

# *Traveling Soldier*

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# Occupation is not liberation

“Leave! ... We want freedom!” shouted Iraqi protestors in Kut on April 23<sup>rd</sup>. “I want to leave,” replied Capt. Samuel Bakion as he reached under his flak jacket to show the protestors his wedding band attached to his dogtag chain. “I want to go back to America”. He told them that his wife was waiting for him back home in Minneapolis.

Unfortunately for the Iraqi people, Capt. Samuel Bakion, and hundreds of thousands of other GIs, Washington wants to keep GIs in Iraq for as long as it takes to install a pro-U.S. government. To this end, the U.S. has sent 20,000 *more* troops into Iraq – but since Bush has declared that the war is over, they are being disguised as a “stabilization force” that will merely “augment” the hundreds of thousands already inside Iraq.

The government claims the war was for democracy, but when asked about the possibility that Iraqis might choose an Islamic government, Donald Rumsfeld said bluntly: “That isn’t going to happen.” What the U.S. means by “democracy” was spelled out further by Lt. Gen. David McKiernan in a proclamation he wrote in Baghdad: “The coalition alone retains absolute authority within Iraq”. And in order to preserve this “absolute authority within Iraq”, the Army has fired on anti-occupation protestors in Mosul, Fallujah, and Baghdad, killing dozens.

GIs are in an unbelievably tight spot: caught between the orders of the politicians and Pentagon brass who want to control Iraq’s oil, and the people of Iraq who want the U.S. military out so that they can get on

with their lives and rebuilding their country.

Genuine democracy and liberation means that the U.S. military must leave Iraq **now** – that is the will of the overwhelming majority of the Iraqi people. But forcing the biggest, most powerful military in the world to leave will be no small task. It will take Iraqis continuing to resist the occupation of their country.

But it will also take a mass movement in the U.S., a movement that draws in millions of working class people. This movement must understand that in order to be successful, it must link up with GIs who have the power – if organized – to end the occupation and force the U.S. to leave Iraq. That’s what happened in Viet Nam and that’s what has to happen today.

## Bring all GIs home now!

**Stan Goff, Former Special Forces soldier responds to Bush's invitation for Iraqis to attack US Troops**

## "Bring 'Em On?"

In 1970, when I arrived at my unit, Company A, 4th Battalion/503rd Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade, in what was then the Republic of Vietnam, I was charged up for a fight. I believed that if we didn't stop the communists in Vietnam, we'd eventually be fighting this global conspiracy in the streets of Hot Springs, Arkansas. I'd been toughened by Basic Training, Infantry Training and Parachute Training, taught how to use my weapons and equipment, and I was confident in my ability to vanquish the skinny untermenschen. So I was dismayed when one of my new colleagues--a veteran who'd been there ten months--told me, "We are losing this war."

Not only that, he said, if I wanted to survive for my one year there, I had to understand one very basic thing. All Vietnamese were the enemy, and for us, the grunts on the ground, this was a race war. Within one month, it was apparent that everything he told me was true, and that every reason that was being given to the American public for the war was not true.

We had a battalion commander whom I never saw. He would fly over in a Loach helicopter and give cavalier instructions to do things like "take your unit 13 kilometers to the north." In the Central Highlands, 13 kilometers is something we had to hack out with machetes, in 98-degree heat, carrying sometimes 90 pounds over our body weights, over steep, slippery terrain. The battalion commander never picked up a machete as far as we knew, and after these directives he'd fly back to an air-conditioned headquarters in LZ English near Bong-son. We often fantasized together about shooting his

helicopter down as a way of relieving our deep resentment against this faceless, starched and spit-shined despot.



