

GI SPECIAL 514:

The Fog of Fame

Pat Tillman as Everyone's Political Football:

“There Are Soldiers And Thousands Of Men, Women, And Children In Other Countries Dying Today For Military Public Relations”



[Thanks to Mark Shapiro]

[Thanks to Pham Binh, Traveling Soldier & John Osmand, who sent this in.]

The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee ought to be renamed: The House Groveling and Gratitude Committee. Oh thank you thank you thank you Lord Rumsfeld for gracing us with your presence; we shall do what we might

to give the appearance of interrogating you while we deflect these troublesome Tillman people.

August 9, 2007 By STAN GOFF, CounterPunch [Excerpts]

Stan Goff is the author of "Hideous Dream: A Soldier's Memoir of the US Invasion of Haiti" (Soft Skull Press, 2000), "Full Spectrum Disorder" (Soft Skull Press, 2003) and "Sex & War" which will be released approximately December, 2005.

He is retired from the United States Army. His blog is at www.stangoff.com.

In 1979, after a break in my Army service and having recouped my sergeant's stripes as a mechanized cavalry scout in Fort Carson, I volunteered for the Rangers.

Off to Ranger School I went, and upon completion I was assigned to 3rd Platoon, Company A (Alpha Company), 2nd Ranger Battalion, 75th Infantry Regiment in Fort Lewis, Washington. Each of the three rifle platoons (organizations of around 40 light infantrymen) had nicknames, in this case, First to Fight, the Blacksheep, and Third Herd. A Company, known for its iron discipline, was called the Alpha-bots.

When I left there in 1981 to become a tactics instructor at the Jungle Operations Training Center in Panama, I never had a notion that I might somehow be entangled with Alpha Company again ... two-and-a-half decades later.

Brothers Pat and Kevin Tillman were Alpha-bots, assigned to the Blacksheep (2nd Platoon), when Pat was killed by friendly fire on April 22, 2004 near a tiny village called Manah in Paktia Province, Afghanistan, near the Pakistani border. When I was a member of the adjacent platoon in the same building, Pat was a baby.

Neither those who knew baby Pat then, nor I, slogging away in the wilds of Fort Lewis, had crystal balls. They did not know that this precocious child would someday play professional football. Even when he did, so many years later, they never reduced this young man to his identity as an athlete.

He was a kid, a whole person, with two brothers, Mom, and Dad, living in the Central California mountains near an old mercury mine, a river, and a state forest.

I wrote a short reflection-piece on the friendly fire incident in April 2006, two years after Pat was killed. Someone read it online and forwarded it to Mary (Dannie) Tillman, Pat's mom.

She found something in it of which she approved, and she contacted me. We talked on the phone, many times, and I went to San Jose to spend a few days with her after I started writing a series about the whole episode.

Eventually, the family would allow me to accompany them to the briefing they were given this year by the US Army Criminal Investigation Division (CID). Army representatives lied directly to the family's face... again.

In the interest of full disclosure, this is personal for me now. Dannie Tillman is my friend. So is Kevin, who was close enough to hear the shots that took his brother's life on April 22, 2004. I am angry as I write this.

Pat Tillman was a lot more than a football player, and in all the right ways also a lot less -- humble when he needed to be, unassuming, tender with loved ones. He joined the Army because he didn't trust fame. He was afraid it might keep him from growing up and being honest and being responsible. He saw a lot of other young people -- and the generations before him -- going through this grunt-thing in the military, and had this idea that having a physical gift shouldn't be some kind of exemption.

Anyone might argue with that for a host of reasons; I would.

But it is something essential about Pat Tillman that needs to be out there ... that sense of ethics that will not substitute words for deeds. And he hated idealizations.

He was 26 when he fell. Pretty thoughtful for 26, in this culture especially.

The Congressional Committee investigating Pat's death, a committee that fawned all over Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Meyers, and John Abizaid on August 1 needs to take note. I'm angry, so I'm saying it. Sometimes invective is appropriate.

Most members of that Committee haven't the ethical sense to qualify for wiping Pat's ass. Instead they kissed Donald Rumsfeld's, Richard Meyers', and John Abizaid's. I'll be coming back to this shameful display.

It's emblematic of not just Congress, but in particular of Democrats who continue to tip-toe around anything to do with the war as if they're walking through a rattlesnake pit.

Pat was right to be suspicious of fame.

This craven display by Congressional Democrats and Republicans alike was just the last entry in a growing archive of opportunism that circles around fame like a vulture over a corpse.

Fame in the wrong circumstances can throw up a carrion scent like a thick fog. The scavengers of American political life -- elected officials and candidates, crackpot polemicists, and the profit-press -- chase the smell along the shifting winds.

That same press that has blood all over its hands for the war in Iraq today was on exhibition again with the recent, and irresponsible, reporting -- excised from context -- on a few lines from thousands of pages of documents, igniting the imaginations of every conspiracy-buff in the nation.

I'm talking about the Associated Press story in late July that suggested Pat was "fraggged."

The subsequent orgy of rumors and ill-informed speculation, the utter failure of the House Oversight and Reform Committee, and the maddening impunity of the War Troika lies that went unchallenged there, compel me to write this.

The Army has insisted that Pat was killed in "the fog of war" by his own comrades; I am insisting that both Pat's memory and the truth are being murdered in the fog of fame.

Had Pat not been famous, his death would be buried inside the lengthening list of sorrow from this obscenity in Southwest Asia. Had Pat not been famous, the Army might not have lied about the circumstances of his death to press and family.

On the other hand, many families have now discovered that the military covers up fratricides.

From The Tillman Files:

Why were at least three other known fratricides reported falsely, and the families deceived, within a two month period of Pat's death? Kenneth Ballard? Patrick McCaffrey? Jesse Buryj?

There was a pattern of deception that corresponded to the toxic combination of April's tactical debacle in Iraq, the release of the first Abu Ghraib photographs, and Seymour Hersh's exposé of Donald Rumsfeld and Stephen Cambone's "Grab whom you must. Do what you want" program.

Kenneth Ballard was killed in Najaf by friendly fire from his own vehicle in May 2004, and the military told his family that he'd been killed by a sniper on a rooftop. Jesse Buryj, killed in May, had his family told that he died defending a checkpoint from an oncoming truck that crashed into him.

When they questioned the story months later, they were told that he had in fact been accidentally killed by a Polish soldier. A former member of his unit (66th Military Police Company, the same unit that "command rape" victim Suzanne Swift was assigned to at the time) visited the family and told them that Jesse was, in fact, shot by a platoon leader). Patrick McCaffrey was killed exactly two months after Pat Tillman, and his mother was told he died in an ambush. They neglected to say that the "ambush by insurgents" was in fact conducted against him and his fellow team members by the very Iraqi forces they were training, after having reported more than once to the chain of command that the "allies" had shot at them.

When Karen Meredith, Kenneth Ballard's mother, asked the Army why it was deceiving people about these fratricidal incidents, she was told that there had only been six cases of this happening. She asked, how was it that she knew four of them?

Nadia McCaffrey and Mary Tillman have been told by military representatives that the concealment of fratricide is an act of compassion... that these reports, given too much publicity, might lower the morale of the troops.

But we know that Pat's case was special to the administration, precisely because of his fame. Claims to the contrary now are disingenuous to the point of stupidity. They just don't want to answer the questions.

This administration, like the powerful generally, has a sense of entitlement that resents having to answer questions; and when it does, it uses the legal system as a shield.

Unfortunately, for reasons I'll explain below, Congress doesn't want to ask the questions.

We don't need Dems on Capitol Hill to strategize around the next election cycle like lawyers. Pat's case is emblematic of what the whole country is going through right now; and for this we don't need any more lawyers.

We need junkyard dogs.

Now that I have that off my chest, and having read the documents accumulated around this case, often several times, and having stayed in constant contact with Dannie Tillman (who hates the limelight and stays at this as a furious act of love), it's time to review again not just what we can prove happened, but also what likely happened.

There is a lot of information available to make reasonable assumptions on this case.

If Waxman's Committee had listened to the family, instead of assuming (incorrectly) that they know what they're doing better than the rest of us rubes, then why didn't they carefully construct a prosecutorial hypothesis, (1) systematically take each aspect of that hypothesis and subpoena the documents and testimony necessary to rule out said hypothesis or support it, (2) swear in their witnesses, (3) encircle the witnesses with the facts at a distance, (4) hedge the witnesses in with direct questions that carry the threat of perjury charges, (5) offer to hold the witnesses in contempt if they equivocate (as all of those pricks did... and got away with it), and (6) state the obvious when these witnesses were ridiculously disingenuous or suffering selective amnesia.

