

The Challenger

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From the Editor..

Few issues have divided humanity more than the ongoing war in Iraq. While this is hardly a war on the scale of several that have preceded it through the twentieth century, the many historical and contemporary ideological strains that it has evoked both in the case of the groups opposed to it as well as those supporting it (and this does not take into account the possible views of the various groups involved) it is an issue that has elbowed aside virtually every other newsworthy issue today.

Therefore, it was something that we could not, but, address, and it was decided that the historical perspective, one that many in the West are unfamiliar with, would be looked at more closely.

We were fortunate in having among us an editor who served in the Marines and is now a full-time student and parent after returning from her tour of duty. Her personal experience should speak more about what is actually happening than the millions of television sound bites that we are

daily bombarded with ever could tell us. And, I am grateful that she agreed to write about the war and her personal experience as a soldier despite it bringing up traumatic memories that lurk within the deepest recesses of her memories.

The issue of private contractors in the war has also been a controversial one. In a sense, the great wars down history have always used mercenaries of some kind, some reviled, others worshiped as heroes. The use of private contractors to perform jobs that would normally have been performed by soldiers and the enormous payments made out to these contractors in comparison to the meager amounts that soldiers get paid have been just two controversial aspects of former soldiers and some career mercenaries who have signed up and are currently performing various jobs in Iraq.

One of our team looks at this very divisive issue from the standpoint of a patriotic American.

And, finally, we come to the soldiers involved in the fighting.

The many differing opinions on the war and the various arguments about it seem to have pushed their enormous sacrifices out of the limelight. While victory or defeat might not really come anytime soon, the sad fact is that with every soldier killed or maimed in the fighting comes a tragedy of horrendous proportions.

An individual is hurt or killed and his family and friends are permanently scarred without participating in the fighting themselves. We have an appeal asking for more respect for the men in uniform and for not using soldiers as pawns in frivolous political arguments.

Finally, we hope to hear from people who have not written for The Challenger. That, Dear Reader, is, of course, you. Do write in with your comments and opinions. We appreciate hearing from you and both flow-ers as well as pies in our faces are equally welcome.

I Will Not Propagate Lies

by Cathy Ramirez

People have served in the United States military for various reasons which are not limited to opportunities to travel, education benefits, and occupational prestige. Very few military members and veterans feel an overwhelming feeling of patriotism beforehand, compelling one from a civilian life to a military one. Often, they are taught ‘patriotism’ through the military regimen *itself*; how and when to be patriotic is incorporated into initial training and continued enforced training.

However, many veterans are discharged feeling bitter, tired, and unprepared to meet the different kinds of challenges that a civilian life has to offer. Somehow, the majority of these sacrificing men and women continue to express pride and a sense of allegiance to the military despite their issues and negative experiences. What drives these veterans to such an extent of loyalty? Is it the bonds of brotherhood, a developed and genuine sense of duty, or mere intimidation?

Active duty and active reservists are individually hand-picked to speak with the media one-

on-one. The military is ‘briefed’ in large formations as to how to conduct behavior appropriately in the presence of the media. Furthermore, military men and women are instructed on the positive statements that are allowed to be made in response to questions that require a personal opinion. It is not surprising that many units even forbid communication to anyone resembling the press; hence, military members under contract do not have the right to free speech. And it’s all legal because the military, whether active or inactive, is not necessarily protected by the United States Constitution. Instead, the military protects *itself* by the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).

If you ever have an opportunity to read any of the punitive articles in Sub-Chapter X of the UCMJ, please examine Article 134;

“Though not specifically mentioned in this chapter, all disorders and neglects to the prejudice of good order and discipline in the armed forces, all conduct of a nature to bring discredit upon the armed forces, and crimes and offenses not

capital, of which persons subject to this chapter may be guilty, shall be taken cognizance of by a general, special or summary court-martial, according to the nature and degree of the offense, and shall be punished at the discretion of that court.”

