

News of the World 12/01/03:

ARK SAILS OFF TO WAR AS GULF HERO SLEEPS ROUGH AND IRAQI REFUGEE LIVES IT UP IN HOTEL

THE Ark Royal task force yesterday set off to liberate Iraq. But lucky Iraqi Ahmed Abdullah has already been liberated —by the British taxpayer.

Asylum-seeker Ahmed is living in a warm, free hotel room in south London, with free meals and a free colour TV thrown in.

In bitter contrast, Gulf War hero Pat Shaw and Army veteran Bob Gordon are also living in London—out on the bitterly cold streets.

Ahmed is 23 and left Iraq three months ago because, he said, "I heard it is good over here."

"It is, too," he added. "I'm well treated and happy. And the most important thing is my freedom." Life can only get better for Ahmed now. "People from the government told me that I will be staying in the hotel only for three months," he said. "Then I'll get a house and a job."

Seventy-nine of his countrymen are sharing the hotel with him - and looking forward to the same privileges.

No such luck for 36-year-old Pat and Bob, 54. They put their lives on the line for their country, but fell on hard times. Now they say our unfair social security rules and bizarre method of allocating housing favours refugees and asylum seekers, while condemning heroes to living rough.

AHMED ABDULLAH'S centrally-heated hotel room overlooks a famous south London common. He was shipped in when the Sangatte Camp in France closed.



LUXURY: Asylum-Seeker Ahmed has a free warm room

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SHAMEFUL: Gulf veteran Pat Shaw has to live rough on the streets

Across London in the streets of Covent Garden, PAT SHAW shivers in the icy wind. He has lived on the streets for five years. Pat was a Lance Corporal in the Royal Irish Regiment. He saw action in the Gulf War, served in Oman, Gibraltar, and Germany, and did two tours of Northern Ireland during 10 years' duty. Pat was in the frontline infantry during the Gulf War and saw "terrible things" including the notorious "friendly fire" incident when American planes bombed British armoured trucks. Because he is homeless, Pat is entitled to £53.09 a week. He would be eligible for housing benefit if he could find a landlord willing to take him. None will.

Asylum seekers are housed immediately, but Pat has been on Camden council's housing list for four years. There is a seven year wait. Many refugees jump the queue.

"It annoys me that they get housed straightaway," said Pat. "I have worked since I was 18, paid my stamps, risked my life for this country, and then was basically kicked in the teeth."



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