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January, 2009
Issue #21

" I Could Not, In Good Conscience, Continue To Serve In The U.S. Army"

Statement of André Shepherd at press-conference in Frankfurt/M. (Germany), November 27, 2008

Hello,

My name is Andre Shepherd, and I was a member of the U.S. Army before finding that my conscience would no longer allow for me to continue in such a capacity.

I am currently Absent With Out Leave (AWOL) and am requesting asylum in Germany. I am asking for your support in this difficult matter.

I enlisted in the military in January of 2004 and worked my way up in rank from private to specialist by the time I left my unit in June of 2007. I served most of my enlistment in Katterbach, Germany, with the 412th Aviation Support Battalion and was deployed to Iraq from September 2004 to February 2005.

My mission in Iraq was to repair and maintain the AH-64 Apache helicopter, which were then used to support the infantry or to find and destroy the "enemy combatants."



My job appeared harmless, until one factors in the amount of death and destruction those helicopters caused to civilians in Iraq.

When I read and heard about people being ripped to shreds from the machine guns or being blown to bits by the Hellfire missiles as well as buildings and infrastructures being destroyed I began to feel ashamed about what I was doing.

It is a sickening feeling to realize that I took part in what was basically a daily slaughter of a proud people.

The second battle for Fallujah is a vivid reminder of the level of destruction that these and other weapons can inflict upon a population.

I believe the Apache is responsible for a significant portion of the civilian death toll in Iraq which at last count was at least 500,000.

I am remorseful for my contribution to these heinous acts, and I swear that I will never make these mistakes again.

When enlisting, I took an oath to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic."

After my deployment to Iraq, however, I began to question whether I was doing what I had signed up to do.

I spent many months researching the causes of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and what the U.S. military

was doing in those countries, and I came to the conclusion that both invasions were illegal according to U.S. and international law.

We have destroyed nations, killed leaders, raided homes, tortured, kidnapped, lied, and manipulated not just citizens and leaders of our enemies, but of our allies as well.

I could not, in good conscience, continue to serve in the U.S. Army.

The U.S. military does not offer a discharge for someone who believes they are being asked to take part in an illegal war, but believes appropriate force is occasionally necessary.

I had to choose between ignoring my beliefs and leaving the military illegally. For me, the correct path was clear: I had to leave.

It is perhaps appropriate that I am applying for asylum in Germany, where the Nuremberg trials took place 60 years ago. One of the main things that were established during these trials was that one cannot defend one's actions by claiming to have merely been following orders.

If I had stayed in the U.S. Army and continued to participate in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, I could not legally argue that I was just doing my job. Here in Germany it was established that everyone, even a soldier, must take responsibility for his

or her actions, no matter how many superiors are giving orders.

I recognize that the U.S. military could try to charge me with desertion with intent to shirk hazardous duty during a time of war. If I were to be found guilty of such a crime, U.S. military regulations state they have the right to convict me with a penalty of death. Nevertheless, I made the decision that I believe is right.

There have been many Germans who have called the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan illegal and immoral. It is only logical to suggest then that the soldiers who participate in these wars are also committing illegal and immoral acts.

The question now is whether Germany will grant asylum and stand with those soldiers who refuse to take part in these wars.

Barack Obama will become president of the United States in January. He campaigned with a message of change and has stated he wishes to end the Iraq War. He has repeatedly stated that as president he will move the troops from Iraq into Afghanistan.

However, this does not translate into sympathy for those who refuse to take part in an illegal war. I believe no pardon or amnesty will be given before both conflicts have ended.

Furthermore, fellow AWOL Army soldier Robin Long was recently deported from Canada to the United States, where he now sits in military prison.

Mr. Obama never stated an intention to reversing the Bush Doctrine, nor has he stated any intention to bring the Bush administration to justice for their part in these criminal activities.

Mr. Obama's silence on these issues speaks volumes as to his current disposition toward those who refuse to fight.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact Tim Huber from the Military Counseling Network and Rudi Friedrich from Connection e.V..

