

Discipline and Uniforms: Joining the Military

Interviewer

Alright, General, could you spell your name for the transcriber, please?

Antonio Taguba

Spell my name.

Interviewer

Yes.

Antonio Taguba

It's A-N-T-O-N-I-O, first name. Middle initial, Mike, as in Mario. And last name is T-A-G-U-B-A, Taguba.

Interviewer

And today is October the 19th, 2011. We're at the studios of the Center for Oral History at West Point. Welcome and thank you for agreeing to come and be interviewed by us today.

Antonio Taguba

Thanks.

Interviewer

When did you decide you wanted to join the Army? What was your first instinct?

Antonio Taguba

You know, as I was coming up on the train I was trying to do some retrospective thinking here. I actually joined the military when I was in Junior ROTC. And let me describe that for a moment, because even though my dad served in the Army, it was in high school, where the high school in Hawaii there are seven schools that Junior ROTC was compulsory for sophomores to senior year.

Antonio Taguba

So I was in Junior ROTC; I loved it. It was about uniforms; it was about being disciplined. We had parades every Tuesday; rifle drills. I joined the drill team, which it's one of the top three in the state at that time. And that somewhat resonated with me all the way through my senior year in high school.

Antonio Taguba

And I truly admired seeing the old classic movie The Long Gray Line. So I said, "Ah, maybe I should try out for West Point," but, you know, academically I wasn't that good. I was third alternate on the list. But it didn't deter me from joining Army ROTC. I thought perhaps if I did that, perhaps again a scholarship, which I did not get again, there were academics. I pursued it. And so, that started back in 1969.

In Father's Footsteps

Interviewer

But now your father was in the Army.

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

And your background is Filipino, is that right?

Antonio Taguba

Rightâ€”yes.

Interviewer

A large Filipino community, I imagine, in Hawaii, am I right?

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

Your father was in World War II.

Antonio Taguba

He was.

Interviewer

Can you describe his experiences in World War II?

Antonio Taguba

Several years ago I had a copy of his complete military file.â€” I knew he was in the Army, because we did not live with him up until we all met in Hawaii.â€” Myâ€”I had three other siblings, my mom; and we were all in the Philippines and my dad had been traveling throughout.â€” So, the first time I actually saw him in uniform was in July of 1962.

Antonio Taguba

Suffice to say, when I read his recordâ€”because he was never, ever disclosing of his military life, other than he was in the Army, retired in 1962â€”he was drafted, actually, in the Philippine Scouts.â€” 12thâ€” Company, 12thâ€” Ordnance Company, I think it was, 57thâ€” Infantry Regiment, on 9thâ€” February, 1942â€”the onset of the Japanese attacking the Philippines.

Antonio Taguba

And he was captured the 9thâ€” of April, 1942â€”I believe at kilometer marker 165â€”I remember that wellâ€”and promptly escaped two or three days afterwards at the march.â€” Up until about last year, I want to say, he had not spoken about Bataan, orâ€”in full, anywayâ€”or had mentioned anything that what happened to him while he was

captured.

Interviewer

Let's pause for a second, because so the viewers know, you're talking about the Bataan Death March.

Antonio Taguba

Bataan Death March.

Interviewer

Could you put that into historical context for us a little bit?

Antonio Taguba

Sure. The Bataan Death March is actually it's not an area more like a peninsula just south of Manila, where about 200,000 troops were mass ordered to active duty by President Roosevelt back in July, 1941. And my dad was caught up in that. He was actually, before he joined the Philippine Scouts, he was more of a truck driver. And so I said, "What did you do when you joined up with the Philippine Scouts?" There were six regiments that was under the command of Army officers. U.S. Army white officers, he said.

Antonio Taguba

He was re-supplying and bringing back casualties the wounded, and the dead and I said, "Were you able to fight?" He said, "Of course." And that he also suffered malaria from and dysentery, from not being able to eat anything of substance. And then they just basically live out in the field. His cousin was also with the regiment, along with my grand-uncle his uncle at the time.

Antonio Taguba

So when they were captured, they were all basically well, prior to that capture, he said the Commanding General I said, "Was it [Jonathan] Wainwright? Was it [Edward P.] King?" He said he doesn't remember the name. But he did remember an announcement that was made throughout the command in the peninsula that "If you wish to surrender, you can. If you wish to fight on, you can. If you wish to escape, you can." You had a personal choice, is what he said. He chose to stay, and he was captured.

Antonio Taguba

And just as recent as January of this year, on his 90th birthday, he finally revealed to me that the Japanese beat him and stole his worldly goods, which was his watch and his wedding ring. And then he got out of his uniform and he found some other clothing to try and escape, but he didn't he was not able to escape until about the second or third day of the march.

Interviewer

Why do you think he held back these memories for so long?

Antonio Taguba

I'm not so sure. I mean it's just part of the whole notion of the greatest generation, you might say, that they've suffered enough. I consider it as part of their PTSD, you might say that they will only describe it if they're talking to a fellow veteran. And all this time we've been asking, "Dad, what did you do during the war?" And he would say, "Well, nothing. I escaped and I came back in the Army."

Antonio Taguba

There's a missing piece of that story, because when he escaped, he said he made it back to the capital city of Manila, where he was almost captured again, and some local policeman saved him but the story ended there. And then he went and jumped three years to July of 1945—16 July, to be exact where he said he was repatriated. He had to take another test in order to reenlist in the Army. And even he remembered his grade. He said, "I received an 82 on my grade," which is a passing grade. Okay, but I asked him, "What did you do between April 1942 and July?" He said, "Well, I was picking trash in Manila, or then I became a farmer."

Antonio Taguba

Which I found rather, you might say fascinating, because in 1978 or thereabouts, when he was watching President Marcos being deposed as the dictator of the Philippines, he made a comment to me. He said, "He's a fine man." He and I fought together. Okay. I won't—I can't forget that comment. So, I said, "Did you fight with Marcos?" And he said, "No." Because he's 92, he's going through dementia. One would think that he probably doesn't remember, or doesn't care to remember.

Antonio Taguba

One interesting thing, though, is that he was married for—he was married three times. Now, we didn't know that either, because we thought—we thought he had only been married once, and that my mother was wife number two. This is back—this is in January of 2011 when I said—when he said, "No, I was married three times." I took my notebook out and I said, "Hold that thought for a moment." He remembered their names and their town, and my mom is wife number three.

Antonio Taguba

Now, my mother, she was 16 years old when she—when World War II started. She came from the northern province, Cagayan Province, in northern Luzon. She was 16 at the time, and they were displaced because the Japanese forces were attacking the north part of the Philippines, and found her way in Manila and tried to find relatives of some sort. And found a family that would take her in. She was alone; she traveled alone. And she ended up being a nurse's aide in the prisoner of war camp on the grounds of the University of Santo Tomas in Manila.

Interviewer

I'm a little confused, though. Your father lived with you when you were growing up? Or did not live with you?

Antonio Taguba

Oh, no. We—I saw him once a year.

Interviewer

Once a year.

Antonio Taguba

Once a year, right.

Interviewer

Because he wasâ€™

Antonio Taguba

He was in the military. Â

Interviewer

Deployed? But as a military family, you didnâ€™t go with him?

Antonio Taguba

No, we didnâ€™t travel with him.Â Â We did not live with him until June, July of 1961, when we all met in Hawaii.

Interviewer

And how old were you, then?

Antonio Taguba

I was ten.

Interviewer

So, your whole early life, you hardly knew him.

Antonio Taguba

Right.Â Â My formative years growing up, my mother raised us.Â Â She told us all about the war, what happened, a little bit about my dad.Â And then this man appears in Hawaii, â€™cause he was assigned in Germanyâ€™Frankfurtâ€™actually Darmstadt.Â Â And my mother, we were all supposed to meet him in Germany, but she didnâ€™t want to travel all that way from Manila, so we all met up in Hawaii.

Interviewer

Did he write to you at all through all this time?Â Â Did you have any communications with him?

Antonio Taguba

You know, I donâ€™t recall.Â Â I do remember seeing him, but it wasnâ€™t as if a father is doting over his children, like myself, or my sister, or my two other brothers.Â Â There was noâ€™I canâ€™t recall any relationship that I had with him.

Interviewer

Nonetheless, you chose the same career.

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

Any connection there?

Antonio Taguba

Well, I think what inspired me a bit about joining the Army was when he was stationed with the 65thth Engineering Battalion, getting ready to go to Vietnam with the 25thth Infantry Division, and he would bring his equipment home. His half of his pup tent, you know, and all the associated equipment. And my brothers and I would shine his boots, or prepare his equipment for inspection that sort of cleaning it up and that sort of thing. And I would just I remember him just sitting there reading the paper or watching TV while the three boys were laboring to get his equipment to pass the inspection during that time.

Antonio Taguba

But what really, truly, inspired me, not as much as my dad being in the service, in as much as being with other students at the junior ROTC program that we had at the high school, Leilehua High School, in Hawaii.

Interviewer

And he was also in Vietnam is that right?

Antonio Taguba

No. He said he had been in World War II, so, and had spent some time during the Korean War, and he said he wasn't about to go to another war, because then my three sisters came along, so.

Interviewer

And when he retired, then, what was his what sort of profession did he follow from there?

