

## **Military Resistance 9L12**

# **The Soldiers Truce: A Hidden History From The First World War**



**German and British soldiers fraternize – Christmas 1914**

[Thanks to Dennis Serdel, Vietnam 1967-68 (one tour) Light Infantry, Americal Div. 11th Brigade, purple heart, Veterans For Peace 50 Michigan, Vietnam Veterans Against The War, United Auto Workers GM Retiree, in Perry, Michigan]

**To many, the end of the war and the failure of the peace would validate the Christmas cease-fire as the only meaningful episode in the apocalypse.**

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December 1, 2005 by John V. Denson, 2005 LewRockwell.com [Excerpts]

**The Christmas Truce, which occurred primarily between the British and German soldiers along the Western Front in December 1914, is an event the official histories of the Great War leave out, and the Orwellian historians hide from the public.**

Stanley Weintraub has broken through this barrier of silence and written a moving account of this significant event by compiling letters sent home from the front, as well as diaries of the soldiers involved. His book is entitled *Silent Night: The Story of the World War I Christmas Truce*. The book contains many pictures of the actual events showing the opposing forces mixing and celebrating together that first Christmas of the war.

This remarkable story begins to unfold, according to Weintraub, on the morning of December 19, 1914:

**Lieutenant Geoffrey Heinekey, new to the 2ND Queen's Westminster Rifles, wrote to his mother, 'A most extraordinary thing happened. . . Some Germans came out and held up their hands and began to take in some of their wounded and so we ourselves immediately got out of our trenches and began bringing in our wounded also. The Germans then beckoned to us and a lot of us went over and talked to them and they helped us to bury our dead. This lasted the whole morning and I talked to several of them and I must say they seemed extraordinarily fine men . . . . It seemed too ironical for words. There, the night before we had been having a terrific battle and the morning after, there we were smoking their cigarettes and they smoking ours. (p. 5)**

Weintraub reports that the French and Belgians reacted differently to the war and with more emotion than the British in the beginning. The war was occurring on their land and The French had lived in an atmosphere of *revanche* since 1870, when Alsace and Lorraine were seized by the Prussians in a war declared by the French. (p. 4).

**The British and German soldiers, however, saw little meaning in the war as to them, and, after all, the British King and the German Kaiser were both grandsons of Queen Victoria. Why should the Germans and British be at war, or hating each other, because a royal couple from Austria were killed by an assassin while they were visiting in Serbia?**

However, since August when the war started, hundreds of thousands of soldiers had been killed, wounded or missing by December 1914 (p. xvi).

It is estimated that over eighty thousand young Germans had gone to England before the war to be employed in such jobs as waiters, cooks, and cab drivers and many spoke English very well. It appears that the Germans were the instigators of this move towards a truce.

**So much interchange had occurred across the lines by the time that Christmas Eve approached that Brigadier General G.T. Forrestier-Walker issued a directive forbidding fraternization:**

***For it discourages initiative in commanders, and destroys offensive spirit in all ranks . . . Friendly intercourse with the enemy, unofficial armistices and exchange***

***of tobacco and other comforts, however tempting and occasionally amusing they may be, are absolutely prohibited. (p. 6–7).***

**Later strict orders were issued that any fraternization would result in a court-martial.**

Most of the seasoned German soldiers had been sent to the Russian front while the youthful and somewhat untrained Germans, who were recruited first, or quickly volunteered, were sent to the Western Front at the beginning of the war. Likewise, in England young men rushed to join in the war for the personal glory they thought they might achieve and many were afraid the war might end before they could get to the front. They had no idea this war would become one of attrition and conscription or that it would set the trend for the whole 20TH century, the bloodiest in history which became known as the War and Welfare Century.

**As night fell on Christmas Eve the British soldiers noticed the Germans putting up small Christmas trees along with candles at the top of their trenches and many began to shout in English We no shoot if you no shoot.(p. 25).**

The firing stopped along the many miles of the trenches and the British began to notice that the Germans were coming out of the trenches toward the British who responded by coming out to meet them.

They mixed and mingled in No Man's Land and soon began to exchange chocolates for cigars and various newspaper accounts of the war which contained the propaganda from their respective homelands.

**Many of the officers on each side attempted to prevent the event from occurring but the soldiers ignored the risk of a court-martial or of being shot.**

**Some of the meetings reported in diaries were between Anglo-Saxons and German Saxons and the Germans joked that they should join together and fight the Prussians.**

The massive amount of fraternization, or maybe just the Christmas spirit, deterred the officers from taking action and many of them began to go out into No Man's Land and exchange Christmas greetings with their opposing officers.

Each side helped bury their dead and remove the wounded so that by Christmas morning there was a large open area about as wide as the size of two football fields separating the opposing trenches.

**The soldiers emerged again on Christmas morning and began singing Christmas carols, especially Silent Night. They recited the 23RD Psalm together and played soccer and football. Again, Christmas gifts were exchanged and meals were prepared openly and attended by the opposing forces.**

**Weintraub quotes one soldier's observation of the event: Never . . . was I so keenly aware of the insanity of war. (p. 33).**

The first official British history of the war came out in 1926 which indicated that the Christmas Truce was a very insignificant matter with only a few people involved. However, Weintraub states:

**During a House of Commons debate on March 31, 1930, Sir H. Kinglsey Wood, a Cabinet Minister during the next war, and a Major 'In the front trenches' at Christmas 1914, recalled that he 'took part in what was well known at the time as a truce. We went over in front of the trenches and shook hands with many of our German enemies. A great number of people (now) think we did something that was degrading.'**

**Refusing to presume that, he went on, 'The fact is that we did it, and I then came to the conclusion that I have held very firmly ever since, that if we had been left to ourselves there would never have been another shot fired. For a fortnight the truce went on. We were on the most friendly terms, and it was only the fact that we were being controlled by others that made it necessary for us to start trying to shoot one another again.'**

**He blamed the resumption of the war on 'the grip of the political system which was bad, and I and others who were there at the time determined there and then never to rest . . . Until we had seen whether we could change it.' But they could not. (p. 169–70)**

**Two soldiers, one British and one German, both experienced the horrors of the trench warfare in the Great War and both wrote moving accounts which challenged the idea of the glory of a sacrifice of the individual to the nation in an unnecessary or unjust war.**

**The British soldier, Wilfred Owen, wrote a famous poem before he was killed in the trenches seven days before the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918.**

He tells of the horror of the gas warfare which killed many in the trenches and ends with the following lines:

***If in some smothering dreams you too could pace  
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,  
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues – My friend, you would not tell with  
such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory  
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est  
Pro patria mori.***

(The Latin phrase is translated roughly as It is sweet and honorable to die for one's country, a line from the Roman poet Horace used to produce patriotic zeal for ancient Roman wars.)

