

GI SPECIAL 7B6:

**“Iraq Veterans Against
The War Calls For The
Immediate And
Unconditional
Withdrawal Of All
Occupying Forces In
Afghanistan”**

**“The Afghanistan War
Dehumanizes The Afghan
People And Denies Them Their
Right To Self-Determination”**



Feb 5 2009 IVAW Website: IVAW.org

Whereas, Iraq Veterans Against the War is an organization that has opened its membership to veterans of the war in Afghanistan;

Whereas, the war in Afghanistan is continuing into its seventh year with rising casualties among the Afghan people, and with U.S. and Coalition forces facing their deadliest year since the invasion;

Whereas a primary motivation for the prolonged occupation of Afghanistan is competition between the U.S., Russia and China for control of oil and natural gas resources in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea;

Whereas, the military occupation is creating tension and resentment among the Afghan people, to include Afghan women, many of whom are calling for the removal of all foreign occupying troops;

Whereas, the Afghanistan war dehumanizes the Afghan people and denies them their right to self-determination;

Whereas, our military is being exhausted by involuntary extensions, and activations of the Reserve, National Guard and Individual Ready Reserve, and by repeated deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan;

Whereas, service members are facing serious health consequences due to our government's negligence in Iraq and Afghanistan and mismanagement of the Department of Veterans Affairs;

Whereas, there is no battlefield solution to terrorism, and any escalation of the war in Afghanistan will only serve to exacerbate the plight of the Afghan people, destabilize the region, and further the breakdown of our military;

Therefore, be it resolved that Iraq Veterans Against the War calls for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all occupying forces in Afghanistan and reparations for the Afghan people, and supports all troops and veterans working towards those ends.

MORE:

Obama's War

From: Dennis Serdel
To: GI Special
Sent: February 08, 2009
Subject: Obama's War

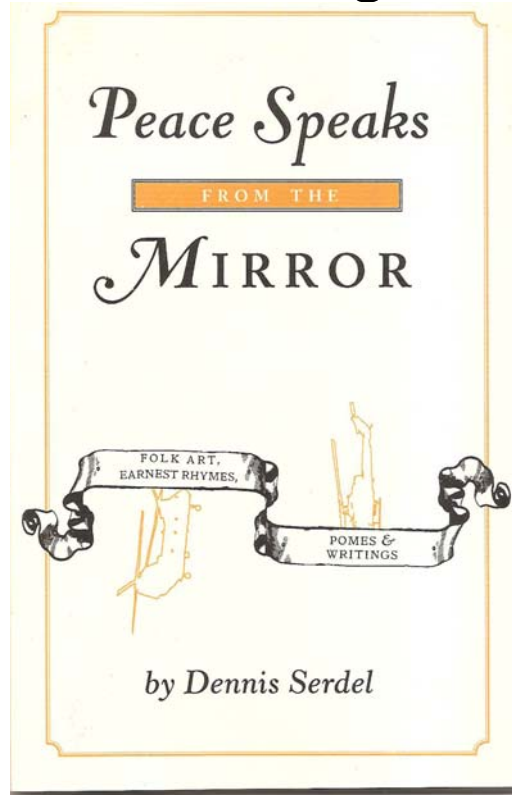
By Dennis Serdel, Vietnam 1967-68 (one tour) Light Infantry, Americal Div. 11th Brigade, purple heart, Veterans For Peace 50 Michigan, Vietnam Veterans Against The War, United Auto Workers GM Retiree, in Perry, Michigan

Obama's War

**The heart of darkness
goes drones
away from the killing
on a computer screen
eye teeth upon key pads
digital DEATH all capital
letters and the password
is called KILL so war
tortures the people below
like McCain dropping
the bombs on Vietnam
no observation no remorse
no for christ sake
I killed children old men
families that are gone
with the click of a button
like a trigger no what
have I done steering
the unmanned drones
not one of us gets killed
that way no Special Ops
no Navy Seals dead just
Soldiers without fancy
names wearing caps
stateside like the
Green Berets
as a woman who has
lost all of her family
is rigged up and blows
up and kills two Army
Soldiers four policemen
are wounded she has
fought back the only way
she knows how by
sacrificing her own life
as the war switches over
to Afghanistan Pakistan
in an air war
except for the grunts.**

MORE:

**If You Know Somebody In The Military,
Send Them Something They Really
Won't Forget:**



Books are \$12 plus \$4 for postage and mailer = \$16 due.

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Let me know.

Dennis Serdel

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

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

**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

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Oops



A truck carrying supplies for occupation troops in Afghanistan after it was burned by militants during an attack on a terminal in outskirts of Peshawar, Pakistan on Feb. 7, 2009. (AP Photo/Mohammad Sajjad)

**As Roadside Explosives Shatter
Afghanistan's Dusty Highways,
Sgt. Spencer's Team Plays A
Deadly Game Of Hide-And-Seek:
"The Convoy Received Word That A
Reconnaissance Aircraft Had Spotted
Two Men Who Appeared To Be
Hiding A Bomb Along The Highway"
"Their Location: The Same Stretch Of
Road Where, Just A Few Hours Earlier,
Sgt. Spencer Had Been Wrestling With
The Blue Jug"**



Sgt. Spencer frees a bomb that had gotten stuck on his truck's shovel arm. Yochi Dreazen/WSJ

FEBRUARY 7, 2009 By YOCHI J. DREAZEN, The Wall Street Journal [Excerpts]

ALONG ROUTE 515, Afghanistan -- A military convoy crawled along at five miles an hour down this dusty two-lane, deep in Taliban territory. Leading the way was "Bonecrusher," a lumbering bomb-clearance vehicle with six wheels and a robot arm.

