

# *Traveling Soldier*

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***"A solid number, perhaps a majority, of the ordinary soldiers believed this war was bullshit"***

This letter was sent to our sister publication, **GI Special**, which is a daily email digest of news and commentary by Thomas Barton who is on our production staff. You can subscribe by emailing [thomasfbarton@earthlink.net](mailto:thomasfbarton@earthlink.net) or order by mail: **GI Special, Box 126 , 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657.** Personal information was removed to protect the writer from any retaliation from the chain of command.

From: A

I was at FOB Summerall, the former Iraqi Air Force base "K2," near Baiji.

My unit was tasked with base defense, and I [xxxx] the guys and gals in the towers for most of our 9-10 months there.

I was able, therefore, to talk with many of the troops, both active and Guard, at length over the months.

Most knew my politics; as the days wore on, more and more of the enlisteds, E-5 & below, spoke with me about their growing misgivings about the war.

Some were openly angry and contemptuous of the officers, generals, and civilian leadership that sent us there.

A few (including one good-ol'-boy from Oklahoma, an active duty sergeant with 18 years in) commented on how "if I lived here, I'd want to kill us, too."

Of course, the leadership, especially the officers, all spouted the party line, but it was obvious to me that a



solid number, perhaps even a majority, of the ordinary soldiers believed this war was bullshit.

The internet access we had at Summerall was not closely supervised.

We were warned against looking at porn, or passing on information that might be picked up by "the enemy," (I suppose the insurgents were intercepting our satellite signals), but I visited GI Special at least weekly, as well as other sites that better explained what I knew to be going on around me.

I didn't have the ability to print anything, so mostly I just shared stories I read with other soldiers in the contexts of our talks.

I wished I could have circulated printed copies; oh, well.

# A Call From Baghdad

My son called this morning, he's ok. But we had a really good conversation.

A lot of it was about the increase in activity there. But he's starting to defy the officers. He refused to wear his flame suit on patrol this morning because he

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said, "a lot good it does, we just lost 4 guys and they were wearing them, we just have them because of war profiteering. The government gives money to the companies who make this shit and say 'oh, let's give it to the soldiers!'"

Then we started talking about movies, and he refuses to watch anything related to 9/11. He said, "Ma, did you watch that WTC

movie yet? We have it here and I won't watch that stuff because it just gets everybody pissed off again and I am tired of hearing that we should kill more people because of 9/11." He then said, "Ma, by the year 2050 we will still be killing in the name of 9/11!!" "Probably when I die and go to heaven people will still be saying, let's kill because of 9/11!" "Enough with killing in the name of 9/11!" I tell all my friends here that we should just move on and get over it. We aren't proving anything."

I almost fell out of bed. But he was able to talk freely because he was told to stay back from patrol because he wouldn't wear his flame suit. He said "I lost it." They said "how the hell did you loose it?" He said it disappeared! Then he said to me, "so what are they going to do to me? Make me go to Iraq?" "I'm not taking part in any war profiteering. I was reading all about it in Newsweek last issue we got here." "That's some shit!"

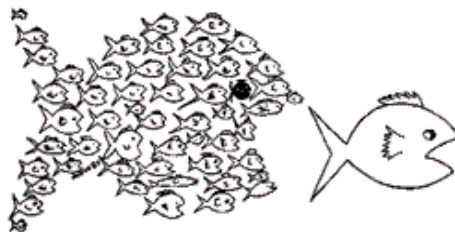
Anyway, we talked about 45 minutes while his company was on patrol, and then they returned so he got off the phone waiting to be yelled at. He said, "so they yell at me, who cares."

- A Military Mom

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## Join the Military Project

Because the troops are ours, because they belong to us as much we belong to ourselves we treat them accordingly. We understand how they've been fucked over in Afghanistan/Iraq, not as tongue clucking observers (or detractors) but as allies in their desire to leave countries they come to realize they have no business in, except to serve the profit drenched interests of those who put them there in the first place and trash their lives as they do Afghans and Iraqis.



## **ORGANIZE**

These are sister-brother citizens who may have enlisted immediately after 9/11 or those who were in need of career. Those who shared our high school class and those who thought by being a National Guard member they

could serve at home in times of disaster. They have been deceived just as much as we during the burlesque(s) of presidential elections, except their fate is exposure to terrifying means of death or dismemberment in a desert capital or mountain pass hunted by thousands of people who simply want them to leave. A Zogby poll of February 28, 2006 reveals their discontent: 79% want to pull out by December 31, 2006 and 29% prefer immediate withdrawal. These percentages are proportionately greater than civilian sentiment.

