

Traveling Soldier

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“I looked in her eyes and I told her ‘peace’ in Arabic but what was she thinking when I told her ‘peace’ and I’m standing there with an M-16 trying to clear her house?”

This U.S.M.C. Sergeant participated in the invasion stage of the Iraq war. Traveling Soldier’s Thomas Barton spoke to him at his home.

Barton: Without giving a name or any identifying personal information, what was your unit and specialty?

Sgt: I was with Romeo Battery Fifth Battalion 5th Marines. I was an artilleryman.

B: And your rank?

S: I was a sergeant.

B: You had some difficulties when you came home, a health issue I believe?

S: Yes I did. Right now I’ve gone 4 days with no sleep; it’s been that way for about a year. Stomach problems started back during the middle of the war, a lot of us got it. They started writing our names down on a piece of paper to turn in and we don’t know what it was for.

B: Was there a particular location in Iraq where this seemed to hit you?

H: One was in Tikrit and one was in one of the staging areas I believe just outside of Baghdad.

B: Did you receive any medical attention while you were there for this problem?

S: They basically just told us to relax the best you can when it’s burning up out there, but you kind of just do what you can do.



B: When you came home, the public thinks that immediately everyone who’s discharged gets attention and all the care in the world from the Veterans Administration. Have you had any care or attention since you’ve been back?

S: Still waiting. I’ve got ringing in the ears, and I’m just....a lot of things so I’m still waiting. There’s a lot of us are still waiting. When I first came back, since I was discharged not on active-duty anymore, I wasn’t able to go in there and see the VA until I received my discharge papers. I had not received them and they told me there’s nothing they could do for me until I received them. It’s a fierce fight to get anything done.

B: When did you return to the U.S.?

S: May 12, 2003.

B: And you haven’t gotten your discharge papers yet?

S: Not yet.

B: This is June 21st 2004, so in effect you’re stuck.

S: Basically.

B: Are you still having symptoms now?

S: Yes. I’ve been going to a civilian doctor to try and get treated and they found a stomach bacteria, but they’re not sure if that’s what’s causing all this.

B: Did you also have a problem with a job prospect, for becoming a fireman?

S: Yes. I missed the civil service test for it, and they only offer the courses once every two years. I was on line to do it and I missed that because of all this. I thought I was going to be good, they told us we were going to be extended for a year and I’d have a chance to get on something until I can do that. We get back and they say we got 10 days and you guys are gone – and that included turning in gear, checking out of everything. Next thing you know we’re sitting up here and when you have a family and you’re trying to draw unemployment it’s about impossible to take of everything on one unemployment check. Having a family, it’s impossible.

B: You have a wife and a boy?

S: Yes I do.

B: How old is he?

S: He’s two and a half.

B: Have you got to see much of him since you been in service?

S: No. We spent six months on deployment, came back for one month, and then left for Iraq shortly after that.

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Came back, and then instead of using that time to be with my family I spent it packing up, just trying to get through everything. I had to stay at a hotel while they tried to fix some of my paperwork. And that came out of our pocket.

B: You got no reimbursement for that?

S: No, I never received anything.

B: So when the government portrays how well the troops are being taken care of during and after their service, how does that hit you?

S: It makes you wonder who they're talking about – I haven't seen it. My friends have come back with – it's called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder I believe – and they won't talk to each other. These guys were best friends, they weren't guys that you just knew, they were best friends, closer than brothers. And I talked to one about a year ago and he threatened suicide. Never heard from him. Another one he's still living with his mom and dad and two children – he just can't seem to get on his feet. With two kids, a wife, and trying to make it on what he's making and what his wife's making – they keep trying to find out ways to make money. The last time I heard from them was about 6 months ago, I don't think they changed much. He still won't talk to her real good – three days without talking to her, he won't talk to me, he won't talk to C---. C--- hasn't heard first. We just don't hear from each other.

B: Are they getting any type of help or attention whatsoever?

S: No. When we came back I hear the Army is giving a lot of guys treatment and looking at them, getting them therapists and people like that to talk to. We came back, it was basically "hey you guys got 10 days." It's affecting a lot of us. I've seen great Marines go through all kinds of problems being discharged. One that he's an excellent Marine, came back, and because of what happened to him I guess it really messed him up a little bit. He kind of went the wrong route, without saying too much about what he did. He ended up being discharged instead of somebody really talking to him, wondering what's going on, what caused it. Our first sergeant, from what I heard, stuck up for him the best he could but there's only so much he can do.

B: So it's kind of like welcome home, get the hell out of here?

S: Yeah. Definitely what it was, definitely. Now I've found a job, and it

pays pretty well but now I'm still waiting trying to figure out over a year later how he is. I don't see a whole lot of light at the end of the tunnel sometimes.

B: In your opinion, do you have any view as to what the war was really about?

S: I hate to say it – I've always believed in the American government, I've had a lot of family serve in the military, Vietnam veterans, Korean war – I hate to say it but sometimes I wonder if it's not for oil. If you take a look at some major things, the taking of Basra, the major port city, the Ramallah oil fields, the oil refinery stations where they'd have us set up and we'd stay there and clear those out great, but instead of staying and taking care of a town and clearing a town, just move on up to the next oil refinery station – there's nobody there – instead of taking care of a town, and we're bypassing all these problems that we know and we're sticking guys in there to walk around and telling them 'don't shoot unless you're shot at' and look what's happened.

B: Here's a quote from a marine officer at Fallujah. He's talking about the Iraqis fighting, and he said "I don't begrudge them. We'd do same thing if some foreign dudes rolled into San Diego and set up shop." What's your take on that?

S: He's exactly right, he's exactly right. If somebody came over here and started things up that are going on over there, every Redneck, everybody from every walk of life'd be out there as quick as they could with a shotgun standing side-by-side.

B: Let's talk about the military strategy situation. There's 22 million Iraqis, and polls say about 65-70% of them support the resistance in the sense that they think it's time the U.S. left. You have 130,000 American troops there, and if every single one was a combat troop and worked 7 days a week 12 hours a day that means you have 65,000 combat troops, assuming none were support, at any given minute. How do you think the generals believe you're going to hold down 22 million people



with 65,000 troops on duty at any given minute?

S: My view on that is, I'd like to see those generals who were saying "well, we don't need all these men to be there" when the looting was going on. While we're out there, we're watching these things go on, we're finding AK-47s in the back of trucks, some of these looters they go in there and kill these people, and take their air-conditioning units and load them up in a back of a truck. Here we are, a squad of Marines, trying to control a little part of a city. It's impossible, I'd like to see them come down there and show us how it's supposed to be done because apparently they know what's going on.

B: In Baghdad, there's 3 million Shias, and they were the ones who really hated Saddam Hussein. Now they've all risen up and declared their part of the city a 'liberated zone.' How many troops would it take to hold down 3 million people who are pissed off and armed?

