

# *Join Us?*

*Testimonies of Iraq War Veterans and their Families*



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*For*

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# Introduction

This pamphlet borrows its title from an October 1967 demonstration. Anti-war protestors faced federal troops on the steps of the Pentagon as the threat of a violent showdown lingered in the air. Some activists sought a violent confrontation, while others sat down and began to chant “Join Us, Join Us, Join Us.” Legend maintains that a few soldiers dropped their weapons and joined the protestors. There are competing interpretations of this event, but I evoke it only to convey the spirit of “join us.” It is not a call to induce anyone to disobey orders; instead it is an appeal to listen to the voices of veterans and their family members. I selected the title “Join Us” to express the sense of joining in a civic dialogue, one that can confront the overwhelming lies of the Bush administration, while at the same time respecting the sacrifice and suffering of veterans and their families. As we listen to the soldiers, we are better equipped to recognize that they are not to blame for the failures of this war. What instead emerges from these voices is the realization that the Pentagon war planners are vulnerable.<sup>1</sup>

This vulnerability is becoming more and more obvious. Even generals and high ranking officials are speaking out against the Bush administration. General Greg Newbold, director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 2000 to 2002, bemoans the “distortion of intelligence in the buildup” to “an unnecessary war.”<sup>2</sup> General Anthony Zinni, former head of the U.S. Central Command, adds that he “saw true dereliction, negligence and irresponsibility” in the Bush team’s war plan, so “don’t blame the troops.”<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the voices of those in this pamphlet make it difficult to blame the troops. Celeste Zappala, anti-war activist and mother of a fallen soldier, reminds us that she is not against the soldiers. Her son was a soldier! To be sure, embracing the troops does not mean adopting milquetoast liberalism. Holding the Bush administration accountable or critiquing the perils of neo-liberal expansionism has nothing to do with supporting or not supporting the troops. We may disagree over the causes and consequences of the war. Whatever our feelings about the war, we must discover the best way to help both the Iraqi people and returning veterans, who are often not getting the assistance that they require from the government.

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the massive 1967 demonstration and the meaning of “Join Us,” see the account of participant Gregory Nevala Calvert, *Democracy from the Heart: Spiritual Values, Decentralism, and Democratic Idealism in the Movement of the 1960s* (Eugene, OR: Communitas Press, 1991), pp. 244-54.

<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant General Greg Newbold (Ret.), “Why Iraq Was a Mistake,” *Time Magazine*, 9 April 2006.

<sup>3</sup> David Cloud and Eric Schmitt, “More Retired Generals Call for Rumsfeld’s Resignation,” *New York Times*, 14 April 2006, pp. A1 and A17.

Consider the case of Herold Noel, an Iraq War veteran who was homeless after returning from the battlefield, expressive of a government that often fails to support its own troops. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs acknowledges that roughly one-third of the adult homeless population has served in the military.<sup>4</sup> “Homeless veteran” conjures up the stereotypical image of the “maladjusted” Vietnam veteran, but we are slowly finding that Iraq War vets are facing similar problems readjusting to society. “I felt like the government turned its back on me,” Herold explains. The government that sent him to a war zone did not help him to readapt to civilian life. A private donor enabled him to move out of his car and into an apartment. All too often soldiers like Herold remain nameless, faceless, and invisible. This pamphlet in its own very small way renders them visible.

Another phenomenon that is gaining visibility is the rising tide of dissent among the troops. The testimony here is not presented as a representative sample of soldiers. However, the emerging voices of discontent from within the ranks are an interesting phenomenon that warrants attention. While I make no claims of predictive value from these testimonies, they are compelling in light of a recent survey. In February 2006, Zogby International conducted a poll of U.S. troops in Iraq. Seventy-two percent of soldiers felt that the U.S. should withdraw within one year; twenty-nine percent said the U.S. should exit Iraq “immediately.” An earlier survey by *Stars and Stripes*, a newspaper funded in part by the military, found that one third of Army soldiers reported that morale was low or very low.<sup>5</sup> Groups such as Iraq Veterans against the War and Military Families Speak Out are increasing in size and intensity. Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a fallen soldier, has become a household name.

Indeed, as David Cortright, author of *Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance during the Vietnam War*, has recently observed: “The Vietnam experience taught that resistance in the ranks is a potent force for restraining imperial ambitions and ending illegitimate war. Whether history repeats itself in Iraq remains to be seen.”<sup>6</sup>

I invite the reader to join me – to join us – in sharing and listening to some difficult and demanding testimony.

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<sup>4</sup> “Overview of Homelessness,” United States Department of Veterans Affairs, <<http://www1.va.gov/homeless/page.cfm?pg=1>>, accessed 2 April 2006.

<sup>5</sup> “U.S. Troops in Iraq: 72% Say End the War in 2006,” *Zogby International*, 28 February 2006, <<http://www.zogby.com/news/ReadNews.dbm?ID=1075>>. Ward Sanderson, “Many Service Members Say Morale is low; leaders say job is getting done,” *Stars and Stripes*, 16 October 2003, <<http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=17516&archive=true>>.

<sup>6</sup> David Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance During the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), p. 279. The book was originally published in 1975.

# *Herold Noel*

*Herold was in the Army Expeditionary Unit 3/7 and served in the Iraq War. His assignment was to deliver tank fuel, one of the more dangerous tasks. During his service, there was a mixup in Herold's pay. When he eventually returned home from the war, Herold was homeless. He is now attending school and lives in the Bronx, New York.*

I was living in Brooklyn, NY and I joined the service mainly to support my children. I served as a "fueler" in Iraq for almost eight months. It was an experience. I saw the Iraqi people as pretty intelligent; they understood what they were doing. I saw them as people like us. They were regular people. I just looked at them with the idea that "If someone invaded my town, what would I do?"

I did receive a couple of overseas medals. But, there was a mistake while I was in Iraq. The Army confused me with someone and they thought that I was AWOL [absent without leave]. As a result, I did not receive my paychecks for some time. There was also a situation when I returned home from Iraq. Soldiers who had traffic tickets and misdemeanor tickets before they deployed had their names called and the police were waiting. Well, this is America, I said to myself. I sometimes feel a whole bunch of regret. I used to be very mad after I returned home. I kept asking myself, "What the hell did I fight for?" I was on the street now. I was mad at everybody, but I learned to tell myself that this is how America is. I just gave my life for something and nobody showed any respect. They try to make you blend in like you weren't doing anything, like you weren't just over there killing fucking people for the last six months. Give me some kind of merit. When you come home, America throws you out like a piece of trash.