But civilian groups have formed and are in the process of providing aid and comfort to service personnel who question, oppose or resist U.S. military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The common slogan of “Bring Them Home Now” is one that’s being heard more and more throughout the country, if not the world. And as the knowledge that the troops have been “had” becomes clear, as it did in Vietnam, we should be ready to increase support for them.

The Military Project is one such civilian group. Formed approximately 18 months ago, it is dedicated to troop support for troops turning against the war, a tactic almost completely absent, to this point, from most of the organized anti-war U.S. Left movements. To achieve this, the organization enthusiastically works with other groups and individuals willing to reach out to the troops.

The organizing committee of the MP has been successful, so far, in establishing military contacts overseas and domestically through web publication, GI Special and print publication, Traveling Soldier. Both of these are aimed at the military and military families. Security (names

withheld, etc.) is offered at all times for contributions.

Military Project’s activities have included attendance and exposition of Military Project via the publications, twice at the Fayetteville, North Carolina anti-war rally outside the giant army base, Ft. Bragg and most recently at a meeting of anti-war activists near a naval base that included active naval personnel. Multiple copies of Traveling Soldier and GI Special were brought to Ft. Bragg. GI Special is read by many active duty members of the armed forces including troops serving in Iraq.

Previous and recent campaigns of support for Seaman Pablo Paredes and imprisoned Army Sergeant, Kevin Benderman in their conflict with the military over conscientious objector status and subsequent court martial took place in conjunction with the previously mentioned allied groups. The popular film depicting GI resistance in Vietnam, “Sir! No Sir!” was endorsed by the Military Project and the movie’s producers were aided by the group in publicizing the film during its April, 2006 run in New York and the nation-wide tour that continues.

In the Fall of 2005 a new Military Project chapter, Prisoners Against The War, was formed by prisoners of the Stateville Correctional Center in Joliet, Illinois. They are dedicated to future organizing against the war(s) not only within their location but, via a Military Project member (prisoners are not permitted to correspond with other prisoners), with prisoners in other locations as well. Many of those imprisoned have family members and friends in the military.

Organizing in the National Guard and Reserve is a key area of work for the Military Project. We have worked with other organizations and individuals in distributing informational/assistance material to troops.

It isn’t deep science to discover that in order to change something one plus many must do something. It’s fine to march in protest, fine to write letters of same but if one or others are truly desirous of change doing something is paramount. If anyone is interested in reaching out to the troops in their present and future anti-war activities, if you have access to any armories in the greater NY area, please let us know at: [Contact@militaryproject.org](mailto:Contact@militaryproject.org)

## A Choice to Make

It is a frightening tribute to the effectiveness of the Bush administration’s public diplomacy campaign that despite all the evidence, many people are still referring to prewar intelligence on Iraq as ‘inaccurate’ or ‘mistaken’ rather than a lie. As difficult as it is for many of us to believe that our leaders would send us off to war on a false pretext, the facts are indisputable. But do the ends justify the means? Even if Saddam Hussein was not a threat to the United States, he was a brutal dictator. Granted, the invasion of Iraq may not have been strictly legal under international law, but freeing the Iraqi



people from tyranny was a noble endeavor.

But if we liberated the Iraqis, why do they continue to attack us? Going on the assumption that we did liberate them will eventually lead us to the conclusion that they are uncivilized and in need of an outside power to oversee their governance. As time goes on we will become less and less able to understand why they resent us and why they take every opportunity to betray us despite our good intentions. Our ignorance will turn to fear and hatred and it will lead to atrocities we did not think Americans were capable of.

The disturbing reality is, we are already well on our way there. It defies all common sense and experience that we could be resented so much despite our best efforts to improve people's lives. It also defies all logic that a well-educated and civilized society could act in such a seemingly uncivilized manner. Therefore we have to question the assumption that we actually have liberated the Iraqis. If we did free them, why is popular support for the insurgency growing? Why is everyone who works with us constantly in fear of kidnapping, torture, and assassination?

Perhaps it has something to do with the Bush administration's talk of privatizing Iraq's oil resources. Perhaps it is related to the secret negotiations currently taking place to secure the oil multinationals' effective control over 80% of Iraq's oil fields. What conclusions should Iraqis draw from our government's pressure on the Iraqi prime minister to withdraw his proposal of amnesty to resistance groups? The bank accounts of Iraqi trade unions, essential to a democratic civil society, have been frozen because they exercised their natural rights of free expression and free assembly and opposed the Bush administration's imperial policies. There is some

contradiction here, to say the least, in America's relationship with a supposedly sovereign nation.

