What we’ve lost in the Iraq war

Does this matter? It certainly doesn’t make Childers any less brave or any less worthy of our admiration, then or now. But if we had known then that the assignment our soldiers had been given would resemble Vietnam more than World War II, it might have changed our readiness to believe that the mission was accomplished by May 1, 2003.

What if we had known what Cpl. Jesse Odom, who tended to his dying officer, later wrote? He heard Childers’ “last words on Earth.” They were:

“It hurts.”

Odom continues: “He died a painful death. I was hurt not only because I saw a father type figure go before me, but to see a grown man cry and urinate his pants hit me hard.” It would have hit us hard, too, if Dillow had given us what really happened instead of a tale of battlefield glory.

Odom writes, “In reality the war in Iraq is over for me, but emotionally the war will never end. There will be a sight or smell that will bring me back to the battlefield.” He mourns Childers and “damn[s] the terrorist for all the hate, fear and sadness.”

Odom’s feelings are sincere. We feel their dignity. But quite another casualty of the Iraq War is the unthinking hatred it has let loose. On YouTube, you can view a video song, “We Hate Terrorists,” played and recorded by “members of 1/133rd Infantry Battalion during Operation Iraqi Freedom II.” In it, we get — in images and words — the Quran as toilet paper, a soldier using his rifle as a phallus, and repeated wishes to skin terrorists alive, sodomize them, and kill them all. Worse still are the six approving comments.

I am sure of one thing. Childers did not die for an America that writes and approves of songs and sentiments like these.

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