

**WTE column of March 12, 2015. Editor's headline: "The many faces of torture"**

**CST column of March 14: "Do rights abuses bring safety and freedom?"**

Recently, when my column discussed "Wyoming Citizens Against Torture," in came a string of perplexing emails. Some readers wrote they are proud America "defends our freedom," even if it means resorting to torture. Really, now. Does a country's war mongering and human-rights abuses truly bring safety and freedom? Consider this: four years ago American forces bombed the bejesus out of Libya and killed countless civilians, primarily women and children, to destroy the Qaddafi regime. The result? Libya has become a lawless wasteland where ISIS extremists hold sway. Examine books like "Arab Spring, Libyan Winter" or "America's Deadliest Export: Democracy," and you'll recognize the reasoning of the protest sign, "Torture Breeds Terror."

A word about Joseph Hickman, an American patriot, professional soldier, and experienced security professional with corrections experience who joined the military because he wanted to serve his country. "I didn't look forward to going away for a year and guarding a bunch of terrorists in Cuba," he writes. "But my country asked, and I was proud to answer the call."

Hickman thought he was dealing with hard-core terrorists but found that Gitmo is far from being used to house the "worst of the worst" battlefield combatants or Al-Qaeda operatives bent on destroying the United States. Instead, the camp functions as "America's battle lab," where interrogation techniques are developed that can be applied anywhere in the global war on terror. Hickman learned that only 5 percent of the inmates were captured by American forces; all others had been kidnapped by questionable bounty hunters. At the time they were rounded up, many were teenagers, kids who, even if they'd signed up with the Taliban, could not possibly have taken part in any high-level Al-Qaeda plans or actions.

At Gitmo, Hickman witnessed unspeakable horrors perpetrated upon these unfortunates: prisoners confined to tiny cells in sweltering heat under metal roofs, forbidden to exercise by running in place or doing push-ups. Guards screaming insults at them and prisoners yelling back, until one or the other was pulled out for a beating.

They were tortured not only physically but also mentally, through injections of psychosis-inducing drugs masquerading as malaria vaccinations. When three young "war on terror" detainees died one night, the camp commander claimed they had hanged themselves in their cells yet Hickman, who was on guard duty in the tower, never witnessed any bodies removed from these cells. All three were college-educated or -bound and came from good families when they were trapped and treated like animals. Two were scheduled to be released. Hickman's account includes a statement by his superior that the three died from socks stuffed down their throats but that he would hear a different, "official" account of their deaths.

At first he refused to believe that an American government could be as callous as that. "Murder at Camp Delta" is Hickman's conclusion, based on what he observed, pieced together, and researched. The Justice Department refused to investigate his allegations, though a fourth "suicide" happened within less than a year. This, in a place where inmates are watched around the clock, at a ratio of four guards per one inmate.

"War is a lie," said one member of "Wyoming Citizens" as they massed in bitter cold to demonstrate against Dick Cheney. A retired staff sergeant, she handed me a book by that title. It includes a quote from General Dwight D. Eisenhower: "As a soldier who experienced war I must say that war is brutality, futility, and stupidity." This book shows, we are the victims of lies by

people we trusted. War-profiteering industries have insinuated themselves into our government and run the show.

Then there is Mohamedou Ould Slashi's "Guantanamo Diary," published after camp authorities withheld it for seven years, an astounding first-person story about imprisonment, torture, and debasement. Replete with government redactions — pages and pages of redactions — it nevertheless contains footnotes tying the narrative to declassified documents. Sadly, this tale illustrates the Gitmo treatment personally approved by Donald Rumsfeld. Slashi's included extreme isolation, sleep deprivation, sexual molestation, frigid rooms, stress positions, and death threats. In 2010, a federal district court judge ordered him released but the Obama administration appealed; the case yet languishes in the courts. Slashi remains locked up, 13 years and counting. Still, readers get to hear his voice, the voice of someone who speaks four languages and learned English at Gitmo, enough to write an entire book in style.

"Wyoming Citizens Against Torture" opposes our government's flagrant transgressions. Readers who deem its protests reprehensible are invited to discussions and a possible follow-up column. The catch: bring the material that supports your views, and read reviews of at least two of the books mentioned above, e.g. at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). Then we'll talk.