

Fear and Loathing at Fort Hood **Op-ed by Alison Lighthall, MSN, RN, Editor**

First, let's get this straight: What happened at Fort Hood on November 5, 2009 was a *terrorist attack* and a *massacre*.

It was not "workplace violence," as it is absurdly being categorized now by the Department of Defense. Nor was it merely a "shooting," as it is listed on virtually every search engine. For this rampage to be considered merely the act of disgruntled employee is an immense betrayal to those who lost their lives to many who sustained serious injuries from multiple gunshot wounds, to their families, and to all the survivors and witnesses who continue to live with abject horror in the ensuing days, weeks, months, and years.

And Nidal Malik Hasan is not a "defendant": he is a traitor and a terrorist. Period. This guy, who was not only sworn in as a US Army Soldier and pledged that he would defend the United States against all threats, foreign and domestic, but was also sworn in as a physician who took the Hippocratic oath to "First, Do No Harm," walked into the Soldier Readiness Center with an FN Five-Seven pistol that he had purchased from a Killeen gun shop called Guns Galore three months earlier, shouted "Allahu Akbar!" ("God is great" in Arabic) and sprayed bullets at unarmed Soldiers in a fan-like motion until he took aim at specific Soldiers he targeted. When it was over, he had killed 13 and wounded an additional 32. They found 146 shell casings at the scene and another 177 in his possession.

A terrorist act is classified as a "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents."

It was a terrorist attack and a massacre.

In PTSD time, three years is a blink. The memories are still fresh. The nightmares still rear their ugly heads in those who witnessed and survived. The panic and rage are still on the surface, always just one small trigger away from being fully felt once again.

All of this would be true even if Hasan had been shot and killed on sight and there had been no waiting for him to stabilize medically and come to trial. But of course it's worse because of the waiting. And waiting. It has been more than three years since the rampage.

But the sum total of the suffering that the survivors are enduring is being made exponentially worse because of the egregious invalidation of this event as a terrorist attack. This was not the act of a pissed off employee.

You see, it's not just semantics that the Pentagon has classified this attack as being "workplace violence." By not classifying it as a terrorist attack, the survivors cannot be recognized as having been injured by the enemy in a combat zone, and therefore do not qualify for Purple Hearts. They cannot obtain continued coverage for ongoing physical therapy or psychological care. Those who were too severely injured to deploy were denied the GI Bill because they did not serve overseas. And those who did deploy (oh, did I mention that every single member of the Reserve Component assigned to the 467th and 1908th Medical Detachments (Combat Stress Control) who were physically capable of going forward on their deployment, chose to deploy to Afghanistan and Iraq respectively as originally planned, even though they were each offered the chance to not deploy?) were never recognized for their courageous choice.

Presidential Unit Citations have been denied to both of these Reserve Units and no other appropriate form of recognition commensurate with the magnitude of heroic actions have been bestowed upon them for their lifesaving, and obviously courageous acts on behalf of everyone there. Though many who engaged in these heroic deeds were presented with Meritorious Service Medals and Army Commendation Medals, and both Commanders and First Sergeants received Legions of Merit, these don't pay medical bills.

And as if that is not enough to endure, *this guy has not even been court-martialed yet. Incredibly, this terrorist is still earning a paycheck as an active duty Major in the U.S. Army.*

What's the hang-up? Well, if you've missed the news reports and don't already know the answer to that, you better sit down, because it's a doozy. He hasn't been court-martialed or brought to trial in any way because *he refuses to shave his beard, citing Islamic law. And our military laws require that someone being brought to a military court be clean-shaven. Appeal after appeal has been filed, compounding the delays.*

And get this: **he's willing to plead guilty.** Yup. He **admits** to being guilty of all that he is being charged with.....but because the prosecution is pursuing the death penalty, the shooter is not allowed to enter a guilty plea. Go figure.

Can someone explain to me how a Soldier in the US Army is being allowed to continue to wreak such unimaginable pain and suffering on so many of his fellow

Soldiers and their families? Why is the military court allowing itself to be held hostage by this terrorist? Why can there not be an allowance that says, okay, in the interest of those who have already been subjected to psychological and physical injury, and based on the lunatic notion that this is somehow a “freedom of religion” issue, we’re going to move this trial ahead and we’re not going to make this guy shave his beard?

I’m disgusted in our military judicial system and I’m outraged on behalf of those who have been in any way hurt by this event. We’re making so many unnecessary mistakes in this case—mistakes that are continuing to harm the very Soldiers who have already been severely and permanently harmed.

The Warrior Ethos dictates that we never give up, we never quit, we never leave a fallen comrade. The Fort Hood massacre should have been our chance as an Army and as a nation to exemplify the Warrior Ethos, our chance to bond together and show these wretched people, once again, that terrorism has a 100 percent failure rate. Instead, we are allowing them to win this particular battle, one misstep at a time.

We must never forget the fallen, whether they died in an Afghanistan outpost, in a dining hall in Iraq, on Iwo Jima, in Somalia, in the jungles of Vietnam, in the World Trade Center, in a Pennsylvania field, in a Pentagon office, in the deserts of Kuwait, in Pearl Harbor, or in the Fort Hood SRC. Those names, those precious souls, must never be forgotten.

CWO Michael Grant Cahill (Ret.), 62

MAJ Libardo Eduardo Caraveo, 52

SSG Justin DeCrow, 32

CPT John Gaffaney, 56

PFC Michael Pearson, 22

CPT Russell Seager, 51

PVT Francheska Velez, 21

LTC Juanita L. Warman, 58

SPC Kham See Xiong, 23

SPC Frederick Greene, 29

SPC Jason Dean Hunt, 22

SSG Amy Sue Krueger, 29
PFC Aaron Thomas Nemeika, 19