

Tuesday, March 4, 2008

## Return of the Winter Soldier Investigation

Â The vast majority of American soldiers in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere not only do not recall theÂ countless American military atrocities in Vietnam as they happened, but were not even born yet. What a splendid way for the military to have recruited with a cleansed slate on Vietnam, let alone the invasions of Grenada and Panama, and the list goes on. Rambo's asking his father if "we get to win this time" in Vietnam probably is better known by those under forty than the horrors of My Lai and mini My Lais.Â IÂ started collegeÂ in 1981 under the impression thatÂ the My LaiÂ massacreÂ -- with American Lt. William Calley as a ground leader of the massacre of hundreds of unarmed villagersÂ -- was not typical behavior by American soldiers in Vietnam. I explored this issue further when I took a freshman English seminar called "America in the Sixties," and saw the Winter Soldier Investigation documentary (see a YouTube excerpt here) in which Vietnam veteran after Vietnam veteran testified that mini My Lais were rampant in Vietnam.Â Regardless of how accurate or inaccurate is the Winter Soldier investigation,Â I became convinced, and remain convinced, that mini My Lais indeed ran rampant in Vietnam, and that Calley was not the only American soldier with the mindset -- at least as to his obligations in My Lai (which was the subject of the Peers investigative report) -- that the Vietnamese people "were all the enemy, they were all to be destroyed, sir."Â Â News coverage of the Vietnam war helped make the war widely unpopular in the United States. The American military propaganda machine learned from that, starting as long back as Gulf War I, when a Willard Scott teddy bearish look-alike in the form of Norman Schwarzkopf daily reported on the war to press members whose movements were strictly limited by the U.S. military. (This photo might dispel doubts that Norm and Willard were separated at birth.) Many -- if not most -- of Schwarzkopf's news briefings looked more like a commander describing video Space Invaders games, than a war in which real people were being killed and maimed daily. Â Gulf War II continues with embedded journalists, platitudes about supporting the troops as a way to deflect attention away from the realities of the daily violence in the air and on the ground, and a presumptive Republican presidential nominee (McCain) who looks ready to continue more of the same. Â Now, on March 13-16 comes a new Winter Soldier investigation, from the Iraq Veterans Against the War. The investigation will take place at the National Labor College, which is located in the same town as our office.Â The event may be watchedÂ online. Here is the schedule for the event. YouTube previews of the Iraq Winter Soldier investigation are here and here, including one or more soldiers saying that liars in the government are mis-portraying the reality of those wars. Â The IVAW Winter Soldier front page says: "In 1971, a courageous group of veterans exposed the criminal nature of the Vietnam War in an event called Winter Soldier. Once again, we will demand that the voices of veterans are heard. Once again, we are fighting for the soul of our country. We will demonstrate our patriotism by speaking out with honor and integrity instead of blindly following failed policy. Winter Soldier is a difficult but essential service to our country."Â Â All this stands in curious contrast to a wounded veteran client who recently responded to my question about his motivation for joining the military a few years ago, by saying that such service is the duty of every citizen. When I pointed out that he had hired a lawyer who did not volunteer for the military, he seemed to acknowledge the expediency of not limiting himself to a lawyer who was a military veteran. Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in Constitutional Law at 00:00