

GI SPECIAL 4E18:



**“A Bewildered Sergeant
Near Tikrit Asked His
Captain, ‘What’s Our
Mission Here?’”**

**“We’re Handing A Shit Sandwich
Over To Someone Else,” The Officer
Said;**

**“We’re Like A Frigging Organ
Transplant That’s Rejected”**

There is no substitute for the investment of time, effort, and risk that was so evident in Tal Afar.

2006-04-10 by GEORGE PACKER, The New Yorker [Excerpts]

From Tal Afar, I flew by helicopter to an airfield a few miles north of Tikrit, called Forward Operating Base Speicher.

The headquarters of the 101st Airborne Division, Speicher is an “enduring FOB”—one of a handful of gigantic bases around Iraq to which American forces are being pulled back, as smaller bases are handed over to the Iraqi Army. Speicher has an area of twenty-four square miles and the appearance of a small, flat, modular Midwestern city; there is a bus system, a cavernous dining hall that serves four flavors of Baskin-Robbins ice cream, a couple of gyms, and several movie theatres.

At least nine thousand soldiers live there, and many of them seemed to leave the base rarely or not at all: they talked about “going out,” as if the psychological barrier between them and Iraq had become daunting.

After three months on the base, an Army lawyer working on the Iraqi justice system still hadn’t visited the Tikrit courts.

A civil-affairs major who had been in Iraq since May needed to consult a handbook when I asked him the names of the local tribes.

A reporter for the military newspaper Stars & Stripes had heard a bewildered sergeant near Tikrit ask his captain, “What’s our mission here?”

The captain replied sardonically, “We’re here to guard the ice-cream trucks going north so that someone else can guard them there.”

Much of the activity at an enduring FOB simply involves self-supply. These vast military oases raise the spectre of American permanence in Iraq, but, to me, they more acutely suggested American irrelevance.

Soldiers have even coined a derogatory term for those who never get off the base: “fobbits.” I spent two days at Speicher without seeing an Iraqi.

After Tal Afar, it was dismaying how little soldiers at Speicher knew about the lives of Iraqis.

When I drove with the civil-affairs major into Tikrit, we stopped along the way at an elementary school, just outside the base. The major wanted to see if the teachers had pursued his request to have the children become pen pals with kids at an elementary school in his home town, in California.

It sounded like a fine idea, but two nervous female teachers who received us in their office gave a number of reasons that the children hadn’t yet written letters. The major pressed them for a few minutes, and then he was ready to let the project go. As soon as he left the room, the women showed me a thick stack of

pictures that their students had drawn for the children in California, along with a letter from the teachers asking for school supplies and “lotion for dry skin.”

The letter concluded, “Good luck U.S.A. Army.” But the women were too frightened to give the bundle to the major; a relationship with an elementary school in America could make them targets of local insurgents. All this was lost on the major. The teachers said that they rarely saw American soldiers anymore.

Speicher provides a more representative picture of the American military’s future in Iraq than Tal Afar.

The trend is away from counterinsurgency and toward what, in Washington, is known as an “exit strategy.”

Commanders are under tremendous pressure to keep casualties low, and combat deaths have been declining for several months, as patrols are reduced and the Americans rely more and more on air power. (During the past five months, the number of air strikes increased fifty per cent over the same period a year ago.)

More than half the country is scheduled to be turned over to Iraqi Army control this year. This is the crux of the military strategy for withdrawal, and it is happening at a surprisingly fast pace.

President Bush has always insisted that the turnover and “drawdown” will be “conditions-based”—governed by the situation in Iraq and by the advice of commanders, not by a timetable set in Washington.

But everywhere I went in Iraq, officers and soldiers spoke as if they were already preparing to leave.

A sergeant in Baquba, northeast of Baghdad, said, “We’ll be here for ten years in some form, but boots-on-the-ground-wise? We’re really almost done.”

He said that the U.S. Army doesn’t allow itself to fail, and when I suggested that Iraq hardly looked like a victory the sergeant replied, “So you adjust the standard of success. For me, it’s getting all the Joes home. It’s not that I don’t give a damn about what’s going on here. But that’s how it is.”

A field-grade officer in the 101st Airborne said, “The algorithm of success is to get a good-enough solution.” There were, he said, three categories of assessment for every aspect of the mission: optimal, acceptable, and unacceptable. He made it clear that optimal wasn’t in the running.

“We’re handing a shit sandwich over to someone else,” the officer said. “We have to turn this over, let them do it their way. We’re like a frigging organ transplant that’s rejected.

“We have to get the Iraqi Army to where they can hold their own in a frigging fire-fight with insurgents, and get the hell out.”

The Iraqi national-security adviser, Mowaffak al-Rubaie, who chairs a high-level committee in Baghdad on American withdrawal, gave the same forecast that was mentioned by a planner on General Abizaid's staff, at Central Command: fewer than a hundred thousand foreign troops in Iraq by the end of this year, and half that number by the middle of 2007.

In other words, "conditions-based" withdrawal is a flexible term. The conditions will be evaluated by commanders who know what results are expected back in Washington.

