

**Transcript (copyright 2006 Traprock Peace Center)**  
**Sgt. Ricky Clousing on his resistance to the Iraq War (with Q and A)**  
**September 16, 2006 at Camp Democracy, National Mall, Washington, DC**

**This is a "rush" transcript. To ensure accuracy when quoting, check the audio recording - MP3; 1:09:54; 128 kbps (64 kbps mono) - of his talk at [http://www.traprockpeace.org/audio/ricky\\_clousing\\_16sept06.mp3](http://www.traprockpeace.org/audio/ricky_clousing_16sept06.mp3)**

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**Traprock thanks Mike Gorse for volunteering his time to transcribe this talk. It was a long program (over an hour, with Q and A that was not always easy to hear). He made an extraordinary effort to prepare this transcription.**

**Ricky Clousing's website is at <http://www.sdmcc.org/rickyclousing/>**

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Camp Democracy: This is someone in a very tough position who's taking on this war in a way that a lot of us can't and a lot of people don't have the courage to do, and he's facing court-martial for it. Give a round of applause to Ricky Clousing. \*applause\*

Clousing: Hello.... My name is Ricky Clousing, and I'm from Seattle, Washington. I'm just going to share my story of the last year and a half, the last few years that have led me to this point in my life where I am right now. Like David said, I'm facing court-martial from the army and a maximum of two years confinement in a military prison.

I'm 24 years old. Like I said, I'm from Seattle. I got through high school, and I went to the university for two years before I joined the army. I lived in Europe when I was younger, so I always really enjoyed traveling. I quit college actually to go and do some mission work in Thailand. It was part of a semester program of the school that I was in. So I was over in Thailand for a few months, actually when September 11 happened, and we were over there working in an orphanage and building some roads and stuff, so I've always really kind of been compassionate; I wanted to help people from an early age. I went to Mexico when I was younger and did that with a group from the church that I was going through in high school. So 9/11 happened on that trip, and I came back from school and decided to quit college to go traveling more. My best friend from the school was German, so I flew to Germany to live with him and just backpack around.

When I was over there, the first wave of soldiers coming back from Afghanistan were traveling from the States to Germany to Afghanistan and back, and I'd spoken with some of the guys that had returned from there. As I was running out of money in Europe, I was contemplating what to do next. It was either go back to the States and finish college, which the downside of that was that I didn't have money for that, and I was always kind of hesitant to jump into school debts and stuff, so I contemplated maybe going into the military.

Like I said, 9/11 had just happened recently, the wave of patriotism. I knew I didn't want to be an infantry soldier, but I went and talked to a recruiter in Europe, and the only job that really appealed to me--I really enjoy foreign languages as well; I studied Spanish a lot when I was in school, and I studied abroad--the only job that appealed to me was being an interrogator. So I took a couple tests while I was there, and I passed, and I was qualified. The recruiter told me--he probably stretched the truth--but he told me that the only opening was in like two weeks. So I went to Amsterdam and decided that I was going to join the army and spend the weekend deciding if I was going to go. I went up there and decided that it was something that would be an exciting couple years and a journey and a new set of experiences. I joined the army and was on a plane back to basic training. I was training for about 18 months. After basic training, I went to the airborne school in Georgia, and, after that, I went to my advanced individual training, which was the interrogation course at Fort Wachuka, Arizona, which is the U.S. intelligence base. I was there for about six months in the interrogation course. After I completed that, I went on to the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California. I studied French there, and, when I graduated from my school, I was then stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina in the 82nd Airborne division.

When I was in my interrogation course, the invasion of Iraq was unfolding, and I didn't know a lot about the politics of the war then. At the time, I felt skeptical about it. I didn't understand how we had come from 9/11 to now going into Iraq, but I didn't really understand it. And, for me, at the time, I had a year and a half of training. I just tried to stay focused on what I had to do in my little reality. So, when I got stationed at Fort Bragg, my unit was already over there in Iraq, part of the first wave of deployments that happened when the war first started. In the winter of 2004, I received orders, when the first stage of the elections began, to go over there and provide support. Because I was in the 82nd Airborne, I know everybody doesn't know a lot about the military, but it's a tactical unit.

So I was an interrogator. There are basically two different units that you can be assigned to: there's a tactical unit and a strategic unit. Strategic interrogators are assigned to places like Abu Ghraib, are assigned to Guantanamo. They're basically assigned to the larger detention facilities where they do interrogations all day. That's all they do is interrogate ... and protected in well-guarded compounds where they basically don't ever leave the wire. They don't ever go in the city, and generally they just do interrogations all day long. I was part of a tactical unit, so I was providing direct support for the infantry guys I was assigned. So I was going out with the infantry guys on raids and on searches and on patrols. Any insurgent activity that we encountered, I would then basically take the individuals and the insurgents and question them on the scene to decide if they needed to be detained back at our interrogation facility or not. And, then, once they were detained, we'd go back, and myself and my team would start conducting interrogations on the prisoners.

My time over there was about nine months after the Abu Ghraib scandal happened. The intelligence community really started stressing interrogation tactics that were questionable. So we were basically told to shy away from a lot of the training that we were told is okay to do, so they kind of tried to refocus the way we were doing interrogations because the rest of the world was watching us, basically. So, personally, in my time over there, I never saw any abuse of the detainees. I heard stories from guys that had been there before the Abu Ghraib scandal happened, and I heard of inducing

hypothermia on the prisoners and putting fans on them. A lot of times, they would leave the sandbags over the detainees' heads overnight and tie them around their neck, and there would be just barb wired areas with ... blasting Metallica or heavy metal music so the detainees were not able to sleep all through the night. So there was sleep deprivation ... but I heard stories of soldiers beating certain prisoners. Like I said, I never witnessed this firsthand, but I knew what was going on over there.

