

GI SPECIAL 4B13:

THIS IS HOW BUSH BRINGS THE TROOPS HOME: BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW



The casket of Spc. Toccara Green in Baltimore Thursday, Aug. 25, 2005. Green was killed in an ambush in Iraq on Sunday. She is the first Maryland woman soldier to be killed in Iraq. (AP Photo/Chris Gardner)

**“My Experience In Iraq
Only Solidified My
Resolve Against The
War”**

“It's good to know that I'm not isolated, that there are a lot more people out there who think this war is wrong and want to end it. I'd like to see other veterans out there too. Tell 'em your story: where you stand.”

[Thanks to Joel G and Martin Smith, who sent this in.]

2/6/06 By Erika Claich, Chicago Flame

Interview with Eric Ahlberg, U.S. Army veteran.

Flame: What led you to join the army and how old were you when you enlisted?

Eric: I was 20 years old and just about to receive my Associate's degree from the Community College of Lake County (CLC). I wasn't sure what was next for me or how I would continue to pay for school because my parents couldn't continue to support my education any longer. My friends were getting into \$50,000 debts in order to pay for college, so money was a big issue, but it was also adventure. I needed something more than to go to school-the army seemed like the best choice to reach my goals.

Flame: Did the Army turn out to be what you had expected?

Eric: I told everyone the army was going to be my four-year vacation, but I was lying to myself. I knew that it would be hard, but reality for me was much different than the fantasy. I was clueless about army life. I didn't even know you had to shine your boots! I knew you had to deal with crap during basic training, but I didn't realize that it actually lasted throughout your entire military career. I thought it was the 'new army.' I thought they wanted smart people to run the computers and technology, but they didn't really; they wanted people who would follow the army's doctrine.

Flame: What about Afghanistan? How did you feel when you found out you were going? Was it what you had expected?

Eric: For Afghanistan as a whole we were pretty motivated. We felt, "We're going to do our job." But the first thing they told us about when we got off the plane was how to wear our boonie hat; there was no cool "your in war now" Hooah! Speech, just how to wear your hat.

That's when I knew things were going to be different than I had expected. I ended up pulling guard duty everyday, 8 hours a day, for two months, sometimes it was 12 hours. It was the most exhausting, mind-numbing thing you could imagine.

Flame: Did you want the Hooah! speech?

Eric: At first, it was what I expected. But eventually I began to look at it as "Don't masturbate (giving a long glorifying speech for your own pleasure) in front of me. Just tell me what to do, don't tell my why." They don't have to lie. If you don't do what they want you to do they'll take away your money, your time, everything. It was a real eye opener. I was like, "Wow. The army really isn't all that."

Flame: How was Iraq different than Afghanistan?

Eric: Well, in Afghanistan, at first we didn't get attacked. Our base only got mortared a few times, but we were just lucky our tour was uneventful (for the most part); a lot of people have died in Afghanistan.

In Iraq, we knew it would be different because of the death toll and the Iraqis didn't want us there. There was a lot more attacks. In the first week someone in our battalion died. He was a machine gunner; he was in the same place as I would've been on that mission. I thought, "This isn't part of my college plan. I signed up before 9/11. I didn't expect this." In Afghanistan we felt invulnerable, but in Iraq you really felt your mortality.

Flame: What turned you against the war in Iraq?

Eric: I was never for the war in Iraq. I thought it was a farce from the get go. I was still in Afghanistan when I started hearing that we were going into Iraq. I got really upset because it didn't seem like we were accomplishing much in Afghanistan. There was so much more to do there, what were we going to Iraq for?

But I signed the line. I was against the war but I had to keep it to myself. The army was "my investment." I had to go through it to get the college money.

My experience in Iraq only solidified my resolve against the war.

Flame: How were you able to make it through?

Eric: My whole method was to make sure me and my friends got home. If you're a peacekeeper, does that work? No, it doesn't. You have people that are trained to kill being peacekeepers. We didn't join the army to walk down the street and pass out flowers.

Flame: What about civilian casualties?

Eric: I'm never surprised to hear about civilians dying. Those who are don't realize that the army is trained to kill. What do you think is going to happen?

Flame: What did happen?

Eric: I saw three generations of a family mowed down by 1000 machine gun rounds. There was a grandfather, a father, and a son driving a chicken truck through a roadblock. They didn't know they were driving through a roadblock. They just didn't stop, and then they were dead. End of story.

On one other day that I will never forget, I almost killed a mother and her daughter when we were ambushed. I jumped out of the truck and pointed my gun at the area where we were drawing fire. Your adrenaline is so high, even though you've been trained to pick targets, you are ready to kill. It was very close but I didn't want to kill anyone, someone who was not the enemy. How could you live with yourself after that?

Flame: How did you and your friends deal with combat?

Eric: You can't feel safe anywhere.

I felt anxiety constantly-even going to take a shit because I was out in the open. Sarcasm was a tool for me to vent. Without it, everyone felt like they'd explode, there was so much stress and pressure.

During off time I would act like the class clown to release tension on our off time. But when we were being attacked, a common mentality was 'laughing at the face of death.' We'd nearly get hit by a mortar and everyone would laugh like, "man that was close!" I never thought that was funny. I wanted to live.

I really didn't believe in what I was doing. It made it much harder.

Flame: How did you feel about the antiwar movement here at home while you were in Iraq?

Eric: I didn't know about the movement. When you're in the army you're pretty isolated. I had no one to talk to about being against the war. The only news was FOX or CNN in short intervals.

Flame: Well, now that you're a part of the movement, what do you think about it?

