

Special War Coverage: On the Ground in Iraq

With all the spin coming out of Iraq, GNN traveled to the edge of the American Empire to find out just how life really is under the post-invasion occupation. GNN's Anthony Lappé and Stephen Marshall spent twenty one days on the ground, shooting over 50 hours of tape and filing dispatches at GNN.tv. Here are a couple excerpts:

DISPATCH 1:

Around 2 pm local time a car bomb exploded in front of the heavily fortified Turkish Embassy. We arrived shortly after. The situation was tense. While the press angled to get a shot of the damage down the now-closed-off-street, around the corner a group of about two-hundred neighborhood kids had gathered, chanting pro-Saddam slogans.

The Americans created a perimeter, while an Arab-speaking translator got on one of the Humvee's loudspeakers and ordered the crowd to disperse, taunting the crowd, "Saddam is gone, he's left you for the hills." The kids aot bold and turned the corner to march on the soldiers and blue-shirted Iraqi police. The journalists were caught in the middle. The soldiers stayed behind the razorwire, sending out the Iragi cops to handle the fast approaching mini-mob. I lost Stephen as he disappeared into the crowd of young Saddamphiles, some kissing Iraqi Dinars with Saddam's portrait on it like he was Sharon Stone. The cops surged forward, firing shots from their AK's into the air, and guickly apprehended the ringleader - an older teenager who was egging the kids on. The cops beat him to the ground and took him away. The kids turned and ran, some tossing a few stones, Palestinian-style, in our general direction. It was all over in short order.

Up the street from the attack sat a small, bullet-riddled truck, its facade pock-marked with holes. Inside on the passenger side of the cab was a nasty pool of blood. Apparently, the truck was being driven by an innocent bystander behind the suicide bomber. When the embassy security opened fire on the bomber, they tragically hit the truck. According to the Iraqi police, three men were shot, two critically. In the back of the truck, you couldn't ask for a more ironic visual metaphor: American flag logos on bags of U.S.-donated flour were splattered with Iraqi blood.

Anthony Lappé

DISPATCH 2:

Anthony and I had only spent ten minutes in a rural community, interviewing people about the resistance when a police car pulled up. Two officers jumped out and started walking briskly toward us. Thinking we were going to lose a (nother) tape for filming the upstarts, I put the camera down and looked over at our translator. The police began speaking quickly in Arabic and motioning toward the road. Our translator pulled at Anthony's arm and said: "Come on, there is a demonstration in front of the town hall, to protest the U.S. violence against the people here."

So much for the much touted alliance with the new Iraqi police force. These guys were out recruiting media coverage of the low-intensity resistance to the occupation. When we got to the demo, we were mobbed by sixty people, many of whom had wounds and who wore torn garments that had numbers written across their backs in blue and red ink. behind them, US soldiers sat high above, looking down from the turrets of a Bradley and 2 Hummers ... staring passively.

Once we had filmed several testimonials, the crowd began to chant the now-familiar mantra: With our blood, with our lives, we sacrifice for you Saddam. It was quite a scene... and one that Rumsfeld would be hard pressed to spin. Because even the military leaders know that they have now entered a cycle of violence and retribution that will not end soon. And with Osama bin Laden's most recent message to the Iragi people, they would do well to be honest with US troops and their nervous families. Instead of lying to them by characterizing the resistance as some rag-tag legion of frightened townsfolk, they should level, and tell them the truth: Even moderate Islamic farmers want the Americans out, now...

Or else.

Stephen Marshall

About GNN

Guerrilla News Network (GNN.tv) is an independent news organization committed to exposing people of all ages to important global issues -free from corporate filters - through innovative multi-platform news and documentary programming. GNN is best known for their short, hardhitting Guerrilla NewsVideos design-rich mini-documentaries that deconstruct complex socio-political video form. issues in music Broadcast at GNN.tv, Guerrilla NewsVideos meld high-impact imagery, poignant interviews, archival footage and enhanced graphics with tracks from top recording artists like Peter Gabriel, AdRoc, Dead Prez, and many others. The GNN website is one of the Internet's premiere alternative news outlets, offering original and syndicated reporting from some of world's top writers the and journalists, in addition to an active forum where a dedicated community of guerrillas meet to discuss issues related to the Information (R)evolution.