In basic terms, it means that any offense that has not been covered in the UCMJ in any other article can fall under this one. They call it the “catch all” article with which a military member can be punished by having pay withheld, reduction in rank, liberty secured, or extra laborious duty or worse if charges are pressed. All one has to do is convince a judge what the definition of “good order and discipline” can mean to someone. I think I may actually be a little too intimidated to discuss Article 140, under Sub-Chapter XI at this juncture!

We all know that there are problems with healthcare in our great country. But how it is we go about making the necessary changes are still quite controversial. One of the ideas that many

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I Will Not...

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Americans have is a system where healthcare is provided to all US citizens at no cost. It's difficult to ignore the comparisons that can be made to the healthcare available to the US military when considering such a position. Military members do not pay out of pocket for their healthcare; 100% free check-ups, vaccinations, dental, simple or special surgery, and medications. The word that hardly reaches the ears of the American public is that the free check-up ensures that we are healthy enough to become a casualty for our country.

Rest assured that there will not be a problem or discussion regarding which hospital or doctor to choose from. It is not the military member's choice. In many cases, specialists are not available within a reasonable traveling distance. Whether they are or not, there is a serious evaluation to determine what a military member can do *without*. Most will not argue that the cost of medication has nearly always been ridiculous for the average American. But if the average American was to receive free medication, what would one

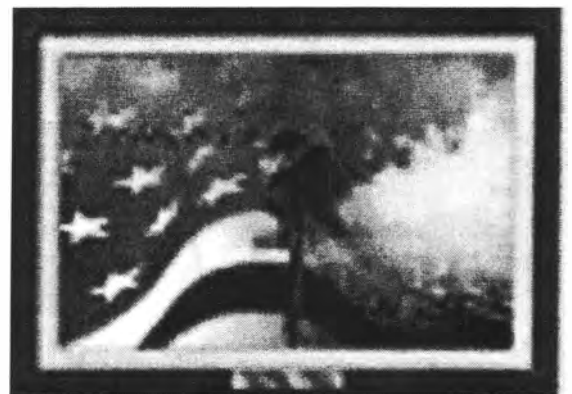
think if ibuprofen was the prescription for all ailments that would not kill you off anytime soon? It would surely allow our country's medical resources benefit those who are suffering from something far more serious than a broken arm, similar to the way our military utilizes their available resources.

When the going gets rough, the going can get a little chaotic. Non-hostile deaths - defined in the military world as "deaths that are not the direct result of fighting the enemy or friendly fire"- have been a part of warfare for centuries. In the Civil War, the main cause was disease: Union soldiers were more likely to die from dysentery, tuberculosis or pneumonia than from a Confederate bullet. But in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, 235 of the 380 deaths (62 %) were considered non-hostile, according to Department of Defense statistics.

In the past, Marine Corps commanders have ordered stand-downs to review safety measures. Frequently, the formations use Marines and Sailors that have been the victims of a non-combative demise and

are made travesties; a caricature of the honor and courage that they once clearly emanated. Truly a disheartening method that is repeatedly used as a psychological technique, employed in training for the purposes of preventing unwanted recurrences. Hardly the respect one would assume is warranted to these ill-fated servicemen and women, but often practiced when an event is considered "of a nature to bring discredit upon the armed forces."

Tuition assistance is 100% while active duty, but many service members work 40 hours straight without sleep. Off duty education is shunned if military manpower suffers and missions are compromised. Within minutes from the attack on 11 September 2001, Marines stood guard duty in four-hour shifts, every other four hours; for approxi-



The picture reads "Freedom's not Free"

A Taste of Tainted Blackwater

by Mike Zuhlke

"We are guided by integrity, innovation and a desire for a safer world." This quote comes directly from the Blackwater USA website, very contradicting to the reason why Blackwater, a private security firm, is in the worldwide news today.

Since the fall of Sadaam Hussein, Iraq has been the primary place of business for 28 private security firms due to the lack of centralized police in Iraq. The biggest of the 28 firms include USA's Blackwater, DynCorp International, Triple Canopy, and the UK's Aegis. Of these main firms, Blackwater is the most controversial. Erik Prince, a former Navy Seal, founded Blackwater in 1997, and if it weren't for the United States involvement in Iraq Prince's company would have been obsolete.

