

I am Sullied No More

by Robert Bryce via rialator - The Texas Observer *Thursday, Mar 15 2007, 8:00pm*
international / peace/war / other press

Consequences of a criminal war

Faced with the corruption and criminality of the Iraq war, Col. Ted Westhusing chose death before dishonour.



Ted Westhusing was a true believer. And that was his fatal flaw.

A colonel in the U.S. Army, Westhusing had a good job teaching English at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He was a devout Catholic who went to church nearly every Sunday. He had a wife and three young children.

He didn't have to go to Iraq. But Westhusing was such a believer that he volunteered for what he thought was a noble cause. At West Point, Westhusing sought out people who opposed the war in an effort to change their minds. "He absolutely believed that this was a just war," said one officer who was close to him. "He was wholly enthusiastic about this mission." His tour of duty in Iraq was to last six months.

About a month before he was to return to his family -- on June 5, 2005 -- Westhusing was found dead in his trailer at Camp Dublin in Baghdad. At the time, he was the highest-ranking American soldier to die in Iraq. The Army's Criminal Investigation Command report on Westhusing's death explained it as a "perforating gunshot wound of the head and Manner of Death was suicide."

He was 44.

In the ever-expanding tragedy of the second Iraq war, the tragedy of Ted Westhusing is just one among tens of thousands. Four years of warfare have decimated Iraq. Its economy and infrastructure are in ruins. Tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of Iraqis are dead. Hundreds of thousands more have fled the country. More than 20,000 American soldiers have been wounded, and more than 3,000 killed. Yet among all of those tragedies, amid all the suffering and heartache, Westhusing's story stands out. It shows how one man's life, and the fervent beliefs that defined it, were crushed by the corruption and deceit that he saw around him.

The disillusion that killed Ted Westhusing is part of the invoice that America will be paying long

after the United States pulls its last troops out of Iraq.

Some 846 American soldiers died in Iraq in 2005. Of those, 22 were suicides. Westhusing's suicide, like nearly every other, leaves the survivors asking the same questions: Why? And what was it that drove the deceased to such despair? In Westhusing's case, the answers go far beyond his personal struggles and straight to the heart of America's goals in Iraq.

When he was in Iraq, Westhusing worked for one of the most famous generals in the U.S. military, David Petraeus. In January, Petraeus was appointed by President Bush to lead all U.S. forces in Iraq. As the head of counterterrorism and special operations under Petraeus, Westhusing oversaw the single most important task facing the U.S. military in Iraq then and now: training the Iraqi security forces.

All the goals set out by Bush and his band of neoconservative backers -- a democratic Iraq, a safe and secure country that can support and govern itself, a country able to rebuild itself with its vast oil wealth, a place governed by pro-Western secular rulers who can provide a counterweight to Islamic extremists in the region -- depend on America's ability to "stand up" the Iraqi army and police force. Without a dependable security apparatus, none of those goals is achievable.

When he arrived in Iraq, Westhusing discovered that just like the rest of Iraqi society, the Iraqi military and police are riven by religion. Religious hatred, Sunni versus Shiite -- combined with the corruption that permeates Iraqi society -- made his job impossible.

Two years before Westhusing left for Baghdad, he had finished his doctoral dissertation in philosophy at Emory University in Atlanta. The focus was on honor and the ethics of war. Westhusing wanted to understand arete -- the ancient Greek word meaning virtue, skill, and excellence. His quest for understanding the concept was, he believed, a central part of his existence. "Born to be a warrior, I desire these answers not just for philosophical reasons, but for self-knowledge," he wrote.

Westhusing did not find excellence or virtue in Iraq.

That fact is evident in a two-inch stack of documents, obtained over the past 15 months under the Freedom of Information Act, that provides many details of Westhusing's suicide. The pile includes interviews with Westhusing's co-workers, diagrams of his sleeping quarters, interviews with his family members, and partially redacted reports from the Army's Criminal Investigation Command and Inspector General. The documents echo the story told by Westhusing's friends. "Something he saw [in Iraq] drove him to this," one Army officer who was close to Westhusing said in an interview. "The sum of what he saw going on drove him" to take his own life. "It's because he believed in duty, honor, country that he's dead."

The officer said that "strength of character was Ted's defining characteristic. It was unflinching integrity." That integrity, he said, was also Westhusing's great flaw. "To be a true flaw, the personality has to have great strength. And that characteristic caused his downfall."

