

GI SPECIAL 7B16:

Not Soon Enough



A mother holds her son at his homecoming ceremony on Feb. 15, 2009 at the Kentucky Air National Guard base in Louisville, Ky. after a year in Iraq. (AP Photo/ The Courier-Journal, David R. Lutman)

Indirect Fire:

**“All Of Us Volunteered To
Serve, But Not In An Illegal,
Unjust War”**

**“A War Which Was Started On A
Lie And Continues With No End In
Sight”**

**“There Were No Notions Of Some
Glorious Idea Of A Mission”**

**“I Volunteered To Serve My Country, Not
To Throw My Life Away For Nothing”**



02/17/2009 By Jim Worlein [Iraq Veterans Against The War]

Branch of service: United States Army (USA)

Unit: 334th SIG CO, 3rd BDE 2nd INF (First Stryker Brigade)

Rank: CPT (Resigned) / SGT (Prior to OCS)

Home: Richardson, Texas

Served in: 57th SIG BN, 3rd SIG BDE III Corps Fort Hood, TX 334th SIG BN, 3rd BDE 2nd INF Fort Lewis, WA FOB Pacesetter near Samarra, Iraq DEC 2003 FOB Freedom (the Palace) in Mosul, Iraq JAN-NOV 2004 142nd SIG BDE (FWD) Fort Lewis, WA

The random nature of indirect fire that we took on a daily basis gave one the sense that anytime you were outside a mortar or rocket could come screaming in and snuff you out.

I had several close calls where I had just left where mortars impacted or I should have been had something not held me up.

One such instance happened on the way to lunch. My best buddy, Michael, and I were about to leave the Brigade TOC (Tactical Operations Center) and walk the half mile to the Chow hall. Just as we were walking out of the Signal shop, I received a phone call which held us up for a couple minutes. Those couple minutes saved us from being right where mortars impacted outside the TOC.

That phone call might possibly have saved our lives. Who knows? It was not standard for us to wear body armor unless we were outside the FOB. Those rounds could have killed or seriously wounded us.

There was a kid I will never forget for as long as I live. PV2 Bradli Coleman was 19 years old and had been in the Army less than a year.

He came over as a replacement to the Brigade's Headquarters Company. I would see him every day because he had been put on a 12 hour night shift manning the desk at the front door of the TOC. He checked IDs and handled any Iraq workers coming into the TOC.

One day, a mortar hit his two man trailer he slept in. The blast did not kill him. He received major burns over a large portion of his body. He was evacuated to the hospital where he died two days later.

Coleman was a kid.

How much life can you experience at 19?

Did he know what it was to truly love someone and to be loved? Did he know what it feels like to hold your child in your arms for the first time? Was he so young that he still held on to those feelings of invincibility we all have in our youth? Did it ever cross his mind he might be killed in Iraq? I think about him more and more as time goes on and my life progresses.

It seemed like it was only a matter of time before I was going to get hit. Many times enemy indirect fire would miss the FOB all together or they would be dud rounds, but this never lessened the danger we lived with everyday.

I knew several folks that got hit. I told you about one that was killed. Some were wounded bad enough to get sent to Germany. Some treated and released.

Mortars impacted outside the "house" as we called our building, many times. Shortly after we arrived in Mosul, I had several close calls of which there would be many. We had toilets in the House, but Iraqi toilets could not handle toilet paper. You see, Iraqis, use their left hand to clean themselves. This is why gestures with the left hand are considered offense in their culture. So, you went #1 in the House and #2 outside in one

of the many Port-a-Johns. I had just come back from one and settled back down in my room, which I shared with eight others.

After a time, you really become schooled in the sounds of war. One can tell the size of the mortar by the sound quality of the detonation. Rockets and car bombs sound different. Incoming and outgoing fire sounds different. Even the sounds of machine guns have a different quality. One uses this ill gotten knowledge to judge the danger at hand.

When I got back to my room, I heard an 80mm mortar round impact just down the hill where I had just left. My PSG (Platoon Sergeant), SFC Okey Facer, happened to be sitting at the window and I rushed to join him.

At the bottom of the hill was another building that served as the HQ for the base's QRF (Quick Reaction Force). The QRF were the "minutemen" of the base. They responded to attacks against the FOB. They are always in full combat gear and ready to roll at a moment's notice to help the injured and rain hot lead upon the enemy with deadly fury.

On the ground in front of the Port-A-Johns, there was a small crater and a QRF soldier on his back bleeding from his face.