Since 2001 Blackwater has earned more than \$1 Billion in U.S. contracts by providing Private Security Contractors (PSCs) to United States personnel for protection from terrorist's attacks while visiting Iraq for any political or social reason. Blackwater is also considered to be the most violent private security firm in Iraq, which led Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to revoke

their private security license on September 17 after a shooting event a day earlier left 17 Iraqi civilians dead, according to Yahoo! World News.

According to the New York Times, on September 16, 2007 3 Blackwater trucks were escorting a U. S. diplomat when a car bomb exploded near where several United State personnel were supposed to have a meeting. After the bombs went off, the diplomat was then transported to safety by two of the trucks, and the third truck "came under fire from 'eight to ten' persons who 'fired from multiple nearby locations, with some aggressors dressed in civilian apparel and others in Iraqi police uniforms.'" (Times Online) A second Blackwater truck was re-dispatched to help at Nisoor Square in Baghdad where Blackwater PSCs found themselves shooting at Iraqi armies and police. United States troops were eventually sent out to diffuse the situation.

During the altercation, there are reports by UK's Times Online that several Blackwater guards yelled to ceasefire and later had to result to pointing weapons to stop colleagues from shooting more. The result was 17 dead civilians, 1 angry prime minister,

and 1 baffled United States secretary of state. After word of this got to the United States, the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice contacted Maliki confirming an investigation would occur and urged PSCs to stay in Iraq since Maliki wanted them out immediately.

An investigation promised by Rice is something that Maliki would take advantage of considering that all private security officers in Iraq are immune to prosecution. Under Order 17 of the Iraqi Law (which was prepared after the fall of Hussein) PSCs are granted immunity from prosecution in Iraq because they should not be held responsible for deaths in a War Zone, although they are technically subject to law of their "sending state." This applies to every private security firms who does business in Iraq.

This is not the first time Blackwater had a controversial shooting. According to Guardian Unlimited, a United States Congressional investigation concluded that Blackwater was found responsible for the death of 4 "untrained" PSCs

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A Taste, cont'd.

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who were attacked and killed by an angry Iraqi mob. The mob mutilated the bodies, set them on fire, and hung them from a bridge in the city of Falluja in 2004, their bodies were seen on worldwide television. This led to a violent reaction from Blackwater PSCs who seemed to be trigger happy in every altercation from there after.

Congressional reports also state that Blackwater employees helped an officer flee Iraq when he killed a 32-year-old bodyguard to Iraqi Vice President in 2006. The Blackwater employee was armed with a 9mm pistol while drunk and hit the bodyguard 3 times with bullets. He has seen no prosecution.

Blackwater was also accused of covering up deaths of Iraqi civilians and according to U.S. congressional report, Timesonline states that "civilian casualties and damage to property appear to be part of a pattern in Blackwater's behaviour in Iraq." Since 2005 Blackwater has been involved in roughly 195 shootings, more than double the number for the second and third highest ranking firms combined. Blackwater guards were responsible for 16 Iraqi casualties (not counting the recent September 16 inci-

dent) and 162 incidents with property damage. 122 Blackwater employees (or about one seventh of the workforce) had contracts terminated for misconduct that included weapons-related incidents, and alcohol and drug abuse.

The United States government also suggests that Blackwater is far more expensive to have as guards when compared to using American soldiers, according to Timesonline. "The company charges the US Government \$1,222 a day, or \$445,000 a year. This is more than six times the cost of an equivalent American soldier." (Timesonline) So the United States government is willing to pay six times more money to have a company like Blackwater tarnish the reputation of Americans in the middle east?

Private security firms should be in Iraq to maintain the safety of diplomats from other countries, but the firm Blackwater should not be only kicked out of Iraq, it should be placed out of business by the United States government. It is obvious that employees of Blackwater are not taught discipline and are not given sufficient training to be given the

task of preserving lives in a hostile environment like Iraq.

It should be understood that employment may be located in potentially dangerous areas, including combat or war zones. This might involve the possibility of suffering harm by dangerous forces or friendly fire. These dangers are inherent to working conditions in a dangerous environment.

