

# Traveling Soldier

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*“I saw the destroyed villages, I saw lives destroyed by what happened there and by what people did”*

U.S.M.C. Lance Corporal Mike Hoffman participated in the invasion stage of the Iraq war and is now a member of Philadelphia Veterans for Peace. He spoke to Traveling Soldier's Tom Barton at the March 20<sup>th</sup> rally in Fayetteville, N.C. at Fort Bragg, home of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne.

**Barton:** You were in the armed forces, Marine Corps, is that correct?

**Hoffman:** Yes.

**B:** What was your specialty and unit?

**H:** I was an artilleryman, and I was part of Romeo Battery Fifth Marines detached to 11<sup>th</sup> Marines for the war in Iraq.

**B:** What was your time in Iraq, when were you there?

**H:** I crossed into Iraq March 20<sup>th</sup> along with the rest of the invasion force and I left Iraq approximately May 1<sup>st</sup>.

**B:** Now to prepare you for Iraq, I understand you had a sergeant who gave you some information about what the war was about.

**H:** While we were still in Camp Lejeune our first sergeant, who is the highest enlisted member of our unit, came up in front of the battery – it was just enlisted, all the officers had gone

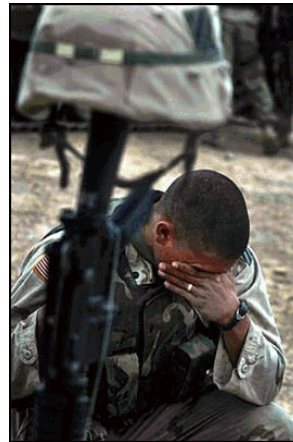
away. And he told us what his view of the war was. He says “we’re not going there because of weapons of mass destruction, we’re not going there to get rid of Saddam Hussein or install democracy, we’re going there for one reason alone, and that’s oil.” But,

after that, he went on to tell us that we also would go not simply because we were told to but it was because our friends were going over there and we had an obligation to them to make sure that everyone came home in one piece.

**B:** Now, I know from what you’ve said in the past that even before you went you had some questions about the war. What I’m wondering is this: how the actual experience of being there influenced your opinion?

**H:** It really added a great deal of resolution to my ideas because after being there I saw what it really meant. I saw the destroyed villages, I saw guys there with lives taken on both sides and lives destroyed by what happened there and by what people did over there.

**B:** I understand from what I see in the press that they’re planning to send some of the units back to Iraq



**who have already been there, including Marines on the west coast?**

**H:** West coast is already back in there. First Marine Division was the Marine fighting force in Iraq for the initial invasion and a little while afterwards. I think most of them were back home by August. Those forces are right now back in Iraq patrolling the western area of the country.

**B:** Do you have any idea at all how they feel about that?

**H:** They’re upset and they’re pissed as anyone would be. You spent your time over there, and next thing you know, just about six months later you’re back in the fire.

**B:** The media have reported that since the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division really raised hell about not going home, there’s been a clamp down that soldiers are not free to express

**opinions against the war. Does this apply to Marines also?**

**H:** It applies to everyone. There was a clamp down before that happened. They told us what we could and couldn't say to the media and the media was told what they could and couldn't report. And on top of that there was an unspoken pressure on everyone not to say the wrong thing. We all knew what the wrong thing was – anything critical of war or about what we thought was happening over there. Even though I'm out of the military when I came back to Fayetteville last night, even though I wasn't stationed here, there's another military town literally less than half an hour from where I was stationed, which is almost the exact same place. Even though I know I'm the military and I'm not part of it anymore, I still felt that pressure again just being here. Especially when it's so fresh it's really something hard to fight against.

**B:** Would you say from your own experience and others you've talked to that feelings among the rank-and-file of the armed forces are more or less or about the same in their criticism of the war – is it increasing or decreasing?

**H:** It's definitely increasing as the length of the occupation goes on 'cuz they don't see themselves getting anywhere. They're doing things almost like something they heard about in Vietnam where in Vietnam guys would go on patrol and they'd sit outside of the base and they'd make false radio reports. Instead, you've got guys who are sent on patrol and instead of a real patrol they jump in a humvee and drive through town as fast as possible to avoid any kind of confrontation. And that's not the point of a patrol. On a patrol you're trying to find intelligence, you're trying to make some difference there. These guys are just trying to get through without getting killed.

**B:** There's two different opinions about what soldiers opposed to the war should do. There's one opinion that more or less says: you should stand up and raise your hand and say

to your commanding officer "sir, I have a moral objection to this war and I will not fire upon the enemy." And then there are others who lean towards the Vietnam model where people very quietly and carefully organized networks to oppose the war before standing up. I mean they didn't do Kamikaze stuff. What's your opinion on that?

