



## VANA NEWSLETTER - BC BRANCH



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c/o D. Morgan, 240 Holyrood Road, N. Vancouver, BC V7N 2R5

Web Site: [www.vana.ca](http://www.vana.ca)

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### Letter from Your Executive

Dear Fellow VANA Members in BC:

The cold winds of fall are always a reminder that Remembrance Day is approaching. This year, with Canadian forces on a virtual war footing in Afghanistan, the tragic loss of two Canadian soldiers, several years after the killings of four others by “friendly” American fire, Remembrance Day has a special significance. It raises the question of why are our forces in Afghanistan?

Is it to fight “terrorism” or is it to bolster the U.S. handpicked regime of Hamid Karzai? Karzai, a former consultant to Unocal, a California-based oil company, has little support in Afghanistan and is running into serious trouble trying to govern that country. Is Canada sending troops to Afghanistan to help the U.S. keep Karzai in power, thus enabling the U.S. to concentrate its forces in Iraq? Should Canadians die for this cause? This is a question that our leaders will have to answer

This issue of your BC update is devoted to the realities of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as experienced by those most closely involved, the foot soldier or “poor bloody infantry.” In spite of media gloss and spin, the realities of soldiering in Iraq are being expressed increasingly by US troops who have to carry out the brutal duties of an occupying power, endure growing hostility and suffer the losses from guerilla attacks. Several of these accounts appear below.

Worldwide opposition to the war is growing. Saturday, October 25, has been proclaimed an “International Day of Action.” Rallies will be held throughout the world, the most important being a march to the Pentagon in Washington. **In Vancouver, a rally, followed by a march, will begin at the Art Gallery at 1 p.m.**

**There will be speakers, music and street theatre. Please show up with your white berets and medals to march under the VANA banner.**

As is becoming more apparent in the news, the war in Iraq has nothing to do with the non-existent “weapons of mass destruction.” It has everything to do with oil. **At our next branch meeting at 1:30 on Monday, October 27, at the Unitarian Church Hall (corner of Oak St. and 49<sup>th</sup> Ave.) Ed Shaffer, a former oil consultant in New York City and the author of several books on oil and Ed Livingston, a geologist, who has worked in many countries, will lead a discussion of the importance of oil in today’s world. Please come to what promises to be a stimulating and enlightening meeting.**

**As usual, VANA members will gather at the northwest corner of Vancouver’s Victory Square on Tuesday 11 November at 10:00 p.m. and will join the parade under our banner: “Let Peace be their Memorial.”**

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At Large: Emil Grieshaber, Ed Shaffer

Below are excerpts from two recent studies of the reactions by members of the U.S. armed forces to the war in Iraq. The first, a report by Jay Shaft of the Coalition For Free Thought In Media, bares the experiences and attitudes of five soldiers who served there.. While their stories are moving, we cannot be sure whether the views of these five men are representative of their fellow soldiers. The other, a story in *Stars and Stripes*, an official army newspaper, summarizes the answers given to a questionnaire by 2,000 respondents. To the extent the respondents answered truthfully, this story gives a more accurate picture of the GI's attitudes.

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## Realities of soldiering

US Soldiers to America: "Bring Us Home Now! We're dying for oil and corporate greed!"  
Interviews by Jay Shaft Coalition For Free Thought In Media  
12th October 2003

I had the unique opportunity to interview five US military servicemen who just got back from Iraq, or in the case of two men, corresponded with their wives so that I could ask questions of these soldiers by mail. When the two I corresponded with came back just last week, I was able to complete the interviews I started several months ago with some new details on how the war is actually going.

I was shocked and angered when I found out how many of the service men hate being in Iraq and want nothing to do with rebuilding and policing the devastated nation. From the conversations I had, many soldiers never wanted to go over to Iraq and fight, and the ones who had were now convinced of the awful crime that had been committed against Iraq and our own troops. I was told very few soldiers now believe in staying in Iraq, or want to stay in the country and serve any more days.

The following interview was with an enlisted man, but someone very high up in the enlisted ranks, with over 20 years of military service. I have promised not to reveal his identity for reasons that he has a family and has been told not to speak to journalists. He told me the Army had put a gag order on him while he was home, and told him they would give him twenty years in prison if he spoke out in any manner against the US or the government.

I took several weeks to finish this interview because of not being able to safely be seen with this individual out of his fears of being caught speaking out. \*\*\*\*\*

He asked me to call him USA in all the transcripts of these interviews. \*\*\*.