My experience with the infantry guys--because we went around the city on patrols and whatnot. There were a couple of instances in particular that really stood out to me and made me question my ability to perform as a soldier and question my participation not only in Iraq but in the United States military in general. I saw one time that one of the vehicles had been hit by an IED when we were providing security down the road, making sure none of the other vehicles turned down our road. A car with a young man driving, probably 18 years old, a small maybe high-school age kid, he was going about five miles an hour and turned down our road. Once he saw American soldiers with weapons drawn, he was obviously terrified. I was the one closest to the vehicle. I was providing rear security on our convoy. So he was about 15 feet from me. I could see it in the windshield when he was approaching us at a slow speed, and he braked immediately, took his hands off the wheel, was terrified to see a whole bunch of Americans with big weapons as you can imagine. And he immediately grabbed the steering wheel and started turning the car around trying to get out of there. Well, one of the soldiers in the turret of the humvee behind me just opened up fire on the machine gun on the vehicle. As the vehicle was turning away, all I heard above my head was \*pop pop pop pop pop\*. This was my first deployment, my first combat experience was that moment right then, and just the sound of machine guns going off over my head. He popped about five or six rounds in the side of the vehicle. Myself and two of the other guys ran over to the vehicle, smashed the window, and pulled the guy out to provide first aid on him. As the medic came over, I was in shock. I couldn't believe not only that that was happening but that this guy was bleeding and getting dragged out of his vehicle in front of me. So, as they pull him out of his car, they laid him on the ground. I was providing first aid on him. I was standing above the kid, and it was a very interesting situation I found myself in at that time, because I was looking down at this kid who had just been shot in the stomach for no reason really--he was trying to leave--and, as the soldiers were doing their policy--the proper procedure is to provide first aid on injured civilians--they were crouched down, ripping the shirt open, bandaging him, and I was still just standing there in shock, looking down at this kid, and he looked right up at me. And his mouth was foaming. His stomach was falling out in his hands. And I was just stricken with fear and shock and didn't know what was going on. And, as I looked down at him, he didn't say any words because he was obviously in a lot of pain. But I'm from a small town right outside of Seattle. I'm not from a big city. I've never seen anybody die. I've never seen a dead body before in my whole life. But I was looking down at this kid, this young boy who was trying to just drive around town and took a wrong turn and tried to go the other direction, was shot at and killed, and I'm looking down at him now. And we made eye contact for about five seconds, and he just looked at me with the most empty, terrified, confused look in his face that will never leave me in my whole life I'm sure. There was no dialogue traded between us, but I could just feel the words inside of his head, just wondering 'why did this happen and what's going on? Why does this hurt so bad? What did I do? What's happening now? I don't understand what is going on right now.' Really just put me in shock, and I was glued standing there. And it took me about 30 seconds to snap out of it. The guys that were providing first aid looked up at me and yelled at me to

go back and pull security, and so I snapped out of it and ran over until we got him loaded in the vehicle. We drove to drop him out at one of the hospitals, and, when I got out, I went directly over there to see if he had survived or what his status was, and he had died in route to the hospital. So I was very upset that he didn't make it and that he was dead now.

And being in the army, being interrogators--I'm in a military intelligence unit with the machoism of the military, the interrogators kind of have the stigma of being the nerds of the army, so I was like the MI geek is what they called me, because we're not the hard-core infantry guys that are \*uuugh\* going around. It's a different caliber of people, pretty much, in the unit that I was in. So I was intimidated to approach these people and tell them that they were wrong not only because they were higher ranking than myself but also because this was my first deployment, and they had been on deployments before, but also because I wasn't an infantry guy, and I didn't earn the respect to speak up to the infantry guys that that's their job. It took me about ten minutes, and I left the area right away and walked around, tried to catch my breath, and I knew I had to say something or I would be haunted forever of just rolling over and not mentioning it.

So I went up to the commanding officer of the unit and the Platoon Sergeant--I was an E5, I was a Sergeant myself, but this guy was higher ranking than me. And I said Sir--I addressed him professionally, and I said, "Sir, I understand that your soldiers were scanning their lane of security, but your soldier ignored the rules of engagement that are outlined." When we get to Iraq, you are given the rules of engagement, and there's a thing called the escalation of force that U.S. soldiers are allowed to use escalation of force as long as the force is matched. So if an Iraqi civilian comes up to me with a gun in my face, then I can raise my gun to his face, and, given that threat, I'm authorized to shoot. If I feel like the threat is lethal, then I can engage the enemy. Or if a kid walks by me swinging a stick, I'm not going to pull my gun out and shoot him in the face because that's not the matching escalation of force. So that was described to the U.S. soldiers when they come to the country. When you first get into Iraq, you're given all the briefings of rules of engagement, the laws of war, and, basically, you're given the summary of intelligence among the area of operation you're working in. So this soldier completely ignored the rules of engagement. The car was turning around, and. If a car is coming at you and they're not turning around and they're not slowing, a soldier is supposed to, the first step is waving your hands, letting them know "hey, you're going in. This is me. Do you realize what you're doing?" If they still ignore that and they still don't stop, then the soldiers are authorized to fire a warning shot in the air, just a pop-off round in the air to let them know like, hey, you're coming at us, and we have weapons in our hand, you might want to think twice. If they still ignore that, then a soldier is authorized to try to disengage the vehicle, which would be trying to fire at the tires to try to, even the vehicle itself, trying to just let him know, again, like this is what you're driving into. If the vehicle still doesn't stop, then you're authorized to engage the person driving the vehicle. Because of the fact that this boy was going five miles an hour, he wasn't pouring his vehicle at us 50 miles an hour trying to ram into us, very clearly he was in the wrong place, he realized it, and he was trying to turn around. So I told the officer that, that he had to tell his soldier to analyze the situation better, and also, in a situation similar to that, he needs to follow the rules of engagement that we're supposed to be abiding by.

