

Traveling Soldier

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"We have all faced death here without reason or justification"



"Shock and Awe" were the words used to describe the awesome display of power the world was to view upon the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom. It was to be an up-close, dramatic display of military strength and advanced technology within the arsenal of the United States and the United Kingdom's military.

But as a soldier preparing for the invasion of Iraq, the words "shock and awe" rang deeper within my psyche. These two great superpowers were about to break the very rules they demand of others. Without the consent of the United Nations, and ignoring the pleas of their own citizens, the United States and Britain invaded Iraq.

"Shock and Awe"? Yes, the words correctly described the emotional impact I felt as we prepared to

participate in what I believed not to be an act of justice but of hypocrisy.

From the moment the first shot was fired in this so-called war of liberation and freedom, hypocrisy reigned. Following the broadcasting of recorded images of captured and dead U.S. soldiers over Arab television, American and British leaders vowed revenge while verbally assaulting the networks for displaying such vivid images. Yet within hours of the deaths of Saddam's two sons, the American government released horrific photos of the two dead brothers for the entire world to view. Again, a "do as we say and not as we do" scenario.

As soldiers serving in Iraq, we have been told that our purpose here is to help the people of Iraq by providing them the necessary assistance militarily as well as in humanitarian

efforts. Then tell me where the humanity was in the recent Stars and Stripes account of two young children brought to a U.S. military camp by their mother, in search of medical care? The two children had been, unbeknown to them, playing with explosive ordinance they had found and as a result were severely burned. The account tells how the two children, following an hour-long wait, were denied care by two U.S. military doctors. The soldier described the incident as one of many "atrocities" he has witnessed on the part of the U.S. military.

So then, what is our purpose here? Was this invasion due to weapons of mass destruction as we so often heard? If so, where are they? Did we invade to dispose of a leader and

(cont. on page 2)

his regime on the account of close association with Osama bin Laden?) If so, where is the proof? Or is it that our incursion is a result of our own economic advantage? Iraq's oil can be refined at the lowest cost of any in the world. Coincidence?

This looks like a modern-day crusade not to free an oppressed people or to rid the world of a demonic dictator relentless in his pursuit of conquest and domination but a crusade to control another nation's natural resource. At least for us here, oil seems to be the reason for our presence.

There is only one truth, and it is

that Americans are dying. There are an estimated 10 to 14 attacks on our servicemen and women daily in Iraq. As the body count continues to grow, it would appear that there is no immediate end in sight.

I once believed that I served for a cause: "to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Now, I no longer believe; I have lost my conviction, my determination. I can no longer justify my service for what I believe to be half-truths and bold lies. My time is done as well as that of many others with whom I serve. We have all faced death here without reason or justification.

How many more must die? How many more tears must be shed before America awakens and demands the return of the men and women whose job it is to protect them rather than their leader's interest?

- Tim Predmore is on active duty with the 101st Airborne Division near Mosul, Iraq. A 1985 Richwoods High School graduate and native Peorian, he has been in Iraq since March and in the military for about five years. His letter originally appeared in the Peoria Journal Star, August 24, 2003. This version appeared here:

<http://www.mfso.org/peoria.html>

Reservist on leave from Iraq organizes protest to bring the troops home now

On Friday October 3, a demonstration took place at the Newark offices of NJ Senators Corzine and Lautenberg led by Army reservist Frank Mendez, along with 25 family members, friends and members of **Veterans For Peace (VFP)**, to demand the troops be brought home.

It was Mendez's 23rd birthday and he is home on a thirteen day leave from the 310 Battalion which is deployed in Iraq. Since 9/11/01, his unit has been on active duty almost two years, first at Fort Tyler and Fort Drum and now in Iraq.

Mendez stated, "I had no problem going into this. I knew the mission going in: We were going to find weapons of mass destruction. Only there weren't any, then the mission became bringing democracy to Iraq. But now we're just in the country sitting on our butts wasting taxpayers money and wasting our time."

