

Florida man burns himself over son's death in Iraq

David Walsh
27 August 2004

The horrifying cost of the Bush administration's illegal and criminal war in Iraq continues to mount. Tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers and civilians, nearly a thousand US troops and now the near-death of a distraught father in Florida.

Costa Rican immigrant Carlos Arredondo set a Marine van and himself on fire August 24 after being informed that his son, Lance Cpl. Alexander Arredondo, 20, had died in the fierce fighting around Najaf.

Arredondo's wife and stepmother of the slain soldier, Melida, told the press that her husband fell apart when he saw three Marines approaching his house in Hollywood, Florida. "My husband immediately knew that his firstborn son had been killed," she explained on ABC News's "Good Morning America."

After he was informed of his son's death, Carlos Arredondo walked into his garage, picked up a propane tank, a lighting device and a can of gasoline. He proceeded to charge the Marines' van, smash a window, douse the insides, climb into the vehicle and set it on fire. Arredondo was thrown from the vehicle when it exploded. The three Marines put out the flames.

Arredondo, 44, was taken to Memorial Regional Hospital in Hollywood with burns over as much as 50 percent of his body. He was later transferred to the major burn unit at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami, about 20 miles south. He remains in serious condition, but is expected to recover.

Melida Arredondo said her husband simply snapped. She told a reporter, "Well, at the time the Marines showed up, I was working. And I knew my husband called me immediately and was crying and screaming in the phone that Alexander had been killed. That his son had been killed. And I went to pieces and my husband, as you know, went to pieces and basically

tried to accompany his son."

Arredondo, a self-employed handyman, moved to Florida last spring from Roslindale, Massachusetts. The dead youth was a graduate of Blue Hills Regional Technical School in Canton, Massachusetts.

Alexander's mother, Victoria Foley, of Bangor, Maine, told the *Miami Herald* that her son grew up in Massachusetts with her and last saw his father at Christmas.

This was the young Arredondo's second tour of duty in Iraq. The Marines did not provide any information about how he died. "He was in the thick of it, that's all I know," his mother said.

The *Herald* reports: "Foley said her son had been about 250 yards away from the Muslim shrine in Najaf where three weeks of fighting have raged between US-led forces and the Mahdi Army militia of rebel cleric Muqtada al Sadr."

Arredondo joined the Marines about one month before the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, when he was still in high school, his mother said. He joined the military, according to his stepmother cited in the *Herald*, "because he didn't want to be a financial burden to his family."

One of the facts of American life, which hardly anyone in the media or political establishment wants to discuss, the widespread and deeply felt popular opposition to the war in Iraq, emerges from this terrible incident in Florida.

The Marines on the scene were convinced that Carlos Arredondo was less determined to end his own life than vent his rage on the closest piece of US government property. Marine Maj. Scott Mack told the press, "The gentleman was determined to exercise some of his grief on the only government entity he saw."

Mack told *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* columnist

Michael Mayo about informing a mother last month of her son's death in Iraq. "He [Mack] said when he handed the folded flag to [Terry Holmes] Ordonez's mother at the funeral, 'if looks could kill, I'd be dead.'"

Carlos Arredondo was apparently proud of his son serving, but wished that his service, according to the stepmother, could have been during a "more peaceful" time. "This was his scream that his Chi-Chi—that's what he called Alex—this is his scream that his child is dead and the war needs to stop," she said. Alexander's grandmother, Luz Marina Arredondo, was blunt about her hostility to the war. She blamed the government directly. "I blame them a lot," she told the *Associated Press*. "They send them like guinea pigs over there."

Opposition came from the other side of his family as well. Alexander followed in the footsteps of his maternal grandfather, Jack Foley of West Roxbury, Massachusetts, who served in the Korean War.

Foley told the *Miami Herald*, "I couldn't have been prouder.... He wrote me a letter from boot camp, saying, 'You're my inspiration.' It's sad. A young Marine is dead at 20 years. It's horrible."

Foley told the newspaper that he had been opposed to the war from the beginning: "We never should have started something we couldn't cope with.... We don't start wars. It's just a waste. I've always been worried about him, but I never thought it would happen."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact