

Military Families Against the War

Millions of Americans are anxious about and even opposed to the American war on Iraq and to the bloody occupation that has followed it. But for Stan Goff, it's personal.

A career soldier and Vietnam veteran, Goff is an organizer of Bring Them Home Now, a fledgling movement of hundreds of relatives of U.S. troops in Iraq who say their family members in uniform are being made to fight an illegal and immoral war.

Goff is also the parent of one of those soldiers, a son who just last month was sent into Iraq to work as an army mechanic. "My son wrote an e-mail back that he's already been under attack by mortars twice," says Goff.

Bring Them Home Now is the combined project of two anti-war organizations—Military Families Speak Out and Veterans for Peace—and has seen its membership soar to more than 700 families over the course of the Iraq war. Because its members have relatives at risk in that conflict, the group poses perhaps one of the biggest threats to the Bush/Cheney/Rumsfeld war axis in Washington.

In These Times spoke with the now-retired Master Sergeant Goff by phone at his office with North Carolina Waste Awareness and Reduction Network, an environmental organization based in Durham.

What has the response been to an organization of anti-war soldiers' families?

Since I got out of the army in 1996, I've never seen anything catch fire like this. It sort of started out with that idiotic comment by George Bush in early July taunting the Iraqi guerrillas with the phrase "Bring 'em on." I wrote a piece condemning that statement in *Counterpunch* and got thousands of responses to it. Forty percent of them were veterans or military families, and they overwhelmingly supported my criticism of Bush. This is especially impressive because a lot of military families feel that there is a risk in speaking out.

What are they afraid of?

Soldiers in uniform do not have the First Amendment freedom to criticize their superior officers about war-related matters, and that

goes right up to the Commander-in-Chief. The families, of course, have their First Amendment freedom, but the reality is that the officer and enlisted personnel management systems control a soldier's career, and they can be



Stan Goff: Bring the troops home now.

extremely subjective. One bad line in your file can ruin your career.

Why are we seeing such a movement among military families with this conflict?

We're not saying bring the troops home because they're suffering hardship and danger. Most soldiers know that hardship and danger are part of their job. What we're saying is bring the troops home because they are facing hardship and danger in a war that is immoral and illegal.

The thing is, most of the kids that are over there believed what they were told, that they'd be greeted as liberators, like the allies marching into Paris. Instead it was like marching into Mogadishu. So now they and their families are asking why are they there subjecting themselves to 120 degree temperatures and daily attacks if [Iraqis] don't want them there?

Are you being harassed by the government? Do you worry that you will be?

There are some people who try to call us whiners. But really there has been no official harassment. It would be incredibly foolish for

the administration to retaliate against us. ... We have a sort of immunity from being charged with being bad Americans, and it's an identity we guard carefully.

Do you feel like this is Vietnam all over again?

In some ways it's similar, and in some ways it's very different. The terrain is different, and you don't have the Cold War underlying it, though the Bush Administration seems to be trying hard to create a new global enemy like that.

What is happening that is similar is that, in order to limit the casualties, which are raising the level of concern at home, the Pentagon has essentially shut down all operations. The troops have been pulled back behind the wire into hardened bases. The problem with that is that when you pull back, you hand the countryside over to the enemy, and then the static positions set you up as targets, which are under surveillance by the guerrillas.

It's a classic no-win situation for the United States now, with the Iraqis executing a classic guerrilla strategy of going after the softer targets like the United Nations and the pipelines, and I frankly don't see how we get out of it.

That sounds pretty pessimistic.

I'm an optimist really, though. Maybe a short-term pessimist but a long-term optimist. You know, the government can spin, spin, spin, like with [U.S. occupation coordinator L. Paul] Bremer saying over and over that we're "turning the corner." But eventually reality reasserts itself.

