

Leashes, Lynchings and Lynndie England

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"I saw SSG Frederick walking towards me, and he said, 'Look what these animals do when you leave them alone for two seconds.' I heard PFC England shout out, 'He's getting hard.'"
—Spec. Matthew Wisdom, testifying at the Article 32 hearing of SSG. Ivan (Chip) Frederick

Cumberland, Md., even in the descending fog, offers a snapshot of a prototypically American scene. Prototypical, that is, in a Rockwellian sense.

Click. A brickwork main street is closed to car traffic. Street lamps emit a lambent glow.

Click. Mr. and Mrs. Claus are settling into the town museum. It is a Thursday evening in December and they await the eager pleadings of small folk.

"I'm Mrs. Claus for the city," says Mrs. Claus, who wears white gloves and whose smart red North Pole attire is trimmed, cuffs and collar, in white fur. It is Pleasantville, U.S.A.

Click. Janet Bartik, who taught school for 41 years and whose husband is president of the museum, is as good a person as any to frame this place in the mind's eye. That it was the headquarters for Union forces protecting the B&O Railroad. That it was once big in tires (Kelly Springfield). There's a booze still in the back of the museum, chopped up by revenueurs during the 1794 Whisky Rebellion, and Janet greatly enjoys showing it off in its reconstituted state.

Sepia-toned photographs of the area and its historical legacy adorn the walls.

This is a story about photographs. Eight months earlier, the town was swarming with reporters and film crews, Cumberland being the closest town of any size with a hotel to Fort Ashby, W. Va., home, as if anyone could possibly forget, to Lynndie England, reservist. The girl with the leash. The trailer-park torturer.

"A hop, skip and a jump and you're in West Virginia," says Mrs. Claus. Geographically close. But West Virginians, viewed from this Christmas card scene, are light years removed. "Culturally different," says Mrs. Claus. They are more "rural oriented." It is, she says, cheerily, a "territorial thing."

The scenery heading south out of Cumberland, toward Cresaptown on McMullen Highway, records a very different snapshot, gradually mutating from the historical preservation of stately homes to new housing developments, to a progressively grimmer landscape.

Click. The Celanese plant, once a major employer, has closed. And Kelly Springfield has long since been taken over by Goodyear and subsequently moved to Akron, Ohio. In their place, the corrections business appears to be going gangbusters.

Observe the Western Correctional Institution, a vast medium-security facility, which sits cheek by jowl alongside the North Branch Correctional Institution, which abuts the Allegany County Detention Center. A maximum-security penitentiary is being constructed, and residents fear the new facility will take over execution duties from the so-called Supermax pen in Baltimore, where prisoners spend 23 hours a day in lockdown.

"That's where the real bad boys are," says Gary the taxi driver, a former prison guard. Supermax has been an inefficient, costly bust. Corrections officials have said there's a 75 per cent chance that the death chamber will be moved to Allegany County.

Fences barricade the adjacent home of the 372nd Military Police. The fencing went up after the scandal broke, after the photos of a grinning Charlie Graner and a grinning Lynndie England and a grinning Sabrina Harman made their way into the mainstream, reservists from the 372nd posed and preserved for eternity with the naked, degraded pictures of pyramided detainees.

For residents here, the 372nd has been a pathway to security, paying college educations and helping to ensure pensions for the offspring of, if not Mrs. Claus, then the nice woman in the

blue sweater. Kathie Dawson's son signed up as a high school senior. One weekend a month, two weeks out of a year, a six-year obligation and all his college dues were paid.

The highway hums along the Potomac, and it is in crossing the river that visitors and locals are transported to West Virginia. Some ritzy neighbourhoods can be found in these parts. There's a new housing development called Lakewood five minutes from the England place, where the houses go for a couple hundred thousand and up.

The tiny towns on the east side of the border bear the names Ridgeley, Frankfort, Short Gap. The Hercules Powder Co. (gunpowder, nitroglycerin) is defunct, but Alliant Techsystems, manufacturer of the Sidewinder missile, is, says Mr. Claus, experiencing a boom.

