

Act to Protect The Voiceless and Those Most Vulnerable to Violent Intimidation

by Kathy Kelly

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CommonDreams.org and *Voices in the Wilderness*

Hogtied and Abused at Fort Benning

by Kathy Kelly

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<http://www.commondreams.org/views03/1127-01.htm>

On Sunday, November 23, I took part in a nonviolent civil disobedience action at Fort Benning, GA, to protest the U.S. Army's School of the Americas (SOA, now called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation -- WHISC)

Shortly after more than two dozen of us entered Fort Benning and were arrested, US Military Police took us to a warehouse on the base for "processing." I was directed to a station for an initial search, where a woman soldier began shouting at me to look straight ahead and spread my legs. I turned to ask her why she was shouting at me and was ordered to keep my mouth shut, look straight ahead, and spread my legs wider. She then began an aggressive body search. When ordered to raise one leg a second time, I temporarily lost my balance while still being roughly searched and, in my view, 'womanhandled.' I decided that I shouldn't go along with this dehumanizing action any longer.

When I lowered my arms and said, quietly, "I'm sorry, but I can't any longer cooperate with this," I was instantly pushed to the floor. Five soldiers squatted around me, one of them referring to me with an expletive (this f_ _ _ er) and began to cuff my wrists and ankles and then bind my wrists and ankles together. Then one soldier leaned on me, with his or her knee in my back. Unable to get a full breath, I gasped and moaned, "I can't breathe." I repeated this many times and then began begging for help.

When I said, "Please, I've had four lung collapses before," the pressure on my back eased. Four soldiers then carried me, hogtied, to the next processing station for interrogation and propped me in a kneeling position. The soldier standing to my left, who had been assigned to "escort" me, gently told me that soon the ankle and wrist cuffs, which were very tight, would be cut off. He politely let me know that he would have to move my hair, which was hanging in front of my face, so that my picture could be taken. I told him I'd appreciate that.

I was then carried to the next station. There, one of the soldiers who'd been part of pushing me to the floor knelt in front of me, and, with his nose about two inches from mine, told me that because I was combative I should know that if I didn't do exactly as instructed when they uncuffed one hand, he would pepper spray me. I asked him to describe how I'd been combative, but he didn't answer.

After the processing, I was unbound, shackled with wrist and ankle chains, and led to the section where other peaceful activists, also shackled, awaited transport to the Muskogee County jail.

At our bond hearing on Monday, Nov. 24, a military prosecutor told the federal judge that the military was considering an additional charge against me for resisting arrest. I explained my side of the story to the judge, grateful that there are at least several witnesses upon whom I could call.

The federal judge determined that most of us were "flight risks" and increased by 100% the cash bond required before we could be released, from last years \$500. to \$1000.

Today I have a black eye and the soreness that comes with severe muscle strain. Mostly, I'm burdened with a serious question, "What are these soldiers training for?" The soldiers conducting that search must have been ordered not to tolerate the slightest dissent. They were practicing intimidation tactics far beyond what would be needed to control an avowedly nonviolent group of protesters who had never, in thirteen years of previous actions, caused any disruption during the process of arrest.

Bewildered, most of us in the "tank" inside the Muskogee County jail acknowledged that during the rough processing we wondered, "What country do we live in?" We now live in a country where Homeland Security funds pay for exercises which train military and police units to control and intimidate crowds, detainees, and arrestees using threat and force.

This morning's aches and pains, along with the memory of being hogtied, give me a glimpse into the abuses we protest by coming to Fort Benning, GA. As we explore the further invention of nonviolence in our increasingly volatile time, it's important that we jointly overcome efforts to deter our determination to stand together against what Martin Luther King once called, "the violence of desperate men," -- and women.

Kathy Kelly is the founder of Voices in the Wilderness, a human rights group based in Chicago that worked to lift the economic sanctions against Iraq. For more information, contact [info\[at\]vitw\[dot\]org](mailto:info[at]vitw[dot]org), call (773) 784-8065, or visit www.iraqpeaceteam.org or www.vitw.org.

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From: Voices in the Wilderness <[info\[at\]vitw\[dot\]org](mailto:info[at]vitw[dot]org)>
Date: Wednesday, December 03, 2003 1:14 AM
Subject: Concerns for violent intimidation and a Wheels of Justice update

Dear Friends,

In a recent article, "Hogtied and Abused at Fort Benning," I described how US Military Police treated me following an arrest for peacefully entering the Fort Benning military base. I was part of a nonviolent protest, held annually for the past 13 years, calling for an end to Fort Benning's training of Latin American soldiers at an institution called WHISC (Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation).[1]

The article, posted on the School of the Americas Watch website (www.soaw.org) and on our website (www.vitw.org), tells about how US Military Police responded when I quietly refused to continue cooperating with an extremely aggressive search procedure. I was pushed to the floor, hogtied, kned while begging for relief because I couldn't breathe, hauled while still hogtied to the next "stations," and threatened with pepper spray if I didn't cooperate when they uncuffed me for fingerprinting.

