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Should U.S. soldiers serve as police officers in captured Iraqi cities?

Baghdad was bursting with anti-American feeling Saturday as residents saw their city being stripped by its own citizens while U.S. forces stood by, rarely intervening and - in some cases - even motioning treasure-laden men through checkpoints. Should U.S. soldiers serve as police officers in captured Iraqi cities?

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Tragedy strikes our newspaper family

By Orley Hood
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Dawn broke Wednesday, and the first thing I see in my newspaper is James Walker's story on the death in Iraq of Jackson GI Larry K. Brown.

It was wonderfully well done, sensitive and smart and complete, and I hoped it would be a comfort to his mother in the days ahead.

I made a mental note to congratulate James later on a great story.

Then, like you, I got caught up in the drama on TV. The news channels had honed in on a remarkable scene in Baghdad. Iraqis and U.S. Marines were struggling to pull down a statue of Saddam Hussein.

On the way to work, like you, I was filled with the sense that the war essentially was over, thankful and amazed, and concerned about winning the end game, the peace, establishing a better relationship with the Arab world.

At the 10:30 a.m. story meeting, editors read off budget lines for articles planned for Thursday morning's newspaper. Top of the list: James Walker, off to Natchez to work another sad story of a Mississippi soldier killed in Iraq.

Microcosm of life

Newsrooms pulsate with an ever-shifting dynamic. Morale up. Morale down. Happy. Sad. Angry. Euphoric. Young. Old.

Once, 20-25 years ago, almost everyone in the newsrooms of the morning and afternoon newspapers was young, single, childless and obsessed with work.

Most every weeknight, newspaper people would fill the back two round tables downstairs at the George Street Grocery, rehashing the day, arguing every point with one another, with the lawyers who frequented the joint, and with legislators.

Advert



- Yes
 No

Two decades later, our average age in the newsroom has skewed up, and talk around the coffee pot is as likely to concern day care or college scholarships as it is Ole Miss-State football or tort reform.

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James was one of the young ones, 26, married, no kids, obsessed with work.

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He was us two decades later, part of a big rambunctious family, full of heat and passion, intense and empathetic, loud and emotional, quiet and loyal.

And now, heartbroken.

All in the family

By the time we gathered again for our weekly Wednesday afternoon meeting, James had died in a car wreck in Copiah County on his way to Natchez. We wouldn't know it for another hour.

He was young, smart, ponytailed, and talented, filled with promise. He handled environmental coverage and its back-breaking research as smoothly as he covered the military beat with its heart-breaking emotion.

Thursday morning, the newsroom is painfully quiet. Car crashes are the unspoken hazard of an enterprise that depends on reporters, sports writers and photographers getting to where the news is.

That could have been any of us, on our way to a story, pulling off to consult a map, then ...

Years ago, we lost a young reporter, Todd Prillhart, also 26, in a freak accident on I-20 during a storm. Our Pam Berry was wounded by a madman a few years ago while she was out reporting a story.

We worry, silently, all the time about our people — our friends — in the field.

Now we've lost one of our own, our James, who held such promise, and we feel as powerless as the mothers James so eloquently wrote about, the moms of lost GIs.

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