Click. Here we have the prototypical four corners of a town, not Rockwellian, but the dour and spare terminus of Fort Ashby. The Evans Dairy Dip is closed for the season. The Fort Ashby Fire Department across the street is volunteer and thus sits quietly abandoned. There's a white clapboard convenience store. On the fourth corner is Evans Motor Sales. Closed.

Part of the barracks of the original fort remains — one of 69 built along the Virginia frontier in the mid-1700s. The town in the modern day is unincorporated, has no mayor, no town council. It just is.

A small sheep farm hugs the roadway, and that is the driver's signal to hang a right. If you reach the roadside saloon, you have travelled too far. Head down the dirt road, and three trailers along the court you come upon Kenneth England's doublewide manufactured home. "Manufactured home" is the new industry parlance, replacing the freighted "trailer."

This, in the England narrative, has been the defining backwater theme. Two trailer sections joined together, stuck on a solid foundation, roofed and sided, a home that today might fetch five grand serves as an emblem for the modest beginnings of Lynndie England, her older sister, Jessica, and her younger brother, Josh.

It is the trailer-park image that springs to mind when an intelligence official said to reporter Seymour Hersh of Abu Ghraib: "We've got some hillbilly kids out of control."

Knock on the door and a male voice says come in. Open the door to observe a gentleman sitting on his living room couch. He turns to see who has entered his home. He is bearded, his hair is longish and greying. He rises and as he does so he says, "You're talking to Mr. England. Yes, you are."

In the seconds it takes for Ken England to make it clear that he does not want to talk about his daughter, there is little time to record mental snapshots. Of his hunting boots sitting behind the couch. Of the photo of a determinedly unsmiling Lynndie on the wall in her reservist's uniform. Of the fact that the entire visual vista of the living, dining and kitchen areas can be taken in without moving an inch. The television is on.

Ken England approaches. He is a man with soft, friendly eyes. To the right of the door, a Christmas tree sports a God Bless America decoration. "That tree's been up there since she's been gone," he says. It has been over a year since Lynndie, now 22, came home for the holidays, before she shipped out to Baghdad.

Her mother, Terrie, is with her now at Fort Bragg, N.C., helping to care for the baby Lynndie had with Charlie Graner.

The baby was born in October. *Dog Leash Soldier Gives Birth* was one newspaper headline. *Torturer's Baby* was another. And *It's a Boy for Lynndie the Leasher*.

Ken England will make a nod to the weather: "It's bad out there." And offer a comment about his home: "It's comfortable, that's about it." But he will not consent to an interview about his daughter. "I don't like talking about it."

Back in Cumberland, Stanley Cook from Moorefield, W. Va., approaches the courthouse steps. He has left his pickup truck idling. He is dressed in a camouflage jacket and a ConAgra hunting cap.

So, what does he think of Lynndie England?

"I think it's just like the Vietnam War when Calley got hung for what he did ... He was ordered to do it, but then when he came into the tribunals and all the generals denied it, he got hung for it."

Picture that.

In David Remnick's introduction to Seymour Hersh's *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib*, he recalls a gruesome detail that particularly resonates in light of Abu Ghraib. The year was 1968 and Col. George S. Patton — as Remnick says, "son of *the Patton*" — sent out a Christmas card featuring photographs of "dismembered Viet Cong soldiers stacked in a neat pile." The card bore the greeting "Peace on Earth."

The macabre photo as memento is only most recently marked by the scandal at Abu Ghraib, both by reservists from the 372nd and the more recently released images of prisoner abuse at the hands of British forces at their camp near Basra.

In one of the latter photos, a British soldier appears to "surf" in flip-flops and underwear atop a bound prisoner. What is notable, too, in this photograph is the third figure in the frame, standing to the rear of the scene, dressed in desert camouflage, holding a camera to his eye. The soldier is thus photographed taking a photograph of the moment.

Gary the taxi driver thinks it's about the dumbest thing he's heard, recording one's crimes and misdemeanors. He likens it to that television show, *World's Dumbest Criminals*, "the stuff you watch at 4 or 5 in the morning just to keep the transmitter warmed up."

