

GI SPECIAL 6C7:



**“That’s When My Whole
Activism Kicked In,
Because I Started
Realizing What Kind Of
Crap War This Is”**

March 05 The District Weekly, Long Beach [Excerpts]

First Congregational Church of Long Beach will play host Sunday to Iraq veterans eager to talk about the war they saw; a war rife with death, anger, courage and lies.

In anticipation of that event — an Iraq Veterans Against The War fundraiser to send the same vets to speak [at Winter Soldier] in Washington D.C. — we asked several of them to tell us their stories. Here’s what they told us.



[PHOTO by JENNIE WARREN]

Specialist Wendy Barranco, Combat Medic, Army, interviewed by Rachel Powers:

Wendy Barranco was 19 when she served as an anesthesia technician at a Tikrit field hospital — from October 2005 to July 2006. She was just out of high school, like so many of her patients, including the first one she saw die.

Now she is 22, a full-time student and anti-war activist, preparing herself for Sunday's participation in the Winter Soldier fundraiser at the First Congregational Church of Long Beach. The fundraiser will bring together many veterans to speak about what they saw in Iraq in hopes of sending the vets to a similar conference in Washington D.C. later this month (www.ivaw.org/wintersoldier).

Her poise falters occasionally: When describing three badly burned Iraqis, she suddenly stops speaking, pausing for a full 12 seconds to steady herself. And certain aspects of the military experience are so ludicrous as to absolutely require the strongest of obscenities.

With all of this in mind, I thank her for her time and willingness to engage in a conversation that must be very difficult — either because the stories are so gruesome and terrible, or because frequent retellings have rendered the subject so tiresome that she feels as if she's going to go out of her mind if she has to go over it one more time. "Both," she says.

Are there any patients that stand out in your memory?

The first guy I saw die. We were in the emergency room and this guy came in, an American soldier. He was all shot up. And basically he was dead on arrival, but we were trying to resuscitate him so we stuck him on a bunch of lines and tried to pump him full of fluids and stuff, trying to bring him back.

We did CPR and it just wasn't working.

The surgeon, as a last resort, went ahead and cracked his chest open and he started doing heart massage to try to get his heart back. That really doesn't work, but you do that as a last resort, a last ditch effort to bring them back.

He was wearing his flak vest, and there were a couple of bullets in his head and his neck. I think he was ambushed or . . . I don't know. He was just shot up. He essentially bled out. That was the first time I saw somebody get their chest cracked. Eventually it became kind of mundane.

With trauma we do a lot of exploratory laparotomies, which is basically cracking the chest down the mid-line and looking to see if there is any damage. And so in that type of surgery everything is wide-open, cracked-open. When the surgeon told us to get in there and keep massaging the heart after him, it was kind of surreal. I just stuck my hands in there and started doing what I needed to do.

We all knew he wasn't coming back. We were trying to make every effort, and then the surgeon said, "I'm just going to go ahead and call it." That was it. That was when I stopped.

And then we all kind of just walked away.

I took a step back about six or seven feet and looked at his body, and it hit me: This guy is 19 years old, and he's basically a kid. I saw myself on that gurney.

That's when my whole activism kicked in, because I started realizing what kind of crap war this is, and what kind of people it was killing, young men and women, kids, 18, 19, 20 years old.

Did you ever treat any Iraqis?

Oh yeah. We treat everybody: Marines, soldiers, contractors, insurgents, local nationals, a couple of coalition troops.

What sort of injuries did you see with the Iraqis?

With the Iraqis? I've never been asked that. Most of the things that we saw with the Iraqi locals were trauma, things like burns, shots. Three guys that stick out in my mind. They were basically burnt to a crisp. They had nothing done for them, there was no treatment, there was no pain control, there was nothing.

Needless to say, the surgeon was pretty pissed off, because their burns were a week old — the event was a week ago — and the Iraqi hospital took them in and did nothing for them. And now they come and they dump them on our doorstep and then we have to take care of them. The surgeon called in a favor and had them medivaced to a Baghdad hospital with a burn unit. Burn victims need all kinds of specialized care. We don't have that type of facility. It's not like we can send them to Germany.

So the men who had been burned: They were still alive when they came to you?

Oh yeah, very much so. Yeah, that was my turning point. They were Iraqi people and the Iraqi (doctors) had not helped them in the least. No pain control, no irrigation, no scrubbing, no temperature controlled room, nothing, absolutely nothing, not even the most basic care. And then they just house them for a week, just to be able to get that money from the government. And when they don't feel like having them anymore, they put them in the little ambulance, bring them over to us, drop them at the front gate, we get a call to pick them up, and we bring them back.

And everybody's like, "What the fuck? What is this?"

Iraqi hospitals are paid by the US government?

For every patient that they get and that they take in, they get money from the US government because we're trying to, I guess, initiate that drive to help your own kind. The problem is that once they take that patient in, there's nothing that says that they have to treat them properly or efficiently or in a timely manner.

And that wasn't the only case. There was a guy who was dropped off who had a chest tube, but it was on the wrong lung. (Another) guy was 60 or 70, and he had a whole array of problems. He was diabetic, he had GI problems . . . I mean, this guy was just a mess. And this guy got dropped off at our gate by the Iraqi hospital, just left there. We spent about eight hours in the operating room, taking tubes out that they had placed, putting things in where they needed to be, just things like that. There was one guy who was shot in the leg and we had to do numerous surgeries on him, because it kept re-infecting and it just wouldn't heal properly. He was about 10 years old, eight years old, something like that.

How did the Iraqi patients seem to you? What were they like?

