

**From:**  
**To:**  
**Cc:**  
**Date:** Sat, 30 Aug 2003 11:27:39 EDT  
**Subject:** Re:  
**Message-ID:** <

Merle,

Many, many thanks for this.

I just signed a contract to go to Iraq as a civilian contractor interrogator for one year. I am almost certain it will fall thru though since my clearances are not likely to be updated in time to go. The FBI will not release the BI they are nearly completing (it has taken them one year to do my BI for a Khmer linguist position).

If perchance you are interested in getting blown up in Iraq, contact Mark D'Ernes at . They were still in need of 17 bodies earlier this week.

Rich

---

**From:** Merle L Pribbenow  
**To:**  
**Cc:**  
**Date:** Sat, 30 Aug 2003 18:23:43 -0400  
**Subject:** Re:

Rich,

I wish you luck with Iraq, but my clearances expired years ago (as did my desire to slap around some Arab terrorist whom I could not talk to directly). I had my shot at interrogating Arab terrorists more than a decade ago - it wasn't any fun and I got absolutely nowhere. At my advanced age, I have no desire to try it again. Now, if the requirement to was interrogate VIETNAMESE terrorists, I might have a different answer.

They should be beating the bushes for Arab speakers and have the language schools churning out Arab speakers by the dozens. This thing starting to look pretty bad, and I'm not sure it's going to get better for a long time.

Hope you found the translation useful.

Merle.

---

**From:**  
**To:** !  
**Date:** Sat, 27 Sep 2003 21:49:44 EDT  
**Subject:** Re: Fw: Riding a Dead Horse  
**Message-ID:** <

Merle,

They just contracted me to ride the dead horse in Iraq. Leaving for Ft Bliss in seven hours, and on to Kuwait over next weekend.

Hang in there!

Rich Arant

---

**From:** [RICHARANT@aol.com](mailto:RICHARANT@aol.com)  
**To:** [mpribbeno@juno.com](mailto:mpribbeno@juno.com)  
**Date:** Wed, 15 Oct 2003 17:17:50 EDT  
**Subject:** Good call, Merle  
**Message-ID:** <f5 32953d5f 2cbf137e@aol.com>

Merle,

You had it correct on the Iraq thing. One week at Abu Ghurayd prison in Baghdad and I had contact with more naked "Jihadis" than I ever cared to see or smell. I'll stick to the horrors of Tuol Sleng from here on out if I ever get the urge to leave Indiana again.

Take care,

Rich Arant

---

**From:** Merle L Pribbenow < >  
**To:**  
**Date:** Wed, 15 Oct 2003 18:36:37 -0400  
**Subject:** Re: Good call, Merle

Rich,

Good to hear from you. With all the news reports we see out of Baghdad, I was little worried about you. It's hard to tell with the press, however. I remember how they made Saigon sound - we had terrorism in those days too, but it very seldom affected one's day to day activities. Is it the same there?

Hope you have a chance to get to relax every once in a while. I'm sure the entertainment scene in Baghdad is nothing like Tu Do Street in Saigon in the old days. Do you guys get periodic R&R out of there?

If you're looking for a little recreation and escapist reading, and provided you can get parcel delivery, I have a new book to recommend to you. An old friend and colleague of mine from Saigon has just published a novel titled "Saigon Station" about a Vietnamese language interpreter/translator who was recruited by and worked for Saigon Station during the 1967-1968 period. While it is a novel, it is based on a number of real events and real people (both heroes and villains), many of whom I knew. One of the events described in the novel is the secret

release of a VC prisoner aimed at developing a secret dialogue with the NLF (and possibly recruiting a senior NLF officer). This "fictional" account is based on a real operation that led to the 1967 American "peace feeler" toward the NLF codenamed BUTTERCUP. BUTTERCUP is described in considerable detail in documents released in the 1967 volume of Foreign Relations of the United States. My friend (the author) was personally involved in this little operation. The book, which can be purchased through Amazon.com, gives a great description of the Saigon Station bureaucracy, the dingy working offices, and the infighting and backbiting that were endemic to that time and place. I recommend it highly.

The following link will take you to the book on Amazon.com Enjoy.

