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War and how Boulder County reacted

By Christina Eisert, Brian Klocke and Pamela White
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Monday, March 17 – President George W. Bush gives Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and his sons 48 hours to leave Iraq. Bush tells the nation that the United States will unleash its "full force and might" if Hussein refuses to comply. "The tyrant will soon be gone," he says.



An estimated 1,000 people gather at a peace rally on March 20 to protest what they believe is an illegal attack against Iraq.

Wednesday, March 19, 6 p.m.

Fourteen people brave muck and heavy snow to hold a candlelight vigil on the Pearl Street Mall and stand in the cold with banners, as the first Tomahawk cruise missiles slam into key targets in Baghdad.

"The government is closed, but the people are out," says Jena Argenta, 22, of Boulder, motioning towards the darkened courthouse, closed due to snow.

Elspeth Wilson, 24, grew up in Boulder, but has spent the past six years in New York City. Wilson says she was buried in rubble in a parking garage during the 9/11 terrorist attacks and doesn't want others to have to go through similar experiences. "War is just wrong and cruel," she says.

6:15 p.m. – Peace activists from the Denver-Boulder area meet to discuss not only how to respond to war the day that it is announced, but also how to sustain a longer and broader anti-war and social-justice coalition. The meeting is interrupted by a cell phone call to inform the group that Bush has officially announced the start of the U.S. war against Iraq. Organizers call for a moment of silence. The organizing and planning then continues with a new urgency. The group discusses plans for large demonstrations on April 15, regardless of the status of the war.

8:15 p.m. – Bush addresses the nation as news stations broadcast

glowing, green images of bombs exploding in Baghdad.

"Now that conflict has come, the only way to limit its duration is to apply decisive force. And I assure you, this will not be a campaign of half measures. And we will accept no outcome but victory," Bush says.

The war, called Operation Iraqi Freedom, has begun.

Early a.m. – A Jordanian truck driver becomes the first civilian killed in a U.S. missile attack.

Thursday, March 20 – Saddam Hussein, believed by Pentagon officials to have been injured in the initial U.S. attack, appears on television. He calls Bush a "little criminal."

"May the infidels, the enemies of God and humanity be shamed," he says.

Anti-war protests sweep Europe, the United States and the Arab world.

In the first hours of military operations, a CH-46E helicopter crashes in northern Kuwait, killing four U.S. Marines and eight British service personnel.

8 a.m. to 5 p.m. – More than 40 Boulder residents join together in a Pass the Gas campaign. They pull into local gas stations, buy a penny or two of gasoline and then sit at the pump, effectively blocking its use by other consumers. Others protest carrying signs with messages like, "We don't want cheap gas at the price of war," and "No blood for oil."

The demonstration includes members of Vox Feminista and Lesbo the Clown. Some SUV drivers flip the bird as they pass, while many more honk and wave and give the peace sign.

11 a.m. – The U.S. 1st Marine Division enters Iraq, signaling the start of the ground war. Soldiers report seeing burning oil wells. Two U.S. Marines from the 1st Marine Expeditionary force are the first U.S. servicemen to die in combat. One is shot in the stomach while advancing toward a burning oil pump. The second is killed while fighting to seize the port of Umm Qasr.

Noon – More than 200 people gather in front of the Boulder County Courthouse to protest the war. Some cry; others hold hands. Musicians play, as signs wave demanding a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Some speakers express anger and sadness, while others present history lessons.

Juliana Forbes, of Boulder, protested with her children.

"My heart is just completely torn," Forbes says, breaking into tears. "People are outside of this political maneuvering who will be bearing

their children and will be buried with their children, which is just as painful as a reality can get."

Asked what she would say if she could speak to an Iraqi mother, Forbes whispers, "I'm sorry."

As the rally wraps up, Brian Brandon comes to the front of the circle of protestors, throws his hands in the air and yells, "I love America!"

Anti-war protesters at first drown him out, but he is given the microphone and asked to speak his mind.

"Don't hang my flag upside-down," he demands. "The war is for peace. I don't think we're attacking Iraq. We're freeing the Iraqi people. If you don't like it, vote, or leave. That is America. We voted Bush into office."

People in the crowd answer with shouts of "No!"

Afterwards, when asked about his loyalty to George Bush, Brandon responds, "I didn't vote for him."

The rally soon evolves into a march from the Boulder County Courthouse to the front door of the Daily Camera. People gather along the sidewalk in front of the newspaper and gradually flow into the parking lot to hold a drum and dance circle on the front stoop.

