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Document: Prisoner abuse was worse than admitted

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WASHINGTON - More than two months after the Abu Ghraib prison scandal in Iraq shocked the world, an official memo described how military intelligence officers witnessed further prisoner abuse in Baghdad but were threatened to prevent them from reporting it.

The memo was the most recent in a collection of government documents released Tuesday. It was dated June 25 and written by Vice Adm. Lowell E. Jacoby, who directs the Defense Intelligence Agency. Lowell described how two DIA officers, assigned as interrogators to a special operations unit designated as Task Force 6-26, witnessed evidence of prisoner abuse while working at an unnamed "temporary detention facility" in Baghdad.

The extensive collection of government documents suggests that abuse of detainees in Iraq and elsewhere was more widespread and systematic than senior officials have admitted publicly. The officials repeatedly have tried to characterize abuse last year at Abu Ghraib as an isolated series of incidents. A small number of low-ranking soldiers already have been prosecuted or are awaiting trial in these cases.

The documents released Tuesday, however, reveal that senior U.S. officials, who claimed they were unaware of the abuse, were repeatedly informed of accusations of abuse through official channels. They also suggest that these and other reports of abuse failed to trigger investigations into what increasingly appears to have been a widespread pattern of prisoner abuse in Afghanistan, Iraq and at the Guantanamo Bay naval base in Cuba.

According to Jacoby's memo, some prisoners arriving at the facility for interrogation had "burn marks on their backs," while others had bruises and some complained of kidney pain.

One of the officers also saw a Task Force 6-26 soldier "punch a prisoner in the face to the point that he needed medical attention." The DIA interrogator was then ordered to leave the room. One of the DIA officers, who took pictures of the injuries, later showed them to his Task Force 6-26 supervisor, "who immediately confiscated them."

The DIA officers were later "threatened," had their vehicle keys confiscated and were ordered not to leave the compound, "even to get a haircut at the PX (post-exchange)," Jacoby's memo said. The officers were told that their e-mails were being screened and were ordered "not to talk to anyone in the U.S." about the incidents, the memo said.

The memo doesn't specify when the incidents took place, but it suggests that they occurred shortly before the memo was written. The DIA officers reported the incidents through their chain of command on June 24. Jacoby wrote the memo on June 25.

A senior military official, speaking on condition of anonymity because intelligence matters are classified, described the memo as "informational" in nature and that it was meant to inform civilian superiors of a problem, but wasn't designed to request corrective action.

"What you see is pretty much what you get," the official said. "The folks who operated with Task Force 6-26 saw some issues, and it was reported up the chain of command and up the Task Force 6-26 chain of command."

The memo was addressed to Stephen J. Cambone, Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, who reports directly to Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld or Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz.

Last spring, Rumsfeld told Congress that he wasn't aware of any reports of prison abuse and promised strong measures to stop further incidents.

The documents released Tuesday consist of official memos, interview transcripts and other records. The American Civil Liberties Union, the Center for Constitutional Rights, Physicians for Human Rights, Veterans for Common Sense and Veterans for Peace filed a request for the information under the Freedom of Information Act, and a court ordered the government to comply. The ACLU posted the documents on its Web site (ACLU.org).

"The more the government is forced to reveal, the more we learn that individuals in U.S. custody ... were tortured and abused," said ACLU Executive Director Anthony D. Romero. "Their documents tell a damning story of sanctioned government abuse - a story the government has tried to hide and may well come back to haunt our own troops captured in Iraq."

The Pentagon refused to comment directly on the documents released by the ACLU, but it issued a statement that characterized many of them as "either part of previous inquiries or are informing queries yet to be completed."

"U.S. policy condemns and prohibits torture," the statement said. "U.S. personnel are required to follow this policy and applicable law."

The documents reveal a pattern of abuse not only at Abu Ghraib but also at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where more than 500 al-Qaida and Taliban suspects are held, and at U.S.-run detention facilities in Afghanistan.

Eight major reviews have been conducted into allegations of torture and abuse by U.S. troops. At least one general has been suspended because of the Abu Ghraib incident, 26 soldiers are awaiting court-martial and 46 have received non-judicial punishment because of abuse in Iraq and elsewhere. Thirteen soldiers have been reprimanded, and an additional 15 have been discharged.

In addition, nine sailors, most of them Navy SEALs, have been charged with assault for alleged abuse. The Marine Corps has court-martialed 14 of its personnel, and another four have received administrative punishment, the Pentagon said.

U.S. Special Operations Command in Tampa, Fla., refused to comment directly on the allegations outlined in the DIA memo or the personnel involved. Rules for the treatment of prisoners by special-operations soldiers are approved by combat commanders in a geographic region, a spokesman said.