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Real Gitmo Shame?

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WASHINGTON - It wasn't tossed in a toilet, but disrespecting an inmate's Koran got at least one American soldier reprimanded at the Guantanamo prison for terrorists, the Daily News has learned.

A record of the 2003 punishment was discovered by Army Brig. Gen. John Furlow while probing Gitmo misconduct alleged in FBI memos. But it wasn't included in the final report given to the U.S. Southern Command, according to a military official familiar with the investigation.

The omission in the final report written by Lt. Gen. Randall Schmidt, who took over from Furlow, was because officers concluded the incident was isolated and new rules prevented further abuses, the official said.

Under White House pressure, Newsweek on Monday retracted a story that Schmidt determined a Koran was flushed in a Gitmo toilet, which the Pentagon slammed as "demonstrably false."

But two reliable military sources confirmed the previously undisclosed reprimand at the Camp Delta prison - contradicting Bush administration denials of any "credible and specific allegations" about Koran desecration at Gitmo.

"That's true," an ex-Army interrogator at Gitmo said. "I am aware of somebody having their hand slapped."

The source said a soldier on another interrogation team was punished for "trying to be insulting" of a detainee's Koran.

It wasn't clear what the soldier did to warrant the reprimand.

Despite the Pentagon denials that any Korans were abused, Southern Command (SouthCom) launched a "commander's inquiry" on May 11 to examine camp logs, where soldiers may have recorded mishandling of Korans.

When asked for comment, Pentagon spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Flex Plexico said: "I would caution you against writing a story based on anonymous sources when the responsible thing to do would be to wait until the ongoing commander's inquiry and SouthCom investigation are completed and released."

The report is expected to be issued within weeks.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said yesterday that Koran desecration at Gitmo was reported to the U.S. three years ago.

A Pentagon spokesman pointed out that a Jan. 19, 2003, Gitmo memo forbids any U.S. personnel from touching detainees' Korans. But the ex-interrogator, who was at Gitmo in 2003, said, "I never saw any [order] that you can't touch it."