**H:** I think it's going to take a lot of both. Just like in the civil rights



**Spanish GI back from Iraq, flashing the peace sign. Time to bring the rest of the troops home.**

movement you had Martin Luther King who was organizing and doing the peaceful route and but back then you had guys like Malcolm X who were really the fanatics and going at it and threatening violence. So you're going to need both sides, you're going to need the guys who will just stand up out of nowhere and say "I'm not doing this" and you're going to need the other people organizing underneath it.

**B:** Now since you've come back, what have you been doing in the way of activity to reach out to other soldiers or civilians?

**H:** Mostly civilians just because of where I'm located, Philadelphia, there's not a large military presence there any more. But every chance I get I'm

attending rallies, speaking out, I've been going to a lot of colleges. It's a great place to speak because a lot of the returning reservists are going back to school and a lot of the guys who are just getting released from active-duty are going to school also, so you're reaching them there. Basically it's just taking every opportunity – whether being at a rally or sitting next to someone at a bar – to get the message across.

**B:** New York City Vets for Peace has been talking about reaching out to soldiers at reserve meetings because they're about to be sent over to Iraq and try to inform about the soldiers and veterans against the war. You think that would be useful?

**H:** I think that would be very good thing. On the military bases you're constantly hearing about Veterans of Foreign Wars and

the American Legion, but you never hear about Veterans for Peace, Vietnam

Veterans Against the War, and those organizations. And those organizations need to make their presence heard. I found out about Veterans for Peace just on a fluke, it was a chance. And it's being a great thing for me. We need to do everything we can to make our presence known in the military.

**B:** Now if someone were interested in inviting you to speak, and it's understood that you're not a rich man so you need your transportation covered, how should they get in touch?

**H:** The best way is either to call me – there a lot of people who have my number – or they can reach me by email: arti57@yahoo.com

**B:** Thank you very very much.

**H:** No problem.

# Military families, vets, and GIs march at Ft. Bragg

By Lou Plummer of Military Families Speak Out

At 12 noon, just over 1000 demonstrators fell in behind a contingent of veterans and military families and swung out of the assembly point onto the main drag in Fayetteville, home of Fort Bragg and other military facilities. Behind a banner with the demo's slogan – "Real Support for Our Troops: Bring Them Home Now!" – Veterans For Peace members in the lead contingent started chanting marching cadences. Call and response rang over the Fayetteville streets:

**One year ago this very day  
Bush betrayed the USA  
A year of lies has come and gone  
Time to bring our children home!  
Bush and Cheney talk that talk  
But we know they're chicken hawks  
If they think they're so damn right  
Let Bush and Cheney go and fight!  
When the GIs come back home  
And take off their uniform  
"Support our Troops" will sure sound fine  
On the unemployment line!  
Sound Off: One, Two  
Sound Off: Three, Four  
Bring It On Down: One, Two, Three, Four,  
One, Two, THREE FOUR**

On a beautiful spring day, the march proceeded to Rowan Park for what even veteran activists agreed was one of the best and most inspiring rallies they had ever attended.

Among the crowd who sat and listened as speaker after speaker spoke from the heart against this disastrous occupation were perhaps a half dozen active duty soldiers, in civvies but with unmistakable "high and tight" military haircuts. They listened, and talked earnestly with activists like Philadelphia VFP's Mike Hoffman, who recently ETSed from the Marine artillery company he served in during the invasion last year.



Throughout, the voices of military families and veterans of wars rang out. Some well known voices in this growing movement, like Nancy Lessin of Military Families Speak Out, David Potorti of September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, Michael McPhearson of Veterans for Peace and MFSO, served as voices for those in whose name Bush and company claim to speak.

Others who took the stage were among those have begun speaking out more recently. Camilo Mejia's aunt, Norma, read greetings from the Army Staff Sergeant who has just turned himself in and applied for conscientious objector status after being AWOL since October. Elaine Johnson from Cordoba, SC seemed hesitant as she approached to the stage and then stepped firmly to the mike and delivered a searing condemnation of the administration and the policy that left her son Darius dead in Iraq.

