

# SABOTAGED?

## Is a Decorated Combat Vet's Career Being Sacrificed on the Altar of Political Correctness?



By Harold Hutchison

### A CAREER IS HALTED

Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Dooley was a rising star, according to his officer evaluation reports (OERs) going back to 2008. Yet instead, his career now lies in limbo. How that happened raises very disturbing questions about the state of professional military education. The threat to LTC Dooley's brilliant career began with a 19 October, 2011, letter to John Brennan, signed by dozens of Islamic groups, demanding action on six fronts. The letter was copied to other high-ranking officials, including Attorney General Eric Holder, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, FBI Director Robert Muller, and National Security Advisor Tom Donilon.

"The use of bigoted trainers and materials like those above is not only highly offensive, disparaging the faith of millions of Americans, but leads to biased policing that targets individuals and communities based on religion, not evidence of wrongdoing. Inaccurate and bigoted training materials also foster fear and suspicion of American Muslims amongst law enforcement and the general public, increasing discrimination, bullying, harassment and anti-Muslim violence," their letter claimed. Three of the groups signing that

letter had been named as unindicted co-conspirators in the Holy Land Foundation case, which resulted in convictions on 24 November, 2008.

Less than a year after that letter was sent, LTC Dooley's career would be in limbo after he was relieved from his post as an instructor at the Joint Forces Staff College, having been denounced by none other than General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It was shocking, considering how quickly his star had been rising.

### PRAISED BY SENIORS

Dooley had attended the Joint Forces Staff College as a student in 2010. Upon the completion of his studies, he became an instructor there. "Upon graduation from the course, I requested him by name to be a member of my teaching team. This is the only time I have made a by-name request for a faculty member, and it goes to Matt's credit that he swiftly became a known positive force in the classroom," Lt. Col. Colin Moening wrote in a memorandum to the Command Review Board.

However, that would soon change, as the result of an elective that LTC Dooley was teaching. The elective was called

"*Perspectives on Islam and Islamic Radicalism*," and it would run afoul of the new standards of political correctness created by the letter from the Islamic groups.

Dooley taught the course. It quickly became a course that was widely discussed. "Having heard student and faculty discussion regarding the Perspectives on Islam elective, I sat in on five of eight lessons and found the elective to be well done and thought provoking. The guest speakers were dynamic and challenging, leading to impressive student participation. The operational design presented by LTC Dooley was well thought out and obviously intended to foster discussion," LTC Moening wrote.

### A SUPERB INSTRUCTOR'S FALL FROM GRACE

These guest speakers had previously been vetted long before LTC Dooley even attended the Joint Forces Staff College, never mind when he began teaching. One guest speaker targeted in the letter from the Islamist groups was Stephen Coughlin. Richard Thompson, the President and Chief Counsel with the Thomas More Law Center, which is representing LTC Dooley, said, "Best information I have is

**Top: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey answers a question during a press briefing at the Pentagon, 10 May, 2012. During this press conference, he pre-judged course materials used by LTC Matthew Dooley for an elective course on Islam at the Joint Forces Staff College. DoD photo By Glenn Fawcett/Released**

that Coughlin was vetted at least by 2009.” Coughlin gave at least one presentation to students of LTC Dooley’s elective course. The 133-slide presentation, dated 14 March, 2011, was titled “Imposing Islamic Law – or – These Are Not the Droids You Are Looking For,” and included reproductions of web sites, including one article discussing a cleric’s call for the death of then-Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

Dooley received top evaluations from his superiors at the JFSC. “Exceptionally superb performance from a professional, innovative and enthusiastic officer. LTC Matt Dooley has rapidly integrated into the faculty at the Joint Forces Staff College and achieved significant contributions during his first teaching effort at the Joint and Combined Warfighting School. From the moment Matt joined the faculty, he worked to positively impact the course,” Captain Vincent Bowhens, USN, wrote on Dooley’s OER dated 15 May, 2011. “Matt then went on to independently research, vet, and create a flexible Libyan intervention Crisis Action Plan exercise as an addition to the existing JFSC Tunisian conflict scenario. A by-

name-request for his second class, LTC Dooley has established a reputation as a faculty enabler; an experienced professional in his skill sets, solid in his doctrinal understanding, and an asset to any Seminar teach team.”

Student evaluations were also very favorable; LTC Dooley’s averages were no lower than 4.42 among student evaluations in the year prior to his relief. Comments described him as “ultra-professional” and “very strong in all respects.”

### **WIRED.COM BUSTS THE SANCTUM OF NDU**

LTC Dooley’s superb evaluations from his superiors, though, were worthless when Wired.com’s Danger Room blog managed to breach the sanctum of the National Defense University. The elective was discussed in a 24 April, 2012, blog by Spencer Ackerman. Dempsey ordered a review of the course. Then, a 10 May, 2012, article by Ackerman and Noah Shachtman discussed a presentation by Dooley, dated July, 2011. The reporting set off alarm bells, but the reaction of high officials was in the direction of en-

forcing political correctness, not in determining how the sanctum on NDU was violated.

The National Defense University has a policy of “non-attribution” concerning the courses, according to its handbook. Paragraph 5 of its policy titled “Academic Freedom/Non-Attribution” states, “So that guests and university community members may speak candidly, the university offers its assurance that presentations will be held in strict confidence. Our policy on non-attribution provides that, without the expressed permission of the speaker, nothing will be attributed directly or indirectly in the presence of anyone who was not authorized to attend the lecture.” In other words, what was discussed at NDU was meant to stay at NDU.