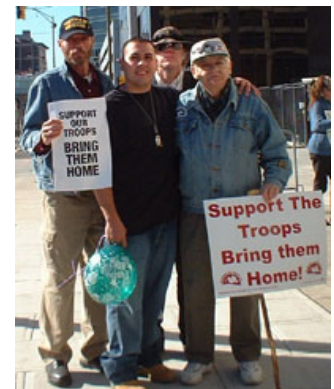
A banner read "God Bless America-Bring The Troops Home Now" and demonstrators chanted slogans and displayed signs, receiving numerous thumbs up and horn blasts of support from the motorists driving by. Only one motorist voiced opposition, shouting "It's better to fight in Iraq than here." Most

people walking by signed petitions calling for a return of the troops and several joined the picket line as well. One veteran joined VFP on the spot.

After demonstrating for an hour, a representative for Senator Jon Corzine came down to speak to Mendez who explained the situation he and his fellow reservists are in and the many problems they face. Mendez said he represented many of his fellow reservists who asked him to speak out on their behalf while he was on leave.

Corzine's aide asked a number of questions about conditions the troops faced and expressed the Senator's opposition to the war but made no commitments about when the troops would be brought home or how the senator would vote on the \$87 billion more now being asked by the Bush administration to continue the war.

Soon after that Senator Frank Lautenberg came out and spoke to Mendez as well, stating that originally he had been for the war but now was opposed to it. He said that much of what Congress had been told were the reasons for war have turned out to be misrepresentations and falsehoods. He also stated that he did not see how the



Bush administration could get out in less than five years.

As the protest ended, we presented a VFP "Support the Troops-Bring Them Home Now" lawn sign to the family. I also gave Frank a "Bring Them Home Alive" button and asked him to take it back to Iraq and show it to his comrades to let them know that we are in sympathy with them and against the occupation as well as those politicians who are responsible for this unjustified military adventure.

Frank Mendez returns to Iraq next Tuesday. He has shown real courage by speaking out while home on leave. The more our servicemen and women take actions like this, it will broaden the antiwar movement and hasten the day when all our troops are brought home.

by Dave Cline, President of Veterans for Peace

25,000 rally in D.C. to say: Bring the troops home now! End the occupation!

Veterans and family members of soldiers now in Iraq mobilized in large numbers for the October 25 demonstration in Washington, D.C. to show their opposition to Bush's war and occupation. The night before, more than 100 people gathered for a vigil by the Viet Nam War Memorial organized by Veterans for Peace.

People searched for the names of loved ones on the massive wall bearing the names of the 58,000 U.S. soldiers who died and traced out their names on paper. "What a tremendous waste of life," said Christyne Harris, whose son-in-law is stationed in Baghdad with the 82nd Airborne. To the waste of life embodied in that wall must be added the figure of 2 million – the number of Vietnamese who died because the U.S. embarked on an arrogant effort to wipe out resistance to its plans to impose its will on an entire people.

"You look at that wall – we lost 58,000 of our brothers in that war," said Dave Cline, Viet Nam veteran and national president of Veterans for Peace, as he kicked off the vigil. "And if their deaths are not to be in vain, we have to learn something from that experience. A Commander in Chief that calls on our enemies to attack our soldiers is an irresponsible Commander in Chief. And it's time that we say no more to the lies that got us in this war, no more to the deceptions by the White House, no more to the betrayal by Congress of the American people."

"It's time to again stand up... This is going to be a long struggle, we know this is a hard fight. This demonstration is just the beginning of a new wave of public actions against the war. We have to stand up for our liberties, which today are being threatened by the so-called Patriot Act. We have to become vocal and take it back into the streets. The only way they'll listen to us is if we open our mouths, and that's what we're doing tonight."

Someone brought up the fact injured troops are being charged \$8.10 a day for meals while they are hospitalized – an incredible insult. Dave Cline, himself a wounded vet, explained: "Back in the mid-90s, this provision was stuck into some pork-barrel bill, because the government is always trying to 'pare down' the military. But they don't cut the big weapons manufacturing contracts, that's what they want the money for. When it comes to soldiers, they try to nickel and dime them every way they can."

"Say you got your leg blown off, and they put you in the hospital for a month before they send you home. You go home without \$240 or your leg. It's outrageous when you



think about it. A lot of this stuff comes back to shortchanging soldiers, privatization – and this was going on before Bush. Rumsfeld is a major architect, but it was also happening during the Clinton administration."

