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## Columnist Jeff German: Iraq war brings out patriotism

*Jeff German's column appears Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays in the Sun. Reach him at [german@lasvegassun.com](mailto:german@lasvegassun.com) or (702) 259-4067.*

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As the war in Iraq intensifies and casualties mount, patriotism among Americans at home is getting stronger.

That was obvious in Summerlin Wednesday night when more than 2,000 Las Vegans attended a **rally** to support the American **troops**.

The turnout was similar to recent rallies in Houston, Atlanta, Cleveland and other cities.

The majority of people interviewed in Summerlin said they simply felt it was time to step up and show their solidarity with the men and women on the battlefield.

Local businessman Phil Randazzo said he organized the **rally** because he got tired of watching massive war protests on television.

"I just told my wife we've got to do something," he said.

The result was an impressive show of support for the **troops**, which drowned out a tiny anti-war demonstration across town at New York-New York that same evening.

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Only a handful of people are actively involved in the anti-war movement in Las Vegas, so it wasn't hard to outdo them.

But we should not be surprised to see a strong outpouring of patriotism here.

We do, after all, have a tradition of important contributions to national security. The Nevada Test Site, once the country's nuclear testing ground, is 90 miles away, and we are the home of Nellis Air Force Base, a training facility for fighter pilots, many of whom are in the war zone today.

So you can bet that patriotism will continue to grow in Las Vegas as the battle for Iraq rages.

The atmosphere was festive in Summerlin. Hanging above the crowd were red, white and blue balloons. Rally-goers were carrying pro-troop placards and American flags of all sizes. There were patriotic chants and songs and lots of food.

More than two dozen family members of Las Vegas serving in the war took the microphone to express their appreciation, and Randazzo said he raised more than \$24,000 to buy the troops long distance calling cards to phone home.

While there was cheering in Summerlin, there was jeering at New York-New York.

"Are you all enjoying your freedom out here?" one tourist yelled, as he walked past the 13 war protestors who had gathered under the megaresort's giant replica of the Statue of Liberty. Other pedestrians hurled similar insults. So did motorists driving by the two-hour demonstration.

There were no flags, no music and no patriotic chants from the protestors, who carried signs such as "Money is for health care. Not war."

The demonstrators -- a mix of veteran peace activists and UNLV students opposed to President Bush's foreign policy -- said they believe the best way to support the troops is to bring them home.

"It's important that this voice be heard," said Lisa Stiller, who protested the Gulf War in 1991 while living in Portland, Ore.

But it's a voice that seems destined to be drowned out in Las Vegas.

Randazzo said Thursday that he is considering organizing other **pro-troops** rallies, including one in Green Valley.

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