The force of the detonation blasted this Joe off his feet and on his back. His body armor protected his torso and head from the blast. His face and shoulder were not so lucky. He lay on his back with blood pouring down his face. His left hand covered his right shoulder where blood was running out. His other hand was covering his forehead. His buddies rushed out to get him with a litter and rushed him into a building for cover.

Mortars rarely ever came as a single round. It was usually somewhere between 3 to 6 rounds and sometimes delayed in order to try and get first responders helping any wounded there may be from the first rounds. I do not know what ever happened to him. I know he survived that is all.

We always had a CAP (Combat Air Patrol) of two Kiowas flying overhead to respond to incidents in the city. These gunships would scream into the area where mortars or rockets had been fired to try and engage the enemy.

The ten months I was in Mosul, to my knowledge, we never caught anyone shooting mortars or rockets at us. They were simply too fast for us to catch them in the act.

Samarra was a totally different situation all together.

In Samarra, the area was much more rural and open. We had a battery of four 155mm (approximately 6 inches) cannons set up which would respond to any indirect fire attacks with their own counter-battery fire. Special radar could pinpoint the launch site of indirect fire. Most of the enemy were untrained and not at all accurate with their attempts to hit targets on the bases. They might launch some 80 or 120mm mortars blindly at our general area and our response would be highly accurate, massive 155mm high explosive rounds raining death down on them. The enemy learned not to launch on us in Samarra or do so remotely as in the case of 107mm rockets.

We could not do this in Mosul.

Mosul is a huge city the size of Dallas (approximately one million people). The Palace complex where I lived was situated in much the same way as the SMU campus is in Dallas. Just beyond the walls was a densely populated city filled with civilians caught up in the maelstrom of the insurgency. We could not return 155mm rounds at launch sites. Imagine you are an Iraqi, the enemy might roll up to your house, set up a mortar tube in your backyard, scare and intimidate you into keeping your mouth shut, launch on us, and then tear down and run like hell. We would have killed countless civilians with counter-battery fire, so we relied on choppers and the QRF to try and get the fuckers shooting at us.

It was a valiant, but fruitless effort on our part.

That frustration really wore on all of us. I know I took great delight in Samarra, when I heard outgoing counter-battery fire. It was a great feeling knowing that we were making the enemy pay dearly for trying to kill us. Of course, it was also terrible knowing that some of the enemy were not true believers at all.

The economy in Iraq was terrible with a lot of young military age males unemployed. This was all made possible by the brilliant idea to disband the Iraqi military. There were financiers that would pay the locals amounts of money for every round they fired at us. So, some of these poor bastards that were ineptly dropping mortars on us were just out of work guys trying to feed their families. Hard times drive people to do desperate things in order to survive. It is difficult to hate those people when you realize that there, but for the fortune of being born in the US, you might have done the same thing in order to feed your family.

War is hell despite the glory videos from the heady days of the invasion when we were supposedly the "good guys".

Being shelled everyday made me very aware of my own mortality and that I could be killed at any time.

I remember there was a female mechanic on FOB Marez who was killed instantly right outside their chow hall by a mortar. That area was called "Mortar Alley" on Marez. Specialist Isela Rubalcava was killed by a mortar fragment that pierced her heart. She was dead before she hit the ground.

That was the way I wanted to go and would literally pray for that at night. . It seems so strange to me now, but I would actually pray for a quick death if it were my time. Not a prayer for protection, but one of a quick passing. I did not feel I was worthy to ask God for protection. There was nothing special about me that made me worth saving over anyone else. I was filled with survivor guilt. I never thought that my experience of war would so change my self-esteem and feeling of self worth.

The seemingly inevitable death that the shelling brought out in me drove me to a point where praying for a quick death seemed not only normal, but quite reasonable. How does one explain this to someone who was not there?

There is a double edge to the sword to surviving this whole experience which I cannot shake. I find myself resenting the people I talk to about the war who were not there.

And at the same time, feeling so thankful for them that they have no idea what I am talking about. This feeling is slowly diminishing thankfully. I would not wish the fear and frustration I dealt with in Iraq on anyone. But, since such a small portion of our population is fighting the war, sometimes I feel like the rest of the country cannot thank us enough for what we sacrificed on behalf of our country.

And few things get me going like someone saying, "Well, you signed up for stuff like this."

Yes, that is true.

All of us volunteered to serve, but not in an illegal, unjust war.

A war which was started on a lie and continues with no end in sight.

I volunteered to serve my country, not to throw my life away for nothing.

That is how I felt the entire time I was in Iraq.

There were no notions of some glorious idea of a mission.

I was solely concerned about the soldiers I was with and I supported. I would have done anything for them including laying down my life. That feeling was a common bond that joined us all forever.

