

GI SPECIAL 2#75



Keri Frank, wife of slain U.S. Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Phillip Frank, during a graveside ceremony for her husband at All Saints Cemetery in Des Plaines, Illinois, April 17, 2004. REUTERS/Frank Polich

**“All This War Is A Waste.
What’s The Good In
It?”**

In the little house in Bellaire, any patriotism was swallowed up by sorrow. "There was no reason for my boy to die," says Shirley. "There is no reason for this war. There were no weapons found. All we have now is a Vietnam. My Toddie's life was wasted over there. All this war is a waste. Look at all these boys going home in coffins. What's the good in it?"

By Rick Reilly, Sports Illustrated, Posted 5/8/2004, Veterans For Common Sense

All day, in San Jose, the parents of late NFL star Pat Tillman were seeing their son get the kind of attention he would've hated: his face on CNN, teddy bear memorials, a tribute from the White House.

All day, in Bellaire, Ohio, the grandmother of former high school football star Todd Bates was living with a solitary ache she can barely describe: The boy she raised as her own came back from Iraq in a box, and nobody broke into a newscast to announce his death to the nation.

Since 9/11, all Arizona Cardinals strong safety Pat Tillman wanted was to fight for his country. He took a potential \$1,182,000 annual pay cut to jump from the NFL to the Army Rangers in 2002, and he refused all attempts to glorify his decision. He told friends that he wanted to be treated as no more special than the guy on the cot next to him. ("He viewed his decision as no more patriotic than that of his less fortunate, less renowned countrymen," Arizona senator John McCain said.) Tillman even forbade his family and friends from talking to the press about him. News crews begged for photos, mere shots of him signing his induction papers or piling out of a truck at Fort Benning, Ga., or getting his first haircut -- anything. They got nothing.

Since he was a kid, all Bellaire High linebacker Todd Bates wanted was "to be somebody," his football team chaplain, Pastor Don Cordery, told the Associated Press. When you grow up poor and without your parents around, you get hungry to make your mark. **He wasn't a good enough player to get a scholarship, yet he desperately wanted to go to college. So in 2002 he took the only road available to him -- he left home and joined the Ohio Army National Guard. Nobody wanted to take a picture of him getting his haircut.**

Tillman, 5'11" and 200 pounds, joined the only team tougher than the NFL -- the 75th Ranger Regiment. He served a tour of duty in Iraq, then went to Afghanistan. He was killed last Thursday in an ambush in the remote eastern Afghan province of Khost. His younger brother Kevin, also a Ranger, escorted his body home.

Bates, 6 feet and 250 pounds, walked eight miles a day with a 50-pound backpack to lose enough weight to join the Army, recalls his grandmother Shirley Bates, who raised him from a baby. He made it to Baghdad and was on a boat patrolling the Tigris River when his squad leader lost his balance and fell overboard. Without a life jacket Bates dived in to rescue him. Both men drowned. It took 13 days to find Bates's body, on Dec. 23, one month before his unit returned home.

Tillman's death shook the country like no other in this war. Makeshift memorials sprang up at his alma mater, Arizona State, and at the Cardinals' offices in Tempe. The club announced that the plaza around its new stadium will be named Pat Tillman Freedom Plaza. At the NFL draft in New York, commissioner Paul Tagliabue wore a black ribbon with Tillman's name on it. Some people talked about retiring his number, 40, league-wide.

Only friends and family grieved for Bates, but deeply.

It so tormented Shirley's companion, 61-year-old Charles Jones -- the man who helped her raise Todd -- that he refused to go to the funeral. "If I don't go, then Toddie can't be dead," he kept saying. He refused to leave the house. He refused

to talk much. He refused to eat. Four weeks later he dropped over dead without a word. "He died of a broken heart," says Shirley. She buried them in the cemetery up the hill from her home, side by side.

Tillman died a hero and a patriot. But his death is a wake-up call to the nation that every day -- more than 500 times since President Bush declared "Major combat operations in Iraq have ended," more than 800 times since the invasion of Afghanistan -- a family must drive to the airport to greet their dead child. The only difference this time is that the whole country knew this child.

In the little house in Bellaire, any patriotism was swallowed up by sorrow. "There was no reason for my boy to die," says Shirley. "There is no reason for this war. There were no weapons found. All we have now is a Vietnam. My Toddie's life was wasted over there. All this war is a waste. Look at all these boys going home in coffins. What's the good in it?"

Athletes are soldiers and soldiers are athletes. Uniformed, fit and trained, they fight for one cause, one team. They take ground and they defend it. Both are carried off on their teammates' shoulders, athletes when they win and soldiers when they die.

Pat Tillman and Todd Bates were athletes and soldiers. **Tillman wanted to be anonymous and became the face of this war. Bates wanted to be somebody and died faceless to most of the nation.**

Both did their duty for their country, but I wonder if their country did its duty for them. Tillman died in Afghanistan, a war with no end in sight and not enough troops to finish the job. Bates died in Iraq, a war that began with no just cause and continues with no just reason.

Be proud that sports produce men like this.

But I, for one, am furious that these wars keep taking them.

(It isn't "wars" that keep taking them. It's the politicians who declare the wars. They live on, enjoying their wealth, ruling class privileges, and imperial powers as the soldiers die, a state of affairs badly in need of course correction.)

Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward this E-MAIL along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the war, at home and in Iraq, and information about other social protest movements here in the USA. **Send requests to address up top. For copies on web site see:**<http://www.notinourname.net/gi-special/>

IRAQ WAR REPORTS:

Impossible Contradiction Means No-Win Situation For Iraq Troops; The “Strategic Defeat”

May 10, 2004 Army Times, By David Wood, Newhouse News Service

A shortage of armored combat vehicles in Iraq is pressing U.S. forces into a cruel dilemma: advance stealthily on foot, or hold up at a city's outskirts and use artillery, mortars and airstrikes.

