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Army Documents Shed Light on CIA 'Ghosting'

Systematic Concealment Of Detainees Is Found

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Senior defense officials have described the CIA practice of hiding unregistered detainees at Abu Ghraib prison as ad hoc and unauthorized, but a review of Army documents shows that the agency's "ghosting" program was systematic and known to three senior intelligence officials in Iraq.

Army and Pentagon investigations have acknowledged a limited amount of ghosting, but more than a dozen documents and investigative statements obtained by The Washington Post show that unregistered CIA detainees were brought to Abu Ghraib several times a week in late 2003, and that they were hidden in a special row of cells. Military police soldiers came up with a rough system to keep track of such detainees with single-digit identification numbers, while others were dropped off unnamed, unannounced and unaccounted for.

The documents show that the highest-ranking general in Iraq at the time acknowledged that his top intelligence officer was aware the CIA was using Abu Ghraib's cells, a policy the general abruptly stopped when questions arose.

CIA operatives began looking for a central place to put detainees captured during secret missions in Iraq in mid-2003, and an early choice was the high-security Camp Cropper near Baghdad International Airport, where CIA officers hoped to deposit a few of their prisoners without registering their names. Lt. Col. Ronald G. Chew, the military police commander there, told Army investigators later that he "argued against the practice" and turned the operatives away.

Instead, according to the documents, the CIA quickly looked to Abu Ghraib, then a dusty and decrepit compound outside Baghdad that was slated to be transformed into the central U.S. detention center for the war.

According to statements investigators took from soldiers and officers who worked at the prison, a stream of ghost detainees began arriving in September 2003, after military intelligence officers and the CIA came to an arrangement that kept the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations from knowing the detainees existed. The investigative documents show that Col. Thomas M. Pappas and Lt. Col. Steven L. Jordan, the top two military intelligence officers at the prison, took part in discussions with the CIA on how to handle agency detainees.

Pappas and Jordan are still under investigation, and Army officials said they believe a decision about whether to discipline them could come by the end of the month.

Keeping ghost detainees was harshly criticized by Army investigators who looked into abuse at the prison, and human rights groups condemn the practice. The Red Cross regularly inspects prisons and is supposed to have access to all inmates to ensure their rights are protected.

The most recent Pentagon review of detainee abuse was released this month by Vice Adm. Albert T. Church III, who told reporters that his probe found 30 cases in which prisoners were held off the books, including one kept secretly for about 45 days.

According to investigative statements by some soldiers, such detainees were left in isolation cells for weeks without being interrogated, they were sometimes registered under fake names and essentially lost, and the rules that applied to thousands of other detainees did not always apply to them.

Lt. Gen. Ricardo S. Sanchez, the top Army officer in Iraq at the time, told the Senate Armed Services Committee last spring that there was no system of keeping such detainees at Abu Ghraib, but he later acknowledged two cases in which it had happened, including that of one detainee who died in custody and another who was kept without registration at the behest of Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld.

In a deposition on Sept. 1, 2004, however, Sanchez said he learned after the hearing that there had been a "staff officer understanding" that allowed ghosting by the "Other Government Agency," a code term for the CIA. He said in the deposition that Maj. Gen. Barbara Fast, his top intelligence officer in Iraq, "had been made aware of the allocation of cells for use by OGA." Fast has been cleared of wrongdoing in Abu Ghraib investigations and last week assumed command of the U.S. Army Intelligence Center at Fort Huachuca, Ariz.

"I do know now that there was not a procedure in place to properly inprocess and assign ISNs [internee serial numbers] for those individuals," Sanchez said, according to a transcript of the deposition obtained by The Post. "And when we found out about that, that was fixed."

One of the highly publicized incidents at Abu Ghraib was the death of an unregistered CIA detainee in a shower room in November 2003. Another case that year allegedly gained Sanchez's attention as well, when the CIA logged three Saudi nationals into Abu Ghraib under false names.

In one of several Pentagon studies of detainee abuse, Army Maj. Gen. George Fay reported last August that the three hospital workers had been swept up by the CIA. The Saudi government asked the United States if it held the three but was told no, because their real names were not registered.

A statement to investigators provided more detail. Darius Khaghani, chief of interrogation operations under Sanchez's command, said it became "a very political situation." Over several weeks, he said, requests to locate the Saudi citizens came from L. Paul Bremer, the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh and then from the office of Secretary of State Colin L. Powell.

Finally, soldiers "came up with the idea to question three detainees" who had been brought to the prison by the CIA, "even though they were registered under other names," Khaghani said. "In short order, the three were released and transported to Saudi Arabia on a CIA aircraft, and later I heard the chief of station was relieved over this matter and recalled back to Washington."

An intelligence official last week disputed the allegation that the station chief was removed for that reason, and said the change was made to bring in a more experienced person.

Nail Jubeir, spokesman for the Saudi Embassy in Washington, said that as Saudi officials made unsuccessful requests to find the three men, they kept emphasizing that they were humanitarian workers helping the coalition. "It's always disturbing when you have citizens detained under false names," Jubeir said. "It took some time to get them released."

The investigative documents showed that several soldiers and civilian contractors reported seeing ghost detainees and being confused about their status and rules pertaining to them.

Luke Olander, a civilian intelligence analyst, said: "We had intelligence reports from one particular detainee and the report showed we did not have him at our facility, but he was there." Spec. John Harold Ketzer, an interrogator, said that the ghosts were "off-limits for Army interrogators" and

that "some OGA detainees have waited for months for OGA interrogators to see them, violating the 30[-day] isolation limit rule."

Capt. Carolyn Wood, a military intelligence officer in charge of interrogations at Abu Ghraib, told investigators that she was one of a few who objected to the CIA using her facility for "overnight parking" of unregistered prisoners and that she expressed her "disapproval" to Pappas and Jordan. "But I was overridden," she said, and ghosting continued at least until her departure on Dec. 4, 2003.

Chief Warrant Officer Jon D. Graham, a member of the 519th Military Intelligence Battalion, told investigators that "OGA [CIA] had what we refer to as ghost detainees that were 'buried' or hidden in our facility," adding that he also objected to the practice.

Jordan, in his statement to investigators, said there was a memorandum of understanding between his unit and "OGA" to guide the housing of prisoners brought in by the CIA and Task Force 1-21, a secret Special Operations unit. He said they "dropped off a detainee about two to three times a week."

Pappas told investigators he initially "had concerns over this arrangement" and asked Col. Steven Boltz, then the second-ranking military intelligence officer in Iraq, if they were going to continue housing ghosts. "He said yes, to facilitate their request," Pappas said, according to his statement. "They would drop off detainees without notifying us."