

U.S. CASUALTIES IN IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT) for 5 minutes.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, we owe a debt of gratitude to Dana Milbank at the Washington Post and to Hal Bernton at one of my hometown newspapers, The Seattle Times. These two journalists, writing almost exactly 4 years apart, have pierced the veil of secrecy this administration shamefully uses to hide the painful images of U.S. casualties in Iraq and the touching and patriotic farewells by loved ones.

On Sunday, April 18, 2004, Bernton wrote a story called: The Somber Task of Honoring the Fallen. This poignant story included the first newspaper pictures of caskets being loaded into a military airplane. The story, which I will enter into the RECORD, set off a firestorm, because the administration did not want anyone to see the grim reality of war—rows of flag-draped coffins inside a military plane to begin the last homecoming. And the civilian contractor who took the pictures was fired for sharing them with the media. They were published at a time when the administration was doing everything to make people believe in its May 1, 2003, Mission Accomplished banner.

The administration continues to spin the message from that phony PR event. To do that, the administration continues to hide the grim reality of the Iraq war. Last Thursday, Milbank wrote a story in the Washington Post called: What the Family Would Let You See, the Pentagon Obstructs. Almost 4 years later after The Seattle Times story, the American people are still denied access to the truth.

Behind me is a photograph of Lieutenant Colonel Billy Hall from the Post story. Let me read an excerpt from that story:

"The family of 38-year-old Hall, who leaves behind two young daughters and two stepsons, gave their permission for the media to cover his Arlington burial—a decision many grieving families make so that the nation will learn about their loved ones' sacrifice. But the military had other ideas, and they arranged the marine's burial yesterday so that no sound, and few images, would make it into the public domain."

They don't want you to see the faces of our fallen heroes, and in my view that's outrageous. Lieutenant Colonel Hall is the highest ranking military officer to fall in Iraq. He went to Garfield High School in Seattle. He deserves to be buried according to the wishes of his family, not hidden from view, because the people running this war only want you to see the images that proclaim Mission Accomplished. I will not accept this disrespect for our soldiers and their families, or the outright distortion of the truth about the war. To honor our fallen heroes, I and many of my colleagues here in Washington have easels outside our congressional offices

with pictures and the names of service men and women who have died in Iraq.

Outside my office, there are three boards with the photographs of 94 soldiers from the State of Washington who have fallen in Iraq. Brave fallen heroes, including:

Specialist Christopher W. Dickison,
Major William G. Hall,
Lance Corporal Daniel Chavez,
1st Lieutenant Michael R. Adams,
Specialist Joshua M. Boyd,
Staff Sergeant Tracy L. Melvin,
Sergeant 1st Class Steven M. Langmack, all from Seattle.

I will enter into the RECORD the Web address where you can see the faces and the names of the fallen from every State:

<http://projects.washingtonpost.com/fallen/search/>

Instead of helping to provide closure to these wounded families, the President's surrogates are deepening the wounds for these families. They only want to share their grief and the pride in their loved ones. Who wouldn't be proud of Billy Hall? They want to share that with us.

Today, in full view, let us honor the ultimate sacrifice made by Lieutenant Colonel Billy Hall and the fallen soldiers from Washington and across this country.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

I ask for a moment of silence in honor of the following:

Sgt. Nathan P. Hayes, 21
Staff Sgt. Juan M. Ridout, 29
Lance Cpl. Cedric E. Bruns, 22
Spc. Justin W. Hebert, 20
Pfc. Kerry D. Scott, 21
Spc. John P. Johnson, 24
2nd Lt. Benjamin J. Colgan, 30
Spc. Robert Benson, 20
Sgt. Jay A. Blessing, 23
Spc. Nathan W. Nakis, 19
Sgt. Curt E. Jordan, Jr., 25
Staff Sgt. Christopher Bunda, 29
1st Lt. Michael R. Adams, 24
Spc. Jacob R. Herring, 21
Spc. Jeffrey R. Shaver, 26
Pfc. Cody S. Calavan, 19
Lance Cpl. Dustin L. Sides, 22
Staff Sgt. Marvin Best, 33
Spc. Jeremiah Schmunk, 21
Capt. Gergory A. Ratzlaff, 36
Sgt. Yadir Reynoso, 27
Lance Cpl. Kane M. Funke, 20
Lance Cpl. Caleb J. Powers, 21
Sgt. Jason Cook, 25
Sgt. Jacob H. Demand, 29
Cpl. Steven Rintamaki, 29
Staff Sgt. Michael Lee Burbank, 34
Spc. Jonathan J. Santos, 22
Staff Sgt. David G. Ries, 29
Lance Cpl. Nathan R. Wood, 19
Spc. Blain M. Ebert, 22
Spc. Harley D. R. Miller, 21
Pfc. Andrew M. Ward, 25
Staff Sgt. Kyle A. Eggers, 27
Pfc. Curtis L. Wooten III, 20
Chief Warrant Officer Clint J. Prather, 46
Maj. Steve Thornton, 46
Cpl. Jeffrey B. Starr, 22
Staff Sgt. Casey J. Crate, 26
Sgt. 1st Class Steven Langmack, 33
Lance Cpl. Daniel Chavez, 20
Spc. Christopher W. Dickison, 26
Lance Cpl. Shane C. Swanberg, 24
Sgt. 1st Class Lawrence Morrison, 45
Staff Sgt. Travis W. Nixon, 24
Cpl. Joseph P. Bier, 22

Staff Sgt. Christopher J. Vanderhorn, 37
1st Lt. Jaime L. Campbell, 25
Sgt. Charles E. Matheny IV, 23
Staff Sgt. Abraham Twitchell, 28
Spc. Eric D. King, 28
1st Lt. Forrest Ewens, 25
Pfc. Devon J. Gibbons, 28
Sgt. Justin D. Norton, 21
Pfc. Jason Hanson, 21
Staff Sgt. Tracy L. Melvin, 31
Spc. David J. Ramsey, 27
Master Sgt. Robb G. Needham, 51
Sgt. Velton Locklear III, 29
Staff Sgt. Ronald L. Paulsen, 53
Sgt. Lucas T. White, 28
Spc. Jordan W. Hess, 26
Maj. Megan M. McClung, 34
Cpl. Jeremiah J. Johnson, 23
Spc. James D. Riekena, 22
Cpl. Darrel J. Morris, 21
Maj. Alan R. Johnson, 44
Sgt. Mickel D. Garrigus, 24
Lance Cpl. Adam Q. Emul, 19
Sgt. Corey J. Aultz, 31
Sgt. Travis D. Pfister, 27
Spc. Ryan M. Bell, 21
Spc. Joshua M. Boyd
Staff Sgt. Casey D. Combs, 28
Staff Sgt. Coby G. Schwab, 25
Spc. Kelly B. Grothe, 21
Pfc. Jerome J. Potter, 24
Sgt. Dariek E. Dehn, 32
Cpl. Llythaniele Fender, 21
Pfc. Casey S. Carriker, 20
Chief Warrant Officer Scott A.M. Oswell, 33
Lance Cpl. Shawn V. Starkovich, 20
Pvt. Michael A. Bologna, 21
Cpl. Jason M. Kessler, 29
Sgt. Bryce D. Howard, 24
Spc. Matthew J. Emerson, 20
Spc. Vincent G. Kamka, 23
Lance Cpl. Jeremy W. Burris, 22
Sgt. 1st Class Johnny C. Walls, 41
Cpl. Christopher J. Nelson, 22
Sgt. Phillip R. Anderson, 28
Lance Cpl. Dustin L. Canham, 21
Spc. Durrell L. Bennett, 22
Lt. Col. William G. Hall, 38

[From the Seattle Times, Apr. 18, 2004]

THE SOMBER TASK OF HONORING THE FALLEN
(By Hal Bernton)

The aluminum boxes, in ordered rows, are bound by clean white straps on freshly scrubbed pallets. American flags are draped evenly over the boxes. Uniformed honor guards form on either side of the pallets as they move from the tarmac to the entryways of the cargo planes. There are prayers, salutes and hands on hearts. Then the caskets are carefully placed in cargo holds for a flight to Germany.

In recent weeks, military and civilian contract crews have loaded scores of these caskets onto planes departing the U.S. military area of Kuwait International Airport, south of Kuwait City. And the rituals are repeated over and over again.

