

## GI SPECIAL 6/13:

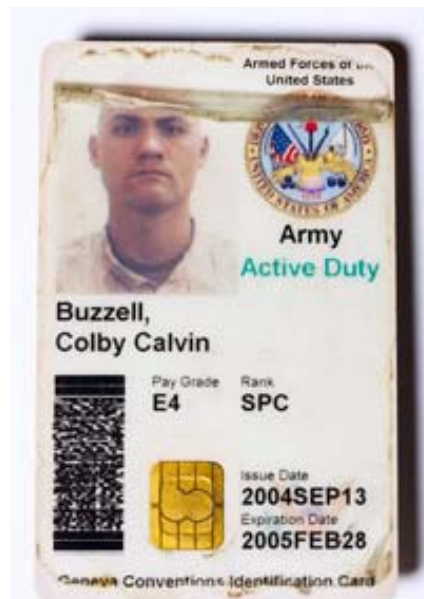


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**“Three Years Out Of The Army,  
Diagnosed With PTSD, I  
Recently Got A Nice Letter From  
The Pentagon Saying They’d  
Like Me Back In Iraq, Pronto”**

# **“My Dad Made A Career Of The Army And Would Retire A Lieutenant Colonel”**

**“He Quickly Said ‘Right Now The  
Democrats Are Just Talking About  
Drawing Down To Get Votes. You’d Be A  
Fool To Believe That We’re Going To Pull  
Out Of Iraq Anytime Soon””**



**VERY LONG  
AND OUTSTANDING  
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[Thanks to Mark Shapiro, The Military Project, who sent this in.

September 8, 2008 By Colby Buzzell, Esquire

Three years out of the army, diagnosed with PTSD, I recently got a nice letter from the pentagon saying they'd like me back in Iraq, pronto.

They didn't even mind that I was a little sick.

And I'm not the only one.

**Imagine that you graduated from college, and a couple years afterward your alma mater contacts you and says, Sorry, you didn't graduate from college. In fact, you have five weeks to drop everything that you're doing--quit your job, get out of your lease, put all your stuff in storage, cancel your Netflix, etc.--and report back to campus so that you can redo all the schooling that you've already done.**

**And not only that, here's a Smith & Wesson .357 revolver with only one round in the chamber--spin the chamber, point it at your head, and pull the trigger.**

**If you live, you live. If you don't, you don't.**

**The only shooting that I care to do from now on is with my camera, and I had just got done with the long and arduous process of getting my GI Bill activated and signed up for photography classes down at the city college when I received the large manila envelope in the mail with the words IMPORTANT DOCUMENT printed in all caps in the center of it.**

**Inside was a letter that said that I had five weeks (just enough time for all the illegal drugs in my system to get flushed out) to report to Fort Benning, Georgia--"Home of the Infantry"--for in-processing, and after that I'd be assigned to a National Guard Infantry unit. Purpose: Operation Iraqi Freedom.**

I love all-expenses-paid business trips, but I don't recall enlisting in the National Guard--I enlisted in the regular Army.

What I do recall is my recruiter telling me that I wouldn't be called back up to active duty unless "World War III broke out."

When I joined up six years ago, I was under the strong impression that I'd be able to do my time, get out, and move on. Which is what I did, or at least tried to do.

**I had no idea that the Army was going to turn into this psychotic ex-girlfriend that you'd need to file a restraining order against because the crazy bitch doesn't get the hint that there's no way we're getting back together again--ever!**

**I separated from the Army three long years ago, and ever since then I've lived every single day in fear that this was going to happen.**

I've endured dozens and dozens of e-mails and phone calls from the Army trying to persuade me to voluntarily reenlist.

Sometimes these phone calls get pretty nasty--especially when I kindly request that my name and number be taken off their list. (There's a law that states you can do this.)

This never works, but it always confuses them.

One guy even told me he couldn't do that because this was the government calling, not a telemarketer.

I called bullshit and hung up.

In times of crisis I call Todd Vance. He was in my platoon, and the two of us got out of the Army around the same time and we've been BFF ever since.

He strongly encouraged me to find a way out and said, "Look at how fucked-up we are now. Imagine how fucked-up you're going to be when you get back the second time!"

I then called my brother. "I've got news," I said.

"What?"

"I'm gay."

"You're gay? (Pause.) That's not news."

"No, I'm serious, I'm gay. I got my orders in the mail today saying that I have to report to Fort Benning, Georgia, in five weeks!"

**I was now in the market for some high heels, because my goal was to not go back to Iraq by any means necessary, and I was just going to show up and tell them that I'm gay and ask them if I can go home now.**

If they didn't buy it, I'd tell them about my scooter and that I live in San Francisco and there's a very good reason I live there.

"It's not going to be that easy, and it's a bad idea," my brother said. "What would Grandma say if she found out you were gay?"

After talking about it for a while, he suggested that I go back to Iraq for the sole purpose of writing a book about the experience.

I rejected that absurd idea, but since the Army was kind enough to send me an invitation to go back to Operation Iraqi Freedom, I decided to RSVP by writing a little op-ed about it for the San Francisco Chronicle.

