

8/2/89

Mr. Mike Powell  
News-Post  
Frederick, Md. 21701

Dear Mike,

I send this to you because I want you to know what I say in it and do not know ~~who~~ whether once again it ~~will~~<sup>will</sup> be rejected, as most of what I wrote in the recent past was.

I presume that you do not have much time for, if you have any interest in, keeping up with foreign affairs or that any of the other editors do but there is much more that is wrong and dishonest in this column.

Whatever the local situation may be, editors do have the responsibility for editing what they publish.

They are also responsible if on controversial issues they publish only one side.

It is not uncommon for responsible papers to seek another side and publish it.

I've not been successful in my efforts to make your editors and papers appear to be honest because not one of my oped page submissions after you delegated the oped page was published.

I intend this as one even though it is in the form of a letter. A few of them did get published but far from all.

I really am sorry that the papers demean themselves this way and ~~mislead~~<sup>mislead</sup> and try to inflame trusting and underinformed readers. Not the way the system is supposed to work.

Best wishes,

*Harold*  
Harold Weisberg

Editor,  
News-Post  
Frederick, Md. 21701

8/2/89

Beginning with the heading, "Who killed William Higgins?" your staff columnist's ~~column~~ <sup>article</sup> of August 2<sup>nd</sup> is dishonest, deceitful, misinformative, and part of his long-lasting hate anti-Israel and anti-Semitic/propaganda. ~~and~~

There is and can be no question about who killed the named American Marine. It is those who captured him, that <sup>Shiite</sup> faction of Muslims <sup>of which Sheikh Abdul Karim Obeid is a leader</sup> to whom your staffer is devoted.

And nobody else!

~~The man~~ Israel is not alone in characterizing <sup>Obeid</sup> as the leader of the Arab extremists who captured this American officer when he was assigned to the UN <sup>He</sup> is the man Israel captured and questioned. He is also the man so incidental to this newest of your endless incitations to hatred your columnist doesn't even give his name. Instead he refers to him - and this is all he says about him <sup>as</sup> "the Shiite cleric."

In your staffer's <sup>NY</sup> gleaning of the <sup>metropolitan</sup> papers he avoids all else that has been attributed to this terrorist leader, including the kidnapping of other Americans and even the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon in which 241 innocent Americans were slaughtered.

Instead he wants your readers to believe that Israel is responsible for the Arab murder of Colonel Higgins and <sup>this column</sup> the ~~column~~ is angled that way. ~~and~~ consistent with this he says over and over again that Colonel Higgins was not killed by the terrorists until after their leader was captured by the Israelis. (Part of his omission is the confession Israel said it got from him under questioning, his assumption of responsibility for these <sup>10</sup> terrorist acts.)

In his persisting calumny your columnist, again dishonest in <sup>his</sup> selectivity, if it exists at all, quotes an unidentified ~~But~~ "Pentagon" source as saying that the colonel was still alive when the "cleric" was captured and he begins this by representing that the murder just happened:

"But when his murder came, sources in the <sup>NY</sup> Pentagon said they believed the Marine had been still alive last week."

Your columnist says only part of what was well-publicized in the papers he reads in saying that after the colonel was captured, "The 'trial' was supposedly held in December." What also was widely reported <sup>and later</sup> "in December" is that Higgins was then killed. Not ~~only~~ <sup>was</sup> not last December. And if that is true, the entire column being based on the fact that he wasn't, where it has any basis at all, is obviously a rotten piece of inflammatory propaganda.

There is no indication that he learned anything <sup>in his journalistic experience</sup> about the craft of which he boasts so often in your staffer's failure to have anything to say at all about the photographs alleging depicting Higgins' hanging ~~on~~ the end of July. A cub reporter should not have missed the fact that there is no means of identifying when Higgins was hanged - even if he was alive when he was videotaped hanging. In the past those terrorists have been careful to include such time identifiers as a newspaper, which dates the photography and the death or life of the subject photographed. This time the terrorists were careful to make it close to impossible <sup>to</sup> the place the time the photograph of a hanging man was taken. It ~~is~~ <sup>was</sup> not even possible, as Pentagon sources your boy managed not to quote <sup>Said,</sup> to identify the victim.