S: It'd be so much more than what we have there now, I'm telling you. Not only the work of where you're out there everyday, and the fear when you have a round snap past your head – it makes you think. The fear of being out there every day, the stress of being out there every day, the stress of everyone's eyes on you – and your just some young Lance Corporal, young PFC, or some new Sergeant out there trying to do a job. It's not fun.... It's not fun to walk around there telling people.... Because some of the things we had to do for our own protection, like clearing houses, and you see a young child crying on his mom's lap. The main thing it affects now is what does she think of me now? I looked in their eyes and I told 'em "peace" in Arabic but what was she

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thinking when I told her “peace” and I’m standing there with an M-16 trying to clear her house. I’m not saying..... You just do the best you can.

B: Some of the soldiers in Vietnam who turned into some of the strongest opponents of that war, I mean fierce opponents of that war, were people who found themselves in combat situations, where they shot women or kids or whatever, and they turned against it. Their argument and my argument in those days was: the responsibility is on the people who put them in that situation. What do you think of that?

S: I agree 100%. You’re just out there doing a job. You’re just out there doing a job – what are you going to do? Tell them no, I’m not going to do it? You can say it, but there’s so many things that go along with denying something. I’ve seen guys cut their fingers off – their trigger fingers – so they wouldn’t have to go into certain areas. You just do your job the best you can and don’t bring home what happened there – just try to bury it, try to make peace with it.

B: On that, there’s two schools of thought. Some people say you’re supposed to stand up and say “Colonel, this is an unjust war and I refuse to follow your orders.” Now in Vietnam, soldiers organized very quietly under the surface against the war. Which way do you think makes most sense?

S: Being quiet, handling it amongst yourselves. But don’t go the point where you’re out there killing officers, it’s just gonna make it worse. You guys have to stick up for each other those are the only people who care for you.

There’s people sitting up there, telling us we can’t have cots out there. And yet we go into one of the rear-echelon bases where the generals are staying at, where our leadership is staying at, and they have cots, bunks, air-conditionings, and here we are sleeping in a tent filled with sand that’s blowing over in the afternoon sandstorms. There’s one hot meal a day. I’m sleeping on a plywood floor in a sleeping bag that’s burning up hot or it’s too cold and it’s not working right. It’s just amazing to me. And then they keep telling us that they’re going to get the air-conditionings on in the tents after we came back in, after all this is over. After we come back in, they kept telling us, “It’ll all be on, it’ll all be on.” Well, we were there for almost a month

and nothing happened. They never came on.

We got to an Army base at Baghdad, where the leadership was at again, and they stick us in holding tents. They’re so cold, we had to go outside.

B: Again and again, carefully, sergeants have been the ones who have come forward to say this war is bullshit, it’s for oil, it’s nothing but a racket, we shouldn’t be here, these people don’t want us here we need to get out of there. Again and again, it’s the sergeants saying this. In Vietnam, the sergeants were these old-timers who’ve been in for 50 years and the soldiers hated them. Now, you’re a sergeant, now it’s sergeants saying this war is bad, it’s wrong.. Why do you think it’s the sergeants taking a lead on this?

S: The way I see it, it’s an NCO is this bridge between the younger men and the higher enlisted guys up there. We’re the ones who will always answer for everything and we’re put in the responsibility to lead. But it makes it hard when you’re questioned. I know it sounds wrong, being a military man, but you sit there and you’re like, “this is stupid.” I remember one night when we heard that we were moving into an area, and then we also heard there was a tank company there, an Iraqi tank company there. We’re not equipped and they keep telling us, “be ready for direct fire, be ready for direct fire.” What kind of sense does that make to send us in?

I think it’s always the sergeant’s job to look at both sides and see which is right and which is wrong, and try to find a way to fix what’s wrong and try to lead Marines towards what’s right. Marine or Army, he’s gotta be a bridge between the younger and the older and stand up for what you feel is right.

B: There used to be some senior officers that were more concerned with getting battle field “experience” as they called it, so they could move up the chain of command, even if it meant putting their troops at risk. Was there any of that going on over there?

S: I heard of some officers from rear-echelon units who were being put up in helicopters to fly above the fights because then they were in a combat zone, so they could receive their medals for it. Whether or not that’s true I’ve heard it from too many units back here who heard the same

thing for it not to be true. It might just be a rumor but everyone I’ve talked to has heard the same thing. I don’t know any names. I’ve just heard some things from rear-echelons units who were sending them above the fights so that way they were in the area.

B: Some people who served there have come back and used a word. These were people who joined the armed services because they believed it was a decent and honorable thing to do, and they are coming back saying this war isn’t about democracy or freedom. They use the word “betrayed.” That word seems to have a special meaning to people who’ve been in service? How do you feel about that?

S: I definitely understand it. Believe me, everyday I sit back and think – I sit back and definitely think--I think it’s true.

B: Anything else you want to wrap with?

S: If this makes it over there to any of you guys over there, just hang in there, just do what you gotta do. Your families are taken care of, don’t worry about it, just keep your mind on what you’ve got to do and hang in there. Believe me, if you ever need anything there’s organizations out there when you come back. Don’t be afraid to ask, don’t let it wear on you. Come back home, do what you’ve gotta do, and hang in there while you’re there. Take care of yourself.

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Production Staff
Pham Binh
Thomas Barton

First, the good news...

Dear Traveling Soldier,

Bryce arrived back at his home base in Germany on Tuesday (July 27th). My family is extremely relieved to have both sons out of Iraq.

Finally!!!

It's just too bad for my many friends in Military Families Speak Out that still have sons over there. I plan to continue my protests at the Federal Courthouse here in town. I'm doing it for my MFSO friends' sons and daughters.

Also, unfortunately, they have already told Bryce he will probably go back to Iraq in July 2005. So, I'm continuing my protests to get the troops out and keep Bryce from going back.

With both guys out of Iraq (at least temporarily), I am going back to my original sign: "Iraqi oil isn't worth my sons' blood."

I will be in NYC for most (if not all) of the big events [the Republican National Convention protest]. MFSO plans an event on September 2nd (the day Bush accepts the nomination). They (along with Veterans for Peace) plan to have a grouping of 900+ pairs of boots. One for each soldier killed in Iraq. It should be a powerful statement.

Thank you for sending the copies of Traveling Soldier. I was honored that Bryce's e-mail was on the cover. It was from a soldier heading back into a country that was more hostile than when he first went it. The reader could feel his anxiousness and his doubts about his country's actions. There are so few of us in the US that have a personal contact with a soldier in Iraq. Sharing his e-mail allowed others to read a real letter from a war-zone.

I have thought all along that the hand-over was a sham. I was even more sure of it when they did it secretly – out of fear. A hand-over based on fear doesn't sound too encouraging. More soldiers have died in the 30 days after it than in the 30 days before.