One of the accolades it received was:

"So, looking at your opening paragraph. There was a clause in the contract you signed. You were concerned enough to ask about it. The person 'closing the deal' gave you assurances that were NOT in the contract and contrary to the clause you were concerned about. You chose to sign and accept the contract anyway. Would you like some cheese with your whine? Your choice was not to sign the contract if you did not want to accept the possibility of being recalled to duty. I do not see the problem here."

And people wonder why I avoid other people.

A couple days after I spoke with my brother, I took my parents out to dinner to an Italian restaurant in North Beach, and I told my father how my brother suggested that I go back to Iraq.

I told him that he reasoned that if a Democrat won the election, I'd be there during the retreat, er, withdrawal, and that maybe I'd be there for less than a year.

**My dad made a career of the Army. He was in Vietnam to experience the Tet Offensive, and would retire a lieutenant colonel. So I was nervous about how he was going to react when I told him that I didn't want to go back to Iraq.**

**"Don't listen to your brother," he quickly said. "I don't think you should go back. And I've seen plenty of elections in my life and right now the Democrats are just talking about drawing down to get votes. You'd be a fool to believe that we're going to pull out of Iraq anytime soon."**

When my father got up from the table to go to the restroom, it was just my mother and I. "I'll support whatever decision you make," she said.

She then looked around the restaurant for a second before saying, "The other night, when you called with the news, your father couldn't sleep. He stayed up all night."

Slowly, one by one, I started telling my friends about how I was being called back up to go to Iraq, and their reactions were all the same, yet all different.

Some got angry, some cried, some wondered, "Wow, they can do that?"

The best was the reaction I received from my one Republican friend, who asked me if it was possible for him to come with me to Iraq. He never enlisted in the military and wanted to hurry and sign up so that he and I could go there together, which instantly reminded me of how not long ago, George Bush was telling a group of soldiers about how much he envies them, talking about how "exciting" and "romantic" war must be.

I guess Vietnam wasn't "exciting" or "romantic" enough for the president, and that's why he blew it off. But Iraq was much different.

And like Bush, my Republican friend was all atwitter about the prospect of seeing combat in Iraq, and he sounded really enthusiastic about this idea of his, and as desperate as the Army is for bodies, it wouldn't amaze me at all if he could possibly do it, but I told him no, that he couldn't, and when he asked if I was sure about that, I lost it and said, "Jason, I'm going back to Iraq because you didn't!"

Harsh, maybe, but war isn't romantic.

Getting shot at with an AK-47 pointed at your head--from so close you can see the muzzle flash--isn't romantic.

It's terrifying.

That's all.

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## **“I Still Keep In Touch With A Handful Of The Guys I Went To Iraq With, And Every Single One Of Them Encouraged Me To Find A Way Out Of It”**

Joe Horrocks, on the other hand, is a fine, brave man who enlisted before 9/11 and was in my platoon with me. After a couple drunken messages on his voice mail (“Those fuckin’ bastards want me back in uniform! Muthafucka! Can you believe that shit?”), I finally got ahold of him.

We had shared a living conex in Iraq, and we’ve been friends ever since. He suggested that I should find a way not to go back and said, “I don’t want to see you over there. Then I’d have to reenlist again and go back there with you to cover your ass just like I did the last time.”

He was joking. Not the part about covering my ass--he did that and did that well--but about going back there again with me.

I would never allow him to do such a thing, but there was a bit of truth to what he said. If Horrocks called me up and said that he was going to Iraq, and asked me to reenlist so that I could go there with him, I’d cuss him out, but I’d also drop whatever I was doing and do it in a heartbeat, because I know he’d do it for me.

I still keep in touch with a handful of the guys I went to Iraq with, and every single one of them encouraged me to find a way out of it--none told me that I should go--and half of them said the same thing about going back there with me again if I went, and a couple were serious.

Which brings up another possible scenario: What if I show up at Fort Benning and come across a bunch of guys that I knew from my old platoon? I’d feel like an ass for not going back there with them.

This scared me--because I can be quite suicidal at times, and I can totally see myself showing up to Benning and completely losing my mind and going, “Fuck it. I’ll go. Where the hell’s my M240 fully automatic machine gun and ammunition?”

My old unit out of Fort Lewis, Washington, flew back to Iraq a little over a year after we returned.

I got out of the Army, while several of my friends stayed in. Out of all the guys I knew, Lieutenant Damon Armeni is definitely the one who had a very legitimate reason to get out of the Army and not go back to Iraq. The guy took an RPG to the stomach for chrissakes.

It gutted him, and he had to stuff his guts back in with his own hands. When he recovered, the Army gave him the option to get out on a medical discharge or stay in and remain in his old unit, which was slated to go back to Iraq. He chose to stay in.

I think very highly of Lieutenant Armeni, and the last time we spoke in person he told me, “You should reenlist.” I shook my head no, that I couldn’t, I’m no good at encores, and he explained to me that I could save lives by going back there again. I had something that none of the new guys who were going over there had, and that was experience. I knew what it was like over there--what to look out for, what to expect, and what to do in

certain situations. One of the reasons he was going back was so that all the newbies would return home alive and in one piece.