**Beth Pratt's husband drives trucks in convoys in Iraq, highly vulnerable to attack by roadside bombs planted by the Iraqi armed resistance. She told the crowd how important the demonstration was, because opposing the war in a military town, "You can feel very isolated and alone. Ending this war and bringing them all home safely would be the best form of support that I can see.**

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## A Weekend of Protests

By Larry Syverson of Military Families Speak Out

Over the weekend of March 13, 14 and 15, many Military Families Speak Out members participated in protests in Dover, DE and Washington, D.C. The weekend began Saturday evening with a get-together of members. There were about 25 of



us that met for the evening. I must tell you about two families that I met. Both lost a son in Iraq. Both sons were only 24 years old (the age my youngest son Bryce went to Iraq). One son was killed in July and one in February. One family was from California and one from New Jersey.

Unfortunately, they had the same story. Both wanted to meet the body of their son as he arrived at Dover AFB. The government denied both families! All they wanted to do was privately welcome their son's body home. So, not only is the press refused access to Dover, but grieving families are also denied access.



**"We will not be silent, we will not be obedient, and we will not stand down"**

**Ret'd Special Forces Master Sergeant Stan Goff's March 20th to the Fayetteville/Ft. Bragg rally**

Welcome to all the partisans of peace. Welcome to Fayetteville. Welcome, people of conscience. Welcome, families, whose loved ones are under arms in the service of a system they don't yet understand. Welcome, soldiers, because I am one of you, and welcome veterans who can say to soldiers, as if we were the dead, that as you are, we once were, and as we are, you shall be. Welcome home to those who have been sent to inflict and to suffer pain and grief in the service of avarice and ambition. My own son is among you. I was among you. Welcome back into our sight and our hearts. Welcome home. There have been too many of you who have not come back whole, and far too many who have come home not at all.

These are hard times and harsh times, and they call for harsh words, and they call for clarity that sometimes seems almost cruel, and they call for a sense of purpose that has passion.

The Bush administration is a gangster administration, and they have used gangster tactics at home and abroad, and they have signed our names to their crimes, and they have spent our treasure on their crimes, and they have spilled our children's blood and the blood of the children of others to commit their crimes, and we have had – by God – enough.

And we are not going to sit idly by and pretend about this. We are not going to pretend that we haven't heard that John Kerry's only criticism of this war is that it isn't being fought competently. We are not going to pretend that this is not about oil. We are not going to pretend that this was an intelligence failure. We are not going to pretend that this is something we can change by being civil or by being obedient. We will not be civil with gangsters, and we'd better learn to quit obeying them. Because it is our obedience that do-signs their crimes, and it is our silence that will make us complicit.

So we will not be silent, and we will not be obedient, and we will not stand down - no matter how long it takes, no matter the cost, no matter the effort, because we are fighting for our children and our grandchildren who we will not surrender to gangsters.

We are not going away. This may be called the instant gratification society, but hear us right now, George Bush and Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld and John Kerry for that matter — we are not an instant gratification movement, and we are not here to make deals with the lives of our children or the children of others.

**NOT ONE MORE DAY.  
NOT ONE MORE DIME.  
NOT ONE MORE LIFE.  
NOT ONE MORE LIE.  
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW!**

Their stories made the Sunday march and rally in Dover, DE that much more important. The event was scheduled to protest the administration's refusal to allow the press to film the arrival at Dover AFB of the bodies of our fallen soldiers. Because of their experiences, we marchers were also demanding the right of families to welcome their fallen loved ones home.

About 600 of us marched 3.5 miles from a friends' meeting house to Dover AFB. Four families spoke at the Dover rally about their sons that had been killed in Iraq. Most have now come to the conclusion that their sons have died in vain because of the lies. It has been **VERY HARD** on these families.

Monday morning, March 15th, we rallied in front of Walter Reed Hospital in northwest Washington, D.C. Many soldiers wounded in Iraq are at this hospital. A mother spoke of her son's injuries and how he was being sent back to Iraq. It appears the administration is more concerned with the number of soldiers in Iraq than in the well-being of the soldiers being sent.

After the rally, we marched six miles to the White House. The whole time I was marching, I was thinking about those families that had been denied access to Dover AFB. I tried to put myself in their shoes and imagine how I would feel if one of my sons that had served in Iraq had been killed. How would I have reacted to the denial of welcoming them home?

A short rally was held in Lafayette Park followed by an attempt to deliver a coffin containing the names of the soldiers killed in Iraq to the White House. We wanted the administration to take responsibility for their deaths. When the administration refused to accept the coffin, a group of about 15 performed an act of civil disobedience by sitting down and blocking the entrance to the White House. Because of the stories I heard on Saturday, I joined those sitting. I sat in honor of those families that had been denied access, and I sat for future families' rights.