And with the continued bombings and kidnappings! Right now, I don't see any improvements.

The local anti-war group here in Richmond had a march/rally on Saturday, July 3rd. Over 1000 people showed up. In order to publicize the rally, the organizers decided to have a press conference on June 30th. The date was picked because of the original date of the hand-over.

The press conference was held in front of the Federal courthouse where I do all of my protesting. (It was my 163rd protest at the courthouse!)

Thanks again for the hard copies of the issue. Continue to get the word out!! In peace,
Larry Syverson



Dear Traveling Soldier,

Just wanted you to know that we got an email from Jason and he has left Baghdad and is now in Kuwait! He leaves for Germany tomorrow and will be home for a 30 day leave on July 29th!!

I have no words to describe how I feel. I am filled with Joy! Thank you so much for all your support of Jason and us during this most difficult time. We are truly among the lucky and the blessed. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

– Pat Gunn

... now, the bad news

Hello,

My name is Brandie Lampin and I am the wife of a Sgt. Tony Lampin, a mechanic for the 115th Field Hospital, stationed at Fort Polk, La. I have sent every media company that I could find or know and the President, this letter because my husband and other soldiers, that are medically unfit for service, were forced to go back to Iraq for a second tour. One soldier's name that I have been given permission to name is Sgt. Jacqueline Stinnett. All left on the 25th of July bound for Abu Ghraib Prison.

Last month, on the 9th of June, my husband had a follow up appointment with his orthopedic surgeon, Maj. Granger, for his knee that was operated on for a second time due to damage.

After several follow ups, the doctor said that my husband's knee has not gotten any better, and that his knee is permanently damaged, and that he recommends that he be medically discharged out of service, and that he is **NON DEPLOYABLE**. He gave my husband a permanent medical profile stating this, and is also marked that he **CANNOT RUN**, should only walk at own pace and distance, that he is unable to move with a fighting load at least 2 miles (48 lbs., includes helmet, boots, uniform, LBE, WEAPON, protective mask, pack, etc.), unable to do 3 - 5 second rushes under direct and indirect fire, and that he is **UNHEALTHY** by medical condition that prevents him from deploying. It also says that he is to not lift or carry a max weight of 30lbs., no prolonged standing for a max. of 20 min., no

marching with field gear and no impact activities such as jumping.

My husband has gone through two surgeries on his knee, gone through physical therapy, water therapy, and has taken numerous medications all to no prevail. The current medications he is on right now are Celebrex, Ultracet, and Percocet. Just a little information on the meds. Celebrex, is for his arthritis, and one of the warning labels on it is: avoid prolonged or excessive exposure to direct sunlight. I ask you this, what does Iraq have plenty of? Ultracet, and Percocet are taken for pain, and both have a warning label that says: may cause drowsiness/dizziness, and SHOULD NOT operate machinery. He has not gotten any better after the second surgery, and in fact, it is starting to get worse once again. His doctor even told him that his knee is permanently damaged, and that being sent back to Iraq would only make it more worse.

In my husband's medical records, the last entry that was entered by his doctor reads this: "At this point we will begin a permanent profile. I'd like to switch him over to Arthroce to see if that treats his osteoarthritic symptoms better. I'd additionally like him to consider having a steroid injection at the lateral portal site if he is not better in another three to six weeks at the lateral portal site. If he continues to persist and we are unable to find a nonsteroidal that can control his osterarthritic symptoms, I would consider offering a Viscus supplementation, Hyalgan injections. He is reticent to have that many injections in his knee and I can understand that but his may help him significantly with his pain. We discussed that at today's visit. Permanent profile was written today recommending him for a medical board as he has attempted to take a walk and bicycle PT test and had been unable to pass either of them and this has now been two years from his initial injury to the knee that he's not a record PT test." This was entered on June 9, 2004 by doctor Shawn P. Granger, MAJ. U.S. Army, Bayne Jones ACH Fort Polk, La.

Now here is where the being forced back to Iraq comes in. After showing this profile to his Battalion Commander, Colonel Richards, he stated that he would override the medical board, and force him to go back to Iraq for a second time with the company. The Colonel promised that he would take care of him and the other soldier and see that nothing will happen to them. Here is the thing, how can the Colonel do this if he himself is not going to Iraq? That he has been reassigned to another duty station sitting behind a nice desk, safe and sound in a hospital in Milwaukee. He said that my husband and the other soldier were badly needed and that there was nothing they could do. I ask this, if, God forbid, something was to happen to them, what would the company do, pack up and go home? Get this, before he was relieved by a Colonel Short, Colonel Richards changed his mind and decided to not take my husband and the other soldier and have their deployable status changed back to non-deployable status. After doing this, the new Colonel said that why bother because he would just change it back and still force them to go. That he wants to hear from their doctor himself

saying that they would only get worse if deployed to Iraq. My husband's doctor had been saying this for over a month.

If he was told this, he would not take them. This is where Colonel Short lied to his soldiers. They were forced to go anyway. He also, like Colonel Richards, promises to keep them safe. What is he going to do, keep them by his side at all times? How can he do this if my husband will be on a convoy from Kuwait to Abu Ghraib Prison where they are being sent to set up a hospital for the prisoners/soldiers? A convoy is one of the most dangerous places to be for a soldier, and the prison alone isn't really all that safe. It has been attacked 6 times in the past 3 months. Which includes a mortar attack that hit the quarters that my husband's company was to be placed in. There also, they have to wear their protective gear at all times. Which means my husband will be forced to go against his medical profile of not to carry or lift anything over 30lbs.

During all this, we then began to write our State Senator of

Texas, Mrs. Kay Hutchison. We sent all the information that was needed for an investigation into why was my husband not allowed his medical board and forced to go to war. All this was done last month, but yesterday, Aug. 3, I was informed that my husband's Congressional has come back, and was read to me by phone. It basically said that my husband's commander, Colonel Richards, has the say if my husband can be deployed or not. I find it unacceptable. No one should be able to tell a soldier that he can no longer receive treatment and not be able to be medical boarded out of service and then

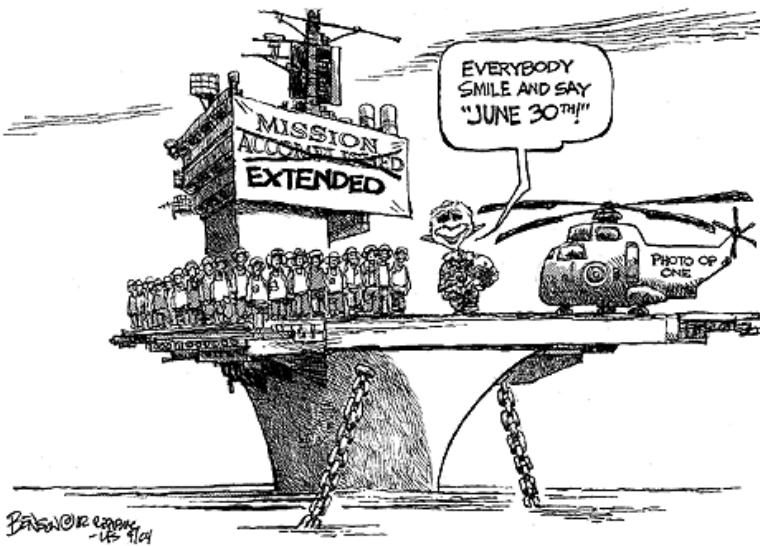


force him to go to war where his life would be at greater risk.

