

# OPINION

THE BATTALION

Page 5 • Tuesday, July 15, 2003

## SAVING PRIVATE LYNCH

### Rescue of Jessica Lynch was not staged, despite BBC documentary's assertions

The spirit of the Salem witch trials is alive and well in 21st century America. But instead of striking down a handful of disliked and suspicious villagers, malicious journalists are needlessly seeking to put a petite, young blonde on the stake of their own cynical world view.



MIKE WALTERS

On April 1, a joint operation of elite soldiers stormed an Iraqi hospital and rescued Pvt. Jessica Lynch, the first prisoner of war rescued since World War II and the first woman war captive ever rescued in U.S. military history. Held by Iraqi forces for nine days and suffering multiple injuries, she was quickly hailed as an American hero.

Recently, however, many journalists have sought to discredit that title. They call into question what The Washington Post initially reported about Lynch being a teenager shipped off into the desert who, upon having her unit ambushed, "fought fiercely, was stabbed and shot multiple times, and killed several of her assailants" before being captured.

After that, the American people watched the news intently as their fragile hero returned home to begin her recovery. Sadly, not everyone was happy to rejoice in hearing about the bravery and courage a fellow citizen exhibited while serving her country. Instead, certain journalists embarked on a witch hunt to discredit Lynch as an American hero.

There's a saying in the journalism business: "If the story seems too good to be true, get more sources." This skepticism is a symptom of a pessimistic view of life where there could be no true heroes because the person uttering such a phrase isn't one and doesn't associate with any. Employees of The Washington Post later followed such bleak advice and interviewed Iraqi medical and civilian eyewitnesses of Lynch's capture, captivity and rescue.

The "revised" story now suggests Lynch suffered her injuries due to a vehicle accident, her weapon jammed before she could kill any enemy soldiers and she was not mistreated by them. What exactly qualifies these scornful eyewitnesses as more reliable sources? When one man claims that the enemy soldiers struck Jessica in the face, another is quoted as saying it "never happened" and is only "Hollywood crap you'd tell the Americans." The Washington Post would now have people believe the "new" version of what happened is more believable because it's more negative.

To those who believe in the existence of the exceptional nature of humanity, such pessimism is disgusting, but is nothing compared to the recent allegations of a BBC documentary. They claim the rescue was staged to raise public opinion about a sluggishly advancing war; that the soldiers stormed a hospital they knew contained no enemy soldiers and carried guns filled with blanks, jumping and shouting in front of a film crew for dramatic effect. They even suggest that the Iraqis offered to hand over Lynch via ambulance days earlier but the Americans turned it away so that they could proceed with their "fictional assault."

Pentagon spokesman Marine Lt. Col. Dave Lapan called the BBC's allegations "ludicrous and insulting," and rightly so. Such tripe belongs in a time slot wedged between documentaries about a faked moon landing and alien hostages from the 1950s kept in the American desert.

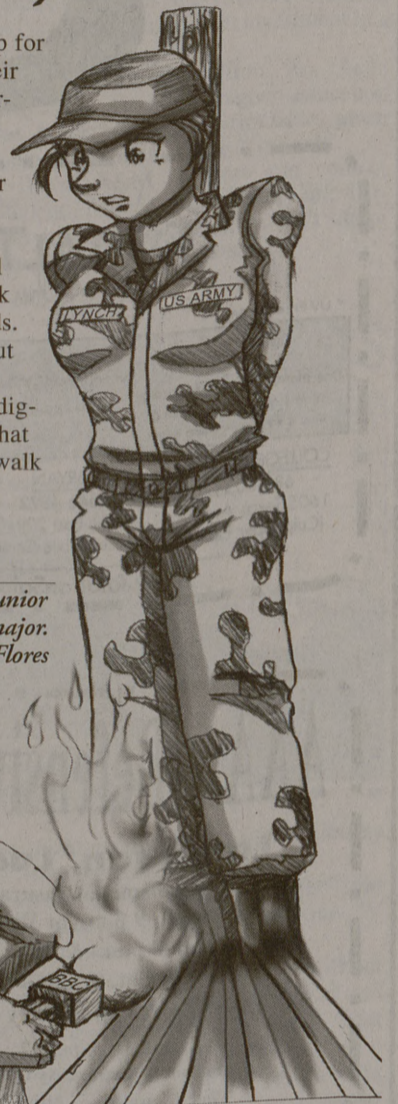
"The thing that is most insulting is the suggestion that we would put U.S. service members at risk to stage such an event. This was a real rescue under a combat situation," Lapan told Reuters.

