

Brother of Pat Tillman denounces Iraq War and Bush administration

Patrick Martin
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The brother of professional athlete turned soldier Pat Tillman, who was killed in a “friendly fire” incident in Afghanistan, has made a public denunciation of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the Bush administration’s attacks on democratic rights.

Kevin Tillman enlisted in the military along with his brother after the 9/11 terror attacks. Pat Tillman’s decision to give up his lucrative career as a National Football League player and join the military was heavily publicized at the time as an example of popular support for the Bush administration’s “war on terror.”

Kevin and Pat served a tour of duty in Iraq, then were accepted into the elite Army Rangers and sent to Afghanistan. In April 2004, Pat was killed by his fellow soldiers after his unit was divided and the two groups of soldiers blundered into each other and opened fire.

Although he was in the same unit, Kevin did not witness his brother’s death and was initially told, like the American public as a whole, that Pat died heroically in combat with Taliban fighters. It was only months later that Kevin and the rest of the Tillman family learned that Pat’s death was due to friendly fire, and the Army began an investigation into his death and the subsequent cover-up which is still not concluded.

It is clear that in the year since he left the Army, Kevin Tillman has done some serious thinking about the nature of the Bush administration and its wars. His statement is the most scathing attack on the war to be acknowledged by the American media, although only a few fragments of sentences were published. The entire statement was published on the TruthDig web site.

The commentary takes its title, “After Pat’s Birthday,” from the coincidence that Pat Tillman would have been 30 on November 6, the day before the US midterm elections.

Kevin Tillman recites the shifting reasons given by

the US government for the war in Iraq: the alleged threat to the American people, the claims of weapons of mass destruction, the suggestions that Iraq was linked to the 9/11 attacks, the declaration that the purpose of the war was to establish democracy.

“Somehow the more soldiers that die, the more legitimate the illegal invasion becomes,” he writes. “Somehow American leadership, whose only credit is lying to its people and illegally invading a nation, has been allowed to steal the courage, virtue and honor of its soldiers on the ground.”

At the center of Tillman’s commentary is an impassioned denunciation of the Bush administration’s attacks on democratic rights, which deserves extended quotation:

“Somehow our elected leaders were subverting international law and humanity by setting up secret prisons around the world, secretly kidnapping people, secretly holding them indefinitely, secretly not charging them with anything, secretly torturing them. Somehow that overt policy of torture became the fault of a few ‘bad apples’ in the military...

“Somehow subversion of the Bill of Rights and The Constitution is tolerated. Somehow suspension of Habeas Corpus is supposed to keep this country safe. Somehow torture is tolerated. Somehow lying is tolerated. Somehow reason is being discarded for faith, dogma, and nonsense. Somehow American leadership managed to create a more dangerous world. Somehow a narrative is more important than reality.”

Tillman continues by urging the American people to take action against the war and the government responsible for it: “Somehow being politically informed, diligent, and skeptical has been replaced by apathy through active ignorance. Somehow the same incompetent, narcissistic, virtueless, vacuous, malicious

criminals are still in charge of this country. Somehow this is tolerated. Somehow nobody is accountable for this...

“Luckily this country is still a democracy. People still have a voice. People still can take action. It can start after Pat’s birthday.”

The conclusion, which amounts to an appeal to vote for antiwar candidates, reflects the enormous and entirely legitimate indignation felt by millions of Americans on the eve of the elections. The likely beneficiary of such a mobilization of angry antiwar voters, however, will be the Democratic Party, which is entirely committed to the continued US occupation of both Iraq and Afghanistan.

In this sense, Tillman’s declaration underscores the central political problem confronting working people in the United States: outside of the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site*, there is no political force that mounts a genuine, consistent and principled opposition to the policies of American imperialism. The sentiments of broad masses of workers find no serious reflection within any section of the political or media establishment.

Tillman reveals the limitations of his own political understanding in another part of his statement, where he declares, “In a democracy, the policy of the leaders is the policy of the people.” This misses a basic fact of American society: that the “people” are divided into classes, and the class which monopolizes the wealth controls the government and both political parties, Democratic as well as Republican.

The people “choose” the leaders only in the sense that they are permitted to vote, every two or four years, for candidates selected and packaged by the financial elite. The people do not choose the policies of the government. Those are determined by the social interests of the ruling class, then packaged, through the mass media, to be sold to the American people.

Tillman’s denunciation of the war in Iraq and the Bush administration was posted on TruthDig on October 19. For three days, there was no reference to it in the mass media, until an AP dispatch on Saturday. This dispatch was reproduced in major daily newspapers Monday, including the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, but there was no follow-up coverage by either the newspapers or the television networks.

These are the same media outlets that gave saturation coverage to Pat and Kevin Tillman’s initial decision to join the military after 9/11, when they were held up as role models for young Americans willing to make the ultimate sacrifice in the “war on terror.” There was even more media attention in the initial days after Pat Tillman’s death, when he was presented as a patriotic martyr who died defending his country. By contrast, the revelation that Pat’s death was due to friendly fire received relatively restrained coverage, and Kevin’s bitter attack on the Bush administration has been largely buried.

Significantly, while quoting Tillman’s attack on the war and on the “malicious criminals” of the Bush administration, the press did not cite any of his criticisms of the attacks on democratic rights embodied in the Military Commissions Act, the Patriot Act, or the secret CIA torture camps. The transparent purpose is to transform Tillman’s denunciation of the whole structure of the bipartisan “war on terror” into something that can be used to help channel antiwar sentiment behind the Democratic Party.



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