

Traveling Soldier

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“ I , personally, don't believe in fighting for the profit of a handful of people. I also don't believe in fighting for a government that is willing, if not eager, to f--- its own people over”

From: [XXXX, Soldier Iraq]
To: *GI Special, Traveling Soldier's* sister publication
Subject: thank you

My name is [XXXXXX],

I'm a [XXXXXX] with [XXXXXX], [XXXXXX] Division, currently deployed to Kirkuk, Iraq.

I just wanted to thank you for putting out *GI Special*.

Its nice to know that a lot of other people who are deployed, or have previously deployed think being in Iraq is completely counter-productive.

I, personally, don't believe in fighting for the profit of a handful of people.

I also don't believe in fighting for a government that is willing, if not eager, to fuck its own people over.

KBR [Kellogg, Brown, and Root] is a perfect example. KBR handles just about everything on our FOB. I was talking to a KBR maintenance guy named [xxxxxx] about what exactly KBR did. He told me about how he had been in Iraq for the past 4 years working, and how sheisty KBR is.

They had a lot of civilian Americans working for them, and from what I've been told by a few of



them, they got paid pretty well considering the shit-hole conditions they have to work in.

But now what's happening is, KBR is actively seeking reasons to fire these people, and starting to hire people from other countries, who do the same job, for a fraction of the money. Putting people like [xxxxxx] out of a job for even the slightest fuckup. At the time I just thought, “hey, that's not right.”

But then I was reading through *Traveling Soldier* and I noticed that KBR was one of Halliburton's entities,

and that Cheney has some major say in what's going on with that company. Maybe this information isn't fully correct, but that's just what I got out of it all. The shit is really piling up on this administration.

I fully support all the men and women deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan but, I'm already at the “fuck the army” point, I've never been a supporter of this war, and I thank you for doing what you do.

Keep it up.

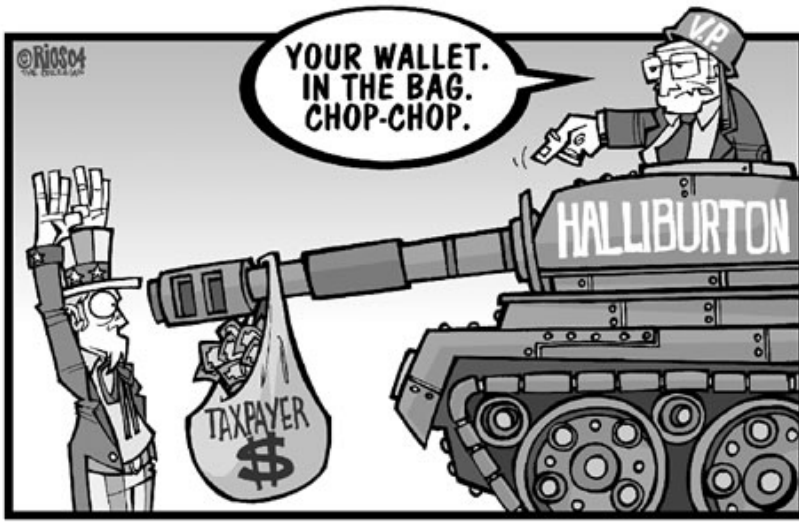
REPLY:

Dear Soldier,

First of all, I want to thank you for reading *GI Special* and *Traveling Soldier* and writing us.

On KBR, Halliburton, and Cheney: KBR is a subsidiary of Halliburton. Cheney was Halliburton's CEO for five years, and stepped down in August of 2000. Since leaving, he has received \$250,000-\$300,000 every year in deferred compensation and his stock options are worth an estimated \$8 million.

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(See http://rawstory.com/news/2005/Cheney_stock_options_rose_3281_last_1011.html for the story.)

The scandal is that KBR got no-bid contracts worth billions to “rebuild” in Iraq.

No-bid means there was no competitive bidding, the Pentagon

simply handed them the contract and wrote them the checks. This is in addition to the logistical support they provide at the many permanent military installations that are being built in Iraq which you know of first hand. KBR also got no-bid contracts to “rebuild” New Orleans after Katrina.

