

August 6, 2003

REMEMBER HIROSHIMA

If there was ever a day to think about WMDs it is today. Perhaps that's the reason the news networks this morning are not talking about it because August 6 is the anniversary of the first use of such weapons in wartimes. The place was Hiroshima in Japan. And it was the United States, the country that has made the most noise about the dangers of such weapons of mass destruction in the last year, and yet has the most nuclear weapons in its arsenal and was the only one to use two of them. 78,000 people died in Japan on this day in just the first moments, and many succumbed afterwards to radiation diseases. There was distinguished and undistinguished journalism about this cataclysmic event.

The Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett was the first foreign correspondent on the scene. He called it "a warning to the world." Later a New York Times man arrived to declare that all the talk of radiation was nonsense. Burchett was later to be baited for his reporting; The Times man, William Lawrence (I believe that was his name but I could be wrong) won the Pulitzer Prize. It was later revealed he was on the payroll of an intelligence agency. His story was subsequently debunked – an incident that makes the Jayson Blair affair pale by comparison. (No racial innuendo pun intended.)

VISITING HIROSHIMA

YEARS later I traveled with a group of Nieman

Fellows to Hiroshima at the invitation of the Japanese government. We visited the world's first ground zero, the epicenter of the blast where a peace park now stands. We were told by our hosts that it is customary for foreign delegations to bring some flowers to honor the dead, not make any political statement. It is a ritual in a ritual-conscious country. To the amazement of the Japanese bureaucrats with us, emissaries of a conservative government, our delegation of journalists split down the middle. Half of my colleagues, including Fred Barnes, now the dean of conservative talking heads refused. "We are being used," he and the other "dissidents" said. Apparently expressing compassion for the innocent victims was beyond their ken as was the expression of any concern that such weapons never be used again. Later I visited the peace museum which offered a very neutral chronology of what happened that day. There was a book for visitors' comments. People from all over the world shared their shock and grief. Only a group of Americans expressed another view. "You started it was one entry." "You deserved it was another." I tell the story in my book *The More You Watch The Less You Know*.

Let us take a second out to reflect on Hiroshima today, and the cry of its people to this day. It is a simple appeal: No More Hiroshimas.

COVERAGE FOR KOBE

WEAPONS and weapons inspectors are in the news today, although these stories are overshadowed

owed by the ten-minute court appearance of basketball player Kobe Bryant who must turn up in Colorado to hear the charges against him, a legal formality of little consequence. Nevertheless CNN reports that “thousands” of reporters will be on hand. The legal experts were out this morning explaining the non-event to come. So much for our media’s priorities.

In England they will be burying the former weapons inspector David Kelly in a private family funeral. The Guardian reports: “Tom Mangold, the former Panorama journalist, today paid tribute to his friend Dr. Kelly as “a man who did so much for peace and did so much to counteract evil”. Just hours before his burial in Oxfordshire, the former Panorama journalist said it was tragic that he was one of the few men who would have been able to establish whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.

“We will be sending to his destiny a man who did so much for peace and did so much to counteract evil and, ironically, one of the few people who would have discovered the evidence of the programme of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq,” he said.

The funeral is expected to be attended by 160 mourners and the media have been asked to stay away. Could you imagine asking the media to stay away from an event like this in the US.

NO GREAT WAY TO DIE

ON the weapons front, we have an admission now from the US military which has been denying the use of napalm in Iraq. But now they say according to James Crowley of the San Diego Union Tribune: American jets killed Iraqi troops with firebombs – similar to the controversial napalm used in the Vietnam War – in March and

April as Marines battled toward Baghdad.

“Marine Corps fighter pilots and commanders who have returned from the war zone have confirmed dropping dozens of incendiary bombs near bridges over the Saddam Canal and the Tigris River. The explosions created massive fireballs. “We napalmed both those (bridge) approaches,” said Col. James Alles in a recent interview. He commanded Marine Air Group 11, based at Miramar Marine Corps Air Station, during the war. “Unfortunately, there were people there because you could see them in the (cockpit) video.

“They were Iraqi soldiers there. It’s no great way to die,” he added. How many Iraqis died, the military couldn’t say. No accurate count has been made of Iraqi war casualties.”