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"We cannot allow any president to shift focus to Afghanistan"

By Camilo Mejia

During the final presidential debate at Hofstra University in Hempstead, N.Y., members of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) requested that moderator Bob Schieffer allow them to ask each candidate a question.

The question for Sen. McCain was about veterans' benefits since, being a war veteran and former POW himself, he should have a better voting record when it comes to veterans' well-being. The question for Sen. Obama, who voted against the invasion of Iraq and called



the invasion illegal at one point, focused on whether he would be willing to support soldiers who wanted to become conscientious objectors.

Not only was IVAW not able to ask the questions, but we were attacked by the Hempstead mounted police. Ten of our members, along with some civilian activists, were arrested, and two of our members were injured, one suffering a broken cheekbone.

Neither candidate mentioned either Iraq or Afghanistan during the entire 90-minute debate.

The promise of a better nation, one whose resources are dedicated to improving social conditions and where wealth is distributed to lift up the working ranks of society, rings hollow when military veterans can't ask a question without being violently repressed.

All this is to say that regardless of who gets elected, the work of building a better world remains in the hands of the people and rests on our ability to assert ourselves as the true architects of our future.

Obama is regarded as the antiwar candidate for having voted against the invasion of Iraq and for promising a progressive withdrawal of troops from that country, and both he and McCain have spoken about the success of the troop "surge" in Iraq.

But to seriously address the situation in Iraq and the eventual withdrawal from it would require Obama to address the 180,000 private contractors in Iraq, the permanent military bases, and the diplomatic and

corporate complex from which the U.S. government intends to run the country. And of course, the "success" of the surge fails to recognize that more than half of the population of Iraq is either displaced, in need of emergency aid or dead.

The "global war on terror," the name given by the past and now present administrations to justify profit-driven invasions and occupations, needs a new centerpiece.

The Iraq war has become too unpopular to continue justifying the U.S. imperial agenda.

We cannot allow any president to shift focus to Afghanistan in order to continue American warmongering.

President Obama has promised to continue pouring troops into that country and to see the war spill into Pakistan if he deems it necessary.

The antiwar movement has to realize the need to continue the struggle for peace and justice, a struggle that starts at home where, in opposing costly and illegal wars of aggression, we wage battles against poverty, racism and exploitation of the working class by the ruling elite.

Only by building a true grassroots movement to combat a corporate-controlled government will we be able to create a world where peace, justice and social equality can prevail.

This is the work of the people, not of the politicians, regardless of who is president.

It has been going on, it continues, it can never stop, not for one minute.



Nick Morgan, former Army Sergeant, was trampled, knocked out, and his face crushed by the hoof of a horse outside the last presidential debate. Police left him unconscious on the sidewalk for up to ten minutes before arresting him. Morgan was initially refused medical treatment beyond a simple piece of gauze taped to his face. His right cheek bone was clearly displaced and pushed back into his skull.

For more, see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxhuZeq_7yQ

" I could not live with myself if I kept my head down and went into another deployment without taking any action"

By Jennifer Fenton
November 17, 2008
Excerpts from *The Wip*

"We have an entire generation of people in their twenties and thirties who have never gone through a war ... the media and government have gotten so good at the creation of messages, people don't know the reality" -- Casey J. Porter

Army Sergeant Casey J. Porter has many battles to fight, and unlike the dramatizations of politicians and media commentators, his battles are concrete, real, and hard fought.

During his time as an enlisted soldier deployed in Iraq, Casey has undergone an evolutionary process, one that has taken him from warrior to peace activist.

His talent and passion for filmmaking have given him the perfect medium for his personal expression. Utilizing his current circumstances and natural talent as a filmmaker to speak out against the war, Casey's films have turned the heads of people like Amy Goodman of Democracy Now! and filmmaker Michael Moore.

I was fortunate enough to spend some time with Casey recently.

Phoning from Iraq, his soft-spoken voice was not quite what I expected -- his intellect, courage, and tenacity are apparent, even from three thousand miles away.

"Most Americans are not affected on a daily basis by this war; it is not personal for them ... I can tell you for example, that what is happening in Iraq is always in the daily thoughts of my mother."

