier Who
Lost His Leg In Basra To “Prove”
He Is Disabled;
Then He Gets Tainted Blood In A
Transfusion:**

“I Think It Is Appalling That My Son, Who Almost Gave His Life For His Country, Should Be Treated In This Way”

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

11 Jan 2008 By JOHN KAY, Chief Reporter, The Sun

BRAVE Steve Shine only found out he may have been given tainted blood in a voicemail message left on his mobile just before Christmas.

It said merely there were “issues” with the treatment he received after his leg was blown off in Iraq.

He rang the medic and was told he had been exposed to the risk of diseases such as Aids, hepatitis and syphilis.

Since then the 23-year-old has received NO offers of help or counselling from the Army or Ministry of Defence.

His angry mother Frances revealed he has not even received a penny of disability pay following the attack last April. Instead officials have asked him to PROVE he is disabled.

Steve is one of 18 British squaddies badly wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan who, The Sun revealed yesterday, may have been given tainted American blood in battlefield transfusions.

Frances, 46, of Paddington, West London, said: “We have had no help or support whatsoever. I have learned more about what has been happening by reading The Sun today and all the subsequent radio and TV bulletins.

“I think it is appalling that my son, who almost gave his life for his country, should be treated in this way.”

Steve lost his entire left leg while serving with 2 Royal Tank Regiment in Basra. He was in a Challenger II blown up by insurgents.

Since then he has been fitted with a false leg and was due to return to light administrative duties next week.

But on Monday he gave blood samples at Headley Court Military Hospital, in Epsom, Surrey – and was handed leaflets about Aids, hepatitis, and syphilis.

Frances said: “Steve was shattered by the news, coming on top of all he has suffered through losing his leg. But he is OK now and is being very brave. He will have to wait just over two weeks for the results.

“We are praying that he will be OK and we have been told the risks of him having contracted one of these terrifying diseases is low.”

The 18 squaddies were given blood donated in America rather than wait for British supplies as an emergency measure. But the US military had failed to test the blood immediately after it was donated – leaving a terrifying question mark over whether it was safe.

All the soldiers involved in the scandal have all been alerted. Two have already been given a clean bill of health with the rest waiting for test results. Meanwhile it emerged six British security workers also received transfusions from the potentially tainted batch. Last night The Pentagon said the American donors had now all tested negative for hepatitis and HIV.

That’s A Start: Bring Them All Home NOW!



Sgt. Hanurabi Torres lifts his son Kyle, 4, into the air while holding his daughter Azul, 2, after a homecoming ceremony from Iraq on Jan. 13, 2008, at Fort Hood Texas. (AP Photo/Killeen Daily Herald, Sarah Moore Kuschell)

Deadline For Reimbursements For War Gear Purchased By Troops Coming Fast

January 14, 2008 Army Times

Troops deployed on contingency operations who purchased their own helmet pads for protection against traumatic brain injuries between Sept. 30, 2006, and Sept. 30, 2007, could be reimbursed for the expense — if they hurry. Congress has approved a one-year extension of an equipment reimbursement program for deployed troops as long as a claim is filed within one year of the date of purchase.

Rep. Darlene Hooley, D-Ore., who pushed for the extension, said some troops were not issued safer padding for helmets before the Sept. 30, 2006, cutoff for reimbursement ordered by Congress two years ago because they didn't know they were going to be deployed.

Reimbursement is available only for purchases made by a service member himself.

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

Iraqi Wounded To Be Sent To Guantanamo: Prison Will Reopen as Branch of Walter Reed



A new sign outside the entrance to the former Camp Delta

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

Unconfirmed Sources.com [Excerpts]

Washington, DC (APE) - Late this evening the Pentagon revealed its plans for Guantanamo Bay, putting an end to rumors that the Bush administration would be closing the controversial prison

All enemy combatants will be removed by the end of next week to make way for the overflow of mildly wounded and combat stressed soldiers returning from Iraq.

The Pentagon stated that it would be working in conjunction with the CIA and conducting round-the-clock flights to undisclosed locations throughout the world where the vast majority of prisoners would continue to be held and some repatriated.