Eric: It's like a big social coalition: people getting together with people to achieve something greater than themselves, to put an end to an unjust war.

It's good to know that I'm not isolated, that there are a lot more people out there who think this war is wrong and want to end it.

I'd like to see other veterans out there too.

Tell 'em your story: where you stand.

It's therapeutic.

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 inside the armed services. Send requests to address up top.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Texas Soldier Killed

February 13, 2006 The Columbus Dispatch, COLUMBUS, Ohio

The family of a central Ohio Marine killed along with two comrades in an explosion in Iraq has declined the military's offer to bury the 21-year-old at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

"He's been away long enough," Dennis Nealon, Pfc. Jacob Spann's stepfather, said Wednesday.

Spann, a Humvee machine-gunner, was helping in a transport mission in the western Iraq city of Hit early Monday when an improvised explosive device detonated under the vehicle. Two Marines died instantly and Spann died a few hours later.

He was based at Camp Lejeune, N.C., and had been stationed in Iraq since November with the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit.

Spann, called Jake by his friends, graduated from Westerville North High School in suburban Columbus in 2003, then worked at an auto-body shop.

He enlisted in the Marines because he was worried he lacked direction and self-discipline, family members said.

"I was worried at first, but he had really thought things out," said Derek Spann, his oldest brother. "I told him, 'Semper fi.'"

Jacob Spann last called home Saturday and mostly talked to his mother, Deborah Nealon. In calls home he only wanted to talk about his family, including five brothers, three sisters and four nieces and nephews, Derek Spann said.

He had hoped to marry his high-school sweetheart, Abby Van Huffel, his family said.

Soldier With Omaha Ties Dies

February 10, 2006 Internet Broadcasting Systems, Inc., OMAHA, Neb.

An American soldier with family ties to Omaha has died from injuries he suffered during an attack in Iraq.

Spc. Allen Kokesh Jr. died Tuesday from injuries he received from a roadside bomb attack in December.

His mother has lived in Omaha for the past 10 years.

Kokesh is a native of Yankton, S.D. He was with the Army National Guard's 147th Field Artillery unit

A memorial service for Kokesh will be held in Yankton.

Attack On Fuel Convoy Near Taji Wounds 3 U.S. Soldiers

02.13.2006 By SINAN SALAHEDDIN, AP

A U.S. logistics convoy was attacked by a roadside bomb north of Baghdad, killing one civilian believed to be a Pakistani truck driver and wounding three American soldiers, the military and Iraqi police said Monday.

The attack happened near Taji, about 12 miles north of Baghdad, where a major U.S. air base is located, said military spokesman Maj. Joseph Todd Breasseale. The three wounded soldiers were taken to a military hospital for treatment, he said.

Iraqi police Lt. Alaa Kamal said the convoy consisted of three fuel tankers and another truck, which was destroyed by fire. Police found the body of the vehicle's driver inside the truck and identity documents said he was Pakistani.

REALLY BAD PLACE TO BE: BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW



U.S. Marines from the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit fire 81mm mortars near the western Iraqi town of Hit, February 7, 2006. (Bob Strong/Reuters)

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Four U.S. Service Members Killed In IED Strike Near Deh Rahwod

Feb. 13, 2006 COMBINED FORCES COMMAND: AFGHANISTAN Release # 060213-04

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan: Four U.S. service members were killed today when their up-armored Humvee was struck by a suspected improvised explosive device north of Deh Rahwod in Uruzgan Province.

The service members were on patrol with Afghan National Army forces at the time of the attack.

Shortly after the attack, the patrol was engaged with small arms and rocket-propelled grenade fire. The Coalition responded with fixed and rotary wing attack aircraft to support the U.S. forces on the ground. Battle-damage assessment is ongoing.

Two Nepalese aid workers were kidnapped at gunpoint in the centre of the capital, Kabul. Two days earlier eight Afghan soldiers were killed by two roadside blasts in the Afghan province of Kunar. Initial reports say that at least one of the bombs was of a new infra-red type used recently in Iraq to kill British and US soldiers.

“The Idea That 3,300 British Troops, Can Police It Is Laughable”

Feb 12, 2006 Simon Jenkins, yahoo.com/s/huffpost [Excerpt]

I have watched America (with Tony Blair's assistance) reopen the Afghan opium trail and readmit the Taliban to southern Afghanistan.

A friend returning from Baluchistan, probably the most lawless place on earth, reports that it is awash in drug and oil money, available on demand to Taliban and al-Qaeda.

The perception that America is cutting and running from the region is enough to drive the big Arab money back towards the Taliban.

The idea that 3,300 British troops, now returning to the area, can police it is laughable.

TROOP NEWS

Cheney Approves New Weapon For Iraq Combat: Says Pentagon Will Save Billions



(AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar, File via PB)

Vice President Dick Cheney, center, inspects a prototype of the new Minus 16 rifle that will be issued in April to all U.S. forces serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Unveiled at an undisclosed location Feb. 12, the weapon will be produced by Halliburton Corporation.

In 2005, Halliburton received a \$41 billion secret emergency Defense Department grant for weapons research and development after a Pentagon task force on counterinsurgency, led by three-star General M. T. Soot, recommended development of a fresh response to the simple but effective weapons used by freedom-hating baby-eating terrorists in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“This will show the enemy that whatever they can do, we can do better,” said Cheney, pointing out that the simplified design of the new rifle not only represents a technological breakthrough, ideal for use in arid, sandy terrain, but will also save billions yearly in manufacturing costs, and save additional billions yearly in expenses for ammunition.

