

# Warrior to War Protester

Jimmy Massey

*Former Staff Sergeant Jimmy Massey was honorably discharged from the U.S. Marine Corps after 12 years of active duty. Diagnosed with major depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), he daily confronts wrenching memories while “speaking truth to power.” Massey is writing a memoir titled Cowboys from Hell.*

**M**y name is Jimmy Massey. I am 33 years old and live in North Carolina with my wife Jackie. I served 12 years in the Marine Corps, mostly as an infantryman and infantry instructor at the Parris Island boot camp in South Carolina. And I was a recruiter for three years in North Carolina.

Two instances during my Marine Corps career changed me from warrior to war protester. The first one happened while on recruiting duty, the other during the invasion of Iraq.



Your first nine months on recruiting duty are like a probationary period; the Marine Corps decides if you are going to produce contracts for them, based on their standards. At the six-month mark, I was in the cafeteria of Tri-County Community College, in Hayesville, North Carolina, passing out business cards, when my boss walked up to me with a young man by the name of Tim. Just looking at him, I could tell that he had a physical deformity. This was confirmed when he stuck his hand out to shake mine, because his arm twitched almost uncontrollably.

I said, “Sir, you’ve got to be kidding me. There is no way this guy could ever pass the physical to get into boot camp.” My boss grabbed me by my dress-blues collar and said, “It is not your job to decide who will and will not make it into boot camp. It is your job to find bodies and ship them down range!”

I thought he was testing me, so I played along. I sat down and started interviewing Tim. I found out he had a neurological disorder that

should have disqualified him immediately, but I proceeded with the interview. By the end of our conversation, Tim was nodding his head and saying that, yes, he wanted to become a Marine.

Over the next few months, I was a nervous wreck! I knew Tim would never make it through the medical exam. What I did not know was that my boss had slipped the guy who would be conducting the medical exam a couple hundred bucks and a case of his favorite beer—to ensure that Tim would be cleared for boot camp.

My boss and I coached Tim, too. We told him that, when he talked to anyone, he was to hold his hands behind his back so they would not twitch. Tim did exactly as he was told.

Tim shipped to boot camp, but did not even make it to the infamous yellow footprints at Parris Island. Drill instructors immediately pulled him off the bus for medical care, because he was having a neurological attack on the bus. And if that wasn't bad enough, that night Tim dreamt that drill instructors told him to shave off his eyebrows—which he did the following morning.

I promptly got a call from a congressman's office, saying that I was under investigation for fraudulently enlisting Tim into the Marine Corps. Naturally, I freaked out and called my boss. He assured me that everything would be taken care of. He told me not to worry, but to get out there and find him another "body" to ship to boot camp.

Later that same day, I got an email from a drill instructor at Parris Island. Attached was a picture of Tim, standing in front of a brick wall with band-aids over his eyebrows. The band-aids had been colored with black marker so he would appear to have eyebrows. The caption under the picture read, "Gentlemen, what are we doing?!"

And I said to myself, what ARE we doing? It had been drilled into my head at recruiters' school that you do not "fraud" anyone into the military under any circumstance. But that was exactly what I had done. I told Tim to lie on his application and coached him on what to do during his medical exam, just so my recruiting station would make mission — that is, meet our quota of enlistees for the month. (I would learn over the next couple of years that recruiters often tell recruits to lie on their application forms.)

A couple of weeks went by and I got a call from that congressman's office, saying that I had been cleared of all wrongdoing, *and that Tim had fraudulently enlisted himself into the Marine Corps.* He was

kicked out with no pay for the time he was in Parris Island. I could not believe that everything had been swept under the carpet.

I finished recruiting duty in October of 2002 and, by January of 2003, I found myself sitting in the Kuwaiti desert, waiting to invade Iraq. I must admit that, before the war started, I had fallen for the whole weapons-of-mass-destruction lie. I really believed that we were going to Iraq to liberate the Iraqi people and find the WMD — what turned out to be weapons of mass *deception*.



We invaded Iraq in March 2003, and I was taken out of the country in May 2003; those few months had taken a heavy emotional toll on me. During that time, my battalion and I killed more than 40 innocent civilians, most of them at checkpoints.

One example: We were getting intelligence reports that the Republican Guard was mounting terrorist attacks by loading ambulances and civilian vehicles with bombs. My battalion set up a checkpoint on the outskirts of the Baghdad Stadium. A red Kia Spectra came speeding into our check point area.

We had established two imaginary zones, a green zone and a red zone. These zones were spaced about 100 meters apart. When a car came into the green zone, we gave two hand-and-arm signals telling them to STOP. The first signal was our fist up in the air; the second was an open palm. Then we gave an audio signal by firing our weapons into the air. If the car did not stop and came into the red zone, we discharged our weapons into the car. Well, the red Kia did not stop after our warnings, and we fired into the car.

We immediately went over and started pulling the “bodies” out of the car. There were four occupants, and three of them were expiring quickly. Miraculously, the driver of the car was unscathed. The corpsman came and took the wounded occupants away to give them

medical treatment. We checked the car and found no bomb materials and nothing that could link them to any sort of terrorist activity.

The corpsman brought the wounded occupants back about 20 minutes later, and dumped them on the side of the road. He told me that the battalion surgeon had said there was nothing they could do for them. They didn't even give these guys any morphine! How is it that when a U.S. soldier is wounded, he has ample amounts of morphine at his disposal, but this surgeon could not spare a few milligrams to dying Iraqis!

The driver of the car went over to one of the three and cradled his head in his hands. He began to rock back and forth, pulling his own hair out by the roots. I was running around barking orders at my Marines. A few minutes went by and, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the driver walking toward me.

I fear no man—but I have never been so terrified as when that young man came toward me. He walked up to me, got toe to toe with me, and pointed his finger in my face. The words that came out of his mouth still haunt me today. He said, “Why did you kill my brother? We didn't do anything to you! We're not terrorists! Why did you do this?! You did this!” I had no idea what to say, so I just walked off.

Much later, I was giving a lecture in Boston. An Iraqi-American lady stood up at the end of my presentation, and asked me why the people did not stop at the checkpoints. I told her that I really wished I could answer her question, but I did not know.

Afterwards, she came up to me and said, “Show me what you were doing at the checkpoints.” I stuck my fist in the air, and she looked at me and said, “That means solidarity.” I stuck my hand in the air, palm open, and she said, “That means hello.” Finally I said, “Well, what about firing our weapons in the air?” She looked at me and said, “What do you always see Saddam Hussein doing on the television? The Iraqi people thought you were the liberators. They thought you were celebrating their freedom.”

Along with the scenes of dead civilians, that conversation haunts me every single day. I had to get a simple cultural lesson thousands of miles away from Iraq. That lesson could have saved civilian lives, but it is too late for them now. All I can do now is tell my story and try to stop more innocent lives from being taken.

I sold my soul to the Marine Corps a long time ago, but every time I tell my story, I get a little piece of it back.