

Five more US soldiers charged in rape-murder atrocity in Iraq

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10 July 2006

Four active duty US soldiers have been charged with participation in the “rape and murder of a young Iraqi woman and three members of her family,” the US military stated in a news release on Sunday. A fifth soldier is accused of dereliction of duty for failing to report the crimes.

The five are charged with conspiring with Steven D. Green, a former private first class who was charged July 3 in a US civilian court. The rape and murders occurred March 12 in Mahmoudiya, 20 miles south of Baghdad. Green, who has pled not guilty, could face the death penalty if convicted.

The soldiers are charged with entering the family’s home, raping the girl—whose age has been placed variously at 15 and 20—shooting her and three members of her family to death, including a young child, and then burning the corpse of the rape victim and attempting to set the home on fire.

This atrocity, coming on the heels of other recent war crime revelations, is rapidly assuming in the minds of Iraqis—as well as people in the US and around the world—a symbolic significance: like Abu Ghraib, it is seen as a concentrated expression of the nightmare of killing, destruction and terror unleashed by the United States government on the people of Iraq. It is, moreover, an expression of both the brutalization and demoralization of the US forces who are seeking to subjugate a population determined to resist foreign occupation.

The active duty soldiers charged in the case have not been identified. They face further investigation and a hearing to determine whether the evidence merits a court martial. All are members of the 502nd Infantry Regiment, a unit of the 101st Airborne Division, based in Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

The Mahmoudiya case, the latest in a series of atrocities committed by US soldiers against Iraqi civilians, has outraged Iraqis not only because of the brutality of the

crime, but also because US forces operate with immunity from prosecution by Iraqi courts.

What is particularly shocking and sickening about this incident, beyond its savagery, is its premeditated character. It cannot be attributed to an eruption of homicidal rage at the death of a comrade, or a disproportionately violent response to a real or perceived threat. Prosecutors contend that the perpetrators, who were manning a checkpoint through which the girl regularly passed, had singled her out in advance of the attack, and that they changed from their battle fatigues before setting out to rape her in her home.

The girl’s mother, Fakhriya Taha Muhsen, was so worried about a possible attack by American soldiers that relatives suggested that the family come and live in an empty house near them. But before the move could be carried out, the soldiers came.

There are many indications of a deliberate cover-up of the incident by American officers. For more than three months, the US military officially attributed the incident to Sunni “insurgent activity,” an assertion that is dubious on its face, as the victims were themselves Sunnis.

An investigation was initiated only after soldiers from the unit came forward following the discovery in early June of the mutilated bodies of two soldiers from the same unit who had been captured at a military checkpoint by insurgents.

Also, Green left the 101st Airborne after serving only 11 months with an honorable discharge as a result of what military officials have referred to as an “anti-social personality disorder.” It has not been explained why this resulted in an honorable rather than a general discharge from the military.

According to the federal affidavit against Green, he and at least two other soldiers targeted the young victim, Abeer Qasim Hamza, for more than a week. On the day of the murders, they drank alcohol, changed their clothes to

avoid detection, and abandoned their US military checkpoint. One soldier was left behind to monitor the radio and two others went with Green to the victims' house, about 200 yards from their post.

In the affidavit, soldiers are quoted telling federal investigators that Green shot the young woman's relatives, including her mother and father and a child of about five years of age, raped the young woman, and then fatally shot her. A second soldier also allegedly took part in the rape.

Soldiers are quoted saying Green and his accomplices then set the family's home on fire, threw an AK-47 rifle used in the killings into a canal and burned their own bloodstained clothing. They then re-donned their uniforms and assumed their posts at the checkpoint.

Abu Firas Janabi, a cousin of the rape victim's mother, has been interviewed by a US investigator and also recently spoke to the *Los Angeles Times* about the atrocity.

He and his wife were the first to arrive on the scene to find the bodies of his relatives. The small farmhouse was still ablaze and he had to douse some of the flames before they could enter the dwelling.

He said he entered the charred house to find the corpse of his cousin's husband, Kasim Hamza Rasheed, "in the corner of the room, and his head was smashed into pieces." He could see that his cousin Fakhriya's arms had been broken. The body of their five-year-old daughter, Hadel, lay beside her father.

He found the body of the young rape victim, Abeer, in another room, naked and burned, with her head smashed in "by a concrete block or a piece of iron," he told the *Times*. "There were burns from the bottom of her stomach to the end of her body, except for her feet," he said.

"I did not believe what I was seeing. I tried to fool myself into believing I was in a dream. But the problem was that we were not dreaming. We put a piece of cloth over her body. Then I left the house together with my wife."

Janabi said that Abeer's parents had told him they believed the "girl was a target" of the Americans. He told the *Times* that three days before the killings, the Rasheed family had been at his house and the girl's mother had complained that the US soldiers from the nearby checkpoint were constantly searching the family's house. Her worst fears came to fruition only days later.

Following the incident, Green served for another two months with the 101st Airborne Division. According to military officials and court documents, he received an

early discharge because of an "anti-social personality disorder," and left the army in mid-May.

Military officials have not been forthcoming as to precisely how Green's "anti-social" behavior manifested itself, but in light of the revelations of the Mahmoudiya incident it seems likely that his participation in the atrocity was known at some level of the military command, and that his honorable discharge was an attempt to cover it up.

The rape and murders in Mahmoudiya are among five criminal cases currently being investigated in Iraq, including an incident last November in Haditha in which 24 civilians, including 15 woman and children, were killed. These increasingly frequent exposures of wanton brutality on the part of US troops have become an embarrassment for the US regime in Baghdad, which has no jurisdiction to try US forces for criminal acts.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has called for an independent inquiry into the rape and murders in Mahmoudiya and a review of a regulation that precludes US forces from facing prosecution in Iraqi courts. His American masters, however, have no intention of doing away with the immunity US forces currently enjoy.

The ban on Iraqi courts trying US soldiers was imposed by the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority that governed Iraq after the 2003 invasion, and retained, at the insistence of Washington, in the constitutional and political setup that has since been orchestrated by the US.

The fact that Iraqi courts have no power to try American soldiers who commit crimes and carry out atrocities against Iraqi civilians thoroughly exposes the fraud of Iraqi "sovereignty" under US military occupation.



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