

STEVE MUMFORD PAINTS THE WAR IN IRAQ

HARPER'S

HARPER'S MAGAZINE/MARCH 2005 \$5.95



AWOL IN AMERICA

When Desertion Is the Only Option

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THE LOST BUDDHAS OF BAMMIYAN
Picking Up the Pieces in Afghanistan
By Matthew Power

[Accusation]

THE ARMY WE HAVE

From an interview with a twenty-one-year-old Afghan man whose name is withheld for his protection, conducted last summer in Gardez by Daniel Rothenberg, an American human-rights researcher. The interviewee showed a Department of Defense discharge letter stating that he was detained from December 2002 through May 2004.

There were eight of us, and they took us all to Gardez. When we were taken to jail, we were masked, with some type of bag put over our heads. Our hands were tied. They poured cold water over us and then started beating us with their fists and with sticks. Sometimes they picked us up on their shoulders and then threw us down. They were all American soldiers wearing uniforms. They untied dogs and they frightened us with them. The dogs bit us and scratched us with their teeth and nails. They didn't give us anything to eat or drink. We were held there for seven or eight nights, and each night we were tortured.

Then they took us to Bagram. When we got to Bagram, we were held in a wooden cell. We spent eight days in the small cell, and we were not allowed to talk or to sleep. There were bags on our heads, and our hands were tied. Whenever we sat down they yelled at us to stand up.

They would come over and yell and then cut off our beards and our mustaches and even our eyebrows. Some people fell to the ground. When we were unable to stand, they tied our hands to an iron rod on the top of the cell. This kept us from standing normally, and we were forced to stand on our toes.

We were interrogated four times during the first eight days. The interrogations were run by Americans with Afghan translators. They asked us:

"Who is your commander?"

"What do you know about the Taliban?"

"What do you know about Al Qaeda?"

"Who are you fighting for?"

Then we were put into a cell made of chain-link fencing. There was only one person in each cell, and we were able to sit. Sometimes they would order us to get on our knees and hold our arms up, and then they would ask us all sorts of questions, some that were so strange you would not have imagined them, even in dreams:

"Have you ever seen cats having sex?"

"Have you ever seen donkeys having sex?"

We were really surprised by these questions.

People were tortured in Bagram. I saw many old people who couldn't walk fast, and the Americans pushed and pulled them. They broke prisoners' arms. I saw three dead bodies. One guy came from Khost. He was in a cell next to ours, and he couldn't stand. His legs couldn't move. They beat him so much. Then they took him to a room on the second floor. The next morning I saw them take his body down the stairs on a stretcher. The second man was from Tora Bora, and I don't know where the third man was from, maybe from Kandahar.

We were not so sad when we were tortured. But when they insulted Islam it was really very difficult. They would come into the cell and search our belongings. They would pick up the Holy Koran and go through it page by page like they were looking for something. We didn't understand what they were saying while they did this. Then they would throw the Holy Koran on the ground or drop it in the latrine. This made us very upset. They searched our cells every day, sometimes many times a day.

The last time I was interrogated in Bagram they told me, "Tell the truth. If you do not tell the truth we will take you to Guantánamo."

I said, "Even if you took me far up into the sky, I couldn't tell you any more. I told you the truth the first time. I have nothing more to say." They sent me to Guantánamo the same way I was sent to Bagram, with a bag over my head and my hands shackled.