You train a soldier to fight for your country. They feel so proud at what they did; they felt that their life is worth something. When they returned, they feel like it wasn't worth anything. Not every returning soldier is as stable as I was. The soldier is angry, and I am not calling the returning soldier crazy, people called me crazy when I returned. But, some of them are angry and might end up blowing some shit up or snapping. I was just looking for respect or some honor. I was first angry at everybody. But, I understand now and am not angry at them anymore. The government is blindfolding them.

I know that people are mad at the president, but I am not mad at him, that's just the kind of soldier that I am. People are mad because the question on why we went to war in the first place was not answered. We got three or four different answers and I lost track of the reasons why we went to war. I went into the military for my country, but I get angry sometimes.

Wouldn't you feel angry if you went to war and did what I did and you were sleeping in a car? I was homeless. You would feel like your government is killing you. I felt like my whole government turned its back on me. It was very difficult. There are actually soldiers who took their lives, and they call us crazy. But, I call America crazy.

We shed blood for this country. My wife's mother is from Jamaica and she says that they take care of their soldiers. Yet a big powerful country like America can't give its soldiers even a little bit. Some soldiers learn to get mad, not at other people, but at the government. I am readjusting myself with some counseling.

We need to show soldiers some respect. Let them know that they have been through something. What happened in Iraq may have been a mistake, but the president started something and he's going to have to clean it up. We can't just back out. We went over there and made another country three times as bad than before we arrived. I saw nice schools and other things, we destroyed all that. We destroyed their way of living. Now there is no government, or something they call a government, and people running around on a rampage. We made it three times worse. I saw what we did to the people. We need to fix it before we move out.

Bush is going to leave it for the next president. I see all these soldiers running for Congress and the Senate, I would vote for any of them: Republican or Democrat. They are probably the only people that could run the government correctly. But, I don't vote. They are going to put who they want to put in office. I know that my people fought hard for the right to vote, but now it is a commercial game.

I am not against the war and I am not for the war. The government should have fixed the mistakes before they happened. If people came into my neighborhood with tanks, what would I do? Would I sit back and watch it happen or would I take out my AK and shoot? I would do the same thing if people attacked my neighborhood. I went to Iraq with orders to do a job, so I had to defend my country. I do not look at it in a political way. All the government is doing is playing with our lives.

Today, I have my own place. Not because of the government, but because of a private donation. If I did not go to the media, I would never have received my VA disability checks. There is a documentary in the Tribeca Film Festival about my return from Iraq and that I was homeless. And, it was not just me: there are many other vets who served in Iraq who are homeless.

## *Michael Harmon*

*Michael Harmon served as a combat medic in the U.S. Army 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and was deployed to Iraq in April 2003. He lives in Brooklyn, NY and is a college student studying respiratory therapy.*

I was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. I was not sure what I was going to do after high school and I took a year off. I met with an Army recruiter, who only told me the great

things about the military and I joined. As a New Yorker, I was also affected by 9/11 and felt that joining the Army made sense. I was shipped to Fort Benning, Georgia in May 2002 for basic training, then to Texas for medical training.

On Martin Luther King Day in 2003, we were told that we were going to war against Iraq. I did not see any tie between Iraq and 9/11. But, I was a fresh, young inexperienced soldier and I did what I was told. My division originally planned to invade through Turkey, but they refused to allow the U.S. entry for the invasion.

After arriving in Iraq, I remember my first taste of combat. I was driving in a HUMVEE smoking a cigarette and all of a sudden I heard machine gun fire, small arms fire and RPGs [rocket propelled grenades] exploding around us. We returned fire. Another day we were doing vehicle checks and my Sergeant and I were enjoying an MRE [meal ready to eat]. We didn't get to eat all that much. We were limited to one MRE and two bottles of water a day. The scout HUMVEE was fired on and it had a Javelin [portable anti-tank weapon] inside, so it exploded. I remember one guy who was literally split open. It was crazy. It was surreal. After such scenes, I would smoke five cigarettes in a row. It felt like I was watching a movie; it was pretty scary and sick. I saw shot children and dead children as well as dead soldiers.

While I was there stuck doing this, I thought I might as well try to help whoever I can. I offered medical services to my fellow soldiers and they appreciated it. This kept me going.

My first sergeant was really scared, he wouldn't leave the base. He used the generator for himself while the soldiers had no lights. My captain, however, was decent and treated us fairly.

I talked with the Iraq people. They wanted to know what we were doing there. One Iraqi said, "Fuck America." But, we were in his country; he had a right to say it. The people really didn't want us there. They were glad Saddam was gone, but they didn't want us there. Poverty in Iraq was unbelievable.

I don't trust my government anymore. The whole war was a lie – based on the false WMD claim. I just read a news story about Tony Blair and George Bush having a meeting where Bush made it clear that he was going to war no matter what. Bush proposed painting a spy plane in United Nations' colors to create an incident where Saddam might fire on it. More and more evidence is coming out against Bush. The whole Bush regime can't be trusted. And a poll showed that over 70 percent of U.S. soldiers want the U.S. to leave Iraq.

The U.S. should withdraw from Iraq immediately. Iraqi polls show that the violence will be less if we leave. The division between the Shiites and Sunnis is largely because of the invasion. Remember Bush divided the U.S., saying "you are either with us, or with the terrorists." He drew a massive rift in this country and he drew a massive rift in Iraq. When I was there early on, I didn't see this Sunni/Shiite tension. Before the invasion,

they were a sovereign country and Bush can't explain that. Another thing Bush says is that he wants democracy. But when it doesn't go his way, he has a fit. For example, Hamas was elected by their people, then Bush said oh no this is not allowed. He is a terrible leader, who is out for "white" America. By this I mean rich, corporate America: Halliburton and the oil companies. He is not looking out for the average person.

Soldiers who return from war are starting to question it. It takes a while to process what happened. When soldiers first return, they are very angry. People should notice this and ask why are these people coming back messed up? Why support something that is destroying soldiers and families in Iraq? I ask people directly: "How would you feel if your child was just blown up?" You can say "support the troops" all you want, and put yellow ribbons on your gas guzzling SUV to feel better about yourself. I say let's wake up. The Bush regime is wrong. People have accused me of being a traitor for saying these things. I am not a traitor. I was a soldier who served in Iraq and I say immediate withdrawal is the way to support the troops.

When I returned home, I did not know what was wrong with me. Your body is so pumped up after being on high alert for so long; you no longer know how to relax. I didn't shower or shave. I was diagnosed with PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder] and took pills, which did not help. There was talk of redeployment after I just returned. I had about a year and a half left on my contract and it was made clear to me that I was going to get stop-loss [service extended beyond discharge date]. I told the military to let me out. There was a fight, they gave me a field grade Article 15 [non-judicial punishment] and stripped my rank. I told them I will not do it any more. They let me go. I guess they didn't want a problem soldier infecting the ranks.