The stories of older soldiers in their 50's and 60's, I hear, are being told to America that they have been called back for duty. Some of these soldiers died in Iraq due to heart failure, heat stroke, and various other medical conditions. If I am not mistaken, did or did not the Army ordered retired personal without medical problems back for duty? Hence the word without. Why doesn't this apply to soldiers who are active? How do you think Americans would react to medically unfit soldiers being sent back to war? Unable to fend/protect themselves and others properly. On medications that makes them sleepy or dizzy. How do you think they would feel if they knew that their tax dollars are being used to send unfit soldiers to war?

When I took my husband to Fort Polk for departure on July 25th, I noticed a female soldier, whose name I do not know, was on crutches. What was wrong with her? She had a broken foot. Was she going? Yes. I have a question for you, how is she going to protect herself if an attack was to occur? Was she to shoot the enemy with her crutches?

The last I heard from my husband was this past Saturday. I asked how things were going so far, and he said not great. The soldier that has a broken foot was forced to walk on it without her crutches. Now, I know that depending on the fracture, you can apply force, but this soldier is in a war. She can't just rush into things. As for him, he told me that his knee was giving him



This is the text of Larry Syverson's speech at a press conference for the local anti-war group in Richmond, VA regarding the June 28th phony power transfer in Iraq.

I'm Larry Syverson of Chesterfield County.

The jury is still out concerning the transfer of power. Two important groups of people hope and pray that this transfer results in peace and security in Iraq: the Iraqi people and the soldiers serving in Iraq and their families. The Iraqis hope that this transfer is genuine and allows them to control their destiny. The soldiers in Iraq and their families pray that the transfer is not hollow and allows the soldiers to return to their families.

An early transfer should be something to celebrate. But because of the circumstances for this early transfer, it is hard to celebrate. The transfer occurred early, not to give the Iraqis their country back, it occurred early, to surprise the insurgents. Fear is no reason to base the giving of a people the control of their destiny. It should be based on hope!

I have a guarded interest in the transfer going well. My youngest son, Bryce, was deployed to Baghdad in May of last year. Bryce was one of those soldiers whose tour of duty in Iraq was extended. Bryce has served in Iraq for 14 months. Yesterday, I received an e-mail from Bryce that he was in Kuwait. The last time he was in Kuwait on his way home, he was sent BACK into Iraq. I hope and pray that this time he will be able to leave the Middle East. He has served his time proudly, and it is time for him to leave.

On Monday, the President said: "The Iraqi people have their country back. We have kept our word." If the Iraqis have their country back, why is my son stuck in the area? There are over 130,000 American troops in Iraq. If the transfer of power means the end of the occupation, why are our troops there? The end of the occupation should mean the end of our troop's deployment in Iraq. For the transfer to be genuine, for the Iraqis to control their destiny, our troops must come home. Let's show the occupation is truly over.

Bring my son home!! Bring ALL the troops home now!!!

problems and is really hurting him. That he had to take himself off a shooting range in Kuwait because the drugs mixed with the heat was causing him to almost pass out. What will it be like for him in the convoy? I am afraid to think. The convoy is supposed to take 3 to 4 days, because of the heat and they are only allowed to drive for so long. During that time, will my husband be able to stay alert. I can only pray for.

My husband has served in the Army for 12 long years. He has been to the Gulf War, where he first initially hurt his knee during training, gone to Kuwait last year for Operation Iraqi Freedom, and after being forced, is now there again despite being medically unfit for duty. I don't know how long he was there for the Gulf War. He was in Kuwait last year for only 3 months, and during this next tour, they told him to be prepared to be there between 6 months to a year. Can you just imagine what further damage his knee will be in?

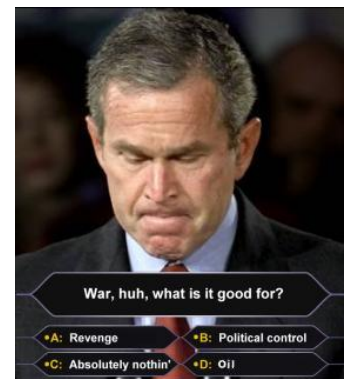
I will leave this letter at this. The 115th Field Hospital's motto is Warrior Medic and that they are here to take care of patients. My husband is a patient. How are they taking care of him? By not letting him get the medical attention he needs and sending him back to war. My husband has served proudly for his country, but look how he is getting treated for it. He deserves better than that. Our country owes him its gratitude. America, let my husband, the father of my children, your son, come home.

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Wife of a medically unfit soldier

"I want to be the peace president" – Bush

Bush has tried to capitalize on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for his election campaign. Back in February of this year, he said, "I'm a war president. I make decisions here in the Oval Office in foreign policy matters with war on my mind" and on May 1, 2003 he landed in a flight suit on an aircraft carrier to declare that "major combat operations have ended" and that the war in Iraq was a "mission accomplished."

With the American death toll in Iraq getting close to 1,000 and the war being the main reason people want to vote against him, Bush seems to have had a change of heart. He told a campaign rally in Cedar Rapids, Iowa on July 20, that he was a reluctant war-time president, saying, "**Nobody wants to be the war president. I want to be the peace president.**" Just when you thought he couldn't outdo the lie about Iraq's WMD, he pulls another one out of his ass. The chances of anyone believing this one are, thankfully, slim to none.



"No, I don't want to ask the audience.."

2004 election results in!