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0595293840/qid%3D1066178428/sr%3D1+1-1/ref%3Dsr%5F11%5F1/103-4214366-0772658>

Merle

---

**From:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**To:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date:** Thu, 16 Oct 2003 04:50:41 EDT  
**Subject:** Re: Good call, Merle  
**Message-ID:** <

Merle,

The book sounds great. I'll track one down.

I'm back in Indiana, Merle. There was nothing in Baghdad for me. The interpreters (all US citizens) were great, but I don't enjoy working with interpreters. The sources were probably wonderful, but I had no luck with them. I do only utility and emotional approaches, and won't treat anyone with the harsh hand that almost everyone feels is needed in these cases. To me, they have the advantage - they seem to know that after a new government is formed, they will be turned back out on the street. Altogether something I did not want any part of. Ongoing investigations of unauthorized nighttime interrogations of female prisoners in isolations cells, etc, etc. Working for NCOs with three years service, that kind of thing.

The prison itself was interesting, and reminded me of Tuol Sleng on a much larger scale, as it held 10,000 prisoners at times. The compound comes under some type of harassment several times each night, but heavy patrolling in the area has kept things reasonable since two were killed and thirteen wounded in a mortar attack in late September. Mortar attacks hit several times while I was there, but the compound is walled off into so many sections that the noise hardly disturbs anybody's sleep. No interrogator is allowed to leave the prison for any reason. I never met an Iraqi who was not a prisoner. The workday averages 16-18 hours, 12 of which are paid, the rest unbillable. No hope of learning the language under those conditions.

So I gave it up. Hated to lose the cash, but life is too short. I'll stick with what I already know from here on out.

Rich

---

**From:** Merle L Pribbenow < >  
**To:**  
**Date:** Thu, 16 Oct 2003 07:50:27 -0400  
**Subject:** Re: Good call, Merle

Rich,

Sorry things didn't turn out, Rich, but I can't say that I'm surprised. It just didn't sound like a job that was do-able or one that would have much that any of us old farts might find rewarding. Re the interrogations, I agree with you about the "harsh hand" issue. I don't have any qualms about making nasty threats, slapping on tight, uncomfortable handcuffs and shackles, wearing them out with round the clock questioning, letting them go hungry and/or thirsty for a day or two, and generally trying to put "the fear of God" into them, but I don't go in for rough stuff. The results that kind of thing achieves are not worth the cost they exact from the prisoner AND from the interrogator. You studied Tuol Sleng - you know what happens to men's souls (or consciences) when they do that kind of thing.

Glad you're back in the good old U.S. of A. Let's stay in touch. I have a few Cambodia-related things I would like to run by you sometime.

Merle

---

**From:**  
**To:**  
**Date:** Thu, 16 Oct 2003 08:29:20 EDT  
**Subject:** Re: Good call. Merle  
**Message-ID:** < >

Merle,

Thanks for the comforting words. I was taught that one used ruses and subterfuge to induce the fear and uncertainty necessary to gain the prisoner's detention. I saw all kinds of opportunity to implement that sort of thing, but they (the military reservists running the show) are not at the stage where they are even considering those kinds of tactics. While they have built a multibooth box for interrogations complete with two way mirrors, the interrogators choose to interrogate inside Saddam's old isolation cells with no witnesses or guards close enough to be witnesses. No officers interrogate, and no officers monitor what is actually going on. All this will change after the ongoing investigations run their course, I'm sure, and things will get on track someday shortly before we decide to pull out. I don't mean to beat all this to death, but wanted you to know that your assessment of the assignment was on the mark. I was naive in thinking I could handle such a mission and even think I could hire an interpreter to teach me some of the language over the course of a year. Even had everything been perfect there, I now know that I could not have physically held out more than six months at most. But I did learn things that I had always wondered about. I found that not a soul worried about the mortar attacks, and discovered why. It just isn't real until it happens to you or your buddy. It's all more like a movie than reality.

As you say, let's stay in touch.

