

Ground Truth: Dear Mike, Iraq sucks (5 Oct 04)

Guardian

Civilian contractors are fleecing taxpayers; US troops don't have proper equipment; and supposedly liberated Iraqis hate them. After the release of Fahrenheit 9/11, Michael Moore received a flood of letters and emails from disillusioned and angry American soldiers serving in Iraq. Here, in an exclusive extract from his new book, we print a selection.

From: RH
To: mike@michaelmoore.com
Sent: Monday, July 12, 2003 4:57 PM
Subject: Iraqi freedom veteran supports you

Dear Mr Moore,

I went to Iraq with thoughts of killing people who I thought were horrible. I was like, "Fuck Iraq, fuck these people, I hope we kill thousands." I believed my president. He was taking care of business and wasn't going to let al Qaeda push us around. I was with the 3rd Squadron, 7th Cavalry, 3rd Infantry division out of Fort Stewart, Georgia. My unit was one of the first to Baghdad. I was so scared. Didn't know what to think. Seeing dead bodies for the first time. People blown in half. Little kids with no legs. It was overwhelming, the sights, sounds, fear. I was over there from Jan'03 to Aug'03. I hated every minute. It was a daily battle to keep my spirits up. I hate the army and my job. I am supposed to get out next February but will now be unable to because the asshole in the White House decided that now would be a great time to put a stop-loss in effect for the army. So I get to do a second tour in Iraq and be away from those I love again because some guy has the audacity to put others' lives on the line for his personal war. I thought we were the good guys.

From: Michael W
Sent: Tuesday July 13 2004 12.28pm
Subject: Dude, Iraq sucks

My name is Michael W and I am a 30-year-old National Guard infantryman serving in southeast Baghdad. I have been in Iraq since March of 04 and will continue to serve here until March of 05.

In the few short months my unit has been in Iraq, we have already lost one man and have had many injured (including me) in combat operations. And for what? At the very least, the government could have made sure that each of our vehicles had the proper armament to protect us soldiers.

In the early morning hours of May 10, one month to the day from my 30th birthday, I and 12 other men were attacked in a well-executed roadside ambush in south-east Baghdad. We were attacked with small-arms fire, a rocket-propelled grenade, and two well-placed roadside bombs. These roadside bombs nearly destroyed one of our Hummers and riddled my friends with shrapnel, almost killing them. They would not have had a scratch if they had the "Up Armour" kits on them. So where was [George] W [Bush] on that one?

It's just so ridiculous, which leads me to my next point. A Blackwater contractor makes \$15,000 [£8,400] a month for doing the same job as my pals and me. I make about \$4,000 [£2,240] a month over here. What's up with that?

Beyond that, the government is calling up more and more troops from the reserves. For what? Man, there is a huge fucking scam going on here! There are civilian contractors crawling all over this country. Blackwater, Kellogg Brown & Root, Halliburton, on and on. These contractors are doing everything you can think of from security to catering lunch!

We are spending money out the ass for this shit, and very few of the projects are going to the Iraqi people. Someone's back is getting scratched here, and it ain't the Iraqis'!

My life is left to chance at this point. I just hope I come home alive.

From: Specialist Willy
Sent: Tuesday March 9 2004 1.23pm
Subject: Thank you

Mike, I'd like to thank you for all of the support you're showing for the soldiers here in Iraq. I am in Baghdad right now, and it's such a relief to know that people still care about the lemmings who are forced to fight in this conflict.

It's hard listening to my platoon sergeant saying, "If you decide you want to kill a civilian that looks threatening, shoot him. I'd rather fill out paperwork than get one of my soldiers killed by some raghead." We are taught that if someone even looks threatening we should do something before they do something to us. I wasn't brought up in fear like that, and it's going to take some getting used to.

It's also very hard talking to people here about this war. They don't like to hear that the reason they are being torn away from their families is bullshit, or that their "president" doesn't care about them. A few people here have become quite upset with me, and at one point I was going to be discharged for constantly inciting arguments and disrespect to my commander-in-chief (Dubya). It's very hard to be silenced about this when I see the same 150 people every day just going through the motions, not sure why they are doing it.

[Willy sent an update in early August]

People's perceptions of this war have done a complete 180 since we got here. We had someone die in a mortar attack the first week, and ever since then, things have changed completely. Soldiers are calling their families urging them to support John Kerry. If this is happening elsewhere, it looks as if the overseas military vote that Bush is used to won't be there this time around.

From: Kyle Waldman
Sent: Friday February 27 2004 2.35am
Subject: None

As we can all obviously see, Iraq was not and is not an imminent threat to the United States or the rest of the world. My time in Iraq has taught me a little about the Iraqi people and the state of this war-torn, poverty-stricken country.

The illiteracy rate in this country is phenomenal. There were some farmers who didn't even know there was an Operation Iraqi Freedom. This was when I realised that this war was initiated by the few who would profit from it and not for its people. We, as the coalition forces, did not liberate these people; we drove them even deeper into poverty. I don't foresee any economic relief coming soon to these people by the way Bush has already diverted its oil revenues to make sure there will be enough oil for our SUVs.

We are here trying to keep peace when all we have been trained for is to destroy. How are 200,000 soldiers supposed to take control of this country? Why didn't we have an effective plan to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure? Why aren't the American people more aware of these atrocities?

My fiancee and I have seriously looked into moving to Canada as political refugees.

From: Anonymous
Sent: Thursday April 15 2004 12.41am
Subject: From KBR truck driver now in Iraq

Mike, I am a truck driver right now in Iraq. Let me give you this one small fact because I am right here at the heart of it: since I started this job several months ago, 100% (that's right, not 99%) of the workers I am aware of are inflating the hours they claim on their time sheets. There is so much more I could tell you. But the fact is that MILLIONS AND MILLIONS of dollars are being raped from both the American taxpayers and the Iraqi people because of the unbelievable amount of greed and abuse over here. And yes, my conscience does bother me because I am participating in this rip-off.