For those who hold a more positive outlook on human nature, the details of Lynch's story are not important — it's what she represents. We live in a

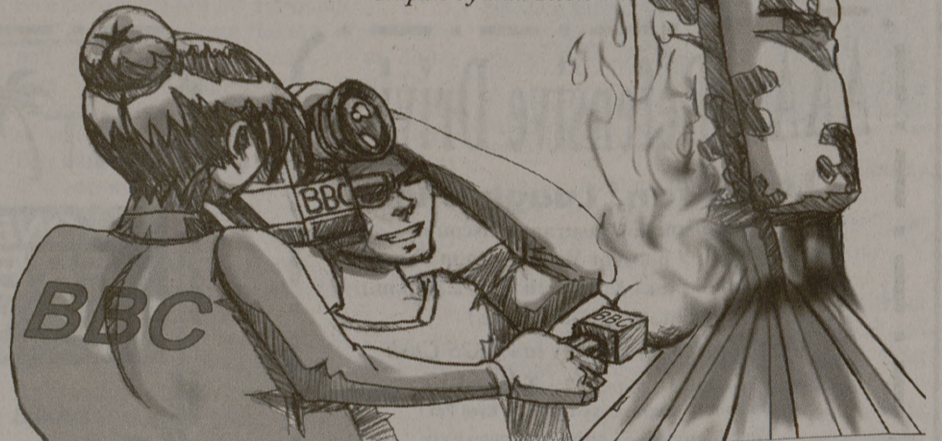
country full of heroes who are willing to stand up for what they believe in, even if it means leaving their lives back home to fight a war against evil on foreign soil. Jessica Lynch — Miss Congeniality at her county fair and the smallest member of her high school basketball team — chose to leave her peaceful life to fight an evil dictator halfway across the world.

Now she undergoes a daily routine of physical therapy, spending hours each day learning to walk again while she heals physical and mental wounds.

Heroism is found not just on the battlefield, but in the choices an individual freely makes to fight adversity against heavy odds. No amount of dirt digging by a few surly journalists will ever change that fact that the 20-year-old war veteran learning to walk again embodies the honor and courage that is the American hero.



Mike Walters is a junior psychology major. Graphic by Ivan Flores



## Rebuilding America's ties with Mexico

### Congressional elections show Mexican citizens' support for Fox is waning

Last week, Mexico experienced an event it had not seen in more than 70 years. The country held midterm congressional elections that signaled change, marking the first time the president's ruling party has not controlled the majority of seats in Mexico's Congress.

The elections held high hopes for Mexican President Vicente Fox's National Action Party and for leftist parties, both hoping to increase their representation at the expense of the PRI, the former ruling party of Mexico. But the PRI actually increased its holdings by 15 seats, and although the leftist parties made gains, Fox's PAN suffered a defeat, losing 50 seats. This erosion of support for Fox's somewhat U.S.-friendly party should alarm the State Department and the Bush administration about Fox's political future in 2006. In a time of rising instability and more left-leaning regimes across Latin America, America cannot afford to lose another ally in the region. The United States must work to repair its fragile relationship with Mexico before it faces a government significantly less sympathetic to U.S. needs than Fox's.

The election results clearly signal dissatisfaction with Fox's presidency. Fox was quoted in The Houston Chronicle before the election



DAVID SHOEMAKER

as saying that Mexico was now a "better and different country," and that he would continue "fulfilling the mandate for change" he was given in the 2000 election. But the results of the most

recent election seem to reflect a revocation of that mandate.

In his tenure, Fox has made many efforts to reform Mexico's internal administration, but they've been met with limited success. His agenda will now suffer, because his party cannot control Congress, further hampering his initiatives. On the foreign policy front, Fox started well but slipped. Before Sept. 11, he was negotiating with Bush for an immigration solution. But following the Bush administration's foreign policy changes, borders tightened and issues related to Mexico languished.