Yesterday, when I read that US Commander-in-Chief George W. Bush, in a moment of blustering arm-chair machismo, sent a message to the 'non-existent' Iraqi guerrillas to "bring 'em on," the first image in my mind was a 20-year-old soldier in an ever-more-fragile marriage, who'd been away from home for 8 months. He participated in the initial invasion, and was told he'd be home for the 4th of July. He has a newfound familiarity with corpses, and everything he thought he knew last year is now under revision. He is sent out into the streets of Fallujah (or some other city), where he has already been shot at once or twice with automatic weapons or an RPG, and his nerves are raw. He is wearing Kevlar and ceramic body armor, a Kevlar helmet, a load carrying harness with ammunition, grenades, flex-cuffs, first-aid gear, water, and assorted other paraphernalia. His weapon weighs seven pounds, ten with a double magazine. His boots are bloused,

and his long-sleeve shirt is buttoned at the wrist. It is between 100-110 degrees Fahrenheit at midday. He's been eating MRE's three times a day, when he has an appetite in this heat, and even his urine is beginning to smell like preservatives. Mosquitoes and sand flies plague him in the evenings, and he probably pulls a guard shift every night, never sleeping straight through. He and his comrades are beginning to get on each others' nerves. The rumors of 'going-home, not-going-home' are keeping him on an emotional roller coaster. Directives from on high are contradictory, confusing, and often stupid. The whole population seems hostile to him and he is developing a deep animosity for Iraq and all its people – as well as for official narratives.

This is the lad who will hear from someone that George W. Bush, dressed in a suit with a belly full of rich food, just hurled a manly taunt from a 72-degree studio at the 'non-existent' Iraqi resistance.

This de facto president is finally seeing his poll numbers fall. Even chauvinist paranoia has a half-life, it seems. His legitimacy is being eroded as even the mainstream press has discovered now that the pretext for the war was a lie. It may have been control over the oil, after all. Anti-war forces are regrouping as an anti-occupation movement. Now, exercising his one true talent – blundering – George W. Bush has begun the improbable process of alienating the very troops upon whom he depends to carry out the neo-con ambition of restructuring the world by arms.

Somewhere in Balad, or Fallujah, or Baghdad, there is a soldier telling a new replacement, "We are losing this war."

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Taken from:  
<http://www.counterpunch.com/goff07032003.html>

# What *Traveling Soldier* is all about

“With skillful manipulation of the press, they make the criminal look like the victim and the victim look like the criminal,” Malcolm X once said.

Today his words are as true as ever: Iraqis are portrayed in the media as looters, while Bush and his cronies are making millions from Iraq’s oil fields; GIs caught stealing thousands of dollars are denounced as thieves, while convicted felon-embezzler and Pentagon favorite Ahmed Chalabi is slowly maneuvered toward power in Iraq; and Iraqis who protest the occupation of their country are “terrorists” and “outside troublemakers” while Paul Bremer and Donald Rumsfeld who are responsible for the murder and oppression of Iraqis are “liberators”.

Telling the truth – about the occupation, the cuts to veterans benefits, or the dangers of depleted uranium – is the first reason *Traveling Soldier* is necessary. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance to those on top – whether it’s in the streets of Baghdad, New York, or inside the armed forces.

For this, we might be criticized for not being “objective” or “balanced”. We aren’t. We proudly take the side of our class – working people and the oppressed the world over – against those who use their wealth and power to make our lives hell.

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## **William and Mary College in Williamsburg, Virginia publish the Flat Hat, in which the pro-war column and this answer by a four-year active duty U.S. Marine appeared.**

To the Editor:

Michael Ruff's column in the Feb. 7 issue of The Flat Hat, in which he attacks "doves" and "peace-niks," sparks the following question: for those who favor the war, are you standing on post ready to die or kill for this cause? If the answer is "no," I highly suggest you either reevaluate your position or enlist, because you are in no position to make ridiculous demands on my life.

I am a U.S. Marine of four years and, as such, have sworn to fight when directed to by my superiors. I am the one forgoing the civilian component of my life. I am the one facing attack in the deserts of Iraq. Torn asunder from family, friends and a life I would much rather lead, I am the one facing extreme conditions. I am a Marine who has willingly joined, but I am totally against this war.

I am not here to argue the idiocy of this war; the absence of

But producing a newsletter for people in the armed forces is about more than telling the truth. Our goal is for *Traveling Soldier* to become the thread that ties working-class people inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize resistance within the armed forces – and that can’t happen without **you**.

If you have a problem, if you or your family are getting screwed, if you agree or disagree with what this newsletter says – we want to know. If you want people to know what’s really going on Iraq, or if you’re stateside and you want people stuck in Iraq to know what’s going on at home, write to us.