A mother encourages her daughter to dance with her, while the crowd chants "Impeach Bush now!" and "This is what democracy looks like!"

A man yells, "Let's take the dancing to the street!" The crowd files out into the street and begins a spontaneous march, blocking traffic as they walk to Broadway and Walnut. The march continues down Walnut, then loops back around to Pearl Street and the mall. Police halt traffic, giving protesters full access to the streets.

6 p.m., – The mood at the Courthouse is somber. People hug and cry. Most people are quiet, but the signs speak volumes. "Wake up from the propaganda," says one. "Shock and Awe are Synonyms for Terror," says another.

A simulated air-raid siren pierces the silence to mark the beginning of the rally, followed by a moment of absolute silence. Steve Goering, pastor of the Boulder Mennonite Church is the first to speak.

"My God has said that we shouldn't be killing other people," he tells the crowd. "We need to continue to work for peace in a nonviolent way."

Another speaker refers to the first Gulf War and says, "Like father like son. And let's hope the son is like the father—one term."

The crowd responds with shouts of "No! Impeach Bush!"

Free Range Theater performs a skit intended to illustrate the impact of the Patriot Act and the policies of Attorney General John Ashcroft on civil liberties.

"Oh say can you see/Our inalienable rights/Drained away in the name/Of Homeland Security," performers sing, as demonstrators boo and hiss at the Ashcroft puppet.

7 p.m. – The Faculty and Staff Against War forum feels like an intellectual pep rally. The audience is mostly academics with a few students (most have left for Spring Break and warmer weather) and community folks, including some demonstrators who have marched over from the Courthouse rally.



Activists and their children stage a die-in on March 22 outside the Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities.

Regent Jim Martin, the first speaker of the night, is greeted with wild cheers and applause when he announces that he recently left the Republicans to join the Democrats.

"I'm so opposed to this war that I no longer wanted to have Republican attached to my name," he says.

He begins to talk about the need for a new declaration, not a declaration of independence, but a declaration of interdependence.

"George Bush has held us captive to fear since 9/11," he says. "That's the wrong way to run a government. That's a dictatorship when they say you can't have the facts because it will breach security interests."

Local leftist celebrity David Barsamian, of Alternative Radio, tells the crowd that the current White House administration consists of "radical nationalists who have hijacked our government and embarked on this imperial program."

Friday, March 21 – Coalition ground troops advance more than 100 miles into Iraq, as U.S. missiles continue to pound strategic points in Baghdad. Iraqi troops surrender by the thousands, though some put up a fight.

U.S. officials stress they're not sure Saddam Hussein and his sons are still alive and report that secret surrender talks are underway.

U.S. Marines raise the American flag in the port city of Umm Qasr and are immediately ordered to take it down. The Pentagon explains that the U.S. mission is one of liberation, not conquest.

Police clash with 30,000 anti-war protesters outside the U.S. embassy in Yemen. Three protesters are shot and killed. About 10,000 protest for the second day in Cairo. More than 150,000 take to the streets in Athens, Greece, hurling rocks and gasoline bombs at officers guarding the U.S. embassy. Protests also rock Britain, Germany, Denmark, France, Brazil, Jordan, Bahrain, Malaysia, Australia, and Japan.

In the United States, protests continue in San Francisco, Chicago, Boston and Washington, D.C., with arrests nationwide topping 2,300 since Wednesday, March 19.

While mainstream media continue to stress that the war is not about oil, CNN and other major outlets report Friday evening that Iraq's southern oil fields "have been secured."

11 a.m. – About 50 people, more than half of them children, carpool to U.S. Rep. Mark Udall's office in Denver for a civics lesson in the politics of war.

Upon arriving at the office, parents discovered that Rep. Udall will not be joining them. His aide, Carter Ellison, will answer the children's questions.

Ben asks why the U.S. isn't bombing North Korea instead of Iraq, given that North Korea is known to have weapons of mass destruction. Ellison tells him that Bush doesn't see North Korea as a regional problem, but considers Iraq a world threat, even if it doesn't make sense.

Kai asks Ellison why the nation is at war. Ellison responds by asking Kai if he's been watching television.

One boy asks whether the U.S. sold chemical weapons to Iraq. Ellison tells him that the U.S. did sell Iraq such weapons during the Iran-Iraq war.

One question brings tears to the adults' eyes: "Is it possible this could turn into World War III?"

Says Ellison: "I don't know."

