

1 [John Israel, civilian, was interviewed on 12 February 2004, as
2 follows:]

3 Q. Have you been informed of the nature of our interview
4 today?

5 A. I would like you to explain to me exactly. We did
6 some investigation back in Abu Ghraib, and I would like to--if
7 you could elaborate on that a little bit more.

8 Q. I would be very happy to do that for you before we
9 start. I just wanted to preface that by saying, if you have any
10 knowledge, whatsoever. I am Major General Taguba. I'm the
11 Deputy Commanding General of the Coalition Land Forces Component
12 Command that is headquartered at Camp Doha, Kuwait. My
13 commanding officer, Lieutenant General David E. McKiernan, the
14 Commanding General of the Coalition Forces Land Component
15 Command has appointed me as the investigating officer under the
16 provisions of Army Regulation 15-6. That was under the
17 direction of General John Abizaid, the Commander of Central
18 Command. Our investigation is to gather all relevant facts and
19 circumstances surrounding recent allegations of maltreatment of
20 detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison, also known as the Baghdad
21 Central Confinement Facility, as well as the detainee escapes
22 and accountability lapses as reported through CJTF-7. And my
3 inquiry will further investigate training, standards,

1 employment, command policies and internal policies concerning
2 the detainees held at the Abu Ghraib Prison. And finally, our
3 inquiry is to assess the command climate and the supervisory
4 presence of the 800th Military Police Brigade and chain of
5 command. I also want to advise you that our interview is being
6 recorded so we can capture the accurate questions and responses
7 that you will provide. Do you have any questions about the
8 scope?

9 A. No, sir.

10 Q. For the record, please, would you please state your
11 full name?

12 A. My name is John Benjamin Israel.

13 Q. And your social security number?

14 A. [REDACTED].

15 Q. The nature of your employment?

16 A. I am a linguist. I was hired by SOS, Titan firm, for
17 the Army.

18 Q. So you're principally an interpreter?

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. Do you do any interrogations at all?

21 A. Not myself.

22 Q. Not by yourself?

3 A. No.

1 Q. But since you're an interpreter, are you interpreting
2 for the interrogator and translating for the detainee?

3 A. Absolutely.

4 Q. Good. How long have you been doing this now?

5 A. Since October 14th until now.

6 Q. Until now. Who are you, since you're a civilian
7 contractor hired by Titan, who is your chain of--who do you
8 report to?

9 A. As far as civilian matters or military matters?

10 Q. Military matters.

11 A. Well, we have Sergeant--in the beginning, it used to
12 be Sergeant Tess, then...to be honest with you, I forgot the
13 name because we kept shifting from team to team. But my
14 immediate guy who was in charge was Don Gravinger.

15 Q. He was a civilian or military?

16 A. He was a military--he was taking care of our
17 businesses for the linguists.

18 Q. Who is your immediate military supervisor? Do you
19 have one?

20 A. Well, usually it's my interrogator, Steve. And Steve
21 has another guy to report to. Because we're working on a
22 special project, and he has to let him know about my situation,
3 and from there, through his report, he has to tell other people.

1 Q. But did you understand that there's a military
2 commander above the things that you're doing?
3 A. Yes.
4 Q. I understand you work with civilians.
5 A. No, I know. I forgot his name, Major Price.
6 Q. Major Price was?
7 A. Major Price, at that time, it was Major Price.
8 Q. When did you arrive at Abu Ghraib?
9 A. October 14th, I believe, either the 14th or the 15th.
10 Q. Did you do any other interpreting, translation job
11 before then?
12 A. No, sir.
13 Q. So you were assigned to Abu Ghraib?
14 A. Yes, sir.
15 Q. Were you hired back in the United States or were you
16 hired here?
17 A. No, back in the United States.
18 Q. At that point in time, were you advised of the nature
19 of your job?
20 A. They told us it could be in the field, could be
21 anywhere if I took the job, regardless of what the situation
22 was.

1 Q. When you arrived at Abu Ghraib, did anyone explain to
2 you the nature of your job?

3 A. Yes, indeed, Chief Gravinger, and they give us like a
4 little seminar of what's going on, what's going to happen,
5 what's the limitations, what you're supposed to do, what not to
6 do. If you see anything wrong, you're to report it immediately,
7 and things like that.

8 Q. So you received a briefing and a seminar.

9 A. They did give us a briefing, yes, sir.

10 Q. How long was that training?

'1 A. That's a good question, an hour, give and take. To be
12 honest with you, I don't recall, but I think it was a lengthy
13 one, because they went through all the procedures.

14 Q. Did they give you, beyond that, the conditions and the
15 personnel that are being held at Abu Ghraib prison, did they
16 give you additional instructions or information with regards to
17 the nature of the operating environment?

18 A. Yes, and no. The reason, for example, they told us
19 what our limitations is. We have to be with an interrogator and
20 we have to have an analyst and things like that. We cannot--we
21 have to stay with the detainee. If we see anything wrong, we
22 have to report it and things like that. And they told us, "If
3 you don't like the environment, you just could stop and walk

1 away and you could report immediately any abuse incident," and
2 things like that.

3 Q. What were some of those limitations that you talked
4 about? What were you authorized to do in your job performance
5 and your role as a----

6 A. My job is just a translator, no more, no less.

7 Q. No more, no less?

8 A. That's it.

9 Q. Okay, all right. Do you have any knowledge,
10 whatsoever, of the Geneva Convention?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Was it ever instructed to you, or were you given some
13 sort of a piece of paper that basically said, "Anything that we
14 do here or not do here is governed by the Geneva Convention"?

15 A. Yes, indeed, they mentioned that.

16 Q. Who mentioned that to you?

17 A. To be honest with you, I don't recall, but I remember
18 the detainees' rights and things like, human rights and things
19 like that. They do mention it, but exactly, I don't recall, to
20 be honest with you.

21 Q. But they did not give you any written references, Army
22 regulations or field manuals or SOPs to read?

1 A. I believe they gave us some paper to read, and we had
2 to sign it at the time. But the details, I don't recall, to be
3 honest with you, but I signed two papers, I believe I signed.

4 Q. Do you recall what you signed?

5 A. Some of the procedures, the limitations for the--if
6 you see anything wrong, you have to report it, anything unusual,
7 you have to report it and things like that. But to be honest
8 with you, Geneva Convention, I might have read it. I might have
9 signed it, but I don't recall too much.

10 Q. Do you know what the Geneva Convention is?

11 A. You know, how to--if somebody has a prisoner of the
12 war, you have to treat them nicely, because it's a mutual
13 situation. We could be detainees on the other side, so there is
14 rules and regulations, like that effect his personal rights and
15 things, you know. There's limitations for everything.

16 Q. Did they explain to you how your employees would
17 protect you should you be detained by Iraqi or anti-coalition
18 forces?

19 A. That's a good question, I don't think so.

20 Q. They never explained that to you.

21 A. No.

22 Q. That you could be detained at any time by other people
3 that were anti-coalition forces?

1 A. That's a good question. I can't answer that, sir. I
2 don't recall.

3 Q. You don't recall that being explained to you?

4 A. I don't recall. They might, but I don't recall. If
5 they mentioned it, I might--it's a great question.

6 Q. Did they explain to you if you get hurt or if you die
7 here or you're captured----

8 A. They gave us a file. They said, give it to the
9 immediate people just in case something happens to you, they
10 have the record. They have things, the next of kin and things
11 like that.

12 Q. Let me move forward now with the context of your duty
13 as a translator purely for doing the interrogation period. And
14 I'm not looking for anything specific or the contents of the
15 interrogation, specific contents of the interrogation. Could
16 you describe for me what typically happens, generally, in the
17 conduct of an interrogation?

18 A. Okay, what would happen is usually the interrogator
19 goes to the MPs and says, "I want this prisoner," and they would
20 say, "Where do you want him to be?" If there's empty booths,
21 they will guide the detainee to that location. And then what
22 happens is the interrogator will set up the tables, the table
3 and the chairs according to the way he wants it to see fit.

1 I've seen some of the interrogators, they tell me to stay behind
2 the detainee. Some of the guys tell me to sit next to him.
3 Some of the guys tell me to "Sit next to me facing the
4 detainee." And then they want to ask a question, then I have to
5 translate back and forth, from Arabic to English, from English
6 to Arabic.

7 Q. So it's never the same.

8 A. Never the same.

9 Q. It could be, where we're sitting today, you're to my
10 left.

'1 A. Right.

12 Q. And the detainee could be to the right, and the
13 interrogator could be in the middle.

14 A. Or sometimes what they do is they put the detainee in
15 the corner with a chair, and I will be sitting next to the
16 interrogator.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Some of the interrogators, they have their own
19 preference. They will say, "We want you to be--" they put the
20 detainee halfway in the middle. I'd be behind him and they--
21 facing him--because some of the detainees, they like to see the
22 interpreter because he speaks the same language, they always go
23 like this [turning his head to the side].

1 Q. So it's not always the same.

2 A. No.

3 Q. I got it. Prior to the interrogation being conducted,
4 is there a plan?

5 A. Yes, lately, they put a lot of emphasis on it. The
6 interrogator will say, "Okay, this is my game plan." Sometimes
7 he will say, "I'm going to ask him 12 questions, and don't
8 listen to him. Just translate my questions to him and don't
9 listen to what he's going to say." Or sometimes they will say,
10 "Okay, this is the game plan. We're going to ask easy questions
11 and we want----"

12 Q. So like a rehearsal?

13 A. A rehearsal, absolutely.

14 Q. Is that in writing, or is that given to you verbally?

15 A. Oh, verbally. But he has----

16 Q. You said "lately," now, you said, "lately," there's
17 been more emphasis on the interrogation plan.

18 A. No, as a matter of fact, this goes back to September,
19 the beginning of September.

20 Q. And you arrived here in October.

21 A. In October, yeah. I would say end of November or last
22 part of November, they put a lot of emphasis on that.

3 Q. You said this was typically done verbally.

1 A. Verbally, yes, sir.

2 Q. Did you see anything in writing signed by somebody?

3 A. Usually, the interrogator will have the info, usually.

4 Because that's done by the interrogator, will brief us, we have

5 an analyst, and then we'll walk into the booth.

6 Q. Please describe for me at the conclusion of the

7 interrogation what happens next?

8 A. What happens, after back and forth session of

9 questions and answers, questions and answers, me and my

10 colleague, which is the interrogator and analyst, will sit and

11 he will try to absorb what happened in the room. And there will

12 be questions and answers. And he will say, "Did I miss

13 anything, as for as----"

14 Q. Is this in the presence of the detainee?

15 A. No, after we send the detainee, we go back to the ice

16 room----

17 Q. Okay, let me back up. At the end of the session,

18 let's just say we just ended now and----

19 A. Okay, I see what you're saying. In that case, what

20 happens is, one of the--usually the analysts are military.

21 What happens is they stay with the detainee and we'll go tell

22 the MPs that we're done and they will come and guard it. This

3 is--we are in the hard cell, in the ISO. But if we are in the

1 outside, what will happen is the analyst, which is the military
2 guy, personnel, he will guard the detainee--obviously he has the
3 handcuffs on. He will put them back on his hands. He will take
4 them where--if it's a walking distance to his camp or they might
5 put him in a HMMWV and take him back to----

6 Q. To somewhere else.

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. But let's just focus for a moment, those detainees
9 that are placed in the hard site, at the conclusion of the
10 interrogation, do you accompany the detainee back----

11 A. Absolutely not.

12 Q. No?

13 A. I cannot continue with it.

14 Q. Okay. And of course, you've never done that.

15 A. No, no, sir.

16 Q. So, those detainees then are given back to the MPs....

17 A. The MPs and the MPs will-----

18 Q. Take them back.

19 A. Okay, what we do also, for example, if we're in the
20 building, usually the analysts will go and tell the MP, because
21 sometimes the analyst would be a civilian. The interrogator
22 will stay with the detainee. I will be next to the interrogator
3 just in case, if he wants something, he wants to say something,

1 and I also will tell the MPs. It's walking distance from the
2 second floor to the first floor, and they will come and guide
3 the detainee back to his cell.

4 Q. Do you know at that time when the detainees are given
5 back to the MPs, whether there are additional instructions given
6 by the analyst to the MP?

7 A. To be honest with you, I don't interfere with that.

8 Q. But you're not aware of any instruction?

9 A. No, sir. Usually, the interrogator will go back to
10 the MPs if they have anything that needs to be discussed.

'1 That's their job.

12 Q. So the detainees are given back to the MPs and they're
13 placed back in their cell. And then you said that now you and
14 the analyst will then review the process....

15 A. And the interrogator.

16 Q. The interrogator, I'm sorry, will review the process
17 and to, they will ask, "Did I miss something?"

18 A. As far as, for example, when he speaks Arabic, he
19 might mention a few things that I wasn't able to elaborate on in
20 detail. I might say, "You know what, also, I think this is what
21 he meant."

22 Q. Okay.

3 A. Give him some example.

1 Q. An after action review.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. But not in any kind of depth, type of a post-
4 interrogation review is the analyst asking you for your thoughts
5 in terms of what to do next.

6 A. No, no. It's a matter of conversation that the
7 detainee was talking about just in case, you know, because a lot
8 of times in the Iraqi accent, there is a lot of things that he
9 mentions, so you have to be aware of that. Since I'm an Iraqi,
10 I know what they want to say, so I will try to help them as much
11 as I can as far as what he's saying.

12 Q. Did you have any knowledge, whatsoever, to rumors or
13 direct knowledge of escapes or shootings or detainee
14 mistreatment in the Abu Ghraib facility?

15 A. I heard about the escapee cases, but indirectly, but
16 we didn't hear it from the military, that aspect. We heard
17 there was an escapee. And the shooting, it happened, was a
18 quirk, we didn't know about it. That night, we were supposed to
19 go on an interrogation with the same guy that started shooting.
20 It could've been me or it could've been the interrogator. But
21 we knew about it like later on. And that day, I worked from
22 almost 10 o'clock at night all the way to the next day until--
3 what was it, like 2 o'clock, 2 in the afternoon.

1 Q. So interrogations typically happened at any given
2 hour?

3 A. Right, absolutely. We have a schedule. They have a
4 schedule. But in my case, because the shooting happened that
5 night, they didn't know what was going on. You know, they need
6 a linguist. So I stayed interrogating a lot of people because
7 they didn't know who got the gun, what's going on. So I
8 volunteered and I stuck there until the next day until almost 3
9 o'clock, and then I went home.

10 Q. How many linguists or translators are working at Abu
11 Ghraib?

12 A. That's a good question. As far as on my team, with
13 the MI, I would say about 16 or 15, because we have the
14 screening people that work in the screening. And we have the
15 interrogation team, I would say a minimum of 12.

16 Q. Do you work with the same interrogator all the time?

17 A. Lately, I work with the same interrogator because we
18 have a special case. But previously, I was with a team and that
19 team, maybe there's three or four interrogators, and I switch my
20 time with them. As soon as this guy's done, the next guy is
21 ready, I go with the next guy.

22 Q. So it's not--you're just based on the need.

3 A. On the need, yes, sir.

1 Q. So you knew about the shooting that happened. What do
2 you know about that?

3 A. I would say like with the next----

4 Q. Do you know what month it was?

5 A. That's a good question. I think it was December.

6 Q. December?

7 A. I think.

8 Q. And you were there when that shooting----

9 A. No, we went and ate chow and----

10 Q. You were in the facility.

'1 A. In the facility, yeah, and then...I forgot his name,
i2 he's transferred now. He came and he said there was a shooting,
13 and he took a [inaudible] he's trying to [inaudible] and things.
14 Because [inaudible] and we didn't know what was happening and
15 everybody was alert. And he came and told us...Colonel Jordan.

16 Q. Colonel Jordan.

17 A. Yes, he came and told us the shooting happened and
18 this is what's going on. And he did elaborate in detail as far
19 as what's going on. He was very concerned. And like after
20 that, they came and tell us, "We want some help with the
21 linguists " So that's how we got stuck until the next day.

22 Q. Okay, let me fast forward now. Do you recall on the
3 20th of December, you were accompanying Mr. Stefanowicz and

1 Sergeant Eckhart to the hard site whereby a prisoner was being
2 returned back to custody to the MPs and being accompanied by
3 Sergeant Cathcart or a Sergeant Elliott. Do you recall that
4 date?

5 A. I met with Eckhart and Stafanowicz, but I don't recall
6 the details, honestly, because I go back and forth so many
7 times, I didn't pay attention, I didn't concentrate on the
8 situation, so it's hard to tell.

9 Q. Let me be a bit more clear on that. That particular
10 day was given as a date where a prisoner was given back to the
11 MPs where Sergeant Cathcart and also Sergeant Elliott, where
12 supposedly noises were heard when prisoners were being put back
13 in their cells, whether a prisoner was being--a detainee, I'm
14 sorry, was either falling down or was being struck by something.
15 Do you recall that?

16 A. No, sir, I honestly do not.

17 Q. Have you heard any comments from any of the MPs or any
18 of the interrogators or analysts regarding any rumors or direct
19 information in regards to detainee abuses?

20 A. Honestly, no.

21 Q. You don't recall any of that at all?

22 A. No, because what happens is a lot of times I walk
3 behind them. And when they talk together, I don't want to

1 interfere. Because once my job is done, I'm so tired, because
2 when I translate, I want to be fair for both parties. I don't
3 want to compromise anybody's situation. I'm so tired from
4 talking. Usually the session goes an hour, an hour and a half
5 just constantly talking back and forth from both sides. And
6 sometimes, you know, it's a peace of mind for me to keep quiet,
7 just walk to my place.

8 Q. Is there a rule in the unit that you belong to now, at
9 the conclusion of the interrogation regarding whether it's the
10 same interrogator or a different interrogator, is there a rule
11 that states not to discuss the contents of that interrogation
12 with other translators----

13 A. Yeah, absolutely, absolutely, especially in my case
14 with Steve. I have to be quiet. Even, I can't tell you
15 anything unless if you want to go ahead and ask, that's up to
16 you.

17 Q. I'm not asking for the specific details----

18 A. Exactly, but in my case, I usually keep quiet. He
19 tells me to keep quiet, but he knows I'm quiet. I don't like to
20 elaborate on my cases.

21 Q. Did they give you a security clearance at the time you
22 were hired?

3 A. My case is pending, sir.