The new rifle uses an easily manufactured round lead ball, another technical breakthrough Cheney said was achieved by the Halliburton R & D team tasked to come up with the specialized counterinsurgency weapon.

“No other troops in the world will have this weapon,” Cheney said. “Our fighting men and women deserve nothing less.”

In other news, the Pentagon announced today that General M. T. Soot will retire May 1, 2006. He will accept a position with Halliburton Corporation as Director, Weapons Research and Development, at a salary of \$2,500,000 a year.

Halliburton would not confirm rumors that General Soot will personally take charge of a new \$10 billion Pentagon funded top secret program at Halliburton to develop technology that can replace the heavy and expensive ceramic plates used in combat body armor with compressed fish scales.

Speaking anonymously, a Halliburton official pointed out that this could save the Pentagon an additional \$40 billion a year “because the fish scales will cost next to nothing. As it is, the fish processing industry just throws them away.”

If the program is a success, the Halliburton source said the new technology can also be used to protect vehicles in combat areas. “Instead of all that heavy steel that has to be bought and installed at great expense, the troops will be issued cans of concentrated fish scale, and apply it to the vehicles themselves on the spot in Iraq or wherever.”

The source pointed out that a secret \$4 billion Defense Department grant to Halliburton for researching terrorist religious views had learned that Middle Eastern terrorist fanatics believe fish scales are “unclean.” “They think any Muslim who comes in contact them will be turned into a frog and forced to listen to speeches by President Bush for all eternity,” he said.

“This is the perfect answer to the IED problem. They won’t use them if they know that after one goes off, fish scales will be blowing around all over the place. We’ll have them where we want them.”

General Soot declined to be interviewed for this report.

Ground Crew To Pilot

[Thanks to M]

P: Left inside main tire almost needs replacement.

S: Almost replaced left inside main tire.

P: Test flight OK, except auto-land very rough.

S: Auto-land not installed on this aircraft.

P: Something loose in cockpit.

S: Something tightened in cockpit.

P: Dead bugs on windshield.

S: Live bugs on back-order.

P: Autopilot in altitude hold mode produces a 200 feet per minute descent.

S: Cannot reproduce problem on ground.

P: Evidence of leak on right main landing gear.

S: Evidence removed.

P: DME volume unbelievably loud.

S: DME volume set to more believable level.

P: Friction locks cause throttle levers to stick.

S: That's what friction locks are for.

P: IFF inoperative in OFF mode.

S: IFF always inoperative in OFF mode.

P: Suspected crack in windshield.

S: Suspect you're right.

P: Number 3 engine missing.

S: Engine found on right wing after brief search.

P: Aircraft handles funny.

S: Aircraft warned to straighten up, fly right, and be serious.

P: Target radar hums.

S: Reprogrammed target radar with lyrics.

P: Mouse in cockpit.

S: Cat installed.

P: Noise coming from under instrument panel. Sounds like a midget pounding on something with a hammer.

S: Took hammer away from midget.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Assorted Resistance Action

02.13.2006 By SINAN SALAHEDDIN, AP & Aljazeera & CBS Worldwide Inc. & Xinhua & Reuters & Agence France-Presse & Deutsche Presse-Agentur & Feb. 12, ROBERT F. WORTH, NY Times

Insurgents killed two Iraqi policemen in Baquba, north-east of Baghdad, according to hospital sources.

The sources said the two policemen were shot dead as they were waiting to have their hair cut in a barber shop. The attackers were reported to have made off in a police car.

A roadside bomb attack in Iskandariyah, 30 miles south of Baghdad, killed two policemen and wounded one, police said.

Guerrillas also shot dead a policeman protecting electricity generating facilities near a hospital in Baghdad's Sadr City.

A police colonel and a brigadier were killed on Sunday in two different incidents in Ramadi.

Insurgents also killed an Oil Ministry employee as he was driving in western Baghdad.

Iraq's former electricity minister, Ayham al-Samarie, escaped injury when a roadside bomb exploded near his three-vehicle convoy in Baghdad, said police Lt. Maitham Abdul-Razzaq. The blast wounds three of Samarraie bodyguards, one of them seriously injured.

Al-Samarie, a Sunni Arab political figure, was a member of the transitional government established after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq that toppled Saddam Hussein's regime.

The bomb targeted the convoy of al-Samarie, a dual Iraqi-U.S. citizen, as it passed through Baghdad's western Mansour district, said Mohammed al-Jibouri, an official at the ex-minister's office.

Two vehicles of Samarraie's convoy were damaged in the blast, added the source.

Guerrillas killed three brothers and two of their sons in an attack on a street in Baqouba, 35 miles northeast of Baghdad, police said. All five were identified as members of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, the country's leading [collaborator] Shiite political party, police said.

Another roadside bomb exploded in Baghdad's southwestern Baiyaa neighborhood targeting an Iraqi police patrol, wounding two policemen, police said.

A fuel truck was set on fire when gunmen fired a rocket-propelled grenade at it near the town of Dujail, about 60 km (40 miles) north of Baghdad, police said.

A policeman was killed and two others wounded on Sunday when a roadside bomb went off near their patrol in Tuz Khurmatu, police said.

Two policemen were killed and another wounded on Sunday when a roadside bomb went off near their patrol in Hilla, 100 km (62 miles) south of Baghdad, police said.

Four policemen were killed on their way home from work in the northern oil refinery town of Baiji. The policemen had taken off their uniforms, a precaution common among Iraqi security forces, and were headed to the city of Kirkuk in a civilian car when guerrillas waylaid them on the highway.

