

MILITARY RESISTANCE GUARD ISSUE: **7K5**

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“The Soldiers’ Biggest Question Is: What Can We Do To Make This War Stop?”

“‘We’re Lost — That’s How I Feel. I’m Not Exactly Sure Why We’re Here,’ Said Specialist Raquime Mercer, 20”

“We Want To Believe In A Cause But We Don’t Know What That Cause Is”

“Asked If The Mission Was Worthwhile, He Replied: ‘If I Knew Exactly What The Mission Was, Probably So, But I Don’t”

“Lieutenant-Colonel Kimo Gallahue, 2-87’s Commanding Officer, Denied That His Men Were Demoralised, And Insisted They Had Achieved A Great Deal Over The Past Nine Months”

But Sgt. Hughes Says: “The Only Soldiers Who Thought It Was Going Well ‘Work In An Office, Not On The Ground.’ In His Opinion ‘The Whole Country Is Going To Shit”

October 8, 2009 Martin Fletcher at Forward Operating Base in Wardak province, The Times [Excerpts]

American soldiers serving in Afghanistan are depressed and deeply disillusioned, according to the chaplains of two US battalions that have spent nine months on the front line in the war against the Taliban.

Many feel that they are risking their lives — and that colleagues have died — for a futile mission and an Afghan population that does nothing to help them, the chaplains told The Times in their makeshift chapel on this fortress-like base in a dusty, brown valley southwest of Kabul.

“The many soldiers who come to see us have a sense of futility and anger about being here. They are really in a state of depression and despair and just want to get back to their families,” said Captain Jeff Masengale, of the 10th Mountain Division’s 2-87 Infantry Battalion.

“They feel they are risking their lives for progress that’s hard to discern,” said Captain Sam Rico, of the Division’s 4-25 Field Artillery Battalion.

“They are tired, strained, confused and just want to get through.” The chaplains said that they were speaking out because the men could not.

“We’re lost — that’s how I feel. I’m not exactly sure why we’re here,” said Specialist Raquime Mercer, 20, whose closest friend was shot dead by a renegade Afghan policeman last Friday.

“I need a clear-cut purpose if I’m going to get hurt out here or if I’m going to die.”

Sergeant Christopher Hughes, 37, from Detroit, has lost six colleagues and survived two roadside bombs.

Asked if the mission was worthwhile, he replied: “If I knew exactly what the mission was, probably so, but I don’t.”

The only soldiers who thought it was going well “work in an office, not on the ground”. In his opinion “the whole country is going to shit.”

The battalion’s 1,500 soldiers are nine months in to a year-long deployment that has proved extraordinarily tough.

Their goal was to secure the mountainous Wardak province and then to win the people’s allegiance through development and good governance. They have, instead, found themselves locked in an increasingly vicious battle with the Taliban.

They have been targeted by at least 300 roadside bombs, about 180 of which have exploded.

Nineteen men have been killed in action, with another committing suicide.

About a hundred have been flown home with amputations, severe burns and other injuries likely to cause permanent disability, and many of those have not been replaced.

More than two dozen mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicles (MRAPs) have been knocked out of action.

Living conditions are good — abundant food, air-conditioned tents, hot water, free internet — but most of the men are on their second, third or fourth tours of Afghanistan and Iraq, with barely a year between each.

Staff Sergeant Erika Cheney, Airborne's mental health specialist, expressed concern about their mental state — especially those in scattered outposts — and believes that many have mild post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). "They're tired, frustrated, scared. A lot of them are afraid to go out but will still go," she said.

Lieutenant Peter Hjelmstad, 2-87's Medical Platoon Leader, said sleeplessness and anger attacks were common.

A dozen men have been confined to desk jobs because they can no longer handle missions outside the base.

One long-serving officer who has lost three friends this tour said he sometimes returned to his room at night and cried, or played war games on his laptop. "It's a release. It's a method of coping." He has nightmares and sleeps little, and it does not help that the base is frequently shaken by outgoing artillery fire. He was briefly overcome as he recalled how, when a lorry backfired during his most recent home leave, he grabbed his young son and dived between two parked cars.

The chaplains said soldiers were seeking their help in unprecedented numbers.