From: Andrew Balthazor
Sent: Friday August 27 2004 1.53pm
Subject: Iraqi war vet - makes me sound so old

Mr Moore, I am an ex-military intelligence officer who served 10 months in Baghdad; I was the senior intelligence officer for the area of Baghdad that included the UN HQ and Sadr City.

Since Bush exposed my person and my friends, peers, and subordinates to unnecessary danger in a war apparently designed to generate income for a select few in the upper echelon of America, I have become wholeheartedly anti-Bush, to the chagrin of much of my pro-Republican family.

As a "foot soldier" in the "war on terror" I can personally testify that Bush's administration has failed to effectively fight terrorists or the root causes of terror. The White House and the DoD failed to plan for reconstruction of Iraq. Contracts weren't tendered until Feb-Mar of 2003, and the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (the original CPA) didn't even come into existence until January 2003. This failure to plan for the "peace" is a direct cause for the insecurity of Iraq today.

Immediately after the "war" portion of the fighting (which really ended around April 9 2003), we should have been prepared to send in a massive reconstruction effort. Right away we needed engineers to diagnose problems, we needed contractors repairing problems, we needed immediate food, water, shelter, and fuel for the Iraqi people, and we needed more security for all of this to work - which we did not have because we did not have enough troops on the ground, and CPA decided to disband the Iraqi army. The former Iraqi police were engaged far too late; a plan should have existed to bring them into the fold right away.

I've left the military. If there is anything I can do to help get Bush out of office, let me know.

From: Anthony Pietsch
Sent: Thursday August 5 2004 6.13pm
Subject: Soldier for sale

Dear Mr Moore, my name is Tony Pietsch, and I am a National Guardsman who has been stationed in Kuwait and Iraq for the past 15 months. Along with so many other guard and reserve units, my unit was put on convoy escorts. We were on gun trucks running from the bottom of Iraq to about two hours above Baghdad.

The Iraqi resistance was insanity. I spent many nights lying awake after mortar rounds had just struck areas nearby, some coming close enough to throw rocks against my tent. I've seen roadside bombs go off all over, Iraqis trying to ram the side of our vehicle.

Small children giving us the finger and throwing rocks at the soldiers in the turrets. We were once lost in Baghdad and received nothing but dirty looks and angry gestures for hours.

I have personally been afraid for my life more days than I can count. We lost our first man only a few weeks before our tour was over, but it seems that all is for nothing because all we see is hostility and anger over our being there. They are angry over the abuse scandal and the collateral damages that are always occurring.

I don't know how the rest of my life will turn out, but I truly regret being a 16-year-old kid looking for some extra pocket money and a way to college.

From: Sean Huze
Sent: Sunday March 28 2004 7.56pm
Subject: "Dude, Where's My Country?"

I am an LCPL in the US Marine Corps and veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Mr Moore, please keep pounding away at Bush. I'm not some pussy when it comes to war. However, the position we were put in - fighting an enemy that used women, children, and other civilians as shields; forcing us to choose between firing at "area targets" (nice way of saying firing into crowds) or being killed by the bastards using the crowds for cover - is indescribably horrible.

I saw more than a few dead children littering the streets in Nasiriyah, along with countless other civilians. And through all this, I held on to the belief that it had to be for some greater good.

Months have passed since I've been back home and the unfortunate conclusion I've come to is that Bush is a lying, manipulative motherfucker who cares nothing for the lives of those of us who serve in uniform. Hell, other than playing dress-up on aircraft carriers, what would he know about serving this nation in uniform?

His silence and refusal to speak under oath to the 9/11 Commission further mocks our country. The Patriot Act violates every principle we fight and die for. And all of this has been during his first term. Can you imagine his policies when he doesn't have to worry about re-election? We can't allow that to happen, and there are so many like me in the military who feel this way. We were lied to and used. And there aren't words to describe the sense of betrayal I feel as a result.

From: Joseph Cherwinski
Sent: Saturday July 3 2004 8.33pm
Subject: "Fahrenheit 9/11"

I am a soldier in the United States army. I was in Iraq with the Fourth Infantry Division.

I was guarding some Iraqi workers one day. Their task was to fill sandbags for our base. The temperature was at least 120. I had to sit there with full gear on and monitor them. I was sitting and drinking water, and I could barely tolerate the heat, so I directed the workers to go to the shade and sit and drink water. I let them rest for about 20 minutes. Then a staff sergeant told me that they didn't need a break, and that they were to fill sandbags until the cows come home. He told the Iraqis to go back to work.

After 30 minutes, I let them have a break again, thus disobeying orders. If these were soldiers working, in this heat, those soldiers would be bound to a 10-minute work, 50-minute rest cycle, to prevent heat casualties. Again the staff sergeant came and sent the Iraqis back to work and told me I could sit in the shade. I told him no, I had to be out there with them so that when I started to need water, then they would definitely need

water. He told me that wasn't necessary, and that they live here, and that they are used to it.

After he left, I put the Iraqis back into the shade. I could tell that some were very dehydrated; most of them were thin enough to be on an international food aid commercial. I would not treat my fellow soldiers in this manner, so I did not treat the Iraqi workers this way either.

This went on for eight months while I was in Iraq, and going through it told me that we were not there for their freedom, we were not there for WMD. We had no idea what we were fighting for anymore.

Will They Ever Trust Us Again? Letters from the Warzone to Michael Moore by Michael Moore, to be published by Allen Lane on October 7 at £12.99. Copyright © Michael Moore 2004