After serving one tour of duty in Iraq, and completing his voluntary commitment to the military, Casey found himself entangled in the controversial military policy, "stop-loss."

The "Backdoor Draft" as some have called it, is the means by which the United States Military may extend the terms of service of a United States soldier to retain them longer than the period for which they volunteered.

Shortly before his second deployment to Iraq, Casey became a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) and helped found its Fort Hood chapter.

For Casey, the decision to join the anti-war group was natural.

As he experienced the plight of the Iraqi people and the injury and loss of friends who served, his opposition and activism grew into an all out personal mission.

Casey has taken his misfortune as a "stop-loss" soldier and turned it into an opportunity to make a difference in how the occupation of Iraq is perceived by Americans.

While discussing his films, Casey says, "most importantly, this is not about me at all, but the soldiers around me and those who continue to deploy year after year. This has been, and will always be about them."

To watch his films, *What War Looks Like* and *Deconstructed* (see below), one cannot help but feel an intimate connection to the reality in Iraq.

Images of dead bodies, blown-out Humvees, and services for soldiers who have lost their lives challenge the myths, sound bites, talking points, and infotainment created by politicians and media pundits.

"The photos you see of soldiers' services in *What War Looks Like* were taken by me," Casey explains.

"Standing there and watching fellow soldiers experience such loss changes you. Watching Iraqi children dig through landfills for food changes you. Seeing the senselessness of it all compels me to speak out ...

"I know that I am not the only soldier who feels this way about the continued occupation of Iraq. Whether they're soldiers who have been stop-lossed or this is their first time over here -- they are seeing the truth for themselves."

Casey cites the stark contrast between his daily experiences in Iraq and what is reported in US media as an important reason for taking action.

Crucial details are kept from view -- details that dramatically influence the daily lives of thousands of Americans and their families.

The hardship of these families, which goes largely unrecognized except for the splattering of yellow ribbon magnets on cars, is the main reason Casey finds himself motivated to act.

"I could not live with myself if I kept my head down and went into another deployment without taking any action ... the hardest stand to take is from within," he says.

After the creation of *What War Looks Like* and the subsequent Internet stir it caused, Casey realized the

potential he had to make a difference with what he calls “guerrilla-style filmmaking.”

Casey’s vision for telling the truth and reaching large audiences is slowly gaining momentum on YouTube; his short films continue to garner support from thousands of activists, fellow soldiers, and concerned Americans.

Before we hung up, I asked Casey to comment on the recent lull in the violence in Iraq, which has been credited to “the surge” of forces injected by the Bush Administration in 2007.

Casey points to the stifling heat, the re-organization of resistance fighters and the continued construction of walls throughout Iraq’s cities.

The effects of walls and checkpoints, he notes, rarely make it into US media headlines or political talking points.

But one recent report by AP writer Hamza Hendawi supports Casey’s assertion: similar to the walls and checkpoints constructed by Israel throughout the West Bank, Baghdad’s walls lead to gridlock, rising prices for food and homes, and complaints about living in what feels like a prison.

“The look on the faces of the Iraqi people shows just how angry and worn out they feel ... and I apologize every chance I get.”

As long as these walls and checkpoints remain, Casey says Iraqis have no real hope of rebuilding a strong stable economy. This is hardly the free and democratic society promised by the Bush administration.

The continued contradiction between the reality of the war and deliberately inaccurate rhetoric has compelled this soldier to turn his personal misfortune into a source of hope.

Casey believes a populace armed with knowledge will act to end the unjustified occupation of Iraq. It is here that Casey has placed his hope for a safe return and an end to this war. And it is in Casey that many have placed their hope for humanity.

The films by Sergeant Casey J. Porter:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iWGYWLv7-Y>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxtNeSm0NHo>

D.o.D. Says Toxic Chemicals Safe to Inhale

Thanks to SSG N (ret’d) who sent this in. SSGs’ comments in bold face.

11.17.08 Army Times [Excerpts]

Disabled American Veterans has issued a call to all service members and veterans who think they may have illnesses related to burn pits in Afghanistan and Iraq: Contact DAV so it can collect data and look for trends.

