

Beneath the Official Lies and Sordid Story Leading up to the War on Iraq: Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski's Sam Adams Award Acceptance Speech

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In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

Here is Karen Kwiatkowski's acceptance speech for the 2018 Sam Adams Award at a ceremony in Washington on Saturday night, preceded by the citation, that was read by former CIA analyst Ray McGovern.

Citation

Karen Kwiatkowski

Know all ye by these presents that Karen Kwiatkowski is hereby honored with the traditional Sam Adams Corner-Brightener Candlestick Holder, in symbolic recognition of her courage in shining light into dark places.

"If you see something, say something," we so often hear. Karen Kwiatkowski took that saying to heart.

She saw her Pentagon superiors acting as eager accomplices to the Cheney/Bush administration's deceit in launching a war of aggression on Iraq. And she said something — and helped Knight Ridder reporters Warren Strobel and Jonathan Landay see beneath the official lies and get the sordid story right **before** the war.

Karen's courage brings to mind the clarion call of Rabbi Abraham Heschel against the perpetrators of an earlier war — Vietnam. "Few are guilty," he said, "but all are responsible. Indifference to evil is more insidious than evil itself." Karen would not be indifferent to evil.

Ed Snowden, Sam Adams awardee in 2013, noted that we tend to ignore some degree of evil in our daily life, but, as Ed put it, "We also have a breaking point and when people find that, they act." As did Karen. As did 16 of Karen's predecessors honored with this award.

With all the gloom and doom enveloping us, we tend to wonder whether people with the conscience and courage of Ed or Karen still exist in and outside our national security establishment. Our country is in dire need of new patriots of this kind.

Meanwhile, we call to mind the courageous example not only of Karen and Ed, but also of Coleen Rowley and Elizabeth Gun, our first two awardees, who took great risks in trying to

head off the attack on Iraq. And we again honor Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange who is now isolated in what the UN has called “arbitrary detention,” for exposing the war crimes resulting from that war.

Karen Kwiatkowski has made her own unique contribution to this company of conscience and courage, and Sam Adams Associates are pleased to honor her.

Presented this 8th day of December 2018 in Washington by admirers of the example set by the late CIA analyst, Sam Adams. Know all ye by these presents that Karen Kwiatkowski is hereby honored with the traditional Sam Adams Corner-Brightener Candlestick Holder, in symbolic recognition of her courage in shining light into dark places.

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Ray McGovern



Karen Kwiatowski and Ray McGovern at Sam Adams awards ceremony. (Photo: Joe Lauria)

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'Thoughts on the Sam Adams Award': Remarks by Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatowski

I am honored beyond belief to be the 2018 recipient of the Sam Adams Award, and I thank Ray McGovern and the Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, Warren Strobel and Jonathan Landay of Knight Ridder during the run up to the second invasion of Iraq, and Rob Reiner for putting together a great movie that was so consistently truthful, that for me, it looked almost like a documentary. I want to also thank the late David Hackworth, a man I never met who published my first anonymous essays from the Pentagon, and of course, Lew Rockwell, who has published so many of my essays examining and trying to understand our government and our offensive policies over the past 15 years.

There have been many American patriots and truth tellers who have received the honor you have given me tonight – and I am going to name them here because I stand in awe of all of them:

Coleen Rowley of the FBI; Katharine Gun of British Intelligence; Sibel Edmonds of the FBI; Craig Murray, former UK ambassador to Uzbekistan; Sam Provance, former US Army Sgt; Maj. Frank Grevil of Danish Army Intelligence; Larry Wilkerson, Col., US Army (ret.), former chief of staff to Colin Powell at State; Julian Assange, of WikiLeaks; Thomas Drake, of NSA; Jesselyn Radack, formerly of Dept. of Justice and now National Security Director of Government Accountability Project; Thomas Fingar, former Deputy Director of National Intelligence and Director, National Intelligence Council, and Edward Snowden, former contractor for the National Security Agency; Chelsea Manning, US Army Private who exposed (via WikiLeaks) key information on Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as State Department activities; and to retired National Security Agency official William Binney, who challenged decisions to ignore the Fourth Amendment in the government's massive — and wasteful — collection of electronic data.

Again, I am very humbled and almost speechless tonight. But not entirely speechless.

My backstory is pretty well-known to most people here, and to anyone who was interested in understanding US war policy in the early 2000s. I had a small role to play, in concert with a number of other truth tellers in media and in the national security bureaucracy. For every one of us, there were probably 20 to 50 people working beside us and around us, who understood a lot about what was happening, and who probably got a funny feeling about being in an organization where we all swore to uphold the Constitution, but in fact were engaged in promulgating lies of both omission and commission, mistruths and misdirection, aimed not at our enemies abroad but against the American people.