Did KBR get these lucrative deals because Cheney is the #2 man in the White House? The answer is obvious.

When Senator Pat Leahy of Vermont confronted Cheney about this issue on the floor of the Senate, Cheney told him to “go fuck yourself.”

If that’s how Cheney thinks about his colleagues in the Senate who dare to raise the issue, I can only imagine what he thinks of rank-and-file anti-war soldiers reading *Traveling Soldier* and *GI Special!*

Hope that clarifies things.

An increasing number of people working in the anti-war movement, including organizations like Iraq Veterans Against the War, are behind you 100%, and we’re doing our best to bring you and all your friends home safe and sound.

Keep writing, stay safe.

– **Pham Binh**

***Traveling Soldier* Production Staff**

“Not us. We’re not going.” – A Unit Revolts

December 14, 2007, *Army Times*

Spc. Gerry DeNardi stood at the on-base Burger King, a few miles from downtown Baghdad. Little did he realize an explosion would hit.

Camp Taji encompasses miles of scrapped Iraqi tanks, a busy U.S. airstrip and thousands of soldiers in identical trailers. Several fast-food stands, a PX and a dining facility are the social hub.

Two weeks earlier, the 20-year-old DeNardi lost five good friends, killed together in a Bradley Fighting Vehicle that rolled over a roadside bomb.

DeNardi lived through daily explosions in 11 months with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, at nearby Combat Outpost Apache. He had rushed through flames to try to save friends and carried others to the aide station only to watch them die. “I’m not getting killed at Burger King,” he thought, and he dived for a bunker.

“Lightning doesn’t strike twice,” DeNardi said, “so I went back. But there were body parts everywhere. ... I’m covered in blood, but I still have my hamburger receipt,” DeNardi said. “I went back to Burger King the next day, but they wouldn’t give me my burger.” For all his dark humor, the “Hero of Burger King,” as fellow soldiers called him, was rattled by the explosion. At Apache, he expected trouble. But not at Burger King. “That affected me,” he said. It was just another bad day to add to many and DeNardi’s platoon had already faced unbearable misery.

When five soldiers with 2nd Platoon were trapped June 21 after a roadside bomb flipped their Bradley, several men rushed to save the gunner, Spc. Daniel Agami, pinned beneath the vehicle. But they could only watch and listen to him scream as he burned alive.

The Bradley was too heavy to lift, and the flames were

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too high to even get close. The four others died inside. Second Platoon already had lost four of its 45 men since deploying to Adhamiya 11 months before. June 21 shattered them.

Though their commanders moved them from the outpost to safer quarters, members of 2nd Platoon staged a revolt they viewed as a life-or-death act of defiance. With all they had done and all they had seen, they now were consumed with an anger that ate at the memory of the good men they were when they arrived in Iraq.

According to Charlie Company soldiers, first sergeant McKinney said, "I can't take it anymore," and fired a round. Then he pointed his M4 under his chin and killed himself in front of three of his men.

Charlie Company was called back in for weapons training. They were told it was an accident. Then they were told it was under investigation. And then they were told it was a suicide. Reynolds confirmed that McKinney took his own life. A week later, without their beloved first sergeant, Alpha Company would experience its first catastrophic loss on a mission that, but for a change in weather, was supposed to go to Charlie Company.

On July 17, Charlie's 2nd Platoon was refitting at Taji when they got a call to go back to Adhamiya. They were to patrol Route Southern Comfort, which had been off-limits for months. Charlie Company knew a 500-pound bomb lay on that route, and they'd been ordered not to travel it. "Will there be route clearance?" 2nd Platoon asked. "Yes," they were told. "Then we'll go." But the mission was canceled. The medevac crews couldn't fly because of a dust storm, and the Iraqi Army wasn't ready for the mission. Second Platoon went to bed. They woke to the news that Alpha Company had gone on the mission instead and one of their Bradleys rolled over the 500-pound IED.

The Bradley flipped. The explosion and flames killed everybody inside. Alpha Company lost four soldiers. "There was no chance," said Johnson, whose scouts remained at Apache and served as the quick-reaction force that day. "It was eerily the same as June 21. You roll up on that, and it looked the same."