“Using bombs and AC-130s is a strategic defeat,” given the political repercussions, said Kenneth Brower, a weapons designer and consultant to the U.S. and Israeli military. **“But we’ve had to use them.”**

American tanks and infantry fighting vehicles, like the Bradley, notoriously have restricted vision when hatches are closed. In city streets, they must operate with crewmen exposed in open hatches or be flanked by walking infantrymen to protect against side attack.

“This is a new mission for us,” Marine Corps Brig. Gen. William Catto said in an interview. **After the Marines left Iraq last summer, he added, “we did not anticipate going back.”**

The 1st Marine Expeditionary Force returned to Iraq in March.

Because the Pentagon did not anticipate the urban uprisings that erupted in April, some military units that recently rotated into the country left behind many tanks and other armored vehicles. The Marines, for instance, are using only 16 tanks in Iraq of their inventory of 403, and have deployed 39 of their 1,057 amphibious assault vehicles that provide protection against small arms but not rocket-propelled grenades.

Still, Army officers said they won’t complete adding armor to their vehicles until October.

Senior Marine Corps officers, meanwhile, stressed in interviews that they are making every effort to add armor to their vehicles.

There is “a paucity of armored vehicles” in Iraq, said Catto, who heads the office that purchases and builds weapons systems. By May 1, every Marine vehicle in Iraq was due to have interim armor and ballistic glass available, he said.

But officers of both services said bolting armor on existing Humvees and trucks is far from satisfactory. Many vehicles simply can’t carry the extra weight, and, when they can, become difficult to maneuver.

And as the Israeli experience suggests, encasing troops in armor cuts them off from the outside world.

“Clearly, if you are going into a hostile area you want to protect yourself — but you don’t want to live like a turtle,” said Col. Philip Exner, a senior Marine staff officer who just returned from Iraq.

It is critical that Marines interact with the population, Exner said.

“There is always a trade-off between protection and your ability to engage people in the streets,” he said. “To focus exclusively on protection is to forget why you are there in the first place — to engage, not just survive.”

Report Says Iraq War Lost

Via List 5.8.04 WASHINGTON [MENL] -- **The United States was deemed as unable to win the insurgency war in Iraq.**

A report by the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies asserted that the United States no longer has a military solution for Iraq. Authored by Anthony Cordesman, the report said any U.S. military solution would result in massive civilian casualties and collateral damage and fail to end the Shi'ite or Sunni insurgency.

"The U.S. can of course defeat the Iraqis," the report said. "However, any military solution is now likely to be the kind of 'victory' that creates a new firestorm over excessive force, civilian casualties, and collateral damage. **At the same time, the U.S. cannot hope to kill or arrest all of the Sunni and foreign insurgents that exist now and is almost certain to create far more than it destroys.**"

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to the E-mail address up top. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential.

Just Go...

Friday, May 07, 2004 Girl Blog from Iraq <http://www.riverbendblog.blogspot.com/>

We'll take our chances- just take your Puppets, your tanks, your smart weapons, your dumb politicians, your lies, your empty promises, your rapists, your sadistic torturers and go.

People are seething with anger- the pictures of Abu Ghraib and the Brits in Basrah are everywhere. Every newspaper you pick up in Baghdad has pictures of some American or British atrocity or another. It's like a nightmare that has come to life.

Everyone knew this was happening in Abu Ghraib and other places seeing the pictures simply made it all more real and tangible somehow. American and British politicians have the audacity to come on television with words like, "True the people in Abu Ghraib are criminals, but" Everyone here in Iraq knows that there are thousands of innocent people detained. Some were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, while others were detained 'under suspicion'. **In the New Iraq, it's "guilty until proven innocent by some miracle of God".**

Through all of this, where is the Governing Council? Under what rock are the Puppets hiding? Why is no one condemning this? What does Bremer have to say for himself and for the Americans? Why this unbearable silence?

I don't understand the 'shock' Americans claim to feel at the lurid pictures. You've seen the troops break down doors and terrify women and children, curse, scream, push, pull and throw people to the ground with a boot over their head. You've seen troops shoot civilians in cold blood. You've seen them bomb cities and towns. You've seen them burn cars and humans using tanks and helicopters. *Is this latest debacle so very shocking or appalling?*

The number of killings in the south has also risen. The Americans and British are saying that they are 'insurgents' and people who are a part of Al-Sadir's militia, but people from Najaf are claiming that innocent civilians are being killed on a daily basis. Today the troops entered Najaf and there was fighting in the streets. This is going to cause a commotion because Najaf is considered a holy city and is especially valuable to Shi'a all over the world.

I sometimes get emails asking me to propose solutions or make suggestions. Fine. Today's lesson: don't rape, don't torture, don't kill *and get out while you can*- while it still looks like you have a choice... Chaos? Civil war? Bloodshed? We'll take our chances- just take your Puppets, your tanks, your smart weapons, your dumb politicians, your lies, your empty promises, your rapists, your sadistic torturers and go.

TROOP NEWS

**Multiple Extensions Infuriating
Military Families:
“We Feel Like We Have Been Strung
Along.”**

Army Times May 10, 2004, Associated Press

Spc. Scott Peterson, 30, a member of the Iowa National Guard's Detachment 1, Company F, 106th Aviation Regiment, learned last month that his tour of duty was extended for a third time.

And that's not making his wife very happy.

The 106th consists of some of the nearly 23,000 soldiers nationwide who recently had their time of duty extended. "I know he's over there doing his job," said Kelly Peterson, 30, of Cole Valley, Ill. **"But the military and the president need to understand that these are people's families.**

Sometimes I think they forget these are people's sons, husbands, wives."

Her husband is a member of a helicopter unit that flies the CH-47D Chinook. Two members of the unit, Chief Warrant Officer Bruce A. Smith, 41, of West Liberty, and Sgt. Paul Fisher, 39, of Cedar Rapids, died from injuries sustained when the helicopter they were in was shot down in November.

Peterson said the news that her husband won't be home until at least fall hit hard. But in fact, these heartbreaking extensions are becoming ritual, she said.

"We've had so many extensions before, but this one really shocked a lot of us," Peterson said. "I honestly had thought in my mind he was going to be home this summer."

The unit's 90 soldiers were deployed in February 2003 and sent to Iraq two months later.

It's possible this won't be the unit's final extension, said Lt. Col. Greg Hapgood, Iowa Guard spokesman.

"The president has the ability to order the National Guard for up to two years, so they can be extended any number of times during 730 days," Hapgood said.

Once a soldier's two-year stint is finished, he can't be called up again, Hapgood said. But until then, "They don't belong to us."

The 106th's homecoming celebration planned for May 15 has been postponed.

So has Spc. Ben Beaudry's June 5 wedding to the mother of his 6-month-old son, Stacey Madden, 22, of Davenport.

"We feel like we have been strung along," said Peggy Beaudry, the soldier's mother. "We recognize that he has a job to do and we're proud of him, but we still want him home."

GET SOME TRUTH: CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER

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 - 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. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers. <http://www.traveling-soldier.org/>

Extending Marines Iraq Tour Being Planned

May 10, 2004 By Matthew Cox, Army Times staff writer

While top Defense Department officials continue to sell June 30 as the start of better times in Iraq, **Pentagon staffers are only certain of one thing: the date when combat forces are no longer needed in Iraq is nowhere in sight.**

The initial plan is to keep the Marines in Iraq for seven months through October. **But depending on the ground situation, commanders could decide to extend the current Marine force for three months, through about December, or bring in fresh replacements, the Pentagon planner said.**

"We are trying to make this a joint solution ... I think you will probably see a Marine-Army joint presence for a while," said one Pentagon planner. **He spoke on the condition that he remain anonymous.**

(See the following item for more on this hopeless situation.)

Enduring Stupidity Award For 2004 So Far; A Handful Of Rolling Coffins Replace Whole Division In Mosul

May 10, 2004 By Matthew Cox, Army Times staff writer

Another form of relief came with the November deployment of the first of the Army's six planned Stryker brigade combat teams.

Because of its ability to move quickly and cover large areas, the 3rd Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division (SBCT), out of Fort Lewis, Wash., was able to take over the Mosul area from the entire 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) in February.

The Army's second Stryker brigade — the 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry (SBCT), also from Fort Lewis — completed its final certification exercise at the Joint Readiness Training

Center, Fort Polk, La., on April 1 and is waiting for Forces Command to validate it as ready for deployment, said Stryker spokesman Capt. Tim Beninato.

A not-so-public option being discussed at the Pentagon is to deploy the second Stryker Brigade ahead of schedule in July to relieve the 20,000 extended soldiers if the situation doesn't improve after the June 30 hand-over, the Pentagon planner said.

(These Stryker soft targets with some weak, pasted-on armor are supposed to replace a whole Division in Mosul? Brilliant. Why not use elephants and have the troops ride on top. They're as well protected, no less maneuverable, just as stealthy, and can move faster.)

MORE:

Strykers: Hopeless Deathtraps; Rumsfeld (The Soldier-Killer) Ignored Official Warning

May 10 issue Newsweek, By Michael Hirsh

The Army's chief weapons tester said Strykers were not safe against RPGs. Then the Army shipped them to Iraq

Tom Christie was worried. It was the fall of 2003, and the Pentagon's chief weapons tester had noted problems with the Army's pride and joy, the new Stryker Armored Vehicle. The \$4 billion program was seen as the vanguard of the lighter, high-speed Army of the future. **But even with new add-on armor, the Stryker "did not meet Army requirements" against rocket-propelled grenades in tests, Christie wrote in his 2003 annual report.** Now the Pentagon was about to deploy the first 300 Strykers to Iraq while an insurgency raged.

So Christie did something unusual: he sent a classified letter to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's office urging the military to be very cautious about where in Iraq it deployed the Stryker. The response? **"I was slapped down," says the straight-talking Christie. "It was: 'What are we supposed to do with this [letter]? ... Are you trying to embarrass somebody?' "**

There may be embarrassment to come. Six months after that exchange, the fighting in Iraq has called into question not only the Stryker's effectiveness but the Army's shift toward a lighter, faster infantry.

Many soldiers killed and wounded in Iraq were traveling in thin-skinned Humvees, which ride on rubber tires like the Stryker.

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to the E-mail

address up top. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential.

Third ID Fucked Again, And Again, And Again

May 10, 2004 By Matthew Cox, Army Times staff writer

One of the most immediate demands could be the need to send more ground forces to Iraq — ahead of a third rotation — to relieve the 20,000 troops of the 1st Armored Division and 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment extended in country last month. But that's a move that goes against the Pentagon's plan to have units at home for one year between combat deployments.

“Some of the people in this building were planning for the best-case scenario and hoping for that,” said one Pentagon planner. He spoke on the condition that he remain anonymous. “That’s why we really don’t want to get caught up on set return times — because the enemy has a vote.”