Experts, in fact, agreed that there is a question about how much can be learned from the videotape the Arab terrorists released because it is "grainy" and otherwise of poor quality. In itself this should raised questions because there was no need for poor ~~quality~~ photographic ~~quality~~ <sup>a Sony</sup> quality and clarity. Addressing this ~~an~~ expert ~~at Sony~~ said "you could not tell how old it was," referring to the disclosed videotape.

On when Colonel Higgins was killed, the Washington Post reported that "senior security officials in Beirut agreed with suggestions that Higgins may have been killed some time ago, and said other hostages, <sup>may</sup> who have died in captivity, will be accused as spies and threatened with 'execution', with the captors capitalizing on the crisis over (this captured terrorist leader) Obeid's disappearance." <sup>Or, dug up and photograph.</sup>

Also from the same paper <sup>which</sup> your columnist reads, "reports that Higgins died before the Israeli capture of Obeid could not be confirmed. But two sources ~~said~~ here said there were indications that Higgins perished in December, ~~1988~~ 1988. ...Israeli officials



discussed this report with their U.S. contacts in February of this year, the sources said, and discovered that <sup>the</sup> U.S. intelligence community had received similar accounts."

~~But~~ In more than a full newspaper column of space, you carried ~~no~~<sup>now</sup> of this information and thereby ~~misled~~ misled your readers. There are published reports that if the body is that of Colonel Higgins it was taken from the grave and photographed. We ~~have~~<sup>now</sup> no way of knowing ~~now~~ whether this is true or not but isn't it as worthy, with all that space, of some mention <sup>in</sup> as all the propaganda you published? All ~~the~~<sup>your</sup> positive statements that no <sup>or responsible</sup> honest reporter or columnist can make as positive statements?

But if your columnist had reported what had been reported elsewhere, instead of indulging in a lengthy diatribe against Israel and contriving an entirely false case that ~~it is responsible for~~ <sup>the murder was only</sup> the end of July, he could not have had his false case against Israel and he could not have attributed any of the blame for this despicable murder to Israel, could he?

And if he had had anything else in mind, how could he have eliminated <sup>their</sup> ~~its~~ entirely all of the reports that indicate the Higgins murder was not recent? Cub reporters get fired for less <sup>yet</sup> and how often ~~has~~<sup>has</sup> he exploited <sup>his</sup> ~~his~~ gray hairs and boasted of his ~~major~~ journalistic credentials?

This is not journalism and it is not a reasonable statement of opinion because it is based on what is alleged to be without question when it is <sup>false and</sup> at best highly questionable.

It is still another of your endless incitations to hating Israel and it is the expression of the papers' beliefs and of what they want believed because he is on their payroll <sup>and</sup> because they have editorial responsibility for what they publish. He is not some writer of letters to the editor. ~~He~~<sup>He</sup> has a long record he has never been man enough to defend and can't defend, ~~and although, particularly~~ <sup>some of my</sup> ~~in~~ the past year or so, the papers have refused to publish comment on his and their incitations to hatred and thus have seen to it that their trusting readers were denied exposure of his untruthfulness and misrepresentations.

The papers cannot escape or avoid responsibility. I regret very much that for all these years they have given so much misinformation to so many who trust them, that they have made themselves into a vehicle for hate propaganda.



**GE DRAMA**

# Beirut Tape Seen Bearing Few Details

*Experts Say Analysis May Be Inconclusive*

By Eleanor Randolph  
Washington Post Staff Writer

As the Defense Department and FBI began studying a 37-second video transmission from Beirut to determine whether it showed the body of Lt. Col. William R. Higgins, television experts yesterday disagreed about how much information computer analysts could gather from the grainy footage of a bound and gagged body hanging from a rope.

The videotape copies that were dropped off Monday at news bureaus in Beirut were driven to Damascus where they were transmitted by satellite to London and then to the United States.

The result is that news agencies and government officials have a faulty picture that has been distorted at least somewhat by the copying process and the satellite transmissions, the experts said.

