

# DISSIDENT VOICE

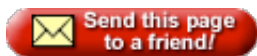
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## Military Court Martial Sentences Camilo Mejia to One Year in Prison

by Dan Bacher

[www.dissidentvoice.org](http://www.dissidentvoice.org)

June 2, 2004



A special court-martial at the Fort Stewart Army Base, Georgia, on May 19-21 sentenced Staff Sergeant Camilo Mejia, the son of Nicaraguan singer/songwriter Carlos Mejia Godoy, to the maximum of one year in prison for refusing to participate in the Bush regime's illegal war and occupation in Iraq.

He was reduced in rank to private and given a bad conduct discharge for refusing to return to Iraq. Even though he had requested conscientious objector status, he was charged and convicted of "desertion." Mejia, 28, is the first soldier to file for conscientious objector status since the Iraq war began.

"I have witnessed the suffering of a people whose country is in ruins and who are further humiliated by the raids, patrols, curfews of an occupying army," said Mejia upon being sentenced. "Going home on leave in October 2003 provided me with the opportunity to put my thoughts in order and to listen to what my conscience had to say... putting my weapon down, I chose to reassert myself as a human being."

His father, Carlos Mejia Godoy, who became known as the "poet/laureate" of the Sandinista revolution for the many revolutionary songs that he wrote and sang, immediately blasted the Army's refusal to grant his son conscientious objector status. "The U.S. uses its big stick against anybody who tries to think differently," he said from Nicaragua.

Maritza Castillo, Camilo's mother, told the press that she would appeal the U.S. military court's decision. Mejia has several well-known attorneys who are helping with his defense, including Ramsey Clark, former Attorney General, who is very critical of the United States' decision to invade Iraq. Todd Ensign, another of Mejia's lawyers, described the conviction as a "miscarriage of justice."

His Costa Rican mother says that she will receive as much help as possible from the Costa Rican government as well, according to the Nicaragua Network Hotline. The family is also receiving help and support from organizations such as "Military Families Speak Out," "Payday," "Code Pink," and other non-governmental organizations.

Born in Nicaragua and a father of a three year-old girl, Camilo Mejia, like many Latino and African-American young people, was attracted to the military's promise to give him college assistance. Like many immigrants, he was attracted to the military as a shortcut to getting US citizenship, according to Ben Martin of Payday/UK and Eric of Payday/USA, [www.refusingtokill.net](http://www.refusingtokill.net).

Mejia spent three years in the army before joining the Florida National Guard. He was deployed to the frontline in Iraq in April 2003. He soon understood what he was recruited into and was particularly upset when a young Iraqi boy was shot and died after the US army refused the boy medical treatment. He was also angered when his unit was reprimanded by officers for celebrating their escape from an ambush. His commander told them their job was "to kill the enemy, not run away."

When he returned to the U.S. on a two week leave to deal with his immigration status, he was able to reflect on the horror and abuses of the Iraqi people that he witnessed in Iraq. He decided that he could no longer participate in an illegal war based on lies and deception.

On March 15, Mejia, surrounded by his family and peace activists, surrendered to military authorities and filed for discharge as a conscientious objector.

Martin and Gjertsen have organized an international petition campaign on [www.thepetitionsite.org](http://www.thepetitionsite.org) to free Camilo Mejia from prison and grant him C.O. status. Payday is an international, multiracial network of men that works with the Global Women's Strike, whose aim is that society "Invest in Caring not Killing."

In a letter to Major General William G. Webster, Jr. Commanding General, Fort Stewart, Martin and Gjertsen said, "We are supporting soldiers like Mr. Mejia who refuse to be killers and torturers. We call particular attention to the crucial life-saving community work of military family members like Mrs Maritza

Castillo, Mr. Mejia's mother, who are campaigning to get justice for their loved ones."

"Mr. Mejia, speaking about his experiences of the military's brutal murder and humiliation of the people of Iraq, has made it clear that the widespread torture of Iraqi prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad is no exception but the epitome of the daily disasters of occupation."

They noted that in his application for discharge as a conscientious objector, Mr. Mejia provides details of the torture and abuse of detainees which he witnessed at Al Assad in May 2003.

"We urgently want to know why the Army isn't investigating the abuses he has brought to light. Instead, Mr. Mejia is the one facing court-martial. Why should he be punished for refusing to be part of a military occupation that is putting Saddam Hussein's torture chambers back in business," they said.

In refusing illegal orders, Mejia was fulfilling his duty as a soldier, obeying a principle of the Uniform Code of Military Justice 809.ART.90 (20), 892.ART.92 (1), and 892.ART.92 (2). This principle, which came out of the Nuremberg Tribunals, has been part of the official policy of the US Department of Defense since 1953.

"Indeed it is the Bush administration which has acted illegally, violating many international laws, including the Nuremberg principles which define as a crime against peace the "planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression ... in violation of international treaties, agreements, or assurances," they said.

They urged the military to immediately drop the charge of "desertion", and accept Mr Mejia's application for discharge as a conscientious objector.

It is the ultimate irony that while a conscientious objector like Mejia is jailed for following international law, George W. Bush, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney are free to prosecute illegal wars and occupations and wholesale violations of human rights, as we have seen so clearly in the current Iraqi prisoner torture and abuse scandal.

I urge everybody to sign the petition on line at: <http://www.petitiononline.com/mejia/>

I also encourage you to write letters to Camilo expressing your support towards his cause. Send letters to the Army Officials and to the Congress of the United States demanding that his conscientious objection application be accepted.

Camilo's Address:

S.Sgt. Camilo Mejia  
A Company USAG MED-HOLD  
865 Hase Road,  
Ft. Stewart, GA 31315

Commanding General, Fort Stewart's Address:

Major General William G. Webster, Jr.  
Commanding General, Fort Stewart  
42 Wayne Place,  
Ft Stewart GA 31314

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Medea Benjamin, co-founder of Code Pink and Global Exchange, in  
[an article](#) published in Common Dreams.org on May 24, also urged  
support for the Campaign to Free Camilo. For more information,  
contact Code Pink at [info@codepinkalert.org](mailto:info@codepinkalert.org).

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