- Standard employment clause in Private Security Contracts in Iraq and other war zones

The use of these security firms raises serious oversight issues, including the accountability of such contractors, and whether we should expand the ranks of Diplomatic Security rather than continue to rely so heavily on contractors...

...Is the United States responsible for ensuring that its contractors (while acting in Iraq) comply with the law of armed conflict? And is the United States responsible for taking disciplinary steps against contractors responsible for violations of the law of armed conflict?

- Sen Joe Biden in a Letter to Secretary Condoleezza Rice, Oct 30, 2007

Symphony of Substitution

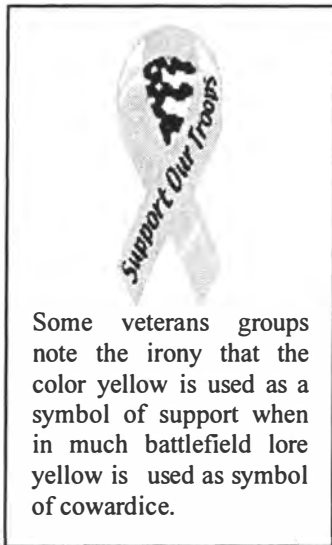
By Ruth Scherer

Democracy is about open debate, critical challenge and responsible government; and “dissent” as Thomas Jefferson pointed out, “is the highest form of patriotism”. But if “the test of patriotism comes only by reflexively falling into lockstep behind the leader whenever the flag is waved” argues Michael Parenti, “then what we have is a formula for dictatorship, –not democracy”. By this “reflexive falling into lockstep”, members of a given group or society succumb to what social psychologists call “group think” where the pressure and influence for unanimity overwhelm the desire to incorporate the very principles of what democracy represents.

In fact, pressure on the Intelligence Community analysts regarding Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities was “an essential component of the Senate Committee’s 2004 report of the Intelligence communities false presumption that Saddam Hussein possessed WMD’s” (272). The

report identified “group think” as a contributing problem.

Although this “pressure” and “influence” have been argued either way, the fixation of the Bush Administration in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks to use war against Al-Qaeda and other “terrorists” as a justification for overthrowing Saddam Hussein has been widely reported (451). More-



over, “the environment of intense pressure in which Intelligence Community officials were asked to render judgments on matters relating to Iraq when policy officials had already forcefully stated their own conclusions in public” (Vice Chairman John D. Rockefeller IV, Senators Carl Levin and Richard Durbin, 449) bring sufficient cause to validate such claims of “group think”.

The pressure and influence spilled into the public sector as well and eventually

became incorporated into slogans which in turn became a

People can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders...all you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger —Herman Goering

symbolic representation through magnets and stickers that Americans obediently adorned their vehicles with. Somehow, supporting the troops became synonymous with supporting the policy. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Professor of linguistics (Emeritus) and author Noam Chomsky, suggests “Slogans like “Support our troops”... don’t mean anything... You want to create a slogan that nobody’s going to be against, and everybody’s going to be for. Nobody knows what it means, because it doesn’t mean anything”.

While soldiers returning from war find the support demonstrated by ribbons is helpful, many are in need of more serious material and psycho-

logical assistance. “Some of the worst problems afflicting wounded warriors are”, according to the As-

Once the war against Saddam begins, we expect every American to support our military, and if they can’t do that, to shut up —Bill O’Reilly

logical assistance. “Some of the worst problems afflicting wounded warriors are”, according to the As-

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Symphony..., cont'd

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sociated Press, "adequate mental health treatment and timely payment of disability benefits, after disclosures emerged in February of shoddy outpatient treatment at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center". Slapping a magnet on a vehicle or flag waving however, seem to be the extent to which troops have been supported.

