

## BOOK REVIEW

# "For God and Country: Faith and Patriotism under Fire"

By James Yee  
(Public Affairs, \$24.00)

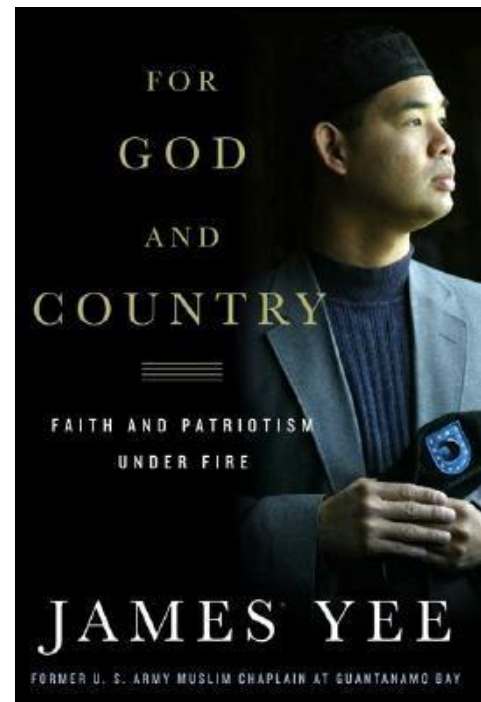
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By George Koo

Captain James Yee, Denise Woo and Dr. Wen Ho Lee have some things in common but also bear some essential differences. They are all American citizens that suffered egregious injustice at the hands of their own government. That much they have in common.

From Dr. Lee's case, we learned that the government as represented by the FBI agent in charge will lie in court in order to indict an innocent person. Denise Woo, a former FBI agent with her case still pending, stood accused of abetting an enemy agent under investigation when her real offense was to tell her superiors that they were investigating an innocent person.

From his recently published book, "For God and Country: Faith and Patriotism under Fire," Yee's personal ordeal at the hands of his government was similar but different. According to his own account, Yee grew up in the all-American tradition. He loved baseball and collected baseball cards. He went from being a casual Lutheran to being a casual Muslim before studying the religion intensively. He studied in Damascus, became fluent in Arabic and a scholar



of the Qur'an. When he returned to the U.S., he rejoined the Army to serve as a Muslim chaplain and serving with distinction. As a West Point graduate who previously served as an officer, he was given the rank of captain.

Yee's misfortune began after September 11, 2001 and the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. He was sent to the Guantanamo base on Cuba and the commanding officer there did not take kindly to even implied disapproval of the inhumane treatment of prisoners on Guantanamo. The commanding general Geoffrey Miller became suspicious of Yee, the only Muslim chaplain on the base, as he carried out his duties including ministering to the 600 some prisoners being held on the base. To Miller, Yee's ability to communicate with the prisoners and offer some words of comfort seemed conspiratorial.

Even at the end of Yee's ordeal when all charges of treason and consorting with enemy combatants were dropped, General Miller leveled last minute accusations of adultery and pornography on Captain Yee. In the end. Miller's

commanding officer. General James Hill, bowing to public opinion, dismissed all the charges against Yee. Even then Hill offered the spurious reasoning that Yee had suffered enough and not because Miller acted incorrectly. Yee never got due process and never had his day in court to clear his name. Even when he was supposedly reinstated and returned to active duty, the Army made it clear that he was tainted goods and would never get a fair shake.

The first part of Yee's book did not tell us anything new. We already know that the U.S. government called the prisoners "enemy combatants" so that the U.S. did not have to abide by the Geneva Convention, since technically they were not considered as prisoners of war. Guantanamo on Cuba selected for the holding pens was leased to the U.S. into perpetuity. Technically, it was not part of U.S. soil and therefore U.S. laws did not need to apply.

Most of us did not know that the Army built an air conditioned hospital for cosmetic effect to show visiting reporters the supposed level of humane treatment being rendered to these prisoners. The visitors did not see prisoners actually housed in furnace-like 8 foot by 6 foot open pens enclosed by wire mesh and a tin roof. We did not know that young boys as young as 12 were held as enemy combatants and regarded as threats to the security of the U.S.

Yee's narrative can be deceptively placid typical of a religious person virtually free of rancor and bitterness. He had gone through solitary confinement, chained and shackled in the manner of Wen Ho Lee. His family went through hell not knowing where he was, what he had done and what would become of him. His reputation devastated and his marriage damaged by deliberate government slanders leaked to the press from which he had no means to defend himself. Yet, the strongest condemnation he can say of his chief tormentor was: *"It is hard to imagine that General Miller did not realize I had suffered seventy-six days of solitary confinement,*

*as well as enormous harm to my reputation, for no reason."*

From the book, the reader will see that General Geoffrey Miller personifies everything that has gone wrong with the so-called "war on terror." At Guantanamo, Miller approved and/or utilized physical, mental and psychological torture in order to extract information and confessions from the prisoners. Desecration of the Qur'an, physical exposure and touching by female interrogators, provocations by guards that led to brutal quelling of prisoner riots and other techniques later applied in Iraq were first practiced at Guantanamo. In Miller's view, all Muslims are potential enemy combatants who are some lower form of life that deserve no measure of decency and respect.

Even though as chaplain Yee was not allowed to participate in the interrogation of the prisoners, he nonetheless formed the impression that most of the hapless prisoners arrested or captured in the war in Afghanistan had no idea why they were taken, were never informed of any formal charges, what they were doing in Guantanamo or when, if ever, they could hope to be released. After being in the state of indefinite limbo, most became severely depressed and some became suicidal.

There are still some 550 prisoners remaining captive at Guantanamo today and most of them have been there for over three years. This is going to be a thorny problem for the U.S. Only four prisoners have been charged with crimes. Someday, the Bush administration will have to find a face saving way to let the rest go. Who is going to vouch that these originally labeled enemy combatants upon gaining their freedom won't become real combatants and try to even the score? The same General Miller is put in charge of the prisons in Iraq. How can we be sure that he is not, through his abusive approach, graduating more future terrorists that will target America?

Captain Yee received officer evaluation report from his direct commanding officers at Guantanamo that was the best ever in his military

career. This was just two days before his arrest ordered by General Miller. Yee was not the only member of his staff that was unjustly treated.

Ahmad al-Halabi was a young American from the Air Force assigned to assist Yee. Yee considered Ahmad the "most skilled and dedicated translator" who worked at Guantanamo. He was arrested upon his return to the mainland and charged with 30 counts including espionage and terrorism. After nine months in prison, 26 charges were dismissed and he pleaded guilty to four minor offenses for time already served, reminiscent of how Dr. Lee was treated.

Ahmed Mehalba who served as a civilian linguist on Guantanamo was imprisoned for almost two years before his release. His only offense turned out to be possessing classified information. At around the same time, a white non-Muslim officer at Guantanamo charged with mishandling classified information was given an

administrative reprimand and spent no time in prison. This too mirrors the disparate treatment Dr. Lee received vs. the slap on the wrist on John Deutch, former CIA director, for taking secret information home.

The lesson is painfully clear. The very ethnic minority Americans that the U.S. needs in its armed services and intelligence agencies are going to be increasingly hesitant about entering into such service. While there are fair minded officers in most branches of service, it would take running into just one like Miller to have his or her life turned upside down. It is also clear that so long as the likes of General Miller are running the war on terror, the U.S. will be fighting a losing battle, creating more enemies even as we try to curb terrorists and insurgents.

*Reviewer George Koo is an international business consultant, a board member of Chinese American Forum and writes for Pacific News Service.*