

# US Forces Make Iraqis Strip and Walk Naked in Public



*All photos by Tomm W. Christiansen*

>>> On 25 April 2003, the newspaper *Dagbladet* (Norway) published photos of armed US soldiers forcing Iraqi men to walk naked through a park.

On the chests of the men had been scrawled an Arabic phrase that translates as "Ali Baba - Thief."

A military officer states that the men are thieves, and that this technique will be used again.

No word yet from the newly liberated Iraqi people about some of them being summarily found guilty of theft, forced at gunpoint to strip, having a racist phrase written on their bodies, and then made to walk naked in public. No doubt the Arab/Muslim world is impressed by this display of "democracy," "freedom," "due process," and "no cruel or unusual punishment."

We wonder if the soldiers will be using this technique on their comrades who stole \$13.1 million in Iraq. Or the journalists who looted Iraq's art.



The *Daily Mirror* (London) :

## **SHAME OF U.S. TROOPS' IRAQI STREET JUSTICE:**

Apr 28 2003

Suspects stripped and paraded at gunpoint

From Chris Hughes In Baghdad

**STRIPPED** at gunpoint and publicly branded as thieves a gang of suspected Iraqi looters are humiliated by US troopers' street justice.

After being hauled before a kangaroo court, the men had the words Ali Baba Haram - Arabic for "dirty thief, he stole" - scrawled on their chests with a marker pen.

They were then paraded in front of a jeering Baghdad crowd before fleeing to safety.

The "appalling" affront to dignity outraged human rights organisations who say it broke the Geneva Convention which protects prisoners against "insults or public curiosity".

It fuelled Iraqi resentment at the US "occupation" of their country, provoked dozens of demonstrations and flew in the face of guidelines aimed at winning over the locals.

But the trooper allegedly responsible was defiant. First Lieutenant Eric Canaday of Delta Squadron's 10th Engineer Corps said: "I don't think this kind of action is excessive.

"We've done it once before to another man we found looting and it worked perfectly."

Raw justice was handed down when the US soldiers arrested four men in Baghdad's Zawra Amusement Park on suspicion of looting.

After questioning and searching the suspects - and with the prison system in chaos - the troopers were at a loss to know where to take them.

So they made their own brutal law. Lieutenant Canaday allegedly asked a group of watching Iraqis how the men should be punished.

Troops said they were told the best way would be to brand them as thieves and strip them.

The fearful suspects were shoved at gunpoint into a tent where they were stripped.

With the help of a Muslim soldier in the unit they were then daubed with insults and forced into the street to brave a crowd screaming "Ali Baba!" One of the men, Zian Djumma, 20, said later: "It was horrendous.

"Now I want to find a hand grenade and throw it at the soldiers. I hate them for this."

He said he and his friends had entered the park, used by Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard for weapons storage, to search for one of their young brothers.

Troops said the men were carrying a bag with spare parts for weapons.

Coming on top of an explosion at a US arms dump in the city which killed up to 40 Iraqis and seriously injured 60, the degrading scenes brought an explosion of fury.

Demonstrating outside the city's Palestine Hotel Adil Al-Harni, 41, said last night: "This is a disgusting way to treat people without trying them. How do we know these men were thieves?"

"Even if they were, this is no way to treat them. If this is US democracy, they can keep it.

"It's just another way of keeping people in their place. I believe it will cause big trouble."

Amnesty International said: "It was an appalling way to treat prisoners. Such degrading treatment is a clear violation of US responsibilities.

"The US authorities must investigate this incident and publicly release the findings."

The Red Cross added: "The Americans have a responsibility to give good treatment to all prisoners, whoever they are."

US Central Command has pledged a probe.

At the heart of the row is a cultural split over looting. The Americans see it as a breakdown of order. Locals say they are only taking a share of what Saddam stole from them.

Baghdad markets now sell goods at four prices - for locals, for foreigners, for those who want to pay less for looted goods and for ultra-religious Muslims who condemn looting and will not buy stolen goods.

Ask a stallholder how much he wants for a pair of trousers, and he will reply: "Looted, sir, or unlooted?" Army trousers, robbed from government stores cost just \$2. Unlooted cost \$10.

But no one in Baghdad can guarantee they have not benefited from looting since no one is sure where goods come from.

When a religious leader re-opened a mosque in Baghdad's lawless Saddam City, he told a 400-strong crowd: "You can come in if you are unarmed and can swear on the Koran that you are not looters,

former looters or have not benefited from looting."

Refusing to lie, the devout Muslims returned home.

The "Ali Baba" row is the latest in a string of embarrassing incidents for the US military in which troops have flouted guidelines on how to win Iraqis' "hearts and minds".

US troops have raised the Stars and Stripes at captured sites on several occasions, most notoriously on a statue of Saddam during the last push into Baghdad.

But allied forces were specifically ordered against such displays as it was believed the population would feel humiliated by the sight of a foreign flag flying in their homeland.