Antonio Taguba

He actually went back to work for civil service and prepared the 25thth Infantry Division. He worked in supply and transportation to get their equipment ready for deployment.

The Army of 1972: An Untenable Climate

Interviewer

So you are commissioned as an officer when?

Antonio Taguba

May 19th, 1972.

Interviewer

It was a different time for the Army.

Antonio Taguba

It was.Â Â It was.

Interviewer

Can you describe the atmosphere in the Army in 1972?

Antonio Taguba

Yes.Â Â Weâ€™the campusâ€™I went to finish my college at Idaho State University, next to the Fort Hall Indian Reservation in Pocatello, Idaho.Â Â Because of Kent State, we were not allowed to wear our uniform on main campus.

Interviewer

Referring to the riot at Kent Stateâ€™

Antonio Taguba

The Kent State, rightâ€™

Interviewer

That resulted in the death ofâ€™

Antonio Taguba

Several students.

Interviewer

Of several protesting students.

Antonio Taguba

Right. Â So, that basically said to us that, you knowâ€™and the Vietnam War was not very well received by the public. There was no will for the troops to go back there. Â Of course, you had the political side of it. Â And so, you might say we were kind of in a very untenable situation. Â You want to serve your country, but the public wasnâ€™t exactly welcoming to us at that time. Â

Antonio Taguba

I wanted to go to Vietnam, but we were onlyâ€™or we were told at the timeâ€™in â€™72 when I got commissionedâ€™that only aviators were being recruited, because I think that at that time of withdrawing forces from Vietnam was at its height by that time, so.

Interviewer

Did you have any political feelings about Vietnam, yourself during this period?

Antonio Taguba

No. Â I thought, you knowâ€”I was a young lieutenant at the time. Â I was very much apolitical. Â I was watching from the sides of whatâ€™s going on. Are we winning? Â Are we having public support? Â Are we having some sort of a controversy with the political dimension of the war? Â

Antonio Taguba

So it was all transparent to me; I was a bit indifferent. Â But what really struck me was when I got my first platoon as an Armor officer that time, around November when I finished my schooling and when I reported to Fort Ord, was we were getting a lot of rift officers. Â In other words, there were officers in Vietnam, but they came out of Vietnam because of an overstrength in the officer ranks, as sergeants, or staff sergeants, or sergeants first class. Â

Antonio Taguba

So I was kind of mystified by that. Â You know, here they are, combat veterans, battle-hardened, and Iâ€™m their brand-new second lieutenant platoon leader. And there was no transition, you might say. Â There was no form of information that says, â€œHey, brand new second lieutenants of infantryâ€”I was an infantry platoon leaderâ€”youâ€™re going to get X.â€” Â All we got was, â€œYourâ€”one of your squad leaders used to be a majorâ€”now heâ€™s a buck sergeant.â€”

Dismal Race Relations in the Army of the 70s

Antonio Taguba

How do you deal with that, you know? So you might say we were not overly cautious about it, because we pretty much followed the protocol: me officer, you NCO. But with my ethnicity, at that point in time I reminded them of the enemy, and thatâ€™s where I started getting the notion that when you start getting calledâ€”I was called a â€œgook,â€” a â€œslope,â€” â€œslant-eyeâ€”. Iâ€™ve never beenâ€”Iâ€™d never experienced that. So as if, you know, my complexion, my ethnicity, my background became a part of their conversation, you might say.

Interviewer

Wow, how did that feel? That must have been very alienating, I would think.

Antonio Taguba

Well, I wasnâ€™t exactly alienatedâ€”being alienated. I was more insulted that because of that particular environment, you know, existed. I mean, the drugs were still very apparentâ€”the use of drugs in Vietnamâ€”marijuana, you name it, was there. The African-American, or the Black American disenchantment withâ€”from the government; race relations at its peakâ€”or we didnâ€™t even have race relations at that time; secret handshakes between the blacks. The whites were all nestled in one setting, and here I am, you might say, disoriented. Or mis-oriented, in some sort of senseâ€”â€œWhy is this all happening around me?â€”

Interviewer

It must have been very lonely, I would think.

Antonio Taguba

Well, it was. Because there was nobody elseâ€”the first sergeant was the only other Asian-

American in the company. Then, you know, I still see him today, First Sergeant Felix. A little bitty guy, you know, but he was firm. Then there was me, and there was a couple other black officers in the ranks, but white company commander; most of the ranks in the company were white. We had a huge disciplinary problems, drug use, just mischief, indiscipline, that sort of thingâ€”as if nobody cared, you know, my first year in the Army.

Antonio Taguba

Did people mistake you, or even willfully mistake you, for Vietnamese?

Antonio Taguba

I wasâ€”in college I was mistaken as a Native American, for example. I was often asked what tribe I was from. You know, dealing with Idaho, you have seven or eight tribes: the Nez Perce, Blackfeet, Shoshone, you know, that sort of thing. And I was mistaken for being African-American. And I was never asked what my nationality was, which is, you know, Iâ€™m Filipino-American. So, as I transcended into the military service, thisâ€”I was more of a curiosity than anything else.

Interviewer

Did you feel less American, yourself, confronting all this?

Antonio Taguba

I donâ€™t think so.

Interviewer

You had grown up in a community where you were notâ€”your looks were not unusual.

Antonio Taguba

Right, right.

Interviewer

And now here you were in main, in the continental United States, in the Army, in a place where you were nonetheless being almost ostracized as not part of the American ideal.

Antonio Taguba

Well, growing up in Hawaii, where there is a multiplicity of ethnicities in that particular state. Then I get to go to Idaho, where republican, Mormonism, conservative, you name itâ€”rural, for that matterâ€”and most of our friends were white, so. But I was treated pretty good. In the Army I took it tongue-in-cheek. If I wasâ€”I didnâ€™t have a lot of friends growing up in the Armyâ€”as a lieutenant, for that matter. I was somewhat ignorant. My classmates at the Armor Officer Basic Course was the class of 1972â€”predominantly West Pointers. All drove Corvettes, okay?

Antonio Taguba

I drove a little bitty Volkswagen [Laughter] so I pretty much understood my place. They were a clique, for that matter. I dared not venture into the officerâ€™s club, because I knew I wasnâ€™t going to get socialized with, you might sayâ€”my size, my complexion, my background, and the whole thing. I thoughtâ€”I looked at it as mostly a disadvantage to me.

Butâ€”

Interviewer

Were there Asian-American officers at all during the time?

Antonio Taguba

There were a few. I can count on one handâ€”that many.

Antonio Taguba

Did you look upon them as role models of how you might progress through the Army, or did you feel like there would be a ceiling in how far you could go?

Antonio Taguba

Well, you know, when you discover that youâ€™re sort of like one-of-a-kindâ€”I was a bit of a bashful individual at the time that I wasnâ€™t going to approach anybody. Â I didnâ€™t see anybody that I considered to be role models at that time. I was just one of these officers thatâ€”do whatever you need to do. Â My mind was towards doing a three-year active duty obligation, and little did I know that Iâ€™d end upâ€”

Interviewer

So you thought you would do a three-year obligation and get out. Â

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

Do something else.

Antonio Taguba

That wasâ€”yeah, that was the plan.

Interviewer

What kept you in? Â What do you think kept you in? Â

Antonio Taguba

Interest, curiosity. Â I wanted to get away from the typical academic environment, like Fort Knox, for example. Â I got a platoon, so that kind of piqued my interest, said, â€œHey, I could do this. Â I could be a platoon leader, and I think I could progress.â€ Â But the assignment wasnâ€™t exactly to my liking. Â You know, I was a platoon leader, and ten months later they say, â€œWell, your replacement is here, also a Vietnam veteran.â€ Â And they said, â€œWell, heâ€™ll be your assistant platoon leader.â€ Â I said, â€œNo, thereâ€™s no such thing as an assistant platoon leader.â€ Â Two lieutenants canâ€™t rule the same platoon, right? Â

Antonio Taguba

So I deferred to him and I became a staff officer, brigade assistant S-1, at the time. And then

they made me the classic, as a minority: the Brigade Race Relations Equal Opportunity Officer, right?"got to be, because, hey, you're not white, so, you know, we'll put you in this position. Â That was an interesting set of circumstances because why does it have to be a minority officer to be a Race Relations Equal Opportunity Officer? Â

Antonio Taguba

Then I volunteered to go to Korea, and in Korea I had tons of fun 'cause everything is focused"more a platoon leader. Â I was a company XO, out in the field all the time. Â It was just something that"my fellow platoon leaders and I were close, you might say, and, you know, you had a job. Â I mean the mission is that you're going to defend the country against the North Koreans, so"

Interviewer

Well, and you're in an Asian country, too. Â

Antonio Taguba

And I'm in an Asian country. Â Right.

Interviewer

So it makes a big difference, I would think. Â Your assignment in Korea lasts a long time, right?

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

And you're in Korea during Desert Storm.

Antonio Taguba

Right, as a battalion commander, yes.

Racial Parity in the Army: A Glacial Progression

Interviewer

Well, two questions. First, before we leave this race relations question"Â

Antonio Taguba

Sure.

Interviewer

Here you are, and you're a retired major general.