My war experienced changed me.

The man that returned home is not the one that left. My wife has told me this as well.

I left something behind in Iraq and coming home without that piece of me has been tough on me and also my family. There have been many times I wished I had been wounded and lost a limb because that would be a visible wound for all to see. But, that thankfully did not happen to me.

Instead, I joined the ranks of the physically unscarred that bear invisible wounds. It is difficult for some people to understand.

If PTSD left visible wounds on the body, the public would be horrified by vets like me.

Sadly, my story is not unique but rather common.

I am finding my own way to embrace a sense of gratitude for my survival rather than the survivor guilt which was smothered me.

Also, I am always searching now for the things that have changed in me which might help me to be thankful for instead of mourning, for lack of a better word, the innocence I left in Iraq. I am most grateful for the love and support of my family and the care of a special doctor who has helped me to begin healing. I now want to help my lost brothers and sisters who may be suffering as well.

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

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Three U.S. Soldiers Killed In Diyala Combat

23 February 2009 Multi National Corps Iraq Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory
RELEASE No. 20090223-04

TIKRIT, Iraq – Three U.S. Coalition Soldiers and an interpreter died as a result of combat operations in Diyala Province, Iraq, Feb. 23.

Resistance Fighters Dressed As Cops Kill U.S. Soldier In Mosul and Wound Three More After Inviting Them To Lunch: Attackers Escape

February 24, 2009 HAMID AHMED, Associated Press Writer & BBC

BAGHDAD (AP) - Two policemen opened fire on U.S. troops visiting an Iraqi police station in the northern city of Mosul, Nineveh province, on Tuesday, killing a U.S. soldier and an Iraqi interpreter and wounding three other Americans, officials said.

Iraqi Brig. Gen. Saeed Ahmed al-Jubouri said the shooting wounded an Iraqi police captain. A second interpreter was also injured.

The shooting took place at 1500 (1200 GMT) at a checkpoint under a bridge in the northern city of Mosul.

A police intelligence source the Americans were invited to lunch with Iraqi police at a checkpoint under a bridge, reports the BBC's Mike Sergeant in Baghdad.

He says when the soldiers arrived, the two policemen - a corporal and a private - opened fire on them, before making their escape.

It was the fourth such shooting in the Mosul area in just over a year purportedly involving Iraqi security forces.

The U.S. military said one interpreter was killed and that a U.S. soldier died later of his wounds after the troops came under small-arms fire at a police station.

It said three other Americans also were wounded in the 2 p.m. attack in Mosul, about 225 miles northwest of Baghdad.

Police spokesman Brig. Gen. Saeed Ahmed al-Jubouri said two Iraqi police officers began shooting at the Americans as they were visiting a police unit that protects bridges.

He said the attackers fled the area in a car and that a manhunt was under way.

Al-Jubouri said an Iraqi police captain who was commanding the regiment also was wounded.

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

4 U.S. Troops Killed By IED Somewhere Or Other In Afghanistan; Obama Promises More

Feb 24 By HEIDI VOGT, Associated Press Writer

A roadside bomb killed four U.S. troops in southern Afghanistan on Tuesday, inflicting the year's deadliest single attack on international forces a week after Washington set plans to send reinforcements. An Afghan civilian working with the Americans also died.

The Americans were patrolling with Afghan soldiers when their vehicle struck a bomb Tuesday afternoon,

Taliban militants have increased attacks the last three years and now hold sway in large areas of countryside, leading the Obama administration to promise an intensified focus on defeating Islamic extremists in this region.

Obama's order would put several thousand troops in place in time for the increase in fighting that usually occurs with warmer weather and ahead of Afghan national elections scheduled for August.

REALLY BAD PLACE TO BE: ALL HOME NOW



US soldiers inspect a US Army damaged vehicle at the site of an attack in Jalalabad on February 5. (AFP/File/Khan Wali Kamran)

“Demonstrators Shouted ‘Death To Canada’ And ‘Death To America’ As Bodies Of The Two Children Were Carted Off To The Gates Of The Kandahar Governor’s Guest House”

February 23, 2009 CBC News

The Canadian military is investigating allegations that two Afghan children were killed in an explosion Monday caused by a shell left by Canadian troops.

The probe follows the accusation by a Panjwai district elder who claims two children were killed and three wounded when they came across an unexploded Canadian rocket

from a firing exercise in the village of Salehan, about 15 kilometres southwest of Kandahar city.

The allegation sparked an angry protest outside the provincial council office in Kandahar city. Demonstrators shouted “death to Canada” and “death to America” as bodies of the two children were carted off to the gates of the Kandahar governor’s guest house.