SEND THEM TO HOTELS

A BIG scoop for the Washington Times on what’s happening to some US soldiers who end up in the hospital. “Officials at Walter Reed Army Medical Center are referring some outpatients to nearby hotels because casualties from operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have overloaded the hospital’s convalescence facility. “We have an informal agreement with any number of hotels in the area.

“If we come to this point, they will take [patients] for us,” said Walter Reed spokesman Jim Stueve. “They’re very supportive and cooperative when we need that assistance.”

LIMITS ON MEDIA COVERAGE

THE soldiers themselves – here and in Iraq – are being told not to complain to the press, according a report in PR Week as passed on by PR Spin: “After several troops made some highly publicized negative comments to the media about the war effort in Iraq, the Pentagon has taken steps to

keep the frustrations of both soldiers and their families out of reports,” PR Week reports. “According to a story in the July 25 edition of Stars and Stripes, the military appears to be curtailing its much-touted embedded-journalist program, which has allowed reporters almost unfettered access to military units throughout the war and occupation. The 3rd Infantry Division, from where many complaints have arisen, has expelled many of its embedded reporters, and its troops are no longer allowed to talk to the media outside of pre-approved news features. ... Soldiers' families are also being advised not to complain to the media, according to news reports,” PR Week writes.

WHAT ARE SOLDIERS THERE THINKING

JOURNALIST Jonathan Franklin interviews veteran soldier David Hackworth for Salon – and the Pentagon is not going to be happy about what he is saying now especially because he calls Donald Rumsfeld an “asshole:”

“Hackworth was everywhere on cable television during the first days of the war, when early military setbacks convinced him and other retired military leaders that the administration, whose backers sold the conflict as a “cakewalk,” hadn't sent enough troops to quell Iraqi resistance. ... Though he is a colonel by rank, Hackworth was counted among the so-called “television generals” the administration blasted after Baghdad fell, and many conservative admirers turned against him. But now, with American soldiers still dying almost daily in Iraq, the tide of opinion may be turning again, in favor of Hackworth's argument that the administration was unprepared for what's turning out to be a long-term guerrilla resistance in Iraq. Today the primary front of

Hackworth's war of opinion isn't cable television, but a pair of Web sites – Soldiers for the Truth (www.sftt.org) and his own site, Hackworth.com – where he's campaigning to document the dire fate of U.S. troops in Iraq. The sites have quickly become a repository for the gripes and fears of America's beleaguered combat troops.”

US BROADCASTER HANGS IT UP: “WE ARE LOSING”

IN other news of the propaganda war, The Mail and Guardian of South Africa reports: “A broadcaster who became known as “the voice of free Iraq” after the fall of Saddam Hussein has walked out of his job, saying the United States is losing the propaganda war. Failure to invest in the new Iraqi broadcasting service means foreign channels are gaining popularity at the expense of the US, Ahmed al-Rikabi, the American-appointed director of TV and radio said yesterday.

“Stephen Claypole, who was a public affairs adviser to Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad, said: “It's very typical of everything the Americans get involved in. They announce large budgets and the money is never released.” BREA

TRY TRY AGAINKING NEWS

DESPITE reports like this, the US propaganda effort plods on according to a report in Statesman: “With anti-American sentiment rising worldwide, Bush administration officials say they are stepping up efforts to market America throughout the world. Polls indicate that international opinion of the United States has plummeted in the last year, and worldwide sympathy for the United States after Sept. 11, 2001, attacks has all but dissipated.

The Bush administration spent more than \$70 million after the attacks to expand broadcasts of

U.S.-sponsored international news services, but such expenditures have returned to previous levels, and critics say they are not enough to counter the growing tide of anti-American sentiment.” Right!

HISTORY OF PROPAGANDA FAILURES

US propaganda has had a long history of backfiring and turning off Americans as former US diplomat John Brown writes. He is at the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University and is working on a book on propaganda and U.S. foreign policy. “John Brown says Americans' suspicion of official U.S. propaganda has a long history. The euphoria over the “victory” in Iraq is now replaced by increasing doubts about how the Bush administration justified and reported on the war. No weapons of mass destruction have been found. The Iraqi people we were supposed to liberate are not greeting American troops with open arms. Press reports on the saving of Private Lynch raise questions about the accuracy of the Pentagon's coverage of the event.

“Letters to the editor in major newspapers complain that the Bush administration lied about the war. More media are suggesting that the pro-war arguments of the administration were deceitful. The public increasingly senses that it was duped by propaganda into supporting a phony war.