Over the coming months thousands of the more highly functioning wounded Iraq War veterans will be housed in the same facilities in an effort to provide intensive rehabilitation designed to return as many as possible back to their combat units.

“We happened to see a ... screening of Michael Moore’s new movie, Sicko,” stated a Pentagon spokesperson.

“Incredibly, Mr. Moore was correct in his assertion that the quality of medical care delivered to the prisoners at Guantanamo far surpasses that available for our returning GIs. We’re just responding... adapting and improvising if you will.”

With suicide being a common outcome among combat stressed soldiers, it is hoped that the highly trained personnel currently staffing Guantanamo will be able to effect a change in the deadly trend.

“This should serve as an example to those who would accuse the president of being cold and inflexible,” said a White House press secretary.

“The president is determined to show all manner of support to our troops during a time of war.

“We’re confident that this new medical facility will have our young men and women whipped back into shape in no time at all.”

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Resistance Action



(Graphic: London Financial Times)

Jan 12 (Reuters) & (KUNA) & 1.13.08 By Laith Hammoudi, McClatchy Newspapers & 2008-01-14 (Xinhua) & (Reuters) & By Hussein Kadhim, McClatchy Newspapers

Around noon, a car bomb exploded at Gharbalani neighborhood in Mosul city which was parked on the road targeting a police patrol injuring three policemen and three people who were on the road at the moment of the incident. The blast also damaged a police vehicle.

Around noon, an IED targeted a car whose passengers were policemen of Dujail police station who were on their way from Baghdad to Dujail .The incident took place at Tarmiyah area in the midway between Dujail and Baghdad.

In Buhriz village (7 km south east Baquba), a house filled with explosions detonated killing three (one policemen and two members of the U.S. funded committees) and injuring 7 others (five policemen and two Iraqi officers).

Around 8.30 a.m., gunmen assassinated Judge Amir Jawdat Al-na'ib, the member of the federal appeal court near Kabab Ninawa restaurant while he was in his way to work. The incident took place in Mansour neighborhood (west Baghdad) . Jawdat's car driver was killed in the incident, too.

The attackers sped away in another car after the attack, police said. Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council is a supervisory body which also nominates the chief justice and other senior posts.

Guerrillas exploded a gas pipeline that links between the fields of Kirkuk and Biji refinery north of Baghdad early morning today. Gas spread in a wide area and it was recognized by people in Tikrit city and Alam area (about 45 Kms south of Biji city)

A parked car bomb wounded two soldiers when it struck an Iraqi army patrol in a town east of Baquba, 65 km (40 miles) north of Baghdad, police said.

Guerrillas killed two members of a U.S.-backed neighbourhood patrol in a village near Dhuluiya, 70 km (45 miles) north of Baghdad, police said.

A booby-trapped exploded when an Iraqi army patrol was passing in northern Baquba, the largest city in Diyala. The explosion caused injuries to an Iraqi soldier.

IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE

END THE OCCUPATION

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

One day while I was in a bunker in Vietnam, a sniper round went over my head. The person who fired that weapon was not a terrorist, a rebel, an extremist, or a so-called insurgent. The Vietnamese individual who tried to kill me was a citizen of Vietnam, who did not want me in his country. This truth escapes millions.

Mike Hastie
U.S. Army Medic
Vietnam 1970-71
December 13, 2004

**“The Slayer Of The Iraqi And
Palestinian Children Must Be Tried As A
War Criminal”
[They’ll Have to Take A Number And Get
In Line]**



Egyptian protesters burn George W. Bush Jan. 14, reading: 'The slayer of the Iraqi and Palestinian children must be tried as a war criminal' during a demonstration in Cairo, Egypt, against Bush's visit to Egypt planned for Jan. 16. (AP Photo/Amr Nabil)

Troops Invited:

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

OCCUPATION REPORT

***Good News For The Iraqi
Resistance!!***

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



Foreign occupation soldiers from U.S. 2nd Infantry Division, from Fort Lewis, Wash., surround a house in a village southwest of Muqdadiah, preparing to break into an Iraqi citizens home Jan. 8, 2008. (AP Photo/U. S. Army, Staff Sgt. Russell Bassett/ho)

[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!**

**A Look Inside The Bunker Of A
Dying Occupation
"Today's Green Zone Is 'Not
Nearly As Social As It Used To
Be,' Said Richard H. Houghton III"
"It's Now Our Own Isolated Little Jail
Cell"
"A Mid-Level Foreign Service Officer
Whispers That The Entire Iraq Enterprise
Is Screwed"**

January 5, 2008 By Karen DeYoung, Washington Post Staff Writer

BAGHDAD -- Several dozen soldiers and embassy staff members relaxed on the patio around Saddam Hussein's old swimming pool, shivering in the desert chill, as a boombox blared Latin rhythms over the racket of low-flying helicopters.

