

AR 15-6 Investigation-- Allegations of Detainee Abuse at Abu Ghraib Psychological Assessment

Certain factors can interact and contribute to horrific outcomes, such as the Iraqi detainee abuse at the end of 2003 at Abu Ghraib (also known as the Baghdad Central Correctional Facility [BCCF]). This is clearly an example of aberrant behavior.

First, Soldiers were immersed in the Islamic culture, a culture that many were encountering for a first time. Clearly there are major differences in worship and beliefs, and there is the association of Muslims with terrorism. All these causes exaggerate differences and create misperceptions that can lead to fear or devaluation of a people. Second, quality of life at Abu Ghraib was poor, and lacking most amenities present in other camps in Iraq. The population at BCCF was disparate, consisting of hardened Iraqi criminals watched by corrupt Iraqi prison guards, as well as the varying types of detainees: males, females, juveniles, criminals, terrorists, and mentally ill. BCCF is a closed environment, an environment that would wear on its occupants (MPs, MI personnel, and detainees) over a prolonged period of time. Third, all present at Abu Ghraib were truly in personal danger. Daily mortar attacks from without and sporadic prisoner riots from within led to several deaths and numerous injuries of both Soldiers and detainees alike.

Fourth, command factors were a key player at the BCCF. There was not only a lack of interaction but also friction between the MP and MI command elements. A lack of proper training and supervision was present. There was a failure to respond to recommendations of corrective actions contained in several AARs, 15-6s, and even the recommendations highlighted in MGs Miller and Ryder assessment reports. Leaders

were unwilling to accept responsibility. Discipline, when taken, was lenient, leading to the realization that the BDE or BN chains of command would essentially do nothing, thus contributing to a mentality that "I can get away with this "

Specifically, there were several commanders and NCOs who were ineffective leaders. Take, for instance, BG Karpinski, Cdr 800th MP BDE. On the basis of her four-hour interview and our examination of the interviews and sworn statements of others, we concluded that she was unable to delegate taskings and did many taskings on her own. Though with good intentions, she lessened or dismissed punishments recommended by her staff. She was painfully aware of several problems in the 800th MP BDE including personnel, logistics, administration, and supplies, but she was not capable of demanding solutions from her chain of command. She felt herself a victim, and she propagated a negativity that permeated throughout the BDE.

Given this atmosphere of danger, promiscuity, and negativity, the worst human qualities and behaviors came to the fore and a perverse dominance came to prevail, especially at Abu Ghraib. Inadequate and immoral men and women desiring dominance may be drawn to fields such as corrections and interrogation, where they can be in absolute control over others. CPL [REDACTED] had a civilian prison job. SSG [REDACTED] was also in corrections. Through our investigation, we identified them as ringleaders of the abuse, but note carefully that they collaborated with other MP Soldiers and several unknown MI personnel, to include Soldiers as well as their U.S. civilian contract interrogators and interpreters. Witnesses report pairs of civilian interrogators and interpreters carrying out detainee abuse, as well as an interpreter raping a male juvenile detainee. In fact, the MI unit seemed to be operating in a conspiracy of silence. Still, it is

important to remember that dominance in and of itself is not improper. In fact, interrogators knowingly dominate their subjects, and sometimes even intimidate, in order to obtain intelligence. But clearly the behavior at BCCF crossed the line. The sadistic and psychopathic behavior was appalling and shocking.

In CPL [REDACTED] and SSG [REDACTED] area of responsibility at tier 1A/1B of the Hard-Site, it was commonplace for detainees to be abused. MP dog handlers cooperated with MI interrogators under the MPs' watch to use dogs to frighten, intimidate, and even bite detainees. 1LT [REDACTED] platoon leader and acting company commander of 372nd MP Company, was openly hostile and allowed his guards to carry illegal weapons. MP dog handler SGT [REDACTED] was disrespectful and racist (he said, "After working at the prison for so long, the dogs came not to like Iraqi detainees. They didn't like the Iraqi culture, smell, sound, skin tone, hair color, or anything about them.") Detainee abuse was common knowledge among the enlisted Soldiers at Abu Ghraib. Abuse with sexual themes (see below) occurred and was witnessed, condoned, and photographed, but never reported. Even officers witnessed abuse on several occasions or had knowledge of abuse at the BCCF.

