

June 25, 2003

GHOSTS OF VIETNAM STALK THE DESERT

Vietnam is the name we dare not speak in connection with Iraq. Those days are long gone. The memory bank has been erased. Most of the punditocracy speaks of a Vietnam era now. John Kerry dwells on his days under fire in the Delta, not hurling medals back at the Capitol building as a leader of VVAW—Vietnam Veterans against the War. If nostalgia for the war and its horrors is no more, a Vietnam War MOVIE veterans society still thrives in the minds of some soldiers. For them, those “glory days” are not to be mourned, but relived. Apocalypse Now has had a real life sequel. Reuters reports:

ROBERT DUVALL, WE NEED YOU

“BAGHDAD (Reuters) – U.S. troops psyched up on a bizarre musical reprise from Vietnam war film “Apocalypse Now” before crashing into Iraqi homes to hunt gunmen on Saturday, as Shi’ite Muslims rallied against the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

“With Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries” still ringing in their ears and the clatter of helicopters overhead, soldiers rammed vehicles into metal gates and hundreds of troops raided houses in the western city of Ramadi after sunrise as part of a drive to quell a spate of attacks on U.S. forces.” Todays NY Times incidentally says we still don’t have all the facts related to this raid: “Veil of Secrecy Around Village Hit in U.S. Raid: The U.S. military evicted five Iraqi families whose houses

were bombed six days ago and refused to say what is going on.”

SITTING BULLSHITE

OTHER “blasts from the past” might also be invoked. Consider today, June 25, in addition to being the anniversary of the start of the Korean War in 1950 also marks an earlier military defeat. Reminds the New York Times today:

“On June 25, 1876, Lt. Col. George A. Custer and his 7th Cavalry were wiped out by Sioux and Cheyenne Indians in the Battle of Little Big Horn in Montana.” No parallels are ever exact but the pacification of Iraq conjures up the treatment Native Americans experienced. In those days, they were being liberated from their heathen beliefs. Alas, many rebelled often with unconventional warfare.

BRITISH TROOPS SLAIN

AND so it was for the British forces in the South of Iraq yesterday. We still don’t know why the soldiers fired rubber bullets into a crowd of protesters or why they were protesting in the first place. But that’s how one incident started. Another involved the chasing down of soldiers who took refuge in a local police station. This was quite a shock on the BBC this morning because the British were said to have developed friendly relations with the natives in contrast to their more muscular, macho Yank cousins.

This military setback may be followed by a

political one today when Alistair Campbell, Tony Blair's spin-meister-in-chief goes before a Parliamentary Committee to explain his role in what former minister Clare Short has termed a policy of deliberate but "honorable deception." With Blair's popularity levels at new lows, his foreign Minister Jack Straw seems to be hanging Campbell out to dry. Reports the Guardian today:

"Jack Straw yesterday accused the government strategy director, Alastair Campbell, of presiding over "a complete horlicks" when he commissioned, received and published the "dodgy dossier" on Iraq's weapons threat in February.

"The foreign secretary said the dossier, claimed by Tony Blair to be based on fresh intelligence, had been a severe embarrassment to the government and that lessons had been learnt.

DODGE BALL UNDER BIG BEN

BOTH of the dossiers Blair used to make his case for intervention are being discredited. The first is being called "Sex-ed up" because it allegedly exaggerated Iraq's ability to launch weapons of mass destruction within 45 minutes. The second, the so-called "Dodgy Dossier" is the one that carried inaccurate excerpts from a student paper.

Blair's whole government seems dodgier than sexier to many in the electorate. "An ICM poll commissioned by the Guardian gives him a personal rating of minus 13, compared to plus 8 during the hostilities. The failure to provide evidence of Iraq's weapons, the controversial Cabinet reshuffle and the recent row over taxes are all given as factors."

