

Mike Powell, managing editor
News - Post
Frederick, Md. 21701

8/9/91

Dear Mike,

When I read today's Meachum column I assumed you were on vacation. I phoned and ^{was} told you were away all this week. While I was disappointed that the paper did not have the self-respect to publish what I sent in when Meachum declared during the Gulf hostilities that Saddam was a man of God, to say nothing of its professional concepts, I am aware that from then until now it had not carried any of his anti-Semitic, Israel-bashing diatribes.

From the time ^{you} he delegated oped-page responsibilities not a single submission I made was published and almost none of the shorter letters to the editor. With so much of his output what would not have offended Hitler, I did not respond to all of them. But had I the oped-page editor would have seen to it that I'd wasted that time anyway.

If he is permitted to continue with those responsibilities after publishing this indecent and outrageous assault on our military, particularly Schwartzkopf, and all of responsibility in the Pentagon and elsewhere, along with a total fabrication of Israel's responsibility for the Beirut Marine-barracks disaster, then the papers you edit are the moral and journalistic equivalent of Der Sturmer.

My wife and I, now both almost 80, presently suffer additional medical problems and handicaps. She retyped what I wrote while I was taking a nap, thinking I intended it as a letter to the editor. I've corrected that by hand and send it without more careful reading to make the outgoing mail, last until Monday.

I've heard reports from inside the paper and other dependable sources that for years even Betty was opposed to George's insistence on paying Meachum for his propaganda, so I know that at least many on the paper are not his fans. I do not believe this column represents either your views or your standards.

I'm writing George separately. If I get it done in time I'll enclose a copy.

Best wishes,

Harold
Harold Weisberg

Harold Busby

August 9, 1991

Letters to the Editor
The Frederick News-Post
200 E. Patrick St.
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HORROR STORY

From the time during the ^Gulf war Roy Meachum annointed Saddam Hussein as a man who had turned to his Allah and thus was a man of love and peace and I called to the papers' attention that he was giving aid and comfort to the enemy until his "War Story" column (8/9), we have been spared his incitations of hatred toward Israel and his praises of all things Islamic.

As his contrived peg for his renewed hate-Israel preaching, he tells an entirely unrelated story of "earlier this summer," when he had a chance meeting with two American soldiers who had served in Saudi Arabia.

He quotes one as saying "there were things he admired about Islam." What? "Their legal system." Why? Because two American soldiers were accused of rape and the Saudis "cut their heads off."

Two Americans were beheaded after a secret "trial," if by our standards there was what can honestly be referred to as a trial, and our government tolerated that and then did not inform us?

What was the reaction of this man who so often has belabored us with accounts of his international reporting career?

Did he phone either the Pentagon or the Saudi Embassy to seek confirmation or denial?

That he did not is his own professional self-characterization.

He does admit he was "jolted" but "not particularly surprised."

Instead of making even a pretense of seeking the truth he concludes that "A journalist's overriding responsibility is to the truth" and because "I believe" this story he has met his concept of his "journalist's overriding responsibility."

This is vintage Meachum: whatever he wants to believe is instant fact.

This story, entirely unrelated, is what led to his renewed assault on Israel as responsible for all the Middle East's tragedies:

"I have never forgiven the Israeli government for pulling out of the high ground overlooking the Beirut airport without informing the Marine commander until after the fact. The information ^{lag} thus denied the U.S. forces the opportunity to secure their perimeter from which the suicide bomber drove."

And thus, in Military Expert Meachum's account - not a single word of which is true ^{and} ~~relevant~~ - Israel and Jews are responsible for the deaths of more than 200 Marines.

No "high ground" is ever close to an international airport to have been a factor. The bomber did not come from the "high ground." He drove to and through the main ~~BARRACKS ENTRANCE~~ ^{ENTRANCE}. Whether or not the Israelis had told the Marines anything at all is irrelevant because Marines know how to protect themselves and they were sadly negligent and didn't. There was an official investigation but Mr. Meachum could not have cited it and written this hate piece.

No alleged "information lag denied U.S. forces the opportunity to secure" themselves. Tragically, they just failed to do it. In that area where car bombings were commonplace they had only a sentry, Because car bombings were so commonplace and because, still another Meachum omission, the battleship New Jersey had been off the coast bombarding Arab civilian areas with the enormous explosive and destructive power of 16-inch shells, there just was no excuse for the failure to make it impossible to drive a car or a truck into the barracks. Merely parking vehicles as a barrier until a permanent barrier could have been put in place would have saved all those American lives. Moreover, they'd had plenty of time.

It was no "information lag" that can be attributed to the Israelis that led the U.S. command not to take and take immediately the obviously necessary precautions to prevent retaliation against the senseless Naval bombardment of

Arab civilian areas.