One Air Force bioenvironmental engineer, Lt. Col. Darrin Curtis, was so worried by the chemicals he believed were being released into troops’ living and work spaces at Joint Base Balad, Iraq, that he warned: “In my professional opinion, the known carcinogens and respiratory sensitizers released into the atmosphere by the burn pit present both an acute and chronic health hazard to our troops and the local population.”

Air Force officials say they had cleaned up the Balad burn pit as of June by using two incinerators and recycling plastic bottles. A report shows that tests in 2007 reflected an “acceptable risk” for cancer-causing and other poisonous toxins from the pit.

“It’s a fantastic before-and-after story,” said Army Capt. Lynn Thompson, waste management officer for Balad from March to October. “The contractor who runs the place is planning to build a tennis court about 100 meters west of the trenches.” **[And what is the 'after story?' Can the contractor be held responsible for tennis players who get sick?]**

Thompson said that he personally inspects the trenches every day, that the 147 tons of waste now burned are lumber and contractor-produced garbage, **[Theirs is different from military garbage? Tell me it doesn't stink!]** and that the pit no longer takes in paints, plastics, solvents, rubber or unexploded ordnance. Petroleum products are stored as hazardous material, rather than burned as they were in the past. The 90,000 plastic water bottles that used to go into the pit daily now are recycled.

The blackness of the pit’s plume is from dining facility vegetable oil and will be eliminated within two months, Thompson said. **[That would be enough vegetable oil to deep fry a C 130.]**

Service members told *Military Times* that they have asthma that was diagnosed after they left Balad; that they have allergy-like symptoms for the first

time in their lives; that an unusual number of people in their units have developed cancer; that they are failing the runs on their physical fitness tests because of breathing problems; and that their headaches still haven't gone away months after returning home.

One Army officer reported a brain tumor.

"The fact that DoD says it's safe just makes no sense at all," Baker said. "Dioxin was used in herbicides in Vietnam. Now it's a byproduct of the burn pits.

"But you don't just have dioxin — you have a list of other chemicals. We need to look at the combined effect of all these chemicals." John Bradley, a legislative consultant for DAV, said the group can look for a positive association between a deployment and disease, and that can lead VA to presume the diseases were caused by this war. The proof shouldn't rest on the veteran, he said.

Army Staff Sgt. Danielle Nienajadlo said her time in Balad led to a nightmare that will haunt her forever.

Immediately upon arrival, she said she started coughing and blowing out black stuff. Soon, she lost

her appetite. She felt nauseated, constantly tired and had trouble breathing.

She went to sick call several times, only to be told she might be stressed out.

As a vehicle mechanic, she spent much time at the motor pool near the burn pit. When she ran for fitness training, she inhaled the noxious fumes. She said the smoke constantly hung over her living quarters.

"We were always covered in ash and dirt," she said. "People got bloody noses and headaches."

Once, she stayed up all night with hot sweats and a fever, so she went to the emergency room and begged doctors to draw her blood.

They did. Her white blood cell count was over the top: She had leukemia.

She believes the burn pit served as a catalyst for her cancer.

"I know I got it out there," she said.

After a full course of chemotherapy at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, where she remains, she said she's doing better. But she will be checked every three weeks for the next five years.

"I'm in remission," she said. "I know I'm blessed. If I'd waited another day, I would've died."



READER-SUBMITTED PHOTO: *ARMY TIMES*, 11.17.08

"It Amazes Me That Officials Say It's Not Hazardous, Yet Somehow You Mysteriously Develop These Problems After You Get There"

Letters To The Editor
Army Times
11.17.08

I was stationed at Joint Base Balad in Iraq last year for about a month on my last deployment with the 202nd Red Horse Squadron.

I remember seeing the ashes fall from the burn pit on the job.

I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma this past February and finished treatments a few weeks ago. I received a discharge because of the cancer this past July with 10 years of service. My family has no history of this type of cancer.

I really believe that this came from my last deployment overseas in Balad.

From what I know, I am one of four people in my unit to be diagnosed with cancer in the past two years, with less than 200 people in the squadron.