"Generally, the quality becomes worse and worse and worse with each copy or 'generation.' The picture becomes somewhat softer. Video noise become worse. Color starts to change its characteristics," said Peter Dare, vice president of product operations for Sony Corp., a large Japanese electronics firm.

Dare said that computer experts could probably tell how many times it had been copied, what kind of videotape machine was used and whether the body dimensions matched those of Higgins.

"But you probably could not tell how old it was," Dare said. The tape may have been made months ago and duplicated recently.

Ed Turner, executive vice president of Cable News Network, said that analysts might be able to de-



Photo taken from a video transmission that terrorists say shows Higgins's body.

termine such things about the tape as "the time of day and the time of year [it was made] and from that they might be able to determine how current or recent [the hanging] is.

"Perhaps they could even look at the density of the background for an idea of where it was taken," Turner said, noting that different building products used in different areas could be identifiable.

But others suggested that because the videotape was of poor quality and may have been shot on tape that had been erased and re-used, it would be difficult to gain detailed evidence about whether the body was that of Higgins.

"You're already starting with a faulty picture, like a home video," said Robert Burke, vice president of Worldwide Television News in London.

The color in the videotape, which apparently came from an amateur video recorder, also began to fade with satellite transmission, several television experts said.

One prominent expert on the use of computers to enhance videotapes said yesterday that most efforts at improving tapes to make them easier to view do not work as well for amateur videotapes.

"You quickly run up against limitations by the electronics," said the expert, who asked not to be named.

Although the footage from the satellite is widely available, Pentagon officials have said they are also trying to look at one of the copies of the video distributed Monday in Beirut. Some news officials, however, have said that sharing those "first generation" copies with U.S. officials could cause problems for journalists working in Beirut or other areas of the Middle East.

Under an informal agreement by the news organizations with bureaus in Beirut, videotapes or statements from terrorist organizations are routinely copied and shared with many other news organizations and widely disseminated by satellite.

"When there is this sort of appalling propagandist action, the footage is widely distributed around the national broadcasters," said David Kogan, managing editor of Visnews, which received one of the copies in Beirut.

"We happened to be the receiving agency, but once those pictures are put onto [a satellite], they are available to us, our competition ... whoever wants it," Kogan said.

The Israeli statement insisted that Obeid was responsible for the kidnapping of Higgins, and a spokesman said that Israel would not release him "under the pressure of terror or blackmail."

Reports that Higgins died before the Israeli capture of Obeid could not be confirmed. But two sources here said there were indications that Higgins had perished in December 1988, as his captors attempted to force him to sign a statement declaring that he was a CIA operative. Israeli officials discussed this report with their U.S. contacts in February of this year, the sources said, and discovered that the U.S. intelligence community had received similar accounts.

Senior security sources in Beirut agreed with suggestions that Higgins may have been killed some time ago, and said other hostages, who may have died in captivity, will be accused as spies and threatened with "execution," with the captors capitalizing on the crisis over Obeid's disappearance.

(Shevardnadze, in Iran, ex-



8/2/89  
Roy Meachum



## Who killed William Higgins?

Primary "credit" for the Marine's death goes to the Organization for the Oppressed on Earth. In fact, there is no such "organization." The name surfaced for the first time after the U.S. Marine was kidnapped 17 months ago.

Journalist Terry Anderson and the other seven American hostages still believed alive are prisoners of Hezbollah. The self-named Party of God is composed of adherents to Shiism, the Islamic faction notorious for its fanaticism.

The possibility exists that Hezbollah "invented" the Organization for the Oppressed on Earth as a device to divert blame for Lt. Col. Higgins' seizure. But the organization could equally be the product of a schism within the Party of God which no longer satisfied the ambitions, personal or political, of all members.

The confusion of today's Lebanon is multiplied by the ability of anyone with a telephone to proclaim a new "truth" that, because of the prevailing chaos, no one can prove to be untrue.

It is generally believed that William Higgins disappeared months ago into the same "black hole" of shattered Beirut's suburbs, which had swallowed the other kidnap victims. In addition to the Americans, there were at last count eight other Western prisoners, including Anglican churchman Terry Waite, who was seized in early 1987 while trying to negotiate release for all hostages.