## *Tina Garnanez*

*Tina is a Navajo woman who was raised on the Navajo reservation in north western New Mexico. She is the daughter of a single mother and joined the U.S. Army right out of high school for college money. She served for five years although she only signed up for four. She was not told about the Army's policy of Involuntary Extensions known as a stop-loss. Tina served in Tikrit, Iraq from July to December 2004 with the 557th Medical Company.*

One day in Iraq I was delivering supplies and was nearly killed by a roadside bomb that exploded in front of my vehicle. I was so upset and angry. I was not angry at the Iraqi people, but angry that I was there. I asked myself, "What am I here for?" I decided that I was finished. I was not going to fight for anyone's oil agenda. A lot of soldiers would ask the sergeants, "What are we doing in Iraq?" Eventually when no one higher ranking than they were was around, a few of them would say that it is for oil. I guess to make

rich men richer. But no one in the Army can say things like that publicly for fear of punishment.

The things I saw as a medic were terrible; God-awful things that I can't get out of my head. To be so young, sent to war and to return home expecting to be the same is near impossible. War changes you and there is not a day that goes by that my life is not affected by it. I sit and talk with fellow Iraq veterans and the stories we share are heartbreaking, tragic and are still happening every day in Iraq. It saddens me to know that we have our whole lives left to live with all this guilt, pain, anger and confusion.

On the third anniversary of the Iraq War, I participated in the Veterans Gulf March, "Walking to New Orleans." We marched from Mobile, Alabama to New Orleans and it was unbelievable. I returned from New Orleans completely heartbroken and on fire ready to do more work. The things we saw on that march and the stories we heard from Katrina survivors were devastating. It has been six months since the hurricane and there are folks who haven't seen the Red Cross or FEMA in their areas. And people who have lost everything somehow do not qualify for a FEMA trailer. What the heck is that! I spoke with a man who sleeps under bridges and when I asked him what he wants most he said "a shower." There is trash, debris, rubble everywhere. They fixed New Orleans's heavy tourist areas but St. Bernard Parish and the 9th ward are still completely destroyed. I noticed poor whites and minorities were so glad to see us and supported us, but rich white folks flipped us off and screamed: "Go Bush" as we walked. Some called us Iraq veterans "traitors." It was unreal; I thought there was no one more patriotic than a soldier.

As a Native American, it made me think of our communities that have also been neglected on the reservation just as Iraqi communities are being neglected. The U.S. government wrote our laws and made treaties with us that were broken time and time again. Now the U.S. wrote the Iraqi's new Constitution which does not seem at all to be in their best interest. I will take the spirit from this experience back to my people. The reservations are like the Gulf Coast: devastated. I want to ask young Native Americans, "If the government truly cared about you, they would fix the reservations. Roads are falling apart, houses are falling apart. Why would you want to fight for them when they don't care about you?"

There is nothing wrong with joining the military but I know now that it was not the best decision for me. To those who consider joining or for those still in the military I am proud of you and I support you. There is a difference in being for the troops and against the war.



# *Kevin M. Benderman*

*Kevin served in the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 1-10 Calvary and was deployed to Iraq from March to September 2003. In December 2004, he applied for conscientious objector status, which was subsequently denied. He refused to redeploy in January 2005 and was charged with intentionally missing movement. Kevin was sentenced to 15 months in prison. He wrote the following statement during his incarceration at the Regional Correctional Facility in Fort Lewis, WA. Amnesty International has declared Kevin a prisoner of conscience. Staughton Lynd collected Kevin's testimony by mail.*

I currently reside at Fort Lewis Regional Confinement Facility, better known in some circles as the "American Gulag." Before my unjust conviction in a military (kangaroo) court, I lived with my wife, Monica, in Hinesville, Georgia.

I was in the U.S. Army for nearly ten years. I served a term from January 1987 to March 1991 and another term from June 2000 to July 2005. I had a strong sense of patriotism and I still believe in being a responsible citizen, but I have learned that war is not the only way to serve one's country. My family has a service background, which has been traced back to the American Revolution.

I have been through basic training twice. The first time was at Fort Bliss, Texas from February to April 1987. The second time was at Fort Knox, Kentucky from June to August 2000. Basic training is where you are taught your basic soldier skills, rifle marksmanship, land navigation, survival skills and how to be a soldier. It is where they teach you to put aside any training that you may have received at home to solve problems with nonviolence. For those who have seen the basic training portion of the movie *Full Metal Jacket* it captures what the first basic training was like for me. The second time in basic training was easier because I knew what to expect and the drill sergeants are not allowed to touch an initial trainee or to even raise their voice too loudly at them. It was physically and mentally difficult, but it has to be as its function is to prepare you for the insanity of war.

My first duty station was Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Fort Leavenworth is an officer training post where the Command and General Staff College is located. I was stationed there from 1987 to 1991 until I got out of the Army after the first Persian Gulf War. The strangest thing I saw at Fort Leavenworth were Iraqi army officers being trained at the war college that was there in 1988. The Army was training them because Iraq was a U.S. ally against Iran from 1980 to 1988. I was surprised when we went to war against them not quite two years later.

My second duty station was Fort Hood, Texas and I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. This is the unit that I went to Iraq with in 2003 as it was a heavy armored division. Heavy armored means that you have tanks and other tracked combat vehicles. I was assigned to the C Troop, 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment. I was deployed to Iraq as part of

Operation Iraqi Freedom from March 2003 to August 2003 and it was the most unusual experience I have ever had. It is difficult to express how it really was. You feel fear, but not overwhelming fear because if you did you could not function properly. You feel fear for the people that you are there with because you know that some of them will not return home alive. You feel for the soldiers that you are responsible for. There is a great deal of uncertainty as I had never been to war before this and I did not know what to expect. You are looking for anything and everything to happen. You can never really put your guard down.

Entering a combat situation makes you put a lid on your emotions in order to ensure your safety and the safety of those around you. War is mankind at its collective, absolute worst, but it also can be an individual at his/her best. It can sometimes make a very indecisive person find strength that they did not know they possessed. At its worst, you are there to kill other human beings who have done nothing to you personally and you see how it affects some people.

When you stand at the edge of a mass grave site and see the rotting bodies of women, children and old men, you think to yourself, "Why the hell are we still participating in war in this day and age?" I remember wild dogs at this mass grave digging into them and eating the remains. When you see a young girl standing along the road and she needs immediate medical attention for severe burns and you have to just drive away because you are at war, it leaves you feeling extremely angry at the stupidity of war. When you see the men that you serve with start behaving in ways that they do not normally do because they are trying to cope with the insanity of war themselves, you realize that there is nothing glorious about war.