In the northern oil city of Kirkuk, gunmen assassinated Khalid Abdul Hussein Muhammad, a doctor at Haweeja General Hospital, police officials said.

Dr. Muhammad's brother, Majid Hussein Muhammad, said he had refused to treat insurgents who were injured in confrontations with American forces.

**IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE
END THE OCCUPATION**

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

This Ain't No Video Game

The relentlessness of his reporting details exactly how broad and how deep the graft and outright theft of our national treasury and soul by the rich and powerful truly is. Needless to say, it's a depressing tale.

From: Ron Jacobs

To: GI Special

Sent: February 13, 2006

This Ain't No Video Game: A Review of Jeffrey St. Clair's Grand Theft Pentagon (Common Courage, 2006)

Once upon a time in America, there was a form of newspaper reporting known as muckraking. Some folks preferred to call this form of reporting "investigative reporting."

No matter. Whatever it was called, the purpose of the reporting, the reporters, and the papers that ran the articles was to expose corruption, graft and just plain old evil in the echelons of government and big business. Of course, there was also a hope that this exposure would end the reported abuses or, at the least, get rid of the worst abusers and most corrupt men involved.

Magazines in the first wave of muckraking included McClure's, Colliers, and Everybody's and some of the better known writers were Upton Sinclair, Lincoln Steffens, and Ida Tarbell.

Over the years this type of reporting has become harder to find. Many of the magazines and journals that used to run the often long articles that investigative reporting requires fell victim to the machinations of monopoly capitalism. Of course, this was fine with the capitalists, who were often the targets of the muckrakers.

Other magazines and newspapers became the victim of the news media's shift to broadcast journalism. In the earlier days of that medium, there were many bold attempts to re-create the investigative form. Television news shows like 60 Minutes began in this mold, but now rarely present investigations that would upset the apple cart of the corporations that fund them. Currently, when shows that move in this direction do make it to television (PBS's NOW comes to mind), they are attacked by the forces they threaten and either disappear or tone down their stories, thereby becoming just one more hour of pap on the television.

During the 1950s and 1960s a few magazines appeared that represented a second wave in US muckraking: Ramparts, Scanlan's, IF Stone's Weekly and even more mainstream journals like Playboy and Esquire ran pieces that fell within the confines of this journalistic form.

Of course, perhaps the most famous investigative journalism of the past century appeared in the pages of the Washington Post and New York Times with the publication of Woodward and Bernstein's investigation of the Watergate scandals and the Pentagon Papers, respectively. For the magazines and newspapers that still exist from that short list, those golden days are ancient history. Except for the occasional series on city crime or local graft, these papers and magazines are mere shadows of their earlier selves.

Fortunately, there is Counterpunch.

Like a select few of its counterparts, this paper expands the limits of journalism, running investigative reports, commentary, announcements and cultural criticism both online and in a paper version.

Edited by Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair, this journal often reminds me of Ramparts in its glory days. Going well beyond other leftish magazines like The Nation, Mother Jones and The Progressive, and maintaining a stubborn independence not found in organizational journals, Counterpunch is a consistent source of reporting that goes to the heart of the matter. "Radical" in its essential definition.

Jeffrey St. Clair's most recent book, Grand Theft Pentagon, is a collection of muckraking exposes of the corruption and greed that help fuel Washington's wars. Many of the pieces in the book originally appeared in Counterpunch, but their presence here in one volume brings together the full force of the theft and corruption we live with.

Although the scope of the ruling elites' arrogance is easy enough to see, the scope of the corruption isn't.

St. Clair's book changes that.

The relentlessness of his reporting details exactly how broad and how deep the graft and outright theft of our national treasury and soul by the rich and powerful truly is. Needless to say, it's a depressing tale.

Whether he's detailing the fraudulent manipulations of federal contracts specified for indigenous peoples by white guys with offices in Virginia or the no-bid contracts of Halliburton and General Dynamics, St. Clair provides the reader with detail after researched detail of the grandest larceny in history.

Let me remind you; there's been some tough competition for that title. His profiles of the US's biggest war profiteers are as detailed as his profiles of those men who deal with (and for) them.

His most biting and even humorous words are saved for his profiles of the men who currently run this land. I chuckled loudly more than once while reading his chapter on George Bush that he titles "High Plains Grifter." The guy sitting next to me on the bus thought I was reading something intentionally comic, not a book about government corruption and war.

St. Clair's reportage on the apparent refusal of the Bush administration to take Osama bin Laden out of business before September 11, 2001 is a story that should get much greater play than it has.

His chapters on the business of war and its accompanying corruption and graft are like bookends to that chapter. After all, if the events of 9/11 had not happened, one wonders if the US would be at war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed, one wonders if the Bush administration would even be in power, especially since it is their use of the 9/11 events that helps them maintain their fearful hold on a substantial part of the US electorate.

Of course, if Bush weren't in the White House, one wonders how much difference it would make anyhow.

That's the danger of muckraking:-it can render the reader hopeless and cynical, especially in today's world of surveillance and all-encompassing barcode-produced data storage.