The guys from Charlie Company couldn't help but think about the similarities — and that it could have been them. "Just the fact that there was another Bradley incident

mentally screwed up 2nd Platoon," Strickland said. The battalion gave 2nd Platoon the day to recover. Then were scheduled to go back out on patrol in Adhamiya on July 18. But when Strickland returned from a mission, he learned 2nd Platoon had failed to roll. "A scheduled patrol is a direct order from me," Strickland said. "They're not coming," Strickland said he was told.

"So I called the platoon sergeant and talked to him. 'Remind your guys: These are some of the things that could happen if they refuse to go out.' But, he said, he didn't know the whole platoon, except for Ybay, had taken sleeping medications prescribed by mental health that day. Strickland didn't know mental health leaders had talked to 2nd Platoon about "doing the right thing."

He didn't know 2nd Platoon had gathered for a meeting and determined they could no longer function professionally in Adhamiya — that several platoon members were afraid their anger could set loose a massacre. "We said, 'No.' If you make us go there, we're going to light up everything," DeNardi said. "There's a thousand platoons. Not us. We're not going."

They decided as a platoon that they were done, DeNardi and Cardenas said, as did several other members of 2nd Platoon.

At mental health, guys had told the therapist, "I'm going to murder someone." And the therapist said, "There comes a time when you have

to stand up," 2nd Platoon members remembered.

For the sake of not going to jail, the platoon decided they had to be "unplugged."

Ybay had gone to battalion to speak up for his guys and ask for more time. But it was orders to report to Old Mod. Ybay said he tried to persuade his men to go out, but he could see they were not ready. "It was like a scab that wouldn't heal up," Ybay said. "I couldn't force them to go out. Listening to them in the mental health session, I could hear they're not ready." At 2 a.m., Ybay said, he'd found his men sitting outside smoking cigarettes.

The need for revenge ravaged them. But Ybay was still disappointed in his men. "I had a mission," he said. "The company had a mission. We still had to execute. But I understood their side, too."

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“When you’re given an order, you’ve got to execute,” Strickland said.

“They called it an act of mutiny,” Cardenas said, still enraged that the men he considered heroes were, in his mind, slandered. “The sergeant major and the battalion commander said we were unprofessional. They said they were disappointed in us and would never forget our actions for the rest of their lives.” ***But no judicial action ever came of it.***

“Captain Strickland read us our rights,” DeNardi said. “We had 15 yes-or-no questions, and no matter how you answered them, it looked like you disobeyed an order. No one asked what happened. “And there’s no record — no article 15. Nothing to show it happened.” After the members of 2nd Platoon had spent a year fighting for each other and watching their buddies die, battalion leaders began breaking up the platoon.

“In a way, they were put someplace where they wouldn’t have to go out again,” Johnson said. “But as an NCO, they took these guys’ leaders away and put them with people they didn’t know and trust. You knew 2nd Platoon would die for you without a second’s hesitation. That’s what made them so great. These guys need each other.”

Then, they were all flagged: No promotions, awards. “I didn’t want to punish them,” Strickland said. “I understood what was going on. But they had to understand you couldn’t do something like that and have nothing happen.”

“After looking into it, I didn’t feel the need to punish anybody.” However, he left the flags in place. Even after the “mutiny,” Strickland said, he had a great deal of admiration for his soldiers. “I understood why they did what they did,” he said.

“Some of the NCOs, I was disappointed in them because they failed to lead their soldiers through difficult times. They let their soldiers influence their decisions. “

“But on a personal level, I applauded their decision because they stood behind their soldiers. I was disappointed, but I thought they had great courage. It was truly a Jekyll/Hyde moment for me.”

And though they were horrified at being torn away from each other, the soldiers themselves were conflicted about the outcome. “For us being disbanded, now we definitely had unfinished business,” Jorcke said. “If we’d cleared Adhamiya, we could have said, ‘I left Iraq and my buddies didn’t die in vain.’”

“But in a way, the disbanding was good,” he said. “We got to come back home alive.”

