

# The Secret File of Abu Ghraib

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## **New classified documents implicate U.S. forces in rape and sodomy of Iraqi prisoners**

It has been months since the now-infamous photographs from Abu Ghraib revealed that American soldiers tortured Iraqi prisoners — yet the Bush administration has failed to get to the bottom of the abuses. “There are some serious unanswered questions,” says Sen. Susan Collins, a Republican on the Armed Services Committee. The Pentagon is stalling on several investigations, and congressional inquiries have ground to a halt. The foot-dragging is astonishing, given that Congress has access to classified documents detailing the abuses outlined by Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba in his report on Abu Ghraib. Rolling Stone obtained those files in June and offers this report on their contents. -The Editors The new classified military documents offer a chilling picture of what happened at Abu Ghraib — including detailed reports that U.S. troops and translators sodomized and raped Iraqi prisoners. The secret files — 106 “annexes” that the Defense Department withheld from the Taguba report last spring — include nearly 6,000 pages of internal Army memos and e-mails, reports on prison riots and escapes, and sworn statements by soldiers, officers, private contractors and detainees. The files depict a prison in complete chaos. Prisoners were fed bug-infested food and forced to live in squalid conditions; detainees and U.S. soldiers alike were killed and wounded in nightly mortar attacks; and loyalists of Saddam Hussein served as guards in the facility, apparently smuggling weapons to prisoners inside.

The files make clear that responsibility for what Taguba called “sadistic, blatant and wanton” abuses extends to several high-ranking officers still serving in command positions. Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, who is now in charge of all military prisons in Iraq, was dispatched to Abu Ghraib by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld last August. In a report marked secret, Miller recommended that military police at the prison be “actively engaged in setting the conditions for successful exploitation of the internees.” After his plan was adopted, guards began depriving prisoners of sleep and food, subjecting them to painful “stress positions” and terrorizing them with dogs. A former Army intelligence officer tells Rolling Stone that the intent of Miller’s report was clear to everyone involved: “It means treat the detainees like shit until they will sell their mother for a blanket, some food without bugs in it and some sleep.” In the files, prisoner after prisoner at Abu Ghraib describes acts of torture that Taguba found “credible based on the clarity of their statements and supporting evidence provided by other witnesses.” The abuses took place at the Hard Site, a two-story cinder-block unit at the sprawling prison that housed Iraqi criminals and insurgents, not members of Al Qaeda or other terrorist organizations. In one sworn statement, Kasim Mehaddi Hilas, detainee number 151108, said he witnessed a translator referred to only as Abu Hamid raping a teenage boy. “I saw Abu Hamid, who was wearing the military uniform, putting his dick in the little kid’s ass,” Hilas testified. “The kid was hurting very bad.” A female soldier took pictures of the rape, Hilas said.

During the Muslim holy period of Ramadan, Hilas saw Spc. Charles Graner Jr. and an unnamed “helper” tie a detainee to a bed around midnight. “They . . . inserted the phosphoric light in his ass, and he was yelling for God’s help,” the prisoner testified. Again, the same female soldier photographed the torture.

Another prisoner, Abd Alwhab Youss, was punished after guards accused him of plotting to attack an MP with a broken toothbrush. Guards took Youss into a closed room, poured cold water on him, pushed his head into urine and beat him with a broom. Then the guards “pressed my ass with a broom and spit on it,” Youss said.

Mohanded Juma, detainee number 152307, testified that on his first day at Tier 1A, the west wing of the Hard Site where prisoners were brought for interrogation, he was stripped and left naked in his cell for six days. Graner, the guard in charge of the tier, entered Juma’s cell at 2 a.m., cuffed his hands and feet, and took him to the shower room, where a female interrogator questioned him. After she left, Graner and another man threw pepper in Juma’s face, beat him with a chair until it broke and choked him until he thought he was going to die. The assault lasted for half an hour. “They got tired from beating me,” Juma told investigators. “They took a little break, and then they started kicking me very hard with their feet until I passed out.” In another instance, Graner and a fellow guard reportedly beat a detainee until his nose split open.

Torin Nelson, one of thirty-two private contractors who worked as interrogators at Abu Ghraib, told investigators that he spoke with an interpreter who witnessed an interrogator toss a handcuffed prisoner from a car. “The interrogator then yells at him for falling on the ground and starts dragging or pulling the detainee by the cuffs,” Nelson testified. He believed the story, Nelson added, “based on the stuff that I have heard and seen.”

