

Bologna sandwich

Bologna sandwich as cruel treatment? Now that's a laugh

By Charley Reese  
Columnist

I couldn't help but laugh. One of the demonstrators arrested in Washington, D.C., told National Public Radio in an outraged and indignant voice that the only food offered to them by the cops was a bologna sandwich, and "most of us are vegetarians!"

Wow, what heinous treatment.

I've got some words of advice for this kid: Don't ever, ever leave the United States. Anybody whose idea of cruel and unusual punishment is a bologna sandwich does not want to know what it's like to be arrested in most countries.

One night in a Tijuana jail would, I think, convince this kid that the jail in Washington was heaven, the cops were angels and the bologna sandwich was ambrosia from the gods. And there are lots and lots of worse places to be arrested than Tijuana.

Now, by and large, I agree with the demonstrators that the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank serve the cause of multinational corporations, but I point out the young man's protest as an example of how soft and naïve a lot of young Americans have become.

They seem to be exceedingly short on life experiences. That's one argument for bringing back the draft and making it a no-exceptions, universal military training program. A few weeks of basic training, even in today's effeminate forces, would probably be enough to teach appreciation of a bologna sandwich.

I don't recall exactly when my moment of truth came, but I believe that it was when I was crawling under barbed wire after a heavy rain during gas-warfare training at Fort Jackson, S.C. The muddy water was about a half-inch below my mouth and nose, and the tear gas was burning the heck out of the part of my face that wasn't submerged. This was in the late 1950s.

"These (expletives deleted)," I muttered to myself, "don't give a flying (expletive deleted) whether I live or die. They are totally indifferent to my fate, much less to my comfort."

Now that is a moment of truth every young American boy should reach, the sooner the better. American kids, if they are halfway lucky, tend to live comfortable lives surrounded by people who care about them. They need desperately to know that that is not a universal condition in the world at large. And few people are better qualified to teach them that lesson than a drill instructor or basic-training platoon sergeant.

Having seen all those Hollywood films in which there is a moment of re- conciliation between the recruits and their DI, I kept waiting for mine during the dark hours at Fort Jackson as we waited to board buses for our next duty stations.

The moment never came. The last words from the first sergeant boomed across the mess hall, "If you aren't putting food in it, keep your (expletive deleted) mouth shut." The cadre was glad to see us go. We were glad to see them stay behind. They despised us. We returned the feeling. So much for Hollywood bravo sierra. But they had done their jobs. They had de-civilianized us. We had become aggressive. We'd fight at the drop of a word or a wrong look.

And people who plan to go head to head with police need to know that they can expect a tap on the head or a stick in the gut. That's the way the game is played. No hard feelings, but if you plan to be a law-breaker, then do not expect law enforcers to treat you like a kindergartner.

That's probably why upper-middle-class American kids don't make good revolutionaries. It never occurs to them that whoever or whatever they are opposing has the right to self-defense. They seemed genuinely shocked to discover that if you get in somebody's face, that person is likely to put his fist in your face. Or worse, give you a bologna sandwich.

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