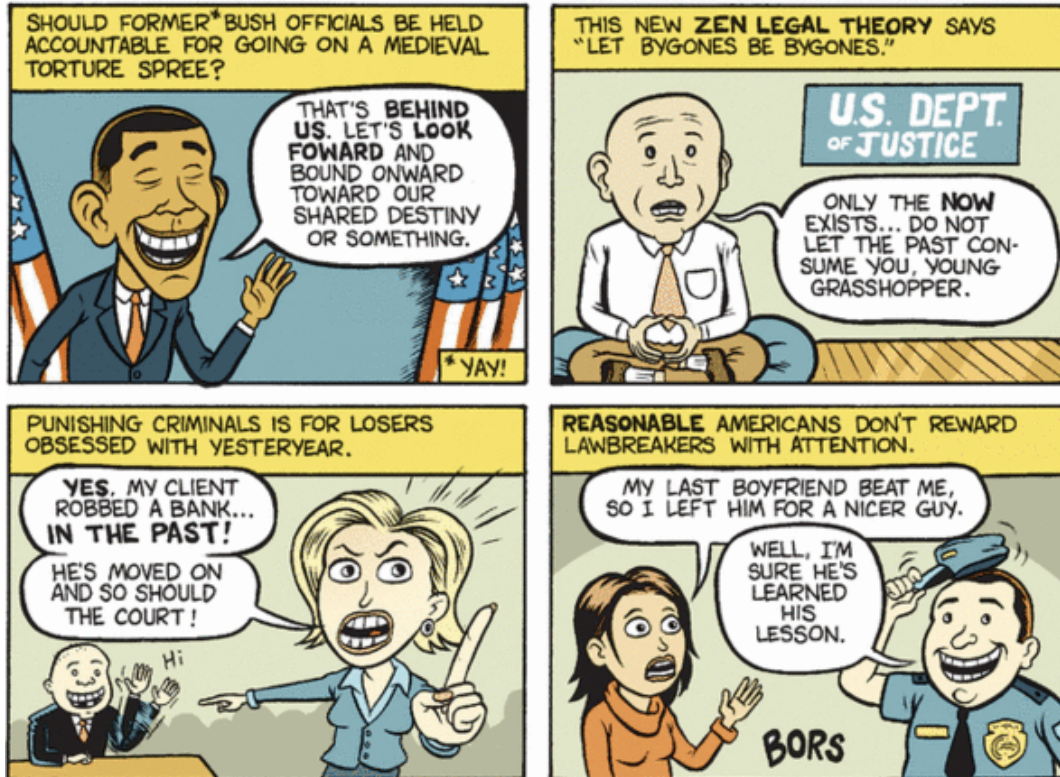


GI SPECIAL 7A14:



**“The Other
Guantanamo”**

**“Bagram Holds Individuals
Seized Outside Afghanistan.
Many Are Thought To Have
Been There For Years”**

It's Being Used "As A Legal Black Hole Where You Can Bring People To Evade Public Scrutiny"

"If They Close Guantanamo And They Expand The One In Bagram, There Will Be No Difference' Said Lal Gul, Chairman Of The Afghanistan Human Rights Organisation"

"Obama's Team Remains Silent On Its Plans For Bagram" "Right Now They Are Expanding It, They Are Building A New Facility. Clearly Closing It Isn't On The Agenda"

25 Jan 2009 By Ben Farmer in Kabul, Philip Sherwell and Dean Nelson, Telegraph.co.uk [Excerpts]

Every Monday, at a Red Cross compound in Kabul, Pashtu families gather for a glimpse by live video feed of brothers, sons and husbands who have disappeared into a feared detention centre at the main American base in Afghanistan.

As President Barack Obama declared with a fanfare his intention to close the controversial Guantanamo Bay terrorist detention camp last week, he made no mention of another growing US-run prison - with more than twice as many inmates and an even murkier legal status.

More than 600 detainees are held at the US Bagram Theatre Internment Facility - known by campaigners as "the other Guantanamo".

Not only are there no plans to close it, but it is in the process of being expanded to hold 1,100 illegal enemy combatants; prisoners who cannot see lawyers, have no trials and never see any evidence there may be against them.

Like Guantanamo, since opening it has held men which the US military says must be kept off the battlefield; alleged al-Qaeda terrorists and Taliban fighters.

According to human rights lawyers the prison also holds scores of innocent people, many seized after tip-offs from feuding tribal rivals. The alleged offences are never tested in court.

The prison has been accused of torturing detainees and two men were allegedly beaten to death there in 2002. The US Army does not let outsiders in to view conditions inside.

While Mr Obama struggles to work out what to do with Guantanamo's 245 remaining prisoners, critics claim Bagram and other detention centres around Afghanistan are still legal black holes.

"If they close Guantanamo and they expand the one in Bagram, it's the same - there will be no difference," said Lal Gul, chairman of the Afghanistan Human Rights Organisation.

The US military admits that Bagram holds a "small number of individuals" seized outside Afghanistan.

But even less is known about who they are or why they are held than is public about the Taliban fighters detained there.

Many are thought to have been there for years.

"It's being used not as a temporary battlefield detention centre, but as a legal black hole where you can bring people to evade public and political scrutiny," said Tina Monshipour Foster, the organisation's executive director.

"Bagram makes the farce of justice at Guantanamo look a lot closer to due process."

Dr Ghairat Baheer was a former Mujahideen leader who was arrested in 2002 because he is related to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a notorious warlord whose men have killed dozens of American soldiers.

He was always anti-Taliban, but he condemned the US invasion of his homeland and was then arrested by CIA agents at his home in Pakistan and was shipped to Afghanistan.

There, in the notorious "Dark Prison", he claims he was held in a cell just two metres by two and a half, completely without light.

