

Iraqis tortured and killed by British troops

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Below we publish the first part of a two-part article on allegations of brutality against civilians by British soldiers occupying Iraq. The second part will be published tomorrow.

Reports are filtering out about the brutal treatment of Iraqis by the occupying British armed forces.

The growing number of cases of alleged beatings, torture and murder of Iraqis reveal that the British Army is conducting just as dirty and brutal a war in the south of Iraq as its US counterparts are waging in the north.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has refused to release details of any investigations, except to issue the recent statement, "Any suggestion soldiers will be charged with manslaughter is pure speculation at this stage."

* On May 15 last year, British soldiers in Basra came to the Mousa family home and told them they were looking for a neighbour who had been an officer in the Iraqi army under Saddam Hussein. While they were searching they found a Kalashnikov rifle the family keeps for protection. This is permitted under current Iraq law and is common practice with families faced with the lawlessness that has gripped society since the US/UK invasion of the country.

Abdel Jabr Mousa attempted to explain the reasons for the rifle to the soldiers. His 23-year-old son, Bashar, explained what happened:

"My father tried to explain to them, but they just started hitting him in the head with the wooden butt of the Kalashnikov.... They dragged him out of the house, bleeding from his leg. Then one of them told me to come with him. He said, 'Give me the rest of the weapons.' I told him there were no more.

"Then he took me to another room and started beating me. He put his hands around my throat and pushed me up against a wall. His hands were so tight I lost consciousness.... Then he dragged me to the personnel carrier."

Bashar Mousa says that he and his father were taken along with the neighbour who was an officer to a British Army base in the former house of Ali Majid (dubbed "Chemical Ali" in the media). They were forced to wear hoods and taken to a room where they were beaten and kicked for an hour. Bashar could hear the screams of his father. After his father stopped screaming, Bashar was taken to a different room where he was given food and medical attention, and a change of clothes. He never saw his father alive again.

After one night, Bashar was taken to US-run Camp Bucca in nearby Umm Qasr, south of Basra, where he was held until June 20. Although Bashar was a civilian, he was held at Camp Bucca as an enemy prisoner of war. The British *Independent on Sunday* newspaper has seen his prisoner's wristband and his Red Cross POW papers, number IQZ-120259-01. His release papers say there is no evidence to doubt he is a civilian.

The family has said that they only discovered where the two men had been taken by a tragic coincidence. The soldiers were searching

for another man, who they identify as Kareem, and threatened to arrest his wife and daughters unless he gave himself up. The soldiers left a message that Kareem should surrender to a Sergeant Henderson of the Black Watch at Ali Majid's former house.

For three days, the eldest son, Amar, called at the base asking for news of his father. On the third day he was taken to a military doctor who told him his father was dead. He said the body, which was bruised and covered in blood, was in Basra hospital.

"When I found the body, there was blood in his mouth," said Amar. "There were wounds all over him, and a huge blue bruise like a boot print on his left side. I saw bruises over his heart and the outline of a military boot. All the body was covered in mud and there were outlines of finger marks on his skin."

The death certificate, signed by Dr Haider Mohammed Saleh, stated the cause of death as "sudden heart attack: infarction of the heart muscles." The family was never given a copy of the British military death certificate. They are demanding an investigation, and several family members have been interviewed as witnesses. Ammar said the investigators, who are refusing to comment on the case, told him the family was unlikely to get compensation.

* Detailed reports are emerging of at least seven Iraqi deaths at the British controlled-Camp Bucca detention centre near the port of Umm Qasr. Military investigators are studying the cases of the seven who died between April and September 2003. Six are thought to have died in British custody and one was shot.

* On June 8 British troops arrested Radhi Nea'ma. His daughter explains: "Around six British armoured personnel carriers surrounded our house. They said they had come for my brother, Mohammed, and that they had received information he was buying weapons. We told them he was not here, and that we bought a gun because we were afraid of the Ba'athists. They weren't satisfied and they took my father.... They put a bag over his head and put him in their personnel carrier."

The next day a British patrol came with a message for the family, stating that Radhi Nea'ma had heart problems and had been taken to hospital. Thinking he was still alive the family searched the wards at all Basra's hospitals. Despairing, Radhi's sister, Afaf, checked a mortuary at one hospital and found his body.

Afaf said, "I didn't recognise him because of the terrible state he was in. There was blood on his body and mud in his hair. There was blue bruising on his side like someone had kicked him."

The family was given a hand-written note that recorded the cause of death as "suffered a heart attack while we were asking him questions about his son."

Mohammed Nea'ma was subsequently arrested and released for lack of evidence. "Even if Mohammed had done something wrong, why did they take my husband?" asked the widowed Rajieh.

The Ministry of Defence has repeatedly claimed that it has

completed its' investigation, which apparently show Nea'ma died of "natural causes" and that there is no case to answer.

