

June 23, 2003

HOORAY FOR THE HULK

Somehow it is fitting that THE HULK is number one in America's box offices. As the self-proclaimed #1 country, we deserve a number one larger than life new movie monster, dontcha think? Another HULK was on CNN last night as the network began selling us the Iraq War all over again, this time on videotape and DVD as the first installment of a new documentary series on the Battle for Baghdad is rushed into the marketplace with its own 800 number. I doubt that there will be many callers from Iraq. In the "nothing surprises me anymore department," I was delighted to find that the Hummer automobile-tank was being advertised on the broadcast.

Of course, the new documentary recycled the familiar news we saw and what I have been dissecting throughout. There was a section of media coverage, which suggested once again that the Arab media was biased and only focused on civilian casualties, as if spotlighting the human costs of the war was somehow off the point.

MESMERIZED BY MACHINES

THE focus on the great hulk of US military superiority was the centerpiece of CNN's effort featuring exclusive footage inside high-tech war rooms and the battlefield. Missing was any new information about what really happened or is still happening now on the ground.

Radio Free Europe is carrying a piece that says Iraqis are more interested in other videos—videos

showing Saddam's abuses. "A man in his early 20s steps into a video store in Mansur, a middle-class district of the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, and declares: "I want a video on torture." Muhammed, a shopkeeper at the Black and White Video shop, takes a video CD from the shelf and sells it to him for \$1.50. Muhammed tells another customer that he's currently out of stock but asks him to leave a deposit. He says seven popular films will be available in a few hours: "Dictator 1," "Dictator 2," "The Crimes of Ali Hassan Al Majid," "The Crimes of Khalupsa," "The Executions of Political Prisoners," "Birthday Party," and "The Battle for Baghdad's Airport."

The video CDs are of poor quality and are wrapped in plastic bags. They contain excerpts from documentaries widely seen in the West and feature scenes of the aftermath of the 1988 chemical weapons attack on Kurdish civilians in Halabja, executions of political prisoners by Hussein's forces, and footage of the interiors of Hussein's palaces. The images are interspersed with reports on the recent Iraq war from the Arabic Al-Jazeera and the U.S. Fox News satellite TV channels."

M.I.A.: MEDIA SELF-CRITICISM

THERE was no critical analysis in the CNN documentary — or an earlier one narrated by Tom Brokaw that I saw on the Discovery Times channel about US media coverage. There was no probing into the Pentagon propaganda effort and its

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use of embedded journalism (This is an interest of mine, having just written an e-book on the subject, *Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception* available through Mediachannel.org) Thanks to Milwaukee Magazine's Peter Robertson, we now find out what has barely been reported by the beneficiaries of government largesse:

"Who paid for this media training, transportation, and equipment? Unwittingly, American taxpayers picked up the tab for these and many other expenses in the military's embedded media program.

""That's one way of looking at it," concedes Maj. Tim Blair, Pentagon officer in charge of the program. Another way of looking at it is the embedded media, by accepting military handouts at taxpayer expense, betrayed the public's trust and venerable journalism policies against freebies. "These hidden costs of the program have gone curiously unreported, perhaps because the top news organizations accepted this bargain for their own embedded employees. Or maybe it's because the Pentagon didn't disclose any media expenses in its \$60 billion war budget.,,,

<http://www.milwaukeemagazine.com/072003/pressroom.html>

ASSASINATION AS POLICY

ASSASSINATIONS seem to have become the order of the day in Iraq. A special US unit is stalking and may have already killed Top Iraqi leaders (The Observer reported that: "Saddam and at least one of his two sons, Uday and Qusay, were among the dead") The New York Times explains today: "A drone destroyed a convoy last week believed to be carrying fugitive Iraqi leaders, and experts are now searching the site for signs of Saddam Hussein's DNA." This all happened last

week but we are just finding out about it.

The unit, called "Grey Fox," is according to press reports, "part of Task Force 20, who come under the political control of the Pentagon's new Under Secretary of State for Intelligence, Stephen Cambone. Its lone mission: to kill or capture Saddam. Cambone, a neo-conservative, was placed in the newly created post by Donald Rumsfeld.

The Observer reports, "the unit that has been criticized by senior US officials for its 'lawlessness' and 'lack of control' has hunted Serbian war criminals in the Balkans, fought in Somalia, and in counter-terror operations across the globe: it is a key part of what the Pentagon calls its 'black world' of undercover operations."

BLAMING OUTSIDE AGITATORS

THE US government justifies using killer units like this because they say, according to the Washington Post: "The intensified resistance has been reinforced by the participation of foreign fighters coming into Iraq, L. Paul Bremer, the civilian administrator of Iraq, told reporters at a conference in Jordan today. "We do see signs of outside involvement in a number of ways," he said. Bremer said that "we so far don't see signs of command and control in these attacks," adding that it appears largely to be small groups of five to 10 people."