Combat is a period of doing nothing or doing some very stupid things that your command element dreams up. Combat is also the adrenaline rush of being put on alert for possible enemy contact in the middle of the night; it is also the desire to make it home alive so that you can be with your family.

I remember being angry at the stupidity of the way the war was being handled. After the initial adjustment to being there, I started to realize that we were not there for the stated reasons and I became fully aware that we were being used as pawns to get the natural resources of Iraq.

Every time I thought that we might do something to help the Iraqi people, we were told that we were not there to do that. I remember seeing the young girl with a burned arm and wanting to get her some medical help, but was told that we did not have the resources. Two of our mortar platoon soldiers were injured by shrapnel because of an order from our First Sergeant. I remember the executive officer getting killed because of a computer malfunction on two of the fighting vehicles. Another incident that I remember is our squadron CSM [Command Sergeant Major] shooting wild dogs with a 9mm pistol from his Humvee in our area of operations. He was bragging as if he had done something great.

There was an extreme level of incompetence displayed by the commanding officer element with which I had contact. Some individuals made sound decisions, but overall they were not exactly a competent, professional force. For example, we were in the process of getting a new battalion and company commander while in Iraq. The word initially went out that we would perform a formal command ceremony at the soccer field in Khanaquin. A change in command ceremony requires the battalion of roughly 1,000 soldiers to stand in formation for about two hours in the stateside version and this is what they wanted to do in the middle of a war zone.

After our new company commander took over and settled in, he started to issue orders as he saw fit. He wanted us to retrieve a bronze statue of a horse and bring it back to our maintenance area so that we could remove the anatomically correct penis and testicles from the statute. He wanted to bring it back to the states and deliver it as an "award" to the vehicle crew who shot the worst during firing exercises.

As for the day to day operations, I also remember telling my vehicle driver to keep his head down after we took some small arms fire. My driver had brought a video camera and he wanted to tape the whole thing and was not thinking that there may be more people trying to shoot us. I saw large numbers of Iraqi people along the roadside everywhere that we went. They wanted us to give them food and water, some would shout things such as "USA GOOD" or "Saddam is a Donkey" (which is a serious insult). A large number of them would just watch us go by and they would not do or say anything. I really can not express my feelings about combat on paper. The only way to fully understand it is to experience it yourself first-hand, but if I had my way no one else on the planet would *ever* have to experience war.

Iraq is, in many ways, still living about 100 years behind what is called the modern world. It seemed as if everywhere you went you could find evidence of war to some degree. The contrasts were extreme. Nonetheless, in the town of Khanaquin there were modern concrete structures mixed with hand built adobe structures. You could watch a Mercedes Benz automobile pass a herd of sheep with their shepherd riding a donkey. Sometimes we would wait for hours for cows to move out of the road before we could move our vehicles.

Many areas had no modern sewer systems and it would just drain along the edge of the street, which smelled in the desert heat. Elsewhere it felt strange to be in places that should have been alive with activity and the only other living creatures that you encountered were stray dogs. There were stray dogs all over the country. When we would be away from the towns and cities, we found places that are very much like the stereotypical desert oasis with the palm trees around the river (a branch of the Tigris or Euphrates I suppose). We would take turns bathing in the river or wash our clothes in it. One soldier would stay in a vehicle equipped with a .50 caliber machine gun to provide security for the other guys who were bathing.

“Camel spiders”<sup>7</sup> were nearly everywhere and they could get as large as a small dog. Scorpions were everywhere as well and they were also large, sometimes eight or nine inches long. I saw one of Saddam’s palaces and it was huge – the entire compound must have taken up five city blocks. It was an extreme contrast to the average Iraqi household.

I met many different types of Iraqi people: vendors, construction workers, school teachers, electricians, plumbers, educated, uneducated, administrators and so on. A Mr. Sadullah was an elementary school teacher and he was a very friendly and generous man. He provided a living for himself, his brother and sister, and her children on a \$40 a month salary. Mr. Sadullah always wanted to invite many of us to his home for dinner, which amazed me because I felt that I should be doing something for him instead. He was showering us with hospitality on a very meager budget.

We met a man named Mahmoud, who was a heavy equipment operator. We got him to do some cleaning up of the compound that we set up for our vehicle maintenance. One day Mahmoud’s boss came by and we all ate lunch together. We learned that his boss was a very good dominos player and he also performed some very good card tricks. There was another young man named Asouah, who started a vending service at our compound. He would go to the market area of Khanaquin and bring back sodas, candy and ice cream. He eventually made enough profit from us to afford a second hand truck.

There was a wide variety of people much as in the United States. I do not believe that the majority of that country has ill feelings towards the average American. There are some fanatics just as there are fanatics in any place. I would say that the people of Iraq want the same thing that the American people want: to earn a living, to provide for a family and to be able to live in their country free from war. I believe that they want to determine how they are going to live without interference from the outside.

Since I am no longer on the ground in Iraq, I have to rely on the news to see a little of what is happening. It is my experience that you do not get the full story from the news; you only get what they want you to see. What I see is that Iraq is in a civil war, which must be fought by the Iraqi people without outside interference. The region is very unstable now that the Project for the New American Century decided to use Iraq as its base in the Middle East for the projection of American military and economic power. I see the Shia and the Kurds getting revenge on the Sunnis for real and imagined wrongs perpetrated against them during Saddam’s reign. I was in a largely Kurdish area and all they talked about was getting the Northeastern section of Iraq to be called Kurdistan and separating from Iraq altogether.

In many ways the people of Iraq are worse now than before the invasion in that they are getting less basic services such as electricity and medical care. There seems to be increased malnutrition and increased violence among the different sects, which led to the destruction of a 1,200 year old mosque. This incident only increased violence and anger.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the *National Geographic*, “camel spiders” are Solpugids of the Arachnida group. Internet myths about these creatures abound; see Cameron Walker, “Camel Spiders: Behind the Email Sensation From Iraq,” *National Geographic News*, 29 June 2004.

I guess that I was gullible enough to allow myself to be duped by people who misrepresented the facts to wage war for their own personal gain. They used me in their scheme to invade and plunder a sovereign nation of its mineral wealth. My wife Monica and I have been in contact with some people in Iraq and the war had a devastating personal effect on them. They told us that they live in fear. They are afraid to send their children to school and many people in their neighborhood have left. It is this impact on the people that is most disturbing to me concerning the U.S. invasion of Iraq. I hope the people of America are going to open their eyes and see the truth and hold those who are responsible for this unprovoked and unwarranted destruction accountable for their actions.

