

British soldiers executed up to 20 Iraqi detainees, say witnesses

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By Jerome Taylor

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British soldiers in Iraq may have tortured, mutilated and executed up to 20 Iraqi detainees four years ago, according to five Iraqi civilians who say they saw the murders.

Lawyers acting for the five men produced a dossier yesterday which alleges the British Army executed the detainees at the Abu Naji military base where they had been taken after a three-hour gun battle near the southern Iraqi town of Majat-al-Kabir in May 2004.

The allegations, which the Ministry of Defence strongly denies, first came to light four weeks after Mehdi Army militia ambushed British troops on a main highway between Baghdad and the southern city of Basra but this is the first time witnesses have come forward with allegations of an execution.

The Army has always claimed 28 gunmen were killed after the ambush which came to be known as the "Battle of Danny Boy" and that 20 bodies and a number of prisoners were taken to the nearby Camp Abu Naji for identification.

When the bodies were handed back to Iraqi medics a day later, however, a number of them showed what human rights activists have alleged were wounds inconsistent with battlefield injuries - including numerous close-range gun shots to the head and one man who had allegedly had his penis removed.

The five men making the allegations - Hussein Jabbari Ali, Hussain Fadhil Abass, Atiyah Sayid Abdelreza, Madhi Jassim Abdullah and Ahmad Jabber Ahmood - were among those taken captive but claimed they were simply farming in the area when the battle broke out. They were all later cleared of any wrongdoing in the Iraqi courts.

According to their witness statements, the five say they heard the sounds of fellow detainees either being tortured, strangled or shot at close range.

Hussein Jabbari Ali, who claims he was harvesting his field at the time the ambush took place, said in Abu Naji he heard the sound of men screaming and then suddenly stopping. "I counted eight different incidents where each involved the victim screaming for a prolonged period followed by a scream that rose in volume, tone and intensity and then nothing," he said.

Phil Shiner, one of the solicitors for the men who are bringing a damages claim in the UK courts, acknowledged yesterday that the bulk of the evidence relied on the men's interpretation of what they heard, and that no postmortem examinations had taken place on

the bodies of the 20 dead. He believed his clients were telling the truth.

“It may be that none of this happened,” he said. “We need a public inquiry to establish the facts.”

The MoD is re-investigating the allegations despite a previous Royal Military Police inquiry which found nobody to be at fault.

A spokesman for the MoD said: “Allegations of mistreatment, unlawful killing and mutilation by British troops following an incident at Vehicle Checkpoint Danny Boy were thoroughly investigated by the RMP. Their investigation lasted 10 months, involved the interviewing of over 150 British personnel and 50 Iraqi nationals, and found no evidence to support these allegations.”

Survivors’ accounts

Atiyah Sayid Abdelreza, 22

“Whichever way I turned, they would kick me full in the face. This went on for a long time but time itself seemed to stop for me. I felt I was surrounded by merciless men.”

Hussein Jabbari Ali, 28

“The soldiers pushed me to the ground and handcuffed my hands behind my back. One soldier punched me repeatedly in the face. The blows were heavy and painful and I was almost knocked unconscious.”

Hussein Fadel Abass, 24

“[At the Abu Naji camp] I heard the terrible sound of someone being choked or strangled. Afterwards there were four to five shots fired.”

Mahdi Jassim Abdullah, 21

“I sensed that there were shifts of soldiers with different soldiers whacking me if my head fell to one side if I dozed off.”

Ahmad Jabbar Ahmood, 27

“[A soldier] kicked me in my back. Another put his boot on my head and ground my face into the earth.”

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