I get severely depressed whenever I think about that because I knew I had nothing but selfish reasons for not going back with them.

Horrocks reenlisted and went back to Iraq again with our old unit. Since they were part of the "surge," the whole unit was stop-lossed, and about one week before they were to come home after being in Iraq for nearly a year and a half, Horrocks's platoon was on a foot patrol when nearly a whole squad was killed after entering a house that was booby-trapped.

One soldier, they just found a leg. When Horrocks got back from Iraq, he put on his Class A uniform and delivered an urn with the leg in it to the family of the deceased soldier and explained to them what happened.

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### **"Welcome To Fort Benning. Have A Nice Day"**

My orders came with a mobilization packet, a bunch of useless forms for me to fill out and bring with me, as well as a packing list requesting that I bring my PT uniform, battle-dress uniform, and Class B uniform (which at first scared me, because for a minute there I was looking like Jon Favreau, but much to my relief, when I threw it on, it fit fine), old ID card, dog tags, and copies of my medical records.

I went down to the VA hospital in San Francisco and spoke with a therapist there and told him straight up that I didn't want to go and needed some documentation testifying that I was a head case.

I'm not ready to go on Oprah or anything, but I'm definitely not the same person I was before Iraq, and I was going to play the PTSD card and hope that would get me out of this mess.

The therapist told me that from his experience the success rate for what I was attempting to do was fifty-fifty. He's written plenty of letters for guys he's evaluated who've been called back up and didn't want to go, and some come back, others don't.

He then told me all about this one guy who he evaluated who was in really bad shape and really shouldn't have gone back to Iraq, and this therapist kept on calling the Army telling them how this guy really should not be going back, and the Army's attitude toward him was thank you for calling, but we have our own doctors who can make their own decisions on whether or not a soldier is deployable, and we really don't need your suggestions.

Click.

He said that he could write a letter for me but what I really needed was a letter from a psychologist. When I went to the main VA hospital in San Francisco, I sat with a staff psychologist on the PTSD clinical team who conducted a triage evaluation of me. I was

completely honest with her and straight up told her that I needed this letter so I could avoid getting redeployed.

She seemed cool with that.

The next day I went back to the VA to pick up my letter. It read:

“Mr. Buzzell came into the evaluation visibly distressed, uncomfortable, presenting with flattened affect and speaking with soft, mumbled speech. When asked about his experiences in Iraq, he became more agitated and asked if it was necessary for him to talk about them.

“When told that he could refer to them very generally, he replied that one of the main incidents involved a firefight that lasted all day that took place when he was driving along a major street and his vehicle was ambushed. During the course of talking about this incident, Mr. Buzzell’s speech became increasingly softer, more incoherent and more disjointed, as he was visibly disturbed and easily stimulated to flooding by this retelling.

“Mr. Buzzell added that there were other traumatic incidents that occurred aside from this roadside ambush, but in the interest of containing this vet, I told him that the information he provided was sufficient for the time being.

“Mr. Buzzell reported that he has tried very hard to ‘push out of his head’ the aforementioned incident and many others since returning from Iraq. He reported that he drinks heavily every day as a way to avoid these traumatic memories, usually to the point of blacking out so he can eventually fall asleep.

“He has been using alcohol for the past three years as a way to numb intrusive thoughts and reminders of his combat trauma since his return from Iraq. . . . He is severely isolated, spending most of his day in his room and sometimes going for several days to weeks without speaking to anyone.

“Upon returning from Iraq, Mr. Buzzell and his wife divorced. . . . When asked whether he has thoughts of harming or killing himself Mr. Buzzell endorsed having a passive suicidal ideation. . . .

“Mr. Buzzell also stated that he does not own a firearm because he is scared of what he might do with it when he is drunk . . . while he has gotten into a couple of fistfights in bars, he has never had an urge to hurt or kill someone. . . .

“In sum, Mr. Buzzell reports extremely significant functional impairments resulting from PTSD symptoms related to his military service in Iraq, including severe intrusive thoughts of his trauma in Iraq, irritability, hypervigilance, difficulty sleeping, feelings of depression, and avoidance of people, places, and things that trigger him or remind him of his service in Iraq.”

**When I showed this letter to a close friend of mine who I’ve known for years, he was amazed. “Wow,” he said. “This isn’t too far from the truth, is it?”**

**“No. It’s not.”**



Now that I had this letter, I was able to file a service-connected disability claim for PTSD, which I was told would take several months to process, which was fine. All I needed was proof that I had the disability and documentation that I had filed a claim.

A couple weeks later I received a phone call from the Department of Veterans Affairs notifying me that I didn't have enough time left for them to file a claim. And that they could fix me up in a jiffy once I got back from Iraq.

I can feel my heart rate go up as I enter the main gate, and when I stop the rental car the armed civilian security guard kindly says to me, "Welcome to Fort Benning."

