

With Torture Banned, US Tries High School Awards Night

by Con Chapman

WESTLAND, Mass. This suburb to the west of Boston is home to one of the state's best school systems, with graduates of the local high school going to top colleges across the country. "Hyper-achievement is instilled into our students from Day One," says guidance counselor Phil Muniz, whose busy season has just come to an end. "Some of these kids need a wheelbarrow to haul away their awards at the end of the year."



"The Certificate of Merit for Outstanding Individual Achievement in a Winter Sport, Dramatic Interpretation or Wind Ensemble goes to . . ."

It is here that the United States Central Intelligence Agency has come to experiment with a new form of torture—prolonged exposure to a high school Senior Awards Assembly—in an effort to wring vital information from terrorist suspects now that waterboarding has been banned by the Obama administration.

"The Lilly V. Smith Award for Holding Heavy Plaques for a Really Long Time goes to . . ."

Once proud parents have settled into their seats two heavily-armed guards escort Abu Osama Al Tunisi, a suspected Al-Qaeda leader in handcuffs, to a choice seat directly in front of the podium. "I was saving that for Jason's grandmother," says Phil Epstein, whose son is Student Council President and is expected to sweep the school spirit, citizenship and leadership awards tonight.



Al-Qaeda member: Fell asleep during National Forensic League commendations.

"The seat is mine, Zionist aggressor!" Tunisi shouts. "Go sit in the roll-away bleachers next to the stinking boys locker room!" Epstein retreats, and the assembly begins with an off-key rendition of The Star-Spangled Banner sung by the junior girls' chorus.



Boys locker room: You don't want to sit near the door.

"Welcome to the Class of 2011 Senior Awards Assembly," intones Principal Melvin Hagerty. "I will try to keep things moving tonight

so that those of you who have jobs get home in time for work tomorrow.” There is scattered laughter, but parents with children who have graduated in the recent past sit grim-faced and silent, knowing the ordeal that they are in for.

“We are so wise beyond our years, also modest.”

After a ten-minute speech of self-congratulation by valedictorian Chloe Farner, who extolls her classmates for being trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, reverent and like totally awesome, the roll of honors begins with the announcement of academic awards, a nod to the school's reputation as a feeder to the Ivy League.

“Give me your best shot, o lap dog of the Great Satan!” Tunisi growls as National Honor Society and National Merit Scholarship awards are handed out. “He's a tough nut,” says veteran CIA officer Marlon McGrath, speaking into a walkie-talkie. “He says he's prepared to die a martyr rather than crack before we get to the Booster Club awards for outstanding male and female athletes.”



“You only have 93 senior letters to give out in film and video? I spit on you!”

The Language Department is next, and awards of merit, achievement, pretty good accomplishment and outstanding mediocrity in French, Spanish, Latin, German, Tagalog and Urdu are handed out as individual honorees rise from their chairs and file to

the front of the gym to receive parchment certificates and crappy plastic statuettes. "Looka me, Mr. CIA Dweeb!" Tunisi says smugly. "I am not weak-willed like the many dorky fathers who must constantly check their BlackBerries here tonight!"

"Everybody got one!"

The Drama Department follows, and for the first time Tunisi begins to show signs of fatigue and disorientation as individual teachers take their star turns at the microphone, turning the assembly into a mini-Oscar night. "Where is a UN observer when I need one?" he begins to moan weakly, his head swaying from side to side. "Can I get a bottle of Perrier?" he begs, and the CIA officers lead him to a bubbler in the lobby for a swig of water that appears to revive him.



"What you are doing to our captives is inhuman!"

He is lead back into the auditorium in time to hear Principal Hagerty announce the James V. Milgrim Award, which is given annually to the student who has not yet received anything two-and-a-half hours into the assembly. "I just can't say enough about this year's recipient," Hagerty begins. "He is so dedicated, so talented, so inspirational to the rest of us as he walks the halls between classes each day . . ."

"Enough!" Tunisi screams, his eyes rolling back into his head. "I will give you Bin Laden!"

"You'll have to do better than that," McGrath says with a smug little smile. "We already got him."

Available in Kindle format as part of the collection "The Lighter Side of Terrorism."