The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee ought to be renamed: The House Groveling and Gratitude Committee. Oh thank you thank you thank you Lord Rumsfeld for gracing us with your presence; we shall do what we might to give the appearance of interrogating you while we deflect these troublesome Tillman people.

Selling War With Lies

Selling war with lies has become one of the most lucrative parasitic industries in Washington DC.

The context for everything that happened after Pat's death requires this Pentagon propaganda-emphasis be center stage.

Some people already understand this.

What is not well understood is that this propaganda-emphasis likely played a central role in creating the conditions for Pat's death in the first place. Let me give that special emphasis, too:

The decision to split the Blacksheep Platoon on April 22 was forced on a platoon leader who stated to his superiors that splitting the platoon in this terrain would require a half-assed preparation cycle and potentially create a dangerous break in inter-platoon communications.

This directive was designed with one purpose in mind: to be able to state that the platoon had reached their "target" on time.

A timeline (a bureaucratic checklist) drove this decision -- not the intelligence.

The push to provide evidence of "progress" in Afghanistan -- using the Rumsfeldian "metrics" of quantification -- as a counterweight to the bad news from the Fallujah-Najaf rebellions and the breaking Abu Ghraib scandal, created the sense of urgency throughout military commands there to send reports confirming that X number of missions were completed in X amount of time.

Focusing only on what happened the day Pat was killed, and then only on the minutiae of the actual shooting, and then studying what happened afterward, obscures the deeper context and conceals the fact that there are soldiers and thousands of men, women, and children in other countries dying today for military public relations.

Let's Review The Case:

April 22, 2004 -- The Blacksheep Platoon was on a zone reconnaissance in Paktia. The "roads" there are little more than eroded wadis, leaving crater-like potholes and exposed boulders. Vehicles have to pick their way through these "roads" very slowly; and the damage to vehicles -- even Hummers and Hiluxes (military field vehicles) -- is enormous.

One Hummer with the platoon was deadlined by this terrain as the platoon pulled into a village named Magarah. I will refer to this vehicle as the Albatross.

Serial communications and repair attempts on this vehicle, including flying out parts, failed to resuscitate the Albatross; and the process stranded the Blacksheep in Magarah for more than six hours. This is not a good security situation in a zone where significant numbers of adversaries are operating.

Daylight. Town. Static position. Many highly curious villagers.

Based on accounts of the subsequent combat "contact," three Afghan guerrillas (understand that these might be three teenagers) with an RPG and a couple of Kalashnikovs get wind of the scene in Magarah. The terrain is very steep; and one can observe the platoon from a mile away without difficulty. They sit on the high ground and watch the show.

Concerns about security are voiced within the platoon; and they request an aerial extraction of the vehicle. That request is denied.

Meanwhile, in Khowst, the larger town where the tactical operations center (TOC) is located, the TOC Commander, Major David Hodne was overseeing multiple missions. He tracked them on maps, reviewed situation reports, and maintained communications through a TOC staff -- generally a dozen or so people jammed together with the maps, radios, and files inside a tent.

Major Hodne is between his bosses and the multiple platoons in the field.

His bosses are not asking for details on every mission. They assess his progress with checklists.

This is how things work in the military. There is a fetish for quantification. "Accomplishments" are measured with extreme empiricism, presented in bullet-points that give numbers. This is true of performance evaluations and operational checklists.

The reason this is important in the story of Pat Tillman's death by fratricide is that the majority of readers -- even military veterans of a single enlistment -- are not familiar with military culture.

The have impressions formed primarily by entertainment media that are generally downright silly.

Descriptions of doctrine, regulations, policies and procedures tell about ten percent of the story of what the military is. The other ninety percent can only be understood culturally.

This numerical fetishism creates a mindset and a relation between supervisor and subordinate that is similar in many respects to standardized testing in public schools.

The numerical fetish in the structure of the test -- ostensibly designed to "measure" learning -- actually changes the definition of "learning." The test-tail wags the learning-dog.

I tried to explain this on the phone to a lawyer with a Congressional office; and she responded the way a cat does when it sees a wristwatch. Lawyers are empiricists, and they have internalized the norms of empiricism (along with the ability to employ logical fallacies to their advantage in courtrooms) to the point where non-linear dynamics are opaque to them. They are -- with some remarkable exceptions -- great test-takers, and a testament to public schooling.

The Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) is a series of highly competitive pyramids (one for each branch, converging branches near the top).

Lots of 2nd Lieutenants at the bottom of the pyramid, and a few Generals at the top. When a 1st Lieutenant is "passed over" when s/he becomes eligible for Captain, that is not just a delay in promotion.

It is the death sentence of a military career.

Each officer is assessed periodically on an evaluation report, and any officer that receives below the absolute maximum (even by one point) will -- with only very rare exceptions, like nepotism or blackmail -- be "passed over."

Officer Evaluation Reports (OERs) list bullet-points with lots of numbers in each bullet.

*Captain Nimrod, during this evaluation period, raised his company's average score on the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) from 210 to 218.

*Captain Nimrod, during combat operations in Afghanistan during this evaluation period, was tasked with 14 missions. All 14 of those missions were completed on time and achieved the commander's intent.

Understand, that if Captain Nimrod has a bullet that reads, "13 of the 14 missions were completed on time and achieved the commander's intent," then Captain Nimrod is in trouble.

Some other Captain has a perfect batting average, and Nimrod stands to be passed over.

Nimrod knows this, so when Nimrod is running missions, just like the school kid who is taking her standardized test, Nimrod will cut any qualitative corner that is necessary (like exercising prudent tactical judgment or following the lead of subordinate commanders on the ground) to achieve the quantitative results (like arriving on an objective early enough to say a timeline was met).

There is not an enlisted person (those who are not commissioned officers) in the military who has not been on the wrong end of this system, when s/he is made to suffer some horrid, senseless goat-screw so an officer can get the numbers (getting the numbers is referred to as the officer punching his ticket).

The briefings that are given under this hyper-empiricist regime are often called "dog and pony shows."

When Cross-Functional Team Commander David Hodne was at the TOC in Khowst, he was a Major -- normally a staff rank (as opposed to a command rank).

This was his opportunity in a cannibalistic OPMS to shine ... the shining demonstrated through bullet-points with numbers.

The Blacksheep Platoon was due -- according to the mission timeline -- to conduct operations in Manah -- not a high priority target -- "no later than" April 22, 2004.

Whether that made sense in the real world, after the unexpected delay of a busted Hummer, was irrelevant.

The threat of missing a mission time is a source of extreme anxiety for any military officer.

To this we must add that this is Rumsfeld's military in 2004. A nuttier empiricist would be hard to find. Rumsfeld, who stole other people's ideas, then bastardized them in his grandiose imagination, had taken this arithmetic fetish and renamed it as part of the "Rumsfeld doctrine", which he called (with typical self-promoting grandiosity) "the Revolution in Military Affairs."

Rumsfeld's concept of Network-centric Warfare (NCW, a scalar bastardization of Col. John Boyd's warfighting theories, which were originally applied to individual air combat) measures success with "metrics," that is, with obsessive quantification.

An interview with DoD Deputy Secretary for Public Affairs, Lawrence DeRita (one of Rumsfeld's closest advisors), gives a good example of this "metrics approach" and how it translates from operations into propaganda. Notice the emphasis on numbers in this quote:

"Since it began last week, Victory Bounty has netted nearly 70 former Fedayeen fighters, including several general and field grade officers. The daily raids and patrols that our troops conduct every day are steadily and deliberately building a more stable and secure Iraq. On average, coalition forces are conducting almost 2,000 patrols every day, hundreds of night patrols, and many of those are conducted jointly with the Iraqi police."

This is really just an extrapolation of MacNamaran "body counts," but Rumsfeld thinks himself a military genius.

The point is -- at Donald Rumsfeld's level, where the war had to be justified to the American populace -- the bullet-points showing "accomplishments" were in demand from the highest offices of the military for inclusion into press releases and briefings.

In the psychological operations being directed at the American populace, which enjoy elevated importance when public support for the war is waning, this show-me-the-metrics command emphasis cascades down through the chain of command like an avalanche.

It is facilitated by bureaucratic overinterpretation of command guidance.

The emphasis from the top does not diminish as it moves further from the source; it is amplified by the desire to please the boss at every level.