I suggested to Senator Chuck Hagel, the Nebraska Republican, who has been a critic of the Administration's war policy, that this sounded like a variation on the famous advice that Senator George Aiken, of Vermont, gave President Johnson about Vietnam, in 1966: declare victory and go home.

"In a twenty-first-century version, yes, probably," Hagel said. "It won't be quite that stark." The Administration, he said, is "finding ways in its own mind for back-door exits out of Iraq."

He added, "We have an election coming up in November. The fact is, we're going to be pulling troops out, and I suspect it'll be kind of quiet. We're going to wake up some morning, probably in the summer, and all of a sudden we'll be forty thousand troops down, and people will say, 'Gee, I didn't know.' "

A senior military officer defended Generals Abizaid and Casey, and said that they would not simply bow to pressure from Washington. "I don't think commanders are so ambitious that they're willing to sell their men and their endeavor up the river so they can tell their bosses what they want to hear."

But he admitted that there was considerable pressure for withdrawal, saying, "A blind man on a dark night can see people want the recommendation to be drawdown."

The pressure is partly driven by the strain on the military, and partly by the fear that thousands of junior officers and senior sergeants, who face future deployments, may quit if the war extends many more years.

Divorce rates among Army officers have doubled since the war began. The Army is so short-staffed that it has promoted ninety-seven per cent of its captains.

"If you're not a convicted felon, you're being promoted to major," a Pentagon official said.

But a good-enough counterinsurgency is really none at all.

There is no substitute for the investment of time, effort, and risk that was so evident in Tal Afar.

The retreat to the enduring FOBs seems like an acknowledgment that counterinsurgency is just too hard.

"If you really want to reduce your casualties, go back to Fort Riley," Kalev Sepp, the Naval Postgraduate School professor, said.

"It's absurd to think that you can protect the population from armed insurgents without putting your men's lives at risk."

The policy of gathering troops at enormous bases, he added, "is old Army thinking: centralization of resources, of people, of control. Counterinsurgency requires decentralization."

MORE:

TAL AFAR: "A Political Disaster"

May 14, 2006 Juancole.com [Excerpt]

The NYT reports Gen. Barry McCaffrey, who teaches at West Point, as estimating that the US military should have a big presence in Iraq for 5 to 7 years, while partnering with and building up the Iraqi military. So in 5 years the Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish battalions will like each other more than they do now? Will be more willing to fight against armed groups from their own ethnicities?

My problem with that is that they seem to think that the Tal Afar operation was a success, whereas it is a political disaster, and if they are planning another 5 to 7 years of that sort of thing, then we are doomed.

At Tal Afar they used Kurdish and Shiite troops to assault Sunni Turkmen, emptied the city on the grounds that it was full of foreign fighters, killed people and made them refugees, and then only took 50 foreign fighters captive.

The Sunni Turkmen, not to mention the Turks in Ankara, will never forgive us.

And the press reports show substantial disappointment in the city even among Shiites with the results.

The Tal Afar operation is considered a "take and hold" or "oil spot" strategy, as opposed to search and destroy. But you can't just empty out one Sunni city after another, bring in troops of other ethnicities to level neighborhoods, force people into tent cities in the desert or into relatives' homes, and call that a counter-insurgency strategy.

Every year the US military has been in the Sunni Arab heartland they have alienated more and more Iraqis.

MORE:

Having Read That, Check Out These Silly Fantasies

May 13, 2006 By Solomon Moore and Peter Spiegel, L.A. Times Staff Writers [Excerpts]

On one side of the strategy debate is a growing cadre of military intellectuals and counterinsurgency experts who advocate an on-the-ground effort to deal with the insurgency, military analysts say.

This group includes, along with Marine units such as those in western Iraq, mid-level officers such as Col. H.R. McMaster, commander of Army forces in Tall Afar, where a counterinsurgency campaign has been cited by President Bush as a model for the country.

"What we know works is presence; that was most visible in Tall Afar," said Kalev Sepp, an instructor at the Naval Postgraduate School who helped write a critique of counterinsurgency strategy for Army Gen. George W. Casey, the top U.S. commander in Iraq.

"We'll have a continuing presence in these areas," said Col. W. Blake Crowe, commander of Marine forces in the western part of Al Anbar. "We won't populate every village: we don't have enough force for that. But we'll continue to contest every town and village. We just need to contest them."

The idea behind the new campaign is to repeat the military's success last year in Tall Afar, where Army units cleared out insurgents and flooded the town with patrols and small-unit interactions with residents. Bush and others have touted the approach.

But not all military officials agree with the praise.

Some senior Central Command officials have been dismissive of Tall Afar, telling military analysts and scholars recently that too much has been made of the success there.

Duplication of that effort across Iraq would require many more U.S. troops than are available, they said.

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IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Helicopter Pilot Killed In Iraq



Chief Warrant Officer Jamie D. Weeks, 47, of Daleville, Ala. killed May 14, 2006, in Yusufiyah, Iraq. (AP Photo/U.S. Army Special Operations)

May 17, 2006 By MARK HICKS, The Leaf-Chronicle

The family of a Fort Campbell soldier told an Ohio newspaper their loved one was killed in a helicopter crash in Iraq.

