

THEATER REVIEW

Putting a Face To the Words Of Soldiers In Iraq War

By MIRIAM HORN

The slight woman with the graying ponytail and soft pouches beneath her eyes begins deliberately, each word precisely enunciated, each date exactly recalled. "Capt. Terrance Wright, a Fort Bragg officer recently back from Iraq, seemed to hiccup almost constantly for weeks before he died," his family says." In the space of a breath, a thing begun lightly has turned grave, confusing and sad.

In this one-woman show, "What Do I Know About War?" Margo Lee Sherman has assembled 40 minutes of fragmented stories from accounts by American soldiers who have served in Iraq. She has drawn her material from G.I. Special, an online digest of news and letters from active-duty soldiers, from Tod Ensign's 2004 book "America's Military Today," from The New York Times and from her own interviews. Captain Wright's story comes from The State, a Columbia, S.C., newspaper. On March 27, 2005, his aunt Karen told the newspaper of conversations with her nephew over several days, during which "he hiccupped con-

What Do I Know About War?

Theater for the New City

stantly, but didn't complain about anything." In Ms. Sherman's affectless recitation, following the officer's tale to its lonely, mysterious end, those hiccups become every variant of human helplessness, from the kind we all know to the kind we can't possibly conceive.

At its best, the experience of this brief evening in the black basement of Theater for the New City is like eavesdropping on a small, sorrowful

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town. Most affecting are the stories that play out at some length, like the abrupt intrusion of mortal danger into the bright innocence of 19-year-old Pfc. Rachel K. Bosveld. Ms. Sherman gives Rachel's words a sweet, teenage bounce. "Right now I'm soaking my feet. Feels soooo good. And I got to drive a tank! I was tooth from ear to ear."

Ms. Sherman enacts combat action, like the near-entrapment of Rachel's unit in a burning armored vehicle, with the big noises and gestures of small boys at play, underscoring the surreal dislocation of these young soldiers. And then the last missive: "Eighteen days until my birthday. Well bye for now. I miss you. I love you. Rachel."

Known for her performances of Beckett's "Not I" and "Footfalls," Ms. Sherman can be brilliant with the small gesture.

"What Do I Know About War?" runs through March 26 at the Theater for the New City, 155 First Avenue, at Ninth Street, East Village; (212) 254-1109.