— **Former Air Force Staff Sgt. Edward Lee Buquo**
Camp Blanding, Fla.

I was stationed at Balad from December 2005 through May 2006.

I am a firefighter and was tasked countless times to extinguish the blaze at the pit when smoke impaired the towers' view of the airfield.

We inhaled that disgusting stuff while performing our duty. It was bad enough just living on the base breathing the poor-quality air, but driving around in the pit was horrendous.

While I understand that air sanitation was not at the forefront of anyone's mind going into Iraq, let us not pretend that the smoke is not a health hazard.

— **Air Force Tech. Sgt. Rusty Thomason**
Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska

My duties in air transportation placed me downwind from a burn pit.

The smoke would often choke out our cargo grid yard for days at a time.

I spent 12-plus hours a day, four to six days a week, for six months breathing black smoke that often made myself and others gag.

We could see in the burn pit not only plastics on the flames, but also old scrap metal such as tin and razor wire. Sometimes you could taste the metal in the smoke.

I'm experiencing problems with my lungs since about halfway through my deployment.

The clinic told me I had a respiratory infection.

However, my breathing problems are ongoing and the inhalers I have been prescribed provide only minimal relief.

My run time for the 1½ -mile run went from about 10 ½ minutes to 13:59 in six months.

Judging by the lack of improvement in my lungs, I am looking at a debilitating condition.

My concern is my responsibility to maintain the Air Force standard for physical fitness and mission readiness.

I cannot fill the requirements in my current condition and the doctors, while concerned, don't have the background knowledge on what I was exposed to.

— **Name withheld**

It's a disgrace that the Air Force will not fully acknowledge the burn pits' effects towards all the people who have served at Balad.

Where is the inspector general or investigation services?

Is the Air Force planning on force shaping our own Bio/Health services so there will be less complaints brought up the chain?

— **Name withheld**

I was based at Balad from March 2004 to February 2005. Even though I was located on the opposite side of the base from the burn pit, at times, the smoke from the burn pit would bank down so low that it was like driving through a forest fire.

— **Army Reserve Sgt. 1st Class John Wingfield**
Fort Knox, Ky.

My story is about Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, a Marine Corps air station similar to Balad.

The company I was with in Iraq experienced many headaches, migraines and shortness of breath.

While some of us were fortunate to sleep in the center of the base, away from the smoke pits, there were also Marines sleeping next to the smoke pits.

The Marines who happened to be exposed were constantly going to medical with headaches and migraines.

Medical told them to suck it up and shut up.

One Marine did some research and concluded that the smoke from the garbage pit was causing the problems.

He showed the information to medical, who finally contacted our commanding officer, and he had them moved immediately. All this took place five or six months into the deployment.

— **Name withheld**

I was deployed (to Balad) with the 332nd Joint Expeditionary Operations Support Squadron from January to May 2005.

The burn pit was a huge source of anger for just about everyone I knew there.

The smoke would routinely hover over parts of the airfield during the late-night and early-morning hours because of temperature inversions keeping the plume on the surface or just above. This delayed many flights and was a hazard for medevac missions.

Upon outprocessing, we were told that testing concluded that the smoke was nontoxic and not harmful to anyone in the vicinity.

We were even told to sign a form — I think it was one of those waiver-of-liability type of things.

Every one of us looked at each other like, “You’ve gotta be kidding me.”

There’s no way that stuff was not harmful.

— **Name withheld**

I served at Balad from November 2003 until February 2004.

The stench of that burn pit with the heavy particulates hung over our tent city every day, and it was particularly bad at night — like a dark fog.

I got my first upper respiratory infection after being there a month and nearly had bronchitis.

I had never been so sick in my life. I went to sick call, and the doctor said lots of people were reporting the same symptoms.

I recently retired from the Air Force Reserve.

A review of my medical records shows no mention of my sickness while in Balad — all records of my time there were purged.

Twice a year since my re-turn, I have developed the same sickness, almost like clockwork. A trip to the doctor and a week of antibiotics, and I am fine.