The sister of Chief Warrant Officer 5 Jamie D. Weeks, told the Akron Beacon Journal she learned Monday her brother died over weekend when his helicopter was shot down.

Brenda Parks, 48, of Bath Township, in Summit County, Ohio, near Akron, said she was told her brother died along with an Army officer in the crash.

She said her brother was a helicopter pilot who worked on testing and modifications of aircrafts.

Chief Warrant Officer Weeks is survived by his wife, Robin, and four daughters.

War Foe's Grandson Killed In Iraq

05/09/2006 By Greg Jonsson, ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Leon "Bud" Deraps has spent years opposing the war in Iraq, concerned about the death toll, the impact on U.S. troops and innocent Iraqis.

This weekend, Deraps found a more personal reason when he learned that the grandson named after him, a Marine, was killed in the war he opposes.

The Iraqi people "are not the enemy, but we're making enemies out of them," he said. "We never should have been there in the first place."

Lance Cpl. Leon Deraps, 19, of Jamestown, Mo., was killed Saturday when a roadside bomb blew up near his vehicle in Fallujah, family members said. Jamestown is southwest of Columbia, Mo. The Defense Department had not yet confirmed his death Monday evening.

Bud Deraps of St. Louis is a member of St. Louis-based Veterans for Peace, a national group of military veterans founded in 1985. The organization has been active locally and nationally in protesting the war in Iraq.

Bud Deraps said his grandson signed up for the Marines when he was 17 and left for basic training shortly after graduating last year.

Bud Deraps, who served in the Navy during World War II and went to Iraq in 2001 to help rebuild water treatment systems, said his grandson's death has only increased his opposition to the war.

Baltimore Staff Sgt. Killed



Staff Sgt. Marion Flint Jr., 29, of Baltimore, was killed in Iraq May 15, 2006, when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle during combat patrol operations in Baghdad. Flint was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, Fort Carson, Colo. (AP Photo/U.S. Army)

Marine Injured In Iraq: Insurgent Fire Shot Off His Lower Jaw.

May 17, 2006 By Deborah Gates, Staff Writer, Delmarva Now

MARION STATION:

Insurgent fire shot off his lower jaw.

Damage to his left leg was so severe, doctors amputated beneath the knee.

Shrapnel from a May 1 roadway bombing near Fallujah still penetrates his skin, in some places 2 inches deep.

And the Lower Shore is pulling for Marine Cpl. Kenny Lyon, who lay in serious condition at a Bethesda military hospital.

"I know my son will bounce back," says his mother, Gigi Windsor of Marion Station.

Faint nods and occasional glances are gentle signs of hope for family members and friends in this rural, patriotic hamlet.

"He opens his eyes and is able to listen and follow a command," said his mother in a telephone interview last week from Bethesda's National Naval Medical Center. "They amputated his leg overseas. He can't talk, but he knows we're here."

As a mechanic, he was repairing an eight-wheel tank on a patrol mission outside Fallujah when his unit was struck, Windsor said.

"There were three bombs; the first two missed and the third one got him," she said. "It happened about 2 p.m. Iraqi time. That was about 5 a.m. here, and that night I couldn't sleep."

Lyon worked at Austin Cox Mechanical in Salisbury from 2002 until he left for war, and Chris Windsor, an administrator, had urged him to stay out of harm's way.

"I told him when he left to keep his head down," said Windsor, who is not related to Gigi Windsor. "He and his family are in our thoughts and prayers."

Lyon was transferred from a hospital in Germany to the Naval medical center on May 5, a day before his 21st birthday.

Windsor and her 19-year-old daughter, Tiffany, a firefighter and emergency medical technician at the Marion Fire Department, have barely left his side.

When he's well enough, doctors will reconstruct his jaw, remove shrapnel peppered throughout his body and size him for a prosthetic limb, said his mother, who works at Credit Plus in Salisbury's Winterplace Park.

"I'm not leaving until he can come with me," she said.

Eldora 'Ironman' Soldier Injured In Iraq, Recovery Expected

May 17, 2006 By PAT KINNEY, Courier Business Editor

WATERLOO: A soldier with the Iowa Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 133rd Infantry suffered shrapnel wounds Monday in Iraq, but is expected to recover and return to duty.

Spc. Joshua Reece, 25, of Eldora, was in a convoy near Ramadi when an improvised explosive device detonated, injuring him, said Lt. Col. Greg Hapgood of the Iowa Army National Guard.

"He received treatment at an Army medical facility in Ramadi," Hapgood said. Injuries were "not of a serious nature," Hapgood said, and it was expected Reece "would eventually be returned to duty, barring any complications." Family members were notified of the injury, Hapgood said.

He said Reece is believed to be the first casualty of the 1/133rd since the unit arrived in Iraq. They left Camp Shelby, Miss. in March after five months' training and are expected to be there about a year. Hapgood said this morning he had no information that any other casualties in the unit have occurred.

Members of the 1/133rd "understand the high degree of seriousness" of their mission, Hapgood said. "Very early, when they first arrived, they started to have incidents or small engagements," and are consequently prepared for the task at hand.