This process was in turn amplified by the personality of Donald Rumsfeld: autocratic, vengeful, and micromanagerial.

War is seen by officers as a career opportunity.

This essential context is not taken up by Congress or the press, because you get into trouble when you deviate from ritual displays of fealty to US militarism.

Congress, the press, the entertainment media, and the public have all taken the de facto loyalty oath that says never speak ill of the military. Militarism is our culture, our religion, and our economy.

On April 22, 2004 -- the last day of Pat Tillman's life -- these were the multiply-related institutional pressures that led Major David Hodne, far from the scene with the Blacksheep and their Albatross, to overrule a ground commander and order the platoon split into two sections: one section to drag the Albatross with a hired Afghan truck to the paved highway where it would link up with an Army recovery vehicle, and the other section to arrive in Manah -- a location on that mission checklist in the TOC -- to get "boots on the ground by dusk" of the appointed day.

First Lieutenant David Uthlaut -- the Platoon Leader -- had strenuously objected to this plan because it endangered his command, control, and communications (C3). Hodne overruled him, saying that he was not going to let a busted vehicle make him miss a mission time.

Uthlaut had mere minutes to organize this foolish, but now mandatory, ad hoc operation in the wake of a six-hour, exposed daylight delay, that would route some of his troops through a deep and highly constricted canyon at the risk of losing inter-platoon communications.

In order to ensure that each section (called a Serial) had a rough parity of weapons and vehicles, the organic chain of supervision in the platoon was broken up and "task organized" around weapons systems... leaving squad leaders and even team leaders in charge of people with whom they hadn't normally worked.

The three Afghan guerrillas sat and watched from the high ground. The Americans were moving, lining up vehicles, behaving as if they were about to leave.

At a fork in the "road" just outside of Magarah, one section was to mount a steep road to the right, toward the highway, with the Albatross in tow behind a hired Afghan "jinga truck." The other section was to turn left and go through the canyon -- less than two kilometers -- to accomplish the "boots on the ground" arrival outside Manah.

Then they would radio back to Major Hodne, and Hodne could check off his bullet-point.

Pat was assigned to the "boots on the ground" section.

The Boots Section left a few minutes in advance of the Albatross section, and steered into the canyon.

The Afghan guerrillas, it may be presumed, watched this and formed a hasty plan to climb up to the high ridges on either side of the canyon. By the time they got there, the Boots Section was already through the canyon.

Meanwhile, the Albatross Section had encountered an obstacle. The road leading to the main highway was not passable for the jinga truck dragging the Albatross.

Platoon Sergeant Eric Godec -- now in charge of the Albatross Section -- had to make a decision, and it was late in the day. The only alternative route to the highway was through the same canyon where the Boots Section had just passed.

He then discovered -- just as the Platoon Leader had feared -- that they had lost radio contact with the Boots Section, now fifteen minutes ahead of them.

The three guerrillas on the ridge line had not reached the higher ground in time to hit the Boots Section with harassing fire -- the most a small force might consider against heavily-armed US shock infantry.

But then the Albatross Section was turning around and lining up to go through the canyon -- yes, a target of opportunity after all.

The Rangers themselves were tired, filthy, soggy in their sweaty heavy battle gear, underslept, low on water, and pissed off after the all-day static security they'd pulled in Magarah for a busted Hummer.

Change 10 in the all-day clusterfuck. Anyone who is a veteran of any infantry unit will identify. This is a set-stage for over-reaction.

The Albatross Section had to crawl into the canyon single file. The sun was very low, and the canyon getting dark. The walls of the canyon swept up and then steeply out over ridgelines that were 800-1,100 meters away.

The "road" was yet another spine-torquing maze of potholes and scree. Clinging to the sides of their vehicles or to their mounted weapons, the weary passengers were agitated like popcorn, sometimes tucking in their elbows to prevent breaking them on the canyon stone.

Kevin Tillman's mounted 40-mm weapon (MK19) would be torn up by the canyon wall.

One guerrilla shouldered his RPG -- a weapon with a maximum effective range of around 250 meters -- and elevated it to get a good throw at the channelized Albatross Section more than 800 meters away. He fired. The round arced up and out then wobbled into the opposite canyon wall, where it exploded.

The explosion stopped the crawling Albatross Section. The standard operating procedure for Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) -- which the Rangers mistakenly believed the explosion was -- is to dismount the vehicles. The RPG round had exploded harmlessly, showering a few Rangers far below with gravel and dirt. But the noise inside the canyon was terrific; and it is always followed by people shouting orders and questions back and forth.

I wrote in another venue ...

The military has tried to suggest that this was a mortar, because a mortar is a more dangerous and sophisticated weapon than an RPG.

Here is why I disagree.

The explosive rounds that initiated the ambush (1) splashed off the canyon wall and (2) did NOT pepper the convoy with shrapnel.

This strongly suggests that these rounds came from a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG).

A mortar is an indirect fire weapon that sends the round up, so that it may achieve vertical penetration of a target (not horizontal penetration into a wall). Even when used as a direct fire weapon, a method called "direct lay," a mortar requires support from a baseplate.

A mortar can not therefore be aimed below ground level, i.e., at a point below the crew. The firing pin is in the bottom of the mortar tube. It cannot, therefore, be angled down. One cannot get the mortar round to drop upwards. It's a gravity-thing.

A standard mortar high-explosive (HE) round has an omni-directional explosion, sending its secondary missiles (shrapnel) in all directions. This is called a bursting radius, because the weapon is designed to "burst."

And RPG is a "shape charge," which is a uni-directional charge, designed to concentrate the explosion in a frontal "jet" that penetrates vehicles, bunkers, and light armor. It is not designed to burst, but to penetrate.

An RPG can be fired downward, because it is shoulder fired. It does not require gravity to drop the round onto the firing pin like a mortar.

The lateral flight of the explosive rounds fired at 2nd Platoon, combined with the lack of either damage to equipment or casualties due to shrapnel, as well as the testimony of the most experienced person there (who stated that it was an RPG, not a mortar), suggest that the three ambushers had an RPG, not a mortar.

A mortar is a more dangerous weapon. It has greater range. It is crew-served, requiring more people. It requires training.

An RPG has a maximum effective range of around two football fields, and can be easily operated by one 13-year-old after a 5-minutes orientation.

The ambush was ineffectual, but the Ranger response to this light, harassing, and ineffectual ambush was highly-channeled aggression.

Into this channel, the Rangers poured great streams of tracer-lighted lead and explosives -- with a cataclysmic roar inside the canyon. The streams of ordnance leaped up over the canyon walls and scattered like rain across the distant countryside. So much ammunition was fired that many Rangers exhausted their basic loads and had to break into the reserve ammunition to re-load.

Fire control and fire discipline were completely lost.

The canyon was like a funnel, a megaphone.

Uthlaut's Boots Section (Pat included), now on the outskirts of Manah at the far mouth of the canyon -- having missed their last turn -- were the recipients of a highly-amplified, and highly-alarming acoustics-and-light show.

The canyon sounded as if it had erupted into Armageddon.

Inter-platoon communications had been lost; so the Boots Section could only deploy into positions near the mouth of the canyon and wait to see what was going on. Most of the Boots Section remained in a tiny hamlet looking almost directly into the canyon mouth.

The sun had set minutes earlier; but in the open the light was good.

Staff Sergeant Matthew Weeks took another detachment, which included Pat, and moved onto a topographical finger overlooking the mouth of the canyon. Weeks kept one team on higher ground, and sent Pat, PFC Bryan O'Neal, and an allied Afghan militiaman named Thani to a position closer to the "road."

Part 2: How Pat Tillman Died “They Pissed On Our Legs And Told Us It Was Raining. Liars, Every Goddamn One Of Them. Liars, Con-Men, And Criminals”

The crimes of this Administration are more serious and vile by orders of magnitude than the mere imagined assassination of one young man.

More than this... if this case becomes one about a conspiracy to murder, the focus is taken off the likely suspects for the real cover-up and crime, and the ones who all these sacrifices of Generals have been designed to protect... Donald Rumsfeld, Lawrence DeRita, and probably George W. Bush. They are all loving this right now.

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Stan Goff is the author of "Hideous Dream: A Soldier's Memoir of the US Invasion of Haiti" (Soft Skull Press, 2000), "Full Spectrum Disorder" (Soft Skull Press, 2003) and "Sex & War" which will be released approximately December, 2005.

