

Twenty-year-old Muslim recruit killed by officers at Marine boot camp

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A 20-year-old Muslim Marine recruit, Raheel Siddiqui, jumped three stories to his death on March 18, 2016 after suffering repeated abuse by officers at the Parris Island base in South Carolina.

Siddiqui's death is one of dozens of cases of officer abuse that have emerged at Parris Island alone. Across the country, officers of the various branches of the US armed forces systematically abuse young recruits, the overwhelming majority of whom, like Siddiqui, come from working-class families.

An initial investigation revealed that Siddiqui began having mental and physical health problems shortly after arriving at training camp. His requests for help were ignored by officers in his company, known as "Killer Kilo Company," who evaluated him and forced him to return to training.

Following a week of grueling physical training that traditionally involves heavy verbal and psychological abuse by drill sergeants and other officers, Siddiqui first complained that he was being abused. These complaints were again ignored. *Salon* reported that officers called Siddiqui a "terrorist" because of his Islamic faith.

On March 18, eleven days after he arrived at camp, Siddiqui told his drill instructor that he had a sore throat and requested medical attention. When the drill instructor refused and began yelling at him, Siddiqui remained silent before falling to the floor in pain. The drill sergeant continued to yell at him, and when Siddiqui again failed to respond, the officer hit him on the face as many as three times. Siddiqui then stood up, began sprinting out of the barracks, and leapt over a railing, falling 40 feet to his death.

Though Siddiqui's death has been labeled a suicide, it would be more apt to call it a murder. Ultimately the young man and his family are victims of American

imperialism.

The young man's family emigrated from Pakistan in 1990 to live in the Detroit-area town of Taylor, Michigan. Like most military recruits, Siddiqui joined the armed forces largely out of a desire to provide a decent life for his family.

Siddiqui's sister, Sidra, told the *Wall Street Journal*: "We struggled as a family when we were little, and he wanted to change that." Siddiqui's father is an auto-parts worker who was returning from his night shift when he first heard the news that his son was dead. He recalls seeing an ambulance parked in front of his home. Inside, first responders were tending to Siddiqui's mother, who had just received the news.

Despite the fact that Siddiqui graduated from Harry S. Truman High School as class valedictorian, the lack of job opportunities for young people forced him to take a minimum-wage job at a nearby Home Depot. He received a scholarship to attend engineering program at the University of Michigan, Dearborn.

Siddiqui's family was skeptical of his decision to join the Marines. His mother told the *Wall Street Journal* that her son told her: "Mom, there are possibilities in the Marines. If life gives me a golden chance, why can I not accept? I'll get a good job. I'll give you a good life. I'll give you a home. I'll give you everything."

When he arrived at training camp, he was thrown into the reactionary, jingoistic climate of the armed forces of American imperialism. So vicious and sadistic is this climate that it broke down an innocent, intelligent, and hardworking young man, killing him in a week and a half.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the drill sergeant who beat Siddiqui was already under investigation for placing another Muslim recruit in a clothes-drying machine in 2015. The officer did so after

accusing the recruit of being responsible for the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Another recruit overheard the officer yelling at the Muslim soldier: “Why are you even here? You’re gonna kill us the first chance you get, aren’t you, you terrorist? What are your plans, are you a terrorist?”

Despite this, the officer was neither demoted nor removed from his position as a drill instructor. In the 3rd Recruit Training Battalion alone, dozens of officers are now under investigation for similar abuse. The battalion proudly refers to itself as the “Thumping Third” for the brutality that its recruits face.

The US Marines issued a perfunctory statement aimed at covering up the fact that officer abuse is a standard operating procedure of all branches of the US military.

“When America’s men and women commit to becoming Marines, we make a promise to them. We pledge to train them with firmness, fairness, dignity and compassion.” said Marine Commandant General Robert B. Neller. But top military brass have not brought charges against a single officer responsible for abusing recruits and are protecting the identities of all officers involved. The ongoing investigation’s purpose is to protect those responsible, present Siddiqui’s death as an isolated incident and ensure that the culture of abuse continues unhindered.

The US armed forces are not trained with “compassion” any more than they are sent to war for “humanitarian” reasons or to protect “democracy.” The brutal, fascist climate cultivated by the officer corps is a reflection of the military’s class character. The military’s purpose is to advance the interests of Wall Street and the American financial aristocracy, pillaging the world and securing its natural resources, shipping lanes, and cheap labor sources.

Siddiqui’s death reveals the dark shadow that fifteen years of permanent war in the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa have cast on American society. The US military has killed over a million people in its ongoing wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan.

This permanent state of war has left no element of life untouched. Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, Fallujah, Haditha, extraordinary rendition, disposition matrix, black sites, waterboarding and drone strikes are the places and terms which have come to define the

character of the wars. Presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump both pledge to continue the so-called War on Terror with no end in sight.



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