TROOP NEWS

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



The casket of Pfc. Jonathan Roberge makes its way to St. Cecilia’s church for funeral services Feb. 19, 2009. The 22-year-old private was killed by a car bomber near Mosul, Iraq, while on patrol in a Humvee. (AP Photo/Winslow Townson)

**“It Was Never Determined Who
Had Planned And Carried Out The
Bombing”**

“The Unit Never Knew If Further Investigations Happened”

“We Did A Dozen Interviews. We Couldn’t Separate Fact From Fiction. We Never Found Out Who It Was”

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

February 20, 2009 By Nancy Montgomery, Stars and Stripes

In the video, you can just barely make it out through the haze. It was a small blue truck, sitting outside Patrol Base Bushmaster for a half-hour or more.

Another vehicle pulled up, and a passenger inside the truck slid out, got into the second car and drove away.

Just then, 1st Sgt. Rick Haddad ordered Staff Sgt. Tyler Pickett to open the gate to let some Iraqis leave. The blue truck started to move and then sped up as it neared the gate.

Everybody knew what was going to happen.

“By the time anybody saw it, all they had time to do was run,” said Sgt. David Johnson, who took a break from a law career to see combat. Johnson was a key player in the unit and has watched the video numerous times.

The truck, carrying a 2,000-pound ammonium nitrate bomb, hit the gate and exploded. It was June 8, at 1:51 p.m.

The bomb killed Pickett, a husband and father of two, who was supposed to be home on leave. It ripped open Haddad’s left side and left the three-time Bronze Star recipient permanently disabled. It wounded nearly 20 other soldiers of Company B — nearly a third of those on the base — including one young Ranger who wasn’t even evacuated at first; he shook constantly and has never returned to the unit.

“As it blasted, it blew off all the doors of our [containerized housing units], pretty much destroyed everything,” said 1st Lt. Justin Burgess. “It was so loud, everybody’s hearing was fucked up. There was dust everywhere you could see.

“We see the MRAP on fire, a 20-foot crater in the ground, and Pickett is. ... We didn’t know it was Pickett. We had to get his ID card out. ... There was blood everywhere.”

The bombing maimed the Iraqis about to leave the base — one turned up months later minus an eye and with a gruesome wound to his throat. The bomber was blown to pieces, which the soldiers kept finding around the base for weeks.

It changed everything.

“The whole mentality then, and the whole relationship, was changed. You’d be a fool to trust them again,” Johnson said.

The VBIED, as the Army calls vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, came after a year of the company’s counterinsurgency efforts. There had been innumerable “chai ops,” meetings with tribal leaders and local councils over tea. There had been projects and foot patrols and a reconciliation process that brought in insurgents and gave them a paycheck for manning checkpoints. As a result, there had been by one count an 80 percent reduction in roadside bombs.

“We had remodeled the school,” Lee said. “The day before we had a soccer game with the locals.”

The bombing put an end to all that.

“It was never the same. It was very hard. The guys would be very standoffish with the locals,” Lee said. “It’s so hard for the guys to get past an event like that.”

“We still did whatever we were told to do,” Johnson said. “If they told us to do a backpack handout, we did it because we were ordered to do it. But the mentality was different.”

It was never determined who had planned and carried out the bombing. But the reconciled Sunni “Sons of Iraq,” who worked at a checkpoint by the gate, were implicated.

“It had to have been reconcilee-aided,” Lee said.

Afterward, Lee went to the local tribal leaders in the former Sunni stronghold, who denied involvement.

“They said, ‘Hey, this is an attack on us, too.’”

The unit never knew if further investigations happened. Despite all the law-enforcement types working in Iraq — former FBI agents, military investigators and the like — apparently no one was sent to track down those responsible, Johnson said.

“Lieutenant Holmes and I seemed like the only ones interested,” he said. “I have no investigating experience. We did a dozen interviews. We couldn’t separate fact from fiction. We never found out who it was.”

But force-protection deficits soon became apparent. Barriers were not in place, Johnson said. There was no guard tower, no one to shoot the driver.

“It was a big tactical error,” he said.

Afterward, the base was a disaster, he said. Computers didn’t work, communications were difficult. Everybody felt terrible. But people came through.

"I remember the cooks. By 1700, they had chow ready to go," Johnson said. "For us, that was a morale booster."

In the first few nights after the bombing, Lee ordered that mortars be fired every half-hour for five hours as a show of force. It was not a popular decision.