Most of them, their demeanor was very calm, cool and collected. It sounds ridiculous, but they were. And it has a lot to do with their culture. They were surrounded by people

they don't know, wearing hats and scrubs, we look completely different, we speak a totally different language.

Most of them were just trying to take it all in, and discern if they were in good hands or not. I do remember one guy with a leg injury who, when we were rolling him in to the operating room, he kept saying, "I love America! I love America!" And looking back on it, I think that was his defense mechanism. He knew what surgery meant with Hussein. With us, I'm sure he was terrified. He knew what had happened to other people, so with him going under and into surgery, I think he was very scared that he might not be coming back.

As for the troops that you saw, did you have any sense of how they felt about the war?

To be honest, the last thing that I had on my mind was asking them, "How do you feel about the war?" They're bleeding out on my table and I'm trying to save them, and to say, "How do you feel about the war?" while I'm pumping away at their chest. . . .

Seeing the type of emotional state that they were in, whether they were completely lacking emotion or just straight-up bawling, like, "Am I going to freaking live? Am I going to lose my leg? Am I going to lose my arm?" To even ask in that moment would be a bit disrespectful.

"I'm blown up here, bleeding out, but you want to talk to me about how I feel about the war?"

So your feelings about the war changed relatively early in your experience?

Yeah, it was kind of a seed that was planted: "Wait a minute, these guys are just like me!"

And then looking at how (the Iraqi) medical system was working, or lack thereof, it was like, "This is ridiculous. This whole little dream that we have of setting up a society, a democratic society, is bullshit." From what I saw of the Iraqi people, our idea of "bettering" them is not the same as their idea of "bettering" themselves.

How are you feeling now? Have you been able to walk away from all of it?

To try and walk away from it is a mistake in and of itself. I've come to terms with the fact that what happened, happened. I'm very proud of the fact that I was there, I'm very proud of the fact that I did something to, in my mind, help humankind, trying to save lives and stuff like that. I go to therapy at the VA. When I came back I thought, "I'm better than that. All this stuff about PTSD and nightmares . . . man, I'm a combat medic. I'm above that." But it's not so. I learned that real quick. But now I've, as cliché as it sounds, "come to terms" with it.

Activism is my therapy, talking about it and letting people know what's going on.

But what helps me the most is just being around other veterans, exchanging stories, just talking about our experiences and just laughing, sometimes even crying, sometimes even just shaking our heads, like "Fuck! The military is just (eaten) up!" (But at first) it just hurt to breathe. And the whole range of emotions inside of me, that I'd been quietly

collecting . . . and I realized, “Shit, this might be a problem.” I’m not incapacitated by it — I know so many people who can’t even sleep, they patrol their own home with their M16, you know? At night, instead of going to sleep, they just walk around with their M16. And they can’t get out of bed in the morning.

So I consider myself to be truly lucky to be where I am today; I didn’t see all the combat stuff and the front line stuff that the other guys saw. That’s why I have so much respect for them. They go through so much, it’s insane. It’s beyond me.

Is there anything else that you would like to tell me?

I’m just trying to get the message out that veterans are here for veterans. That’s all. I’m not here to say, “Go to the VA,” because that blows. I’m not here to say, “The war affected you and so therefore you should be against it.” Veterans are here for veterans.

“My Enlistment Oath Was To Protect And Defend The Constitution That This War Was Violating”

SGT. JASON LEMIEUX, MARINES, AS TOLD TO DAVE WIELENGA

“I got to Marine Corps boot camp in Parris Island, South Carolina, on Sept. 10, 2001. Boot camp is a media blackout so we didn’t realize the gravity of what was going on. The drill instructor told us the country had just been attacked by terrorists. But for all we knew he could have been exaggerating to scare us into submission.

“My first deployment was to Kuwait on Jan. 21, 2003, in preparation for the invasion.

“I was part of a huge boot drop. That’s not official terminology —boot drop — but it’s what they call dropping fresh infantry school graduates straight into combat. Our boot drop comprised 50 percent of the manpower of the unit we were joining.

“Normally they wouldn’t put so many fresh, inexperienced soldiers together in combat, but that’s the way they’re doing it in this war. I invaded Iraq on March 21, 2003, and went all the way to Baghdad. Most of the units we were supposed to attack fled when they found out we were coming. After the invasion we moved down to Karbala, the safest city in the country at the time. We supported the local businesses with our money, and were welcomed for our ability to maintain order. I came home in September.

“My second deployment was to Husaybah, from February to September of 2004. It was a meat grinder, incredibly violent, a whole different world than the Iraq I had left five months before.

“Husaybah was a nightmare. It was a place where human life lost all meaning for most people — American, Iraqi, or otherwise. The only life worth saving was your own.

“Among our forces there was blatant disregard for rules of engagement.

Instead, there was an understanding all along the chain of command that those rules were a formality for the sake of political protection for the people at the highest levels — so they would be able to fall back on those rules and say, ‘Well, he did commit crime X, but we have this rule against it so we’re not to blame.’

My section had a 50 percent attrition rate. We went with 14 Marines and came back to the States with seven.

“Personally, I didn’t agree with the war from the very beginning. I thought it was strategically unwise and legally unjustifiable. It is unconstitutional, and it was very demoralizing to fight an unconstitutional war. It contradicted the whole basis of my service in the Marine Corps.

My enlistment oath was to protect and defend the Constitution that this war was violating.

“But I actually served three deployments to Iraq.

For the third, I voluntarily extended my contract for 10 months.

Why? Most of the combat experience in my unit was leaving at the same time — all those members of that huge boot drop I’d come in with — and it was happening right before a redeployment to Ramadi, the center of gravity for the insurgency.