I release an inaudible guttural grunt of pain and agony as I hand him my ID card and military orders and he hands me a vehicle pass so that I can get on post. He looks over the documents, hands them back to me, and, with a smile, says, "Thank you. Have a nice day."

I stare blankly at him for a couple seconds until I snap out of it and slowly put pressure on the gas pedal so that the car slowly rolls into the belly of the beast.

As I pass a banner encouraging the troops to vote, my entire body physically tells me to abort mission and turn this bad boy around and get out of Dodge while I still can--but just like on missions in Iraq when I felt this way, I drive on.

When I report to the Welcome Center the lady there instructs me to report to the staff duty desk at 30th Adjutant General.

When I arrive at 30th AG I park the car and light up a smoke. I remember the ride on the white bus half a decade ago that took me from the Atlanta airport straight here.

I stand there in the parking lot and remember how I was back then--excited, nervous, scared, but most important, I was willing to be here. That was what I wanted for my life, and this was the place I wanted to be.

Now I just feel very sick.

In block letters by the American flag up on the wall it says, "Welcome to the U.S. Army," and there's two groups of soldiers waiting inside here with me, both groups wearing digital-camo ACU uniforms, and I'm wearing shorts and a Hawaiian shirt.

One group looks like a bunch of high school sophomores (basic-training privates), and the other group all look my age or considerably older. I wonder if they are Individual Ready Reserve callbacks like me, so I approach them and find out that they're a bunch of prior-service guys who got out years ago and volunteered to reenlist.

One guy tells me that he was in the Marine Corps for ten years and got out years ago, and the other one tells me that he's been trying to get back in the military for a while now and finally this last time they let him in. Same with the guy sitting next to him.

He was amazed that the Army was recalling infantry guys to active duty, said he's tried several times in the last several years to get back in the Army, and they finally lowered their standards to a point where they could let him back in.

Next morning, the 0530 formation is a lineup of disgruntled half-asleep draftees straight out of central casting. Mismatched civilian clothing from head to toe, and there's this defeated tone--that nobody really wants to be here--radiating from all of us that you could probably feel a couple clicks away.

About half of us still have military-style haircuts, but there's a handful here who are poorly shaven with shaggy hair.

One guy has his entire neck completely tattooed. (When I ask if the Army plans on kicking him out with his neck decorated like that--it's forbidden, I recently looked into getting work done on my neck for that reason--he tells me no, that they lowered their standards and don't really care about neck tattoos anymore.)

The sun's not even up yet and all around us are other platoons conducting physical-training exercises. The last time I woke up this early was back when I was in the Army, and the only time I've done any PT whatsoever since being discharged is when I'm doing wind sprints to the liquor store five minutes prior to closing.

I keep telling myself over and over that this is not happening.

After a warm welcome, the NCO in charge starts the day off with a head count and one by one we sound off, One! Two! Three! . . . until it ends at around sixty.

**Out of 150 IRR soldiers recalled and ordered to report to duty, only a third showed up. It's a bit too late, but I realize that I'm in the wrong group. I should have been one of the ninety no-shows.**

**A guy in the formation, sarcastic, says, "We should all pat ourselves on the back for showing up."**

**Another replies, "We should pat ourselves on the back for being stupid?"**

**After that, they march us over to the chow hall, and as we wait in formation for it to open up, another E-6 walks over to us. "How many of you guys are glad to be here?" he asks.**

**One moron who probably completely misunderstood the question raises his hand, another joker yells out a mocking "Hooah!"**

**"How many of you are not glad to be here?" he asks. Before he could even finish asking this question, every single hand shoots straight up in the air.**

In the far distance you can faintly hear a platoon of soldiers standing in formation, all singing "The Army Goes Rolling Along."

**Last question: "How many of you have already been deployed?" E-6 asks. All the hands in the formation stay up.**

Earlier, while standing around waiting for the start of formation, I recognized a face among us that I hadn't seen in years. I couldn't believe it at first, but then I realized it was Ponitz, who was in my platoon back at Fort Lewis.

After exchanging what-the-fuck-are-you-doing-heres, he told me that when he got out of the military he moved back to Ann Arbor and got a job sorting and delivering bread for nine dollars an hour.

And after that he showed me his wedding ring, told me that he was originally going to get married in October, but when he got the letter from the Army the two of them quickly got married a week ago. I congratulated him and could see that Ponitz was still glowing from it all, and he went on to tell me at length how great she was and how much he loved her.

"How's she feel about you deploying?"

"She wants me to find a way out of it."

"Are you?" I asked.

"No," he said. He was broke when he received the letter. He needed the money. "Fuck it," he said. "Give me back my gun and send me."

He didn't sound too excited about leaving his bride, and asked me if I was still married. I lifted my left hand, which is ringless.

As we make the stations of the cross, getting our documents checked and rechecked and new ID cards made, it becomes clear that the soldiers being recalled here at Fort Benning are vastly outnumbered.