The sworn statement of Amjed Isail Waleed, detainee number 151365, is especially graphic. On his first day at the Hard Site, he told investigators, guards “put me in a dark room and started hitting me in the head and stomach and legs.” Then, one day in November, five soldiers took him into a room, put a bag over his head and started beating him. “I could see their feet, only, from under the bag. . . . Some of the things they did was make me sit down like a dog, and they would hold the string from the bag, and they made me bark like a dog, and they were laughing at me.” A soldier slammed Waleed’s head against the wall, causing the bag to fall off. “One of the police was telling me to crawl, in Arabic,” he testified, “so I crawled on my stomach, and the police were spitting on me when I was crawling and hitting me on my back, my head and my feet. It kept going on until their shift ended at four o’clock in the morning. The same thing would happen in the following days.”

Finally, after several beatings so severe that he lost consciousness, Waleed was forced to lay on the ground. “One of the police was pissing on me and laughing at me,” the prisoner said. He was placed in a dark room and beaten with a broom. “And one of the police, he put a part of his stick that he always carries inside my ass, and I felt it going inside me about two centimeters, approximately. And I started screaming, and he pulled it out and he washed it with water inside the room. And the two American girls that were there when they were beating me, they were hitting me with a ball made of sponge on my dick. And when I was tied up in my room, one of the girls, with blond hair, she is white, she was playing with my dick. I saw inside this facility a lot of punishment just like what they did to me and more. And they were taking pictures of me during all these instances.”

In the classified files, some of the photographed soldiers also provide firsthand accounts of the abuses. Pvt. Lynndie England testified that on November 8th — the evening of her twenty-first birthday — she went to the Hard Site to visit Spc. Graner, her boyfriend. Just after midnight, seven Iraqi detainees accused of taking part in a fight at one of the many tent compounds used to house prisoners at Abu Ghraib were brought to Tier 1A. For England, the evening was a break from the tedium of her job processing prisoners. For Nori Al-Yasserli, detainee number 7787, it quickly became a “night which we felt like 1,000 nights.”

Al-Yasserli and the other prisoners arrived at the Hard Site with empty sandbags over their heads to prevent them from seeing where they were and their hands bound behind their backs with plastic handcuffs. The guards threw the men against the walls until they collapsed on the floor in what England called a “dog pile.” Some of the MPs took turns running across the room and leaping on top of the men. “A couple of the detainees kind of made an ‘ah’ sound, as if this hurt them or caused them some type of pain,” Spc. Jeremy Sivits testified in a sworn statement. While the Iraqis were on the floor, England and Sgt. Javal Davis stomped on their fingers and feet. Sivits was certain that the men felt pain this time because he heard them scream.

So did Sgt. Shannon Snider, who was working in an office on the top tier. Drawn by the cries of pain, Snider leaned over the railing and in a fury yelled down to Davis to stop abusing the prisoners. Davis stepped away from the men, and Snider left.

“I believe that Sgt. Snider thought it was an isolated incident,” Sivits testified, “and that when he ordered Sgt. Davis to stop, it was over.” But it was just getting started.

After Snider had gone, the MPs pulled the prisoners to their feet one by one and removed their handcuffs. Graner, who had learned a few key phrases in Arabic, ordered the detainees to strip. As one prisoner took off his clothes, Graner cradled the man’s head in one arm and smashed his fist into the naked and hooded man’s temple. “Damn, that hurt!” Graner complained, waving his hand in the air. The prisoner went limp, and someone removed his hood. “I walked over to see if the detainee was still alive,” Sivits testified. “I could tell that the detainee was unconscious, because his eyes were closed and he was not moving, but I could see his chest rise and fall, so I knew he was still alive.”

According to England, Staff Sgt. Ivan Frederick made an X on another prisoner’s chest with his finger and said, “Watch this.” Then the six-foot-tall Fredericks punched the man in the chest. The hooded prisoner lurched backward and fell to his knees. He gasped for air. “Frederick said he thought he put the detainee in cardiac arrest,” Sivits later told investigators. England was asked why she thought Frederick assaulted the man. “I guess just because he wanted to hit him,” she said.

