

Former US soldier charged in rape and murder of Iraqi girl

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A former US soldier was charged by federal prosecutors Monday with rape and murder following an investigation into the brutal killing of a teenage Iraqi girl and three members of her family. The new charges come in the wake of a raft of revelations of atrocities committed against Iraqi civilians by US soldiers.

Steven D. Green, 21, a former private first class, appeared in a federal magistrate's court in Charlotte, North Carolina in connection with a March 12 incident in Mahmoudiya, 20 miles south of Iraq, involving up to five soldiers from the US Army's 101st Airborne Division, 502nd Infantry Regiment.

Prosecutors said Green and other soldiers entered the family's home, where he and others raped the girl, after which Green shot her and three of her relatives to death, and then burned the corpse of the rape victim. Green faces a possible death sentence if convicted of murder.

Four members of the 502nd Infantry have been confined to a US base near Mahmoudiya, according to military officials, and could receive the death penalty under US military law if convicted of premeditated murder. One active soldier has reportedly been arrested after admitting his role in the alleged attack.

Private Green served 11 months with the 101st Airborne Division, based in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, but his case is being handled by federal prosecutors because he is no longer in the military. According to an affidavit filed with the criminal complaint in the case, he was discharged "before this incident came to light. Green was discharged due to a personality disorder."

Since the US military revealed last Friday that it was investigating the rape and murders, chilling details have emerged about the rape victim and her family in the days leading up to the atrocity. This new information—which paints a picture of Iraqi civilians

terrorized by the American occupiers—also strongly suggests a cover-up of the incident, which until June 24 had been officially attributed to "insurgent activity."

According to the *Washington Post*, the rape victim, Abeer Qasim Hamza, was only 15 years old. She was killed along with her mother and father and her seven-year-old sister. Preliminary information in the US military investigation puts the age of the rape victim at 20, contradicting hospital records and statements of neighbors and local officials in Mahmoudiya. The US military has not identified the other family members or their ages. Contacted over the weekend by the *Post*, officials claimed not to know most other details of the case.

Omar Janabi, a neighbor of the murder victims, provided harrowing details of the incident to the *Post*. He said that Abeer's mother, Fakhriyah, told him that the girl had attracted the unwelcome attention of US soldiers at a checkpoint in their village, which she was forced to pass through almost every day.

Janabi recalled a conversation he had with the girl's mother on March 10, two days before the rape and murders, in which Fakhriyah said she feared the Americans might come for her daughter at their home at night. She asked if Abeer could sleep at his home with the women in his family.

Although he agreed to her request, "Abeer did not live to take up the offer of shelter at Janabi's home," the *Post* writes. The soldiers came to the girl's house the next day and carried out the rape and killings. Two of Abeer's brothers were apparently at school at the time.

In preparing the case against Green, the FBI conducted interviews at Fort Campbell with three unidentified soldiers assigned to his platoon. The affidavit filed by FBI special agent Gregor J. Ahlers

states that Green and three other soldiers from the 101st's 502nd Infantry Regiment were manning the traffic checkpoint on March 12 when they conspired to rape the young girl.

According to the affidavit, to avoid detection, the soldiers changed their clothes before going to the family's home. One of the soldiers said he witnessed Green and another soldier rape the woman once inside the home. At one point, "Green came to the bedroom door and told everyone, 'I just killed them. All are dead,'" the soldier related.

"After the rape, [the soldier] witnessed Green shoot the woman in the head two to three times," the affidavit states.

According to the details provided to the *Washington Post*, when the soldiers came to the home they separated Abeer from the other family members and raped her, and then fatally shot the four. They then attempted to set Abeer's body on fire, according to Omar Janabi and another neighbor who spoke to the *Post* on condition of anonymity.

Janabi was one of the first people to arrive at the home following the attack. According to the *Post* account, "He said he found Abeer sprawled dead in a corner, her hair and a pillow next to her consumed by fire, and her dress pushed up to her neck. 'I was sure from the first glance that she had been raped,' he said."

Photos taken by Army investigators, according to the affidavit, showed a burned body of "what appears to be a woman with blankets thrown over her upper torso." Family members have given permission for the girl's body to be exhumed for examination as part of the US military's investigation into the incident, which began last Saturday.

Many questions are raised by the military's handling of the Mahmoudiya atrocity. US soldiers at the scene initially attributed the civilian killings to "insurgent activity"—in particular, to Sunni Arab insurgents active in the area. This was perplexing to villagers who knew the murdered family was Sunni. The US military's official acceptance of this explanation of the incident is suspect at best.

The circumstances of Private Green's discharge from the US Army "due to a personality disorder" are also suspect. This "disorder" must have been manifested in some manner to his fellow soldiers and his superior officers. Was this behavior connected to the events of

March 12?

Then there is the more than three-month delay in beginning the investigation. It was only initiated after soldiers from the unit came forward following the discovery in early June of the mutilated bodies of two soldiers from the same unit. The two had been taken captive from a military checkpoint.

In all likelihood, there would have never been an investigation by the Army if these soldiers had not spoken up, and the atrocity would never have come to the attention of the American public.

As has become all the more clear of late, atrocities such as the one committed against Abeer Qasim Hamza and her family are not a rarity in Iraq. They are being repeated every day in villages across the ravaged nation by an occupation force that has been dehumanized by the brutality of the imperialist enterprise. The central responsibility for these unspeakable crimes rests with the highest levels of the US government and military, who conspired to launch this illegal war and continue to prosecute it.



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