

Final Tour

2008. Acrylic on canvas, 36 x 36"

By
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How many more tours will there be for the American military in Iraq? Tour after tour takes its toll. Each tour increases the chance of not getting out alive, or in one piece with all arms legs, eyes, hands, and feet – a physically functioning human being. Even then, how destroyed is the mind? The brain subconsciously takes pictures with the eyes, retaining those images for a later time, creating a different world inside the mind. Perhaps it's a world without myths, without propaganda; without hero worship; a world of reality from within the abyss.

When will the final tour arrive? Will it be a final safe physical exit, a blinding flash of destruction, or a hard drop to the ground in darkness? Each tour brings more uncertainty to the answer. Getting out after one, two, or three tours is luck. What about four, five tours?

Perhaps the mind closes each compartment after each day, having survived once again. Which day will be the last? What moment will it end? Now? Here? There? Today? Tomorrow? Walking out the door? Looking left, Looking right? During a laugh? In a smile? A blink? A cough?

Senator Lindsey Graham, a Republican from South Carolina supported the extension of tours in Iraq, and said, like some 1930s Southern politician, "They'll be disappointed, but they'll do it."¹ That's what passes for leadership in the United States Senate.

While out in the real world, one woman noted the deception of the Pentagon extending tours; "Last time they said nine months, and it was 14 months."²

However, sheltered country bumpkins like Graham can count on the think tank guys, like Anthony Cordesman to back up the vicious military machine with easy explanations like, "You've got to do it."³

Furthermore, what disturbed Defense Secretary Robert Gates was not that he was going to continue deceiving soldiers and families about extended tours for a losing, illegal war, no. What upset him was that the families found out about it before he could manipulate the public through the media. "I can't tell you how angry it makes many of us."⁴

So the reality of the American character kicks into play. Soldiers figure out the game. Their solution is, "search and avoid missions." Drive out to an open field and call in that they are searching for weapons. Or sit on a bridge as a watch position, observe rather than sweep, and call in radio checks saying they are doing sweeps.⁵ After all isn't that the American way; create a perception of success, or a mission accomplished?

When the final tour does arrive, the next tour will be civilian life, and psychological disorders that will trigger suicide and violence. Post-war trauma, like a silent villain, will bring forth the retained images tucked away in the dark recesses of the mind. Three hundred thousand troops suffer Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to an estimate by the Rand Corporation.⁶

Perhaps the final tour never ends.

Notes

1. *Army extends Iraq tours to 15 months*, by Robert Burns, Associate Press, 2007.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. *US soldiers shy from battle in Iraq*, by Dahr Jamail, Asia Times, www.atimes.com, October 25, 2007
6. *When the war comes back home*, by Jill Carroll, The Christian Science Monitor, July 11, 2008