

US torturers in Afghanistan were redeployed to Iraq

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American intelligence officers, in interviews with journalists, have alleged that US military interrogators involved in the atrocities at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison were also involved in earlier cases of prisoner abuse that took place in Afghanistan. This helps give the lie to official claims that the Abu Ghraib crimes were the independent actions of low-level soldiers and not the result of a deliberate policy aimed at bullying and intimidating the Iraqi people into accepting the occupation.

At least three Afghan prisoners died while in the custody of US forces in Afghanistan. Two of these deaths reportedly took place at the Bagram Airbase at the hands of a platoon of interrogators led by Captain Carolyn Wood. Mullah Habibullah, 30, was the first detainee to die at the Bagram facility. Interrogators allegedly left Habibullah isolated with arms shackled and tied to a beam in the ceiling, and he was found dead on December 3, 2002. Dilawar, a 22-year-old farmer and taxi driver, was reportedly beaten by US military police and interrogators and died on December 10.

An intelligence officer, speaking under condition of anonymity, told Knight Ridder Newspapers that conditions at the Bagram detention facility were such that it would have been impossible for Captain Wood to have been unaware of what was taking place, and that he himself had easily been able to hear sounds of extreme distress—moans, screams—from interrogation and isolation rooms. A poster of guidelines for interrogators, drawn up by Wood herself, outlined the use of military dogs and the placing of prisoners in stress positions for up to 45 minutes.

An informal inquiry ordered by Lt. Gen Dan McNeill, at that time commander of US and coalition forces for Afghanistan, chastised two interrogators and two

military police officers, but did not assign any blame for the prisoners' deaths. In January the platoon returned to their base in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, only to be sent to Iraq in March 2003. By July the platoon, along with an added complement of 15 fellow soldiers from Company A of the 519th Military Intelligence Battalion, was stationed at the Abu Ghraib prison.

In other words, not only was no one charged with any crime in connection with the deaths of prisoners in Afghanistan—the platoon allegedly responsible for the deaths was quickly put to work again in Iraq. Wood was ultimately awarded two bronze stars for her work in Afghanistan and Iraq. This makes a mockery of official claims that the torture of Iraqi prisoners was the result of a few bad apples.

At Abu Ghraib, soldiers from Company A were allegedly involved in an incident in October 2003 in which three soldiers removed a female prisoner to a vacant room and ordered her to take off her clothes. One of the soldiers in question was reportedly involved with a prisoner death in Afghanistan.

The military responded to the incident with an inquiry, and ultimately with a nonjudicial punishment that consisted of reducing the three soldiers' ranks and fining them \$500-750. Earlier, when the Army's Criminal Investigative Command had suggested they be charged with abuse, two of these soldiers, along with four others, had been "flagged" by their commander as ineligible for promotions, awards and transfers to another post.

The US military was supposed to have released a review of prisoner abuse in Afghanistan in June, but this has been postponed to late August.



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