

A COMMENTARY COLUMN

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

BY JAMIL MUHAMMAD · PUBLISHER & EDITOR



A SPECIAL EDITORIAL FEATURE

Captain Wali Bahar

The Messenger's Captain. The Protecting Friend.

In the Nation of Islam, there were many captains. Every Temple had one. The Fruit of Islam was led by them. Above them stood the Supreme Captain. The titles were known. The chain of command was known. The men who held those posts were known.

Captain Wali Bahar holds none of those titles.

He is not the captain of a Temple. He was not the Supreme Captain of the Nation. He is the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad's personal Captain. No one else holds that title.

Captain Bahar puts it plainly. He was never the captain of any FOI. There was no one between him and the Messenger on the instruction.

Captain Bahar is also one of the very few men still living who walked closely with the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad and remained personally close to three of His most recognizable students — the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan, Imam W.D. Mohammed, and Brother Silas Muhammad. He served beside them and loved them, and he disagreed with some of them where he had to. None of those relationships displaced the post the Messenger had placed him on.

He has stood at that post for half a century while the Nation around it has rearranged itself three different ways.

The correction

Captain Bahar did not seek the title. He says so himself. What brought him to the Messenger's side was a correction, not a promotion.

He had wanted to be a minister. He wrote the Messenger asking for the position. The reply was a test. “Don’t tell me you want to be something,” the Messenger told him. “Go catch me a fish, and then come back and I’ll tell you what fish to catch.” Captain Bahar was sent to Santa Barbara, California, where the Black population was small enough that he knew them by name. He converted a local family and helped them establish a Black Muslim bakery. After Santa Barbara he was sent to Ohio, where he served in Akron, Youngstown, and Columbus.

It was in Ohio that the second turn came. Minister Theodore Hamza, out of Cleveland, charged him with teaching that the Messenger was the Father — not in the biological sense, but as the spiritual Father of the Nation — and with addressing Him as Father in his teaching. The Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad called him in. The conversation was short. The Messenger corrected him on the title and on the teaching, plainly.

Later He called him in again. He told him not to call himself minister anymore. Call himself Captain.

He went back to Akron as Captain, still doing the work of the minister. Later the Messenger called him to Chicago. That is when Captain Bahar understood what he had been given. He was being placed. There was no one between him and the Messenger on the instruction. He repeats that line whenever he tells the story. He wants you to hear it.

He does not tell this story to be admired. He tells it the way a man tells the story of being corrected. The position came directly from the Messenger, and it came with a duty.

That duty has never ended.

The name

The Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad named him Wali Bahar. Captain Bahar asked Him what it meant.

“It means a friend,” the Messenger said. Then He added: “More than a friend. It means a protecting friend.”

Captain Bahar answered back that Allah is the greatest protector.

The Messenger looked at him.

“When you come to me other than what I say you are, you won’t have a friend to keep me from killing you.”

Captain Bahar tells that story today without dressing it up. He understands now what he could not understand then. The Messenger had given him an identity, not a compliment. To depart from it was not a small thing.

“

*All I am is
what he made me be.*

CAPTAIN WALI BAHAR

Proximity

Most of what Captain Bahar saw, he does not describe as event. He describes it as proximity. He was where the Messenger was. He was at the meals. He was in the room when no one else was in the room.

He guarded the Messenger. That meant guarding the man and the teaching at the same time. Not from the public enemies. Those were known. From the closer threats. The labors of the day. The visitors. The believers who wanted the affection of the Messenger and could not understand why one quiet man kept being near Him when so many louder men were not.

The assignments Captain Bahar was given as the Messenger's personal Captain were the assignments that required someone the Messenger could trust without question. The first major one was Newark. When Minister James of the Newark Temple was murdered, the Messenger dispatched Captain Bahar to investigate. That is the kind of work a personal Captain does. Sent quietly, because there is no one else to send. Reporting back to one man only.

Captain Bahar acknowledges what those believers must have wondered: what is Wali doing here? He does not answer the question. He does not need to. The Messenger had answered it once, by His instruction.

The darkest morning

Captain Bahar calls it the darkest moment of his life.

Before five o'clock in the morning, Imam W.D. Mohammed called him. He asked Captain Bahar to come with him to the hospital. Captain Bahar went.