They were replacing us with another big boot drop — sending new and inexperienced guys to a horrible, dangerous place. I extended my contract to help bring home alive as many of these 18-year-old kids as I could. Looking at those kids, I wondered how I would feel if I was back home — drinking beer, talking to girls — and I got a phone call telling me that so-and-so got killed, I wasn’t there to do something about it.

“How would I be able to look myself in the mirror?”

“They’re Trying To Kill Off Our Generation” **SPEC. EDGAR CUEVAS, ARMY**

By Will Swaim

Edgar Cuevas hated the Iraq war long before he landed in Tikrit where, 24 hours into his first Iraq assignment, he watched medics haul in two soldiers injured in a roadside bombing.

“From the beginning of the war, I was like, ‘Why are we even invading?’ There was no connection between Iraq and 9/11,” Cuevas says.

He grew up in Burbank, joining the Army out of high school, in January 2001. “At that time I didn’t think we’d be in a war, so I thought it was good timing,” he says.

The Army sent Specialist Cuevas to Schweinfurt, with tours in the Balkans — “police actions,” he calls them. “Both the Serbs and Albanians were really happy we were there,” he says. “We helped them and they helped us. Nothing there made me say, ‘I don’t like this, I want to get out.’”

Then, in Nov. 2003, just 12 days from the end of his service, the Army hit Cuevas and thousands of other military men and women with a stop-loss order.

“If you remember the election of 2004, John Kerry was talking about the ‘backdoor draft.’ That’s what happened to me,” Cuevas says. “Days from coming home, my family waiting for me, and all of a sudden they extended my time a year and a half. I had to serve three months of training time before Iraq, one year in Iraq, and three months of reintegration — which is not an easy thing if you’ve seen some of the stuff. . . .”

He’s a funny, open, smart and articulate guy, Cuevas is — he’s going to LA Valley College now — but when the conversation seems likely to lead us toward a bog of dark fact, he doesn’t complete this thought or others.

The Army assigned Cuevas to a base in Tikrit, in March 2004. On his first night there, Cuevas monitored radio traffic. His shift ended at 4 a.m., and he walked toward a phone to call home.

But then the gates swung open and a swirl of activity surrounding two wounded soldiers swept Cuevas toward an aid tent. Medics under lights worked so close to Cuevas that he can tell you in detail about the injured men: Jason Ford was just 19 years old, and he was clearly not going to survive his head wound; 31-year-old Captain John F. Kurth would live the rest of his life a triple amputee if he lived. But both men died there, in front of Cuevas and the others. “Right before breakfast,” Cuevas says without affect. “And then I’m supposed to just go on with my day like . . .”

That day? “Rather traumatizing,” he says with delicacy. “I had to push through all that emotional stuff, set everything aside. As the days went by I continued to push stuff aside, and I just kept doing that until I had almost no feelings.”

Does he have any feelings now?

“The feeling that they’re trying to kill off our generation.”

In Tikrit, Cuevas was a scout — “binoculars, a map, compass, radio and a machine gun mounted on a Humvee. We conducted raids, mounted and foot patrols, checkpoints, gate guard, convoys . . .” He remembers the first time he was shot at. “They were aiming at us, but they weren’t getting anywhere near us. I was a gunner for a truck, and the gun I was firing was a 240 Bravo machine gun — the same rounds as an AK-47.

“I fired that toward a man, but not intending to kill him. I didn’t feel like killing someone. It’s not how I was raised. So I fired just beneath him — just to scare him, you know? It was a two-story building, so I fired underneath, at the building, just enough to kick up debris from the wall. He dropped the weapon and he ran off. He just took off. And I stopped shooting.” “My parents brought me up Catholic,” he says. “Right then I heard my mom saying, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’”

A colleague — raised differently, we might suppose — picked up the man’s abandoned AK and bristled. “Why didn’t you shoot him?” the man asked Cuevas.

“Because he didn’t have a weapon,” Cuevas told him.

He recalls the time “a rocket-propelled grenade flew 16 feet over my head.”

“Jesus,” I say.

“Exactly what I said,” he tells me. “I swore to the whole Holy Family—Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.”

“Comic books kept me sane,” he says. “I’m a big comic-book reader — X-Men, Wolverine, all the Marvel Comics. Those books kept me going,” he says. He’s attracted to the parable in each, the fact that graphic stories parallel real-world events. “If you read the Civil War comics that Marvel published about a year or two ago you would understand some of the problems of the war,” he says—and then he cites issues 42 through 47, and recommends a close reading of “the character known as Wolverine” if you want to “learn about war profiteering.”

He doesn’t say anything about the backstory — that the X-Men are born normal but in teenhood blossom with the blessings and curses of superhuman powers and the almost unbearable responsibility that attends those powers: It may be no accident that Cuevas identifies most with Wolverine, a man of bullish strength and fists that sport adamantium claws whom the Canadian government hoped to transform into a kind of enfleshed weapon.

I ask Cuevas about warnings that an American pullout will lead to a bloodbath. He figures the Iraqis will shoulder the responsibility to create peace if we refuse — as we should — to enforce it.

But if they don’t?

He responds with a kind of dry but patriotic calculation: “If they start shooting each other up, are we going to send more of our people — our men and women — over there to die?”

**“When I Hear People Say That You Shouldn’t
Speak Out Against The War Because It Will
Discourage Our Soldiers, I Find That Insulting; It
Treats Soldiers As If They’re Children”**

SGT. JABBAR MAGRUDER, ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

As told to Steve Lowery

"I joined the Army National Guard in 2000. I was a high school kid who wanted to learn a trade while serving my country. The day of September 11, I called my National Guard unit and asked them, 'Are we going to get involved, are we going to go anywhere?' And they told me, 'We're the National Guard. We don't go anywhere.'