CFTM-- "How are you today? Resting I hope?"

USA-- "Can't sleep for sh..t and I have horrible nightmares when I do sleep. I might be lucky to catch an hour at a time before the nightmares wake me up. I slept easier in the combat than now that I'm away from there. Most awful place I've ever been or served duty and I didn't want to leave my guys. That was the hardest part was leaving the guys I had been leading around and trying to keep out of trouble and alive."

CFTM-- "Did you see a lot of your buddies get killed? How did it affect you?"

USA—"How the hell do you think it affected me? I saw over 30 of the men I had to keep safe die, and over 100 get wounded and not come back. I still don't know if some of the wounded men made it or not. I was never told before I came back home."

CFTM—"So it really was awful and as bad as some returning troops have claimed?"

USA—"It was like a long trip to hell that you knew you might return from. Of course it is as bad as the soldiers say it is. Hell it's even worse if the truth has to come out. It's a constant fu..ing nightmare trying to figure out where the guerillas are going to hit, how to keep the civilians calm, and also getting enough water and food to eat. That is one thing the media never really told the Americans about, how bad it was when our convoys weren't getting through. We had to go to some Iraqi people and trade socks and underwear for some food and a little water." \*\*\*\*\*

(continued on page 3)

**Realities of soldiering** (continued from page 2)

CFTM—“Just keep going. I want to hear more about the hardships the military and Bush made you go through. I want the American people to know what a nightmare this war has become and what it’s doing to our service men over there.”

USA—“Okay, well I can bitch about the problems like food being short and water going bad, but I want to tell people about how bad the attacks on US and coalition forces have gotten in the last month. In the last two weeks I was there we were attacked at least 20 times a day if you count all the shots we heard from random sniper or opportunity attacks. We were losing at least five men a day to injuries and there was at least one of our unit killed every twenty four hours.” \*\*\*\*\*

“I had one guy tell me all he wanted was to see his little daughter; she was born three days after the war started. He died in the sand holding my hand and crying because his daughter would never know him. Tell me that’s fu..ing right. Where was George Bush when this kid was gasping for air and spitting his blood on foreign soil?”

CFTM---“I talked to you about this the other day. Do you think George Bush is the wrong man to order troops into battle when he ducked it himself?”

USA---“That asshole went AWOL and never showed up for duty and then he has the nerve to take us into two different wars that will be going on for years. I do not believe he should be president of this country, he’s a complete idiot and he’s controlled by madmen with a drive for only profits and getting oil.” \*\*\*\*\*

“Believe it or not I read authors like Noam Chomsky, Gore Vidal, and Jim Hightower, and went through three copies of ‘Stupid White Men’ by Michael Moore while I was over there. I let people read parts of Mike’s book and they were irate that Bush had screwed us so hard. I had parts of ‘Best Democracy Money Can Buy’ mailed to me because I knew if I had the whole book it would get stolen in a heartbeat.”

CFTM---“So you might be quite a bit more aware and well informed about the real reasons for the war that others did not know. I don’t know of many line soldiers reading Greg Palast or Noam Chomsky.”

USA---“I guess you’re right and that might be why I am trying to speak out and let the Americans know that they are sending us to be slaughtered. \*\*\*”

CFTM---“Alright tell me what it was really like and don’t skip the gory details. I want people to be shocked and offended enough to realize why you spoke out and what it is doing to our military by sending them over there with blind flag waving and cheers of false victory” \*\*\*\*\*

USA---“I want to talk about some of the children I saw killed for no reason, maybe it will wake someone up who doesn’t believe it was happening, or that it was very bad. I can tell you I will never forget the screams of the wounded or orphaned kids, or the wailing of the parents who lost their kids. The Iraqis and most Muslims have a very vocal way of mourning the dead by lamenting and wailing for the dead. There is no mistaking a mother or father crying out in pain for the loss of a child. They don’t cry like that unless there has been a death. Sometimes after a bombing raid or an artillery attack you could hear hundreds of people wailing and weeping.”

“I have several grown children with grand kids about the age of most of the dead children I saw in Iraq. I also have several kids who are about half grown and I saw a lot of Iraqi children that age wandering around in charge of three or four little ones because their parents were dead.”

“Let me tell you about the cluster bomb raid we saw wipe out a whole bunch of little kids. It looked like they had already lost their parents and were trying to salvage food from a destroyed Iraqi convoy by the side of the road we were on. The kids were way off to the side about half a mile away by then when we got the word that the Iraqi column was going to be hit with cluster bombs and we had to clear the area. We got on the radio and tried to get the air strike stopped but we were told it was too late to get it stopped.”

