

Mary Tillman condemns Obama's appointment of McChrystal to head military families commission

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15 April 2011

Mary Tillman has condemned President Barack Obama's decision to appoint as co-chair of a military families commission General Stanley McChrystal, the man who led the cover-up of the killing of her son, football player Pat Tillman, by friendly fire in Afghanistan in April 2004.

Last summer Obama forced McChrystal out as commander of US and NATO operations in Afghanistan, after his counter-insurgency strategy failed to suppress resistance to the occupation and after a string of provocations and acts of insubordination from the general. These included comments made to the *Rolling Stone* deriding Obama and other administration officials (See: "Militarism and democracy: the implications of the McChrystal affair").

The move to give McChrystal a symbolic role with the Joining Forces campaign, which claims it will draw attention to the needs of military families, is an effort by Obama to patch up relations with elements of the officer corps who never reconciled themselves to McChrystal's firing.

Pat Tillman, a professional football player who joined the Army after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, was killed in 2004 by friendly fire from members of his own platoon. Playing on his fame, the Bush administration publicized his decision to join the army in order to promote the war in Afghanistan. This continued after his death, when the military covered up his accidental killing and produced a completely false story of a heroic death at the hands of Islamist fighters.

After learning of this cover-up, his family has waged a courageous campaign to learn the truth about his killing. The Pentagon continues to stonewall it, seven years later.

Speaking with ABC News about the appointment of McChrystal, Mary Tillman expressed her anger: "I was actually pretty shocked to hear it; I don't think it's the appropriate choice," she said. "[S]omeone who has a heartfelt desire to help families would not have been involved in the cover-up of a soldier's death, especially one that they used to promote a war," she said. She added that Obama's decision "makes him look foolish, frankly."

"[McChrystal] deliberately helped cover up Pat's death, and he has never adequately apologized to us for doing that. He knew we were actively looking for answers. No one contacted us to try to square with us what had happened.

"I've come to learn through this journey that there are many other families that have been lied to by the military about their sons and daughters, and so we feel that what happened to Pat pertains to other people, not just us. I think it's a slap in the face to all soldiers to appoint this man to be on this committee."

Tillman's comments were echoed by Amir Bar-Lev, director of the documentary *The Tillman Story*, and by Jon Krakauer, author of *Where Men Win Glory: The Odyssey of Pat Tillman*.

"Putting Stanley McChrystal in charge of a commission on military families is a little like putting [convicted financial swindler] Bernie Madoff in charge of a commission on pensions," Bar-Lev told ABC.

Krakauer said, "I think this appointment is an outrage. McChrystal continues to dissemble about the

leading role he played in the cover-up. It's shameful."

It is documented that McChrystal, in his capacity of commander of special operations in Afghanistan, actively engaged in the cover-up of Tillman's killing. After learning of his death, McChrystal wrote an urgent confidential memo stating it was "highly possible that Corporal Tillman was killed by friendly fire," and warning the military brass of the potential for "public embarrassment if the circumstances of Corporal Tillman's death become public."

In her comments to ABC News, Mary Tillman pointed to this language, noting that McChrystal wrote "if this becomes public this could be an embarrassment to the administration. He didn't say 'when' this becomes public, 'when' we tell the family. So there was going to be an effort to cover this up."

In spite of his knowledge of the circumstances of Pat Tillman's death, McChrystal enlisted in the propaganda campaign.

In approving a Silver Star medal for the dead soldier, McChrystal wrote, "Corporal Tillman put himself in the line of devastating enemy fire as he maneuvered his Fire Team to a covered position from which they could effectively employ their weapons on known enemy positions. While mortally wounded, his audacious leadership and courageous example under fire inspired his men to fight with great risk to their own personal safety, resulting in the enemy's withdrawal and his platoon's safe passage from the ambush kill zone."

This was a fabrication. In fact, Tillman died as he pleaded with US soldiers to stop firing on his position.

In Senate testimony given in 2009, McChrystal claimed that the citation was simply "not well-written." Though a Pentagon inspector general proposed disciplinary action against McChrystal, the military cleared him in 2007. Obama appointed him to head Afghan operations in June 2009, and removed him one year later after *Rolling Stone* published a story in which McChrystal mocked Obama, Vice President Joe Biden and other administration officials.

Obama's selection of McChrystal to head up the Joining Forces campaign 10 months later is an affront to Mary Tillman and to mass popular opposition to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Asked about Mary Tillman's criticism of the selection, White House spokesman Jay Carney said that

Obama was "very aware...of the general's resumé."

First Lady Michelle Obama announced the move on Tuesday. McChrystal, she said, "has a distinguished career in the military. There's a level of respect in the military community for both him and his wife. He was the right fit, he was willing to take up the challenge."

The fact that McChrystal is guilty of repeatedly lying to perhaps the highest profile military family, the Tillmans, should alone disqualify him for such a position. His actions do not suggest that he is concerned about military families or the difficulties they confront, which include severe psychological trauma, physical disabilities, and financial hardship.



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