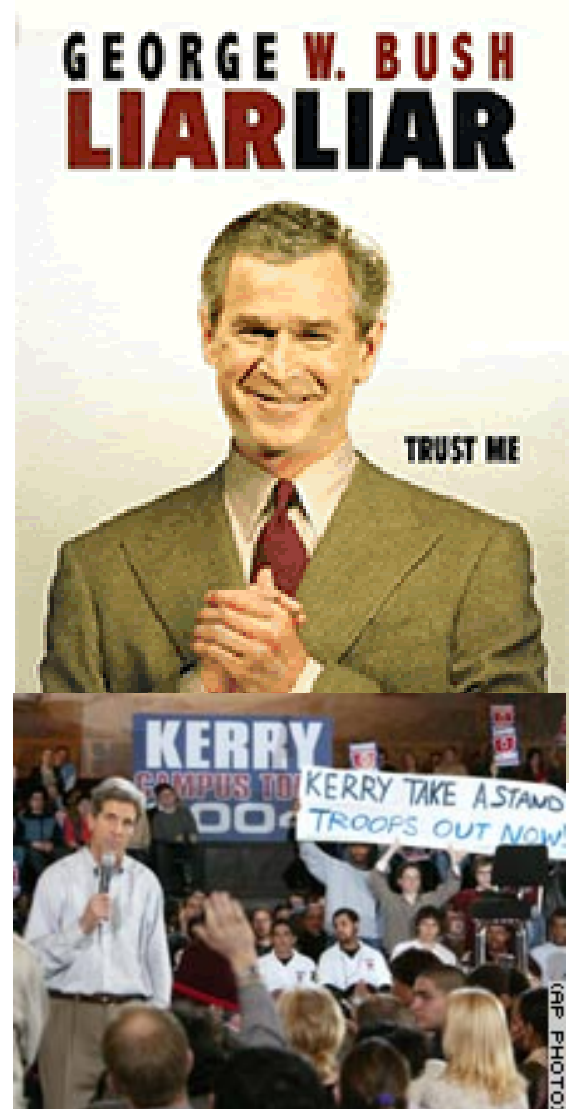
That's right – Traveling Soldier already has the results of the 2004 presidential election. The winner is for waging war in Iraq and refuses to “cut and run.” He helped pass the USA-PATRIOT Act, which violates the 4th amendment of the Constitution and gives the government enormous power to spy on citizens without cause. He wants to give tax breaks to big corporations and the rich. The winner's name is either George W. Bush or John F. Kerry and the losers are all of us.

This election is a fight between tweedle-dum vs tweedle-dumber and people who want to bring the troops home now can't win with these two choices.

The problem is that when people who want to end the war and bring the troops home now get behind the “lesser evil” John Kerry – simply because his last name isn't B-U-S-H – they end up getting the lesser AND the greater evil. The classic example is when people who were against the U.S. invading Vietnam in the 1964 election campaigned for Democrat Lyndon Baines Johnson under the slogan “part of the way with LBJ.” The idea was that while Johnson wasn't perfect, at least he wouldn't do terrible things like put our boys in the jungles of Southeast Asia like his Republican opponent Barry Goldwater. Johnson won the election, and what did he do? He sent tens of thousands of ground troops into Vietnam, destroyed huge amounts of jungle with chemical weapons, and began a war that would cost billions, kill 58,000 Americans and 3 million people from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

The war ended when the anti-war movement realized that it could not rely on politicians from either the Democrat or Republican parties to lift a finger for them and instead relied on mass demonstrations to spread anti-war sentiment. Eventually, the very people forced to fight the Vietnam war – soldiers, Marines, sailors, and airmen – decided to end it themselves, both on the ground in Vietnam and on their ships and planes. With the military in revolt, Richard Nixon, a Republican who had escalated the war by invading Laos and Cambodia, was forced to bring the troops home from Vietnam in 1972.

The lesson here is that the anti-war movement can't give up its independence and expect a bought-and-paid for politician like Kerry to help end the war, especially when Kerry says he wants to escalate the Iraq war by expanding the Army by 40,000 active-duty troops. The only way to end the war is by building a grassroots movement in every neighborhood, community, campus, workplace and barrack that isn't willing to settle for the “lesser evil” but will take its fight to the streets.



Protest the war and Bush in NYC August 29!

The Republican National Convention will be held at Madison Square Garden from August 29 to September 2. Join **hundreds of thousands** in the streets Sunday, Aug. 29 at the anti-war march and rally organized by United for Peace and Justice.

March details: Assemble between 14th and 23rd streets, stretching from 6th to 8th avenues. The march will kick off from 23rd St and head up 7th ave past Madison Square Garden and head over to West St, also known as the West Side Highway. The march will proceed south to the rally site, which will stretch north from Chambers St. Check www.unitedforpeace.org for more info.

What happened to the anti-war movement?

By Keith Rosenthal is an active socialist in Burlington, VT. He can be reached at keithmr81@yahoo.com

It's high time that the anti-war movement addresses the 500-pound gorilla standing in the middle of the room. That's right – I'm talking about the mass movement that collapsed roughly around the 20th of March 2003, in the wake of Bush's decision to go ahead with the invasion of Iraq.

We all remember the feeling of euphoria on February 15th of that year, when 10 million people worldwide marched against the war on Iraq. Millions took to the streets across America, chanting, blocking traffic, and speaking out. Although we all knew that Bush was determined to have his war, somewhere, in the recesses of our minds, we also held a flicker of hope that maybe – just maybe – we would force him to stand down.

Within two months' time, the million beams of hope had receded back into the dark alleys of the general feeling of powerlessness we know as "the American political system."

First, we were barraged with the hypocritical demand: "Support the Troops!" The media, Democratic and Republican politicians alike, and "common-sense," all chimed in to order anti-war activists to immediately cease and desist, for the very lives of American soldiers were at stake!

Next, as soon as the invasion had turned into occupation, we were told by the same foregoing echo chambers that we again had to cease and desist all anti-war activity, but this time for the sake of the Iraqis themselves. For if the US were to just pull out of Iraq, the argument went, we would

most certainly leave Iraq a much worse place than when we found it. This turned into a variation of the 'you break it, you own it' mantra.

Finally, we were told that the US must stay in Iraq for the next 5 to 10 years to continue fighting "foreign terrorists," "insurgents," and "former Ba'athist loyalists." All pretenses of ridding Iraq of weapons of mass destruction or of securing revenge for the attacks of September 11th went out the window.

In the end, the sole reason offered by the Bush administration for why the US had to stay in Iraq was (drum roll please) . . . because we were already there (dah-dah)!

The saddest part of this whole charade was not the base superficiality of the Bush administration's rationalizations, but the fact that the vast majority of anti-war activists bought it, or, at least, sunk into a deep demoralization out of despair that we were unable to stop the war.

The past year has been characterized by an intense hangover for the anti-war movement. This hangover has been made worse by the fact that people have grasped to the Democrat, John Kerry, as the alternative – an alternative, not to Bush, but to our inability to influence policy through mass demonstrations. The "Anybody But Bush" phenomenon is less a referendum on George Bush, and more so on the confidence of the American Left in its ability to affect change through independent, mass action.

This is the reason why there was barely a



ripple of protest when the pictures of Iraqis being tortured in Abu Ghraib prison by American soldiers spread across the front-pages of newspapers like wildfire. This is the reason why the anti-occupation movement remains so peripheral in the American public eye despite a recent Gallup poll revealing that 44%

of Americans are for an immediate US withdrawal from Iraq.

