

Guantanamo videotapes expose brutality against detainees

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Videotapes taken by the US military at Guantanamo Bay provide new evidence of torture of detainees at the US prison camp. The video footage shows five-person teams from the “Immediate Reaction Forces” punching detainees, tying one to a gurney for interrogation and forcing a dozen to strip from the waist down.

The Associated Press has obtained a secret report based on the videotapes prepared by investigators from the military’s US Southern Command (SouthCom) in Miami, which oversees the camp. SouthCom commander Gen. Bantz Craddock ordered the investigation last month after the public release of FBI documents describing abuse.

The FBI documents told of prisoners shackled in a fetal position on the floor for as long as 24 hours, left in their own urine and feces. In one document, a barely conscious prisoner was described tearing out his hair after being left overnight in a sweltering room.

SouthCom’s investigation was originally scheduled to conclude February 1, but Craddock has extended the deadline to February 28, reportedly to question witnesses in the US and abroad. The military has so far reviewed only 20 of some 500 hours of videotape involving the Guantanamo “reaction” teams, but the material contained in even this small portion of the tapes is shockingly revealing of the brutal methods employed at the prison camp.

According to the report, a video clip from February 17, 2004, showed “one or more” team members punching a detainee “on an area of his body that seemingly would be inconsistent with striking a pressure point.” (Military policy apparently sanctions striking such “pressure points” to subdue prisoners.)

A number of cases were deemed “questionable” by the military report. One video showed a guard kneeling a detainee in the head; another shows a team tying a

detainee to a gurney in preparation for interrogation.

Video footage captures a platoon leader taunting a detainee with pepper spray, then repeatedly spraying him before bringing the “Immediate Reaction Forces” team into the cell.

Military investigators noted about a dozen cases in which detainees were stripped from the waist down and taken to the “Romeo block” of Guantanamo. According to two former British detainees at the camp, Shafiq Rasul and Asif Iqbal, this block is a section of the camp where prisoners have been left naked for days.

Although no video footage depicted female guards being present during these stripping incidents, military investigators cited several incidents which involved female MPs traumatizing prisoners, many of whom are Muslim men and view contact with women other than their wives as proscribed by Islam.

The report says, “Several detainees express displeasure about female MPs either escorting them, or touching them as members of an IRF team.” In one video clip, “A detainee appears to be genuinely traumatized by a female escort securing the detainee’s leg irons. In another video, inexplicably an all-female IRF team forcibly extracts a detainee from his cell.”

With female guards comprising only about 20 percent of the camp’s guard force, the formation of an all-female team suggests a conscious policy aimed at taunting and traumatizing Muslim detainees.

Portions of a draft manuscript for a book by a former Guantanamo translator, also obtained by Associated Press, detail how female interrogators tried to break detainees’ will. Former Army Sgt. Erik R. Saar did not approach AP with the manuscript, but has confirmed the authenticity of the nine pages obtained by the wire service.

Saar’s manuscript is classified as “Secret” pending a

Pentagon review. The book, titled *Inside the Wire*, is due out later this year with Penguin Press. The Pentagon has censored sections of the book, mainly blacking out individuals' names.

The 29-year-old Saar, who is neither Arab nor Muslim, worked as an Arabic translator at the US facility in Cuba from December 2002 to June 2003. About three months after his arrival at the prison camp, he said he started to notice "disturbing practices."

The former translator writes of one female civilian contractor who used a special outfit for late-night interrogations of prisoners that included a miniskirt, thong underwear and a bra, which she hung on the back of a door of one IRF office. He said he learned that the outfit was worn by the woman while working as part of "a team which conducted interrogations in the middle of the night on Saudi men who were refusing to talk."

Saar also describes a female military interrogator questioning a 21-year-old Saudi detainee who is alleged to have taken flying lessons in Arizona before the 9/11 terror attacks. "His female interrogator decided that she needed to turn up the heat," Saar writes. She repeatedly demanded the prisoner tell her who had sent him to Arizona, and told him he could "cooperate" or "have no hope whatsoever of ever leaving this place or talking to a lawyer." At this point, the man reportedly closed his eyes and began to pray.

In an effort to "break him," according to Saar, the interrogator then removed her uniform top, exposing a tight-fitting T-shirt, and began to taunt the detainee, who reacted by spitting in her face. The woman then reportedly left the room to ask a Muslim linguist how to proceed. He told her to tell the prisoner she was menstruating, touch him with fake blood and turn off the water in his cell so he couldn't wash up.

Saar writes, "The concept was to make the detainee feel that after talking to her he was unclean and was unable to go before his God in prayer and gain strength." The interrogator used red ink to fool the prisoner, smearing it on his face. "He began to cry like a baby," the manuscript says, and the interrogator then left, saying, "Have a fun night in your cell without any water to clean yourself."

Erik Saar's account resembles two incidents of such interrogation tactics by females at the camp that were previously reported by the US military in response to an AP request. In one, an interrogator ran her fingers

through a detainee's hair and sat on his lap. In another, a different female interrogator again wiped red ink on a prisoner's shirt, telling him it was blood. Both women were reportedly reprimanded.

At Guantanamo, Saar said, "Interrogators were given a lot of latitude under Miller," referring to Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, who took over command operations at the prison camp at the end of 2001. Miller later moved on to the Abu Ghraib prison, and has been implicated in extending the torture methods used in Guantanamo to Iraq.

More than 500 prisoners, from some 40 countries, are still being held at the Guantanamo facility, many having been there for more than three years without charges or access to their families or legal counsel.

The American Civil Liberties Union has filed a Freedom of Information Act request asking the US government to release all photographs and videotapes depicting the treatment of detainees, and a court order directed the government to turn over such material.

While thousands of documents have been turned over to the ACLU, to date, authorities have refused to turn over any videotapes, citing privacy. The damning contents of the videotapes examined in the US Southern Command's report are one indication why they have refused to comply.



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