The German soldier was Erich M. Remarque who wrote one of the best anti-war novels of all time, entitled *All Quiet On The Western Front*, which was later made into an American movie that won the Academy Awards in 1929 as the Best Movie of the year.

He also attacked the idea of the nobility of dying for your country in a war and he describes the suffering in the trenches:

*We see men living with their skulls blown open; We see soldiers run with their two feet cut off; They stagger on their splintered stumps into the next shell-hole; A lance corporal crawls a mile and half on his hands dragging his smashed knee after him; Another goes to the dressing station and over his clasped hands bulge his intestines; We see men without mouths, without jaws, without faces; We find one man who has held the artery of his arm in his teeth for two hours in order not to bleed to death.*

I would imagine that the Christmas Truce probably inspired the English novelist and poet, Thomas Hardy, to write a poem about World War I entitled *The Man He Killed*, which reads as follows:

*Had he and I but met  
By some old ancient inn,  
We should have sat us down to wet  
Right many a nipperkin!*

*But ranged as infantry,  
And staring face to face,  
I shot at him as he at me,  
And killed him in his place.*

*I shot him dead because – Because he was my foe,*

*Just so: my foe of course he was;  
That's clear enough; although*

*He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,  
Off-hand like – just as I – Was out of work – had sold his traps – No other reason  
why.*

*Yes, quaint and curious war is!  
You shoot a fellow down  
You'd treat if met where any bar is,  
Or help to half-a-crown.*

Many leaders of the British Empire saw the new nationalistic Germany (since 1870–71) as a threat to their world trade, especially with Germany's new navy.

The idea that economics played a major role in bringing on the war was confirmed by President Woodrow Wilson after the war in a speech wherein he gave his assessment of the real cause of the war. He was campaigning in St. Louis, Missouri

in September of 1919 trying to get the U.S. Senate to approve the Versailles Treaty and he stated:

**Why, my fellow-citizens, is there (anyone) here who does not know that the seed of war in the modern world is industrial and commercial rivalry? . . . This war, in its inception, was a commercial and industrial war. It was not a political war.**

Weintraub alludes to a play by William Douglas Home entitled A Christmas Truce wherein he has characters representing British and German soldiers who just finished a soccer game in No Man's Land on Christmas day and engaged in a conversation which very well could represent the feelings of the soldiers on that day.

**The German lieutenant concedes the impossibility of the war ending as the soccer game had just done, with no bad consequences – Because the Kaiser and the generals and the politicians in my country order us that we fight.**

**So do ours, agrees Andrew Wilson (the British soldier)**

**Then what can we do?**

**The answer's 'nothing.' But if we do nothing . . . like we're doing now, and go on doing it, there'll be nothing they can do but send us home.**

**Or shoot us. (p. 110)**

The Great War killed over ten million soldiers and Weintraub states, Following the final Armistice came an imposed peace in 1919 that created new instabilities ensuring another war, (p. 174). This next war killed more than fifty million people, over half of which were civilians. Weintraub writes:

**To many, the end of the war and the failure of the peace would validate the Christmas cease-fire as the only meaningful episode in the apocalypse.**

**It belied the bellicose slogans and suggested that the men fighting and often dying were, as usual, proxies for governments and issues that had little to do with their everyday lives. A candle lit in the darkness of Flanders, the truce flickered briefly and survives only in memoirs, letters, song, drama and story. (p. xvi).**

He concludes his remarkable book with the following:

**A celebration of the human spirit, the Christmas Truce remains a moving manifestation of the absurdities of war. A very minor Scottish poet of Great War vintage, Frederick Niven, may have got it right in his 'A Carol from Flanders,' which closed,**

*O ye who read this truthful rime  
From Flanders, kneel and say:  
God speed the time when every day  
Shall be as Christmas Day. (p. 175)*

**MORE:**

# British And German Soldiers Arm-In-Arm



The Illustrated London News of January 9, 1915 [Thanks to June VI, who sent this in.]

## BRITISH AND GERMAN SOLDIERS ARM-IN-ARM AND EXCHANGING HEADGEAR: A CHRISTMAS TRUCE BETWEEN OPPOSING TRENCHES. DRAWN BY A. C. MICHAEL

SAXONS AND ANGLO-SAXONS FRATERNISING ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE AT THE SEASON OF PEACE AND GOODWILL: OFFICERS AND MEN FROM THE GERMAN AND BRITISH TRENCHES MEET AND GREET ONE ANOTHER - A GERMAN OFFICER PHOTOGRAPHING A GROUP OF FOES AND FRIENDS.

The spirit of Christmas made itself felt in at least one section of the trenches at the front, where British and German soldiers fraternised, and for a brief while, during an informal and spontaneous truce, there was peace on earth and goodwill towards men among those who a few hours before had been seeking each other's blood, and where bound to do so again after the truce was over.

The part of the British lines where these incongruous scenes occurred, was, it is said, at a point where the enemy's trenches, only about eighty yards away, were occupied by a Saxon regiment. Further along the line, where Prussian troops were said to be stationed, there was a certain amount of fighting.

It was apparently towards the British left that the friendly truce was observed, while officers and men from both sides left their trenches and met in No Man's Land between, where, as a rule, no man dares to show so much as the top of his head.

British and Germans met and shook hands, exchanged cigars and cigarettes, newspapers and addresses, and wished each other the compliments of the season, conversing as far as possible with the aid, as interpreter, of a German soldier who had lived in America.

A group of British and German soldiers, arm-in-arm, some of whom had exchanged head-gear, were photographed by a German officer.

The figure on the extreme left in our drawing, for instance, is a German soldier in a British service-cap, while the fourth figure from the left is a British soldier in his goat-skin coat wearing a Pickelhaube, or German helmet.

Some of the British, it is said visited the German trenches and an Anglo-German football match was even played. The dead who lay in front of the trenches were buried, and a party of German brought back the body of a British officer.- [Drawing Copyrighted in United States and Canada.]