For the next two hours vets like Cline, relatives of service members, and their supporters demolished the Bush administration's case for war, denounced Bush's callous disregard for the lives of both Americans and Iraqis, and exposed the war as a grab for oil and empire.

Patrick McCann, a member of the D.C. chapter of Veterans for Peace, spoke about the campaign his chapter is launching on November 11 – Veterans Day – to publicize the neglect of veterans' medical needs at Walter Reed Hospital, the largest veterans' hospital in the country.

"We're developing the kind of [inside] information that didn't happen during the Vietnam War, or that took 10 or 20 years to happen," he said. "We're going to be ahead of the curve on this one. We're going to have contacts in there, and when things happen on that ward, we are going to know about it."

Later, Patrick explained why his military career was particularly short. "I volunteered for Viet Nam, I had orders to Danang. But I met the Black Panthers in Chicago on December 4, 1971, on the second anniversary of the killing of Fred Hampton, and the Black Panthers won me over."

"I refused to go to Viet Nam, wound up getting a bad discharge – did 30 days in the stockade for antiwar activities. And you know what? I don't regret one second of it. My

father was CIA. His immediate superior was Gen. Westmoreland in Viet Nam. If I had gone in three years earlier, two years earlier, maybe even a year earlier, I'd have been in Viet Nam. But fortunately, I was able to learn from the people who came before me. We stand on the backs of people who came before us."



Julio Mendez, a cab driver from New York City, was typical of many of the people at this vigil. He was one of many people with a relative in Iraq who never saw themselves as political activists, but who have been pushed by circumstances to search for some way to get the politicians to understand their concerns for the safety of their relatives. His son is in North Carolina waiting to be redeployed in Iraq.

"We have no faith in our politicians. We called them, we complained to them, but we have no faith in them. We don't know how to fight this, but we're doing little things."

"I drive around with my nephew's picture in my cab. And before I came to Washington, we collected all the oil credit cards in the family – and we only have three credit cards – but we cut them up. We're writing letters to the companies, and we're telling them that our troops are worth more than their future profits."

"We have to speak out. They're the reason why we're there, and they're not fighting for anything but corporate profits. They're not fighting for democracy or liberty."

The next morning, the veterans and military families contingent swelled to 1,000 people as they took up their position near the front of the 25,000-strong march. Around her neck, Nanci Mansfield of Burnsville, N.C., wore a heart-shaped sign with a picture of her son in military uniform and the words: "Love my soldier. Hate this war."

Susan Schuman of Ashfield, Mass., was one of the military family members who addressed the rally. Her son, a member of the Massachusetts National Guard, has been in Iraq since March. "He is living in conditions that are very difficult. He

has lost 50 pounds. He was rationed to two liters of water a day when the temperature was 125 degrees. ... The cynicism with which this government treats its military is incredible."

"When they say support our troops, they're not supporting our troops – \$175 million proposed cuts to veterans' benefits, closing military hospitals all over the country, people coming back from Iraq with undisclosed illnesses which they aren't telling us about. We don't hear anything about the wounded. We don't hear about the mysterious pneumonia. And they talk about supporting our troops? They're lying!"

"Bring the troops home now—right now. There's not a military solution to the situation in Iraq. We've got to stop the occupation."

"I do agree that the U.S. has a responsibility towards Iraq," she concluded. "But that responsibility is not going to be carried out by continued occupation. I don't want Justin replaced by Jorge, by Turkish soldiers, by Japanese soldiers, by the son of someone in Latvia. End it now."

Brenda Pearson stood quietly to the side, seemingly hiding behind her dark sunglasses. She wrung her hands, the anguish pouring out of her as talked about her husband, a Tennessee National Guardsman who's been overseas since February.

"Early on, my husband was a heat casualty three separate times and was hospitalized once. And since the third time in August, they've not been able to stabilize his blood pressure, so he's not been going on any missions. But they continue to keep him over there. They have a number in his unit who aren't doing what they were sent there for. The average age in his unit is people in their forties, and a good many of them are in their fifties."

When asked what her husband thinks of the situation, she paused in an effort to condense all that she can in a few words. "He *hates* it," she said finally. "He says that this is the closest thing to prison he's ever been."

"I feel that the Bush administration has betrayed not just military families but the entire American people. On September 11, 2001, the American flag went up in front of my house. Those flags are down, and they won't go back up as long as Bush is president."

Nancy Lessin, one of the founders of Military Families Speak Out, couldn't hide her happiness – she beamed from ear to ear as she surveyed the waves of signs saying "Bring them home now."

"We started out with two military families last November in the run-up to war. We're now up over 1,000 military families. In the beginning, there was a very clear

understanding that this war was not about defending the U.S., it was about oil.”

“But we have many members who actually supported the invasion—they thought that the U.S. was in imminent danger. It was because Bush’s lies have been exposed that we have had many members join.”

Just a few feet away, Cline led some of the best chants of the day. Using the traditional call and response of military cadences, Dave had the whole crowd following him:

**“Dubya’s lies should make him choke
He must still be snortin coke
Saddam’s secret poison gas
Must be stashed up Rumsfeld’s ass**

**We’re veterans against the war
We know what we’re marchin for
Bring the troops back to our soil
We say no more blood for oil.”**

“Am I right or wrong?” Cline chanted. “You’re right!” answered the crowd.

As the end of the march neared, Larry Syverson, a state worker from Richmond, Va., said that this demonstration showed that it’s time “to get the movement started again.”

“We know the ‘war is over,’ and ‘nothing is going on.’ But we that have family over there know that there are soldiers dying every day.”

He has two sons in the military – Bryce and Branden –, and one is in Iraq. “Bryce voted for Gore, and Branden voted for Bush, but they both want out now. And the conservative one has already told his supervisors that he won’t reenlist and gets out in September. It’s surprising because he really wanted to go over there and fight a war. So I think they’re disillusioned.”

“And they hate Rumsfeld, it’s like they’ve directed all their energy toward him. ‘We hate him,’ my son told me. ‘We don’t like him because he sent

us over here, won’t tell us why we’re here, and there’s nothing for us to do, but he won’t let us come home.”

Larry can’t believe how the military won’t even come clean about how long his sons will be stationed in Iraq. “The administration is saying that they’re not going to be there very long,” he said. “But with Bryce, they put him in air-conditioned tents. And they have guys there whose only job is to make sure the generators for the tents are working. The interesting thing is that they opened a Burger King at the Baghdad Airport in May, only one month after the city fell. And Halliburton has a 10-year contract to build barracks at the airport. They say that they’re getting them out as soon as possible. But they’ve opened fast-food restaurants to feed them, and they’re building barracks to house them, so I don’t think they’re coming home any time soon.”

As the march came to a halt along Constitution Avenue, the military families and veterans who marched together and shared experiences throughout the day said their good-byes. Roberto Resto, a USMC vet, explained the importance of the march this way: “A lot of people came out in the first big demonstration since Bush declared the war ‘over’. I have shrapnel in my feet from a booby trap in Viet Nam, but I

made it through the whole march today because we need to bring all the troops home now.”

The atmosphere was giddy – especially for veterans of the Viet Nam War, who realize what had been accomplished. In a matter of months, military families and veterans accomplished in terms of organization and numbers what took years during the Viet Nam era.

As Dave Cline explained earlier in the day, the turnout today in Washington “reflects a change in the forces of the peace movement. I’ve said this before. We have to base ourselves on the working people and how the war affects people – both their kids in the military, and in their jobs and communities. Some people in the peace movement got discouraged when Bush went to war because they thought we couldn’t accomplish anything. It made us more determined.”



Marine: "You will see me assault the Bush regime at every possible angle"

My name is Andy Topetzes, and I am a 24-year-old Lance Corporal in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve. I am also a research assistant for a political research and analysis firm here in Columbus, OH called Social Science Automation, Inc. I am currently finishing up classes at Ohio State.

I just returned from combat in Iraq 2 months ago. Even before the military buildup began for the war in Iraq, coupled with a virtual assault of misguided and unconfirmed intelligence claims (aka: lies) by the Bush administration, I was against an unprovoked invasion of any nation, despite our hostile past with Saddam's former regime.

