

Slain Irish soldier's mother condemns Iraq war

Julie Hyland
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The mother of the only Irish soldier to be killed during the occupation of Iraq has attacked the US-led war.

Mary Malone's 28-year-old son, Lance Corporal Ian Malone, was shot dead by a sniper near the southern Iraqi town of Basra on April 6, 2003. A 20-year-old British soldier also died in the attack.

Mrs. Malone was making a St. Patrick's Day visit to the Irish Guards' barracks in Bessbrook, South Armagh, for a presentation being made by Princess Anne. During the ceremony on March 18, Mrs. Malone had presented a cap badge to the Guards' regiment in honour of her son and others who had died in the war. But afterwards, she said that she felt the attack on Iraq was wrong, and should never have taken place.

Ian Malone had served in the Irish Guards for six years and had been stationed in the UK, Poland, Oman, Canada, Kosovo and Germany. She had been bitter following his death, "but you cannot go through life being bitter because Ian wouldn't have wanted that."

Nevertheless, she thought the war was "totally unnecessary":

"I don't think the war should ever have happened. It was not necessary. There was no need for the war at all. Since the war has ended, so many have died, I think it was totally unnecessary."

Mrs. Malone's comments caused severe embarrassment to the Irish governments, north and south of the border. The Iraq war sparked mass protests in Ireland. During the wave of international demonstrations last February, some 20,000 protested in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and quarter of a million in Dublin. The protesters were particularly outraged by the decision of Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern to defy popular opposition to the war, and grant overflying and landing rights at Shannon airport, near

Limerick, to US military transport planes en route to the Middle East.

The Dublin mother joins a growing number of relatives with loved ones killed in Iraq who have spoken out against the war.

In January, the British government was condemned by the widow of one soldier killed in Iraq, after it was revealed that his death was the result of equipment shortages. Sergeant Steven Roberts, 33, was serving with the 2nd Royal Tank Regiment when he was shot dead at Zubayr, near Basra, on March 24. His wife revealed that her husband had informed her in a cassette tape letter before his death that he had been made to hand over body armour to another soldier because there was not enough to go around. The pathologist's report showed that an armoured vest would have saved Roberts's life.

In the US, as the death toll of US steadily mounts, more military family members are denouncing the government's Iraq policy.

In November, the relatives of 16 soldiers killed when their Chinook helicopter was shot down over Iraq condemned the Bush administration for the deaths. Rosemarie Dietz Slavenas, mother of a 30-year-old Illinois National Guardsman Brian, refused to allow a military funeral for her son and rejected the stars and stripes being draped over his coffin.

In an outspoken attack on the government, she said, "I believe my son Brian died not for his country but because of our country's lack of a coherent and civilised foreign policy.

"My son was not a soldier, 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."



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