Considering disputes with the United States over water along the Rio Grande and the war in Iraq, relations with Mexico seem to have hit a low point. Add Mexico's stalled economy, and it looks like Fox has few concrete successes to point to. A Chronicle political analyst even said that "the ineptitude of the Fox

Government ... has led to the desperation and disappointment of today." But, some of Fox's perceived ineptitude stems from being ignored by the United States on important issues. The Bush administration, even though currently busy with crises elsewhere, shouldn't ignore problems brewing in Mexico.

The administration must work to repair Mexican relations through compromise. One area where the Bush administration agrees with Fox is Cuba.

Traditionally, Mexico — under the PRI — had been close with Cuba and had not supported U.S. policy regarding the country. But shortly after his election, Fox cooled Cuban ties pleasing America. Although Cuba is not currently a hot-but-ton issue, working with Fox's government in dealing with Cuba will strengthen relations.

Another area where Bush and Fox could reap political gains is immigration, particularly illegal immigration. The Bush administration should jump-start dialogue in this area by offering a plan, if for no other reason than to get meaningful talks underway again. This would help both leaders' appearances domestically, because even if they do not reach a solu-

tion, they will at least appear to be working for their constituents' needs. Other issues such as water rights on the Rio Grande and Colorado rivers are pressing, but will prove more difficult to solve, making them less than ideal ways to improve Mexican relations.

The Bush team must beware of ignoring Mexico. America, in areas such as immigration and the economy, directly affects certain problems in Mexico. Unless the United States shows it is working with Fox to help solve these problems, Fox will be perceived as weak and ineffective, especially by his own people. As PRI Secretary General Elba Esther Gordillo was quoted in The Chronicle as saying, "In 2006, citizens will vote for those who make public policy responsibly."

The PRI has many savvy politicians who sense Fox's weaknesses and seek his job in 2006. The 70 years in which the PRI ruled Mexico brought about a lukewarm relationship between the United States and Mexico, and despite setbacks, Fox and his party have worked hard to change this. It is no time for the Bush administration to forget its work.

David Shoemaker is a junior management major.

### MAIL CALL

#### Students 'left out in cold' by loss of department

How can you turn a university into one of the top 10 colleges in the nation? Kill the journalism department. At least that's what Texas A&M is doing. Under the mantra of "Vision 2020," a program designed to elevate A&M into the nation's elite class of universities, I received a letter over the weekend telling me that A&M had decided to cancel my degree program.

They tell me not to worry about the worth of my degree in the future. They say that I'll be able to graduate in December with a degree in journalism as planned. They tell me that it's not the kind of degree that's important, it's only that it says "Texas A&M" across the top that matters.

Sorry. No dice. Their attempts to assuage my fears have done little to restore any faith in what I've worked so hard to achieve over the last four years. Still, A&M

insists that it remain dedicated to its journalism students.

Can someone explain to me why I feel left out in the cold? A&M, I understand that it's too late to save my department. I hope in the future you'll understand that you'll never become a top university by ostracizing those bold enough to choose the educational road less traveled.

Marcus White  
Class of 2003

#### Graduates alienated by journalism closure

Dr. Johnson, I'd like to be counted as one of the many graduates who have been instantly alienated by your seemingly reckless recommendation to close the journalism department with no immediate plans for its reincarnation.

It is absolutely incomprehensible to think that a University with such high

aspirations for itself may no longer have a mass communications program.

I am disappointed that this program, its faculty, students and graduates are not seen as something of inherent value to Texas A&M. I suppose that the next time an A&M cause falls out of public favor the value of loyal graduates in a position to influence content will be realized.

Each and every journalism graduate deserves an apology for this startling display of treason. There are other options available, and I find your chosen course of action entirely unimpressive.

A'Dell McCleskey  
Class of 2001

#### Journalism department needed to be axed

I, for one, applaud Dr. Charles Johnson's decision to ax the A&M journalism program. This is a move that has been long overdue to a department which has become an insult to aca-

demical excellence.

It has become apparent through various sources — The Battalion being a prominent one — that Aggieland's journalism program simply wasn't producing graduates capable of fulfilling a competent or competitive journalistic role. The Battalion's editor and some mail call contributors have spoken of the closure as an "insult," the only insult

I have seen with reference to this department was, and is, having to read painful and clumsy prose written by students who should know better and whom are normally within just a year or two of graduating with a degree.

Good riddance to it.

Daren Swanick  
Class of 2006

