

Boot camp ordered to pay Seymour men \$900G

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A Mississippi military boot camp has been ordered to pay \$900,000 in a case involving a Seymour man who said he was tortured at the camp.

Joseph Peter Paolillo and his son, Joseph Gabriel Paolillo, 25, sued the Bethel Baptist Church boot camp of Lucedale, Miss., in 2002 claiming the younger Paolillo was tortured while at the boot camp in 1998.

The claim states Paolillo was denied medical treatment for two weeks for a broken bone that was protruding through his flesh.

While injured, Paolillo was beaten, rolled through the dirt and interrogated until he could not remember who he was, the claim states.

During Paolillo's time at Bethel, the claim states his Italian heritage and sexuality were repeatedly insulted, and that school leaders encouraged the abusive behavior. School leaders owned a pit bull trained to attack students by biting them in their crotch area, the claim states, if they could not outrun the dog. The dog was also allowed to urinate and defecate in the student barracks, the claim states.

A school leader would regularly bite students' ears, bragging "how he could see sunlight through the open wound," the claim states.

The claim states Paolillo was told by school leaders if he told anyone about the beatings "they would find him and seek retribution no matter where he went in the country."

Bethel staff members could not be reached for comment.

While the boot camp was billed as a Christian organization, the suit claims Paolillo was mocked for his faith in God. According to the claim, the program leader preached "his respect for the money and power of the Mafia, Mafia gunfights, and the manner in which the Mafia dressed."

A jury in Mississippi awarded \$900,000 to the Paolillos this month — \$14,855 to the elder Paolillo in actual damages, \$15,000 in consequential damages, \$28,855 in exemplary damages, and \$150,000 for his son in actual damages in \$750,000 in exemplary damages.

A class action suit in Mississippi federal court, which alleges similar abuses, is pending against Bethel. The boot camp is still in operation under the name Pine View Academy, said Paolillo's Mississippi-based attorney, George Yoder. No criminal charges relating to Paolillo's treatment have ever been brought against Bethel's operators, Yoder said.

The elder Paolillo said he enrolled his son at Bethel while living in Washington state. He said his son made false charges of child abuse and was placed in foster care. Paolillo said he son was repeatedly sexually abused by a therapist at a children's home in Washington.

"Being a Christian, I thought a Christian academy would be most appropriate, because of all the bizarre and dirty circumstances," the elder Paolillo said. "To start a child in a good Christian academy with the good book on one side and good academics on the other. ... I was never prepared for anything like this. Who in God's name wishes something like this on a child?"

The younger Paolillo was sentenced to 20 years in a maximum-security psychiatric hospital in 2005 after setting his parents' Seymour home on fire. According to police, Paolillo had planned to kill his parents and himself Dec. 16, 2003, but couldn't find a gun. No one was injured.

His father said he hopes to use money from the judgment to provide private therapy for Paolillo.



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