Suddenly, and unwisely, a smaller truck pulled out and moved to the front of the convoy -- putting it on roadway not yet cleared of explosives. Sgt. Mario Spencer, the highest-ranking Marine in Bonecrusher, swore sharply.

"That's how people get killed," he said.

The words were barely out of his mouth when a violent explosion erupted in front of his windshield. The vehicle out front had struck a bomb.

"Improvised explosive devices," or IEDs -- the military's antiseptic term for buried bombs -- are the top killer of U.S. forces in both Afghanistan and Iraq. They have killed more than 2,000 U.S. troops in the two countries, and they're gaining popularity.

Last year, attacks rose 33% in Afghanistan, according to the International Security Assistance Force, the official name of the U.S.-led military alliance here.

Kyrgyzstan's decision on Friday to move ahead with plans to close the Manas air base, which is used by U.S. forces to airlift supplies into Afghanistan, means that more food, equipment and fuel will have to be driven into the country. That makes it even more important for teams like Sgt. Spencer's to keep Afghanistan's roads clear of bombs.

His job is one of the most dangerous in the military. Taliban militants have buried at least 31 bombs along Sgt. Spencer's road in recent weeks, according to U.S. officers here. This past Thursday and Friday, two separate explosions in the area killed six Afghans and badly wounded two Canadian soldiers.

"When I first got the job, my mom said, 'Why you?'" said Sgt. Spencer, who hails from Virginia and answers to Spence. "She was sure I'd get blown up."

Militants here are learning to build ever-more-powerful bombs, drawing directly on tactics first developed in Iraq. For instance, instead of burying one bomb, they "daisy chain" several together in an effort to pierce heavy U.S. armor.

Sgt. Spencer and his men eat, work and sleep inside their 13-foot-tall armored vehicle, a Buffalo MPCV built by Force Protection Inc., a South Carolina company. The truck is their home away from home. Photos of family members line the dashboard. A crate of Rip It, an energy drink, sits between the two front seats. The cabin is strewn with hunting magazines, Pringles containers and Christmas cookies.

The windows are three solid inches of bomb-proof glass, so the men prop open the roof hatches to smoke. They pass the time watching "Get Smart" and other comedies on a laptop. At night, they sleep in their seats, using dusty towels as pillows.

A Buffalo had a starring role last year in “Transformers,” the movie about robots who disguise themselves as trucks. So the bomb-clearance teams here have taken to naming their vehicles after characters in the film. Thus Sgt. Spencer’s truck is Bonecrusher. His commanding officer, Lt. Samuel Murray, travels in a vehicle called “Megatron.”

Late one night in early January, a convoy of 40 or so Marine vehicles set off from the patrol base at Delaram on a four-day mission to clear portions of Route 515, a mottled, 20-mile dirt road connecting Bakwa and Delaram, the two biggest towns in the southern province of Farah.

Inside Bonecrusher, Lance Cpl. Jason Mueske pulled portable speakers out of his backpack and connected them to an iPod. Jimi Hendrix’s “Voodoo Child” soon echoed through the cabin.

“Let’s get blown up and get this over with,” Sgt. Tom Paidousis said as the truck lumbered into the darkness.

Route-clearance work, as it is called, is slow and tedious. The vehicles amble along at barely more than walking speed. They stop for anything even slightly suspicious.

Over the course of the mission, the team checked out a pile of hay, a mound of dirt, and a Ziploc bag that appeared to be filled with white powder. All passed muster.

The Marines never actually encounter the people whose bombs they dig out of the dirt. It leaves them itching for a fight they know will likely never come.

“I wish we’d see a couple of these guys planting a bomb, just one time, so we could smoke ‘em,” Cpl. Tom Ruggles mused as the truck drove past a silent village of domed houses and crumbling mud walls.

“But they’re always long gone.”

Sgt. Spencer and his team have a distant relationship, too, with the Marines they’re trying to protect. They aren’t part of the same unit as the convoy members, so despite the fact that they travel together for days on end, the men in Bonecrusher don’t have particularly close ties to them.

The route-clearance personnel also expect to get blamed if any bombs do kill or wound someone. “Fairly or unfairly, they’ll hold us responsible,” Sgt. Spencer said that night. “You can see it in their faces.”

At 8 a.m. the next morning, Bonecrusher got word that a possible buried IED had been spotted in a nearby section of road. Bonecrusher was given the task of unearthing it.

“Megatron wants you to dig it out so we can see what we’re dealing with,” Sgt. Spencer told Cpl. Ruggles. “Be cool, Ruggles. Do it nice and slow.”

In the front seat, Cpl. Ruggles took up a yellow plastic control pad with a half-dozen or so paddles and toggles. Using it to control the truck’s 30-foot-long mechanical arm, he

traced a box in the dirt around the bomb, a maneuver that cuts any wires connecting it to a roadside trigger.