The Waterloo-headquartered 1/133rd, the "Ironman Battalion," traces its roots back to the Civil War and earned its nickname for the unit's consecutive days in combat in World War II.

The battalion has units in Waterloo, Dubuque, Oelwein, Iowa Falls and Charles City. Its core mission is to conduct close combat with enemy forces and provide security of key terrain, facilities and installations.

**THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO
COMPREHENSIBLE REASON TO BE IN THIS
EXTREMELY HIGH RISK LOCATION AT THIS
TIME, EXCEPT THAT A TRAITOR WHO LIVES
IN THE WHITE HOUSE WANTS YOU THERE,
SO HE WILL LOOK GOOD.**

That is not a good enough reason.



U.S. Marine Lance Cpl. Timothy Dupuis, of Dover, New Hampshire in Fallujah May 2, 2006. (AP Photo/Jacob Silberberg)

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Broke Down Army



Canadian Warrant Officer Paul MacKinnon walks in front of a broken-down Bison vehicle that stranded a Canadian resupply convoy for hours Monday, in dangerous Taliban territory in Afghanistan. (CP PHOTO/Bob Weber)

Canadian Captain Killed In Panjwai Firefight

May 17 2006 CTV.ca News Staff

Canada lost its first female soldier in Afghanistan during a firefight with Taliban insurgents on Wednesday, military officials said.

Capt. Nichola Goddard, of 1st Royal Canadian Horse Artillery based in Shilo, Man., also became the seventeenth Canadian to die in that country since 2002, and the first female combat death since the Second World War.

One diplomat and 16 soldiers, including four who died in the friendly-fire bombing by a U.S. warplane, were the other casualties.

The 26-year-old Goddard was serving with Task Force Afghanistan and was attached to the 1st Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (1 PPCLI) Battle Group.

She was married with no children. Her hometown was not immediately available.

Brig.-Gen. David Fraser, commander of the multinational brigade based in Kandahar, said Goddard was killed in action at 6:55 p.m. local time (10:25 a.m. ET) about 24 kilometres west of Kandahar city in the Panjwai region.

Members of the Canadian Forces were sent in to reinforce combined operations of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan police, who were involved in a firefight against a group of Taliban fighters.

Fraser said the soldiers had formed a ring around the "outer cordons" of the battle area, while the "inner work was being done by the Afghan security forces."

Coalition air support was also involved.

Fraser said details surrounding Goddard's death were still sketchy.

"There was a firefight out there and sometime during the firefight she was killed."

There has been intermittent fighting in the region since Monday between Afghan forces and Taliban insurgents. Fighting had stopped Wednesday night, but Fraser said the operation was expected to continue Thursday.

The incident occurred as troops prepared for a concert at Kandahar airfield that was designed to entertain the troops and boost spirits, Mackey Frayer said.

There is no word on whether the festivities will continue in light of the death.

Meanwhile, a car bomb exploded near a UN convoy in southern Afghanistan on Wednesday. The attacker died, but there were no reports of other casualties.

The bombing took place in the former Taliban stronghold of Kandahar, as a convoy of vehicles was travelling to a nearby coalition base.

Thor Yali, a police officer at the scene of the attack, told the Associated Press the attack occurred in Kandahar city, a former **[Doesn't sound much like "former," does it?]** Taliban stronghold, as the convoy was travelling to a nearby U.S.-led coalition base.

An AP reporter said parts of the attacker's body were visible on the road next to a severely damaged UN four-wheel-drive vehicle.

TROOP NEWS

"Now All There Is Is Pain"



Albans NEWS

Maria Gomez cries in arms of husband, Felix Jimenez, at burial of son Sgt. Jose Gomez.

Her left hand ran across the coffin.

She cried out a question in Spanish whose answer should have nothing to do with economics, a question that might influence national policy if a military draft made it just as likely to come from a politician or a CEO as from a woman who packs air fresheners.

"Why did it have to be my son?"

May 11th, 2006 New York Daily News & By LORENA MONGELLI and ANDY GELLER,
New York Post

Moments after the grieving mother was helped across the street from the funeral home to the church, a pair of school buses turned the corner.

The grammar school youngsters inside gazed out at the white-gloved Army honor guard and other uniformed figures gathered in front of Our Lady of Sorrows Church on 37th Ave. in Corona, Queens.

Several of the children waved, their faces bright, not comprehending the immense sadness they were witnessing.

They were certainly unaware this was a funeral for a young man who was good at math and wanted to become an accountant but enlisted in the Army and died a soldier because he lacked the money to continue on in school.

At 9:38 a.m., the church bell began to toll and the honor guard raised those white gloves in salute. Uniformed pallbearers carried the flag-draped coffin of 23-year-old Sgt. Jose Gomez from the Rivera Funeral Home into the church.

His mother, Maria Gomez, sat in the front pew in a black jacket and white pants, leaning against her Army escort. The dead soldier's fiancée, Marie Canario, sat nearby wearing the diamond ring she had chosen when he took her to a jewelry store and let her pick from an array of 14.

