

GI SPECIAL 6E9:

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



A U.S. soldier wounded by a roadside explosion is rushed to a helicopter at the military base in Chercook neighbourhood, Baghdad's Khadamiya district, May 11, 2008.
REUTERS/Oleg Popov

**“Yes, The Chain Of
Command Deserves To
Burn In Hell”**

“Why Would These Elite American Soldiers Kill An Unarmed Prisoner?”

The Answer: “Pressure From Their Commanding Officers To Pump Up A Statistic Straight Out Of America’s Last Long War Against An Intractable Insurgency”

“The Young Snipers Were Pushed By Officers To Stretch The Bounds Of The Laws Of War In Order To Increase The Enemy Body Count”

When those decisions landed them in a military court, it was the lowest-ranking soldiers, not the brass, who paid the price, and a sergeant who said he was pushed into taking a fatal shot who wound up with a long prison sentence.

It was battalion commander Lt. Col Robert Balcavage, who pushed for a higher body count, who initiated the prosecution of three of the battalion’s snipers.

May. 09, 2008 By Mark Benjamin and Christopher Weaver, Salon.com

Genei Nesir Khudair al-Janabi, an Iraqi vegetable farmer, walked down to the ramshackle pump house along the banks of the Euphrates. Each day at midmorning, he would start the seven-horsepower pump to water his crops.

Khudair passed through the tall grass and palm trees of his farm in Jurf as Sakhr, a predominantly Sunni area 30 miles south of Baghdad dominated by sprawling patches of farmland, irrigation canals and regular eruptions of lethal violence. Daytime temperatures had lately been over 115 degrees, and it was already sweltering as he crossed the 500 meters for the last time.

As Khudair approached the pump house on May 11, 2007, he stumbled upon a team of five sweat-soaked U.S. Army snipers, dazed with heat and fatigue, hidden in the grass of a small hill. It’s hard to say who was more surprised, the Iraqi or the American troops. The sniper on guard at the “hide” was so shocked to see Khudair wander up to his

position that he froze for a moment, staring. Then he approached Khudair and pointed a 9 mm pistol at the farmer's head.

Meanwhile, Khudair's 17-year-old son, Mustafa, was at the family home when he learned that a cousin had been killed in an accident. Mustafa hurried from the house to find his father in the fields and tell him the horrible news.

But as Mustafa approached, an American sniper popped out of the brush and waved him closer. Struck with fear, he entered the snipers' hide to find his father, alive, face down on a patch of dirt with the corner of a plastic Army poncho over his head. Two soldiers were standing over him. They forced Mustafa to lie down, with his head close to his father's in an "L" on the ground, and then pulled the corner of the poncho over his head too.

A half-hour passed. Khudair complained about the heat. The soldiers suddenly hoisted Mustafa up and signaled that he was free to go, but his father was still on the ground under the poncho. As he left the hide, Mustafa motioned toward Khudair and tried, in broken English, to tell the Americans who their prisoner was: "Father, father."

Mustafa had just gotten back to the family home, 15 minutes later, when he heard two gunshots.

Three snipers with exemplary military records from the 1st Battalion of the 25th Infantry Division's 501st Regiment were charged in Khudair's killing. They were tried by the military judicial system in Iraq beginning in 2007.

But the most important question raised by his death remains unanswered. Why would these elite American soldiers kill an unarmed prisoner in cold blood?

The answer: pressure from their commanding officers to pump up a statistic straight out of America's last long war against an intractable insurgency.

A review of thousands of pages of documents from the legal proceedings obtained by Salon shows that in the months prior to Khudair's death, the young snipers, already frustrated by guerrilla tactics, were pressed to their physical limits and pushed by officers to stretch the bounds of the laws of war in order to increase the enemy body count.

When the United States wallowed in Vietnam's counterinsurgency quagmire decades ago, the same pressure placed on soldiers resulted in some of the worst atrocities of that war. A paratrooper who remembered the insidious influence of body counts in Vietnam warned Salon in 2005 that the practice could also ensnare good soldiers in Iraq. "The problem is that in Iraq, we are in a guerrilla war," said Dennis Stout. "How do you keep score? How do you prove you are winning?"

The pressure from above for more bodies was also toxic in Iraq, where the isolated, outnumbered and outgunned snipers of the 1st Battalion had to make split-second life-or-death decisions.

When those decisions landed them in a military court, it was the lowest-ranking soldiers, not the brass, who paid the price, and a sergeant who said he was pushed into taking a fatal shot who wound up with a long prison sentence.

It was battalion commander Lt. Col Robert Balcavage, who pushed for a higher body count, who initiated the prosecution of three of the battalion's snipers.

"Yes, the chain of command deserves to burn in hell," one sniper who served with the unit wrote Salon in an e-mail.

"But I am not going on record saying that, well, cause I am still in the fucking Army."

The body-count pressure on the 1st Battalion's sniper section began to build in early 2007.

In an insurgency like Vietnam or Iraq, it's hard to point to achievement of a military objective or conquest of a town or region as success. Instead, commanders find themselves relying on numbers, which is how body counts began to creep into the Iraq war, despite their explicit disavowal by former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in 2003 ("We don't do body counts").

In need of a positive metric, commanders of the 1st Battalion reached for body counts, since the metrics they did have were moving in the wrong direction.

At the time, U.S. casualties from invisible roadside bombs were mounting. In the six months before the snipers arrived in country from Alaska in late October 2006, 426 U.S. service members had died in Iraq. In the six months between the 1st Battalion's arrival and the day Khudair was killed, May 11, 2007, nearly 590 service members died in Iraq.

It was one of the bloodiest periods of the Iraq war. At the time there was a new commander in Iraq, Gen. David Petraeus, who was talking about winning hearts and minds. The snipers' commanders were talking about bodies.

The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Balcavage, and top noncommissioned officer Command Sgt. Maj. Bernie Knight sent a clear message to the battalion's snipers. Spc. Alexander Flores, a sniper, described it this way in a hearing: "Get more bodies. Raise the morale of the battalion."