This policy was clearly breached by whoever provided Dooley’s July 2011 presentation to Shachtman and Ackerman, who appear to have taken Dooley’s presentation out of context, particularly by failing to mention a disclaimer on slide 7 of the presentation that stated that “the concepts presented herein are not the Official Policy of the United States Government or the DoD.”



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The 10 May article by Shachtman and Ackerman prompted an immediate denunciation of the course by General Martin Dempsey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "To your question about the issue at the Joint Forces Staff College, as you know, I've made an inquiry into a particular course that was brought to my attention by one of the students because he was concerned that it was objectionable and it was counter to our values, you know, our appreciation for religious freedom and cultural awareness. And the young man who brought it to my attention was absolutely right. It's totally objectionable. And so we are looking at how that course was approved, what motivated the individual to adopt that – it was an elective, but what motivated that elective for being part of the curriculum. And we are looking across the institutions that provide our professional military education now to make sure there's nothing like that out there. It was just totally objectionable, against our values, and it wasn't academically sound. This wasn't about, you know, we're, you know, pushing back on liberal thought. This was just objectionable, academically irresponsible."

**DESTROYING A CAREER**

During that briefing, Dempsey also said ominously, "The individual instructor is no longer in a teaching status. He is not in a teaching status. And are you asking me am I surprised? Yeah. I'm surprised. And I was actually quite thankful that the young man who did find the course material offensive spoke up."

LTC Dooley soon found himself the recipient of a memo from Lieutenant General George J. Flynn, stating that he was being relieved. "I have made this decision because of my lack of confidence in your judgment as an instructor and based upon my review of the course material you created and provided to students in your elective seminar titled, 'Perspectives on Islam and Islamic Radicalism.'" This was despite the fact that the materials had been prepared

and used long before the letter of complaint had been sent.

One student comment written after his relief stated, "Very disappointed however in the way the Islam course controversy was handled at the JCS level – public judgments made prior to collection of the facts and completed investigation. Dooley is an outstanding officer and deserved better from leadership." A second comment echoed the view: "He is probably too smart. We all feel awful that he was removed from the class. We understand the political sensitivity of the subject, however feel that removing Matt from the classroom went too far. He is an outstanding instructor, very, interested and enthusiastic."

**FIGHTING BACK**

LTC Dooley was represented by the Thomas More Law Center. The public-interest legal group began a public-relations offensive to preserve his career. As such, while this author was able to talk with President and Chief Counsel Richard Thompson, LTC Dooley was unavailable to comment on the situation.

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Participants in the Moderate Voices of Islam Initiative prepare to go to the Jordanian Mosque at Forward Operating Base Shank, Logar Province, Afghanistan. The participants from Logar and Wardak provinces will then travel to Amman, Jordan and Mecca, Saudi Arabia. A presentation discussing Islam at the Joint Forces Staff College raised controversy over its depiction of Islam. (U.S. Army Photo by Sgt. Sean P. Casey)

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For Thompson, Dempsey's actions appear to be creating a serious threat to America's security. "In December 2005, Marine General Peter Pace, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, gave a lecture at the National Defense University. He warned his audience—if we are to defeat Muslim extremists, it is important to 'understand the nature of the enemy,'" he wrote in a statement provided. General Pace went on to reiterate a common observation about World War II. It could have been prevented, and millions of lives saved, if only Western leaders had taken more seriously what Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*, and said in his speeches. General Pace admonished, 'Read what our enemies have said.'"

"General Dempsey's public punishment of LTC Dooley for teaching a course offensive to Islam and his order to scrub all military training material offensive to Islam, effectively sabotaged our ability to know the enemy and therefore was detrimental to our national security," Thompson added. The Thomas More Law Center filed a complaint to the Mid-

dle States Commission on Higher Education on 29 January, 2013, asking that it revoke the accreditation of NDU over the treatment of LTC Dooley.

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?**

The relief of LTC Dooley remains very controversial, notably due to the involvement of General Dempsey and other high-level leaders at the Pentagon. There has been no indication of any investigation into the violation of NDU's "non-attribution" policy. Furthermore, it also seems apparent from the presentation that the concepts presented were described as not being DOD policy. E-mails were sent to Wired.com and to the DOD, requesting comments from Shachtman, Ackerman and GEN Dempsey. As of this writing, a spokesman for General Dempsey sent a lengthy statement that re-iterated the DOD's party-line version of the controversy.

"I find it disturbing that Matt's character and flawless reputation have been called into question, and that our aca-

demic freedom and non-attribution policies seem to have been disregarded in this case. If the best among us can so readily be cast aside, with disregard for the protections of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs own Academic Freedom policies at NDU, I am left with great concern for the rest of the military and civilian faculty to perform their duties without fear," LTC Moening wrote.

Entities like NDU and JFSC are necessary to ensure that higher leadership can address future threats; this controversial firing has placed its ability to train the next generation of leaders in jeopardy. NDU has had to walk a delicate balance of academic freedom and the discipline needed in the military. That is perhaps the real loss to the military, above and beyond that of the future good that LTC Matthew Dooley would do as he rose to higher levels of command in his military career. This incident clearly requires some significant Congressional oversight to repair the damage, if it is possible to do so. 

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