Gomez had been engaged once before, to a fellow soldier who enlisted because she lacked the tuition to become a psychologist. Pfc. Analaura Esparza Gutierrez had been killed in 2003 when her Humvee was struck by an improvised explosive device.

Gomez had left the Army and met warm and wonderful Canario only to be summoned back to active duty. He had sought to spare his mother worry by telling her he was studying in Texas. She had not known he was back in Iraq until April 28, when she came home from her job packing air fresheners to see two Army officers at her door.

His mother got suspicious when a bank statement arrived at her home, showing that Army paychecks had been deposited to his account.

But her suspicions were confirmed only when Sgt. Albert Laga showed up at her door to break the grim news.

"That was the toughest day of my life. I felt the burden of the world was on my shoulders. When I saw his mother, I thought of my own," Laga said.

The mother "had no idea what was coming" and when the sergeant told her that her son was dead, "her face drained. She went into shock and broke down."

"Nothing prepared me for that day," he said. "Despite everything I've been through, nothing compared to watching that woman and telling her her son is dead. Nothing can replace a son."

"Save her the pain," Msgr. Thomas Healy said yesterday of the son's hope. "Now all there is is pain."

Healy said the funeral Mass in Spanish. An Army lieutenant spoke, followed by Gen. Bill Grisoli. He read from an account provided by the dead soldier's squadron commander.

"On 28 April, 2006, the S3 security detachment was conducting reconnaissance patrol along route Bengal when it was hit by multiple IEDs," Lt. Col. Gian Gentile had written. "After the first IED blast, SSG Herlem and Sgt. Gomez moved their HMMWV forward to protect a damaged vehicle from the first blast. It was in the act of protecting their buddies that the second IED blast occurred and killed SSG Herlem and Sgt. Gomez. It was their perfect act of selfless devotion to protecting their buddies and the fundamental element of chance in war that killed these two brave soldiers."

The general also read something written by Cpl. Jacob Portalatin of Gomez's squad. Portalatin reported the unit had a saying that kept the soldiers going when things got difficult.

"Cause Gomez said so."

Portalatin had added, "It was very clear what the most important thing was ... and that was his family. He was always helping his mother. He was the one his whole family counted on."

The general presented the mother with a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart. The bell began to toll again as the coffin was carried from the church into a sprinkling rain too light to match the tears streaming down the mother's cheeks.

A police escort led the funeral procession through workday Queens to St. Michael's Cemetery in Astoria. The mother flinched at the first rifle volley fired by seven soldiers. She sat motionless as two more volleys made it a 21-gun salute.

A bugler who had played trumpet in the Taft High School band before joining the Army then played taps. The pallbearers folded the flag that had covered the coffin and the general took it over to the mother. He went down on one knee.

"Maria, this flag is presented on behalf of the secretary of the Army and a grateful nation for the honorable and faithful service of your son Jose," he said.

The general's white-gloved right hand touched the mother lightly on the shoulder, a gesture made all the more gentle by his warrior look. He stood and saluted as she crumpled into her attentive husband's arms. The mourners began placing red roses on the coffin.

As the sun broke through the clouds, the mother approached on unsteady legs. She slumped sobbing against the coffin, her hands splaying on the shining metal, seemingly desperate to hold her boy one more time.

"My Jose! My Jose!" she cried in Spanish. "My son!"

She dissolved into wails of absolute grief.

"Oh God!"

Her left hand ran across the coffin.

She cried out a question in Spanish whose answer should have nothing to do with economics, a question that might influence national policy if a military draft made it just as likely to come from a politician or a CEO as from a woman who packs air fresheners.

"I can't believe you're not here. I know you'll be back. Why did it have to be my son?" a grief-stricken Maria Gomez exclaimed as she placed a red rose atop the silver coffin of her son, Sgt. José Gomez, at St. Michael's Cemetery in Astoria.

MORE:

"I Wish That The President Was There When I Was Notifying The Mother"

As Sgt. Jose Gomez Is Laid To Rest, A Soldier Tells How He Broke The News Of The Death To His Mom

May 11, 2006 BY GRAHAM RAYMAN, Newsday Staff Writer [Excerpts]

When the time came last month to notify Jose Gomez's family that he had been killed in Iraq, the task fell to U.S. Army Sgt. Albert Llaga, a combat medic and supply officer born in the Philippines.

Llaga, 36, who attended Gomez's funeral yesterday in Queens, said afterward that he got the assignment because the person trained for that job was unavailable. And so, Llaga found himself in the company of another soldier on his way to a small walk-up on 104th Street in Corona.

"It was the toughest thing I've ever done," he said after Gomez's funeral at St. Michael's Cemetery in Astoria. "I would rather charge a machine-gun nest. But I would do it again if it would prevent another soldier from doing it."

About 100 people attended Gomez's funeral at the Our Lady of Sorrows Church, a structure that dominates the mostly Hispanic neighborhood of two- and three-story walk-ups.

The Rev. Thomas Healy told the congregation, "There is no greater love than to give your life for your friend." Healy spoke mostly in Spanish, amid the curl of incense smoke.

Llaga, 36, spoke with a reporter after he hugged Gomez's mother, Maria Gomez of Corona. Their encounter came just before Maria Gomez collapsed on her son's coffin in the church and embraced it.