With every word of this renewed hate-mongering false, irrelevant or both, as is obvious from what had long been well known, the papers owe us, at the very least, an apology for permitting the misuse of this column for its anti-American ^{and} hate-inciting purpose.

With Mr. Meachum's renewed boasting of his "journalist" credentials and standards, the papers ought get from him some explanation of why he did not seek official confirmation or denial of the absolute outrage of Americans being beheaded after a secret trial, if any, and of our government then suppressing it.

Mr. Meachum's column defames the papers and is still another of his continuous impositions on the trust of the papers' readers.

The one thing this column is not is "journalism."

It is hate-mongering!

Whether or not American heads were cut off, with or without a secret trial, what should be cut off, after too many years of it, is the opportunity Mr. Meachum has to puff himself up, indulge his hates and loves, deceive and mislead your trusting readers, and to publish the inflammatory and outrageous without even the effort that could be expected of a high-school reporter, to ask for official confirmation or denial.

Even a high-school kid should know that "I believe" is not fact. This is not justification for publishing the really outrageous. It certainly does not meet "a journalist's overriding responsibility," the single truth in this column, which indeed should be "to the truth."

He has to have know^{N!} that he was publishing a lie that defames our government and our Gulf military leaders, especially General Norman Schwartzkopf, because, as a former reporter, he has to have known that, were this a true story, he had the most sensational international "scoop," and because the general,

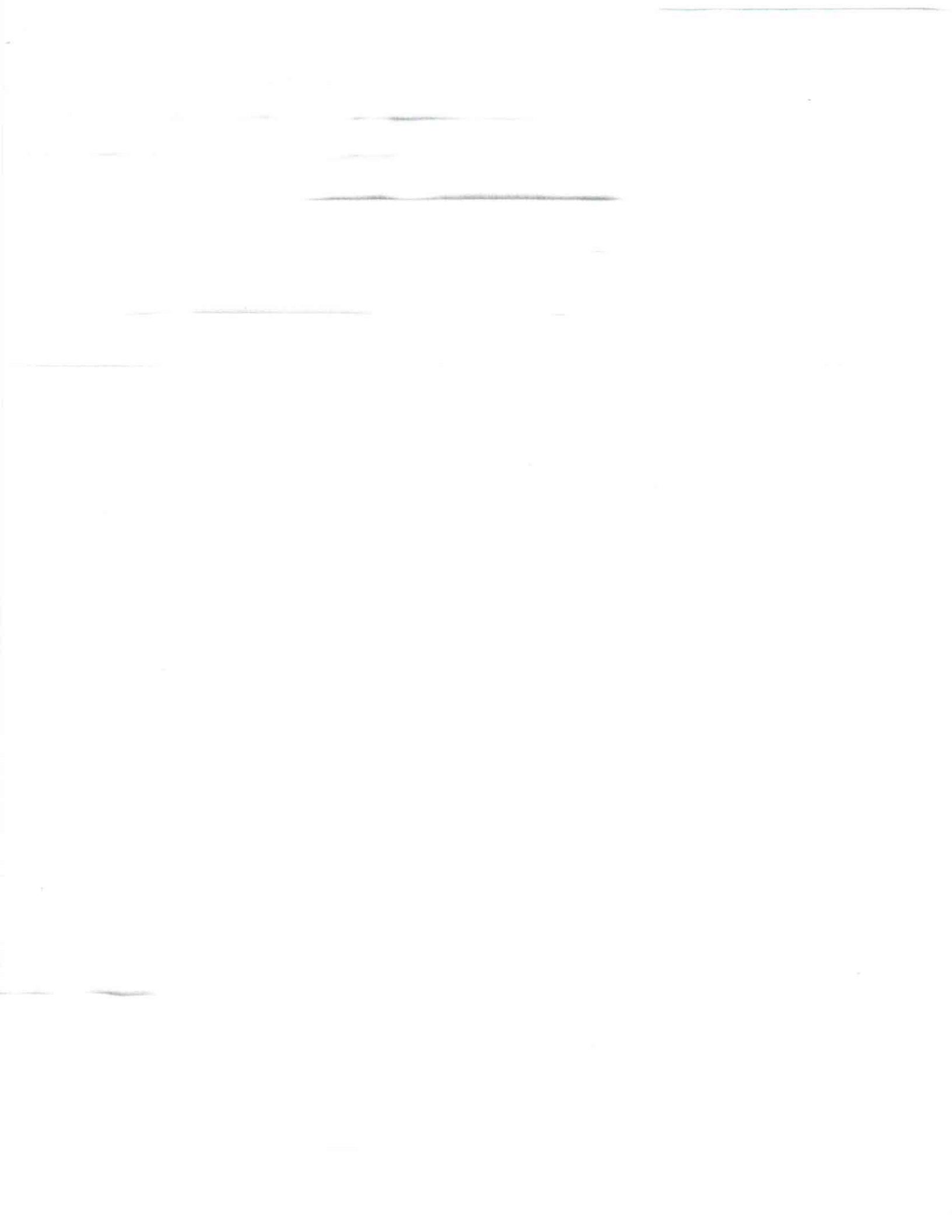
those under him and official Washington permitted such an outrage against American soldieris and then suppressed all news of it.

