

Navy Probes New Iraq Prisoner Photos

By Seth Hettena, AP
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CORONADO, Calif. - The U.S. military has launched a criminal investigation into photographs that appear to show Navy SEALs in Iraq sitting on hooded and handcuffed detainees, and photos of what appear to be bloodied prisoners, one with a gun to his head.

Some of the photos have date stamps suggesting they were taken in May 2003, which could make them the earliest evidence of possible abuse of prisoners in Iraq. The far more brutal practices photographed in Abu Ghraib prison occurred months later.

An Associated Press reporter found more than 40 of the pictures among hundreds in an album posted on a commercial photo-sharing Web site by a woman who said her husband brought them from Iraq after his tour of duty. It is unclear who took the pictures, which the Navy said it was investigating after the AP furnished copies to get comment for this story.

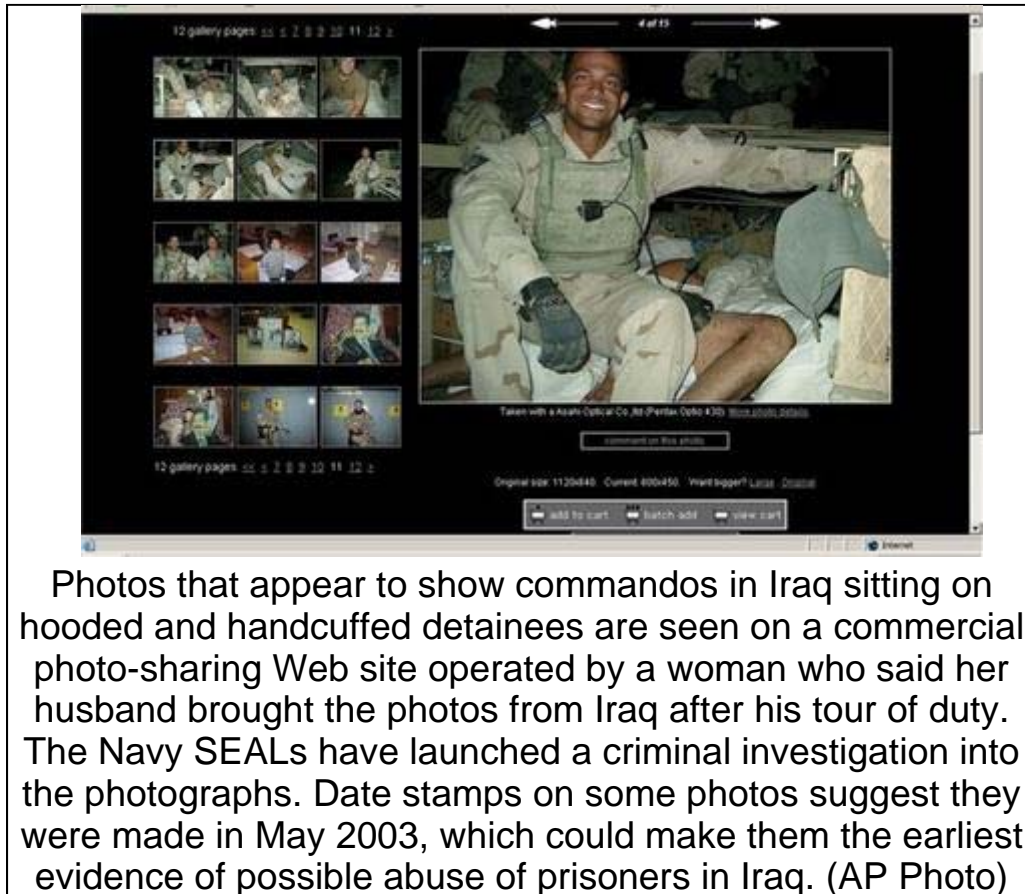
These and other photos found by the AP appear to show the immediate aftermath of raids on civilian homes. One man is lying on his back with a boot on his chest. A mug shot shows a man with an automatic weapon pointed at his head and a gloved thumb jabbed into his throat. In many photos, faces have been blacked out. What appears to be blood drips from the heads of some. A family huddles in a room in one photo and others show debris and upturned furniture.



A photo found posted on a commercial photo-sharing Web site operated by a woman who said her husband brought the photos from Iraq after his tour of duty appears to show a subject constrained by U.S. military personnel. The Navy SEALs have launched a criminal investigation into photographs that appear to show commandos sitting on hooded and handcuffed detainees, and photos of what appear to be bloodied prisoners. (AP Photo)

(AP) Photos that appear to show commandos in Iraq sitting on hooded and handcuffed detainees are seen on...

"These photographs raise a number of important questions regarding the treatment of prisoners of war (POWs) and detainees," Navy Cmdr. Jeff Bender, a spokesman for the Naval Special Warfare Command in Coronado, said in a written response to questions. "I can assure you that the matter will be thoroughly investigated."



Photos that appear to show commandos in Iraq sitting on hooded and handcuffed detainees are seen on a commercial photo-sharing Web site operated by a woman who said her husband brought the photos from Iraq after his tour of duty. The Navy SEALs have launched a criminal investigation into the photographs. Date stamps on some photos suggest they were made in May 2003, which could make them the earliest evidence of possible abuse of prisoners in Iraq. (AP Photo)

The photos were turned over to the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, which instructed the SEAL command to determine whether they show any serious crimes, Bender said Friday. That investigation will determine the identities of the troops and what they were doing in the photos.

