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## **Rumsfeld says he twice offered to step down**

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WASHINGTON -- Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said yesterday that he twice offered his resignation to President Bush over the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal, but both times was asked to stay in the job.

Photographs of US personnel sexually humiliating and physically abusing prisoners at the jail on the outskirts of Baghdad surfaced last April, triggering global condemnation and calls for Rumsfeld to quit.

"I submitted my resignation to President Bush twice during that period and told him that . . . I felt that he ought to make the decision as to whether or not I stayed on. And he made that decision and said he did want me to stay on," Rumsfeld said in an interview on CNN's "Larry King Live."

Rumsfeld did not state the specific dates when he offered his resignation.

On May 5 of last year, a week after CBS broadcast the first Abu Ghraib pictures, White House aides said that Bush had complained to Rumsfeld that the secretary had failed to alert him fully to the details of the scandal.

But Bush the next day told reporters, "Secretary Rumsfeld has been the secretary during two wars and he's an important part of my Cabinet and he'll stay in my Cabinet."

During testimony before Congress on May 7, Rumsfeld said: "These events occurred on my watch. As secretary of defense, I am accountable for them. I take full responsibility." At the same time, Rumsfeld and other Pentagon officials attributed the abuse to misconduct by low-ranking soldiers, several of whom have now pleaded guilty or been convicted in military courts.

In his CNN interview, Rumsfeld said, "What was going on in the midnight shift in Abu Ghraib prison halfway across the world is something that clearly someone in Washington, D.C., can't manage or deal with."

"I have no regrets," Rumsfeld said.

"We've made a lot of corrections to make sure that those kinds of things [that] happened either don't happen again or are immediately found out and limited and contained," he added.

Last August an investigating panel named by Rumsfeld and headed by former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger said top Pentagon leaders and the military command in Iraq contributed to an environment in which prisoners suffered sadistic abuse at Abu Ghraib.

The panel also found that Rumsfeld and top generals failed to exercise proper oversight over confusing detention policies at US prisons in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Human rights activists argue that coercive interrogation techniques approved by Rumsfeld for use at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where foreign terrorist suspects are held, helped set the stage for detainee abuse by American forces.

Bush in November asked Rumsfeld, already the oldest man to serve as defense secretary, to remain in the job in the president's second term.

Rumsfeld said on CNN that he never discussed with Bush whether he would remain for all four years of the president's second term, which began last month.

While he has many admirers among Bush supporters, Rumsfeld has amassed numerous enemies as well and many Democrats have called for him to quit.

Some leading Senate Republicans, including John McCain of Arizona, former Senate majority leader Trent Lott of Mississippi, Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, and Susan Collins of Maine, also have questioned Rumsfeld's performance.