Recall Dixie Chicks' lead singer Natalie Maines' remarks about President Bush and the war in Iraq. The Dixie Chicks told a London audience, "Just so you know, we're ashamed the president of the United States is from Texas" prompting a barrage of death threats, boycotts and accusations of communism. Dixie Chicks documentary, "Shut Up & Sing." Variety reported, "NBC's commercial clearance department said in writing that it 'cannot accept these spots

It is the absolute right of the State to supervise the formation of public opinion
—Joseph Goebbels

as they are disparaging to President Bush." Similar sentiments

about the imminent war in Iraq prompted remarks to anti war protests such as the following by the Free Republic organization, "We will not al-



For the movie trailer and clips for "Shut Up & Sing" see www.myspace.com/shutupandsing.
Picture from www.myspace.com/shutupandsing

low these communist organized demonstrations (to) go unanswered. Patriotic Americans are countering these terrorist supporting leftists wherever and whenever they pop up".

In an article published in September of 2006, Katherine Monk of CanWest News Service also wrote, "For a society that prides itself in the notion of free speech and the red, white and blue, the Dixie Chicks' descent into the land of crispy Salem witches seemed like a betrayal of crucial American truths" adding "The idea that anyone should be penalized for criticizing the

president is profoundly un-American".

While the flag waving has subsided, there remain a few bold enough to step away from the lockstep of unanimity and understood the distinction between what is meaningful support and that of chanting empty slogans. Commenting in an interview in Iowa why he no longer wears an American flag lapel pin, Democratic Presidential candidate, Barack Obama said, "Because it has become a substitute for true patriotism." The Senator added that he is "less concerned about what you [are] wearing on your lapel than what [is] in your heart". To the campaign crowd, Mr. Obama said, "you show true patriotism by how you treat your fellow Americans, especially those who serve; you show your patriotism by being true to our values and ideals".

"... The Committee's report makes clear that the facts gathered by intelligence in 2001 and 2002 did not support the threatening changes to the analysts assessments. So how did these changes occur? The Committee's report explains the changes as "layering" of previous assumptions, "groupthink" about ambiguous evidence, and a "broken corporate culture and poor management." I agree that those caused the intelligence to be both bad and wrong. However, the Committee's report does not acknowledge that the intelligence estimates were shaped by the Administration. In my view, this remains an open question that needs more careful scrutiny..."
-Senator Dianne Feinstein
2004 Report of The Senate Intelligence Committee

Debunking Myths About the Iraq War

By Mehul Kamdar

An old saying that is attributed to many people in various versions, suggests that Victory has many fathers while Defeat is an orphan. This is truest of the ongoing war in Iraq, an endeavor that is currently bogged down not just in military and logistical mire, it is something that has hardly anyone in favor of it. From reasoned pacifists who dislike all war to a growing legion of conspiracy theorists who always seem able to influence public opinion to some extent, there is no shortage of supposed pundits who seem to know "exactly" why the war is being fought. It has been called an oil grab, an attempt at ruling over the world, the megalomaniac military delusion of a group of bloodthirsty politicians and much more. This brief article is an attempt at looking at some of the conspiracy theories surrounding the war.

Iraq under the Ba'athist Socialist regime of Saddam Hussein Abdal Majid al Takriti was a brutal, violent nation that saw, perhaps, as many of two million of its own and its neighbors dead between 1979

and 2003. During this turbulent period, Iraq would be, variously, a client-state of the former USSR, an ally of the West overnight when he decided to take on the Shia Republic of Iran, and then, again, a pariah nation when he invaded Kuwait in 1990 and had to be forcibly ejected from there until the second Iraq War of 2003 when he was finally defeated and subsequently captured and executed.

Under Saddam Hussein, Iraq would try to acquire Weapons of Mass Destruction from several countries, but, finally, when the war of 2003 took place, wouldn't have any – he had paradoxically become true to his word about not having WMDs in the crumbling stages of his regime.

During Saddam's rise to power and his consolidation of his hold on his country, it is no secret that he loved weapons, the more devastating, the better. He tried to build nuclear reactors at Osirak until one of the reactors was bombed by the Israelis, he used poison gas to kill thousands of Iranians and Kurds, he

used the services of Canadian ballistician Gerald Bull to try to develop a rocket launcher that would take huge payloads of offensive weapons far to countries that he did not like, until Mossad assassinated Bull and put an end to that project. And, he also planned methodically to develop his country's conventional forces into a phenomenally efficient fighting machine buying arms from wherever he could, leaving last ditch plans for a long term insurgency were Iraq ever to be invaded, something that has bogged the world's most powerful nations down for four years now.

