

Mother of US soldier: “Bush killed my son”

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The mother of one of the US soldiers who died when a Chinook helicopter was shot down in Iraq earlier this month has sharply condemned the Bush administration, and blames George W. Bush for her son’s death. First Lt. Brian Slavenas, 30, an Illinois National Guardsman, was the pilot of the helicopter that crashed November 2, resulting in 16 soldiers’ deaths and 20 injuries.

Rosemarie Dietz Slavenas, in her capacity as executor of her son’s will, refused to allow a military funeral for Brian, organizing a civilian service instead. She rejected the military’s offer of a casket, and insisted that her son’s coffin not be draped in the American flag. Dietz Slavenas is divorced from Brian’s father, Ronald, who together with another son, Eric, held a separate military service later at the Genoa Veterans Home.

Speaking outside the civilian service in Genoa, Ill., a suburb of Chicago, Dietz Slavenas said, “I believe my son Brian died not for his country but because of our country’s lack of a coherent and civilized foreign policy.”

“My son was not a soldier,” she added, “He was my son. George [W.] Bush killed my son. I request in Brian’s name a stop to the killing. No more preemptive wars.”

Dietz Slavenas, a retired college professor, began taking part in antiwar demonstrations more than a decade ago, when her son Marcus, a Marine, was serving in the first Gulf War. Before the Bush administration launched the invasion of Iraq earlier this year, she took part in the mass protest in Washington, D.C.

According to Dietz Slavenas, Brian was opposed to the current war and tried to resign his National Guard commission before he was shipped out. “They did not honor his resignation,” she said. “If they had honored him when he resigned, he would still be with me today... That’s unspeakably difficult.”

At a Veterans Day commemoration sponsored by Rockford, Ill., peace groups, Dietz Slavenas told reporters that she had not wanted her son to be buried in uniform, but that he could not be dressed in civilian clothes either. “There is no body,” she said, “There are just remains.”

More than 200 people packed into the Faith United Methodist Church for Brian Slavenas’s funeral service, honoring a young man who had a passion for flying. They watched a slide show depicting various stages of his life—as a Little Leaguer, a grade school student, a basketball player and weightlifter. His body was buried in a nearby civilian cemetery.

Brian’s brother Marcus, while refraining from comment at his brother’s funeral, told CNN last week in an interview, “I don’t believe we need to be there. I wish the Iraqis well and I hope they can figure out their problems, but I don’t want this to happen at the expense of our boys.”

Marcus Slavenas also commented shortly after his brother’s death, “I’m just furious that we’re over there.” 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.”

In a related development expressing growing distrust and anger among US soldiers and their families, an Illinois National Guardsman has spoken out publicly against the government’s military policy. Sergeant Jessica Macek has been serving in Iraq for six months with the National Guard’s 333rd MP Company south of Baghdad.

During a recent nine-day leave, in an interview with WNTA, a Rockford radio station, Macek said, “I believe it is in the forefront in the minds of many soldiers that we were lied to about the reasons for going to war.”

Macek cited in particular the administration’s lies about weapons of mass destruction. “We have been

there for six months now,” she said, “and we have not found any weapons. If there were weapons, it seems we should have found them by now.”

She added she has not been seeing the “smiles on the faces” of the Iraq people in recent days. “There has been a change since the first time I arrived. It is just different,” Macek said. “It used to be welcoming, but the attitude has changed to a more negative attitude toward American soldiers.”

US Central Command spokesman Major Peter Mitchell indicated Macek’s criticism of the Bush administration could make her subject to military discipline. “If she has said these things about the Commander-in-Chief she has opened herself up to disciplinary action,” he said. “Just what that action is would have to be determined by her unit commander.”

Mitchell added, “At the moment [Sergeant Macek] is not a private citizen. She is serving her country and while she wears the uniform she voluntarily agreed to curtail her behavior for the purpose of maintaining discipline and cohesion.”

Jessica Macek has defended her criticism of government policy, commenting, “As an American I have a right to speak out against the war if I choose.”



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