Gomez, 23, a sergeant, was killed April 28 when a roadside bomb exploded near his vehicle. A second soldier also was killed.

He was on his second tour of Iraq, but to keep his mother from worrying, he had told her he was in Texas, attending school. Llaga had no way of knowing that when he knocked on the family's door late last month, he said.

Maria Gomez greeted the two soldiers cheerfully at first, he said. But she did not speak much English, and they did not speak fluent Spanish. The soldiers could not at first convey the bad news.

Then, a bilingual neighbor, watching the scene unfold, came to the soldiers' aid and agreed to translate. They went inside to a little table in the cramped apartment that Maria shares with her husband, Felix Jimenez. Llaga used a prepared statement to convey the news.

"Right away, she says, 'No way,'" he recalled. "'That can't be my son. He's not in Iraq. He's in Texas.'"

There at the table, Llaga paused and wondered for an awful moment whether he and the other soldier had the wrong house, the wrong family. Finally, he said, the news sunk in.

Llaga came to the U.S. to go to law school, but after the 9/11 terror attacks, he joined the Army. He has about 14 months left in the stint and will attend law school when he's done, he said.

Speaking after the funeral, he said, "We should have gone into Afghanistan, rebuilt and left a legacy. As for the other war, it's up to people way above my pay grade."

Referring to Gomez's death, he added, "I wish that the president was there when I was notifying the mother."

Corona City Councilman Hiram Monserrate pointed out that Gomez lived a few blocks from Marlon Bustamante, a soldier killed in Iraq in February. "It's a sad day," he said. "I really wish the conflict would stop. It's inflicting so much pain and suffering on the community."

Pentagon Scum Tried And Failed To Get HBO To Censor

Material On Treatment Of Iraq Wounded

[Thanks to Phil G, who sent this in]

May 17th, 2006 Democracy Now! [Excerpts]

A new documentary film on the emergency room of a US military hospital in Iraq is being met with resistance by the US Army.

The film "Baghdad ER", which airs Sunday on HBO, chronicles life in the emergency room of the 86th Combat Support Hospital in Baghdad's Green Zone during a two-month period last year.

"Baghdad ER" was screened on Monday night at the National Museum of American History and is scheduled to be shown at 22 military installations around the country. But it has already caused controversy because of its graphic footage of soldiers reeling from, and in some cases dying, from their war wounds.

HBO screened the film in March for Senior Army officials including Undersecretary of the Army Pete Green. HBO's executive Vice President Richard Pleper said the film received an enthusiastic response.

But then last week, the Army suddenly seemed to withdraw support for the film.

HBO's offer to co-sponsor a screening of the film this week at Fort Campbell, Kentucky where the 86th is based- was turned down by the Pentagon.

And last week the Army suddenly declined to attend Monday's screening.

The Army surgeon general has warned military-personnel it could cause post-traumatic stress disorder, while the Secretary of the Army asked HBO to delete some footage from the final cut.

In addition, none of the highest ranking officers or senior medical personnel attended the screening.

AMY GOODMAN INTERVIEWS:

Jon Alpert, award-winning filmmaker and founder of Downtown Community Television. Produced and Directed "Baghdad ER" which airs on HBO on Sunday, May 21st.

Matthew O'Neill, a producer at Downtown Community Television. He Produced and Directed "Baghdad ER" which airs on HBO on Sunday, May 21st.

AMY GOODMAN: *So, Jon Alpert, what happened? You were embedded. You had the full support of the unit and the Army. They knew you were there, obviously. I mean, the*

images of just the two of you with your cameras right in there in the surgeries. What happened?

JON ALPERT: What happened in terms of the latest reaction to this?

AMY GOODMAN: The support, and then now as this film is coming out, the Army pulling back.

JON ALPERT: The support from the people who were there on the ground, the people in the hospital, the people who every single day are there saving American lives has not wavered at all.

Everybody that we've spoken to feels honored by this film, is proud that they're part of it, and they want everybody in the United States to see it. It's been universal.

There are people in some offices in the Pentagon that have had objections to this, but it's certainly not anybody who is in Iraq helping to keep Americans alive.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, what about the top brass? What happened? They originally did support what you're doing, and then at the Washington screening, where many of them were going to be -- can you talk about the memos? Can you talk about what has turned around?

JON ALPERT: There certainly was an attempt at one point from the Secretary of the Army to see if HBO would change this film or alter it, and a phone call was made, and this is very sensitive.

All these large media organizations are affected by Congressional legislation. There is a bill going through Congress that you've been talking about on your show that has certain language in it.

It's billions of dollars for Time Warner one way and billions the other way if the language is changed, and when somebody makes a phone call, it's intimidating. And to HBO'S credit -- you know, I've been in this situation before in the first Gulf War.

Our reports came back, and the news organizations wouldn't play it.

And HBO basically looked back and said, "You know, this is the truth, and it's going on the air." And I'm really proud to be associated with HBO on this, because they didn't buckle.

AMY GOODMAN: The call that was made, the Secretary of the Army called the president of HBO?