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This is where there are conflicting stories, partly because of the "fog of war," but more importantly to evade possible prosecutions... and the Pandora's box of counter-accusation a recrimination that might be opened by prosecutions.

I won't belabor the minutiae.

A vehicle under the control of Sergeant Greg Baker, with a driver, an M240B machinegun, an M2 50-caliber machinegun, an M249 Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW), and two M4s (the standard assault rifle now used by the infantry) came out of the canyon and fired on both the village and Pat's position.

Pat and Thani were killed; and Uthlaut, along with his radio operator, Jade Lane, were wounded.

What is established is that Baker directed the fires, and that after firing at Pat's position once, the vehicle advanced and fired on the same position again, probably to regain visibility after Pat threw a smoke grenade in an attempt to alert them that they were firing at "friendlies."

The distance was between 35-85 meters. My own examination of the photo imagery suggests to me that the distance is much closer to the low number. The length of the longest building in the hamlet was 29 feet (iirc), and an extrapolation from the seen-from-above images shows the distance between the shooters' position and Pat's to be around four times that (116 feet, or 35 meters). SSG Weeks (now SFC Weeks) supported this estimation when I called him on the phone last year.

In later accounts, Army investigators would attempt to pump up the number of enemy combatants, upgrade an RPG into a mortar, suggest a far more efficacious ambush, equivocate about light conditions, and extend the distance between the shooters and Pat to as much as 200 meters.

Since there is nothing in the actual statements or physical evidence to support these claims, I am assuming there was a motive to mislead. My assumption is that these distortions were designed to introduce "mitigating" circumstances in a homicide.

My contention from having seen the Rules of Engagement (ROE) and from familiarity with the Law of Warfare is that this warrants a re-investigation into the question of whether there was a criminal homicide.

The reason the killings were both intentional and illegal has to do with the rules for firing.

It is a violation of the Law of Warfare to fire into a village if one is not receiving fire from that village.

Baker's team did fire into a village from which there was no fire received, and they had not been under enemy fire for several minutes.

The Rules of Engagement (ROE), which are theater-specific, and which supersede both doctrine and SOP for firing, required "positive identification" of the target.

The investigators and the Army have consistently thrown sand in the eyes of the public on this account.

This is an arcane but crucial point.

Doctrine says an infantryman fires at "known, suspected, and likely enemy targets."
Doctrine is highly decontextualized and general.

The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in the Ranger Regiment is to orient one's fires on the fires of the leader (Baker, in this case). SOPs are specific to the unit, but not the theater. Rules of Engagement (ROE) are specific to the theater, contextualized, and in every case become the highest of these three guidelines ... superseding all others. ROE has the force of a General Order in the theater of operations.

When questioned about why they fired, various Rangers and leaders repeated that they fired at "known, suspected, and likely enemy positions." This is a legalistic mantra.

Unfortunately, this doctrinal criterion was circumscribed by the ROE, which required "positive identification" of targets.

The distance between the shooting vehicle and Pat's position was easily near enough to make an identification of a standing Pat Tillman and Bryan O'Neal... two American soldiers, wearing distinctive uniforms and battle-gear, including Kevlar helmets, and waving their arms. (In the lull in fire when Baker's vehicle moved forward to see past the smoke, Pat and Bryan apparently thought they had been identified as "friendly," so they stood up... only to be cut down by another volley of machinegun fire.)

QUESTION: Why would investigators and the chain of command conceal this loss of fire discipline and fire control -- which led to the death of two men -- inside the manufactured premise of "an intense firefight"?

HYPOTHESIS: A "hang-together or hang separately" strategy evolved, in which each member of the chain -- from SPC Alders, who admits firing his Squad automatic weapon (SAW) at two men whose hands were raised, to SSG Baker, to MAJ Hodne, who ordered the platoon split for a daylight movement, in violation of both common sense and a Regimental directive concerning daylight movement (including CPT Saunders, who had to "go on record" with these orders to split and move during daylight), to (fill in the blanks) everyone who was responding to a "show progress" directive from Public Affairs, that resulted in "bureaucratic over-interpretation" by Hodne, i.e., the false sense of urgency to get "boots on the ground before nightfall."

If Baker is prosecuted for ROE violations (firing into a village and failing to make positive identification of Pat and the AMF soldier who were killed), he will then be forced to testify in detail about the split-order, which leads directly to questions about the "sense of urgency" to have "boots on the ground before nightfall."

If Hodne or Company Commander Captain William Saunders (who passed Hodne's order to Uthlaut by radio, and later received immunity in advance of changing a statement that Hodne gave the order) is relieved, then they are potential disaffected officers who can point out that command emphasis on "showing progress" was the basis of the false sense of urgency that led to this contravention of a Regimental Directive against daylight overland movement and the tactically unsound order to split the unit in order to check the box on a time line.

Now, and only now, can we get to the sequence of events in the subsequent cover-up.

The Conspiracy Theories

First, however, we have to deal with the recent AP story and the flurry of conspiracy theories to which it has given rise.

Note: Martha Mendoza's article that is cited and excerpted here is -- according to reliable sources -- not what the author originally wrote. It was given its spin by editors at AP.)

MARTHA MENDOZA
AP News
Jul 27, 2007 01:49 EDT
SAN FRANCISCO (AP)

Army medical examiners were suspicious about the close proximity of the three bullet holes in Pat Tillman's forehead and tried without success to get authorities to investigate whether the former NFL player's death amounted to a crime, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press.

"The medical evidence did not match up with the, with the scenario as described," a doctor who examined Tillman's body after he was killed on the battlefield in Afghanistan in 2004 told investigators.

The doctors - whose names were blacked out - said that the bullet holes were so close together that it appeared the Army Ranger was cut down by an M-16 fired from a mere 10 yards or so away.

Well, there are doctors and there are doctors.

The proximity of bullet wounds is not sufficient to determine the distance from which a round is fired.

Two of the best gunshot wound pathologists in the country, at Dannie Tillman's request, accompanied me to the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Rockville, Maryland earlier this year to examine the autopsy findings and autopsy photographs for Pat Tillman.

Both agreed that the trajectories, exit wounds, and proximity of rounds are most consistent with a burst fired from the M-249 Squad Automatic Weapon, like the one fired from around 40 meters away by Specialist Trevor Alders outside Manah on April 22, 2004.

The AP story set the conspiracy theorists alight, and when I dismissed the "assassination theory," a correspondent told me I was "naive" (this person having never read the documents in the case and never having spent a day in the military).

"I wonder if all the soldiers in that platoon were actually soldiers," asked the correspondent ominously.

"No," I replied with a bit of pique. "The Black Ops folks always hire 20-year-olds (one member of the shooter vehicle was 19!), and put them in deep cover — which they study between playing video games and sharing high school lies.

Here's a slab of conspiracy-mongering with my comments:

"The task organization of the platoon that placed that particular vehicle, with those particular troops, in this situation... with Pat exactly where he was... was decided on an ad hoc basis, less than an hour before it happened, after an all day delay, caused by a busted vehicle.

"The decision was made by a 1st Lieutenant [SG: was he in on it?], and forced on him after an argument by members of the TOC in Khowst [SG: were they all in on it?], and altered at the last minute by an Afghan jinga truck driver [SG: was he in on it?] who'd been randomly hired in Magarah to tow the broken vehicle on that very day, after consultation between the platoon chain of command [SG: were they all in on it?].

Pat's position was decided by Pat, after being released from an earlier position by an acting squad leader [SG: was he in on it, and did he control Pat's mind in Pat's selection of exactly that place in the boonies of Paktia Province?], who was himself sent forward in response to gunfire in a canyon. [SG: Did the Black Ops people put the ruts in the road that trashed the hummer that caused the delay that stalled the Blacksheep Platoon in Magarah for more than six hours, where they were sussed out by three part-time guerrillas -- were they in on it too? -- who played their role by staging an ineffectual ambush along a last-minute route determined by the inability of the jinga truck that was towing the busted vehicle to climb through the originally planned (less than one hour before) wadi?]

I love how conspiracists refer to others as "naive," when they themselves cannot describe the difference between correlation and causation, and attach themselves to stories that are only possible in the minds of scriptwriters.

Real Black Ops are straightforward affairs, with planning designed to minimize complexity and reduce the number of independent actors and "moving parts"... but that makes a lousy script.

But if this is what you want to believe, then we'll leave you to the Illuminati.

In the real world, power has to mobilize such awesome resources on its own behalf precisely because it cannot exercise the kind of control you suggest. No one can.

