

First Iraq Mutiny

As War Drags on, Will There Be More?

Walker Lane (Peter Werbe)

2016

Fifth Estate history

Mutiny. This word, fearsome to the brass of any army (but joyful to anti-war activists), was left out of October 2004 media accounts about a US Army Reserve unit whose soldiers refused to deliver fuel along a route in Iraq they considered too dangerous to travel.

Eighteen soldiers, including the commander of the 343rd Quarter-master Company, refused to under-take a fuel delivery north of Baghdad in what they characterized as a “suicide mission,” given the frequency of attacks and the lack of armor for their unit. The commander was relieved of duty with the hope that the entire incident could be swept under a rug already showing great bulges from previous sweepings.

All armies depend on the unquestioning adherence to orders with no allowance made for individual or subordinate group objection. To do so, we are continually told, would jeopardize the command authority of any army. Military training stresses, perhaps even more than fighting skills, the necessity to take orders without hesitation. This is particularly acute in the US since all of its conflicts since World War II involved aggressive acts or imperial machinations.

Throughout the recent Iraq episode, the mutiny of the 343rd is routinely referred to as “mission refusal,” so reluctant are the armed forces and their compliant corporate media to resurrect the specter of Vietnam, where such acts almost sunk the army. After insisting, “I will not be the first American president to preside over a losing war,” war criminal Richard Nixon began a withdrawal; the U.S. military had to get out of Southeast Asia before imploding under the pressures of desertion and insubordination.

—Walker Lane

excerpted from *Fifth Estate* #367, Winter 2004–2005

fifth Estate

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Fifth Estate #395, Winter 2016 — 50th Anniversary

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