

Mike Prysner: Courageous Testimony from an Iraq War Veteran

"The Winter Soldier Hearings" March 2008

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Theme: [History](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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The dramatic speech of Mike Prysner

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akm3nYN8aG8>

TRANSCRIPT BELOW

Introductory Note by Gary Kohls

Once in awhile, you come across something powerful when you least expect it. That was true for me when last year I stumbled across some powerful testimony about the current war from Iraq War veteran Mike Prysner. Prysner is justifiably considered a true hero to those courageous few who refuse to remain silent about atrocities and war crimes that are almost invariably covered up by the military or censored out of public consciousness by the mainstream media, a situation that is epidemic in this time of war.

Mike Prysner gave his testimony at the widely ignored "Winter Soldier Hearings" in New York in 2008 where many Iraq War veterans whose consciences haven't been obliterated gathered together and spoke of the atrocities that they had seen committed or had committed themselves in the name of the United States government. The Winter Soldier Hearings replicated a similar event in 1971 where Vietnam War veterans came together and publicly told unwelcome truths about that atrocity-producing war that most Americans didn't want to hear. International war crimes were the norm in that war and it too was blacked out by our dishonorable media.

Military veterans who participate in the killing, maiming or terrorizing of innocent unarmed civilians (and 80 - 90 % of all casualties in modern war are civilians) almost inevitably come home crazy, depressed, anxious, suicidal, drug-benumbed, having hideous recurring nightmares or exhibiting other intolerable symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder - UNLESS they have devolved instead into psychopathic personality-disorders (sociopaths) in which case empathic feelings are absent, guilt is repressed and sorrow for the crimes committed is unknown. Criminals who have no remorse for evil done are in the same category of personality disorder. They can participate in evil and feel no remorse for their

victims.

Combat-induced PTSD

The treatment for combat-induced PTSD is extremely difficult, but in my experience as a holistic mental health care practitioner that frequently dealt with PTSD, I have found that the essential first step for the healing process to begin is to encourage the veteran to come around to the point where he can admit that he had been lied to by the recruiters who told, at best, half-truths and that the orders to fight and kill had come from an institution that does not believe in truth in advertising.

In other words, the traumatized veteran had to come to the point where he recognized that he had likely been lied to in order to get him to sign up. He did not really know what was in store for him. He had not been fully informed about the high likelihood of having to engage in (or support) international war crimes or crimes against humanity. Being a conscientious objector to war and killing had not been offered to him as an option. He had been deceived and placed in situations where he had no options other than to kill or be killed. Not participating in the killing and one would risk being legally summarily executed by your superior officers for disobeying orders during combat. Without coming to that understanding that the reluctant soldier often had no option but to participate in criminal activity, the guilt cannot be alleviated and healing will be impossible. The Winter Soldier Hearings were the first step towards healing for the participants.

The psychological toxicity of being silent during moral crises

*Dante said: **"The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in time of great moral crises maintain their neutrality."** The courageous Mike Prysner may have received death threats for doing the honorable thing and telling the truth and he was probably advised to stay silent by some of his buddies who have not yet come around to doing the right thing. But Prysner chose to not remain neutral in one of the great moral crises of our time, a crisis that could have otherwise destroyed him. The name of that crisis is war, a euphemism for the organized, state-sponsored, taxpayer-paid-for mass slaughter of humans.*

Here is part of Mike's powerful testimony:

"And I tried hard to be proud of my service but all I could feel was shame and racism could no longer mask the occupation. These were people. These were human beings. I've since been plagued by guilt anytime I see an elderly man, like the one who couldn't walk and we rolled onto a stretcher, told the Iraqi police to take him away. I feel guilt anytime I see a mother with her children like the one who cried hysterically and screamed that we were worse than Saddam as we forced her from her home. I feel guilt anytime I see a young girl like the one I grabbed by the arm and dragged into the street.

"We were told we were fighting terrorists, but the real terrorist was me and the real terrorism is this occupation. Racism within the military has long been an important tool to justify the destruction and occupation of another country. It has long been used to justify the killing, subjugation, and torture of another people. Racism is a vital weapon deployed by this government. It is a more important weapon than a rifle, a tank, a bomber or a battleship. It is more destructive than an artillery shell, or a bunker buster, or a tomahawk missile. While all of those weapons are created and owned by this government, they are harmless without people willing to use them.

"Those who send us to war do not have to pull a trigger or lob a mortar round. They do not have to fight the war. They merely have to sell the war. They need a public who is willing to send their soldiers into harm's way and they need soldiers who are willing to kill or be killed without question. They can spend millions on a single bomb, but that bomb only becomes a weapon when the ranks in the military are willing to follow orders to use it. They can send every last soldier anywhere on earth, but there will only be a war if soldiers are willing to fight, and the ruling class: the billionaires who profit from human suffering care only about expanding their wealth, controlling the world economy, understand that their power lies only in their ability to convince us that war, oppression, and exploitation is in our interests. They understand that their wealth is dependent on their ability to convince the working class to die to control the market of another country. And convincing us to kill and die is based on their ability to make us think that we are somehow superior. **Soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, have nothing to gain from this occupation.**

"The vast majority of people living in the US have nothing to gain from this occupation. In fact, not only do we have nothing to gain, but we suffer more because of it. We lose limbs, endure trauma, and give our lives. Our families have to watch flag draped coffins lowered into the earth. Millions in this country without healthcare, jobs, or access to education must watch this government squander over \$450 million a day on this occupation. **Poor and working people in this country are sent to kill poor and working people in another country to make the rich richer,** and without racism soldiers would realize that they have more in common with the Iraqi people than they do with the billionaires who send us to war

"I threw families onto the street in Iraq only to come home and find families thrown onto the street in this country in this tragic, tragic and unnecessary foreclosure crisis; only to wake up and realize that our real enemies are not in some distant land. But not people whose names we don't know, and cultures we don't understand. The enemy is people we know very well and people we can identify. **The enemy is a system that wages war when it's profitable. The enemy is the CEO who lays us off our jobs when it's profitable; it's the insurance companies who deny us health care when it's profitable; it's the banks who take away our homes when it's profitable. Our enemies are not 5000 miles away, they are right here at home.** If we organize and fight with our sisters and brothers, we can stop this war, we can stop this government, and we can create a better world."

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