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Lynndie Deserves an Apology

Editorial
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Before being sentenced to three years in prison and a dishonorable discharge, Lynndie England apologized to just about everyone in sight. She apologized to "coalition forces and all the families" and to the "detainees" she and others had abused at Abu Ghraib prison - England was the smirking soldier holding the leash, you might remember - and to "the families, America and all the soldiers." What she did not do is demand an apology in return. She's entitled to one.

A stronger person, maybe one with some political fiber, would have demanded an apology from her superiors - starting with the commander in chief, George W. Bush: How dare you send me into war for reasons that now seem downright specious? She might have demanded an explanation as well - not that she would have gotten one. After all, none of us really have. It was, it seems, some sort of mistake.

She might have demanded from Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld an apology for a military plan that no one, with the possible exception of Mrs. Rumsfeld, thinks called for enough troops and which was implemented before all of the troops were on the ground. How dare you, sir, send me to war so exposed?

She might have demanded an apology from the Army for sending her to work in a bad and chaotic place without proper training. Who says they're sorry about that? Not the President. Not Rumsfeld. Just salute and shut up.

She might have demanded an apology for not being told if the Geneva Convention applied to her detainees. From the President on down, the unspoken message had gone forth that the war on terror was something new under the sun. And the prisoners in Abu Ghraib were not real soldiers because the actual war was over and the enemy defeated - or so said the President. The detainees were something else, terrorists maybe, linked if only by rhetoric to Osama Bin Laden and the darkest of evil. A little fun at their expense - a pyramid of nude men and some sexual abuse - is what they had coming. If she got that message, who can blame her? Better yet, who will apologize for it?

The Washington Post on Wednesday published a letter written to Sen. John McCain by an Army captain, a West Pointer at that. In it, Capt. Ian Fishback says that for 17 months he's been searching for the Army's standards regarding the humane treatment of detainees. He cannot find them. Surely, torture is applying a hot poker to some poor guy's rear end. But is it putting a leash on a nude man? Is it mocking his genitals? Is it, in fact, any of the things Lynndie England did and which, thanks to digital photography, so offended the Muslim world?

It's impossible not to be revolted by what England did and to insist that no American should need special training in the humane treatment of fellow human beings. But she is, as she says, weak and passive and the sort of woman who is an easy mark for a man with the gift of fibbery. This was Charles Graner, her superior, boyfriend and the father of her child. As is very often the case in life and literature, the perpetrator is often also a victim. No reading of England's life story can stand any other interpretation. She is one of life's losers.

Nonetheless, she deserves her punishment. So do the others. But at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo and elsewhere, the buck stops suspiciously low in the chain of command. Somehow, no one higher up is responsible for the situation England found herself in or for what

she did. She's apparently accustomed to this sort of thing - just another example of getting stuck with the baby. Maybe someday she'll realize that a whole lot of very important people did her wrong. Who will apologize for that?