

Drill sergeant gets 6 months in prison for abusing recruits

by Rick Rogers - CNS

SAN DIEGO - Perhaps the worst reported case of recruit abuse in Marine Corps history came to a close Thursday when a former San Diego drill instructor was sentenced to six months in prison for mistreating 23 members of his platoon.

Sgt. Jerrod Glass also will be demoted to the lowest possible rank - private first class - and be given a bad-conduct discharge.

He could have received a maximum punishment of nine years in the brig.

The lead defense attorney, Capt. Patrick Callahan, asked Glass if he was fine after the sentencing announcement. Glass nodded, his eyes looking red and moist.

His mother, Barbara Glass, sobbed in the courtroom at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego. His father, Jerry Glass, came over and hugged him.

Outside the courtroom, the parents again stated their belief in Glass' innocence. They said he acted in accordance with the conduct and expectations of higher-ranking drill instructors.

"I have utmost respect for the Marine Corps as a whole. But the problem I have is with the judicial system. ... The rules of evidence don't let you tell the whole truth," Jerry Glass said.

"I think this is a very small part of a very big problem," he added. "Marine officials have their heads in the sand if they don't think this is happening every day."

It took a military jury about two hours to decide the punishment for Glass, who carried out his abuse between December 2006 and February at the depot.

On Wednesday, the same jury had found Glass guilty of eight counts of beating, choking or denigrating the men under his charge. The cruelty ranged from hitting recruits with a tent pole and flashlight to making them drink water until they threw up, then making them wallow in the vomit.

Regulations for recruit training ban drill instructors from using undue force on those in their charge. But tales of abuse during boot camp have been widespread for decades, and some former recruits defend such treatment because they said it toughens people for combat and adds to the uniqueness of the Marine experience.

Glass' abusive behavior included slapping or choking certain recruits after they committed minor infractions. In arguably the most serious incident, he beat Kyle Leonard 50 to 75 times with a wooden tent pole because the recruit forgot the combination for his footlocker.

Leonard, now a lance corporal, suffered a black eye and swelling of his head because of the beating.

During his closing arguments for the sentencing phase Thursday, Capt. Brent Stricker asked jurors to send Glass to prison for two years. He said a stiff punishment is needed not only because Glass "terrorized his recruits" for weeks, but because a strong sentence would provide general deterrence.

"Drill instructors right now are going to be watching your decision in this case. ... If he's not sent to the brig, none of the drill instructors is going to be deterred," Stricker said.

On the defense side, Capt. Greg Jensen recommended 60 days of restricted movement but no time in the brig.

He agreed that Glass had crossed the line with recruits, but insinuated that two more experienced drill instructors - Sgts. Robert Hankins and Brian Wendel - had inspired or condoned the abuse.

Wendel, Hankins and Glass served in the same recruit training unit, and Glass was the junior man. Wendel and Hankins are awaiting courts-martial.

Jensen also said Glass' abusive behavior wasn't "meaningless, rambling violence" but directed at recruits who failed to do things correctly.

Ultimately, Jensen said, Glass' talents - including his dog-handling skills and expertise as a martial-arts instructor - make him a Marine worth keeping.

"It's not time to quit on this Marine," Jensen said. "There are ways of dealing with Sgt. Glass without throwing him out."

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