In response, I received this from another correspondent: "I'm not at all interested in promoting any 'conspiracy theories,' I'm just wondering if this new information moves Tillman's cause of death due to 'friendly fire' closer to a possibility of a deliberate fragging."

I replied:

Not unless it occurred in front of at least eight people, all of whom had great respect for him, and who conspired to cover this fragging up together.

Two of the top gunshot specialists in forensic pathology in the nation examined Pat's autopsy reports and photos and agree with me that this was likely a squad automatic weapon (same caliber as an M-4).

The army dummed up the distances, then drew them down to 85 meters to support a "fog of war" thesis (as opposed to the actual serial violations of the ROE that did occur... more likely at around 40 meters. The three shots that killed Pat were actually two tight, and one flyer, all head shots and each instantly fatal on its own account.

Now think in slow motion.

Let me begin with the terminal ballistics one never sees in films and on tv.

Destruction of the connection between the brain stem and the rest of the body causes a body to fall... straight down.

No, people do not fly through the air like the stunt-people in Hollywood (unless shot from an extremely close distance).

Straight down.

This happens instantly.

The new theory proposed by some so-called expert, says that this tight shot-group (less than 4 inches) could only have been fired by someone shooting on semi-automatic (one shot at a time, in rapid succession). A fully-automatic weapon, like the Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW) that is presumed (by two of the top forensics experts in the country) to be the lethal weapon, according to this theory, cannot fire this shot group because automatic weapons can not be controlled for this tight a shot-group.

This premise is the basis of the presumed distance (10 meters) and mode of fire (semi-auto)/weapon (M-4) in the new AP-inspired theory.

Two problems: (1) the theory about auto fire is wrong, and (2) Pat was shot in the face three times, while facing downhill, and standing on a steep incline dropping to his front.

Number (2) first.

For this to have been an M-4 firing on semi, the shooter would have had to fire, re-acquire (aim), fire, re-acquire, and fire again, before Pat fell to the ground (straight down, on a steep forward-inclining piece of terrain, with a large stone in front of him to prevent him tumbling down the hill).

Even a very good rapid-fire shooter could not have placed all three shots together (from a standing or other non-prone-supported position at 35-40 meters) quickly enough to fire the second and third shots before Pat fell away from the sight alignment.

The only 5.56 mm weapon on the scene that could have placed those shots that quickly in the same place was the SAW... cyclic rate of auto-fire: 850 rounds per minute (14 rounds per second, ergo, three rounds in 2/10 of a second).

To the constraints of physics and physiology now add on the statistical improbability that a bunch of enlisted people would willingly participate as accessories after the fact in a cold-blooded murder (that just happened to coincide with an unplanned – (but ineffectual -- ambush)... and we begin to appreciate how unlikely this scenario is.

Now for number (1).

I'll happily go to the range with anyone who cares to set it up today (or chose anyone who has been trained to fire the SAW), and demonstrate that these tight groups very well can be fired from a SAW, when they are part of a continuous firing cycle that allows the gunner to first walk the fire onto a target, then tighten down on the weapon as he orients on the impact signature (The rock in front of Pat was covered with bullet strikes.).

There are family members who will not easily dismiss this, and who can blame them after the government has lied and covered up again and again and again on this case. I don't fault them; and in fact I have great affection for them.

The depth of their sense of betrayal would make anyone think the worst, and want someone to prove otherwise.

More than this... if this case becomes one about a conspiracy to murder, the focus is taken off the likely suspects for the real cover-up and crime, and the ones who all these sacrifices of Generals have been designed to protect... Donald Rumsfeld, Lawrence DeRita, and probably George W. Bush.

They are all loving this right now.

Let me say for the record, again, that I do not believe that Pat Tillman was targeted for assassination.

A second lieutenant and an infantry sergeant are not tasked with anything as politically sensitive as assassination.

I am speaking as an alumnus of Delta Force, one of the few organizations that actually might be entrusted with this kind of operation (and then only very rarely). It doesn't matter what you see in the movies.

The decisions that placed Pat Tillman at exactly the place and exactly the time of his death were made ad hoc, on the spot, at a series of junctures that could not have been controlled, including a vehicle that unexpectedly broke down, one key decision made by an Afghan jinga truck driver and Pat's own decision (following two on-the-spot decisions by members of his platoon in direct response to a completely unexpected situation) to move forward into the position where he was shot.

The mystique of Special Operations (including the Rangers, who are the Special Operations' shock infantry component) is useful as a deterrent, but it is not reflective of a reality.

The Pentagon and others want you and the rest of the world to believe this mystique, because your fear and the fear of the rest of the world is what maintains the efficacy of a huge bluff.

This government wants us to spin out as many scary fantasies as possible, because it serves the dual purpose of either portraying opponents of the military as “conspiracy nuts” or promoting precisely the myth of spooky invincibility that keeps us in line.

I came straight from the bowels of this system, and I have written three books exposing the worst aspects of the military.

If they haven't yet cut my brake lines or shot me when I'm out fishing, then they didn't kill Pat Tillman because he criticized the war in Iraq and read a book by Noam Chomsky...

Key facts, as presented in this series ... have already “escaped,” e.g., the Scott investigation and the fraudulence of awarding a Silver Star as part of a cover story. These facts are now, for the Administration and the Pentagon, inescapable.

All that is missing right now is someone with a little integrity and courage, and subpoena authority, to use these facts to tear the rest of the mask away.

All that is required, however, to discredit those asking the questions is our own insistence on the least plausible scenario, no doubt inspired by a righteous mistrust and loathing of people like Donald Rumsfeld and Lawrence Di Rita, when the existing facts do not support that scenario.

There is nothing the Pentagon would rather do with this case, aside from making it evaporate, than turn it into a debate about whether Pat was assassinated or not.

He wasn't, and so they can not only poke fun at any of us who propose that hypothesis, they can relax as we all bark up the wrong tree.

What they do not want is a rigorous examination of the motives, decisions, and events that might lead a larger public to see how they have been spinning prevarications to call an imperial Oil War democracy-building.

Pat Tillman, and many who knew and cared for him, at some point believed, based on the evidence before them, that he was bound for a place in history of some kind... in football.

What neither he nor they could know was that football fame would emerge as just a stepping stone to a far more significant role in history: contributing to the end of an illegal war, and bringing down (hopefully) a dangerous clique of international scofflaws.

The crimes of this Administration are more serious and vile by orders of magnitude than the mere imagined assassination of one young man.

The Cover Up

And now, at last, I will briefly describe the cover-up.

Pat Tillman was the most well-known enlisted man in the entire military. When he enlisted, Pat received a personal letter from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld thanking Pat for his enlistment. So Pat was on Rumsfeld's radar immediately.

The fog of fame began then as the spin on Pat's enlistment was that he took a break from a lucrative football career because of 9-11. That's not how it was. Pat saw young men being marched off to war; and he didn't want to use his talent as an exemption. It's different.

The day Pat was killed outside Manah, officialdom developed a multiple personality disorder.

On the one hand, there was bureaucrat's panic, because it was known almost at once that this was a case of "fratricide."

On the other hand, the scriptwriters smelled a story with Pat's corpse propped up like a Greek statue that would draw all eyes away from the debacle of Fallujah-Najaf and the wanton racist cruelty of Abu Ghraib.

So there was the bureaucrat's instinct to hide the facts in a period of waning legitimacy; and there was the flack's instinct to tell a lie.

Hiding a thing and lying about it are two different things, and they can be contradictory. That's how both the hiding and the lying began to unravel.

At the highest levels, there was a decision to be made about how far one could get away with the lie in the short term, and hide their own complicity in case the lie was exposed in the long term.

On April 29, Major General Stanley McChrystal -- commander of the task force that the Rangers served in Afghanistan, and head of the most secretive joint-service force in the US military -- sent a memo to John Abizaid, telling him to warn everyone all the way to Commander-in-Chief George W. Bush, an investigation "will find that it is highly possible Cpl. Tillman was killed by friendly fire..."

"I felt that it was essential that you received this information as soon as we detected it in order to preclude any unknowing statements by our country's leaders which might cause public embarrassment if the circumstances of Cpl. Tillman's death become public."

No reference to telling the truth... "which might cause public embarrassment if the circumstances of Cpl. Tillman's death become public."

According to an unnamed source, Abizaid misled Congress on August 1, 2007, when he stated that this memo -- from the General in theater who directed the most politically-sensitive and secret operations in the military, which include units

like Delta Force (now operating under a new name) -- did not "reach him" for "10 to 20 days."