"Everyone you meet is just down, and you meet them everywhere — in the weight room, dining facility, getting mail," said Captain Rico. Even "hard men" were coming to their tent chapel and breaking down.

The men are frustrated by the lack of obvious purpose or progress.

"The soldiers' biggest question is: what can we do to make this war stop.

"Catch one person? Assault one objective?"

"Soldiers want definite answers, other than to stop the Taleban, because that almost seems impossible. It's hard to catch someone you can't see," said Specialist Mercer.

"It's a very frustrating mission," said Lieutenant Hjelmstad. "The average soldier sees a friend blown up and his instinct is to retaliate or believe it's for something, but it's not like other wars where your buddy died but they took the hill.

"There's no tangible reward for the sacrifice. It's hard to say Wardak is better than when we got here."

Captain Masengale, a soldier for 12 years before he became a chaplain, said: "We want to believe in a cause but we don't know what that cause is."

The soldiers are angry that colleagues are losing their lives while trying to help a population that will not help them. "You give them all the humanitarian assistance that they want and they're still going to lie to you.

"They'll tell you there's no Taleban anywhere in the area and as soon as you roll away, ten feet from their house, you get shot at again," said Specialist Eric Petty, from Georgia.

Captain Rico told of the disgust of a medic who was asked to treat an insurgent shortly after pulling a colleague's charred corpse from a bombed vehicle.

The soldiers complain that rules of engagement designed to minimise civilian casualties mean that they fight with one arm tied behind their backs. "They're a joke," said one. "You get shot at but can do nothing about it. You have to see the person with the weapon. It's not enough to know which house the shooting's coming from."

The soldiers joke that their ISAF arm badges stand not for International Security Assistance Force but "I Suck At Fighting" or "I Support Afghan Farmers".

To compound matters, soldiers are mainly being killed not in combat but on routine journeys, by roadside bombs planted by an invisible enemy.

"That's very demoralising," said Captain Masengale.

The constant deployments are, meanwhile, playing havoc with the soldiers' private lives. "They're killing families," he said. "Divorces are skyrocketing. PTSD is off the scale. There have been hundreds of injuries that send soldiers home and affect families for the rest of their lives."

The chaplains said that many soldiers had lost their desire to help Afghanistan.

"All they want to do is make it home alive and go back to their wives and children and visit the families who have lost husbands and fathers over here. It comes down to just surviving," said Captain Masengale.

"If we make it back with ten toes and ten fingers the mission is successful," Sergeant Hughes said.

"You carry on for the guys to your left or right," added Specialist Mercer.

The chaplains have themselves struggled to cope with so much distress. "We have to encourage them, strengthen them and send them out again. No one comes in and says, 'I've had a great day on a mission'. It's all pain," said Captain Masengale. "The only way we've been able to make it is having each other."

Lieutenant-Colonel Kimo Gallahue, 2-87's commanding officer, denied that his men were demoralised, and insisted they had achieved a great deal over the past nine months. A triathlete and former rugby player, he admitted pushing his men hard, but argued that taking the fight to the enemy was the best form of defence.

He said the security situation had worsened because the insurgents had chosen to fight in Wardak province, not abandon it. He said, however, that the situation would have

been catastrophic without his men. They had managed to keep open the key Kabul-to-Kandahar highway which dissects Wardak, and prevent the province becoming a launch pad for attacks on the capital, which is barely 20 miles from its border. Above all, Colonel Gallahue argued that counter-insurgency — winning the allegiance of the indigenous population through security, development and good governance — was a long and laborious process that could not be completed in a year. “These 12 months have been, for me, laying the groundwork for future success,” he said.

At morning service on Sunday, the two chaplains sought to boost the spirits of their flock with uplifting hymns, accompanied by video footage of beautiful lakes, oceans and rivers.

Captain Rico offered a particularly apposite reading from Corinthians: “We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”

National Guard Soldier Sues KBR For Damage From Afghanistan Burn Pit Injuries

Oct 8, 2009 The Associated Press

ENTERPRISE, Ala. — A National Guard soldier has filed suit contending his health problems were caused by a contractor who burned vast quantities of unsorted waste in pits near where soldiers were living in Afghanistan.