We sat there for about 1.5 hrs singing. Each of us told why we were there. Most said they were there to get the administration to account for the soldiers that had died. I told them I was there for my son Bryce who was in Baghdad and for my son Branden who had just returned from Tikrit. I also told those gathered of the two families denied access to Dover. I told them that these soldiers and their families deserve better. I told the administration that they must change their policies.

I was mentally prepared to be arrested. I don't think the administration, however, wanted the embarrassment of arresting the father of two soldiers and a sailor. The Secret Service told us that they would not arrest us. They said we could sit there as long as we wanted, blocking the entrance. When it appeared the stand-off (or more correctly sit-off) was going no where, the leaders (a group of peace activists from PA) lead the group, about 150 people (most had been standing behind us for moral support) back to Lafayette Park to continue the vigil.

I came away from the experience energized. The crazy thing. March 15th was my first anniversary of protesting! I participated in my first protest at a big "March on the White House" on March 15, 2003. Who knew that one year later I would be in the same spot. Only this time instead of marching I was sitting. During that first protest, I marched for



my sons. One year later, I sat for all our sons and daughters in Iraq and their families.

# What they won't tell you about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Everybody serving in Iraq, or who has served in any other combat area, knows that harassing and tormenting soldiers who are overcome by the horrors of war is absolutely routine. Accusations of cowardice are customary. Threats of punishment are unleashed. Appeals to stay with your unit, and the people closest to you, are designed both to arouse guilt feelings, and make you feel you will be all alone in a big empty world if you leave the war.

What they don't tell you is that one of the best cures for PTSD is fighting back.

Vietnam combat troops who carefully organized inside the services, stayed saner and suffered the least damage. Vietnam vets who joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War and kept with it over the years were much more successful at keeping their heads together than those who fought or lived after the war in isolation.

It doesn't take rocket science to understand why.

War arouses the strongest feelings a human being can experience, the terrible fear of death and the immense murderous

rage that goes along with it. Human beings are hard-wired to have those reactions to the prospect of being maimed or killed.

The soldiers and vets who turned their anger into organized action against the Vietnam War got the relief that goes with taking action in the face of danger, they had the satisfaction of being able to fight a great social wrong, and they used the anger constructively to fuel their activity.

An Airborne soldier, who organized against the war in Vietnam and came home to help organize an anti-war march of Vietnam vets in Washington D.C. said: "You had to let the anger break right through the fear. Then you were OK. It was such a fucking relief. It was payback time."

Today, the New York City Veterans' Hospital is handing out thiorazine, haldol, and valium to New York reservists back from combat in Iraq and calling it "treatment" for PTSD.

Thiorazine is famous for causing impotence. Worse, it causes tardive dyskinesia, an often irreversible damage

to the central nervous system that leaves the individual drooling and trembling uncontrollably. (*Tardive dyskinesia, an irreversible set of abnormal movements, becomes more likely the longer the patient takes the drug; Presti, 1999.*)

Haldol is given with thiorazine to mask symptoms of nervous system damage. Former mental hospital patients damaged in this way have sued hospitals for millions.

Valium, along with the other benzo class of drugs, is extremely addictive and sudden withdrawal can be fatal. How bad is it? The Bellevue Hospital heroin treatment program won't accept a patient who is taking benzos.

So, there's a choice. Become a drooling, shaking addict, thanks to the tender mercies of the VA, or organize with active duty soldiers, veterans, and military families to stop the war, which is, after all, the only sane thing to do.

- Thomas Barton has worked with PTSD survivors for over 30 years, including war veterans at the V.A. clinic in New York City.

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## Wounded soldier needs your help!

Specialist Jason Gunn of the 137th Armored Battalion lost hearing in his left ear and whose left leg artery was severed when an I.E.D. exploded under his humvee, killing his sergeant and injuring 2 other GIs. After being treated in Germany and spending a few weeks on medical leave at home with his family, the Pentagon ordered him back to the Iraqi slaughterhouse.

Before going back, Gunn was able to see a doctor and received a diagnoses of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), medically unfit to serve in a combat zone. The Pentagon ordered him back anyway, promising that he would stay in the rear and do paper work so that he could continue to take his PTSD medication. But when he got back to his unit in Baghdad he was forced by his commanders to sign paperwork that said he was medically

fit and wanted to go back into his old job patrolling the streets in humvees!

"They don't care what condition soldiers are in, they just need a body to fill a quota, and they don't care what they send back from Iraq either" said Pat Gunn, Jason's mother. She has begun, in conjunction with Military Families Speak Out, a campaign to get her son out of harm's way as soon as possible.