If the situation doesn't improve after the June 30 hand-over, the Pentagon planner said, an alternative acknowledged by Gen. Peter Schoomaker, chief of staff, could be to **deploy the 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized) earlier than the present plan to deploy it in November.**

The 3rd ID led the assault into Iraq at the war's opening and came home late last summer. It is the first to reorganize under the unit-of-action plan and were told weeks ago that it should be ready to go back to Iraq in November for OIF III.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Class And Resistance: “The U.S. Lost The War April 9 This Year”

Doug Lorimer, Green Left Weekly, May 5, 2004 & by Aljazeera May 1st, 2004 & by Agence France Presse, The Jordan Times, May 3rd, 2004

“Fallujah will be their Stalingrad. The Euphrates will be a river of their blood. Now the resistance is spreading all over Iraq and everyone is coming to Fallujah to

help us. It will not be conquered.” These comments by Amar Abbas, a Fallujah electrical engineer, were quoted by the April 26 London *Daily Telegraph*.

Abbas and other members of his extended family had been forced to flee Fallujah when the US marines launched their offensive on April 5 to retake the city, which had been liberated by its armed residents from the control of US Army paratroopers in early February.

Abbas spoke from his bed in a temporary hospital on the outskirts of Fallujah, where he was preparing for an operation to remove shrapnel from his jaw. The family had taken refuge in the nearby village of Naamiya. However, **a US missile strike on the village had killed a dozen people and left Abbas' eight-year-old son horribly disfigured. The only words his son had spoken since he was so badly injured were, “I hate the Americans”.**

Bessam Jarrah, a Baghdad surgeon who has been coordinating efforts to send volunteer physicians to treat the wounded in Fallujah, told the *LA Times*: “In the first months of the occupation, we, the educated people, thought America would show us a humanitarian way, a political way, to solve problems. But America is using Saddam's approach to problems: brute force.”

He added that the US occupiers had “lost the war on April 9 this year — that is what Iraqis feel”.

The April 22 *New York Times* reported that when it interviewed shopkeepers along the up-market commercial boulevard of Baghdad's Outer Karada neighbourhood, they made comments “dripping with venom at the American occupiers”.

“More than anything else”, the *NYT* reported, “Falluja has become a galvanizing battle, a symbol around which many Iraqis rally their anticolonial sentiments”.

Referring to the US assault on Fallujah, Towfeek Hussein, the owner-operator of an electronic goods shop, said: “Frankly, we started to hate the Americans for that. The Americans will hit any family. They just don't care.”

His sentiments were echoed by Hassan al Wakeel, the owner-manager of a men's designer clothing shop: “My opinion of the Americans has changed. When the Americans came, they talked about freedom and democracy. Now, the Americans are pushing their views by force. All of us feel that.”

“People like Mr Wakeel and Mr Hussein”, the *NYT* added, “are the kind of middle-class Iraqis that the Americans are relying on to help them rebuild the country, with livelihoods already rooted in the principles of free-market capitalism. Yet their sense of kinship with Iraqis in Falluja, Najaf and elsewhere runs deeper than any pull toward abstract notions of democracy offered by the Americans — notions that to them appear increasingly hypocritical given the reliance of the occupiers on overwhelming force as a means to an end.”

Of course, **the real capitalists in Iraq — unlike these middle-class shopkeepers — tend to have a different view of the US-led occupation. Their attitude was more**

typically expressed by Abbas Ali, the Shiite owner of an electronics factory. The April 7 *Kansas City Star* reported: “Pro-American to the core, he's taught his three children, aged 3 to 13, to say, ‘Long Live USA!’... He wants Washington to pour more US forces into the country, and estimates 750,000 would do the trick.”

The hatred of the US occupiers expressed by the shopkeepers interviewed by the *NYT*, however, is widespread among Iraqi working people. The April 11 *NYT* cited the comments of Maneer Munthir, a 35-year-old labourer in Baghdad, as being typical of the views of working-class Iraqis: “Americans are attacking Shiite and Sunni at the same time. They have crossed a line. I had to get a gun.”

The article added that while many Iraqis “said that they did not consider themselves full-time freedom fighters” — because they “have jobs in vegetable shops, offices, garages and schools” — when “the time comes, they say they will line up behind their leaders — with guns” — against the US occupiers.

The key political problem for Washington is that *the Iraqi people agreed with Kimmitt's claim that the people of Fallujah are being held hostage and terrorised by foreign fighters. But they recognise that these foreign fighters are the US troops besieging the city.*

The May 1 London *Daily Telegraph* reported that US commanders “argued that there had been no deal with the insurgents and the marines leaving the city were not handing over control but simply ‘repositioning’ their forces”. However, it added that US troops and tanks had “left Fallujah after pulling down barbed wire defences around the soft drinks factory where they had set up a base for the past three weeks. Up to 80 marines remained but were expected to withdraw to a base outside Fallujah last night.”

Senior marine officers have been careful to avoid presenting the move as a withdrawal from Falluja, where they lost dozens of men after laying siege to the city on 5 April.

But since the decision to send in the new force, marines have given up their main foothold in the city and pulled back to camps further away. They still have some positions on the outskirts of the city, but are expecting to move out of those within days.

The *Telegraph* added that US officials in Washington had “decided the political risks of fighting for Fallujah street by street were too great. Abandoning much bellicose rhetoric about wiping out the foreign fighters and Saddam loyalists, US commanders decided to allow at least some of these elements to police the city with their blessing.”

The Qatar-based Arabic satellite TV station Aljazeera, which had reporters in Fallujah throughout the US siege, commented on May 1: “After promising to ‘liberate’ Fallujah for the second time in a year, the US failed to do so and as they retreat the Fallujah fighters are viewing this as a military victory against the occupation forces.”

It added that the US decision to hand over Fallujah to an Iraqi-commanded military force “sets a dangerous precedent” for the US-led occupation forces “as if/when other cities turn against the occupation they will know if they can beat the siege for long-enough they will soon get their own Iraqi army back into their town”.

Young fighters, brandishing AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenade launchers greeted those returning home through the checkpoints decorated by Iraqi flags after a month of fighting with US Marines.

Fallujah residents returned greetings by throwing candies to the fighters, who covered their faces with traditional chequered keffiyahs. Others flashed "V" for victory as they drove their cars over slogans written on the asphalt denouncing the United States and its President George W. Bush.

57% Of Iraqis Want Immediate Withdrawal

(For a little while, Bremer was peddling the line at press conferences that “Of course Iraqis want us to leave, but they also want us to stay.” Sorry Paul, game over. And this poll was taken before the prison abuse photos hit. And what % of Iraqis do you suppose might have a little reluctance to tell a U.S. polling operation they want the occupation to get the fuck out, given how easy it is to end up in Bremer’s prisons?)

Even before the US occupiers launched their assault on Fallujah, Iraqi public opinion was solidly opposed to the US-led occupation. According to a *USA Today/CNN/Gallup* poll of 3444 Iraqis conducted between March 22 and April 9, 71% said they saw the US and allied foreign troops in Iraq as “occupiers”, while only 19% said they viewed them as “liberators”. **Fifty-seven percent wanted the foreign troops to leave “immediately”.**

“More and more Iraqis who once resented — but tolerated — Americans now refuse to even talk to them”, the April 18 *Los Angeles Times* reported.

**OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION
BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME NOW!**

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

First Casualties

Thanks to bruce_mcphie2004@yahoo.com.au for sending this in:

**"In times of war, the first casualty is truth."
In times of war the first truth, is casualties of all kinds.**

U.S. Strategy At Najaf

May 6 by Rahul Mahajan

The reason for the withdrawal from Fallujah but the renewed intensity in Najaf is likely a calculation that the Mehdi Army's base of support in Najaf is a minority and that other Shi'a clerics are increasingly uncomfortable with Sadr, while in Fallujah the mujaheddin were so obviously just townspeople defending the town.

The calls by some senior Shi'a clergy for Sadr and his people to leave Najaf and fight with the Americans somewhere else must have been taken as signs of sufficient isolation that a careful assault that spared the holy shrines but targeted the Mehdi Army could work.

Remember that the poor, downtrodden, unemployed Shi'a who form the Mehdi Army are exactly the ones who were supposedly going to be "liberated" – now they are facing the ultimate liberation.

OCCUPATION REPORT

Ashcroft Picked Man Fired For U.S. Prison Inmate Death To Open Abu Ghraib

May 8, 2004 By FOX BUTTERFIELD, New York Times & by Normon Solomon published by Media Beat

<p>If ordinary young men and women are prone to committing torture in a situation of occupation, then perhaps occupation is to blame. Azmi Bishara, Al-Ahram Weekly 6-12 May 2004</p>
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Physical and sexual abuse of prisoners, similar to what has been uncovered in Iraq, takes place in American prisons with little public knowledge or concern, according to corrections officials, inmates and human rights advocates.

In Pennsylvania and some other states, inmates are routinely stripped in front of other inmates before being moved to a new prison or a new unit within their prison. In

Arizona, male inmates at the Maricopa County jail in Phoenix are made to wear women's pink underwear as a form of humiliation.

At Virginia's Wallens Ridge maximum security prison, new inmates have reported being forced to wear black hoods, in theory to keep them from spitting on guards, and said they were often beaten and cursed at by guards and made to crawl.

The corrections experts say that some of the worst abuses have occurred in Texas, whose prisons were under a federal consent decree during much of the time President Bush was governor because of crowding and violence by guards against inmates. Judge William Wayne Justice of Federal District Court imposed the decree after finding that guards were allowing inmate gang leaders to buy and sell other inmates as slaves for sex.

The experts also point out that the man who directed the reopening of the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq last year and trained the guards there resigned under pressure as director of the Utah Department of Corrections in 1997 after an inmate died while shackled to a restraining chair for 16 hours. The inmate, who suffered from schizophrenia, was kept naked the whole time.

The Utah official, Lane McCotter, later became an executive of a private prison company, one of whose jails was under investigation by the Justice Department when he was sent to Iraq as part of a team of prison officials, judges, prosecutors and police chiefs picked by Attorney General John Ashcroft to rebuild the country's criminal justice system.

Mr. McCotter, 63, is director of business development for Management & Training Corporation, a Utah-based firm that says it is the third-largest private prison company, operating 13 prisons. **In 2003, the company's operation of the Santa Fe jail was criticized by the Justice Department and the New Mexico Department of Corrections for unsafe conditions and lack of medical care for inmates. No further action was taken.**

Nationwide, during the last quarter century, over 40 state prison systems were under some form of court order, for brutality, crowding, poor food or lack of medical care, said Marc Mauer, assistant director of the Sentencing Project, a research and advocacy group in Washington that calls for alternatives to incarceration.

In a 1999 opinion, Judge Justice wrote of the situation in Texas, "Many inmates credibly testified to the existence of violence, rape and extortion in the prison system and about their own suffering from such abysmal conditions."

In a case that began in 2000, a prisoner at the Allred Unit in Wichita Falls, Tex., said he was repeatedly raped by other inmates, even after he appealed to guards for help, and was allowed by prison staff to be treated like a slave, being bought and sold by various prison gangs in different parts of the prison. The inmate, Roderick Johnson, has filed suit against the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

Asked what Mr. Bush knew about abuse in Texas prisons while he was governor, Trent Duffy, a White House spokesman, said the problems in American prisons were not comparable to the abuses exposed at Abu Ghraib.

Chase Riveland, a former secretary of corrections in Washington State and Colorado and now a prison consultant based near Seattle, said, "In some jurisdictions in the United States there is a prison culture that tolerates violence, and it's been there a long time."

This culture has been made worse by the quadrupling of the number of prison and jail inmates to 2.1 million over the last 25 years, which has often resulted in crowding, he said. The problems have been compounded by the need to hire large numbers of inexperienced and often undertrained guards, Mr. Riveland said.

