

Anti-war bus makes Akron stop

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By BENJAMIN DUER Repository staff writer

AKRON — Before Ohio State Buckeyes and Texas Longhorn battled on the gridiron. Before Cleveland Indians fought to stay in the wild card lead against Minnesota Twins.

A group of mothers, wives and former soldiers challenged President Bush and the war to end “a parade of death” for U.S. soldiers in Iraq.

The “Bring Them Home Now” bus tour stopped Saturday and held an emotional rally at the New Covenant Presbyterian Church in Akron.

More than 80 people, including Gary Teeple of Canton, attended the event.

“This situation has reached a point that I couldn’t just sit back anymore and watch. I had to start getting active again,” Teeple said.

In the 1960s, he said he actively protested U.S. military operations in Vietnam. He described the current missions in Iraq as oil driven.

“I think businesses in this country feel there’s going to be an oil crisis in the coming years. They need to be in control of it no matter the cost,” he said.

Celeste Zappala of Philadelphia, Pa., co-founded Gold Star Families for Peace, one of the peace activist groups involved in the anti-war campaign.

Zappala’s son, Sgt. Sherwood Baker, was killed by an explosive device on April 26, 2004. She told people about the day she learned of her son’s death.

Zappala started to make dinner. She heard on the radio about a soldier dying in Baghdad. Suddenly, the family dog’s barked. A man was on her porch.

“He said to me, ‘Are you Sherwood’s mother? Are you Sherwood Baker’s mother?’ I just began to scream,” Zappala said.

At Baker’s grave, Zappala said she made a promise to her son.

She said: “I will not be quiet. With God’s help, I will not be broken and I will speak the truth. This war is a disaster,” with Saturday’s crowd applauding.

Beatriz Salvidar, a former United Nations diplomat, had an enlarged picture of her nephew, Sgt. Daniel Torres of Forth Worth, Texas, who died on Feb. 4.

According to the Associated Press, Torres was killed when a roadside bomb hit his vehicle, one week after he found out his girlfriend was pregnant.

He was on his second tour of duty.

That day, “We lost our soul,” Salvidar said. “The war does destroy the family.”

Salvidar, Zappala and other tour members urged Saturday's crowd to become active, outspoken and unwavering in stopping the war.

Zappala said: "Do not be quiet. Do not be made cynical. There is much hope out there.

"I don't have all the answers. (But) I'm darn sure that when you begin to tell the truth about the situation in Iraq, we might find our way to peace."

There was some opposition.

Fairlawn resident David Wygle, a Vietnam veteran, stood alone, quietly and opposed to the campaign's mission. He politely questioned their views.

"Do you think President Bush killed Cindy Sheehan's son? If Sheehan's son did not join the military he would not be dead," Wygle said.

Sheehan's son, Casey, was killed April 4, 2004. She re-energized the anti-war movement with publicized vigils by Bush's Texas ranch home in August.

Sheehan was not in Akron.

But, Wygle said: "You denigrate your son's devotion to life because your devotion to anger and hurt is greater than what your son gave up."

For more information on the campaign, visit the group's Web site:

www.bringthemhomenow.org

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