This memo, it must be assumed, was a living organism that had to exercise its own initiative to "reach" its intended recipient.

Pat Tillman's death by friendly fire --instead of the enemy fire described in a fraudulent Silver Star citation drafted by officers who knew how Pat was killed -- was explosive news. Yet on August 1, 2007, Rumsfeld, his former-Joint Chiefs Chair Meyers, and the ex-CENTCOM Commander John Abizaid -- not one of them - - could remember when, where, or how they learned of this explosive news.

We're talking about a man at the top whose middle name was "Micromanager".

- Since the day he took command of the Pentagon, Rumsfeld has been using his famous "8,000-mile screwdriver" to tilt the civil-military balance his way. According to his critics, he is Robert McNamara reborn—an arrogant micromanager, contemptuous of soldierly expertise and certain of his own infallibility. (Andrew Bacevich, Los Angeles Times)

- It says Mr Rumsfeld has held 139 meetings with the Joint Chiefs of Staff since the beginning of 2005, and 208 meetings with the senior field commanders. The retired generals complained that Mr Rumsfeld was a "micromanager" who often ignored the advice of senior commanders. (Mark Mazzetti and Jim Rutenberg, Sydney Morning Herald)

- Was Donald Rumsfeld a micromanager? Yes. Did he want to be involved in all of the decisions? Yes. (Michael DeLong, Retired Marine Lt. Gen, former deputy commander of the U.S. Central Command during the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, New York Times)

(On Rumsfeld's micromanagement of torture see Andrew Cockburn's series here.)

But little Donnie Rumsfeld can't remember when, where, or how he learned of Pat Tillman's death, and he doesn't interfere in the business of his officers, and I am the rightful King of Connecticut.

Since I'm not bearing that ridiculous pretense of objectivity that "journalists" so audaciously lay claim to, and since I am not a lawyer schooled in absolute empiricism, I can only say what seems to be apparent to me from this testimony... which Congress left unchallenged.

They pissed on our legs and told us it was raining. Liars, every goddamn one of them. Liars, con-men, and criminals.

Based on the evidence, this is what I believe.

Someone has to say this out loud.

Dannie Tillman has been trying to tell us this for three years.

Part 3:

Inside The Labyrinth Of Lies: The Cover-Up Of Pat Tillman's Death

The whole unit was then given an order to speak to no one at any time under any circumstances about "the Tillman incident."

They were threatened with jail if they did.

August 11 / 12, 2007 By STAN GOFF, CounterPunch [Excerpts]

Stan Goff is the author of "Hideous Dream: A Soldier's Memoir of the US Invasion of Haiti" (Soft Skull Press, 2000), "Full Spectrum Disorder" (Soft Skull Press, 2003) and "Sex & War" which will be released approximately December, 2005.

He is retired from the United States Army. His blog is at www.stangoff.com.

There is the cover-up (of the fratricide).

There is the original lie (that Pat was killed in an intense combat engagement).

There is the layering of plausible denial in case the stories unravel.

The motives of the spin-meisters were to pin a recruiting poster to Pat's coffin.

The motive of the cover-up (at least one of them) was to preserve the mystique of the US Army Rangers -- the elite of the infantry -- as flawless, disciplined, steely-eyed commandos.

Motives for covering up? Which part?

Now there is the lie that "we didn't know until late May."

Finally, there is the highly probable lie that President George W. Bush didn't know until late May either.

The Waxman Committee was advised by the family to subpoena every scrap of paper from Rumsfeld's or DeRita's office beginning April 15 and ending May 15 2004.

Therein is the likely paper trail of command directives to show the metrics of "progress in Afghanistan," and therein is the paper trail of notification about the circumstances of Pat's death and the further directives on how to handle it.

The subpoenas, as far as we can tell, were never issued.

The first key mistake in covering up was a paper trail to the false script: the Silver Star award, with its false narrative and its construction in violation of the process required by Army Regulations.

Silver Star citation:

During a ground assault convoy in Afghanistan Tillman's platoon was split into two sections. Tillman was the team leader of the lead section when the trail section began receiving suppressive mortar and small arms fire. The nature of the cavernous terrain made it extremely difficult to target enemy positions and there was no room for the trail element to maneuver out of the kill zone.

Although Tillman's element was already safely out of the area under fire Tillman ordered his team to dismount and maneuver his team up a hill towards the enemy's location.

As Tillman crested the hill he maneuvered his team into positions and himself with the M249 Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW) returned suppressive fire.

Through the firing Tillman's voice was issuing fire commands to take the fight to the enemy on the dominating high ground.

Only after his team engaged a well-armed enemy did it appear their fires diminished.

While Tillman focused his efforts, and those of his team members without regard to his personal safety he was shot and killed

The second key mistake was the attempt to conceal the original investigation, conducted by Captain Richard Scott.

At the US Army Criminal Investigation Division briefing that I attended with the Tillman family in March this year, Army officials stated categorically that a report from the original investigation by Captain Scott "does not exist."

They said that more than once, and they were emphatic.

Dannie Tillman now has a copy of the Scott Report, and so do I.

AORG-SN-CO (15-6) 29 April 2004

MEMORANDUM FOR Commander. 2nd Battalion. 75th Ranger Regiment

SUBJECT: AR 15-6 Final Report

Purpose: To investigate the events and circumstances surrounding the death of CPL Patrick D. Tillman

etc etc etc

When the Tillmans left that briefing calling them liars, the Army CID officials acted like Dannie Tillman had just shot their favorite dog. Amazing... like they were being victimized by this little woman.

The Army was perfectly justified in doing a second "AR-15-6 investigation." Scott's report stated:

Serial Two (the Albatross Section, in particular Staff Sergeant Baker's vehicle) continued to fire their weapons systems without positively identifying enemy forces once they got out of the enemy's kill zone and mistakenly fired on friendly forces on the ridgeline. Most notable was the lead GMV (ground mobility vehicle) led by SSG Baker.

By the time they were approaching the ridgeline where friendly forces were positioned; (sic) Serial Two was not receiving enemy fire. In fact, Serial Two never received effective enemy fire throughout the entire enemy contact.

He states clearly that Baker violated the ROE at a minimum, resulting in the deaths of two men.

He later uses the radioactive word "negligent."

ROE violations and negligent homicide are charges that could result in a General Court Martial; and that requires by regulation an investigation by a minimum O-5 (Lieutenant Colonel). No rank below LTC can act as something called a General Court Martial Convening Authority (GCMCA). So tasking Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Kauzlarich (the 75th Ranger Regiment's Executive Officer) with a subsequent investigation is strictly according to Hoyle.

The problem was the phony Silver Star citation (where the cover-up and lie converged on paper).

The original report was "disappeared" and when the new report was finished, statements had been changed to "mitigate" for the shooters, and the "fog of war" fabrications about light conditions, combat intensity, and distances.

The entire 2nd Ranger Battalion in Khowst (at least 400 men) knew before May Day -- via the Ranger grapevine -- what had happened.

The whole unit was then given an order to speak to no one at any time under any circumstances about "the Tillman incident."

They were threatened with jail if they did.

The notice was even posted in the rear at Fort Lewis to silence rear detachment personnel.

This battalion was due to rotate back to Fort Lewis, Washington (near Tacoma) in late May; and it finally dawned on the chains of command that this was an untenable secret.

Rangers (mostly kids between 19-25) come home and vent to wives. They drink in local bars. They have loud conversations in public places. Anyone possessed of a bad conscience can make an anonymous call to the press.

This is likely when a certain panic began to set in.

Anyone with a brain could figure out two things:

(1) the Army was going to have to 'fess up before the Rangers returned, and

(2) the Silver Star award narrative was already out there, irretrievable... like a blood trail leading back to its authors.

Bush and Rumsfeld were already looking for some distance.

The backup plan that developed was to announce the fratricide, then shut up and ride it out.

RELEASE NUMBER: 040528-01

DATE POSTED: MAY 28, 2004

MEDIA ADVISORY: USASOC to release Tillman investigation results during May 29 press statement, U.S. Army Special Operations Command Public Affairs Office

FORT BRAGG, N.C. (USASOC News Service, May 28, 2004) — The U.S. Army Special Operations Command will announce information about the death of Cpl. Patrick D. Tillman during a press statement here May 29.

Lt. Gen. Philip R. Kensinger, USASOC's commanding general, will address the media at Stryker Golf Course at 9 A.M. The statement will concern a completed military investigation into the circumstances of Tillman's April 22 death in Afghanistan.