**For every one of us IRR recalls who's here, there are at least three civilian contractors here as well getting their packets ready for deployment.**

**They all seem eager and more than willing to deploy. Half are obese, almost all look pathetic, and a great majority of them seem to be living in a Blackwater fantasy with a perverse fetish for tactical gear, which a lot of them seem to be wearing an overabundance of from head to toe.**

**One idiot is walking around carrying his Kevlar helmet. (WTF?!) While waiting in line I overhear the guy next to me say, "Why the fuck are those people so goddamn happy?" The guy next to him grumbles, "Shit--if I was making six digits doing absolutely nothing, I'd be walking around with a hard-on too."**

Six hours later I get my new ID.

They gave preference to the contractors and seemed to zip those guys right on through. While all of us were patiently waiting, one contractor passed by happily with his new ID card and said, "You guys don't look like you're having too much fun."

None of us bothered to look up.

**After I finally receive my card, I begin to panic.**

**I am now only two steps away from being back in the military and assigned to a unit headed straight to Iraq.**

Just like that the Army almost has me, and there are only two things left on my checklist that need to be marked off before I will be handed a uniform again--and that's medical and dental.

The following day is set aside for dental, and the day after that is for medical. So the in-processing to see if you're mentally and physically able to deploy is roughly thirty-six hours from the time you show up.

I now need a drink. I don't want to drink at the bar on post with the lifers and the high-and-tights. I want to get away from that and get my mind off of what's going down, so I go off post to Broadway in Columbus.

The bar has a sign outside advertising \$2.50 drafts. I take a seat next to a guy who's already had a couple and appears to be here by himself as well, and we nod a friendly hello to each other as I order a drink. "I just got back from Iraq four days ago," he says right away.

"Welcome home," I say. "Are you with 3rd Brigade?"

"Yeah," he says. "How'd you know?"

"There's 'Welcome Home 3rd Brigade' posters and banners all over Benning."

He nods. "You're in the Army?" he asks.

I tell him that I am--was--kind of--I got out a while ago, and I am back here at Benning because the Army came calling again.

We exchange pleasantries about how the Army was now doing that a lot, and after some Army small talk (What unit were you with? What's your MOS? Where you from? When and where were you in Iraq?), we both go back to drinking by ourselves again sitting right there next to each other.

And as we're both mentally in our own worlds, I keep on looking back over at him to see how he's doing--he's somewhat slouched, with both his elbows on the bar, and seems to be having trouble at times keeping his head up.

He reminds me of myself when I got back, and when I point this out to him he slowly tells me, "This is the worst part. Coming home."

It's around last call when I arrive back on post, and there's a guy with a cooler of beer with his truck doors wide open blasting country music out in front of the barracks.

I walk over and am instantly handed a tall can, which I happily crack open. I ask the guy who handed me the beer if this is okay, because although I drank in my room the prior night--"waiting for a mission . . . and for my sins, they gave me one"--I was under the

impression that alcohol was prohibited in the barracks area. He told me not to worry. "I've been here for a little over eight weeks," he says. "It's all cool."

Eight weeks!

He says he's waiting for the paperwork for him to get out.

He's claiming some family-lineage reason--his father recently died and he's the only one to pass on the family name, or something like that.

He's the first guy I've come across who is trying to get out of being deployed, so I ask him about PTSD, and he tells me that he tried that but those doctors don't give a fuck and they'll say you're deployable no matter what you tell them.

"I fucked up," he says. "They asked me if I wanted to kill people. I said no, which I now totally regret--not wanting to kill people is normal. What I should have said was 'Fuck yeah! I want to go to Iraq and just fucking kill everybody! I don't care who the fuck it is, I just want to kill everything and everyone!'"

All the while he's telling me this, there's this drunk guy who can barely stand, and he's just saying, "I just want to go over there and kill some fuckin' hajjis, man!" over and over again. He's in bad shape, and I try and ignore him as I ask the guy about how many people he's seen get out of it.

"Not many," he says. "Why, are you trying to get out of it?"

I cautiously nod yes.

"Do what you gotta do."

**"If you don't want to go back, then don't go back. You and I--we've already done our part, we've already been to Iraq, we've already served our country. Ain't no shame at all in not wanting to go back."**

**He then gives me some advice: "Your only chance is to try and find a way to the main hospital, and once you get there, find someone in mental health and talk to them."**

The guy talking about going over there to kill some hajjis then tries to bro with me by extending his hand to shake, which I do, and when he asks me if I want to kill some hajjis too, I tell him no. "Why not?" he hollers.

It's time for me to leave, since I don't care to answer his question, and as I thank the soldier bearing beer he again tells me, "Do what you gotta do."

First formation is in a couple hours, but instead of going back to my room, I, for whatever reason, probably because I'm drunk, decide to bring a couple beers with me up to the "off-limits" fourth floor of the barracks, and my brain works in very, very strange ways when I'm inebriated, and when I am stumbling about exploring the vacant floor I keep on thinking, Wow, they could, like, convert these barracks into, like, cool artist lofts! And then I come across a half dozen or so gallon paint cans in the corner, and in a drunken

fog, I take a look at the walls, which appear to me as huge blank white canvases, and I can't help but think of the abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock.