The fact of the matter is that the anti-war movement has to face up to some tough political realities. **First and foremost, we have to come to understand why the anti-war protests failed to stop Bush's war, lest we draw the hopeless conclusion that mass protests simply don't work.** In the context of the Election 2004, this amounts to the idea that the only way we can have our voices heard is by changing our tune (i.e., voting for a candidate who is for everything that we're against).

During the Vietnam War era, millions of people all across the country spent years organizing and protesting to stop the slaughter. One Democrat after another betrayed the anti-war movement by escalating the conflict. The anti-war movement was left with but one recourse: up the stakes.

This meant coming to organize on the basis of a political analysis that went deeper than simple opposition to a "mistaken" military venture. It meant coming to see that wars fought by powerful nations against weaker ones was nothing more than imperialism, pure and simple. Imperialism – the logical extension of the "survival-of-the-fittest" capitalist system onto the global market – was no mere policy adopted by this or that administration. Imperialism is something rooted in the economic system under which we live.

The movement had to begin to develop ideas to explain the stubbornness of the government in the face of mass protests. It had to deepen its connections with the armed resistance of the Vietnamese against the US invasion. It had to forge more solid links with the US soldiers becoming increasingly radicalized by the experience of fighting a war to liberate a people who sought liberation from the US.

It was only at this juncture that the American public eye began to turn wearily towards the anti-war movement, seeing it not as a blight but as a haggard sage. It was only at this juncture, when the movement began to pass beyond the bounds within which it had previously defined itself – that is, when it passed from an anti-war to a potentially revolutionary movement – that the rulers began to listen . . . and take heed.

We are currently at the very beginning of this process. The movement that failed to stop Bush's war was politically unequipped to deal with the question of occupation; the question of the Iraqi resistance; the question of democracy under capitalism. It may not come to develop an understanding of these central issues for some time.

Meanwhile, the dynamic of the occupation and the indemnity it is incurring domestically, are playing out in an interesting manner. New forces are beginning to emerge in active opposition to the occupation – forces a thousand times stronger and more resolute than those comprising the February 15th demonstration. The February 15th movement was planning all along to disappear within a year – either as a result of stopping the war, or as a result of not stopping the war.

The new movement, however, is being spear-headed by military families opposed to the occupation; by soldiers themselves returning from Iraq; by Palestinians connecting the occupation of their land with that of the Iraqis'; and by the remnants of the anti-war movement of yester-year who have drawn the conclusion that the only weakness of the February 15th protests was that they didn't go far enough – politically or organizationally.

Such forces will not easily be diverted from their course. In fact, their cause can only grow in active support as the Iraqi resistance develops apace, as the US continues to lose more soldiers in the years to come, and as the occupation waxes more and more brutal as the US attempts to “pacify” a population refusing in larger and larger numbers to be accomplices in their own oppression.

Moreover, whatever the outcome of the election in November, it can be nothing more than a school in the futility of advancing social causes through a “changing of the guard.” If Bush wins, people will once again be forced to look for alternatives to the electoral arena in which to make their voices heard. If Kerry wins, he will add 40,000 more troops to the occupation, and people will in due course have to once again discover the importance of independent, mass organizing as the only vehicle for social change.

None of this is to preach inevitability. The dynamics playing out in Iraq – and their domestic consequences – can merely render the conditions around us ripe for the re-emergence of mass struggle. Moreover, this struggle has the potential to emerge on a much more solid political footing than it had before it last disappeared.

The key link in this chain of events is

the extent to which all of the above lessons are learned, transmitted, and integrated into the very consciousness of any future mass movement. This will primarily be done by developing organizational links between the various forces emerging around us in opposition to the occupation, but more importantly, in carrying out a series of political discussions with these forces and all others around us who are not yet active.

We have to develop a lesser or greater degree of political continuity between the coming movement and the last. We have to ensure that, although we may go through the same motions in rebuilding a protest movement, we are actually not reinventing the wheel. We must ensure that we come to the tool-bench this time with a more refined dexterity and a clearer blueprint. Finally, we must make sure that our toolkit is stocked with the best equipment: anti-imperialism, a history of social struggle, and a sober assessment of our own strengths and weaknesses. These crucial tools must be forged through the process of political debate, discussion, and argumentation.

This is the single-most important task that we will face over the next year.

Fahrenheit 9/11 goes to Ft. Bragg

Dear Traveling Soldier,

I just returned from handing out 175 copies of War Times outside of the only theater in Fayetteville, NC showing Fahrenheit 9/11. I talked to literally dozens of Iraq and Afghanistan vets who were there to see the film. Many were close to their discharge (ETS) date and were eager to talk about the many problems the military has maintaining credibility in the information age. Everyone I questioned said that reenlistment in their units was negligible and that we should not believe what we read in the papers.

I also distributed Bring Them Home Now buttons and had people taking my email so that they could get buttons after I ran out. We are out of War Times so tomorrow night I'll be handing out a flyer that touts BTHN, MFSSO and Fayetteville Peace With Justice as well as Traveling Soldier. A local person who has been supportive of the movement but not real active is having a house party after a showing of the film tomorrow to further discussion of the points raised.

It was an energizing experience. Even though I had one Vietnam vet who was ready to “whup” me, it turned out to be all good, He calmed down and several other vets gathered around to listen to our exchange. Once the “whopper” left, the vets who had heard his spiel stopped by to give me their perspective, which was 100% antiwar.

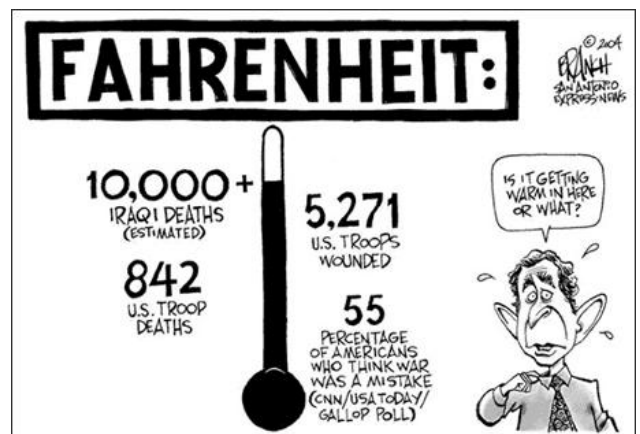
What a night! Thanks for your support as we continue to organize outside of Ft. Bragg

Peace,

Lou Plummer

Military Families Speak Out

Bring Them Home Now!



The death of Sgt. Van Dale Todd

by Daniel Borgström
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Thirty two years ago, near the end of the War in Vietnam, I was living in San Francisco, and my close friend, ex-Sgt. Van Dale Todd, a combat veteran of the 101st Airborne, lived in another apartment of the same building. It was an old Victorian house out on 29th Street. Sometimes Van would take a notion to hit the wall which separated our apartments with his fist and shout, "Who the fuck would join the Marine Corps?" And I'd yell back, "Airborne sucks!" "The Marine Corps sucks!" "Only two things come out of the sky," I'd yell back again, "Bird shit and fools!" That was how we said good morning to each other. It was our ritualized greeting.