Rich

---

**From:** Merle L Pribbenow < >  
**To:**  
**Date:** Thu, 16 Oct 2003 09:34:02 -0400  
**Subject:** Re: Good call, Merle

Rich,

This is a subject I have thought about quite a bit recently. I wrote an article this summer on the subject of interrogation - specifically, on the value of "rough" treatment during interrogation - based on the recently-published memoirs of a senior North Vietnamese security/intelligence officer who was interrogated by Frank Snepp in Saigon 1972-73 (Snepp wrote about the interrogation in his book, "*Decent Interval*"). My article was accepted last month for publication in *Studies in Intelligence*, the Agency's in-house journal, but they promised me it will be placed in the unclassified edition and will be available to the public on the Agency's website. Hopefully it will be published soon, as I think it might be of use to the young Agency and military interrogators working on "hard-core" Al Qaeda and terrorist subjects today. My hope is that it will give interrogators a different perspective on the subject, and that perhaps it might help keep a few of these guys out of the kind of trouble that it sounds like some people at the prison you were at have gotten into. I've been in that situation myself, and I know how easy and how tempting it can be to "cross the line" for the sake of the "greater good."

Merle

---

**From:**  
**To:**  
**Date:** Thu, 16 Oct 2003 11:03:57 EDT  
**Subject:** Re: Good call, Merle  
**Message-ID:** < >

Merle,

Fantastic! I hope to see the article, and hope that these boys can be set on the right track. What I see makes me think the system still does not quite understand. Newly arrived military guys from the camp in "Gitmo" arrived there recently, convinced that they will convert Iraq into their wonderful model of success. All rumors I had heard about Gitmo were just the opposite. They seemed to have no more of a clue than the reservists already on station. On the other hand, FBI guys are there doing their own work and poly folks are on site with them, so professionals must have an idea of what is wrong and must be working it in their own way. I trust it will all work out well in the end. If your article does become available in an unclass forum, please give me a head-up, Merle.

Rich

---

**From:**  
**To:**  
**Date:** Sat, 25 Oct 2003 10:55:26 EDT  
**Subject:** Cambodia Book  
**Message-ID:** < >

Merle,

The second of four books I've translated for that Cambodian NGO is out now in English. I've only got one copy at the moment, but will send one along to you when I find another. It is not available in the States.

Some nice articles recently on rounding up Bedouins at random and hauling them off to Abu Ghurayd. At least Rumsfeld is now talking in more realistic terms about what is ahead. I really doubt that people are willing to sustain two or three dead per day through the next election, especially when they realize that every time one is killed or wounded crowds gather around to cheer and jeer. Even though the cause makes little sense to me at the moment, I cannot help but admire the kids out there. While they don't seem to believe in what they are doing, they fear absolutely nothing and complain very little. How such a seemingly soft society produces such people will always be a mystery to me.

Rich

---

**From:** Merle L Pribbenow < >  
**To:**  
**Date:** Sat, 25 Oct 2003 12:37:37 -0400  
**Subject:** Re: Cambodia Book

Rich,

Thanks. I look forward to seeing the book. Why isn't it available in the States? If it is produced with State Department funding, don't see why it should be available to U.S. readers.

Your comments about our troops in Iraq sound very familiar. A lot of people who were there used to say exactly the same things about our troops in Vietnam. The more things change, the more they remain the same.

I'm sending along (attached) a draft of my article on interrogation that I mentioned was accepted by Studies in Intelligence. I have no idea when it will be published (the latest issue of Studies just came up on the Agency's website, so it will probably be at least six months before the published version comes out). Please keep it to yourself, since they were adamant that they didn't want anyone else to put it out before they published it, but I would appreciate any comments you might have on it.

Merle

---

From:  
To:  
Date: Sat, 25 Oct 2003 13:48:35 EDT  
Subject: Great Article!  
Message-ID: < >

Merle,

Fascinating article. I'd love to read Tai's memoirs in the original Vietnamese someday.