Guerrilla News Network.

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SITES TO PEEP & PROLIFERATE

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Don't Be Misled: www.Misleader.org

News Wire Your Hearts and Minds, or Else

(Balad, Iraq) Mohammed Al-Awasari's shack was no match for the American M-113 armored personal carrier. In a matter of minutes, the APC's powerful tracks reduced his small shop in the village of Albu Hishma to a pile of rubble. The U.S. soldiers on this " **PSY-OPS** " (psychological operations) mission deep inside Iraq's Sunni Triangle, were laughing, some were taking pictures to show back home, while the gathered villagers stood around and looked on helplessly.

Shopkeeper Mohammed was out of luck. The U.S. troops had decided to give him a break after he told them he wasn't responsible for the spray-painted pro-Saddam slogan on his shop's facade. But the Kurdish translator working with the Americans entered his shop and found a notebook in which Mohammed had apparently been practicing writing the very slogan on the wall outside: "Saddam is the heroic leader of a cowardly people. Saddam..." Mohammed was given five minutes to clear out his produce before the APC went in.

Mohammed's shop was one of five houses in Albu Hishma that were partially destroyed on this day by the soldiers of the 1st Battalion 8th Infantry, stationed near the town of Balad. Several other villagers escaped the same fate by hurriedly covering up the anti-American graffiti with mud. Today's mission was part of a new, two-liered approach to winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqis in this area. "I feel bad that the children have to see this," said Specialist Bryan Bledsoe, "But we have tried to help these people and they have thanked us by shooting at us. Now we're trying it this way. We want to make them understand that there is a price to pay if they support the terrorists."

The Americans refer to Albu Hishma as "Tupac," after the slain rapper **Tupac Shaku**r. "On our maps this place is called Albu Shakur, so we just went with Tupac," said Specialist Brad Lewis. It is doubtful whether anyone in Albu Hishma has ever heard of Tupac Shakur - American pop culture is not high on people's minds here. Albu Hishma is one of many villages in this area where U.S. troops come under attack on a regular basis.

These days, most of the attacks are done by IED's, Improvised Explosive Devices, which are hidden on the side of the roads or buried in the road surface and remotely detonated, or by mortar attacks from the fields surrounding the many U.S. bases in the area. Balad airfield, a sprawling former military base of the Saddam regime, which is on its way to becoming the biggest American support base in Iraq, gets shelled on a nightly basis. Officially, the U.S. military refuses to give out figures on the number of wounded-in-action at Balad airfield, but individual soldiers spoke of one incident in which fourteen medical personnel were injured. Battalion headquarters at Balad town, too, has come under repeated mortar attack, and during a recent visit, work was underway there to surround the old school building with an anti-hand-grenade fence. The Americans' closest neighbors have wisely moved away.

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The 1st Battalion 8th Infantry is confronted with a peculiar local situation in Balad. Battalion headquarters is in an old school in the town of Balad, which has a majority Shia Muslim population and has been cooperating with the Americans. But the town is surrounded by what the Americans call a "donut" of Sunni Muslim villages where many people remain loyal to the old regime. "Inside the 'donut', there hasn't been a single shot fired at the Americans," said Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Nate Sassaman, "and our policy from the start has been: If you don't shoot at us, you will be rewarded."

So the Americans are pouring money into Balad - \$1.2m so far - providing help with the water and electricity, and fixing up schools, whereas the villages where the Americans get shot at get slapped with an early 7 p.m. curfew; they get four hours a day of electricity and very little in terms of reconstruction projects. The policy is eerily similar to that of the Saddam regime, only in reverse. Sunni villages and neighborhoods traditionally loyal to Saddam received subsidies and favors, like a continuous flow of electricity, while Shia areas suffered neglect and outright oppression at the hands of the dictator and his henchmen.