We were both active in a veterans antiwar group, and the two of us used to get together almost every day and talk about the war, politics and other things. He told me about his experiences in "Nam," the killing he'd seen and participated in. Although I'd spent four years in the USMC, that was before Vietnam. So while we both opposed the war and shared similar opinions on it, Van often reminded me that he was the one who'd been there and experienced it. "You weren't in Nam," he'd often say, "You're coming from a philosophical point of view. You don't know what it's like to see your buddies die in front of you." It seemed to be Van's one-upmanship, or at least that's the way I took it. People who've been through a certain experience sometimes insist that they have a special claim on knowledge and understanding of the subject.

One night at around midnight he came to my place and pounded on the door. "I've got something to show you!" he shouted. When I opened the door I could see he was terribly upset, apparently in a violent mood. He demanded that I go with him to his apartment and see whatever it was that he wanted to show me. As soon as we went in, he took out a bottle of bright red pills and swallowed all of them in front of me. "I killed seven people in Nam," he said. He'd told me that before, but this time he added, "I can't live with it any more!" He also told me once again, as he had so many times before, "You don't know what it's like to see your buddies die."

I told him to sit down and take it easy. Within minutes he had passed out. I went for help and got him to a hospital where he died a week later without ever regaining

consciousness. I later learned that the red pills he'd overdosed on were Seconal, which is a type of sleeping pill. People also told me, "When somebody O.D.s on downers, you never want to let them sit down. You gotta keep them walking."

Van had once believed in the war, and he was a guy who fought for what he believed in. He enlisted in the Army, volunteered for Vietnam, asked to be assigned to the airborne infantry – and got it all. And when his year in Nam was up, he asked for another. In all he spent seventeen months in combat with the 101st Airborne. That was back in 1969 and 1970. After returning from Vietnam, however, Van began to have second thoughts about the war. He took part in peace marches, and on April 17th, 1972, he and I were part of a group of sixteen ex-GIs who occupied an Air Force recruiting office in San Francisco to protest the war.

Nevertheless, Van was not really political, or maybe I should say he wasn't much given to theories or philosophical speculation. Instead of looking at what U.S. corporations were doing around the world, and how he'd been exploited into defending them, he blamed himself for what he'd done, and tormented himself for having "enjoyed" it. "I loved combat," he used to say, shaking his head remorsefully. "I was so sick I loved to kill."

By the time I'd met him, of course, he was no longer in love with war. In a diary we found after his death, he'd written: "Vietnam left me so alone. Why or how could I take the life of a human? Why was killing humans fun? Can God forgive me?" It must have bothered him back in Vietnam, too, because he'd found refuge in drugs. "I got this medal for killing two people," he'd say, showing me a bronze star, "and when I did it I was high on opium."

Van didn't want another G.I. sent to Nam because he knew that a person can come back traumatized. He said many times, "I don't want my little brother Sam, or anybody's little brother, to go and see what I saw or do what I did." But as much as he hated the war, he still believed very deeply in something he called "America." And in Van's "America," there was still something left of that romantic, mythical age when you could just walk into the White House and talk with the President and tell him the problem. Van saw public officials as people

who listen – which sometimes they do, but not quite as often as Van seemed to think.

I believe that's what his thinking was on April 17th, when sixteen of us occupied the Air Force recruiting office. After three hours' occupation, Federal Marshals broke the door down and arrested us. We spent the night in jail and were bailed out the next day.

On April 21, we went back to court for a preliminary appearance and got our first look at Judge Lloyd Burke. Judge Burke sat there, just leaning on his elbow and looking completely bored, like an old railroad engineer gazing at the scenery along the spur he's been chugging up and down for the last twenty years. The charge was "disorderly conduct," and using the pretext that it was a "minor offense," the judge refused us a trial by jury. When our attorney pointed out that trial by jury was a Constitutional right, stated in the Sixth, Seventh and Fourteenth Amendments, Judge Burke just said, "Overruled," without even lifting his chin off his elbow, and then he set our trial dates.

To Van, it was a pretty heavy shock. About all he could say when we got home was, "The Man [Judge Burke] just doesn't give a shit about us!" "Did you expect him to?" I said. "No-o-o," Van answered slowly, "I guess not." And he just sat there for a long time with a vacant look in his eyes. I tried to explain to him that this judge wasn't there to give us a fair trial. "Judge Burke's a cog of the war machine," I said. "He was obviously assigned to our case for the purpose of putting some quasi-legal façade on a very dubious process. The reason for denying us a jury trial is that he wanted to find us guilty."

Our group had done a similar action in December 1971, occupying the offices of the South Vietnamese Consulate. We'd been tried by a jury and acquitted at the end of a four-week trial in March 1972. So this time the powers-that-be apparently distrusted the jury process. Perhaps Van understood my explanation, but he seemed unable to accept it.

Five of us, including Van and myself, went on trial a week later in the courtroom of a different judge, Judge Robert Schnake. This judge didn't lean on his elbow, but he did reaffirm the decision to deny us our Constitutional right to trial by jury, and then

found us all guilty at the end of a two-hour session.

The irony of this process is compounded if one pauses to recall that trial by jury is one of the most fundamental American rights which Van and other GIs had supposedly fought to defend. Although it has often been wrongfully denied, as it was in our case, the right to trial by jury is an ancient principle of English and American law which existed before the U.S.

Constitution was written, and even before the thirteen colonies were founded. It goes back to the Magna Carta of 1215 A.D.

Before sentencing we were each allowed to say a few words. Van, wearing all his medals on his fatigue jacket, stood up and began: "I was a machine gunner . . ." He told of the horrors he'd seen and even committed himself, and of his buddies he'd seen die. He told the judge that the government just had to stop sending American GIs to Vietnam. Judge Schnake nodded. He seemed to be listening. But he sentenced each of us to 30 days and fined us each \$50. We appealed it, and the way it eventually turned out, we paid the \$50 but didn't go to jail.

Judges Burke and Schnake were both former prosecutors. As judges they did their job as functionaries of the system that sends American GIs abroad to kill or be killed in defense of U.S. corporate strategy. But to Van there was no such thing as a "system" -- just "America." These judges represented the "America" he believed in, and the experience devastated him. From then on, he acted like a person utterly lost. He became so lonely that he dropped by my apartment five or ten times a day, sometimes even at one or two in the morning.

Van had been known to smoke a joint before, and occasionally I'd seen him stoned. But after seeing these judges, he seemed to be stoned much more of the time, as well as drunk. I'd never seen him inebriated before that. Two small glasses of wine had been his limit. But after the trial, he'd often put away half a gallon of wine in a day. The overnight change in him was phenomenal. His war memories bothered him more and more, and he'd talk about people he'd seen killed. "Do you know what it's like to see your buddies die?" He'd keep saying. And he told me of a woman he'd killed, and he'd say: "Do you know what it's like to kill a mother who's crying because her children are all dead?"