Still, I remain troubled that at this very moment we have young reserve NCOs in the field operating with no officer supervision, thinking that parading both imagined and real "holy warriors" around in red panties and threatening to rape their wives is their model of success. Oh well, I guess if that is worst that happens, nothing criminal has been done, and everyone gets to let off a little steam. I have nothing whatsoever against terrifying the bejesus out of these guys, but as any good Vietnamese prison memoir teaches us [Thép Den my favorite example] all that can easily be done by skillful deception and ruse. But more realistically, we all will likely be out of Iraq before things ever get organized to that level, and even if we were doing it today, the lengthy time period needed to break knowledgeable enemies will mean that their information is worthless by the time it is extracted recorded. I talked to one guy who had bombed a US convoy and was caught red-handed by a US helicopter. He clearly understood the name of the game -- "Bring on the trial, bring out your witnesses. He knew full well that soon after the Coalition Provisional Authority becomes the sovereign government, he and his colleagues will be released, and all forgotten, their acts taken against American occupiers seen more as a badge of honor than as a crime.

Rich

---

From: Merle L Pribbenow < >  
To:  
Date: Sat, 25 Oct 2003 16:03:41 -0400  
Subject: Re: Great Article!

Rich,

I have to disagree with you on one point - if what you say is true, that the American interrogators are dressing the jihadis up in red panties and threatening to rape their wives, something criminal is being done. It's criminally STUPID, because all the interrogators are accomplishing is to confirm that every pre-conception that the "holy warriors" have about us is true. These kinds of actions will only build up the prisoner's faith in his cause and provide additional incentive to increase to the prisoner's will to resist. We would be better off if these guys were simply torturing the prisoners and then shooting them! At least then we wouldn't have to worry about these guys coming back at us again in the future.

As I'm sure you were taught in your classes, the purpose of an interrogation is to turn your subject around - in the parlance of my old trade, to "recruit him" to your side.

You want to make him stop identifying with his side and start identifying with yours. He has to WANT to talk to you. Mutt and Jeff routines, carrot and stick, can be good ploys, but playing immature high school pranks makes us look both evil AND weak at the same time - the worst of all possible worlds. If humiliation is going to be used (and it can be a useful tool), it doesn't work if YOU humiliate the prisoner - the prisoner has to believe that HE has humiliated himself. The old ploy of feeding a prisoner lots of coffee or tea (or Coke) during an interrogation and then dragging the interrogation out in a subtle, inconspicuous way, is a case in point. The prisoner may in that case give something up to avoid humiliating himself, but tying him to a chair and waiting until he pisses his pants will not work, because then it will be clear to everyone, including the prisoner, that what happened wasn't his fault.

I hope to God that if that kind of thing was going on in Baghdad, someone has put a stop to it by now, because all it will accomplish will be to create more "holy warriors."

Merle

---

**From:**

**To:**

**Date:** Sat, 25 Oct 2003 17:19:33 EDT

**Subject:** Re: Great Article!

**Message-ID:** <

>

Merle,

I'm so relieved you feel that way, because that is precisely what I witnessed going on. I was beginning to doubt myself, thinking I was simply squeamish. Myself and one other contractor, a smart young man who was new to interrogation, both saw this going on at the same time our first night there. We both independently reported to our boss, only later discovering that both of us had done so. To me it was simply un-American behavior, though I never made up my mind if it were actually criminal; I think not technically, but as you say, tactical foolishness. [One of the American citizen ethnics who are used as interpreters told me later that he did not bother to accurately translate the interrogators' threats at times when lines were crossed.] I was willing to turn my head once and walk away, but unwilling to do the same again. [Had I been there as an active duty officer, I would have had no alternative other than to make a scene and take control. As a new contractor assigned to a young reserve NCO who was "to show me how we do things", I just turned my head, but with some feeling that I was neglecting some important responsibility.] The next evening after my own first two interrogations, the unit commander called everyone together to report that an investigation was ongoing into an alleged unauthorized interrogation of a female prisoner inside the isolation cell in which she was held. [All the events I have described occurred in the isolation block next to Saddam's old execution chamber.] Quite frankly, that was enough for me to push me over the edge and decide to leave, thinking what I had seen was unlikely to have been an isolated instance, and after rethinking this all that evening, I took action with my contractor to get me off station. I've tossed this around every waking moment during the last two weeks, on one hand ashamed of leaving, on the other telling myself that there was in fact no alternative that I could live with. The agency I was with had just arrived with six new people, all good people who would never engage in anything like this, experienced cops and former military interrogators. The other four were assigned screening duties and so were free of this particular scenario. My boss was worried about liability and vulnerability to charges of mistreatment even before we arrived; he