Please send her letters of support to: [gunn@sig.com](mailto:gunn@sig.com)



# the mailbag

Dear Traveling Soldier:

In your Issue #4, you featured an article, "Should we vote for anyone but Bush in 2004?" This article does a good job of showing how the Democratic Party is not all that different from the Republicans on the issue of war, and how putting a Democrat in the White House is not a solution to the main problems America faces. This is an argument that needs to be made.

But there is another argument that also needs to be made. In the few years he has been in office, George W. Bush has made radical changes in U.S. policy. He has announced that "preemptive attack", which used to be called "aggressive war" and was considered a war crime, is now permitted to the United States. He has announced that forcing regime change in countries where the U.S. doesn't like the government, which used to be called "internal interference in domestic affairs" and was not permitted by international law, is now permitted to the United States. He has announced that the U.S. has the right to arrest foreign people in foreign countries and imprison them, sometimes with a military tribunal, and sometimes with no trial, no lawyer, no charges at all.

And he has done all these things, and lied to the world about why he was doing them.

After having done that, if this man is not punished, not turned out of office, what message does that send to the world about the American voter? He's got to be dumped.

So it's a dilemma: Bush has to be kicked out, but Kerry is hardly any better, maybe no better at all. How do we think about that?

For me the best solution is the Support Nader, Dump Bush campaign. Ralph Nader is substantially different from Bush and Kerry. In his campaign he is raising the issues that

Bush and Kerry don't even talk about. He is an honest man, and a courageous one. His campaign deserves to be

supported. Supported means: send him money, write letters in his favor, put his bumper sticker on your car, talk him up among your friends, do whatever you can to help get his message out to the people.

But on election day, vote to dump Bush.

Isn't that betraying Nader at the last minute? Not really.

Nader is not going to win this election. He doesn't expect to become president of the United States, and probably doesn't want to. He is running an educational campaign, to help people to see that the difference between the Republicans and the Democrats is very small, and that we can't solve the problems the country is facing by voting in a Democrat. His campaign will be a success if he begins to get this message out to the public. How many votes he gets is not the main issue.

So, support Nader in every way but one. On election day, vote to Dump Bush. We have to wipe the smirk off that liar's face. And if as a side effect of dumping Bush, John Kerry gets put in the White House, well, we'll dump him next.

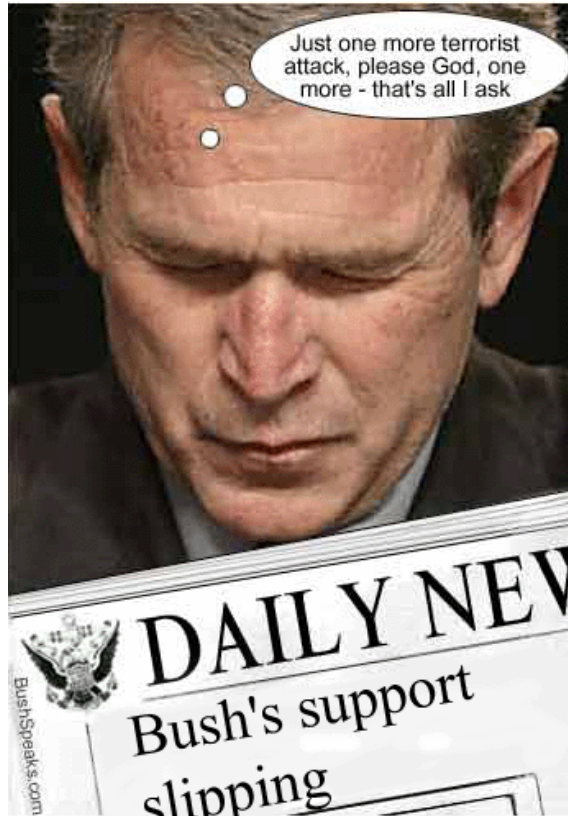
- Doug Lummis

## Traveling Soldier responds:

The changes that Bush made were not as radical as you claim. Clinton made "regime change" in Iraq official policy back in 1998. Had 9/11 happened during Gore's watch, there was a good possibility that they too would have attacked Iraq. Gore said he supported Bush's "next step" in the "war on terror" (in other words, "attacking Iraq") back in 2002. Bush has gotten away with a lot, but he's gotten away with it because the Democrats supported him.

You say that "if as a side effect of dumping Bush, Kerry gets put in the White House, well, we'll dump him next." And who will we dump him in exchange for? A Cheney-Rumsfeld ticket in 2008?

## Bush's 2004 election strategy



Agree? Disagree?

Write to:

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# The lesser evil in 2004?