The résumé of Staff Sgt. Mike Hensley made the battalion leadership think he would be the leader who could produce the bodies. It wasn't just that during a previous tour in Afghanistan, he refused to leave his unit despite contracting malaria, or that in Iraq he insisted on inspecting bridges personally for road bombs to keep his soldiers out of harm's way, though that helped. He combined that commitment to the mission and to his men with a reputation for lethality. He was a competition-winning sniper. "The rest of the sniper section love Staff Sgt. Hensley," Sgt. Alexander Anuschat, a sniper who reported to Hensley, would later testify. "He was the perfect man for the job."

Officers hand-picked Hensley to lead the sniper section in early 2007. Hensley immediately suggested beefing up his new section from seven to 13 snipers, that in the field would operate in teams of about six men per mission. The men Hensley commanded also included Sgt. Evan Vela, Spc. Jorge Sandoval, Pvt. David Petta and Spc. Alexander Flores. Vela was a father of two from Idaho, married to his high school sweetheart. Sandoval, of Laredo, Texas, had never seen snow before being stationed in

Fort Richardson in Alaska prior to Iraq. Petta and Flores would later start the investigation of the sniper section's actions by reporting questionable shootings to their commanding officers.

Officers were pleased when, under Hensley's lead, the snipers started racking up kills. But soon, the snipers were pushing the envelope.

The decision of when to shoot and when not to shoot is often vexing for snipers, but following the rules of engagement became still more difficult for the snipers after commanding officers encouraged a loose interpretation of the rules to increase the likelihood of a kill.

The Law of Armed Conflict requires soldiers to identify "hostile intent" before pulling the trigger. "You have to decide if the individual you are looking at is a combatant or a civilian," explained Scott Silliman, executive director of the Center on Law, Ethics and National Security at Duke Law. "You must conclude that the individual is a combatant."

There is no requirement that a target be armed, but he can't be hors de combat -- injured, surrendering or detained.

The nature of guerrilla warfare makes it difficult, however, to nail down exactly what that means on the battlefield. Lt. Matthew Didier, the officer directly in charge of the snipers, offered a tautology in one hearing late last year, explaining that the snipers could shoot if they had "reasonable certainty that the military target is, in fact, a military target."

Knight, the senior noncommissioned officer in the battalion, told Army investigators who later looked into the killing of unarmed Iraqis that the snipers were instructed that they could fire when they had "reasonable certainty that someone is committing acts of violence against coalition forces or Iraqis."

The snipers remained nervous because, at best, the guidelines they were getting from their commanders were nebulous. The snipers felt they were being pressured to interpret "hostile intent" loosely to justify kills.

During testimony, sniper Spc. Joshua Michaud said that Lt. Col. Balcavage and Command Sgt. Maj. Knight "constantly pushed for 'If you feel threatened, you know, obviously eliminate the threat.' But they kind of said it in a manner in which a lot of us took it like, 'Hey, you need to go out there and you guys gotta start getting kills.'"

At worst, the rules explicitly allowed the killing of unarmed Iraqis under certain circumstances, a particularly dicey concept given an enemy that does not wear a uniform and hides among civilians.

Specifically, the snipers were allowed to shoot unarmed people running away from explosions or firefights.

The chain of command was particularly frustrated by insurgents fleeing after attacks from roadside bombs, called improvised explosive devices. The notes from Army agents who later investigated the shootings said the battalion leaders, Balcavage and Knight, worried that the snipers had "let a lot of guys go after IED explosions." The snipers called these fleeing, sometimes unarmed Iraqis "squirters."

Of course, it's not unusual for innocent people to run from explosions.

Didier, who has since been promoted to captain, said that “if that individual makes contact with you and then breaks contact of their own accord and disarms themselves while they are breaking contact, they are still an engageable target because they are not wounded, nor did they surrender.” He explained, “They are only breaking contact so that they can engage coalition forces at a later time.” In court, Sgt. Anthony Murphy, one of the snipers who was responsible for a questionable kill, testified that he interpreted this order about breaking contact so they can engage at a later time as: “Engage fleeing local nationals without weapons.”

In addition to the vague rules of engagement and pressure to boost the body count, a furtive Pentagon unit, the Asymmetric Warfare Group, further blurred the soldiers' perceptions of what was acceptable. The covert program run by the Pentagon and supported by another “government agency” supplied the snipers with materiel to place on the battlefield, like explosives and ammunition, that might interest insurgents.

The Washington Post reported in September 2007 that the items were part of a “baiting” program and that the purpose was to shoot Iraqis who picked them up. Pulling the trigger, however, was never part of the operation, according to testimony and people with knowledge of the program.

The idea of “baiting,” or putting out items and shooting Iraqis who picked up the materiel, was actually developed at the platoon level, according to the testimony of Didier, the officer in charge of the platoon. It is unclear if the tactic was ever used in the field.

Only a handful of the snipers were informed of the materiel's real purpose, which remains secret but has nothing to do with shooting people on sight. Because equipment was distributed equally among their packs, some soldiers who were not aware of the materiel's purpose were still forced to lug it. Soon, confused about the extra equipment's true purpose, they were imagining other explanations, and their confusion seems to have contributed to their willingness to bend the rules of engagement.

The two snipers who eventually alerted authorities to the questionable kills and spurred an investigation believed the items were “drop weapons” to be placed on unarmed Iraqis after an illegal kill.

The killing of Genei Nesir Khudair al-Janabi took place on May 11, and it was the final kill for which snipers were prosecuted. But Khudair was, in fact, at least the fourth unarmed Iraqi the snipers had killed in the short time since Hensley took over leadership of the sniper section in March 2007. Each incident illustrates the ways in which the rules of engagement, the pressure to produce, the mysterious extra equipment, and the inherent difficulties of their jobs landed the snipers in court.

The first incident occurred on April 7, 2007. Sgt. Anthony Murphy's sniper team was hiding in a shallow ravine. Through his rifle scope, Murphy watched a lone Iraqi man approaching through some bushes, his figure distorted by a heat mirage. The man appeared and then disappeared again, winding through nearby ravines. Soon, he was 50 meters away and Murphy was sure the man had spotted the team's satellite communications gear through the brush.

