

Jimmy & Jackie Massey

by Virginia Rodino

"We forget what war is about, what it does to those who wage it and those who suffer from it."

~ Chris Hedges

March 21, 2005—Below is an interview conducted by Virginia Rodino of *Democracy Rising*, with Jimmy Massey, a soldier-turned-anti-war activist, and his partner, Jackie. Jimmy, 33 and Jackie, 23 live in Waynesville, N.C.

VR: Tell me about yourselves.

Jackie: We were both born here but Jimmy moved to Texas with his mother when his father passed away when Jimmy was 7. While Jimmy was on recruiting duty in the Marines, it brought him back to western North Carolina. . . I was working at Eckerd Pharmacy and recruiting duty was giving him high blood pressure and the rest is history. Jimmy is focusing on speaking out against the war and writing his memoirs while I am beginning nursing school in the fall of this year.

Jimmy joined the marines in 1992 and started out in bootcamp in San Diego, CA. His main occupation in the military has been infantry. . . . He was an infantry instructor at the Marine Corps boot camp in Paris Island, S C for three years and then volunteered for recruiting duty. . . . He recruited in western North Carolina from October 1999 to October 2002.

After [that], he was ordered to return to Twentynine Palms where he was again assigned to 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines. He was deployed to Kuwait in January 2003 and invaded Iraq in March 2003. Jimmy was horrified and unable to reconcile himself to what was taking place. He began to speak out to his superiors. Jimmy was eventually medivaced out of Iraq and diagnosed with depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Labeled as a conscientious objector by his commanders, Massey sought legal counsel and won his honorable discharge in December 2003.

VR: What was your impression of the military before the moment you find yourself at now? How about the U.S. government? How has that changed? Why has that changed?

Jimmy: . . . I was taught the Geneva Conventions and the Rules of Engagement from day one in boot camp. I believed that we were going over there to help those people but when I started witnessing innocent civilians being killed and no humanitarian aid being provided, I started to see the evil doings.

My disillusionment with the military began when I was working as a Marine recruiter in the early 90s. The Marines prey on young people from economically depressed areas. I'm not going to say that the Marine Corps is all flat-out lies, but it is very misleading.

A lot of the kids joining the military are from the 'barrios' and 'hoods,' or the poor parts of the Appalachian Mountains, where we live. Appalachia has some of the poorest counties in the country – so they're sweeping them up.

These kids are just thankful that they've got some health care – for a lot of them, the first time they even went to the dentist is when they joined the Marines. Then you pump them full of patriotism and intangible benefits – self-confidence and what not – and now you're indoctrinating a young person with an ideology.

Boot camp is designed to dehumanize a person and desensitize them to violence. I was a Marine Corps boot camp instructor for two-and-a-half years, and I know that it is designed to strip you down and rebuild you. The only purpose of the Marine Corps is to meet the enemy on the battlefield and destroy them.

America is becoming an increasingly militaristic society, where poor people have been encouraged to sign up as the front line. The bottom line is, for the Halliburtons and Enrons war is good, but for the poor and for all of the soldiers coming home, especially the ones coming home wounded, there's not much of a future. But for a lot of the kids getting ready to graduate high school, the military is looking pretty good because their families have no money to send them to college.



Iraq Mother & Child courtesy: Lorna Tychostup.com

VR: What led you to your decision?

Jimmy: My mother is a strict Southern Baptist woman. . . . She taught me the difference between right and wrong and told me that I should always follow my gut and that I should stand up for what I believe in. It was those values that led me to stand up against the Marine Corps and what we were doing in Iraq. Killing innocent civilians is wrong no matter how you look at it and I had to say something. I'm not a mercenary nor do I want to be one.

It was pretty evident what the overall goal of the Iraq mission was when, eight months before we even left to go to Kuwait, the Marines were training to shut down and take over the Ar Rumaylah oil fields. We had detailed schematics and terrain models of all of the oil fields outside of Basra, and once we took care of those, all that was left was the ride into Baghdad.