He said: "There were loudspeakers which played horrifying music 24 hours a day, and sounds of people shouting. I was hooked to the wall by handcuffs, with my feet shackled, and stripped naked. I was there for six months. But I didn't know where I was."

Dr Baheer's ordeal lasted for years as he was shifted from one Afghan prison to another. Sometimes he was denied food; and in some facilities he was held in cells with al-Qaeda terrorists.

He said of one prison: "It was an enemy factory, creating future insurgents from the detainees and their large families."

A Western diplomat in Kabul agreed. He said: "His treatment is an example of how we helped create the insurgency. He should not have been arrested at all. They (the Americans) thought arresting him would help them get to Hekmatyar."

There have been some limited visits.

Waiting for their 20 minute call, each family insisted their relative was innocent and was only seized after a denunciation from a rival clan or feuding family.

Syed Mohammad, a Pashtu wheat farmer from Tarin Kowt district in Uruzgan, travelled for two days and two nights to see his brother Shah Mahmud who had been held for nine months.

"Some villagers informed on him and the Americans attacked his house," he said. "We don't know what he is supposed to have done."

The case-by-case review of the 245 prisoners still held at Guantanamo will not be extended to the 600 prisoners held in indefinite US custody in Afghanistan, or the thousands more in Iraq.

Barack Obama's team remains silent on its plans for Bagram, and there seems to be little likelihood of change at the prison.

Joanne Mariner, a lawyer and terrorism expert at Human Rights Watch said: "Right now they are expanding it, they are building a new facility. Clearly closing it isn't on the agenda."

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

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

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

'He Was The Best': Buddies Remember Soldier

1/16/2009 By Sarah Bultema, Loveland Reporter-Herald

Justin Bauer had a simple motto: Live like there's no tomorrow, because tomorrow might not come.

And those who loved him know it's a lifestyle the athlete, firefighter, soldier and friend followed until the very end.

"Everything he did was 100 percent," said one of Bauer's best friends, Devin Olsen of Fort Collins. "He wanted to be the biggest and best at everything. And he was the best."

On Saturday, Bauer, a 24-year-old Army paratrooper, was killed while serving in Iraq. It's the last thing his buddies expected to happen to their larger-than-life friend.

"You always hear about it on the news, but you never think it's going to happen to you," said Blake Felton of Berthoud.

"Especially to a guy like Justin," Olsen added.

Yet while they mourn his loss, his friends find comfort knowing Bauer died following his dreams.

"Whether it was going into a burning building or doing what he did ...," Felton said, pausing.

"Either way, he was going to be a hero," Olsen finished.

Both Olsen and Felton knew Bauer well before he ever set foot in the Middle East, jumped out of a plane or even talked about joining the military. They all grew up in Berthoud, and Felton and Bauer became friends in second grade.

Olsen and Bauer met in middle school, although their acquaintance didn't become a friendship right away.

"We didn't start off as friends," Olsen said bluntly.

Always a competitor and never one to back down, Bauer often came off as arrogant or cocky, Olsen explained.

"But once you know him, you know he has every right to be cocky — because he says he's going to do something, and he does it," he said.

Soon the two became friends, and Olsen realized that Bauer's drive to be the best at everything applied to how he cared for his friends, too.

"The way he treats his friends and family, you can't not like the guy," he said. "He's younger than I am, and I always looked up to him."

After their graduation from Berthoud High School, the three friends continued to stay close. During the day, they worked at a feed store together. And their weekends were spent boating on Carter Lake and listening to Bauer's favorite singer, Kenny Chesney.

"He loved boating, and he loved Carter Lake," Felton said.

When he was about 19, Bauer joined the Berthoud Fire Department, following in the footsteps of his father, Greg Bauer.

But his ambition to keep moving forward didn't stop there. Soon after joining the department, Bauer took a job as a firefighter well out of his comfort zone — in Antarctica.

He was gone for almost a year — and when he returned, Bauer was just as eager to keep living life to the fullest.

The Army was next on the list.

Olsen remembers when Bauer announced his plans to join the military.

"I said, 'Why? You know you're going into a war,'" Olsen said.

However, he knew there was no chance he'd change his friend's mind.

"Justin's the kind of guy that when something gets in his mind, he's going to do it no matter what," Olsen said. "And he wanted to fight."

During his first deployment to Iraq, Bauer's friends often gathered with his family to talk, pray and simply cope.

It was a hard time, they said — not only was Bauer in Iraq, but his younger brother, Jeremy, also was serving in the Middle East.

"It was rough," Felton said.

But unexpected phone calls from the soldier helped put his friends at ease.

"Talking to him made you feel a lot better about the situation," Olsen said. "He never for a second made you feel like he's scared."

After about 16 months overseas, Justin Bauer made it home safely. And the soldier spoke well of the experience. "He loved it," Felton said. "He didn't once regret signing the line to go."

Over the next year, while he was stateside, Bauer and his fiancée and high school sweetheart, Berthoud's Kari Campbell, lived near Fort Bragg in North Carolina. However, they came home for a little more than a week in September for a Colorado wedding.

It was the last time either friend would see Bauer.

Felton remembers one of their last conversations together. During the wedding reception, he and Bauer were discussing the tour the soldier would depart on in just a few months.

"He told me the tour will be cake: 'There is nothing to worry about — it'll be easy,'" Felton said. "It was definitely not easy."

A little more than a month after Bauer was deployed, Felton and Olsen got a phone call from Kari.

“She was hysterical,” Olsen remembered. “Finally, she told me Justin had died that day. He was gone.”

Since hearing of Bauer’s death, the friends have been trying to cope the best they can.

On Sunday, Felton, Olsen, Bauer’s two brothers and other friends sat around a bonfire at Carter Lake, the place Bauer loved so much, to remember the man who would do anything for them. “He’d stand in front of any one of his buddies to defend them,” Felton said. “That’s why he died. He was doing it for us.”

