

Right-wing smear campaign against antiwar vet Jimmy Massey

Jeff Riedel

18 November 2005

Former Marine Staff Sergeant Jimmy Massey, an outspoken opponent of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, has become the target of a smear campaign by right-wing activists, who claim that he was lying when he reported atrocities committed by US forces there.

The campaign has been fueled by a pair of articles published earlier this month in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* by the paper's Washington correspondent Ron Harris, who was "embedded" with a US Marine unit during the same period that Massey was in Iraq.

Seizing on inconsistencies in different accounts given by Massey—who returned from Iraq in late 2003 suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder—Harris accuses the antiwar vet of lying about having witnessed the killing of civilians and indicts those sections of the media that reported his story.

Harris claims that some details of Massey's story changed over the period spanning his honorable discharge from the Marines in December 2003 through the publication of his recent book, *"Kill, Kill, Kill,"* published in France last month. Neither the Marine Corps nor other embedded journalists in Iraq, Harris claims, could corroborate other details reported by Massey. Harris's contention is that Massey is a liar whose exposures of US crimes against the Iraqi people cannot be believed, and that therefore the incidents never happened.

In some cases, the charges against the ex-Marine involve the twisting of his words or outright misquotation, Massey insists. In others, the "contradictions" involve using different words to describe the same thing.

For instance, Harris writes about a checkpoint shooting Massey recounted: "In some accounts, Massey said Marines fired at the vehicle after it failed to stop at a checkpoint. In another, version, he said the Marines stormed the car." That these "versions" are hardly mutually exclusive seems to have escaped the reporter.

The interest of the right wing in this reporter's work is clear. They see it as a means of denying the obvious—that the US war has claimed the lives of more than 100,000 civilians—and of further intimidating the media from reporting the ongoing war crimes in Iraq. They also want to silence an opponent of the war whose sharp critique of American militarism is based on more than a dozen years in the US Marine Corps.

Curiously, Harris's smear against Massey has received more coverage from some sections of the mass media than Massey's original story.

For example, CNN—which never interviewed Massey in the two years since he returned from Iraq—invited Harris onto the network's "American Morning" program last week to call the antiwar vet a liar. No attempt was made to get Massey's response or allow him to rebut what amounted to character assassination.

The WSWS has itself received a number of e-mails relating Harris's accusations and asking if we intend to retract a previous interview and article, written by this reporter one year ago.

We have no intention of joining those sections of the media—most notably the *Sacramento Bee*—that have engaged in hand wringing over their failure to detect the inconsistencies that Harris has tried to turn into an indictment against Massey.

The same sections of the mass media which now voice deep concern over such supposed lapses had no problem swallowing—and covering up—the inconsistencies and bold-faced lies that characterized the Bush administration's justification for carrying out a war of aggression against Iraq.

The WSWS spoke with Massey again this week in Miami, where he appeared at an event organized by Broward County Peace Coalition along with Camilo Mejia, a former Florida National Guard member who spent nine months in prison for refusing to fight in the Iraq war. While in Miami, Massey also spoke to high school students about the methods of military recruitment and the war in Iraq. On Monday, he appeared on Pacifica Radio's "Democracy Now," where he was interviewed together with Ron Harris.

WSWS: Why do think you have become the target of attacks from Ron Harris?

JM: For one, he is attempting to say that the US is fighting a legitimate war and that atrocities are not being committed against the Iraqi people—that the things we did were not war crimes. And let me just ask this, did the military ever admit to any of the atrocities that were committed in Vietnam? I mean, look at My Lai—look at who was a part of My Lai—Colin Powell. He was a Major back then, and he was sent in to investigate the massacre and he came back with nothing. The

US military does everything within their power to control information, but they just can't do it. I also think that it is partly retribution for me criticizing him in a speech that I gave in Boston at the Veterans for Peace Convention back in 2004. I criticized the honesty of his so-called investigative journalism, particularly a piece he wrote on the Rasheed [military complex] conflict. He was reporting stories as they were fed to him from military officials, like he did about weapons of mass destruction.

