

Latino Soldiers Who Refused Iraq Speak Out

By [Aaron Glantz](#)

Global Research, May 20, 2007

Inter Press Service News Agency 18 May
2007

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

A U.S. Army medic who refused to load his gun in Iraq and then escaped through a base window in Germany rather than be deployed a second time returned home to Los Angeles this week after serving six months in a U.S. military prison.

Augustin Aguayo, 31, was born in Mexico and grew up in Southern California. After graduating from high school, he married and had twin daughters, but never got a college degree.

Aguayo told IPS he joined the military in November 2002 while he was working the night shift at a bank to support his wife and daughters, while he attended community college during the day.

"I'm working at night and I hear a radio announcement for the National Guard and that planted the first seed in my head: Work two weeks a year, one weekend a month, make some extra money, serve your country. That's exactly what I needed," he said.

So Aguayo went to a local Army recruiting office. The U.S. military had already toppled the Taliban in Afghanistan and President George W. Bush was talking about war with Iraq.

Aguayo said the recruiter downplayed the dangers of deployment.

"He was a veteran of the first Gulf War and he shared his experience with me," Aguayo said. "He said he was only there for four months, and that it wasn't bad. He said he mostly read books."

Aguayo's excitement started to wane, however, once he entered basic training. He said he was disturbed by boot camp chants like "left, right, left, right, KILL" and, although he had enlisted as an Army medic, he realised that he would still have to carry a weapon and fire it at other human beings when necessary.

That feeling of unease intensified after his unit received orders to deploy to Iraq. Before leaving for Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit, they ran training exercises in Germany.

"We would drive around in convoys in the woods in Germany in a training area and constantly targets would pop up and we would fire out the window," he said. "We did this day after day [and] at nighttime. I was part of an infantry battalion. At that point it became clear to me that in today's army a medic isn't just someone who helps people. In all fairness, it's an infantryman, a rifleman, that has some medical skills."

By the time Aguayo arrived in Tikrit, he had already appealed to be discharged from the Army as a conscientious objector. He said he realised that he couldn't kill anyone and went out on patrol and guard duty without loading his gun.

"It seemed like the whole point of these convoys was just to start a firefight," he said. "It's like a vicious circle that continues. We're there because there's conflict and there's conflict because we're there. It's a never-ending cycle."

He told IPS that what he saw in Iraq strengthened his opposition to killing and war.

"One time we were driving around the city setting up checkpoints and we heard an explosion so we went to see what was happening, and a vehicle of Iraqi police had been hit and my unit stayed back and I could see wounded people in the distance," he said.

"We just stayed back and that seemed weird to me. I couldn't understand why we just stood there. I couldn't understand why we couldn't randomly help people. We could only help people when we hurt them."

Aguayo rode out his deployment and returned to Germany. The next thing he knew, the military denied his application for conscientious objector status, and decided to send his unit back to Iraq for a second tour.

But Aguayo could not bear the thought of going to Iraq a second time. So he ran, climbing out a window on his base in Germany. A few weeks later, he turned himself in at Fort Irwin in California, hoping that would get him lenient treatment.

Instead, the military shackled him, put him in solitary confinement and flew him back to Germany for trial. He eventually served six months in a military prison.

"Initially it was that shocking moment," he said. "I had never gotten in trouble in any kind of way. Just two speeding tickets back when I started driving in 1990. But on the other hand it was also a moment of peace where I could reflect, and I'm really at peace because I finally have what I wanted for so long. I wanted to be separated from the military because this is wrong, because morally I couldn't continue down this path."

After his release from prison, Aguayo was joined on a California speaking tour by three other conscientious objectors from the Iraq war: Pablo Paredes, Camilo Mejia, and Robert Zabala.

Camilo Mejía was one of the first Iraq combat veterans to refuse to return to Iraq and served almost nine months in prison for his stand against the war. Pablo Paredes refused to ship out to Iraq from the San Diego Naval Station in 2005. He is now a GI rights counselor and counter-recruitment activist. Robert Zabala is a Marine who recently won a discharge as a Conscientious Objector (CO) by a federal judge after fighting for nearly four years to be recognized as a CO.

Like Aguayo, Mejia, Paredes, and Zabala are all Latino.

"It's hard to overlook," Paredes told IPS. "The evidence is pretty clear that there's a lot of Latino resistance. Part of it is that we're disproportionately targeted for jobs that are high risk — combat roles, infantry roles. We make up a very small percentage of elite jobs like officers and Blue Angels [a naval aviation show squadron]. We make up only four percent of the officer corps but when the invasion started we were 20 percent of the infantry."

“So when it’s time to question things, this population of Latinos is the ones who see what war is really about,” he said.

The original source of this article is Inter Press Service News Agency
Copyright © [Aaron Glantz](#), Inter Press Service News Agency, 2007

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Aaron Glantz](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca