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US Army Reports New Detainee Procedures

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The U.S. military says it has implemented new procedures to ensure that detainees are not abused, as they were at Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad and allegedly at other U.S. military detention facilities. Officials say allegations of abuse by army soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted in 308 criminal investigations.

The U.S. military said Wednesday it has implemented new training procedures and made other changes designed to guarantee that detainees are treated properly. Senior officers and civilian officials say the changes were under development even before pictures of abuse at Abu Ghraib prison became public last year.

But they acknowledge that the scandal caused them to hold a revised training and procedures manual until lessons learned from Abu Ghraib could be incorporated. That new manual is now in the process of being published, but officials say the new rules and procedures are already being implemented across all U.S. military services.

The deputy chief of staff of Army counterintelligence, Thomas Gandy, says the responsibilities of prison guards and interrogation specialists are clearly defined in the new manual, as is the extent to which guards and interrogators can put pressure on detainees.

"The idea of 'softening up' and all that kind of stuff has never been a part of our doctrine and has never been a part of our training," said Mr. Gandy. "And we clarify those roles and missions so that that can not occur again."

Officials say the Army was given the job of revising prison procedures for the entire U.S. military.

Also on Wednesday, the Army's top law enforcement official, Major General Donald Ryder, said the Army has launched 308 investigations of abuse charges against its soldiers working as prison guards in Iraq and Afghanistan. The general said about two thirds of the cases have been concluded, but he could not say how many investigations resulted in formal charges being filed. The numbers do not include any complaints against U.S. troops in other services.

The general also reported that the Army is reorganizing the way it trains and deploys prison guards, establishing a new 55-hour training course and beginning a three-year process to create 35 fully trained and deployable prison guard units.

He said the first two units are already operating at the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. General Ryder said the new training course includes such subjects as ethics, values and the rules of the Geneva Convention. Mr. Gandy, the counterintelligence official, said there had been such training before, but soldiers had a difficult time applying it in situations like Abu Ghraib. He said the new training is designed to integrate the Geneva rules into the techniques and boundaries of conduct that the soldiers are taught.

General Ryder says, in addition, new procedures are designed to ensure that all detainees in U.S. military facilities are registered and that all U.S. government agencies that operate in the military detention centers follow the rules. This is apparently designed to prevent intelligence agencies from secretly holding people at military prisons, and mistreating them, as has been charged.

The U.S. military's detention policies have been the subject of numerous investigations since the Abu Ghraib scandal first came to light. General Ryder says there has been an ongoing effort to learn the lessons of that scandal and to adopt the recommendations of all the investigations, some of which have not yet been finished.