"By 2003 we were told we'd go to Kosovo. Then, in March of 2004, we learned we were going to Iraq. We arrived in January of 2005.

I was stationed in Tikrit. Iraq was essentially in chaos. Explosions were so normal that you got so that you could tell, just by the sound, the difference between an insurgent blast and one where the MPs were doing a controlled blast. It got to a point that we were so jaded that if we heard an explosion our first concern wasn't safety but would they close the chow hall down this time?

"I guess the scariest times for me were whenever we had to go out with a convoy. Those were times when you think, okay, I'm going to have to shoot someone. It was around the time that I was there that one of the specialists embarrassed the Secretary of Defense by asking him why we didn't have the equipment we needed, especially on the troop transports.

So they sent us three-quarter-inch steel plates to put on the trucks. But all that meant is that it would allow us to have open casket funerals. We're still sitting in open trucks with people shooting at you all the time.

"I don't think people here understand what it's like to be occupied.

To be without electricity, to have your house raided.

I use the analogy of telling people to imagine if China invaded Southern California. All those factions in Southern California, racial, gang-related, that hated each other and fought with each other, would all of a sudden direct their attention to the Chinese. That's what it's like in Iraq. We've destabilized it and so it's now a breeding ground for terrorists.

"I began to feel like I'd been lied to once I got there. There were no weapons of mass destruction.

"Yes, Saddam was a bad man, but I didn't have the feeling we were necessarily making things better.

"In the end, I did my job, 12 hours a day, nine straight days with one day off. I did that because I wanted to bring my friends home safely.

"That's why I'm speaking out now.

When I hear people say that you shouldn't speak out against the war because it will discourage our soldiers, I find that insulting; it treats soldiers as if they're children.

They're intelligent people who understand that a nation built on political dissent is supposed to have open discussions.

Soldiers talk about the war. There's as wide a political spectrum in the military as in America. It's the soldiers who bear most of this burden, we need to talk about that burden."

IRAQ VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR ★ IVAW.ORG

On the occasion of the 5th anniversary of the U.S. occupation in Iraq,
Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) presents

Winter Soldier: Iraq & Afghanistan

March 13-16, 2008 - Washington DC

The largest gathering of Iraq Veterans Against the War to date.

Hundreds of members of IVAW will gather at the National Labor College near Washington D.C. from March 13-16, 2008 to disclose the realities of U.S. war policy in a public investigation called Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan. Veterans and civilian survivors of both conflicts will give public testimony and share the eyewitness stories that have been censored from the American public about the true human cost of these occupations.

Continuing a tradition of courage.

Winter soldiers, according to the patriot Thomas Paine, are those who stand up for the soul of their country in its darkest hours. In 1971, a group of courageous Vietnam War veterans held the first Winter Soldier hearing during which they presented public testimony to expose the criminal nature of the war. Now, over 35 years later, another Winter Soldier is needed.

It is our turn to tell our stories.

Americans have heard from the generals, the pundits, and the politicians, but through Winter Soldier they will be able to hear the eyewitness accounts of those who experienced these occupations firsthand.

Soldiers are not criminals. The occupations are criminal.

Contrary to the rhetoric of political and military leaders, wrongdoings in Iraq and Afghanistan are not isolated incidents perpetrated by "bad apples." Throughout the military, from the highest levels of power, servicemen and women are being ordered to do things that violate their consciences and the rules of war.

Leaders need to be held accountable.

We repeatedly see lower enlisted soldiers getting punished for bad policy. Winter Soldier will place the blame of atrocious U.S. war policy where it belongs: on our political leaders. Our voices will come together to destroy the myth that individual soldiers are to blame.

What you can do to support Winter Soldier:

- Fundraise by collecting donations or hosting events.
- Encourage and sponsor GIs and veterans in your area to attend Winter Soldier and speak out about their experiences.
- Organize community forums to view live feed coverage of the Winter Soldier hearings from March 13-16, 2008.
- Send letters to the editor to your local newspapers explaining why Winter Soldier is important to you.

For more information, and ways you can help, visit www.ivaw.org/wintersoldier.

Ft. Lewis: “Active-Duty Soldiers Joined A Crowd Of Nearly 100 Antiwar Activists”



March 7, 2008 Socialist Worker

In Seattle, more than 25 active-duty soldiers joined a crowd of nearly 100 antiwar activists at a concert dubbed “Soldier, You Are Not Alone.”

IVAW [Iraq Veterans Against The War] members from four Washington State chapters organized the event. Soldiers who had come but were not already against the war took the opportunity to talk about their experiences with IVAW members and other antiwar activists. One active-duty soldier joined the IVAW on the spot.

Musical guests set the stage for great discussions with their songs about the Iraq war, soldiers' resistance and the history of U.S. militarism.

The concert capped a week of outreach to soldiers at Fort Lewis.

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

U.S. Soldier Killed In Diyala, Another Wounded

3.7.08 Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory RELEASE No. 20080308-01

TIKRIT, Iraq – One Multi-National Division - North Soldier was killed from injuries sustained from an explosion while conducting operations in Diyala March 7.

One MND-N Soldier was injured during the attack and evacuated to a Coalition forces hospital.

THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO COMPREHENSIBLE REASON TO BE IN THIS EXTREMELY HIGH RISK LOCATION AT THIS TIME, EXCEPT THAT A PACK OF TRAITORS IN D.C. WANT YOU THERE
That is not a good enough reason.



A US soldier at the area damaged by an explosion at a checkpoint in Baghdad.
(AFP/Sabah Arar)

Orrick Man Among Those Recently Killed In Iraq

February 13, 2008 Kansas City Star

A soldier with ties to the area was one of four killed in Iraq last week when their vehicle rolled over an improvised explosive.

