

Michael Musheno and Susan M. Ross, authors of *Deployed: How Reservists Bear the Burden of Iraq* University of Michigan Press, 2008.  
[www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=262968](http://www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=262968)

## Q&A with Michael Musheno and Susan M. Ross

Michael Musheno and Susan M. Ross are the authors of *Deployed: How Reservists Bear the Burden of Iraq*. We sat down with Michael and Susan to talk about the book.

You can also listen to this interview on our University of Michigan Press Author Podcast page at: [www.press.umich.edu/podcasts/index.jsp](http://www.press.umich.edu/podcasts/index.jsp).

**University of Michigan Press: What was the inspiration or motivating reason for writing this book? What was missing from the public discussion that made this book in your view necessary?**

**Michael Musheno:** This project came looking for us more than our setting out to write a book about the deployment of reservists. We came to know each other in 2002-03 at Lycoming College, a small liberal arts institution in central Pennsylvania where Susan has been a professor for several years and [I] returned as a visiting professor to [my] undergraduate alma mater. By the time the two of us had met and struck up a friendship, Susan already had several student reservists receive orders and deploy.

**Susan M. Ross:** Within this small college setting, deployed students and alumni started corresponding with [me] and their letters from Afghanistan and later Iraq revealed stories of fear, anxiety, personal triumphs, and frustrations. Michael and [I] started to have long conversations about the wars and the letters from [these] students. Were they fighting this generation's Vietnam? Had they gotten more than they'd bargained for when they signed up as young men and women to serve? Would their friends remember them when they returned to campus? Would they be able to pick up their studies where they had left off? We weren't certain how they would handle the transformation from cloistered undergraduates to wartime soldiers and back again. We began talking about how we might use our positions and knowledge to give voice to the experiences of citizen soldiers called to fight after 9/11.

**MM:** As we started talking about a project, we read accounts about soldiering, popular and academic, contemporary and historical. To our surprise we found little to share with the student soldiers that seemed helpful to them or us. Turning to our own expertise and past field projects, we concluded that the best contribution we could make would be to use our positions to enable reservists, like those called from the classroom, to tell their stories about becoming citizen soldiers, being deployed and coming home.

**UMP: Your decision to include significant portions of the soldiers' raw responses to your interview questions makes for a very personal account of their lives. Was there ever a discussion of approaching the book a different way or was this how you went about putting the book together from the beginning?**

**MM:** We went after their voices from the get go. Our job was to create the questions to conduct retrospective interviews with the soldiers that would provide us with a way to understand how they imagine themselves as "citizen soldiers," an identity that was thrown upon them, and to reveal their evolving relationships with one another and the people important in their civilian lives. We did want to see if there were patterns that cut across the individual life histories and indeed, we found clusters of soldiers whose stories are sufficiently similar to allow us to tell our story about their lives. Still, we want that story to be told as much through their voices as our own.

**UMP: Why did you choose this particular unit, rather than, say, one from later in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars?**



Michael Musheno and Susan M. Ross, authors of *Deployed: How Reservists Bear the Burden of Iraq*  
University of Michigan Press, 2008.  
[www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=262968](http://www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=262968)

**SR:** The men and women of the 893rd were among the first wave of reserve soldiers deployed as a unit twice after 9/11, first for a year stateside and after a very short break, to Iraq for nearly a year. They entered Iraq shortly following President Bush's declaration that the mission in Iraq had been accomplished as he stood aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln and finally came home with the complete understanding that they were fighting, as they often noted, "this generation's Vietnam." These citizen soldiers experienced the Iraq War at the same time the U.S. military was playing catch up with the Bush Administration's declared war on terror, and it played out in everything from an overall shortage of properly armored vehicles to their coming home to a veterans' administration ill-equipped to handle this new wave of war veterans. These soldiers, like many who followed them, were providing support services in a war with no clear lines between the combat zone and rear guard safe havens. And, in the two years the 893rd was deployed, its members saw the public shift from flag waving patriots to war skeptics who questioned reserve units, like the 893rd, whose assignment closely paralleled the assignment of the reservists whose work at Abu Ghraib gave the entire reserve system a black eye.

**UMP:** *Did you hear about the reservists being told to stop talking about this subject, or were the authors told directly by US officials? What do they think of that response? What kind of reactions are they getting/hearing about reservists being told to be quiet, if any, since it's so crucial that these Americans have a voice?*

**SR:** While we did hear from colleagues in larger research institutions that gaining access to soldiers was becoming increasingly difficult, we did not experience any difficulties in working with the 893rd. The ability to give voice to these reservists was central to our motivation, and while many people had warned us going into the field that soldiers would likely not open up to outsiders, we actually had a difficult time keeping our one-on-one conversations with them under two hours. They wanted to be able to tell their stories and hoped that in doing so, they might make a positive difference in the lives of other reservists. After finishing the book, we spoke with several former members of the company, and they are quite pleased to know that their experiences may help inform future military policy.

**UMP:** *While gathering together the interviews you conducted, what sorts of patterns or parallels did you find among the reservists?*

**MM:** When we listened to the voices of 46 members of the 893rd, we found neither a potpourri of individual stories of completely distinct experiences nor a singular meta-story of "the citizen soldier experience." Instead, we came to realize there were three clusters of stories of citizen soldiering post-9/11.

One cluster, adaptive reservists, adjust quickly, moving lock-step with changing institutional expectations as a result of a dynamic sense of their identity and relational networks that run deep at home and in the military. These reservists cut across gender groups to include men who have experienced international deployments as well as all the female reservists who had been raised in military families.

Other citizen soldiers, who we call struggling reservists, juggle the many home-grown stresses of the shaky civilian lives they left behind as they take on very demanding military duties. These men, and all but one were men, expressed some combination of discontent, disappointment, disillusionment, and disapproval about the circumstances of their civilian lives and came to find deployments oddly comforting, even if they were experiencing war-grown troubles.

Finally, we heard the stories from resistant reservists who are dismissive of military life while they live it and are against the war even as they fight it. These citizen soldiers get out of the military as soon as possible and yet, have many attributes that are most valuable to today's military. They are ambitious, analytical, more educated than many of their peers, and patriotic.

Michael Musheno and Susan M. Ross, authors of *Deployed: How Reservists Bear the Burden of Iraq* University of Michigan Press, 2008.

[www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=262968](http://www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=262968)

***UMP: Were there surprises along the way in these stories? What are some things you found that were unexpected?***

**SR:** We were warned by military veterans before entering the field that military personnel are unlikely to want to talk to civilian researchers about their experiences. We were actually met with an eagerness among the citizen soldiers who yearned to have someone, somewhere interested in learning of the sacrifices they had made for what was becoming an increasingly ungrateful nation. They were often dismayed by the short-lived civilian concern for their experiences and sacrifices despite having been warned in debriefing sessions that, "People really don't care where you've been or what you've done." In talking with us, they wanted the military planners and military families to learn from their experiences.

**MM:** In terms of their overall stories, two things were perhaps most surprising and ran counter to the popular discourse on soldiering. First, we did not expect to find the large cluster of adaptive reservists. The heavy emphasis in the literature on war-induced trauma did not prepare us for hearing stories of reservists pleased to have had their years of training put to the test and still living in happily intact families who had made "lemonade out of lemons" as one officer noted. Many of the citizen soldiers we spoke with were seriously contemplating transferring to the full-time active duty component of the Army.

Second, we did not expect to find that so many of the soldiers who were clearly struggling in their personal lives were struggling long before they were deployed. While the deployments certainly exacerbated their personal struggles, they were most often not the cause of the reservists' struggles.

***UMP: You say that some soldiers' troubles are as much homegrown as they are war-grown. What do you mean?***

**MM:** The men and women of the 893rd were living their lives on September 10, 2001 without the anticipation that in the coming weeks their first responsibility would be to the Army. While they had woven military reserve service into their civilian lives through their one weekend a month and two weeks per summer training schedule, they were actively engaged in their civilian lives – lives that for some, who we call struggling reservists, were already spinning out of control or producing dissatisfaction and high stress. So if a young man was dealing with an unwanted pregnancy, unanticipated and extended military service was only going to exacerbate that problem. Already stressed families dependent on a reservist during peace times to provide a significant amount of emotional, physical, or financial support, were completely disrupted during the deployments and lashed out at reservists for their absence. These are the types of problems that the reservists dealt with that we dub homegrown struggles, whereas war-grown struggles are those more typically thought of as negatively impacting soldiers' lives due to the traumas of being in war zones.