As mentioned earlier, everyday life was extremely stressful. And several MP and MI Soldiers were especially indifferent and vindictive against detainees involved in any violence toward Coalition Forces or who exhibited deviant behavior. On 23 August 03, an MI Soldier kicked and beat a passive, cuffed detainee who was suspected of mortaring BCCF. This incident was witnessed by officers and NCOs alike. On 28-29 October 03, CPL [REDACTED] and SSG [REDACTED] received three detainees involved in rape of a male juvenile. MI Soldiers instructed them to "rough them up." CPL [REDACTED] and SSG

[REDACTED] tackled the three together, lying on the floor, simulating gay sex. On 8 November 03, MP guards brought seven hooded detainees to the Hard-Site who had rioted in Camp Ganci earlier that day. They were stripped, told to get on their hands and knees, and placed face forward in a pyramid. Other Soldiers stopped by to view. PFC England said, "We would joke around, everyone would laugh at the things we had them do." On 24 November 03, a detainee shot a MP guard (who was unhurt) with a pistol smuggled in to him by the Iraqi prison guards. He sustained lethal shotgun rounds to his legs. Then later, after returning from the hospital, CPT [REDACTED] hit him severely, including direct blows to his leg wounds.

Clearly some detainees at Abu Ghraib were totally humiliated and degraded. This is a classic example of the legal formula that "predisposition + opportunity = criminal behavior." Predisposition included the psychological factors of negativity, anger, hatred, and desire to dominate and humiliate. And, with an unsupervised workplace in which no threat of appropriate punishment would be forthcoming, there was opportunity. Moreover, competent authority needs to expedite the detainee release process so that detainees without intelligence value will be rapidly released. And we can learn from the program in place at Dover Air Force Base, where the remains of servicemen are received. Psychiatrists or psychologists are always present, and General Officers have the opportunity to observe the entire process of personnel conducting mortuary affairs operations and how they cope with conditions of their workplace.

Finally, we must be ever ready to prevent the recurrence of such inhumane behavior to the best of our ability. But when such behavior occurs, the guilty must face swift, decisive, and appropriate justice. While justice is being served, an investigation

team needs to analyze the organization and needs to deal with it accordingly. It seems incomprehensible that such misdeeds could happen in a facility, even in a prison complex as notorious as Abu Ghraib. But they did.

But BCCF would be a troublesome arena today even for a well trained MP or MI unit conducting detainee and interrogation operations. Compare and contrast the differences between the detention missions of the Soldiers of Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Desert Storm Soldiers dealt with male enemy prisoners in a war that lasted a matter of hours. At war's end, they released and repatriated the prisoners. In OIF-2 the war is ongoing with no end in sight, and the detainees are in fixed and exposed camp facilities. These detainees are male and female, young and old; they may be innocent, may have high intelligence value, or may be terrorists or criminals. No matter who they are, if they are at Abu Ghraib, they are remanded in deplorable, dangerous living conditions, as are the Soldiers. Every day, the Soldiers must deal with extremely frustrated and hostile detainees who are in total limbo concerning their fate and release, the Soldiers must always be on their guard. And, depending if they are MP or MI Soldiers, they are pressured to either prevent escape or obtain intelligence rapidly. Thus, BCCF has both depressive and anxiety-laden elements that would grind down even the most motivated Soldier and lead to anger and possibly loss of control.

This new "psychological battlefield" requires a new support system for today's MP guard and MI specialist. Of course they must receive all prerequisite training and be knowledgeable on international law and information technology. But they should receive respite away from these detention camps periodically. Physicians and chaplains are needed for the body and spirit, but mental health providers are needed for the mind. A

psychiatrist or psychologist should be on the lookout for significant anger/depressive/anxiety symptoms, and he/she would also provide education and support to prevent Soldiers from any negative conditioning that could impair job performance. Our Soldiers deserve no less.

Assessment by:

COL. [REDACTED]

USAF Psychiatrist

Member AR 15-6 Investigation Team—800th MP Brigade