A few minutes passed. The arm, under Cpl. Ruggles' command, plucked a coil of severed black wiring out of the dirt.

Next, he clawed carefully at the dirt, revealing a blue jug about the size of a watermelon -- the bomb itself.

But now, Sgt. Spencer and his Marines faced a new challenge.

Somehow, the blue bomb had gotten stuck between the prongs on the end of the mechanical arm. Cpl. Ruggles wasn't able to shake it off.

Cursing under his breath, Sgt. Spencer pulled on body armor, grabbed his M-4 rifle, and climbed out of his vehicle. Then, he walked up to the stuck bomb, and tried to yank it free with his own two hands.

"This is about the dumbest thing you can possibly do," he said.

The jug wouldn't budge. So Cpl. Ruggles and Sgt. Paidousis joined him. Together, it took the men 15 minutes of sweating and cursing to get the bomb unstuck.

They put it down on the ground, and bomb-disposal experts from another vehicle came over to take a look.

Their conclusion: It held enough explosives to demolish an armored Humvee and likely kill its crew.

The disposal team took the jug a few hundred yards into the open desert, to be safely blown up. Once it was wired for controlled demolition, Sgt. Spencer got on the radio and counted down -- "10, nine, eight..."

At zero, the jug exploded in a bright flash.

"It makes me feel a whole lot better that we found it, instead of it finding us," Cpl. Mueske said.

Sgt. Spencer, Bonecrusher's top-ranking Marine, joined the service nine years ago, inspired in part by the sight of his stepfather in his Coast Guard uniform.

"I remember thinking how professional and put together he was," he says. "I'd never seen a man who looked like that before."

Sgt. Spencer married a fellow Marine, Rafaelina Anderson, and now has two children. He carries photos of his wife, son and daughter on his iPod.

"Cute, aren't they?" he said one afternoon.

"That's how you know they take after their mom," Cpl. Mueske joked.

Cpl. Mueske is a second-generation Marine. He was a pitcher on his high-school baseball team in Wisconsin, and once tossed a shutout game. But after graduation, he dropped out of technical school two credits short of an engineering degree.

“Jay wasn’t doing well, and he knew it,” recalls his father, Allen Mueske. “He needed structure, and the Marines gave that to him.”

The elder Mr. Mueske, who himself served nearly four years in Vietnam, says he thinks about his son constantly.

“I wake up each morning worrying about him and go to bed each praying that he stays safe,” he said.

The men don’t choose bomb-clearance duty, they’re assigned it. They get several weeks of training at a bomb-clearance school in California, and at the South Carolina factory where Buffalos are manufactured.

After the incident with the blue jug, the convoy resumed its long, slow trip down Route 515.

The quiet didn’t last long.

A few miles down the road, full-fledged crisis erupted: It was at this moment that the smaller vehicle suddenly pulled out and passed Bonecrusher, putting it in front of the bomb-clearing crew.

Within moments, it struck a bomb so powerful that the explosion shook Bonecrusher, some 20 yards behind.

The radio crackled with confusion. “Troops in contact!” someone said, using the military term for an attack in progress.

There is a procedure for this. Partly because IEDs are such a constant risk, all vehicles carry flares specifically to indicate whether anyone’s been hurt or killed in an attack.

Peering through the thick black smoke obliterating the view, Cpl. Ruggles scanned for a flare. Within seconds, he spotted one.

“Green smoke, they’re OK!” he said.

When the smoke eventually cleared and the bombed truck came into view, the Marines aboard Bonecrusher broke into laughter. The truck, a heavily armored MRAP, or “Mine Protected Ambush Protected” vehicle, wasn’t damaged at all by the blast. It was able to drive away under its own power.

“That’s a tough SOB,” Cpl. Mueske said of the truck.

After about two hours, the convoy pulled in to a nearby U.S. patrol base, surrounded by sandbagged walls. It wasn’t yet 4 p.m., but the journey was over for the day.

That afternoon, a Marine who had been aboard the bombed MRAP, Sgt. Marquis Summers, walked over to Bonecrusher to chat with Sgt. Spencer and his men.

Sgt. Summers almost certainly had cheated death: He'd spent most of the day standing in his vehicle's open hatch, but ducked inside just as the bomb went off.

Then, in an odd twist of fate, just minutes after the explosion Sgt. Summers received word that his wife had given birth to a baby girl back in the U.S.

"She might never have known me," he said of his new daughter, shaking his head.

