

07/23/2006**Iraq Update—07/17/2006**

In the effort to close Abu Ghraib, it appears that higher echelons have finally come to the conclusion that since there are not enough other facilities to house all of the detainees here, the time has come to release most of the detainees whom the ICCC (court) have found innocent (and are only still detained because U.S. Army/Marine appeals).

About half of the detainees (many of whom I've mentioned in past e-mails) have been set free. Watching the blind/deaf man be carried to the "happy bus" by the other detainees, knowing that he will get to see his family again, and that his life will not needlessly end in the squalor of Abu Ghraib, was one of best moments I've had here.

But there is one man whom will probably be in U.S. custody until the end. He is my age, maybe a couple of years older, and is a Christian from the Kurdish region of northern Iraq (known as Kurdistan to those who live there). After graduating from High School, he acquired a student visa to go to college in the United States, and he received his bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan in just under 4 years.

After college graduation, he returned to Iraq, and after 2 years' of study, received his master's from the University of Baghdad. He then returned back to his native land of Kurdistan to begin his career in business.

A little-known fact is that about a year before our invasion of Iraq: U.S. Special Forces were operating in Kurdistan (northern Iraq). He met a group of them while they were there, and they asked him to come on board as an interpreter (he speaks seven different languages, and his English is flawless—he hardly even has an accent). Seeing an opportunity to avenge the genocide that Saddam had attempted on his people, he accepted their offer, was issued a U.S. Army uniform, body armor, Kevlar helmet, 9 mm pistol, and shotgun; and was flown south to be a part of the very first wave to invade Iraq.

As U.S. Forces pushed north towards Baghdad, he was made the "point man" for house raids (the guy who busts down the door), and would act as interpreter for the on-the-spot interviews/interrogations.

It didn't take long for Baghdad to fall, and the statues of Saddam began to be toppled across the country. In the midst of this, he got word that his mother was missing, apparently kidnapped from her home in the middle of the night. A few days later he received an anonymous call from the kidnappers demanding that he cease working with U.S. forces; otherwise they would decapitate her. He refused.

A week later news arrived that his mother's headless corpse had been found on the side of the road; he tells me that at that moment he pledged to dedicate his life to the elimination of terrorism. He was unable to attend his mother's funeral. It was around this time that he began dating a female U.S. Army Specialist in the unit to which he was attached.

A few months later, as the war shifted from invasion to occupation, his unit's mission changed from house-raids to traffic checkpoints (with vehicle searches), and he continued working with them as an interpreter out in the streets of Baghdad. As the attrition of life in Iraq began to wear on the U.S. soldiers in his unit, jealousy of his relationship with the American girl (I hear she was very attractive) began to brew; and one day, the commander of the U.S. Army Brigade to which he was attached called him into his office and ordered him to cease dating her. Being that an Iraqi translator is not actually an enlisted soldier, he was not required to comply with the order, and he informed the Brigade Commander that he was declining to obey with the directive. At that point the Brigade Commander could have terminated the interpreter's contract with the Army, or he could have ordered the female soldier to end the relationship; he chose to do neither, I guess the anger of being "disobeyed" by an Iraqi planted the seed of a different course of action in his mind.

Two days later, during a typical day stopping traffic, after finishing questioning the driver of a suspicious vehicle, the interpreter looked up to see that the rest of his U.S. Army company was nowhere to be found. He had been abandoned in one of the worst sections of Baghdad, wearing a U.S. Army uniform with an American Flag on his shoulder; basically left there to be killed. Luckily he saw an Iraqi Police (IP) car nearby. Unluckily, it was nearly 6 blocks away and the area was swarming with anti-coalition forces.

He had gone less than 2 blocks before the first shot rang out, the bullet striking him directly in the back, lodging into his body armor. The impact of the round knocked him off of his feet, but within seconds he had drawn his 9 mm pistol and was back on his feet running towards the IP vehicle.

