

## The Downing Street Memo

By Dante Zappala | June 13, 2005

For the first 30 years of my brother Sherwood Baker's life, his mission was to be a responsible citizen. He made oaths and he honored those oaths. This made him a loving father and husband. This also made him a noble and committed soldier. He courageously deployed with his National Guard unit to Iraq in 2004.

For the last six weeks of his life, Sherwood's mission was to provide convoy security for the Iraq Survey Group. He was killed in action, providing site security for the group that was looking for weapons of mass destruction. Mounting evidence indicates that the weapons' non-existence wasn't a mistake. It was a ruse.

The clouds surrounding Sherwood's death became even darker recently when I read the contents of a memo from the upper echelons of the British government. The memo reiterates the fact that our administration had every intention of invading Iraq in the summer of 2002. The White House needed only to sell the idea to the American people.

Prior to congressional approval, prior to saying, "War is the last resort," the decision had been made to go to war regardless of legal justification or the problems associated with the aftermath of an invasion. The most telling quote in this memo reads, "The intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy." Read the memo: <http://www.downingstreetmemo.com/memo.html>

My brother died scouring the Iraqi countryside not to protect his country, but to satisfy the Bush administration's public relations agenda.

The leaders of our country politicized intelligence to satisfy an ideology. My brother and more than 1,700 other soldiers have been killed as a result. Yet I have to sift through the papers and the news channels to find even a pulse of concern. In the wake of such disturbing revelations, a majority of our press and populace resoundingly choose to be silent.

Overwhelmingly, Americans have ceased to care about how and why we went war. Apathy, in the face of our soldiers' sacrifice, seems more convenient.

We cannot allow our government to simply replace the motivations for war midstream and expect an entire nation and all its allies to succumb to selective memory.

Yet, this is exactly what has happened.

The poet Archibald MacLeish, who also lost a brother in war, wrote:

They say  
We leave you our deaths  
Give them their meaning

If we are to give meaning to the deaths in Iraq, we must be willing to engage in truthful dialogue about the pretenses of war. Acquiescing to the lure of silence and ignorance is an affront to the families and memories of all who have fallen. It is a prescription for unending violence and suffering.

Are we so ashamed of what our soldiers have and continue to do in Iraq that we can't even talk about how they got there? Or, are we simply ashamed of ourselves for letting it happen?

We must each confront ourselves over the failures in Iraq. For that failure is not simply the fault of our leaders misusing suspect intelligence. Our course as a country, ultimately, stems from the individual conclusion of all of us to be either complicit or resistant to war.

The government's failure in Iraq becomes our own failure when we substitute political rhetoric or blanket ideology for reason. It becomes our fault when we are recklessly arrogant and willfully deaf.

Our responsibility as citizens is to acknowledge and embrace the whole truth about the Iraq War. We must look past partisanship and hold ourselves and our leaders to the high standards of integrity that citizenship demands. When we fail to honor that responsibility, we fail to honor the sacrifices of our soldiers.

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