And with word of Bauer’s death spreading through the community and country, the friends have been overwhelmed with calls from those who knew him.

“He touched a lot of people and made a lot of people who they are,” Felton said. “And he’s going to continue to do it.”

Bauer’s best friends hope his life will serve as a message for everyone to live by.

“The most important thing to take from Justin’s life is don’t ever let anyone tell you you can’t,” Olsen said.

“Live every moment like it’s your last. He did that his entire life.”

REALLY BAD PLACE TO BE: ALL HOME NOW



U.S. soldiers in Baghdad’s Sadr City January 21, 2009. REUTERS/Erik de Castro

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Welcome To Liberated Afghanistan “Hundreds Of Villagers Denounced The American Military”



25 January 2009: Angry civilians in Laghman province demonstrating against a US air strike that killed 21 civilians on January 23, 2009. Quqnoos.com

Jan. 25 2009 The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan -- President Hamid Karzai condemned a U.S. operation he said killed 16 Afghan civilians, while hundreds of villagers denounced the American military during an angry demonstration Sunday.

In Laghman's capital, hundreds of angry demonstrators denounced the U.S. military Sunday and demanded an end to overnight raids. U.S. military leaders, victims' relatives and Afghan officials -- including two top Karzai advisers -- met at the governor's compound to discuss the issue, Gov. Latifullah Mashal said.

“The U.S. military said ‘We are sorry for this incident and after this we are going to coordinate our operations with Afghan forces,’” Mashal said. [

Resistance Action

01/21/09 Reuters & January 25 (RIA Novosti)

A car bomber killed two Afghan soldiers and wounded three more in an attack on Wednesday in the Mir Awad area of Herat province, some 645 km (400) miles west of Kabul, the defense ministry said in a statement.

A car bomber wounded nine people, including the provincial police chief, Baghlan province, during a wedding on Wednesday in Baghlan-e-Jadeed district, around 180 km (110) miles north of Kabul, a police official in the area said.

Taliban insurgents fired rockets on police posts in several areas on the outskirts of Kandahar overnight, some 500 km (310) miles southwest of Kabul, but there were no casualties reported, a police official said.

Five policemen were killed and one captured after Taliban militants attacked a police post in southern Afghanistan on Sunday. The attack was carried out in the Arghandab district of the Kandahar province, a Taliban spokesman told journalists. Meanwhile, the chief of the Kandahar security forces said the Taliban attack had killed three and wounded two policemen and police were investigating the circumstances of the incident, including the capture of a policeman.

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

TROOP NEWS



[Thanks to SSG N (ret'd) who sent this in. She writes: "I'm looking forward to this. First rule of holes: When you find yourself in one, stop digging."]

By A Wide Margin Americans Say That Torture Should Never Be Used, No Matter The Circumstances; A Majority Of Americans Favor The Closing Of Guantanamo



January 22, 2009 by Glenn Greenwald, Salon.com [Excerpts]

One of the most common and most corrosive aspects of our political discourse is the endless assertions -- based on nothing -- about what "Americans believe."

It is exceedingly conventional wisdom that Americans generally view the world through the prism of Jack Bauer and therefore want our government to torture, want Guantanamo kept opened, and do not want suspected Terrorists to be tried in civilian courts inside the U.S.

A new Washington Post/ABC News poll released yesterday negates all of those beliefs.

Here was the question that was asked about torture -- note that it's phrased in the most pro-torture manner possible, because it is grounded in the ludicrous, 24-clichéd "ticking time bomb" excuse that is the most commonly used argument by torture advocates:

Q. Obama has said that under his administration the United States will not use torture as part of the U.S. campaign against terrorism, no matter what the circumstance. Do you support this position not to use torture, or do you think there are cases in which the United States should consider torture against terrorism suspects?

By a wide margin -- 58-40% -- Americans say that torture should never be used, no matter the circumstances.

Let's repeat that: "no matter the circumstance." That margin is enormous among Democrats (71-28%) and substantial among independents (56-43%). As usual these days, Republicans hold the minority view, but even among them there is substantial categorical opposition to torture (42-55%).

Moreover, a majority of Americans (53-42%) favor the closing of Guantanamo, with large support among Democrats (68%) and independents (55%).

Troops Invited:

Comments, arguments, articles, and letters 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. Same address to unsubscribe. Phone: 917.677.8057

**NEED SOME TRUTH?
CHECK OUT TRAVELING
SOLDIER
The New Issue Of Traveling
Soldier Is Out!**

This issue features:

1. "I Could Not, In Good Conscience, Continue To Serve In The U.S. Army" says Andre Sheppard.

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/1.08.shepherd.php>

2. "We cannot allow any president to shift focus to Afghanistan" says Iraq vet Camilo Mejia.

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/1.08.afghanistan.php>

3. "I could not live with myself if I kept my head down and went into another deployment without taking any action" says active-duty soldier Casey Porter.

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/1.08.porter.php>

4. D.o.D. Says Toxic Chemicals Safe to Inhale
<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/1.08.toxic.php>

5. "It Amazes Me That Officials Say It's Not Hazardous, Yet Somehow You Mysteriously Develop These Problems After You Get There" says
<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/1.08.letters.php>

6. Download the new Traveling Soldier to pass it out at your school, workplace, or at nearby base.
<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/TS21.pdf>

"A Coalition Of Anti-War Groups Say National Guard Troops Are In Iraq Illegally"



01/21/09 NewsChannel 8

A coalition of anti-war groups say national guard troops are in Iraq illegally. They are introducing legislation in more than a dozen state legislatures to force governors to demand their recall.

More than a quarter of American troops in Iraq are National Guardsmen and many have served multiple tours.