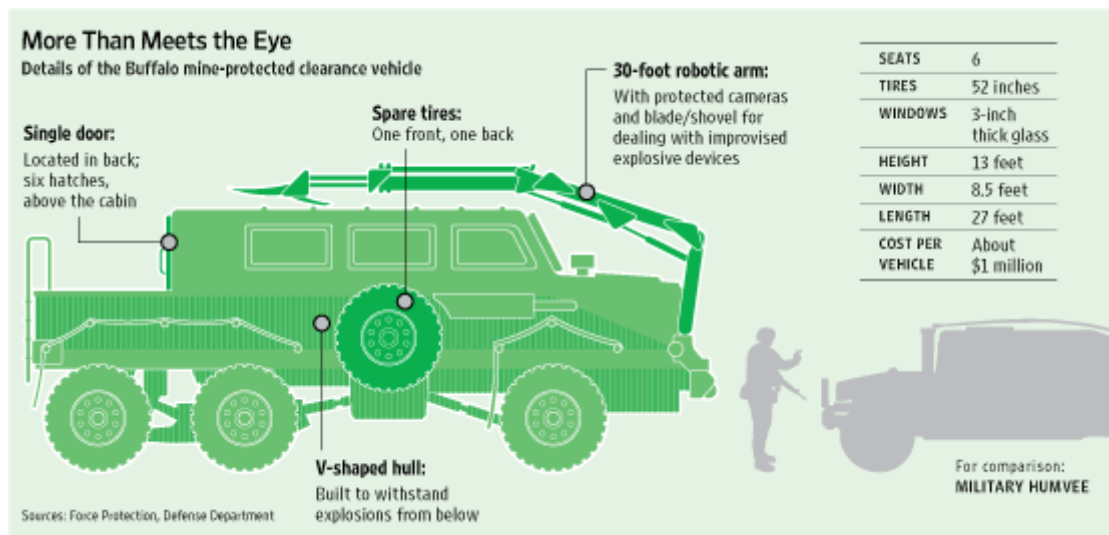
It's still unclear why Sgt. Summers's truck pulled out passed Bonecrusher, exposing itself to danger.

Sgt. Spencer asked for an explanation, but never got one. Marine officers said the fog of war could make it tough to ever know definitively.

Night fell over Route 515, and the cat-and-mouse game of planting, and dismantling, roadside bombs continued to play out.

The convoy received word that a reconnaissance aircraft had spotted two men who appeared to be hiding a bomb along the highway.

Their location: the same stretch of road where, just a few hours earlier, Sgt. Spencer had been wrestling with the blue jug.



MORE:

2 U.S. Soldiers Die Trying To Disarm Bomb In Afghanistan

Feb. 8, 2009 By JASON STRAZIUSO Associated Press

KABUL — Two American soldiers died in Afghanistan on Sunday when a roadside bomb they were trying to defuse exploded, a U.S. spokeswoman said. An Afghan interpreter and a policeman also died in the blast.

A group of American soldiers and Afghan officials had been traveling through the world's largest opium poppy producing region — the southern province of Helmand — when they discovered the roadside bomb and tried to defuse it, said Kamal Uddin, Helmand's deputy provincial police chief.

Two American soldiers died in the blast, said Capt. Elizabeth Mathias. Uddin said an Afghan translator and a police officer also died.

REALLY BAD PLACE TO BE: ALL HOME NOW



Soldiers with the US Army's 6-4 Cavalry patrol near Combat Outpost Keating in eastern Afghanistan January 21, 2009. (Bob Strong/Reuters)

TROOP NEWS

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



The remains of U.S. Marine Lance Cpl., Julian T. Brennan at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va., Feb. 5, 2009. Brennan, 25, from Brooklyn, New York died Jan. 24 in Farah Province of Afghanistan. He was assigned to Camp Lejeune, NC. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

Army Reports Spike In Suicides Last Month “This Is Terrifying,” An Army Official Said: “We Do Not Know What Is Going On”

[Thanks to SSG N (ret'd) who sent this in. She writes: “Why? We were lied into these wars, and young people are lied into the military, and then lied to when they return and told they are heroes. But they know the truth now.”]

The anti-depressants prescribed to soldiers can have side effects that include suicidal thoughts. Those side effects reportedly are more common in people 18 to 24.

01/29/2009 John Simerman, Contra Costa Times & February 5, 2009 By PAULINE JELINEK, Associated Press Writer & From Barbara Starr and Mike Mount, CNN

The Army is investigating an unexplained and stunning spike in suicides in January.

“This is terrifying,” an Army official said. “We do not know what is going on.”

The Army said 24 soldiers are believed to have committed suicide in January alone -- six times as many as killed themselves in January 2008, according to statistics released Thursday.

The Army said it already has confirmed seven suicides, with 17 additional cases pending that it believes investigators will confirm as suicides for January.

The count is likely to surpass the number of combat deaths reported last month by all branches of the armed forces in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the fight against terrorism.

Fort Campbell in Kentucky reported that four soldiers killed themselves near the installation, where 14,000 soldiers from the two wars have returned from duty since October.

Some Fort Campbell soldiers have done three or four tours of duty in the wars.”

The seven confirmed suicides and 17 other suspected suicides in January were far above the toll for most months. Self-inflicted deaths were at 12 or fewer for each of nine months in 2008, Army data showed. The highest monthly number last year was 14 in August.

The anti-depressants prescribed to soldiers can have side effects that include suicidal thoughts. Those side effects reportedly are more common in people 18 to 24.

The stresses of multiple deployments have made a difficult readjustment tougher, said Dick Talbott, a Vietnam veteran who oversees 32 Vet Centers — including ones in Concord and Oakland — where veterans can receive counseling.

“These people are going back three or four or five times,” he said. “You steel yourself and keep yourself constantly on guard. That mechanism drives every part of your system. When you know you have to go back you continue to be amped in that way.”