"The way everyone salutes with such emotion and intensity and respect. The families would be proud to see their sons and daughters saluted like that," says Tami Silicio, a contract employee from the Seattle area who works the night shift at the cargo terminal.

For U.S. troops, April has been the worst month of this war, with at least 94 service members killed by hostile fire.

"So far this month, almost every night we send them home," Silicio said. "... It's tough. Very tough."

The remains arrive at the Kuwait airport accompanied by a soldier, sometimes a comrade from the same unit. On one occasion, the comrade was also the victim's father. Another time, the comrade was the wife.

Silicio knows what it is like to lose a child. The mother of three sons suffered the

death of her oldest to a brain tumor when he was 19. "It kind of helps me to know what these mothers are going through, and I try to watch over their children as they head home," she said in an interview conducted by telephone and e-mail.

Silicio, who grew up in Seattle and Edmonds, is used to hard work. After a decade of events-decorating work in the Seattle area, she went to war-torn Kosovo, where she worked on the transportation crew for a contractor during the NATO peacekeeping mission in 1999.

"Nothing scares her," said Silicio's mother, Leona Silicio.

Tami Silicio first went to work at the Kuwait airport in March 2003, before the start of the war. She then returned home but found it tough to get a job in an economy still sour from the recession. So by last October, she was back in Kuwait and her airport job for a contractor that works with the military to coordinate and process airport cargo.

The crews help move thousands of tons of supplies onto the Iraq-bound flights that support the U.S. military forces. Much of Silicio's job is handling paperwork to track the cargo. But she also might drive equipment to help load cargo, or make a quick run to a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet to secure a few savory buckets to offer a soldier just in from Iraq.

Around Christmas, she helped handle a rash of incoming cargo from the United States—candy, shaving cream, razors, baby wipes and other items in care packages headed to Iraq. "Thank God, no fruitcakes," she e-mailed her mother. "The soldiers would just give it to the Iraqis, anyway."

Just after Christmas, there was a marathon of work as medical supplies to aid Iranian earthquake victims moved through Kuwait.

And now, the crews are helping to coordinate the departures of dozens of U.S. civilian contractors who, with the recent violence and kidnappings, no longer want to risk being in the region.

More time also is devoted to the dead. The fallen come into Kuwait on flights from Baghdad. Before they are loaded onto the outbound aircraft, soldiers in full uniform form parallel lines along the tarmac. There is a prayer. Then loaders lift up the coffins, which are joined on board by soldiers who share the final journey. After going first to Germany, according to the military, they fly to Dover Air Base in Delaware.

Since the 1991 Gulf War, photographs of coffins as they return to the United States have been tightly restricted. And few such photographs have been published during the conflict in Iraq.

On the April day depicted in the photograph that accompanies this story, more than 20 coffins went into a cargo plane bound for Germany. Silicio says those who lost loved ones in Iraq should understand the care and devotion that civilians and military crews dedicate to the task of returning the soldiers home.

Silicio says she shares her motto, "Purpose and Cause," with colleagues who appear worn down from the job: "We serve a purpose and we have a cause—that's what living life is all about."

[From the Washington Post, Apr. 24, 2008]

WHAT THE FAMILY WOULD LET YOU SEE, THE PENTAGON OBSTRUCTS

(By Dana Milbank)

Lt. Col. Billy Hall, one of the most senior officers to be killed in the Iraq war, was laid to rest yesterday at Arlington National Cemetery. It's hard to escape the conclusion that the Pentagon doesn't want you to know that.

The family of 38-year-old Hall, who leaves behind two young daughters and two stepsons, gave their permission for the media to cover his Arlington burial—a decision many grieving families make so that the nation will learn about their loved ones' sacrifice. But the military had other ideas, and they arranged the Marine's burial yesterday so that no sound, and few images, would make it into the public domain.

That's a shame, because Hall's story is a moving reminder that the war in Iraq, forgotten by much of the nation, remains real and present for some. Among those unlikely to forget the war: 6-year-old Gladys and 3-year-old Tatianna. The rest of the nation, if it remembers Hall at all, will remember him as the 4,011th American service member to die in Iraq, give or take, and the 419th to be buried at Arlington. Gladys and Tatianna will remember him as Dad.