Staff Sgt. Jerald A. Whisenhunt, 32, died Feb. 8 in Taji, Iraq.

Whisenhunt's home town was Orrick, according to the Department of Defense. Whisenhunt, who was married, joined the army in 2000 and was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, Schofield Barracks in Hawaii.

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Foreign Occupation Soldier Killed, Another Wounded In Paktia; Nationality Not Announced

March 8 (Xinhua)

One soldier of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was killed and another one was injured by roadside bombing in eastern Afghan province of Paktia province on Saturday, said an ISAF statement.

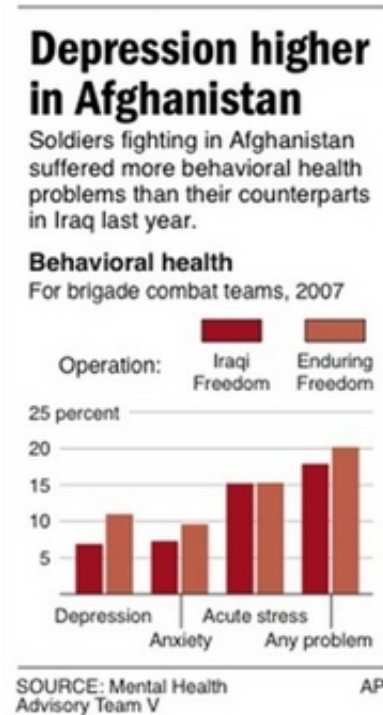
"An ISAF routine patrol hit an improvised explosive device in Waza Khwa district of Paktia province," the statement said.

Two ISAF soldiers were wounded and one of the two soldiers died of wounds sustained from the explosion, it added.

In accordance with ISAF policy, ISAF does not release the casualty's nationality prior to the relevant national authority doing so.

<p>IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE END THE OCCUPATION</p>

No Comment Necessary



TROOP NEWS

War Profiteer Kellogg Brown & Root Supplied Water That Made U.S. Troops in Iraq Sick; “Soldiers Experienced Skin Abscesses, Cellulitis, Skin Infections, Diarrhea And Other Illnesses”

Mar 9, 2008 By LARRY MARGASAK, AP

Dozens of U.S. troops in Iraq fell sick at bases using “unmonitored and potentially unsafe” water supplied by the military and a contractor once owned by Vice President Dick Cheney's former company, the Pentagon's internal watchdog says.

A report obtained by The Associated Press said soldiers experienced skin abscesses, cellulitis, skin infections, diarrhea and other illnesses after using discolored, smelly water for personal hygiene and laundry at five U.S. military sites in Iraq.

The Pentagon's inspector general found water quality problems between March 2004 and February 2006 at three sites run by contractor KBR Inc., and between January 2004 and December 2006 at two military-operated locations.

Water used for hygiene and laundry must meet minimum safety standards under military regulations because of the potential for harmful exposure through the eyes, nose, mouth, cuts and wounds.

MORE:

War Profiteer Kellogg Brown & Root Claimed To Be A Foreign Corporation To Avoid Paying U.S. Taxes And Fuck Employees Out Of Unemployment Benefits

[Thanks to SSG N (ret'd) who sent this in.]

March 7, 2008 By Farah Stockman, The Boston Globe [Excerpts]

CAYMAN ISLANDS

Kellogg Brown & Root, the nation's top Iraq war contractor and until last year a subsidiary of Halliburton Corp., has avoided paying hundreds of millions of dollars in federal Medicare and Social Security taxes by hiring workers through shell companies based in this tropical tax haven.

More than 21,000 people working for KBR in Iraq - including about 10,500 Americans - are listed as employees of two companies that exist in a computer file on the fourth floor of a building on a palm-studded boulevard in the Caribbean. Neither company has an office or phone number in the Cayman Islands.

The Defense Department has known since at least 2004 that KBR was avoiding taxes by declaring its American workers as employees of Cayman Islands shell companies, and officials said the move allowed KBR to perform the work more cheaply, saving Defense Department dollars.

But the use of the loophole results in a significantly greater loss of revenue to the government as a whole, particularly to the Social Security and Medicare trust funds, and the creation of shell companies in places such as the Cayman Islands to avoid taxes has long been attacked by members of Congress.

With an estimated \$16 billion in contracts, KBR is by far the largest contractor in Iraq. It has eight times the work of its nearest competitor.

The no-bid contract it received in 2002 to rebuild Iraq's oil infrastructure and a multibillion-dollar contract to provide support services to troops have long drawn scrutiny because Vice President Dick Cheney was Halliburton's chief executive from 1995 until he joined the Republican ticket with President Bush in 2000.

Social Security and Medicare taxes amount to 15.3 percent of each employees' salary, split evenly between the worker and the employer. While KBR's use of the shell companies saves workers their half of the taxes, it deprives them of future retirement benefits.

The practice also enables KBR to avoid paying unemployment taxes in Texas, where the company is registered, amounting to between \$20 and \$559 per American employee per year, depending on the company's rate of turnover.

As a result, workers hired through the Cayman Islands companies cannot receive unemployment assistance should they lose their jobs.

In interviews with more than a dozen KBR workers registered through the Cayman Islands companies, most said they did not realize that they had been employed by a foreign firm until they arrived in Iraq or until they returned home and applied for unemployment benefits.

"They never explained it to us," said Arthur Faust, 57, who got a job loading convoys in Iraq in 2004 after putting his resume on KBRcareers.com and going to orientation with KBR officials in Houston.