Kensinger will depart after concluding his statement and will not be available to take questions.

-USASOC-

FOR THE MEDIA: Members of the media who wish to attend the ceremony should arrive at Fort Bragg's Stryker Golf Course no earlier than 8 a.m. Parking for media personnel will be reserved on the left side of Stryker's parking lot, with the row closest to the clubhouse set aside for live trucks.

Live feeds will be permitted during the press statement. However, organizations wishing to conduct a live stand-up must depart Stryker prior to doing so.

Live stand-up locations are located at either end of Bragg Boulevard, in front of the "Welcome to Fort Bragg" signs. Media will not be allowed to remain at Stryker Golf Course, as this will disrupt golf course operations.

RELEASE NUMBER: 040529-01

DATE POSTED: MAY 29, 2004

PRESS STATEMENT: USASOC announces Tillman investigation results U.S. Army Special Operations Command Public Affairs Office

FORT BRAGG, N.C. (USASOC News Service, May 29, 2004) — The U.S. Army Special Operations Command announced information about the death of Cpl. Patrick D. Tillman during a press statement here May 29.

Lt. Gen. Philip R. Kensinger Jr., USASOC's commanding general, addressed the media at Stryker Golf Course at 9 A.M. The statement concerned a completed military investigation into the circumstances of Tillman's April 22 death in Afghanistan and is presented below in transcript format.

PRESS STATEMENT BY LT. GEN. PHILIP R. KENSINGER JR. DELIVERED AT 9:15 A.M., MAY 29 AT STRYKER GOLF COURSE, FORT BRAGG, N.C.
KENSINGER:

Good morning. I would like to make a brief statement on the events surrounding the death of Corporal Pat Tillman April 22 in Afghanistan. I will not be taking questions.

A military investigation by U.S. Central Command into the circumstances of the 22 April death of Corporal Patrick Tillman is complete.

While there was no one specific finding of fault, the investigation results indicate that Corporal Tillman probably died as a result of friendly fire while his unit was engaged in combat with enemy forces.

The results of this investigation in no way diminish the bravery and sacrifice displayed by Corporal Tillman. (This is a bald-faced effort to grandfather in a cover for the fraudulent Silver Star award narrative. -SG)

Corporal Tillman was shot and killed while responding to enemy fire without regard for his own safety. He focused his efforts on the elimination of enemy forces and the protection of his team members. There is an inherent degree of confusion in any firefight, particularly when a unit is ambushed, and especially under difficult light and terrain conditions which produce an environment that increases the likelihood of fratricide.

Corporal Tillman's platoon was ambushed with small arms and mortar fire at about 7:30 p.m. local time while conducting combat operations in the vicinity of Khowst, Afghanistan. The enemy ambush was immediately responded to by a coalition patrol including Corporal Tillman with direct fire, and an intense firefight lasting approximately 20 minutes ensued.

The ambush was conducted by 10 to 12 enemy personnel from multiple locations over approximately one kilometer in very severe and constricted terrain with impaired light conditions. Following initial contact, Corporal Tillman disembarked from his vehicle and, in support of his unit, moved into position to suppress enemy fire.

We regret the loss of life resulting from this tragic incident. Our thoughts and prayers remain with the Tillman family.

Thank you all for being here this morning.

-USASOC-

May 29, 2004. The Die Is Cast.

Kensinger is placed in the center. Sworn statements in the investigative documents suggest the Kensinger kicked and screamed not to be the one to deliver this press briefing. But he was given his orders; he recited dutifully; and now he will be looking for his out.

Meanwhile, Kevin Tillman was reassigned to Headquarters Company in his battalion. He is no longer comfortable working in Alpha Company, knowing that one or more of his fellow Alphabots took his brother's life. Headquarters Company Commander is none other than Captain Richard Scott.

Kevin had begun to interrogate anyone and everyone about what happened. He had been separated from his unit on the scene -- before what had happened was sorted out - - and redeployed stateside. His unit was commanded not to talk to him about what happened.

Neither he nor his family knew Pat had been killed by fratricide until five weeks after the fact; and he was livid.

In a casual conversation with Captain Scott, Kevin repeated a remark he had heard about the investigation. Captain Scott, before he thought, commented, "That's not what I found in my investigation."

Kevin was stunned.

"Your investigation?"

Another cat was out of the bag.

Cats every damn where.

The tough cat, however, was "Mama T." Dannie.

Now that her mistrust of the government was aroused, she sank her teeth into the investigation and has not to this day let go of it. She won't either.

In May, 2006, she asked me if I would help "interpret" the military documents. Shortly afterwards, she sent me two news stories she'd tracked down.

General Myers Visits Afghanistan
Associated Press
April 16, 2004

KABUL, Afghanistan - Gen. Richard B. Myers, the chairman of the U.S. joint chiefs of staff, headed to Afghanistan on Friday amid a stepped up campaign to kill or capture Osama bin Laden and a growing urgency to stabilize the country for historic elections.

His visit comes one day after an audiotape purportedly recorded in the past few weeks by bin Laden offered European nations a truce if they pull troops out of Muslim countries and vowed violence against the United States and Israel.

The al-Qaida chief and his right-hand man, Egyptian surgeon Ayman al-Zawahri, are believed hiding in the craggy mountains between Pakistan and Afghanistan, but a 2 1/2 year dragnet has failed to catch them. The military recently pulled back from predictions that bin Laden would be caught sometime this year.

In the past month, Washington has sent 2,000 Marines to Afghanistan to beef up a U.S.-led force that had already numbered 13,000 soldiers. The military has vowed a sweeping spring offensive to crush Taliban and al-Qaida holdouts ahead of presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for September.

The United Nations and others have warned that the elections will fail if security cannot be improved.

Taliban insurgents attacked Afghan soldiers in eastern Khost province, along the border with Pakistan, killing two soldiers and injuring two others, Gen. Khial Bas, the local Afghan military commander, told The Associated Press on Friday. He said nine militants were killed in the exchange of rocket and machine-gun fire on Wednesday ...

Okay, pay attention here. "Taliban insurgents attacked Afghan soldiers in eastern Khost province, along the border with Pakistan, killing two soldiers and injuring two others, Gen. Khial Bas, the local Afghan military commander, told The Associated Press on Friday. He said nine militants were killed in the exchange of rocket and machine-gun fire on Wednesday ... "

Now read this:

*Ex-NFL star Tillman makes 'ultimate sacrifice'
Safety, who gave up big salary to join Army, killed in Afghanistan
NBC, MSNBC and news services
Updated: 3:39 a.m. ET April 26, 2004*

WASHINGTON - Pat Tillman, who gave up the glamorous life of a professional football star to join the Army Rangers, was remembered as a role model of courage and patriotism Friday after military officials said he had been killed in action in Afghanistan.

"Pat Tillman was an inspiration on and off the football field, as with all who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the war on terror. His family is in the thoughts and prayers of President and Mrs. Bush," Taylor Gross, a spokesman for the White House, said in a statement.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., the author of a recent book about courage, said he was "heartbroken" and raised the prospect that "the tragic loss of this extraordinary young man" could be a "heavy blow to our nation's morale, as it is surely a grievous injury to his loved ones."

Tillman, 27, was a member of the 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, based at Fort Lewis, Wash. The battalion was involved in Operation Mountain Storm in southeastern

Afghanistan, part of the U.S. campaign against fighters of the al-Qaida terror network and the former Taliban government along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, military officials told NBC News.

U.S. military spokesman Lt. Col. Matthew Beevers said Saturday that Tillman was killed Thursday night in a firefight at about 7 p.m. on a road near Sperah, about 25 miles southwest of a U.S. base at Khost.

After coming under fire, Tillman's patrol got out of their vehicles and gave chase, moving toward the spot of the ambush. Beevers said the fighting was "sustained" and lasted 15-20 minutes.

Beevers said Tillman was killed by enemy fire, but he had no information about what type of weapons were involved in the assault, or whether he died instantly.

An Afghan militiaman fighting alongside Tillman also was killed, and two other U.S. soldiers were wounded.

A local Afghan commander, Gen. Khial Bas, told The Associated Press that nine enemy fighters were killed in the confrontation.

Bas said six other enemy fighters were believed to have escaped. Beevers said he had no information about any enemy fighters killed.

Did you get that?

April 16, 2004, six days before Pat Tillman was killed, Afghan militia General Khial Bas is in contact, when two "allies" are killed along with two wounded, and nine "insurgents" are killed in the confrontation.

