

## **Bring 'em home, say Cleveland protesters**

### **Peace vigil marks 3,000 deaths in Iraq**

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**Grant Segall**

**Plain Dealer Reporter**

Our troops in Iraq didn't ring in the new year. They tolled it in.

Peace activists in Cleveland marked two milestones Monday that happened to have coincided on Sunday: the passing of 2006 and of our 3,000th warrior in Iraq.

"New Year, New Policy," proclaimed a banner waved in blowing rain at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument on Public Square. "Resolve to Bring the Troops Home Now."

Walter S. Nicholes, a merchant seaman in World War II, said, "This has got to end in 2007. The troops have to be home."

Don't tell Nicholes that the United States should try to finish the job it started almost four years ago with an invasion.

"Our presence there simply exacerbates the situation," said Nicholes, of Cleveland Heights. "It can't get worse than it is now."

Dick Hazelton of South Euclid once hoped the war would be long over by now. Next month, his Marine son will join it.

"A lot of young people are dead," said Hazelton. "They're gone forever. No kids. No grandkids."

Many of Monday's protesters oppose all wars.

Hazelton supported our reprisals against Afghanistan. But he said our "U-turn" into Iraq stopped United Nations inspectors from laying bare the weakness of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

Saddam's execution Saturday was yet another milestone, and Mary Jo Muser said the timing was no coincidence.

"They hung Saddam when they did because they knew 3,000 deaths were around the corner," said Muser. "They're trying to drum up support for a war that voters made it clear they're against."

On Sunday, at his Crawford, Texas, ranch, President Bush reaffirmed an annual resolution: "In the New Year, we will remain on the offensive against the enemies of freedom, advance the security of our country and work toward a free and unified Iraq."

Cleveland's vigil was one of more than 322 protests planned Monday in 46 states, according to the American Friends Service Committee.

The local protest was organized by two groups, Cleveland Peace Action and Northeast Ohio Anti-War Coalition.

A couple hundred protesters lit candles, spread ashes, wore black armbands and set 3,000 toy soldiers on a map of Iraq. They also recited the names of the 3,000 American combatants and a fraction of the Iraqis who have died during the war.

The protesters cited estimates by some observers of more than 600,000 Iraqi deaths. But the research group Iraq Body Count estimates 52,000 to 58,000.

One death was too many for Rosemary Palmer, who lost her son, Marine Lance Cpl. Edward A. "Augie" Schroeder II.

Said Palmer: "We did this war on the cheap," with too few troops to secure Iraq. Now some officials want to boost the troops, but Palmer said, "It's too late."

Her husband, Paul Schroeder, said generals who oppose the war now should have spoken out sooner. They were loyal to their higher-ups. "We should be loyal to the kids."

On Monday, the Associated Press reported two more deaths of American fighters in Iraq, raising the total to 3,002.

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