Moving Forward Together



by Liam Madden, Boston chapter president, Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW)

IVAW faces a critical juncture. As we have witnessed the addition of numerous new, talented members and the development of an organically constructed strategy, we have failed to implement our strategy with goals and plans that facilitate the achievement of our objectives.

During the National Strategy sessions held earlier this year, members analyzed why the war in Iraq was being fought and the institutions that enabled the U.S. government to continue the illegal occupation of Iraq. Clearly, the U.S. military is the single most important entity to the U.S. government’s capacity to wage war and extend the occupation. We acknowledged that IVAW was in a unique position to remove the support of the military by utilizing three primary methods:

1. Organizing Active-Duty resistance
2. Truth in Recruiting
3. Counter-Retention

Since the creation of this framework, our organization has been working to generate a unified effort among our members to implement this strategy. However, we didn’t set goals or make plans that would guide our actions to fit directly into this strategy. Recently, our members, particularly those who dedicate time to our strategy team, have devised a plan that will drastically refocus our energy to making tangible inroads into the active duty. This plan, as all

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plans henceforth should, passes the litmus test of the following questions:

*Does this project make our organization stronger (ie, more members, stronger community, healthier chapters, better active duty outreach, developing leaders, etc)?

*Does this plan/action assist in removing military support for the war?

A serious political question arises from this plan; it is the question that necessitates this entire essay:

“Why are we devoting time to building a GI resistance movement?”

This question can be expounded to say:

“Why build a GI movement if the next president or congress will end the war?”

It is vitally important to address this question so that we can move forward together as an organization with

a common understanding of the significance and urgency of our work. Further, engaging in active duty outreach implies that we all know how to handle the inevitable questions that will emanate from the service

members we encounter.

In order to explain why we want members and service members to organize with us, we must be able to analyze these pertinent issues:

1. Why the U.S. is occupying Iraq
2. What it's going to take to end the war
3. How the elections will affect our interactions
4. How U.S interests at stake in Iraq affect our actions
5. How this war is a symptom of a deeper problem
6. What are we asking service members to do

As we all know, the primary reasons given by the Bush administration for invading Iraq, WMDs that threatened the U.S. and its allies and terrorist links, were fraudulent. Thus the real reasons for invasion have been avoided by the government and media alike. This isn't meant to be a lecture on points we've all

heard before, but it is necessary to illustrate that if our members or potential members feel that the U.S. invaded Iraq simply because Bush is an idiot or that he wants to “export democracy,” we will fail to grasp why our strategy was devised.

The U.S. is perpetuating the occupation of Iraq to dominate world energy supplies and to project military power into the Middle East, i.e., the war is being fought for neo-imperialism. It is important to note that this is not a problem that rests solely on the doorstep of the Bush administration, as we have seen from the prevailing position of ALL presidential front runners, no major candidate or party is calling for an end to the occupation. This is not because the Democrats simply don't have the votes; in fact, they are basing their presidential campaigns on the grounds of a continued, albeit modified, occupation that perpetuates the same

policy of controlling oil and projecting power.

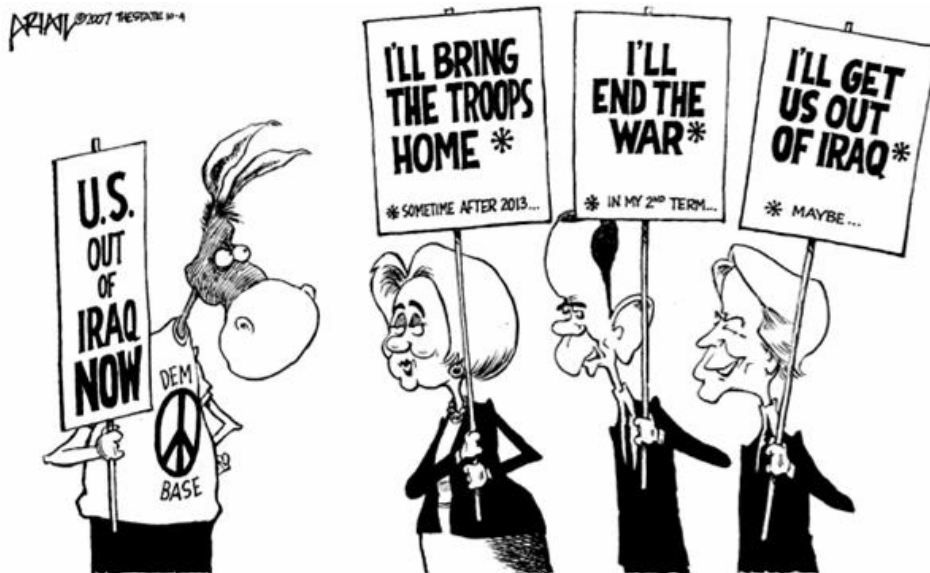
Even if they did promise to “Redeploy,” it would be foolish to disregard the lesson taught to the people of 1968 when Richard Nixon was elected on promises of “peace with honor.” As history reveals,