German and Russian soldiers fraternise on the Eastern Front

## **DO YOU HAVE A FRIEND OR RELATIVE IN MILITARY SERVICE?**

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## **AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS**



# Idaho Falls Soldier Ryan Sharp Was On His Last Tour Of Duty When He Was Hit By A Bomb In Afghanistan's Kandahar Province



Ryan Sharp, of Idaho Falls, died of injuries he suffered in Afghanistan. Provided by The Post Register

12/06/11 By SVEN BERG - Post Register

Army Cpl. Ryan Sharp was six months from leaving military life behind when an improvised explosive device killed him.

Three tours with the U.S. Army were apparently enough for the 28-year-old Skyline High School graduate and father of two, his aunt, Lisa Pardonnet, said. Sharp was scheduled to finish his final tour in Afghanistan sometime in the middle of 2012, Pardonnet said.

"He was a very loving, kind, tender-hearted man," she said.

Sharp was on a mission in Afghanistan's Kandahar province when a bomb exploded near him, causing severe wounds to his legs, shoulder and head, Pardonnet said. Doctors induced a coma, she said, then transferred him to Germany for treatment.

The soldier's parents, David and Lynnette Sharp, were able to be with him in Germany -- one tiny silver lining in the cloud that hangs over the Sharp family, despite the fact that he was never conscious while they were there.

On Wednesday, Pardonnet said, a glimmer of hope emerged. The pressure in Sharp's head dropped, and there was some optimism that he could pull through. It was not to be. Later in the week, Pardonnet said, the pressure increased.

Sharp died Saturday. He left behind 8-year-old and 6-year-old daughters, as well as two brothers and two sisters. His parents will now return to Idaho Falls to face life without their son. Details as to when, where and how the funeral will take place have yet to be determined, Pardonnet said.

Mike McClendon, a strategic adviser for the Military Affairs Committee in Idaho Falls, said committee members will be involved in the planning. One possibility is a ceremony marking the arrival of Sharp's remains, McClendon said.

As she looked back on her nephew's life, Pardonnet said the Army helped Sharp bring structure when he most needed it. "He had been a troubled boy and just needed some additional guidance," she said. "The Army was the best thing. He left a boy and came back a man."

**POLITICIANS CAN'T BE COUNTED ON TO HALT  
THE BLOODSHED**

**THE TROOPS HAVE THE POWER TO STOP THE  
WARS**

**ENOUGH OF THIS SHIT;  
ALL HOME NOW**



Dec. 1, 2011: A U.S. soldier with Apache Company of Task Force 3-66 Armor, out of Grafenwoehr, Germany, walks in an Afghan army outpost at Gulruddin Sar Hawza district of Paktika province, south of Kabul, Afghanistan. (AP Photo/Heidi Vogt)

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## **IRAQ WAR REPORTS**

**“The American War In Iraq  
Came To An Unspectacular End  
Thursday”**

**“No Senior Iraqi Government  
Officials Showed Up For The  
Event, Though The Name Tags  
Attached To Two Chairs In The  
Front Row Indicated American  
Hopes That They Might”**

**“Sooner Or Later, The American  
Flag Had To Be Taken Down  
Because It Is Unacceptable To  
Live In The Shadow Of Their Flag”**

**“So I’m Happy They’re Leaving Because  
They Are Occupiers”**

December 15 By Liz Sly and Craig Whitlock, Washington Post [Excerpts]

BAGHDAD — The American war in Iraq came to an unspectacular end Thursday at a simple ceremony held on the edge of Baghdad's international airport, not far from the highway along which U.S. troops first fought their way into the capital more than eight years ago.

There were speeches paying tribute to the fallen, promises that the United States would not abandon Iraq, vague declarations of “success” and warnings of challenges ahead. A brass band played, and the flag that had flown over the headquarters of the U.S. mission here was lowered for the last time and folded away.

No senior Iraqi government officials showed up for the event, though the name tags attached to two chairs in the front row indicated American hopes that they might. One was labeled for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, the other for President Jalal Talabani.

The only prominent Iraqis to attend were a former defense minister and three generals who have worked closely alongside U.S. forces and have often expressed hope that they would remain.

It was a reminder that for all the declarations of progress, the troops are leaving primarily because most Iraqis wanted them to go, despite the significant lingering concerns about the capabilities of the Iraqi security forces and the country’s still-precarious political balance.

“Sooner or later, the American flag had to be taken down because it is unacceptable to live in the shadow of their flag,” said businessman Qais al-Lami, 39. “So I’m happy they’re leaving because they are occupiers.”

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## **MILITARY NEWS**

### **HOW MANY MORE FOR OBAMA’S WARS?**



The remains of Marine Cpl. Adam J. Buyes of Salem, Ore., at Dover Air Force Base, Del. Nov. 30, 2011. Buyes was on foot patrol Saturday when he died in Afghanistan. (AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana)

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**Marine Corps Command Fraud  
About Actions Of Medal Of  
Honor Recipient Exposed:  
“Crucial Parts That The Marine  
Corps Publicized And Obama  
Described Are Untrue,  
Unsubstantiated Or Exaggerated”  
“What’s Most Striking Is That All This  
Probably Was Unnecessary”  
“Meyer, The 296th Marine To Earn The  
Medal, By All Accounts Deserved His  
Nomination”**

December 14 By McClatchy Newspapers [Excerpts]

WASHINGTON — With Dakota Meyer standing at attention in his dress uniform, sweat glistening on his forehead under the television lights, President Barack Obama extolled the former Marine corporal for the “extraordinary actions” that had earned him the Medal of Honor, the nation’s highest award for valor.

Obama told the audience in the White House East Room on Sept. 15 that Meyer had driven into the heart of a savage ambush in eastern Afghanistan against orders.

He’d killed insurgents at near-point-blank range, twice leapt from his gun turret to rescue two dozen Afghan soldiers and saved the lives of 13 U.S. service members as he fought to recover the bodies of four comrades, the president said.

But there’s a problem with this account: Crucial parts that the Marine Corps publicized and Obama described are untrue, unsubstantiated or exaggerated, according to dozens of military documents McClatchy Newspapers examined.

**Sworn statements by Meyer and others who participated in the battle indicate that he didn’t save the lives of 13 U.S. service members, leave his vehicle to scoop up 24 Afghans on his first two rescue runs or lead the final push to retrieve the four dead Americans.**

Moreover, it's unclear from the documents whether Meyer disobeyed orders when he entered the Ganjgal Valley on Sept. 8, 2009.