Antonio Taguba

Right.Â

Interviewer

If we wouldâ€™ve told you that back in 1972, you would have probably laughed at us, right?Â

Antonio Taguba

Right, I would have laughed. Not just out loud, but forever, that thatâ€™s not going to happen.

Interviewer

So it says something, I guess, about the Army, and about the country, about whatâ€™s happened in that time, that we have progressed, would you say?

Antonio Taguba

Right. I think slowly, deliberately, glacially, you might say. But it happens. You just have to wait, you know, two or three generations, but itâ€™s bound to happen. The first Asian-American general that I saw was Lieutenant General Alan Ono, from Hawaii. I think heâ€™s in his late 90s now, but I think heâ€™s still alive. We didnâ€™t see very much of that. When you see one, then you say, â€œNot going to happen again,â€ right? And then you see a Shinseki, a General Shinseki, and you say, â€œOh, maybe it will happen again.â€ But still today, weâ€™re very much a small minority. Weâ€™re not even one percent of the total General Officer Corps.Â

Interviewer

Do you feel that there is still a substantial amount of racism in the Army?Â

Antonio Taguba

Yeah. Thereâ€™s a little bit of institutional bias in there somewhere, â€™cause we do watch theâ€”at least I doâ€”watch the promotion rates. Results, you might say, especially the General Officer ranks. Weâ€™re lucky if we get one a year, for that matter. I think we had one last year. We had two the year before. And you know, just very minimal.

Interviewer

And you thinkâ€”is this overt racism, or is it more of a subtle kind of racism that maybe is unthinking?Â

Antonio Taguba

I think itâ€™s more subtle. Maybe itâ€™s our own fault in our Asian-American-Pacific Islander community that weâ€™re not doing enough to, you know, proffer our young Asian-American officers to compete. I mean, you have to compete. I mean, the military is such a competitive service, a competitive profession, that unless you compete, you wonâ€™t get recognized. My mentor used to tell me that, you know, â€œBe visible. You know, just donâ€™t be in the background because youâ€™re Asian,â€ because thatâ€™s our culture, right? Youâ€™re humble. Youâ€™re somewhat seen as very subservient. Well, not with Taguba, you know. I was going to do something a little different. My assignment pattern did notâ€”was notâ€”was kind of askew. I mean, I was twice a platoon leader, twice as a company commander, twice going to staff colleges.

Antonio Taguba

I mean, I was telling myself, â€œGeez, you know, Iâ€™ll never get ahead, because Iâ€™m

doing things twice all the time.â€ Twice as a brigadeâ€”Iâ€™m sorryâ€”as an adjutant. But, you know, I wanted to do something on my own to show that, you know, we are competitiveâ€”on a scale of onesies and twosies. So, it just has to happen that way.Â

Interviewer

Did you find that there was racism in the other direction, too, that as a platoon leader, getting the respect of your men, given that youâ€™re from a minority race in the Armyâ€”was that difficult?

Antonio Taguba

That was very difficultâ€”my first platoon, because some of the NCOs were saying that I looked like the enemy. People were actually wanting to fight me.Â

Interviewer

What do you mean, â€œwanting to fight you?â€Â

Antonio Taguba

Well, they wereâ€”a couple of threats, and a couple of folks who would come up to my face and say, you know, â€œLetâ€™s go in the back.â€

Interviewer

Just because youâ€™re Filipino.

Antonio Taguba

Right, just because I was not of their kind. And I remember one said, you know, â€œLetâ€™s duke it out in the back.â€ I said, â€œNo thatâ€™s not going to happen, because right now Iâ€™m charging you for insubordination and disrespect,â€ but just, you know, like that. You know, another soldier just flat-ass disobeyed me. But my biggest supporter was my platoon sergeant, Staff Sergeant Sidney Gilman. He would not have any of it, and he was a Vietnam Veteran. I still see him today; no teeth.Â

Interviewer

White, I assume.Â

Antonio Taguba

Whiteâ€”very much white. And he was very supportiveâ€”was my teacher. He was a helicopter crewmanâ€”Sixty-seven November, we called him. But he wasâ€”he and I were serving in an infantry company, and, you know, he was not going to have any indiscipline in the platoon at all. Â He was very, veryâ€”he was very inflexible when it comes to discipline, and he was very rigid.

A View of Desert Storm From Korea

Interviewer

You told me in the car on the way over here, that Desert Storm, you know, you missed going to Desert Storm; you wanted to go to Desert Storm, and nonetheless, thatâ€™the interesting perspective of watching Desert Storm from Korea.Â Can you tell me that story again? Â

Antonio Taguba

You know, I commanded the First Battalion, Seventy-Second Armor, where I had been a mortar platoon leader, I had been a battalion adjutant, I had been a Company XO. That was in 1973 to 1976. And I take over this battalion. And we were always uploaded ever since I was a lieutenant my first assignment there, second assignment as a battalion commander tanks were all uploaded. And the environment in Korea was rather heightened, because of the classic premise that while we're fighting Desert Storm, Kim Il Sung was going to do something dramatic, you might say.

Interviewer

And sort of take advantage of the moment, you mean?

Antonio Taguba

Right. But he knew that there's a mass of soldiers, 700,000, that was being postured towards the Middle East, and you have one division of the United States Army postured across the DMZ. So we were at a heightened

Interviewer

From the Fourth Army Reserve, right?

Interviewer

Fourth Infantry Reserve, right, at Fort Carson, Colorado, so how fast are they going to come, right?

Interviewer

Right?

Antonio Taguba

So we were always in that heightened level of alertness that there was not a given time where we were always being alerted two, three, four times a month, just to see how well we could respond.

Antonio Taguba

Following my command, I ended up in the Combined Forces Command in Seoul, where the war was still pretty much prominent at the time. And I remember the Commander in Chief for the U.S and Iraq Forces would say, I want to be sure that you beam every strike we had precision guided missiles at every position the Iraqi Forces has, and beam that to Kim Il Sung. Beam it however you want to do it to ensure that he's going to use that as a deterrent that if you try anything different, that we will strike without haste. And I did a lot of terrain walks.

Interviewer

Because of these network of tunnels, right? can you describe that for the viewers?

Antonio Taguba

Right. We did something that was rather that I learned in Germany as a company

commander: the General Defense Posture, the GDP terrain walks. So when I did my own battalion alerts, I would take companies and put them into their battle positions. Â Then we would take pictures of their sectors of fire, you might say, and how far they can range to the target. Â And we did that every quarter up to the DMZ because we didnâ€™t want to be defending from outside of Camp Casey, you know. Â We wanted to defend all the way up to the DMZ. Â

Antonio Taguba

So I took that principal, I took that â€œlessons learned,â€ and I got all my leaders, my platoon sergeants, my first sergeants, platoon leaders, and the like, and we walked that all the way up to the DMZ. Â And we also arranged for tours of several tunnelsâ€”I think about three or four tunnels that we knew existedâ€”and got that to let them know to what extent can our defenses hold against a horde of North Koreans coming across the border.

Interviewer

These are tunnels built by the North Koreansâ€”

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

In order to be able to accessâ€”cross the DMZ.

Antonio Taguba

And they were guarded by South Korean soldiers at the tunnel entry point, on the south side.

Origins of the Taguba Report

Interviewer

Letâ€™s go to the latter few years of your career which were occupied by an episode dealing withâ€”well, a major, very important part of the war in Iraq.

Antonio Taguba

Sure.Â

Interviewer

Can you tell me the origins of what is now known as the Taguba Report?Â

Antonio Taguba

The Taguba Reportâ€”yeah, somebody coined that. Actually, the person whoâ€”the first time I heard that term, the Taguba Reportâ€”you know, Iâ€™ll get back to your question hereâ€”but I got a phone call around two in the morning in Kuwait. I was a deputy commanding general for the Combined Forces Land Component Command/Third Army. And I just happened to answer the telephone, and it was some sergeant from the Army Public Affairs Officeâ€”I donâ€™t recall his name now. He said, â€œSir, I would justâ€”â€ and his comment to me was, â€œSir, you know, I just want to verify that you are the author of the Taguba Report.â€

Antonio Taguba

I said, "I was very much surprised when he said that to me. I said, "What report is that? What are you talking about?" He said, "The report you did" the 15-6 report you did on Abu Ghraib. I says, "How did you know that?" I mean, it's a classified report. So he detailed the disclosure, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Well, that all started around January of I guess the date around the 16th of January, 2004, when I saw SIPR e-mails coming across that something had happened"

Interviewer

What are SIPR e-mails?

Antonio Taguba

Secure e-mails that came across my desk and said, "Something is happening at a detention center named Abu Ghraib. Now, we knew what Abu Ghraib was, because that's where Saddam Hussein kept over 20,000 prisoners that he let loose during the March, 2003, invasion, which we later turned into a detention center. So I saw that, and I said, "Oh, something must be really dramatic that's going on in the prison site."

Interviewer

Now, these reports are coming from where?

Antonio Taguba

The reports were coming from CENTCOM "Central Command, so" and I was cc'd on some of that because we were the "I want to say the operational command in Kuwait that is providing support to CJTF-7 up in Baghdad. And little did I know that the next day my commanding officer, Lieutenant General David McKiernan, told me to drop whatever I was doing, and to go up north and determine what needs to be done to do an investigation.