But there is one circumstance in which KBR does claim the workers as its own: when it comes to receiving the legal immunity extended to employers working in Iraq.

In one previously unreported case, a group of Service Employees International workers accused KBR of knowingly exposing them to cancer-causing chemicals at an Iraqi water treatment plant. Under the Defense Base Act of 1941, a federal workers' compensation law, employers working with the military have immunity in most cases from such employee lawsuits.

So when KBR lawyers argued that the workers were KBR employees, lawyers for the men objected; the case remains in arbitration.

"When it benefits them, KBR takes the position that these men really are employees," said Michael Doyle, the lawyer for nine American men who were allegedly exposed to the dangerous chemicals. "You don't get to take both positions."

KBR declined to release salary information. Workers interviewed who served in a range of jobs said they earned between \$48,000 and \$85,000 per year.

If KBR's American workers averaged even as much as \$63,000 per year, they and KBR would have owed more than \$100 million per year in Social Security and Medicare taxes, split evenly between them. Over the course of the five-year war, their tax bill would have been more than \$500 million.

In 2004, auditors with the Pentagon's Defense Contract Audit Agency questioned KBR about the two Cayman Islands companies but ultimately made no complaint.

In Your Ear? Iraq & Afghan Combat Troops Suffering Epidemic Of Hearing Loss



Dr. Michael Hoffer, a Navy captain and an inner-ear specialist, talks about some of the causes of hearing loss at Balboa Navy Medical Center, San Diego, Feb. 6, 2008. Many soldiers and Marines returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are suffering from noise-induced hearing loss, a condition audiological specialists now consider an 'epidemic' within the military. (AP Photo/Denis Poroy)

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

March 8, 2008 The Associated Press

U.S. soldiers and Marines caught in roadside bombings and firefights in Iraq and Afghanistan are coming home in epidemic numbers with permanent hearing loss and ringing in their ears, prompting the military to redouble its efforts to protect the troops from noise.

Nearly 70,000 of the more than 1.3 million troops who have served in the two war zones are collecting disability for tinnitus, a potentially debilitating ringing in the ears, and more than 58,000 are on disability for hearing loss, the VA said.

One major explanation given is the insurgency's use of a fearsome weapon the Pentagon did not fully anticipate: powerful roadside bombs. Their blasts cause violent changes in air pressure that can rupture the eardrum and break bones inside the ear.

Also, much of the fighting consists of ambushes, bombings and firefights, which come suddenly and unexpectedly, giving soldiers no time to use their military-issued hearing protection.

"They can't say, 'Wait a minute, let me put my earplugs in,'" said Dr. Michael E. Hoffer, a Navy captain and one of the country's leading inner-ear specialists. "They are in the fight of their lives."

In addition, some servicemen on patrol refuse to wear earplugs for fear of dulling their senses and missing sounds that can make the difference between life and death, Hoffer and others said. Others were not given earplugs or did not take them along when they were sent into the war zone.

And some Marines were not told how to use their specialized earplugs and inserted them incorrectly.

For former Staff Sgt. Ryan Kelly, 27, of Austin, Texas, the noise of war is still with him more than four years after the simultaneous explosion of three roadside bombs near Baghdad.

"It's funny, you know. When it happened, I didn't feel my leg gone. What I remember was my ears ringing," said Kelly, whose leg was blown off below the knee in 2003. Today, his leg has been replaced with a prosthetic, but his ears are still ringing.

"It is constantly there," he said. "It constantly reminds me of getting hit. I don't want to sit here and think about getting blown up all the time. But that's what it does."

Sixty percent of U.S. personnel exposed to blasts suffer from permanent hearing loss, and 49 percent also suffer from tinnitus, according to military audiology reports.

There is no known cure for tinnitus or hearing loss.

The number of servicemen and servicewomen on disability because of hearing damage is expected to grow 18 percent a year, with payments totaling \$1.1 billion annually by 2011, according to an analysis of VA data by the American Tinnitus Association. Anyone with at least a 10 percent loss in hearing qualifies for disability.

Some Marines were issued a \$7.40 pair of double-sided earplugs, with one side designed to protect from weapons fire and explosions, the other from aircraft and tank noise.

But the Marines were not given instructions in how to use the earplugs, and some cut them in half, while others used the wrong sides, making the devices virtually useless, Hoffer said.

In any case, hearing protection has its limits. While damage can occur at 80 to 85 decibels - the noise level of a moving tank - the best protection cuts that by only 20 to 25 decibels.

That is not enough to protect the ears against an explosion or a firefight, which can range upwards of 183 decibels, said Dr. Ben Balough, a Navy captain and chairman of otolaryngology at the Balboa Navy Medical Center in San Diego.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. Oh had I the ability, and could reach the nation's ear, I would, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. Frederick Douglas, 1852

**"What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms."
Thomas Jefferson to William Stephens Smith, 1787.**

**"The mighty are only mighty because we are on our knees. Let us rise!"
-- Camille Desmoulins**

**"When someone says my son died fighting for his country, I say, "No, the suicide bomber who killed my son died fighting for his country."
-- Father of American Soldier Chase Beattie, KIA in Iraq**

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**

Building Armed Forces Resistance: “Only The Fear Of Mass Action By Enlisted Men And Women Can Prevent Retaliation” “Veteran And Civilian Support Is Imperative”

By Jonathan W. Hutto, Sr. GIvoice.org.

Navy Petty Officer Jonathan Hutto is a founding member of Appeal for Redress. He can be contacted at antiwarsoldier@fourthfreedom.org. This is an excerpt from *Anti-War Soldier: How to Dissent Within the Ranks of the Military*, forthcoming from Nation Books.