Well, they didn't take kindly to my advice and my perspective, so the officer and the senior-ranking Sergeant just basically ripped into me. I won't say all the stuff that they said, but they just jumped on my back and basically wrote me off as an inexperienced soldier and said that I don't understand how infantry operations work and basically that this is what happens in Iraq. This is the reality of it. And I was really taken aback. That point really was the pinnacle of where I was like 'what am I a part of? What is going on over here?' I joined the army, and I'd always been kind of made fun of because I'm from Seattle, and in my unit in North Carolina, the guys know. A lot of the guys that are in my unit, they're from the south and the east coast and this and that, and they kind of poke fun at me because I'm west coast. I was always called like a tree-hugger and a hippie, and I surfed a lot, so they kind of made fun of me for that. I had this stigma of being this granola soldier that didn't adapt well to the army, so that carried on over there. When I was deploying, when I was leaving, they even made the joke of not to let me interrogate prisoners without letting them go. It wasn't that I was against the U.S. military or anything. I just felt that a lot of the perception of Iraqis and of the war in general was totally misconstrued, and I've always just been reluctant to just buy what they tell me. So, when I was over there, the same kind of stigma stuck to me right away, and they were trying to get me not to go on certain missions and stuff, not to let me see and be out in what's actually happening.

One of the times, I was in route from one base to another, I was riding in the same Humvee as some of the infantry soldiers. They were actually transporting me from one base to another so I could conduct some interrogations on the other side of Mosul, which is where we were at, and I was in the back seat of the Humvee looking over some of the files and interrogation reports on the people that I was going to be talking to. In Iraq, when convoys drive by on freeways, the Americans have been here long enough that the Iraqis know that they mean business and that people are getting shot and killed every day. So, when a convoy of American vehicles is driving by, it's standard protocol for the Iraqis to pull off to the side of the shoulder and turn their hazard lights on. It basically lets everybody know we're getting out of your way, and you can proceed, nobody's a threat, just drive through. So we were driving, and I'm looking over a file, and all I feel is the vehicle being shaken and driven into something. If you follow the news, you know that the IED has evolved into the VIED, which is the vehicle-born IED, which is basically they put bombs in the cars and drive them into them now, in the U.S. troops and stuff. So I just thought what the hell was going on. The car was shaking. I'm freaking out, like what? I look out the window, and we're slamming into vehicles on the side of the road. I looked up at the vehicle in front of us, and they're driving normally in the middle of the road, no problems, in the other lane. And then the driver swerves back in the road, and they're laughing in the front seat. And then the guy in the ... passenger rolls the window down, extends his baton, the driver smashes back into the vehicle, side-swiping them, and they're smashing out windows as they're driving by. And I just could not believe this was happening. So I yelled at the people in the vehicle, like what the hell are you doing? Not only is that wrong, and they were harassing people, but, from your own safety, they could have bombs in their car, and you're totally pissing them off, and I don't understand why. So I yelled at the guys, and we kept driving. And then, later on in that trip, it didn't even stop there, later on in that trip, the guys I was with, there are four people in a Humvee and one of them on the turret standing up on the top of the vehicle. We came to a point just before the base where there was an Iraqi man walking his herd of sheep across the road. And I heard a couple rounds pop off from the turret. I just heard \*pop pop pop\*, like two or three rounds. And then the soldier standing in the turret ducks down and kind of says

jokingly that he just shot a couple of the guy's sheep, and I was livid. I could not believe that this was happening. The carelessness ... not even trying to be discrete and think that I might even care. They just thought it was a funny joke to them.

So, when we got back to our unit, I went directly to the battalion commander, who was a Lieutenant Colonel, and I said, sir, I need to tell you what I just witnessed and what your troops just did in route from this place to this place. Because not only was I already hesitant to be serving over there after I saw that kid die, but, now when I'm watching this behavior from U.S. soldiers, it just blew my mind that this was standard and happens over there. So I told the commander, and he acted upset, and acted like he was really mad about things. We're briefed as interrogators on what war crimes are, because, as interrogators, as you know, with Abu Ghraib, we're kind of held to a higher standard of detainee treatment and how we treat the people over there. And what those soldiers did was a war crime, what would actually constitute as a war crime. And I found out about three days later that the BC, the Battalion Commander basically had swept it under the rug and not wanted to bring it up as an issue, probably not to embarrass his command and his unit. They just kind of like discarded it, and they didn't pursue any punishment for it.

But, other than that, my feelings intensified more and more of what is going on over here, what am I doing. I really started to question the validity of us even being over there. Whereas before I was skeptical, but I went in with an idealistic attitude where I wanted to see firsthand what was going on, and I wanted to be the exception. If I was interrogating people, I wanted to let them go and not keep them detained. So I kind of went him hoping I could make a difference and change the way things were going on over there. But when I realized that this was the general attitude and the general behavior of soldiers, and, even when I addressed it, and it was on the top echelon of command that just swept it under the rug, I was really disturbed and really pushed to a point where I was questioning whether or not I could even do this anymore. Because I was in charge of a team of interrogators, I basically finished my time there. I worked mostly in the interrogation facilities after that, and then I chose not to go out on patrols.

When I got home, I really started digging into the politics and the premise of the war in general. Once I started reading that, that led me into a whole tangent of information that I was bombarded with, and I started reading about the Iraq war and what led up to that and the connection with Al Qaeda and that it didn't exist, how weapons of mass destruction didn't exist, and then questioning the premise of the war. That led into even questioning the premise of the conflicts that have happened in the last 50 years, really post-World War II. I started analyzing foreign policy since World War II, and really the driving force of all the interventions that we've been involved in. And I just started debating whether or not I could even serve in the military anymore. It went from just being opposed to Iraq to feeling really like, I came to a point after I was reading some of this stuff and after I saw what I saw in Iraq, where, I was honestly, for the first time, embarrassed to be not only a U.S. soldier, but I was embarrassed to be an American. My family wasn't too liberal growing up. They weren't really conservative. They were just kind of like politics wasn't that really big of an issue. And you go through school learning, you're conditioned as an American in the public education systems of what America stands for and all these ideals that we're supposedly trying to spread to other nations of the world. And, when I started reading the driving force behind not only what's going on in Iraq but what's been happening in the Middle East for as long as oil

has been a concern, and other places around the world, in South America, all over, I just became so disturbed that I didn't even feel like I could wear a uniform.

So, when I got home, I talked to my command, and I was home for about three months, and I was studying. When I got home, I talked to my command and letting him know I was having some issues with some of the stuff I saw over there, and I needed to talk to somebody about these problems. So they sent me to go talk to mental health advisors. I talked with them, and a lot of the issues I was feeling, I was reading about existentialism and reading about philosophy, and I've always been a spiritual person not identified with certain churches and denominations and stuff but just knowing. That's always been a driving force in my life. So I started reading a lot of things that have always inspired me, aside from the political stuff.