The hunt for Saddam is also leading to resistance according to the LA Times, Alissa J. Rubin: "While the Americans don't always tell the Iraqis who or what they are looking for, interviews with Iraqis who have been interrogated and released - among them Mahmud's erstwhile host, Rija - suggest that U.S. forces are hot on the trail of Hussein himself.

It is the part of Iraq where Hussein could find shelter in almost any house he approached and be assured that his hosts would not betray him.

"They are asking silly things. 'Have you seen Saddam Hussein?' 'Where did you see him?' And the answer they get is, 'No, I haven't seen him.' And that is reality," said Marwan Adnan Nasiri, a 37-year-old lawyer who said six or seven of his cousins have been detained. Some of them have been released. "If I knew where Saddam was, I would never tell you," he said with a pleasant smile, "because you are an American."

US TROOPS IMPLODING

WHILE the American media focuses on the Saddam hunt, the British press is interviewing American soldiers who are beginning to tell stories that the Pentagon would prefer the media not relay. One such story was filed by Bob Graham, of London's Evening Standard from Baghdad:

"What they told me, in a series of extraordinary interviews, will make uncomfortable reading for US and British politicians and senior military staff desperate to prevent the liberation of Iraq turning into a quagmire of Vietnam proportions, where the behavior of troops feeds the hatred of an occupied people.

"Sergeant First Class John Meadows revealed the mindset that has led to hundreds of innocent Iraqi civilians being killed alongside fighters deliberately dressed in civilian clothes. "You can't distinguish between who's trying to kill you and who's not," he said. "Like, the only way to get through s*** like that was to concentrate on getting through it by killing as many people as you can, people you know are trying to kill you. Killing them first and getting home."

The men have been traumatized by their expe-

riences. Cpl Richardson said: "At night time you think about all the people you killed. It just never gets off your head, none of this stuff does. There's no chance to forget it, we're still here, we've been here so long. Most people leave after combat but we haven't."

Sgt Meadows said men under his command had been seeking help for severe depression: "They've already seen psychiatrists and the chain of command has got letters back saying 'these men need to be taken out of this situation'. But nothing's happened." Cpl Richardson added: "Some soldiers don't even f***** sleep at night. They sit up all f***** night long doing s*** to keep themselves busy - to keep their minds off this f***** stuff. It's the only way they can handle it. It's not so far from being crazy but it's their way of coping. There's one guy trying to build a little pool out the back, pointless stuff but it keeps him busy."

RETIRED US GENERAL BLASTS POLICY

THE Observer also spoke with a retired US General who criticized military tactics: "At the end of a week that saw a war of attrition develop against the US military, General William Nash told The Observer that the US had 'lost its window of opportunity' after felling Saddam Hussein's regime and was embarking on a long-term expenditure of people and dollars for which it had not planned.

"Nash said the US had 'failed to understand the mindset and attitudes of the Iraqi people and the depth of hostility towards the US in much of the country'. 'It is much greater and deeper than just the consequences of war,' he added. 'It comes from 12 years of sanctions, Israel and Palestinians, and a

host of issues.' As a result, he says, 'we are now seeing the re-emergence of a reasonably organised military opposition - small scale, but it could escalate."

DEAD BY THE DEAD SEA AND ON THE HILL

THERE are 11 heads of state or government at the three-day meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in the Dead Sea resort of Shuneh. BBC reports: "One Arab analyst, the BBC's Barbara Plett reports, said the summit might provide regional legitimacy to American rule of Iraq by switching the focus from politics to humanitarian aid and economic reconstruction."

While the situation in Iraq deteriorates, is the Congress planning to investigate what's happening on the ground or the WMD issue. CBSNews.com's Dick Meyer doubts it. He says "The WMD-Gate Inquisition has begun not with a bang but a whisper. There will not be a credible, serious investigation of the spies, the Bush Hawks, the WMDs and the war without some big bangs. Will that happen? Will Congress cop out? I can't say it's looking good.

"The congressional committees tasked with finding the secrets of the secret agents have opened hearings on the intelligence secrets used to justify the war with Iraq — in secret. In both the House and the Senate, the intelligence committees are meeting behind closed doors. Closed hearings held by committees with narrow jurisdictions cannot and will not provide the oversight needed in the post-9/11, post-Iraq War world."

GENERAL CLARK ON 9/11

FAIRNESS and Accuracy in Reporting is indicting media outlets for not following up or investi-

gating claims made by former NATO commander Wesley Clark on NBC's Meet the Press about the administration's efforts to link the attacks of 9/11 to Iraq. Here's part of the transcript making the rounds on the internet:

CLARK: "There was a concerted effort during the fall of 2001, starting immediately after 9/11, to pin 9/11 and the terrorism problem on Saddam Hussein."

"RUSSSERT: "By who? Who did that?"

CLARK: "Well, it came from the White House, it came from people around the White House. It came from all over. I got a call on 9/11. I was on CNN, and I got a call at my home saying, 'You got to say this is connected. This is state-sponsored terrorism. This has to be connected to Saddam Hussein.' I said, 'But—I'm willing to say it, but what's your evidence?' And I never got any evidence."

