Colorado woman faces charges by military

Interview with US soldier who refused to abandon children and return to Iraq

Joanne Laurier
7 November 2003

A 30-year-old US soldier faces charges after choosing to look after her children in Colorado rather than returning to duty in Iraq. Simone and Vaughn Holcomb, the parents of seven children, were both serving in Iraq when a family crisis forced them to take emergency leave and return home to Fort Carson, near Colorado Springs.

During the couple's tour of duty in the war, their children, ranging from four to twelve years old, had been taken care of by Mr. Holcomb's mother. At this point his ex-wife, the biological mother of two of the children, filed for child support and was threatening to seek full custody of her children. She was subsequently granted temporary joint custody with the children's grandmother.

The legal action forced the Holcombs to leave Iraq in September. At the custodial hearing, the judge mandated that one of the parents was required to stay home in order for the couple to retain full custody of the two children.

Vaughn, 40, who is a tank platoon sergeant with the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment based in Fort Carson, returned to Iraq. Simone, 30, a medic in the Colorado National Guard, stayed behind—but without the army's permission.

Having denied her request for release from active duty or a reassignment to Fort Carson, army officials are beginning the process of dismissing her from the military. The six-year veteran could also face jail time. Despite the Colorado judge's order, the army has made clear that it considers her in violation of military law.

Simone, who describes her ordeal as something worse than a nightmare, spoke to the WSWS:

"I'm in the National Guard, so I volunteered and left for Iraq in January. My husband has had 20 years in the military and he left for active duty in April. The Colorado judge ruled that if I get on a plane right now and return to Iraq, I will be abandoning my children and we could lose custody of Dustin and Taylor.

"The children have suffered devastation upon devastation. First I left, then their dad left. They were sending us letters saying 'Please don't die.' Our older son was getting poor grades in school and then something awful happened and we both came home on emergency leave. Then they see that Daddy had to go away again. I promised them that I would not leave them—they've been through so many changes in the last year. But they are still wary and don't believe that their Mom will not go away.

"I have seven wonderful children, all with their own personalities. But they have all started acting up in one way or another. One got very negative, he was so upset he started blaming me. He threw temper tantrums in school. My 11-year-old, Forest, takes the whole world on his shoulders and believes he can change anything if people will just listen to him. My 12-year old, John, has a tendency to act as a parent, but he needs to have more of a childhood—so these things are not good for him. I feel very guilty about all of this.

"I chose the army and I believed in what I was doing when I signed the contract. I chose to support this country, even if I didn't agree with everything that was going on with the war. When my husband went back after our emergency leave, I asked the army to first, to take me off active duty service—that was denied. Second, I asked for compassionate reassignment to be near my children—that was denied and then third, to hold off sending me back to Iraq until my husband

© World Socialist Web Site

retires in November [his retirement has already been approved]—that was denied.

"I am waiting on the military to see what happens next. They don't acknowledge anything except via email. I could be charged with being AWOL and/or desertion—very serious charges which could mean going to jail. They have stopped my pay and want to recoup the money I have been paid since October 10.

"My husband and I fought for three years to get the custody of his two children from a previous marriage. There are two families on our block who face the same custody situation. So this is not new for the military. The army accepted our applications to be soldiers, they should appreciate our custody problems. I will fight with all my motherly might to protect my children. If both my husband and I are in Iraq together, these children could lose their parents. I know that when both of us were in the theater in Iraq, my husband worried about me and if anything had happened to him, I would have thought that it was my fault.

"When I left for Iraq I thought that everything was going to be wonderful and that my kids would be well taken care of. The last time my husband, who is an excellent platoon sergeant, fought in a war, he was gone for six months—so I was basing myself on that time-frame.

"After we came home, it was more difficult to return to the war because the situation became more complicated both at home and in Iraq. We were now seeing soldiers die on a daily basis. I made a commitment to the army that I would honor, but if I had a choice, I would not go back to Iraq. I just don't want to lose my children. Both my mother and my mother-in-law have their own responsibilities and can't take care of our children for any serious length of time. And you can't just ask a day-care provider to take your children for nine months. But ultimately, the army has full control of what will happen. This is both unjust and heartbreaking!

"I have not heard from my husband for many days. This means he could be on a mission. It could also mean that something has happened to him. So the whole situation is very stressful.

"I don't want to comment too much on what I saw over in Iraq because of my status, but I will say that it's a sad and terrible situation. This war is not popular over there, it's not popular over here, it's not popular anywhere."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site