Congress authorized their mobilization in 2002, but anti-war advocates say that law has expired. "We contend this law is moot, that its terms have been met, and therefore there is now legal basis for sending the National Guard to Iraq," said Jean Athey, Peace Action Montgomery.

Seven years ago, National Guardsmen were called up to help find weapons of mass destruction Iraq.

Since none were found and until Congress re-authorizes their mobilization, campaigners argue, they are there illegally. "The National Guard should be commanded by their governors, lacking the authorization from Congress," said Karen Dolan, Institute for Policy Studies.

The coalition is trying to introduce legislation in every state to demand governors take back control of National Guard units and block future call-ups of guardsmen, unless there is a valid reason.

"Until there is some lawful basis for the guard to be deployed to Iraq, we are instructing our state executive, our governor, to stay no," said Ben Manski, Liberty Tree.

So far, legislators in 18 states, including Maryland, have agreed to introduce the bill.

Maryland supporters say the legislation will be introduced to the general assembly soon.

“Asked How The Soldiers He Knows In His Unit Feel About The War, He Said, ‘We Don’t Want To Be There, We Want To Be Home’”



Master Sgt. Minnie Hiller-Cousins greeting antiwar protesters, including John Fenton, right, whose son, Matthew, 24, died in a bombing in Iraq. Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

[Thanks to SSG N (ret'd) & Sandy Kelson, Military Project & Veterans For Peace, who sent this in.]

January 21, 2009 By MICHAEL WINERIP, The New York Times Company

TEANECK, N.J.

EVERY Wednesday since mid-August 2005 — approximately 175 straight Wednesdays — a couple of dozen women and men have gathered in front of the National Guard Armory here for 90 minutes, starting at 4:30 p.m., to hold a peace vigil against the war.

They carry signs that Paula Rogovin, a teacher, always keeps handy in the trunk of her Toyota, demanding that the troops be brought home.

They hold four-foot-high numbers updating the latest death toll of American soldiers that Tom Urgo, a plumber, painted and lacquered.

They urge passing motorists to honk if they oppose the war. “We had honks from the very beginning, but not honks like this,” John Fenton, a retired postal worker, said during a vigil last month.

“I would say the honks really started to increase after the 2006 election.”

Ms. Rogovin picked the armory because it’s convenient — she lives in town — and because the symbolism is strong. The National Guard has traditionally been deployed to keep domestic peace during floods, hurricanes and riots, but for this war, record numbers have been sent overseas to fight, including 2,850 last year and 300 from this armory, the largest mobilization of the New Jersey Guard since World War II.

On the face of it, you’d think the protesters and the National Guard members are divided and separate, antiwar outside the armory, pro-war inside.

But that is not so.

There is much common ground between the two groups.

About once a month, before the vigil, Ms. Rogovin and a half dozen other protesters go inside to donate diapers and groceries to the armory’s food pantry for Guard families who are struggling financially while their loved ones are in Iraq.

During the December drop-off, the protesters were warmly welcomed by National Guard leaders.

“How you guys doing?” said Master Sgt. Minnie Hiller-Cousins, who runs the Teaneck Armory’s family assistance program and has herself served in Iraq. “I thank you all so much for helping our families.” Then she gave the vigil organizer a hug.

As for the protesters, many are themselves veterans, and they speak respectfully of the National Guard soldiers.

“We’re not against the National Guard,” Ms. Rogovin said. “We have loved ones in the military.”

Ms. Rogovin has a son in the Marines who has done two tours in Iraq. Mr. Urgo, who brings the death toll numbers each week, was a Vietnam combat veteran.

And Mr. Fenton, who urges passers-by to honk, lost his son, Matthew, 24, a Marine sergeant, to a bomber in Falluja in 2006.

For her part, Sergeant Hiller-Cousins said that based on her talks with the National Guard family members with whom she works so closely, a majority have the same view of the war that the American public has expressed in opinion polls — they're against it.

"They think it, but most are afraid to say it out loud," Sergeant Hiller-Cousins said.

AT first, the protesters and National Guard were divided and separate.

"I didn't want any part of them," Sergeant Hiller-Cousins said. "We thought they hated us. We felt they were picketing against us."

The sergeant has been in the Guard 29 years and did not have to serve in Iraq.

But during a 2004 mobilization, at the age of 50, she requested to go, because she felt that she had helped train so many soldiers for war, it would have been hypocritical not to do her share.

When she returned from Baghdad at the end of 2005, to her job as director of family assistance — essentially the morale officer for the families left behind — she was not happy to see a peace vigil outside her armory.

Mostly, she ignored it. The vigil is held on a far corner, a football field's length from the lot where Guard members park. She felt that the vigil was bad for morale and that her job of keeping up the families' spirits was hard enough without a weekly reminder of public opposition to the war.

On the Wednesdays after Memorial Day in 2007 and 2008, the protesters held larger vigils, with about 300 people ringing the armory, holding up the names of every soldier killed in Iraq, which angered Sergeant Hiller-Cousins and other Guard members.

Ms. Rogovin said: "Someone at the armory came out to speak to us.

They said they're concerned the names of the dead will upset the National Guard. I said, 'Of course they'll be upset, it's very upsetting.' "

Last spring, for the Memorial Day vigil, Guard members were told not to report to work, to avoid a possible confrontation with the hundreds of protesters. "I was mad about that," Sergeant Hiller-Cousins said. "We're the Army, how come we let them push us around?"

But about that time, the sergeant was walking in front of the armory during a vigil and noticed a sign one woman was carrying that said, "Support Our Troops, Bring Them Home Now."

That was Ms. Rogovin.

The sergeant noticed that she was the same woman who was donating food. "Until then, I had blinders on," Sergeant Hiller-Cousins said.

“It took me awhile to see they’re not protesting against us.”