April 22, 2004, Afghan militia General Khial Bas was not only with Pat Tillman and the Black Sheep Platoon, but the two wounded are 1LT Uthlaut and RTO Jade Lane, the two killed are Pat Tillman and an Afghan militiaman – who even the Department of Defense hasn't seen fit to identify with his actual name, and the intrepid militia of said General Bas prove again that they have the remarkable ability to kill exactly nine enemy in each confrontation.

The latter story was given out by the Public Affairs Officer in Kabul, Matthew Beevers.

Some overworked, under-slept E-5 writing that day's scripted message slipped up and mixed the boilerplates.

The point is, there was no attention being paid to real events except to re-script them. The "official" statement is always, first and last, designed to prop up a public perception, not inform or educate the public ... far from it.

This kind of thing happens when too many cooks are in the kitchen and supper is late.

There were already a lot of cooks in the kitchen in April 2004, and Pat's death by fratricide constituted a major emergency for them all.

This was triage by committee.

Bas was not with Pat; and nine enemy were not killed during the engagement on April 22nd.

Dannie Tillman was now onto them, and onto them good.

Circumstantial Evidence

We cannot claim perfect accuracy for this account any more than any other journalistic organ can, because the witnesses themselves were making eyewitness accounts, the original statements by the participants were not made for days after the incident, and the original investigation was torn up when it proved too politically sensitive to ever see the light of day.

The statements taken during the second investigation, where the investigating officer had a tremendous conflict of interest, had been altered.

The case that we are making here is – in legal jargon – circumstantial.

The case for which the Department of Defense has settled so far is based on eyewitness statements, some of which have changed and many of which were obviously being coached and led when one reads the transcripts of the interviews – and we have all of them from the second and third iteration of investigation.

It needs to be pointed out, since the military is hiding behind legal customs and cultural biases about evidence, that the record of accuracy for circumstantial evidence is acutely stronger than that for eyewitness testimony.

The association of physical evidence with time-space correlations is what circumstantial evidence is.

If I have purchased a gun at store X at 3:15 PM on a given day, twenty miles from my home, and an ATM machine records a withdrawal by me one block from the store at 3 PM, that does not “prove” that I bought the gun... but it sure as hell places me within range of the gun store at the right time.

If the gun store owner is asked who was at the store at 3:15 on that day, and can he identify me, when even a few days have passed, what exactly will he remember... really? How many readers can remember exactly what happened yesterday at 3:15 PM?

In fact, studies suggest that as many as 5,000 wrongful convictions happen in the US each year based on eyewitness testimony.

That is why I made the provocative claim that law – and the legalism that is used as a cover by public officials – is not science-based. It is the manifestation of custom and

precedent, and it has a deeply religious character – complete with church-like courtrooms designed to inspire awe and obedience, incantations to ritualize its activity, and even priestly robes for the presiding judges.

A trial, for example, is one exercise of the law. The so-called objectivity of the law, which pretends it has no point of view, renders the law a mirror of the status-quo.

Every assumption that holds sway, with or without the formal recognition of the law, enters the courtroom, then, as a fact of nature – a universality, something above and immune from the actual living bodies and all their turbulent histories in the courtroom.

This is why every trial that purports to be objective is a lie. This reflection of the status quo that calls itself objectivity, and pretends it has no point of view, reflects power ... then surrounds that power in a force field of invisibility.

I want to look behind that legalism, to establish, as far as possible, what the circumstances were before, during, and after the actual firefight, and give the public a peek at the muttering functionaries behind the legal curtain of the Great Oz.

There is no way to understand what happened once Pat Tillman fell on April 22 without tearing down that curtain, without rejecting the myth of legal “objectivity.”

The Denied Reality That Tillman’s Death Was An “Emergency”

We will begin, instead, with the denied reality that Pat Tillman’s death was an “emergency” on multiple scales. We will not begin with the disingenuousness and selective amnesia of the boss.

What were these emergencies, and for whom?

On April 22, the day Pat was killed, Rumsfeld was chastising the press for not telling the public the “good news” about what was happening in Iraq and Afghanistan.

He said that because there was no good news... unless you were a partisan of the Iraqi resistance or an opium farmer in Afghanistan.

Lawrence Di Rita will be remembered, if at all, by history as the guy who was selected to publicly deny that there was any evidence available to the Pentagon that desecration of the Koran, including putting them in the toilet, was a regular part of detainee abuse in the Guantanamo Bay concentration camp.

Di Rita is the Principle Deputy Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs; but he is also one of Rumsfeld’s closest advisors, a veteran of the Heritage Foundation, one of the premier neo-con think-tanks leading the charge to invade Iraq.

Di Rita is a very influential character. There is little doubt that he was intimately involved in the damage control over Pat Tillman being killed by fellow Rangers. Rumsfeld runs the entire Department of Defense; and Lawrence Di Rita is specifically assigned to the chief coordinator of Pentagon perception management.

“In the battle of perception management,” said Di Rita said in December 2004, “where the enemy is clearly using the media to help manage perceptions of the general public, our job is not perception management but to counter the enemy’s perception management.”

This was Di Rita’s defense of the Information Operations Roadmap, the same program that replaced the Office of Strategic Influence, the first Pentagon program to plant false stories in the news as part of “operations.”

When Pat Tillman was killed on April 22, 2004, the stories about detainee abuse at Guantanamo Bay were already boiling over, and Di Rita was putting in a lot of late nights on this story.

The four “civilians” that were killed and burned in the ambush at Fallujah were not having the desired effect of mobilizing outrage so much as they were drawing attention to the extensive use of mercenaries by the Department of Defense.

That incident then obliged the Rumsfeld Pentagon to demonstrate its collective masculinity by attempting the destruction of the entire city of Fallujah. The attack failed, and a second front opened up in Najaf after US troops killed Shia demonstrators protesting the Coalition Provisional Authority that had arbitrarily shut down one of their newspapers. The Abu Ghraib scandal was to be broken by 60 Minutes on April 28, though the televised news magazine had informed the Pentagon of their intent to air two weeks prior ... around April 15.

By the time the news that Pat Tillman had been killed by friendly fire arrived at Di Rita’s and Rumsfeld’s offices, presumably around April 24, the Public Affairs Office was overwhelmed, and the issue had to be triaged. In fact, two forms of triage were in demand:

(1) they had to step on bad news – especially anything that ran counter to the tale of ubiquitous professionalism they needed to counter the recurring stories of US abuse, and

(2) they needed, as Rumsfeld noted on the fateful day, “good news.”

John Abizaid, commander of Central Command, was embroiled in the breaking Abu Ghraib scandal even as he was losing a two-front campaign in Najaf and Fallujah.

Someone who was not similarly tangled up would have to handle the Tillman episode for the moment, with only general guidance: no reports on fratricide, not right now, and turn this into something that re-kindles American patriotic feeling for the war.

General Kensinger, presumably, was given the guidance from Abizaid’s staff.

Kensinger passed it along to the logical person, Colonel Nixon, who passed it along to the second investigator, his XO, LTC Ralph Kauzlaurich.

Before the after-action review was even conducted ... commanders had worked out the outlines.

A Silver Star and a tale of American heroism. It wouldn't be until CPT Richard Scott, the HHC/2-75 Company Commander, filed his Article 15-6 investigation findings that people would begin to appreciate how bad this was going to make the entire chain of command look.

He had an emergency.

And with that emergency, another troop had one, too. SSG Greg Baker, the NCO in charge of the killer vehicle outside of Manah on April 22nd.

Hodne's creation of a "false sense of urgency" amid the pressure from Rumsfeld's Pentagon to "show success," was now paired with Baker's fate under the cloud of a possible criminal negligence charge that could spread to his whole crew that day, in one report – written by Captain Richard Scott.

That report – which was the result of an Article 15-6 investigation that was completed – had to disappear.

And disappear it did.

Until Dannie Tillman, after three years of relentless badgering, choked the "non-existent" report out of the Army.

And after three years, Dannie continues to hang on.

Of all the things the Army, the Department of Defense, and the Bush administration didn't see through the fog of fame that drifted in around the broken body of Pat Tillman, the most formidable danger to their fraudulence, their criminal ambition, and their skulking evasions of responsibility, was a woman.

One woman, who could not rescue her son, but who still has it in her power to rescue his memory as the actual person she once pushed into the world.

My rambling here is a rushed and feeble attempt to protect and support her efforts. It's not tidy. But I had to put some of these things out there. I hope it helps.

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