We publish this newsletter once a month, but we will publish more often if there’s enough demand for it. If you liked reading this newsletter we hope that you’ll become a regular reader. You can subscribe by writing us (it’s free to people in the services since the pay is so damn low). If you like what you’ve read, we hope that you’ll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers.

**Write to:  
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New York, N.Y. 10021**

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evidence performs that job for me. What I am here to say is how laughable it is for someone to make ludicrous demands on my life when they have little to lose. There is nothing easier than sitting back and casting one's opinion about a volatile situation, in turn giving the impression that one's view is "hardline" or "tough" when you are taking absolutely no steps to enforce your beliefs.

If, in fact, you have concerns such as raising your kids in a safe world, I believe your local Marine recruiter would be more than happy to talk to you.

I will fight this war and, hopefully, I will return safely to the life I am leaving behind. I must do so because I volunteered for service. But I refuse to let others comfortably opine without retribution and make demands on my life, especially for a cause so intellectually vacant. If your needs are imperative, then stand next to me with your M-16 and face this Iraqi regime that is so "threatening" to the world -- stare down the barrel of the gun you are asking others to do for you.

-- Luke Thomas, class of '02

<http://flathat.wm.edu/February212003/opinionsletter.shtml>

# The right to resist: theirs and yours

More than any other single event since Bush ordered the invasion of Iraq, the massacres in Fallujah ripped the mask off the government's lies about "freedom" and "liberation".

In Iraq today, exercising the right to demonstrate can be deadly.

Occupation troops were ordered to open fire on unarmed demonstrators, including children, who just wanted their school back.

A reporter on the scene, Chris Hughes, wrote: "I watched in horror as American troops opened fire on a crowd of 1,000 unarmed people here yesterday.

"Many, including children, were cut down by a 20-second burst of automatic gunfire during a demonstration against the killing of 13 protestors at the Al-Kaahd school on Monday."

In the coming days and weeks, you can expect Bush, Rumsfeld and their partners in crime to tell you that the Iraqis fighting the U.S. troops are "terrorists," "Iranian agents," "Saddam Hussein loyalists," "criminals," and God knows what else.

One thing you can be sure of; **they will not tell you that Iraqis have the right to organize armed attacks on the Bush regime's murderous**

**occupation of their country.** The politicians and brass certainly will not tell you that the Iraqis will keep on

The politicians in Washington and the generals couldn't stop the GI rebellion because the troops were too



fighting until they have won their national independence and driven every last soldier out.

In Viet Nam, U.S. troops being used to deny the Vietnamese their national independence got tired of being ordered to butcher civilians. By 1969 **their** rebellion was in full swing. They refused to fight for U.S. imperialism any more. Their movement spread from the Army and Marines to the Navy and the Air Force.

well organized. Local officers couldn't stop them because they decided to kill their officers wholesale, giving the world a new word: "fragging."

They acted as teams, just like they were trained to do. But they figured out who their real enemies were and turned their guns around.

You bet that stopped the war and brought the troops home.

Think that over very carefully. The life you save may be your own.



# *Words from the frontlines*

“If you asked the soldiers, they’re ready to go home ... It was a very emotional day for our guys. They’re torn up over throwing old ladies and kids out [of their houses].” – **Maj. Brian Pearl, EO, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, Northern Iraq.**

“I don't see it getting better. We can't be everywhere, can we? I feel like a cop, but I'm not a cop.” – **Pfc. Jacob Weber, 21.**

“Every hour, this gets worse. Any foot-dragging on getting what we need here means those people are responsible for me getting shot at.” – **Master Sgt. Jerry Best, Army Corps.**

“I think our welcome’s worn out. We don’t even get that



fake wave anymore. They just stare.” – **Lt. Tom Garner of the Fourth Infantry Division remarked to his superior, Capt. Dave Gray, Tikrit.**

“You are fighting a group that is in their home. If it was me and someone was to come into my home, I’d be throwing some lead downrange.” – **Sgt. Joseph Denny, 25, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 502<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, Forward Operating Base Exxon, Iraq.**

“It's a little sobering. When you're training for this, you joke about, you can't wait for the real thing. Then when you see it, when you see the real thing, you never want to see it again.” – **Capt. Sal Aguilar, Baghdad.**