In sniper talk, they had been “compromised.” Being compromised, or seen while on a mission, was particularly chilling, especially in areas where there had been significant insurgent activity. Three days earlier, a seemingly innocent goatherd had spotted one of the sniper teams in the same location. Within minutes, mortars were raining down on them.

Even a handful of insurgents could easily overrun one of the small, autonomous sniper teams. “They are all around us,” Murphy said during a court hearing. “We are put into their environment, their backyard.”

On April 7, even after the Iraqi man had apparently seen the snipers’ gear, he continued to move forward, alarming Murphy. “When people see us, they freak out,” Murphy explained in a hearing. “They leave. They get scared. They stop. They start screaming.” This Iraqi kept moving closer.

Murphy could see through the bushes that the man also had something in his hands, he just couldn’t make out what it was. Murphy did not wait to find out. He pulled the trigger, killing the man with one bullet.

When it turned out that the Iraqi was carrying a 3-foot piece of pipe, the snipers got nervous. Murphy later testified that Sgt. 1st Class Steven Kipling worried that higher-ups might question the legitimacy of the shooting and asked Murphy if they should place a weapon on the body to make him look “more guilty.” Murphy refused. “I did the right thing,” he said, and then cited the rules of engagement. “Hostile intent. Hostile act. End.”

Murphy’s aggressive commanders agreed. Notes from Army special agents who later investigated the snipers show the chain of command had looked into the April 7 shooting and “concluded Sgt. Murphy correctly determined hostile intent and engaged the individual with a single shot.”

The words “hostile intent” would show up again and again in thousands of pages of sworn testimony about the incidents that were reviewed by Salon.

In such a dangerous area, seeing an Iraqi eyeing U.S. troops with binoculars, or just digging a ditch, was enough to create a belief in “hostile intent.” On April 14, a sniper team was monitoring a power substation when Hensley, the sniper section leader, told other snipers that he had spotted an Iraqi man who appeared to be laying command wire for a roadside bomb. But Hensley couldn’t get in a clean shot and lost sight of the man.

A little before 5 p.m. Hensley received an order to keep an eye on a nearby house while incoming infantry troops performed a search there. According to the notes of Army investigators, this irritated Hensley, who asked for two volunteers. Hensley, Pvt. David Petta and Sgt. Richard Hand walked directly down a road toward the home.

Hand and Petta flanked Hensley as they approached the house. There were women and children outside and an unarmed Iraqi man, Mutham Nia Hussein Alwan, working on a water pump.

At about 120 meters away, Hensley said, "That's the guy." Hand and Petta split off to the left. According to the investigating agents' notes, when the snipers were 50 meters away from the house, a little more than half a football field, Hensley raised his weapon, then lowered it. They continued to close in.

Then a single shot rang out from Hensley's M14 sniper rifle. At that moment, Sgt. Hand's weapon was trained on one of the women. "As soon as the shot happened, she became hysterical," Hand would later testify. "She started going crazy. I mean, obviously, somebody she loved or cared for had just died. She became my No. 1 priority, because I was afraid I was going to have to shoot her."

The body was later tested with EXPRAY, a field test kit used to detect explosives. It came up positive. But there is some evidence that Hensley might have been worried that the chain of command would still balk at the kill. Kipling testified that earlier that day he had found a length of detonation wire, balled it up, and given it to Hensley to bring back to base. A balled-up section of detonation wire was found on the body. Kipling said in court that he was "80 percent sure" the wire on the body was the same wire he had given Hensley. If Kipling is to be believed, the snipers had moved from merely talking about "drop weapons" to using them.

Two weeks later, on April 27, the loose rules for shooting unarmed, fleeing Iraqis -- "squirters" -- contributed to a death. Didier, the snipers' immediate superior officer, radioed to Hensley that a squirter was headed his way.

An Iraqi army unit was investigating a weapons cache site when they were attacked by two insurgents dressed in dark track suits who quickly broke contact and fled east. Didier had set up Hensley and other snipers a half-mile in that direction. He radioed Hensley and described the two men en route.

A half-hour later, Hensley replied that he had "got eyes on" a man who fit that description moving east, according to hearing transcripts. "(Hensley) said (the man) was no longer armed. But he asked if he could still engage the individual," Didier recalled. "I said yes, based on the current ROE, he could."

The sniper team was hidden in a 3-foot-deep dry creek bed. Hensley and another sniper, Spc. Jorge Sandoval, watched through some trees as a man in dark clothing walked into an olive grove, squatted and began cutting the knee-high grass with a sickle. Hensley told Sandoval to grab his weapon and the two men moved 150 to 200 meters south along the creek bed to the edge of the tree line that had been blocking their shot.

Even from the new position, 200 meters away, only the man's head appeared intermittently in Sandoval's rifle scope through the tall grass. Hensley asked Sandoval if he had the shot. Sandoval stood to get a better angle. Hensley asked twice more. The third time, Sandoval fired. He quickly chambered another round, but Hensley told him he wouldn't need it.

Sandoval drew his sidearm as the two snipers approached the body. The man had been shot in the head. Other snipers from the team approached as well and recognized the Iraqi as a man they had detained and released just days earlier. "You could tell by some of his face that was left," Michaud, one of the other snipers there that day, said in a hearing.

As shocking as it might seem to shoot an unarmed Iraqi cutting grass, many times the snipers had seen insurgents feign farming or other harmless activity after attacking U.S. troops. Michaud said in one hearing that “they’ll run and pick up some farm equipment, or they might run to their house and start working on their vehicle, or they basically try to do anything they can to throw you off to make you think that, ‘Hey I was not part of that.’”

Even though the snipers had seen squirts’ tricks before -- and this shot had been approved by Didier -- Hensley and Sandoval apparently worried officers would not see the April 27 shooting as a clean kill. Sandoval testified that when he and Hensley first stood over the mutilated corpse, Hensley handed him command wire and told him to put it next to the body.

The snipers, however, did not use the Pentagon’s secret equipment as drop weapons. The use of drop weapons by Hensley was freelance. The presence of the unexplained equipment, however, may have encouraged the belief among soldiers that drop weapons were acceptable.