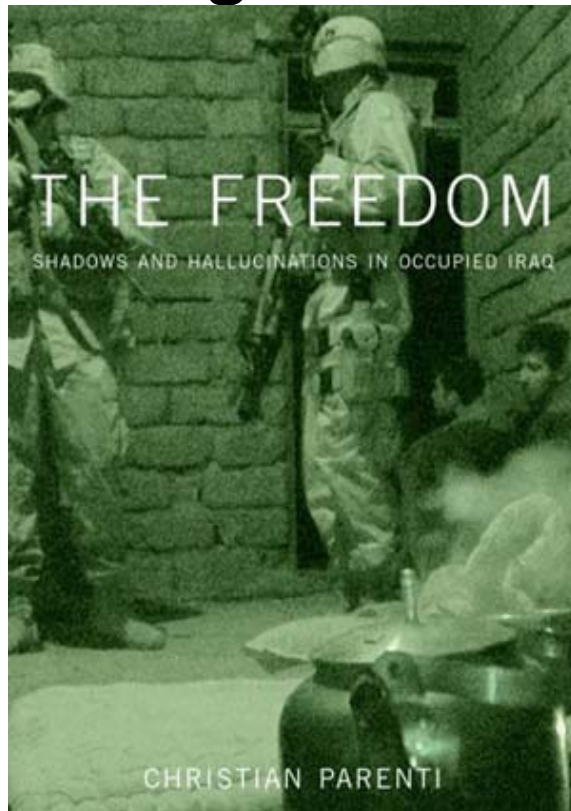
That's where the intention of the original muckrakers is important to recall. Sinclair, Steffens, Tarbell and the rest of those reporters wrote their exposés to anger and inspire their readers into taking action.

It wasn't enough to be ticked off that your government was a den of thieves and your leaders were well-connected criminals.

You had to take this knowledge and use it to change things.

Remember this after you finish Grand Theft Pentagon.

“Who Are We To Search These Peoples’ Homes? Do We Really Have The Right To Do This?”



THE FREEDOM: SHADOWS AND HALLUCINATIONS IN OCCUPIED IRAQ

During another interview, Staff Sergeant McGuire, who, like the people of Falluja, is deeply religious, puts it quite succinctly: “There’s no nice way to search someone’s house. I think about how if we did this in eastern Tennessee, where I am from, they’d just as soon shoot you as look at you.”

BY CHRISTIAN PARENTI
PHOTOGRAPHS BY TERU KUWAYAMA

The New Press, New York, November 2005
\$14.95 PB; 208 pp.
ISBN: 1-56584-948-5

[Excerpts, Part 2: Highly recommended. T]

Eventually the talk turns to the CO, Rodney Sanchez. I immediately liked Sanchez when I met him, but I soon learned that his men almost uniformly loathed him.

The CO's sins began with his first address to the troops upon taking command of the company a few months before the war. As one soldier explained it, Sanchez committed the ultimate military faux pas by immediately bragging about his background in the active-duty National Guard Special Forces. At the first company address he allegedly dipped his shoulder and crassly pointed out his "long tab," the patch reading "Special Forces."

"You just don't do that shit," says Brunelle, himself a former Army Ranger.

Like a lot of the young men in Alpha Company his father served in the military, Vietnam, and saw lots of combat. Brunelle and Crawford, both from military families, have absorbed that ethos of macho modesty: respect is earned; decorations and qualifications are not pointed out or bragged about.

The CO's next mistake was to get most of his company wiped out in a war game exercise. "We started taking fire, and he didn't wait for the PL (platoon leader) to report, he just sent us running through the woods and we all got wasted," explains a soldier.

Sanchez's final sin was committed during another botched war game, when he called in a fake artillery strike on his own forward observers. "In the regular army you'd get canned for that sort of thing," the guy comments.

As a warm-up for the invasion of Iraq it did not bode well.

Then in Iraq, Sanchez did things like micro manage ambushes and screw them up.

Howell's squad was once sent out to catch a crew of insurgents who were planning to hit the Club with RPCs, but Sanchez refused to give the squad permission to fire on the carload of attackers, even as the vehicle circled the building several times. In the end the insurgents managed to hit the Club with an RPG.

Sanchez of course blamed Howell, even though the CO had prevented the squad from firing on the attackers when the chance presented itself.

On another occasion the CO ordered Howell and Brunelle to sweep an area on foot where there was a known IED. By the time Alpha Company was garrisoned in Baghdad the soldiers under Sanchez by and large thought of him as an inept and arrogant amateur.

"It's not just the traditional thing of the grunts hating the officers: this guy really sucks," says Sellers.

These young guys from rural and suburban Florida feign a callous disregard for the world, but it is clear that the war is eating at them.

They are proud to be soldiers and don't want to come across like whiners, but they are furious about what they've been through. They hate having their lives disrupted and put at risk. They hate the military, or at least the Guard, for its stupidity, its blowhard brass living comfortably in Saddam's palaces, its feckless lieutenants who do stuff like raid the wrong house despite clear directions and worried suggestions from the grunts to consult the intelligence.

They hate Iraqis for trying to kill them. They hate the country for its dust, heat and sewage-clogged streets. They hate having killed people. And because they are, in the main, just regular, well-intentioned guys, one senses the distinct fear that someday some of them may hate themselves for what they have been forced to do here.

To assuage these pressures many turn to pharmaceuticals.

In the big city of Baghdad, "the freedom" means cheap drugs. No law and order means no need for prescriptions, so Baghdad is awash in high-quality steroids, painkillers and sedatives.

Military squads will stop on patrol and take on supplies from the local pharmacy. A lot of soldiers, in Alpha Company and elsewhere, are "juicing" on steroids, taking a subcutaneous shot in the butt once every week. It's the drug that makes you stronger, mean and angry. How could the army object?

And to calm those same 'roid-hyped emotions, there is always plenty of cheap Iranian Valium to help you get a solid night's sleep after patrol.

