

Guantanamo Revelations Point to Rumsfeld

by Edward Spannaus

“The intent was to humiliate this detainee, and to create a barrier, through sexual humiliation and sexual enticement, between the detainee and his faith . . . to create a wedge between the detainee and his God.”

This is Army Sgt. Eric Saar being interviewed on a May 5 National Public Radio show. Saar spent six months as an interrogator and translator at Guantanamo, from December 2002 through June 2003, and has now written a book called *Inside the Wire: A Military Intelligence Soldier's Eyewitness Account of Life at Guantanamo*. He was describing an incident in which a female interrogator used sexual taunts and behavior to try to make a prisoner feel “unclean,” so that he could not pray and draw strength from his religious faith.

On the interview, Saar was asked: “Was it part of the policy at Guantanamo to keep people from their faith? . . . The Bush Administration is so pro-faith. . . . Was this idea of creating a wedge between a prisoner and his faith, part of policy?” Saar replied that he does indeed believe that this “was a matter of policy, to use these techniques,” because, he said, it was a concerted effort, and none of this was hidden. When asked how far up the chain of command, did people know about this, Saar said that he had no reason to doubt that “individuals very high up in the chain of command,” knew what was going on. One reason he knows this, he said, is because interrogators had to follow procedures, and get approval to use certain techniques.

Saar's story was also featured on CBS-TV's “60 Minutes” on May 1, which reported as well on new e-mails from FBI agents at Guantanamo who were warning FBI Headquarters about the torture of prisoners at Guantanamo. Saar said that not only did he regard the abuse and humiliation of prisoners as wrong, but also as ineffective. The “sex-up” approach did not work, and the detainee remained uncooperative, he said. “It's impossible to try to build a connection and establish trust. We were now relying solely on fear to get the detainee to cooperate, and I think that's an enormous mistake.”

CBS also interviewed retired Army Col. Patrick Lang, one of the military's leading experts on the Middle East. “Unimaginable to me; I just cannot imagine what people think they were doing,” Lang said. “I mean, what is this? A scene from Dante's *Inferno*?”

“If we do things like this, if we beat people and we neglect them, and we try to use their religion against them, however stupidly, we're debasing ourselves to the point, in fact, in which we're losing something, that we should be trying to

protect in this war,” said Lang. “As a professional soldier, and someone who dedicated his life to the service of the United States, in fact, to think that United States would stoop to such tactics as this, I find to be a disgraceful thing.”

Staged Interrogations

Saar’s account also confirmed something that was suspected by many for a long time—particularly by journalists who had visited Guantanamo—that interrogation scenes were staged for visiting VIPs. Saar says that interrogators would pick someone who had already been cooperative, and they would just go over the same material with him again. (*EIR* has been advised that the same thing was done to some military officials as well.)

Rep. Adam Schiff (D-Calif.) was one of those VIP visitors to Guantanamo in May 2004, and he came back reporting that “important intelligence is being derived from detainee interviews conducted in a humane manner.” Now, Schiff is asking for a House Judiciary Committee investigation into the reports of staged interrogations, saying, “The fact that members of the committee and other members of Congress may have been deliberately deceived is extremely disturbing, if true.”

Miller and Boykin

In November 2002, a new commander, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, was appointed for Guantanamo, after the previous commander, Brig. Gen. Rich Baccus, was removed by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and top Pentagon officials, who accused Baccus of being too soft on detainees. “I was mislabelled as someone who coddled detainees,” Baccus later told the London *Guardian*. “In fact, what we were doing was our mission professionally.” One of the practices which Baccus resisted, and which was instituted by Miller, was to strip detainees naked and shackle them to the floor before they were questioned.

That these policies came from the top, was confirmed in an FBI memorandum from May 2003, describing a confrontation between FBI officials at Guantanamo, with Miller and another Army general. “Both sides agreed that the bureau [the FBI] has its way of doing things, and the DOD has their marching orders from SecDef”—referring to the Department of Defense getting its orders from the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld.

Miller has a reputation as an anti-Muslim, Christian fundamentalist “Boykin-type,” referring to the Muslim-hating fanatic Gen. William “Jerry” Boykin, the deputy to Rumsfeld’s Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, Stephen Cambone. Cambone and Boykin were instrumental in sending Miller to Iraq in August-September 2003, with the mission of “Gitmo-izing” detainee operations at Abu Ghraib Prison and other facilities there.

One of the most infamous images from Abu Ghraib is that of the young female soldier holding a dog leash which is

wrapped around a naked prisoner’s neck. *Newsweek* has now reported a similar incident at Guantanamo, where interrogators led a detainee around with a collar and leash in an attempt to break his resistance. Even without that particular example, the correspondence between the methods used at Guantanamo, and those memorialized in the notorious Abu Ghraib photos, is too obvious to be missed—unless you happen to be a military official charged with investigating such matters.

There is yet still another investigation of prisoner abuse and torture still underway, one specifically about Guantanamo. According to the May 1 *New York Times*, the investigation was triggered in response to the disclosure of FBI messages complaining of interrogation methods at Guantanamo. This investigation, being conducted by Air Force Gen. Randall Schmidt, is now close to completion, and reportedly has determined that several prisoners at Guantanamo were mistreated or humiliated, perhaps illegally, but, according to the *Times*, it is unclear how high up the chain of command the report will go in assigning responsibility.

Command Accountability

Just how far up these investigations should go, was stated very clearly in a statement issued in the April 18 *Legal Times* by two retired flag officers, Adm. John Hutson and Gen. James Cullen; this was in the wake of the March Pentagon report on prisoner interrogation and detention policies issued by Vice Adm. Albert Church. The Hutson-Cullen statement elaborated the concept of “command responsibility,” and declared that Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld should be held personally accountable for the abuse and torture of prisoners.

“It’s not sufficient for a leader to claim, ‘I did not commit the criminal act,’ or ‘I did not personally order it.’ Command bears distinct responsibilities to make decisions and be held accountable for their consequences,” they write. “The military—an organization that relies on discipline in the midst of chaos—cannot function without such accountability for decisions.”

They point to the case of Gen. Tomoyuki Yamashita, the Japanese commander of the Philippines, who was tried and executed for war crimes committed by his forces during World War II, even though there was some doubt about his actual control and communication with his men. The case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which upheld the conviction in 1946. “Our country argued that Yamashita was responsible for abuses by his forces, and no one can persuasively argue that we should exempt ourselves from the same standard,” the two officers write.

Hutson and Cullen document the policies which Rumsfeld put in place, undercutting long-standing prohibitions on the use of torture and other inhuman and degrading treatment, and then how he ignored and failed to act on reports of abuses. “The honor of our military is at stake,” they declare, reiterating their previous for the creation of an independent commission to conduct a full investigation.