The Iraqis are well aware of the cynicism and hypocrisy behind our leaders' foreign policies and therefore they cooperate with U.S. forces when they must and support the insurgents when we have our backs turned. It is a bitter irony that Iraqis and American troops are paying in blood while this administration does the opposite of everything it says it stands for. It is not the Iraqis but our own government which is creating the conditions of suspicion, distrust, fear, hatred, and racism, which inevitably lead to atrocities against civilians.

A recent article by Army Lieutenant Colonel Wade Markel titled *Draining the Swamp: The British Strategy of Population Control* suggests that we relocate entire towns and cities into internment camps in order to separate the civilian population from the insurgents and hunt the latter down. History has proven this strategy militarily successful, no doubt. But at what cost? History has also proven that the perpetuation of imperial rule requires tyrannical repression, leading to greater and greater contradiction between principles and action. The violent and tragic history of Iraq and many other countries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is in large part the fault of Britain's imperial policies. Empire abroad also directly corresponds to the erosion of democracy at home, as we see today with the executive branch's increasing need for secrecy. As earlier noted, we are already well along the path to losing our civil liberties and betraying our American values.

This leads us to the question, what is our duty as military members and what does this mean practically? Not only did the Bush administration violate international law by invading Iraq under a false pretext, it also continues to pursue imperial policies

through its de facto control over Iraq's economy. Our oath is to defend the Constitution of the United States. The longer we remain silent while our political leaders brazenly disregard international law and use us to trample upon the self-determination of Iraqis, the further we have strayed from our oath and our values. We must not mistake nationalism for patriotism.

The nationalist blindly accepts out of a willing ignorance, fearing the price of dissent. This is cowardice. The patriot remembers his country's values and demands that when he is called to arms the cause is just. He is not content that he should enjoy liberty at another nation's expense. The threat of global terrorism demonstrates that ultimately we cannot be free if we deny freedom to others.

Our duty is to speak up against these policies and demand that Iraqis are truly given the chance to determine their own future. The first step is to understand the issues; the second is to act. The only way to end the senseless violence and restore America as a positive moral force in the world is to voice our dissent to our senators and representatives in Congress and to tell the American public the truth about Iraq as we see it through our own eyes. A number of courageous individuals have chosen to refuse orders to deploy to Iraq altogether. This is a personal decision with high costs, but each individual should also weigh the alternative on their conscience. I have come to the conclusion that this administration has betrayed our American values and therefore it is my duty to voice my dissent. Regardless of the conclusion you come to, it is our duty to make a moral decision, which requires us all to discern reality from rhetoric.

– **Dissenting Patriot, U.S. Military**

# Letter From a Peace Mother

My son is currently serving in the 1-25 Weapons Company and I am so proud of him I sometimes can't even say it out loud. He's a young man of privilege who signed up for various reasons, as all of you did, but one main reason was because he felt it was not fair for only poor kids to have to go into the military because it is one of the few ways left to get ahead nowadays. He didn't need to go in to get his education - he joined after he graduated from college. And that is why I am a Peace Mother, and, frankly, a protester.

Please don't tune me out just yet. There is something very important that I want to say to all you marines and others reading this. You see, I feel that you soldiers who all are serving our country so honorably have a right to expect respect from our politicians. And, I don't think you are getting it. You have all volunteered to take a huge risk by becoming marines - knowing full well that you could be called to make the ultimate sacrifice. And, you know what? You have the right to be sent into battle only when it is worth it. I don't know about you all, but I don't think that getting rid of

Saddam Hussein was worth the risk you are taking. From all accounts, all the WMD's were removed in 1992 after the 1st Gulf War, and President Bush did not even wait for the inspectors to finish their job and make a report before he attacked. There was no good reason that I can think of that we went in the first place, except that the oil companies are right now making obscene profits - the biggest quarterly profits ever recorded by any company anywhere. I don't think the building of 1,000 schools in Iraq is worth the risk to your lives. And I don't believe that my son's life is worth 100 brand new democracies. And I certainly don't think he should make the ultimate sacrifice so that Exxon Mobile can make over 10 BILLION DOLLARS profit in ONE QUARTER!!!!

What I really want to say here is that I belong to three different peace groups and I participate in three separate actions each week trying to bring about awareness in my small town so that citizens will make the right choices in November - and I believe we have to vote on one issue, and that is the war. By being out on

the streets holding my sign I am not in any way, shape or form disrespecting you soldiers. I am trying to support you. All the members of all three of my groups feel exactly the same way. And, I think all over the country the peace protestors feel the same way. This is not Vietnam. We know that you have no choice but to be where you are and to try and survive. I know this because of my son, and I want him to do whatever is necessary to get out of Iraq in one piece and to help his buddies do the same.

