From Bagram to Abu Ghraib

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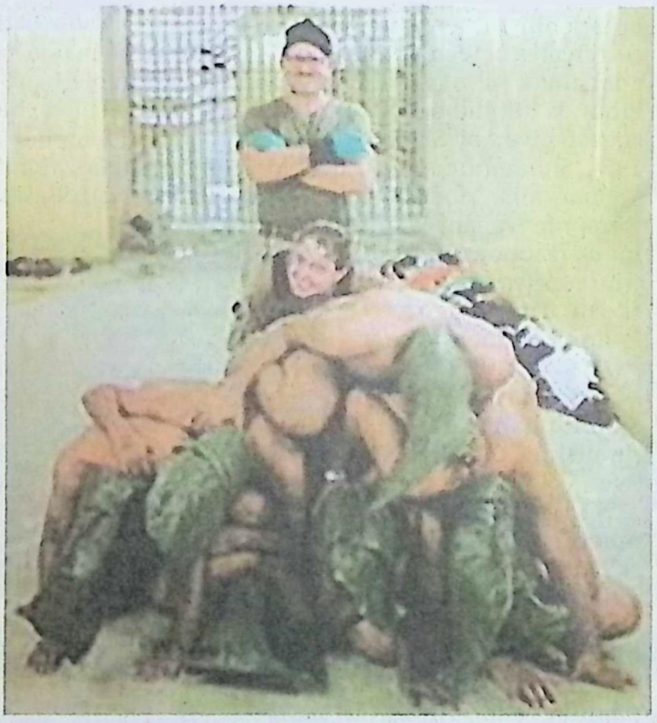
(Continued from last week)

A FEW WEEKS AFTER the fall of the Taliban, in January 2002, a State Department memo described Bagram as "a temporary 'collection centre' where some detainees stop over enroute to their permanent location," typically Guantanamo. Over the following months, however, Bagram became much more than thatin part because troops in the field kept bringing in detainees who were not deemed valuable enough to send on to Guantanamo but were nonetheless kept at the base for months at a time. Many of them were local men arrested during U.S. raids on villages, according to Ahmad Fahim Hakim, deputy chair of the Afghan human rights commission. The problem, Hakim says, has been that the U.S. military frequently responds to tips from competing tribal factions, but isn't in a position to assess whether those claims are credible, or simply attempts to settle scores. "The Americans get a report that a village belongs to Al Qaeda," he explains. "When we go to check, we find nothing. The commission is very keen to share information about our cross-checking of these local accusations. But the coalition forces do not consult with us or with any other Afghan authority."

In May 2002, a few weeks before Hussain Mustafa was flown to Bagram, a 30-year-old Connecticut reservist was posted to the base as a senior interrogator. He and his team had come from a camp in the Afghan city of Kandahar, where they'd been conducting interrogations according to the 16 methods taught in their training standard questioning techniques, from "good cop/bad cop" to "we know all"and become frustrated by their failure to collect abundant useful information.

In Bagram, the interrogation team's number was cut from the 25 they'd had at Kandahar to 7. The team had about 200 prisoners to question and was processing between 35 and 40 a day. The reservist, together with Los Angeles Times reporter Greg Miller, later wrote a book about his experience, The Interrogators; the Army required that he use a pseudonym in writing the book and talking to reporters.

Chris Mackey, as the reservist is known, had been taught that harsh interrogation techniques yielded poor information because they prompted detainees to lie. Still, he recalls, "the more aggressive we werethough we never became physically violentthe more reliable the information was." His team realized that they often got their best information in the last half-hour of a 10-hour session, and they concluded that fatigue was their best available weapon. "We decided by committee that we couldn't get away with sleep deprivation under the Geneva Convention," Mackey says. "So we came up with this tech



The Bush administration had decided at the beginning of the conflict that the Geneva Conventions did not apply to the Afghan detainees. But Mackey's commander never told him of that decision, and Mackey worried that he could be disciplined for breaking the rules.