It was two weeks after our trial that he took the overdose of Seconal. We gave him

a veteran's antiwar funeral, and veterans came from all over the Bay Area, almost everybody wearing military fatigue jackets. We buried him in his combat uniform with his service medals and his button which proclaimed him to be a member of VVAW (Vietnam Veterans Against the War). While five veterans and a woman carried out the coffin, everybody lined up in two rows and gave Van a clenched-fist salute.



On returning home that afternoon, I went next door, into the vacant apartment where Van had lived until so recently. "Airborne sucks!" I called out. Van's things were gone, and the place was empty now. It was an emptiness that left room for my voice to echo back and forth between the walls. I tried again, louder than before, "Only two things come out of the sky!" Again, there was an echo, a louder echo of course, but still only of my own voice. It was followed by the creaking of wooden floorboards under my feet in this old Victorian house.

That was 32 years ago. Today our soldiers are fighting in Iraq, and since last fall there have been reports of GI suicides over there. An article in the November 23, 2003 issue of the Oakland Tribune read: "Since April, the military says, at least 17 Americans -- 15 Army soldiers and two Marines -- have taken their own lives in Iraq. The true number is almost certainly higher. At least two dozen noncombat deaths, some of them possible suicides, are under investigation according to an AP review of Army casualty reports." The situation was alarming enough that the U.S. military sent a mental health assessment team to Iraq to see what could be done to prevent suicides and to help troops better cope with anxiety and depression.

Although I'm glad to see that the military is making an effort, I think it is limited in what it can do. The basic problem starts with the fact that American GIs are in Iraq, and memories of that experience are likely to be

a lifelong affliction for some of them. I should hardly need to point out that Van did not kill himself while he was in Vietnam; it was after he came home that he died, some two years afterwards. If GIs are killing themselves already, it's a bad sign for the future. It should be obvious that we have to get our troops home, out of Iraq.

However, even pulling our troops out of Iraq wouldn't be quite enough. Van didn't kill himself only because of his traumatic memories; what really did him in was his discovery that something he believed he'd fought for wasn't real. When Van got his day in court, it was without a jury. He expected to be heard when he

spoke on a subject he knew so well -- the war. Instead, the judges made it graphically clear to him that he had no voice, and the commercial media also failed to relate any of his story or what happened to him. As far as I can tell, his death was not even recorded as a statistic.

Since Americans across the political spectrum tend to respect GIs and veterans, the government and the commercial media often try to manipulate our feelings of obligation to serve their own purposes. "Support our troops," they tell us, when they're sending them out to be killed, injured, traumatized and subjected to poisonous substances.

After the Vietnam War, veterans had all sorts of problems that the government was slow to deal with. Likewise after the First Gulf War. The same thing is likely to happen again because the people in power today are extremely unwilling to put money into any program that doesn't directly benefit some major corporation. Today's veterans can expect to see monuments constructed in their honor, but when this war is over and they speak out about real problems, they are likely to find that they have no more voice than Van did. Ironically, given our government's misuse of the armed forces and neglect of veterans, it may be left to the antiwar movement to defend these people's rights.

Words from the front-lines

“Hello, hey Mama. Well, sorry I haven’t been able to call. They took the phone seven days ago. I got the letter and box. That is so cool, your first grandson came the same day your oldest son did. How is everyone? I’m doing fine, we are just out here in the sand in the windstorms waiting. What in the world is wrong with George? Trying to be like his dad. Bush. He got us out here for nothing whatsoever I’m so furious right now. Mama, I really hope they do not re-elect that fool honestly. I am in good spirits and I am doing okay. I really miss you guys. Thanks for the Bible and books and candy. I really look forward to letters from you guys. Well tell all the family ‘Hello’ and that I am doing fine. We don’t expect anything to happen any time soon. I cannot wait to get home and get back to my life. Tell Sputnik congrats and I’ll see my first nephew soon as soon as I get back to the states. Hope you guys are doing okay. And keep sending the mail, it makes getting through the days easier. Well, I’m on my way to bed so I will write you guys soon. I love and miss all of you guys.” – **Sgt. Michael Pedersen, crew chief on a Blackhawk that crashed in Iraq April 2, 2003. This was his last letter to his mother, Lisa Lipscomb, who was featured in *Fahrenheit 9/11*.**



“People have been waiting a full year, hearing, ‘It’s going to happen, it’s going to happen.’ My patience probably would have run out too.” – **Lt. Col. Gary Volesky, commander of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, referring to the electricity being restored in Sadr City, Baghdad, Iraq.**

“Being in Iraq sucks. Let me rephrase that. Being over there is emotionally straining on you, and you are missing your family.” – **Army Pfc. Derrick Crumpaker, 3rd Brigade, Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, Ad Duluiyah, Iraq.**

“I’m tired of every time we go out the gate, someone tries to kill me.” – **Staff Sgt. Sheldon Rivers, Ramadi, Iraq.**

“We still haven’t found any WMD. It was wrong, totally wrong. The way I feel is that we are fighting an American war. It is all for Bush’s cabinet and campaign.” – **British Corporal Simon Stone, Cheshire Regiment, Basra, Iraq.**

“If I leave here, I’m going AWOL, I’m not coming back.” – **Master Sgt. Thomas R. Thigpen, who fell dead of a heart attack during a touch football game in Kuwait on March 16 at age 52.**

“When people [politicians and journalists] come over here, where do they stay? In the Green Zone. I call it the Safe Zone. They miss the full picture. It’s just like the West, when we were trying to settle it with the Indians.” – **Sgt. Maj. John Jones, Ramadi, Iraq.**

“A lot of times, I look at this place and wonder what have we really done. ... When we first got here, we all wanted to change it and make it better, but now I don’t give a shit. What the hell am I here for?” – **Sgt. 1st Class James Tilley, Ramadi, Iraq.**

“I don’t have any idea of what we’re trying to do out here. I don’t know what the goal is, and I don’t think our

commanders do either. I feel deceived personally. I don’t trust anything Rumsfeld says, and I think Wolfowitz is even dirtier.” – **Staff Sgt. A.J. Dean, Ramadi, Iraq.**

“We find that if we don’t go there, they won’t shoot us.” – **Capt. Joe Jaspar, 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, Ramadi, Iraq.**

“I didn’t think it would be like this. No one is going through what we are going through. ... They just don’t want us here. I hope that all of us make it back. I pray that we all do, but I don’t think it could get any worse. This is worse. I’ll do everything I can to bring all the soldiers back. Anything.” – **Sgt. Reggie Butler, 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, in Sadr City, Baghdad, Iraq.**