THE SHAMEFUL CRITICISM OF RUMSFELD

[I am so glad Jack Kelly wrote this defense of Donald Rumsfeld - and I am so disgusted at the sudden torrent of Republican criticism of him. Donald Rumsfeld is one of the most heroic figures in the world today, and America is fortunate in the extreme to have him as Secretary of Defense.

The temerity of Clueless Bill Kristol of the Weekly Standard, professional jerk Senator John McCain, and Senator Trent “Vacant” Lott, calling for him to resign is squalid and shameful. Secretary Rumsfeld deserves our deepest appreciation, admiration, and support. He certainly has that from the vast majority of American soldiers in Iraq.

As evidence, I am appending at the end of Jack Kelly’s column, a letter we received from First Sergeant Timmy Rikard serving in Iraq, and who was present when Rummy spoke to the troops there. Every American needs to read Sgt. Rikard’s letter and understand how the liberal media totally distorts what the troops think of their Secretary - most especially Kristol, McCain, Lott and their ilk.- JW]

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld doesn't lack for critics. But his critics soften lack sound judgment. Rumsfeld long has been a punching bag for Democrats and journalists, who wish we had not gone to war with Iraq at all. Lately they have been joined by right-wingers who want someone to blame because we haven't won yet.

The most recent spate of Rumsfeld bashing was triggered when a reserve soldier asked him why his unit had to scrounge for armor to put on its humvees and trucks. Rumsfeld was "passing the buck" when he indicated it was the Army's responsibility to put Specialist Thomas Wilson in an armored truck, said the Weekly Standard's Bill Kristol in a snarky editorial, and "arrogant" when he told Wilson that "you have to go to war with the Army you have, not the one you'd like to have."

Does Kristol think there are no generals in the Army competent enough to whom to delegate responsibility for putting armor on Army vehicles? Is Rumsfeld derelict because he himself isn't welding rivets at the Hess-O'Gara plant outside Cincinnati?

The real burr under Kristol's saddle is that Rumsfeld and then CENTCOM commander Gen. Tommy Franks attacked Iraq with what he thinks were too few troops. This complaint is shared by many who have more military experience than Kristol, which is zero. Sen. John McCain declared he has "no confidence" in Rumsfeld. But the complaint is mostly bovine excrement.

U.S. and British troops swiftly defeated the Iraqi forces, with very few casualties. This would have been true even if some of the Republican Guard formations which mysteriously melted away had stood and fought. The invasion force would have been larger had Turkey not forbidden the 4thInfantry Division to stage from its territory. Kuwait's ports are not large enough to sustain a (much) larger buildup. Trying to build up a larger force -- which was (obviously) not necessary for

victory -- would have meant postponing the invasion to the fall of 2003. That would not have been a good idea.

Another frequent complaint -- that the U.S. should not have abolished the Iraqi army -- is entirely excrementitious. To begin with, there was no Iraqi army to keep on hand for peacekeeping. The poorly paid and horribly treated Shia conscripts all had deserted. Loyal Sunnis in the Republican Guard had left to prepare for guerrilla war against the Americans. We couldn't trust Saddam's officer corps, and if we had tried to turn peacekeeping over to them, we'd have incurred the enmity of the Shia and the Kurds, together 80 percent of Iraq's population. We had no choice but to rebuild the military and police from scratch.

America made a few big and many small mistakes in Iraq, as we have in every war we have ever fought. But the biggest mistakes were intelligence failures, for which the CIA is far more to blame than is the Pentagon.

The CIA gets more grief than it should about the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Every other Western intelligence service, and most of Saddam's generals thought Saddam had such weapons, so it is not unreasonable that the CIA would think so, too. What was really bad was the CIA's inability to detect that Saddam had a plan for protracted guerrilla war. Plans for the occupation would have been much different had this been known.

The failure to detect Saddam's plan for protracted guerrilla war was largely responsible for the failure to have more peacekeeping troops. Former Army chief of staff Eric Shinseki and others had warned that roughly twice as many as we had on hand were required, even if a guerrilla war hadn't been in the offing. But it isn't Rumsfeld's fault that the Army is too small to provide many more troops - we can thank the Clinton administration for that.

Jack Kelly is a former Marine and Green Beret and a former deputy assistant secretary of the Air Force in the Reagan administration. He is national security writer for the Pittsburgh (Pa.) Post-Gazette.

An Open Letter from US Army 1st Sgt. Timmy Rikard:

This is a shotgun blast response to the media reports on Secretary Rumsfeld's visit to our Camp. I was fortunate enough to be there and even shake the man's hand. When the media reports were released concerning the event, I could not believe what I saw and heard. There are over 12,000 troops on our base. Only 2,000 or so had the opportunity to attend the gathering and I can tell you, those were hotly contested seats.

Not as the media would have you believe, so we could voice our displeasure, but rather to have the opportunity to see and hear the man we admire. Mr. Secretary spoke for 10 minutes or so on the war in Iraq and what freedom meant to the people of Afghanistan. He was there for the recent

elections and shared his wonderful insight. After his prepared remarks he opened up the floor for questions and made it very clear that nothing was off limits.

Folks, this is extremely unusual for a dignitary to do. Also, we as leaders were instructed to not screen our soldiers' questions. They were to be honest and from the heart. Mr. Rumsfeld fielded a number of questions, took down notes for the ones he did not have answers to and genuinely enjoyed talking to the soldiers. Afterward, he spent over an hour with the enthusiastic troops who literally mobbed him and would not let him leave. He smiled for all, shook hands and had pictures taken. It ended only when his security forced us away. *He was applauded, he was given a standing ovation, and he was loved.*

He stood there like a professional, like a man, and he took the heat because that's what leaders do. And yet somehow, the American media turned that wonderful event into a "disgruntled troops meet with Secretary Rumsfeld" headline. Incredible. The morale is high, the equipment is good and improving daily. Disregard what you read and hear from the media and trust in the American fighting men and women to do the right thing. We have excellent leadership and are doing what we signed up to do.

1SG Timmy Rikard