is more of man than I'll ever be, an old retired Marine, and I know he will keep his people away from this type of thing. Surely with this investigation going on, things will change. Perhaps I should have waited that out. But in the end I come back to the stand that I will only work the emotional, futility and incentive type approaches, along with the little tricks that induce fear but which can be shown later to be just illusions. Even at that, I felt some guilt on one Bedouin I used what I thought was a good intense emotional approach with [I can shed tears at will in the middle of those things because in a way I really believe what I am pitching to the guy] , wondering what would become of him, if he would be one like those in Cuba that went on to commit suicide. I suppose one has to be willing to exert great emotional stress on all corners, knowing full well that some if not most are innocent. I could no more do that than I could butcher hogs all day. I can accept that perhaps someone has to do it. Despite all of this, I feel some pride about how I handled the two people I dealt with, even if it turns out that both were guilty as hell, not just the one. I made no new enemies for America while I was there. My interpreter told both my "victims" that they had just dealt with the nicest guy there, so whatever happened to them later was on their own heads. I guess a real interrogator would have taken offense; I was pleased. The interpreters there are all sick at heart. It must be very painful for them, all from the region, all now US citizens. But \$100,000 a year is hard to walk away from for almost anyone.

Now we see the news stories this week of eight Marines charged with beating a prisoner to death earlier this summer, and a whole Bedouin village brought in to Abu Ghraid because some cell phone tracking pointed to the general area. A nasty situation, one that I don't know how we will work ourselves out of.

Hope I'm not beating this to death with you, but I know no one else to unburden myself with.

Rich

---

From: Merle L Pribbenow < >  
To:  
Date: Thu, 30 Oct 2003 10:04:03 -0500  
Subject: Army Accuses Officer in Iraq Of Firing Pistol Near Prisoner  
(washingtonpost.com)

Rich,

Thought you might be interested in this article in today's Washington Post.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A37861-2003Oct29.html>

---

**From:**  
**To:**  
**Date:** Thu, 30 Oct 2003 12:01:36 EST  
**Subject:** Re: Army Accuses Officer in Iraq Of Firing Pistol Near Prisoner  
(washingtonpo...  
**Message-ID:** < >

In a message dated 10/30/2003 10:11:27 AM Eastern Standard Time,  
writes:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A37861-2003Oct29.html>

Merle,

Nice story. Strangely enough, I could have done that myself and not lost any sleep at all. It is the denigrating, dehumanizing stuff that troubles me. I've got my doubts about whether or not the "information on another attack" was worth much, but who knows, maybe it was. I can think of bunches of ruses that could be perpetrated in that isolation block that would simply terrify the hell out of folks, yet would not disturb me greatly, and which I might use given the chance. The I would be the one accused, since word of these things would eventually get out. Just goes to show the ground is very very tricky for anyone involved. The colonel has my sympathy as do almost all those involved in the effort. Everyone thinks they are the noble ones, the ones who have the right to make these decisions, the ones who can make the judgments and live with themselves. The slippery slope always starts that way.

Rich

---

**From:** Merle L Pribbenow < >  
**To:**  
**Date:** Thu, 30 Oct 2003 12:48:57 -0500  
**Subject:** Re: Army Accuses Officer in Iraq Of Firing Pistol Near Prisoner (washingtonpo...

Rich,

I'm sure you noticed that the officer involved was the commander of an ARTILLERY battalion. I have seen a lot of TV and press reports on artillery units that have been assigned to conduct food patrols, provide area security, assist Iraqi police, etc. on the streets of Baghdad and in other cities. While our infantry is not well trained or particularly well suited for such tasks, artillery personnel have had virtually NO training and absolutely no experience to conduct such operations. I am sure the artillery battalion commander was in way over his head - this was a situation that his training and experience had simply not prepared him for, and in the adrenalin rush of the moment he did not have time to think through the possible consequences of his actions. I sympathize with him myself, but his action set an unacceptable example for his men. After seeing their commander do something like this, what do you think would be the first thing that the young, scared, untrained sergeants and Spec 4s under his command would think of to do if/when they encountered a similar situation? The problem is they might very well decide to go a step farther, maybe shoot off a thumb or a kneecap. You are exactly right - It is a very slippery slope. If you're going to go to the edge, and admittedly sometimes you have to, you must to do it in a cold, calculating, well-thought-out manner, and NOT in the heat of the moment.