There are many issues facing Iraq. Some existed for a long time, but other issues were created by the invasion. American credibility among other nations has been destroyed by this misguided attempt to expand U.S. economic and military power throughout the globe. Our military presence is now fueling the problems we see in Iraq. We need to withdraw U.S. forces so that Iraqi forces can start to provide their own protection. There are many infrastructure problems facing Iraq, such as the power grid, the potable water supply, effective sanitation disposal, security, highway construction, etc. The government of Iraq must find solutions, not Halliburton. Some U.S. corporations might be allowed to offer technical assistance, but they should not be allowed to take over and rebuild the country. There are many intelligent and hardworking Iraqis who are very eager to work and take responsibility for repairing the nation.

The U.S. should withdraw its forces gradually over a six month period, while negotiating with other Arab nations to provide assistance to Iraq. The mineral resources of Iraq should be used to benefit the people of Iraq and not to benefit individuals or corporations elsewhere in the world. Now that evidence proves that the administration had information that Iraq did not possess weapons of mass destruction at the time of the invasion, it must be held accountable. I also believe that the American people should demand full accountability.

People should also be aware that a number of people in this confinement facility should have received rehabilitative treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or other stress factors in their life. Many of these guys went to combat for this country and a lot of them are here due to their inability to cope with the readjustment. There should be better rehab programs for the people serving time here. They have only one program for people serving over two years; it is a wood working program. Most of these guys made mistakes which should not be used to beat them down the way this system does. There are rapists and child molesters who deserve to be incarcerated, but their sentences are somehow shorter than those who went AWOL.

# *Anonymous Marine*

I was active duty infantry. I think most people who join the infantry are not political. They join because they want to experience combat. Most of them aren't even patriotic, at least in my experience. They want to experience war. Especially since the Vietnam War era, they almost want to be, in a sense, victimized. They want to experience this romantic ideal of being a soldier.

When we went to Iraq, it was more like excitement than anything else because we were able to go to war. We're going to become like all those Vietnam vets, we thought, with what they saw over there. We wanted to experience that and be changed in that way and be a veteran and be looked at in that way. I went to Iraq in March 2003. There was excitement, an over-dramatization of war, a kind of romantic appeal at the time.

I was sort of a troublemaker in the Marines. The day before my unit was to leave Kuwait for Iraq I was a lance corporal and I got into an argument with an officer. I was a SAW [Squad Automatic Weapon] gunner and we got into an argument on how to clear trenches. He was a new lieutenant and I felt his decisions would put me in danger. Then he ordered me to clean a portable toilet. I was not about to spend the day before I went to Iraq cleaning toilets. My battalion commander actually NJP'd<sup>8</sup> me. He pointed his finger at me and called me a punk. I had a smile on my face. All my friends were "shit bags" who weren't liked by the officers, but I felt we were pretty well liked by our peers. I was defiant, but got along with everyone in my company. But the officers took me out and put me into a new unit, Bravo Company, where I did not know anybody. So, I got separated from my old company that I had been with for awhile. The officers labeled me a "shit bag" and troublemaker. But, leaving my friends for a different company added to the romantic appeal in a way.

So, now I was going to Iraq in a new unit. I was kind of nervous. I felt the officer and staff sergeant in charge of my platoon were idiots. My unit was one of the units that invaded al-Nasiriyah. Our first casualty in Bravo Company was at night in the middle of the desert and one of our own tanks ran him over. And that really set the pace for the rest of the war from what I experienced. We kept moving through Iraq and, if I remember correctly, on March 23, 2003 we got ambushed in al-Nasiriyah. We coordinated the attack with my old company, Charlie Company. They went into the city first. My battalion commander called in an air strike and they started bombing the city with A-10 Warthogs. Charlie Company was in the city. If my memory serves, 18 members of Charlie Company were KIA [killed in action]. I would guess that 90 percent were killed by our own Warthogs.

My platoon was in the city too. My cowardly platoon sergeant wouldn't let us get out of the tracks [tanks]. He was scared shitless. Many Marines make up war stories and make

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<sup>8</sup> NJP refers to Non-Judicial Punishment under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. It is issued by commanding officers or officers in charge for minor offences.

it seem like *Saving Private Ryan*. In reality it was pathetic. Once we got there, I realized how incompetent most of our officers were. Al-Nasiriyah was one of the first major battles of the war; I think it was in *Time* magazine. It has been romanticized, but most of the killing in that battle was of civilians and dogs. I feel embarrassed and foolish for desiring combat, for wanting to be a war hero.

We then set up some defense outside al-Nasiriyah. I did not see any Iraqi soldiers during this attack. Marines shot at people and dogs, almost as if they needed something to do. Most of the time we did vehicle checks. We checked for weapons. No one ever had any weapons. We took a lot of random prisoners, who were unarmed civilians. Some of the vehicles were shot up because they didn't stop.

Most Marines aren't patriotic. Most marines are in love with the warrior ideal, that's why people join. We used to make fun of all these patriotic songs and George Bush – no one liked Bush. But, we were thankful that we had this war because now we could fulfill childhood fantasies of combat. After seeing what our unit did in Iraq, it made me reevaluate my opinion of the military and what were doing in Iraq. None of the romantic feelings were satisfied. It was just disgusting. I saw people carrying groceries get shot. We couldn't get out of our tracks; it was like a drive by shooting. Some of my Marine friends email me and are mad at me for saying this, they call me a liar. Many of the casualties were from friendly fire. You're not going to get any Marines to tell you this because they want to be warriors who see crazy stuff. Indeed we did see crazy stuff but not anything to be proud about: a lot of dead citizens, sort of a massacre, not real combat. A lot of Marines are reluctant to admit this and they despise me for saying so. I get messages: "You're a lying fucking faggot." This ideal they want attached to them isn't true. I lose respect for them because we discussed amongst ourselves how pathetic the whole thing was. It wasn't heroic. They really did want to fight and they didn't care, they were willing to die. We romanticized these things as if it was cool. We all talked about this.

I think it is important to be realistic about what is going on. The war in Iraq, in the beginning, it has certainly changed since I've been there, but it was foolish as a lot of Iraqi civilians were killed.

Actually, I patrolled the city and ate ice cream with Iraqi civilians. We airdropped all these flyers on how Iraqis should surrender to U.S. soldiers. I met a young boy collecting water for his family. He had one of those flyers on how to surrender. He wasn't afraid; he was friendly and matter-of-fact about it. I searched him to entertain him. His family was really poor and we gave them MREs [meal ready to eat] and clean water. We met his family and I gave him my home address. The people seemed confused. They weren't sure what to think and were nice and cooperative. But later I can remember riots and civilians throwing rocks at us. Other things I remember are kids with sling shots shooting at us.