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

New “Under The Hood” Café A Refuge For Dissent:

“I Knew This War Was Wrong, But I Had No One To Tell Me That It’s OK To Not Support The War And Be In” “I Didn’t Have Anyone To Comfort Me”



Cindy Thomas, an Army wife for 17 years, is the manager of Under the Hood café in Killeen. The café will open on Saturday as a support location for soldiers and those in need. Photo: Morris

[Thanks to Aaron Hughes, IVAW & SSG N (ret'd) who sent this in. She writes: “Happy opening day!”]

Feb. 6 2009 By Rebecca LaFlure, Killeen Daily Herald

As an Army wife of 17 years, Cindy Thomas struggled through her husband’s three deployments to Iraq.

The second tour of duty left him close to death with a brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, collapsed lungs and multiple fractures in his spine and pelvis.

But it was not until her stepson, then 19 years old, called to say he was joining the Marines in 2007 that she felt compelled to vehemently protest the ongoing wars in the Middle East and work to improve the lives of soldiers and their families.

“It was at that moment when I thought, ‘I have to do something, we have to do something,’” Thomas said. “It’s our children who will be fighting in these wars.”

Since April 2008, Thomas has devoted her time, thoughts and passion to opening Under the Hood Café, a local outreach center for active duty military personnel, veterans,

family members and friends to support and console each other about their daily struggles.

The café house is located at 17 College St. in Killeen.

Thomas said the refuge, scheduled to open Saturday, will be a “free speaking zone” to discuss difficult issues such as the death of a friend or family member overseas, spouses and children coping with the absence of their loved ones during multiple deployments or perhaps a guilty conscience for fighting in a war that increasingly more soldiers no longer believe in.

“A lot of people want to hear the hero story. We don’t want to hear that they’re hurt because it hurts us,” Thomas said.

“I did that for a very long time. ... When I started searching for the truth, going online, looking at videos that no one wants to see, it becomes so much harder to live on a daily basis knowing that this is happening, and you’re not doing anything about it.”

Spirit Of The Oleo Strut

Created in the spirit of the Oleo Strut, a GI coffee house that operated in Killeen during the Vietnam War, the Under the Hood concept was first developed in March 2008 when Tom Cleaver, a Vietnam veteran from Los Angeles and former Oleo Strut staff member, noticed a Fort Hood soldier’s story online.

The soldier’s name was Bryan Hannah, a young cannon crew member who had recently returned from a 15-month tour of duty in Iraq. Hannah was struggling with suicidal thoughts and an overwhelming guilt for fighting in, what he believed to be, a never-ending and unjustified war.

Hannah said he felt alone and largely ignored by the on-post mental health resources.

“I was going through a hard time, not just because of my PTSD, but I didn’t know what to do,” Hannah said.

“I knew this war was wrong, but I had no one to tell me that it’s OK to not support the war and be in. I didn’t have anyone to comfort me. Home was 1,800 miles away in Michigan.”

As a way to vent his frustrations, Hannah kept a candid online blog chronicling his experiences in the military.

One particularly powerful entry was published in the GI Special, a widely circulated independent e-newsletter covering the Iraq war from the perspective of the troops and their family members.

The publication was originally created during the Vietnam era and distributed by soldiers on post in footlockers, barracks and motor pools. **[Correction: That was a different publication, Vietnam GI, Edited by Jeff Sharlet, Vietnam Veteran. T]**

Cleaver, an avid GI Special reader, noticed Hannah was stationed at Fort Hood, and contacted the soldier. The two began corresponding by e-mail.

Hannah was honorably discharged from the Army in November, and is now attending college in Austin. He wants to be a history teacher.

According to Cleaver, Hannah and several other Fort Hood soldiers wanted to organize a modern-day Oleo Strut for a long time, but they didn't know how to turn the idea into reality.

With Cleaver's connections and fundraising abilities, he and the Fort Hood chapter of the Iraq Veterans Against the War, began to organize the project.

In April, Thomas was asked to help execute their vision.

"We have counseling services on post obviously, but when you're sitting around and hanging out, it's more relaxing and natural, and you feel more comfortable asking for help," Thomas said. "The concept of it is having that place they can come and not only support each other and help each other out, but maybe even advocate for each other."

Thomas said the house will have a kitchen with coffee and snacks, a break room, a pool table, a big-screen television, a jukebox and multiple couches and tables, all funded by donations.

Though a peace activist herself, Thomas stressed the café is open to people of all ideologies.

Thomas said she is prepared for some public backlash, but her goal is to provide an inclusive environment for military community members to share their stories.

"They might not like what some of us or some of the soldiers have to say because everybody's experience is different. If you experienced ... reconstruction and helping the community, then great, that's absolutely great. But not every soldier did," she said.

"There are others with difficult stories, and the difficult choices they had to make. They have a right to be heard. If you want to support them, hear them. Just let them have their voice."

For more information on Under the Hood Café or to read about the history of the Oleo Strut from someone who was there, go to www.underthehoodcafe.org.

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

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

Texas Stands Up



“Mike, Bryan, Ronn and Hart at the Capitol on Veteran’s Day” Austin, Texas Iraq Veterans Against the War [Thanks to SSG N (ret’d) who sent this in.]

