

# Video shows British Army brutality in Iraq

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14 February 2006

A video obtained by the London newspaper *News of the World* shows British Army soldiers in a Basra military compound brutally beating four Iraqi teenagers, and apparently kicking a dead man in the head.

The NoW said that the video, which had been filmed secretly, had been handed to it by an unidentified source and that “we’ve satisfied ourselves that this was an absolutely genuine article.”

The video was reported to have been filmed in January 2004 during widespread protests against the record levels of unemployment that have accompanied the US-led war and occupation of Iraq.

A 60-second sequence, apparently recorded from a rooftop within the Army’s HQ, shows a stand-off between a crowd of protesters and British troops. A group of young Iraqis are shown throwing stones at the compound before being chased away by soldiers armed with batons and rifles.

A radio message is heard directing troops, “Black top, blue bottoms! Black top, blue bottoms! GO!” and four Iraqi boys—thought to be in their early teens—are pulled into the compound by eight soldiers.

Shielded from public gaze by the camp wall, the soldiers proceed to beat their captives, whilst another provides sadistic commentary: “Oh yes! Oh yes! You’re gonna get it. Yes, naughty little boys! You little f\*\*\*ers, you little f\*\*\*ers. DIE! Ha, ha!”

All but one of the captives are barefoot, and all are unarmed, dressed only in trousers and t-shirts. The first prisoner is headbutted, and punched in the kidneys and face. He pleads “No! Please!” as he tries to stop the assault, whilst the unseen commentator ridicules his cries and his accent, “No, pleese—don’t hurt me.”

He is grabbed round the neck by another soldier and flung to the ground where he is kicked and beaten again, before the first soldier strikes him over the head with his baton.

The second prisoner is also on the floor, having been thrown there by another soldier. Ten baton blows are aimed at his body, as the young captive attempts to wriggle free from the soldiers’ range. Another soldier who was not part of the original snatch squad binds the boy’s wrists and another strikes him on the backside with a baton. The boy goes limp and what looks like a pool of blood forms around his head.

Meanwhile, two soldiers are shown kicking the third prisoner six times in the body, before one grabs him by the shoulder and beats him on his legs and feet with his baton.

After being beaten several times, prisoner four is held up by his arms by two soldiers whilst another—identified by the NoW’s source as a sergeant—comes from behind the captive to boot him in the testicles. As the prisoner slumps, the commentator screams encouragement, “In the f\*\*\*ing head!”

The NoW reveals that the video has a further two minutes of footage shot at various intervals. In one sequence, the cameraman is shown an Iraqi corpse and proceeds to kick the dead man in the face twice, whilst a soldier sniggers: “He’s been a bad mother\*\*\*\*er.”

Another sequence shows three soldiers grabbing an Iraqi man and forcing him to kneel behind a wall where he is kicked in the chest.

The NoW says that it knows the unit and regiment involved in the beatings, but has not published the details for “security reasons.” It says that its informant came across the tape after the unit had returned to Britain and handed it over out of disgust.

Reports indicate that footage was filmed when Britain’s contingent in Basra was drawn from the 20th Armoured Brigade and soldiers from The Royal Scots and 40 Commando.

The Royal Military Police has begun an inquiry amidst strenuous efforts to depict the scenes as the work of a “rogue” group of soldiers. A man was

detained on February 12, but no further details were made available.

The main concentration of the British press and the government has been to defend the occupation of Iraq.

Prime Minister Tony Blair said that British troops were “of fundamental importance” in “helping Iraq to become the democracy they want to be,” whilst Chancellor Gordon Brown said “loyal, hard-working, decent troops” in Iraq would see the “allegations” as a “slight on their great work.”

In Basra, British military spokesman Flight Lieutenant Chris Thomas said the army hoped that “the good relations that the multi-national forces have worked very hard to develop won’t be adversely affected by this material.”

A spokesman for the Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari also expressed concern that the footage should not “undermine the trust that has been built up between the British forces that have really done a good job.”

Although the video images have been shown through much of the Middle East, Iraq’s Al-Sharqiyah TV channel has apparently yet to report the incident.

Claims that the abuses shown in the video are an aberration do not hold water. More than 180 allegations of abuse have been made against British troops in Iraq, and 29 soldiers have faced abuse charges. Last year, 18-year-old private Gary Bartlam was jailed for his role in taking photographs of Iraqi detainees in sexually humiliating positions. In a separate case, also last year, three British soldiers were jailed for up to two years and dismissed from the army for assaulting Iraqi prisoners at the food distribution centre in Basra, nicknamed Camp Breadbasket.

The type of snatch squad depicted in the video was commonly deployed in Northern Ireland and in other instances of civil unrest.

As Michael Evans, Defence Editor for the *Times*, pointed out, “These are not soldiers engaging in some form of unauthorised extracurricular activity, but members of a battle group sent out to deal with rioting Iraqis and to take arrested offenders for interrogation back in the barracks. The soldiers were not part of a ‘rogue’ unit beating up Iraqis at will. They would have been ordered to leave the British military compound to disrupt and arrest the violent demonstrators. The orders would have come from their company commander or a senior non-commissioned officer. So under what

circumstances and in accordance with which rules of engagement did they feel their actions were necessary and justified?”

Claims that the soldiers were “out of control” or lacking in discipline are also undermined by the fact that the assault appears premeditated and deliberate—occurring as it does only once the captives are behind the compound walls—and that an officer was apparently involved in the assault. The NoW source is quoted complaining “the ringleader was supposed to be a senior sergeant. Instead of reeling the lads in and calming them down, he was in the thick of it, urging them on. He even kicked that boy straight in the b\*\*\*s with two other soldiers twice the lad’s size holding him face down.

“That’s sick. You could understand some terrified 19-year-old private losing it. But that’s what NCOs are for—to lead and set an example.”

The video emerged only days after Defence Secretary John Reid had urged that people be “very slow to condemn” the involvement of British troops in Iraq. British forces were on an “uneven battlefield,” he claimed, because of the “scrutiny, accountability, media intrusion and questioning” they faced.



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