She began talking to the protesters when they came in with donations. Several vigil regulars are Vietnam veterans — Mr. Urgo; Connie Enright, a retired police officer; Jan Barry, a retired Bergen Record reporter; Walt Nygard, a route driver for a vending company. Sergeant Hiller-Cousins spoke with them about her uncle, also a Vietnam veteran.

During one visit, Mr. Fenton told the sergeant how his son had been the gunner on a Humvee when a single piece of shrapnel tore through both hemispheres of his brain and killed him.

“There were five Marines in that Humvee, and Matthew was the only one killed,” he said. “Of course, I’ll never be the same again.”

The sergeant is herself in counseling for post-traumatic stress from her combat tour, and she was moved by Mr. Fenton’s words.

“I looked in his eyes and there were tears and pain when he told about his son. Here was a guy who had to be so angry about the death of his child, but he was coming in to bring us food.”

Sergeant Hiller-Cousins said she believes that part of the reason a common ground was reached here is that many of the National Guard families themselves feel ambivalence about the war.

It is, of course, impossible to know. Part of the American military’s professionalism is training soldiers to carry out the president’s mission regardless of their own politics. Soldiers are generally reluctant to discuss their views publicly with reporters, and certainly a majority may feel like Sgt. John Roldan, a guardsman from Cliffside Park, N.J., doing his second tour of Iraq, who says: “I agree with the war, it’s a good thing. You see all the suffering over there, I think we’re making a difference.”

ON the other hand, the National Guard members and their families are not isolated on military bases; they are citizen-soldiers with civilian jobs who live in the community when not mobilized. Their state, New Jersey, voted heavily for the man with the stronger antiwar policy, Barack Obama, 57 to 42 percent over John McCain, the war hero.

The typical active-duty Army soldier is 27, and the general public in that age group voted 66 to 32 percent for Mr. Obama, according to national exit polls of 18- to 29-year-olds. (In contrast, in 1972, during the Vietnam War, that same age group voted for Richard Nixon over George McGovern, the peace candidate, 52 to 46 percent.)

Mary Hamilton, a nurse from Demarest, N.J., joined the Teaneck vigil about the same time her son, Staff Sgt. Jesse Hamilton of the Army, left to fight in Iraq.

Sergeant Hamilton spent a year working with a unit of 10 American soldiers, training Iraqi military personnel.

At the start, he said, he disagreed with his mother and was gung ho for the war, as was the majority of his unit.

By the end of his tour in 2006, he said, he had turned “completely against the war,” as had most of his unit.

After nine years in the Army, he has finished his military service and is a civilian again, working in financial planning. “I consider myself a moderate politically,” he said, “but Bush has pushed me unnaturally to the left.” He voted for Barack Obama. As for his mom taking part in the vigil, he said, “I love it.”

Specialist Gregg Walls, an accountant from Teaneck, is currently stationed in Iraq with the New Jersey Guard. His wife, Iris, is strongly against the war, but in an interview, while he was home on a two-week leave this month, Specialist Walls would not discuss his opinion: “I’m a soldier, I have a job to do. That’s all I’ll say.”

Asked how the soldiers he knows in his unit feel about the war, he said, “We don’t want to be there, we want to be home.”

He did say he voted by absentee ballot from Camp Bucca for Mr. Obama, and watched the victory speech on his computer election night. “It was tough not to get misty, I will say that,” Specialist Walls said.

Mr. Barry, the retired reporter, is a well-known figure in the peace movement, a founder of Vietnam Veterans Against the War in the 1960s and a regular at the Teaneck vigils.

He says the Iraq war protests are less likely to criticize soldiers for fighting the war and more aimed at the political leaders who sent the soldiers to fight: “There was more hostility in the late ‘60s, between people in the peace movement and the veterans. I think more people from this generation are trying to be more receptive to listening to other people’s points of view.”

Joseph Nygard, 27, who served 16 months in Afghanistan with the Army, said he likes that his parents, Nancy and Walt Nygard, are regulars at the vigil.

“We have pretty much the same feelings about the war,” he said. At one point during his tour, he flew home to Newark, on leave from Afghanistan. “When we landed, the pilot made an announcement: ‘Please stay seated and let the soldiers leave first.’ We got up and everyone on the plane clapped for us. It was a great feeling.”

Asked how he would describe the American public’s attitude, he answered, “I’d say, ‘End the war, support the troops.’ “

FOR 36 years, Ms. Rogovin, 61, has been a New York City elementary school teacher. She is the Bergen County, N.J., coordinator for Military Families Speak Out and started the weekly protest here after visiting the vigil near President Bush’s ranch in Crawford, Tex., held by Cindy Sheehan, whose son, Casey, was killed in Iraq in 2004.

A daughter of the highly regarded social documentary photographer Milton Rogovin (still alive at 99), Ms. Rogovin has long been involved in liberal activist causes, including protesting the Vietnam War; fighting for better neighborhood day care and health care in Upper Manhattan; and ending apartheid in South Africa.

For the first vigil here, she had just six people, including Nancy and Walt Nygard. "Nancy worked for a contractor who was renovating a bathroom in my home," said Ms. Rogovin. "I mentioned it to her and she said, 'My son's going, I should get involved.' I talk to everybody, that's how you get people."

In 2006, she phoned Mr. Fenton and invited him to join, after reading a news story about his son being killed.

"We met at a diner," Mr. Fenton said. "I just didn't want to join without understanding what it is. I didn't want Matthew or myself to be in a position to be used."

He was impressed that so many other parents in the vigil, including Ms. Rogovin, had children in the Marines or Army. "Twenty years from now most people will forget this war," he said. "Not me. Losing my son Matthew is the biggest disaster of my life."