If drop weapons were standard operating procedure, where was the line between right and wrong?

The events leading to the killing of Genei Nesir Khudair al-Janabi began three days earlier, on May 8. The snipers awoke at 4 a.m. to begin preparations for a mission that night. The team finally left Patrol Base Jurf at 11:30 p.m., bearing packs that weighed more than 100 pounds. They moved slowly through the night to avoid detection. It took them 90 minutes to travel three miles. The snipers finally reached their “hide” at 4 a.m.

They spent the next day hidden in reeds by a canal, while the temperature climbed past 115. That afternoon, Murphy drank 12 quarts of water in six hours and still needed two IVs. He checked his pulse and counted 120 beats per minute. “Once you feel like you are cooking inside, your heart begins to race,” he later testified.

The snipers stayed in position until 8 p.m. that night. For part of the march back to the patrol base, the snipers joined an infantry company headed in the same direction. One soldier from the company who was not even carrying a rucksack passed out from heat exhaustion. Medics gave him three IVs when the men reached the base at 11:30.

The snipers ate, debriefed and changed their clothes. Some got a few hours of sleep. Hand, who had been awake for 45 hours, testified that he slept from 3 a.m. to 7 a.m. then “scrounged together enough coffee” to have a cup.

The snipers spent a restless, sleep-deprived May 10 cleaning equipment and preparing for the next mission outside the wire, scheduled for that night. “In terms of the patrol base,” Hand testified, “you really can’t sleep, there is too much movement, too much noise and there is no shade unless you make some.”

Murphy, still recovering from the previous day’s dehydration, told Hensley, the leader of the sniper section, he could not make that night’s mission. Another sniper, Sgt. Robert Redfern, volunteered to take Murphy’s place.

Murphy, whom Vela later described as “like a brother to me,” saw Vela just before the mission. Vela was readying his gear. He looked drained. Murphy asked Vela, “Are you good, man?”

Hensley, Vela, Sandoval, Hand and Redfern left Patrol Base Jurf at around 10 p.m. and arrived at their “hide” at 2 a.m. on the morning of May 11. The hide was a grassy hill next to a run-down pump house on the banks of the Euphrates. An infantry company soon began raiding a nearby house in a futile effort to locate insurgent rockets.

In the field, snipers sleep in shifts, or “rest cycles,” with one man keeping guard while the others try to rest. By 10 a.m. the next morning, the guard on duty was Vela.

Vela testified that he remembered looking over a nearby berm and then in another direction at some children playing a few hundred meters away. When he turned back around toward the berm, Khudair, the vegetable farmer, “was just there.”

Vela froze. Sandoval, who had been woken by the sound of the Iraqi’s approach, motioned toward Vela’s gun. Taking the signal, Vela pointed the 9 mm pistol at the farmer’s face.

Sandoval woke up Redfern. Redfern and Vela waved the Iraqi into the hide, forced him down on his stomach and put the corner of the plastic poncho over his head. Vela stood over the man with the pistol, while Redfern ran his hands over Khudair’s shoulders, arms, sides, back and chest in a cursory search. No weapons.

Vela woke Hensley and told him an unarmed Iraqi was in the hide. Hensley stood up, walked over to the Iraqi -- and from a standing position dropped a knee into his back with the full force of his body.

Khudair threw his head back, gasping for wind. “Staff Sgt. Hensley grabbed him by the mouth,” Vela testified, “and told him to shut up or he was going to kill him.”

Hensley wrapped parachute cord around the Iraqi’s hands and Redfern dragged him deeper into the snipers’ hide. At this point, Redfern spotted a boy approaching and waved him into the hide site as well. The snipers put him on his stomach, so the two Iraqis formed an L-shape on the ground with both of their heads under the corner of the poncho.

Hensley then dispatched Sandoval and Redfern to the pump house, 15 to 20 meters away, to provide security. Vela handed his pistol to Sandoval, who was armed with a bolt-action rifle that could only hold five rounds without reloading.

Vela said Hensley sat down on the berm for a moment. He then got up and radioed their superior officer, Didier. Hensley reported that he had spotted an Iraqi nearby armed with an AK-47. But Vela couldn’t see anyone who matched that description. Vela alerted Hand, who was fading in and out of sleep on a nearby berm, that Hensley “might have seen something.” Then Hensley ordered Vela to retrieve his pistol from Sandoval in the pump house.

A half-hour after the 17-year-old Iraqi boy entered the hide, Sandoval and Redfern saw him pass by their position in the pump house as he walked home. Thinking that both

Iraqis had been released, Sandoval peered around the pump house wall to look into the hide. Khudair was still there. Vela was sitting on his rear, with one leg cocked up and an elbow resting on his knee, holding the pistol in one hand.

Inside the hide, Hensley radioed Didier a second time, saying an insurgent was moving closer to their position. Hensley asked permission to do a "close kill" to avoid being compromised.

Vela then looked around, but still didn't see any armed insurgent. "I was just really confused about what he was saying," Vela testified.

Hensley untied the Iraqi. "I thought we were going to let him go," Vela told the Army court.

"Are you ready?" Hensley allegedly asked Vela.

Hensley stepped aside. "Shoot," he said.

Vela claimed during testimony that he doesn't remember pulling the trigger. "It took me a second to realize that the shot had come from the pistol and it was in my hand."

Hensley radioed to Didier that the snipers had killed an insurgent. Meanwhile, the Iraqi's body convulsed. Hensley "kind of laughed" at the spectacle, according to Vela. Hensley then " (punched) the guy in the throat, and said, 'Shoot him again,' which I did."

Vela testified that after he shot the man for the second time, Hensley pulled an AK-47 out of his rucksack and placed it on the body. The snipers then agreed on a story about the shooting consistent with Hensley's radio calls.

Murphy, the soldier who had stayed behind because of dehydration, was sitting on a Humvee when the snipers trailed back into Patrol Base Jurf. The men were so soaked with sweat that Murphy thought they had waded through a canal.

"Hey, what's up, man?" Murphy asked Vela. But Vela just walked past his friend in silence. In testimony Murphy described Vela as "detached, somber, serious."