"Large explosions, all night long," Johnson said. "You couldn't sleep, and if you did fall asleep you woke up with the thought it had happened all over again."

Many soldiers had trouble sleeping at the base even after the mortars stopped.

"I couldn't sleep there," Sgt. Chris Bartell said. "I really had some issues. Everything would get on my nerves. As soon as I'd get off the patrol base, I'd be all right."

"The fear never went away. I always walked a little faster as I passed the front gate," Johnson said. "After the VBIED went off, everybody was rocked. You think, 'I could be dead tomorrow.'"

The base was rebuilt, renamed for Pickett, and on Sept. 4 it was turned over to the Iraqi army.

"It's been an honor serving with you," Lee told the Iraqis. "We have sacrificed much so that the people of the Rashaad Valley and al-Noor village can live in peace. I have complete faith that you will carry on our mission here with distinction."

Haddad is no sentimentalist.

"Being blown up does not make you a hero," he said.

But he also said that the horror-filled moments of the bombing were followed by the most valiant ones of the deployment.

His medic saved his life. Then, because poor visibility meant no helicopters, two patrols raced the wounded in MRAPs to FOB Warrior, usually a 30-minute trip. They did it in 15 minutes.

Not all the wounded left the base that day.

One sergeant whose head was bleeding, quite a lot, Johnson said, just refused to go so that he could help others.

"All the training, it was worth it for that one moment," Haddad said. "That's the take-away. They did great when it counted."

MORE:

**“We Have A Rule In Our House Now:
If I Need Help, I’ll Ask For It,” Rick
Said:
“He Mows The Lawn One-Handed Now.
To Rake Leaves, He Tapes The Rake To
His Hand”**



Master Sgt. Rick Haddad at Fort Drum, N.Y. in October. Photo: Joe Gromelski / Stripes

February 20, 2009 By Nancy Montgomery, Stars and Stripes

The blast slammed Company B’s first sergeant to the ground.

Pain seared him. Blood spilled from his body. He looked over and saw one of his young staff sergeants, dead and gone.

Rick Haddad, a New Englander and former Marine who had led 135 men for nearly a year near Kirkuk, Iraq, who loved his job and believed in his mission, was about to bleed to death.

“I was sad,” he said. “I asked my medic if I was going to die about 10 times. He said, ‘No, you’re not going to die. Keep your eyes open.’ He actually told me to shut up.”

Haddad’s injuries were the worst of all but one of the 19 soldiers hit by the explosion at their combat outpost just before 2 p.m. on June 8.

The 2,000-pound truck bomb exploded inside the gate at Patrol Base Bushmaster. It was the worst event in the unit’s 14-months in Iraq, and it left the wife of Staff Sgt. Tyler Pickett a widow.

But Haddad lived and became among the first of his unit to come home. It wasn't how anyone would have wanted it to be.

There were no victory speeches or joyous ceremonies in the gym on Fort Drum in New York. He couldn't even pick up his life where he had left it.

There was fear, at first, that he still might die or be among the war's amputees. There was sorrow as Haddad, 40, his wife, and their two adolescent daughters reckoned with his new reality — a severely damaged body and its emotional impact — and tried to figure out how to go on.

"It killed me inside to see my family that first time," Haddad said. "I've been with my wife for 17 years. ... That was the first time in my life I needed her to take care of me.

"I was at the top of my food chain, in charge of 135 guys. And then the next day, you're learning to wipe your butt."

Rick and his wife, April, had become all that an Army family could be: solid, smooth, a model of teamwork. He had rank and respect; she presided over a serene household whether he was home or away.

But then he was nearly killed in combat. And a whole new life opened frighteningly before them.

April read a brief report on Yahoo news that 18 people had been injured on a patrol base near Kirkuk. It was about 3 p.m, her time, that June 8.

April, 38, had sailed through previous deployments, never resenting her husband's absence, she said, always being proud of him and able to handle things on her own.

That afternoon, "I had a really bad feeling," she said. "But I always think of my husband as invincible, so I wasn't expecting he was hurt."

She called the rear detachment commander. He told her that Rick had been seriously injured. He told her not to tell any of the other wives.

April went outside and called Rick's mother.

"I was crying," she said. "The kids were inside — I didn't want them to see me like that. Then I just got angry. I thought, 'If anything happens to him ... '"

She spent a couple hours on the phone outside, tried to collect herself and went in and told her girls. Family members arrived that night.

"We were just sitting around, waiting for the phone to ring," she said.

It rang at 8 p.m. It was her husband.

"He said, 'I'm pretty bad.' That's the first thing he said. 'I'm pretty bad, Ape,'" April remembered.