Interviewer

Now, who chose you to do this investigation? Was that the Lieutenant General Sanchez, or?

Antonio Taguba

General Sanchez was the one who requested it"

Interviewer

Who requested the investigation "not necessarily you, but requested the investigation.

Antonio Taguba

Right. If I remember this well, he requested "General Sanchez requested an investigating officer to CENTCOM, General Abizaid's headquarters, for a two-star general to conduct an investigation, and CENTCOM tasked my immediate commander, Lieutenant General, then-Lieutenant General David McKiernan, to appoint one.

Interviewer

And he chose you.

Antonio Taguba

He chose me.

Interviewer

Now, why do you think he chose you?

Antonio Taguba

I was available.Â I had just come back from training, supporting the training of III Corps to take over from Lieutenant General Sanchez. And I was available.

Interviewer

Had you ever done an investigation of this sort before?

Antonio Taguba

Not of this magnitude.

Interviewer

Did you have any inkling at the moment when you were assigned it just how explosive this might be?

Antonio Taguba

Not until I went up to Baghdad and spoke to several staff members from CJTF-7, and when I visited the site.

Interviewer

Tell me about thatâ€”whatâ€”so you go up toâ€”

Antonio Taguba

Yeah.

Interviewer

CJTF-7, and youâ€”

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

What do you hear that first day?

Antonio Taguba

Well, there was rumor abound. They said that a two-star general was appointed to conduct an investigation of alleged detainee abuse and torture at the prison site, and but the name did notâ€”was not released at the time.Â Â So when General McKiernan appointed meâ€”verbally, until orders could be cutâ€”I had my aide and I and several other staff

members accompany me to Baghdadâ€”Camp Victory. And I spoke to the Provost Marshal, Colonel Jerry Marcello, to give me some background on what had happened, since he was in charge, not only of the MPs but he was also the commander of the Criminal Investigation Division assigned there in Baghdad, or throughout Iraq, primarily.â€

Antonio Taguba

So he gave me the background information, showed me the CD that contained all the photographs.â€ I was not impressed.â€ I was basically highly disappointedâ€”angry that something like this had happenedâ€”that havingâ€”

Interviewer

Where had the CD come from?â€ Where had the reports sort of filtered up from to create this investigation?â€

Antonio Taguba

Well, there was allegations that something was going on of detainee abuse and torture at the prison site, becauseâ€”

Interviewer

Coming up from other guards that wereâ€”

Antonio Taguba

Right.â€ It was just percolating, you might say.â€ And there had been a 15-6 investigation before that was I think that was done by a lieutenant colonel.

Interviewer

What is a 15-6 investigation, by the way?

Antonio Taguba

Itâ€™s a administrative investigation.â€ It could be done informally to sort out the facts.â€ And itâ€™s typically focused on a particular unit or a particular individual, and to make a determination of what caused that particular incident to occur and what would be the recommendations to provideâ€”to remedy thatâ€”

Interviewer

In this case, though, youâ€™re looking to see even if there were any incidents that occurred, or whether there was a reason to do a further investigation.

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

Did you have a staff at this time, or?

Antonio Taguba

No, not yetâ€”only after I spent a day up in Baghdad to visit the prison, take a look at all the

documents that was present at the time, and any type of statements, you might say, that we could see.Â Then I went back to Kuwait to back-brief General McKiernan, and told him, “I need certain things assembled” an investigating team.Â I had to call in for experts from the states, typically MPs, but just since the focus of the investigation was an MP unit, the 800 MP Brigade that was commanded by Brigadier General Janis Karpinski, that was the limit of my investigation. Â

Antonio Taguba

But what I wanted, because of my assessment at the time when I went there previous to assembling my team, was what units were actually at the prison site, and we determined that there were all kinds of units.Â It was not just MPs, but you had military police”

Interviewer

So why was the investigation only limited to that?

Antonio Taguba

Because they were the ones that would”they were identified as the unit”the 372ndÂ MP Company”as the unit that were found to have”the allegations were against them.

Interviewer

I see.Â But you had reason to believe as you began working on the investigation that it was more widespread than that first”

Antonio Taguba

It was.

Interviewer

Now, when you said earlier that it was”you looked at the pictures, and you were, I think you used the term, and it was somewhat understated, that you were not impressed, and disappointed.

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

I have to think it was even stronger than that.

Antonio Taguba

[Laughter]Â Well, the first question in my mind is, “How can something like this happen in modern warfare?”Â You know, all the time”the My Lai incidents, what had happened at Somalia”I mean, we”re better than this.Â We were trying to liberate a country; we”re trying to posture democratic ideals.Â We did away with a dictator who was doing this to his own countrymen, for example.Â And then we got caught up.Â How did this happen, was the first thing in my mind, and where were the leaders that could have prevented this or intervened, you know?Â And who else were involved?Â How could this happen?

Interviewer

When you went back to Lieutenant General McKiernan, did he share the same level of shock?

Antonio Taguba

He saw the pictures and some photos that was relayed to us through the SIPR net—the classified net. But not to the extent of what I saw. I saw hundreds of different photographs. Sexual acts—soldiers on soldiers sexual act, for example. Iraqi women baring their chest—which is, of course, illegal; beatings that had been photographed. Then you saw the rest of the pictures when I believe CBS released them on the media. Of course, what we didn't know was that soldiers were actually taking the pictures, the MPs.

Interviewer

Well, that's the next question. Why was this—it's one thing that the abuse would have happened, and another that it would have been recorded

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

As evidence already. What was, in your mind, immediately, the relationship between the abuse and the actual record of the abuse?

Antonio Taguba

Well, number one, there was no leadership associated with this. There was nobody managing, leading, supervising, or even scrutinizing how the operation was being done, up until we started making our interviews.

Interviewer

So, you would blame Janis Karpinski in this case?

Antonio Taguba

Today I would blame more than Janis Karpinski.

Interviewer

We'll get to that in a minute. But I mean that was—but in terms of, just to get into the mindset of the abusers here, what was the point of taking the pictures? Was it

Antonio Taguba

It's called technology. I mean, you go to an AAFES store, anywhere where there's an AAFES store throughout the Middle East, so namely Iraq and Kuwait, people want to take pictures. Not just themselves, you know, posing with a rifle in their combat uniform, their Kevlar helmet, and their individual body armor. They want to show something that they can take back, you know, like moving tanks, or moving Bradleys or whatever have you, or damaged villages. But this is more—this was more indicative of

what they wanted to see if they did something to the Iraqi people. A You know, what does, what effects does war have to do when you start beating up on people notâ€”Â

Interviewer

Thereâ€™s a certain pride you feel they took in it, then.

Antonio Taguba

Yeah, a certain pride, a certain number of arrogance that, hey, the old classicâ€”Ugly Americanâ€”scene, that weâ€™re here to liberate you, but weâ€™re also going to punish the enemy, you knowâ€”without any understanding, without any respect with regards to whether theyâ€™re enemy or not.â€”Â And they just basically did on their own free will.â€”Â But we also found out that there were people who were exploiting them to do that during myâ€”the course of my investigation.

The Tip of an Iceberg Called Abu Ghraib

Interviewer

Weâ€™ll get to that in a second. So Lieutenant General McKiernan, when you showed him the tip of the iceberg, essentially, after that visit to Baghdad and to Abu Ghraibâ€”what was his reaction?

Antonio Taguba

Well, he wasnâ€™t pleased to begin with, but he was also the one who gave me only 30 days to complete my investigation. And I couldnâ€™t get an extension. He said, â€œYou have 30 days.â€

Interviewer

Why was thatâ€”why do you think he wanted to limit theâ€”

Antonio Taguba

I didnâ€™t know at first, but over the course of my 30 days, I felt there was more than just the MPs who were involved.

Interviewer

So you think that General McKiernan was worried that if you went longer than the 30 days, your investigation might penetrate deeper into the leadership?

Antonio Taguba

Right. â€”My sensing that it will, and I think my sensing proved true. â€”That it was just more than the soldiers there, soâ€”and I thinkâ€”I felt as if it was going to be an open-and-shut case, because I had a very good, close relationship with my investigating teamâ€”before we launched, just to let you know, for this interview. â€”We made sure that we knew what we were getting ourselves into, so we trained ourselvesâ€”read regulations. â€”Read anything that we can on the doctrinal matters of detainee operationsâ€”refreshed ourselves on the Geneva Convention. â€”

Antonio Taguba

We read whatever we can on the operations order that started the war back in March of

2003â€”any annexes had to deal with EPWs, detainee operations, civilian detentionâ€”all of that. Â And we didnâ€™t just say, â€œOkay, guys, pack up your gear and weâ€™re going to go up there.â€ Â Noâ€”we spent four or five days dealing with our own training to ensure that weâ€™re not prejudging ourselves.

Interviewer

There were JAG officers, I assume, as part of your team, too.

Antonio Taguba

I had three JAG officers there. Â One was a trial lawyer, had the Command staff judge advocate, had an administrative lawyer on the staff. Â I had one psychiatristâ€”thatâ€™s all they could give me, one psychiatrist. Â I didnâ€™t have any medical personnel, because they were all needed in commands. Â No chaplain, because we were short chaplains to begin with, so I cobbled together what I thought would make a good investigating team.