politician's empty promises often provide little more than broken hearts and shattered lives.

This is why our strategy is hinged to our ability to organize GI resistance. Such organizing will not only reduce the capacity of the government to execute its policies, it will develop our members organizing ability, strengthen our organization, and fill our ranks with new members. If we were to engage in any other strategy, we would be expending energy on endeavors that ultimately left us with nothing to show for our effort and frustrated that our organization wasted precious resources.

Obviously, it will take more than the efforts of IVAW to end this war. The Iraqi resistance will certainly continue to play a role, as well as the civilian anti-war movement. The Vietnam War was ended by a

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combination of all of these components. Many say that Vietnam was ended because “America lost the political will to fight,” the fact is that it was soldiers who lost the will to fight. Of course not every soldier did, but enough to make the government choose between the occupation of Vietnam and a functioning U.S. military.

As elections draw nearer, the conditions exist where members and potential members will be confused and attracted to the sheer magnitude of the mainstream dialogue about the war. No “serious” candidates will say anything remotely close to committing to the removal of troops from the occupation, however many will make it seem like they are advocating for a serious change, for example continuing the occupation with 90,000 troops and changing the nature of their mission.

Thus it is imperative that we predict these conditions and prepare our tactics to correspond with our goal. Meaning, we need to know what to say when troops/members doubt that a GI movement is necessary.

Where as I previously stated that the government was forced to reevaluate its policies during Vietnam in response to the staunch VC/ NLF resistance, the crippling decline in effectiveness and discipline of the military and tremendous, domestic unrest, the current scenario requires a qualitatively different level of all forms of resistance. More clearly, the U.S. has much more at stake in Iraq than it did in Vietnam; therefore the need for dedicated GI organizing is much more pressing. It is foolish to think that the war will peter out on its own. The U.S. will not give up its superpower status, which is entirely bound to its ability

to dominate the Middle East, unless it is forced to by a conscience within its own ranks.

The war in Iraq is unique in its importance and scale, but it is entirely consistent with U.S. foreign policy for the last century. I believe that if we don’t end this war and simultaneously lead the way to a systemic change in the American power structure, the same pattern will reemerge. Given the near certainty of this, I believe it would be wise to put forth a strong argument for the drastically different method of change for which we stand and also the level of change I feel we should stand for as individuals.

What are we asking of our members and our new members?

Our new plan asks our members to develop tactics to conduct outreach to active duty service members with the express goal of developing chapters of IVAW on military installations. Our six month plan needs the organization to focus its efforts on carrying out this outreach. Chapters are being called upon to facilitate the organizing and training needed to successfully conduct this outreach.

Our new active duty members are being asked to organize a community of service members who can support and educate each other personally and politically. The ultimate goal is to empower members to stand on their principles in an organized and thoughtful manner that defies the mold of individualism that is unfairly projected on war resisters, and to foster the sense of solidarity needed to stand by each other while we act to bring peace and justice to our nation and the world.



“The first time I put on that uniform I hoped I would wear it with honor. On Sept. 15, I finally did.”

By Michael Prysner, IVAW

On the morning of Sept. 15, I held in my hands a uniform that was issued to me nearly five years ago.

