

Testimony
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Congressional Iraq Forum
September 26, 2006

Congresswoman Woolsey, thank you for this opportunity to speak about a critical matter I've been studying. What I want to share with you are the thoughts and experiences of some of the brave men and women I've met over the past year. It has been an honor for me to meet these soldiers, Americans on the front lines of what may be their most important battle: a fight for our country's soul.

One of the things that's surprised me most as I returned from travels around the U.S., up to Canada, and over to Germany talking with soldiers opposed to the Iraq War is how few civilians know about the growing resistance within the military to Bush policy in Iraq.

The tragedy of civilian deaths in Iraq is devastating. U.S. troops assigned to the kind of duty that leaves innocent civilians damaged and destroyed are also victims. The escalating number of troops returning from the war suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is proof.

One soldier after another told me of being devastated by orders that put them in the position of disobeying, or of shooting what they feared were noncombatants.

These soldier's stories are critical to hear. Their credibility cannot be impugned. They volunteered for the military. They've seen it from the inside.

Consider Darrell Anderson; I met with him in Toronto. He deserted after fighting in Iraq rather than face another deployment there.

In addition to taking shrapnel from a roadside bomb – an injury that earned him a Purple Heart – Darrell told me he often found himself in firefights. Darrel described a Baghdad street battle that scarred him – and scared him about himself. He was in an armored vehicle. Other soldiers were riding on the outside, when it came under attack from an enemy armed with rocket-propelled grenades. One of the soldiers riding outside was hit, and injured severely. Darrell told me the scene still returns to him in the nightmares he

suffers every night. “I look at him and he is bleeding everywhere. He’s spitting up blood.” Someone had to take his place on the outside, Darrell realized. “Me, I’m gung-ho. I go up there. There’re explosions. They tell us if you’re under attack, you open fire on anybody in the streets. They say they’re no longer innocent if they’re there. I take my weapon and I find someone running. I point and I pull my trigger, but my weapon is still on safe.” By the time Darrell clicked it over to fire, he realized he was about to shoot a kid who was running away from the violence, a kid he was by then sure was not part of the battle. But what was most traumatic for him were his own emotions. “I’m angry. My buddy is dying. I just want to kill.” He told me he realized then he had become a different man, changed by the pathology of war and the suffering of the innocents. “When I first got there, I was disgusted with my fellow soldiers. But now I’m just the same. I will kill innocent people because I’m not the person I was when I got there.” The attack ebbed, and Darrell survived it, as did the running boy.

A timely example of how the war is tearing at the conscience of the troops came in an email I received the other day from a conflicted soldier. He is an army reservist, a counterintelligence agent who served in Afghanistan, where he was awarded two Bronze Star medals for his valor.

“My unit may be deploying to Iraq in January and I am contemplating not going,” he wrote. “This is somewhat complicated by not being a conscientious objector, which limits my options.” This reservist requested my assistance steering him toward sources that can provide him with credible information about the alternatives open to him and the ramifications of refusing orders.

More and more soldiers with the pedigree of my email correspondent are considering destroying careers and enduring prison time because they oppose the Iraq War. Imagine the courage it takes for a soldier – such as the reservist who requested a referral – to reject the mission, and instead respond to the calls of conscience and say no to the Iraq War.

The fact that both the Marines and the Army are faced with dipping into the Ready Reserve to force soldiers back to Iraq is another indication that more and more soldiers are opposed to the war. What will be important to watch now is how many refuse this recall to active duty.

In his September 11th speech a few weeks ago, President Bush again invoked the names of the soldiers dead in the Iraq War. He claimed again, as he has so many times before, that the war must go on so that their sacrifice is not wasted, and he noted that over a million and a half Americans have enlisted in the services since the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon.

What do those volunteers think today? We could use a poll that asks them all. In the meantime, I've tallied the feelings of some of them.

Meet Joshua Key, combat hardened from his Iraq time, now a deserter in Canada seeking refugee status. He misses his family and he blames the Bush Administration. "I blame them because they made me do it. You can lie to the world; you can't lie to a person who's seen it. They made me have to do things that a man should never have to do, for the purpose of their gain – not the people's – their financial gain."

George W. Bush is culpable for crimes in Iraq, according to Joshua Key. "He'll pay for it one day. On the day he goes to prison, I'll go sit in prison with him. I say if he goes to prison – George Bush – I'll go sit in prison with him. Let's go. I'll face it for that music. But that ain't never going to happen." And Joshua Key laughed a bitter, bitter laugh in his basement apartment in Toronto.

Meet Steven Casey, still susceptible to recall from the Inactive Ready Reserve after his time fighting in Iraq. He says he'll never put his uniform back on. "You'll see me on the news. I won't be back. I'll be a statistic of a guy who doesn't show up." His voice is quiet as he says it again, "I'm not coming back." Steven Casey says he's going to college, an education he'll pay for with the money the Army guaranteed him when he enlisted. "I did get what I was promised," he says about his benefits package. "I got everything they said I was going to get," he says about the tuition money. "I got a hunk of money for school, and with that I got social anxiety and I got this cool skin rash that I'm never going to get rid of. I've got a social disorder. I yell at my wife. I don't think I won. There are a lot of things that came with this that are irreparable and I'm going to have the rest of my life." He talks about anger and anxiety. He wonders if he's suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, if he's facing a lifetime of prescription drugs and psychiatrists. "I wish I could make it all go away, to be honest with

you. But I can't. I should have worked at McDonalds and found a way to pay for my tuition.”

Meet Clifton Hicks, who returned from fighting in Iraq to apply for and receive an honorable discharge based on his the conscientious objection to war he developed in Iraq. It's a war, says Clifton Hicks, fought for the “filthy rich too cowardly to do it themselves” who want more money, fought by “us, the masses of uneducated fools killing each other.”

Soldiers such as these – who have been on the ground in Iraq, awarded metals for their valor, seen and done things unimaginable to most of us – offer us some of the best news reports of this war. I believe the stories from these soldiers can help us understand what is wrong in Iraq.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these stories here today.