FRIEDMAN VS RUMMY

BACK in the USSA, influential for reasons that escape me New York Times philosopher in resi-

dence Thomas Friedman, a war backer, is now a Pentagon attacker. Today he lashes his tongue out at the very agency he once cheered on. "

"I still believe that with the right effort Iraq can be made a decent place. But that task has been made much harder because of the Pentagon's poor planning for postwar Iraq. If the Pentagon's lapses can be overcome – and I hope they will be – then we should learn from them for future wars. If they can't be overcome, then they will be grist for next year's who-lost-Iraq debate.

"Let's start with the biggest analytical failure. The Bush Pentagon went into this war assuming that it could decapitate the Iraqi army, bureaucracy and police force, remove the Saddam loyalists and then basically run Iraq through the rump army, bureaucracy and police.

"Wrong."

KURTZ VS MILLER

HOWARD KURTZ of the Washington Post reports that "New York Times reporter Judith Miller played a highly unusual role in an Army unit assigned to search for dangerous Iraqi weapons, according to U.S. military officials, prompting criticism that the unit was turned into what one official called a "rogue operation."

"More than a half-dozen military officers said that Miller acted as a middleman between the Army unit with which she was embedded and Iraqi National Congress leader Ahmed Chalabi, on one occasion accompanying Army officers to Chalabi's headquarters, where they took custody of Saddam Hussein's son-in-law. She also sat in on the initial debriefing of the son-in-law, these sources say.

"Since interrogating Iraqis was not the mission of the unit, these officials said, it became a "Judith

Miller team,” in the words of one officer close to the situation.”

TIME FOR ANOTHER WAR?

NONE of this seems to discourage a well conditioned and cultivated US public opinion. Many Americans seemingly want more war, not less: Reports the Washington Post: “Most Americans would support the United States taking military action to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons despite growing public concern about the mounting number of U.S. military casualties in the aftermath of the war with Iraq, according to a new Washington Post-ABC News poll.”

“AGENTS MATH AND LOGIC”

NOTE the term “The aftermath of the war with Iraq.” Aftermath. Suggests its over. Hardly. The aftermath is more war in Iraq, or at least so far. The US and Britain are now training a new Iraqi army. TomDispatch.com dissects a New York Times story

“Patrick Tyler of the Times (U.S.-British Project: To Build a Postwar Iraqi Armed Force of 40,000 Soldiers in 3 Years) also reports on the announcement of the formation of a new Air Force-less Iraqi military – 40,000 troops trained by an American major general and “defense contractors” (i.e. rent-a-mercenary companies), only 12,000 “light infantry (emphasis on the “light”) next year. In addition, despite Paul Bremer’s previous statements – and here’s an understandable switch – the demobilized army, the other 388,000 men assumedly, will be offered back pay and pensions not to get angry and become guerrillas. (So in Iraq anyway, protests work.)

“Here’s the paragraph you could have read here first, a week or two back, “The projected size of

Iraq’s first postwar military seems to reflect the reality that a large contingent of American and British troops will be positioned in Iraq for some time, as the guarantor of security.” Of course, to give myself credit, I was relying on my own sources of “solid intelligence.” I refer to them as Agents Math and Logic. If you did your math on the size of the future Iraqi military and the logic of the situation was obvious long ago.”

THE NON-INVESTIGATION

YOUR News Dissector has reported on the various accountings of civilian casualties in Iraq, including a recent report by Associated Press. Now Editor and Publisher magazine has spoken with the AP about an unreported aspect of their probe—promised official probes that never took place:

“Using a rigorous methodology, seven AP reporters in Iraq over a period of five weeks reviewed dozens of documents from 60 of Iraq’s 124 hospitals, covering the period from March 20, the war’s beginning, to April 20, when the fighting abated. The tally: 3,240 civilians died throughout the country, with 1,896 of those in Baghdad alone. But AP referred to these totals as “still fragmentary” with the likely figure “significantly” higher...