Merle

---

**From:**  
**To:** \_\_\_  
**Date:** Thu, 30 Oct 2003 13:20:38 EST  
**Subject:** Re: Army Accuses Officer in Iraq Of Firing Pistol Near Prisoner  
(washingtonpo...  
**Message-ID:** < >

Merle,

How strange is it that the position of interrogator, probably more fraught with moral dilemma than any other in the military, is left to young unsupervised kids to perform? I felt like the few officers around did want to be covered on paper, but did not want to be around the interrogations. The paper won't absolve them of their responsibility though.

What I am beginning to wonder about now is that the incident of the eight Marines beating a PW to death and this latest incident to be publicized both happened during June thru August. The people in the field must have known about these and other incidents, but were still into the antics I witnessed in October. One would hope all concerned read the papers and will get the message.

Rich

---

**From:**  
**To:**  
**Date:** Sat, 1 Nov 2003 11:58:44 EST  
**Subject:** Abu Ghraid  
**Message-ID:** < >

---

**From:** Merle L Pribbenow < !>  
**To:**  
**Cc:**  
**Date:** Sat, 1 Nov 2003 13:51:52 -0500  
**Subject:** Re: Abu Ghraid

Amnesty International protests don't bother me. If Amnesty International didn't have any complaints, it would be a sign that our troops weren't doing their jobs. The complaints I, and most other Americans, would be concerned about are those filed by the Army JAG or Defense Department IG, and I'm afraid we're going to have some of those before very long. Urban counter-insurgency is a dirty job, but there's a fine line between being tough enough to get the job done and being so tough that you end up making the problem worse. The Marines used to say that "If you grab them by the balls, their hearts and minds will follow." Just try letting someone grab you by the balls, however, and see where

your heart and mind goes. The sooner we get the situation turned over to Iraqi security forces and get our troops out of there, the better.

Merle

---

**From:**  
**To:**  
**Date:** Sat, 1 Nov 2003 17:44:12 EST  
**Subject:** Re: Abu Ghraid  
**Message-ID:** <

>

Merle,

I agree, and that report was so early in the process. What the ICRC has to say would mean more to me, and I haven't been able to find anything. As I understand it, they don't make public statements about abuses or claims of the same. I like the idea of pulling people off the WMD thing and putting them into more Tactical HUMINT Teams. I'd really be surprised to see things turn rosy, but there is nothing I'd love more. Then again, if it had been a "cakewalk" as some were saying, we'd probably be at war in Iran or Syria by now, so perhaps these things work out in some natural order to keep us humble and in check.

Rich

---

**From:** Merle L Pribbenow <  
**To:**  
**Date:** Sun, 2 Nov 2003 07:44:06 -0500  
**Subject:** Fw: Latest POW news

>

Rich,

Don't know if you saw this - it's from Veith's weekly POW update. In case you didn't, I thought you might be interested.

Merle

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** "Veith, Jay" <  
**To:** "Veith, Jay" <  
**Date:** Sat, 1 Nov 2003 19:14:20 -0600  
**Subject:** Latest POW news  
**Message-ID:** <

>

>

>

Associated Press Newswires  
Saturday, November 1, 2003

AP Enterprise: Former Iraqi detainees tell of riots, punishment in the sun,  
good Americans and pitiless ones  
By CHARLES J. HANLEY

---

**From:**  
**To:**  
**Date:** Sun, 2 Nov 2003 09:23:18 EST  
**Subject:** Re: Fw: Latest POW news  
**Message-ID:** < >

In a message dated 11/2/2003 7:47:28 AM Eastern Standard Time,  
writes:

Rich,  
Don't know if you saw this - it's from Veith's weekly POW update.  
In case you didn't, I thought you might be interested.  
Merle

Thanks, Merle. Sounds pretty consistent with what one of my interpreters told me -- you haven't seen anything yet, it is worse than you know.