— **Former Air Force Reserve Sgt. Eric Gibeaut
Columbia, S.C.**

I was deployed to Balad from September 2007 through mid-January 2008.

All day, every day, all you saw was that plume of smoke rising out of the burn pit. It was worse at night, the smoke would settle on the ground like a thick fog.

It would get so bad that it literally choked you.

There was no relief from it; it would seep into our living quarters, making it difficult to sleep or even relax. You would blow your nose and get nothing but black nasty mucus, plus the wheezing, sinus problems, headaches and eye irritation.

It amazes me that officials say it’s not hazardous, yet somehow you mysteriously develop these problems after you get there.

The officials need to do what they tell us: Suck it up — and take care of the troops who have been exposed.

— **Name withheld**

I was stationed at Balad from January to June 2006.

The burn pit was constantly burning — day and night.

When we drove by it, everything imaginable was in there. Destroyed vehicles from IEDs to old Iraqi vehicles abandoned during the takeover.

I worked 100 yards from the burn pit, and on any given night, if the wind blew the right way, we would step outside and walk into a fog of smoke and stench.

I never had migraines before deploying to Iraq, but I was in such pain there that one night I had to go to the hospital and get IVs for morphine and another medication so I would stop throwing up.

Since then, I’ve had a few of the same type of headache, but not as bad.

I received a copy of the memo for my medical records stating that the burn pit could cause adverse effects.

— **Air Force Staff Sgt. Scott A. Chamberlain
Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho**

This is a problem not only at Balad but also at Camp Al Taqaddum.

During my tour there last year, I was a maintenance chief, and my Marines worked outside 24 hours a day.

Most nights there would be soot or ash falling, and we would breathe this stuff in all night.

I also recall many nights waking up in my little 6-by-8 ply-wood hooch thinking it was filled with smoke because the taste and the smell was so thick.

During the day, you could see usually two separate burns going at the same time with plumes of smoke so black we thought that an oil line was set ablaze.

Many of us had the “crud” (hacking coughs, a lot of mucus) for most of the deployment, and like most, we had to suck it up and chalk it up to the environment we were in.

— Marine Corps staff sergeant, name withheld

I was at Balad in 2007 and 2008, and the burn pit is the nastiest thing you can imagine. Constant black smoke billows out, and if there is no wind, it settles on the base like a thick fog in which you can’t breathe.

I noticed headaches and sinus issues during my deployments there. Also, you can forget doing any sort of PT with the nasty air. Your lungs would burn if you tried to work out in that.

The constant smell and toxins it produces into the air must have some serious long-term effects on personnel.

It’s a shame that the military says it’s not harmful.

— Air Force Tech. Sgt. Arthur A. DuReitz
Eglin Air Force Base, Fla.

While I was deployed to Camp Bucca, Iraq, in 2006 and 2007, I recall sitting in a tower or doing simple roving patrols around my compound and having to wear a mask to help with breathing.

There would be a nasty haze floating over the camp; sometimes there were even reduced visibility warnings.

— Senior Airman Veronica Nieto
Minot Air Force Base

When I was deployed to Iraq last year, we had a burn pit about a mile from our forward operating base.

That burn pit was no joke.

The locals would throw in anything and everything imaginable. They also used dangerous chemicals, such as diesel fuel, to (burn) it.

We had to don gas masks several times because the fumes were absolutely noxious and painful to your lungs. It constantly smelled like nail polish remover and ammonia.

— Name withheld

I was deployed to Camp Lemonier, Djibouti, for six months. During that time, our living units were about 50 yards from a burn pit.

On the days after the nights when it was really bad, I couldn’t even taste the food I was eating, and I could still smell it — it was on my clothes and eventually saturated the walls and bed in my living quarters.

The report I was given when I left says there are no ill effects of exposure. It does outline what was burned, which was anything with the exception of ammunition and batteries.

A lot of us were waving the red flag while we were there, and nobody really seemed to care, nor do they now when I bring it up.

I simply get the question, “Do you feel sick now?” Last I checked, long-term effects don’t appear a month after you get back.

— Senior Airman Thomas McCaulla
Randolph Air Force Base, Texas

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