OCCUPATION PALESTINE

**Zionism Up Close, Personal And
Despicable:**

“The Amount Of Racism I Heard On The Trip, From Both My Fellow Birthrighters And The Actual American And Israeli Tour Guides, Was Mind-Boggling.



February 5, 2009 Kyle Matzpen (not his real name) describes what it was like to be in Israel during the slaughter of Gaza; Socialist Worker.

JUDAISM EQUALS Zionism--so I have been taught since my early days in Hebrew school.

To be against one is to be against both, so if you disagree with the tenets of Zionism or the actions of Israel in the slightest, then you're an anti-Semite--or in my case, a self-hating Jew.

But underneath this name-calling by Zionists lies a demand for unquestioning conformity from Jews in support of Israel in perpetuity, despite whatever that means for others.

Otherwise, you're not a Jew.

At least that's what my family told me after they found out my "Free Palestine" political beliefs.

I wouldn't say what happened next was necessarily "forced" on me--"coerced" is probably a closer term--but before I knew it, I was signed up to Taglit-Birthright Israel to connect to my "people's roots," and maybe get some sense knocked into me.

To give a fuller idea what Birthright is exactly, I'll quote one of its founders, a South African and current president of Hillel (a national college-level Jewish youth group),

Avraham Infeld, who spoke to a crowd of us Birthrighters on my last night in Israel. He said he had aimed through Birthright to “create a world where every Jewish child is born with a ticket to Israel tied to his umbilical cord.”

Despite the fact that I’ve never been there, and have no immediate family in Israel, I get a free 10-day, all-expenses-paid trip there, and could even emigrate there with little fuss if I so wished. All because I am Jewish.

At the same time, Palestinians whose families up to 1947 had hundreds of years of roots in this land are forever barred from returning.

This sense of racial nationalism and entitlement highlighted just about everything I saw and heard in Israel.

BEFORE THE in-flight movies started on the flight from JFK to Tel Aviv, they played a 30-minute video intro to Israeli tourist attractions. It was a roaring epic of music and montage shots of deserts, wildlife, mountains. And, overall, the theme of the land, the importance of the land, who should get the land, making the land bloom.

A shot of Jerusalem cuts to a clip of two Ibexes fighting over a chunk of cliff rock, then a cut to a pan-shot of acres of irrigated farm. The subliminal symbolism was unnerving.

We landed in Tel-Aviv on January 2. On January 3, our bus of about 40 college kids was on its way for some sightseeing in Jerusalem when a person next to me asked one of the American tour guides about the chances of the ground invasion of Gaza happening while we were in Israel. The tour guide smiled and said, “I think the chances are pretty good.” He sounded pumped.

That night, we came to a place in East Jerusalem called Ammunition Hill. Ammunition Hill is the site of a major battle in what is called by the tour guides the “Reunification of Jerusalem”—in other words, when Israel captured East Jerusalem in the 1967 war, liberating the land from its inhabitants.

Today, it’s a memorial with the Jordanian trench works from the battle fully restored. This came in handy, as one of the Israeli tour guides had us reenact in the trenches, step by step, the entire battle of Ammunition Hill.

This is where you came under heavy fire from a Jordanian pillbox. Three of us played dead. This is where you throw your grenades into the Jordanian pillbox.

When we arrived back at our hotel that night, we learned that while we were playing Israel Defense Forces (IDF) make-believe and shooting at invisible Jordanians, the ground invasion in the slaughter of Gaza had begun.

Suffice it to say, we were purposely kept out of the loop about what was happening at every step of the way.

News about the IDF attacking UN-run shelters and food aid hubs, or the widespread use of the white phosphorus chemical weapons, I only heard after coming back.

But information about Israeli casualties--they made sure that sunk in.

On the day after the ground invasion began, they took us for a tour of the Israel Defense Forces national cemetery, proving once again that the trip organizers had a morbid sense of irony.

The constant noise of F-16s going supersonic and Blackhawk helicopters flying low overhead made an oddly poignant background noise as we viewed the graves of the likes of Levi Eshkol and Theodore Herzl.

I looked at the rows upon rows of graves of children my age, and thought about what life was like for them.

They pump these children up to their eyes with nationalism, religious pride and a contrived Israeli-origin history, written by the victors, and they send them off to kill Muslims.

And if, God forbid, they die in battle against other children, they will be buried in a cemetery among heroes and prime ministers, so that even smaller children can come here on class field trips, put stones on their graves and think of how glorious it must be to die in battle.

And if for some reason an Israeli child wants no part of this cycle, there must be something wrong with them.

The mandatory draft has created an Israeli society that is entirely militarized.

Newspapers had full-page articles just on the type of gear that the Special Ops were using in Gaza. Everywhere, there were IDF T-shirts, T-shirts proclaiming that "Masada Will Never Fall Again" and Israeli flags.

People seemed naturally more aggressive on every level. Just imagine it's like living in the movie 300, minus the slow motion, and with an uber-emphasis on the "stronghold of civilization against the dirty barbarian hordes" concept.

THE AMOUNT of racism I heard on the trip, from both my fellow Birthrighters and the actual American and Israeli tour guides, was mind-boggling.