And I talked to my unit and told them I was having real concerns about being in the army, and they immediately were trying to find a way they could discharge me, and I told them I wasn't trying to be discharged. I wasn't just trying to get out of the army. That wasn't my issue. I really needed help about how to deal with what I had seen and what I've been part of and what's going on, and, for a couple months when that first happened, I kept having really gruesome nightmares about that boy that died and really gruesome nightmares about just people being dismembered and crazy stuff that my mind just generally doesn't think about. And I was really depressed for those couple months when I got home, and I just wanted to talk to somebody that's been to Iraq, like counselors or something that could tell me this is normal, this is what, whatever, blah blah blah, this is what you need to do, somebody that could help me out in any way. Basically, when I was talking to people and telling them my concerns about serving in the army based on what I saw in Iraq and how I feel personally, they were asking me how I wanted to be discharged, and I wasn't really seeking a discharge. The counselor was even asking me, they told me if I wanted to be discharged, that there are ways to go about doing that and that I could tell them that I was gay if I wanted to get out of the army. I could tell them that I'm not mentally stable, and they would do a series of tests and discharge me out. And I was insulted. I wasn't trying to work the system over. I was actually trying to get a legitimate perspective on the things I'd been exposed to and what's happening now. So I was frustrated with them. I went and talked to my command, my First Sergeant, my first-line supervisor, chaplains, I spoke to anybody and everybody I could and voiced my concerns politically about what's going on and also spiritually and what we reduced ourselves to, what we are reducing ourselves to, fighting for the reasons that we are fighting for. So, when I started talking about spirituality, the first thing that they tried to do was offer me conscientious objector status, which basically states if you don't believe in war, if you're a pacifist, then you can go through an another series of interviews and a whole bunch of other paperwork, and, if you pass their criteria, they will discharge you out of the military. A lot of people lately since Iraq's happened, there have been handfuls of people, some even that are here right now, that have gotten ... out in CO status, which is great. I mean, everybody has their own set of morals and their own standards of what they think is right and wrong. Me, personally, because I wasn't just trying to get out of the military, I contemplated that. I started reading up on what CO status meant and what it involved and who is it applicable to, and I was finding out that, to be selected for CO status, you have to believe basically that you will not fight in any wars. Well, that was really hard for me to try to think about. I knew for sure that I didn't want to fight for this fake pretense of freedom that we try to say we are fighting for now. I knew obviously that that wasn't something that I was willing to fight for. Then I started thinking about

past wars, World War II and these other circumstances, and even about civil disobedience and how I felt about violence in general, and I came to the conclusion that I could not say that 100% of the time that I would not fight in any conflict at all. And I could not say 100% of the time that I was a pacifist and I believe in nonviolence 100% of every situation I found myself in. So then I was in another predicament because I'm not filling this standard that they're laying for me. I knew that I could probably be discharged if I filed for that paperwork, but I felt personally that, if I said that I did feel that way, and they discharged me out for being a conscientious objector, that I would have lied in some way and been dishonest and manipulated my feelings and beliefs just to fit into their administrative window. So then I'm in another predicament. So I told my command that I wasn't willing to apply for that, which they were hoping that I would so that I would be kind of quiet and brushed over. I told them that was not something that I was willing to do, and they were getting obviously frustrated at this point, and they just told me to suck it up and deal with it.

So this is three months after I'd gotten home. This whole process took place over that amount of time. And my feelings kept intensifying more and more, and I felt I that the only two options that lay before me were that I could either roll over and plan on just sweeping it under the rug and try not to worry about it, finish my time in the army, take my college money that they would be giving me, take the other VA benefits that I would get, and just try to finish my time out and go that route, which, at that point, I was fast-tracking with promotions. I had promoted to Sergeant after two and a half years. I was really successful in all my training, and I never had any actions taken against me. I never was punished for anything. So part of me was like, okay, I committed to this, I signed this contract, I'm obliged to stay there, and there were benefits. I was being paid \$2000 a month and not having any bills, not having to pay for housing, food, anything. So it was decent money. I had college money that I was wanting to get when I finished, and so I was tempted to do that. Or I could file for CO status and get discharged, which I didn't want to be in the military anymore, but I felt that both of those options to me were dishonest. I could be dishonest to myself and my conscience and silence that and pretend that I'm not bothered by what I saw and pretend that I'm not bothered by being in uniform, and I could finish my time, get an honorable discharge, get my college money, all the benefits that were afforded to me. Or I could be dishonest and fill out this paperwork just so I could be separate from the army and go back home, which I wanted to do. Like I said, I didn't know what I was supposed to do. The only other option that I felt like I had was to leave and separate myself from the army. So, after thinking about that for a few days, I really decided that that was the only decision I could honorably do. I told my unit, I talked to them and told them, because they offered to change me to a unit that wouldn't deploy, that wouldn't be going back to Iraq or whatever, but I felt that my involvement in the army, whether it be directly or indirectly, whether in Iraq or training guys to go to Iraq, I was still that piece of machine in the system that still allowing this war to take place and still supporting that. My actions, whether or not they were on the front line or back safely at home, was still part of the body of the machine that's occupying this country. So I ultimately felt that the only thing I could do was to leave, so I packed my stuff last June, and I went AWOL.

I left a note on the door when I left that explained my decision. My unit was well aware how I felt. I explained that I couldn't fight under a false pretense of freedom. I couldn't train my soldiers to do exactly what I thought was wrong and be a part of what's happening over there. And I left a quote by Martin Luther King that says "Cowardess

asks the question 'is it safe'? Expediency asks the question 'is it politic?' And conscience asks the question 'is it right?' And that follows by saying "there comes a point in one's life where we must make a decision not because it's safe, not because it's politic, but because it's right." \*applause\* I left that note on my door and packed my belongings in my car and drove back to Seattle. A few months afterwards, I didn't know exactly what I was going to do. I wasn't familiar with the process of what to expect, what's happening. I got linked in with a great group of people from the GI Rights hotline, and they kind of pointed me in the right direction of what to do now.