Noon – More than 100 anti-war demonstrators rally in front of the Army recruiting station at 3055 Walnut St. They gather in a semi-circle around a homemade coffin, draped with American flags, the word "innocence" written across the top.

"We stand here today in solidarity with hundreds of millions around the world to say that our president and our administration carry out their so-called war in Iraq without our consent and that of tens of millions of Americans. We stand here to let the president and his administration know that we're not buying it—not the lies, not the arrogance and disregard for the United Nations and the world

community, and not the disregard for us," Lauren Solten tells the gathering crowd.

People spill off the sidewalk and mingle among the cars in the parking lot. Some block access to the recruitment center, which had locked its doors prior to the rally.

"Our nation is acting in defiance of international laws our government was party to the formation of. The announcement of war with Iraq, with neither a threat of imminent attack nor approval from the security council, represents perhaps the greatest threat to world peace the world can know at this point in history," says Theo Horesh, of the Boulder Co-op Market, which has agreed by consensus to a resolution opposing the war.

Demonstrators gather around the coffin, lay down flowers. The demonstration becomes a mourning service for the casualties of the war.

Staff Sgt. Keith Jones, of the Army recruiting station of Boulder, has spent 14 years in the military. He supports the president and his administration.

In response to the demonstration, he says, "I'm happy we live in a country where people are free to protest, and state their opinions."

Deborah Mulliner, a sergeant's wife, leaves a message written on a dry-erase board outside the door: "Down with protesters. You don't know until you've been there."

A woman with two sons serving in the military— one in the Marines and one in the Air Force—comes to the Army recruitment station to counter-protest. She drives along side the crowd and leans on her horn to drown out the speakers. A moment later she moves through the crowd and shouts, "Get a life!"

Meanwhile, in Longmont, demonstrators who support the war stand near Sixth Avenue and Main Street holding signs that read, "Kill Saddam. Nuke 'em," "Bomb Iraq," and "If you don't like freedom, get out."

5 p.m. – During the height of rush-hour traffic in Boulder, six banners are hung from a pedestrian/bicyclist bridge over Foothills Parkway just south of Colorado Avenue. The banners were created by BikeForPeace.Org and focus on a more personal solution to not only the war against Iraq, but the continual war on the environment by the Bush administration. One banner says, "George W: We are shocked and awed by your brutality." Another states "Oil Dependence=CARmageddon." The most eye-catching banner shows Jesus peddling a bicycle, with the words, "WWJD: Why Would Jesus Drive?"

7 p.m. – Thirty-plus poets and friends have gathered at the Dairy Center for the Arts in Boulder to express their reactions to the U.S. war against Iraq. Their feelings are expressed with words that range from somber to angry. Lebanese-American Linda Mamoun reads her poetry in public for the first time and despite her nervousness, feels compelled to speak out.

"The U.S. has just launched not a war, because a war implies relative military equivalence, but an unprecedented, unprovoked attack on a basically defenseless population in Iraq," she says.

At the same time, a small group of Boulderites, including dual citizens of New Zealand, Germany and Arab countries, gathers in a circle on the floor of the Boulder Co-op's Community Room to support each other in a time of grief.

Saturday, March 22 – Coalition forces move to within 150 miles of Baghdad, securing cities and oil fields as Tomahawk cruise missiles continue to pummel the Iraqi capitol. They encounter limited resistance.

Sgt. Asan Akbar is detained in an alleged attack on fellow servicemen. One soldier from the 101st Airborne Division is killed and 12 wounded when two hand grenades are thrown into the operations center where they are working. U.S. officials say Akbar's motives were likely "resentment." The death toll for U.S. and British forces stands at eight and 14 respectively. Military spokesmen say the worst is yet to come, as coalition forces get closer to Hussein's best-trained troops. Gen. Tommy Franks tells the media that fighting would be "unlike any other in history."

The Bush administration admits to being stumped as to why coalition forces have not yet discovered evidence of weapons of mass destruction.

Iraqi reports state that more than 200 civilians have been injured in the missile strikes, and Al-Jazeera, a media network based in Qatar, shows photos of burned children and other casualties.

U.S. forces capture key oil refining facilities and pumping stations. U.S. officials stress they are counting on revenues from oil to help pay back the cost of rebuilding Iraq once the war is over.

Anti-war protests continue around the globe, spreading to Palestinian areas. In the United States, protesters continue to flock into the streets by the thousands. But counter protests in support of Bush and the war take place across the country as well, the largest in Chicago.

