NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Are the Crusades alive and well?

Maureen Fiedler | Aug. 21, 2009 NCR Today

Some of you may be following the ongoing scandal about Blackwater, the private contactor that has made billions providing "security services" during the war in Iraq. Among other allegations, Blackwater operatives were accused of the reckless killing of 17 civilians in Baghdad, and *The New York Times* reports that they were hired by the CIA [1] under the Bush/Cheney regime to run an assassination program against Al Qaeda for the CIA. This was the program that Leon Panetta, CIA Director in the Obama Administration, cancelled immediately when he heard about it.

These facts and allegations are bad enough. But what's especially shocking for me as a person of faith, and a Catholic, is the testimony that recently came to light about Erik D. Prince, the CEO of Blackwater (now called Xe Services). The reporting comes from Jeremy Scahill in *The Nation*. Scahill is also the author of *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army*. He reports that a former Blackwater employee [2] and an ex-Marine have given sworn testimony accusing Prince of either murdering, or facilitating the murder of employees who were cooperating with the federal government's probe of the company.

This same sworn testimony describes how Erik Prince thought of himself? "as a Christian crusader tasked with eliminating Muslims and the Islamic faith from the globe." According to this testimony, Prince "intentionally deployed to Iraq certain men who shared his vision of Christian supremacy, knowing and wanting these men to take every available opportunity to murder Iraqis. Many of these men used call signs based on the Knights of the Templar, the warriors who fought the Crusades."

Although Mr. Prince comes out of a conservative evangelical background -- his father helped bankroll the Family Research Council -- he reportedly converted to Catholicism in 1992, partly because the Catholic Church has more direct historical ties to this period of the Crusades.

It's important to note that these are unverified charges, and anonymous ones at that. But they're not surprising. Scahill's long study of Blackwater reveals a fascination with military campaigns in the name of God, and he reports that some Blackwater bosses boast membership in the Sovereign Order of Malta, another Crusader brotherhood.

Remember when then-President Bush talked about being on a "Crusade" after 9-11? When Muslims and others objected, he backtracked from using that word. Now, I wonder? was it accurate, after all?

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