Rich

---

**From:**  
**To:** ;  
**Date:** Wed, 7 Jan 2004 09:30:02 EST  
**Subject:** Re: CNN.com - U.S. discharges soldiers for abuse of Iraqi prisoners - Jan. 5,...  
**Message-ID:** < >

Merle,

Thanks for the story. I was watching PBS the other night, when an NCO threatened to shoot a prisoner in the head, on camera no less. Did not even draw a comment. I guess the world is changing or never was what I had once imagined. Got an email from the guys at the prison yesterday. They are all fed up. Three months there must seem like two lifetimes. Got a call Monday morning from a guy recruiting for the Middle East. He went on to explain the job was in Baghdad. The he mentioned the name of the company. We both had to laugh when I told him I had quit the same job two months ago. I had sent in a resume to a blind posting on monster..com being run out of Boston.

Hope the holidays went well for you and your family.

Rich

---

**From:**  
**To:**

**Date:** Wed, 3 Mar 2004 21:41:06 EST

**Subject:** Baghdad corrections

**Message-ID:** < >

Merle,

Talked to my friend from the prison last night. He made it back home for leave.

He says the 17 people the Wash Post article mentioned last week were MPs. Some bad actor interrogators were demoted and cast away several months ago (that never made the news), and the out of control boys are all gone now. The unauthorized interrogation of a female prisoner accusations did turn out to have actually happened, and proper punishment was dished out. The situation in the prison is remarkably improved, experienced interrogators on hand, living conditions better. Most importantly, the place is being run like an American operation should be. So, I'm greatly relieved to see that the system can indeed recognize its problems. And my friend now speaks of working several weeks on one important guy, instead of trying to exploit two terrorists a day, two hours at a crack. Good news all around, thought he country seems headed for meltdown.

Take care.

Rich

---

**From:** Merle L Pribbenow < >

**To:**

**Date:** Fri, 19 Mar 2004 18:47:22 -0500

Rich,

Following is from CNN web-site.

Merle

**WASHINGTON (CNN) – Criminal charges are being prepared against six U.S. Army soldiers for alleged abuse of Iraqi detainees at Abu Gharib prison in Baghdad, U.S. military officials told CNN.**

The charges are expected to include indecent acts, assault, cruelty, maltreatment, conspiracy, and dereliction of duty.

Multiple sources said the allegations involve soldiers who took photographs of Iraqi prisoners, including pictures that show the prisoners partially clothed or physical contact between soldiers and detainees.

One source said "less than two dozen detainees" were subjected to the alleged abuse, which was reported by U.S. Army soldiers who witnessed it.

Draft charge sheets have been prepared, but it's not clear yet if the charges have been formally filed against the soldiers under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

Nine additional military personnel and two civilian employees may also be facing severe administrative action, according to U.S. military sources.

Eight of them are expected to receive letters of reprimand that effectively will end their military careers.

A civilian translator and a civilian interrogator are expected to be fired.

The Army's Criminal Investigative Division's investigation concluded there is sufficient evidence to recommend charges. But a final decision will be up to commanders.

A formal announcement is expected in the next few days -- as soon as the paperwork is approved by commanders in the region.

All of the military personnel are believed to be members of the 800th Military Police Brigade, which was guarding Abu Gharib prison until recently.

CNN has previously reported that 17 personnel at the prison were relieved of their duties, including a battalion commander, a company commander, three non-commissioned officers, and 12 military police directly involved in guard duties.

Prisoners held by the United States in Iraq are accorded the rights of dignity and may not be held up to public ridicule under the Geneva Conventions.

A source indicated that taking pictures would be considered criminal activity unless it could be demonstrated it was done for official reasons related to processing and handling of detainees.

The Pentagon official said some computer drives were seized by the CID in the search for the photographs and additional evidence of abuse.

Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, head of coalition forces in Iraq, has also ordered an investigation to determine whether any problems exist in the chain of command.

---

**From:**

**To:** \_

**Date:** Fri, 19 Mar 2004 20:04:59 EST

**Subject:** Re: (no subject)

**Message-ID:** <

>

Merle,

Thanks. I had been looking for some public explanation.