About six months after me being on AWOL, I wanted to turn myself in. I never had the intention of leaving and just running away forever. I knew it was something that I was going to have to deal with. But I also knew that, if I stayed away longer than 30 days, that I would be dropped from the roles in theory I believe, anyways, and that they would discharge me administratively from the army, so, when I came back, all they would do was basically discharge me and punish me. My fear was that, if I returned to early, that, because the army invested so much money into me, into my security plans, and into my training as an interrogator, and in my language training, that they would not want to lose an asset in the training they would just re-enter me back into my unit, which I was not willing to do. And, I felt that even wearing the uniform was an insult for myself, and ... putting on that uniform was something I was dreading and not wanting to do. But, at the same time, I knew I was going to turn myself in eventually. So my lawyer started contacting Fort Bragg and telling them my client, Sgt. Clousing, is AWOL and wants to turn himself in but doesn't know where he's supposed to do that. Is he supposed to go to Fort Bragg, or where is he supposed to go? Well, Fort Bragg, it was basically this huge conundrum. Administratively, nobody knew what was going on. Nobody in my unit would even talk to my lawyers. They said that my paperwork was transferred to Fort Lewis. And my lawyers talked to people at Fort Lewis, and they had no idea who I was. So it was basically back and forth pointing a finger at who was supposed to do that. So, for a whole year, I was waiting for some sort of direction on what I was supposed to do, where I was supposed to turn myself in at. After a year had passed, I made the decision that I was going to publicly speak out against the war and why I made my decision and then turn myself in. So, last month, on August 11, I held a press conference in Seattle at the Veterans for Peace rally. I had a press conference, and there was a lot of media. They received it well, and my story actually ended up going across the nation. I spoke on Democracy Now the morning that I turned myself in. I did a couple other radio interviews. And I turned myself in at Fort Lewis, where they sent me straight back to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to be punished or to be discharged. So I was sent back to Fort Bragg three weeks ago, which is where I'm currently supposed to be at right now. It's in North Carolina. And I found out last week, rather than discharging me, they're going to court-martial me. So I'm faced with a charge of desertion, which is Article 85 under UCMJ, which I was told desertion carried a maximum punishment of two years confinement, or, if they charged me with AWOL, the maximum would be a year confinement.

So my court-martial is two and a half weeks from now. So I have a really good team of people back in Seattle that are supporting me legally and in other ways and are just trying to rally support and effort behind stuff. I met with Lt. Watada before I came back to Fort Bragg. It's kind of interesting. When I was in Fort Lewis for a few days before they sent me here, I was confined to the barracks and wasn't allowed--my family is from Seattle, so they naturally wanted to come up and visit me, but the General, the post actually called

down and said that I wasn't allowed to leave the barracks. I had to sign in every hour. I wasn't allowed to sign any guests on the post. And I got a phone call from Lt. Watada, and he ended up coordinating me and my family and signing them in ... for me, and they got to come on base and see me before I went to Fort Bragg.

So right now I'm at Fort Bragg awaiting to see what's exactly going to happen. It's really been amazing the last year. I've talked to the media and stuff that I've spoke to, everybody's always interested and wanting to know before I turned myself in when I did all the (?), am I nervous, am I scared. But I really have a peace about my decision, and a lot of my family and friends of mine asked me do I regret my decision. The day that I left and drove out, that was the only thing I was afraid of, that down the road I might regret my decision and think that I acted too irrational and I should have thought things through ... Well, I can also say that, each day since I left, I had complete peace, and it's only grown with the time that I've spent away from the military. So it's really encouraging to be out here and to see that people outside of the military that aren't directly affected with the reality of that are concerned and care and want to speak up and let the government know that this is not something that should be tolerated. \*applause\*

-- We can take a few questions at this point for Ricky, so if anybody has any questions you'd like to ask Ricky? --

Q: Do you have a legal defense fund set up so people can help you?

Closing: There's a link on the web site -- [www.sdmcc.org](http://www.sdmcc.org) (it stands for Seattle Draft and Military Counseling Center). That web site was created by people at home. It has pictures of myself in Iraq and even journal entries of mine, the statement that I gave to the press, links to other interviews that I've had in the media, and updated information. There's a link on there.

J. E. McNeil: I don't have a question. I just want to correct your definition of conscientious objection. I'm glad you got in the hands of the GI Rights hotline. I wish you'd got in the hands of the GI Rights hotline earlier. I always wish that. Every time somebody calls me, I always think, damn, if they'd only called me a week ago or a month ago, or two days ago, or five hours ago. A conscientious objector does not have to be a pacifist. My son will tell you I am not a pacifist. I've smacked the boy. I've gotten into wrestling matches with the boy. I am not a pacifist. I am so glad that this is true. The other thing that a conscientious objector doesn't have to believe that they don't know what would have happened in World War II, that they think maybe World War II was okay. Because, correct me if I'm wrong, you weren't alive during World War II. So you don't have to know what you would've done in World War II. But I'm not suggesting that you change your mind in the least about the choices you've made because everybody has to make their own choices. But I would be amiss in my deeds, as part of the GI Rights Hotline and part of the Center for Conscience and War, to let y'all leave here with this misunderstanding about conscientious objection, because I want to make sure that as many people in the military who go through your experience and have the heart-wrenching change of heart that you went through, who can no longer wear that uniform without disgust at it, understand that they may well be, for them, an honest and legitimate choice to take. You suggested that, but you narrowed it down because you said you thought you had to be a pacifist, that you thought you had not to be able to use violence. It's okay, if somebody attacks your mom, if you wanted to shoot them. It's alright with

me, and it's alright with the law. And I just want to be really clear with y'all that that's the law. Remember that the most famous conscientious objector from the Vietnam era was Muhammad Ali, and, let's face it, he beat people up for a living. You don't have to be nonviolent. You do not have to be a pacifist. You don't have to figure out what you would have done for every war. And I want to commend you, however, very much for coming forward, for standing up, and I'd like to suggest, which I'm sure you've heard from your attorney, that you probably will not serve two years in jail, and I know everybody's afraid of that for you, that the stiffest sentence we've had so far has been about a year, and that most people don't even get that much. So we have hopes that you won't be in jail for very long, and we know also that military jails, as horrible as they are, are so much better than civilian jails that we subject the people in our neighborhood to. So you're a wonderful, brave young man. I am honored to have heard your story. I'm sort of a little heart-broken because it's so similar to hundreds and thousands of other stories that so many people don't need to hear with your speaking out your story helps their stories get heard to, so I think you're just wonderful. But, like I said, I felt called to correct that definition, because I don't want people to go out of here thinking that they cannot get a CO discharge from the military.

