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YOUR VOICE

Terror war takes tenfold civilian toll

BY DAVID LYNN

Thank you, Les Taha, for your piece, "Numbers don't lie: We're killing 'em in war on terror" (column, 3-7).

I was staying in a small farming community just 10 miles north of Baghdad working as a photographer during the U.S. bombing and invasion of Iraq.

After a U.S. Army unit went through our area, I walked a 10-mile stretch of highway between Taji and Baghdad photographing the smoldering battlefield.

I have walked through other battlefields; Vietnam as an 18-year-old Marine; Northern Ireland, South Africa and Nicaragua as a freelance writer and at times human rights worker; and El Sal-



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vador, where I worked as a homicide detective for the United Nations investigating "death squad" murders. However, none of those experiences prepared me for what I witnessed that day.

The country road that led to Baghdad was littered with bullet-riddled, burnt-out hulks of civilian cars and minivans filled with the stench of death and family members whose apparent only crime was to be there the day U.S. troops blasted their way through.

Yes, there were also Iraqi military vehicles and tanks, but most were on a parallel side dirt road and nearly all appeared to have been abandoned earlier by Iraqi soldiers and were left intact and unscathed.

I also photographed numerous civilian vehicles on the main highway whose gasoline tanks appeared to have been deliberately targeted in order to torch the cars and the civilians inside them.

Some apparently scrambled out of their flaming cars, as evidenced by the burnt remains of men, women and children lying nearby.

As many bodies lay rotting in the Iraqi sun, people who lived nearby came out of their homes and began burying the dead civilians without documenting their names and numbers, which leads me to believe we will never have an accurate civilian body count for this war.

During that day, which still literally sickens my stomach when I think about it, my best estimate is that I saw and or photographed at least 10 dead civilians for every dead Iraqi soldier I encountered, perhaps as many as 50 dead civilians in all.

Are we truly fighting terrorism in Iraq or in our zeal have we actually become what we dread most?

David Lynn lives in Wauna.