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Details Still Sketchy On Prisoner Abuse

Officials are withholding the names of the six U.S. soldiers arrested in Iraq. Eleven were suspended.

By Carol Rosenberg, Inquirer Foreign Staff

BAGHDAD - Senior U.S. military officials yesterday continued to shield soldiers embroiled in a prisoner-abuse scandal at Iraq's notorious Abu Ghraib prison, saying only that none of the 20 or so abused prisoners required medical treatment.

U.S. commanders on Saturday charged six U.S. Army Military Police and said 11 others were under suspension in the abuse case. Those charged face allegations of cruelty and maltreatment, indecent acts with another person, assault, conspiracy and dereliction of duty.

The abuses allegedly occurred in November and December at Abu Ghraib, which served as a torture center during Saddam Hussein's rule and today houses about 1,500 Iraqis being detained by the U.S.-led coalition.

The investigation started two months ago after U.S. troops reported the alleged abusers, senior officers said.

By Baghdad standards, yesterday was a fairly quiet day. Insurgents lobbed a rare daytime volley of rockets toward the Green Zone, where U.S. and other officials are managing the occupation, and one fell short, killing two Iraqi motorists near the posh Mansour district.

Most rocket attacks have rattled the capital at night, averting wider casualties, because many Iraqis stay home after dark.

U.S. officials also announced four U.S. military casualties yesterday: Two soldiers were killed Saturday in a five-rocket attack on a coalition post near Fallujah, which is west of Baghdad; a soldier was shot and killed early yesterday in a noncombat incident near Samarra, which is north of the capital; and a soldier died last evening when a roadside bomb exploded.

Military lawyers declined to name the soldiers, reportedly from the 800 Military Police Brigade, who were charged, or to release their charge sheets or describe the nature of the alleged abuse. In response to a question, they said none of the prisoners was given medical treatment, and would not say if any of the mistreated prisoners were women.

Coalition troops have about 9,500 detainees in detention centers across Iraq; briefers said last week that only 20 are women.

Commanders here say they are shielding the soldiers' identities and ranks, as well as details of the alleged abuses, because the accused are innocent until found guilty. Other military-abuse cases here were made

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public at the time of charges, however, and resulted in internal plea-style agreements before they reached trial.

Other soldiers here have been charged with assaulting prisoners, and have left the service. Saturday's charges were unusual in part because the "indecent acts" accusation, according to the military's court-martial manual, refers to "grossly vulgar, obscene, repugnant" behavior "to excite lust and deprave the morals with respect to sexual relations."