

War Stories: Addenda & Errata

Explanation

This note contains addenda and errata associated with the book *War Stories*.¹ They are cued to chapters and pages.

Chapter 2: Storylines in Metaphor, Folk-Tale, and Narrative

pp. 15 ff.

The text shows parallels between events in the Gulf War [1990-91] and other recent wars and **Vladimir Propp's categories developed in *Morphology of the Folktale***.

But how representative of Russian folk-tales are those on which Propp based his analysis? And was his use of them true to the original texts? Readers wishing to pursue these questions could usefully consult the article "Afanasiev and Propp," by Claude Bremond and Jean Verrier.² They argue that the readings given by Propp force his entire sample into the functions of category 300—*The Dragon-Slayer*—of the Aarne-Thompson index of folk tales. They summarize their position:

... we have kept our faith in the notions of *function* and *sequence*, but we have gradually become convinced of the irreplaceable character of such notions *motif* or *type of tale*. The function without the motif is a relation without a basis, a form which hides its vacuity only by a hidden recourse to the motif. Propp's merit is to

¹ Bruce D. Larkin, *War Stories* (New York and Bern: Peter Lang, 2001).

² *Style*, v 18 n 2, Spring 1984, pp. 177-195, translated and with an introductory note by Thomas G. Pavel and Marilyn Randall.

have shown the functional component of the motif; his mistake is to have thought that one can characterize a tale without mentioning the motifs. The result is that a *purely* morphological approach, which pursues the illusory aim of reducing the structure of a tale to a series of functions, fails to account for the object of the analysis ...³

So perhaps the suggestive quality of Propp's functions for war lies in congruences between the kingdom beset by a fire-breathing dragon and the State threatened by aggression.

Chapter 8: Reading Groups

pp. 102 ff.

The text introduces the claim that **US forces in the Gulf War [1991] buried Iraqi soldiers alive in their trenches** under sand. In addition to the sources cited in the text, a further source has come into my hands.

The document is the after action report of Lt. Col. Gregory Fontenot, Armor, commanding, describing the action on 24 and 25 February 1991 of the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division.⁴ The relevant reference is

Teams B and C dropped plows at 1510 [24 February 1991]. At 1523 Team B used an ACE to bury the defenders, plows and the CEV's rake to clear AP mines, secured 3k and taken [*sic*] 4 survivors prisoner. ...

At 1542 the attack to secure 4kA, 4kC, and 4kD began in earnest. CPT Burns, as Battle Captian [*sic*], synchronized [*sic*] an opposed assault on 4kA and 4kC where Team A's ACE did first class work burying defenders with the ACE. ...

The assault on 4kD developed into a significant fire fight. Team D called for ridge and were receiving small arms fire from 4kD and I2k. CPT Bushyhead used 25mm and coax fires to suppress the enemy position which included fighting positions and mortar battle position. At 1610 he fired AVLM and followed up with ACEs and dismounts while using his tank platoon to suppress enemy position at

³ *ibid.*, p. 194.

⁴ "Breach of Enemy Positions, 24 and 25 February 1991," 13 March 1991, pp. 70-74 [and map p. 12], *Desert Shield/Storm: History*. US Government Publications D 101.2:H 62/4. I am grateful to the officer who brought this to my attention.

I2k. By 1614 the enemy on 4kD evaporated with Team D taking 4 EPWs, burying an unknown number of Iraqis and confirming 2 Iraqi KIA.

The *New York Times*, acknowledging *Newsday's* original reporting of the incident, brought it to the attention of a wider public, but not until September 1991. Their article, in part:

The Army said it knew the operation would kill Iraqis who did not surrender or otherwise get out of the way, but said the tactic spared the lives of American soldiers who would have had to leave the safety of their armored vehicles and fight Iraqi troops hand to hand in the trenches.

"People somehow have the notion that burying guys alive is nastier than blowing them up with hand grenades or sticking them in gut with bayonets," said Col. Lon Maggart. "Well it's not."