So, please, when you see us out on the streets, don't mistake our protesting to be against any of you. We are there on the streets because of you, because we love and support all of you, but most of all because we respect the choices you made and feel you deserve the respect of our current administration - and we feel you are not getting it.

Sincerely and with Gratitude to All of You,

Annie

MilitaryFamiliesSpeakOut.org  
mfso.org NashuaPeace.org  
MoveOn.org



# Rebuilding the GI Movement

**By Seaman Jonathan W. Hutto, Sr. Hutto is an active duty sailor stationed in Norfolk Virginia. You can reach him at [citizensailors@yahoo.com](mailto:citizensailors@yahoo.com)**

For my generation of activists born post the Civil Rights and Peace Movement of the 1960's, the struggle against the Vietnam War conjures up images of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's advocacy and the conscientious objection of heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali. For others, images of peace activists being viciously beaten and attacked by Chicago police in the summer of 1968 and Jimi Hendrix giving his rendition of the "Star Spangle Banner" at Woodstock holds a place in our national conscious.

Over thirty years after the U.S lost the war in Indochina, my generation is coming to know the history of the GI resistance in Vietnam. As documented by David Cortright's "Soldiers in Revolt", first published in 1975, and David Ziegler's 2005 documentary film "Sir No Sir", the movement of soldiers and sailors against the occupation of Vietnam was pivotal in ending U.S Imperialist aggression against the Vietnamese people.

The GI Movement was also instrumental in advancing reforms to the military command structure. In the aftermath of the racial rebellions of the early 70's on the USS Kitty Hawk and the USS Constellation, the military attempted to address racism and discrimination through the creation of Equal Opportunity (EO) advisors.

Over thirty years later, I have gained personal and political

experience dealing with equal opportunity on my ship. It is my hope these experiences can be a road-map for soldiers and sailors dealing with discriminatory and abusive conditions within their workplace.

I enlisted in the United States Navy in January of 2004. After having worked at non-profit organizations and an unsuccessful stint at teaching 5th grade post graduating from Howard University in 1999, I was searching for a clean slate, a chance to repay my student loans and obtain a new lease on life. However, what I found was an institutional culture laced with discriminatory behavior based on race, gender, sexual orientation and geography. I still remember the West Virginia recruit in my division in boot camp being asked repeatedly by our Chief Petty Officer (E7) whether or not he had ever slept with his cousin.

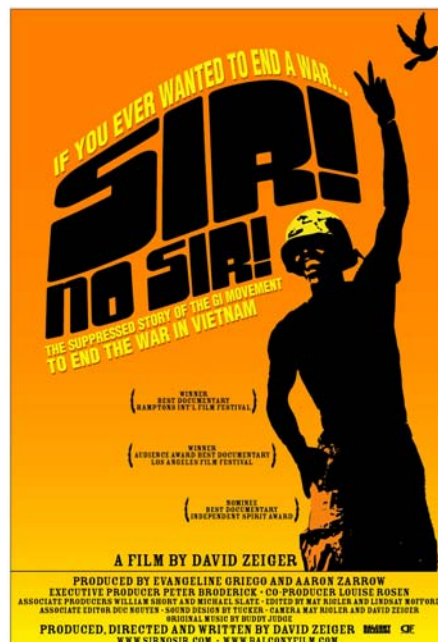
Upon arriving on my ship in the summer of 2004, I realized my

adjusting to the existing culture within the shop would be impossible. Racial and sexual remarks were constantly made to both males and females. One petty officer (E4) was notorious for his comments admiring the Ku Klux Klan and Adolf Hitler. I vividly remember this same petty officer making derogatory statements regarding the national celebration of Dr. King's birthday. Every-time I related these incidents to the chain of command, it was always excused and swept under the rug.

In the summer of 2005, during the evaluation process, I wrote my Chief Petty Officer (E7) and Senior Chief Petty Officer (E8) a two and half page memo detailing the gross equal opportunity abuses in my shop and the need for reform. The result was me being targeted as an agitator and not being a team player. As usual, my complaints were ignored and business as usual continued in the shop.

My ship deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in September of 2005. During the deployment in January of 2006, a junior petty officer (E4), in the company of other petty officers, displayed a hangman's noose in my face mocking the mass lynchings of African-Americans in this country.

At this point, enough was enough. I vowed to resist this oppressive culture to the fullest extent of military law and beyond. I immediately drafted a memo on the situation and rallied support from other shipmates adversely affected. The military preaches the doctrine of handling situations at the



lowest level possible. The purpose is to ensure higher enlisted and officers are never fully exposed and held accountable in these situations.