What upsets me the most about Operation Iraqi Freedom are three fundamental truths:

- Hundreds of my comrades have died, and the numbers rise every day, but the original reasons why they were sent to their violent deaths (WMD, connection w/ Al-Qaeda, etc.) have no been rebuked by

virtually everyone in the U.S. intelligence community. Saddam was never a threat to the United States, nor would he have been for a substantial amount of time.

- The Iraqi people were duped into believing that their economic well-being and physical security would be insured once Baghdad fell and American troops took control of the nation. This is certainly not the case, hence all the problems we've been having in that region since our we got our "Mission Accomplished" on May 1st.

- Our piece-of-garbage president - the same one who thumbed his nose at an entire conglomerate of United Nations before the invasion and broke international law by commencing with the invasion - is now begging for their help...and money, and troops...to bail his stupid country ass out.

And all of these things are perpetuated by a group of men who dodged Vietnam, lied about the shady nature of what little military service they did

have, and then have the audacity to call themselves Patriots.

I spit on them.

I have lost faith in our president. I have lost faith in the electoral system, and all that is decent and honest in Washington today. The only man who can bring that decency and integrity back to the White House - and lead our nation through the War on Terrorism successfully, without another shot in the foot like Iraq - is a man who's honorable military service and patriotism can't be matched.

Gen. Clark, sir, we need you desperately.

In the mean time, in what little freetime I actually have, you will see me assault the Bush regime at every possible angle...because, like a true Marine should, I attack my enemies wherever and whenever I have the chance, from every possible angle.

Sepmer Fi, to all my friends-in-arms in this Yahoo! group.

-LCPL Topetzes, A.R.
USMCR, OIF veteran

Posted on Vets For Clark board

Traveling Soldier responds:

Lance Corporal Topetzes will find out soon enough that Clark betrays him and his friends-in-arms too. He should ask General Clark a very simple question: Are you or are you not for the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. soldiers from Iraq?



Anything less than an unequivocal, no bullshit **YES** means Clark wants more dead U.S. soldiers, including LCPL Topetzes' friends.

The Democratic Party is no less a party of corporate rule, blood for oil, and death for soldiers than the Republican Party. After all, the Democrats gave Bush the authorization for the war on Iraq and gave him the \$87 billion for continuing the occupation. And we would do well to remember that that the 60s anti-war movement gave its support to the Democrat Johnson in 1964 as the "moderate," "reasonable," candidate – only to see Johnson massively escalate the war on Viet Nam, sending thousands of American troops to their deaths and murdering millions of Vietnamese. Voting for the "lesser evil" got us both the lesser **and** the greater evil.

That said, LCPL Topetzes shows the world that our soldiers are already thinking and acting in ways that will set them on a collision course with those who really rule America, whichever party holds office. Nothing is more terrifying to a corrupt ruling

class than a soldier who is thinking things over.

When he writes that he has lost faith in the electoral system, he only expresses what more and more ordinary working class people know. It's a stacked deck and a rigged game we can't ever win, operated by and for the people with the money to buy and sell elections. The California recall election just cost \$56 million.

LCPL Topetzes and his brothers and sisters-in-arms are our brothers and sisters too. We need them to protect us against a government that serves the superrich and the giant corporations that care nothing for their lives, or ours.

Sooner or later, attacking our enemies "from every possible angle" means taking our fight to the streets, like Indonesians did to get rid of the tyrant Suharto, and Serbians did to get rid of Milosevic. In Indonesia and Serbia, the soldiers refused to defend the government, and joined the revolutions.

When that time arrives here, LCPL Topetzes and all his friends-in-arms

will have to decide whether to open fire on their civilian brothers and sisters, or turn their guns against the corrupt politicians giving the orders.

Which way it goes depends in part on whether we reach out our hands in friendship now to LCPL Topetzes, and all his brothers and sisters-in-arms; listening, discussing; defending their right to question and speak out; and arguing for a completely different political vision of how life can be.

There is no reason for LCPL Topetzes to look for some General to save him. He obviously has the spirit, intelligence, good instincts, and strategic smarts to be a general himself, in a movement from below that includes his brothers and sisters-in-arms and that can't be betrayed by one more ruling class politician like Bush, or Clark, or Dean, or Kucinich, or whoever.

We need to recruit him and his brothers and sisters-in-arms for our side in the only war that can change things for the better: the class war.

Why is the Pentagon ripping off the troops?