JON ALPERT: Not president. He called a vice president of HBO.

AMY GOODMAN: Who was it?

JON ALPERT: I don't know. I'm not privy to the conversation, but I do know that he wondered whether certain things in the program could be changed, and HBO said, "Hell, no."

MATTHEW O'NEILL: I think it's important to understand that every person that wears a uniform that's spoken to us, including the top people in the Army, the Chief of Staff of the Army, have nothing but respect for this film, and they've told us directly that they think that it accurately captures the truth of what's happening over there and the heroic efforts that the soldiers, the doctor soldiers are making every day in Iraq.

AMY GOODMAN: *Do you think it will be shown in Fort Campbell?*

JON ALPERT: It was shown in Fort Campbell last night to a very enthusiastic response. We've talked to the soldiers, right? You talked to some of the soldiers.

MATTHEW O'NEILL: I talked to some of the soldiers who saw the film yesterday in Fort Campbell in a closed screening, just for people in the C.A.S.H. who were involved with the film, and one major called me up and she said, "I don't understand what the warnings are about. You guys only showed the tip of the iceberg. They were saying this was gruesome, and you showed nothing."

“Sir, No Sir” Opening In Washington DC; Producer And Iraq Veteran Speaking At Film Friday Night



Vietnam: They Stopped An Imperial War

May 17, 2006 From: John Judge

Here's an update on Sir, No Sir at the E Street Landmark Theatre (555 11th St, NW, DC) starting Friday. This powerful 85-minute documentary of GI resistance to the war in Vietnam begins Friday (12:30, 2:45, 5:05, 7:20, 9:40pm) and runs through Thursday.

Following the 7:20 Friday show, speakers include the producer and Garrett Reppenhagen from Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Members of Veterans For Peace and Military Families Speak out will speak following the 7:20 pm show on Saturday. Times are the same for the entire week, with the exception that the 12:30 show is only on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

The film is strong on the role of Black GI resistance in the Vietnam era.

Hoping to see folks this weekend.

If they have good attendance, they'll keep it for another week.

Peace, out
Patrick McCann,
Veterans For Peace

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.

Marines "Killed Innocent Civilians In Cold Blood" "It's Much Worse Than Was Reported In Time Magazine"

[Z writes: Ishikawa and Kuroshima would understand: insert troops into a hell on earth and there's no way to prevent atrocities. Yet the real fiends in their capital suites are never spattered with a single drop of blood. Solidarity, Z]

May 17, 2006 By Christian Lowe, Army Times staff writer

Rep. John Murtha, an influential Pennsylvania lawmaker and outspoken critic of the war in Iraq, said today Marines had "killed innocent civilians in cold blood"

after allegedly responding to a roadside bomb ambush that killed a Marine during a patrol in Haditha, Iraq, Nov. 19.

The incident is still under investigation by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and Multi-National Forces Iraq.

The Marine Corps originally claimed that a convoy from the Camp Pendleton, Calif.-based Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, hit a roadside bomb that killed Lance Cpl. Miguel Terrazas, 20, of El Paso, Texas, and the ensuing firefight killed 15 Iraqi civilians; casualties the Corps at first claimed were killed in the bomb blast — including seven women and three children.

A March 27 Time magazine report published claims by an Iraqi civil rights group that the Marines barged into houses near the bomb strike, throwing grenades and shooting civilians as they cowered in fear. The report prompted calls for a Pentagon probe.

“It’s much worse than was reported in Time magazine,” Murtha, a Democrat, former Marine colonel and Vietnam war veteran, told reporters on Capitol Hill.

“There was no firefight. There was no (bomb) that killed those innocent people,” Murtha explained, adding there were “about twice as many” Iraqis killed than Time had reported.

Murtha said combat stress prompted the Marines’ alleged rampage.

“It’s a very serious incident, unfortunately.

“It shows the tremendous pressure that these guys are under every day when they’re out in combat,” he said. “One man was killed with an IED and after that they actually went into the houses and killed women and children.”

Governors Will Fight Bush Try At Taking Over National Guard Troops

5.16.06 National Journal's CongressDailyAM

State National Guard leaders are poised to carry out the Bush administration's plan to deploy thousands of troops to patrol the Mexican border, but they likely will fight any attempts to place the state-run units under federal control.

Maintaining state control over Guard units enables governors to manage the strain on the force and determine which troops and equipment to send-and for how long-said Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, president of the Adjutant Generals Association of the United States.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Assorted Resistance Action

17 May 2006 RTE & (KUNA) & (Reuters)

In Baquba guerrillas killed three policemen and wounded five others in a subsequent bombing.

An Iraqi officer was killed in an explosion Wednesday morning in the province of Diyali, northeast Baghdad, Iraqi police said.

A statement issued by the joint coordination center said an explosive device blew up while a patrol vehicle was passing by Al-Malemeen area.

It added that an Iraqi officer was killed and two others were injured in the incident.

Two policemen were wounded when a roadside bomb went off close to their patrol near al-Kindi hospital in eastern Baghdad, police said.

Also in eastern Baghdad, two policemen were wounded when a roadside bomb exploded near a police check point in eastern Baghdad, police said.

