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The Longest Winter
By William Rivers Pitt
Truthout | Perspective

Wednesday 9 April 2003

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There is a US Army chaplain in Iraq named Josh Llano, hailing originally from Houston, who is tending his flock in the desert outside Najaf.. He has in his possession a 500-gallon pool of pure, clean water. He is well aware of the fact that our troops have been suffering a water shortage due to Fedayeen attacks on Army supply lines; many soldiers have gone weeks without



bathing, and have often been forced to go thirsty, because of this.

Llano, who describes himself as a Southern Baptist evangelist, sees this deprivation as an opportunity. "It's simple," he said in a recent Miami Herald article. "They want water. I have it, as long as they agree to get baptized." Said baptism involves listening to one of Llano's hour-and-a-half sermons, followed by a rite which requires another hour of Bible quotations, before the troops are allowed to bathe and drink. "You have to be aggressive to help people find themselves in God," says Llano.

On another part of the planet, a doctor from Boulder named Gene Bolles works as chief neurosurgeon at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. His job is to repair, as best he can, the grievous wounds American soldiers have suffered during the war in Iraq. "We have had a number of really horrific injuries now from the war," Bolles said in an article from the Boulder Daily Camera. "They have lost arms, legs, hands, they have been burned, they have had significant brain injuries and peripheral nerve damage. These are young kids that are going to be, in some regards, changed for life. I don't feel that people realize that."

Bolles, who describes himself as a pacifist "opposed to any war," felt compelled to do what he could for his country after the attacks of September 11. He has learned, in very short order, what is really happening during the Bush administration's action in the Middle East. "The feeling here originally was, this is going to be over in a couple days," said Bolles. Instead, he has dealt with a steady torrent of wounded American soldiers. "It really is disgustingly sanitized on television," he said.

Back in America, some 500 anti-war protesters descended upon the Port of Oakland on Monday in California to stand against the conflict in a place where many of the war's supplies are shipped from. Nearby were several longshoremen who work the docks. The Oakland Police, facing the protesters, let loose with a fusillade of "non-lethal" crowd-controlling wooden dowels, which are about three inches wide and four inches thick, fired from stout steel launchers. Said launchers are emblazoned with the words, "Do not fire directly at persons as serious injury or death may result." The police also fired bean bags, concussion grenades and "sting grenades" – rubber pellets accompanied by tear gas – at the protesters.

One young woman was blasted in the jaw by one of these wooden bullets, which ricocheted into her neck and opened a bloody gash. Another protester was shot three times in the back by these dowels, which are supposed to be fired only when the armor-clad police feel threatened. The back wounds are indicative of only one thing: The protester was shot while fleeing, and a fleeing person is no threat to anyone but the grass he is running across. Several of the longshoremen were struck in the crossfire.

Tin soldiers and Bush is coming.

These are but three of the stories that have come to us through the mainstream media filter in the last 72 hours. They are a dismal trifecta speaking to the darkness of the age: A chaplain who abuses his position and the sanctity of his robe by bribing bedraggled soldiers into accepting his religion in order to get a cool drink in a combat-riven desert; a neurosurgeon up to his elbows in the blood of American children who knows, for an unassailable fact, that the war goes far worse than we are told; and a young woman in Oakland whose face was smashed because she dared to speak her mind.

The war goes on.

Here in Boston, the winter does not want to end. It started early, in mid-October, and has roared on and on with no sign of a letup. It snowed yesterday, again. It has been cold, and it has been raw. This has been, without question, the longest winter in my memory. Add to this a war without cause, an administration without shame, and an American people who have been fed a lie so verbose that their televisions can scarcely contain it.

The anthrax killer walks free, as does Osama bin Laden. The prime justification for this Iraq war, the existence of weapons of mass destruction, has been thoroughly downplayed and spun away because it has become clear that this premise was nonsense from the start. Soon, the term 'WMD' will join said 'thraxer' and said super-terrorist on the back shelf designated to hold all the stuff we're not supposed to care about anymore. Patriot Acts I and II wait like coiled snakes for the opportunity to sink their venomous teeth into our constitutional body politic, a death blow that will come when the terrorism caused by our Iraq adventure makes its inevitable appearance on our shores.

I am forced to wonder if the flowers will ever bloom again.

William Rivers Pitt is a New York Times best-selling author of two books - "War On Iraq" (with Scott Ritter) available now from Context Books, and "The Greatest Sedition is Silence," now available at <http://www.silenceissedition.com/> from Pluto Press. He teaches high school in Boston, MA.

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