

WHAT HAPPENED?

On 12 March 2006, in the town of Al-Mahmudiyah, Iraq, a fourteen year old Iraqi girl, Abeer Qasim Hamza, was gang raped, murdered, and set on fire by a group of soldiers from the 502d Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne, assigned to operate a check point near her farm home. On that day, four soldiers, with another posting guard outside the house, entered the home, murdered Abeer's mother, father, and five year old sister in the family's farmhouse, and then raped and murdered Abeer.

The five soldiers, SGT Paul E. Cortez, SPC James P. Baker, PFC Jesse V. Spielman, PFC Brian L. Howard, and PFC Steven D. Green, were charged with the crimes. SPC Baker was sentenced to 90 years in prison and avoided the death penalty by entering into a plea agreement in which he provided evidence incriminating the other soldier's involved. SGT Cortez was also sentenced to a court martial, a dishonorable discharge, and 100 years in prison after a similar plea agreement. PFC Spielman was court martialed, dishonorably discharged, and sentenced to 110 years in prison. PFC Howard, who served as the lookout that day, was court martialed, dishonorably discharged, and sentenced to 27 months imprisonment for obstruction to justice. PFC Green, the man accused with the actual killing of the family, and the raping of Abeer, is awaiting trial in federal court scheduled to be heard beginning in April 2009. He was discharged from the Army prior to the accusations coming to light due to a personality disorder. He has pleaded not guilty to the charges of premeditated rape and murder.

During SPC Baker's closing statements at his Article 32 hearing, he accepted full responsibility for the crimes but also offered that he committed these crimes because the violence he had encountered in Iraq left him "angry and mean" toward Iraqis. (Wikipedia, 2008)

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR SOLDIERS...

1. Although SPC Baker and SGT Cortez both provided evidence against the other soldiers, did they display moral courage in stepping forward with the truth regarding the events? Why or why not?
2. In some sense, as SPC Baker alludes, the violence soldiers encounter will make them feel "angry and mean" towards those they encounter in the field. When unchecked, these feelings can express themselves as "revenge" in some actions against people encountered in the field. As a soldier, can you relate to this sentiment? As a leader, how can you redirect soldiers' feelings or actions to more morally acceptable positions? What motives are appropriate in the field?
3. As a leader, can you articulate some possible 2nd and 3rd order effects of this incident to your soldiers? What is your evaluation of the impact of this event to the local community, fellow soldiers in this unit, fellow leaders in this unit, other Army soldiers, and citizens back home?
4. As a soldier, what actions within the chain of command would you like to see enacted to prevent similar events from happening? What can you personally do to act with personal and professional integrity to minimize such events?
5. As an American Soldier, how does this incident make you feel?

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6. Discuss this vignette from a US public relations point of view.

7. Discuss this vignette from an Iraqi public relations point of view.

8. Discuss how a units' climate and culture will influence this situation.