We were lying, with the help of a compliant and war-supportive media, to patriots young and old. Millions of Americans were eager to enlist, to fight, to sacrifice their life and health – for a made-up government fairy tale.

A sense of unease, I believe, was shared by many, many people who never blew a whistle, and never said a word. To their credit, some of these people passively resisted within their organizations, and tried to set things straight where they could. Some of these people simply called their assignments guy and got orders out of the Pentagon, others were removed if they resisted too much. There is always a cost when you seriously question the directions or actions of the bureaucracy that employs you.

It is in our country's interest — as security professionals, as intelligence professionals, as soldiers and citizens, as writers and newsmakers — to be sensitive to the lawlessness, the immorality, and the wrongdoing of the bureaucracies and the leaders of the organizations we are a part of. That is the first thing we must cultivate and encourage — a sensitivity to and an awareness of something as simple as right and wrong. This is fundamental. From knowing right and wrong, we move to the factor that motivates so many whistleblowers, something that we all share as human beings, and that is an idea of justice.

The truth tellers who have been honored with Sam Adams Award, and thousands of others we may not be aware of around the world, share a concept of justice. For those who try to correct our U.S. government, particularly in its initiation and exercise of war, state-sanctioned murder and physical devastation of whole societies, we as Americans have tools that many others around the world don't have. We have a Constitution that many of us swore to uphold. Americans tend to have a good grounding in the fundamentals of right and wrong, derived from religion or tradition, or both. We live in something that calls itself a Republic, and it is a fine form of government, with a solid set of rules.

But how do we get from a certain moral discomfort, from seeing something going on around us that is wrong, to trying to do something about it? How do we decide if we want to leave the room, turn our backs, put our head down, or instead take some sort of action that will put us on a collision course with very powerful people? What if we, as truth tellers, are like blind men describing an elephant — we see only one part of a larger story? How do we decide that our faith in our leadership is misplaced, and that more is at stake than just our jobs?

When you look at the experiences of people who made the dangerous and difficult decision to act, like Daniel Ellsberg, and Sam Adams, and Sibel Edwards, Jesselyn Raddick, Colleen Rowley, Thomas Drake, Ed Snowden, Julian Assange, and many others, you realize that speaking up and doing the right thing had a primary impact. That impact wasn't improved transparency, a more informed democracy, a more aware and alert citizenry and better government decisions by our elected leaders.

Those were all secondary impacts, and in many cases tenuous, as the improved level of national understanding seems to last for less than a single generation. No, the primary impact was the unimaginable wrath of the state aimed at the life, livelihood, reputation, family, character and credibility of the truth teller. In several cases, this included physical and psychological abuse, prison time, gag orders, and even more devious programs. The rage of the state against these truth tellers is not impulsive and short-lived — it is a forever project funded by tax dollars, and fueled by very profitable agendas.

Knowing all of this, can we really expect to see a healthy and growing flow of truth tellers, whistleblowers, and simply bold honest people speaking out about government lies?

I think we can, and I am optimistic about the possibilities of better government through honest, bold, and forthright people working in and around this government.

To start with, as I mentioned, we as government employees and uniformed service-members need to have a solid sense of right and wrong. We need to cultivate a sense of justice. In a wonderful way, our younger generations are well prepared for this, at least in terms of cultivating a sense of justice. The young people we see portrayed, often disparagingly, as young socialists may not completely understand the nature of government

or the state, but they do cherish ideas of justice.

Image on the right: The conquering of Iraq on a bed of lies. (U.S. Marines)



We also need people in government service who are sensitive to what is going on in their organizations, and how people are feeling and behaving around them. It is not coincidence that many of the people who have been honored by this award are women, who may be paying closer attention to the mood and morality of their organizations. There's a country song that has a line in it about "Old men talking about the weather, and old women talking about old men." We need both in our organizations, to be in tune with what is happening, and who is leading us.

We need people in government service who are willing to walk away from a job, and to say or even broadcast why they are leaving, without worrying about the next job, without worrying about being blacklisted, without worrying that they can't make their next house payment or college tuition payment, or the alimony or child support payment. We need people in government who travel light, so to speak, and do their job because they love what they are doing and what it stands for.