**The statements also offer no proof that the 23-year-old Kentucky native “personally killed at least eight Taliban insurgents,” as the account on the Marine Corps website says.**

**The driver of Meyer’s vehicle attested to seeing “a single enemy go down.”**

**What’s most striking is that all this probably was unnecessary.**

**Meyer, the 296th Marine to earn the medal, by all accounts deserved his nomination.**

**At least seven witnesses attested to him performing heroic deeds “in the face of almost certain death.”**

Braving withering fire, he repeatedly returned to the ambush site with Army Capt. William Swenson and others to retrieve Afghan casualties and the dead Americans.

He suffered a shrapnel wound in one arm and was sent home after the battle with combat-related stress. Meyer’s commander, Lt. Col. Kevin Williams, commended him for acts of “conspicuous gallantry at the risk of his life ... above and beyond the call of duty.”

But an exhaustive assessment by a McClatchy correspondent who was embedded with the unit and survived the ambush found that the Marines’ official accounts of Meyer’s deeds — retold in a book, countless news reports and on U.S. military websites — were embellished.

**They’re marred by errors and inconsistencies, ascribe actions to Meyer that are unverified or didn’t happen and create precise, almost novelistic detail out of the jumbled and contradictory recollections of the Marines, soldiers and pilots engaged in battle.**

**The approval of Meyer’s medal — in an unusually short time — came as lawmakers and serving and former officers pressed the military services and the Pentagon to award more Medals of Honor because of the relatively few conferred in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.**

Only 10 of the decorations have been awarded since 2001, seven of them posthumously.

Meyer is the first living Marine since the Vietnam War to be awarded the honor. It was first bestowed in 1863.

The process for awarding the medal — designed by Navy rules to leave “no margin of doubt or possibility of error” — involves reviews by commanders at every level of the nominee’s chain of command and then by top Pentagon officials. The nominating papers — known as a “medal packet” — typically comprise dozens of sworn witness

statements, maps, diagrams, a draft citation and a more detailed account of the nominee's deeds.

As the Afghan and Iraq wars wind down, senior Marine Corps officials conceded the pressure to award more medals, and to do it quickly.

One senior Marine official told McClatchy that the service felt that it deserved the decoration after having served in the toughest, most violent areas of Afghanistan and Iraq.

In response to McClatchy's findings, the Marine Corps said it stood by the official citation that was produced by the formal vetting process. Asked to explain the individual discrepancies and embellishments, the Marines drew a distinction between the citation and the account of Meyer's deeds that the Marines constructed to help tell his story to the nation. They described that account as "Meyer's narrative of the sequence of events," which Marine officials said they didn't vet.

**Hours before this McClatchy report was published, the Marine Corps inserted a disclaimer into its official online account of Meyer's heroic actions. The Web page now reads that the summary "was compiled in collaboration" with Meyer and Marine Corps Public Affairs.**

**A prominent historian of military medals, Doug Sterner, expressed disbelief at the idea that the Marine Corps would publicize an account of a complex battle based solely on the recipient's recollections.**

**"Give me a break," Sterner said. "A recipient is responsible for writing his narrative? I have never heard of such a thing."**

The Marine officials, who requested anonymity because of the issue's sensitivity, acknowledged that portions of the narrative were changed from the account Williams submitted.

They said that the changes occurred between July, when Obama approved Meyer's medal nomination, and the September White House ceremony.

Inaccuracies were written into the citation and the narrative of Meyer's deeds, although the narrative contained far more errors and exaggerations.

**The president's version drew on materials the Marine Corps provided but it was written in the White House, the Marine officials said.**

While there's no indication that the White House knew that Obama was narrating an embellished story — to an audience of several hundred Meyer family members, top officials, lawmakers and service members — the revelations could tarnish one of the signature moments of his time as commander in chief.

The White House said Obama's remarks were based primarily on "extensive documentation provided by the Department of Defense and the Marine Corps," including sworn testimony from Meyer and other eyewitnesses.

It also relied on news reports and on a 2011 book, "The Wrong War" by Bing West. However, McClatchy found that the book's account of the battle is riddled with inaccuracies.

Sterner said errors in citations had always haunted recipients and that many Medal of Honor winners had been cited for things they didn't do. He added that the mounting pressure to find a living recipient has made mistakes in details almost inevitable.

"Did this man deserve the Medal of Honor? If the answer to that is yes, then the details of the citation become secondary," Sterner said. "But we do need to keep the record as accurately as we possibly can."

### **From Kentucky To The White House**

The fallout could obscure Meyer's genuine acts of heroism and threaten a book contract, speaking engagements and other deals that have lifted him from the obscurity of rural Greensburg, Ky., to fortune and national renown, including famously having a beer with Obama at the White House the day before the ceremony.

**McClatchy found that the claim that Meyer saved the lives of 13 U.S. Marines and soldiers couldn't be true. Twelve Americans were ambushed — including this correspondent — and of those, four were killed.**

(One wounded American would die a month later.) Moreover, multiple sworn statements affirm McClatchy's firsthand reporting that it was the long-delayed arrival of U.S. helicopters that saved the American survivors.

There are no statements attesting to Meyer killing eight Taliban as recounted on the Marine Corps website.

The driver of Meyer's vehicle, Staff Sgt. Juan Rodriguez-Chavez, reported seeing Meyer kill one insurgent.

No sworn statements — including one Meyer gave to military investigators five days after the battle — refer to him leaping from the Humvee's turret to rescue 24 wounded Afghan soldiers on his first two runs into the valley.

Rodriguez-Chavez attested to nine Afghan soldiers getting into the Humvee by themselves while Meyer remained in the turret.

Four sworn statements, including Rodriguez-Chavez's, undermine the claim that he and Meyer drove into the valley against orders. And the documents indicate that it was Swenson who led the final drive to retrieve the fallen Americans, taking command of Meyer's Humvee after ditching his bullet-riddled Ford Ranger. Meyer rode in the Humvee's back seat.

**The inflated versions of events were prepared at the Marine Corps' Public Affairs office at the Pentagon by a special working group assembled for the task, a knowledgeable official said.**



The group consulted Meyer's former commander, Williams, as it drafted the citation, but it didn't confer with him in assembling the account posted on the Marine Corps website, the official said.