“Americans' suspicions of propaganda by their own government have a long history. It would not be surprising if this anti-propaganda tradition were to resurface given the growing controversy over the reasons the Bush administration led the country into war.”

DEATH TOLL NOW 14 IN INDO

THE bombing in Indonesia yesterday was seen as an expression of Anti-Americanism. New disclosures on the Jakarta bombing say that the chemical used was the same as the one used earlier in Bali. What they have yet to show – contrary to impressions on Nightline last night – is that this is part of some coordinated or orchestrated Al Qaeda campaign. It seems to be growing out of local organization that may or may not be affiliated. The New York Post is reporting: “The attack occurred just hours before Jemaah Islamiyah's spiritual leader, Muslim cleric Abu Bakar, started testifying at his trial in a Jakarta courtroom, on charges stemming from a series of Christmas Eve bombings three years ago.”

The other day, CNN was filled with reports that Secretary of State Colin Powell would be leaving office. Then Powell denied it all, blaming gossip mongers in Washington. Now The New York Times's Maureen Dowd is suggesting that this was more than a mere leak. She calls it a “Neocon Coup at the Department d'Etat.” The Washington Post originally reported the story which got big play.

Now, writes Dowd: “Countering the Post story, Mr. Powell's posse claimed that neither the secretary of state nor his deputy had ever said they intended to step down, and charged that the neocons were leaking a canard to turn the two men they consider lame doves into lame ducks.

“This is the revenge of the neocons for two months of bad news, looking like they're falling all over themselves in Iraq,” said a Powell confidant, noting that Alma Powell was furious she had been dragged in.

In The Post, nearly all of the names of those

who could move up if Mr. Powell moves out are Iraq hawks: Condi Rice, Paul Wolfowitz and Newt Gingrich were mentioned as candidates for secretary of state; Wolfie, Cheney Chief of Staff Scooter Libby and Condi deputy Steve Hadley, who may be radioactive after the uranium mistake, were mentioned for national security chief. The move against the popular Powell had all the earmarks of the neocons' pre-emptive strike on Iraq."

MILITARY INSIDER BLOWS HER WHISTLE

WE now have a retired military officer who worked in the Pentagon at a policy level to confirm that she saw the neo-cons up close and in action and didn't like what she saw:

Karen Kwiatkowski, a recently retired Air Force Lieutenant colonel, writes in The Beacon Journal: "Much has been written about the role of the founding members of the Project for a New American Century, the Center for Security Policy, and the American Enterprise Institute and their new positions in the Bush administration. Certainly, appointees sharing particular viewpoints are expected to congregate, and an overwhelming number of these appointees having such organizational ties is neither conspiratorial nor unusual. What is unusual is the way this network operates solely with its membership across the various agencies – in particular the State Department, the National Security Council and the Office of the Vice President.

"Within the Central Intelligence Agency, it was less clear to me who the appointees were, if any. This might explain the level of interest in the CIA taken by the Office of the Vice President. In any case, I personally witnessed several cases of staff officers being told not to contact their counterparts

at State or the National Security Council because that particular decision would be processed through a different channel. This cliquishness is cause for amusement in such movies as Never Been Kissed or The Hot Chick. In the development and implementation of war planning it is neither amusing nor beneficial for American security because opposing points of view and information that doesn't 'fit' aren't considered."

FCC BATTLE LINES

THERE was speculation that FCC chairman Michael Powell might be quitting. He says no....Sen. Ernest Hollings, one of the prime movers in the Senate who is trying to roll back the new FCC media ownership rules, has announced plans retire after 55 years in politricks. ... Media activists have launched a petition to try to flood Congress with a million names to press for a rollback of proposed FCC rule changes that would lead to more media monopolies. Mediareform.net writes: "Please go to: <http://www.mediareform.net/petition>. It only takes a minute.

"If we can get 1 million signatures demanding a rollback of the new rules, Congress will be forced to act in the public interest. This is a new petition. We need everyone to sign it now, including those who signed previous FCC petitions. Please send this alert to your friends, family, colleagues and email lists.

"Whether Congress legislates to overturn the new FCC rules, passes a resolution nullifying the FCC action, or votes for a spending bill that accomplishes the same result, the public demands - indeed our democracy demands - a total rollback of the June 2 rule change.

Go to <http://www.mediareform.net/petition>

