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**HEADLINE:** 'Army of God': HBO Braves the Abortion War

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**BODY:**

Reporters who cover the abortion wars quickly learn one thing -- people on both sides, even those who curse the press in unprintable language, are more than happy to talk to you. In my experience the antiabortion zealots -- who didn't mind being called zealots -- were particularly voluble, enjoying any opportunity to filibuster a listener into exhaustion.

The creators of a new HBO documentary have taken excellent advantage of this tendency and produced a deeply frightening portrait of the most extreme wing of the antiabortion movement, "Soldiers in the **Army of God**," which airs tomorrow night at 10 following "The Sopranos."

The people who call themselves the **Army of God** say that homicide is justifiable if the victim is a doctor who performs abortions, a clinic owner or operator, or even a mere escort for patients. But these are not just wacky eccentrics flying under First Amendment radar; these guys are genuinely dangerous. Since 1973, the year the Supreme Court established a constitutional right to abortion, seven clinic workers have been killed, 150 clinics have been bombed or torched, and a total of 2,400 acts of violence committed against those who seek to receive or perform this legal medical procedure. The "soldiers" say nothing less than a civil war will be required to settle

the matter and routinely compare abortion to the Holocaust.

"Stop it with a bullet, if that's what it takes," says Bob Lokey of Opp, Ala. "Right now."

The four main profiles in this documentary, which is based on an Esquire article by Daniel Voll and produced by Daphne Pinkerson and Marc Levin, are of men. Three of them have prison records -- one is Paul Hill, on death row in Florida for the murder of two men at a Pensacola abortion clinic. Other than Hill, the men are not married, nor do they have children; at least none is referred to in the program.

Lokey, proprietor of the Save the Babies Web site, relates proudly how he circumcised himself with a razor blade after he became a Christian while serving 20 years in prison for a murder committed during an armed robbery. After this personal rebirth he decided to "give up" women and devote himself to saving babies. "I've been vaginally defeated all my life," he says.

Even Michael Bray, the Bowie minister who served four years in jail for torching seven abortion clinics and who advocates murder in his book "A Time to Kill," squirms away from the overbearing Lokey. A trucker by trade, Lokey encounters Bray at the White Rose banquet held in this area on the eve of the yearly march in Washington to protest Roe v. Wade. The banquet honors those "martyrs" to the cause who have been or are in jail for violent acts directed at clinics or their employees.

Paul Hill is one of their all-time heroes. Interviewed in prison, he calmly and chillingly tells how tough it was for him to kill Dr. John Britton and his volunteer escort James Barrett, and wound Barrett's wife, in 1993. "It was very difficult, a very grim task," he says proudly. He is delighted to be on death row, although he admits having had some pangs of regret at leaving his three children fatherless. "I hope others will act in a way similar to the way I acted," he says. The filmmakers were smart to include his description of loading and firing his shotgun -- the detail reveals Hill as more coldblooded killer than martyr.

Jonathan O'Toole is an admirer of Hill's. At 19 he is drifting but determined to make his mark as an antiabortion crusader. His passion stems from having watched the births of his siblings at home in Mississippi. He thinks the movement is failing because too few people have been willing to lay their lives on the line; through an Internet search he finds the Army of God and becomes a new recruit. "It's just a question of how I lay down my life," he says.

He goes to work in Georgia for Neal Horsley, the keeper of the Nuremberg Files, a Web site listing the name and address of every abortion clinic owner, manager and doctor. Horsley, who spent time in prison for selling marijuana, compares the fight against abortion to protests against the Vietnam War. He, too, is endlessly garrulous, and the viewer learns that one reason these guys are so vehement is that they think what they're doing is manly. Men have been afraid to stand up to -- well, anything, including women and homosexuals.

Other characters appear in minor roles: John Brockhoeft, who served seven years for bombing two clinics -- inspired, he says, by a Pat Buchanan column. Donald Spitz, the former head of Pro-Life Virginia and creator of the Army of God Web site. And one woman, Regina Dinwiddie, a kind of cheerleader for death who holds social events to show that their army can have "fun."

As the film rolls on, you get the impression that abortion is just a vehicle for these people to express some deeply buried sense of impotence and rage. The "civil war" seems to be going on within themselves, and it's hard to understand why they haven't been arrested as conspirators when they so proudly proclaim themselves as such. The only indication of police intervention (other than in Hill's case) is when Lokey is visited by two Secret Service agents. He assures them he does not plan to harm the president or the Supreme Court -- "unless or until the civil war comes."

If it weren't for the fact that these "soldiers" claim credit for numerous acts of murder and violence, this film could be criticized for focusing on only the most sensational fringe of the antiabortion movement. It is part of the "America Undercover" series, which in the past has examined such journalistically challenging subjects as strippers and the sex lives of everyday couples.

The documentary neglects to tell us the source of the army's money, a key point that should have been included. But both sides of this unending debate would profit from watching it. Abortion rights proponents can use it to invigorate their troops. The antis could use it to assess what they have unleashed, and figure out a way to get the discussion back to principle and away from terrorism, which only they can do. And that can be accomplished only by convincing these extremists that they are hurting their own cause.

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