Among the regular Valiumheads I met in Baghdad were journalists, NGO workers, alcoholics from devout Moslem families hoping to hide their abuse, hotel staff, and an upright young college girl whose father and brother were lost somewhere in Abu Ghraib prison.

People talk about it openly, just like they talk about IEDs. "Yeah, I know it's all very stressful. Have you discovered Valium?" At times it seems like the whole city is high, floating in a diazepam haze, coasting through one deranged situation after another with pharmaceutically enhanced ease.

War and the risk of being killed give one license to do all sorts of self-destructive things.

On our last time out with Howell's squad we roll at night in two Humvees. Now there's more evident hostility from the young Iraqi men loitering in the dark. Most of these infantry soldiers don't like being stuck in vehicles. "We're legs, infantry. I hate these Humvees," says Howell while scanning the rooftops and doorways with occasional blasts from a floodlight.

At the sight of a particularly large group of youths clustered on a blacked-out corner the Humvees stop and Howell bails out into the crowd. There is no interpreter along tonight.

“Hey, guys! What’s up? How y’all doing? OK? Everything OK? All right?” asks Howell in his jaunty, laid-back north Florida accent. The sullen young men fade away into the gloom, except for two who shake the sergeant’s hand. Howell’s attempt to take the high road, winning hearts and minds, doesn’t seem to be for show. He really believes in this war. But in the hot Baghdad night his efforts seem tragically doomed.

Watching Howell I think about the civilian technocrats working with L. Paul Bremer III at the Coalition Provisional Authority. I recall a group of them drinking and laughing poolside at the cushy Al-Hamra Hotel (they cycle in on three-month contracts).

The electricity is out half the time, most people are unemployed, and the occupodians hold endless meetings about nothing. Meanwhile, the city seethes.

The Pentagon, likewise, seems to have no clear plan; its troops are stretched thin, lied to, and mistreated.

The whole charade feels increasingly patched together, poorly improvised. Ultimately, there is very little that Howell and his squad can do about any of this. After all, it’s not their war. They just work here.

Despite its secrecy, the basic contours of the resistance seem clear. There are distinct but overlapping networks of groups, organized into autonomous cells. The most common type of resistance cell seems to be Baathist and made up of former military or intelligence veterans, many of whom are also deeply religious and work with the communities in their mosques.

The resistance also includes non-Baathists, nationalists organized along lines of religion and clan. But even these forces usually interface with components of the fallen regime’s more than 400,000 strong security forces. And beginning in the winter and bursting into full recrudescence during the spring of 2004 were the Shiite militiamen of al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army, or Jeshi Mahdi, who formed another enemy of America. As the crisis grew, many mainstream Shiites joined the Mahdi in their fight, if not in their religious beliefs.

Strategy for this diffuse collection of fighters is simple, almost intuitive.

First, undermine the legitimacy and operations of the occupying powers by creating chaos and fear through sabotage and terror.

Second, attack America’s allies and the occupation’s weak points so as to isolate the US.

Third, attack and coopt Iraqi collaborators, like the police and the new National Guard.

Fourth, kill and maim American troops to wear down the occupiers' morale. It's simple and brutal, but vast sections of world politics hinge on the outcome of this struggle.

He says that his group has "many eyes" working inside the police and in the new Iraqi army. This is totally believable since there are continual reports of Iraqi police and ICDC men firing on American patrols. The occupation's "puppet army" is a thoroughly booby-trapped tool: use it too aggressively and it might blow up.

As for the underground's structure and methods, the man confirms a general picture that has been gleaned from other press accounts and recent military intelligence: the resistance is highly decentralized and is kept so by fear of spies and lack of secure communications.

Often fighters are related and operate in units that are all kin. Other cells are more formal and maintain their anonymity from each other as much as possible by using *noms de guerre*.

Cells operate in small networks or completely alone. Compartmentalization is their key to survival; it makes the underground forces resilient and hard to crush because it limits every US victory and inroad into the resistance. The military could bust this cell in Adhamiya and torture the truth from each of its members, but how far would the trail lead? Eventually the US forces would be back at square one: getting bombed and not knowing who was doing it.

In short, the mind of the resistance is everywhere; there is no head to cut off. Its strategy does not take the form of a plan but rather that of a logic or sensibility embedded in Iraqi culture: repel the invader. And this leaves American forces baffled, striking at shadows.

The Sunni guerrillas are less a movement in the traditional sense than a collection of nationalists and soldiers with serious grievances, military training, and ready access to both weapons and targets.

One thing is for sure: this is an insurgency that will be nearly impossible to crush. The resistance will never win militarily, but as the cell leader who rode with me in Abu Hassan's BMW explained, maybe it does not need to.

During these searches the paratroopers are not unduly aggressive, but, as in the school, they often have to damage property, and it is clear that many people, particularly the women and children, are scared.

The men are more often humiliated and angry. In most of Iraq, women are not supposed to be seen by strange men. And now the weary paratroopers are rifling through their underwear drawers and herding them outside while their men watch helplessly.

“Who shoots at us from these buildings? Are you with the Baath Party? Hey, get a ‘terp over here. Ask this guy if he’s with the Baath Party.”

As a journalist, even being around these searchers is nauseating, let alone forcing myself to go inside and see or film the action up close. One becomes party to the spectacle of occupation and the ritualized humiliation of the people of Falluja.

Even the soldiers, numbed as they are, feel this, and when pressed they will admit it.

“Who are we to search these peoples’ homes? Do we really have the right to do this? Yeah, I wonder about that stuff a lot,” says Staff Sergeant Luis “Doe” Pacheco, the company medic, one night in his hooch.