Colonel Maggart, commander of one of two brigades that led assaults on a key line of Iraqi defenses, said in a telephone interview from Fort Riley, Kan., that between 80 and 250 Iraqis had been buried alive. Army officials said the First Infantry's experiences had been the only incidents of live burials during the war.

At a news conference here on Thursday, the Pentagon spokesman, Pete Williams, defended the tactic and said it did not violate the Geneva Conventions on the conduct of warfare. "I don't mean to be flippant, but there's no nice way to kill somebody in war," Mr. Williams said.

The disclosure of the live burials, which were first reported in *Newsday* this week, seems likely to add to the debate about how forthcoming the Pentagon has been in providing details about the toll suffered by the Iraqi Army at the hands of American forces.

Army officials strongly denied any attempts to hide the breaching operation, and pointed out that senior commanders had given extensive interviews about the maneuver after the war.

Journalists in combat pools were assigned to the First Infantry during the breaching operation, but none of their reports mentioned the live burials. In fact, the reports noted that few slain Iraqis had been visible in the bunkers and trenches.⁵

Describing a BBC retrospective broadcast ten years after the Gulf War, the *Irish Times* reports that

⁵ Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Army Buried Iraqi Soldiers Alive in Gulf War," *The New York Times*, 15 September 1991.

John Pilger told the programme about the armoured snow ploughs used to bury Iraqi soldiers alive in their trenches. And he reminded us we never saw them at the time either.⁶

This technique was later in the repertoire of the First Marine Expeditionary Force attacking ‘insurgents’ in Falluja, Iraq, during the **Iraq War [2003 - ..]**. Describing the US effort to root out ‘insurgents’ in November 2004, the *New York Times* reported that

When artillery or aircraft proved incapable of dislodging the well-hidden insurgents—or when they could not be used for fear of inflicting civilian casualties—the **Americans brought in armored bulldozers to bury them alive**, commanders said.⁷

Of course, by their own account they could not see who was “well-hidden,” but presumed that anyone who was hiding was an “insurgent.”

p. 103

The text concerning **Dag Hammarskjöld’s death** refers to

the aircraft which carried Dag Hammarskjöld, then Secretary-General of the United Nations, to his death in Zaire in 1961

Hammarskjöld’s mission concerned Zaire, but the aircraft fell in Zambia [then Northern Rhodesia].

Since publication of *War Stories* there have also come to light documents—unverified—pointing to a plot involving US, UK and South African services to assassinate Hammarskjöld.⁸

⁶ Harry Browne, “Beyond Dev’s Crossroads,” *The Irish Times*, 13 January 2001, on the program *Night Waves* (BBC Radio 3, 9 January 2001).

⁷ Thom Shanker and Eric Schmitt, “Past Battles Won and Lost Helped in Falluja Assault,” *The New York Times*, 22 November 2004. Bolding added.

⁸ BBC site, 19 August 19, 1998: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/mnnewsid_154000/154384.stm Bishop Desmond Tutu, Chairman of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, said that the documents were released because the commission had not had time to investigate them before its mandate expired. He further stated that “we have been unable to investigate the

Revision History

- 2001.10.11 First revisions to pp. 15 ff., 102 ff., and 103.
- 2004.11.22 Added to pp. 102 ff. reference to The New York Times, 22 November 2004, asserting use of a bulldozer to bury Iraqis in the Iraq War [2003 - ..].
- 2008.10.05 Added to pp. 102ff, on use of bulldozers to bury Iraqi soldiers alive in the Gulf War [1991]. Reference to The New York Times, 15 September 1991, reportage, and John Pilger's mention of the incident reported in the Irish Times 13 January 2001.

veracity of these documents and of allegations that South Africa or other western intelligence agencies were involved in bringing about the air crash." The BBC despatch also notes the theory advanced by Smith and O'Brien in 1992.