. . . I was in the main invasion all the way up into Baghdad, and then once Baghdad fell, my battalion headed south towards the city of Karbala. We were like a bunch of cowboys who rode into town shooting up the place. I saw charred bodies in vehicles that were clearly not military vehicles. I saw people dead on the side of the road in civilian clothes. As a matter of fact, I only remember seeing a couple of bodies in military uniform the whole time.

There wasn't a whole lot of direct fighting to speak of but it wasn't major combat action. We took the highway the whole way up to Baghdad. They had no artillery; they had no air support. They were so weakened by all the sanctions. All of their equipment was in very bad shape. Most of their hardware was left over from the war against Iran. The first Gulf War just devastated them. I don't think they had the will or ability to fight.

The real war did not begin until they saw us murdering innocent civilians. I mean, they were witnessing their loved ones being murdered by US Marines. It's kind of hard to tell someone that they are being liberated when they just saw their child shot or lost their husband or grandmother.

The turning point for me was when I was working at a roadside checkpoint. We signaled a car to stop and when it didn't we opened fire. They were innocent civilians. We found no weapons, no explosives – nothing. Somehow one guy got out of the car and he wasn't badly wounded. He was the brother of one of the men bleeding to death in the car. He looked at me and asked, 'Why did you kill my brother. What did he do to you?'

This didn't happen only once. With the intelligence reports that we were given, it was very hard for us to distinguish the good guys from the bad guys. We ultimately started looking at everybody in Iraq as a potential suicide bomber or terrorist from women to children to old men. We were discharging our weapons, 50 cal and —16s into civilian vehicles. When we would do this, we were expecting secondary explosions, ammunition to be cooking off or actually have the occupants in the vehicle fire back at us. However, none of this ever happened. When we would go to search the vehicles, we would find no weapons, and nothing to link these individuals with – these individuals with

terrorist acts. And this happened continuously through the fall of Baghdad. I would say my platoon alone killed 30-plus innocent civilians.

I blame the top of the chain of command. The president of the United States authorized the war, said there were weapons of mass destruction, made the case to us for going to war. I blame Tommy Franks to General James Mattis, commander of the First Marine Division. They all knew that the military was not trained properly when it comes to dealing with Muslim culture and a foreign land. But that was not our purpose for being there.

We were told we were there to set up a democracy. All we did was cause chaos and have a genocidal mindset. Iraqis have every right to be mad. I know if somebody killed my brother, you know, indiscriminately and laughed about it and said, well, sorry, wrong place, wrong time, I would be mad, too.

VR: Was there any humanity in the military's dealing with the Iraqi people?

Jimmy: That was not our purpose. Let me give you an example. We actually left all of the humanitarian MRE's [Meals Ready to Eat] in Kuwait. We were supposed to give these out for relief, and we left them in Kuwait. They were just for show when the film crews came into the camps. We also had this big show with the medical supplies that we were prepping for Iraqi casualties. We were supposed to get in there and take care of them.

But I'll give you an example of what we actually did. After we shot up this car with civilians, I called in the corpsmen to bring in stretchers. They came in and put two men on stretchers. Five minutes later, they brought them back and dumped their bodies on the side of the road. They were still alive. They were riddled with bullets – one guy was just rolling in agony on the side of the road.

VR: What was it like to break with the military?

Jimmy: When you're in the military, it's a lot like being in a mafia family. You don't step outside the family, and it's a very sheltered environment – you're taken care of; you've got a guaranteed paycheck on the 1st and the 15th, and when you're living on a Marine base, it's a bit like a utopia. But with the utopia comes the conformity to the ideology, which allows the utopia to continue. If you break away from the family, they're going to do whatever they can to keep you quiet.

It's very hard to break away – you have to reach down deep in your soul for answers to questions that begin to come up.

And what happened with me was, I was coming into contact with groups like the War Resisters League while I was out on recruitment duty. They were out there counter-recruiting. I started reading some of the literature that they were passing out at the high schools. I became curious and started doing my own research.

VR: How did you get an honorable discharge?