Interviewer

Okay. So whoâ€™it would be important to have a chaplain, I imagine, and a psychiatrist, but what about investigators? I mean, how many investigators did you have?

Antonio Taguba

Well, we were all self-trained, you might say, on the pace. Â We wereâ€”

Interviewer

How many did you have that worked at it?

Antonio Taguba

I had 23 of us.

Interviewer

1.

Antonio Taguba

Right. Â I had an MP Colonel who was our Deputy Provost Marshal for Third Army. Â I had a commander that came out of Fort Leavenworthâ€”Weathersbee, I believe, was his name; Lieutenant Colonel. And I had a Master Sergeant Baldwin, who knew his stuffâ€”big, burly guy. Â Iâ€™d say he was probably 6â€™4â€, maybe 260â€”your typical MP guard, and he actually was my subject matter expert, â€™cause he had done EPW duties during Desert Storm. Â And so did my aideâ€”in fact, he was at Camp Bucca at the time.

Interviewer

When you began this investigation, having already come back with this early sense that it was really some shocking abuse hereâ€”

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

Did you feel immediately that the trail would lead you to a higher place, and to

moreâ€”higher part of the leadership, and to more places than this particular unit at Abu Ghraib?

Antonio Taguba

Initially, no. Â I focused on the brigade commander at first. Â Thatâ€™s because her unit was mentioned in my assignment orders, but I also compelled to know that there was a commanding general thatâ€™s conducting combat operations and detainee operations, and Lieutenant General Rick Sanchez just happens to be a good friend of mine. Â But I didnâ€™t let our friendship get in the way, because I was dealing with something as dramatic and horrific as an Abu Ghraib, for example, and looking at all of the other detention centers, the other three: Camp Cropper, Camp Ahsraf, and Camp Bucca. Â

Antonio Taguba

I did not look at any of the prisons. Â There are six prisons in Baghdad that was also being administered by the Army, and also by the Department of Justice.

Interviewer

So the only one being administered by Brigade Commander Karpinski was Abu Ghraib, right?

Antonio Taguba

Well, she had four detention centers plus the six prisons.Â

Interviewer

Fourâ€”and did you interview her immediately?

Antonio Taguba

No. Â What I wanted to doâ€”and I talked to my staff about itâ€”first of all, only me and our lawyer saw the pictures. Â I didnâ€™t want to show the pictures to or the CD to the rest of my investigating team because I felt that I ought not to have them prejudge the investigation. Â I already knew what the pictures looked like, so all I had to do was describe it to them. Â

Antonio Taguba

And the process by which I wanted to conduct the investigation wasâ€”everywhere I went, they came with me. Â What I saw, they saw. Â What I read, they read. Â And I broke us up into two investigation teams with some preset questions to ask those that we were going to interview.

Interviewer

Because you didnâ€™t want there to be any excess subjectivity to everyâ€”

Antonio Taguba

Right. Â We want to be as objective as we could. Â And oh, by the way, before we deployed to the prison site or to Iraq was we took an oath, because we were reminded thatâ€”state the facts and provide the recommendationsâ€”no speculation.

Interviewer

Was itâ€”but it must have been known fairly quickly that the team was arriving, and that an investigation had begun.

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

What was the first work that the team did, and if you didnâ€™t go to Karpinski right away, what did you do first?

Antonio Taguba

We assembled ourselves at Camp Victory, had an in-briefing with Lieutenant General Sanchez and his team, â€™cause he knew whatâ€”we were transparent to him.

Interviewer

Was he supportive ofâ€”

Antonio Taguba

Oh, he was very supportive, and he wanted to find out what happened, basically. Â So we posted ourselves at Camp Victory. Â He gave us an office spaceâ€”

Interviewer

Can I ask you to interpret one thingâ€”

Antonio Taguba

Yes.

Interviewer

So did he have a sense that you were investigating what happened, as if it was a discrete set of acts that had already concluded, or was he concerned that you were investigating what is happening? Â In other words, that it was rife throughout the detention centers?

Antonio Taguba

May I put it in this context: they wanted it somehow, the feeling I got was, to be isolated only at Abu Ghraib. Â But you know, my sensing tells me that it wasnâ€™t just isolated at Abu Ghraib. Â But if it was only isolated there, then we wanted to prove that fact by going to the other detention centers, that it wasnâ€™tâ€”that abuse and torture wasnâ€™t being done systematically acrossâ€”

Interviewer

But your investigation did not have that scope to do that, right?

Antonio Taguba

No.

Interviewer

And that was never done.

Antonio Taguba

I took liberty, you might say, under advisement by the staff, our command staff judge advocate—all three lawyers as well said, “You can, but since they’re all belong to the same unit, the 800th MP Brigade, the three battalions that were operating there. But I could not go beyond that scope of my investigation by dealing with the MI Brigade that was also involved in that investigation. That was, again, recommended that they do a separate investigation of the 213th MI Brigade, which”

Interviewer

Did that ever happen?

Antonio Taguba

Yes, it did. A four-star general actually headed that one.

Interviewer

Who did that?

Antonio Taguba

General Paul Kern, class of ’67.

Following the Trail

Interviewer

So back to the trail here—so the two teams go out, and their assignment is to interview the guards at Abu Ghraib immediately?

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

And find out.

Antonio Taguba

What we did was all of the interviews—we did on-site interviews, and we also did interviews at Camp Victory.

Interviewer

Were these videotaped, audiotaped?

Antonio Taguba

Yes, they were audiotaped. There were legal paralegals who transcribed everything, yeah.

Interviewer

And what did you learn?

Antonio Taguba

That a lot of the folks that we interviewed were rather defensive and were in a high state of denial that none of that stuff was happening, even though they had statements to the fact, to the contrary, that something like this was happening. Â We read their statements. Â There were statements fromâ€”

Interviewer

These statements from the very same peopleâ€”

Antonio Taguba

From the same people.

Interviewer

That had already been takenâ€”

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

That said that this was happening, when you went to interview them, fear struck them that they should go back on what they originally said?

Antonio Taguba

Well, youâ€™re right. Â Thereâ€™s others that did not make a statement, and basically said they didnâ€™t know anything about it. Â Well, you know, we took that in stride, even though we were suspicious of those comments, soâ€”especially when it came to the leadersâ€™ side.

Antonio Taguba

The soldiers were pretty much open on what they saw and did not see, but we wanted to interview the senior leaders, the sergeants, the captains, the majors, and the colonels. Â Who wereâ€”some of them were a little bit defiant, you might sayâ€”some of them were not very disclosing. Â Some wanted to know if they were being charged. Â Told them that they would not be unless they provided false statements, and then we will charge them with making false statements.

Interviewer

They were defiant that it had happened at all, or they were defiant that it happened with their knowledge?

Antonio Taguba

Both. Â Thereâ€™s some knowledge in there they werenâ€™t going to disclose to me unless they were being charged. Â One in particular was a lieutenant who did not want to

surrender his pistol, his M-9 pistol, at the door prior to being interviewed, so we basically ordered him to surrender his pistol, â€™cause I didnâ€™t have anyâ€”want any weapons inside the interview room.

Interviewer

He wanted his weapon for his own defense in the interview.

Antonio Taguba

Right. Â Soâ€”

Interviewer

These are very hostile interviews.

Antonio Taguba

They were very hostile. Â It turned out to be hostile, even though we told them the extent of the investigationâ€”administrative in nature, fact-finding and the like. Â But there was some occasion there where we turned and we had a hostileâ€”hostile soldier.

Interviewer

Did you sit in on the interviews yourself?

Antonio Taguba

Yes. Â I was one of the interview team. Â I led one of the interview teams, and my deputy, Colonel Lafete, held the other interview team. Â And if we found anything inconsistentâ€”for example, if I found some response from one of the interviewees, I would recall that witness or recall the soldier and have him be interviewed by Colonel Lafete to see if he would remain consistent. Â Some of these soldiers were responding to the answers, because even though I told them, â€œPlease do not convey or repeat any of these deliberations to your fellow soldiers or prospective interviewees,â€” they went ahead and did it anyway. Â So we put the word out that if you did this, youâ€™re disobeying, you knowâ€”

Interviewer

You mean they wereâ€”there were whispers of, â€œThis is the story.â€”

Antonio Taguba

Right. Â They were sharing their information amongst themselves, just in case they get called upon by me, orâ€”â€™cause we had a list of prospective witnesses. Â And this is where I wanted to hear their story first, before I interviewed General Karpinski. Â I wanted her to be the last one, to see what she had to say. Â Now, I did not convey to her what her soldiers said about her or what had happened. Â I wanted her to state her own series of responses to me based on the questions.

Interviewer

But she knew she was being investigated, right?

Antonio Taguba

Of course. Â She was trying to leave the country, for crying out loud.

Interviewer

She was trying to leave the country?

Antonio Taguba

Yes. Â Kuwaitâ€”she wasâ€”they were all being readied to deploy, and sheâ€™s requested to leave the country to visit one of her soldiers in Germany whoâ€™s attending primary leadership development courseâ€”said, â€œNo.â€

Interviewer

You mean that she was leavingâ€”she wanted to leave the country in particular to be away from the investigation?Â

Antonio Taguba

Or out of the wayâ€”right. Â Right. Â And a lot of her leadersâ€”

Interviewer

And no wonder that sheâ€™d have to return to the investigation eventually.