**The Marines excluded Williams — who was shot and wounded in the left arm during the battle and won a Bronze Star for valor — from Meyer's ceremony at the White House.**

**Also excluded was Capt. Ademola Fabayo, who won the Navy Cross, the nation's second-highest award for valor, for his role in Ganjgal. Williams and Fabayo declined to be interviewed for this article.**

Many of the exaggerations appear in "The Wrong War" by West, a Marine veteran and former senior Pentagon official-turned-best-selling writer.

West, who frequently embeds with troops and has testified before Congress on military strategy, spoke with Meyer a few days after the battle. The pair recently signed a contract with West's publisher, Random House, to co-write Meyer's memoir, due out next July.

They received an advance that a well-informed publishing industry executive, who asked not to be identified because he wasn't authorized to disclose the information, described as being in the "mid-six figures."

Meyer's own public retelling of the battle hasn't always been accurate. In a CBS "60 Minutes" interview that was taped before the White House ceremony and aired Sept. 19, he recounted: "Me and Capt. Swenson kept driving this unarmored truck through this valley. The rounds are going everywhere through it. You've got both windows down, you could hear them whizzing through."

But the sworn statements show that Meyer didn't ride in the unarmored Ford Ranger pickup that Swenson drove through Ganjgal Valley.

### **Pressure For Medals**

Obama held up Meyer as embodying "the best of a generation that has served with distinction through a decade of war." But even beyond individual heroism, the military prizes the Medal of Honor as recognition of the contributions of the recipient's unit and branch of service.

In recent years, some lawmakers and active and retired military officers have questioned whether the relatively few medals awarded since 2001 are the result of a quiet toughening of the criteria.

In January, a congressionally mandated Pentagon study found that Medal of Honor criteria hadn't been tightened. Instead, it said, the development of high-tech, long-range weapons and insurgents' increased use of improvised explosive devices and suicide bombers had reduced face-to-face combat.

The findings, however, didn't end the controversy.

Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Calif., a former Marine who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, wrote in an Oct. 4 letter to Defense Secretary Leon Panetta that he “categorically disagreed with the notion that warfare somehow changed and those who were taking and holding ground from the enemy, and often engaged in close-quarter combat, were in some way ineligible for the nation’s highest military award for valor.”

Hunter urged Panetta to review four cases in which service members had been nominated for Medals of Honor but received lesser decorations. They included Marine Cpl. Rafael Peralta, whose 2004 medal nomination for covering a grenade with his body in Iraq and saving his colleagues’ lives was downgraded by the Pentagon to a Navy Cross. The decision was based on a finding that Peralta had been shot in the head and therefore wasn’t acting voluntarily — and it infuriated the Marine Corps.

A senior Marine official told McClatchy that after that decision, the Marines were determined that one of their own would earn a Medal of Honor by the time Commandant James T. Conway retired in 2010. The official described Peralta’s case as a learning experience that the Marines didn’t want repeated.

The frustration may have prompted Conway’s successor, Gen. James F. Amos, to breach Pentagon guidelines against “premature disclosure” of information about Medal of Honor nominations. During a visit to Camp Pendleton, Calif., on Nov. 6, 2010, Amos announced that Conway had approved a living Marine for the decoration. While he withheld the name, the Marine Corps Times identified the Marine as Meyer two days later.

Amos said he was moved to tears when he read Meyer’s citation, according to the Times. “I read it cover to cover, and it watered my eyes,” he was quoted as saying.

A Medal of Honor nomination for Swenson, who’s since left the Army, was submitted in December 2009 — months before Meyer’s — but it remains under review after being lost for 19 months, according to the Army. The account of the battle in Swenson’s nomination is sharply at odds with the Marines’ account of Meyer’s deeds, McClatchy learned.

Swenson — a 33-year-old Seattle native nominated to be the first living Army officer to earn the Medal of Honor in the Iraq and Afghan wars — declined to be interviewed.

## **The Battle In Ganjgal**

McClatchy’s findings are based primarily on statements by participants in the battle that were taken under oath in two official investigations, known in military parlance as 15-6 investigations, and the sworn statements that many of the same witnesses submitted voluntarily in support of Meyer’s nomination. This article also relies on copies McClatchy obtained of the Army’s draft citation and account of Swenson’s actions from his medal nomination.

The battle in Ganjgal — a redoubt of stone and rock-hard mud in Kunar province — began as a goodwill mission by Afghan troops and their American trainers. It erupted

into some seven hours of searing combat that produced two Medal of Honor nominations, two Navy Crosses, eight Bronze Stars and nine Purple Hearts.

Five Americans and 10 Afghans were killed; 22 U.S. and Afghan troops were wounded.

The battle also prompted the two 15-6 investigations that resulted in career-killing reprimands for dereliction of duty for two officers with the 10th Mountain Division, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1-32 Infantry, the Army unit responsible for the area. The officers were cited for denying repeated requests from the ambushed Americans for air and artillery support and refusing to send in troops to rescue them. The two officers told investigators they were unsure of the friendly and enemy forces' positions.

The operation, dubbed "Dancing Goat II," was part of the U.S.-backed effort to weaken the Taliban-led insurgency by promoting local aid projects.

Located at the closed end of a U-shaped valley near the border with Pakistan, Ganjgal overlooks a sweep of descending terraced fields partitioned by waist-high stone walls. The only drivable access is a rutted track that runs up a boulder-strewn wash. Afghan forces were to conduct a routine search of Ganjgal and then meet tribal elders to discuss making improvements to the local mosque in return for the establishment of a police post — a small but unequivocal statement of the village's acceptance of the Kabul government's authority.

Word of the operation, however, reached the wrong ears.

As sunlight hit the fields at 5:30 a.m., some 60 Afghan troops and 30 border police officers, nine U.S. Marine and Army trainers, and this correspondent walked into a three-sided ambush by 50 to 60 attackers.

The insurgents unleashed barrages from assault rifles, machine guns, mortars, rocket-propelled grenades and a recoilless rifle from houses, trenches, the slopes overlooking the village and a U.S.-funded school.

Three Marines — 1st Lt. Michael E. Johnson, of Virginia Beach, Va., Gunnery Sgt. Edwin W. Johnson of Columbus, Ga., and Staff Sgt. Aaron M. Kenefick of Roswell, Ga. — and a Navy corpsman, Petty Officer 3rd Class James R. Layton of Riverbank, Calif., were trapped in a house on the edge of the village along with several Afghans. Forced out by enemy fire, the Americans and an Afghan soldier later were found dead in a trench to which they'd retreated.