The PSYOPS mission in Albu Hishma was preceded by an action a day earlier by the 1-8th's Lightning Platoon, which received the **"Eagle Play of the Day"** award "for firing **white phos-phorous grenades** into the fields south of Albu Hishma, burning several acres of vegetation," which added "extra emphasis" to the next day's PSYOPS mission.

PSYOPS, of course, brings to mind **Vietnam**, where the "hearts and minds" program originated. The Americans at the time were trying to "pacify" South Vietnam by giving aid to villages supporting the communist guerrillas, and financial incentives to encourage Viet Cong defections. But PSYOPS also had a sinister aspect to it, in that uncooperative villages were punished, often cruelly. Capt. Gerard Walsh, a civil affairs officer with the 1-8th, admitted that the hearts and minds campaign "ultimately didn't work in Vietnam since we lost the war." But the tactic has never disappeared from the Army's textbooks "because it was felt that, regardless of the outcome of the war, the tactic itself did produce positive results."

"I realize that today's mission in Albu Hishma doesn't exactly send the message that we are here to help them," Lt. Col. Sassaman said afterwards. "In fact, you could say that we are

by Gert Van Langendonck

using some of the same tactics as Saddam's people did. But it does send the message that we will not be threatened by anyone. Keep in mind that our Battalion alone has had eleven wounded-in-action since we arrived here in June."

It helps that, at least in Balad, "We are treated like rock stars," said Lt. Col. Sassaman. The Shia population has embraced the U.S. presence, and the town's officials work closely with the Americans in providing information about the resistance. The town's mayor, Nibil Dawash, says he entirely agrees with their approach to the loyalist villages, "These people are supporting terrorists. They deserve to die."

But working with the Americans is not without danger. On the morning of the interview, the mayor's staff discovered two handgrenades and explosives just outside city hall. Several weeks ago, there was an attack with rocket-propelled grenades (RPG's). The mayor refuses to see the conflict in terms of the Shia-Sunni opposition, blaming the attacks instead on outside influences, "former Baath party members from Fallujah and Ramadi, and local Wahabi's, religious fanatics who get support from Saudi Arabia." He feels that, "If we are mean and strict with these people, the situation will improve. There is no use being nice to these people."

"I will teach my children and their children to hate the Americans until the end of their lives. Even if they pave our streets in gold, we don't want them here."

It remains to be seen whether the carrot-and-stick approach to the loyalist villages will make the Americans anymore popular there. Days after the raid, in the absence of U.S. soldiers, the people of Albu Hishma seemed to be heading in the opposite direction. Fifty-five year old Hassan Ali Hamoud proudly pointed to his ten-year old son Maher as the author of the "Long live Saddam!" slogan which resulted in a two-room dependency of his house being demolished by the Americans. "They'll never stop us from loving Saddam," he said...

One thing the Americans have accomplished is there will be no new pro-Saddam slogans painted on the walls of Albu Hishma. "We're not stupid. They will just destroy more houses if we do," said Ali Mahmoud. "No, we will paint them instead on the walls of the school the Americans have just renovated."

The school, just outside Albu Hishma, is one of the few American reconstruction projects in this area. Every night, local Saddam supporters taunt the Americans by defacing the freshly painted white wall around the school with slogans such as "Yes, yes, Saddam" or "Down USA." And every day, the Americans have the wall painted white again.

It is a constant source of frustration for Lt. Col. Sassaman, because he knows the Americans would look ridiculous if they tore down the very school they helped renovate. "No, we're not going to tear down that wall," he said angrily. "We're just going to have the Iraqi police paint it white over and over again, as long as it takes."

Lt. Col. Sassaman is popular with the men of the 1-8th because of his gloves-off approach to the loyalist villages, but privately he is given to some doubt. "Our first approach didn't really work all that well," he admitted. "We found that the former regime loyalists were using the fact that we were favoring the Shia in Balad town to rally support against us amongst the Sunni villagers." Recently, he has given the battalion's civil affairs officers permission to start some reconstruction projects in the loyalist villages. "Meanwhile, we will continue to militarily target the people shooting at us from those areas," he said...