WSWS: What about the timing of this? The accusations against you are coming at a time when the Bush administration is slipping deeper into a political crisis with the exposure of the lies used to launch the war and poll numbers that are dropping to all-time lows.

JM: You hit the nail right on the head. They have to step up the propaganda now and turn things around and attack anyone who criticizes them. It's aimed against people like Cindy Sheehan and anyone else putting themselves on the line to speak out against the war. It's trying to send a clear message to let people know who's in control and to keep the lies going.

WSWS: What is your answer to Harris, to his claims that your story has no credibility? Let's talk about some specifics

JM: Well, you know Mr. Harris has even admitted that he was never with my company over in Iraq. He was with Lima Company. I only saw him one time over there, and that was when he showed up after an incident at the Rasheed Complex where he interviewed my driver. His name was Cpl. Jesse Schutz and he quoted him saying it's "either them or us, and it's got to be them." So Ron Harris knew very well that civilians were being killed. The question is, how did he respond to that? He decided to follow all of the intelligence reports and the military's propaganda. And he bought into their explanation and mind-set, their ideology, which basically gives the military carte blanche to shoot first and ask questions later—you know, "Just because they're in civilian clothes doesn't mean they aren't terrorists."

In my mind, that makes him a war criminal as much as anyone. The only difference, and this makes it worse, is that he knew exactly what was going on and he had a responsibility as a journalist to report the truth to the rest of the world. And he didn't.

WSWS: You mentioned his position on weapons of mass destruction.

JM: I'll tell you what his position was on WMD, and one good example was Salman Pak. This was a town outside of Baghdad that supposedly had a terrorist training camp. The intelligence was telling us that it was being used as a key chemical weapons manufacturing plant. It was on the hit list of the UN for years. They suspected it back in '91 because there was a fuselage of a 747 jet there. So we did this massive raid of the site and found nothing. What did Mr. Harris write about it at the time?

He wrote that one Marine was wounded before the attack. He

continued by writing that in 1991 the UN had said that a biological research center there had the capacity to produce more than 200 quarts of anthrax a week.

That's how he ended his report—that's the last sentence of his article back in April of 2003. Now you tell me, I'm an investigative reporter in Baghdad covering the story, and we are at war because of weapons of mass destruction. I would be right there behind the Marines saying, "Okay, where's the chemicals?—where's the munitions?" And then, when I didn't see any, I'm going to report "Hey, Salman Pak was clean—there was nothing there." But that's just not his style. That's not his approach. He just repeats the old bad intelligence and expects readers to hang on like they are getting close.

WSWS: Aside from your own experiences over in Iraq, what is your opinion about the perpetuation of this war and the consequences for the Iraqi people?

JM: It just baffles me how many Iraqis, like in Fallujah, have been systematically murdered because of the ongoing war. I grieve for the Iraqi people and for the soldiers who are losing their lives. I just hope that one day when this war is over that the Muslim people can look within their hearts and find the forgiveness for what's been done to them. It will be a long road of healing—so much damage has been done. I struggle with this. I wonder how a group of people can lower themselves as human beings to the level where there is just no compassion and can systematically be killing people. And so I think that the embedded reporters need to get out of the Green Zone and start doing actual investigative journalism—and start reporting with honesty.

WSWS: Do you think that Ron Harris's approach is widespread among embedded journalists? How is it possible that people are not seeing more pictures and hearing more stories of the reality over there?

JM: Yes, I think that overall there is a systematic failure with these embedded journalists to fully cover the casualties, the toll on the Iraqi people, the lack of water, the lack of medical supplies. I mean, we're dealing with Hurricane Katrina here, but the Iraqi people have been dealing with Hurricane USA every day for quite a while now.

See Also:

Iraq veteran Jimmy Massey speaks to the WSWS
"We're committing genocide in Iraq"

[11 November 2004]



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact