

A reply to a reader on “Recruit’s death highlights brutality of Marine training”

5 March 2005

To the attention of Clare Hurley:

I have read many WSWs articles on the American military, and they seem to have one thing in common. They usually portray American military personnel as barbarians with no respect for human life. Perhaps the best example of this is Clare Hurley’s article entitled “Recruit’s death highlights brutality of Marine training” In this article, Hurley claims Marine training is designed “with the express purpose of rendering recruits capable of razing cities to the ground with overwhelming force, killing innocent civilians, ‘softening up’ detainees and policing a population opposed to US occupation.”

I do not dispute that Marine boot camp is an extremely brutal and rigorous experience, but does Clare Hurley or anyone else at WSWs have any actual evidence that Marine boot camp trains soldiers to torture people, kill innocent civilians, or raze cities? I myself have not been to Marine boot camp, but I did serve in the US Navy from 2000-2004. Not once in navy boot camp did any of my instructors teach me that killing innocent civilians, torturing detainees, or razing cities was an acceptable tactic. On the contrary, through both classroom studies and field exercises, navy boot camp and all other subsequent training programs made it clear that such practices were illegal and should never be carried out under any circumstances. I also met and talked with some Marines over the course of my navy career. Not once did any of them advocate any of the barbaric actions Clare Hurley claims they are trained to carry out. Also contrary to Clare Hurley and the rest of the WSWs staff’s depiction of them as “killing machines,” I found them to be polite, well mannered, and not any different from my friends in the civilian world, and when discussing military policies, none of them ever advocated anything that could be considered inhumane or barbaric.

There were many aspects of the military I did not like, but I am proud of my service in the United States Navy. As such, I take offense when your organization refers to me and my fellow servicemen as killing machines who enjoy razing cities and torturing civilians, which you do directly or indirectly on a regular basis. But in this case, Clare Hurley goes even farther by making a sensational accusation against the military without providing any supporting facts to back it up.

CS

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Clare Hurley replies:

That atrocities are being carried out by the US military in Iraq, as well as in Afghanistan, Guantánamo and elsewhere is an undeniable, well-publicized fact. The cases of torture at Abu Ghraib, in addition to homicides at other US prisons, some of whose perpetrators the military has been forced to prosecute, represent only the tip of the iceberg.

Such crimes are not a matter of failings by individual soldiers, or “bad apples,” as the military has sought to portray them. They represent a pattern of abuse, authorized at the highest levels of the Bush administration. Recently confirmed Attorney General Alberto Gonzales sponsored memos in 2002 granting the president the constitutional authority to order torture, including interrogation techniques such as “water-boarding” even if illegal and in contravention of the Geneva Convention.

To condemn these atrocities and defend the Iraqi and Afghan people who are their victims does not mean “demonizing” each and every individual serviceman or woman. Recruits like Jason Tharp *are* being trained to kill—the question is for whom? In whose interest? The “extremely brutal and rigorous experience” to which they are subjected is accompanied by a diet of

propaganda about fighting the war on terror to avenge 9/11, to defend the US homeland, and spread “freedom and democracy” in Iraq and throughout the Middle East.

Behind these lies, however, are the interests of the US ruling elite, the oil companies and other giant corporations which stand to profit, and for whom strategic control of the world’s second largest oil reserve is of vital importance. Securing not just Iraq, but the entire region for US domination against potential European and Asian rivals is the goal of these military operations. That they are prepared to be ruthless, flagrantly violating internationally accepted rules of warfare such as the Geneva Convention, which has been deemed “quaint,” is beyond a doubt.

To this end, and no other, US military personnel are fighting—not in their own interests, nor in the interest of the majority of the American people, but for those of a handful of billionaires and multimillionaires. US servicemen and women too are victims of this war and this system.

The American military *as an institution* serves the interests of this financial elite, regardless of the wishes and intentions of the individual member of the armed forces. Washington’s aims in Iraq and Afghanistan are politically and socially reactionary. If fulfilled, they would not only lead to the colonial enslavement of the Iraqi and Afghan people, but would further consolidate the power of the wealthiest elements in American society.

The reactionary purposes of the US military in the Middle East and Central Asia must color and shape the actions of each individual serviceman and woman. Each day they face the hostility of the local population, who have no wish to be dominated by a foreign power. The frustration, demoralization and rage of US troops created by this situation give rise to the abuse and torture of Iraqis and Afghans, with, one can predict, worse atrocities to come.

The toll that waging a brutal occupation takes on those who carry it out can be gauged by the increase in the number of suicides among the Marines—reported to be up 29 percent in 2004—as well as the sharp rise in cases of post traumatic stress syndrome. An untold number of military personnel, who unlike Tharp make it through basic training, are coming home mentally and physically maimed for life.

And the brutality required undoubtedly encourages the more sadistic, homicidal elements in the armed forces. When a senior officer like Marine Lt. Gen. James N. Mattis publicly says “it’s a hell of a hoot to shoot some people,” he is expressing an ethos that pervades the upper echelons of the military, whatever lip-service they may give during boot camp to “humanitarian” treatment of the enemy.

The WSWS does not believe that the hundreds of thousands of military personnel sent to Iraq are all “killing machines who enjoy razing cities and torturing civilians.” In response to the brutalizing conditions of occupation and the realization that they were sent to fight based upon a lie, a growing number of soldiers have responded with anger towards the Pentagon and the Bush administration. While they still may be only a handful, some have come forward to publicly condemn US policy and appeal to others in uniform to do likewise.

Such is the case with Sgt. Camilo Mejia, who was released February 15, 2005 after a year’s imprisonment for refusing to return to service in Iraq. He says of his own experience:

“Refusing and resisting this war was my moral duty, a moral duty that called me to take a principled action. I failed to fulfill my moral duty as a human being and instead I chose to fulfill my duty as a soldier. All because I was afraid. I was terrified, I did not want to stand up to the government and the army, I was afraid of punishment and humiliation. I went to war because at the moment I was a coward, and for that I apologize to my soldiers for not being the type of leader I should have been.” <http://www.ivaw.net/news.htm>

The *World Socialist Web Site* is confident that more and more young workers in the US military will draw similar conclusions from their experiences in Iraq, and that their unrest and resistance will play a major role in the ultimate defeat of US imperialism’s policy of aggression.

Thank you for writing to the WSWS,
Clare Hurley



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