It was Salsa Night in the Green Zone, but on a Friday evening in late November, only a few bundled-up couples shuffled awkwardly to the beat.

Suddenly, a 30-something woman and a 20-something man, both in Air Force uniform, took the dance floor, their camouflage jackets and holstered sidearms swinging with each smooth, expert turn. The bored patio denizens perked up, transfixed by a rare moment of magic.

The moment was a fleeting reminder of the good times in the war's early days, when the pool patio was the Green Zone's social hub and young conservative staffers, eager to remake Iraq, danced away the cares of nation-building.

Those times and people are long gone, replaced by sober diplomats and soldiers with lower expectations, slogging diligently through their duties, collecting combat pay, and envisioning an Iraq where the electricity works and where a trip to the market does not court death.

When the music stopped, Tech Sgt. Heather Warr of Miami smiled and left the floor. She had been here three months, and the best thing about the Green Zone, she said, is that she has a "wet trailer" -- one with an inside bathroom.

Her dance partner, Capt. Jaime Bastidas of Albuquerque, had arrived three days earlier, and he said the best thing so far had been finding someone else who could dance. The next day, they would return to work -- Warr assisting Iraq's Air Force, Bastidas working with the Defense Ministry, and both counting the days until their tours end.

Always more MASH than Malibu, today's Green Zone is "not nearly as social as it used to be," said Richard H. Houghton III, a three-year resident.

"It's now our own isolated little jail cell."

Good Intentions

Shortly after triumphant U.S. forces arrived in Baghdad in April 2003, they took over Hussein's Presidential Palace along the Tigris River, enclosed the surrounding 5.9 square miles with concrete walls and concertina wire, and declared it the seat of their occupation government. In those days, soldiers thought they would return home within months.

Many U.S. civilian staff members who arrived in the military's wake were young conservatives working up the Republican Party ladder. They saw Iraq as a place to transfer their ideals to a grateful nation, fight terrorism and have an exciting time.

They set up no fewer than six bars, a disco, a cafe, two Chinese restaurants and an outdoor shopping arcade. Personnel stationed inside the zone would jog on the sidewalks and relax in the garden behind the Republican Palace.

But before the first year ended, violence exploded in the Red Zone -- the 437,000 square miles that make up the rest of Iraq -- and the soldiers settled in for a long fight against a growing insurgency. As the attacks against U.S. forces escalated, Iraqis proved

resistant to American ideas of how to organize their government and lives, and they began to fight among themselves.

Inside the Green Zone, fear replaced enthusiasm as mortar shells rained from the sky during 2006 and 2007, and many hours were spent inside concrete bunkers. Over the past several months, the attacks have largely stopped, except for a burst of two dozen shells on Thanksgiving, but the walls grew higher and civilian trips outside the wire became infrequent.

“When I got here, it was just getting to the end of the time when you could go out in the city. You could hop into a cab or walk across the bridge,” said Houghton. “The watershed was the bombing of Samarra” in February 2006, when the Sunni insurgent group al-Qaeda in Iraq destroyed the historic Askariya Shiite shrine in that city north of Baghdad, sparking all-out sectarian war.

With the muscled bulk and haircut of a Marine, Houghton, 48, came here in early 2005 with the nongovernmental International Republican Institute. He quit after a close colleague was killed last January in a Baghdad ambush, but he stayed on with the State Department.

Houghton now advises Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker on U.S. legislative affairs and serves as organizer and guide for congressional delegations -- in 2007, a record 57, bringing 208 lawmakers -- passing through Iraq.