For example, a tour guide informed us as our bus was driving on a Jewish-only access highway through the West Bank that Palestinians "went to the bathroom in the street and bred like rabbits."

One afternoon, they took us to the Israeli-Lebanese border to get a better view of "the enemy."

From our vantage point next to a rather plush Israeli suburban town--which wouldn't look out of place in Orange County--we were assured by our tour guide that somewhere in those bombed-out buildings in Lebanon, Hezbollah was waiting to kill us.

The tour guide then taught us about the dangers of Islam. He said, "To me, 'radical Islam' is a misnomer since 80 percent of imams preach Jihad. Just saying."

I would find out after returning that, oddly enough, at the same time that this lecture was happening, a UN-controlled school in Gaza that was being used to distribute aid was being shelled, killing 40 civilians.

The next day, they took us on a lovely Jeep tour through the Golan Heights to learn about its strategic importance for Israel. Over here are bombed-out Syrian pillboxes, bunkers and rusted-out Syrian tanks.

Here is an abandoned Syrian town, now in Israeli territory, and right over there, just over the border and less than a mile away, is the new Syrian town, so the people there can actually see every day where they used to live.

As the slaughter in Gaza was intensifying, and bits of information began floating in to us by rumor, the trip organizers found it necessary to intensify our propaganda education with "structured discussions" and a lecture from an IDF lieutenant colonel.

We were told candidly that the siege was not, at its core, a response to the rocket attacks, but was an attempt to wipe out Hamas--to "squash out the cockroaches."

To quote the lieutenant colonel, "We gave them democracy, and the land, and opened up the borders to goods and services, and what do they do to repay us? They voted for Hamas. They failed our test...I don't understand what they mean by 'innocent bystanders' in Gaza, because they all voted for Hamas."

On the charge that the 100-to-1 Palestinian-Israeli casualty ratio in the Gazan slaughter might be ever-so-slightly asymmetric, the lieutenant colonel gave what was possibly the most interesting statement of the entire trip.

He reversed the David and Goliath analogy, saying:

"Look at Goliath, he's well trained, well armored, huge, nothing can beat him, you'd think. But then along comes this tiny religious fanatic, David, with a slingshot. Goliath thinks nothing of him, so all David has to do is stay just out of Goliath's reach and hit him in his weak spot, and Goliath comes tumbling down.

"This is a lesson for Israel--no matter how better armed we may think we are, we must never underestimate our foes and never let them out of our reach, or else we'll go the way of Goliath."

Indeed.

While we were bobbing in the Dead Sea, a fellow Birthrighter told me--in the language of racism, accentuated by curses--that Palestinians and Muslims in general would "kill me twice, once for being Jewish, a second time for being an American."

Which was kind of weird since not a week earlier, I was at a protest in New York City against the bombing of Gaza among 2,000 people, 80 percent of them Muslim or Arab, holding up a sign saying “Jew for a Free Palestine”--and nobody stabbed me.

In fact, I was well welcomed.

Go figure.

While I was climbing Masada and touring Tel Aviv, protests all over the world were erupting against Israel's barbarism in Gaza.

I was privileged to witness one particular news broadcast while in Tiberius.

I couldn't understand a word that was said, but it was clearly a protest of the attack on Gaza put on by maybe 30 Israeli college kids.

They were being heckled, pushed and spat upon by passersby, and I realized two things: Firstly, that if they were in college, that would mean they were all veterans of the IDF, and secondly, that they had every ounce of my respect.

Zionism attempts to portray itself as the sole political representative of the Jewish people, for it is only then that it can whitewash the genocidal crimes of Israel by saying they are what's required to protect all Jews everywhere.

This claim of hegemony is a lie.

Though still a minority, the numbers of fellow Jewish Anti-Zionists are growing.

They are people who wish to epitomize the best in Jewish history, and stay on the side of the oppressed. They deny the racist concept that the life of an Israeli is somehow more precious than the life of a Palestinian.

Israel is a sort of utopia--modern towns defended by young men and women with Uzis, all held together by a strong sense of community. I can understand why it is tempting to some Jews.

But it is a utopia for some, not for all, built on the oppression of others, and those groups are defined in purely racial terms. Israel is the world's largest and most aggressive gated community.

When speaking to the socialists of the Jewish Bund, the Russian revolutionary Lenin said that it was wrong to “legitimize Jewish isolation by propagating the idea of a Jewish ‘nation.’” The task was “not to segregate nations, but unite the workers of all nations. Our banner does not carry the slogan ‘national culture,’ but ‘international culture.’”

Peace is simply impossible as long as Israel defines itself at its core as a Jewish exclusive state, and the chauvinistic and racist tenets of Zionism remain its guiding philosophy.

Only one state--one secular state, with equal rights for all and the right of return for all Palestinian refugees--can solve this.

Nothing more, nothing less.

[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



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/)

CLASS WAR REPORTS



**“Workers Are Occupying Kherson
Engineering Plant In Ukraine”
“The Situation Is Controlled By
Yesterday Elected Workers Council”**

“In Case Of Ignoring Their Demands Workers Are Ready To Turn To The Toughest Forms Of Protest”



February 3rd, 2009 Livasprava.livejournal.com

11:35 am - WORKERS ARE OCCUPYING KHERSON ENGINEERING PLANT IN UKRAINE

Today at 9:30 more than 300 workers occupied the administrative building of Kherson Engineering Plant.