* On September 14, British soldiers raided the Ibn Al Haitham hotel, Basra. Baha Mousa's night shift on the reception desk was coming to an end and his father had just arrived to drive him home.

The soldiers ordered Baha to lie on the floor of the lobby with six other hotel employees, their hands on their heads. They then searched the building and arrested the staff. At the reception desk they found the three Kalashnikov rifles kept for hotel security. In a safe in a room rented as an office by businessman Haitham Baha Ali, one of three partners who own the hotel, they found an Iraqi military uniform, two pistols and two small automatic rifles.

Haitham, who had been in the hotel that morning, had disappeared by the time the safe was opened and appears to have been the target of the raid. The soldiers also removed bundles of money from the safe.

Baha's father, Daoud Mousa, a colonel in the Basra police force, said he saw soldiers stuff money into their pockets and under their shirts. He told a British officer. "I explained it wasn't good for them to do this. The officer searched one of the soldiers and took the money out from inside his shirt," he said. The officer, a "Lieutenant Mike", said that the arrests were a formality and that Baha and the others would soon be freed. They were then driven off to a nearby British military base.

Four days later Baha was dead.

When Daoud Mousa arrived at the British military morgue to identify his son's body, he found a bruised, bloodied and badly beaten corpse. "When they took the cover off his body I could see his nose was broken badly," he said. "There was blood coming from his nose and his mouth. The skin on his wrists had been torn off. The skin on his forehead was torn away and beneath his eyes there was no skin either. On the left side of his chest there were clear blue bruises and also on his abdomen. On his legs I saw bruising from kicking. I couldn't stand it."

Two other hotel staff, who have been questioned by investigators, described in interviews with *The Guardian* newspaper how they were repeatedly punched, kicked and forced to crouch in stress positions for two days and two nights.

Kifah Taha, a maintenance engineer, who was asleep when the British soldiers began searching the Ibn Al Haitham hotel has provided a detailed account of the prisoners' treatment. They were handcuffed with plastic ties and hoods were placed over their heads as they were driven to a military base in the city. "They started beating us as soon as we arrived. From the first second they beat us. There were no questions, no interrogations."

At first the men were ordered to lean with their backs flat against the wall and their arms straight in front of them, palms together with their thumbs pointing up: "They were kicking us in the abdomen, like kickboxing.... They were laughing. It was a great pleasure for them. We were in so much pain."

Later, the soldiers forced the men to crouch, their arms straight in front of them, palms together.

"We were like that for several hours and they continued beating us," he said. Each prisoner was then given a footballer's name. "They called us names, like Van Basten, Gullit. They said if we didn't remember our names they would increase the beating."

Another of the prisoners, Rafeed Taha Muslim, 29, who also worked at the hotel, still has scars on his wrists from the tight, plastic cuffs. "They were hitting us in the kidneys. They were punching and kicking," said Muslim. At one point the soldiers made the prisoners

dance. "They said: 'Like Michael Jackson. Disco.'"

Taha, who was locked up near to Baha Mousa's cell, recounted his last hours. On the second night he was taken to another room but his friends could hear Baha moaning through the walls.

"I heard his voice," said Taha. "He said: 'Blood. Blood. There's blood coming from my nose. I'm going to die. I'm going to die.' After that there was nothing from him."

On the third day the surviving prisoners were taken to Camp Bucca. Taha and Muslim were so badly injured they were taken to a military hospital. A medical report written on September 17 by Major James Ralph, a consultant in anaesthesia and intensive care at the 33 Field Hospital in the British base at Shaibah, north of Basra, described Taha's condition as acute renal failure.

"It appears he was assaulted approximately 72 hours ago and sustained severe bruising to his upper abdomen, right side of chest, left forearm and left upper inner thigh," the report said.

Another medical document, handwritten late on September 16 and marked Medical Restricted, said, "Severely beaten when arrested." Taha spent two months in hospital recovering.

A month after Baha's death, the British military commander, Brigadier William Moore, wrote to his father expressing "regrets", offering "sincere condolences" and promising an investigation. Since then officers from the special investigation branch of the 3rd Regiment, Royal Military Police, have been examining the circumstances of Baha's death.

Daoud Mousa, a policeman for 24 years, says that although he spoke to a British forensic specialist who conducted an autopsy on Baha, he was not allowed a copy of the report. The death certificate, dated September 21 and seen by the *Guardian*, marks the cause of death as "cardio respiratory arrest/asphyxia."

"My son didn't die on the street, or in the hotel or in my house," said Mousa. "He died in custody and it wasn't a natural death. There should be a just trial and compensation for his children." Baha's two sons, Hassan, 3, and Hussein, 5, are now orphans. Their mother died of cancer six months before Baha.

Families have been promised inquiries, condolences have been offered, witnesses have given filmed testimony, but to date no British soldier has been arrested or charged in connection with Baha's death, or the beating of the six others.



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