***UMP: You write that "some of the soldiers oppose the war even as they take pride in fighting it." What do you mean? And what do their fellow soldiers think of that stance?***

**SR:** Although you volunteer for military service, a soldier doesn't get to pick the war in which he or she will be called to duty. The resistant reservists joined the military because of the great pride they feel in being Americans and their desire to give something back in return. These ideologically-driven soldiers take pride in having established themselves as men among men, so to speak, and having made a tremendous sacrifice for their country. At the same time, no amount of rationalization will convince them that they are participating in a justified war in Iraq.

***UMP: Why do you call reservists "the new conscripts of the twenty-first century U.S. Army?"***

Michael Musheno and Susan M. Ross, authors of *Deployed: How Reservists Bear the Burden of Iraq* University of Michigan Press, 2008.  
[www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=262968](http://www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=262968)

**MM:** We call the reservists the new conscripts of the twenty-first century U.S. Army to awaken the public to the extreme sacrifices this small number of our citizens are making while most of us have been allowed to avoid any sacrifices in one of the longest wars in American history. There is no precedent in our history for calling on so few of our citizens to multiple wartime deployments while calling upon so little of the rest of us. Many of the reservists we came to know willingly left their civilian jobs and families twice, including their serving nearly a year in Iraq, but they have grown distrustful of the military and uncertain about their futures, not knowing whether there is any end to their volunteering to serve their country.

**SR:** The response to this inequity of service is felt fully in the comments of enlisted reservist Troy Bixler, a college student and son of a former military man who eagerly anticipated military service, puts it this way: "I actually got to the point where I felt like the army was going to use me until I died, as in died while I was doin' my job. Because after being deployed once and being deployed again, I was like, 'So, obviously I can't be deployed again because I'm dead.'"

**UMP:** *Are there parallels to—or differences with—Vietnam in the way reservists are used today?*

**MM:** In the early months of 1965, U.S. executive and military leaders agreed that the Vietnam War was going badly. Elite units of the South Vietnamese Army were defeated by the Vietcong in major battles, North Vietnamese Army units were beginning to move into South Vietnam, and there was deep concern that the North was preparing for an all-out offensive on Saigon, now Ho Chi Min City. It was a time in which President Lyndon Johnson made the decision to escalate the war over an alternative to negotiate as favorable withdrawal of U.S. military forces as possible.

With this decision taken, the debate shifted to how such a force would be put together and deployed. The military leadership wanted the president to declare an emergency and call up the reserve. They reasoned that deployment of reserve forces would put the public on notice that America was at war and provide the army with experienced junior leaders in the field. President Johnson and leaders in the U.S. Congress realized that a call-up of the reserves would put the war front and center in American politics, and get in the way of the President's ambitious domestic policies.

The President decided to rely on expanding the draft over mobilizing reserve forces and as a consequence the Reserve as an institution was ripped apart. The established members of the Reserve, particularly its sergeants and officers, were veterans of the active military and previous military campaigns. While these reservists were not anxious to go to war, they had strong ties to the military and substantial experience to draw upon when deployed to war zones. With the President's decision to withhold these forces, the Reserve became a refuge for the disaffected and a haven for those whose connections allowed them to avoid the draft.

**UMP:** *Why do we rely so heavily on citizen soldiers, the Reserve and National Guard, for fighting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan?*

**SR:** One of the casualties of the Vietnam War was the end of the draft in July of 1973. The question of how to raise armies has been a controversy in the U.S. since the nation's founding. Throughout most of its history, the U.S. has relied on a draft to conduct protracted ground wars, including World War II. With the draft ended, the task of putting together an army was left to General Creighton Abrams, who was a legendary combat commander in World War II and a high ranking officer during the Vietnam War. As the army's chief of staff, Abrams put into motion the policy, called Total Force Doctrine that would restore the reputation of the Reserve and determine its fate to be a force deployed en masse to Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11.

Michael Musheno and Susan M. Ross, authors of *Deployed: How Reservists Bear the Burden of Iraq* University of Michigan Press, 2008.  
[www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=262968](http://www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=262968)

**MM:** Abrams, like many of his contemporaries, was deeply disturbed that President Johnson had decided to tip toe into the Vietnam War without the public's full awareness and commitment. He saw soldiers perform bravely and consistently under battlefield conditions but also witnessed growing difficulties he attributed to a reliance on conscription without public backing. Abrams and his colleagues regarded the mobilization of reserve forces as the crucial decision that must be taken any time America was contemplating engagement of its military in sustained combat. The reserve provides the army with experienced officers and public awareness of war because it draws upon citizens from across the rural areas, towns and cities of America.

The army he put together after Vietnam, involving three separate components, relies substantially on a combat force of professional, active duty soldiers. The active duty component is augmented with what he called "round-out" combat forces made up of elements of the National Guard. The responsibility of the Reserve is largely to provide the support needed to maintain the army in the field for sustained combat, including medics, cargo handlers, maintenance and transportation personnel, and military police. As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan became protracted wars, rather than a quick war like the first Gulf War, the army put total force doctrine into practice, resulting in the heavy reliance on particular reserve forces where the lines between combat and military support are blurred, and danger is ever present. Typically, a third of the forces serving in these wars has been and remains reserve forces.

**UMP: *In a similar vein, who are these citizen soldiers and where do they come from?***

**SR:** In terms of geography, the reservists of the 893rd, like those from units around the country, are representative of the American public. They come from big cities, suburbs, small towns and rural areas. Their social characteristics, though, are more particular to the civilian work force that is blue, not white collar, ranging from jobs in the service economy to frontline civil servants, including police and correctional officers.

A substantial number of them are ambitious first and second generation college students going to community colleges, state universities and small liberal arts colleges, paying for college in large part through their service in the reserve. The Army Reserve has the highest percent of female and minority soldiers of any of the three Army components, with about one third of the membership African American or Hispanic and about 14 percent female. The over-representation of minorities is an often-cited rationale for reinstating a draft. With the advent of the all-volunteer military, there has been a marked transformation in the composition of military personnel as a growing number of soldiers are married and approximately 40 percent of reservists have children. Many who are noncommissioned and commissioned officers were professional soldiers before transitioning into the reserve or rejoining as reservists. Most of the citizen soldiers we came to know were motivated to join to better themselves economically and to enhance their sense of themselves, taking pride in having part of their identities associated with the military.

**UMP: *Some say that the reservists and members of the National Guard should be making the sacrifices post 9/11 because they joined voluntarily and have been getting benefits from the government for years that the rest of us don't have. What is your response to that?***

**SR:** Like us, many of our friends and acquaintances have made few if any sacrifices since 9/11. When we started talking about our view that citizen soldiers are the new conscripts of today's U.S. Army, we kept hearing a refrain – these guys are volunteers for military service, they have received the benefits, including money for college, that go with signing up, and now they should be expected to fulfill their duties.

**MM:** In our view, the fact that reservists have volunteered, get paid, and have some benefits does not solve the inequity problem that a very small number of our citizens are carrying the full weight of war on their soldiers. Our designation of them as conscripts is intended to awaken the public to their sacrifices and draw attention of

Michael Musheno and Susan M. Ross, authors of *Deployed: How Reservists Bear the Burden of Iraq* University of Michigan Press, 2008.

[www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=262968](http://www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=262968)

decision makers to halt the abuse of reservist call-ups to sustain protracted wars that are neither just nor in the interest of the United States.

***UMP: How have the Iraq and Afghanistan wars changed, if they have changed, the way we maintain forces—reservists, National Guard, or army volunteers? Do you think that the way we maintain forces will undergo a transformation in the future as a result of what's happened in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars?***

**MM:** Beginning with George Washington, many leaders in the U.S. have called for universal national service of the American public as part of our duties as citizens. But, when push comes to shove, the raising of an army to fight a ground war has always fallen disproportionately on the less privileged of American citizens. We don't see this changing particularly when patriotic fervor wanes and a war becomes prolonged and less popular. American military leaders reasoned after the Vietnam War that making the reserve integral to a ground war would sober the political leadership of this country in taking the decision to go to war. Doing this did not stop the most recent march to war by our political leadership and so, we are back to a point where the public is skeptical of our political leadership, distrustful of the media's accounting of the lead up to war, and more aware of the costs of protracted war. That will probably put a break on going into another war in the near term but it leaves our nation vulnerable to political and media propaganda when our first hand memories fade and still without a solution to our longstanding struggle over how to raise an army that can fight successfully when necessary and serve as a brake on the political leadership when not. We agree with those who advocate for a program of national service that provides citizens with options, including becoming citizen soldiers. We are not so naïve to think that the story we tell about the sacrifices of the few will turn the tide but it may fall upon the ears of future leaders who will require more sacrifices of the many and make clear the boundaries of sacrifices required of the few.

Read more about *Deployed: How Reservists Bear the Burden of Iraq* at [www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=262968](http://www.press.umich.edu/titleDetailDesc.do?id=262968)