During another interview, Staff Sergeant McGuire, who, like the people of Falluja, is deeply religious, puts it quite succinctly: “There’s no nice way to search someone’s house. I think about how if we did this in eastern Tennessee, where I am from, they’d just as soon shoot you as look at you.”

For some of these searches I tag along with an intelligence officer, Captain Mark Zahanczewky aka Captain Z. His line of questioning keeps returning to the issue of foreign fighters. His subjects keep claiming that the attacks on Americans are the work of Syrians. The intelligence officer seems ideologically predisposed to seeing his work as part of the War on Terrorism and fixates on this theme of bad outsiders. Maybe it’s for my benefit.

“Ask him if Syrians come here,” snaps Z to his interpreter. “Oh, yeah? Look, tell him we got his wife inside, and she says there were Syrians here and that I want to know which one of them is telling the truth.”

But when I speak with other soldiers, including Captain Caliguire, they confirm my suspicion that very few foreign fighters have been caught. The reality is that most attacks against US soldiers are the work of locals. When the locals blame Syrians it is a rather transparent attempt to redirect the interest of the US military. ‘What are they going to say? “No, it’s us Fallujans who are shooting at you”?’

The official line in the military now is: “Everything is intelligence-driven.” As one of the war’s star generals put it, “You have to be able to identify the structure of who is out there and who their leaders are; what their support system is; where their weapons caches are; who’s funding them.”

If that task is left to monolingual intelligence officers like Captain Z, then put your money on *al-mujahadeen*.

Things on the radio net are getting confused. Because the paratroopers are using a device called Warlock, which jams the radio frequencies used by garage-door openers and other remote-control devices that trigger IEDs, their own radio network is getting scrambled.

As we move forward Bacik stops to explain to Lt. Lipscombe what’s going on. It’s a quintessential example of stressed-out combat vernacular.

“What’s up?” asks Lipscombe.

“The 1st is down there. I gotta tell them to get their fucking crunchy fucking fucknuts the fuck out of there.”

“Roger that.”

Then it happens again, the rapid bomb-bomb-bomb of several RPGs and more small-arms fire.

This time an armor-piercing RPG has hit one of the Bradleys; the engine is destroyed, but no one is hurt.

Silly Bullshit Dept.

February 12, 2006 Xymphora, xymphora.blogspot.com [Excerpt]

A common theory is that the upcoming attack on Iran is due to Iran's plan to establish an oil bourse to trade oil in Euros.

Any American geopolitical thinkers worried about the value of the American dollar would be worried about keeping the dollar as the world reserve currency, and the cost of an attack on Iran, a cost which would be enormous (in total, probably five to ten times the one or two trillion the Iraq war will cost) and would all have to be borrowed, would do much more to finish the American dollar as a reserve currency than any oil bourse would.

The bourse might have a small effect, as countries which need to buy oil might find it handier to keep more of their reserve currencies in Euros, but the overall status of the American dollar is much more dependent on the continued general financial health of the United States.

American planners may very well be looking to the bourse as an excuse to gently deflate the overly high value of the dollar.

[And that’s not half of it. What the paranoid idiots don’t get is that somebody can sell a million barrels of oil at 4:34 pm for dollars. At 4:35 pm they can sell the dollars as they buy euros in the trillion dollar a day interbank currency market. Buyers can keep all their currency reserves in euros, and if they wish to buy oil priced in dollars, just buy some dollars with the euros at the time of purchase, and use those dollars to pay for the oil. Duh.

[What does matter is what offshore holders do with their vast holdings of U.S. treasury paper. Compared to those holdings, the cash generated by the oil market is chump change. T]

OCCUPATION REPORT

U.S. OCCUPATION RECRUITING DRIVE IN HIGH GEAR; RECRUITING FOR THE ARMED RESISTANCE THAT IS



An Iraqi citizen waits as foreign troops from U.S. Marines 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) search his home in the village of Abu Rayat February 4, 2006.
REUTERS/Bob Strong

[Fair is fair. Let's bring 150,000 Iraqis over here to the USA. They can kill people at checkpoints, bust into their houses with force and violence, overthrow the government, put a new one in office they like better and call it "sovereign," and "detain" anybody who doesn't like it in some prison without any charges being filed against them, or any trial.]

[Those Iraqis are sure a bunch of backward primitives. They actually resent this help, have the absurd notion that it's bad their country is occupied by a foreign military dictatorship, and consider it their patriotic duty to fight and kill the soldiers sent to grab their country. What a bunch of silly people. How fortunate they are to live under a military dictatorship run by George Bush. Why, how could anybody not love that? You'd want that in your home town, right?]

OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION

BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME NOW!

The Death Blossom

Feb. 20, 2006 By Michael Hastings and Scott Johnson, Newsweek [Excerpt]

U.S. troops shake their heads over a phenomenon they call the "death blossom": under sudden fire, Iraqi soldiers sometimes start shooting in all directions, like lethal flower petals.



OCCUPATION PALESTINE

**The Execution Of A Mentally Disabled
9 Year Old Girl By Israeli Troops
Found To Be “According To Open
Fire Regulations”**

[Thanks to J, who sent this in.]

08 Feb 2006 Human Rights Watch

On January 23, Israeli soldiers shot a 13-year-old Palestinian boy in the back as he walked along a West Bank road reserved for Jewish settlers. The boy, Munadel Abu Aalia, from the nearby village of El-Mughayer (near Ramallah), died the same day.