There is the supreme irony about Saddam's military preparation in that he started off as a socialist dictator getting the bulk of his arms from the Soviet Union and then from the West. France sold him Exocet missiles which would be devastating against Iranian shipping during his country's long war with Iran, and, indeed, even against a US warship, the USS Stark which his pilots attacked and damaged in

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Debunking Myths, cont'd

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1987, making it clear that he could inflict damage, if required, on the world's most powerful military.

There was also his country's enormous oil wealth, which he used to pursue his motives across his borders in financing suicide bombers' families if they managed to kill any Israelis, for example.

To any national security planner in Washington after 9/11, there must have been a worry about how or when Saddam just might decide to use similar tactics to turn the US into another target like Israel was until the Sharon government started assassinating the commanders and families of extremist Palestinian militias involved in suicide attacks on Israeli territory. Indeed, one does not need to be a supporter of

Israel or of those who made the now clearly wrong decision to rush into war in Iraq, to understand the thoughts that went into the war decision eventually being taken.

When it comes to apportioning motives leading to the war, hardly anyone these days talks about the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998.¹ This act, signed into policy by then

President Bill Clinton, was passed jointly by both the Senate as well as the House of Representatives with near equal support from both parties. The Act specifically sought to look at means for regime change in Iraq without specifying any details. A Republican, right-wing, Christian plot as many have alleged? Hardly! And George Washington University has a project aimed at collecting, classifying and publishing declassified government documents on Iraq which would be revealing to anyone interested in tracing the history of the current war back to the early days of the Iraqi regime.²

We now hear from some of the war's critics that Iraq is in the midst of a civil war, a war between the Iraqi Shias and Sunnis that the US has caused by its invasion. The proponents of this myth claim that due to the history of violent conflict between the two main branches of Islam, some of the worst bloodletting that has taken place recently was inevitable and that the west should have seen this. Again, there is little historical evidence of this. While there is no doubt that the Sunnis were the privileged community in

Iraq, during the long war with Iran, Iraqi Shia units fought hard against the fundamentalist Iranian army. In a strongly nationalistic part of the world, nationalism has, occasionally, been a driving force, relegating religion into the background. Yes, there are groups within Iraq's Shia majority that are pro Iran and vehemently opposed to the US, though this is most likely because of a feeling of being let down by the West after they were encouraged to rebel in the aftermath of the 1990 Liberation of Kuwait. To say that one or another community in Iraq is for or against the Western armies fighting there would be as erroneous as saying that the whole of the US was either Democratic or Republican.

And, finally, the WMD, oil-grab and association-with-Al Qaeda issue, one that has generated the most sound and fury. After the attack on 9/11 Czech intelligence sources reported that they had seen Mohammed Atta in their country, meeting an Iraqi diplomat.³ Saddam Hussein had never denied that he sought WMDs to the end, his

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Debunking, cont'd

(Continued from page 9)

own officers telling western media after Iraq was captured that they were surprised at a meeting just before the invasion where Saddam told them that he didn't have any.

The Iraqi regime had been funding the families of Palestinian suicide bombers who killed Israelis by then. It had tried to assassinate George Bush, Sr earlier. Saddam's constant bluster and his murderous behavior in the past must have worried powerful minds in the west after 9/11. If, indeed, his regime had a connection with Mohammed Atta, if he had WMDs, if he was financing suicide bombers in Palestine, then, it was, perhaps, a question of time before there was an attack that made 9/11 look miniscule, the flawed reasoning must have gone. As far as the oil-grab theory is concerned, the US and other countries paid Iraq to buy its oil during the Oil for Food Program. They still pay the Iraqi government for whatever little oil leaves the country these days. A "grab?" There's hardly any evidence of this. A conspiracy? No, except in the minds of

the "the CIA blew up the twin towers" lot. A bungle based on faulty intelligence? Yes, based on the evidence, the most likely reason for the invasion. No nation could let an attack like 9/11 and the possibility of a more devastating one go unchallenged. The very circumstantial evidence suggesting what is now grist for the conspiracy theory mills powered the rush into the war to depose a dangerous former ally now turned implacable foe. At worst, the decisions leading to the war were a mistake. Was there a conspiracy involved in the events leading to the war?