While hundreds of thousands of troops are off fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Pentagon another target in its sights: commissaries and schools run by the Department of Defense that serve service members and their families. Nineteen commissaries are slated to be closed and another nineteen may be closed later, while at the same time the Pentagon is finishing a study on how to close or transfer control of 58 schools located on 14 installations throughout the continental U.S. These two initiatives come on the heels of the Bush administration's campaign to

cut or hold down basic pay, combat pay, health care services, and death gratuity pay for the families of soldiers killed on active duty.

"Betrayal – write that down and put it in your report," said Col. John Kidd, garrison commander of Fort Stewart, Ga. at a forum on the school closings. "As a commander, I will fight this tooth and nail. **Folks down here are not just militant on this issue. They will march on Washington.**"

But the betrayal doesn't stop there. A quarter of the 130,000 troops stationed in Iraq don't have the ceramic body armor that can stop bullets from AK-47s, the main rifle of choice of the Iraqi resistance. Critics in Congress blame the Pentagon's sluggish supply chain and some soldiers' families have resorted to buying body armor with their own money and shipping it there.

These are only a few examples of the outrageous bullshit that soldiers have to deal with. The question is: why is it happening?

It's not because the country is running out of money. President Bush has raised over \$84 million for his re-election campaign by having \$2,000 plate dinner events at posh parties for the ultra-rich. As Jan Hogan put it, **"I'd like to take some of those millions he raised and help those two boys as well as all the others."** Hogan's nephews, Chad Krandall, 36, and Dave Schmaltz, 35, are in the Minnesota National Guard, 142nd Engineer Combat Battalion, stationed north of Baghdad.

Marine Col. James Lowe, the base commander at Quantico, had it right when he said: **"The very fact that [the cuts are] being conducted at this time when Marines, sailors, soldiers, airmen, and their families are increasingly required to give more of themselves to go into harm's way is taken by many as a personal affront. It raises serious questions about DoD's commitment to quality-of-life issues."** The truth is, the Pentagon looks at the troops not as people with families, not as patriotic Americans defending freedom or democracy but as employees. And disposable employees at that.

The military is run like a business is because it's owned by big business. Joseph Tafoya, Director of Education Activity at the DoD, said that as soon as Donald Rumsfeld became Secretary of Defense, he began asking: "Why am I running stores? Why am I in education?" He is pushing for the "transformation" of the military into a swift moving, micro-chipped, killing machine, where electronics turn night into day, satellites and laser-guided weapons destroy enemy armor and artillery, and where labor costs are kept to an absolute minimum. Anything that doesn't help the military kill is an extra – schools for military children, health care for veterans, combat pay for troops, and even bullet-proof vests!

Rumsfeld is abusing the Army, Army Reserves and National Guard by increasing the number missions while holding the number of troops down. From World War I to Gulf War I – 75 years – the Reserves and Guard were called up nine times. In the past 12 years they have been mobilized 10 times. And they are serving in combat zones for a full year – the same as active-duty troops. The thinking behind all this is simple math: Reserve and Guard troops are much cheaper than regular troops. As Christopher Caldwell at the Weekly Standard notes, "it is hard not see a similarity between the army's shift to part-time soldiering and businesses preferences for part-time vs full-time labor."

It's not a coincidence that the civilian leaders of all the services are former CEOs. Thomas White, the Secretary of the Army until Rumsfeld fired for disagreeing with him in public, was also on the executive board at Enron. It shouldn't be a surprise that the welfare of the troops is the last thing on their minds.

But the problem is bigger than just Rumsfeld, the Bush administration, or whether or not someone who holds office at the Pentagon is a former CEO. The House of Representatives

recently killed a bill that would have given \$3.6 billion of funding for medical and dental screening of reservists, funding family assistance centers, pre-paid phone cards for troops in Iraq, transportation of troops for their R&R, construction of more water treatment and power plants to service soldiers, and the replacement of damaged equipment.

The government itself is set up and designed to protect the interests of big business – at home and overseas in places like Iraq, where the world's second largest oil reserve sits under its sand. But big business doesn't foot the bill; instead taxpayers pay in dollars, and people in the service pay in blood.

