

# Sgt. Bergdahl, your next president wants you shot

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

Long before there was "Little Marco" Rubio, "Lyn" Ted Cruz or even "lock her up" Hillary Clinton, there was Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl.

Other than Fox News host Megyn Kelly, the former POW may have been the first to endure one of Donald Trump's sucker punches.

In August 2015, Trump told a New Hampshire audience that Bergdahl was a "dirty rotten traitor" who deserved to be executed. He pretended to fire an imaginary rifle - twice - and then said: "Bing bong."

Next it was Las Vegas in October 2015:

"We're tired of Sgt. Bergdahl, who's a traitor, a no-good traitor, who should have been executed," Trump told his audience. "Thirty years ago, he would have been shot."

And then in July, Trump repeated this campaign shtick for an Indiana rally: "Remember the old days? A deserter, what happened?" Trump asked before pulling the trigger on an imaginary gun and uttering: "Bang."

Bergdahl is the Idaho native who stands accused of walking off his post in Afghanistan seven years ago. Captured by the Taliban, he endured five years of trauma that included being chained, locked in a cage, being beaten and malnourished. The Obama administration secured his release in a controversial swap for five Taliban operatives imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Since then, Bergdahl has been accused of desertion, which would require prosecutors to prove he never would have returned to base on his own had he not been captured first. He also faces an additional count of misbehavior before the enemy, a rarely imposed charge that carries a potential penalty of life imprisonment.

Does Bergdahl deserve it?

Who can say?

Certainly not Trump.

He's not among the five officers who will sift through the facts of this case when Bergdahl's court martial begins next year.

Presumably, those officers will get to the bottom of allegations that other soldiers were injured while searching for Bergdahl.

Here's hoping the panel will pay serious attention to the Army's role in knowingly placing an emotionally unstable soldier in a combat zone. As established by the Washington Post, Bergdahl washed out of basic training in the U.S. Coast Guard, which found him psychologically unfit for duty in 2006.

For Bergdahl to join the Army two years later, the military had to look past his "uncharacterized discharge" from the Coast Guard and issue him a waiver.

By then, however, the man sitting on the top of the chain of command will be none other than President Trump - the same man who called him a traitor, the same man who called for him to face a firing squad and the same man who mangled the facts of the case by claiming soldiers were killed looking for him and that freed Taliban detainees were already back on the battlefield.

It might not get that far.

Bergdahl's defense lawyer, Eugene R. Fidell, wants President Obama to issue a pardon before he leaves office on Jan. 20. He doesn't think Bergdahl can get a fair trial when Trump is commander in chief of the armed forces.

What an awful bind for Obama.

Soldiers in the field and veterans at home consider Bergdahl's behavior an affront to unit cohesion. To extend clemency to him would further undermine the president's already shaky standing with the troops.

Officers judging Bergdahl's guilt or innocence are presumably far enough removed from the upper ranks to function without fear or favor toward the White House.

A pardon also carries the taint of Bergdahl's guilt - which is far from certain. Long before a commander ordered a general court-martial last year, an Army investigator recommended against further punishing a soldier who, he concluded, was delusional at the time he walked away.

Should Obama not act, Fidell intends to seek dismissal of the case against his client as soon as Trump takes the oath of office - arguing a Trump presidency and a fair military trial is oxymoronic.

However bad for military morale a presidential pardon may be, it can't compare to having the case dismissed outright because the new commander in chief couldn't restrain himself on the campaign trail. - M.T.