

By Ralph Lopez

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The soldier in a now-famous WikiLeaks video, who found a rocket launcher at the scene of a controversial [2007 Apache helicopter attack](#), in Baghdad, said in a [radio interview](#) this week that he did not believe an ambush was imminent. The video shows 12 men, including two Reuters newsmen, standing on a street corner before being fired upon by the Apache's 30mm cannon, resulting in what appears to be an unprovoked massacre.

The video caused an international outcry after it was leaked to the media by the government watchdog WikiLeaks. The presence of the rocket launcher was seized upon by defenders of the attack as proof that the attack was justified and that this was evidence of an impending ambush.

The soldier, Ethan McCord, can be seen in the video as he runs with a wounded child in his arms to a Bradley armored vehicle, seeking to get the child to help.

"One thing I do need to make clear is that when I came onto the scene I did see an RPG and an AK-47, however, my experience in Iraq is when the locals see someone with a camera, maybe a photographer, someone with a news agency, is they always come out with their weapons, kind of like showing off ... look what I have, make me famous, put me in the magazine type of thing ... my personal belief is that I do not believe these guys had anything to do with the attacks we were facing earlier, from a few blocks away, these guys were walking around nonchalantly, they weren't gathering in any kind of formation to do anything to us ..."

McCord's remarks suggest a plausible alternative explanation for why would-be attackers would be standing so casually out in the open and with so little concern for the small, but visible, pair of Apaches so dreaded by insurgents. The remarks undermine the Pentagon's conclusion that the attack was justified.

At one point, McCord criticized media war analysts, whom he called "these supposed war analysts [who] were going over this video, who knew nothing of what happened that day ..."

In the wide-ranging interview with Cindy Sheehan on her weekly radio program "Cindy Sheehan's Soapbox," McCord also attested again to witnessing a high-level war crime, that of [random execution of civilians](#) in retaliation for an attack on US forces, the same type of crime successfully prosecuted after World War II. McCord's allegation was broadcast widely across the Internet two months after he first made it in an interview in April.

Read the full transcript of Cindy Sheehan's interview with Ethan McCord, [here](#) .

In that interview, McCord recounted that, in the middle of a particularly turbulent time when his battalion was being hit frequently by improvised explosive devices (IEDs), his battalion commander issued an order which was to be a new "SOP" or Standard Operating Procedure. McCord attests that the commander, a lieutenant colonel, gave the order to engage in "360 rotational fire" upon being hit by an IED. McCord recalls the commander saying, "If someone in your line gets hit with an IED, 360 rotational fire. You kill every motherfucker on the street."

Understanding this to mean civilians as well, including women and children, McCord has said previously, "many soldiers wouldn't do that" and agreed among themselves that they would shoot into rooftops rather than kill civilians. McCord goes on to say, however, that he witnessed the order being carried out many times and saw civilians shot indiscriminately following an IED attack. Two other soldiers in McCord's unit have stepped forward since that interview to corroborate his claims.

McCord said in the April [interview](#) : "I've seen it many times, where people are just walking down the street and an IED goes off and the troops open fire and kill them."

In 1944, German SS Obersturmbannführer Herbert Kappler ordered the execution of civilians in retaliation for a hidden bomb ambush of German soldiers. Kappler rounded up prisoners of war and civilians in the ratio of ten executions for every German soldier killed in a March 1944 attack by Italian partisans. Kappler stood trial for [war crimes](#) and was sentenced to life in prison. High level orders for the killing of civilians have also been

[documented as war crimes](#)

in the cases of Nanking 1937, Hankow 1938 and German Invasion of Poland 1939.

The WikiLeaks video shows men with cameras being mistaken by the Apache helicopter crew for men with weapons, although a man at one point does appear to be carrying a rifle. Rifles such as AK-47s are legal and common in Baghdad and are frequently carried by private bodyguards for protection against bandits in the generally lawless climate of the city.

The American crew whose radio chatter is captured in the video has been heavily criticized for the casual and sometimes callous tone of its banter, in which crewmembers are heard making remarks such as "nice shootin'," "you talk, I'll shoot," and at times laughing.

Upon discovering that two children have been wounded in an attack on a van in which the alleged insurgents were attempting to evacuate a wounded man, a crewmember is heard to say, "That's what they get for bringing kids into battle." The crewmembers and their ground controllers regularly use the word "engage" to mean "open fire." Although the word "engage" means "to enter into contest or battle with," the alleged combatants possess no weapons remotely capable of harming the helicopter.

McCord and his unit mate Josh Stieber have gained prominence as the authors of "Open Letter of Reconciliation and Responsibility to the Iraqi People," a statement which is gathering co-signers of soldiers and nonsoldiers alike at www.LetterToIraq.com. A portion of the [letter](#) reads:

"We did unto you what we would not want done to us. More and more Americans are taking responsibility for what was done in our name. Though we have acted with cold hearts far too many times, we have not forgotten our actions towards you. Our heavy hearts still hold hope that we can restore inside our country the acknowledgment of your humanity, that we were taught to deny...."

In his discussions of civilian casualties and atrocities in the combat zone, McCord insists on placing the lion's share of the blame on the systematic training implemented by the Army, which teaches soldiers to "dehumanize" the enemy, which easily extends to entire civilian populations.

McCord says:

"Instead of people being upset at a few soldiers in a video who were doing what they were trained to do, I think people need to be more upset at the system that trained these soldiers. They are doing exactly what the Army wants them to do."

McCord notes in the radio interview that in the Apache helicopter attack, upon hearing that children had been hit, a crew member first says, "Oh damn," but quickly recovers bravado, as perhaps trained to do so, with the remark. "that's what they get for bringing kids into battle." McCord relates a cadence taught in basic training, a song soldiers sing to keep time as they run or march:

we went to the market where all the hadji shop,
pulled out our machetes and we began to chop,

we went to the playground where all the hadji play,
pulled out our machine guns and we began to spray,

we went to the mosque where all the hadji pray,
threw in a hand grenade and blew them all away.

Although the focus of controversy over the WikiLeaks video has been almost exclusively on the legality of the initial attack on the group of men, it is the second attack on three good Samaritans, who attempt to evacuate a wounded man, which many experts put forth as a clear war crime.

McCord said that although he relives his experiences in Iraq, as do many veterans, every day, part of his healing process has come from speaking out and letting people know about the atrocities which take place in war so that people might "open their eyes." McCord said the kinds of events depicted in the video happen "almost every day" and that the only thing unusual about

the events in the video is that "America got to see what happened."

The Army has charged [Pvt. Bradley Manning](#) with leaking the classified video to WikiLeaks. Manning is now being held in the military prison at Quantico, Virginia, awaiting charges of leaking classified information.

Click [here](#) for the WikiLeaks 2007 Apache attack video.