Staff NCOs [non-commissioned officer] would catch a rioter and put them in a little jail and rough them up. Anything to satisfy combat urges is what it seemed to me. It was almost like we were little kids playing war, shooting at empty buildings.

Anyway, when I was over there, it was just a butcher, a massacre. It is different now but I felt that my time in Iraq was a big, sick joke. Too many civilians were killed and our own Marines were killed by friendly fire.

I left the Marines in the summer of 2004. I had about a month to go before I would get out and I was reading books, getting ready to go to school. I enrolled in college and briefly joined the anti-war movement as my last “fuck you” to the Marine Corps, but as a personal stance not a political one. None of my anti-war actions are political. I am shying away from being an activist because I am not political. I am against the war in Iraq because we don’t know why the hell we are over there. And, we are the ones doing the fighting. More civilians are getting killed than soldiers and that’s why I am against it. Saddam obviously was bad and shouldn’t be a leader of a nation, but I really don’t buy the American romantic stance about freeing all nations.

I can’t really offer much to the anti-war movement. I feel politics are part of the problem. To me it is easier to not think about it. I don’t want to exhaust myself over political arguments. I don’t like biased politics in general.

I do, however, think the anti-war movement is good. To me war is never necessary for anything religious or political. War is a large scale version of one college football team fighting another; everyone thinks war must have some more significance behind it, but it really doesn’t. People view their government like a child views their parents: I am not sure why we are doing this, but it must be okay because my parents said so, or my government said so.

I really am sorry that I sort of blew the cover on the Marines “soldierly” failures. I know that they didn’t want other people to know. I think it is important to know, especially for people who like me hold a romantic view of what the military and war is about. War is pointless, it seems like it is for people who are suicidal and homicidal at the same time. I remember thinking over there, “Are we allowed to do this?” The government just unleashed us on this country, randomly killing people and we were allowed to do it. A government that tries to make fair rules for everybody was allowing us to do things that in civilian life we’d get life in prison.

I was anxious to get away from the hyper-macho mentality of the Marines and go to school. I am doing well in school and I have such an appreciation for intellectual and studious people. I love being in school as I move forward in my life. I think it is important to take your education seriously; those are the people I admire now. After being exposed to hyper-macho people, I really think it is the college students who actually voice their opposition to war who are really the heroes, especially in America because the country was founded on questioning things. Not people who just join the Marines, because the people I met in the Marines could care less about defending their



country, they are interested in experiencing war. The students that were shot at Kent State [by National Guardsman on May 4, 1970] are more heroes than the Marines I knew.

## *Patrick Resta*

*Patrick was an Army medic with the 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry. He served in Iraq from March to November 2004 in the Diyala Province, roughly 100 miles northeast of Baghdad.*

I joined the military after high school in 1996. My main motivation was always money for college and to get some training in the medical field. My parents had made it clear that they were not in a position to assist me with college tuition. I think that many people that join the military do it for the educational benefits.

My aunt and uncle worked in the World Trade Center and were killed on September 11. My National Guard Unit was called up a few weeks after the September 11 tragedy. I was sent to Fort Jackson, South Carolina. When we arrived, they brought us off the buses and into a movie theater. They showed us a slide show of the World Trade Center attacks. They made comments throughout the slide show about getting revenge, etc. The whole idea of attacking nations and the Middle East in retaliation did not make sense to me. It is one thing to go after the people behind the attacks, but to go after the whole Middle East is pretty ridiculous.

In October or November of 2001 I started to hear rumors at Fort Jackson that we were going to invade Iraq no matter what. I dismissed it at first. But, the talk became more and more intense as time went on. My unit eventually deployed to Iraq about a year after the war started, so it was clear to us that there were no weapons of mass destruction. When I was over there, *Stars and Stripes* was running letters to the editor from soldiers who served in Iraq and nearby that were very critical of the war. So, in my own experience and in these letters, there are certainly soldiers who are against the war.

Daily life as a soldier varies greatly by where you are in Iraq. Soldiers at the bigger camps have better amenities than I ever did, such as movie theaters, swimming pools and fast food restaurants. I myself lived in a trailer with three other medics. If you can picture one of the metal shipping containers at a port you have a good idea of the size. It was slightly smaller. It had fluorescent lights, air conditioning, and several power outlets. I rarely, if ever, had a day off for the entire time that I was over there. My days consisted of working in our clinic, going on patrols or missions, or going on convoys to other camps. When I was in Iraq, I did not want somebody simply sending me stale brownies. I wanted them to demand answers and hold the leadership of this nation accountable. Why was a twenty-eight year old kid in my unit killed because the only protection he had on his Humvee was plywood? Why did I have to buy my own body armor?

We were attacked for the first time soon after arriving in our camp on the first night. About four or five insurgents were in the field in front of our camp firing rockets and AK-47's at us. While this attack was going on a car was flying down the road towards our camp. The road dead-ended into our camp and the local nationals knew this and rarely if ever were seen on the road. It was pitch black outside and this car has pieces of scrap metal tied to the roof so long that they are running over the hood and trunk and dragging on the ground creating showers of sparks that look similar to the rockets being fired very close by. At the time there were a lot of soldiers standing at the perimeter of our camp. The unit we were replacing was giving a tour of the guard towers. A Lieutenant ordered a machine gunner to fire a few rounds in front of the car as a warning shot to get them to stop. Most of the guys out there had been told for months that warning shots were not allowed. When the machine gunner started firing so did many other people. The car stopped after it was hit about 20 times.

A team of soldiers was then sent out to get the occupants of the vehicle. The military personnel quickly saw the metal on the car and saw that they were innocent civilians. The victims were brought into our treatment facility and we quickly began rendering care. It was a father in his 40's, his son who was about 12, and the father's brother. The 12-year-old boy was okay because his father jumped on top of him when the shooting started. His father had been shot six times. Four rounds had entered the side of his pelvis and shattered his thighbone. The other two rounds had entered his left upper chest. None of these wounds were life threatening, but would require extensive surgery. His brother had also been hit twice in the chest, these wounds were also not life threatening. After stabilizing these two men they were quickly flown by helicopter from our camp to a field hospital outside Baghdad. I have plenty of other stories of Iraqis getting caught in the crossfire.

