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ABU GHRAIB PRISON (BAGHDAD CORRECTIONAL FACILITY)

Abu Ghraib is a city in Iraq approximately 30 kilometers west of Baghdad where the government of Iraq built a 280-acre prison facility in the 1960s. Under Saddam Hussein, Abu Ghraib became a symbol of the ruling Ba'ath party's tyranny. Saddam's security services dispatched countless thousands of real and suspected enemies of the state there during his 24-year reign. In 2004, the prison became the focal point of an enormous scandal involving American abuse of prisoners following the U.S.-led invasion that liberated Iraq from Saddam's regime.

For decades, Abu Ghraib figured prominently in human rights reports from Iraq. In the 1980s, Amnesty International catalogued thousands of reported cases of abuse, brutal interrogation, forced starvation, and torture, as well as innumerable "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions occurring inside Abu Ghraib. Conditions did not improve after Iraq's defeat in the 1991 Gulf War; if anything, the regime's survival emboldened it to take even more repressive measures against dissent. In the 1990s, thousands of alleged enemies of the state (including large numbers of Sh'ia Muslims and Kurds who had risen against Saddam following his army's expulsion from Kuwait in March 1991) were sent to Abu Ghraib, and reports of torture and execution continued. In 1998, Amnesty International reported that several hundred inmates, many of them political prisoners of the regime nearing the end of their sentences, had been suddenly executed there the previous November. As late as 2001, approximately 15,000 inmates

were held in the prison, many for political reasons. However, with war against the United States imminent, Saddam Hussein announced a general amnesty, and in October 2002 most prisoners throughout Iraq were released. Abu Ghraib was largely abandoned, and files pertaining to past prisoners were hurriedly burned by prison officials and staff. Hence, it is probable that the fate of many who "disappeared" inside Abu Ghraib will never be known.

In March 2003 an American-led military coalition invaded Iraq, quickly brushing aside Iraqi military opposition and seizing Baghdad. Saddam's government disintegrated within three weeks, although Saddam himself was not apprehended until December. Subsequently, Abu Ghraib, renamed with typical bureaucratic loquaciousness the "Baghdad Central Confinement Facility," was reactivated by the Americans to serve as a detention center for Iraqi prisoners of war, insurgents, and suspected terrorists. By year's end, more than 5,000 Iraqis were held in the facility.

In January 2004 the U.S. Army commenced an investigation into reports of abuse and torture being committed by American military personnel at Abu Ghraib after receiving testimony and a compact disc of photographic evidence from a member of the military police. In late April, the American television program *60 Minutes II* and the journalist Seymour Hersh, writing in the online edition of *The New Yorker*, exposed to the public the abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners by American military personnel. Thus began a series of revelations that engulfed the U.S. armed forces, the Department of Defense, and the Presidency itself in scandal. Published photographs of U.S. service

personnel intimidating, sexually humiliating, and in some cases beating prisoners or threatening them with dogs shocked many Americans accustomed to regarding their armed forces as defenders of human rights. In addition, the revelation of these crimes did incalculable damage to the moral credibility of the American cause. Henceforth, the claim that the United States had invaded Iraq to liberate its citizens from tyranny would, throughout much of the world, be dismissed as self-serving hypocrisy.

In some cases the instances of abuse and torture occurred during interrogations to extract “actionable intelligence” from prisoners, but in others it appears to have had no motive apart from abject sadism. While decrying the incidents, U.S. President George W. Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stressed that only a handful of poorly trained and ill-supervised individuals were directly responsible for the abuse (neither Bush nor Rumsfeld would deign to use the word “torture”). Subsequent accusations regarding similar incidents in American detention facilities in Iraq, Afghanistan, Cuba, and, indeed, at various “secret” facilities utilized in the War on Terror, have led many to suspect that the Abu Ghraib incidents may have been more systemic.

In all, 17 soldiers were relieved of duty and seven charged under military law. The prison’s commanding officer, Brigadier General Janice Karpinsky, was demoted to colonel, while as of December 2005 two soldiers, Specialist Charles Garner and Private Lynndie England, have received jail terms of 10 and three years, respectively.

For opponents of the war, Abu Ghraib has become a symbol for everything morally and pragmatically wrong with U.S. policy in Iraq. The irony, however, is that American treatment of prisoners in Abu Ghraib, appalling though it was, actually constituted an improvement over the former regime’s, but few opponents of the Iraq War had ever heard of the facility before April 2003.

See also Hussein; Saddam Iran-Iraq War; Gulf War; Iraq War; Torture; War on Terror

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—Graham Broad

ACCOMMODATION

Detaining powers face many challenges when handling prisoners of war and civilian internees, not the least of which is the need to provide accommodation, or living quarters for captives. In some conflicts, belligerents are able to make advance preparations, but more often, arrangements must be made much more hastily. As a result, prisoners have usually been housed in structures that have been hurriedly converted to prisons rather than in camps specially designed for internment.

For centuries, belligerent nations have agreed on a number of practices for the release of prisoners, all of which have been intended, in part, to solve the problem of having to provide accommodation. Until the twentieth century, there was widespread use of parole, whereby, upon giving a pledge not to fight again, prisoners would be released, either to their home country or to arrange their own lodging in the enemy state. Many prisoner exchanges, often on the basis of numerical equality, also allowed prisoners to return to their homes. At the other end of the spectrum, it was not uncommon for prisoners to be massacred. This, like exchange and parole, was a way to



A typical hut that accommodated Allied POWs on the Burma-Thailand Railway in World War II (Australian War Memorial 157878)

relieve a belligerent state of the burden of housing prisoners.

However, if exchange or parole could not be agreed upon and if execution offended the sensibilities of the state, it had no choice but to provide accommodation for prisoners. In the worst-case scenario, when an enemy collapsed suddenly or an offensive was more successful than predicted, a belligerent government would suddenly be faced with masses of prisoners to house. This was the case at certain points during the U.S. Civil War, during the German spring offensive in the summer of 1918, after the fall of France in 1940, and after the fall of Germany in 1945. In each instance, prisoners bore the brunt of the lack of preparations. They endured long and exhausting treks, only to discover there were no buildings to shelter them. When the first Union prisoners reached Andersonville, Georgia, in February 1864, there were no barracks; POWs slept in the open air, dug holes in the ground, or

cobbled together rude shelters from scraps of lumber they found. The situation was the same for the hundreds of thousands of German soldiers who surrendered when the Nazi state collapsed in 1945; there were simply not enough buildings available to house them, so many spent weeks living in open fields without shelter. Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II, sent to Thailand to work on the Death Railway, found that they had to build their own camps. Their captors provided the tools, but they had to clear the jungle and erect the barracks themselves.

Wherever possible, detaining powers have adapted other structures to serve as prisons. Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with this practice: Provided there is sufficient time to complete the arrangements, a converted camp can be quite adequate. Indeed, millions of prisoners have been incarcerated in camps that had once been something else. Perhaps the most common practice has been to convert a military estab-