Eventually, all seven Iraqis were standing naked and hooded, and the MPs got out their cameras. A few pictures had been taken earlier in the evening, but now the abuse turned into a photo-op. Men taught to be ashamed of appearing naked in front of other men were forced to assume a series of humiliating and bizarre poses. Graner had them climb on top of each other to form a human pyramid, and the MPs took turns taking each other’s picture standing behind the men. In one photo, Graner and England smile and give the thumbs-up sign behind the men, who are naked except for the green sandbags covering their heads. The Iraqis were made to crawl across the floor on their hands and knees while the guards rode on their backs. Two were posed as if performing oral sex on each other, and others

were lined up against the wall and forced to masturbate while England pointed at their genitals and leered. And all the while, the Americans were laughing, cracking jokes and taking pictures.

An Army investigator later asked one of the seven Iraqis how he felt that night. "I was trying to kill myself," replied Hussein Al-Zayyadi, detainee number 19446, "but I didn't have any way of doing it."

The secret files make clear that day-to-day living conditions at Abu Ghraib were "deplorable" for soldiers as well as prisoners. The facility was under constant attack from mortars and rocket-propelled grenades. The files make no reference to the number of attacks, but a partial list obtained by Rolling Stone indicates that there were more than two dozen explosions between July and September alone. Six detainees and two soldiers were killed, and seventy-one were injured. But officers at Abu Ghraib told Taguba that their repeated requests for combat troops and armored vehicles to protect the facility were ignored by top brass. "I feel, and my soldiers feel, that we're just sitting out there, waiting to die," said Cpt. James Jones of the 229th MP Company. "As a commander, I'm charged with bringing my soldiers home, but how do I control that? It's frustrating. It's frightening."

The prison was filled far beyond capacity. Some 7,000 prisoners were jammed into Abu Ghraib, a complex erected to hold no more than 4,000 detainees. Prisoners were held in canvas tents that became ovens in the summer heat and filled with rain in the cold winter. One report found that the compound "is covered with mud and many prisoner tents are close to being under water." Another report described the conditions in one compound: "The area is littered with trash, has pools of water standing around latrines, and the bottles of water carried by detainees for water consumption are filthy. The tents lack floors and are inadequate to provide protection from the elements." Detainees wore soiled clothes because laundry facilities were inadequate; mentally ill detainees were "receiving no treatment."

In a series of increasingly desperate e-mails sent to his higher-ups, Maj. David DiNenna of the 320th MP Battalion reported that food delivered by private contractors was often inedible. "At least three to four times a week, the food cannot be served because it has bugs," DiNenna reported. "Today an entire compound of 500 prisoners could not be fed due to bugs and dirt in the food." Four days later, DiNenna sent another e-mail marked "URGENT URGENT URGENT!!!!!!!!!!" He reported that "for the past two days prisoners have been vomiting after they eat."

Officers reported that their repeated pleas for adequate food and supplies went unheeded, even though prisoners were attacking soldiers. "I don't know how they're not rioting every day," Jones told Taguba. The worst riot occurred on November 24th. According to an internal investigation, prisoners in one compound "were marching and yelling, 'Down with Bush,' and 'Bush is bad' and other slogans to that effect." The detainees threw rocks at guard towers and at soldiers on the other side of the concertina wire. One guard said that "the sky was black with rocks"; another added that he "feared for his life." The riot quickly spread to other compounds, where several guards were injured by flying debris. The soldiers fired nonlethal ammunition at the mob but quickly exhausted their meager supplies. Fearing they were on the verge of a mass prison break, the guards were given the go-ahead to use deadly force, and they opened fire with live ammunition. Three detainees were killed and nine were wounded. Nine soldiers were also injured in the riot.

That same evening, a detainee in Tier 1A told an MP that a prisoner had a gun and several knives. The informant even knew where he was: Cell 35. The guards instructed every prisoner on the tier to put their hands through the cell bars to be handcuffed, a standard precaution before searching a cell or moving a prisoner. But when the MPs came to Cell 35, the man inside refused to put his hands out. Instead, he told the guards he “had no gun.”

No one had used the word gun around the prisoner. Sgt. William Cathcart, one of the MPs on duty that night, immediately made a grab for the man’s wrists. The prisoner pulled away and fell to his knees to say a prayer. “At that point,” Cathcart told investigators, “I knew it would be a gun battle.” He was right. The detainee suddenly turned, withdrew a 9 mm pistol from under his pillow and opened fire on Cathcart from close range. A bullet struck the MP in the chest. Fortunately, before beginning the search, Cathcart had put on his “full battle rattle” – a Kevlar vest with pockets holding ceramic plates – and wasn’t injured. Another MP shot the inmate with two nonlethal rounds, knocking the man down. But the prisoner jumped back up and continued to fire. An MP finally ended the incident by firing a load of buckshot into the man’s legs.