Anyway, I was told I was going there to help the Iraqi people. Once I arrived in Iraq, I discovered that I could not treat them unless they were about to die and the injury had been caused either directly or indirectly by U.S. forces. I do not believe that this is conducive to getting people on your side. One evening a local Iraqi arrived at the gate of our camp. He had been beaten up and pistol-whipped, and the people in town told him that if he came back to town they would kill him. He came up to our gate begging for help. I went out to dress his wounds and take care of him. He was begging me to save his life and he was basically turned away and told "Go to the Iraqi police and they will help you." It was after nightfall and the police were not functioning. It was that kind of callous disregard that really set in what is really going on over there for me.

The U.S. occupation does not have the support of the overwhelming majority of Iraqis. A U.S. State Department poll indicated that 75 percent of Iraqis want the U.S. to leave the country. If it was wrong of us to go into Iraq, it is wrong of us to stay. The administration sent is to war without equipment, without a plan and without a mission. I will continue to speak out until the last soldier leaves Iraq.

# *Ann Wright*

*Ms Wright served in the U.S. Army and Army Reserve for 29 years, followed by 16 years in the State Department. She received an award for heroism for evacuating over 2,500 people during civil unrest in Sierra Leone. Ms Wright was also instrumental in reopening the U.S. embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan in December 2001. In March 2003, she resigned from the U.S. State Department in protest of the Bush administration's foreign policy.*

I was member of a five-person team that reopened the U.S. embassy in Kabul in December 2001. I felt that after 9.11 the United States needed to take some kind of action. Members of al Qaeda had taken down three buildings and slammed a plane into the ground. I felt it was appropriate to go to Afghanistan and track some of these people. As it turned out, the Bush administration's method of taking action was not very good. It did succeed in removing the Taliban, which was a favor to the people of Afghanistan, but it really did not affect al Qaeda very much. They already had their plans to leave the obvious areas before the invasion.

I was in Afghanistan for five months. It was dangerous, but we could still travel the country and talk to the Afghan people and the new members of the Afghan administration. The folks that we were speaking with were thrilled that finally the international community had taken some action. But they said please take more action so that the warlords do not retake control of Afghanistan and continue the rape, plunder, and pillaging of Afghanistan that occurred since the Soviets were kicked out. It wasn't something one could tell the average Afghan that we were going to make that happen. We had already given millions of dollars to virtually all of the warlords in exchange for their helping to remove the Taliban. Some of them offered very minor assistance. Now we have situation where the warlords are re-equipped with weapons and now have plenty of money and are causing trouble for the new government. The picture is not pretty for the future of Afghanistan. The warlords will continue, as they have for the last thirty years, to be a challenge. They are not ready to give up the parts of the country that they control.

And, there was a very small U.S. military force in Afghanistan in December 2001 when we reopened the U.S. embassy. We sent back dispatches to Washington asking, "Where the hell is the U.S. military?" We wondered why military forces were only concentrated in Kabul. The warlords on the Iranian side, by Herat, already were taking the customs fees that should have gone to the central government. We also asked where is the money for economic assistance? It should be coming in now. But it was very slow in arriving. The light bulb went off in everyone's head when the president said in his State of the Union address in January 2002 that there were other countries of interest in the world. He identified the axis of evil: Iraq, Iran and North Korea. No wonder we were not getting the attention of the U.S. government that we needed in Afghanistan. It was already being diverted to what ultimately turned out to be the war in Iraq.

I had been in government service most of my adult life. I had seen the U.S. government, with virtually every administration that I served, do things that were not particularly good for U.S. foreign policy. Looking back, there are policies that I probably should have resigned over. But in every administration, I found some niche where I felt like I was helping other people and helping the security of America. But, for me, the overwhelmingly negative consequences of going to war in an oil-rich Arab country, invading and occupying an oil-rich Arab country that had not done anything to the U.S., was a disaster from the beginning. I honestly still can't figure out why more people didn't resign from the State Department and from other agencies of the federal government. I received over 400 emails from colleagues around the world in the first week after I resigned. The emails said that we respect what you did; this war is going to be terrible. I wasn't resigning in protest of the State Department. Although I felt Colin Powell should have resigned from his position as Secretary of State as his resignation was probably the only resignation that might have prevented the war. I knew that my resignation was not going to stop the administration from going to war in Iraq, but as a point of conscience I felt that I had to resign.

I remember vividly watching television at the embassy in Mongolia when Colin Powell gave his presentation to the UN Security Council. We all knew there was a twelve year embargo on Iraq and there were two no-fly zones over Iraq. We knew that UN weapons inspectors over a period of eight years really investigated the country quite well, and their judgment was that there were no weapons of mass destruction. All of this was common knowledge. We were taken aback by Colin Powell's presentation. The United States also did some arm twisting behind the scenes and threatened to cut off military and economic aid if countries did not vote for the resolution to go to war. With all this arm twisting, if the UN Security Council still did not vote to go to war, then the U.S. was on legal thin ice. I did not believe that Iraq was an imminent threat to the United States.

There are three common explanations on why the Bush administration went to war. One is that Bush had surrounded himself with advisers that were left over from the Reagan and Bush I administrations. Advisers that felt George Bush, Sr. should have gone into Baghdad and toppled Hussein after Gulf War I. That same group had been lobbying DURING the Clinton administration that action be taken against Saddam. Another reason is the alleged assassination plot against Bush, Sr. by Iraq. The third one is the drive for U.S dominance of the oil fields in the Middle East. By propping up a regime in Iraq that was favorable to the U.S., corporate interests and oil companies would get sweetheart deals in Iraq. The sweetheart deals would never be passed down to the American consumer. Instead, they would insure that corporate profits would soar to the highest levels in the history of the world.

The curtailment of civil liberties is another reason why I resigned. The U.S. Constitution and the laws we have are very strong. For thirty-five years, I was proud to go across the world and highlight the strengths of our freedoms. I felt that the Bush administration's passage of the Patriot Act was unnecessary in many aspects, although there were some parts of it that I agreed with, such as forcing the FBI and CIA to share lists of potential

terrorists with the State Department so that visas would not be issued to them. The Patriot Act allows the government to apprehend any person that it says has some tie to information about terrorism. The government does not have to tell a neutral person, such as a federal judge, what it has done. It can hold any person for an indeterminable length of time for a suspicion of ties to terror. But every single person taken into custody must have charges filed against them and be taken before a judge. They are holding people that we do not even know about. We have to be very concerned about the Patriot Act.

As long as American troops are in Iraq, the chaos will continue. It was created by us and as long as we remain, there will be people to fight against us. For the violence to lessen, the U.S. must withdraw. But, this does not mean it would be a vacuum. An immediate withdrawal would not occur before three months, and in that time, the Iraq government can determine who it wants to assist it. Each of the factions in Iraq has dealt with international groups that they are more comfortable with than the U.S., which unilaterally invaded and occupied the country.