The Afghan and U.S. personnel scattered for the cover of terrace walls, boulders, trenches and buildings, and fired back. Pinned down and denied artillery and air support, they began taking casualties.

About 150 yards before the house where the four Americans were trapped, Williams, five other U.S. and Afghan personnel and this correspondent dived behind a terrace wall. They later were joined by Swenson, Army Staff Sgt. Kenneth Westbrook and Swenson's translator. Westbrook, of Shiprock, N.M., was wounded and died about a month later from blood transfusion complications.

Meyer and the Mexican-born Rodriguez-Chavez were outside the valley for almost the entire 90-minute ambush, about a mile west of the village standing guard over vehicles left by the Afghan-U.S. contingent that had hiked up to Ganjgal.

'We had injured guys in there'

**The official accounts of what happened next contain so many disparities and contradictions that they tarnish the genuine valor that Meyer and others displayed.**

As Obama related the story, Meyer and Rodriguez-Chavez asked four times for permission to drive into the valley to help repel the attack and rescue their trapped colleagues, and "four times they were denied. It was, they were told, too dangerous."

The sworn statements, however, raise questions about that account.

Meyer and Rodriguez-Chavez, the statements say, received no responses to their initial requests, which were being relayed to Williams, his first sergeant, Christopher Garza, and Fabayo through two Marines in an "overwatch" position on a mountaintop. Eventually, Garza sent word that they should stay put.

But later, after failing to raise Garza again, Staff Sgt. Guillermo Valadez — one of the Marines on the mountaintop — and Rodriguez-Chavez agreed that Rodriguez-Chavez and Meyer should drive into the valley. Marine Corps doctrine authorized the two staff sergeants to take that initiative.

Rodriguez-Chavez said, "We raised Staff Sgt. Valadez on the radio and told him we were going in no matter what was going on; we just needed him to assist us into the valley." Valadez, he continued, "agreed with the decision taken by Cpl. Meyer and me."

Valadez recounted: "I told Staff Sgt. Rodriguez-Chavez to go in because we had injured guys in there."

In a telephone interview eight days after the battle — while he recovered in a U.S. military hospital in Germany from a concussion he'd suffered from a rocket-propelled grenade explosion — "Garza recalled that he ... called Cpl. Meyer and Staff Sgt. Rodriguez-Chavez forward to start collecting the wounded," according to a memorandum of the interview.

Rodriguez-Chavez and Meyer then set out in a Humvee on the mile-long drive up toward Ganjgal, running into "a blizzard of fire" — the former behind the wheel, the latter in the turret, according to the accounts read by Obama and posted on the Marine Corps website.

"Coming upon wounded Afghan soldiers, Dakota jumped out and loaded each of the wounded into the Humvee, each time exposing himself to all that enemy fire," the president said. After driving those casualties to safety, he and Rodriguez-Chavez went "back into the inferno," Meyer again jumping out and loading up more wounded Afghans.

The medal citation read by a military aide after Obama spoke put the number of Afghans rescued on those first two runs at two dozen.

But Rodriguez-Chavez recounted in his statement for Meyer's medal nomination that the Afghans got into the vehicle themselves on both runs. He said Meyer stayed in the turret, firing a Mark 19 automatic grenade launcher. Rodriguez-Chavez's marks on an accompanying satellite photograph show both runs ending just short of the ambush zone.

Seeing Afghan National Army troops trying to take cover, Rodriguez-Chavez said: "I drove up to their position, while Cpl. Meyer was providing cover fire. We saw five wounded ANA soldiers and Cpl. Meyer signaling them to get into the truck. Three ANA took the empty seats in the truck, and the other two opened the trunk and climbed into the trunk."

After dropping off the Afghans about 150 yards back down the track, the pair returned, stopping just before the first location. Four more Afghan soldiers piled into the vehicle.

**The official account doesn't explain how the pair could have evacuated 24 Afghan soldiers given that no more than five people — three inside and two in the trunk — could have fit in the vehicle with Meyer and Rodriguez-Chavez. A senior Marine Corps official acknowledged that the figure was misleading.**

### **"We Weren't In A Battle Zone Anymore"**

The official Marine account also credits Meyer with saving the lives of 13 U.S. Marines and soldiers.

In all, only eight Americans directly embroiled in the ambush survived: six trapped in the "kill zone" and two on a nearby ridge. Army Capt. Raymond Kaplan and Marine Cpl. Steven Norman had led a group of Afghan soldiers to an "overwatch" position on a ridge nearly a half-mile southwest of the village, where they were engaged in heavy firefights with insurgents on nearby hilltops.

Five other U.S. personnel played supporting roles but were even farther away.

Valadez and Marine Staff Sgt. Chad Miller were on the mountaintop about three-quarters of a mile northwest of the village; a three-man Army sniper team was on a mountain about one and a half miles to the southwest. Their statements make clear that they made their own way back to their base after Meyer left the valley with the bodies of his four fallen comrades.

Witness statements agree that it was the long-delayed arrival of U.S. helicopters that allowed Williams' group to escape. Williams and Norman attested that Rodriguez-Chavez and Meyer arrived in the valley after Kiowa Warrior helicopters had reached the scene.

One pilot, Ryan Elliott Neal, with the Palehorse squadron of the Army's 7-17th Cavalry, said in a statement recorded two weeks after the battle that after his helicopter began strafing enemy positions, "the enemy fire ceased long enough for (Williams' group) to begin moving to their southwest." Neal's rank was redacted.

The Nigerian-born Fabayo told 15-6 investigators that after a Kiowa Warrior suppressed the insurgents' fire, "we shot back a few times once in a while, but we started walking like we weren't in a battle zone anymore."

According to the narrative read by Obama, Rodriguez-Chavez and Meyer saved the group by pulling their vehicle between the group and the village, "wedging (it) right into the line of fire," allowing the Americans to escape.

Rodriguez-Chavez and Fabayo referred to this maneuver in February 2010 statements that were included in Meyer's medal nomination. Their statements, however, make clear that the group already was exiting the ambush site, though the fighting continued into the midafternoon.

Finally, there is no report in any of the statements, including his own, of Meyer killing eight Taliban — the number cited on the Marine Corps website. Miller, watching from his mountaintop position, said that as the Humvee drove up the wash, he radioed Meyer: "You have enemy at your 9 o'clock, driver's side." Valadez sent a similar warning after he saw the vehicle "get swarmed by people."