I learned from someone inside the facility that several interrogators were demoted and sent back home, aside from the 17 mentioned in the public account of the investigation. Nice to see some action being taken, and corrections being made. I do understand soft-pedaling the extent of what went on there, which is what this latest account seems to be doing. If the world knew specifics, aside from the loss of any national prestige still remaining, I'm sure some of our future prisoners in hostile hands would face more of what Mr. Daniel Pearl got in Pakistan. I really believe that abuse of prisoners is one of the worst sins of war. It is most always intentional, done with cold prejudice and malice, and cowardly. At balance, I come away from this feeling somewhat better than I did when I left in September.

Thanks for the update, Merle. I've got two eye surgeries coming up during April. It took me a while to get my medical insurance back. I first recognized how bad the problem was when I was in Iraq. After interviewing a couple of guys outside on a concrete pad all day, I found that I could not read a computer screen inside a poorly lit room. It was humiliating to have to dictate reports to my boss so he could input them. So one way or another I was unfit for the task at hand there, though I'm still hoping to get back in time to witness the upcoming civil war.

Rich

---

**From:**  
**To:**  
**Date:** Thu, 15 Apr 2004 11:10:59 EDT  
**Subject:** Off again  
**Message-ID:** < >

Merle,

Looks like I will be heading back to Iraq and/or Qatar in early May, though things can always change with the situation over there. A contract interrogator job supporting the ISG. I went into detail with them about why I left earlier, and they did not seem troubled.

We will see what develops.

Rich

---

**From:** Merle L Pribbenow < >  
**To:**  
**Date:** Tue, 4 May 2004 09:41:55 -0400  
**Subject:** Abu Ghraib

Rich,

Don't know if you're still able to receive e-mail, but if you are, I just wanted to say that the scandal of Abu Ghraib Prison that has dominated the news over the last few days has now provided conclusive proof that the actions you took when you confronted that situation were indeed courageous and proper. If

senior leadership had only taken action to correct the problem when you called it to their attention, perhaps this whole terrible situation could have been averted. I mentioned to several of my friends and former colleagues what you had told me about the situation there and how you had reported the situation, resigned, and come home rather than participate in such a situation. They all had the same reaction - To quote one of them: "*I admire your colleague for his actions. Wish there were more like him.*"

You were one of the very few heroes in this whole sorry episode, and I hope you receive proper recognition for your courage and moral fortitude.

Merle Pribbenow

---

From:

To:

Date: Tue, 4 May 2004 10:05:23 EDT

Subject: Re: Abu Ghraib

Message-ID: <

>

Merle,

Your note meant a lot to me. I am due to head to DC Wednesday, on to Ft. Benning Sunday, then back to DC a week later for final briefings and departure. Always looking for the worst, I expect that the job may not come off as planned, with all the nightmare of publicity.

Perhaps I should have done more, been more confrontational. I have taken that approach in the past, and have been fried crispy both times.

Since I had been dropped from consideration for an FBI contract Khmer linguist job when I departed for Iraq, immediately upon returning I faxed them asking me to reactivate my application if they had not already hired for the position. In that fax I sketched out the reasons I had resigned, saying I had witnessed prison handling and interrogation methodology that while perhaps not deemed serious by some, had fallen well below the American standard as I understood it, that there was a line I had never I would never cross, and I was not prepared to watch others do so. I told a DSS investigator several months ago the same, that what I had personally witnessed I would not judge as criminal given the immaturity and inexperience of the actors, but I knew full well that if I remained in the situation, given my background and the environment, I would inevitably be judged as culpable. That said, I no doubt in the eyes of some fell short of the mark myself by being too willing to question myself, thinking I was just too softhearted, and thinking that my experience dealing with translating the piles of Tuol Sleng death confessions had made me overly sensitive to the environment of Abu Ghurayb.

So what I am trying to say is that I know some will attack me when I get called to testify, assuming that may happen. Had I operated my own way at the facility, no doubt the techniques of ruse and deception and infiltration I would have used would also have been criticized by many. It is after all and ugly duty in any circumstances.

Thanks again. I hope to come through this and hope to contribute something in this new job, but as Dith Pran told Sidney in April 1975, "Sydney, I fear for the future."

---

Hang in there, Merle. You did more than anyone to pull me through these times and help me understand.

Rich