The workers demand payment of wages, nationalization of the plant without compensation to its owner and are decisively inclined to occupy the building until complete fulfillment of their demands.

During occupation no worker has injured. Factory guards did not resist seriously.

The situation is controlled by yesterday elected workers council.

The police has not yet appeared near the building.

At this moment the council is meeting in the former cabinet of a technical director. Leonid Nimchinov, the chair of the workers council, says that these events must be widely spread and calls workers from other plants throughout Ukraine to display solidarity and support each other.

In the near future he is going to address this call to workers of Lviv Bus Plant and other factories.

The main demands of protesting workers:

- payment of wage arrears (near 4.5 million Ukrainian hryvnias);

- nationalization of the plant without compensation to its owner;
- the state-secured plant's production distribution – high-quality farm machinery

In case of ignoring their demands workers are ready to turn to the toughest forms of protest.

Background: on February 2, 300 workers of Kherson Engineering Plant started protest action against non-payment of wages since September 2008 and actual destruction of the plant by its owners.

During one of the previous meetings with the workers Ms. Pugacheva, the alternate director, said that the owners were not going to save the plant. "Why did you stick to this plant so much?" she said.

The workers hold a meeting near the entrance and elected 5 representatives to the Workers Council and its chair Aleksey Nimchinov who will lead the future struggle and negotiate on behalf of the workers.

Contact to Zakhar Popovich, +380 91 114 01 76

Photos, details and updates in Ukrainian and Russian:

<http://financist.org.ua/news/4222>

<http://shapinbaum.livejournal.com/86723.html?style=mime>

<http://samozahist.org.ua>

NYC Cop Scum Beat Up Anti-Terrorist Activists While A Pro-Israeli Piece Of Shit "Journalist" Attacks A Demonstrator And Goes Free

[Instead of sending the New York National Guard off to die in Imperial wars overseas, we need them mobilized and fully armed to sweep the filth in blue off our streets once and for all. Let them guard us from these rats right here at home. T]

February 3, 2009 By Frankie Cook, Socialist Worker

NEW YORK--More than 200 people gathered outside the Marriot Marquis Hotel in Times Square January 29 to protest a \$1,300-a-plate benefit for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

After weeks of a devastating military assault on the people of Gaza in which over 1,300 Palestinians were killed and thousands of homes, schools, hospitals and government buildings destroyed, AIPAC had the gall to throw a benefit party for Israel.

Numerous organizations and student activists came together to make sure that attendees--including Mayor Michael Bloomberg--weren't going to enjoy their gala, and to oppose Israel's devastating economic and military siege on Gaza.

Activists highlighted the hypocrisy as Bloomberg and others spent thousands of dollars to support Israel--money that will likely go to kill Palestinians and destroy their homes--while millions of New Yorkers are struggling to get by.

Numerous student groups and other Palestine solidarity groups organized the demonstration. Protesters agreed on the need to continue to build a movement and educate more people about Israel's apartheid.

While numerous pro-Israel supporters attempted to intimidate the crowd, everyone remained confident and stood up to their hatred.

When a photographer from the pro-Israel New York Post attempted to aggravate protesters, the crowd stood up to him.

The reporter went berserk and punched a young woman in the face, right in front of police.

The activist who was punched by the photographer, M. Aryai from Northern Manhattan Peace and Justice, said, "I'm appalled at what just happened to me. The media that is in favor of Israel behaves just as Israel does.

"This incident was just a small glimpse of what Israel does to Palestinians on a daily basis. As horrible as this was for me, this is still nothing compared to what Palestinians face every day."

As the protest continued, 10 activists chained themselves in front of two entrances. As Dave Florey, an activist who took part in the civil disobedience, explained, "AIPAC wants to insure that the U.S. continues to support Israel 100 percent, regardless of what kind of war crimes they commit in Gaza. We represent the opposite. As Israel's biggest funder, the U.S. has to be held accountable for every Palestinian who dies under an Israeli bomb."

When the police began arresting activists, protesters from the main demonstration rushed to chant in support of those engaging in the civil disobedience. As the police arrested the activists blockading the entrance, activists outside chanted, "Arrest the people inside, they're supporting genocide!"

The police brutally arrested the activists, kicking and hitting them.

"The police were pretty vicious with us," Florey said. "There are bruises up and down the left side of my body, including under my armpit. At one point, there were five or six police on me."

It's telling that the police brutally arrested nonviolent activists standing up to Israel's crimes while a pro-Israeli journalist assaulted a woman and goes free.

As this article was being written, three students were arrested for occupying Democratic Sen. Carl Levin's office, demanding that he stop funding Israel. This protest was part of a wave of student occupations throughout universities in Britain, as well as sit-ins at the Israeli consulate in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Activists at the protest in New York vowed to continue to build a worldwide movement to educate and organize demonstrations and boycotts until Palestine is free.



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The following have chosen to post issues; there may be others:

<http://williambowles.info/gispecial/2008/index.html>;

http://www.traprockpeace.org/qi_special/;

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