In late June 2007, less than two months after Khudair's death, Flores and Petta informed military authorities that the sniper section might be using drop weapons. That led to investigation of the circumstances of several of the unit's kills, which led in turn to the arrest of Sandoval, Hensley and Vela.

Sandoval was charged with murder for the deaths on April 27 and May 11, but convicted only of planting command wire in connection with the April 27 killing. He served about a month and a half in prison.

The Army charged Hensley with three murders for the shootings of April 14, April 27 and May 11. He was convicted of planting a weapon, for placing the AK-47 next to Khudair, and insubordination. He was sentenced to time served and busted down to sergeant.

On February 10, 2008, however, Vela was sentenced to 10 years in a military prison for the murder of Khudair.

Top battalion leaders, who had to sign off on the charges, have faced no serious questions about whether their demand for more bodies, their vague rules of engagement or the confusion sown by the secret program might have contributed to the events of spring 2007.

U.S. Army Alaska spokesman Lt. Col. Jonathan Allen said Balcavage and Knight were unavailable for an interview.

Hand, one of the snipers in the hide on May 11, later testified that he believes his “main responsibility is to take care of my subordinates.”

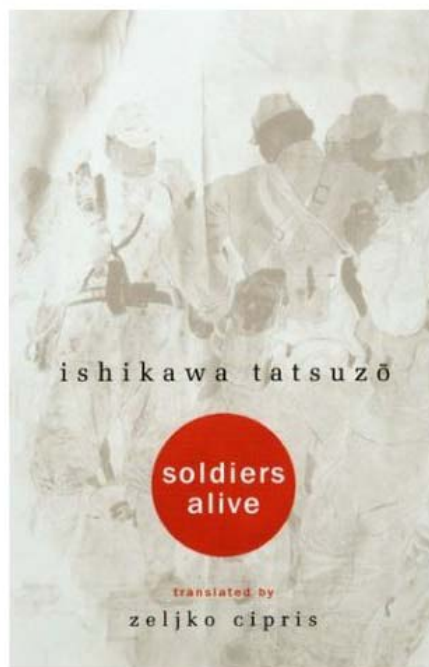
But the battalion leaders, he said, “have been very lax in their care of anybody except themselves.”

“If you have never been outside the wire, you really have no basis (to judge),” said Hand. “You’ve never been in a life-or-death situation where you have had to count on the guy to your left and right ... You see stuff out there that no one back here is going to see.”

Hensley, meanwhile, is back on active duty.

Now a sergeant, he is stationed in Georgia, where he is an instructor for Army Rangers.

Ishikawa and Kuroshima would understand: insert troops into a hell on earth and there’s no way to prevent atrocities. Yet the real fiends in their capital suites are never spattered with a single drop of blood. Solidarity, Z



IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Baghdad IED Kills U.S. Soldier

May 12, 2008 Multi National Corps Iraq Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory RELEASE
No. 20080512-02

BAGHDAD – A Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldier was killed after being struck by an improvised explosive device during a route clearance patrol at approximately 9:20 p.m. May 11 in northwestern Baghdad .

The Soldier was quickly transported to the medical facility where he later died of his wounds.

Baghdad IED Kills U.S. Soldier

May 13, 2008 Multi National Corps Iraq Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory RELEASE
No. 20080513-07

BAGHDAD – A Multi-National Division – Baghdad Soldier was killed when his vehicle was struck by an improvised explosive device in northwestern Baghdad at approximately 7 p.m. May 13.

Son Of Casper Man Dies In Iraq

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

May 7, 2008 Christine Robinson, Star-Tribune staff writer

An Arizona resident with Casper ties died Friday in Baghdad of wounds when a road-side explosive detonated near his vehicle, the U.S. Department of Defense announced earlier this week.

Army Pvt. Corey L. Hicks, 22, was an outgoing, talkative man whose job in the Army was to shoot road-side bombs, his stepfather, Timothy Settle, said from his home in Arizona.

He joined the Army less than a year ago, ready to fulfill a dream, Settle said.

“We talked to his commanding officer and he told us that the day he died he personally destroyed five IED’s himself,” Settle said. “That means he saved up to 40 lives, since each one kills about four or five people.”

Settle said he and Hicks' mother, Dawn Settle, spoke with Hicks nearly everyday and Hicks loved his job in Iraq.

Hicks spent most of his life in Arizona, and graduated from Cortez High School in north Pheonix, Ariz., in 2004.

Hicks' father, Russel Hicks, moved to Casper in 2003, and said his son loved the friendliness of people here.

His father described Corey Hicks as a young man with a "passion for animals, the rodeo and outside activities."

"He loved horses, and there were a couple that were his favorite," Russel Hicks said. "One that his godparents had in Montana, Smoky, and one that was mine in Arizona called Country."

Corey Hicks surprised his father with a visit after Christmas, and Russel Hicks said they made plans for future visits to go hunting and fishing.

"He wanted to serve his country," Russel Hicks said. "I am extremely proud of him."

The last time Russel Hicks said he spoke to his son was on the Wednesday before he was killed. He said Corey Hicks had just gotten back from a mission where he and the other soldiers took and returned gun fire.

Corey Hicks was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 66th Armor Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, Fort Hood, Texas.

Soldier's Sacrifice Hits Close To Home

May 7, 2008 By TAMARIA L. KULEMEKA, The Eagle-Gazette Staff

CARROLL - James Kimple often walked the halls of Bloom-Carroll High School carrying a novel.

Kimple was an avid reader. He often read books - hidden within schoolbooks - during class.

He could've become anything he wanted to, one teacher said.

Kimple died doing something he longed to do since he was 16 years old. "He was very bright. He could've gone on to school and did any profession, but he wanted to pursue the military," said Jan Hodge, a vocational teacher whose class Kimple enrolled. "It's something he talked about a lot."

The 21-year-old U.S. Marine lance corporal was killed Saturday in combat.

Kimple is the second Fairfield County resident to be killed in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Dustin Derga of Pickerington died May 8, 2005. Derga, 24, a Marine corporal, died of injuries from small arms fire during combat operations in Ubaydi, Iraq.

