

[NYTr] Iraqi Boy Subjected to Mock Execution

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sent by Rich Winkel (activ-1):

The Independent - 10 May 2004
<http://www.independent.co.uk>

Boy, 16, 'was subjected to mock execution by US interrogators'

By Justin Huggler in Baghdad

American soldiers subjected a 16-year-old Iraqi prisoner to a mock execution inside an American detention centre and made his brothers watch, one of the brothers alleged yesterday.

Husam Mahawish told The Independent he was forced to watch as an American soldier put a handgun to his younger brother Mohammed's forehead and pulled the trigger. "I thought he was going to kill Mohammed," Mr Mahawish said. "But instead there was a click. There was no bullet."

Mr Mahawish, claims he and his three brothers were beaten, given electric shocks, forced to stand under cold water and forced to kneel for hours on end under American interrogation. They were questioned about their father, Abed Hamad, but they did not know he had given himself up to US forces three days after they were captured. After the torture came five months of detention without charge. When they were released in March, the brothers discovered their father's body had been delivered to the local hospital by US soldiers. They claim it showed signs of torture.

Theirs is one particularly disturbing account out of a huge number of stories of abuse by American soldiers in Iraqi prisons that have emerged since the publication of photographs showing soldiers humiliating naked Iraqi detainees in Abu Ghraib prison.

There is no way of confirming Mr Mahawish's allegations, and some Iraqis have been accused of fabricating accounts of abuse in US detention since the Abu Ghraib photographs appeared. Mr Mahawish has American prison identity papers which give his identity number as US91Z-154300CI -- CI stands for "civilian internee". His name is given incorrectly on the papers as "Hasan Mahawish". He also has photographs of his father's body which show extensive bruising.

The four brothers - Husam, 27, Arkan, 22, Qusay, 20, and Mohammed, 16 - were arrested by US forces in their home town of Al-Qaim on 26 October last year, Mr Mahawish says. "The Americans came to our house. They were looking for my father but they did not find him,

so they took us instead," he says. The family is Sunni but Mr Mahawish claims neither the brothers nor their father had anything to do with the Sunni insurgency. All four brothers have been released.

They were held at Tiger Base, a local American camp, for two weeks, then transferred to Baghdadi air base, in Anbar province - not to be confused with Baghdad international airport - where they were interrogated.

During five sessions of interrogation, Mr Mahawish claims he and his brothers were stripped to their underwear. He has a broken tooth which he claims is the result of severe beating and claims interrogators used an electric baton on the back of his neck that gave him a shock which knocked him unconscious for five minutes.

He claims the questioning revolved around their father, with interrogators repeatedly demanding to know where he was, despite the fact that he had surrendered to US forces three days after they were arrested.

Mr Mahawish describes Arkan being tied with his arms and legs together behind his back in an excruciatingly painful position known as the "scorpion", for an hour at a time. He and the others were forced to remain kneeling for two to three hours at a time.

But his most disturbing allegations concern his 16-year-old brother Mohammed. "Throughout the questioning, it was Mohammed who got the worst treatment," he says.

One of the interrogators put a handgun to Mohammed's head. "He said: 'If you don't tell us where your father is I will shoot him'," says Mr Mahawish. "After 15 minutes, he said 'I will come back and kill him tomorrow if you don't tell us'." The next day the scene was repeated, but this time the interrogator pulled the trigger. The chamber was empty.

Mr Mahawish says he believed the threat was genuine because of a disturbing alleged incident that took place a few days before. The brothers had overheard what they believed was a prisoner being shot dead by interrogators in the cell next door.

"I can't remember his name, he was in a cell next door with completely closed walls," Mr Mahawish recalled. "We heard them asking who his accomplices were. He said there weren't any, then we heard shooting. About two hours later, we saw them drag the body from the cell." If this incident took place, it is possible that it was staged to frighten the brothers, particularly as the alleged mock execution took place shortly afterwards.

After five sessions of interrogation, the alleged mistreatment stopped. In the months that followed, they were transferred repeatedly from prison to prison, including a stint at Abu Ghraib. But Mr Mahawish's account is very specific, he says the alleged abuse took place only in one place, at one time - and it was not at Abu Ghraib but at the air base. He also claims that it was carried out only by interrogators, and not by the regular guards.

If his allegations are true, they would add to mounting evidence that the mistreatment of prisoners spread far beyond the walls of Abu Ghraib prison, and that it was systematically used by interrogators,

and not the work of a few "bad apples".

Mr Mahawish claims he was questioned by three American interrogators, together with two masked assistants who he believed from their accents were Iraqis. He remembers one of the Americans' names as a Sergeant Van, or something similar.

The brothers were released on 23 March. They discovered that the Americans had delivered their father's body to a hospital in Al-Qaim in November. The cause of death was given as a heart attack but the body was heavily bruised and had broken ribs, according to Mr Mahawish.

In the massive publicity now surrounding the prison abuses, there is a genuine risk of some Iraqis manufacturing stories of mistreatment.

Another Iraqi who took part in a press conference together with Mr Mahawish and several other former detainees was yesterday accused of lying by the conference organisers after he claimed he was sodomised by US soldiers.

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