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***"Freedom of the Press belongs to those who own one."***

*A. J. Liebling of the New Yorker*

March 20, 2004



# Commentary

## **Please Spare Me the Outrage**

**A**t the risk of annoying friends, I will not join the chorus of outrage against the “torture and humiliation” of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison.

Certainly there have been excesses, and I am outraged with them, but the humiliation I have seen pictured and read about are no worse than I had during Plebe Year at the U.S. Naval Academy – and certainly no worse than the “humiliation” I received as a pollywog upon my first Crossing of the Equator.

To put normal “hazing” in perspective: The Crossing of the Equator was perhaps twice as harsh as the Greek Initiation I was subjected to in a college before I attended the Academy. The Academy was not so harsh as the Crossing initiation – but it lasted a year instead of a day!

Even hazing incidents in American colleges sometimes rise to the level of the great majority of “humiliations” I have read about in Iraq. College hazings, on occasion, get badly out of hand, as do even high school hazing incidents. There were sodomizing incidents in Pennsylvania high school football camp just this past year – something certainly criminal whether in a New York police station, a Pennsylvania football camp or an Iraqi prison.

But there is much being made about making prisoners dress up in female underwear. My, how horrible! Prisoners being

paraded naked. How awful! Juvenile, certainly, but hardly criminal. (I would hate to describe a “Thermocouple” that I endured at the hands of Upperclassmen at Annapolis!)

Hazing, at least the humiliation kind, is as much a part of life in the military and college as anything else. Colleges and the military try to keep it under control but understand that they can only stop the most egregious parts of it – and even at that they fail.

Remarking about the sexual activity between his sailors and native Polynesians during his historic exploration of the Pacific, British explorer Captain Cook said: “I allow (it) because I cannot prevent it.”

Precisely.

Some people seem to have a deep-seated need to haze. I don’t have that particular gene, but I have been on the receiving end of some fairly rough treatment – certainly more harsh than most of the treatment that has caused the ultrasensitive to be so atwitter.

I am all in favor of punishing those who cross over the humiliation line into abuse, but let’s try to keep some perspective as to what constitutes which. These are not high school football players or college pledges – they are brutal military and para-military men.

You want humiliation? We could send the Iraqi miscreants into the tender mercies of the Jordanians, the Saudis, the Yemeni’s, even the Egyptians. They are REALLY into “humiliation” – right up to and sometimes past the point of death...but not for many weeks. Given the choice of what I have read about the American prison, I strongly suspect that the Iraqi prisoners would happily sign a lengthy document asking for American humiliation – or even sexual “torture” rather than be given over to the tender mercies of the countries I have mentioned.

Lets keep some perspective.

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*Eppur si muove*

Galileo



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