

# Who killed Pat Tillman?

**THE** American mass media are like tired old dogs, dutifully fetching official lies on command, dropping them like bones at the feet of an unsuspecting public. We in turn reward them by buying both the products and the myths that they sell to us. Eventually, however, the products fail and the myths unravel. When, despite the support of a compliant press, the government's popularity wanes sufficiently, however, even old dogs can come up with new tricks, reviving the lost art of investigative reporting.

Take the Pat Tillman case. Remember him? He was the star NFL defensive back who, after the 9/11 attacks, walked away from his \$3.6 million contract with the Arizona Cardinals to enlist as an elite Army Ranger and go off to Afghanistan to whip some terrorist butt. No matter what your opinion on the U.S. Invasion of Afghanistan, or your theory on who was ultimately responsible for the 9/11 attacks, Tillman was clearly acting as a selfless hero, in the traditional sense of the word. The media sang only one song at the time – dirtbags in Afghanistan did this to us, and "deterrence" through violent retribution was the only discussable response. Both Tillman and his brother Kevin, like most every American, took the bait – only, unlike most supporters of Bush's wars, they actually volunteered to fight.

After signing up, however, they were shipped off, not to Afghanistan, where they believed terrorists were holed up, but to Iraq – to fight in a newly minted war that didn't exist when they signed away control of their lives. Here's where the recruiting poster

## **WHO KILLED PAT TILLMAN? / 2**

image deviated from the script. There was a lot more depth to Tillman, who was pursuing a master's degree in history, than one would normally expect of an NFL gladiator. Afghanistan was an easier sell. Tillman never bought into the official line on Iraq, at one point, according to a San Francisco Chronicle article published nearly a year and half after his death, telling fellow Rangers fighting in Iraq that the war was, "so fucking illegal." A close friend told The Chronicle, "That's who he was – he totally was against Bush." Tillman's mother clarified, explaining that her son believed the Afghanistan war was justified by the September 11 attacks, but adding, "Pat was very critical of the whole Iraq War."

He was also critical of the Bush agenda. Another friend, who served with him, recalled how Tillman admonished fellow Rangers to vote Bush out of office in the upcoming presidential election.

### **The Chomsky factor**

Tillman, we now know, was also in contact with one of his favorite authors – America's leading intellectual dissident, Noam Chomsky. According The Chronicle, Tillman had set up a meeting with Chomsky, to take place when he returned from Afghanistan, where he eventually wound up after serving his tour in Iraq.

This image of an anti-Bush, anti-Iraq war (at a time when most of the U.S. population supported the war), Chomsky-loving hero flew in the face of the official Bush administration portrait of Tillman, painted by dutiful media whores such as Ann Coulter, who once described him in near-racist terms as, "An American original – virtuous, pure and masculine, like only an American can be" (Max Blumenthal, blogging for the online Huffington Post, cited Coulter's line, asking if we could have it in the original German).

As both wars droned on, Tillman, the picture perfect recruiting poster boy, evolved into somewhat of a wild card. With a Chomsky meeting on the horizon, there existed a very real possibility that Tillman might go public with his anti-war anti-Bush stance in the weeks leading up to the 2004 presidential election, dealing a fatal blow to the very foundation of the Bush administration's propaganda pyramid. That day, however, never came. On April 22, 2004, Tillman was killed on patrol in Afghanistan by three American bullets to the head.

### **Jessica Lynch redux**

When Tillman died, the Bush administration's professional liars spun one of their tallest tales, with their cohorts in the Pentagon explaining how the hero Tillman was killed by enemy fire. George W. Bush chimed in and announced that Tillman was "an inspiration on

and off the football field, as with all who made the ultimate sacrifice in the war on terror." As they did with the Jessica Lynch story, the Pentagon spewed forth so many lies as to bury themselves under an obvious pile of bullshit. In the Tillman case, the Army issued Tillman a postmortem Silver Star for bravery, explaining in the process, how, "through the firing Tillman's voice was heard issuing fire commands to take the fight to the enemy on the dominating hill ground." And this is the story the media reported to the world. Files from three Army investigations into the killing obtained by Tillman's mother, however, document a different set of last words. According to testimony issued by a fellow Ranger who was at Tillman's side when he died, the last words he shouted before being shot in the head were, "Cease fire, friendlies, I am Pat Fucking Tillman dammit!"

Evidence surrounding the killing began to disappear. One day after his death, someone burned his body armor. Two days later, someone burned his uniform. At some point, his journal, which he wrote in religiously, went missing. With the journal, disappeared Tillman's voice.

### **Reports of fratricide**

The day after his death, according to The Chronicle, Ranger commanders received a report stating that Tillman died in a suspected act of fratricide, the crime of killing members of your own group. The more they were confronted with the truth of what happened, the harder Army officials stuck to the official lies. One week after his death, they pulled the Silver Star move, successfully milking the hero dying in action myth in a compliant media environment. Two weeks after his death, the Army's official casualty report stated that he was killed by enemy forces. Six weeks later, however, with the mythic version of Tillman's killing firmly embedded in the American conscious, and with the Tillman story safely buried in the ashbin of "old news," the Army finally told Tillman's family that the official cause of death was "fratricide."

By all accounts, Tillman was popular and loved by the troops he served with – supporting the theory that his death was in fact a tragic accident. One of the Army investigations, however, suggested leveling charges of criminal intent against the killer or killers, prompting Tillman's mother to ask, "I want to know what kind of criminal intent there was." All she is able to glean from over 2,000 pages of official reports, however, are contradictions, continuously changing stories, and countless blacked out lines.

What we have with the Tillman case is a cover-up and a fabrication. What was covered up was the embarrassing reality surrounding the futility of his death – the wasting of an iconic American hero. More importantly, what was buried was the complex story of Pat Tillman's opposition to the Iraq war and the Bush agenda. What was fabricated was a

## **WHO KILLED PAT TILLMAN? / 4**

fairy tale story of a heroic battle that would support the Bush administrations global war effort while not undermining its military recruiting. Murdered in this fabrication and cover-up was Pat Tillman's voice. According to Tillman's father, "The administration clearly was using this case for its own political reasons. This cover-up started within minutes of Pat's death, and it started at high levels."

Only now, as a Tsunami of public opinion is forcing the media to report critically about the Bush administration, will we possibly see a real investigation into how Pat Tillman died. And if we are persistent enough, we might even see a proper investigation into why Pat Tillman, and thousands of other Americans, and tens of thousands of Iraqis and Afghans, died.