How did a detainee in the Army’s toughest prison in Iraq get his hands on a gun?

According to an internal Army investigation contained in the secret files, the civilian-run Coalition Provisional Authority had hired at least five members of Fedayeen Saddam — a paramilitary organization of fanatical Saddam loyalists — to work as guards at the prison. An Iraqi guard, probably one of “Saddam’s martyrs,” had smuggled the gun and two knives into the prison in an inner tube, placed them in a sheet and tossed them up to the second-story window of Cell 35. In May, when Taguba testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sen. Wayne Allard asked him a direct question: “Did we have terrorists in the population at this prison?” Taguba answered, “Sir, none that we were made aware of.” His own files make clear, however, that a more accurate response would have been: “Yes, sir — but only among the guards.”

Taguba was only authorized to investigate the role of military police in the torture at Abu Ghraib — even though the Hard Site was controlled by military intelligence when the worst abuses occurred. Nevertheless, the classified annexes indicate that responsibility for the torture extends at least as high as several top-ranking officers in Iraq who have yet to be disciplined or removed from command. Maj. Gen. Barbara Fast, who remains director of military intelligence in Iraq, was aware of the conditions at Abu Ghraib and received regular reports from officers at the prison. Lt. Col. Steven Jordan, who directed intelligence at the prison, admitted to Taguba that he did not actually report to the British colonel who was supposedly his supervisor. “On paper, I work directly for him,” Jordan told Taguba. “But between you, me and the fence post, I work directly for General Fast.” Fast is currently under investigation, but unlike lower-ranking officers and soldiers, she has not been reprimanded or charged in the abuses.

Miller, who was sent by Rumsfeld to speed up interrogations at Abu Ghraib, spent ten days in Iraq touring prisons and meeting with intelligence officials. The two-star general was commander of the military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba — known as Gitmo — where “enemy combatants” were already being subjected to harsh interrogation techniques, including the use of military dogs to frighten prisoners. According to Col. Thomas Pappas, who commanded the military intelligence brigade at Abu Ghraib, Miller spoke with him about using dogs on prisoners: “He said that they used military working dogs, and that they were effective in setting the atmosphere for which, you know, you could get information.”

Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski, who was in charge of all military prisons in Iraq, told Rolling Stone that Miller described his plan to “Gitmo-ize interrogation operations” in Iraq and boasted that prisoners at Guantanamo “were treated like dogs, because you can never let them be in charge.”

Miller has denied making either statement. But whatever he said, his plan to “rapidly exploit internees for actionable intelligence” was quickly adopted at Abu Ghraib. A slide presentation in the classified files spells out the new “Interrogation Rules of Engagement,” specifying that soldiers, with proper approval, may subject prisoners to dietary manipulation, sleep deprivation, stress positions and the “presence of mil working dogs.” In at least one instance documented by Taguba and photographed by soldiers, a prisoner at Abu Ghraib was bitten by a dog. Most of the MPs who have been charged with crimes say they were told by military intelligence officers to “soften up” prisoners prior to interrogations. “MI wanted to get them to talk,” Spc. Sabrina Harman told investigators, saying she was told to keep detainees awake. Sgt. Davis, who jumped on the pile of seven detainees on November 8th, said intelligence officers would tell guards to “loosen this guy up for us” and “make sure he has a bad night.”

The classified files also show that intelligence officers at Abu Ghraib felt pressured to produce results. “Sir,” Lt. Col. Jordan told Taguba, “I was told a couple of times . . . that some of the reporting was getting read by Rumsfeld, folks out at Langley [the Central Intelligence Agency], some very senior folks.”

In May, after photos of the torture were published, Rumsfeld declared that he would take “all measures necessary” to ensure that such abuse “does not happen again.” But the defense secretary had already sent a clear signal to commanders in Iraq about his position on the proper way to interrogate prisoners. In April, Rumsfeld transferred Gen. Miller from Guantanamo to Baghdad, putting him in charge of all military prisons in Iraq. Instead of court-martialing the man who authored the plan to subject prisoners at Abu Ghraib to harsh abuses, Rumsfeld has left him in charge of the facility.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we have changed this,” Miller told reporters in May. “Trust us. We are doing this right.”

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