Clousing: But the pacifism was something that I was mentioning myself, but I was informed by my unit that, for CO status, there's not a convenience of agreeing or disagreeing. Basically, there's no wars of choice. You couldn't say "I don't agree with Iraq, but I would fight a different war." It doesn't apply to that. It's basically, if you're going to fight, you can't say "I don't believe in this war, but maybe a different war I would." Even like Lt. Watada, who I spoke about, personally he feels that Iraq is illegal, but, if he was sent to Afghanistan, he would have went. Me, personally, I feel like the fact that, right now, the military is engaged in an illegal war, any kind of function that I would be serving in the military would be illegal. So that's why I personally didn't file for CO status. And, like you said, it is a personal decision, and people do need to understand ...

J. E. McNeil: You're correct. You do not get to pick and choose wars, which is why Lt. Watada could not be a conscientious objector. And that is one thing that, by the way, the Center of Conscience and War is trying to get a bill introduced into congress to change, because we don't want our young men like Lt. Watada to be in positions where they're forced to be engaged in an illegal war when they have really only agreed to do a particular thing, which is to fight honorably and legally for their country. Anyway, I'm going to split. Thank you.

Camp Democracy: Let's have a big round of thanks for J. E. McNeil, who is probably the nation's preeminent legal expert about this area. \*applause\* ... and helping out GIs who have a conscious, among many. Ricky, I'd like to welcome you to Camp Democracy.

Clousing: Thank you.

Camp Democracy: I want you to know that this is your home, and this is a follow-on to what both (?) said and J.E. We want to support you financially. We want to support you legally. And we also want to recognize there are many of us who have been a part of an anti-war movement for several decades now, and some of us never served in the military and have spent time in jail. There are others, many here, who have served in the military and have made decisions like you have to come forward. And Will Cox, who's here, and

I am on the National Peace Action Committee of the Green Party, and, when this war began, we recognized that the strategy for a successful anti-war movement would be to support the leading edge of the anti-war movement, and that leading edge would be the young men and women like yourself who have been in Iraq, who have come back from Iraq, who can tell us what their experiences were and who can tell us why this war must end. So thank you so much, Ricky. I'm going to pass the microphone. If there are questions, if there are brief statements, if you want to just step forward here and say a few words or ask a question to Ricky. Thanks so much.

Q. Yeah, Rick, I just had a quick question. As far as once you made objections to your unit and other folks while you were there, I'm interested in you talking about what you know, if anything, about soldiers feeling physically threatened once they essentially take issue with what's going on. And how many guys, and women for that matter, have been not only physically assaulted but perhaps killed. Because we know that there are suggestions about that and some families finding that their sons in particular have been murdered.

Closing: There obviously are cases in different parts of the military where that happens. I have never known that to be true of anybody I know, but then again, in my unit, there aren't very many objectors, basically. So, if I would have stuck around Fort Bragg longer and spoke out, the reaction that I received when I was in Iraq, for me, spoke for itself. There wasn't a physical threat to me of my safety, but the fact that I addressed and tried to correct ... a commanding officer about a situation that was wrong, and I was ripped apart and humiliated in front of their unit just because I wasn't an infantry guy and just because I was a MI. I was just making a correction. I wasn't even pointing fingers. My role as an interrogator, I tried to tell the command. I spoke to Iraqis every single day, and I was hearing their firsthand perspective of what they think about us. And these guys were telling me that, when you guys first came into our country, we didn't hate you at all. We were happy that you were here. We were ecstatic. We couldn't wait for Americans to be here. They were waving American flags when the first wave of troops went in. Well, three years later, after the invasion happened and the daily assault and harassment that, I'm not going to say that every soldier that everybody does this because it's not true, but the assault and harassment that goes on without accountability and the abuse of power has basically pissed these people off to the point where they're not happy with us being there. So, to answer your question, yeah, I mean, I know those cases do exist, and people are physically threatened, but I've never experienced it, and I didn't experience it firsthand, but, then again, I packed myself and left and didn't stick around for the possibility for that to happen.

Q: Thanks for sharing your story. I just wondered if your family's been supportive of you, because I know that's been something that's been hard for Cindy, that part of her family at least doesn't support her. And, also, when you were younger, were you politically active, or did you consider yourself to have these kinds of doubts earlier in your life?

Closing: First of all, my family has been amazing through all this, and my mom has just been really, really supportive. They were just really supportive in knowing that I sincerely felt the way I did. When I went home on leave after I was in Iraq, I expressed my frustration and my concerns and my conflicts, and they could see what it was doing to me, and they could see that I was having issues, and so they have been really, really

supportive, all of my family. And, like I said, when I was younger, I really didn't know much politically about stuff. It's only been actually through this experience of me being in the army. I always had like the burden for the unfortunate, sticking up for the guy at school who got picked on. I was never really politically active when I was young. But, when I joined the army, that's the one thing that I'm really thankful for. I don't regret going into the military. I don't regret being in the army because my experiences through that has made me who I am today and brought me to where I'm at. It has brought me to the point of awareness and then on the change, and I just want to square that with everybody else ...