The next morning there is a loud pounding on my door as somebody is yelling my name, telling me to wake up.

I quickly get up and make my way to the formation--still drunk from the night before--and once the formation is over I walk over to the E-6 and tell him that I'm not doing so well and that I have to go to the main hospital.

He tells me that he can't send me to the hospital--that I have to go to sick call first. So a driver escorts me to sick call, and when I get there the receptionist hands me a form to fill out.

For "Reason" I write: "illness."

He then hands the form back and asks me to be more specific. So I write "mental" before the word illness and hand it back to him.

When I speak with a doctor I tell him that I'm not doing so well and request to see a psychiatrist at the main hospital, and he asks me a series of questions. He then says that they will call me to set up an appointment. When I ask when they will call, he doesn't have an answer, and when I ask if there is any way that I can possibly see someone today, he tells me no.

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### **"What If I Told You That I'll Kill Myself If I Don't See Somebody Today?"**

**When I told Callahan, who was a SAW gunner in my old platoon, that I was going to report back at Benning, he told me not to, that if I showed up, I'd be fucked.**

I'm starting to believe that he was right.

I was now debating going AWOL and was putting some serious thought into it. When I get back to the shuttle van that's waiting for me outside, the driver asks me how it went and I tell him not good--that the people at sick call told me that I have to be dropped off at the main hospital immediately.

**When I get to the main hospital I take the elevator up to the fourth floor. The receptionist there tells me that a doctor can't see me that day, but if I want to see a mental-health professional I can set up an appointment, the earliest of which would be in three weeks. I look at her and say, "What if I told you that I'll kill myself if I don't see somebody today?"**

**"Uh," she says, and then she stares at me for a second or two to see if I'm serious or not.**

**On the counter is a ballpoint pen, and I think that if I don't hear the answer from her that I want to hear right now, I swear to God my plan is to pick up that pen and stab myself in the arm to prove to her that I need to see somebody today.**

She gets up and walks out of the room. A minute later she comes back. "Just take a seat in the waiting room, and a doctor will see you shortly," she says.

After I fill out the paperwork and watch two full episodes of Walker, Texas Ranger, starring Chuck Norris, there are absolutely no what-ifs at all about me contemplating suicide.

I've only had a couple hours of sleep in the past several days, and when I enter the doctor's office I take a seat and she starts off by asking me how I'm doing and I tell her that I'm not doing so well and that being back here at Benning has brought back a bunch of memories that I'd prefer not to relive.

She asks me what I've been doing since I got out, and I tell her that I wrote a book about my experience in Iraq, as well as a handful of articles, half of which are military/war related, every now and then I do a panel discussion or speaking engagement where I'm asked to talk about my experience in the war--all I'm ever asked about is the war--but other than that I've pretty much been unemployed and that for the last three and a half years I've been trying to put the war and the military behind me and start on a new chapter in life and I wasn't quite able to ever do that--I was never really able to move on--and now being back here, surrounded by people in the military, and surrounded by people constantly talking about the military and the war in Iraq.

"I can't do it again," I tell her. "I think I'll lose my mind."

I then hand her the letter that I got from the psychologist at the VA hospital in San Francisco and sit there quietly as she goes over it.

She looks up at me, asks me a few psychiatrist questions, writes down my answers, and then says, "Don't worry, we're going to get you back home to San Francisco."

When I got back to the barracks we had an end-of-the-day formation, and for some reason, the First Sergeant was there.

He came out and told us that the other evening there had been an incident up in one of the main rooms on the off-limits fourth floor, where someone completely vandalized an entire room, splashing paint all over the walls.

He mentioned that he's been here at Fort Benning for a couple years now and has never seen anything like that happen, and that he suspected that somebody--probably drunk out of his mind and pissed off about being called back up--decided to throw a hissy fit and trash the hell out of the place.

First Sergeant asked anybody in the formation who knew or had seen anything to write it down on a piece of paper and slip it to him in his office.

I didn't know anything at all about what happened, so I didn't write anything for the First Sergeant, and again, I have no idea what he's talking about, so I can neither confirm nor deny that I had anything to do with what happened--but I do have a newfound respect for Mr. Pollock's work. It takes a shitload of paint--a lot more than I thought--to do what he did.

I wouldn't believe it until they stamped me NOT DEPLOYABLE.

And because the Army is the Army, I still had to have a hearing test, then some paperwork, blood work, quick eye check, hand my dental records off to a guy in dental, and then wait in line to see a medical provider who'd tell me what shots I needed.

While sitting on a folding chair in the waiting room, waiting--I had my head down, lost in thought, wondering if I was really going to get out of this or not--I heard my name.

I looked up and it was Ponitz. He was talking to a couple of guys seated next to him. He pointed at me and said with a kindness in his voice, "That guy right there. He was my team leader in Iraq."