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I remembered the first time I held it, wondering if I would ever wear it home, wondering if it would be stained by blood or shredded by bullets. It looks much different now than the first time I put it on—it is faded from 12 months of desert sand and sun. The elbows and knees are worn from lying in the street. The boots are tattered from kicking down doors and walking over cities of rubble. As I put it on for the first time since I returned from Iraq, I finally felt as if I was putting it on for a purpose.

For so many years, that uniform has not stood for justice and freedom. It is the uniform that the Iraqi people saw stomp through their towns. It is the uniform that drove humvees and manned machine guns. It is the uniform that dragged people from their homes and interrogated them in prison camps. But on the streets of Washington , D.C. , the uniform took on new meaning.

It was no longer worn with the intention of fighting for the government, but fighting against it. For me, and for my brothers and sisters in Iraq Veterans Against the War, the uniform that once symbolized fear and destruction would now be worn in the spirit of justice and resistance.

In March of 2003, our government ordered us to put on that uniform, march into a foreign land and take it from those who lived there. On Sept. 15, we put on that same uniform to march to the Capitol and face those who sent us to war.

A significant factor in ending the war in Vietnam was the ability of protesters and GIs to

strike fear in the heart of the government. Countless citizens and soldiers threw their bodies into the gears of the war machine, and made the ruling class realize that instead of fighting their war, we would fight them.

This war will end when the government begins to fear the masses—when the army they sent to spread imperialism becomes the army that marches to their offices and charges through the police barricades.

The first time I put on that uniform, I hoped I would wear it with honor. On Sept. 15, I finally did. I could finally do something right while wearing it. The nearly 200 people arrested on that day—many of whom were Iraq war veterans—showed the government that we will do more than just march.

We will defy them at every turn; we will not fade away, but only grow in numbers and intensity. The longer this war rages on, the more we will resist and the more we will sacrifice.

Wearing that uniform at the steps of the Capitol, I knew that the most important action that I could do was to advance towards the barricade, and help light the spark that will empower



Michael Prysner being arrested by the D.C. police at the September 15th protest.

people to stop this government.

For the first time, that uniform was worn fighting a just war. When I emerged from jail that night, I saw hundreds of cheering supporters outside. Then, I knew that sooner or later we will win this war against imperialism. And I have never felt prouder wearing that uniform.

While Bush's Buddies Cash In On the War, Pentagon Scum Won't Supply Wounded Female Troops With Clothes Forcing Them to Beg Civilians for Help

By Amy Olson

December 14, 2007

Wausau Daily Herald [Excerpts]

The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs aims to collect new women's undergarments and comfortable clothing for wounded female troops in Iraq awaiting medical care in Germany or the United States, said Gundel Metz, coordinator of female veterans' issues.

A service member's clothing often is destroyed by an injury, and the military often is unable to send personal gear immediately to a hospital, said Maj. Frances Wiedenhoef, a nurse anesthetist at the University of Wisconsin Hospital who currently is stationed in Iraq.

The 18-year reservist, who calls Madison home, said she got the idea when she arrived at Balad Air Base Hospital during her current tour in Iraq. During each of her three deployments, people back home have asked how they could help, Wiedenhoef said in an e-mail interview.

"I have always received such a generous outpouring of support from family, friends and my workplace for those needs," she said.

Wiedenhoef said when she got to the intensive care unit at the hospital in Balad, the overwhelming opinion was there was a need for women's clothing that would be easy to put on after an injury.

She contacted Metz, who has been working stateside to set up donation centers, including collection points at VFW Post No. 388 in Wausau and at the Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation's rural office in Stevens Point.

The foundation has been working with the state's Veterans Affairs department on helping veterans make the transition back home, said Bobbie Kolehouse, its director of rural women's health programs.

The foundation's collection point so far has received a couple of checks, Kolehouse said.

Wiedenhoef said the vast majority of the injured treated are military personnel, but the hospital occasionally treats injured Iraqi women as well.

"They are quite destitute here for the most part ... and may not have much to put on to go home," she wrote.

New clothing items and financial contributions can be dropped off at collection points through Dec. 31. Organizers also hope to collect video games and players to help give injured soldiers something to do while they're awaiting transport, Metz said.