This grounding and lack of rigid self-identification with their employing bureaucracy is extremely important. Thanks to technology and societal evolution, the younger generations of Americans are very likely to walk away from a job that they believe to be immoral, to act to correct what they see as wrong or unjust, and incidentally, are less likely to own a home, and more likely to define themselves by what they believe and stand for, not where they work, and how many promotions they had planned for themselves in that organization.

But even with our younger generations coming into government service - with a good sense of justice, a strong sense of self, and a willingness to speak openly about what they believe and know - there is risk when someone questions the collective government story.

There is risk in the act of challenging authority and one's peer group, risk of being wrong and suffering loss of credibility. There is the rational and real risk of incurring the rage of the state, and being jailed, harmed, ruined and even killed on the whispers of an incensed or threatened agency.

There is another risk that we really don't talk about much. I think most concerning for many people is the risk that you are actually right, that you have discovered something damning and dark in your country, in your government, in your organization. Once this happens, if it happens, your life is irreversibly changed, and nothing is ever going to be the same.

Understanding how your government actually works, in particular how it works to create and provoke war and murder, how it works to extract the wealth of the nation and use this blessing to commit Constitutional crimes and untold evil, in your name – for many this understanding is not a gift, but a curse. I estimate at least 10% of our country, 20 – 30 million Americans, many of them veterans the U.S. Empire’s global adventures in the past 50 years, feel this curse, and many of them deal with it by turning away from the dark side of Washington D.C., and not talking, writing, or speaking about what they know.

If anyone has followed the case of former Marine Sergeant Brandon Raub a few years ago, you realize that the government keeps a close and paranoid eye on what veterans are doing and saying. Given how things work today, they may be wise to turn away silently from the truth they know.

I think this is why it is often hard for us to demand more truth-tellers come forward, especially in the defense and security and intelligence arena, when we should be shouting it from the rooftops.

Some years ago, I did an online radio program where I would interview interesting people, like Ray McGovern and Sam Provance and Sibel Edmonds , among many others. One person, in our conversation, expressed surprise that I was a short (formerly) brown haired woman, when he thought I would be a tall blonde. I was reminded of this when watching Shock and Awe, because Rob Reiner and the writers did not know who I was, and they portrayed me as a tall light-haired woman, a modern day Viking of sorts. Notwithstanding that this is a popular and attractive stereotype, I think there is something to be learned here. We want to believe that anyone who stands up to authority, who knows his or her own mind, who is willing to enter into a battle of wills with the state, and to take a risk is somehow taller, stronger, bolder and braver than the rest of us.

But it isn’t true. There is something remarkably childlike and simple in being honest, in observing without fear what is happening around you, and reporting this to the person who pays the bills. In the case of the national security arena, the bill payer is the American people.



Where Karen worked when she told Knight-Ridder that the intel on Iraq WMD was false. (Defense

To tell the truth is simple, honorable, and good for the health of the Republic. The fact that it drives the security apparatus and the government crazy is just icing on the cake. Granted, we all need jobs, and our mental health, and we don't want to be imprisoned, tortured or killed. But the more of us – specifically those working with and inside the US government today – who tell the truth, the less likely that government embarrassment will result in harm to a whistleblower, and the less likely in the long run that we will see whistleblowers as we tend to see them today.

In a world of that values honesty, they would be receiving the public commendation of a proud Congress, a grateful media and President, and a contented population.

I'm not a Pollyanna, and I'm worried about the role the US government is playing at home and abroad. The kind of devastation that the US tolerates, supports and initiates around the world – Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, of course Yemen comes to mind, the horrendous situation that Julian Assange is still facing as we speak – is not limited to “overseas.”

The industrial warfare state is as dangerous to Americans as it is to Iraqis, Syrians, and Yemenis. The arts of the warfare state are already being practiced here, against Americans. We – average Americans – are increasingly controlled, spied on, monitored, tracked, threatened, boxed in, and shut down by tools that were first used and tested on some contrived wartime enemy.

You don't need me to tell you this, it's in every newspaper every day, on every page. It is our modern reality. Truth and transparency are its only antidote, and truth and transparency needs all of us. To live in a society, to be a citizen, to love your country — you cannot sleepwalk through it.

People who value wisdom, people who value common sense, people who value justice and people who believe that being woke is a good thing – congratulations! You are the majority! You are alive, you are in charge of this country, and you can choose. America is worth preserving, healing, and saving – and if she is to be saved we will do it by first learning the difference between the truth and a lie, and then speaking the truth loudly, boldly, to anyone who will listen, over and over and over again.

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