

FrontPage Magazine's Man of the Year: Col. Allen B. West

By Ben Johnson

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This year offered any number of exemplary choices for FrontPage Magazine's Man of the Year award. President George W. Bush, with the assistance of Tony Blair, courageously led the world to eliminate a terrorist regime, commanded a lightning-quick military victory and ended the year by taking Saddam Hussein into custody. General Tommy Franks orchestrated the most successful campaign in modern warfare while avoiding civilian "collateral damage," even at the expense of Allied military advantage. Arnold Schwarzenegger shocked the world by toppling a failed political hack and setting the nation's largest state on the road to fiscal responsibility once again. Representative Jack Kingston took the initiative to introduce the Academic Bill of Rights in the House of Representatives, and conservative politicians, writers and thinkers across the nation have produced vital books, columns and position papers to advance the cause of liberty. We salute them all.

However, FrontPage Magazine's Man of the Year has shown true courage, compassion and heroism in the face of battle – and unlike the worthies named above, he has suffered for his good deeds rather than received commendation. He has been on the frontlines of the War on Terror in the heart of the Iraqi resistance. He undertook extraordinary measures to safeguard the lives of his men, to protect Americans under attack by bloodthirsty Islamist gangleaders. Yet instead of reward he has been tested by fire, having been dishonored by the very military he served so effectively for the last 20 years of his life. This irresponsible punishing of someone who should be awarded for his bravery and patriotism endangers the American people. For that reason, we seek to honor Col. Allen B. West.

Colonel West earned the disdain of leftist intellectuals and the rebuke of the United States armed forces for protecting the lives of his troops. West commanded the 4th Infantry Division, 2nd Battalion, 20th Field Artillery Regiment, near Tikrit. In the days following the toppling of Saddam's regime and preceding the dictator's capture in a filthy desert hole, West was responsible for the lives and safety of 700 men and women who had spent a cautious summer sweltering in the crosshairs of Sunni Triangle terrorists.

The 42-year-old was no stranger to the battlefield, having received the Bronze Star and having been decorated for valor. He knew only too well of the terrorist attacks carried out by Saddam loyalists and recently arrived *jihadist* fanatics, claiming an average of one U.S. soldier's life each day. With a firm commitment to protect his soldiers' well-being, he determined to keep his troops safe.

In late August, Colonel West received news that his men had been targeted by a group of thugs associated with an Iraqi policeman named Yahya Jhodri Hamoodi. Allied forces quickly apprehended Hamoodi in Saba al Boor, a tiny town near Tikrit. Four interrogation specialists worked late into the evening of August 20, desperately trying to pry the attack plans out of him. Growing frustrated, the interrogators resorted to physical

force, punching Hamoodi – without success. (Hamoodi was not seriously injured at any point during the interrogation.) It was then that Col. Allen West intervened.

Seeing that even physical violence had proven ineffective, Colonel West took the next logical step: He took the intransigent suspect outside, shoved Hamoodi's head into a sandbox and threatened to kill him. The Colonel then pulled out his sidearm and fired a warning shot into the sky. Then West carefully held Hamoodi's head aside as he fired a shot over Hamoodi's shoulder, into the warm Iraqi sand burying his visage.

That near-scrape with death did the trick. Hamoodi began singing, telling West the identities of two men planning the attacks and revealing their attack plans, including the site of the intended ambush. The two men were arrested, and Colonel West ordered his men away from the site as they continued to serve the liberated Iraqi people. Upon turning Hamoodi over, he admitted his unorthodox tactics. For protecting the 700 soldiers in his care and cracking Hamoodi where professional interrogators had failed, Colonel West was immediately stripped of his command and threatened with jail time.

In October, the armed forces offered Colonel West an ultimatum: resign the military and lose his pension and benefits, or face trial for violating standard interrogation procedure. If convicted, West could have received up to eight years in jail – for saving his men's lives. On the other hand, West, who had just qualified to retire with 20 years service, needed his benefits to care for his wife, Angela, a cancer victim.

West chose to make his case to his military colleagues. Publicly choking back tears, West acknowledged his actions in interrogating Hamoodi; he merely denied that what he had done was criminal, knowing his troops had been targeted for extermination in the midst of a war. His great heart showed during his trial, as he said, "If it's about the lives of my men and their safety, I'd go through Hell with a gasoline can . . . There is not a person in this room I would not sacrifice my life for."