Antonio Taguba

Well, I wasÂ [Laughter]â€”I reflagged everybodyâ€”anybody and everybody that was in that brigade. Â They were not to leave the country. Â They were not going to redeploy. Â We flagged every one of them. Â We flagged their connexes full of their paperwork. Â They were not to be shipped. Â They were not going to go without my express permission, which sent out a signal that, you know, this is not just another investigation; this is a series of investigations. Â CIDâ€™s involved, Iâ€™m involved, you know.

Culture of Indifference

Interviewer

Now, all of this happened within 30 days, then.

Antonio Taguba

Completelyâ€”everything.

Interviewer

And as you were doing the interviewing, you come to realize that, in your judgment, the errors donâ€™t reside merely at the bottom of the stack.Â

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

That weâ€™re seeing a kind ofâ€”would you refer to this as whatâ€”culture of indifference? Or would you actually describe it as active encouragement?Â

Antonio Taguba

I took that as both, as in your comment. There was a culture of indifference. I recall a fellow two-star, when we wereâ€”before I proceeded to do the investigation, he made a comment that, â€œTheyâ€™re just Iraqis.â€ I was rather taken aback by his comment that, â€œtheyâ€™re just Iraqis,â€ so I asked him for clarification: â€œWhy do you see that as theyâ€™re just Iraqis?â€ You know? It brought me back to what I just mentioned to you earlier, that Iâ€™m not a white person, so maybe I want to get treated a little differently, based on my own experience. I think that is an insult, actually.

Antonio Taguba

Because I had mentioned to this fellow two-star general that Iâ€™m going to interview the MI brigade commander, Tom Pappas, Colonel Tom Pappas. â And his comment to me was, â€œIf you go after my brigade commander, Iâ€™ll be sadly disappointed.â€ â So I said, â€œWell, you better be disappointed now, because Iâ€™m going to interview him in his role with regards to Abu Ghraib.â€

Interviewer

Did you take that as a threat?

Antonio Taguba

I took that as a threat, and have not spoken to him since then. â That was in January of 2004.

Interviewer

Now, as you do the interviews, youâ€™re hearing that thisâ€”youâ€™re hearing both that there was indifference, and that there was encouragement, going how far up the ladder here?

Antonio Taguba

I would think on my best assessment that the encouragement was happening inside of General Sanchezâ€™s staff. â But I was not able to investigate them because I was limited to a one-star general. â I believe that came about after my investigation, which is the investigation on the 213th MI Brigade. â By that time, they appointed a three-star generalâ€”Major General George Fay was assigned to investigate the brigade. â But there was not enough horsepower, because you canâ€™t investigate a fellow two-star if you are junior to that particular two-starâ€”you have to be senior. â

Antonio Taguba

So they brought in Lieutenant General Tony Jones, and he was running into some difficulty, so they appointed a four-star general because there was a heightened interest whether General Abizaid was involved as the commander of CENTCOM.

Interviewer

A heightened interest that General Abizaid mightâ€™ve been involved in encouraging the abuse on some level?

Antonio Taguba

No, I think it's more of how did the command responded to the allegations.

Interviewer

To the news of the abuse.

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

In other words, then we go back to the indifference.

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

But you said "so within General Sanchez's Command" let's back up a little bit. Let's go to when you finally did interview General Karpinski.

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

What did you hear?

Antonio Taguba

Defensive, wanted to detract from the issue "she was more interested that she was being targeted because she's a woman, she's an Army Reserve officer, and that she was not actually in charge of Abu Ghraib, and it's just a matter of putting the attention on herself as opposed to putting the attention on what had happened at Abu Ghraib. In other words, she was a bit reluctant in accepting any responsibility, let alone accountability, for what had happened there.

Interviewer

Did she blame higher-ups herself?

Antonio Taguba

Oh, absolutely.

Interviewer

Where did she point the finger?

Antonio Taguba

General Sanchez, to the point where she was being "making disparaging remarks, not only against him, but his staff and others of senior rank to her, where I actually stopped her twice during the interview and warned her that if she made any more disparaging remarks

against her superior officer, then I will have to charge her under Article 88, UCMJ, and for her to focus on the issue at hand, as far as what her role and responsibility was.

Interviewer

So youâ€™re saying her disparaging remarks were gratuitous statementsâ€”they were not fact-finding.

Antonio Taguba

Yeah, yeah. Â Obviously, very gratuitous in nature, and she took liberties at it, so.

Interviewer

But to herâ€”her contention was whatâ€”that this was orders from Sanchezâ€™s team?
Â That thisâ€”or was it indifference from Sanchezâ€™s team?

Antonio Taguba

Well, I think itâ€™s more, you know, from her own perspective, she was blamed because, again, because of her gender, and of her component, which I told her that thatâ€™s not the case in point. Â And she was also making comments that â€œthose were not my soldiers.â€ Â And I said, â€œWell, they are your soldiers, â€™cause theyâ€™re assigned to you, irregardless of what state they came from or what units they came from.â€ Â She was also toldâ€”she also told me that she never had any control over the MI Brigade, for that matter. Â That she was not in charge of their interrogation program. Â

Antonio Taguba

And I said, â€œThat might be true, but youâ€™re in charge of the detention centers.
Â Everybody thatâ€™s in your domain is under your command and control.â€ Â And she didnâ€™t know that that changed in November of 2003, â€™cause her staff, as dysfunctional as they were, as indisciplined as they were, did not tell her.

Conclusion: A Systematic Failure

Interviewer

So you gather this, and you are expected to deliver your report within 30 days, orâ€”

Interviewer

Right.Â

Interviewer

So this is fast writing.Â

Antonio Taguba

Very fast writingâ€”very fast. We didnâ€™t want to do it in such a manner that weâ€™re doing a drive-by. There was a lot of literature to read, documents to read. I hadâ€”you talk about investigations, investigatory processesâ€”we were uncovering things. Secret documents here, a report that was done by Major General Don Ryder, who did a report that followed Major General Jeff Millerâ€™s report, for example. Other documents that detailed there were no accurate accounting of escapes, or accurate reporting of, you know, prisoner situation or prison conditions, anything of that nature. Â It wasâ€”it wasâ€”it was very lax.

There was, you know, thereâ€™sâ€”the daily logs were almost nonexistent, you might say. Leadersâ€”

Interviewer

What were the conclusions in the end of your report, as you finished that?

Antonio Taguba

I thought it was a veryâ€”a systemic failure in leadership at the tactical level. In fact, to follow up on your question there, during the halfway point of my investigation, I had a meeting with Lieutenant General Sanchez to which I told him that he was going to be the fall guy.

Interviewer

How did he respond?

Antonio Taguba

Well, he was silent for a moment then he said, â€œThis is because they were not trained fully for the mission.â€” I said, â€œNoâ€”because your staff failed himâ€”of not doing supervisory checks on the prison, or having, or providing specific and clear guidance on how the detainees were to be handled, for that matter, let alone taking care of their own soldiers in the conduct of their operation.

Interviewer

Was he defensive on that?

Antonio Taguba

He was, you know, and I expected that. But I told him that, â€œitâ€™s all going to lead to you.â€” You know, we would find unsigned statements with his signature blocked in there, posted on the bulletin board, you know. If somebody prepared those documents with his signature block on there, theyâ€™d better be signed by him or his deputy, one of the two, but not just â€œS/â€” on it. To me, thatâ€™s not signedâ€”thatâ€™s somebody just developed one for the sake of just posting on the bulletin board so, â€œOh, the commanding general knows about this.â€” Not in combat.

Interviewer

So you issue your report, and it goes to whom?

Antonio Taguba

The first person that I briefed was Lieutenant General McKiernan. The second one that I briefed was Lieutenant General Sanchez. I went to the appointing officer first, then I went to the requesting officer, then I briefed Lieutenant General Ron Henley, who is the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Reserve Command, since thoseâ€”since the brigade belonged to him at pre-deployment, and it would belong back to him again upon deployment. And I also briefed Lieutenant General Lance Smith, General Abizaidâ€™s deputy, which was a different story, so.

Interviewer

Weâ€™ll come back to that in a second. A What is the mood in the room when youâ€™re giving these briefings?

Antonio Taguba

Somber, and somewhat surprised, and somewhat in a state of denial. Â I donâ€™t think theyâ€™

Interviewer

Was there a lot of concern that the findings of the report would become public?

Antonio Taguba

I donâ€™t think so. Â Even my own investigation team asked me that question.

Interviewer

There were not concerns that it would become public.

Antonio Taguba

Well, my investigative team were concerned that when it gets exposed to the publicâ€™â€™cause they asked me a specific question: â€œSir, when do you think this is going to get exposed to the public?â€

Interviewer

It was always your intentionâ€™

Antonio Taguba

I was neverâ€™

Interviewer

The intention of the Army that it was going to be exposed to the public at some point.

Antonio Taguba

Right. Â This is not proprietary, in a sense, you might say, for me. Â Once I completed my report, I hand offâ€™whatever anybody else above me wants to do with that report, thatâ€™s out of my hands at that point.