And he went on to tell them all about how he was on my gun team, and I was reminded of all those times in Mosul when we'd set the M240 down out on OP (observation post) and just sit there together for hours bumming cigarettes off each other, staring out at the city, thinking about home; the hours spent together up on the guard towers; sitting next to him in the back of the Stryker vehicle; and the day when we received fire from a mosque and Ponitz was behind the .50-cal engaging said mosque and the combat medic next to me was yelling, "Get some, Ponitz! Get some!"

When I got to the last station I handed my medical records and in-processing packet to the guy behind the desk--he seemed to be having a great day at work--and when he opened up my packet he asked me what I did for work before this.

When I told him I was unemployed, he laughed, "Well you don't have to worry about that anymore."

While going over my packet he asked me a couple more questions: Are you on any medication?

"Medical marijuana."

Have you ever been to the emergency room? "Not yet." When was the last time you had an anxiety attack? "Yesterday."

I then pulled out the business card of the kind lady over at the hospital who had seen me the day before and told him that I spoke to her and she documented that I was non-deployable and that it'd all be in the system.

He then pulled it up on the computer and started reading her assessment of me, and his attitude shifted somewhat after that.

**He then stamped my packet NOT DEPLOYABLE and said, "Don't worry, you can go home now."**

I was numb, stepped outside to a picnic table, and lit up a smoke. Ponitz came out, sat with me, and said, "Everything I know about the M240 machine gun I learned from you and Horrocks." I smiled.



"But now I don't know shit," he said.

I told him not to worry about that--he'd pick it up real quick. "After a while it'll be second nature operating that thing," I said.

And I started talking to him about what I still remember about the 240 and then I stopped talking and I took a long drag from my smoke and looked at him and said, "I'm not going to be able to be with you on this one."

He took a drag from his smoke and nodded his head. He knew exactly what I meant by that. "I'm sorry, Ponitz, I just can't."

He looked away and told me that he was really looking forward to me meeting his wife.

I told him I would someday--as soon as he got back.

He thought about that and smiled, still looking away. A shuttle bus pulled up to give us a ride back. We stood up, flipped our butts, got in, and sat down next to each other.

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## **ACTION REPORTS**

# **Army National Guard And More: Contact!**



[piesandbass.files.wordpress.com]

From: Alan Stolzer, The Military Project  
To: GI Special  
Sent: Wednesday, September 17, 2008 9:53 AM  
Subject: Rail report

The troops were out last night.

A soldier at the [xxxxx] railroad station recognized me from our action at the National Guard Armory Friday night and said he didn't get a brownie. His partner had.

**He accepted an information pack after saying (as others sometimes do) they're not supposed to accept anything on duty. Solution: Folding it in a square and putting in large trouser pocket.**

**He also knew the DJ at the upcoming birthday/IVAW benefit [see more about that in the Troops News section of GI Special below] and may come. Gave out all the benefit flyers.**

\*\*\*\*\*

**Workers I know who have friends/relatives in the military eagerly took about 30 of the surplus information packages we brought to the National Guard armory last Friday.**

**One, while reading our "Why We Are Here" statement that was included in the handout, kept saying "good, good, good." ["Why We Are Here" just below this article. T]**

**Please remember to ask anybody you meet whether they know anyone in the military.**

**If they do it's rare the person they know isn't against the wars and they'll want handouts too.**

**MORE:**

## **Why We Are Here**

**The Military Project is an organizing committee of activists focused on encouraging participants in the anti-war movement to reach out to active duty, reserve and National Guard troops.**

**Our mission is to support and provide aid to soldiers opposed to continuing the war in Iraq.**

**All troops—including members of the National Guard and Reserves—have every right to question and oppose the war and occupation.**

**No one has more of a right.**

**Every time you speak out, it gives a voice to the soldiers in Iraq who don't want to be there. It gives others the courage to resist and openly dissent inside the military.**

**A soldier's voice, when it's raised, carries authority. People will listen.**

**During Viet Nam, the anti-war movement within the armed forces was the decisive factor in ending the war.**

**Now we're at a decisive moment in history. The majority of the American people want the troops to come home now. But it is clear that the Bush administration has no intention of ending the war.**

**GI resistance will stop this war.**

**No one has a bigger stake.**

**If you would like to organize with other dissenting soldiers, receive support in distributing and replacing materials, attend one of our meetings or speak to us with any questions you may have:**

**We are here to help you.**

**Contact us:  
contact@militaryproject.org**

**The Military Project  
Box 126,  
2576 Broadway,  
New York, N.Y. 10025-5657  
917.677.8057**

**MORE:**

## **MORE ACTION REPORTS WANTED: FROM YOU!**

**An effective way to encourage others to support members of the armed forces organizing to resist the Imperial war is to report what you do.**

**If you've carried out organized contact with troops on active duty, at base gates, airports, or anywhere else, send a report in to GI Special for the Action Reports section.**

**Same for contact with National Guard and/or Reserve components.**

**They don't have to be long. Just clear, and direct action reports about what work was done and how.**

**If there were favorable responses, say so. If there were unfavorable responses or problems, don't leave them out.**

If you are not planning or engaging in outreach to the troops, you have nothing to report.

**NOTE WELL:**

Do not make public any information that could compromise the work.