Instead of handling this situation at the lowest level, I sent a memo to my entire departmental chain of command including the EO advisor. A full level investigation was opened to investigate the matter. The investigating officer found the perpetrator did engage in racial intimidation. The result was the perpetrator going before the Captain and being reduced in rank and confined to the ship for 30 days. The senior petty officer in the situation (E5) was given a letter of reprimand.

Despite the small victory, this investigation had its challenges. My Senior Chief (E8) stated in the investigative report that I had never told him of the situation in the shop which is contrary to the letter I gave him six months prior to the incident. Also, shipmates in the shop told me of the hostility of the chain of command towards the investigative process. Lastly, after the Captain awarded punishment to the perpetrators, I was denied a copy of the investigative record by the legal office.

I filed an appeal to the EO advisor on three points in March of 2006. First, in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), I believe I was entitled to a copy of the investigative file. Second, that my Senior Chief needed to be held accountable for being untruthful in the investigation and lastly the punishment given to the perpetrator was not appropriate given the severity of the incident.

On March 21st, I was denied the investigation files and told I could appeal within 30 days. From the GI Rights Hot-line I learned that all military members can send a protected communication to a member of Congress on any matter. I sought assistance from Congressman John Lewis's office. His office sent a letter to the Navy on my case and received a response on April 19th. Although my appeal was denied I felt a sense of closure in knowing I had exhausted my rights in this situation.

The atmosphere in my shop has changed for the better although some resentment is present. For any military member going through an adverse situation in their shop which is discriminatory and unfair in nature, several points to remember.

First, document all instances of discriminatory and unfair treatment and report it promptly to your chain of command. If the chain of command fails to take action, you should seek out your EO advisor and continue to document accordingly.

There are civilian/veterans organizations that will help you in filing a complaint and resolving adverse situations. You can call the GI Rights hot-line at 1-800-394-9544 or email them at: [girights@objector.org](mailto:girights@objector.org). They have counselors on call ready to help with any questions or concerns you have. You can also contact the National Lawyers Guild Military Law Task Force at [www.nlg.org/mltf/](http://www.nlg.org/mltf/). The task force helps to provide direct legal assistance to active duty members.

The late abolitionist and fighter against slavery, Frederick Douglass, taught us power concedes nothing without a demand. A revitalized GI movement of the 21st century in America must deal with the basic grievances of active-duty along with the higher issues of War and the proper distribution of resources for human need. In the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement, we shall overcome one day!



# ***Words from the front-lines***

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“I’d like to punch him [Rumsfeld] in the gut. He treats us like we’re not human. He acts like he’s not destroying families.” – **NCO, 4-24 Infantry Battalion, 172<sup>nd</sup> Stryker Brigade, Baghdad, Iraq.**

“The world keeps turning and so does the fighting in Iraq. Yesterday, my soldier and friend was shot and killed. He is the first one in our platoon to be killed. His death has started an uproar of emotions in the platoon. ... No one understands why we are here and what our mission is. This war is lost. We aren’t helping these people. We are just dying and getting injured.” – **Sergeant Ryan Kahlor, Task Force 1-36, Hit, Iraq.**

“Nobody is pro-American in this city. They either tolerate us or all-out hate us. If we do leave, the city will be a lot better and they’ll build it a lot better. ... Nobody wants us here, so why are we here? That’s the big question. ... If we leave, all the attacks would stop, because we’d be gone.” – **Major Brent E. Lilly, Marine civil affairs unit, Hit, Iraq.**

“It sucks. Honestly, it just feels like we’re driving around waiting to get blown up. That’s the most honest answer I could give you. You lose a couple friends and it gets hard.” –

**Specialist Tim Ivey, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division, Baghdad, Iraq.**

“No one wants to be here, you know, no one is truly enthused about what we do. We were excited, but then it just wears on you – there’s only so much you can take. Like me, personally, I want to fight in a war like World War II. I want to fight an enemy. And this, out here, there is no

enemy, it’s a faceless enemy. He’s out there, but he’s hiding.” – **Sergeant Christopher Dugger, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division, Baghdad, Iraq.**

“At this point, it seems like the war on drugs in America. It’s like this never-ending battle, like, we find one IED, if we do find it before it hits us, so what? You know it’s just like if the cops make a big bust, next week the next higher-up puts more back out there.” – **Specialist David Fulcher, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division, Baghdad, Iraq.**

“The first time somebody you know dies, the first thing you ask yourself is, ‘Well, what did he die for?’” – **Specialist Joshua Steffey, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division, Baghdad, Iraq.**