In November, millions of Americans are looking forward to another “regime change” – this time, right here in America. The idea is that “anybody but Bush” would be a better President because no one could be as much of a lying, corrupt S.O.B. as Bush.

The first problem with voting for “anyone but Bush” is that it sets the bar too low. Dick Cheney isn’t Bush, why not vote for him? What about Rumsfeld, or Powell? After all, their names aren’t Bush either.

Getting Bush out of office isn’t an end in itself. Everyone who hates Bush wants something: an end to the occupation of Iraq, money for schools or health care and not for ultra-rich CEOs, for example. Those who are planning to vote for the Democrat John Kerry think that Kerry will get them somewhat closer to their goals.

But step back and look at history, the history of how people got things in this country. The civil rights movement ended segregation in 1965 not because a Democrat was in office. John F. Kennedy had been in the White House for three years and was assassinated before his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, signed any civil rights legislation. It took years of protesting, sit-ins, and marches on Washington before politicians lifted a finger to help blacks in this country.

The same thing is true of the Vietnam war. In 1964, people against U.S. involvement in Vietnam argued that the thing to do was to vote for the Democrat Lyndon B. Johnson because he was the “lesser evil” compared to his

Republican opponent Barry Goldwater. The anti-war group Students for a Democratic Society said that the movement would get “part of the way with LBJ,” meaning that while he wasn’t completely anti-war, at least he wouldn’t go “all the way” in Vietnam like Goldwater would.

When LBJ got into office however, he sent tens of thousands of American GIs to die in Vietnam, bombed the hell out of the country, and defoliated Vietnam’s jungles with Agent Orange. LBJ not only went part of the way into Vietnam, he went all of the way. Voting for the “lesser evil” got us **BOTH** the lesser **AND** the greater evil; it did then and it will today.

But why?

The reality is that movements can’t sacrifice their independence (that is their strength) by aligning themselves with politicians who are half a centimeter to the left of the Republicans and expect to get anything out of it. John Kerry, because his name is not Bush, assumes that he has the left vote, the anti-war vote, the black vote, the women’s vote, and the union vote in his pocket. He doesn’t have to do a damn thing to **EARN** those votes, and once he’s in office, he’ll continue the soldier-killing in Iraq that Bush started.

His campaign website says that he wants to add 40,000 active-duty troops to the Army. Those 40,000 aren’t going to be sitting tight in stateside bases; most likely they’ll be deployed to Iraq because Kerry wants to “finish the job” in Iraq. What he doesn’t mention is that “the job” is setting up a puppet government in Iraq that will sell oil at the price Corporate America wants and



will allow the U.S. to have large permanent military bases there.

Back in the Vietnam days when Kerry had some principles and led Vietnam Veterans Against the War, he asked the Senate Foreign Relations committee: “How do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?” Today we need to ask Kerry him the same question.

Politicians in Washington won’t end the occupation. It wasn’t LBJ who brought the troops home from Vietnam – it was Richard Nixon, who was even more right-wing than Bush. He had no choice because hundreds of thousands of GIs revolted against the war and wouldn’t fight it anymore. And today we have to build a movement that will force whoever is in the White House – Democrat or Republican – to bring the troops home now.

## “Democrats helped put young Americans in harm’s way”

This appeared in the letters section of Feb 16, 2004 *Newsweek* magazine:

The fact that John Kerry and John Edwards supported our march into Iraq seems to be forgotten by much of the country, including the heretofore anti-war crowd. I opposed the war from the start and will not forget. My memory will be abetted by emails from my son in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, who was deployed to Iraq in January, five months after his return from Afghanistan. Your article “Blood and Honor,” about the First Battalion of the Eighth Infantry and the ever-present dangers to young Americans in Iraq, is a somber reminder that the war is far from over. The articles about Kerry and Edwards help us remember that it was Democrats such as these who helped put young Americans in harm’s way.

- Amy Keith  
Charlotte, N.C.

# First soldier to quit the Iraq war

**"I don't think we're fighting terror in Iraq. The justification for this war is money, and no soldier should go to Iraq and give his life for oil. ... My commanders are not evil but this war is evil. I did not sign up for the military to go halfway around the world to be an instrument of oppression. ... When I saw with my own eyes what war can do to people, a real change began to take place within me. I have witnessed the suffering of a people whose country is in ruins and who are further humiliated by the raids, patrols and curfews of an occupying army. My experience of this war has changed me forever."**

These are the words of Staff Sgt. Camilo Mejia of the Florida National Guard. He had enough of the war in Iraq. He decided to defy orders to go back. He is going to go on trial for desertion.