The Dothan Eagle reported Thursday that Richard Guilmette’s suit is one of at least 17 against KBR Inc., claiming the company “knew or should have known” that the burn pits put soldiers and contractors in danger. KBR denied the allegations.

Guilmette said that after a month in Kandahar in 2004, he began to experience breathing difficulties, stomach problems, headaches and dizziness, even extreme fatigue during normal exertion.

Guilmette said the pits were close to the soldiers’ living quarters, and that winds often sent a large, black cloud of smoke over the tents.

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

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

National Guard Troops Cheated Out Of Retroactive Pay Again, As Usual: “90-For-90 Rule, Which Allows Guard And Reserve Members To Receive Retirement Before Age 60 — When Benefits Begin For Most Reservists — Was Left Out Of The Final Defense Bill”

Oct 12, 2009 By Rick Maze, Staff writer, Army Times [Excerpts]

Congressional negotiators blamed themselves for leaving intact a reserve retirement formula that treats the 600,000 National Guard and reserve members who mobilized before Jan. 28, 2008, differently from those who mobilized later.

Negotiators who prepared the final version of the 2010 defense authorization bill rejected a Senate-passed provision that would have made retroactive to Sept. 11, 2001, a retirement formula that allows reservists to begin drawing military retired pay 90 days earlier for every 90 days of mobilization.

That 90-for-90 rule, which allows Guard and reserve members to receive retirement before age 60 — when benefits begin for most reservists — was left out of the final defense bill because lawmakers said they could not find a way to pay for the benefits under congressional budget rules. **[Right. They can “find a way” to pay off every thieving war profiteer in the country, but the troops? Congress has more important work to do: approving endless billions for the stupid, hopeless Imperial wars that kill off the troops. They got their priorities. Ed.]**

This is not the first time congressional budget rules have prevented retroactive improvements in retired pay.

In 2007, when lawmakers first decided to give mobilization credit toward earlier retirement benefits to Guard and reserve members, the change was not made retroactive to the start of deployments in response to the 2001 terrorist attacks because of the entitlement spending limits.

Despite a demand from major military associations that everyone mobilized since the 2001 terrorist attacks should be treated the same, lawmakers failed in 2008 and again this year to find a way to cover the estimated \$550 million in additional retired pay for the 600,000 people who had been mobilized for 90 days or longer between Sept. 11, 2001, and Jan. 28, 2008.

SUPPORT MILITARY RESISTANCE



“What Makes The Guard Or Reserve Personnel Who Put Their Lives In Harm’s Way, I.E., Iraq Or Afganistan, Any Different Than Those In The Active-Duty Service?”

Forums
Army Times
9.28.09

Any guardsman or reservist who has been called to active duty for more than 30 days or longer and has 20 years of service should be able to retire and collect retirement immediately.

What makes the Guard or reserve personnel who put their lives in harm’s way, i.e., Iraq or Afganistan, any different than those in the active-duty service?

There is no difference, yet, those in active service who do 20 or more years collect immediately after they get out.

Guardsmen and reservists have to wait until age 60?

Their pay is pro-rated based on points accrued for retirement anyway.

— SFC Ret

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.

Our Good Earth

From: Dennis Serdel
To: Military Resistance
Subject: Our Good Earth

**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**

Our Good Earth

National Guard, you're still in Iraq
but you're supposed to be home
protecting and helping us
you didn't sign up to fight
overseas and now they want
you to fight in Afghanistan
It was the Bush the Coward
who sent you to Iraq
but Obama said if elected
he would bring you home
but the Rich own him too
They have imprisoned the Earth
like a large cage in Alcatraz
with bars and locks
so that the Rich can enjoy life
but nobody else can
They don't like so-called
Socialism like Social Security
that makes them share
Instead they send their great Armies
wherever they want to
to plunder the wealth that any
Country has on supposedly
"Their Earth"
They do it with flags with bombs
with guns and with wounded
and dead Soldiers.
So Soldiers beware
don't let them make you be
mercenaries to keep
your own Families
back home in an "Earth Jail"
that they keep locked tight
as they lay off Worker Members

of your extended Families
So open your cage door
with your guns with your supplies
so you can fly home to
jail all the Bankers
who will not share
like Madoff in chains
"Our Good Earth" will be
glorious without them



“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

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