“They’re killing us. Enough is enough.” – **Staff Sgt. Ray B. Robinson, Third Infantry Division.**

“You call Donald Rumsfeld and tell him our sorry asses are ready to go home. Tell him to come spend a night in our building.” – **Pfc. Matthew C. O'Dell, Third Infantry Division.**

“I didn't want to get shot, so I shot him first. ... OK, I'm done. I'm ready to go back to Kuwait now.” – **Cpl. Juan B. Elenes, 21, of Portland, Ore., 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit.**

“I've seen a car blow up and then a guy run back and grab his wife from the seat and we couldn't do anything about it. ... I saw people taking pictures of dead people. I thought: That's disgusting. I asked my tank commander, 'Why are you doing that?' He said, 'If my son says he wants to join the Army, I'll show him this [photograph] and tell him this is what the Army does.' ” – **Spc. Jarrid Lott, 28-year-old tank driver.**

“Some of the people I killed who I didn't know if they were innocent or not. That won't leave me,” he said. – **Sgt. 1st Class Jeff Lujan.**

“Who picked them up? Who buried them? ... I've reconciled myself. We did the right thing, even though it was wrong.” – **Sgt. 1st Class Jeff Lujan again.**

“We’re more angry at the generals who are making these decisions and who never hit the ground, and who don’t get shot at or have to look at the bloody bodies and the burnt-out bodies, and the dead babies and all that kinda stuff.” – **Spc. Anthony Castillo, Third Infantry Division.**

“I had to look that woman right in the eyes and I felt so horrible for her. I've got a little girl. ... I'm fucking constantly angry over what happened with that family. [They were shot as they approached a checkpoint] ... I'm pissed off at my chain of command for not putting up signs in every language, to warn ‘em. Normally I'm a talkative guy, a happy person, ... but I've been real quiet lately, because I'm so pissed off. I'm thinking more and more I'm so frustrated, so angry, I want to choke somebody ... constantly.” – **Spc. 1st Class Bill Scates of Oklahoma City, stationed at a checkpoint in Baghdad.**

## From "Axis of Evil" to "Forces of Badness"

After Bush randomly lumped together Iran, Iraq, and North Korea into an "axis of evil", the British decided to take the lead in the race to be the world's stupidest colonial power. Before flying to Baghdad, Rumsfeld sat and had tea with Maj. Gen. Robin Brims, the commander of British forces in the southern city of Basra, who remarked: **"I assume the forces of badness** will try to use infrastructure as a means of discrediting what we are trying to do to make things better". (AP 5.1.03) Let's hope they keep Brims in the tea room.

## Soldiers arrested – for not stealing big enough

AP 4.23.03: BAGHDAD, Iraq - U.S. soldiers found \$112 million in U.S. currency sealed inside seven dog kennels in a wealthy Baghdad neighborhood of mansions and rose gardens where top Baath Party and Republican Guard officials once lived, a newspaper reported Wednesday.

In a related development, investigators from the Army's Criminal Investigation Division have sealed off the area and were questioning six American soldiers about an undisclosed amount of missing cash, the newspaper reported.

The six soldiers, all from the Third Infantry Division, included four already under investigation for \$900,000 stolen and recovered Friday from the cash in the cottages. Of that amount, \$600,000 was found hidden in a tree and \$300,000 inside a cooler on



**Remember: Sacrificing American lives for OIL is a TEAM EFFORT!**

one of the trucks used to transport the \$656 million to Baghdad's airport Friday night.

On Tuesday, The New York Post reported that four soldiers had been arrested in connection with the attempted theft. The Los Angeles Times reported Wednesday that the suspects, who were either assigned to guard the cash or load it onto trucks, have not been charged pending further investigation.

**Comment: OK, let's see if we got this right: GIs get arrested for**

stealing \$900,000. Chalibi, Rumsfeld's candidate for head of the new Iraqi government, was sentenced to 22 years in prison for stealing \$300 million from his bank in Jordan before escaping from the country. Moral: Steal big enough and you get to be a dictator. And don't forget to give the right politicians a big campaign contribution. Instead of the stockade, you may get a Presidential Palace and a friend in the White House.