When it comes to the Middle East, Truth and Mr. Meachum are strangers.

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Roy Meachum



War story

One year ago news stories spoke of lead elements of the 82nd Airborne arriving in Saudi Arabia.

Earlier this summer I met a pair of those "elements": muscular young men, barely out of their teens, splashing about a motel swimming pool and keeping an eye out for girls.

The pair had landed in the desert kingdom last August and stayed until mid-April. One was a medic, the other worked communications gear.

Names were not exchanged. We enjoyed the anonymity shared by Chaucer's pilgrims. I identified myself as a journalist who had formerly lived in the Middle East. Combat was not discussed.

The medic expressed sympathy for the Iraqis he had treated. He displayed no animosity toward them as enemies. He had admiration for the Saudis he had met after the shooting stopped. The radio man agreed, while pointing out his unit had spent virtually all those months "out in the boonies" — some isolated spot completely surrounded by sand.

It is important to understand this was a conversation among temporary friends. My questions generally responded to matters they brought up. I made no attempt to prod the young men into areas that might have made them uncomfortable. My wife was off shopping. I wanted the company.

I did ask what they thought about the Arabs. The medic told about a Saudi who had invited his work crew back to his home. Their host had graduated from a U.S. university. They talked about Islam.

"He tried to convert me," the young trooper insisted, mentioning a Koran given as a gift. "I told him straight out I was a Southern Baptist and I believed in the Bible."

The medic admitted leafing through Islam's holy book. "They've got the stories all wrong," he said, but then allowed as how there were things he admired about Islam. "Like what?" I asked.

"Their legal system," he said. "Saudi Arabia has no crime. We committed all the crimes while we were out there." No comment from me seemed called for.

The Desert Storm veteran con-

tinued: "Two guys from our division were caught raping locals. They cut off their heads. Their families probably received letters that said, 'Billy Bob fell off the back of a moving deuce-and-a-half.'"

I did not ask him how he learned of his comrades' executions. I assumed their fate had been circulated by commanding officers, warning other soldiers. As a medic, my new friend may have handled the bodies when they were shipped back to this country.

The way the beheadings were related left no doubt in my mind,

especially since the youthful Southern Baptist felt the rapists had received exactly what they deserved.

It is difficult to describe my reaction. I was not particularly surprised; on the other hand, my senses were jolted. Given time to absorb the story, I may have returned to the executions in an oblique fashion, seeking further verification. But the conversation was abruptly terminated when an awaited young lady appeared. My paratrooper friends departed with handshakes and "Good meeting you, sir."

Sitting alone, my thoughts turned to an incident during Reagan's attempt to intervene in Lebanon.

In the weeks leading up to the suicide truck bombing that killed 248 Americans, a Marine position was threatened by an Israeli tank headed straight in. At the last minute, a U.S. lieutenant saved his men by scrambling aboard the rolling vehicle and holding his cocked .45 to the tank commander's head.

I have never forgiven the Israeli government for pulling out of the high ground overlooking the Beirut airport without informing the Marine commander until after the fact. The information lag denied the U.S. forces the opportunity to secure their perimeter from which the suicide bomber drove.

No, I do not blame former Israeli Prime Minister Begin for the American deaths. My greater anger was reserved for my own govern-

ment's failure to demand full Israeli cooperation and coordination, particularly after the tank incident.

In order to get American troops into the desert, did the White House yield jurisdiction over crimes committed against civilians to Saudi justice? Hearing the paratrooper's story, I wondered what further price George Bush paid to have his fling at military glory.

I understand full well why news of the probable executions was not released to the media. Strong law-and-order enthusiasts would have probably cheered, echoing the 82nd's medic. Many Americans, even those who support capital punishment, might be repulsed at the prospect of their countrymen, however guilty, being forced to submit to an alien legal system that includes beheadings.

The complete facts about the recent war may be years surfacing, thanks in no small part to the tight censorship imposed by the Bush White House. History teaches such delay is always more damaging to democracy than immediate full disclosure. Will politicians ever learn?

A journalist's overriding responsibility is to the truth, as he believes the truth to exist. I believe the Desert Storm veteran.