Rick first felt he had returned home as he was being wheeled into Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington. Thirty or 40 people from the hospital staff had gathered to greet the wounded troops arriving from Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, clapping and welcoming them.

“That’s the first emotional moment,” he said.

His wife arrived from Fort Drum the next day.

“I wouldn’t let her bring the kids until 10 days later. I was not going to let them see me until I could sit up,” Rick said. “You never have your kids standing over you.”

April looked at him in the hospital bed. He was groggy, on a lot of pain meds. But he was there.

“I didn’t have time to prep myself,” she said. “I thought I was going to cry. I was so happy, and the moment I saw him all the stress went away. Just seeing his face did it for me.”

The shrapnel that shot into Rick near the end of what was his third deployment ripped apart muscle, sliced through arteries and severed nerves throughout the left side of his body. They were devastating injuries, made worse by the fact that Rick is left-handed.

He was at Walter Reed nearly three months and exceeded expectations for his recovery.

“The self-pity part ... if you wallow in that, you’ll never get better,” he said. “I jailbroke that place.”

Doctors had considered amputating his left limbs but in the end, Rick kept them, though they no longer work as they once did.

He can’t open a jar now.

“My hand — it’s a claw,” he said.

Nerve tremors run through him every few minutes.

He can’t walk more than a few steps without pain. He has a cane. He doesn’t like it.

“I’m an athletic person. It was difficult to give that up,” he said. “I just drag my leg around. My foot swells up, I can’t feel my toes. On a pain scale of one to 10, I’m a two or three all the time. I just block it out.”

When he first got home, April said, “The kids and I would baby him. I would constantly be, ‘Do you want me to do that?’ He didn’t like that too much.”

“We have a rule in our house now: If I need help, I’ll ask for it,” Rick said.

He mows the lawn one-handed now. To rake leaves, he tapes the rake to his hand.

“I’ll be honest: I hate writing now. I hate typing now,” he said.

“I don’t like to look at my scars. It’s not the same when I take off my shirt, and I’m not a vain person. There are hundreds of reminders in your house every day.”

His wife understands his feelings but doesn’t share them at all, she said.

“Mentally, he’s still the same,” she said. “That’s the most important thing to me. The physical — that means nothing to me.”

Rick does physical therapy every morning at 7, then heads to his office on Fort Drum. He’s in charge of the Soldier Family Assistance Center, where he spends five hours a day working with the 500 soldiers assigned to the base Warrior Transition Unit.

At first, he had a hard time putting on his uniform.

“It doesn’t feel the same,” he said.

He’s a master sergeant now.

“It feels better than wearing first sergeant rank. I have so much respect for that position,” he said. “It’s so deep and personal, the things we know about lives. Wives have issues when you’re gone. People die. I was the one that gave them their Red Cross messages. I gave 30 of them.”

He’s been able to put things in perspective.

“There’s worse off than me,” he said. “I want that to be clear. Everything I have, the Army is the foundation.”

He credits two people for saving him: Pfc. Sean Dmytryszyn — “a phenomenal medic” — and April, whom he describes as “earthy, nondramatic, very gentle.”

Rick and April have known each other since their high school years in Maine, and both say their marriage has always been solid.

“We both committed to something,” Rick said. “We were going to drive this train for up to 20 years. Every time I re-enlisted I said, ‘Are you in or out?’”

For her part, April said, “We have a mutual respect. He’s my buddy. There’s no hiding anything.

“It’s not the type of relationship where we have to ask. Only one time I said, ‘Please don’t do that’ — Special Forces. I said I’ve never asked you not to do anything. And he said, ‘That’s fine.’”

It was only after his injuries, Rick said, that he noticed certain important things. For instance, all these years, he said, “April constantly has had to make adjustments for me. It’s so obvious to me now.”

And he thinks about the way his career gave him things but also took things away.

“Do you know how much stuff you miss in a year? It’s ridiculous,” he said. “Both my girls — you come back, and they’re young women. You wish you got to see it gradually.”

He said he listens better now, sees things more clearly, enjoys his family more.

Before, April said, if he wasn’t deployed, he’d be gone by 4:30 a.m. and not get home until 7 p.m.

“Like I told him: ‘What happened, happened for a reason,’ April said.

“He says, ‘For what reason?’

“I say, ‘Maybe it’s time for you to slow down once in your life. Maybe that was the reason.’”

Rick always responds the same way.

“He looks at me like I’m crazy,” April said.

“The single largest failure of the anti-war movement at this point is the lack of outreach to the troops.” Tim Goodrich, Iraq Veterans Against The War

Most Loathsome Disgusting Rat-Scum Betrayal Of The Year Coming?