11:30 a.m. – More than 400 people pack an emotional town hall meeting held at the Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities. The bipartisan event is held by Congressman Bob Beauprez, a Republican,

and Mark Udall, a Democrat.

A predominantly anti-war crowd peppers Udall and Beauprez with questions about their action, or lack thereof, against the war. The mood is confrontational, and shouting drowns Beauprez out when he tries to answer questions.

But many have been shut out of the meeting, which is filled to capacity. Those who cannot fit inside protest the war along the highway in front of the Arts Center. Two people dressed as large puppets, representing an Iraqi man and woman, walk in silence holding two limp dolls, representing dead Iraqi children

A loud siren suddenly blares, and a young man screams, "Air raid!" Men, women and children drop to the ground and are draped in sheets and theatrical blood. This is a die-in and is meant to represent the deaths of innocent Iraqi citizens caught in the fighting.

Amy McMaster, of Boulder, lies under a sheet and plays dead. Mothers and their children lie all around her. Women dressed in black, with shawls covering their heads, pray over the bodies. McMaster, an eighth-grade teacher at Lyons Middle School, says this is the first protest she has ever attended.

"(This protest) has definitely touched a place inside of me," she says.

1:30 p.m. – A crowd of about 800 people gather at the Boulder County Courthouse to stand and march for peace. David Barsamian is one of the main speakers and talks about U.S. imperialism. After the rally, the large group marches down Pearl Street to 28th Street and circles west down Canyon Boulevard with a police escort. The march is bolstered by the beat of a drums, which seems to cheer the crowd. Onlookers offer support. As the high-energy march continues, chants like, "Power to the People!" and "This is what democracy looks like!" ring out and reverberate in the streets.



BikeForPeace.org hangs banners over Foothills Parkway during rush-hour traffic on March 21. Most motorists respond with supportive honks and peace signs.

Sunday, March 23 – Coalition forces advance to within 100 miles of Baghdad. Iraqi soldiers use ambushes and fake surrenders to kill and capture as many as 21 American troops. The attacks mark the first serious opposition encountered by coalition forces and represent the

greatest battle losses to date.

"The hardest part is yet to come," says Gen. Richard Myers, referring to coming battle with Hussein's elite troops in and around Baghdad.

U.S. forces take control of what officials allege is a chemical weapons facility in the city of Najaf.

Captured U.S. servicemen are shown on Iraqi TV, along with the suspected bodies of men killed in action. U.S. officials decry the exhibition as a violation of the Geneva Conventions rules for the treatment of prisoners.

In New York, Richmond, Va., and Washington, D.C., people rally in support of the Bush administration and the war effort. The New York rally draws an estimated 100,000. About 3,000 gather at the State Capitol in Denver to show their support for Bush and U.S. troops.

"They say it's American and Iraqi blood for oil," said event organizer Neil Dobro, a Denver-area dentist. "If it's all about oil, why don't we just buy it?"

Noon – About 50 musicians gather at the Boulder County Courthouse for a rally called the Musician Mobilization for Peace. Playing everything from flutes to cellos to a variety of percussion instruments, the musicians perform peace songs from the Vietnam era, in particular "Where Have All the Flowers Gone," as a crowd of about 100 watch. People walking down the Pearl Street Mall stop to listen for a while, and then move on.

Monday, March 24 – Coalition forces advance to within 50 miles of Baghdad and encounter Hussein's elite Republican Guard units. Warplanes and helicopters lead the attack. Two U.S. servicemen are taken prisoner when their helicopter crashes behind Iraqi lines. The U.S. death toll climbs to 19, with 14 troops captured or missing in action.

Hussein appears again on Iraqi television, urging the Iraqi population to be patient.

"God's victory will soon be ours," he says.

Bush tells Congress the war will cost about \$74.7 billion.

Meanwhile, protests continued around the world and the nation, with mass arrests in San Francisco.

9:30 a.m. – The Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center sponsors an emergency non-violence training session to teach activists the principals of non-violent civil disobedience.

"I think it's best to be prepared," says Betty Ball, director of the center.

"Non-violence is resistance. It's resisting a harm, resisting injustice and it requires courage. It requires a great deal of courage to take direct action against the government."

Fourteen people attend the training session, which focuses on the teachings of Martin Luther King, Jr.

7 p.m. – Sean McAllister, a member of the National Lawyers Guild, speaks at the Boulder Co-op Market about the legalities of civil disobedience and mass protests.

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