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A General's Dishonor

Editorial
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BY INVOKING his right to avoid self-incrimination, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey D. Miller has avoided a much-needed cross-examination of his role in the abuse of detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. He has also added to his dishonor as a commander who oversaw improper interrogations at Guantanamo Bay, then introduced some of the same practices in Iraq in violation of the Geneva Conventions. Gen. Miller's subsequent account of his actions, in sworn testimony to Congress and Army investigators, has been contradicted by at least four other witnesses, so it's not surprising that he has sought shelter in the military's equivalent of the Fifth Amendment. He has yet to be the subject of any charge. But anyone who still accepts the Abu Ghraib cover story peddled by the White House and the Pentagon -- that the abuses portrayed in now-infamous photographs were invented by rogue guards on the night shift -- ought to be asking what this two-star general is afraid of.

Gen. Miller was commander at Guantanamo in 2002 when prisoners were subjected to abuses documented by shocked FBI agents as well as the International Red Cross, which called them "tantamount to torture." An Army investigation completed last summer found that an al Qaeda suspect named Mohamed Qahtani was threatened with snarling dogs, forced to wear underwear on his head and led by a leash attached to his chains -- the very abuse later shown in the Abu Ghraib photographs. In August 2003 Gen. Miller was dispatched to Iraq with the mission of improving intelligence collection from detainees. Within weeks dogs had been introduced to interrogations at Abu Ghraib, and Lt. Gen. Ricardo S. Sanchez, the senior U.S. commander in Iraq, had issued several memos authorizing other interrogation techniques used at Guantanamo but violating the Geneva Conventions, including painful shackling, sleep deprivation and nudity.

The military intelligence commander at Abu Ghraib, Col. Thomas M. Pappas, told investigators in 2004 that Gen. Miller specifically recommended the use of dogs in interrogations. The prison's former warden, Maj. David DiNenna, supported that account in sworn testimony last summer. So did a military interrogator who said he had been trained in using dogs by a team that Gen. Miller sent to Iraq. But the general denied recommending dogs for interrogations in sworn testimony to Congress in 2004 and in interviews with military criminal investigators. "No methods contrary to the Geneva Convention were presented at any time by the assistance team I took to Iraq," he told the Senate Armed Services Committee. This highly questionable testimony was not challenged by the Senate or by the numerous Pentagon investigations into Abu Ghraib, which excused all senior officers except for one reserve brigadier general who says, convincingly, that she was made a scapegoat.

That Gen. Miller has now been obliged to hide behind a self-incrimination shield is mainly due to the tenacity of defense lawyers handling the court-martial cases of two Abu Ghraib dog handlers. The lawyers won a court order giving them the right to interview Gen. Miller. What's not yet clear is whether Army prosecutors and senior commanders are willing to stop protecting the general. Last year his superior, Gen. Bantz J. Craddock, rejected a recommendation by the military's own investigators that Gen. Miller be sanctioned for his performance at Guantanamo. Army prosecutors have obtained immunity for Col. Pappas; that should have been done only if they intended to use his testimony against more senior commanders. Unless charges are forthcoming against Gen. Miller, he could yet escape all responsibility for his actions -- even that of telling the truth.