Rodriguez-Chavez recounted that Meyer quickly started firing the Humvee's .50-caliber machine gun but that the barrel couldn't be swung low enough to hit his targets. He then heard Meyer firing his M4 assault rifle. "I saw a single enemy go down from a round hitting him in the head," Rodriguez-Chavez continued.

This incident would've had to occur while there were U.S. helicopters overhead, loosing rockets and machine guns at any insurgent target they could find.

Eight Taliban leaping down the waist-high walls as they charged across the terraces toward Meyer's Humvee almost certainly would have been seen by the helicopter pilots, whose statements indicated that they were monitoring the vehicle.

Only three bodies later were retrieved from the track: those of Williams' translator and two insurgents, according to Rodriguez-Chavez's marks on the satellite photo.

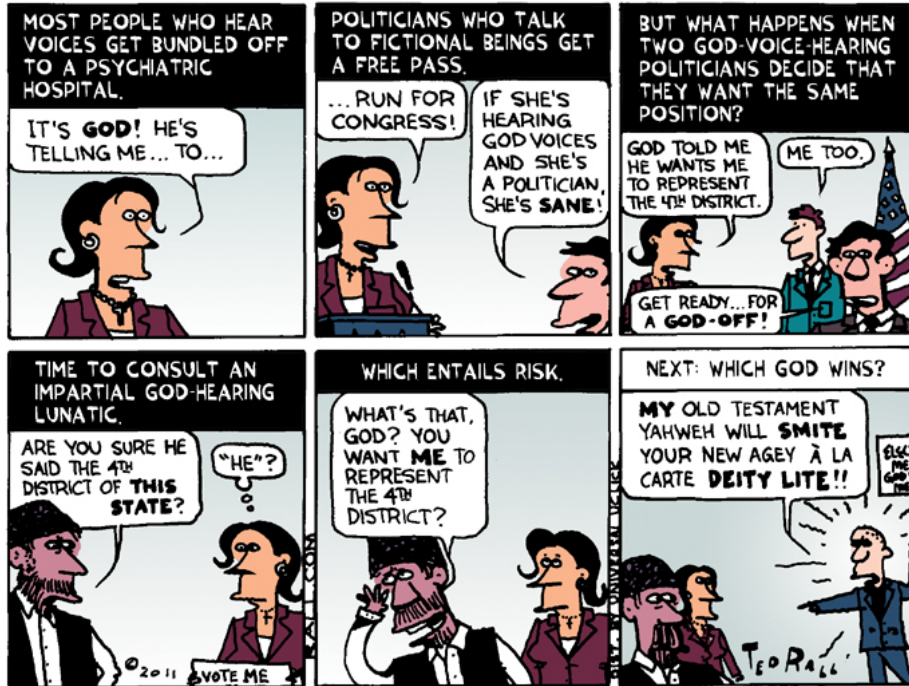
If the two were among the eight insurgents whom Meyer is credited with killing, the six others would've had to have been carried off. But that would have required at least 12 fighters — two to each corpse, each probably toting a rifle — charging across the terraces and down the walls, retrieving the bodies and returning.

And all that without being blasted by the helicopters.

### **Troops Invited:**

**Comments, arguments, articles, and letters from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Write to Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or email [contact@militaryproject.org](mailto:contact@militaryproject.org): Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Same address to unsubscribe.**

# DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



# CLASS WAR REPORTS

The "Invisible Hand" 2011



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# **Syrian Soldiers In Revolt: “Army Defectors Killed 27 Government Forces Thursday In Apparently Coordinated Attacks” “Busra Al-Harir Is Home To About 300 Army Defectors Who Have Been Clashing With Regime Forces Daily For Nearly A Week”**

Dec 15 By BASSEM MROUE and ELIZABETH A. KENNEDY, Associated Press  
[Excerpts]

Army defectors killed 27 government forces Thursday in apparently coordinated attacks that were among the deadliest by rebel troops since the uprising began nine months ago.

The fighting began around daybreak in the southern province of Daraa, where the uprising against President Bashar Assad's authoritarian regime began in March.

**Defectors from the Free Syrian Army, whose leaders are based in exile in neighboring Turkey, fired a rocket-propelled grenade at a bus carrying policemen into the town of Busra al-Harir on Thursday, killing 12 officers, an activist based nearby said.**

**That set off clashes with an accompanying force of soldiers. The defectors killed 13 of them, said the activist, who would only agree to be identified by his first name, Omar, for fear of retribution.**

**The fighters then killed two more soldiers in an attack on a checkpoint, he said.**

**Busra al-Harir is home to about 300 army defectors who have been clashing with regime forces daily for nearly a week, he said.**

"The army was shelling the town with tanks shortly before the attack by insurgents," Omar said.

Syrian troops are usually accompanied by policemen in buses, who round up people after the army enters an area.



"As these attacks by the defectors intensify, the army could become torn and splintered," said [Mohamad] Bazzi.

"The regime has tried very hard to keep the security forces (such as secret police) instead of the army as the first line of repression against the protesters."

All of the defectors interviewed said their commanders gave standing orders to stop the overwhelmingly peaceful protests throughout the country "by all means necessary."

They understood the phrase as an authorization to use lethal force, especially because they had been given live ammunition instead of other means of crowd control.

About half the defectors interviewed said the commanders of their units or other officers also gave them direct orders to fire at protesters or bystanders and reassured them that they would not be held accountable.

The report quotes defectors as saying that in some cases, officers themselves participated in killings.

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**Rebellion Takes Power In Chinese  
City After Government Murders  
Protest Leader:  
“We Lament His Death, As He Died  
For Us”  
“The Villagers Have Forced Local  
Officials And Police To Flee Wukan And  
Have Erected Barricades To Prevent  
Them From Re-Entering”**



Thousands rallied Tuesday in Wukan, a fishing village of about 20,000 in southern China. Malcolm Moore/Telegraph

[Thanks to Alan Stolzer, Military Resistance Organization, who sent this in.]

**In Wukan, Chinese authorities now face a tough choice between sending in more security forces to restore order — and risking serious violence — or negotiating a compromise with the villagers and possibly encouraging copycat protests across the country.**

DECEMBER 15, 2011 By JEREMY PAGE in Beijing and BRIAN SPEGELE in Lufeng County, China; Wall Street Journal [Excerpts]

A fishing village of about 20,000 people in southern China is in open revolt against the local government a day after it announced the death in police custody of a villager who had led protests over a land grab, according to residents.

