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'Eye for Eye': Fighting Abortion and Taking No Prisoners

BYLINE: By JULIE SALAMON

BODY:

God gets a bum rap in "Soldiers in the Army of God," an unnerving HBO documentary about the most radical segment of the antiabortion movement.

"If God told me to kill, I would kill," says one recruit, a man named Bob Lokey, who has planted a giant billboard on his front yard that says, "The U.S. Supreme Court murders babies." Mr. Lokey, who spent 20 years in San Quentin for killing a man, says he circumcised himself with a razor while in jail because God told him to. He takes his commands from on high seriously.

When Paul Hill, a 45-year-old Presbyterian minister, killed a physician and his escort outside an abortion clinic in Pensacola, Fla., in 1993, he, too, laid the blame (or credit, in his view) on God. "The Lord wanted me to shoot the abortionist," he says.

These men could be dismissed as unhinged zealots if they weren't part of an organized national movement linked by ideology and the Internet. Their opposition to abortion is their business, but their righteous murderousness is repellent (and, of course, illegal).

The producers, Daphne Pinkerson, Marc **Levin** and Daniel Voll, present these tin soldiers without polemics and without commentary, though the factual intertitles that appear on screen are damning enough. These offer the information that since 1973, when abortion was legalized, seven people have been killed and more than 150 clinics bombed or set on fire by people who disagreed with Roe v. Wade. There have been more than 2,400 incidents of violence against doctors

and abortion clinics.

Rather than condemn them outright, the producers spent a year getting to know people who believe that abortion is murder and deserving of violent retaliation, a kind of justifiable homicide. The participants came to trust the filmmakers, judging from their candor.

Their forthrightness is unassailable, but their methods and their fractured sense of history are appalling. They identify themselves with the anti-Hitler forces in Germany before World War II; a Web site called The Nuremberg Files listed the names and home addresses of doctors who perform abortions. When a doctor was killed in his home, his name was crossed off the list.

These are not rational people agreeing to disagree. They see themselves as political activists following an honorable tradition of protest -- even at great risk to themselves.

The filmmakers capture a weirdly appealing side of Mr. Hill, now on death row, who was interviewed wearing orange prison clothes and handcuffs. The boyish-looking killer speaks poignantly about taking his three young children to the beach a few days before he decided to open fire on the abortion clinic. He knew his act would separate him from his family, but he says it was an act of faith and compares himself to Abraham, who was prepared to sacrifice Isaac at God's behest. (Hill must have skimmed the story in seminary, because in the Bible story God stops Abraham from carrying out the killing.)

He isn't gleeful about what he did. "It was a grim task," he says. Sincerity may be the most frightening aspect of these fanatics, who earnestly discuss the need for a civil war to prohibit abortion.

The documentary reminds viewers exactly what his "grim task" was. It shows the horrific aftermath of the killings, and presents clinicians and escorts at abortion clinics, who keep doing their job despite the danger.

Many of the Army of God members describe themselves as ministers and cloak their vicious ideology in religious imperatives. But their ranks also include a former drug dealer and protester against the Vietnam War. Not surprisingly, this is not a group friendly to women -- and that includes the women in it. (One of them describes herself as a "former femiNazi.")

As if to restore God's credibility, the producers end the documentary in a Unitarian church at a memorial service for the two men Mr. Hill murdered in front of the Pensacola clinic.

AMERICA UNDERCOVER SUNDAYS
Soldiers in the Army of God

HBO, tomorrow night at 10
Produced by Daphne Pinkerson, Marc **Levin** and Daniel Voll; directed by Mr. **Levin** and Ms. Pinkerson; edited by Bob Eisenhardt and Brian Cotnoir. For HBO: Nancy Abraham, supervising producer; Sheila Nevins, executive producer.

NATURE
The Panda Baby
PBS, tomorrow night at 8
(Check local listings.)

A very different life and death matter is the subject of "The Panda Baby," a charming one-hour documentary about Hua Mei, a giant panda born in the San Diego Zoo in August 1999.

The documentary explains why Hua Mei's birth was so important. Giant pandas are in danger of extinction because they are such picky eaters, depending almost entirely on bamboo, which is also in dwindling supply.

The courtship of Hua Mei's parents attracted much amused anthropomorphizing news coverage. It wasn't an easy match. She was too frisky; he was too grumpy. Finally, with teams of scientists on the case, the odd couple got together and a star was born.

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