“Iraq And Afghanistan Veterans Of America And The American Legion Are Considering Asking Lawmakers To Place A Cap -- \$13,000 Per Year Has Been Suggested By The IAVA -- On Tuition Aid For Veterans”

“That’s Far Less Than Would Be Available In Many States Under A New GI Bill”



Planning meeting to cut GI Bill benefits making progress: [Photo: Wolfstad.com]

February 23, 2009 The Virginian-Pilot

WASHINGTON -- Just a few months after securing a historic, multibillion-dollar increase in veterans educational benefits, some veterans groups may ask Congress to wipe out part of what they gained.

The Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and the American Legion are among groups considering asking lawmakers to place a cap -- \$13,000 per year has been suggested by the IAVA -- on tuition aid for veterans.

That’s far less than would be available in many states under a new GI bill for post-9/11 troops but is enough to cover virtually all public college costs, advocates of the limit say.

[Translation: veterans are unfit to go to more expensive private colleges so we sell-out backstabbing worthless, shit-eating fake “Veterans Organizations” don’t want them to have the money to go; those are for the children of the rich, after all.

[We can’t have a bunch of grotty veterans around campus reminding Muffie and Bruce Jr. about the unpleasant realities of American life. As the super rich of Greenwich, Connecticut like to say, “They just wouldn’t fit in.” And by the way, did you catch the weasel words, “*virtually all*” public college costs? That means it won’t cover all public college costs. Duh.]

The cap would make the new benefit program easier for veterans to understand and simpler for the Department of Veterans Affairs to run, said Patrick Campbell, the IAVA's legislative counsel. **[Well yes. Every veteran can certainly understand if a pack of scum rat traitors fuck them over by getting Congress to cut the amount of money they get to go to school. And yes, it will be simple for the VA to give out less money to the veterans. Oh, sorry, misunderstanding: the purpose of the program isn't to benefit veterans first, they come after making things "simpler" for the VA, yeah, that's what the priority should be, right, fuck the veterans. What a pack of lame, stupid sleazy bullshit.]**

The new law is the signature initiative of Virginia Sen. Jim Webb, a freshman Democrat and former Navy secretary who overcame the opposition of the Bush administration to get it passed.

It requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to pay each eligible veteran's tuition and fees, up to the maximum charge at the most expensive public college in the state where the vet enrolls.

The law also gives vets \$1,000 each year for books and materials and a housing allowance during the school year equal to that provided to troops on active duty.

[Now what the fuck is so complicated about that? Seems clear as day, right? Webb wrote a law that said a veteran could apply to the best school out there in any state, and if accepted, get the fees paid. And that is exactly what these shit-eating rat "veterans groups" are considering asking Congress to cut.]

[If they actually dare to ask Congress to do that, they are the domestic enemies of every member of the armed forces and every veteran, and they will richly deserve whatever payback may be expressed. What goes around, comes around.]

Some of the maximums, which the VA posted on its Web site this month, are eye-popping.

Whatever limits are ultimately set, reports of the bill's enhanced benefits have caught veterans' attention, said VA, college and military officials.

"We are getting a lot of questions," said Resty Orduna, a retired Navy personnel specialist who counsels other vets at Tidewater Community College's Veteran Affairs office and attends TCC classes himself on the Montgomery GI Bill.

Orduna expects to shift to the new benefit plan this summer, an option available to him because part of his service came after the Sept. 11 attacks.

He said he's particularly pleased that the VA will make his tuition payments directly; under the Montgomery Bill he pays those costs and uses a monthly benefit check to gradually reimburse himself.

Other vets, like Pete Tapyrik of Virginia Beach, are looking to share part of their benefit with their children, an option provided by the new law. After 21 years in the Air Force, working with munitions and then in intelligence, Tapyrik is pointing toward a new career as a chef.

He's attending TCC now on the Montgomery Bill and will save benefits under the new law for his 10-year-old daughter.

[Gee, maybe the “veterans’ organizations” can propose cutting that too. That would make it even “simpler” for the VA to administer, wouldn't it? And surely even “easier to understand,” right? “Fuck you and your kids too” is really easy to understand.]

The agency has hired more than 500 people to help administer the new program after deciding last fall that a new automated system to handle inquiries and an expected flood of paperwork could not be ready in time.

“They are mounting a herculean effort to get this done,” the IAVA's Campbell said.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Resistance Action

Feb. 23 (Xinhua) & Reuters & AFP

Insurgents attacked an Iraqi Army checkpoint in western Baghdad on Monday, killing three soldiers and wounding eight others in the neighborhood of Ghazaliyah around midday.