“We could see the body parts flying up into the air after the bombs hit. It was terrible and we could not do a damn thing but watch it happen and scream into the radio at the dumb sh.t pilot that was dropping the bombs. After the strike was over we went to see if there were any survivors and all we found was bits and pieces of little kids and here and there an arm or leg you could still identify.” (continued on page 4)

## Realities of soldiering (continued from page 3)

“I damn sure will not go back over there even if they throw me in Leavenworth. I never could understand how a guy could be a conscientious objector until what I just went through. I wish more guys would stand up and tell Bush and the Pentagon they will not fight their war for oil. We should not have to die for these rich bastards profits and enrichment.” \*\*\*\*

“This war is killing the poor or middle class American men and women who went in the armed Forces to have college or some kind of better future.. You don’t see the rich kids joining up or any or any senator’s kid dying in Iraq. It’s us little guys who are joining up.” Bring us home now! We are dying for oil and corporate greed!”\*\*\*\*

”Iraq is going to hell and all the little kids are starving and dying from their injuries they got during the war. “There is not enough medicine or antibiotics to keep them from getting gangrene or stop the diarrhea they get from bad water. Most of the people are drinking sewage or water contaminated with shit or oil. Months later and they still haven’t fixed the

pumps. I saw kids dying everyday because they had the shits so bad they wasted away to nothing.”\*\*\*\*

“This war is not about freedom or stopping terrorism.”

CFTM---“Anything else you want to say to America? Any final thoughts or words?”

“Bring us home now!!! Tell your Senators to stop giving Bush money for this carnage. If you demand that we come home they will have to listen. At least I hope they would, they are supposed to have our best interest at heart!”

“Fuck you George Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Paul Wolfowitz, Paul Bremer and all the rest of you sorry assholes! Why don’t you come fight this war if you think it’s right?”

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## Voices on the ground: Stars and Stripes surveys troops on morale in Iraq

By David Josar, Stars and Stripes, European edition, Wednesday, October 15, 2003

Conditions for U.S. troops in Iraq vary widely, and so too, does the mood and morale of the individual units scattered throughout the country. For months, Stars and Stripes has received scores of letters from troops complaining about one thing or another connected with their service, as well as scores of letters from troops decrying the claims of the complainers and urging them to just do their duty.

In an effort to feel the pulse of U.S. forces firsthand, Stars and Stripes reporters spent three weeks in August fanning across Iraq. Reporters traveled as far south as the enemy prisoner-of-war camp in Umm Qasr, about 15 miles north of the Kuwait border, and as far north as Mosul, about 70 miles from Turkey. To get a firsthand account of what life was like for American forces in Operation Iraqi Freedom, reporters slept, ate, showered and went on patrol with troops.

They handed out and received responses to nearly 2,000 questionnaires. (The U.S. Air Force allowed reporters to visit Air Force bases, but did not allow airmen to complete the surveys at some of its bases. At one base, reporters were allowed to meet with airmen and ask them the questions on the survey.)

Troops were asked about their morale and their unit’s morale. They were asked about their living conditions and whether they thought their commanders were doing anything to improve those conditions. They were asked about their unit’s mission and if they felt going to war in Iraq was worthwhile for America.

Of those surveyed:

¶ Many Reserve and National Guard respondents said  
(continued on page 5)

*Stars and Stripes* (continued from page 4)  
they were unhappy with a number of things, just as letter writers from those units had said in letters to the newspaper. They said they often felt like second-class soldiers who don't receive the same equipment, support and treatment as their active-duty counterparts.

¶ When asked how worthwhile they thought the war in Iraq was for the United States, the split among all those responding was 67 percent saying it was "worthwhile," "probably worthwhile" or "very worthwhile," with 31 percent saying it was of "little value" or of "no value at all."

¶ Asked about their personal morale, 34 percent overall rated it as "low" or "very low," 27 percent said it was "high" or "very high," and virtually all the rest called it "average." Perceptions of their unit's morale ranked heavier on the "low" side. This question of personal morale elicited widely different responses among the services. Reservists ranked their morale as the lowest by far. Marine and Air Force respondents tended to rate their own morale on the high side, while Army respondents were fairly evenly divided between high and low morale, with most falling in the middle, or "average." \*\*\*

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Note: The above survey indicates that approximately one-third of the respondents opposed the war and had low morale. Because this was a government-sponsored survey, we can assume that many of those answering hid their true feelings. If this is so, the opposition to the war is probably much greater than the figures indicate.

