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Army Describes Alleged Iraq Prisoner Abuse

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WASHINGTON - Hundreds of pages of Army records released by the American Civil Liberties Union describe alleged mistreatment of Iraqi citizens by U.S. soldiers that the ACLU charges were not taken seriously by superiors.

The records described one investigation into whether an Army staff sergeant attempted to give a captured Iraqi an old handgun to justify shooting him.

A U.S. soldier said the sergeant, whose name was marked out in the documents, told his troops, "If he grabs this gun, shoot him!"

The Iraqi, a museum guard initially suspected of firing an AK-47 at troops, refused to take the gun, investigators said. "I thought he was going to shoot him," another U.S. soldier told Army investigators later.

The sergeant denied it. "I can understand they may have misinterpreted what I said to the detainee," he told investigators, "but if they said I was trying to give the detainee the weapon or said to shoot him, then they are lying."

Another soldier described the sergeant who was investigated as a good soldier. "If someone was shooting at one of my soldiers, I would be upset also," this soldier said. He added that, "This is getting carried away. We don't know what our role is in Iraq."

The ACLU, given the documents under the Freedom of Information Act, said the government reports illustrated troubling patterns of alleged abuses that weren't taken seriously. "These kinds of crimes should not simply be brushed under the rug," said ACLU Executive Director Anthony Romero.

The latest disclosures about alleged mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners followed reports earlier this week that military interrogators at the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay, some posing as FBI agents, humiliated and abused detainees, including inserting lit cigarettes in their ears.

President Bush expects full investigations into all reports of prisoner abuse, a spokesman said Tuesday.

"The president expects that if there are allegations of abuse, that those allegations need to be taken seriously," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said. "People need to be held accountable and brought to justice if they're involved in wrongdoing, and that preventive measures and corrective measures are put in place to prevent it from happening again."

Army spokesman Col. Joseph Curtin said the documents released by the ACLU are "indicative that the Army takes seriously any allegation of detainee abuse. Any allegation will be investigated."

The reports said one U.S. soldier, whose name was marked out on documents, fatally shot an Iraqi prisoner in September 2003 in Tikrit. The soldier was reduced to the lowest rank possible and discharged from the Army in the shooting.

Army criminal investigators determined there was probable cause to charge the soldier with murder and send him to court-martial. But he was charged and punished administratively for

voluntary manslaughter, the documents showed.

The soldier said the victim, Obeed Hethere Radad, was trying to escape. But the investigation found the soldier did not attempt to warn Radad in any fashion, which is mandatory under U.S. military policy.

It was unclear if the military had ever acknowledged this prisoner death before. Officials had made vague references to a September 2003 incident in which a soldier was discharged for using excessive force in killing an Iraqi prisoner, but alleged that prisoner threw rocks at the soldier first.

In another case, an Army specialist in September 2003 threatened to fatally shoot Iraqis during interrogations, which Army investigators considered a possible war violation, according to the reports. The ACLU said it found no evidence the specialist was prosecuted.

"I see TV shows where the police always trick people," said the specialist, whose name also was marked out in the documents.

The specialist told investigators he never intended to harm anyone but wanted to trick the Iraqis into supplying important information, though he acknowledged that he had no formal training as an interrogator.

A witness, another soldier, said the specialist handed each Iraqi a bullet and threatened to shoot them unless they cooperated. "I walked outside. I told a couple of people outside what was going on, and that I didn't think it was right," he wrote.

The witness also told investigators he believed most Iraqis knew useful information about insurgents. "If we're allowed to use this method, we'll stop every Iraqi on the street and tell them to tell us something or that we'll shoot them," he said.

In another case, Army investigators said a private first class, whose name was marked out, shot himself in the left foot in May 2003, after a raid on suspected Fedayeen homes.

Investigators said they believed the private stole 180,000 Iraqi dinars from two homes he was searching, and that he shot himself deliberately when informed he would face disciplinary action in the alleged robberies. The money was found inside the private's protective armor and returned to the Iraqis.