I think that the Bush Administration will collapse from its own hubris. You know, [Defense Secretary Donald] Rumsfeld is not the smart guy people in the media say he is. He is a fool who thinks he's smarter than his generals. He has an outrageous faith in technology's ability to solve military problems, and he seems to have Bush firmly in tow. But they're in a box. They're in the process of self-destruction.

The problem is that when it's over, we'll have a whole bunch of damaged people coming home sick, lame, and crazy. All I want is for my son to come home in the same condition that he left in. ■

THE FIRST

By Joel Bleifuss

James Watt of the 21st Century

J. Steven Griles has taken his skills as a corporate shill for the energy industry to the Interior Department. There, as second in command to Secretary Gale Norton, he is "advancing the Bush administration's assault on our public lands," says Adam Werbach, who made a political name for himself in 1996 by becoming president of the Sierra Club at the age of 23.

Today, Werbach works as executive director of Common Assets Defense Fund, an organization he founded to stop giveaways of public assets. He has set his sights on Griles as the person who best exemplifies all that is wrong with the Bush administration's environmental policies.

Griles is a former employee of the oil and gas lobbying firm National Environmental Strategies, which is currently paying him \$284,000 a year as part of a \$1.1 million buyout of his client base. Those clients include more than 40 coal, oil, gas, and electric companies and trade associations—the same corporate interests he is currently serving by leading administration efforts to weaken the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act and to expand mining and drilling on public lands.

During his confirmation hearings, Griles recused himself from lobbying for his former clients, yet he has continued to promote their anti-environment agendas. For example, according to documents released under the Freedom of Information Act, Griles has held 14 meetings on mountaintop-removal coal mining with industry officials, despite having previously lobbied on behalf of six coal companies and the National Mining Association. And he has held 32 meetings about offshore oil drilling with industry officials, despite having lob-



ROGER L. WOLLENBERG / UPI

J. Steven Griles exemplifies what is wrong with the Bush administration.

bied on behalf of six offshore drilling companies and the American Gas Association.

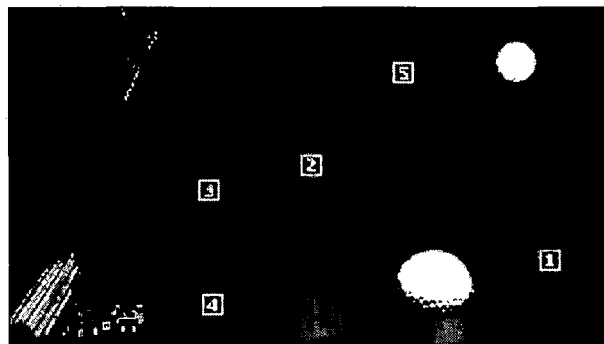
Griles is not new to controversy. During the Reagan administration, Griles served in the Interior Department where he was involved in a shady deal to sell the mineral rights to 17,000 acres of federal land to a private company for \$42,000. The company turned around and sold those rights for a \$37 million profit.

Borrowing the strategy of the campaign to remove Reagan's Interior Secretary James Watt, Werbach has begun a Web-based campaign, www.firegriles.com, to collect petitions and force Griles out of

office. "This man has got to go. Griles is serving corporate interests rather than the people's interests," says Werbach. "People think Bush is bad on the environment, but they can't cite an example. Griles is that example."

Heavenly Profits

The U.S. dominance in "near space" not only helps guarantee total global control, it guarantees huge profits for weapons corporations (see "Rods from God"). In April, several thousand Pentagon space warriors and space industry executives gathered in Colorado Springs for the 19th Annual Space Symposium. "Transforming the Future" was the theme of the symposium, which included workshops such as "The Role of Space in Homeland Defense and Homeland Security" and "Views from the Top—a CEO Roundtable." The latter program included presentations by some of the leaders of the 19 "major U.S. space companies" that co-sponsored the symposium, including Boeing, Lockheed Martin and



(1) Radar detects missile (2) Signal sent to satellite (3) HQ notified (4) Defense missile launched (5) Incoming missile destroyed