Ranked by how little Americans here knew about the fortress in which they lived, Houghton has written a 41-page “Visitor’s Guide to Baghdad’s Green Zone,” complete with color photos of zone landmarks from the Monument to the Unknown Soldier to the Believer’s Palace -- actually a fake shell of a building Hussein had constructed to conceal an underground bunker.

“There was no institutional memory,” Houghton lamented, adding that he has “been through 12 Air Force rotations, three State Department rotations” and numerous other turnovers.

For example, on a recent driving tour of what is officially known as the International Zone, or the IZ, he stopped inside a traffic circle at the junction of al-Kindi Avenue and the Qadissiyah Expressway, empty boulevards once a part of busy central Baghdad.

“Nobody knows what that statue is,” he said, referring to a huge pedestal at the center of the circle showing three bronze soldiers with a dead comrade at their feet. He explained that it commemorates the July 14, 1958, military coup that overthrew the Iraqi Hashemite monarchy. The coup created the Republic of Iraq and paved the way for Hussein’s takeover.

Farther down al-Kindi, behind a U.S. military base and surrounded by war litter, stood a small, exquisite building with a blue tiled dome. The tomb of Michel ‘Aflaq, who was the ideological founder of Baathism, it was home to a U.S. Marine unit, Houghton said, until he told the Marines they were sleeping on the sarcophagus. They soon vacated, leaving behind four portable toilets.

Thousands of Iraqis live inside the zone, which also contains the offices of the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, several ministries and the Iraqi parliament.

A city within a city, the Green Zone encompasses a geographic area that was once the center of Iraqi government power and a residential neighborhood crisscrossed by major highways.

It is as if an occupying army had built a wall around federal Washington, including Pennsylvania Avenue, the monuments and a substantial part of the housing on Capitol Hill.

The few entrances are heavily guarded by coalition forces from the Republic of Georgia.

There are signs in English and Arabic that read “Do Not Enter or You Will Be Shot.”

Inside, it is divided into compounds -- one for the embassy, others for the U.S. Agency for International Development, Iraqi government installations, a hospital, and numerous military installations -- each with its own walls, checkpoints and guards.

Movement between compounds can take minutes or hours.

A recent overcast afternoon found Houghton standing in a parking lot outside a bunker, while Peruvian checkpoint guards searched a car that a bomb-sniffing dog had found suspicious.

Houghton had just seen Sen. James Webb (D-Va.) on his way out of Iraq after a one-day visit. As the sun set and the temperature dropped, he spent his time on a cellphone. Most zone residents carry around two or three phones -- an Iraqi local, a U.S.-listed mobile and a BlackBerry.

The embassy itself, with its huge blue palace dome, was just spitting distance away, but the Peruvians were adamant that no one pass. After a 90-minute wait, Houghton organized a mile-long march to another checkpoint.

Looking Diplomatic

The zone feels more gray than green. At the end of Iraq's long dry season, scattered palm trees stand limp under the dust that covers every surface.

Head-high walls of sandbags wrapped in gray canvas line the walls and pathways; they are used as protection against mortar attacks. The clusters of metal boxes that provide embassy housing, whimsically signposted with such names as “The Oasis” and “The Palms,” are surrounded with stacks of the fat, gray bags, worn with age and dripping sand. The makeshift wooden stairs that reach the high palace back door are painted gray.

When Crocker arrived as ambassador last spring, a goal was to turn the embassy -- established in June 2004 but still permeated with a feeling of catch-as-catch-can impermanence -- into a "normal" diplomatic posting.

Khakis and T-shirts were deemed unacceptable, and young women now stumble along the potholed sidewalks in stiletto heels.

The U.S. government has done its best to make Hussein's Presidential Palace, a half-mile-long behemoth at the heart of the zone, look like an embassy.

Drab drywall and metal slabs divide its extravagant rooms into cubicles. The furnishings are U.S. government-issue desks and chairs, but pieces of the palace's past remain -- the immense rotunda at its entrance, marble floors and a scattering of gaudy, Hussein-era sofas and chairs, upholstered in heavy fabric. The bathrooms, where sinks and toilets are painted with pink flowers, are bigger than most offices.

A walk through the wide, dim, marble corridors reveals a surreal mix of people.