Interviewer

But did you sense that it was the Armyâ€™s responsibility to make this public?

Antonio Taguba

No, â€™cause itâ€™s classified secret. Â You know, the reason why we classify it as secret is because there were some references in there that were of a classified nature.Â

Interviewer

How was it leaked?

Antonio Taguba

If you ask me, I think it was done by somebody inside the Pentagon.

Interviewer

Not part of your team.

Antonio Taguba

Not part of my team.

Interviewer

Do you really think you know who it is who leaked it?

Antonio Taguba

No. Â To this day, I donâ€™t know. Â But not my teamâ€™lâ€™I tell you why: they were concerned for their safety. Â They asked me that.

Interviewer

From the Iraqis?

Antonio Taguba

No. Â Just from the press or anybody else who will identify them as part of this investigating team. Â Thatâ€™s why we chose to redact their names, and I told them that there were only going to be one talking head, and that is yours truly, and if anybody goes after you or wants to interview you or anything of that nature, you diffuse that by referring everybody either to me or to the command.

Interviewer

Did you brief Secretary Rumsfeld on the investigation?

Antonio Taguba

Not officiallyâ€™not until he called me to his office, so.Â

Interviewer

And that happened after it was leaked.

Antonio Taguba

After it was leaked.

The Day the Report Leaked

Interviewer

Letâ€™s go to the day when it was leaked.

Antonio Taguba

Right. Â [Laughs]

Interviewer

How did you hear that it was leaked?

Antonio Taguba

First, remember I mentioned that sergeant who called me at two oâ€™clock in the morning.

Interviewer

Yes.

Antonio Taguba

When he called me and asked me if I was the author of the Taguba Report, he was calling me on an open line. It was not a classified lineâ€”it was not a secure line. So I saidâ€”if he already knew the Taguba Report was out there, then I assumed that it had been leaked. And then I was in an airport on â€”going back for myâ€”General McKiernan was sending me back to a mission in Atlanta, and I was at the Amsterdam airport waiting for my flight when my face was flashed on the TV monitor at the gate, along with Karpinski, that I knew now this is a full-fledged leak.

Interviewer

This was CNN or something wasâ€”

Antonio Taguba

It wasâ€”it was BBC or something like that, yeah. Then I said, â€œOh, good Lord,â€ and it all went downhill from there.

Interviewer

Well, so then youâ€”how quickly after that does Secretary Rumsfeld call you to give him a briefing?

Antonio Taguba

Two days afterwards.

Interviewer

And you arrived at his officeâ€”

Antonio Taguba

Yeah.

Interviewer

With who?

Antonio Taguba

I arrived at his office with me and my command staff judge advocate, Colonelâ€”

Interviewer

Just the two of you.

Antonio Taguba

Just the two of us, yeah.

Interviewer

And youâ€™re hitâ€™

Antonio Taguba

Now, prior to that, I was called to the Secretary of the Army.

Interviewer

Well, letâ€™s go to that first.â€™ The Secretary of the Army is Tom White, is it?

Antonio Taguba

No.â€™ It was Les Brownlee at the time.â€™ Secretary White was dismissed by Rumsfeld two months before, I believe it was.â€™ Iâ€™m sorryâ€™several months before.â€™ So they were preparingâ€™little did I know that they were preparing for testimony before the House Armed Services Committee.â€™ This is I recall 6 May, 2004, and theyâ€™re going to testify the next day, which is a Friday, 7 May, 2004.

Interviewer

About the Taguba Report.

Antonio Taguba

About the Taguba Report, which by that time nobody had read.â€™ But the press knew about it, but did not have access to the entire 6,000 pages.â€™ What we provided to Abizaid and his staff was a briefing of all the facts, figures, people involved, recommendations, and all thatâ€™about 25 pages longâ€™whichâ€™

Interviewer

So you briefed the Secretary of the Armyâ€™

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

And then?

Antonio Taguba

And then General Myers, General of the Joint Chiefs, along with Vice Chairman Peter Pace.

Interviewer

And are they angry at you for having the discoveries that youâ€”are they blaming the messenger here, or are youâ€”

Antonio Taguba

If they were, they didnâ€™t show it.Â Â They were moreâ€”well, the question was, â€œTell me what happened in 10 minutes or less,â€”okay?Â Â That told me that they didnâ€™t read it.Â Â General Schumacher showed me a boxâ€”I think it was a box ofâ€”well, a carton box where they had theâ€”what do you call thatâ€”Xerox papers, right?Â Â And on top of it was the entire report.Â Â He was going through it page by page.Â Â So that tells me that he is not going to read it the day or the night before he has to make the presentation at the House Armed Services Committee. Â

Antonio Taguba

I was surprised at the demeanor of General Myers and General Pace, as if they didnâ€™t know anything about it.Â Â They knew something was going on.

Interviewer

They acted as if they didnâ€™t know anything about the investigation itself?

Antonio Taguba

Right, right.Â Â They knew about the CBS release of the photographs, but they didnâ€™t know the full extent of what was contained in the investigation, on the report.Â Â And I was even more surprised when Rumsfeld said he had not seen the report, nor had he seen the photographs.

Rumsfeldâ€™s Reaction

Interviewer

Letâ€™s go to your briefing with Secretary Rumsfeld.

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

Did youâ€”had you ever met him before that?

Antonio Taguba

Oh, yes.

Interviewer

Interviewer

You had.

Antonio Taguba

I had met him.

Interviewer

You had a friendly relationship with him?

Antonio Taguba

Well, it was more in passing, you might sayâ€”we didnâ€™t converse up until the time I sat in his conference room surrounded by the rest of his staff.

Interviewer

What was his demeanor in that meeting?

Antonio Taguba

He was angry.

Interviewer

Angry at?

Antonio Taguba

Angry probably at me, because the line of question wasâ€”well, when I sat down next to him, I wasâ€”next to me to my right was General Myers, I think, if Iâ€™m not mistaken. Â And then at the head of the table was Rumsfeld, and what he told his staff, â€œWell, hereâ€™s General Tagubaâ€”have at it,â€ you know. Â I still remember those commentâ€”â€œHave at it.â€ Â In other words, you guys ask him the questions, and Iâ€™ll just listen. Â That kind of showed me that one, he wasnâ€™t even remotely interested, two, he was probably stewing at the fact that a report of this magnitude had been leaked.

Antonio Taguba

â€™Cause he asked me afterwards if I knew who leaked it; looking at me very intently, as if I did it. Â I told him, â€œWhy would I want to do that?â€ Â So I wasnâ€™t going to get intimidated by someone whose staff failed him, and then points the finger at me. Â And the fact of the matter is nobody actually in the room had ever read the report.

Interviewer

Well, what was the nature when they â€œhad at it,â€ what was the nature of the questioning of you then?

Antonio Taguba

Well, they didnâ€™tâ€”they wereâ€”I was watching the mood and the demeanor, and there were some discussions of how to prepare themselves for the hearing the next day. Â In other words, they were notâ€”they were woefully unprepared.

Interviewer

And did any of them question the validity of your findings?

Antonio Taguba

Yes. Â There was a staff memberâ€”I forgot who it wasâ€”he was across the table from me. Â Next to me, the chair next to me was Cambone, the Undersecretary for Intelligence, and Wolfowitzâ€”they were sitting in the middle. Â The question was, â€œWas it torture or

abuse?â€” I gave them a description of a detainee who was naked, lying on his stomach, soft-cuffedâ€”in other words, they used those plastic cuffsâ€”with his arms behind his back, being interrogated in his cell.â€” December, for that matterâ€”which is against policy, against SOP, because according to who I re-interviewed, the procedure was they were only supposed to be interviewed at the interrogation control elements site, away from their cells.â€”

Antonio Taguba

So here they are doing that, and according to the detaineeâ€™s statement at the time, that a foreign object wasâ€”that felt like a wooden broom of some sort, handle, was shoved through his rectum, and then he was sprayed with chemical lights, all over.â€” So I turned to whoever asked me that question: â€œIf somebody shoved a foreign object called a broom up your rectum, would you consider that abuse or would you consider that torture?â€”â€”â€” Cause now youâ€™re inflicting grievous bodily harmâ€”by definition, torture is inflicting grievous bodily harm that could cause organ failureâ€”I think a broom handle will do thatâ€”just that.â€” Especially when done by an interrogator.

Interviewer

What was the response in the room to that comment?

Antonio Taguba

Quiet. Yeah, it was quietâ€”not in the sense that they were surprised. It was quiet because they werenâ€™t expecting that kind of a response.

Interviewer

Do you think any of them felt as if the real question was how far up the leadership command you could point the finger? â€” I mean the debate at the time, it seems to me, was largely centered around, â€œWas this a few bad apples?â€”

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

And if they in the next day could reassure the Congress, and through that, the American people, that what happened was the odd incident, and not something that was endemic, that it would be a story that would depart pretty quickly.

Antonio Taguba

It would. You know, we felt, my team and I, when we deliberated on how to organize our findings and how to provide some sort of a chronological-exempt context to the report. You know, what happened, how did it happen, and who were responsible, and what are the recommendations, and that kind of a context. â€” We deliberated for over two days doing that, so we wanted to be sure that we stayed within the scope of the investigation. But we also discussed the point that soldiers like them, like the ones that we identified, would not have acted independently if they were not being exploited by a higher authority.

