



Lt. Col. Darrel Vandeveld exposed the injustices of the military commissions at Guantanamo. Now his career is on the line.

For an Army officer, criticizing the military commissions at Guantanamo as a perversion of justice probably isn't the best career move. That goes double if you also happen to be a former top military prosecutor at Gitmo. That's why Lt. Colonel Darrel Vandeveld, a US army reservist with nearly 20 years of service under his belt, fears the worst when a military promotion board renders its decision in his case this week.

Theoretically, the military brass reviewing his record could reward his distinguished service—to which various awards and commendations attest—and bump him up to full-bird colonel. Or, they could derail his military career. Vandeveld has reason to believe the board may attempt the latter—forcing into retirement the officer who, in a July 2009 congressional hearing [pdf], declared that "the military commission system is broken beyond repair."

The road to that hearing room led through Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and, finally, the US detention center at Guantanamo Bay, where from May 2007 to September 2008 Vandeveld served as a military lawyer. In civilian life, Vandeveld was a senior prosecutor in the district attorney's office in Erie County, Pennsylvania (he's now the county's chief public defender). He arrived at Gitmo a "true believer," eager to do his part in the war on terror.

At one point, according to Vandeveld, he was the lead prosecutor on one-third of the cases the Office of Military Commissions was preparing to take to trial—but all it took was one to throw his life and belief system into turmoil.

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