In the parking lot, the Imam stopped him. He prepared him for what he was about to see. Then they went up.

The Messenger was behind a sheet. The Imam went in first. Then he came out and asked Captain Bahar if he wanted to go in. Captain Bahar said yes.

Captain Bahar went to the bedside. He found the Messenger's eyes and mouth still open. He was able to close His eyes. He could not close His mouth. He stood there with the understanding that the man he had served was gone. The life in that man was the only life he had. His post had become permanent.



Captain Wali Bahar

SAVIOUR'S DAY · FEBRUARY 26, 1975
The day following the departure of the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad

The path he did not take

The years that followed are the years many believers will not speak about. Captain Bahar speaks about them. He is direct.

He accepted Imam W.D. Mohammed at the beginning. He had heard the Messenger speak of his son. He did not begin in opposition.

Then they went to Hajj.

On the plain of Arafat, Captain Bahar and Imam W.D. Mohammed had a conversation. The conversation was about the kissing of the Black Stone. Captain Bahar had not kissed it. The Imam asked him why. He told the Imam the Black Stone represented his father. The Imam asked him what Allah meant. He told the Imam Allah is the wisdom and knowledge of all understanding. There was no further question.

He saw, at the same Hajj, King Faisal break through the crowd with his entourage to kiss the stone. He noted it. He did not change his mind.

After 1978 Captain Bahar and Imam W.D. Mohammed began to drift. There was no argument. There were two different paths. He had a love for the Imam, and still has a love for him, and the disagreement did not change that.

But Captain Bahar did not stop teaching the Messenger. He could not stop. The Messenger had named him Wali Bahar. The name was not negotiable. To stop teaching the Messenger was to come to the Messenger as something other than what the Messenger had said he was. The Messenger had warned him, once, in a room a long time ago, what that would cost.

The books were banned in those years. The lectures were silenced. The recordings disappeared. Captain Bahar did not move.

Why it matters now

This is why Captain Wali Bahar matters now. The title is rare, but that is not the reason. He matters because he is the man who did not leave the post the Messenger assigned him, even when the Nation around the post changed shape and direction.

The Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad stands alone. His students do not stand with Him. They stand under Him. Any change of direction after His departure in 1975 was a change among His students, not in Him.

Three of those students gathered communities of believers in the years after 1975. The Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan rebuilt the Nation of Islam on the Messenger's teachings. Imam W.D. Mohammed led the believers who came with him into Sunni Islam. Brother Silas Muhammad led his own community based on the Messenger's teachings.

Captain Bahar did not gather a community. He did not join one. He remained personally close to all three brothers without becoming a follower of any of them.

He came into the Nation in California alongside Brother Silas Muhammad. They were not blood brothers. They were brothers in the teaching and friends before either of them had a title. They stayed close as men for

decades after. Brother Silas went on to lead his own community. Captain Bahar stayed where the Messenger had placed him. The friendship did not need them to be in the same room to remain what it was.

He served alongside the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan in the Nation under the Messenger Himself. He knows the work the Minister did then. He knows the work the Minister continued to do. His regard for the Minister is the regard of a man who watched another man stand for the Messenger when standing was not easy.

He accepted Imam W.D. Mohammed at the transition. He went to Hajj with him. He had the conversation on Arafat. He drifted from the Imam's direction after 1978. He uses the word *drift* on purpose. The love did not change.

Most accounts of what came after 1975 were written from inside one of the paths. Captain Bahar's witness was not. He was close enough to each of the three brothers to speak about them honestly. He stayed under the Messenger the whole time. That is the discipline that makes the record he carries irreplaceable.

The man

Captain Bahar does not call himself a religious man. He calls himself a man who believes in nature. The order of God is the order of things as they are. He focuses on the righteous way of life.

That is consistent with everything else he says. He is not interested in performance. He is not interested in being a star. When the conversation tries to flatter him, he turns the compliment outward and refuses to accept it inward.

When pressed on what made him stay, what made him keep the discipline for fifty and now sixty years, he does not embellish. His relationship with everyone he has ever met is the same. With the Messenger. With Joseph Bey, before he died in prison. With Brother John Ali. With those still living. With those gone. His experience, he says, has always been sincere. Whether the outcome was good or bad.