Public Relations spokespeople for the WHISC claim that the school has been reformed and now teaches Latin American soldiers the same standards of respect for human rights and civil law practiced by the US military. How can they possibly teach respect for human rights or set a good example for Latin American soldiers when, for purposes of intimidation, they themselves respond to nonviolent protest with physical abuse. If this is what US Army MPs will do, with witnesses present, to someone connected to a large body of supporters, what would they do in secret to voiceless and unknown victims?

Christian Peacemaker Team members in Iraq recently recorded testimony of a teenager in Baghdad who experienced much worse punishment than what I've described:

"At 2:30am, US troops came to our house, and ordered our entire family outside. They ransacked the house searching for something, but they didn't tell us what they wanted. They broke the locks to our cabinet [a large storage chest and display case along one wall of the front room] and threw the contents onto the floor, even though our father gave them the cabinet key so they wouldn't have to do this. They took our money and a gold wedding necklace belonging to my mother. My father, cousin, older brother, and I were tied and taken away. We were not told why we were taken."

"We were taken to the soldiers' military base at a palace within this district and kept in a small dark room. We were tied at our wrists with plastic ties behind our backs the entire night. In the morning, we were put out into the sunlight, as a type of punishment. The soldiers were verbally abusive towards us. We asked for shade, but the soldiers refused. We were squatting in the sun all day. [Temperatures at the time were 110-120F]. When I was taken, I was only wearing my underwear because I was sleeping. I was embarrassed. These were my only clothes during the time I was in custody."

"The first day, our hands were still tied behind our back with the plastic ties. Because of this, we were unable to drink any water. We explained this to the soldiers, and they refused to re-tie us so we could drink. We asked if just one of us could be re-tied with his hands in front of him so that he could help the rest of us to drink. The soldiers refused. The soldiers re-tied us with the plastic ties in front of us on the next day."

"The water they gave us for drinking was also kept out in the sun with us. This way it was too hot to drink. Another day I asked a soldier for water, because I hadn't had anything to drink for the entire day in the sun. He beat me on my back and chest, while another soldier kicked me in the back. Both were verbally abusive towards me during the beating."

(recorded by CPT members Le Anne Clausen and David Milne,
http://www.cpt.org/iraq/testimonies/testimony_1.htm)

Please also visit "The Soldiers At My Front Door," (<http://www.commondreams.org/views03/1129-07.htm>) and read an account by Rev. John Dear, SJ, of US military harrassment outside his home in northeastern New Mexico. 75 soldiers from a nearby National Guard base assembled in front of his home shouting and screaming war slogans and chanting "Swing your guns from left to right, we can kill those guys all night."

For reports about abusive treatment of FTAA protesters in Miami, FL, please visit www.democracynow.org

Now, as numerous reports are circulating about abuses of police power, the unnecessary brutality toward nonviolent protesters, and training that de-humanizes members of the US military and local law enforcement agencies, we urge you to contact your local media and elected representatives to request investigations.

Letters seeking an investigation of the tactics used by US Military Police at Fort Benning can be directed to the US Senate Committee on Armed Services. Write to the Chair of the Committee, Senator John Warner of Virginia, and the ranking democrat on the committee, Senator Carl Levin of Michigan at:

US Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

You can also write to Senator John Warner and Senator Carl Levin online at:
<http://www.senate.gov/~warner/contact/contactme.htm> and <http://www.levin.senate.gov/emailform/>

We're very grateful for the numerous letters of concern which flowed in during the past week. Many people asked what we can do. Let's act, in concert, to raise our concerns on behalf of those who are voiceless and most vulnerable to violent intimidation.

Sincerely,

Kathy Kelly
Voices in the Wilderness-Chicago

1. The WHISC, formerly called the School of the Americas, is a combat training school for Latin American soldiers. Graduates have consistently used their skills to wage war against their own people. Over its 56 years, the SOA has trained over 60,000 Latin American soldiers in counterinsurgency techniques, sniper training, commando and psychological warfare, military intelligence and interrogation tactics. These graduates have consistently used their skills to wage a war against their own people. Among those targeted by SOA graduates are educators, union organizers, religious workers, student leaders, and others who work for the rights of the poor. Hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans have been tortured, raped, assassinated, "disappeared," massacred, and forced to seek political asylum by graduates of the SOA.