

Militarism Leads to Torture

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Drill Sergeant: "El Salvador!"

Troops: "Kill!" ...

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Troops: "Kill!" "When the coffee beans come creeping all around in El Salvador"

On our way to the mess hall morning, noon and night we sang that cadence in 1983. The U.S. military was preparing us to kill Salvadorans. They wanted us to think of them as less than human. One of the goals of military training is to prepare you to kill; another is to prepare you to follow orders. The combination of de-humanizing the enemy and becoming subservient to the chain of command leaves many soldiers capable of torture.

I also remember the stories about the CC, or Correctional Custody facility. The purpose of Correctional Custody is to make one last ditch effort to mold disobedient troops into soldiers. The stories were of hard labor, including carrying large rocks up and down hills, sleep deprivation, and humiliation. I was never sent to one of these facilities, but the Marine Corps Manual describes them as boot camp x 10.

It is in these camps where our military police or correctional officers receive training. While many, including myself, are shocked by the pictures of the torture being conducted by our troops in Iraq, I understand why those soldiers were capable of carrying out these shocking acts. From their first day at boot camp, they were trained to follow orders and to kill. I remember being told that I was a private, I was not paid to think, but to do as I was told.

I remember the first meeting with Drill Sergeant Wyatt. I was overweight with long hair. He immediately pointed to me, and said: "I want that one." He always told us that the reason he came back into the military after Vietnam was to get revenge on any recruits that he thought would run to Canada. He was sure I was one, and paid special attention to me. He was in my face regularly, humiliating me in front of my fellow recruits.

In prisons in Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantanamo, and other places, the army acknowledges the use of sleep deprivation, and other techniques to break detainees in the interrogation process. The reports out of Iraq are much more severe and troubling, but we must ask: Once we sanction certain forms of torture, why should be shocked that some will feel it is OK to go further?

Those responsible should be punished, but we are not talking just about those conducting the acts. The actual participants may not have been directly ordered to carry these acts out, but they were asked to soften the detainees for interrogation. It was years of military training that prepared them to not question their orders, and to not sympathize with their prisoners.

I am not anti-soldier. They joined the military, like I did, to defend their country, get an education, learn a skill, etc. I am against militarism, a system where the enemy is de-humanized to the point where otherwise good people can be trained to be capable of the horrors in the photos from Iraq, and capable of massacres. What happened in those prisons was a symptom of the same mentality that led to the Mai Lai massacre. The victims were less than human to those that acted.

Until we as a people reject militarism as a way to resolve our differences, indiscriminate killing and torture will continue to happen.

Many will be outraged by what I said, especially veterans. I don't think I ever broke and would have been capable of those acts, and many other soldiers don't reach that point. Before you dismiss what I am saying, think back to your unit and count how many you think were capable of carrying out torture, and then think about how many of them re-upped and excelled in the military. Again, it's not the person, but the system.

Senator Ben "Night Horse" Campbell of Colorado, while looking at the latest set of photographs, said, "This is not my Army conducting these acts." Senator, I have to say to you: It was the same United States Army that I joined in 1983.

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http://www.truthout.org/docs_04/051504A.shtml