A mid-level Foreign Service officer whispers that the entire Iraq enterprise is "screwed," and that somebody in Washington ought to do something about it.

A public diplomacy expert explains the gift of democracy that Iraqis have been given, while a senior diplomat reflects on the difficulties of persuading the Iraqi government to do what Washington wants, saying, "This is really, really hard."

Filipino cleaners sweep through the dust, while a rumpled soldier snores on a black leather couch in the Starbucks-imitation coffee shop.

An aide to commanding Gen. David H. Petraeus, working late into the night, eats from a foam box as he proudly clicks through a slide show of the general's visit to a prison that day.

On the poolside patio, Peruvian guards dressed in camel-colored jackets, rifles slung over their chest, stand chatting in the dark, watching Sgt. Warr and Capt. Bastidas salsa-dance.

Alcohol is forbidden in public areas of the zone, but food is free and plentiful, imported to guard against sabotage and to ensure that Americans and foreign workers have their fill of iceberg lettuce and Jell-O mold.

No cooking is allowed in the trailers, and the air in the huge, boxlike Dining Facility, known as the D-Fac, is laced with the scent of hamburger grease.

Servers try to spice up the menu with entree themes -- "Louisiana night" or Salisbury steak -- but it is easy to imagine the drudgery of eating in the company cafeteria three times a day, every day, all year.

No spouses or families are allowed.

After dinner, there is nothing to do but work, sit by the pool or watch U.S. cable television. Status and job classification determine if a trailer is shared. Some fix

up their “hooches” -- standard boxes of about 20 feet by 10 feet with linoleum floors, plywood bed frames and huge televisions -- with carpets or cabinetry, but most seem not to try.

Military activity in the Red Zone picks up after dark, and the embassy compound is on the landing path for a constant flow of helicopters carrying battle wounded to the nearby hospital.

There are booms and gunfire in the distance, and the occasional loudspeaker yell of “Incoming” jolts one from sleep onto the cold floor to wedge beneath the bed.

So Close, So Far

The last stop on Houghton’s tour is a stretch of hulking buildings behind high, ocher walls on a broad highway outside the existing embassy compound.

The NEC, or New Embassy Compound, is the most expensive U.S. embassy in history, costing more than \$600 million. Scheduled for completion last September, it is still unoccupied.

Built to standard State Department specifications, it includes a modern child-care center unlikely to be used any year soon. Originally designed to provide work and living space for 600 people, it must now must accommodate at least 1,000.

Like Manhattan efficiencies, its one-bedroom apartments are being divided with drywall to accommodate more.

There is no D-Fac, and no one has figured out how hordes of hungry diplomats will commute three times a day, through the Peruvian checkpoint, to the facility in the old compound.

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

The George W. Bush Presidential Library

Jan 13, 2008 Via Ed Pearl

There’s a show on C-SPAN about presidential libraries. Here’re what the draft plans for the George W. Bush Library now call for:

The Alberto Gonzales Room - Where you can’t remember any of the exhibits.

The Hurricane Katrina Room - It's still under construction.

The Texas Air National Guard Room - Where you don't have to even show up.

The Walter Reed Hospital Room - Where they don't let you in.

The Guantanamo Bay Room - Where they don't let you out.

The Weapons of Mass Destruction Room - Nobody has been able to find it.

The War in Iraq Room - After you complete your first tour, they can force you to go back for your second and third and fourth and fifth tours.

The K-Street Project Gift Shop - Where you can buy an election, or, if no one cares, steal one.

The Men's Room - Where you could meet a Republican Senator (or two).

To be fair, the President has done some good things, so the museum will have an electron microscope to help you locate them.

When asked, President Bush said that he didn't care so much about the individual exhibits, so long as his museum was better than his father's....

CLASS WAR REPORTS

Capitalism At Work:

“Even As The Economy Was Growing, Only The Wealthiest Benefited”

“Between 2003 And 2005, An Amazing \$400 Billion In Pre-Tax Dollars Was Shifted From The Bottom 95 Percent Of Households To Those In The Top 5 Percent”

January 11, 2008 By Nicole Colson, Socialist Worker [Excerpts]

According to an analysis of Congressional Budget Office (CBO) statistics on U.S. household incomes from 1979 to 2005, the Economic Policy Institute's Jared Bernstein found "a sharp increase in income inequality over the past few years. In fact, the increase in income inequality...was greater from 2003 to 2005 than over any other two-year period covered by the CBO data."