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## **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE**

News Flash

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25 April 2003

**Iraq: Stripped naked and humiliated by US soldiers**

Amnesty International expressed concern today at the disturbing article and images portrayed in the Norwegian newspaper Dagbladet which show American soldiers escorting naked Iraqi men through a park in Baghdad. The pictures reveal that someone has written the words 'Ali Baba - Haram(i)' (which means Ali Baba - thief) in Arabic on the prisoners' chests.

The article quotes a US military officer as saying that this treatment is an effective method of deterring thieves from entering the park and is a method which will be used again; another US military officer is quoted as saying that

**Suspected  
Iraqi Thieves  
Stripped by US  
Soldiers:  
Journalists**

Agence France-  
Presse

Fri Apr 25, 7:17  
PM ET

**BAGHDAD  
(AFP) - US  
soldiers stripped  
four suspected  
Iraqi thieves  
naked and  
burned their  
clothes before  
pushing them  
into the street,**

US soldiers are not allowed to treat prisoners inhumanely.

"If these pictures are accurate, this is an appalling way to treat prisoners. Such degrading treatment is a clear violation of the responsibilities of the occupying powers," Amnesty International said today.

"Whatever the reason for their detention, these men must at all times be treated humanely. The US authorities must investigate this incident and publicly release their findings."

Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention clearly states that "Protected persons are entitled in all circumstances, to respect for their persons, their honour, their family rights, their religious convictions and practices, and their manner and customs. They shall at all times be humanely treated, and shall be protected especially against all acts of violence or threats thereof and against insults and public curiosity".

To link to the article from Dagbladet please go to:  
<http://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/2003/04/25/367175.html>

For a full copy of Amnesty International's report: Iraq: Responsibilities of the occupying powers please go to:  
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde140892003>

#### Public Document

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566  
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*New York Post*

journalists from a Norwegian newspaper who witnessed the incident told AFP.

The soldiers also wrote "Ali Baba. Haram" in Arabic across the Iraqis' chests in a crude reference to the tale of "Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves," said Line Fransson from the Oslo-based Dagbladet daily.

The phrase translates roughly as slang for "sinful thieves."

"We suddenly saw four naked Iraqi guys with four American soldiers," said Fransson, on her way with a photographer in the early morning to do a story about the suffering of animals at Baghdad's zoo in Zawra park

## ARMY SEEKS NAKED TRUTH

April 27, 2003 -- The U.S. Central Command said yesterday it was looking into reports that American soldiers in Baghdad had stripped four suspected Iraqi thieves, burned their clothes and forced them to walk along the streets naked.

Journalists for the Norwegian daily Dagbladet said they had photographed a group of young Iraqi captives being led along Baghdad streets at gunpoint on Thursday. They said one of the Iraqis had the words "Ali Baba Thief" scrawled with marker on his chest.

"Our guys saw these four young men being marched along stark naked by the Americans," said reporter Snorre Byrne.

*Aly Sujo*

[Original URL for article](#)

amid the war.

"We thought they were going to the bathroom. They went into a building and a minute later (the soldiers) pushed them out into the main street," she said.

"Then the naked guys ran as fast as they could" to a friend who was waiting in a nearby car, she said.

Photographs taken by the newspaper and shown to AFP appear to confirm the incident.

One of the Iraqis, who gave his name as Ziad and said he was 20, spoke to the reporters once he managed to find a pair of shorts. He claimed he and his friends were in the park to search for his missing

younger  
brother.

The  
commanding  
army officer at  
the scene, First  
Lieutenant Eric  
Canaday,  
confirmed his  
men had  
stripped the  
Iraqis. He said  
he had been  
having trouble  
with young  
Iraqi men trying  
to steal light  
weapons being  
stored in the  
park.

He claimed he  
got the idea to  
strip them from  
people in the  
neighborhood.

"They gave us  
the idea so we  
took their  
clothes and  
burned them  
and then we  
pushed them out  
with thief  
written on  
them," Canaday  
was quoted as  
telling the  
journalists. He  
confirmed their  
clothes had

been set on fire with gasoline.

"It has actually been pretty successful," he said, claiming that as many as 100 people had been trying to steal the weapons, including Kalashnikov rifles, which are being stored to eventually re-arm Iraq's security services.

"It's not as bad as it seems," a laughing Canaday was quoted as saying, "we only do it to the people who are stealing weapons."

"A little public shaming; no physical damage and everything will be fine tomorrow," he said. "Hopefully they will be embarrassed enough not to

come back."

Canaday said his soldiers, who wrote on the Iraqis with a black marker, had "done this one time before" but that time "we only did it with one person."

He said he intended to continue the policy.

Fransson said that when the US soldiers pushed the Iraqis into the street they were shouting after them: "Ali Baba, Ali Baba."

"Ziad said he was so angry being humiliated by the soldiers that the only thing he wanted to do was find a grenade and throw it at the American soldiers and all the other ones

in the city," she said.

The chief of US army public affairs, Colonel Rick Thomas, said it "certainly does not sound like the type of incident we have seen during this operation," but declined further comment. He could not say if an investigation would be opened.

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