

## Soldiers Back in U.S. Tell of More Iraq Abuses

By **REUTERS**

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ANTIOCH, California (Reuters) - Three U.S. military policemen who served at Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison said on Thursday they had witnessed unreported cases of prisoner abuse and that the practice against Iraqis was commonplace.

"It is a common thing to abuse prisoners," said Sgt. Mike Sindar, 25, of the Army National Guard's 870th Military Police Company based in the San Francisco Bay area. "I saw beatings all the time.

"A lot of people had so much pent-up anger, so much aggression," he said. Sindar and the other military policemen, who have returned to California from Iraq, spoke in interviews with Reuters. Advertisement

U.S. treatment of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib has stirred wide international condemnation after the publication of photos in recent days showing Americans sexually humiliating prisoners. Six soldiers in Iraq have been charged in the case and President Bush apologized publicly on Thursday.

Although public attention has focused on the dehumanizing photos, some members of the 870th MP unit say the faces in those images were not the only ones engaged in cruel behavior.

"It was not just these six people," said Sindar, the group's nuclear, biological and chemical weapons specialist. "Yes, the beatings happen, yes, all the time."

An officer in their group was reprimanded last year after holding down a prisoner for other men to beat, Sindar told Reuters. Sindar and fellow military policeman Ramon Leal said they saw hooded prisoners with racial taunts written on the hoods such as "camel jockey" or slogans such as "I tried to kill an American but now I'm in jail."

Leal said one female soldier in his unit fired off a slingshot into a crowd of prisoners. Sindar, who was familiar with the incident, said one person was injured.

Another group of soldiers knocked a 14-year-old boy to the ground as he arrived at the prison and then twisted his arm, Sindar and Leal said.

"The soldiers were laughing at him," said Leal. "I saw the other soldiers that would take out their frustrations on the prisoners."

Until earlier this year prisoners would arrive at Abu Ghraib with broken bones, suggesting they

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had been roughed up, he said. But the practice ended in January or February, as practices at the prison were coming under increased internal scrutiny.

Photos obtained by Reuters show U.S. soldiers looking into body bags of three Iraqi prisoners killed by 870th MP guards during a prison riot in the fall of 2003. One photograph shows a bearded man with much of his bloodied forehead removed by the force of a bullet.

“We were constantly being attacked, we had terrible support ... also being extended all the time, a lot of us had problems with our loved ones suffering from depression,” said another of the military policemen, Spc. Dave Bischel. “It all contributes to the psychological component of soldiers when they get stressed.”

The Californians' remarks were unusual, as U.S. soldiers have been reluctant to speak out in public on the issue.

Some say investigators went out of their way to keep the allegations under wraps. When military investigators were looking into abuses several months ago, they gave U.S. guards a week's notice before inspecting their possessions, several soldiers said.

“That shows you how lax they are about discipline. ‘We are going to look for contraband in here, so hint, hint, get rid of the stuff,’ that’s the way things work in the Guard,” Leal said.

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