Kimple served with the 1st Marine Logistics Group CLB1 Security Company and was stationed out of Camp Pendleton, Calif. He was serving a second tour in Iraq.

He is survived by his wife, Amber, of Amanda, and three children.

Kimple's family released a statement Tuesday expressing their gratitude for the support of friends, neighbors and the country. "The family of Lance Corporal James F. Kimple on behalf of his wife, children and parents are sad to say James died but are relieved to say he did so doing what he loved to do - serving his family and his country as one of the few, the proud, the Marines," the statement read.

Flags have flown at half-staff in Carroll, Kimple's hometown, since Saturday and probably will remain that way for at least 30 days, said Mayor Charles O'Hare.

"The untimely passing of (Kimple) saddens me," O'Hare said. "Anytime the community loses a young man or woman in the line of duty, their passing is a tragic loss to their family and the community. Their passing leaves a void that cannot be filled."

O'Hare said he personally didn't know Kimple but had seen him around town as a young man.

Carroll Clerk-Treasurer Mary Dawson remembers the youthful Kimple well. She said Kimple lived next door to her when he was a child.

"All I remember was a really good kid," Dawson said. "He helped my husband time and time again with anything like lifting, digging or anything else. James was just right there to help. He was a polite, good-acting kid. He was extra special to us."

Students and staff in Bloom-Carroll Local Schools paused for a moment of silence Tuesday morning to honor Kimple, a member of the Bloom-Carroll High School class of 2005.

"It's not fair sometimes what happens," said Janine Sieger, a teacher's aide at Carroll Elementary School.

Sieger spent a lot of time at the high school and knew Kimple. "He was very handsome, a nice-looking guy," she said. "He was ornery, but a good ornery. He was always respectful to me, and he was just a fun-loving student. He's going to be sadly missed."

Bloom-Carroll Superintendent Roger Mace said Kimple always had a smile on his face and a book in his hand each time he saw the teen in the hallways.

"He loved to read novels, and he just took a lot of pride in being a father and loved his kids," Mace said. "It's just a sad situation. It's wonderful we have people like him who do what they do and give us the freedoms we do have."

Hodge said it was difficult to chastise Kimple for preferring to read his intellectual novels as opposed to his textbooks. "It wasn't like he was reading Hot Wheels or Sports Illustrated," Hodge said.

Kimple - determined to join the military - left high school during his senior year. He earned a GED and joined the U.S. Marine Corps, Hodge said.

"He was a smart man. He just didn't care for school," she said. "He wanted to learn things that were going to benefit him - things he would use for life, and he would rather be out working or going into the military."

Hodge, who teaches occupational work experience, said that's one of the reasons Kimple took her class. "James was pretty sure he didn't want to go to college so he chose this program to get him ready for the real world," she said.

Hodge, who's worked in the district for 30 years, said Kimple often visited the high school while on military leave. He always was dressed in uniform and eager to share how much he enjoyed being a U.S. Marine.

The last time Kimple visited Hodge was in November.

"I was so proud of him because I knew he'd be successful at whatever he chose," she said. "He was very proud of what he'd accomplished. Before he was a boy, a high school kid. But now you could see he was a young man."

BEEN ON THE JOB TOO LONG: COME ON HOME, NOW



3.17.08: US soldiers rest on a car during an operation in Diyala Province, northeast of Baghdad. (AFP/David Furst)

**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/)

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

N.M. Soldier Killed In Afghanistan

05/09/2008 The Associated Press

FARMINGTON, N.M.—While on leave from his first tour of duty in the Middle East, Army Staff Sgt. Kevin Casey Roberts told those at home about building a playground at an Iraqi orphanage and receiving a warm welcome from several Iraqi citizens. “A lot of people were happy,” Roberts said in a 2004 interview with The Daily Times. “They would shake your hand and the kids would give you hugs. These were good signs we were there.”

Roberts, 25, was one of two Fort Campbell soldiers killed by a roadside bomb on Wednesday in Afghanistan’s Sabari District, according to the Department of Defense. The other soldier was identified as Spc. Jeremy R. Gullett, 22, of Greenup, Ky.

Both were assigned to the 101st Airborne Division’s Fourth Brigade Combat Team at Fort Campbell, a sprawling Army post on the Kentucky-Tennessee line. They were the first from the 101st Airborne Division to die in Afghanistan.

After his first tour, Roberts—who went by his middle name—returned home for a year before being deployed to Iraq for another tour. In March, the former volunteer firefighter was deployed to Afghanistan.

Born in Farmington, Roberts graduated from Farmington High School in 2000 and entered the Army in November 2001. He arrived at Fort Campbell in April 2002.

Roberts left his volunteer post with the San Juan County Fire Department to enlist following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

“I was serving my community and I felt I served my community the best I could, so I thought now I’ll serve my country,” Roberts told the Daily Times in 2004.

He is survived by his wife, Donnice; son, Keeghan; and daughter Caehlen all of Fort Campbell; his parents, Milton Clayton and Gerri Roberts; and brothers Curby and Jerry all of Farmington.

Services will be held in Shelbyville, Texas, with interment to follow at Hamilton Cemetery. A memorial service also was being planned in Farmington.

Including Roberts and Gullett, a total of 36 soldiers from Fort Campbell have died in the latest deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Since the war started, 237 soldiers from the post have been killed.

TROOP NEWS

“Their Mission Now, They Said, Was To Get Their Military Compatriots Home”

“I Am More Proud To Be In This Fight,” She Continued, As Members Of The Audience Began To Clap, “Than Anything I Did In The Army”



April 9, 2008 By DREW HARWELL, Alligator Staff Writer

Just a few years back, Clifton Hicks was an M1 Abrams tank operator almost 7,000 miles away in Iraq. As an active Army squad member, he'd seen buildings packed with families crumbled and burned. Watched women and children bleed and die. Killed insurgents and civilians alike.

Now 23 years old and back living stateside, Hicks attests that he is a changed man - yet the regret, he said, still remains.

