

Relatives of US soldiers killed in Iraq denounce Bush policy

Kate Randall
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Opposition to the war and occupation in Iraq is being voiced by the families of a number of US soldiers who have been killed there. Some relatives of the 15 soldiers who died as a result of last Sunday's missile attack on a Chinook helicopter have openly denounced the Bush administration's war policy.

The tragedy of the soldiers' deaths was compounded by the fact that most of those on board the helicopter were heading home on leave. Instead of welcoming their loved ones home, relatives must now prepare to bury them.

Thomas Wilson, the uncle of Staff Sgt. Joe N. Wilson, 30, of Mississippi, killed in the attack, told reporters that his family was devastated. "The whole family was expecting him to come home," he said. "He's coming home, but he ain't coming home the way he wanted to. He's coming home in a pine box. Tell Bush to go over there and fight for oil. Some of his family needs to go over there, then he'll realize what's going on. As long as they ain't over there, he don't care."

The family of the Illinois National Guard pilot killed in the downed helicopter, 30-year-old First Lt. Brian Slavenas, voiced similar sentiments. "I'm just furious that we're over there," said Marcus Slavenas, Brian's brother, who was a Marine in the 1991 Gulf War. He described the death toll among US personnel as "a sickening waste," adding, "All of them should have been back here dating girls and working jobs."

Rosemarie Slavenas, Brian's mother, said that while her son had a passion for flying, he was not eager to fly in Iraq. "He did not want to go on this operation," she told the *Washington Post*. "He told me on the phone that he resigned his commission, and then he wasn't allowed to resign. The last time I saw him, he said, 'I don't want to hurt anybody.'"

Sgt. Ernest Bucklew, 33, was heading home on leave to attend his mother's funeral when he died in the helicopter crash, leaving his family to now plan a double funeral. Bucklew's uncle, Jack Smith, 75, of Point Marion, Penn., said, "They say there's a reason for everything, but I just can't find a reason for this. This country shouldn't be starting wars; we should be defending ourselves and others. I think all these boys should be sent home."

A total of 379 US soldiers have died in Iraq, including 240 since Bush declared the end of "major combat" on May 1. According to White House officials, the president has not attended the funerals of any American soldiers killed in action.

In the aftermath of the Chinook helicopter attack Bush focused his comments at public appearances on the supposed "health" of the economy and the California wildfires, leaving comments on the 15 casualties to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

As the death toll of US soldiers steadily mounts, more military family members are denouncing the government's Iraq policy, with many of those who initially supported the invasion beginning to ask questions.

Pam Brown Lois's son, Private First Class Tim R. Brown Jr., of Conway, Penn., died August 12 in an explosive attack on his Humvee in Taji. "On the terms that the president told us we were going to war, I backed it," Lois told the *Boston Globe*. "But we had more of our soldiers killed since this war has been over [since Bush declared the end of 'major combat'] and there were no weapons of mass destruction, and all these things we were told we were going to war for. For what? I don't understand why we continue to let our men and women be killed over there."

Other residents of Conway were both deeply

saddened and angered by Tim Brown's death. Jessica Haglan, 31, tending bar at Haglan's Cafe, told the *Globe*, "[After Tim's death]. I started thinking about it," she said. "I don't think they should even be there. If Bush hadn't been president, none of the [terrorist attacks] would have happened. They don't like him."



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