At the Stop Prisoner Rape organization, executive director Lara Stemple points out: "For women, whose abusers are often corrections officers, the rates of sexual assault are as high as one in four in some facilities."

Some states have a hard time recruiting enough guards, Mr. Riveland said, particularly Arizona, where the pay is very low. "Retention in these states is a big problem and so unqualified people get promoted to be lieutenants or captains in a few months," he said.

Something like this process may have happened in Iraq, where the Americans tried to start a new prison system with undertrained military police officers from Army reserve units, Mr. Riveland suggested.

When Mr. Ashcroft announced the appointment of the team to restore Iraq's criminal justice system last year, including Mr. McCotter, he said, "Now all Iraqis can taste liberty in their native land, and we will help make that freedom permanent by assisting them to establish an equitable criminal justice system based on the rule of law and standards of basic human rights."

A Justice Department spokeswoman, Monica Goodling, did not return phone calls on Friday asking why Mr. Ashcroft had chosen Mr. McCotter even though his firm's operation of the Santa Fe jail had been criticized by the Justice Department.

Mr. McCotter has a long background in prisons. He had been a military police officer in Vietnam and had risen to be a colonel in the Army. His last post was as warden of the Army prison at Fort Leavenworth.

After retiring from the Army, Mr. Cotter was head of the corrections departments in New Mexico and Texas before taking the job in Utah.

In Utah, in addition to the death of the mentally ill inmate, Mr. McCotter also came under criticism for hiring a prison psychiatrist whose medical license was on probation and who was accused of Medicaid fraud and writing prescriptions for drug addicts.

In an interview with an online magazine, Corrections.com, last January, Mr. McCotter recalled that of all the prisons in Iraq, Abu Ghraib *"is the only place we*

agreed as a team was truly closest to an American prison. They had cell housing and segregation." (And a whole lot more.)

But 80 to 90 percent of the prison had been destroyed, so Mr. McCotter set about rebuilding it, everything from walls and toilets to handcuffs and soap. He employed 100 Iraqis who had worked in the prison under Saddam Hussein, **and paid for everything with wads of cash, up to \$3 million, that he carried with him.**

Mr. McCotter said he worked closely with American military police officers at the prison, but he did not give any names.

Military Prison Guard Just Did What Comes Naturally; Very Well Trained In The U.S.A.

CBS News April 29th, 2004 & By Neil Mackay, May 2nd, 2004 Sunday Herald

One of the soldiers facing court martial is Army Reserve Staff Sgt. Chip Frederick.

Frederick is charged with maltreatment for allegedly participating in and setting up a photo, and for posing in a photograph by sitting on top of a detainee. He is charged with an indecent act for observing one scene. He is also charged with assault for allegedly striking detainees – and ordering detainees to strike each other.

He's a corrections officer at a Virginia prison, whose warden described Frederick to us as "one of the best." (At tormenting prisoners, he probably is.)

In our phone conversation, 60 Minutes II asked Frederick whether he had seen any prisoners beaten.

"I saw things. We had to use force sometimes to get the inmates to cooperate, just like our rules of engagement said," says Frederick. "We learned a little bit of Arabic, basic commands. And they didn't want to listen, so sometimes, you would just give them a little nudge or something like that just to get them to cooperate so we could get the mission accomplished." (Every sadistic prison guard who ever got caught comes out with the same kind of whining excuses you just read. Stomp, beat, break some bones, pepper spray a prisoner into unconsciousness and let him lie for a day in his own vomit? Hey, that's just "a little nudge.")

Frederick also blamed the intelligence services for encouraging the brutality. Among the agencies coming to the prison were "military intelligence", says Frederick, adding: "We had all kinds of other government agencies, FBI, CIA."

Former Marine Lt. Col. Bill Cowan said **"We will be paid back for this. These people at some point will be let out,"** says Cowan. **"Their families are gonna know. Their friends are gonna know."**

This is a hard story to have to tell when Americans are fighting and dying in Iraq. **And for Cowan, it's a personal issue. His son is an infantry soldier serving in Iraq for the last four months.**

"If we don't tell this story, these kinds of things will continue. And we'll end up getting paid back 100 or 1,000 times over," says Cowan. **(You got that right. There will be payback. From the resistance, which just picked up another 50,000 adherents, bare minimum.)**

Cover-Up Working Just Fine: Generals' Charges That Mil Intel And CIA Behind Iraqi Prison Abuse Ignored In Media Shitstorm

Agence France Presse, May 2nd, 2004

Brigadier-General Janis Karpinski told The New York Times in a telephone interview that the special high-security cellblock at the Abu Ghraib prison outside Baghdad had been under the direct control of army intelligence officers, not the reservists under her command.

Karpinski says intelligence officers are still at work in Iraq.

"We're disposable," she is quoted as saying. "Why would they want the active-duty people to take the blame? They want to put this on the MPs and hope that this thing goes away. Well, it's not going to go away."

Karpinski said the special cellblock, known as 1A, was one of about two dozen cellblocks in the large prison complex and was essentially off limits to soldiers who were not part of the interrogations, including virtually all of the military police under her command, the paper said.

She added she was also alarmed that little attention has been paid to the army military intelligence unit that controlled Cellblock 1A, where her soldiers guarded the Iraqi detainees between interrogations, The Times said.

She said military intelligence officers were in and out of the cellblock "24 hours a day," often to escort prisoners to and from an interrogation centre away from the prison cells.

"They were in there at two in the morning, they were there at four in the afternoon," General Karpinski is quoted as saying. "This was no nine-to-five job."

Karpinski also said that CIA employees often participated in the interrogations at the prison complex, according to the report.