The two girls were there in Section 60 yesterday beside grave 8,672—or at least it appeared that they were from a distance. Journalists were held 50 yards from the service, separated from the mourning party by six or seven rows of graves, and staring into the sun and penned in by a yellow rope. Photographers and reporters pleaded with Arlington officials.

"There will be a yellow rope in the face of the next of kin," protested one photographer with a large telephoto lens.

"This is the best shot you're going to get," a man from the cemetery replied.

"We're not going to be able to hear a thing," a reporter argued.

"Mm-hmm," an Arlington official answered.

The distance made it impossible to hear the words of Chaplain Ron Nordan, who, an official news release said, was leading the service. Even a reporter who stood surreptitiously just behind the mourners could make out only the familiar strains of the Lord's Prayer. Whatever Chaplain Nordan had to say about Hall's valor and sacrifice were lost to the drone of airplanes leaving National Airport.

It had the feel of a throwback to Donald Rumsfeld's Pentagon, when the military cracked down on photographs of flag-draped caskets returning home from the war. Rumsfeld himself was exposed for failing to sign by hand the condolence letters he sent to the next of kin. His successor, Robert Gates, has brought some glasnost to the Pentagon, but the military funerals remain tightly controlled. Even when families approve media coverage for a funeral, the journalists are held at a distance for the pageantry—the caisson, the band, the firing party, "Taps," the presenting of the flag—then whisked away when the service itself begins.

Nor does the blocking of funeral coverage seem to be the work of overzealous bureaucrats. Gina Gray, Arlington's new public affairs director, pushed vigorously to allow the journalists more access to the service yesterday—but she was apparently shot down by other cemetery officials.

Media whining? Perhaps. But the de facto ban on media at Arlington funerals fits neatly with an effort by the administration to sanitize the war in Iraq. That, in turn, has contributed to a public boredom with the war. A Pew Research Center poll earlier this month found that 14 percent of Americans considered Iraq the news story of most interest—less than half the 32 percent hooked on the presidential campaign and barely more than the 11 percent hooked on the raid of a polygamist compound in Texas.

On March 29, a week before the raid on the polygamists' ranch, William G. Hall was riding from his quarters to the place in Fallujah where he was training Iraqi troops when his vehicle hit an improvised explosive

device. He was taken into surgery, but he died from his injuries. The Marines awarded him a posthumous promotion from major to lieutenant colonel.

Newspapers in Seattle, where Hall had lived, printed an e-mail the fallen fighter had sent his family two days before his death.

"I am sure the first question in each of your minds is my safety, and I am happy to tell you that I'm safe and doing well," he wrote, giving his family a hopeful picture of events in Iraq. "I know most of what you hear on the news about Iraq is not usually good news and that so many are dying over here," the e-mail said. "That is true to an extent but it does not paint the total picture, and violence is not everywhere throughout the country. So please don't associate what you see on the news with all of Iraq. 'Love you and miss you,' he wrote. 'I'll write again soon.'"

Except, of course, that he didn't. And yesterday, his family walked slowly behind the horse-drawn caisson to section 60. In the front row of mourners, one young girl trudged along, clinging to a grown-up's hand; another child found a ride on an adult's shoulders.

It was a moving scene—and one the Pentagon shouldn't try to hide from the American public.

REAL HEALTH CARE SOLUTIONS FOR AMERICAN FAMILIES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BOUSTANY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BOUSTANY. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Americans remain frustrated with the cost of health care. As costs rise, fears grow that they'll lose coverage and even fall into bankruptcy. Americans face this anxiety every day. But it doesn't need to be that way. We can give all American families confidence in a health care system.

Americans deserve more affordable and more widely available health care. Americans deserve real access to health care, not just health care coverage that doesn't lead to access but real access to health care. That's why we must modernize our health care system and learn from other sectors of the economy where competition has driven down costs, particularly in the insurance arena, so that we can drive down those premium costs and make it more affordable for all American families.

When addressing health care, Washington fails to put the needs of the patient first. I know this as a physician. I was in private practice for 14 years and saw how policies really drove a wedge between the patient and their doctor.

Patients want personal, quality, high-value health care. That's what we all want. That's going to be the way that we get true quality in health care. We must focus on what patients most want and need: prevention, early detection, early diagnosis, control of chronic illnesses, enhancing the quality of life, and wellness programs.

I know as a physician that trying to get a patient to quit smoking takes a