The majority of people in the armed forces – Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, the Reserves, and National Guard – have nothing in common with the people at the top of the chain of command. In fact, they have more in common with the Iraqis who are supposed to be the "enemy." The same Pentagon that ordered the invasion on the bogus pre-text of WMDs is the same Pentagon that is trying to cut combat pay for its troops!

The main enemy isn't in Baghdad or Kabul – it's in Washington, D.C. and on Wall Street.



“How can we leave Iraq?”

Have you noticed how the politicians who ask that question aren't in Iraq? They're making speeches and holding press conferences in Washington about “How can *we* leave Iraq?”

An old story from Vietnam Days comes to mind.

Somebody asked a soldier who was against the war, “How can we leave Vietnam?”

The answer: “Ship or plane, either is good.”

The liars in Washington in those days were selling a different line of bullshit. If “we” leave Vietnam, the Communists will take over Vietnam, then Thailand, then Malaysia, then Burma, then India, then the Philippines and before you know it they're landing in California. “It's better we fight communism in the streets of Saigon than in the streets of New York,” they said.

Vietnam “fell” and none of that happened. Today Vietnam is full of sweatshops where people get paid shit making sneakers for U.S. corporations and all kinds of other stuff, but noticeably few Communists have invaded California, and no Vietnamese appear to be interested in getting even for their millions of dead by traveling over here and fighting in the streets.

So what would happen if the U.S. military left Iraq and all the troops came home now?

Maybe some Iraqi multimillionaires will buy up the government and pocket the oil money. That would be the American way.

Maybe some religious political parties will get control of the government. In Turkey, a religious political party is in control of the government. It's (gasp) Muslim too. And Bush just handed that government \$8 billion. Washington politicians use “Islamic fundamentalism” as a boogeyman to scare people into supporting the occupation. They don't give a damn about the rights of Iraqi women, or religious minorities, or democracy – so long as their fat checks come in, and they stay rich and powerful.

Maybe the millions of workers who live in the cities will organize their own party and fight for their own interests and agenda. They might even start a revolution from below that seizes the oil fields and uses their wealth to make it possible for all Iraqis to have a decent life, instead of ending up in some corporate bank account.

Maybe there will be bloodshed, a civil war, and a period of unrest until the Iraqis figure out who is going to be in charge. America had one of those from 1860-65 and no one – not the British, not the French, not the Russians, not the U.N. – had a right to interfere.

But one thing there won't be is a foreign, invading, occupying military power suffocating all of Iraqi society and generating a national resistance movement that makes the whole country a war zone.



We shouldn't forget that the Iraqis managed to organize their own society for about 3000 years before America was “discovered” in what were some of the earliest human civilizations. Before the U.S. invasion, Iraq was one of the few Muslim countries where city life was more like Europe than it is in Kuwait, or Saudi Arabia, or other medieval regimes supporting Bush's Imperial War. It's the most vicious, ignorant racism to assume they can't run their own country without Bremer and Bush.

And while no one knows exactly what will happen in Iraq when the U.S. leaves, a few things are for sure.

Not a single American soldier will get killed by Iraqis who want to run their own country if American soldiers aren't there.

No Iraqis fighting for independence will get killed by American soldiers if American soldiers aren't there.

Want to make Iraq a better, safer place to live? Want to reduce the number of American soldiers missing hands, feet, arms, or life in a pointless and impossible occupation?

Bring all the troops home now.

Words from the front-lines

“In the beginning I was into this; we all were. [But] we haven't found anything, no weapons of mass destruction, no Saddam, no nothing. And the people there hate us. If we were rolling through a town and they were cheering, hell yeah, it would make us feel better. But when they're not cooperating and throwing rocks and giving us evil looks, we don't want to be there. We're conquerors to them. It wasn't supposed to be like that. ... I hate it over there, I hate it.” – **Specialist Castillo, while on leave from Iraq.**

“We do not fire on anybody unless we feel that our life is threatened. We don't just kill for the fun of it. Have you ever killed anybody? It sucks! ... I have lost two very good friends of mine in an RPG attack a few months ago. Having to help put them in body bags is an image I will never forget.” – **Joshua Matthews, 101st Airborne Division, northern Iraq.**