His mother, Maritza Castillo, wrote the letter below, asking that he not face the enemy alone. The enemy is this Imperial war government, which intends to send him to prison for refusing to be complicit in their deadly greed for Iraqi oil.

As journalist Christian Parenti has pointed out, so far this war has produced only a few AWOL convictions and one high-profile asylum case in Canada. Pfc. Jeremy Hinzman of the 82nd Airborne is seeking refuge north of the border on the grounds that he is a conscientious objector. Marine Reserve Lance Cpl. Stephen Funk also went AWOL and claimed conscientious objector status this past April. Funk was convicted of being away without leave, demoted, forfeited two-thirds of his pay, received a bad-conduct discharge and sent to the brig for six months.

Most recently, Brandon David Hughey, a private in the Army stationed at Ft. Hood, Texas, was successfully smuggled over the Canadian border by war resisters who have organized a new underground railroad. He will not be the last. He also sees the war in Iraq for what it is: an attempt at Imperial conquest, one of the worst causes in which soldiers can fight.

Individual soldiers are saying no, one way or another. With no publicity or organizational support, more are simply walking away.

This is how it starts. The initial stages of resistance tend to be individual. The really effective action builds more slowly until soldiers begin to act together to stop a war.

What does that look like?

In October, 1971, riflemen of Bravo Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division at Firebase Pace made a decision together and acted together.

Ordered to set up a night ambush four hundred yards from their base, sixty-five men, including nine sergeants, out of a total force of one hundred ten, signed a petition saying they would face court-martial rather than obey. Actions like this brought the Vietnam war to a halt.

Help defend Sgt. Mejia. His mother's letter explains how you can do that:

My name is Maritza Castillo and I'm an active member of Military Family Speak Out (MFSO). I'm also the mother of Staff Sergeant Camilo Mejia.

On March 24, 2004, Louis Font, my son's lawyer informed me about the charges that my son is being accused of. This is what he told me:

"Staff Sgt. Camilo Mejia, 28, of Miami, Florida was charged by his commanders at Ft. Stewart, Georgia with desertion on Wednesday, March 24, 2004. He will be tried by a Special Court Martial, which means that the maximum sentence he can receive is one year imprisonment and a Bad Conduct Discharge."

I've also learned that army officials have restricted Camilo to Ft. Stewart and have barred him from conducting face to face interviews on the base with the media. Louis Font, his civilian attorney, plans to challenge this "gag" order, arguing that my son's rights to free speech are being abridged.

President Bush does not give any explanation about the weapons of mass destruction that have not been found and for which he invaded and bombed the people of Iraq and sent our young soldiers to die in this illegal and immoral war. Instead he makes a mockery about the reasons he's had to spend the money of the American people in this bellicose adventure. When he is asked about the weapons of mass destruction and the chemical weapons, he responds

with vulgar gestures.

It is in this context that the army ignores the conscientious objection application that my son Camilo submitted to this institution. Instead they accuse him of desertion.

I'm addressing the people of the United States of America, the Hispanic Community and the world to express my deepest sorrow and indignation about the injustice that is being made against my son. I want to ask you to continue giving him your support. Please write letters to Camilo expressing your support towards his cause. Send letters to the Army Officials and to the Congress of the United States demanding that his conscientious objection application be accepted.

Camilo's Address:  
Ssg. Mejia Camilo  
A Company USAG MED-HOLD 865  
Hase Road,  
Ft. Stewart, GA 31315

Commanding General, Fort Stewart's Address:  
Major General William G. Webster, Jr. Commanding  
General, Fort Stewart,  
42 Wayne Place,  
Ft Stewart GA 3131





# Report on Marine morale in Okinawa

“If you asked the guys in my barracks, ‘How many of you would like to go home tomorrow?’ I’d say maybe 90% would raise their hands.” So says a young Marine stationed on Okinawa. Morale is way down, on – base crime is up, the violence level is up; at the psychiatric clinic at the Naval Hospital, most of the patients are Marines. You hear stories of kids back from Iraq suffering Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) being treated as malingerers by their COs, stories of kids drinking themselves crazy, stories of attempted suicide.