I ask that all Americans to look carefully at what is going on and to look past the rhetoric that the administration continues to put out. The invasion and occupation of a country that was no threat to the U.S. is a war crime. The chaos will continue as long as the U.S. is in Iraq because most of the Iraqis do not want us there. We must also consider the extraordinary debt that the United States has incurred because of this war and recognize the unnecessary costs that this administration has decided to go to war for: the corporate interests that are being served by the privatization of the military and a needless war that feeds into the military-industrial-complex that Eisenhower warned us about fifty years ago. We've got to stop this war and not let any military actions occur again, unless our national security is truly threatened.

## *Celeste Zappala*

*Celeste is the mother of Sergeant Sherwood Baker, who was the first soldier from the Pennsylvania National Guard to die in the Iraq War. Sherwood, a social worker in civilian life, leaves a wife and young son. He joined the National Guard in 1997. Celeste is a founding member of Gold Star Families Speak Out and a member of Military Families Speak Out. She is also on the Advisory Board of the National Council of Churches.*

My son, Sherwood Baker, served in the Pennsylvania National Guard and was deployed to Iraq in March 2004. He was killed in an explosion in Baghdad while he was protecting the Iraq Survey Group. They were the people who were looking for the weapons of mass destruction and he was assigned to look after them. Sherwood had been in Baghdad for six weeks. He was thirty years old and in civilian life he worked as a counselor for disabled adults.

The Iraq Survey Group, headed by Charles Duelfer, was still looking for the weapons of mass destruction in April 2004 after everyone had generally agreed that they were not there, but the administration was still looking for them. One day they were supposed to examine a small factory. Some people said it was a perfume factory, so they were not sure if they were going to go on the mission. The morning of the mission they were supposed to take a large anti-explosive truck with them, but the truck broke down. They were told to go on the mission anyway. They arrived at the building and there was an explosion. Sherwood tried to get out of his truck to help the others. There was a second explosion that sent debris flying through the air and caught him in the back of his head. The day of his funeral in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, one thousand people came.

Sherwood was a card-carrying democrat and did not vote for George Bush, but he took an oath to serve and he loved the guys that he served with. He was not a vengeful person; he just wanted to protect "his men." One of the things that was especially difficult for Sherwood was a training exercise. The soldiers were told that if they were in a tank they had to keep moving no matter who got in front of them. They practiced running over cardboard cut outs of kids.

While in Iraq, Sherwood called home and told me that food and water were being rationed. This was after we had to buy him equipment. We bought him a field phone and global positioning device, which was infuriating: to be expected to buy equipment for my son who was being sent off to war. When he told me that food and water was being rationed, I called newspapers and Congressional representatives, and no one cared. We sent a large package of food to Sherwood a few days before he was killed. He never got it. The package was sent back to us during Memorial Day weekend. It was waiting by our front door after we visited Sherwood's grave site that weekend. I couldn't bring it into the house. I left it on the porch.

In March 2004, George Bush made a joke about looking for the weapons of mass destruction at the annual correspondents' dinner in Washington, DC. Bush was pretending to look under a desk and around the room for the weapons and it brought the house down. They found it riotously funny. Yet, people like Sherwood were still looking for the weapons for real. People were risking their lives looking for weapons that did not exist and the Bush folks made a joke out of it.

I do not think war is something to joke about. I think this war is unjustified, immoral, and illegal. People often ask me, "What is the definition of a just war?" The definition of a just war is the one that you are willing to send your own children to. The architects of the war have shown us that it's not such a just war. How is it okay for my son to go and be killed in this war that no one can explain, but the people who wanted the war don't send their kids?

I feel that the administration has betrayed the military in the way that they have casually used those people. The administration sent soldiers to a war and it still can't even agree

on what the reason for going is. I do not in any way wish to denigrate the soldiers. After all, my son was a soldier.

When Sherwood was killed, I made a decision that I would not be quiet. I met other families who spoke out. I work closely with Military Families Speak Out, which now includes 3,500 families of both the fallen and soldiers currently serving. It is a powerful idea that military families themselves will speak. I also think it is important that the mothers, wives, and girlfriends of soldiers are speaking out. I recall the mothers of the “disappeared” in Argentina in the 1970s who would hold the pictures of their children and demand to know what had happened to them. This image is so informing and empowering for me.

We also have to remember the tens of thousands of Iraqis who had no decision in what has happened to them. Iraqi people run over the same bombs that our soldiers are running over. We must remember the people caught in the crossfire. The U.S. presence does not help them. The vast majority of Iraqis want the U.S. to leave.

I wrote a poem in July 2004 when the number of fallen soldiers was near 900. Today the number is much higher:

2,472  
Just a number perhaps  
a moment,  
at sometime today  
some young person's life  
swung in the balance,  
they drew their last breath  
and were gone.  
And all the hopes  
that rode on them,  
all the prayers  
that followed them,  
from all the people  
who loved them are done.  
All the glorious days  
of a future  
they would have held,  
dreams they had in their heart,  
words they wanted to say  
and maybe children  
they hoped to have  
are gone.  
In the wind of the desert,  
in the smoke of explosion  
at the speed of a bullet.  
Gone.

And we who mourn them  
will never know  
who they may have become,  
what light they may have given  
the World.  
In their name  
and with all the love we possess  
let us work  
to stop this war.

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## Contact Information

If you are a veteran or family member who wishes to participate in the Historians Against the War Oral History Project, contact: Carl Mirra, Oral History Project, P.O. Box 58, Eastport, NY 11941. E-mail: [mirracc@yahoo.com](mailto:mirracc@yahoo.com)

Groups that assist Veterans and their families:

**Citizen Soldier**, 267 Fifth Ave., #901, New York, NY 10016

**The GI Rights Hotline**, 405 14th Street Suite 205, Oakland, CA 94612.  
Phone: (800) (800) 394-9544

**Gold Star Families for Peace**. E-mail: [contact@gsfp.org](mailto:contact@gsfp.org)

**Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America**, 770 Broadway, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10003. E-mail: [info@IAVA.org](mailto:info@IAVA.org)

**Iraq Veterans Against the War**, P.O. Box 8296, Philadelphia, PA 19101.  
E-mail: [ivaw@ivaw.net](mailto:ivaw@ivaw.net)

**Military Families Speak Out**, P.O. Box 300549, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.  
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For additional copies of this pamphlet, write to Historians Against the War, PO Box 442154, Somerville, MA 02144. The cost (including postage) is \$1 per copy for 1 to 4 copies, \$0.80 per copy for 5 to 24 copies, or \$0.60 per copy for 25 or more copies. Make checks out to Historians Against the War.