Absolutely not. There is no more truth in this than there is in the arrant nonsense proffered by television comedians and extreme left academicians with too much time on their hands suggesting that missiles hit the Pentagon, that the various flights that were hijacked and used as weapons on 9/11 were actually diverted somewhere and that the Twin Towers were brought down by explosives and not by the impact of aircraft on them.

Suggested website for Iraqi

History: <http://www.historiae.org/links.asp>

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"Allah is great. The Muslim Ummah is victorious and Palestine is Arab." - Saddam Hussein on the gallows shortly before his execution. Quoted by Weissert, Will, Associated Press, December 30, 2006

my sweet old etcetera

my sweet old etcetera
aunt lucy during the recent

war could and what
is more did tell you just
what everybody was fighting

for,
my sister

Isabel created hundreds
(and
hundreds)of socks not to
mention fleaproof earwarmers
etcetera wristers etcetera, my
mother hoped that

i would die etcetera
bravely of course my father used
to become hoarse talking about how it was
a privilege and if only he
could meanwhile my

self etcetera lay quietly
in the deep mud et

cetera
(dreaming,
et
cetera, of
Your smile
eyes knees and of your Etcetera)

ee cummings

"It is perhaps true that only people who are denied the gift of liberty can truly appreciate its full meaning and bounty. I look with admiration at the American debate surrounding the Iraq war, and I admire even those opinions that differ from my own. As prime minister of Iraq I have been subjected to my share of criticism in that American debate, but I harbor no resentment and fully understand that the basic concerns of Americans are the safety of their young people fighting in our country and the national interests of their society. As this American debate goes on, I am guided and consoled by the sacred place of freedom and liberty in the American creed and in America's notion of itself."

-Al- Maliki, Nouri, "Our Common struggle,"
Opinion Journal, June 13, 2007

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A Personal Dedication:

This issue of The Challenger has a theme that was prompted by my memories of an old friend and junior from my years in India, Tarek Ayoub, a journalist killed accidentally while covering the taking of Baghdad on April the 8th 2003. A former student of Calicut University and a Palestinian who came to India on a Jordanian travel document, Tarek decided to return to the Middle East to tell his peoples' story to the world. He left Reuters to join the then new Al Jazeera channel in what he believed would be an opportunity to show the war as it took place to the rest of the world. He was, almost certainly, the first martyr to friendly fire during the war. Tarek, my friend, you will never be forgotten.

- Mehul Kamdar

I Will Not...,cont'd

(Continued from page 3)

mately three months. They all receive at least 30 days of paid vacation (leave/liberty) per year, but can only travel to see their families at the command's convenience and discretion. When they finally get to sleep, they are obligated to wake at any given moment for practice drills, or even just to clean up.

I'd hate to look up the regulation on the food that sustains them, and time and again, marriages and families fall apart over prolonged absences, depression, alcoholism, and anger. And after they are able to make it home alive, the veterans' benefits are unable to contribute a

fraction of the support in exchange for what was lost and is gone forever. So then why are we so proud and so defensive of our military?

It is important for us to realize that US military cannot be summed up simply as "our troops." Those that have volunteered their services are familiar with the character and propensities of it all, and have truly come to understand it as an *establishment*. Its infrastructure consists of many of our loved ones' blood, sweat and tears, and the price that is paid day after day to keep such a standard of excellence is nothing short of hell. Yet and still, the goals of the establishment are not set by its components. It is not the military the Ameri-

can public holds in high regard, for the ends that are met when its power is exercised is not always for the better of us all.

As a US Marine, we indeed were the first to go, the last to know, never questioning, never forgetting, losing all, but gaining more! It is because of this unquestioning selflessness and discipline that we can substantiate such a profound sense of fellowship, of loyalty, of pride; of *patriotism*. We are not benefactors for the military; we gladly, and without regret, extend this courtesy for the people of the United States.