Ms. Rogovin supports efforts in New Jersey and several other states to bring National Guard members home, arguing that the authorization to send them overseas has expired. These efforts are given little chance, but, she says, she does not get discouraged. "Never, I'm not cut out that way."

Sergeant Hiller-Cousins helps keep National Guard families' spirits up by holding monthly dinners and social events at the armory, and Ms. Rogovin does the same for her vigil regulars, hosting pot-luck dinners at her home. "We've become a tight social group," Ms. Nygard said.

Ms. Rogovin believes her vigil and others like it have helped shift public opinion, and, at least locally, there is some evidence that's true. She and other vigil members have met several times with their local congressman, Steven R. Rothman, a Democrat, who initially was a strong supporter of the Iraq war. Bob Decheine, the congressman's chief of staff, said those meetings helped change his boss's position in 2006.

"Steve did have several terrific conversations with Paula and her group, and that definitely played a significant role in the evolution of his thinking about the war," Mr. Decheine said.

Quietly, subtly, the weekly vigil has helped people here recognize common ground. Terry Moore, a teacher at Stillman Elementary, has brought his social action club — World Improvement by Tenafly Students — to the vigil several times, and before each visit, his third, fourth and fifth graders collect canned goods to drop off at the armory for National Guard families.

And recently, when Nora Lennon, treasurer of the Ladies Auxiliary of American Legion Post 128 of Teaneck, had a \$100 check for the National Guard families, she asked her neighbor Paula Rogovin to drop it off when she went over to the armory for her Wednesday vigil.

DO YOU HAVE A FRIEND OR RELATIVE IN THE MILITARY?

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 wars, 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

Heartless Pentagon Bottom Feeding Scum Suckers Cut Off Pay For Alaska WWII Militia Survivors; Most From The Largely Native Militia Are In Their 80s



This undated photo shows Alaska Territorial Guard members sitting on caribou skin rugs in Barrow. University of Alaska Fairbanks archive photo via The Associated Press

January 22nd By RACHEL D'ORO, The Associated Press

The Army has decided to cut off retirement pay for veterans of a largely Native militia formed to guard the territory of Alaska from the threat of Japanese attack during World War II.

The change means 26 surviving members of the Alaska Territorial Guard -- most in their 80s and long retired -- will lose as much as \$557 in monthly retirement pay, a state veterans officer said Thursday. The payments end Feb. 1, according to U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski.

“What kind of a government, what kind of a Cruella, could cut retirement benefits to a group of Eskimos in their 80s in the dead of Alaskan winter?” the Alaska Republican asked Thursday on the Senate floor. “It is time for some soul searching on this at the Pentagon.”

Applications for retirement pay from 37 others have been suspended.

The state is pursuing a remedy for “these brave Alaskans, who did so much for the cause of freedom during a time of great national peril,” Gov. Sarah Palin said.

The action comes almost a decade after Congress passed a law qualifying time served in the unpaid guard as active federal service.

The Army agreed in 2004 to grant official military discharge certificates to members or their survivors.

An Army official said the law was misinterpreted. The law applies to military benefits, including medical benefits, but not retirement pay, said Lt. Col. Richard McNorton of the Army’s human resources command in Alexandria, Va.

“The focus is to follow the law,” he said. “We can’t choose whether to follow the law.” **[If the Pentagon gave a shit about “following the law,” there would not be one troop left in Iraq, a war begun and continued by traitors on a platform of lies for no reason but greed for oil and empire, and every politician who has ever voted one cent to keep it going would be in prison, with not one exception.]**

The Army doesn’t intend to seek to recoup past pay, he said. **[Wow! How fucking generous.]**

About 300 members are still living from the original 6,600-member unit called up from 1942 to 1947 to scout patrols, build military airstrips and perform other duties. But only a fraction had enough other military service to reach the 20-year requirement for retirement pay.

Among those who did is 88-year-old Paul Kiunya in the western Alaska village of Kipnuk. Kiunya was 16 when he joined the territorial guard and worked in communications, reporting by radio any unusual noises or the direction of aircraft, including some Japanese planes he spotted.

“We did not get one cent being in the territorial guard,” he said. “And we worked hard.”

Kiunya -- who later put in 22 years in the National Guard and another decade in the Guard reserves -- will lose more than \$358 a month in his retirement package because of the Army’s decision.

With gasoline in his village at almost \$10 a gallon, that’s a huge amount to lose.

“I don’t know why they’re trying to cut the pay. It’s not good for us right now,” he said in a telephone interview. “It’s not right.”

Murkowski and fellow Alaska Sen. Mark Begich, a Democrat, are preparing legislation clarifying that service in the territorial guard counts as active duty for calculating retirement pay, she told her Senate colleagues.

Murkowski said Alaska's three-member congressional delegation also has sent a letter to President Barack Obama, asking him to intervene to ensure that those affected by "this tragic, tragic series of events do not lose the safety net."

OCCUPATION PALESTINE

If Israel Is So Worried About Rockets Fired By Hamas, Why Doesn't It Swap An F-16 For Some Of Them?

January 23, 2009 Mark Steel, Socialist Worker [Excerpts]

THE WORRYING part about whether the ceasefire in Gaza can hold together will be whether the international community can stop the flow of arms to the terrorists.

Because Israel is getting its planes and tanks and missiles from somewhere, and until this supply is cut off, there's every chance it could start up again.

The disregard for life from these terrorists and their supporters is shocking. For example, Thomas Friedman, the New York Times columnist, wrote that the purpose of the Israeli attack must be to "inflict a heavy death toll and heavy pain on the Gaza population."

Replace "Gaza" with "Western," and that could have been written by al-Qaeda. Maybe this is the problem: The Israelis are writing their policies by downloading statements from an Islamic Jihad Web site, and just changing the place names.

Also, if the Israelis think the Hamas rockets are as lethal as they say, why don't they swap their F-16 fighters and Apache helicopters for a few of them?