Hicks' stories, along with the testimonies of five other Iraq war veterans, were shared Tuesday night with a group of almost 200 people who attended the local "Winter Soldier, Iraq at UF" event at the Presbyterian and Disciples of Christ Student Center across from the UF campus.

The event coincided with Tuesday's U.S. Senate interviews of head commander Gen. David Petraeus, who recommended that consideration of new American troops withdrawals from Iraq be delayed.

The Gainesville panel, organized by the Iraq Veterans Against the War, Gainesville Veterans for Peace, and a few student groups, was inspired by the Vietnam War-era protest of the same name. Last month, Iraq Veterans Against the War organized a similar national protest just outside of Washington, D.C., that drew several hundred U.S. veterans and allowed them to share their own horrors of the Iraq war in hopes of bringing an end to the fighting.

Many of the stories Tuesday night were harrowing and gruesome. Hicks told of a unit firing wantonly into a wedding party. Former Marine Jorge Alvarez told of civilian casualties and suicide bombers. Zollie Goodman, a former aircraft carrier worker, described the smell of burning flesh and the sight of dead bodies left to rot in the street.

"When you're in Iraq," said former infantryman Micah Goulet, "it's almost like you're in another world. You think very carnally. Brutally."

Yet the veterans agreed that they hadn't come to gross out listeners or to point fingers at wrongdoers.

Their mission now, they said, was to get their military compatriots home.

"We're here because we care about the guys that are still over there," Hicks said. "We're here because we want to bring them home."

But even outside of the battlefield, the veterans said, the dangers to the troops remain.

Hicks spoke of soldiers both in Iraq and back in America beginning to use ecstasy, heroin and prescription drugs to pass the time and block out bad memories. Goodman spoke of the "broken, underfunded and understaffed" Veterans Affairs hospitals that reportedly prescribed unregulated treatments and overlooked soldier suicides.

Maggie Martin, a five-year sergeant in the Army and the panel's only woman, told of the military's lack of concern for troops' families and personal relationships.

“They just think soldiers’ families are a burden to the mission,” she said. “But this is their lives.”

“I am more proud to be in this fight,” she continued, as members of the audience began to clap, “than anything I did in the Army.”



Iraq war veteran Maggie Martin speaks Tuesday night about invading a factory during her deployment at the Presbyterian Disciples of Christ Student Center during “Winter Soldier, Iraq at UF.” (Nicole Safker / Alligator Staff)

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. Phone: 917.677.8057

British Soldiers ‘Too Poor To Buy Their Own Food’

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

May 11, 2008 Daily Mail

Soldiers are being issued with food vouchers because they cannot afford to eat, an army report has revealed.

The new Pay As You Dine (PAYD) system has been blamed for the crisis by army chief of staff Gen Sir Richard Dannatt.

Under the new system, soldiers not on active duty pay for each meal they eat in the mess rather than a flat rate for all their food.

This had led to some soldiers running out of money for meals towards the end of the month, prompting the 'hungry soldier' voucher schemes.

Some soldiers are said to be living close to the poverty line and poor pay has forced out many who cannot afford to raise a family on army wages, the report adds.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Resistance Action

May 12, 2008 By STEPHEN FARRELL and AMMAR KARIM & By MICHAEL R. GORDON and STEPHEN FARRELL, The New York Times Company & AP & May 13 (Reuters)

In Baghdad's Sadr City district an Iraqi armored unit was struck by three roadside bombs on Sunday. Three Iraqi soldiers were wounded by the blasts, including the Iraqi colonel, who strode through a rubble-strewn street with a bandage on his left leg.

Along Al Quds Street there was no break in the fighting. An Iraqi soldier was wounded by a sniper near one forward position. A rocket-propelled grenade was fired at a different Iraqi strongpoint that is jointly operated with the Americans. There were loud explosions as American "route clearance" teams found and detonated roadside bombs.

A roadside bomb killed five Iraqi soldiers and one civilian when it exploded near an army patrol in southwestern Mosul, police and hospital sources said.

A roadside bomb attack on a police patrol killed one policeman and wounded three others on Monday near Mahmudiya, 30 km (20 miles) south of Baghdad, police said.

Guerrillas killed an army officer, Brigadier-General Nibras Fadhil Abbas, in a drive-by shooting on Monday in Nisoor square in central Baghdad, police said.

At a Patrol base an Iraqi soldier was seriously injured by a sniper shot on Monday.

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

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

May 13, 1968: Heroic Anniversary The French General Strike Begins



“We Are The Power”

Carl Bunin Peace History May 7-13

Workers joined Paris students' protest, launching a general strike calling for the fall of the government and protesting police brutality.

The protest by French students included occupation of The Sorbonne; by the end of the month over 10,000,000 had been involved in school and workplace occupations.

**“Hezbollah Now Effectively Controls
Beirut”**

**“A Fresh Reminder Of The Ascendancy
In The Region Of Groups The U.S. And
Its Western Allies Have Tried, Without
Success, To Marginalize”**

May 10, 2008 By Nada Raad and Farnaz Fassihi, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
[Excerpts]

The lightning takeover of streets and neighborhoods appeared to take Western powers by surprise.

The raids served as a fresh reminder of the ascendancy in the region of groups the U.S. and its Western allies have tried, without success, to marginalize.

Washington has designated Hezbollah a terrorist organization, though the group is seen as a legitimate political party by many in the region. Lebanon's opposition is also backed by Syria, another U.S. opponent.

In the past few years, the influence of traditional regional players like Saudi Arabia and outside powers such as the U.S. has been waning. Islamist groups, such as Hamas, and Shiite Muslim parties, such as Hezbollah, have gained support and have flexed their muscles.

Moderate Sunni Arab leaders, including Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Lebanon's Mr. Siniora, have appeared weak and cornered.

Hezbollah now effectively controls Beirut. But the group appeared more eager to send a message than to seize and hold all of the territory it swept through Friday.

"It turned out that Hezbollah has a lot more power than the government coalition.

There wasn't even a contest," says Rami Khouri, a political analyst in Beirut.