Jimmy: I was diagnosed with depression and post-traumatic stress disorder and sent back to the United States to argue against a dishonorable discharge in the summer of 2003. They tried to label me a conscientious objector. I told them, 'If you want to label me a conscientious objector for not wanting to kill innocent civilians, then I'll see you in court.' The next day I had a meeting with the regimental Sergeant Major – who's pretty high ranking, in charge of about 4,000 Marines.

I had a seat in his office, and he said that the Sergeant Major over in Iraq had sent him an e-mail explaining everything, and that I should stop worrying, that he was going to fix everything and it would all be okay. But just before I started to speak, I saw him reach into his desk drawer and pressed what I know was the record button on a tape recorder, and then he closed the drawer really fast and acted all nonchalant. I was thinking, 'Damn, if you're going to entrap me then at least try to cover it up a little.'

So I said nothing, and finally he says, 'You know, you only have another seven years to retire – we're going to move you to a nice little office somewhere or passing out basketballs or something like that...you've got a lot vested in the Marine Corps and you need to think about your retirement.'

I stood up and said 'Well, Sergeant Major, I don't want your retirement and I don't want your benefits. We killed innocent civilians, and you have to face that responsibility, and I'm going to tell everybody what happened.' I remember his face turned red, and he said that there was going to be legal repercussions that go along with that decision. I told him that I would not expect anything less from the Marine Corps.

I contacted a lawyer, Gary Meyers, whose practice dates back to the Vietnam War. In the end, the Marines backed down and agreed to an honorable discharge. I'll keep hanging on to one thing that my grandfather used to say: 'The truth shall set you free.' I'll keep talking as long as people listen.

VR: Detail your daily life now...

What does your future look like?

Jimmy: Well, my daily life consists of having to take 6 different medications just to make it through the day. I have had to try and learn how to live my life with PTSD [post traumatic stress disorder] and so far it has not worked too well but it is getting better. I spend a lot of time with my wife who schedules my media requests and I work on writing my memoirs. At this point, I am just trying to take things one step at a time.

VR: It would be powerful to have you explain your feelings about the anti-war movement. . . .

Jimmy: I feel very strongly about the peace movement and am very happy to say that I am part of it. I can think back on when I was in the military and looking at those demonstrators and saying 'What a bunch of hippies!' But now, I realize that we are not just a bunch of hippies. We are simply standing up and speaking out against something that we believe to be wrong.

VR: What steps do you think the peace movement should take now?

Jimmy: Keep going and don't give up. Challenge the media. Make them start asking tough questions. Keep demonstrating and keep calling for an end to the occupation in Iraq and everywhere else that we don't belong.

VR: How have you changed as a person?

Jimmy: I have changed completely. I see the world from the other side of the fence now and in some ways it's very rewarding. However, it is disgusting to think of what I had to go through to see it this way. I wouldn't change a thing though.

VR: What do you think of refuseniks – U.S. soldiers who have decided to not fight in this war? What do you think of Jimmy?

Jackie: . . . If someone feels that what is going on over in Iraq is wrong, they should have every right to say so. I am very proud of Jimmy and the work that he is doing. He is one of the strongest and bravest people that I know and I am honored to stand by his side.

VR: How has this affected you and your future?

Jackie: Dealing with the PTSD has been the only thing that has affected me. I had to learn by trial and error what to do for Jimmy. I had no idea what was coming home to me. I had to make him talk to me and push him even when he didn't want me to. We are both learning the hard way that there is life with PTSD and we are dealing with it day by day.

It hasn't really affected our future as far as I am concerned. I have always been the type of person to go with the flow of things and to play with whatever cards life deals your way. So what if Jimmy and I don't go to work everyday from 9-5 and have a white house with a picket fence and 2.5 children. That is boring. We are making a difference and I am so proud of that.

VR: Have your feelings changed about the peace movement?

Jackie: My feelings are the same as Jimmy's for the most part. I really never cared about politics and I can honestly say that I was one of those people that went through life saying 'as long as it is not happening over here, I don't care.' It is liberating in a way to be on the other side of that and to have had my eyes opened to what is really going on under our noses. I am proud to say that I like who I am much better now than I did then.

~ <http://democracyrising.us>. Printed with permission Ms. Rodino