“The military, however, has asserted it would investigate certain incidents that resulted in civilian deaths. Charles J. Hanley, a roving AP correspondent who helped research the tally in Basra and Hillah, had earlier reported on heavy civilian casualties in Hillah during days of cluster bombing by the U.S. military. On May 17, he reported that Central Command said the incident was under investigation. He was surprised to read in Price’s AP story that Central Command now

acknowledged “it had no information to add” about the tragedy.

A Central Command spokesman also told AP no inquiry was conducted into the controversial March 28 shelling of the al-Shoala market in Baghdad – another bloody incident it had promised to probe.

“As a journalist trying to convey truth to the American people,” Hanley told E&P, “I find it distressing that U.S. military spokesmen seem to facilely tell journalists that they are conducting an investigation into an incident and then weeks later, when attention is distracted, let it slip out that there was no investigation, that no further information is available.”

STRIKE UP THE BAND

RIGHT or wrong, no matter because perception usually trumps reality and so we now have Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld trying to whip up public opinion to back the attack and attackers. His target: the usually conservative and secure homeland of Orange County California.. Reports Jim Washburn for the local press:

“His staffers have been phoning city officials, including some in Orange County, and strongly urging them to structure Fourth of July celebrations around the war in Iraq.

“I got the impression that they had a list of every city in the nation that had applied for a pyrotechnics permit, and were calling them to persuade them to be part of the program,” said one OC city official.

OPERATION TELL US YOU LOVE US

THE project even has a name: Operation Tribute to Freedom, putatively overseen by Air Force gen-

eral Richard B. Myer. Check out the website at www.defendamerica.mil/otf/photos/index.html

Therein, it is claimed that Pentagon officials had been “inundated” with requests from communities asking how they could show support for the troops. Another press release remarks on the “spontaneous” displays of support for the military. And there doubtless have been many. So why, then, does the Department of Defense deem it necessary to cold-call cities to sell them on a military salute? “It seemed pretty obvious they were just trying to manufacture more public support for their war,” said the city official. “

NO ACCESS TO GITMO GULAG

THE Guardian reports: “The US military clashed with British journalists yesterday at Camp Delta in Guantanamo Bay after inmates shouted to a BBC Panorama team who had been invited to tour the maximum security camp. As the journalists walked through camp four, detainees shouted that they wanted to tell their story and the US soldiers immediately halted the tour, ordering everyone out....An audio recording made by the Panorama team was seized by US forces and the BBC reporter Vivienne White was banished to a section of the bay away from Camp Delta.

FCC BATTLE STILL RAGES

COMMON Cause is seeking to mobilize pressure on Congress: “Last Thursday, the Senate Commerce Committee responded to the call to overturn the FCC decision. It took the first step by approving Senate Bill S.1046, and added several amendments, including one addressing the consolidation of radio that, if approved and passed into law, could address the creation of a more

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independent and less monopolized media.

"You answered our cry to upend the FCC and flooded the Senate with messages and we won this first step. We'll keep you informed as the legislation moves through the full Senate after the July 4 recess. But right now, we need your help to build momentum in the House. Please urge your Representative to listen to the American people by supporting legislation similar to S.1046.

Contact your representative in the House by clicking here:

http://causenet.commoncause.org/afr/mail/on_eclick_compose/?alertid=2651106

Common Cause adds: "Whatever the end result of the legislation approved by the Senate Commerce Committee, a new era has begun. More than ever, the American public is aware that a diverse and independent media is integral to a healthy democracy."

FOX VS FAUX

FOX News is using legal action to shut down a website that is challenging the conservative network. The site is called "Faux News." They explain that they have been issued a "cease-and-desist order by FOX NEWS HQ in New York. As you know, we have an huge, unavoidable red and white disclaimer clearly stating that our tee-shirts are political parodies and we are not connected or endorsed by FOX NEWS in any way. It is on every page of the site and takes up a quarter of each page.

"Despite these enormous disclaimers, Chris Silvestri, Senior Media Council for Fox News, tells us that, "The Fox News Channel is in no way affiliated with the Website and, by creating confusion as to the relationship between Fox's programs and the Network, you harm the goodwill (goodwill???

Ed.) represented by Fox's program."

<http://www.agitproperties.com/cease.htm>

JOURNALISTS BUSTED, TV STATION CLOSED

IRANIAN activists report that two more journalists were detained in current wave of arrests and that an appeals court has upheld a three-year jail sentence for another journalist: "Freelance journalist Amir Teirani and Mohamed Reza Bouzeri, a journalist with Golestan-e-Iran, were arrested last week June... Mother Jones Online reports: 'Russia's last independent television network, TVS, was shutdown by the Kremlin at midnight on Saturday leaving its viewers with one final message, "Goodbye! We have been shut off." Critics charge that the government-induced shutdown puts Russia one step closer to a totally nationalized media – reminiscent of the former communist USSR ... Good News in Indonesia ... Billy Nesson, the US journalist has been freed in Aceh according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

PROTESTING BUSH IN NEW YORK

YESTERDAY I noted that a New York Times report on a \$4 million Presidential fundraiser in New York ignored the protesters on the outside. The Village Voice does not, reporting: "In what looked like a mini dress rehearsal for the cacophony of dissent that's expected to hit the streets of New York City during next summer's GOP convention, nearly 3,000 demonstrators protested on Seventh Avenue to protest President Bush as he presided over a \$2,000-a-plate fundraiser inside midtown's Sheraton Hotel on Monday....

"In the same way that this fundraiser is a kickoff

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for Bush's reelection campaign, this may be the kickoff for a wave of protest across the country against Bush," said Bill Dobbs, spokesperson for the antiwar coalition United for Peace and Justice.

One of the speakers was the journalist Greg Palast who criticized the police and media. He said in part: "They're trying to spread out the demonstration so that people inside paying two grand for their pudding won't puke when they see the reality of what's going on out here," Palast complained. "I just got in town from London, where my documentary exposing the Bush family fortunes is airing on primetime television, but here in the U.S. it's like I'm relegated to samizdat reporting. It's like there's an electronic Berlin Wall against covering this stuff," he said, gesturing to the satellite news trucks swarming around the Sheraton."

TODAY'S LETTER

GREG MUIR writes: "Though I am sure your News Dissector is enjoyed by many liberals, I know that I have forwarded your emails to a number of not-so-liberal people with great appreciation. It isn't a liberal vs. conservative issue at the core - it's about the loss of a free independent press - which in turn results in the loss of honesty and accountability in government (think both Democrats and Republicans in the Senate), the loss of personal freedom, loss of our democracy, and in the end slowly becoming just another banana republic. These things should (and often do, if they find out) shock people of any political persuasion. A free inquisitive press serves everyone. Hope we get it back someday."

GOOD NIGHT DAVID (PT 2)

ALTERNET carries an assessment by Media writer Dennis Hans about the late David Brinkley, the NBC and ABC anchorman who was praised in death for his sense of irony and "conscision" in writing. Hans claims that the obits were just more uncritical legend building..."judging from his 1981-1996 stint at ABC hosting a Sunday morning interview-and-chat show, "This Week with David Brinkley," he was mostly style and little substance. Sure, he used words economically and precisely, and he possessed a wry wit. But those qualities hardly offset his deference to power and his superficial, inside-the-beltway knowledge that made him an easy mark for U.S. officials eager to demonize a foreign foe or glorify a friend."

Interestingly, Brinkley was finishing a final book at the time of his demise which included this thought, according to William Falk in *The Week*: "The American people tend to assume that whatever they are told by political leaders is a pack of lies. And we have seen and continue to see, remarkably, they are right." Yo, David if we/they are right to distrust the pols, what about our media?

Actually before his final Goodnight, David comment on the medium he devoted his life to: "Television news has become so trivial and devoid of content as to be little different from entertainment programming." Remarkable. But not unusual. Many media greats tend to offer similar critiques once they are safely off the air. Alas.

And so with Brinkley on my side, I leave you now.