Bremer Takes Baath

May 3rd, 2004, The New York Times, by John F. Burns and Ian Fisher

To American officers who chose him, Gen. Amer Bakr al-Hashimi had one overriding qualification for his recent appointment as commander of Iraq's new army: Among 11,000 generals under Saddam Hussein, he was one of a handful who had refused to join Mr. Hussein's Baath party.

But during a meeting with other former Iraqi generals this past week, when General Hashimi was asked by a reporter what he thought of having served under Mr. Hussein, he responded: "I feel proud."

The fact that the man named by the Americans to head the new army would not distance himself from Mr. Hussein indicates how far things have moved in the past month. Confronted by uprisings in Falluja and Najaf, and a surge of anti-American violence elsewhere, the American occupation authority has cast about urgently for new ways of stabilizing the country before matters spin out of control, the nightmare of many senior American officials here.

Like a storm-tossed ship's master calling all hands, Paul Bremer has reached out to members of the old government, holding out the prospect of return to thousands of former officials and Baath Party members.

When asked if the new army would recruit officers who fought Americans in Kuwait in 1991 — or in the invasion last year — an American officer, a 1991 war veteran, was blunt. "I don't care if they fought against us, as long as they didn't rape any villages," he said.

Shiites, disunited on this issue as on many others, have reacted to Mr. Bremer's course change in complex ways that reflect the underlying battle over Iraq's past — and over who will lead the country going forward. **While the militant Mr. Sadr and his followers have reacted virulently, more moderate groups have presented more layered messages. Moderate Shiites, generally, seem ready to accept at least some degree of "re-Baathification" as the price for moving away from the current instability and back towards the political path mapped out by the Americans.**

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

“Life” In A War Zone

May 05, 2004 By Ann Scott Tyson, Special Correspondent, Christian Science Monitor

ORGUN, AFGHANISTAN – "Incoming!" a soldier shouts when the first rocket explodes outside a dusty US military outpost near the Pakistan border.

It's dusk - the guerrillas' favorite time to strike and then slip away.

Moments later, the shrill, descending whistle of another rocket ends with a boom and dark cloud several hundred yards to our right.

Soldiers pull on their helmets and flak vests and bound toward a concrete bunker reinforced with sandbags. After they're crammed inside, nervous energy fuels black humor. "You're a lousy aim!" one GI yells toward the adjacent mountainside.

"Everything's half off tomorrow at the *haji* market," says another, imitating a vendor at the weekly Afghan bazaar. "You buy blankets, I buy rockets!" he says. The harassing attack drags on for more than an hour.

Life for US troops in Afghanistan's lawless borderlands is often like this, a swirl of danger and drollery, of combat and coping.

Here in rugged Paktika Province, soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division's 1-87 Battalion have spent months operating from small, dark, mud-brick encampments that are some of the US military's most remote and spartan bases.

It's a daily struggle, not just against Taliban and Al Qaeda insurgents, but with loneliness, boredom, and the trauma of losing their own. A handful of soldiers, unable to take the stress, has been temporarily evacuated or repatriated. Yet most show resilience as they grapple with risk, entertain one another, and wonder about life at home.

In December, when a Monitor reporter visited the Orgun firebase, a sign painted in big red letters on the wall of the cramped weight room read: "The Enemy Trained to Kill You Today. What Did You Do?"

Inside the camp's low walls, signs like these - along with paintings commemorating three fallen comrades - are a reminder of dangers lurking "outside the wire."

Sgt. Paul Roberts, a medic with 1-87's Charlie Company, strains to complete another set of bench-presses with 135 pounds. "It helps keep my morale up to keep fit and ready," he says, as one of the battalion's adopted dogs curls up nearby.

Amid the rhythm of rolling out on uncertain missions and coming back to clean weapons and pull guard duty, humor is another constant outlet for the soldiers.

Pfc. Joshua Howe, an infantryman from Newport, N.H., cultivates a goofy image. Nicknamed Clark Kent, he makes a point of driving his Humvee while wearing a pair of glasses that have no lenses. "I figure we could die any minute," he says, "so we might as well have some fun."

Like generations before them, many of the soldiers also develop a superstitious side, never leaving camp without certain amulets, coins, or other "protective" charms.

One young lieutenant reaches into his pocket and pulls out a worn silver dollar. "My great-uncle was wounded in France in World War II," says Lt. Johnny Ulsamer. "When he was in the hospital he would rub this," he says, feeling the coin's smooth face.

Veteran Staff Sgt. Michael Raymond finds solace - and an unusual leadership tool - in the form of an eight-inch GI Joe action figure he calls "Ranger Buddy."

"My son wanted to come with me, and he couldn't, so he told me to take Ranger Buddy instead," says Sergeant Raymond of Trout River, N.Y. He carries the figure everywhere in the back of his flak vest and whispers to it during night patrols.

"It breaks the fear and monotony," he says, adding, "I have to have someone watching my backside."

As the leader of a 13-man squad, Raymond also uses the figure to show his men he's human. "I guess you could say I still play with dolls," he says, "but I did all the macho stuff, and I'm also 42, so I don't have to be [tough] all the time."

Some soldiers draw strength from a more somber source, a belief that those killed in action are protecting them.

Cpl. Chris Dedrick, of Delevan, N.Y., looks far younger than his 21 years, but is already serving his second tour in Afghanistan. He carries with him a woven tag bearing the name "Fuller," which belonged to his friend and former platoon member Spc. Chad Fuller, a sniper killed in an ambush in August.

"It feels like he's with us when we go on patrol," Corporal Dedrick says softly, "like he's watching us."

For others, the memory of the dead is more troubling.

Pvt. Joseph Meadows of 1-87's Alpha Company has been in some scrapes before. An orphan raised by his grandmother in West Virginia, he grew up making trouble and joined the Army to avoid three years in jail.

Yet nothing prepared the impish soldier for the close combat he's seen in Afghanistan. More than once, enemy machine-gun bursts have shredded the limbs of a tree where he took cover.

While committed to his job, any bravado Private Meadows felt about soldiering has faded. "You'd have to be crazy to actually want to kill someone," he says. Weighed down by his rucksack, he says he throws up every time he's in combat.

He also has few illusions about dying for his country. "You're only a hero a few days," he estimates, "unless you've done something spectacular, and then they'll name a road after you or something."

In his most difficult moment, Meadows saw a good friend die. Pvt. Evan O'Neill was shot in an intense fight near the Pakistani border on Sept. 29. "It messes with your mind," says Meadows, as he sits on his cot sewing a button on his pants.

At night, his ears ring so badly that he hums himself to sleep. Then, he says, he dreams about O'Neill.

At 6 a.m. sharp, 1st Sgt. Andrew Spano's voice blasts over the loudspeaker system he rigged up the night before at the tiny, mud-walled US compound perched on the Afghanistan border at Shkin.

Making a noise that sounds like a kazoo, Sergeant Spano "plays" Reveille, causing soldiers to groan in their bunks. Puppies with names like JDAM (a GPS-guided bomb) poke their noses out of houses the soldiers built for them.

"Wakey! Wakey! It's time for tea and cakey!" Spano says brightly.

Then, just in case anyone is still asleep, he puts on the screaming lyrics of "Bodies" by the hard-metal rock band Drowning Pool. It's a theme song of sorts for US troops:

*"Skin against skin, blood and bone
You're all by yourself but you're not alone
You wanted in
Now you're here
Driven by hate, consumed by fear
Let the bodies hit the floor, Let the bodies hit the floor...
Nothing's wrong with me, Nothing's wrong with me..
Something's gotta give, Something's gotta give..."*

A few days later, Spano's announcement system mysteriously breaks; sabotage is suspected.

In between combat missions, 1-87 soldiers often resort to pranks, self-parodies, and other concocted entertainment that builds camaraderie and eases cabin fever in the isolated outpost.

Soldiers celebrating birthdays here have been dragged out of bed, handcuffed with plastic strips, bound in olive-green duct tape, and then doused with cold water, shaving cream, and various table seasonings.

"The [Afghan] interpreters saw us in the middle of the compound and started asking 'Qaeda? Qaeda?' They thought we were detainees," said one soldier who got the late-night treatment.

Homemade entertainment passes the time

Soldiers of 1-87's Charlie Company have staged more creative diversions to break up the camp's long hours of darkness.

One night, they put on a skit spoofing their commanders using puppets they fashioned out of Popsicle sticks.

On another, they had a movie and bonfire. The highlight, though, was "casino night," an evening of blackjack, craps, and other betting games in which the soldiers used live bullets from their weapons as chips. "One round equaled \$5 worth of stuff," says Cpl. Clayton Fuchs of Cortez, Colo.

Perhaps the camp's favorite entertainer is Pvt. Jeremy Wilson, a medic of the 10th Military Police. The sign on the wooden door to his mud-walled room reads "Welcome to the Pig Pen."

"It stands for pride, integrity, and guts," he says in a slow drawl.

A former band member from Scottsboro, Ala., Private Wilson says he joined the Army after losing his college scholarship because he "partied a little too much."

He's now saving money for a truck, and has found new appreciation for his musical skills, which he hopes eventually to parlay into a career.

"I take the day's events, things that are funny, and I elaborate on them," says Wilson, who composes songs that poke fun at everyone from the commanding general to the lowest private.

When he picks up his steel-stringed acoustic guitar, called a "flattop," he usually has a captive audience.

His latest musical parody is a takeoff on a song about a jilted lover, "She Hates Me" by the band Puddle of Mudd. Naturally, Wilson calls it "The Army Hates Me."

*"The haji food sometimes makes me hurl,
At least Kandahar has Air Force girls,
I have to shower with another man
And on top of that fight the Taliban.
The Army hates me..."*

Worries about what's happening back home

One of the biggest sources of comfort - but also worry - for the soldiers of 1-87 lies on the home front.

Bundles of mail delivered by helicopter bring everything from letters to boxes of fudge, Christmas trees, and hand-knit socks from Mom.

But word from home can also mean arguments and breakups, and a few soldiers say they'll be going back to empty houses.

"They say 'My girlfriend left me,' or 'I may not trust my wife; she might be out there,' " relates battalion Chaplain Ken Godwin, who adds that such relationships top the list of concerns the men bring to him.

To bridge the gulf of time and distance, some soldiers write, phone, or e-mail home as often as they can.

Pfc. Patrick Barrett keeps a daily journal for his "girl," Katie. "Today was stupid," he writes in a small green notebook one afternoon as he sits on the hood of his Humvee.

Others minimize contact with those back home - and the pain it can evoke. "I try not to call at all because it makes me sad," says Private Howe of New Hampshire, explaining that an extended deployment means he'll probably miss the birth of his first child: "I was supposed to be home, but good ol' Uncle Sam...."

Indeed, for many of these 10th Mountain Division soldiers, there's a Rip Van Winkle feeling of life passing them by while they're at war.

"When you're here, it's like everything at home is fast-forward, and you're standing still or in reverse," says Meadows, who has a girlfriend back in West Virginia. "I don't want to go home and find out my life done left me."

Received:

To: GI Special
From: Alan S.

The Situation:

7th inning stretch at the Yankee-Oakland game of 4/26 or 27. I'm standing 10 feet away from a white, working class man who just before/after (I really can't remember when) Kate Smith's rendition of "God Bless America" said "send Bush over there and let our people come back."

There wasn't a sound after the remark, obviously loud enough so that I could hear. It would seem that Kate Smith has finally been topped. Now to shut her up completely.

Solidarity

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