Some of the photos recall aspects of the images from Abu Ghraib, which led to charges against seven soldiers accused of humiliating and assaulting prisoners. In several of the photos obtained by the AP, grinning men wearing U.S. flags on their uniforms, and one with a tattoo of a SEAL trident, take turns sitting or lying atop what appear to be three hooded and handcuffed men in the bed of a pickup truck.

A reporter found the photos, which since have since been removed from public view, while researching the prosecution of a group of SEALs who allegedly beat prisoners and photographed one of them in degrading

positions. Those photos, taken with a SEAL's personal camera, haven't been publicly released.

Though they have alarmed SEAL commanders, the photographs found by the AP do not necessarily show anything illegal, according to experts in the laws of war who reviewed photos at AP's request.

(AP) A photo found posted on a commercial photo-sharing Web site operated by a woman who said her...

Gary Solis, a former Marine Corps prosecutor and judge who teaches at the United States Military Academy, said the images showed "stupid" and "juvenile" behavior - but not necessarily a crime.

John Hutson, a retired rear admiral who served as the Navy's Judge Advocate General from 1997 to 2000, said they suggested possible Geneva Convention violations. Those international laws prohibit souvenir photos of prisoners of war.

"It's pretty obvious that these pictures were taken largely as war trophies," Hutson said. "Once you start allowing that kind of behavior, the next step is to start posing the POWs in order to get even better pictures."

At a minimum, the pictures violate Navy regulations that prohibit photographing prisoners other than for intelligence or administrative purposes, according to Bender, the SEALs spokesman.

All Naval Special Warfare personnel were told that prior to deployment, he said, but "it is obvious from some of the photographs that this policy was not adhered to."

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The images were posted to the Internet site www.Smugmug.com. The woman who posted them told the AP they were on the camera her husband brought back from Iraq. She said her husband has returned to Iraq. He does not appear in photos with prisoners.



A photo found posted on a commercial photo-sharing Web site operated by a woman who said her husband brought the photos from Iraq after his tour of duty apparently shows a U.S. military member posing with hooded prisoners in a

The Navy goes to great lengths to protect the identities and whereabouts of its 2,400 SEALs - which stands for Navy Sea, Air, Land - many of whom have classified counterterrorist missions around the globe.

photo date stamped May 2003. The Navy SEALs have launched a criminal investigation into photographs that appear to show commandos sitting on hooded and handcuffed detainees, and photos of what appear to be bloodied prisoners. (AP Photo)

"Some of these photos clearly depict faces and names of Naval Special Warfare personnel, which could put them or their families at risk," Bender said. Out of safety concerns, the AP is not identifying the woman who posted the photos.

The wife said she was upset that a reporter was able to view the album, which includes family snapshots. Hundreds of other photos depict everyday military life in Iraq, some showing commandos standing around piles of weapons and waving wads of cash.



A photo found posted on a commercial photo-sharing Web site operated by a woman who said her husband brought the photos from Iraq after his tour of duty appears to show a prisoner having his picture taken at

The images were found through the online search engine Google. The same search today leads to the Smugmug.com Web page, which now prompts the user for a password. Nine scenes from the SEAL camp remain in Google's archived version of the page.

"I think it's fair to assume that it would be very hard for most consumers to know all the ways the search engines can discover Web pages," said Smugmug spokesman Chris MacAskill.

Before the site was password protected, the AP purchased reprints for 29 cents each.

Some men in the photos wear patches that identify them as members of Seal Team Five,

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gunpoint. The Navy SEALs have launched a criminal investigation into photographs that appear to show commandos in Iraq sitting on hooded and handcuffed detainees, and photos of what appear to be bloodied prisoners, one with a gun to his head. (AP Photo)

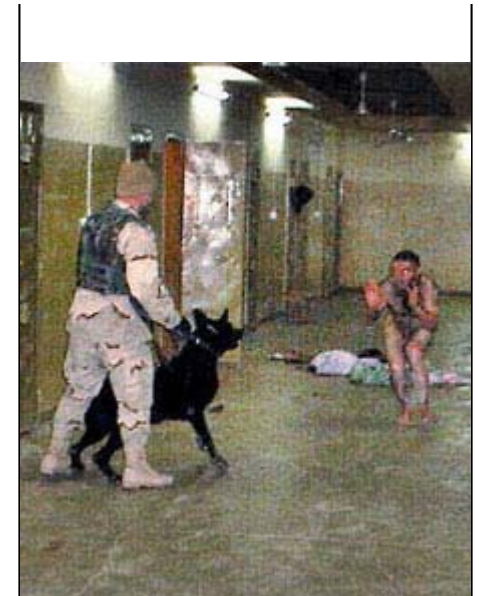
based in Coronado, and the unit's V-shaped insignia decorates a July Fourth celebration cake.

The photos surfaced amid a case of prisoner abuse involving

members of another SEAL team also stationed at Coronado, a city near San Diego.

Navy prosecutors have charged several members of SEAL Team Seven with abusing a suspect in the bombing a Red Cross facility. According to charge sheets and testimony during a military hearing last month, SEALs posed in the back of a Humvee for photos that allegedly humiliated Manadel al-Jamadi, who died hours later at Abu Ghraib.

Testimony from that case suggest personal cameras became increasingly common on some SEAL missions last year.



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