On December 11, West escaped court martial. Major General Raymond Odierno ordered West to pay a \$5,000 fine and allowed him to retire as a *Lieutenant Colonel*. The ordeal caused by his desire to save his troops a violent death in a desert land had finally ended. He was free to return to Ft. Hood, Texas, to his wife Angela, with his reputation essentially cleared.

However, the disgraceful treatment of Colonel Allen B. West by the U.S. Armed Forces is practically unforgivable. In the midst of war, West did what was necessary to keep the troops committed to his charge from becoming the latest headline detailing the Fedayeen's postwar sabotage. His interrogation was not nearly as vicious as the tactics of Saddam's men in 1991, their **savaging of POWs** and **raping of female captives**. This level of dedication, this commitment to *preserving* life, this steadfast commitment to bear any burden to keep his troops safe, shows why West had been so highly decorated in his two decades in the service. For his actions, he should have received high honors; instead, he was deprived of his job, publicly humiliated and disowned by his own superiors.

Col. West is the model leader, precisely the kind of man any soldier would want watching his back in combat. His subordinates, and his fellow countrymen, were denied his valiant service in a misguided effort to curry favor with the international Left. Euro-socialists decried his actions, and an Administration then frantic to bring foreign troops into the fray sacrificed Col. West to show the “international community” that not all Americans are “cowboys.” It didn’t work; the anti-American Left refuses to as much as forgive the massive debts Saddam ran up building his multiple palaces, let alone put any troops into harm’s way.

The trial of Col. Allen B. West sent a message to another, unintended party: Iraqi insurgents. It told Iraqis they need not fear for their lives if captured, that the brutal Ba’athists would do them greater physical harm than the Allied forces, if they squeal. This has resulted in a series of uncooperative interviewees. Colonel West’s attorney, Neal Puckett, revealed the costs of the military’s persecution of his client. “All of the intelligence witnesses regularly expressed the fact that detainees bragged they know they don’t have to talk because we can’t do anything to them,” **Puckett said in a recent interview**. Word has apparently percolated all the way to the top: Saddam Hussein is reportedly slapping down interrogators’ questions with one sarcastic jab after another. One senior official has said Saddam is behaving like a “wiseass.” Perhaps he knows that should anyone get serious about questioning him – about the terrorist insurgents, the location of his WMDs, his long history of rape and torture – the interrogator will be more likely to face consequences than the Madman from Tikrit. While the United States is launching an all-out assault on terrorism, the last thing it needs is to cultivate an image as a paper tiger, a castrated neo-European power following Ambassador Joseph Wilson’s interrogation methods.

The West case also demonstrates the major fissure between how the Left would conduct foreign policy vs. how anyone of a sensible persuasion would run our affairs. The Left, ever exalting procedure over substance, would send Col. West down the river for his “misdeeds.” Average Americans would reward West for his valor and determination; the Left would scapegoat him in an effort to curry favor with Jacques Chirac and Kofi Annan. The fact that the leading Democratic presidential candidates espouse this irresponsible policy of national emasculation is the primary reason none of them should be entrusted with a position of leadership during such a vital time.

And the Left has not been alone in its denunciation of Col. West. Former Representative Bob Barr of Georgia has publicly declared West is not “heroic.” “I do not believe we ought to, as a nation, take the step for the very first time of condoning these sorts of interrogation techniques,” he sniffed. This, along with his opposition to the Patriot Act and increasing coziness with the Left on Homeland Security issues, is a most alarming trend in the Congressman’s previously praiseworthy conduct.

FrontPage Magazine is thankful to other Congressmen who have not been poisoned by the Left’s negativism. We are grateful to Representatives Duncan Hunter, R-CA, and John McHugh, R-NY; as well as Senators Jim Inhofe, R-OK, and John Warner, R-VA, for their actions on Colonel West’s behalf.

We are also thankful to those who have contributed to Colonel West's legal defense fund. Those who have not yet contributed may do so by sending a donation to:

Allen West Defense Fund

c/o Angela West
6823 Coleman Drive
Ft. Hood, TX 76544.

Colonel Allen B. West was unjustly tried and, however slightly, *punished* for the "crime" of valuing his own troops' lives over the mental well being and self-esteem of an Iraqi terrorist. FrontPage Magazine wishes all our troops in Iraq had commanders as dedicated and long-suffering as the Colonel. The Psalmist wrote, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all." May the Lord continue to deliver Colonel West from all danger in his new life in the civilian sector, just as Colonel West, when he had the opportunity in Iraq, delivered his troops out of danger.