

Photos indicate torture and sexual abuse by British troops in Iraq

Paul Mitchell
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Staff in a British photo-processing shop have handed-over photographs to the police that indicate British troops tortured and sexually abused Iraqi prisoners of war.

One picture taken in a warehouse shows a man stripped to the waist, while suspended from a rope attached to a forklift truck. A soldier driving the truck is apparently laughing at the man's plight.

Another picture seems to show an Iraqi man being forced to perform oral sex on a (white) man.

A third picture shows two Iraqis apparently being forced to perform anal sex. A fourth picture shows two naked Iraqis cowering on the ground.

Amnesty International spokeswoman Lesley Warner said if the photos "are true then this is clearly a violation of the Geneva Convention, which absolutely prohibits any torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment."

An assistant in a photo processing shop in Tamworth, Staffordshire, Kelly Tilford (22), uncovered the photographs when checking that a film handed in by a soldier had developed properly. She said, "I felt sick when I looked at the pictures. They were grim. I just felt awful.... I immediately realised something terribly wrong had happened and something had to be done about it. I started shaking and was panicking."

Officers from the Special Investigation Branch (SIB) of the Royal Military Police have arrested Gary Bartlam, a private in the First Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers who brought the film in to the Max Spielman's photo-processing shop last week. Bartlam was on leave from the regiment presently stationed in Iraq's second city Basra and the port of Umm Qasr. The detention facility at Umm Qasr now holds about 500 detainees—down from the 6,000 it held after the fall of Baghdad. The SIB has not said where

Bartlam's pictures were taken, nor the function of his unit.

At the height of the aggression in Iraq, British Army Chief of Staff, General Sir Mike Jackson praised the Fusiliers as a "thoroughly competent and well-organised infantry battalion". He regrets that the "good name of the British Army appears to have been tarnished by a few ill-disciplined and unprofessional soldiers".

The "good name" of the British Army was a key component in Prime Minister Tony Blair's campaign to try and get the British public to accept the war in Iraq. It was promoted as the most professional and humanitarian force in the world dedicated to liberating people from despotic regimes. Stuart Crawford, a retired lieutenant colonel in the Fourth Royal Tank Regiment, told the *Daily Telegraph's* Olga Craig, "Britain and other European nations have imperial traditions. As a result, British troops have been inculcated with the ethos and tradition of colonial policing, where small numbers of men would have close contact on a daily basis with local populations."

It did not take long for the real "ethos and tradition of colonial policing" of depravity and brutality to be revealed.

A few days before details of Bartlam's alleged war crimes emerged, it was reported that Lieutenant Colonel Timothy Collins, commanding officer of the First Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment, was under investigation for alleged mistreatment of civilians in Iraq. Ayoub Younis Nasser, an Iraqi Ba'ath Party official and former headmaster of a school in Rumailah near Basra, claims that he was pistol-whipped, beaten and threatened with a mock execution by Collins. Nasser said, "They put our faces towards the wall, me and my son. I heard Colonel Collins telling a soldier to

'kill them'. Then I heard the soldier cock his gun."

A US Army Major Re Biastre of the 402 Civil Affairs Battalion has also accused Collins of mistreating civilians, but the veracity of his claims are disputed as he was not present when the acts he lists were said to have happened and is said to have a personal grudge against Collins who severely and very publicly reprimanded him on one occasion.

What is not in doubt is that Collins helped set the tone for the type of brutal treatment of Iraqis that is now being alleged to have occurred. He was glorified as a hero by the British media in March after he delivered a pre-battle oration to 800 troops at Fort Blair Mayne camp in Kuwait during which he warned, "The enemy should be in no doubt that we are his nemesis and that we are bringing about his rightful destruction. There are many regional commanders who have stains on their souls and they are stoking the fires of hell for Saddam. He and his forces will be destroyed by this coalition for what they have done. As they die they will know their deeds have brought them to this place. Show them no pity."

It is no wonder then that Bartlam and his unit may have felt no pity towards their captives and thought they could get away with filming their depraved acts with impunity. Bartlam's mother sensed who was really to blame for her son's predicament when she told reporters, "He does not belong to us any more. The army is his mother. It's the army which looks after him. We have not been able to contact him and we know nothing about what's happened to him, so we're saying nothing."

The Ministry of Defence has downplayed the significance of the Bartlam photos saying, "Usually there is a flurry of allegations in the wake of a conflict or a highly publicised case like this one. That is the pattern."

The Royal Irish Regiment was formed in July 1992 from the discredited Ulster Defence Regiment and prides itself on its anti-terrorism expertise. It is the subject of an inquiry into allegations of bullying and abuse of recruits. The inquiry is charged with investigating the death of teenage soldier Paul Cochrane who was found shot dead in 2001 at the regiment's Drumadd barracks in Northern Ireland. But the Ministry of Defence claims it will also tackle issues about the "wider military culture" in the regiment.

Paul's father Billy emphasised that he had no faith in the inquiry, saying "I don't trust these people."

Robert Peterson, a military lawyer said his law firm deals with several cases every month from soldiers especially recruits who say they were assaulted or abused and noted the culture of bullying and brutality "can easily spill over into a war situation."



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