Police found the body of a leader of a U.S.-allied neighbourhood guard unit in Jurf al-Sakhar, about 60 km (40 miles) south of Baghdad, police said. The man had been handcuffed and shot in the head.

BAGHDAD - Two soldiers were killed when insurgents opened fire on a checkpoint in the Ghaziliya neighbourhood of western Baghdad, police said.

Two policemen were wounded when a bomb blew up as a police convoy was passing the Agriculture Ministry in the centre of Baghdad, police said.

Three policemen were wounded when a roadside bomb targeted a police patrol in the district of Karrada in Baghdad, police said.

A member of the secular Iraqi National [collaborator] List of former premier Iyad Allawi, Amer Shaaban al-Haibi, was seriously wounded in a bomb attack and risks having a foot amputated, security and medical sources said.

Insurgents in the northern city of Mosul, Iraq's second largest and a hotbed of insurgents, shot dead a policeman in plainclothes on the street, a security official.

Three policemen were wounded on Monday when militants threw a grenade at their check point in southern Mosul, police said.

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 Douglass, 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**

Betrayal By The Money Changers



From: Mike Hastie
To: GI Special
Sent: February 23, 2009
Subject: Betrayal By The Money Changers

Betrayal By The Money Changers

This is a picture of a Vietnam veteran at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Portland, Oregon. Moments after he touched the name of a friend who was killed in Vietnam, he broke down. Not only did he break down for his friend, but he broke down for himself. The still living carry a burden that is so overwhelming. It is a trauma that never receives a Purple Heart--never. Day after day, month after month, year after year, decade after decade. The wound is called betrayal. It is a gunshot wound to the soul. Day after day, month after month, year after year, decade after decade. Drip after drip after drip after drip. Betrayal is the insidious and pervasive

wound that eats away the heart and soul.
The vet eventually drifts away from everything
and everybody.
That's what happened to a Vietnam veteran
friend of mine.
He left his home and went to a motel room.
Drip after drip after drip.
They found him the next morning.
He had hung himself in the closet.
Why did he do this?
Because,
Betrayal is the gunshot wound to the soul.
Lying is the most powerful weapon in war.
It drained everything from his life.
The bleeding never stopped.
This country never stopped the bleeding.
Drip after drip after drip.
Here rests in emotional silence,
an American Veteran known but to God.

Mike Hastie
U.S. Army Medic
Vietnam 1970-71
February 23, 2009

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) T

OCCUPATION PALESTINE



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

[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



CLASS WAR REPORTS

**Greece:
“Mounting Social Unrest Is Believed To
Have Goaded The Militants Into Armed
Action”**

[Thanks to JM, who sent this in.]

22 February 2009 By Helena Smith in Athens, The Observer

[P]olitical extremists yesterday issued a warning to journalists, saying it had them within its sights because they represented a corrupt establishment.

In a statement claiming responsibility for an assault on a private television station four days earlier, the Sect of Revolutionaries guerrilla group vowed to step up their campaign of terror.

“By attacking the channel, we are sending an ultimatum to all journalists,” the militants said in the declaration, originally made on a CD and published in the daily newspaper Ta Nea

Policemen noticeably appear terrified on patrol and as they guard public buildings, all too aware that it could be them next.

Most of the attacks have been against policemen whose reputation as a hated symbol of authority was reinforced when 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos was shot dead, as he enjoyed a night out in Athens, by special police guard Epaminondas Korkoreas.

The shooting prompted thousands to take to the streets, unleashing a wave of anger that saw the country erupt in riots for the next three weeks.

“From now on, the life of every cop is worth as much as a bullet, while their bodies are the ideal target practice,” the Sect of Revolutionaries declared in its maiden proclamation.

“They, like the doughnuts that they eat, are no good without a hole in the middle.”

“We don’t do politics, we do guerrilla warfare,” it declared.

Ominously, the group also pledged to expand its targets to “prominent Greeks” including politicians, media stars, capitalists and state officials.

Mounting social unrest is believed to have goaded the militants into armed action.

Youths radicalised by record levels of unemployment and deep-seated economic disaffection are thought to have augmented the ranks of anti-establishment groups, many of which emerged emboldened from the December “uprising”.

**NEED SOME TRUTH?
CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER**

Telling the truth - about the occupations 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 to Imperial wars 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 Veterans Against the War to end the occupations and bring all troops home now! (www.ivaw.org/)



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

OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION

ALL TROOPS HOME NOW!

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

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



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