And yet, history tells us we would have been more surprised had there been no photos, and had they not been highly sexualized in nature. What distinguishes this photographic archive — a series of images Maj.-Gen. Antonio Taguba called in his investigative report "sadistic, blatant and wanton criminal abuses" — is the active participation of women. Sabrina Harman, cheerily grinning over the dead body of a plastic-shrouded Iraqi detainee in one photo; cheerily grinning behind a pyramid of naked bodies in another.

And, more so, Lynndie England. With a cigarette tipped from her lips, England gives the ubiquitous (and masculine) thumbs-up sign as she points to the genitals of a hooded detainee. She poses in a love shot with Graner, each with their arms around the other as they stand behind the naked pyramid.

Click. A sullen Lynndie stares down at a naked prisoner, who is writhing on the floor. She is dressed in a T-shirt, fatigues and combat boots. She holds in her bare hand a tether, which extends down to the naked man, where it is wrapped around his neck. In this photograph, England's mien is of the dominatrix. The photo is atypical of the group, in that the torturer, England, is expressionless and unanimated.

This has become the iconic image.

In May, England gave a sworn statement to investigators. The photo with the leash, she recalled, was one of the first taken. Sometimes, she was the photographer.

One of the Abu Ghraib detainees, Nori Al-Yasseri, had previously given a sworn statement to investigators. "They started to take photographs as if it was a porn movie," he said.

Another, Haider Sabbar Abed al-Abbadi, told *Time* magazine he was told to masturbate but was too scared. As he pretended to follow this order, a female soldier bared her breasts. That soldier, according to *Time*, was Lynndie England.

Further revelations included allegations of sexual fondling of prisoners by female soldiers and the sworn statement of one detainee, Kasim Mehaddi Hilas, that an unnamed woman soldier had photographed the alleged rape of a teenaged boy by a civilian translator. Yet another detainee, Mustafa Jassim Mustafa, told investigators he witnessed Graner sodomizing a detainee with a phosphoric light. "There was also a white female soldier, short. She was taking pictures."

The photographer as voyeur.

Even without benefit of a photographic image, it is too easy to recall the picture of a lynching 100 years ago, a body swaying from a tree limb. What is not so readily recalled of that horror are images of white folk smiling for the camera. Lynching as social encounter.

Picnic baskets were packed. Children were included in the outing. Photographs were taken.

Five years ago, photographs of lynchings gathered by James Allen, an antiques dealer in Georgia, were published in a book entitled *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*. A number of essays accompanied the gruesome images. In one, "Hellhounds," Leon Litwack includes an on-the-ground account of the lynching of Thomas Brooks in Tennessee in 1915.

"Hundreds of Kodaks clicked all morning at the scene of the lynching ... Picture card photographers installed a portable printing plant at the bridge and reaped a harvest in selling postcards showing a photograph of the lynched Negro. Women and children were there by the score."

The atmosphere was "carnival-like," the participants "exuberant." The executioners wore no masks nor made any attempt to conceal their identity.

The sexualized fervour of the proceedings extended to genital mutilation.

"I see Abu Ghraib as a re-enactment of lynching and the history of the KKK," says Duke University literature professor Susan Willis, who recently gave a speech in Toronto on the Abu Ghraib photographs.

"But instead of the besieged white woman fearing the lust-driven blacks, she becomes the dominatrix. Were these women performing for the benefit of the white male soldiers? Were they, let's say, teasing their white male cohorts? Or were white male soldiers pleasuring themselves watching white women conduct themselves in aberrant ways? The whole thing is ricocheted. Who's looking at who and who's pleasuring who and who's dominating who?"

"What the photo does," says Sherene Razack, professor of sociology and equity studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, "is it keeps the moment of control living ... That's so important because that's what you need, to achieve the sense of self that comes with that control."

Razack is the author of *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping and the New Imperialism*. The photographic image, the moment, mentally stored from the Canadian peacekeeping mission in Somalia is that of a bloodied and beaten Shidane Arone. Click. Eighty men watched the torture of the 16-year-old Somali.