Westhusing was born in Dallas, one of seven children. He went to grade school in La Porte, near Houston, until the seventh grade, when his family moved to Tulsa. He was an outstanding student. He was the starting point guard on the basketball team at Jenks High School, a National Merit Scholar, and a devout Christian. He was a hard worker. He was so devoted to basketball that he would shoot 100 jump shots each morning before school. His work ethic, grades, and reputation gave him his pick of colleges. He was accepted at Notre Dame and Duke. He chose West Point.

Westhusing's father had served in the Korean War and had later been in the Navy Reserve.

Westhusing got to West Point in 1979, a time of major upheaval. The academy was still going through the aftershocks of a major cheating scandal. There was a tremendous emphasis on ethics and truthfulness. Westhusing loved it. As an underclassman, he was his company's honor representative on the cadet committee. In 1983, during his senior year, he was selected as the honor captain for the whole school, a position that made him the highest-ranking ethics official within the cadet corps. In that position, Westhusing helped adjudicate all of the honor violations that came before the committee. That year, he graduated third in his class.

From West Point, he went on to serve in the 82nd Airborne Division. He went to Ranger and Airborne schools and did stints in Italy, South Korea, and Honduras. He learned to speak Russian and Italian. And he continued his quest for intellectual excellence. In 2000, he went to Emory for a master's degree in philosophy. In 2002, he moved to Austin to take a six-week class in classical Greek at the University of Texas. Westhusing and his Greek teacher at UT, Thomas Palaima, worked as consultants on a television documentary about the Trojan horse.

At West Point, Westhusing was comfortable in his teaching job. He had no reason to do anything else. He was at the pinnacle of his profession and doing a job he loved. But in late 2004, he got a call from a former commander in the 82nd Airborne Division asking if he wanted to go to Iraq. Westhusing didn't hesitate before saying yes. Westhusing's father, Keith Westhusing, would later tell T. Christian Miller, a reporter for the Los Angeles Times, that his son wanted to go to Iraq to "obtain verification." Going would make him a better soldier, his father is quoted as saying in Miller's recent book about corruption in Iraq, *Blood Money*. A stint in Iraq would "lend authenticity to his status, not only as a soldier, but as an instructor at West Point."

A fellow officer who worked with Westhusing at West Point said in an interview that prior to leaving for Iraq, "Ted never swayed in his belief that the Iraq mission was both just and being performed correctly; he told me personally that he would stay longer than the assigned six months if necessary. Before leaving, he was engaged in intense debate with the senior philosophy professor in the department. Ted believed in the mission, while his counterpart had several questions as to whether Operation Iraqi Freedom met the standards of a just war."

Westhusing's wife, Michelle, later told investigators that her husband believed "going to Iraq would make him a better professor when he taught cadets who would likely be going over there. ... He thought we were doing a great thing in Iraq."

The first stop on Westhusing's deployment was Fort Benning, Georgia. He went through his medical exams, collected his equipment, and worked on his shooting skills. After so much time in the classroom, those skills were not sharp. According to documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, Westhusing scored just 170 on the combat pistol range when he was tested on January 15, 2005. If he had scored just 20 points lower, he would not have qualified.

Nevertheless, Westhusing's first few weeks in Iraq were, he wrote to a friend, "high adventure." His formal title was director, counter terrorism/special operations, Civilian Police Assistance Training Team, Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq. He liked working closely with his Iraqi counterparts and seemed to get along well with the contractors from Virginia-based U.S. Investigations Services, a private security company with contracts worth \$79 million to help train Iraqi police units that were conducting special operations. (The owners of USIS include the Carlyle Group, the powerful private equity firm whose investors formerly included George H.W. Bush and former Secretary of State James A. Baker III.) In another message to a friend back home, he said

that "if you are not of strong character and know right from wrong, you will leave this place devastated in personal esteem and priceless human beings will be harmed."

Westhusing worked under the supervision of two army generals: Joseph Fil, a major general (two stars) and Petraeus, a lieutenant general (three stars). Petraeus was impressed with Westhusing. By 2005, Petraeus had become a darling of the U.S. media thanks, in part, to his success in helping stabilize and rebuild northern Iraq. Petraeus liked what he saw in Westhusing and promoted him from lieutenant colonel to full colonel. In a March 2005 e-mail, Petraeus told Westhusing that he had "already exceeded the very lofty expectations that all had for you."