On November 9, 1969, The New York Times published an open appeal by 1,365 active-duty service members calling for an end to the Vietnam War and for no punishment for participating in the historic Vietnam Moratorium march.

The petition of these soldiers, representing 80 bases and ships throughout the world, had a huge impact and helped establish the (limited) civil liberties and rights GIs have today.

The members of the GI Movement risked their careers and personal security by signing this petition and participating in subsequent actions.

One of those signers was David Cortright, who went on to write *Soldiers in Revolt*, the definitive 1975 chronicle of the GI Movement. He was part of an activist group of GIs at Fort Hamilton, New York.

Thirty-five of the 60 personnel in his company signed the petition and several traveled to Washington, D.C. for the historic march.

I contacted David to arrange for a community meeting with some of my civilian and active-duty colleagues in June 2006 in Norfolk, Virginia. Its success led us to ponder whether something similar could be organized around the Iraq War. We wanted to build a movement where service members could express their dissent in a legal, constructive way. I began researching the rights and responsibilities of active-duty service members. The most comprehensive source I found was the website for the Central Committee for

Conscientious Objectors (CCCO), which was very helpful in determining the limits for GIs in petitioning their government for redress of grievances.

I also found an old leaflet from the Military Project, an organization based out of New York, which seeks to educate active-duty service members about their civil liberties and constitutional rights.

The leaflet had several DOD directives that listed limited rights to express dissent:

DOD Directive 7050.6: Military Whistle-blower Protection Act

This Act is the foundation for the Appeal For Redress, our organization. It establishes that every soldier can communicate individually with a member of Congress and Inspector General (IG) without reprisal. Punishment constitutes a violation of Article 92 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, Failure to Obey Order or Regulation. Once a reprisal is initiated, the soldier can file a complaint with an IG and seek redress from his Commanding Officer (CO). If the CO fails to provide it, the military member has the right to file an Article 138 complaint against the CO seeking redress and restoration to the member of any rights, privileges, property or status to which the member would have been entitled had the wrong not occurred.

Guidelines for Handling Dissident and Protest Activities Among Members of the Armed Forces:

This directive explained how to conduct the redress campaign.

Distributing newspapers and/or publications: Soldiers can distribute newspapers—even ones critical of government—at official outlets on base such as post exchanges and military libraries.

Publication of Underground Newspapers: A member of the military may write for an underground publication if it is done off duty and on nonmilitary equipment. Articles in the publication may not contain slanderous language that is punishable under federal law.

Participation in political demonstrations: Soldiers can participate in political demonstrations while off base, off duty, in the United States, out of uniform and not acting on behalf of the military. Military members cannot attend demonstrations where violence is likely to occur.

DOD directive 1344.10: Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces on Active Duty:

Military members:

- may express their personal views on political and social issues.
- may make monetary contributions to a political organization.
- may attend political meetings, rallies, or conventions when not in uniform.
- may write a letter to a newspaper editor expressing personal views on public issues.

- are prohibited from making a contribution to and soliciting or receiving a contribution from another member of the armed forces or a civilian officer or employee of the United States to promote a political cause, including a political campaign.
- are prohibited from using contemptuous words against officeholders and government officials.

DOD Directive 1354.01:

DOD Policy on Organizations That Seek to Represent or Organize Members of the Armed Forces in Negotiation or Collective Bargaining

Military members may:

- join or maintain membership in any lawful organization or association not constituting a “military labor organization.”
- present grievances concerning the terms or conditions of the service of such member in accordance with established military procedures.
- petition the Congress for redress of grievances.

The Strom Thurmond Anti-Union Law

In 1976 the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) was considering a union drive in the military. The drive was based on the recent GI Movement and the American Service Members Union (ASU), the first attempt to organize a service members union within the United States.

At its height in 1970 the ASU had 15,000 members. Although it had all but disappeared by 1973, with GI activists being discharged and transferred in the thousands, the ASU was a bold example of the political potential of lower-ranking GIs (it was solely for lower-level troops).

Strom Thurmond led the charge to outlaw unionization and organizing within the military when he introduced S. 3079 during the 94th Congress. Before the bill was signed, the military made it law in October of 1977 through the establishment of DOD Directive 1354.1, prohibiting all forms of “collective job-related action” within the ranks and banning union solicitation on base. The directive prohibits soldiers from joining, maintaining or soliciting membership in a labor organization and from striking.

The Appeal for Redress, however, has shown that active-duty troops can express themselves legally to the government and civil society at large. Using the limited rights we have under the Military Whistle-blower Protection Act and DoD regulations, we mobilized more than 2,000 U.S. military members in 10 countries to send appeals to their congressional members to end the Iraq War.

But there are limitations to our work.

Commanders do not legally have to recognize active-duty organizations. Many soldiers are unaware of their political options. Most fear potential reprisals for speaking out. Not breaking any laws does not prevent retaliation by the brass.

Only the fear of mass action by enlisted men and women can prevent retaliation.

The Appeal for Redress is a model for a successful GI movement for the 21st century. Human Rights training in boot camp and the support of the veteran/civilian community are key to success.

Human rights training in boot camp. Boot camp is where service members must receive a firm grounding on all of their rights and responsibilities.

They must be educated about their rights under Article 138 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice and their right to seek out an IG to correct misconduct by the chain of command and to appeal to higher authority if the wrong has not been addressed. These complaints are sent to the General Court-Martial Convening Authority, comprised of general and/or flag officers.

Unlike Equal Opportunity advisors, IGs are independent of the command structure, DoD civilians mandated by federal law to investigate and report to commanders on mission performance, discipline, efficiency and the morale of the armed forces. They do not have the authority to correct the wrong, but their findings carry weight with commanders.

