

If Cluster Bombs Could Talk

By Norman Solomon, author of *The Habits of Highly Deceptive Media*.

Hi! My name is CBU-87/B, but let's not be formal. A lot of my friends call me Cluster Bomb. I've been busy lately, doing what I'm supposed to. And I sure appreciate the careful treatment that I receive from the American news media.

My pals at the Pentagon put me in the category of a "Combined Effects Munition." My maker describes me as an "all-purpose, air-delivered cluster weapons system." Not to brag or anything, but such labels don't do me justice. When I explode, the results can really be quite awesome.

I have gotten to do my stuff in Yugoslavia this month. One of my memorable performances came at around noon on a Friday. Some people in the city of Nis were shopping at a vegetable market when — boom — I arrived. It was dramatic as hell.

An article in the May 8 edition of the *San Francisco Chronicle* said "the bombs struck next to the hospital complex and near the market, bringing death and destruction, peppering the streets of Serbia's third-largest city with shrapnel and littering the courtyards with yellow bomb casings."

This was one of my few moments in the U.S. media limelight, so forgive me while I quote some more: "In a street leading from the market, dismembered bodies were strewn among carrots and other vegetables in pools of blood. A dead woman, her body covered with a sheet, was still clutching a shopping bag filled with carrots."

I know, it's immodest to flaunt my press notices. But people don't get to see those sorts of news accounts very much in America! If the stories are reported at all, they're usually buried (ha ha) on back pages of newspapers and rarely even mentioned on the networks.

Once in a while, some Western journalist decides to put me down. The moralizing can be unpleasant. For instance, a BBC correspondent named John Simpson has been reporting from Belgrade, and he did a rather brusque commentary that the *Sunday Telegraph* in London.

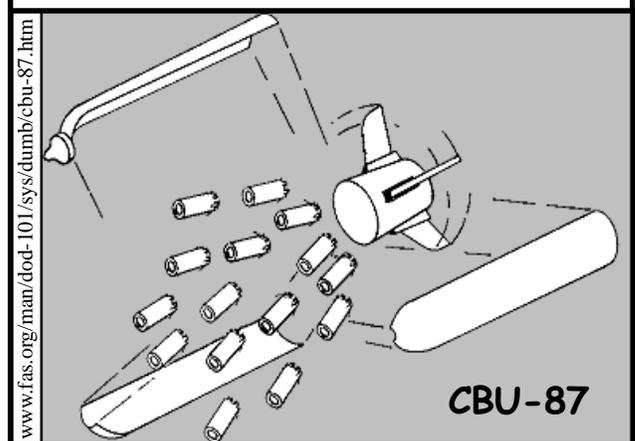
"In Novi Sad and Nis, and several other places across Serbia and Kosovo where there are no foreign journalists, heavier bombing has brought more accidents," Simpson carped. He complained that cluster bombs "explode in the air and hurl shards of shrapnel over a wide radius." And he went on to say: "Used against human beings, cluster bombs are some of the most savage weapons of modern warfare."

Cluster bombs like me could do without the overheated pejoratives, thank you. Fortunately, we hardly ever have to endure such indignities in the American press.

But please don't forget the very real accomplishments that I can partially claim as my own. The next time you see a headline or hear a newscaster referring to the "air campaign," remember that my achievements are outrageously understated by such jargon!

You see, I'm a 1,000-pound marvel, a cluster bomb with an ingenious design. When I go off, a couple of hundred "bomblets" shoot out in all directions, aided by little parachutes that look like inverted umbrellas. Those 'chutes

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slow down the descent of the bomblets and disperse them so they'll hit plenty of what my maker calls "soft targets." Before that happens, though, each bomblet breaks into about 300 pieces of jagged steel shrapnel.

Sometimes, as a cluster bomb, I get a little jealous of the exaggerated notoriety that the news media confer on outfits like the National Rifle Association. They get credited with the proliferation of murder and mayhem. Well, they're rank amateurs! Piddling sidearms pushers! Compared to me, they're small-time retailers. I'm into wholesale. They don't know how to preserve, protect and defend the Grim Reaper like I do.

I just laugh when I read the nasty things that so many pundits have been writing about the NRA. While they rant and rail against assault rifles that take a few lives now and again in the United States, I've been busy slicing up tender human bodies in Yugoslavia.

When those high school students died in Colorado, the news media kept saying what a horrendous tragedy it was. But what about the work I've done on kids and grown-ups in Yugoslavia? Journalists merely echo the statements coming out of the White House, mumbling that it's regrettable and can't be helped.

The pundits keep talking about gun control. Meanwhile, big bombs like me are more and more out of control as we roam the skies above Yugoslavia.

This has been a great spring for me as I serve my lord, the Grim Reaper. From the standpoint of public relations, I'm doing fine. In the offices of top Washington officials, and the upper echelons of American news media, I've got lots of friends in very high places. They may pretend not to know me, but we understand each other very well.

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