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### **Letter from Ben Swankey**

Dear Members of VANA:

Thank you for coming to my 90th birthday party on Sept.13. It was wonderful to see so many relatives and friends Thank you also for honouring me with a Certificate. VANA is close to my heart because I know what an outstanding and effective voice it is for peace.

The birthday party gave me such an unforgettable feeling of warmth. What a fine sense of solidarity unites all stragglng for a better world!

With best of personal wishes to all of you,

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### **On the Light Side - Disorderly letters**

Did yiu konw taht aocdrnig to a rscheearch at an Elingsh uinervtisy, it deosn't mttajer in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoetnt tihng is taht frist and lsat ltteer is at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a toatl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae we do not raed ervey lteter by it slef but the wrod as a wlohe. Cool ehd

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## **VANA MEMBERSHIP**

**To renew your membership in or to join VANA, please fill out the form below and send, along with a cheque payable to VANA, to Shayle Duffield, RR#1 Z-46, Bowen Island, BC V0N 1G0. The dues are \$30, \$20 of which go to the national office and \$10 to the branch. (You can use the enclosed addressed envelope)**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Code \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Prov \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Note-The article below indicates that there still may be hope for peace in the Middle East.

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## **Israelis and Palestinians Join in Peace Draft**

By GREG MYRE, *New York Times*, October 14, 2003

JERUSALEM, Oct. 13 — A group of prominent Israeli and Palestinian politicians, working outside official channels, have written a symbolic peace agreement that they hope could be a foundation for future negotiations. The announcement came with the Palestinian leadership engaged in a political crisis that pits Yasir Arafat, the Palestinian leader, against his newly installed prime minister, Ahmed Qurei, over who will be the Palestinian security chief. While some Palestinian officials said on Monday that no official action had been taken, The Associated Press reported, quoting an unnamed official, that Mr. Arafat had already decided to name his choice, Hakam Balawi, to the position.

The 50-page draft peace agreement was completed over the weekend in neighboring Jordan by the two delegations, which included current legislators and former cabinet members on both sides.

The proposal offers highly specific solutions and calls for major compromises on the most sensitive issues that have torpedoed previous peace efforts, ranging from the status of Palestinian refugees to Israeli settlements.

The right-wing Israeli government immediately denounced the proposal, calling it irresponsible, freelance diplomacy.

"The public rejected these same political figures," Limor Livnat, Israel's education minister, said of the Israeli delegation. The Palestinian Authority did not immediately comment.

The proposal, dubbed the Geneva Accords, will be formally signed at a ceremony planned for next month in that Swiss city.

The Israeli delegation was led by Yossi Beilin, a former justice minister. The most prominent Palestinian was Yasir Abed Rabbo, a former information minister.

Under the proposal, a Palestinian state would be created that would include the entire Gaza Strip and almost all of the West Bank. The capital would be in the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem.

The plan identifies about 20 of the larger Israeli settlements among the 140 in the West Bank that Israel would keep, and Israel would give the Palestinians land in southern Israel in compensation.

On another delicate issue, the plan calls for the Palestinians to have ultimate control over Jerusalem's most important and contested holy site, the mosque compound in East Jerusalem, called the Noble Sanctuary by Muslims. Israel would relinquish its claim of sovereignty over the site, which Jews call the Temple Mount. Israel would keep full control of the Western Wall, the Jewish place of prayer that borders the compound.

On another complicated question, Palestinian refugees from the Arab-Israeli war in 1948 and their descendants would be allowed to live in a future Palestinian state, move to a third country or receive compensation for their losses. But they could not return to their old land inside Israel without Israeli consent, according to the plan.

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### **Important Events-**

Lloyd Axworthy will speak on "The Future of the United Nations. Off Again? On Again?"

Friday, October 24, 7:30 pm (United Nations Day) Unitarian Church of Vancouver, 949 West 49 Avenue (at Oak Street)

Sponsored by :The Social Justice Committee, Unitarian Church of Vancouver The World Federalists of Canada - Vancouver Branch The United Nations Association in Canada - Vancouver Branch .Admission by donation.

Public Forum on "U.S., Middle East & Empire"

Speaker-Phyllis Bennis, Institute for Public Studies, Washington and the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam. She is also the author of several books on oil and the Middle East.

Monday, November 3, 7pm, St. Andrew's Wesley Church,

Sponsored by Stop War.Ca Free admission.