Veteran and civilian support is imperative.

The appeal's success was largely due to the support of major veteran peace organizations, which formed a task force that supported the troops in terms of supplies, contacts, legal support and overall coordination.

Civilian activists and community organizers were also instrumental.

The Military Project, a civilian organization in New York City, provided key support in their publications.

It is my hope that with the support of these peace activists, the appeal will develop into a permanent active-duty support network.

This network must work with influential, established nongovernmental organizations and members of Congress. Organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and Amnesty International USA (AI) can be effective in helping GIs maintain, enhance, and become educated about their civil liberties.

The ACLU can help publish manuals that educate GIs on their rights; the NAACP can help organize hearings with the Congressional Black Caucus addressing the surge in Nazis and white supremacists joining the military. Former California Congressman Ron Dellums used his position on the House Armed Services Committee to investigate racism and other misconduct within the military in the wake of hate crimes committed by troops in the early nineties.

This type of advocacy is needed today from Congress. AI can help the GI movement by challenging the unionization ban using the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). Countries such as South Africa, Belgium and Australia grant their troops unionization rights.

The history of social justice movements demonstrates that when all legal means are exhausted, those seeking relief will use unsanctioned strategies if the government fails to act.

During the struggle for the abolition of slavery in the 1800s, the denial of Dred Scott's human rights in 1857 led to John Brown's raid in 1859.

During the Vietnam era, the brutality of Chicago's police against antiwar demonstrators in 1968 led to a mass movement against the war. The Appeal For Redress gives our leaders the platform to address the concerns of GIs before they lose faith in their government.

OCCUPATION REPORT

U.S. OCCUPATION RECRUITING DRIVE IN HIGH GEAR; RECRUITING FOR THE ARMED RESISTANCE THAT IS



Iraqi citizens inspect damage done to their homes during an overnight US troops raid in northeastern Baghdad, Feb. 11, 2008. US troops raided a mosque and nearby houses and arrested 26 people, police said. (AP Photo/Karim Kadim)

[Fair is fair. Let's bring 150,000 Iraqi troops over here to the USA. They can kill people at checkpoints, bust into their houses with force and violence, butcher their families, overthrow the government, put a new one in office they like better

and call it “sovereign,” and “detain” anybody who doesn’t like it in some prison without any charges being filed against them, or any trial.]

[Those Iraqis are sure a bunch of backward primitives. They actually resent this help, have the absurd notion that it’s bad their country is occupied by a foreign military dictatorship, and consider it their patriotic duty to fight and kill the soldiers sent to grab their country.

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

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

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

**FIGHT THEM HERE, SO YOU WON’T
HAVE TO FIGHT FOR THEM OVER
THERE**

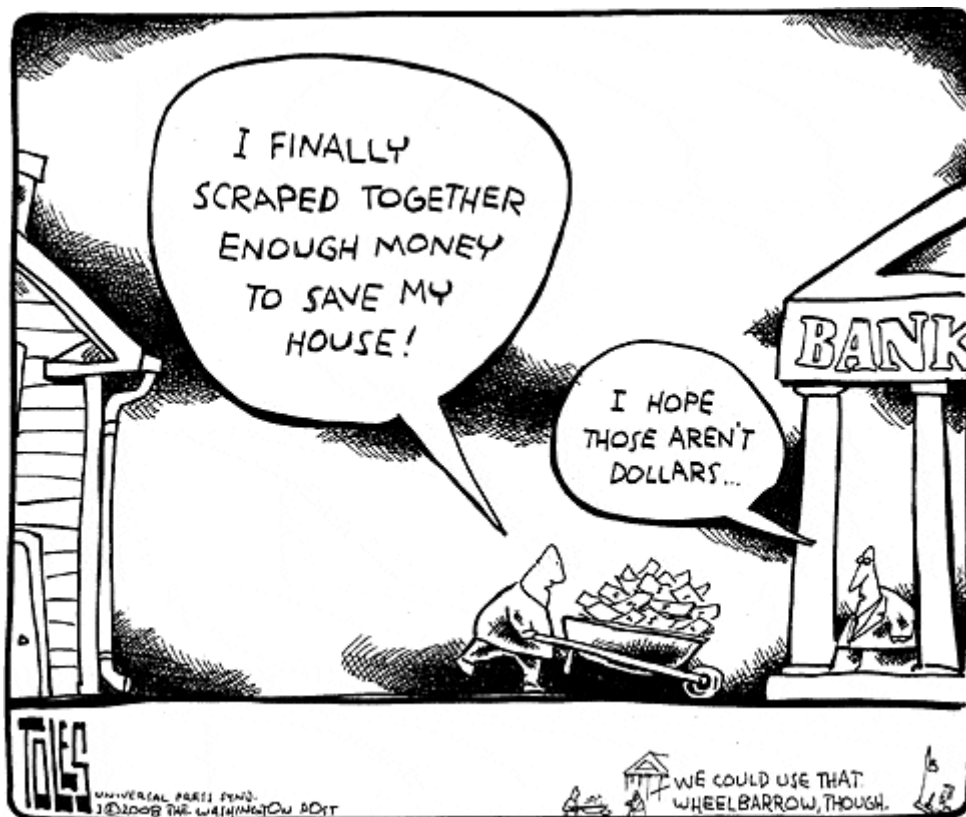


The traitor Bush meets with the former commanding general of the Multinational Corps in Iraq, Odious Odierno, March 3, 2008, in the White House. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak)

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



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=6&l=e>; http://www.traprockpeace.org/gi_special/;
<http://www.albasrah.net/pages/mod.php?header=res1&mod=gis&rep=gis>

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