“I don't need friends like this. They smile in your face during the daytime and they try to kill you at night.” – **Sgt. Derek White, 299th Engineer Battalion.**

“[The Iraqis] seem to have gotten pretty aggravated with us being around. I asked my interpreter if the Iraqi people are mad at us. He said that 90 percent of Iraqis hate us, and the other 10 percent have left Iraq.” – **Private T.J. Knight, the driver of White's humvee.**

“We shouldn't be here and we should never have been sent here. And maybe you can tell me: why were we sent here?” – **Military policeman, near Abu Ghurayb.**

“Before I came over, watching the news I was rah-rah and here we go. Now I am just thinking, this needs to stop and go away. When talking to my wife at home, you know, people just hear about a few casualties a day and it doesn't

sound like a big deal. But when you see a 19-year-old kid with his leg barely hanging on, that one alone is a big deal.” – **Major Gordon Olsen, orthopedic specialist, Heber City, Utah where the most seriously injured from Iraq go for treatment.**

“I don't give a damn about Rumsfeld. All I give a damn about is going home. The only thing his visit meant for us was we had to clean up a lot of mess to make the place look pretty. And he didn't even look at it anyway.” –

Specialist Rue Gretton, on Rumsfeld's visit to Tikrit.

“If I got to talk to Rumsfeld I'd tell him to give us a return date. We've been here six months and the rumor is we'll be here until at least March. This is totally, totally uncalled for.” – **Sgt. Green, Tikrit, Iraq**

“I'm definitely getting out. To heck with the Army.” – **Corporal José Alvarez, Iraq.**

“When will the worldwide fight against terrorism be over? I mean, should I get my 3-year-old ready for air assault school?” – **Question from soldier from the 101st Airborne Division to Rumsfeld during his visit to Iraq.**

“I missed Vietnam. I thought about retiring after Desert Storm. I should have. [Iraq is] classic FUBAR. ... A mission without a goal. An engagement without rules. The intel was pure FUBAR. No exit strategy. We're going to be there for a long, long time. Maybe people are right. Maybe it is another Vietnam. We were in Vietnam for 10 years. ... I've been a professional soldier most of my adult life. I've been proud to serve my country even when I thought we might be wrong. But I'm not proud now. And that makes me want to puke.” – **Anonymous reservist after returning home from Iraq.**



Soldiers await their flights back to Iraq in Frankfurt, Germany. How many more for Bush's war?

What is *Traveling Soldier* about?

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.

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**.

We publish this newsletter every other 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.

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Brass aims at GIs during Rummy's visit

I just got off the phone with my son... It was great to hear his voice. It was only the second time I have talked to him since he has been in Baghdad.

In the conversation I asked him about Rumsfeld's visit to the Baghdad Airport. My son said that on an average day, there are Iraqis around the airport doing different chores. He said that none were allowed at the airport during Rumsfeld's visit. More disturbing, my son said there were sharp-shooters on the roofs of all the buildings. **I asked my son why they would need sharp-shooters on the roof if there were no Iraqis at the Airport. He said they were for the SOLDIERS! He said they were all warned that any one that went on a roof would be SHOT!** The airport is made up of several high rise buildings that the troops live in. My son said several of his friends live on the upper floors of these buildings. He said they generally go up on the roof to read or to smoke, etc. These soldiers were warned they would be shot if they went up on the roof for any reason. I find it shocking that the morale is so low for the troops that the upper brass don't trust them.

In closing, my son told me that his friends appreciate our efforts. He said they know that we are protesting against the administration and not them. They back us completely.

In peace,
Father of a Soldier in Iraq
posted September 25, 2003 on the
Bring Them Home Now sound off board.



"In another six months, the war in Iraq will be extra-super over."

Wolfowitz gets a taste of Iraq

Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, a prime architect of the Iraq war, went to Baghdad where he met the real world for the first time. Iraqi resistance forces rocketed the heavily-guarded al-Rashid Hotel, the imperial cantonment where he and other U.S. VIPs were lodged, missing Wolfowitz's room by one floor.

The attack left Wolfowitz visibly shaken. Here was the fire-eating warlord, the tough neo-con theoretician who had sent American GIs into combat in Afghanistan and Iraq, trembling in his brand-new chukka boots after the tiniest taste of real war.