Q: I just want to say I'm a military mom, too. My son spent a year in Iraq. And I'm very proud of what you're doing. And I expect, if he is recalled, I would like to see him also take a firmer stance against the war, and I think he will. He was at an anti-war forum the other night with Paul Hackett in Cincinnati. \*applause\*

Clousing: Awesome, that's really good. The thing is that most people don't realize, if there's one thing I can try to help a lot of my friends and a lot of the movement people who are involved in the anti-war movement back in Seattle and stuff, is to not look at soldiers as the enemy. And a lot of people, and I have friends and stuff when I went back home and friends when I was in the army that I would meet that I hadn't seen in a couple of years, and they would look at me in disgust that I was in the military and that I was a part of what's going on. They would immediately associate me with the politicians that decided to go there. And, me, I joined after 9/11, and I joined before Iraq. But ... just like your son, he's not saying that he agrees with what's going on. He's in that position, and, unfortunately, he's being exploited along with thousands and thousands and thousands of other people... So he had an earnest desire to want to serve, and the thing that people need to do is understand that there are a lot of people, a lot of soldiers out there. Since I left, I have a lot of friends that have come to me and told me 'man, I really wish I could just leave. I really wish I had the courage to just leave, ' or 'I wish I wasn't financially strapped into this position where I can't leave; my family and my kid have to be fed. There's people who aren't able to make the decision that I made, and I don't look down upon these people. I think that they need to make their own decisions in their own way. But we, as a nation and as a people in general and mankind, have to stand behind people like your son and the rest of the people that are refusing and really like team up. Because the thing that I want soldiers to know from my experience and going public is that they have a choice, and that choice is more powerful than any bomb that they can drop on any nation, because, if enough people just threw down their uniforms and walked away, the military would be crippled. They could do nothing. And I'm just trying to let people know, soldiers especially, that, number one, I don't look down on all soldiers and hate them, but they have a choice, and they need to fight for the right to make their own decision. But I wish the best for your son, and I hope he doesn't get called back.

Q: I just wanted to say that your decision is very consistent with international law and the Nuremberg Principles. Each person has their own responsibility to deal with illegal behavior in the military. The question that I have is I missed part of what you said about the vehicle you were riding in hitting this other vehicle. You said that that was a war crime. Could you explain that a little bit more in detail what happened. And, also, was that kind of behavior common?

Clousing: Actually, what I was referring to as a war crime wasn't the sideswiping of vehicles. It was soldiers firing upon non-targets. We fired upon the man's animals, that was constituted as a war crime. As far as if that's a normal behavior, the amount of time that I was outside the wire and in the city, I saw that handfuls of times, not the exact incident, but the harassing of people. And I've heard stories from the infantry guys that were out there a lot more than myself and stories from the people I interrogated, telling me about how, two weeks ago, units kicked in the door and knocked over their dishes and TV and stole stuff from their house, and there's no accountability whatever with that. And I've talked to soldiers, actually. The unit that I'm in right now temporarily that has about 1500 soldiers that have gone AWOL, all for different reasons, but a couple of those guys have told me like 'man, when I was over there, I thought it was funny, and I kind of went along with it, but I saw this and this and this, and, when I was over there, soldiers stole TVs from people's houses and took them back to the little temporary places that we stayed at, took the Iraqis' stuff.' And, eventually, if you guys remember when the war first happened, there were crazy amounts of looting and money that got stolen and artifacts. Soldiers have been caught coming back into the U.S. with artifacts that were stolen from the museums and stockpiles of money that they found in the palaces, and crazy amounts of stuff. And the people are not reimbursed at all. The peoples' vehicles that we slammed into, imagine if you're driving down the street, and some army vehicle smashes into your car and wrecks it, and you're just like 'sucks to be you.' That's the attitude that's put out there. There's big signs on the back of the Humvees that say, in Arabic and in English, 'stay back a hundred meters or you will be shot. ' And they're given that authority. Just like that boy I talked about earlier, if you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, it sucks to be you. You know, unfortunately, you're going to die. That type of behavior, it's not out on the media. They talk about these isolated incidents. That's what I talked about in my press conference the most is that I didn't witness a huge atrocity like Haditha and the 14-year-old girl that was raped and killed in Abu Ghraib and this and that, and interrogation violations and all this. Because that's the stuff that made it in the media. But, every single day, there's physical and psychological harassment that's going on every single day where people are getting beaten up, stuff stolen from them. That behavior definitely is widespread, to answer your question.

Q: In that car that was thrown off the road, did anyone stop and see if the people were okay?

Clousing: No.

Q: In other words, anything could have happened to them.

Clousing: They were actually not driving them right off the road. Like I said, when convoys were driving along the freeways, the vehicles pull over and put their hazards on and sort of stop. And the vehicle Humvees were driving into the vehicles, just sideswiping them, like if you drove down Constitution Avenue and just slammed into six or seven vehicles and smashing out windows. They weren't driving to run them off the road. They were just kind of a joke and drove off.

Q: So your responsibility as a military person is to see if people are injured, and that was totally...

Clousing: Yeah. Like I said, it was more of a joke. It wasn't any concern about anybody's safety. It was a funny thing to them to be damaging vehicles. It was more of a joke.

Q: The commanding officers were well aware of that behavior.

Clousing: When I saw it firsthand, I addressed it and told them when I was this happen. And there was damage on the Humvee to show that it actually did happen. The unit I was in actually, 82nd Airborne, has a reputation for that kind of behavior, and Human Rights Watch has a couple of investigations going on for that exact thing. But, yeah, that type of behavior, if you talk to a lot of even the Iraq vets that are here and some of the other people who have spoken out, that type of behavior is rampant. It's happening all over the place.

Q: The shooting of farm animals, it's the same kind of thing?

Clousing: I can't say that people are getting their animals shot all across the country. I saw it happen, and that one time was too many for me.

Q: Thank you very much.

Q: I'm Harry Thursted, U.S. Navy commander, retired. I spent about a year in Vietnam, was an advisor day after day for a year, myself and 29 Vietnamese. I'd just like to say that I know what you're going through. I admire you. Thank you.