The Messenger, Captain Bahar believes, did not look at him as a believer. The Messenger knew that Captain Bahar trusted Him and would give his life for Him. The Messenger received that as a thing in itself.

Captain Bahar does not consider himself worthy of anything particular. He says so plainly.

That is the discipline that kept the title from corroding into vanity. He has held the post for half a century without converting the post into status.

Home

Captain Wali Bahar is eighty-nine years old. He claims C.R.O.E. as his home.

He says C.R.O.E. is the only place that focuses exclusively on the remembrance of Elijah. That is why he is here. Not because of any building. Not because of any social network. Not because of any inheritance of position. Because of the work.

C.R.O.E. has preserved the books that were banned. The lectures. The recordings. The teaching of the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad in His own words, without alteration. Captain Bahar — who heard those words from the Messenger Himself, who can tell you which Saviour's Day a particular lecture was delivered and what the room looked like — recognizes the work he was given.

The Messenger's personal Captain has chosen C.R.O.E. as his home because C.R.O.E. preserves the Messenger's teaching.

There is no clearer credential for what C.R.O.E. exists to do.

The renaming

Captain Bahar's service to the Messenger reached into ordinary moments in believers' lives. One of them was the renaming of my family.

After the Messenger's departure in 1975, Imam W.D. Mohammed reassigned the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan from Temple No. 7 in Harlem to Chicago's West Side. The Minister served there under the Imam's authority for the next few years, until he made the public break in 1977 and 1978 to rebuild the Nation of Islam on the Messenger's teachings.

In that window, my father, Brother Munir Muhammad, served as secretary at the West Side Temple under Minister Farrakhan. I was six years old. I attended classes at the Temple with my father. At one of those classes I asked the Minister directly for a holy name. I asked him face to face, a child in the audience during class.

The Minister delivered the request to Imam W.D. Mohammed. The Imam answered it. Captain Wali Bahar was present when the answer came. He knew what had been asked and he saw it granted. The Imam conferred the names. A six-year-old boy named Anthony X. Waller became Jamil Muhammad. The whole family took the surname in one grant — mother, father, and child.

The clipping that recorded the moment exists. It ran in the Bilalian News in 1977 under the headline *First grader proud of new name*, written by Brother Malik Hakim. The clipping names the Imam. It does not name the Minister or the Captain. The article was about the child.

First grader proud of new name

By Malik Hakim
CHICAGO — The brown-haired youth beams when you call his name, "Jamil Muhammad." Just five months ago he was Anthony X. Waller. A first-grader at Clara Muhammad School, Jamil told B.N. how he requested and received a name from Chief Imam Wallace D. Muhammad. "Jamil" means "handsome" in Arabic. The whole family received names as a result of that request.

His father's name, "Munir," translates as "shining with faith" his mother's, "Ameenah," means "loyal and trustworthy."

Jamil emphasized that he preferred his new name "because the old one is Caucasian." The bright-eyed six-year old said his mother's expecting a baby, and if she's a girl, she'll be called Aginah (growing) Musherah (counselor).

"Muhammad" means praiseworthy and much praised. Jamil's favorite subjects are math, reading and penmanship, and he hopes to be a lawyer when he grows up.



JAMIL MUHAMMAD, first grader.

First grader proud of new name

B I L A L I A N N E W S · 1 9 7 7 · B Y M A L I K H A K I M
Jamil Muhammad, first grader

Decades later, Captain Bahar tells me he never forgot that child. He says I was the only child he ever knew who got his entire family a surname. He remembered because he was present. That is what a personal Captain does. He stands where the work is happening, including in the hour when the work is the renaming of one family.

The record

Captain Wali Bahar is still here. He still answers the telephone. He still bears witness when he is asked. His memory is intact. The record is intact in him.

The men who walked with the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad daily — who lived in the houses, who stood at the meals, who guarded the body, who heard the small remarks — are not many. The number gets smaller every year. Each one who departs takes a record with him that no archive can fully reconstruct.

Captain Bahar's words deserve to be recorded while he is still able to give them, and to be listened to before any of us interpret them. The words he uses are not interchangeable with the words we might choose for him; the accuracy of his language is part of the testimony. The post he holds is not a relic. He has held it since the Messenger named him, and he will hold it for as long as he draws breath.

*Captain Wali Bahar is the Messenger's personal
Captain. That is what the record will say.*

