

Bring 'em On: Dover AFB

2004. Acrylic on canvas, 48x60"

by
Martin Ostrye

In July 2003, President Bush, when asked by a reporter about insurgents attacking U.S. military personnel in Iraq, said, "Bring them on." It was tough talk, boastful and self-confident, for a person thousands of miles from the danger; protected daily by armed security and bullet-proof vehicles. The President's response was an irresponsible invitation to confront American soldiers in a combat zone. How many have died?

Since the First Gulf War in 1991, the President's father, George H.W. Bush, put a stop to photographing the arrival of military caskets at Dover Air Force Base. The current President Bush continued that policy for his Iraq War. It is a policy that both administrations implemented to censor the reality of war: Americans killed in misguided conflicts. However, both Bush administrations, for their own self-interest, used military families as a cover story to advance the policy of censorship.

In April 2004, the Seattle Times published a photograph of flag-draped caskets loaded onboard a military transport plane bound for Dover Air Force Base. The photographer, Tami Silicio, a worker for Maytag Aircraft based in Kuwait, took the picture and agreed to have them published out of a patriotic duty to show the respect given to the military dead by comrades. Ms. Silicio and her husband, David Landry, were fired from the company.

At around the same time, Russ Kick, whose website, The Memory Hole, published pictures of arriving caskets at Dover that were taken by military personnel for a historical record. Mr. Kick obtained the photographs through the Freedom of Information Act.

As an interesting note, this painting was in the final drawing stage when controversy erupted about pictures of caskets being shipped to, and arriving at, Dover Air Force Base.

The American people have a right to know what their government is involved in, both at home and overseas. In matters of life and death, that knowledge includes knowing who makes the sacrifice in carrying out the orders and policies of their government.