It should be recalled that the seizing of non-Lebanese off the streets of Beirut began as an attempt to blackmail Kuwait into releasing 17 prisoners convicted of terrorist acts against the royal family, whom Shiites accused of supporting Iraq in its long war with Iran. Last year a Kuwaiti airliner was hijacked for the same reason, and two passengers killed. Neither was American.

From the outset, Lt. Col. Higgins occupied a different status than the other prisoners. His captors charged that his service with the U.N. Truce Supervisory Organization in Lebanon was a cover; they said he was spying for Israel whose 1982 invasion resulted in the truce which the U.N. had to supervise.

The Marine's abduction was

viewed by some Middle East observers as a gesture of support for the Palestinian uprising, less than three months old when his kidnapping took place.

In those early days, Iran made every attempt to capitalize on the intifada. However, Teheran and its supporters competed with anti-PLO Arabs in seeking some claim for leadership in the occupied territories. None succeeded.

Of all the groups, Lebanon's radical Shiites possessed the singular advantage of the American hostages, who could be used to apply pressure on the occupying power's main source of financial and diplomatic strength, the United States.

Indeed, the pressure was applied when Lt. Col. Higgins was "tried and convicted" as an Israeli spy, and condemned to death. The "trial" was supposedly held in December.

But when his murder came, sources in the Pentagon said they believed the Marine had been still alive last week. A view that must have been shared by the Israelis who used a possible swap for the U.S. officer in their initial justification for their "counter" snatching of the

### Shiite cleric early Friday.

On the other hand, there appears little doubt that the latest kidnapping was in direct response to a breakdown in negotiations to release three Israelis held captive in Lebanon since 1986. Bringing two soldiers and the downed flier home would provide a tremendous boost to a people whose self-esteem has been badly torn by the Palestinian uprising, now in its 20th month.

According to the *Jerusalem Post*, the intifada's single most important victory was over the image of invincibility previously enjoyed by the Israeli armed forces. Staging the commando raid can be seen as an attempt to regain lost luster. It calls to mind other daring forays of the past, notably the 1976 Israeli assault in Uganda. Paratroopers rescued passengers from a hijacked El-Al jet. On that success, the world erupted in praise for the Jewish nation.

However, 12 years later, a different world condemned the Israelis when they sent a masked crew to Tunisia last year. They assassinated PLO

military chief Abu Jihad whom they held responsible for the uprising. At any rate, killing Abu Jihad served chiefly to inspire the Palestinians to step up their protests.

When informed of last week's raid, George Bush condemned "kidnapping and violence" as instruments of any quest for peace. The president instructed U.S. Ambassador William Brown to inform the Israelis that this country wanted no part in a hostage swap. But to no avail.

In its single direct response to demands from Lt. Col. Higgins' captors, the Israeli government waited until shortly before the announced execution deadline to offer an exchange of the Muslim clergyman and other Shiite prisoners for the captured Israeli soldiers and the hostages, including the Marine.

The offer was accompanied by news stories that reported Jerusalem officials placed little stock in the threat against the U.S. officer. They may have relied on the "outside" intervention which his captors said caused them to delay a second American hostage's murder. The official were wrong. William Higgins paid.

At any rate, Jerusalem's insistence it still hoped for an exchange was rebuffed yesterday by Shiites. At this point freedom appears no closer for the hostages in Lebanon.

As the Israelis would have welcomed praise had their risky scheme brought the colonel's release, they must accept their share of involvement in his murder.

And so must the Reagan administration. It was beyond conscience to allow another Marine to serve in the atmosphere of tribal warfare, which already had cost the lives of his 241 comrades a few short years ago.

In simple truth, no more Americans should be allowed in the Middle East until this country forges and enforces a pragmatic, intelligent policy that protects America's interests. It is a travesty on our national honor and power that the United States has been reduced to the sidelines, where the only action possible is reaction.

At this moment my thoughts are with Mr. Anderson, Mr. Waite and those others still hostage. They have my prayers. In all this week's cries for revenge, they were forgotten. As usual.