Two policemen killed in drive-by shooting in northern town of Mosul, police said.

A roadside bomb targeted a police patrol in Baghdad's western Mansour district, wounding four policemen and two civilians.

One Iraqi soldier was killed and four wounded when a roadside bomb struck their convoy in Kirkuk, police said.

The body of Muhib Abdul-Razzak, a general director in the Finance Ministry, was found in the morgue after he was captured earlier in the week.

A roadside bomb blew up near an Iraqi army patrol in the town of Balad, about 80 km (50 miles) north of Baghdad, killing one soldier and wounding three others.

IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE END THE OCCUPATION

OCCUPATION REPORT

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



U.S. soldiers from the 1st Armored Division kick down an Iraqi citizens' door in the Al Jazeera Desert area May 8, 2006. REUTERS/SSgt. Aaron Allmon II/Handout

There's nothing quite like invading somebody else's country and busting into their houses by force to arouse an intense desire to kill you in the patriotic, self-respecting civilians who live there.

But your commanders know that, don't they? Don't they?

"In the States, if police burst into your house, kicking down doors and swearing at you, you would call your lawyer and file a lawsuit," said Wood, 42, from Iowa, who did not accompany Halladay's Charlie Company, from his battalion, on Thursday's raid. "Here, there are no lawyers. Their resources are limited, so they plant IEDs (improvised explosive devices) instead."

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

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



"IT APPEARS TO BE A FENCE."

© Detroit News. Dist. by UFS Inc.

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

FBI Admits Spying On Journalists' Phone Records

The official said our blotter item was wrong to suggest that ABC News phone calls were being "tracked." "Think of it more as backtracking," said a senior federal official.

May 16, 2006 Brian Ross and Richard Esposito Report:

ABC News.com

The FBI acknowledged late Monday that it is increasingly seeking reporters' phone records in leak investigations.

"It used to be very hard and complicated to do this, but it no longer is in the Bush administration," said a senior federal official.

The acknowledgement followed our blotter item that ABC News reporters had been warned by a federal source that the government knew who we were calling.

The official said our blotter item was wrong to suggest that ABC News phone calls were being "tracked."

"Think of it more as backtracking," said a senior federal official.

But FBI officials did not deny that phone records of ABC News, the New York Times and the Washington Post had been sought as part of an investigation of leaks at the CIA.

Officials say the FBI makes extensive use of a new provision of the Patriot Act which allows agents to seek information with what are called National Security Letters (NSL).

The NSLs are a version of an administrative subpoena and are not signed by a judge. Under the law, a phone company receiving a NSL for phone records must provide them and may not divulge to the customer

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER

Telling the truth - about the occupation or the criminals running the government in Washington - is the first reason for Traveling Soldier. 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/> And join with Iraq War vets in the call to end the occupation and bring our troops home now! (www.ivaw.net)

Bush Blinks

16 May 2006 By David Morgan, Reuters

The White House, in an abrupt reversal, has agreed to let the full Senate and House of Representatives intelligence committees review President George W. Bush's domestic spying program, lawmakers said on Tuesday.

The Republican chairmen of the Senate and House panels disclosed the shift two days before a Senate confirmation hearing for Air Force Gen. Michael Hayden as the new CIA director, which is expected to be dominated by concern over the program.

The chairmen said separately that Bush had agreed to full committee oversight of his Terrorist Surveillance Program rather than the more limited briefings allowed up to now.



Two In Three Americans Say Bush Regime Shouldn't Keep Detainees At Guantanamo Bay Unless Charged With A Crime

May 13th, 2006 World Public Opinion.org (by way of Tom Condit)

Two in three Americans say the United States should change the way it treats detainees at Guantanamo Bay as prescribed by the UN Commission on Human Rights. Americans generally support giving international courts broad authority to judge compliance with treaties and seven in ten reject the idea that the United States should receive exceptional treatment under such treaties.

These are some of the findings of a new nationwide poll conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org and fielded by Knowledge Networks.

Respondents were told that the UN Commission on Human Rights has determined that the United States has violated international conventions at Guantanamo Bay by holding certain individuals for interrogation without charging them with a crime.

Sixty-three percent said the United States should follow the Commission's prescriptions and change this practice, while 30% said the United States should not.

Americans show little support for the idea that the United States should have a special exemption from the judgment of international bodies. For example, only 25% agreed that as a general rule US compliance with human rights treaties should never be “subject to the judgment of an international body,” while 69% thought the US should not claim a “special exception.” This included 63% of Republicans and 78% of Democrats.

In light of the continuing controversy over the Abu Ghraib prison abuses, US public attitudes on torture gain particular relevance.

When a government has not taken action against individuals who may have engaged in torture, 70% favor giving an international court the right to investigate.

Further, asked, “When acts of torture have been committed, who do you think should be held responsible?” 77% said both those who gave the orders as well as those who committed the torture.

The poll of 1,023 respondents (margin of error +/- 3.1%) was fielded April 18-26 by Knowledge Networks, using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided internet access.

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

GI Special Looks Even Better Printed Out

The following have posted issues; there may be others:

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