Between 2003 and 2005, "an amazing \$400 billion in pre-tax dollars was shifted from the bottom 95 percent of households to those in the top 5 percent."

Bernstein said. "In other words, had income shares not shifted as they did, the income of each of the 109 million households in the bottom 95 percent would have been \$3,660 higher in 2005."

"If this is the ownership society at work," adds Bernstein, "I think we need to have a serious talk with the owners."

That the income gap between the super-rich and the rest of us has been steadily growing for decades is hardly news. But according to the EPI's analysis, the trend has accelerated in recent years, yielding the following facts:

-- The share of national income held by the richest 1 percent doubled, from 9 percent in 1979 to 18 percent in 2005.

-- After-tax income for the poorest 20 percent of U.S. households grew just 6 percent from 1979 to 2005 (a gain of just \$1,800). For the richest 1 percent, it shot up by 228 percent--a gain of \$781,000.

-- Over half of all household income in the U.S. was held by the richest one-fifth of households, the highest such share on record.

And the gap keeps getting wider. According to Bernstein, in 1979, the post-tax income of the top 1 percent was eight times higher than for middle-income families and 23 times higher than for the lowest fifth. In 2005, those ratios grew to 21 (top compared to middle) and 70 (top to bottom).

In other words, even as the economy was growing, only the wealthiest benefited.

"Aggregate household income, according to these CBO data, grew \$1.1 trillion (from) 2003-05," commented Bernstein.

"But, to put it mildly, these gains have failed to flow broadly throughout the income scale, and the extent of their concentration at the top of the income scale is historically unique.

Just under two-thirds (63 percent) of the gain in household income from 2003 to 2005 went to just 5 percent of the nation's wealthiest households."

As the New York Times commented last year--in an article titled "The richest of the rich, proud of a new gilded age"

“Only twice before over the last century has 5 percent of the national income gone to families in the upper 0.01 percent of the income distribution--currently, the almost 15,000 families with incomes of \$9.5 million or more a year...Such concentration at the very top occurred in 1915 and 1916, as the Gilded Age was ending, and again briefly in the late 1920s, before the stock market crash.”

But don't expect any apologies from the rich for their sponging up of all that wealth.

“I think there are people, including myself at certain times in my career, who because of their uniqueness warrant whatever the market will bear,” equity fund manager Leo Hindery bragged to the Times.

Apparently, Hindery's “uniqueness” warrants a whopping \$150 million in assets.

Received:

Re: GI Special: National Guard Edition; “Veterans Know The Truth When They See It”

From: Gene F [Veterans For Peace]
Date: January 12, 2008
To: Dennis Serdel [Veterans For Peace]

Subject: Re: GI Special: National Guard Edition

This issue containing the IVAW [Iraq Veterans Against The War] Sergeant's beliefs is, for this Veteran, the best statement I have seen articulating why this Iraq War is wrong.

His statements are basic moral principles and [he rejects] unethical actions as a consequence of our invasion.

I titled this, 'IVAW Statement of Principles'.

The conclusion I draw is based upon what I learned on my mother's lap - 'better late than never', and 'two wrongs do not make a right.' – we must bring all U.S. military and Contract personal home immediately

Gene F,
VFP, Ch. 50

From: Dennis Serdel
To: Gene F
Sent: Saturday, January 12, 2008
Subject: GI Special: National Guard Edition

Thank You Gene,

It is always good to hear a response from Veterans on my list because Veterans know the truth when they see it.

Thanks Again,
Dennis Serdel
VFP 50

[The National Guard Edition may be seen at:
<http://www.militaryproject.org/docs/vol6/GI%20Special%206A8%20National%20Guard%20Edition.doc> T]

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER

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

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



GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out

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

The following have chosen to post issues; there may be others:

<http://williambowles.info/gispecial/2007/index.html>; <http://www.uruknet.info/?p=>

http://www.traprockpeace.org/gi_special/;
<http://www.albasrah.net/pages/mod.php?header=res1&mod=gis&rep=gis>

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