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## Finally freed, Afghans say they were kicked and abused in U.S. hands

CHARLES J. HANLEY, AP Special Correspondent. **Associated Press.** New York: Mar 23, 2002. pg. 1

### Abstract (Document Summary)

Sunday's latest raid was disclosed in Washington on Tuesday, when two U.S. military officials said it had been determined the men seized were neither Taliban nor al-Qaida members. On Wednesday, however, a military spokesman said the men were still being "evaluated." But also on Wednesday, another spokesman, Brig. Gen. John W. Rosa Jr., they "never became detainees."

At the airport detention center, hoods were pulled over their heads and they were "thrown down" face first on rocky ground, Sharif Khan said. "Then one person took you by the head and another by the feet, and they were pounding on your back with their foot." He had a freshly bruised arm.

"My ribs had been broken before and so they were weak," said Fida Mohammad. "They picked me up and threw me down on the rocks. It was painful. I couldn't rest on my chest. When I moved they kicked me." He had a fresh black eye.

### Full Text (962 words)

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SANGESAR, Afghanistan (AP) \_ More than 30 Afghans seized by American troops in a 3 a.m. raid on a village security post said they were kicked and abused at a U.S. Army detention center before being freed four days later.

"If they gave us all of Afghanistan now, this wouldn't make up for this insult," said one of the bruised and angry men, Fida Mohammad, 35.

Another man said it was fortunate his armed security team didn't react defensively to the U.S. force.

"If we reacted, there might have been a firefight, and many people might have been killed," said Ghousullah, 22.

Maj. Ralph Mills, a spokesman for U.S. Central Command, said any injuries could have happened when the men were apprehended in last Sunday's raid.

"Some of the people may have resisted when being subdued, and they may have been bruised in the process," Mills said Friday. "We don't have anything that suggests that anyone was mistreated while in captivity."

The military has been reluctant to discuss its detention center at a U.S. airport base outside Kandahar, 25 miles east of here. Scores of Taliban and al-Qaida terrorist suspects are held there.

A U.S. military spokesman at the base denied the allegations of abuse.

"We treat detainees well," said Maj. Ignacio Perez.

The Afghans' accounts of mistreatment were similar to those in February from another group, seized on Jan. 23 when U.S. special forces raided a compound in Uruzgan province and witnesses reported 21 Afghans killed.

After that attack, American officials acknowledged that the dead and the 27 men detained were neither Taliban nor al-Qaida operatives, but insisted U.S. forces were fired on first.

Men captured in that raid said in interviews with reporters that they were treated so badly that some lost consciousness and suffered fractured ribs, loosened teeth and swollen noses. At the time, the U.S. command denied that those detainees had been abused.

Sunday's latest raid was disclosed in Washington on Tuesday, when two U.S. military officials said it had

been determined the men seized were neither Taliban nor al-Qaida members. On Wednesday, however, a military spokesman said the men were still being "evaluated." But also on Wednesday, another spokesman, Brig. Gen. John W. Rosa Jr., they "never became detainees."

In fact, the men were not released from the detention center until late Thursday morning, according to the detainees as well as a knowledgeable U.S. military source in Afghanistan.

The Afghans had been housed and were operating from the compound, beside the main regional east-west road here, under provisional security arrangements made after a U.S.-led war toppled the Taliban government in December.

The dozens of militiamen, loyal to a member of the new pro-U.S. Afghan Cabinet, Aref Khan Noorzai, the small-industries minister, maintained security on the road and surrounding area, which has been quiet since the war.

The Pentagon's Rosa said the raid was carried out because weapons were known to be in the compound and Afghans working with U.S. forces "did not know who was in that compound."

Afghan officials said anyone who asked would have been told who they were.

"Someone gave the Americans wrong information, that there were al-Qaida and Taliban based here," said Mohammad Sharif Khan, 64, chief of the security force.

He said the raid early Sunday involved at least one helicopter and other aircraft, 10 to 15 vehicles, and 50 to 60 uniformed U.S. soldiers.

He quickly saw the raiding party was American and ordered his men, aroused from sleep, to cooperate, Sharif Khan said Friday. The U.S. force, which had overpowered four guards outside, then drove off with 31 detainees, the U.S. military later reported. Sharif Khan said they numbered 34, all of them bound, half of them barefoot. No shots were fired at the compound.

At the airport detention center, hoods were pulled over their heads and they were "thrown down" face first on rocky ground, Sharif Khan said. "Then one person took you by the head and another by the feet, and they were pounding on your back with their foot." He had a freshly bruised arm.

Several other men also told of being kicked. All were treated the same way, their chief said.

"My ribs had been broken before and so they were weak," said Fida Mohammad. "They picked me up and threw me down on the rocks. It was painful. I couldn't rest on my chest. When I moved they kicked me." He had a fresh black eye.

The Americans next shaved their beards, which their Muslim faith obliges them to grow. Their heads also were shaved and they said they were left completely naked for a period.

Later, held in wooden-barred "cages," they were at times punished for talking by being made to kneel with hands behind their heads for long periods, and were kicked again when they moved, the men said.

Their account provided a rare glimpse into the secretive detention center, where they saw Arabs, Chechens, Sudanese and other suspected al-Qaida members.

They said 18 of them were kept in a plastic sheet-topped cage about 10 feet by 30 feet, with desert dust blowing in. They had no exercise and no toilet facility other than a bucket for use in the crowded space, they said, and were fed bread, cookies and potato chips.

They were interrogated repeatedly on Sunday and Monday, but then the Americans realized they were not Taliban or al-Qaida, Sharif Khan said. Still they were held for more than two days further.

The freed men said they would demand of the Americans the names of those who misinformed on them. Those responsible should be arrested, they said.

They said they were promised a meeting Saturday with American officers, Kandahar provincial officials and elders from this area to discuss their ordeal.

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