Whether you are serving in the armed forces or not, do not in any way identify members of the armed forces organizing to stop the war.

If accidentally included, that information will not be published.

The sole exception: occasions when a member of the armed services explicitly directs his or her name be listed as reporting on the action.

**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

**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/](http://www.ivaw.org/))**

## IRAQ WAR REPORTS

### **UNREMITTING HELL ON EARTH; ALL HOME NOW**



101st Airborne troops come under fire while on patrol. Photograph: Sean Smith; Guardian. [Thanks to JM, who sent this in.]

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## AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

**“The Pakistan Air Force Deployed Its  
U.S.-Supplied F-16s To Challenge  
The Violation Of Its Airspace By U.S.”  
DemoRats**

14 Sep 2008 CHIDANAND RAJGHATTA, TNN, Time Of India

WASHINGTON: The United States is suddenly faced with the uncomfortable scenario of confronting the very same weapons and military hardware, including F-16 fighter jets, it has armed Pakistan with for decades.

**The unsavoury prospect of having to take a crack at the its one-time ally has surfaced most starkly in the skies over the Afghan-Pakistan border this weekend after the Pakistan Air Force deployed its US-supplied F-16s to challenge the violation of its airspace by US drones, and in one case, an airborne assault that landed US Navy Seals inside Pakistani territory.**

The turnaround of Pakistan from an ally to a potential enemy has alarmed lawmakers, some of whom are now questioning the continued supply of arms to Islamabad.

**On Tuesday, a Democrat-controlled House Foreign Relations panel has scheduled a hearing whose snarky title -- "Defeating al-Qaida's Air Force: Pakistan's F-16 Program in the Fight Against Terrorism" -- betrays the unease over the Bush Administration's relentless arming of Pakistan.**

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## TROOP NEWS

Mail Call



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

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# Katherine's Birthday/IVAW Benefit



Friday, September 26, 2008 at 9:00pm  
Sutra Lounge: 16 First Avenue @ 1<sup>st</sup> St. (NYC)

Special DJ: Afrika Bambaataa



\$20 (suggested) donation  
to Iraq Veterans Against the War.  
All proceeds go to IVAW!

Note:

The venue is waiving the cover charge for our guests.  
Just tell them at the door that you're there for the IVAW benefit and they will  
direct you to our table.

Please RSVP: [kgorell@gmail.com](mailto:kgorell@gmail.com)

**POLITICIANS CAN'T BE COUNTED ON TO HALT  
THE BLOODSHED**

**THE TROOPS HAVE THE POWER TO STOP THE  
WARS**

## **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



# **“The Child Has Grown--The Dream Is Gone”**



From: Mike Hastie  
To: GI Special  
Sent: September 16, 2008  
Subject: “ The Child Has Grown--The Dream Is Gone “

## **“The Child Has Grown--The Dream Is Gone”**

**Sometimes I wish I were still a child,  
so I could go to a park on a beautiful day,  
swing in a swing,  
and not know that my government has  
lost its mind.**

**Mike Hastie  
U.S. Army Medic  
Vietnam 1970-71  
Sept. 16, 2008**

Photo and caption from the I-R-A-Q (I Remember Another Quagmire) portfolio of Mike Hastie, US Army Medic, Vietnam 1970-71. (For more of his outstanding work, contact at: ([hastiemike@earthlink.net](mailto:hastiemike@earthlink.net)) T)

## **“Never A Thought Of Grabbing It For Themselves”**

From: Chris Lombardi  
To: GI Special  
September 17, 2008

About his peers in the Union Army:

“Not professional life-long fighters, the product of European militarism — just plain, ordinary American, volunteer soldiers, who loved their country and fought for it with never a thought of grabbing it for themselves; that is a trick which the survivors were taught later by gentlemen desiring their votes.”

-- Ambrose Bierce

### **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](mailto:contact@militaryproject.org): Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Replies confidential. Same address to unsubscribe. Phone: 917.677.8057**

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

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

# GI SPECIALS BY MAIL FREE FOR ACTIVE DUTY TROOPS

IF YOU WISH TO HAVE A SELECTION OF GI SPECIALS MAILED TO YOU, EMAIL YOUR ADDRESS TO: [CONTACT@MILITARYPROJECT.ORG](mailto:CONTACT@MILITARYPROJECT.ORG) OR DROP A LINE TO: BOX 126, 2576 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10025-5657 USA. 917.677.8057

Please say how many you wish sent.

NOTE WELL: They will all be different issues of GI Special to satisfy DOD regs that you may possess copies, *provided you don't have more than one of the same issue.*

## DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



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

# GI Special www.militaryproject.org

*This is how Bush brings the troops home,  
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW, ALIVE.*



*GI Special is a near-daily news bulletin for service members  
www.militaryproject.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/2008/index.html>; <http://www.uruknet.info/?p=6&l=e>; [http://www.traprockpeace.org/gi\\_special/](http://www.traprockpeace.org/gi_special/);  
<http://www.albasrah.net/pages/mod.php?header=res1&mod=gis&rep=gis>

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