Villagers say the man was murdered, but police say he died of a heart attack.

The villagers have forced local officials and police to flee Wukan in the southern province of Guangdong — China's export powerhouse — and have erected barricades to prevent them from re-entering, according to residents.

The police have responded by imposing a blockade on Wukan, stopping food and water from entering, and preventing local fishing boats from heading out to sea, the residents said.

Police erected a roadblock three or four miles from Wukan and checked cars traveling in both directions. They prevented a Wall Street Journal reporter from entering.

**The siege in the prosperous province is one of the most serious recent examples of mass unrest in China, much of it due to local officials misappropriating farmland and selling it to property developers at an enormous profit that farmers never see.**

Illegal land seizures — often for golf courses, luxury villas and hotels — are seen by many Chinese and foreign experts as the single biggest threat to the Communist [translation: Capitalist] Party as it struggles to maintain legitimacy in a society that is becoming increasingly demanding and well-informed, thanks in large measure to the Internet, even as income disparities widen.

Such land disputes account for 65% of "mass incidents" — the government's euphemism for large protests — in rural areas, according to Yu Jianrong, a professor and expert on rural issues at the state-run Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

**Mr. Yu estimates that local officials have seized about 16.6 million acres of rural land (more than the entire state of West Virginia) since 1990, depriving farmers of about two trillion yuan (\$314 billion) due to the discrepancy between the compensation they receive and the land's real market value.**

China's Land Ministry has also warned that misappropriation of farmland has brought the country dangerously close to the so-called red line of 296 million acres of arable land that the government believes it needs to feed China's 1.34 billion people.

The Land Ministry, which uses satellite imagery to spot abuses, launched a fresh crackdown on illegal land use this year, targeting golf courses, hotels and villas in particular, and has announced several high-profile cases in which officials have been punished.

But the central government's attempts to curb such abuses, and to draft new legislation that would protect against land grabs and give farmers a market rate for their land, have met fierce resistance from local authorities who rely on land sales to maintain growth, service debt and top up their budgets.

In 2010 alone, China's local governments raised 2.9 trillion yuan from land sales. And the National Audit Office estimates that 23% of local government debt, which it put at 10.7 trillion yuan in June, depends on land sales for repayment.

**In Wukan, Chinese authorities now face a tough choice between sending in more security forces to restore order — and risking serious violence — or negotiating a compromise with the villagers and possibly encouraging copycat protests across the country.**

The standoff is particularly risky for Wang Yang, the Communist [translation: Capitalist] Party chief of Guangdong, who is vying with other candidates for promotion to the Politburo Standing Committee — the party's top decision-making body — in a once-a-decade leadership change next year.

Mr. Wang launched a "Happy Guangdong" campaign this year, pledging to focus on improving living standards while slowing GDP growth in the province of 104 million

people that pioneered China's economic reforms and has long been seen as a bellwether of the country's future.

**Mr. Wang's campaign has been undermined by a series of high-profile labor and land disputes this year, including riots by hundreds of migrant workers in the cities of Zengcheng and Chaozhou.**

**The rioters attacked government offices and overturned police cars over several days in June.**

In China, all urban land is owned by the state, although usage rights can be traded. Farmland belongs to rural collectives, headed by village officials, and usage rights can also be traded, though only for agriculture.

Under Chinese law, local governments can acquire farmland for construction projects that are "in the public interest" in exchange for compensation based on a multiple of the land's agricultural yield, rather than its market value.

**In reality, local authorities often hatch those deals secretly with village officials, change the land's status from rural to urban to allow construction, and then sell the land-use rights to property developers at an enormous profit, according to experts in the field.**

**In such cases, some villagers are typically angered that rights to their land have been sold at all, while others are upset that they are not paid the market value, with most of the profits going to the officials and developers.**

"This kind of dispute is very widespread," said Eva Pils, an associate professor of law specializing in land disputes in China at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

**"Because people are better connected and better informed, you can sense that there is more radical opposition to what's happening to them," she said.**

**"It's also easier for this kind of protest to spread — and far harder to isolate because information can still travel."**

The unrest in Wukan began in September, when villagers attacked local government offices to protest against officials who they said had sold the rights for their land to property developers without providing proper compensation.

Some villagers have said that local officials sold the land to a property developer for as much as one billion yuan and then pocketed about 70% of that.

Local authorities responded at first by sending in riot police, but later tried to negotiate with villagers, asking them to appoint 13 representatives to deal with the government.

Those negotiations failed to achieve a compromise, however, and last week men in plainclothes detained some of the 13 representatives, villagers say.

**On Tuesday, the local government announced that one of the detained representatives, 42-year-old Xue Jinbo, had died of a cardiac arrest in custody Sunday.**

**Mr. Xue's relatives believe he was beaten to death, according to villagers.**

**"We lament his death, as he died for us," one villager, who asked to be identified only by his surname, Lin, said in a telephone interview.**

**He said that Mr. Xue's mother, wife and elder brother had been to see his corpse and had found three fractures, as well as several scars.**

Xinhua said Mr. Xue was suspected of having led protests in Wukan in September "regarding issues related to land use, financing and the election of local officials." It said he and other villagers had broken into local government offices and police stations and destroyed six police cars.

Mr. Xue and two others were arrested Friday on suspicion of damaging public property and disrupting public service, it said, quoting a local police official.

He pleaded guilty to the accusations during two interrogations on Friday and Saturday, Xinhua quoted the police official as saying.

The escalation of the protest was reported this week by the Daily Telegraph newspaper.

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## **RECEIVED:**

**“I Would Like To See The Amount Those Who Established The \$50,000 Payment Would Sue For If Somebody Cut Off Their Precious Little Organs”**

From: SANFORD KELSON [Veteran & Military Resistance Organization]  
To: Military Resistance Newsletter  
Subject: Loss of sex worth \$50,000?  
Date: Dec 15, 2011 8:57 AM

Military Resistance recently published an article reporting that Service members' Group Life Insurance Traumatic Injury program will now pay a lump sum of \$50,000 for damage to sexual organs that results in complete loss of the ability to have sex.

I would like to see the amount those who established the \$50,000 payment would sue for if somebody cut off their precious little organs.

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<http://www.albasrah.net/pages/mod.php?header=res1&mod=gis&rep=gis>

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