Clousing: Thank you. \*applause\* This to comment that, when I was at the Veterans for Peace conference, I spoke individually with a lot of Vietnam vets and a lot of Iraq vets, and, really, you guys, not even just the military but just the people who are part of this movement, really are empowering people like myself to make these decisions, because I know when I got home, I didn't even think. The way you're conditioned in the military is to think that, if you go AWOL, if you leave, your world is done. Not only are you going to go to Leavenworth for twenty years, or you won't be able to get a job, and all this other stuff. For me to get back and read about people like Pablo Paredes and Camilo and Benderman, and all these other guys who said no, really was like, wow, I have a choice, I really do. And reading about Vietnam vets that did the same thing, that really is empowering myself and other people in the military that are having feelings. And, also, mostly making you feel like you're not alone. I felt like I was crazy for a while because I was the only one around me that was feeling the way I did. And to read about other people and to meet people like yourself is really--thank you, guys. \*applause\*

Q: I have several questions. One, ... that there's no effort on the part of the command to discipline the troops in these ways. I mean, I remember reading about all the ... wars, and the fact that the British really did make high-level efforts to keep their soldiers' civility is stated, for example. And we don't have anything like that ... discipline from the top. People aren't getting severely punished for infractions.

Clousing: Sure. I'm not going to say that there's no command out there that's trying to stop what's happening. I know from firsthand experience that I addressed serious issues, and they were neglected and ignored. And I know that other people have voiced the same concerns, and they were ignored. And the pattern that looks to me, personally, I

can't speak for every commanding officer in Iraq or that has ever served there, but the pattern that I've seen, knowing the amount of soldiers that I've seen and the top two that have voiced the same concerns that I did, is that there's never really a crackdown until it's really exposed in the media, until there's really a huge amount of exposure of what's going on. Then they pretend to care about issues. And, ... when I got back to Fort Bragg a few weeks ago, I met with CID and a couple of investigative officers that wanted to investigate the allegations that I made and the things that I saw. And it was obvious to me that they were doing the motion of it. They weren't inquiring names and exact stuff. They were just kind of making it look like they actually responded to the allegations I made, and there wasn't a lot of effort put in there. Like I said, I can't comment on every commanding officer that's over there, but I know the pattern that I've seen, and other people, is that it's not really brought up until or unless it's really a huge incident. I mean, history is a pattern. We all know that. I mean, look at Abu Ghraib and all these big things that have happened. The military lied about it in the beginning. At first, they wanted to point the finger at Marines, and the Marines said this, and they said that, and no one wants to take the blame for it, because, naturally, I mean, what commanding officer wants to take the blame for his unit ... and have his career be ruined. So it's easier, it's more convenient for a commanding officer to sweep it under the rug and verbally reprimand them instead of punishing them.

Q: The other question I have is that what you say is really understandable.... You were welcomed when you first went into Iraq, and then you explained how that attitude changed. What concerns me is the paradoxical situation you're saying, I believe you said you have no enemies over there among the other side. What do you do when you come to suicide terrorists? How do you analyze them? Do you justify their behavior in terms of our behavior, or what?

Clousing: No, I don't think that their behavior is justified because of it. I just think the problem is that that is a problem, that we're trying to justify the behavior instead of stepping back and looking at what causes their behavior. Why are they trying to drive a bomb into us? ... Why are they reacting the way they are reacting? The thing is, the media, the way they portray the insurgency and the terrorists in Iraq is as if there is this big group of Moslems, maybe this whole country of people that hate us, and they're all coming to Iraq to fight us. That is so untrue. Not only are 85% of the people that are brought into the places to be interrogated by myself and my guys. Not only are they innocent, and they had no grounds to be held at all. They're Iraqis. They're not Syrians and Saudis and Pakistanis and Afghans and Taliban people coming down. That's the way the media portrays it, that that's the front of the war on terror. The only front to that is that we pissed off enough people that now they're sick of us being there. Like I said, I would speak to the guys I was interrogating, people who were labeled insurgents. Just like you said, if somebody's coming at our guys, and they're driving ... a car bomb ... with AK's hanging out rambo-style, shooting at us, sure, our guys are authorized, and they're able to engage the enemy and fire back, because the safety of American soldiers is first. But the thing is is that the people that we're capturing and bringing in and asking 'what are you doing? What insurgent cell are you working for? Who's the leader of this cell? Where are you guys hiding your stockpile of weapons? Where are you receiving financial support from? Where are the logistics of your insurgent cell?' You know, we're asking all these questions, and they're telling us, well, not all of them because not all of them want to talk, but the guys who are talking to us are saying, 'you know what? I didn't care about you guys a couple years ago.' Every Iraqi has their own story. One of them

might be because two weeks ago, his brother was killed at a checkpoint because he turned the wrong way and then turned the other way, and he was killed. One of them might be that his mom was walking down in a market and looked at an American soldier and grabbed something out of their purse, and they thought they were going to be a firearm, so they killed her... One of them now might be because their cousin was that 14-year-old girl that was raped and killed. They all have their own personal stories of why they hate Americans now. Because, after three years of occupation, we've oppressed them, and they've been totally exploited, and they're just labeled as collateral damage. I mean, what's the death toll of Iraqi civilians killed? Do you really think that that many Iraqi civilians are insurgents? I don't think so. That's not the way it is. And, the way the media misconstrues it is what's causing people to support the war, because they think, legitimately, that there's this big group of people that hate us, and they want to take us now. No, there's people that are tired of this kind of behavior that's going on without accountability, so they're taking it into their own hands. You know, if you were here in D.C. and some other country was ramming cars off the road, and you got your brother shot and killed, and your house was broken into and stuff was stolen from it, your neighbor's daughter was raped by U.S. soldiers and burnt alive, and the next town over had phosphorus gas dumped on them, and they were burning alive, and all these crazy tragedies happening, all these atrocities, I would be a little bit pissed off and concerned about what am I going to do about it. Am I just going to sit back? A lot of these guys were telling me they didn't feel the way they felt maybe now, but, once that kind of experience happens to you, and then they walk by the same street corner they walk by every day, and they hear these radical Moslems talk about fighting the occupation and fighting America, now their ears are open to it, and now they're a little bit receptive to what these guys are talking about, because they're, wow, they experienced firsthand that America is terrorizing this country. Like I told commanders that their soldiers are creating the insurgency. The behavior that the U.S. is inflicting upon the Iraqi population is creating the same people that we're trying to stop. It's a cycle of nonsense that nobody seems to understand how it's happening. And so it's this crazy, mindless cycle of violence and death and killing and wasted money, and nobody seems to understand the big picture.

Camp Democracy: Thank you, sir. Ricky, thank you so much. \*applause\*

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