After first telling the press that the boy and his friends were planning to throw stones at settler cars, Israeli military officials then told journalists that the boys were planting an explosive device. [The normal lies. J.]

The Israel Defense Forces' allegation that the boy posed a threat should not preempt a criminal investigation since media accounts suggest that the incident occurred outside the context of any exchange of fire, he was shot in the back, he reportedly was far from any conceivable target when he was shot, and the incident occurred in broad daylight. The soldiers did not fire warning shots or attempt to question or arrest the boys first.

In a second incident, soldiers patrolling Israel's border with the Gaza Strip on January 26 shot dead a 9-year-old Palestinian girl on the other side, not far from her home in Khan Younis. Gaza-based human rights organizations investigating the case found that Israeli forces had opened indiscriminate fire on Aya al-Astal without warning when they saw something moving near the border.

Afterwards, the Israeli military contacted Palestinian security officials in Gaza to announce that their "soldiers shot and hit a terrorist."

The girl's mother told the press, however, that her daughter was small, unveiled and should have been easily identifiable as a child.

Her father said that she was mentally disabled and had become lost after wandering from the house. According to the girl's family and paramedics, the girl was shot multiple times in the neck, leg, arm and stomach. The Israel Defense Forces have not accounted for the mistaken identity or their rules of engagement at the border, warranting an immediate criminal investigation.

As noted above, both of these shooting deaths occurred outside the context of any armed conflict or exchange of fire.

While the Israel Defense Forces immediately announced their intention to open a probe into the death of the boy, the military's spokesperson was unable to tell Human Rights Watch whether they had opened a similar probe in the case of the girl.

However, the media reported that an internal probe was launched in the girl's case, and that the judge advocate general's office had already found no fault in the judgment used by the unit commander and found that the shooting was carried out according to open fire regulations.

[To check out what life is like under a murderous military occupation by a foreign power, go to: www.rafahtoday.org The foreign army is Israeli; the occupied nation is Palestine.]

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



[Thanks to David Honish, Veterans For Peace, who sent this in.]

CHENEY SAYS SHOOTING OF FELLOW HUNTER WAS BASED ON FAULTY INTELLIGENCE **Believed Shooting Victim Was Zawahiri, Veep Says**

February 12, 2006 The Borowitz Report

Vice President Dick Cheney revealed today that he shot a fellow hunter while on a quail hunting trip over the weekend because he believed the man was the fugitive terror mastermind Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Mr. Cheney acknowledged that the man he sprayed with pellets on Saturday was not al-Zawahiri but rather Harry Whittington, a 78-year-old millionaire lawyer from Austin, blaming the mix-up on "faulty intelligence."

"I believed I had credible intelligence that al-Zawahiri had infiltrated my hunting party in disguise with the intent of spraying me with pellets," Mr. Cheney told reporters. "Only after I shot Harry in the face and he shouted 'Cheney, you bastard' did I realize that this intelligence was faulty."

Moments after Mr. Cheney's assault on Mr. Whittington, Mr. al-Zawahiri appeared in a new videotape broadcast on al-Jazeera to announce that he was uninjured in the vice president's attack because, in his words, "I was in Pakistan."

An aide to the vice president said he believed that the American people would believe Mr. Cheney's version of events, but added, "If he was going to shoot any of his cronies right now it's a shame it wasn't Jack Abramoff."

At the White House, President George W. Bush defended his vice president's shooting of a fellow hunter, saying that the attack sent "a strong message to terrorists everywhere."

"The message is, if Dick Cheney is willing to shoot an innocent American citizen at point-blank range, imagine what he'll do to you," Mr. Bush said.

“Ladies And Gentlemen, The President Of The United States”

[Thanks to M, who sent this in.]

A lady bought a new Lexus. It cost a bundle.

Two days later, she brought it back, complaining that the radio was not working.

"Madam", said the sales manager, "the audio system in this car is completely automatic. All you need to do is tell it what you want to listen to, and you will hear exactly that!" She drives out, somewhat amazed and a little confused.

She looked at the radio and said "Nelson." The radio responded, "Ricky or Willie?" Soon, she was speeding down the highway to the sounds of "On the road again." The lady was astounded. If she wanted Beethoven, that's what she got. If she wanted Nat King Cole, she got it.

Suddenly, at a traffic light, her light turned green and she pulled out. Off to her right, out of the corner of her eye, she saw a small sports utility vehicle speeding toward her. She swerved and narrowly missed a terrible collision. "Asshole", she muttered. And, from the radio.....

"Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States"

Received:

A Modest Proposal

From: Mark S
To: GI Special
Sent: February 12, 2006
Subject: us army deserter 'hot-line'

Some good news: The number of Deserters must be going way up; the Army now even has it's own 'Deserter hot-line.' Readers of 'GI Special' might want to call this number collect and tell them to go fuck themselves?

"Q. Does CID investigate deserters?"

"A. Under most circumstances, no. However, if the individual deserts because of a criminal act, CID will work with local law enforcement authorities to apprehend the suspect for investigation."

"For general information on deserters or to report a deserter, contact the Chief, U.S. Army Deserter Information Point at 502-626-3717."

[From: <http://www.cid.army.mil/faqs.htm>]

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to thomasfbarton@earthlink.net. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential.

GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out

The following have posted issues; there may be others:

http://robinlea.com/GI_Special/, <http://qi-special.iraq-news.de>,
<http://www.notinourname.net/qi-special/>, www.williambowles.info/qispecial,
http://www.traprockpeace.org/qi_special/, <http://www.uruknet.info/?p=-6&l=e>,
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