While the promotion was important, Westhusing was increasingly isolated. He did not have, as his fellow officer from West Point put it, a "battle buddy," a person who "looks out for his friend both physically and psychologically." The lack of personal support began to wear on Westhusing. His friends in the U.S. began seeing his mood darken. His e-mails became less frequent and more ominous. Westhusing began having increasingly contentious conflicts with the contractors from USIS. There were ongoing problems with USIS's expenses, and Westhusing was forced to deal with allegations that USIS had seen or participated in the killing of Iraqis. He received an anonymous letter claiming USIS was cheating the military at every opportunity, that several hundred weapons assigned to the counterterrorism training program had disappeared, and that a number of radios, each of which cost \$4,000, had also disappeared. The letter concluded that USIS was "not providing what you are paying for" and that the entire training operation was "a total failure."

Westhusing was devastated. Even if the charges were accurate, there was little that could be done. Iraq had no functioning judicial system, and there were questions about jurisdiction in case the contractors were indicted. Westhusing wrote to his family, telling them about the problems with the contractors, and said he needed to talk to a lawyer about the issues he was handling.

By late May, Westhusing was becoming despondent over what he was seeing. Steeped in -- and totally believing in -- the West Point credo that a cadet will "not lie, cheat, or steal, nor tolerate those who do," Westhusing found himself surrounded by contractors who had no interest in his ideals. He asked family members to pray for him. In a phone call with his wife, Michelle, who was back at West Point, Westhusing told her he planned to tell Petraeus that he was going to quit. She pleaded with him to just finish his tour and return home.

Westhusing quit exercising, started chewing tobacco, and was increasingly withdrawn. His co-workers noted that he was fidgety. On the night of June 4, one of the female contractors who worked with Westhusing said he appeared "very tired, almost like he hadn't been sleeping," and was "out of sorts" and scratching his legs "quite a bit." The same person said that Westhusing had begun to "play/examine his weapon" and that he seemed "mesmerized" by his pistol. The same contractor mentioned that Westhusing talked about an ongoing problem with the Iraqis coming into the counterterrorism training program. The program was always at risk of being infiltrated by members of Iraqi militias, criminal gangs, and other elements. Westhusing asked the contractor for her thoughts about "vetting the students prior to the course." The contractor said that after the conversation, Westhusing sat in the office and would "say aloud that he didn't know how to solve the problem with the vetting issue. ... Only once did he address me directly. He said, 'I just don't see a way to resolve this problem.'"

A few minutes later, the female contractor said Westhusing "stood up and started to examine his weapon again" for about five minutes. The next morning, on June 5, Westhusing had one meeting at Camp Dublin with the contractors and another with government personnel. At the second meeting he expressed his disgust with "money-grubbing contractors" and said he "had not come over to Iraq

for this." Westhusing was slated to leave Camp Dublin after lunch. When he did not show up for a meeting, one of the contractors went looking for him. At about 1:15 in the afternoon, Westhusing was discovered in trailer 602A. Near his body was a note addressed to his commanders, Petraeus and Fil. Written in large, block letters, it read:

Thanks for telling me it was a good day until I briefed you. [Redacted name] -- You are only interested in your career and provide no support to your staff -- no msn [mission] support and you don't care. I cannot support a msn that leads to corruption, human right abuses and liars. I am sullied -- no more. I didn't volunteer to support corrupt, money grubbing contractors, nor work for commanders only interested in themselves. I came to serve honorably and feel dishonored. I trust no Iraqi. I cannot live this way. All my love to my family, my wife and my precious children. I love you and trust you only. Death before being dishonored any more. Trust is essential -- I don't know who trust anymore. [sic] Why serve when you cannot accomplish the mission, when you no longer believe in the cause, when your every effort and breath to succeed meets with lies, lack of support, and selfishness? No more. Reevaluate yourselves, cdrs [commanders]. You are not what you think you are and I know it.

COL Ted Westhusing

Life needs trust. Trust is no more for me here in Iraq.

Austinite Robert Bryce is an Observer contributing writer.

© 2000-2006 The Texas Observer

<http://www.texasobserver.org/article.php?aid=2440>

Cleaves Alternative News. <http://cleaves.lingama.net/news/story-439.html>