

Report from final days of “Camp Casey”

Soldier returned from Iraq: “The rich don’t fight wars in America”

Mark de Socio
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WSWS reporter Mark deSocio traveled to Crawford, Texas at the end of August to speak to protestors supporting the antiwar campaign of Cindy Sheehan, whose son Casey was killed in Iraq in 2004. Sheehan camped near President George Bush’s ranch last month where Bush was vacationing to highlight popular opposition to the war, demanding that the president meet with her and explain why his administration had sent her son to be killed in a war based on lies. Bush refused to meet with her.

Cindy Sheehan returned to Crawford, Texas, on August 24 to continue her antiwar vigil outside of Bush’s ranch, after having left on the 19th to tend to her ailing mother. Sheehan and her supporters subsequently launched a nationwide tour to focus and promote popular opposition to the war. Sheehan said she planned to continue her vigil in Washington until the president agreed to meet with her.

“I thought our country was going down, down, down,” Sheehan told the Associated Press while supporters and protesters packed up, preparing to leave for their bus tour which will culminate in Washington D.C. outside the White House. “I thought nobody cared about our children killed in the war, but millions care, and millions care about our country and want to make it better,” she said.

In a show of support, more than two thousand antiwar protesters gathered on August 27 and at least a thousand on August 28 at “Camp Casey.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed several antiwar protesters over the weekend, including 33-year-old former Army Sergeant Scott Service of Montana, an Iraq war veteran. “Coming here was a very personal thing for me,” Scott said. “I went through a lot in Iraq...

I’d say the most important reason I am here is for emotional and psychological healing.”

Scott had enlisted in the Army National Guard in 2000 because, he said, he “wanted some meaning, some fulfillment, and some sort of honor in serving my country.”

“My feelings against the war became very strong when I was in Iraq,” Scott said. He and his unit were deployed to Iraq in February 2004 and spent the next 15 months there.

Speaking of conditions in Iraq, Scott said that his base sustained up to 800 mortar attacks, one of which narrowly missed him, daily small arms fire, and numerous car bomb attacks at the front gate. He expressed dismay at his unit’s lack of equipment, including anti-ballistic vests that were not issued until later in their deployment.

Concerning morale in his unit, Scott said, “I’d say that 60 percent or so of the people in my unit were angry that they were there, very frustrated with the situation, very confused about why we were doing what we were doing, and why we were even there in the first place.” Asked what sorts of jobs he and his colleagues held prior to deployment, Scott responded with the comment that “the rich don’t fight wars in America.”

When asked what political lessons, if any, he has drawn from his experiences in Iraq and at the Camp Casey vigil, Scott said, “Before I left, I was a registered Democrat. Now I am an Independent.”

Chelan Clapp lost her husband, Army Chief Warrant Officer Douglas Clapp, in a Black Hawk helicopter crash near Red River Arsenal in Texas during pre-deployment training. She said that she came to Camp Casey to support Cindy Sheehan. “I never supported

this war, not ever. I didn't support it then, and I don't support it now," she said.

Amy Branham, 43, lost her son, 22-year-old Army Sergeant Jeremy Smith, in a car crash at Ft. Hood just 48 hours before deploying to Iraq. According to Amy, her son was killed when he drove off the road to avoid hitting another car and hurting others. "He died heroically," she said. "He has more honor than President Bush. Our soldiers are honorable and good people, but Bush is a liar."

Several mothers of children that are of, or close to, military age said that they were motivated to come to Camp Casey because military recruiters were constantly calling their homes or knocking on their doors. Alison Williams, a school teacher and mother of three boys, one of whom is 18 years old, said that her house was "getting bombarded by recruiters." The war, she said, "is unjust... it was pre-meditated for private industry." Williams expressed concern about the possibility of a military draft. "I am worried for my sons," she said.

Ramona Trevino, a grade school principal and mother of a 17-year old boy, said that she "came as a mom."

The *World Socialist Web Site* also spoke with sisters Jeannie, Annie, and Marie Burns, of Ithaca, New York, who together comprise the acoustic folk/country music band the Burns Sisters. Asked why they came to Camp Casey, Jeanie said, "We wanted to support this movement. We were against the war before it started, but now that [Cindy Sheehan] has gotten the media's attention, we wanted to be here to be counted." Added Marie, "We're mothers! I have a 17-year-old and a 20-year-old, and recruitment stuff is coming into my house, you know, every week, and it is driving me crazy!"

Speaking of their political leanings, Jeannie said, "We were raised Democrats." Annie said, "Our father was Democratic state chairman of New York when we were little." Today, however, "I feel that the Democrats are turning into Republicans," said Annie. "We're the left wing of the Democratic Party," added Jeannie.

"Let me say this," said Marie, "I just feel this is not Republican, it's not Democrat, its families, it's giving a voice to people who don't want to be affiliated—I mean, Hillary Clinton is for the war! She is a big disappointment, and they're all just playing it so safe, they don't represent people that way."

Speaking of the Camp Casey vigil, Annie said, "Bush's numbers are going down, the support for the war is going down, and Cindy Sheehan came here and it was just this amazing turning point."

Added Marie, "All these families that were feeling all this stuff and not having any place to talk or anything to say where they're not going to be affiliated with a political person or organization." Jeanie said, "I love how Cindy says that she was the spark, but now the flame is taking hold."



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