The larger threat the Americans face, according to Williams, is "the alliance between former Baath party members and extreme religious groups. We believe that the Baath party people are financially supporting these religious groups because they have a common goal: getting the U.S. out of Iraq." There is evidence of "some kind of a contingency plan put in place by the former regime," and it is believed that the villagers are being paid as little as \$50 to shoot at American soldiers, and as much as \$1,500 if they manage to kill one. Locally, there is a branch of the so-called "**Mohamad's Army**," a larger cell that extends to Samarra," and recently a group has surfaced that goes by the name of the "**Sept. 11 Revolutionary Group**." It claimed a recent attack on the Americans in a leaflet bearing the logo of the Fedaheen, Saddam's paramilitaries, combined with the Iraqi and Palestinian flags and a verse from the Koran. "But personally, I don't get too hung up on names." Williams said. "In these parts, you get three guys together in a room and they're a group."

Three such guys are sitting in a room in a house near the Tigris, somewhere in the Balad area. They all claim to be "mujahedeen" on a personal "jihad" against the U.S. occupation. One of them is a former officer from the Special Republican Guard, Saddam's bodyguards. Another is an Iraqi police officer, who works with the Americans during the day and shoots at them at night. "We give them the daylight but the nighttime is ours," he said. "This goes for all of the Iraqi police in this area."...

"It's not an insurgency," Lt. Col. Sassaman said. "I truly believe that ninety percent of the Iraqis support us. But there is a lot of ambivalence. Many Iraqi's are sitting on the fence right now. They are not quite convinced that the old regime is finished, and they are afraid to be labeled as American spies should Saddam ever come back. This is why it is so important that we catch Saddam. Then those people on the fence are going to sigh with relief, and the Iraqis will finally be able to get on with their lives." cointel of the month:

Felipe Fernandez-Armesto



With the recent invasion and occupation of Iraq, historians and cultural commentators have begun to invoke the 'E' word when describing America's identity in the world. But is it justified? While some would say that America is not an empire, in the traditional sense and others that it is already an empire in decline. The prevailing interpretation is that the United States has become something much more than a "superpower." In this interview, conducted for GNN's upcoming feature film, bestselling author and Oxford historian Felipe Fernandez-Armesto deconstructs the legacy of Earth's imperial dynasties, dispelling conventional (lib-

eral) wisdom that they were all evil and exploitative. Focusing on the invasion of Iraq, Prof. Fernandez-Armesto explains how elites are able to motivate the populace to spill blood for their causes and why media is such a crucial element to the expansion of their imperial desires:

GNN: In our generation there is a view that imperialism is bad. It's hard to imagine people thinking of it as a good thing. It wasn't always that way.

FELIPE FERNANDEZ-ARMESTO: I would say that if you look at it very broadly, most empires have been good. At least they have not been any worse than any other kind of state. Empires in the sense that Reagan used the term when he berated the Soviet system as an empire (which maintains power by continual menace and brutality and violence), are actually very rare in history, because for most of history that kind of system has not worked very well. The only way you can maintain a state which endures for a long length of time is by getting people's collaboration on the ground and cooperating with traditional and local elites. That's how the Chinese empire has endured for such a long time and that's how the British empire achieved such an extraordinarily large and vibrant system in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Therefore, on the whole, I think that you can say that empires have advantages for their subject peoples.

I don't want to whitewash empires. I particularly don't want to whitewash the great European empires of the 19th and 20th centuries. The British, French and German empires were in my opinion guilty of a great deal of intellectual impropriety. Racism above all, affected peoples' lives and spread misery around the world. They are also outrageously inefficient, particularly about delivering food where it was needed. And I hold the British Empire, in particular, responsible for a great deal of 19th century famine from Ireland to India.So I won't whitewash them, but I think you've got to give them their due. I offer one such good example of imperialist virtue by citing the British empire's commitment to the abolition of slavery. That was something, which in honesty was not in the interest of the British people. It was dismantled not for economic, but for moral reasons. In history, that's quite an extraordinary example of commitment of the state to a moral purpose. And it was achieved at the cost of an enormous amount of British blood and money. You can cite that. The empires of today, like the American empire, and the empires of the future, should measure themselves I think against that kind of achievement. America has got to ask itself today what are we going to do for the world which is comparable to the efforts the British made when they abolished slavery.

GNN: Empires are often built at the behest of the elite who will benefit from trade and from the administration of those colonies. However, the foundation of the empire is the work of the people themselves. How are the people inspired, coaxed or encouraged to work on behalf of the empire and how is it made to seem as though it is in their interest?

FFA: On the whole, that's how empires work. They get people to collaborate and sometimes to identify with the state. A very remarkable example of this is the Roman empire where the concept of Roman citizenship spread throughout the empire. Romans continually granted the status of "Roman citizen" to ever

more subject communities and what you got was a single culture and strong kind of Roman identity and commitment to the empire amongst Hebrews, Celts, Greeks and Romans. But really the Roman empire was a Romanic Greek empire in the east and a Romanic Celtic empire in the west, but subject peoples really identified emotionally with it. When it collapsed it didn't collapse because people rebelled within their own empire, it collapsed because of things that were happening from outside. The British empire didn't work by bossing people around and fighting them but by finding a collaborative elite through whom they could guide the local economy and policy into the channels and into the directions that they wanted. Empires work best when the imperialist is delivering to its subject peoples something they need. What they deliver can be economic prosperity, or it can be something very elementary like peace. or security against outside enemies. What I think is a really critical thing is that imperial elites can be sources of the administration of justice, which I call the "stranger effect." The imperialist comes from outside society so that he is not embroiled in its historic hatreds and rivalry. He can bring objectivity to the administration of justice - in the British empire it was the district commissioner. He may have just been a lone figure with nothing more than a pistol in his pocket but he travels around these vast territories amongst peoples who could easily get rid of him if they wanted to but because he is delivering that objectivity, he can help sort out their problems and their disputes and so they are actually very glad to have him. As long as the empire is not fiscally oppressive to make those advantages worthwhile, it endures.

GNN: The foot soldiers, the people who go out and fight the wars for the empire, the citizens of the state - they often need to be encouraged. In this case, much of the spoils from this occupation are going directly to the few. Historically, how have the common people been motivated and inspired? And what role has media, hype and propaganda played into that?

FFA:Probably the broadest possible generalization I can offer in response to that question is "duty." The foot solider is usually involved in the process of imperialism for what he can get out of it. In most empires he has a role as a colonizer. Ordinary soldiers who settled on frontiers, who often married locally, were given land by the state. They were leaving the world of restricted social-economic opportunity at home and acquiring social-economic opportunities by going out to the frontier. Sometimes, of course, those soldiers deserted as they could do better by allying with their potential victors than they could by serving their imperial masters back home. to keep them functioning as agents of the empire, the empires had to reward them.

Unfortunately, that's where American capitalism has got it right. It's based on an unfortunately accurate reading of human nature. Because you can persuade people to do things out of altruism, especially in the short-term, and rhetoric and propaganda can play a big part in that. And if you tell people lies, like the country we're invading is a threat to us, or if you tell lies like these people are longing to be liberated, and it'll make them much better off than they formally were - you can temporarily get people to act for you, galvanized in this moral dynamism. Unfortunately, moral dynamism usually runs out of steam in history, and I don't think American draftees and volunteers are going to continue fighting in Iraq happily whilst the rhetoric that took them there corrodes.

GNN: There's a view we have now that people, in a sense, have been lied to. Are there myths that society needs sometimes to conjure, to tell itself, to reaffirm to itself, so that it allows itself to move in the ways that it needs to? Do we tell ourselves lies sometimes to justify what we're doing abroad?

FFA: Life is unsustainable without lubrication by lies. We know that in our own everyday lives. Who can put his hand on his heart and say that everything he's ever told his wife or his children has been crudely truthful. The truth is often hurtful; it very often directly inspires violence. So actually, we always need to protect ourselves from the ill effects of the truth.tries and states. Actually the whole of history is a tissue of such myths, which are there to create collective identities, or to defend them when they've been created, or to generate hatreds against communities with whom you have to go to war for some reason or other...