He made it another block and a half, then he was struck with 5 more rounds: 1 was stopped by the armor, but the other 4 hit their mark (3 going into his abdomen and 1 through his shoulder). As he laid on the ground bleeding, with his life quickly draining from his body, he tells me that his mind was again filled with thoughts of his mother, and that gave him the strength to pull his bullet-riddled body back to his feet and run the remaining two and a half blocks to the IP vehicle; he collapsed unconscious at the feet of a young Iraqi policeman.

He awoke two days later in the bed of an Iraqi hospital. The doctor told him that the Iraqi policeman had called an ambulance which had brought him there, that his heart had stopped twice on the way to the hospital, and that barring infection he would survive (though they had to remove one of his kidneys).

During his recovery, he was visited by an Iraqi reporter. The fact that a U.S. interpreter was being treated in an Iraqi hospital (instead of a U.S. military facility) was unusual, and the reporter was interested in the details behind the story. The interpreter told about his girlfriend, the meeting with the Brigade Commander, and being left for dead. The story (including the names of everyone involved) was published in an Arabic newspaper a few days later. Within a week, the Brigade Commander whom had been named in the story filled out a sworn statement claiming that the interpreter was a “terrorist,” and that was all that it took to have him sent to Abu Ghraib.

When he arrived here he was thrown in the Special Housing Unit (SHU) for 14 days, where as a “terrorist” he was routinely subjected to the torture of being strapped in-between medical litters and tied down into a restraint chair in the hot sun for hours on end. The U.S. soldiers felt justified in inflicting this torment on the freshly wounded and recovering former-Army interpreter, because the orders to do so were signed directly by a U.S. Army Colonel (his former Brigade Commander).

When the two weeks were completed, he was thrown into the general population where numerous attempts were made on his life by other detainees; not only was he a non-Arab Christian in the same cage with Sunni Arab insurgents, but he was actually assigned to the same tent with 2 detainees who he personally arrested while working with U.S. forces.

He tells me that every day in the general population was a battle for his life, but motivated by the memory of his mother, he continued to survive. A few months went by, and the U.S. Army/Marines began capturing more and more foreign terrorists. Many of these terrorists spoke Pashtu (the language of Afghanistan), not Arabic; which created a big problem since there are no Pashtu interpreters stationed here. However, Pashtu is one of the languages that the detained former-interpreter speaks, so military intelligence would use him to translate notes/writing that were confiscated from the foreign detainees. After a while (about 14 months ago), it was decided that he was too valuable of a resource to be left to die in the general population, and they moved him into the Shia level where I was later assigned.

He was in Abu Ghraib for almost two years and had never been permitted to go before the court or even speak to a lawyer (the U.S. Army claims that he has

top-secret information that they don't want him to reveal), and the only witness against him continues to be his former Brigade Commander (who was rotated out of Iraq over a year ago).

So here he sat in his yellow jumpsuit, treated just like every other thug we have detained here. I only ever heard him complain one time, and that was in regards to our records having him listed as a terrorist. This is what he said to me:

"A terrorist? How can I be a terrorist? They killed my mother, they tried to kill me (showing me he scars), if the U.S. government want to hold me here for no reason, then fine, say that; but don't call me a terrorist."

Personally, I don't see how military intelligence can label him a terrorist and then trust him to translate writings seized from other terrorists. It just doesn't make any sense. But, we all know (me, him, and the U.S. Army) that because there are orders signed by a Colonel, he will be detained until U.S. troops finally leave Iraq.

While I was away on leave, we had several large detainee transfers to Camp Bucca (a detention facility in southern Iraq). He was on one of them. When he arrived at Bucca, he was thrown back into the general population area of the facility. It wasn't long before he was recognized by some of the other detainees; and a few days later, he was beaten nearly to death. He had to be helicoptered out to one of the main hospitals in Iraq, where he is currently lying on a cot in stable condition.

Before I went on leave, I asked him that after all my country has done to him, why does he continue to help us by translating intelligence documents. He told me that he still "loves the U.S. Army," because we "kill the terrorists every day," and that he's proud to be able to continue working to fulfill the pledge that he made to himself to eliminate terrorism after the death of his mother. He's a better man than me.

Hope all is well. Talk to you later.

Mike