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New reports emerge of Guantanamo prison abuse

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GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba - Three more U.S. soldiers have been punished for mistreating inmates at the prison here, among them an Army officer who mishandled the case of a guard who threw a solvent on a detainee, the military said Thursday.

At least one case occurred, but was not reported, during an independent investigation of the scope of detainee abuses worldwide for Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

In that case, a private first class threw a cleaning solvent on a detainee at the Camp Delta prison in January. He left the island on a regular rotation and was at Fort Dix, N.J., when he was brought back to face discipline, said the camp's superintendent, Command Sgt. Maj. Anthony Mendez.

The soldier was demoted to private in June, reassigned to new duties and fined \$300. His company commander, an Army captain, was given a letter of reprimand "for failing to properly investigate the incident," said Lt. Col. Leon Sumpter, spokesman for detainee operations.

The Army captain, responsible for roughly 140 Military Police, is the highest ranking officer to be disciplined here in a detainee mistreatment episode so far. "He didn't take immediate action," Sumpter said. "That's why he was accused of dereliction of duty. He should've taken corrective action immediately."

Sumpter did not know at what date between January and June the attack was uncovered.

In the other case, a sergeant was busted down to specialist, reassigned and fined \$500 for slugging a captive who spit on him and tried to bite him last month.

Army Col. Brice Gyurisko, the Camp Delta warden, said the sergeant gave the captive "a fat lip" in a struggle to subdue him, exceeding "appropriate levels of force."

The military disclosed the cases in the same week that a Sudanese captive alleged in a lawsuit that he was subjected to abuse at Guantanamo, including sexual humiliation and brutal interrogation.

What is unique about the allegations in the suit - filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Washington by Ibrahim al Qosi, 44 - is that he was held for four months in isolation and had contact only with his Air Force lawyer and guards, meaning he could not have been imitating the reports of abuses that arose out of the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

In the suit, he asserts that female interrogators rubbed their bodies suggestively against detainees, that U.S. soldiers or interrogators here performed sex acts in front of prisoners and displayed hard-core pornography/ in an interrogation room/.

Qosi also asserts that there was a Middle Eastern political theme to the abuse. He said detainees were strapped to an interrogation room floor and wrapped in an Israeli flag, were subjected to "constant pounding of deafening music" and were threatened with transfer to Egypt or Jordan, "well-known in the region for their grotesque treatment of prisoners."

Commanders here denied that an Israeli flag was ever used in interrogations and said no detainee abuse has occurred.

A senior interrogator who briefed reporters on the condition that he not be identified said such behavior did not occur during the previous six months, because he was knowledgeable about those interrogation activities as well.

"This is not Abu Ghraib," he said, citing intense outside oversight of interrogators at this showcase prison known in military jargon as Gitmo.

"Gitmo is a success story, and success is not sexy," he said.

Besides, he said, interrogators don't believe harsh techniques achieve sound results. Rather, he said, they try to "establish rapport."

Commanders here previously acknowledged eight episodes of guards and interrogators mistreating prisoners, including one in which a detainee suffered bruised knees from harsh tactics in an interrogation. They were made public in August in the Schlesinger Report, a Pentagon investigation into worldwide detainee abuse issues sparked by the Abu Ghraib scandal.

The latest two episodes were not among those eight, chronicled by the Navy's inspector general in a May tour of the base.

"I'm pretty confident that there's no abuse currently going on, or that there's been any in (the) recent past that's gone unreported," Vice Admiral Tom Church told reporters May 16.

In Church's assessment at that time, there was "a low probability that something's slipped through the cracks."

While outside investigators have made several pre-announced investigations of soldiers' behavior, commanders here say there is no independent outside mechanism for investigating abuse.

As an example, the independent Navy-run Combatant Status Review Tribunals write a memo to prison commanders describing any allegations of prison abuse that emerge in a case-by-case administrative review of the detainees.

Neither organization would say how many abuse complaints have come up in the 350 or so hearings.

At a hearing Wednesday, an Afghan detainee in an orange jumpsuit alleged he had urine thrown on him and had been beaten by fellow prisoners here so badly he required medical treatment. Based on earlier military briefings here, it is unclear how the prisoner could have legitimately had physical contact with other prisoner.