ROAD MAP CLAIMS MORE VICTIMS

DEATH continues to stalk the occupied Palestinian territories. Two Palestinians died in Gaza when a bomb they were carrying blew up, or so BBC reported. A Hamas spokesperson was targeted and killed over the weekend as Israeli assassinations of those they denounce as terrorists continues unabated. And so do the retaliations. This prompted this sad but angry comment from Hadas Ben-Eliahu, an Israeli whose 19-year-old sister was killed in the Jerusalem suicide bombing. His remarks were addressed to Israel's Minister of Defense, Sha'ul Mofaz.

"You offer us only violence and killing. That is the only solution that you offer us. What other solution? What did you invent during the last years? Apart from killing people, what else did

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you do? You were the Chief-of-Staff, and now you are the Defense Minister, what did you do? You murdered my sister. At least you are an accomplice to the murder."

JIMMY BRESLIN INDICTS MEDIA FOR STENOGRAPHY

IN this country, over the weekend, the always readable Jimmy Breslin wrote: "I am thinking that it could be time for me to begin thinking about leaving this news business. It is not mine anymore. Let me tell you why.

"Friday, the newspapers and television reported the following matter with no anger or effort to do anything other than serve as stenographers for the government:

"On March 1, give or take a day, in Columbus, Ohio, the FBI arrested an American citizen they say is Iyman Faris. There wasn't a word uttered. He vanished. No lawyer was notified. He made no phone calls and wrote no postcards or letters.

He was a United States citizen who disappeared without a trace into a secret metal world.

Our news people write like the worst of the old Pravda. I read in papers from everywhere yesterday morning, "After Mr. Faris was secretly arrested three months ago ... "and court papers this week said that Mr. Faris secretly pleaded guilty to charges of terrorism last month." They say. They were simply typed out, as if to report the guy getting a parking ticket. Now, the FBI doesn't even tell you the right name of a kidnapped man and makes the news reporters love it.

Faris/Rauf violated the laws handed down by Madison, Jefferson, Marshall. A small religious zealot, John Ashcroft, takes their great laws and bravery and using our new Patriot Act, turns it into Fascism. He could do this openly because

news reporters go about the government like gardeners, bent over, smiling and nodding when one of the owners shows up. You only have to look at a White House news conference to see how they aggressively pursue your right to know.

The news people stand when the president comes into the room. They really do. They don't sit until he tells them to. You tell them a lie and they say, "Sir."

ASHCROFT'S PLEA TO THE PRESS

MEANWHILE, The New York Times reports: "- Attorney General John Ashcroft called on the press and television today to dispel fears about the sweeping antiterrorism law known as the U.S.A. Patriot Act, which was enacted after the attacks at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

"Addressing two dozen editors, publishers, television executives and others, Mr. Ashcroft said, "We need the help of the news industry, the fourth estate, to inform citizens about the constitutional tools and methods being used in the war against terror. We need the media's help, for instance, in portraying accurately the U.S.A. Patriot Act."

SAVE BILLY NESSEN

ZNET Is appealing for letters to Indonesian authorities to protect American journalist Billy Nessen in Aceh province. "Billy is a freelance journalist who has been reporting on the burgeoning independence movement in Aceh. Now he is trying to leave the war zone and is being prevented from doing so by the Indonesian government soldiers. It is essential that people please send faxes to the Indonesian government and to the US

Ambassador to Indonesia.

BELGIUM WANTS TO KNOW

"WE'RE a few researchers here in Belgium trying to establish the personal links between media-workers and the environments of business and politics. One specific topic that I'm illustrating is the case of journalists crossing-over to political parties, think-tanks, PR companies, spokes servicesof corporate and government organizations etc.(and perhaps returning to their editorial rooms after time spend "on the other side.") It has become a "normal practice" but I consider it to be a sort of contamination. As we say in Flemish: The one who sleeps with the dog, gets his fleas. Do you know of such cases in the US or elsewhere?

KIDS IN TROUBLE

I WROTE last week about youth in Benton Harbor, Michigan, who have been revolting after a police abuse incident. I said that military recruiters are probably targeting them. Shebar Windstone who hails from Michigan wrote to say:

"...on the subject of kids looking for a way out

of small towns — consider, too, the extremes military recruiters will go to in efforts to entice them. I've only seen news reports of recruiters in high schools & colleges, but a conversation with one of my sisters makes me wonder to what extremes these obscene pimps for death & destruction will go. She said an Army recruiter who had been going after my nephew, spent an hour at the house trying to talk him into enlisting until my brother-in-law came home & showed him the door. This is a kid who's been on Ritalin for ADD since elementary school, was held back for one year, & who's finally gotten his head & life together enough to attend community college, hold down a part-time job & play in a band. Fortunately he's also intelligent & sensible enough to realize that the military would not be good for his health — but how many 17- or 18-year-olds would have the strength & courage to withstand an invasion or steady bombardment of promotional materials & empty promises from such death merchants?

Again I have to wonder how many of our tax dollars are going for this.