But at this point, this doesn’t necessarily translate into feeling opposed to the war in Iraq, especially among the people who haven’t been there. Those who have been there mostly don’t want to go back. But those who haven’t, and don’t know what it’s like, tend to feel left out: “What’s the point of all this, if I don’t get to go and do The Real Thing?” Military training never teaches recruits that war is a picnic; “War is

Hell” comes from General Sherman, after all. What the troops are taught is that it is terribly hard, but also exciting, the highest high you’ll ever have, and maybe most important, is the rite of passage that will make a Real Man out of you, and get you admitted to the Band of Brothers, the people who have been to war. And those people around you who came back from Iraq in a state of deep medical depression, who can’t sleep, who get the shakes, who panic at sudden sounds, well, those must be the losers. That won’t happen to me. It’s awfully easy for someone 18, 19, or 20 to fall for this line, which is why the military has a steady supply of new people to send off to war. But as the Iraq War grinds on and on, the same thing that happened in the War in Vietnam is sure to happen again. More and more troops will begin to see that the war is not the solution to their misery, but rather the cause of it. And that’s what the Pentagon fears the most.



## Bush laughs at Iraq WMD lies – military families not amused

At the annual dinner of the Radio and Television News Correspondents Association, **Bush cracked jokes about Iraq’s lack of WMD** during a slide show of himself looking behind furniture in the Oval Office. Bush told the audience, “Those weapons of mass destruction have got to be somewhere ... nope, no weapons over there ... maybe under here?” Laughter erupted from the crowd of journalists, politicians and their guests then and at other times during Bush’s remarks. This isn’t surprising, given that the media repeated every single one of Bush’s lies without question to build support for the war.

**George Medina, 43, of Orange County, who lost a son in Iraq, heard about Bush’s remarks when his outraged daughter, an Army sergeant, called him yesterday. “She was very upset,” Medina said. “This is disgraceful,” Medina continued. “He doesn’t think of all the families that are suffering. It’s unbelievable, how this guy tries to run the country.” His 22-year-old son, Spec. Irving Medina, died Nov. 14 in Baghdad when an explosive device struck his convoy.**

For a man who dodged the draft in Vietnam and went AWOL from *Alabama*, and for a man who told every single lie he could think of – from Iraq WMD to Saddam and Osama being buddies – to get Americans to support his oil war, he has a lot of nerve to be cracking jokes when GIs are still getting killed because he lied. The only thing he and his buddies Dick Cheney, Colin Powell, and Don Rumsfeld give a shit about is their money and power. They’re laughing all the way to the bank and the joke is on us.

# ***Words from the front-lines***

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“On the subject of WMD, we once did a raid on a place where we heard they may have been storing ‘mustard gas,’ [and] being the patriots that we are and always out to prove our Commander in Chief’s allegations, we geared up in our chemical suits and stormed the place. It turnout out to be a restaurant... but they did have mustard, and some guy there had gas.” – **Reservist, 124th Infantry Regiment, Florida National Guard**

“Did I honestly think doing this and coming over here was going to stop terrorism? No. That’s the dumbest thing I ever heard. There are no weapons of mass destruction that we’ve seen. These people didn’t even have an air force. ... I didn’t even see an army.” – **Lt. Michael Isbell, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division**

“We were pointing our weapons at those families and they don’t know what will set us off. I’d be pretty angry if someone came to my town and started pointing a gun in my face.” – **First Lt. Katie Noll, 1-24 Signals Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.**

“I was in Germany when [Chancellor Gerhard] Schroeder made his speech against the war saying he would put his country first. Don’t quote me because in the military it doesn’t pay to be too critical, but I thought hey, that’s a good point. We’ve got jobless and homeless too back home and we can’t go round being a Band-aid for everybody.” - **Anonymous soldier, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division**

“Reserve members can’t possibly keep this pace up. With deployments to Bosnia and for homeland defense, our families are continuing to suffer. Does anyone care? This is totally unacceptable. Bring us home or suffer mass exits soon.” – **Master Sgt. C.J. Nouse, reservist who has spent 4 months with his family since September 11th.**



“Even the \$1,000 a month is not going to keep me here. I will retired when I get back. I am not going to put my family through this – or myself.” – **Warrant officer Jim Akers, 319th Signals Battalion, National Guard.**

“Once we got there, we accomplished what we did... what we set out to accomplish, and we were just guarding ourselves. Well, if all we’re doing over there is guarding ourselves, why don’t we just leave? I believe we should just leave. We went there under false pretenses, which I didn’t know at the time. ... We were told there were some weapons of mass destruction over there. Well, we didn’t find any; still haven’t found any. So we went

over there to try to get rid of those. But when we got over there, we didn’t find any. Okay, well, we got rid of Saddam. ... I think we did our job, more than our job as soldiers, and now it’s time for us to leave. I mean, we’re not the world’s police force. I’m not a conscientious objector, I’m a patriot, and I will die to defend this country. But I’m not going over to another country and die to produce more oil for someone to make profits off of.” - **Anonymous soldier in a T.V. interview**