These things are capable of terrorizing a whole nation for years apparently, yet the Israelis have neglected to buy any, wasting their money on gunboats and stuff.

Given that their annual arms budget is \$7.2 billion, plus \$2.2 billion in "aid," they'd save enough to buy a selection of banks in every country in the world.

The military advantages would be enormous because the Israelis' complaint about Hamas is the use of tunnels to smuggle arms.

But if Israel gave Hamas a few planes and tanks and helicopters, they could probably be persuaded to shut down those tunnels that seem to be the cause of such bad feeling.

Whatever you say about Israel, at least it moves its weapons about legally--except for when it secretly built a nuclear arsenal, in violation of an array of international agreements.

But they did it above ground and not in a tunnel, and that's the main thing.

WATCHING THE reports from Gaza, another reason why the ceasefire may break down becomes apparent. The Israelis might claim that their satellite pictures now show Palestinians in possession of huge mounds of rubble--lethal if thrown over the border.

Luckily, these weapons are easy to spot. Most of them are next to women howling, "Look what they've done to my house," but perhaps the air force should bomb them again--just in case.

The Israelis say they fear Hamas will once again break the ceasefire by sending over those rockets. But the whole point of the operation was to make that impossible.

Because they must have asked themselves the question, "If we slaughter 1,300 people, including 300 children, is that likely to make people: A. less cross or B. more cross?" And presumably, they concluded it will make them much less likely to grow up full of hatred and determination to retaliate.

Perhaps they saw medical research that shows when someone is suffering from anxiety and bouts of irascible ill-tempered behavior, the best treatment is to pen them in with no food or medicine and then kill some of them, and that calms them down a treat.

Another way to allay their worries about Hamas breaking the ceasefire is to read the report from their government's own Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center. This states that during the ceasefire "Hamas did not take part in any rocket fire, and sometimes prevented other organizations from attacking." Still, with all that's been going on, I suppose they haven't had time for reading.

Despite all this, there might be one cheery sign, which is that never before have so many people seen through the Israeli government's excuses for handing out mass destruction.

The demonstrations in support of Palestinians have been bigger than ever before, and even the United Nations and the Wall Street Journal have suggested Israel has committed war crimes.

One poll in America suggested that 60 per cent of people opposed the bombardment, and the change of opinion reached the point that an Israeli diplomat has admitted that "the harm to civilians in Gaza is causing us huge damage."

Maybe, best of all, was genetics expert Steven Rose, who appeared on Radio 4's Today program to talk about a new study that's located "morality spots," the part of the brain that deals with our morality.

Asked how we could know whether this was true, he said in a marvelously posh academic Radio 4 voice, "Well, we could test the brains of the Israeli cabinet and see if they've got no morality spots whatsoever."

“Despite Its Victory In Free And Fair Elections, The U.S. And Israel Sought To Undermine And Destroy Hamas”

“When A People Lose Their Livelihood, Their Homes, Their Loved Ones And Their Dignity At The Hands Of An Occupying Power, They Resist”

“In This Case, The Resistance Movement Is Led By Hamas”

A strategy that offers hope for Palestinian liberation would connect workers' struggles throughout the region to the fight for one secular, democratic state in Palestine. And that would lay the basis for a lasting peace in the Middle East.

January 21, 2009 By Deepa Kumar, Socialist Worker [Excerpts]

MOST MAINSTREAM accounts of the Palestinian Hamas organization present it as a bunch of rabid fanatics, bent on violence and motivated by an irrational hatred of Jews and the state of Israel. This view is reflected both in the mainstream media and in many books published on the topic.

When we separate propaganda from reality, however, what we find is a group that has taken on the mantle of national resistance against Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands.

Hamas describes itself like this: "The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) is a Palestinian national liberation movement that struggles for the liberation of the Palestinian occupied territories and for the recognition of the legitimate rights of Palestinians."

In its manifesto in the lead-up to the 2006 elections, it stated: "Our Palestinian people are still living through the phase of national liberation; they have the right to endeavor to regain their rights and end the occupation using all available means, including armed resistance."

It is because of this commitment to the national liberation struggle--and the recognition among Palestinians that Hamas, whatever else it may stand for, refuses to concede on the question of resisting Israeli repression--that the organization has won wide support.

Hamas began to gain a hearing in the late 1980s, when the secular nationalist Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), dominated by the Fatah faction led by Yasser Arafat, gave up on the long-term goal of liberating all of historic Palestine--and followed a path of negotiations that resulted in the Oslo Accords of 1993.

The culmination of Hamas' growing support was the January 2006 elections to the Palestine Legislative Assembly, in which Hamas won a majority.

The reason for this victory lies not only in the failure of Oslo and the continued brutality of the Israeli occupation, but also mass disillusionment with the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority. Hamas' steadfast opposition to occupation and constant criticisms of Fatah's compromises, combined with its network of social service and charity agencies, bolstered its image not only among religious Muslims, but also among secularists and Christians.

Despite its victory in free and fair elections, the U.S. and Israel sought to undermine and destroy Hamas.

Israel suspended the transfer of tax revenues collected from Palestinians in the amount of \$50 million a month. This began the strangulation of Gaza and set off a humanitarian crisis.

While the public strategy involved the collective punishment of the people of Gaza for electing Hamas, Israel and its U.S. ally also undertook a secret operation to overthrow Hamas, which involved funneling arms and money to Fatah fighters to enable them to carry out a coup in Hamas' base in Gaza. Hamas won the battle for Gaza, and Fatah was routed.

Yet mainstream accounts of the conflict present Hamas as having launched a coup in order to come to power.

Israel continued to step up its pressure on the people of Gaza, cutting off much-needed supplies, electricity and essentials and launching a military assault late last month.

