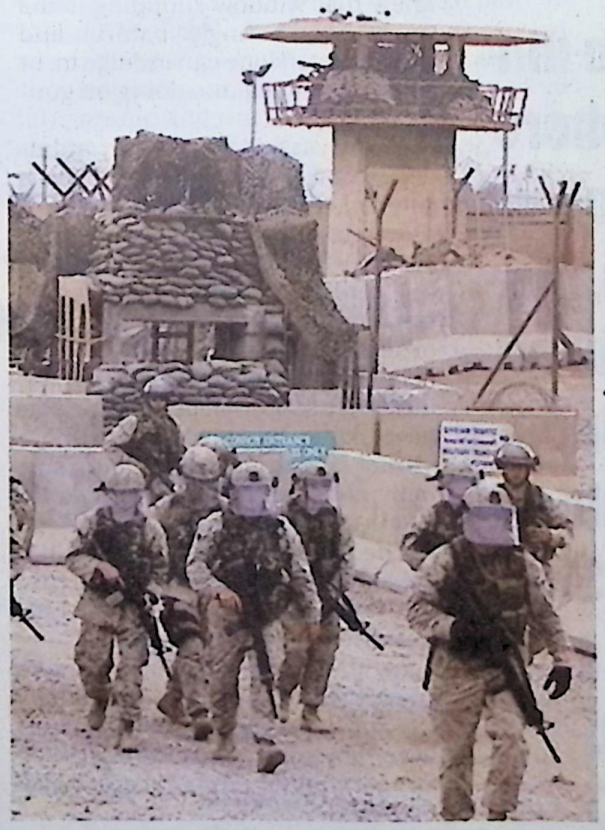
that it would live with me for the rest of my life." He said other prisoners told him that they had experienced similar treatment.

Americans, and the world, have become accustomed to accounts like Mustafa's in connection with Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison. But his story hints at another scandalone that has received little sustained media attention and sparked no public outrage. Over the past three years, numerous reports from Afghan and American human rights groups, and from the Pentagon itself have documented allegations of abuse inside U.S. compounds in Afghanistan. Hundreds of prisoners have come forward, often reluctantly, offering accounts of harsh interrogation techniques including sexual brutality, beatings, and other methods designed to humiliate and inflict physical pain. At least eight detainees are known to have died in U.S. custody in Afghanistan, and in at least two cases military officials ruled that the deaths were homicides. Many of the incidents were known to U.S. officials long before the Abu Ghraib scandal erupted; yet instead of disciplining those involved, the Pentagon transferred key personnel from Afghanistan to the Iraqi prison. "Had the investigation and prosecution of abusive interrogators in Afghanistan proceeded in a timely manner," Human Rights Watch executive director Brad Adams noted in an open letter to Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld last fall, "it is possible that...many of the abuses seen in Iraq could have been avoided."





Even now, with the attention of the media and Congress focused on Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, the problems in Afghanistan seem to be continuing. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, created in 2002 during the early stages of the transition to Afghan self-governance, has collected a total of 120 reports of abuse by coalition forces; 50 of them were made just since last May. Many of the complaints involve excessive force by soldiers during the course of an arrest. But others come from former detainees who say that soldiers stripped them naked and sexually abused them. The Afghan commission and Human Rights Watch, as well as a smaller group, the Washington, D.C.-based Crimes of War Project, have also gathered evidence on detainee abuse at American "forward operating bases" near Kandahar, Gardez, Khost, Orgun, Ghazni, and Jalalabad. Investigators estimate that in each of these places, between 5 and 20 prisoners are held at a time, compared to as many as 200 at Bagram.

It's hard to explain how facts this disturbing have garnered so little attention especially in light of the connection to Abu Ghraib. According to the U.S. military's own investigators, it was at Bagram that interrogators devised and tested the methods that would shame the United States in Iraq. Documents and witness accounts from both detainees and soldiers starkly portray how an initially disciplined interrogation effort deteriorated, in a climate of lawlessness and pressure to produce intelligence, to the point where officers and soldiers first bent the rules, and finally broke them.

(continues next week)