"In the Somalia affair," Razack says, "we made all this big to-do about these soldiers, white working class and of colour. Those guys got really marked. We didn't mark at all the leaders who gave these orders, who let this happen, who thought it was fine."

In the immediate aftermath of the release of the photographs at Abu Ghraib, the theories as to the "why" were many.

Says Razack: "The most popular argument at Abu Ghraib, which practically everyone used, was that anybody under the right conditions can do this. If you or I were forced to guard these people in these terrible overcrowded conditions, you and I could do this, too. What it actually does is exonerate people. You don't have to bear any specific responsibility because it's only human nature.

"Rather, we should ask why this kind of violence is happening ... And my answer to that is that these are colonial encounters. These are encounters between people who imagine themselves to be racially superior and that this is a colonial project ... What I specifically want to think about is the way in which these acts express a collective will, like lynching did."

Razack notes the public nature of the Abu Ghraib crimes. There was no attempt at secrecy as the photos bounced around members of the unit.

What has changed is merely the differentiation of gender roles. While men did the actual lynching — a man's job — the women formed the crowds. "There has never been any pretence that white women were in any way less cruel," says Razack.

The role assumed by England seemed superficially startling because of the predictable contrast with that other young woman soldier, Jessica Lynch.

"The Ur-moment for the Lynndie England incident is at the inception of the war," says Duke's Susan Willis. "The story that came into the press was on the order of melodrama, featuring the plight of a young white captive ... the allegory of white womanhood — abducted, abused, raped, rescued ... The fact that Iraqi doctors saved her life was not part of this melodramatic moment."

This allegory of white womanhood becomes, Willis says, "twisted in a perverse way at Abu Ghraib."

We should not, says Razack, be surprised by the sexualized role. "Whenever you're theorizing violence in white supremacy, you've got to theorize desire.

"You've got to theorize the relationship between the bodies because the violence is so sexualized."

This sexualization of roles pushes past any notion that the abuses at the prison were culturally specific, as in forcing prisoners to wear women's underwear on their heads. Lynndie England told investigators this was nothing more than a humiliation tactic. "In other instances," she said, "underwear wasn't used, we used maxi pads."

Click.

"The cultural line only works because you are able to think of Iraqis as somehow different from you," argues Razack.

"My fear is that you think of them as a different human order, a different moral order, and the culture thing is just a little veneer to get past that."

In a Stanford University study in the 1970s, a group of mock prisoners was made to wear loose-fitting muslin smocks. "The ill-fitting uniforms made the prisoners feel awkward in their movements; since these 'dresses' were worn without undergarments, the uniforms forced them to assume unfamiliar postures, more like those of a woman than a man — another part of the emasculating process of becoming a prisoner."

The photographic archive of Lynndie England, at least the archive that has been made available to the public, is incomplete.

After a closed-door congressional meeting last May, an unnamed U.S. lawmaker was quoted saying England had been photographed "having sex with numerous partners." And there were reports of female soldiers engaged in sex acts in front of male prisoners.

The most recent photographs of England to have appeared in the media were taken at her hearing at Fort Bragg, N.C., in August, when she was very pregnant and dressed in maternity camouflage and beret. This is not the final image. Sabrina Harman is due to stand trial at Fort Hood, Texas, next month.

Next up, and last on the list of reservists charged for the abuses at Abu Ghraib, will be England herself.

In an interview, her lawyer, Rick Hernandez, describes a young woman who previously worked at a chicken-processing plant.

"This isn't a kid who thought of these things and thought to do these things on her own," he says. "She never had a history of any type of behaviour like this. She is easily influenced and she does follow."

He is vague as to whether England has shown remorse:

"While she has shown remorse for some of the things that have gone on, you have to understand that they had to do a job and they believed they were doing a job."

After the release of *Without Sanctuary*, James Allen spoke with reporters about the impact of the gruesome lynching pictures.

"After you get through the shock," he said, "what lingers are the images of the perpetrators and not of the corpses, and that's where the focus needs to be."

Click.