The siege and the latest invasion of Gaza have caused untold suffering, death, and misery.

But they have not accomplished Israel's aim of fomenting a Palestinian opposition ready to topple Hamas.

On the contrary, the group continued to gain influence since the 2006 elections.

The reason for this is simple.

When a people lose their livelihood, their homes, their loved ones and their dignity at the hands of an occupying power, they resist--and in this case, the resistance movement is led by Hamas.

If elections were to be held in occupied Palestine, Hamas would likely win again.

This is not because all the people of Palestine agree with Hamas' Islamist principles--and not at all because Palestinians are anti-Semitic fanatics--but because people living under inhuman conditions imposed by an occupying power will turn to organizations that give voice to their aspirations for liberation.

HAMAS TODAY is a different organization than the one that was founded in 1987.

For instance, its 1988 charter makes little effort to distinguish between an anti-Zionist and an anti-Jewish stance.

Yet the experience of fighting against the occupation and for national liberation transformed the organization--in 1990, it published a document stating that its struggle was against Zionists and Zionism, and not Jews and Judaism.

Hamas exhibits all the contradictions of modern Islamist parties. It achieved prominence because of a political vacuum caused by the collapse of secular nationalism and the left.

Yet given its politics and class basis, it doesn't present a long-term solution to the economic and political problems faced by the people who turn to it.

The class basis of Islamism is the middle class or the petty bourgeoisie. In general, this class does not have the social weight necessary to bring the system to a standstill or force concessions from powerful groups.

This problem is further compounded in the case of Hamas by the context of occupation.

Hamas draws support from merchants, business people and the rich, but its cadre and leadership are drawn largely from the educated middle classes or de-classed people in refugee camps.

This explains why Hamas vacillates between armed struggle and radical pronouncements on the one hand, and ceasefires and concessions on the other. Ultimately, these strategies are a dead end.

Palestinian liberation will depend on support from outside the Occupied Territories--most obviously, from the region's working classes, where massive sympathy and solidarity exists with the Palestinian cause.

Israel's assault on Gaza stirred huge demonstrations around the world, from Indonesia and Pakistan to South Africa and Europe--with some of the largest in Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Morocco and Turkey.

In Egypt, in particular, the working class has expressed both anger against the neoliberal Mubarak regime and sympathy for the Palestinian cause--a revolt that toppled Mubarak would remove a crucial source of complicity with Israel's occupation.

A strategy that offers hope for Palestinian liberation would connect workers' struggles throughout the region to the fight for one secular, democratic state in Palestine.

And that would lay the basis for a lasting peace in the Middle East.

[To check out what life is like under a murderous military occupation by foreign terrorists, go to: www.rafahtoday.org The occupied nation is Palestine. The foreign terrorists call themselves "Israeli."]

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

So Much For That "Change You Can Believe In" Bullshit: DemoRat Politicians In DC Overwhelmingly Favor Killing More Palestinians

January 23, 2009 Council for the National Interest Foundation

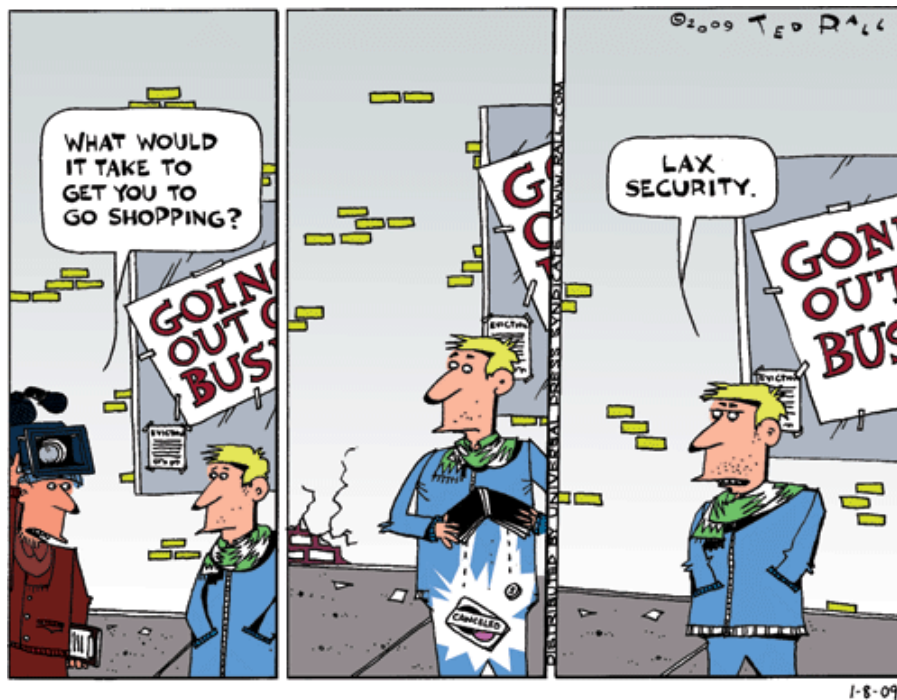
On January 9, the US House of Representatives passed by a vote of 397 to 5, H. Res. 34, basically endorsing Israel's massive and brutal attack on Gaza that was in full bloom.

The resolution states that Israel has a right to defend itself, and blames Hamas launched rockets (in reality not much more than enhanced fireworks) for the Israeli attack. Fifty-eight House members gave floor speeches on the measure.

Most obediently and obsequiously gushed in favor of America's "strong ally" Israel, and blamed evil "Islamic-radicals", as well as Hamas for the plight of the starving and imprisoned, yet stubborn (because they just won't evaporate), Palestinians.

While the rest of the world witnessed unbelievable horrors unfolding, the US Congress was spontaneously endorsing the horror. The Senate had passed the same resolution on January 8, by a voice vote.

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