**“The Poor, The So-Called Poor,
Have Only One Choice: To Resist
Or To Succumb”**

**“And People Believe That Faced With
Extermination They Have The Right
To Fight Back”**

“By Any Means Necessary”

Perhaps they wonder how they can go on hunger strike when they're already starving. How they can boycott foreign goods when they have no money to buy any goods.

How they can refuse to pay taxes when they have no earnings.

Excerpts from a speech by ARUNDHATI ROY; International Socialist Review March–April 2008

This article was delivered as a lecture in Istanbul on January 18, 2008, to commemorate the first anniversary of the assassination of Hrant Dink, editor of the Turkish-Armenian paper Agos.

Last summer, I happened to wander into a cool room in which four beautiful young girls with straightened hair and porcelain skin were lounging, introducing their puppies to one another.

One of them turned to me and said, “I was on holiday with my family and I found an old essay of yours about dams and stuff? I was asking my brother if he knew about what a bad time these Dalits and Adivasis were having, being displaced and all.... I mean just being kicked out of their homes ‘n’ stuff like that? And you know, my brother’s such a jerk, he said they’re the ones who are holding India back.

“They should be exterminated. Can you imagine?”

The trouble is, I could. I can.

The puppies were sweet. I wondered whether dogs could ever imagine exterminating each other. They’re probably not progressive enough.

That evening, I watched Amitabh Bachhan (another) Bollywood superstar, heartthrob of millions) on TV, appearing in a commercial for the Times of India’s “India Poised” campaign. The TV anchor introducing the campaign said it was meant to inspire people to leave behind the “constraining ghosts of the past.” To choose optimism over pessimism.

“There are two Indias in this country,” Amitabh Bachhan said, in his famous baritone:

One India is straining at the leash, eager to spring forth and live up to all the adjectives that the world has been recently showering upon us. The Other India is the leash.

One India says, “Give me a chance and I’ll prove myself.” The Other India says, “Prove yourself first, and maybe then, you’ll have a chance.”

One India lives in the optimism of our hearts. The Other India lurks in the skepticism of our minds.

One India wants, the Other India hopes.

One India leads, the Other India follows.

These conversions are on the rise. With each passing day, more and more people from the Other India are coming over to this side. And quietly, while the world is not looking, a pulsating, dynamic new India is emerging.

And finally:

Now in our sixtieth year as a free nation, the ride has brought us to the edge of time's great precipice. And one India, a tiny little voice in the back of the head, is looking down at the bottom of the ravine and hesitating. The Other India is looking up at the sky and saying, "It's time to fly."

Here is the counterfeit universe laid bare. It tells us that the rich don't have a choice (There Is No Alternative) but the poor do. They can choose to become rich.

If they don't, it's because they are choosing pessimism over optimism, hesitation over confidence, want over hope.

In other words, they're choosing to be poor. It's their fault. They are weak. (And we know what the seekers of lebensraum think of the weak.)

They are the "Constraining Ghost of the Past."

They're already ghosts.

"Within an ongoing counterfeit universe," Robert Jay Lifton says, "genocide becomes easy, almost natural."

The poor, the so-called poor, have only one choice: To resist or to succumb.

Bachhan is right: they are crossing over, quietly, while the world's not looking. Not to where he thinks, but across another ravine, to another side.

The side of armed struggle.

From there they look back at the Tsars of Development and mimic their regretful slogan: "There Is No Alternative."

They have watched the great Gandhian peoples' movements being reduced and humiliated, floundering in the quagmire of court cases, hunger strikes, and counter-hunger strikes.

Perhaps these many million Constraining Ghosts of the Past wonder what advice Gandhi would have given the Indians of the Americas, the slaves of Africa, the Tasmanians, the Hereros, the Hottentots, the Armenians, the Jews of Germany, the Muslims of Gujarat?

Perhaps they wonder how they can go on hunger strike when they're already starving.

How they can boycott foreign goods when they have no money to buy any goods.

How they can refuse to pay taxes when they have no earnings.

People who have taken to arms have done it with full knowledge of what the consequences of that decision will be.

They have done so knowing that they are on their own.

They know that the new laws of the land criminalize the poor and conflate resistance with terrorism.

They know that appeals to conscience, liberal morality, and sympathetic press coverage will not help them now.

They know no international marches, no globalized dissent, no famous writers will be around when the bullets fly.

Hundreds of thousands have broken faith with the institutions of India's democracy.

Large swathes of the country have fallen out of the government's control. (At last count it was supposed to be 25 percent.)

The battle stinks of death. It's by no means pretty. How can it be when the helmsman of the army of Constraining Ghosts is the ghost of Chairman Mao himself?

Are they Idealists fighting for a Better World? Well...anything is better than annihilation.

The prime minister has declared that the Maoist resistance is the "Single largest Internal Security threat." There have even been appeals to call out the army. The media is agog with breathless condemnation.

Here's a typical newspaper report. Nothing out of the ordinary. "Stamp Out the Naxals," it is called.

This government is at last showing some sense in tackling Naxalism. Less than a month ago Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asked state governments to "choke" Naxal infrastructure and "cripple" their activities through a dedicated force to eliminate the "virus." It signaled a realization that Naxalism must be eliminated through enforcement of law, rather than wasteful expense on development.

"Choke." "Cripple." "Virus." "Infested." "Eliminate."

Yes. The idea of extermination is in the air.

And people believe that faced with extermination they have the right to fight back.

By any means necessary.

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. Phone: 917.677.8057

OCCUPATION REPORT

FIVE YEARS AND \$50 BILLION LATER, U.S. TRAINED IRAQI SOLDIERS IN ACTION FOR BUSH AND THE EMPIRE



Iraqi army soldiers battle Mahdi Army militia in Baghdad's neighbourhood of Shulla May 13, 2008. REUTERS/Oleg Popov

MORE:

FIVE YEARS AND \$0 LATER, NATIONALIST, ANTI-OCCUPATION MAHDI ARMY SOLDIERS NOT TRAINED BY U.S. IN ACTION AGAINST BUSH AND THE EMPIRE



Mahdi Army militiamen in action in Sadr City, Baghdad, Wednesday, April 9, 2008. (AP Photo)

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



CLASS WAR REPORTS



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