Read the complete interview with Felipe Fernandez-Armesto at www.GNN.tv

From the East Coast Bunker

The Media War in Iraq: First the Iraqi Governing Council bans the Arab TV network Al-Arabiya from working in Iraq for simply playing a tape of Saddam Hussein. Now Rumsfeld is accusing both Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya of being collaborators with the resistance. Rumsfeld claims the resistance is inviting the Arab networks to film them attacking Americans, and by accepting they have become nothing more than propaganda outlets for "terrorists." But what is embedding, other than inviting journalists to film the U.S. military attacking Iraqis? It's only propa-ganda when the other guy does it. Hell, Newsweek has interviewed and photographed resistance fighters on several occasions. Recently, Fox News Channel played a videotape of a group of Iraqi resistance fighters shooting shoulder-fired rockets at planes. Of course, none of that matters. Rummy's comments are meant to intimidate and ultimately silence the Arab networks. Al-Jazeera reporters and cameramen have been beaten and arrested by American troops. During the war, the Al-Jazeera HQ was hit by a tank shell killing one of their correspondents. There is no doubt that Al-Jazeera, the more popular of the two Arab news networks, is hostile to the American effort. We spent time with them in Baghdad, and they are tough on the occupation. But they argue they are simply presenting the news from "an Arab point of view." Now Rumsfeld is trying to make that a crime in an Arab country. Anthony Lappé, NYC





Pentagon Iraqi Media Network 'Fair and Balanced'

The U.S. sponsored Iragi Media Network -planned to include a 24-hour satellite channel. two land-based TV channels, two radio channels, a national newspaper and studios in every major Iraqi region -- promises Iraqis "comprehensive, accurate, fair, and balanced news."

The Village Voice's Cynthia Cotts reports, however, that IMN already faces credibility issues. Budgeted at \$100 million (part of the \$87.5 billion approved for Iraq), the project's money will flow through the Defense Department's Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict division, which also handles military psy-ops. "Critics say the network's

mission is weakened by its contradictory goals. So far IMN is touted as both the voice of an occupying military force and an inspiration for Iragis to produce fair and balanced news coverage. But many Iraqis have already dubbed the network a propaganda organ. (As if to underscore that impression, IMN recently ran a speech by CPA administrator Paul Bremer in which he spoke repeatedly of Hussein as 'the evil one.") A recent poll found that 35 percent of Iragis now have satellite receivers, and of those, 67 percent prefer to get TV news from the satellite channels Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera, rather than from IMN," Cotts writes.

Source: Village Voice

OK Review

"Covert Action: The Roots of Terrorism" Ellen Ray & William Schaap (Ocean Press)

While the media tide may be turning against the Bush-led, neo-con drive for global U.S. hegemony, info-starved civilians shouldn't

expect any serious level of historical analysis from the mainstream outlets. Luckily there is this encyclopedic compilation of essays from the editors of CovertAction, one of the most consistent and articulate critics of American unilateralism. Writers like Noam Chomsky, Jane Hunter, and Egbal Ahmad show how the War on Terrorism is merely an evolution of the strategies developed under the Reagan and former Bush administration. A must read for anyone who needs ammo for the conservative holiday party circuit. 8.5/10

EHH Review

Panasonic AG DVX-100 ("24p")

This camera will transform the way that studios, networks and film-makers view the medium of digital video. We first heard raves about it from our UK allies, OBAHC, who signed a deal with Miramax's Bob Weinstein after showing him footage shot on the DVX-100. He couldn't believe it wasn't film. So we bought 2 and have been shooting our new feature film exclusively in 24PA, the progressive 24 frame setting that can be imported through Final Cut Pro and exported for a direct film transfer. Panasonic's ergonomically advanced design, easy-access aperture and neutral density controls made shooting in sunsaturated Irag a breeze. 9/10

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