Antonio Taguba

Itâ€™s justâ€”itâ€™s incredible for me, having spent all this timeâ€”three decadesâ€”in

the militaryâ€”that you just wonâ€™t do that. But the comments made to us by the soldiers that we interviewed was that their own chain of command would not give them specific guidance. You know, is it okay to use dogs? They would always get referred to the MI people or the OGA people or the CACI people â€” C-A-C-I, whichâ€”contractors, of courseâ€”who wereâ€”they were working with 24/7. Â And they would give them those instructions, but those people were not in their chain of command.

Antonio Taguba

So you might say there was an exploitation there of some sort for taking advantage of somebody thatâ€™s untrained, unknowing, and uncaring about their own chain. If their chain of command acted responsibly, none of that would happen. Some of them probably would question it. â€œNo, you cannot use dogs because such,â€ right? How thatâ€”

Interviewer

Did you think that the commandâ€”that the failure here is one of the command structure and accountability, rather than the failure being that there was no moral fiber to the leadership on this question.Â

Antonio Taguba

Well, again, all of the above, but one, you had a very ambiguous chain of commandâ€”the command structure of who was actually in charge of detainee operations. You have a brigade commander that says, â€œYouâ€™re going to be in charge,â€ but youâ€™re not really in charge. You have a staff proponent, called a C-2, whoâ€™s giving directions, and by doctrine, the C-2, G-2, J-2, in any command structure, by doctrine, is not the proponent for detainee operations. Itâ€™s your operations cellâ€”thatâ€™s Tom Miller at the timeâ€”who, when he told me he was now being placed in charge of detainee operations as a staff proponent to Lieutenant General Sanchez, I laughed my head off, because these are seasoned officers. Theyâ€™ve been in command. Now theyâ€™re occupying a high level of power.

Antonio Taguba

But when he told me that, I just cracked upâ€”I laughed. I said, â€œGeez, you know, doesnâ€™t anybody follow doctrine around here?â€ Army Regulation 190-8â€”who nobody ever read until I read itâ€”and this is one of those investigatory things that my staff said, â€œOh, sir, hereâ€™s a tri-service regulation that applies to all three services.â€ Â And guess who the executive agent is in combat, in a combat zone? The executive agent for Detainee Operations in a combined joint operation is the United States Army, and the staff proponent for that is the Army G-3, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, who at that time was this guy named Lieutenant General Dick Cody.

Antonio Taguba

Now, I would venture to say that I donâ€™t think Dick ever read that regulation. It was very explicit on how you handle detainee operations. Nobody read it, so, you know, or one of those discovery learnings that happened. So you have a unit here, an operational command up here, and thereâ€™s this gulf of information thatâ€”or lack of information. Â Even Karpinski was lacking in that, because they were looking at the expediency of the war. Okay, I will give them that, but it doesnâ€™t mean you abrogate your responsibility and try to find out how to do that. How do you conduct detainee operations when thereâ€™s absence of guidance? Well, I think weâ€™re more than trained to do that, because of technologyâ€”you go find out, right?

Antonio Taguba

When I asked initially, when I went to Baghdad, I was surrounded by colonels. And when I asked the question, "Who is actually the staff proponent for detainee operations?" And a colonel said, an MP Colonel said, "Sir, I am." I said, "And your position is?" "I'm the Command Provost Marshal." I said, "Oh." I thought Colonel Mozillo was, "right, 'cause he's the commander." Mozillo said he was not, either. So I said, "So how long have you been in country?" "Sir, I'm here as an individual augmentee; six-month tour of duty." I said, "But you can't be, 'cause in three months somebody else is going to take your job." "You're just going to confuse yourself as you turn overtime."

Antonio Taguba

When I asked Karpinski a simple question "You have four detention centers and six prisons, as you mentioned to me. Of all of those areas and concentrations, where do you think is your single point of failure?" In other words, what is your priority, of all of the assorted things "gave me the wrong answer." She said, "Camp Ashraf." Ashraf is where all the MEK folks are. They only had 43 detainees, commanded by about 300 people, the Mujahedin-e-Khalq, the multinational, multi-citizen state folks from Iran. But you had almost 10,000 prisoners at Abu Ghraib, that is cobbled together, and nasty things were happening in there, you know? She said that that wasn't her focus. I said, "Why would it not be?" "Well, because people were interested at Camp Ashraf," and she started dropping names.

Antonio Taguba

"Secretary Rumsfeld was interested in that. Secretary Wolfowitz was very commendable about me about handling them." I said, "I think you have the wrong focus, General. You have about 10,000 prisoners, detainees, in one dilapidated, decrepit place, and you've only got maybe 250 to 300 people guarding them."

Personal and Professional Repercussions
Interviewer

Do you think you were personally punished for your findings?

Antonio Taguba

[Laughter] I wouldn't say personally "more so that I was professionally discounted, you might say. A comment was made to me when I was testifying "I testified four times, by the way. You only saw one. The others were closed sessions, where a comment was made by a congressman from Florida that said that he had heard from a few general officers in the Pentagon that I was too "I was overzealous about doing this investigation. I thought for a moment, and I said, "I can't be, other than wanting to do the right thing."

Antonio Taguba

I mean after all, this is my army, too, and when somebody goes after my army, you know, I want to know why. And this is about making sure that we restore the traditions and the pride that we have in our military institution. After all, we're the only national element that "and people "a lot of people "are getting killed. So I told him, "I don't think I'm overzealous. I just wanted to ensure we would do the right thing," and I owed that to the 22 other members of my investigation team, 'cause they expected that from me, and not to sugar-coat anything, for that matter.

Antonio Taguba

And then when I was told that I was going back to work on Secretary Rumsfeld's staff, eh, now, you might say I took that a little personal. And I was interviewed by them, and I was also investigated, 'cause the IG, Army IG asked me several questions, whether I followed proper procedures. You know, that kind of heightens my interest of that.

Antonio Taguba

I had three lawyers on my staff, one lawyer who reviewed the documents. I briefed my commanders; my chain of command, and being questioned whether I followed proper procedures. I took—I took personal note of that, and

Interviewer

Do you think you were passed over for a promotion because of this report?

Antonio Taguba

I don't know. I don't know, but when I get a phone call saying, 'I want you to retire,' from the Vice Chief, I mean I detailed all of that on the New Yorker report. There was no room to negotiate. It's not as if I was looking for a promotion. I was looking to stay a little longer, just so I could be on active duty for a personal note—just so I could be on active duty so I could commission my son as a second lieutenant in the United States Army in May of 2007, but that fell short 'cause I was told to retire in not later than December of 2006.

Interviewer

And you feel you were told to retire because of the report, though.

Antonio Taguba

I had in good stead from a highly-placed, reliable source, that some disgruntled Under Secretary had called the Vice Chief of Staff and told him that, 'I think it's time to retire Taguba.' And I say highly-placed because it was done as a favor for me, not because I was soliciting that favor. In fact I was trying to tell my friend not to seek that particular segment, as I tried to retire from the Army, but he was determined that he was going to ask a friend to ask directly why I was told to retire.

Interviewer

Do you know which Under Secretary we're talking about?

Antonio Taguba

I can probably guess. There were at least one of the two that I would probably—either the Under Secretary for Policy, or the Under Secretary for Intelligence, I would venture. My guess would be the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, 'cause after all, Doug Feith developed that policy, detention policy. And I think discovery has something to do with it, too. You know, there were 17 investigations, I think, that was done after mine—Schlesinger's investigation about the aftermath used my report as a reference. I don't think they interviewed anybody, for that matter. General Kern's and George Fay's investigation pretty much detailed what had happened. There were a series of systematic failures in the brigade—and others.

Future Policy Implications
Interviewer

General Cody told us that he felt that the initial reaction to your report was somewhat volatileâ€”not his word, but characterizing itâ€”because it was the first. And then it took some time for them to understand just how significant those findings were.

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

But that the other reports confirming that brought them to the same conclusion.

Antonio Taguba

Well, you know, I owe a great amount of appreciation for my investigation team. They did a yeomanâ€™s job of looking into every aspect of what had happened there, in the time frame that we were provided, â€”cause we spent a lot of time in the evenings analyzing, determining, discerning, indicating that we were trying to separate the wheat from the chaff, you might say. That weâ€™re going to report as much as we can and as factually as we can, and to attempt to recommend to hold people accountable. And even that portion of it, we had some, you might say, disagreements. You canâ€™t relieve this, and you canâ€™t relieve that, so.

Interviewer

Do you think there should be some kind of further accounting for theâ€”what happened in the detention policy of those years, or are we done with this episode?

Antonio Taguba

You know, Iâ€™d like to think that weâ€™re done. The December, 2008 report from the Senate Armed Services Committee, I believe there are 17 recommendationsâ€”findings, I should say, and recommendations, where they actually put the onus on President Bush, Rumsfeld, Jim Haynes, and General Myers for developing the policy, or at least being involved in the development of the policy, unlawful as it was, and knowing full well that youâ€™re going to get a lot of resistance inside the military. Alberto Mora, the Secretary of the Navy, and all of the subjectâ€”

Interviewer

When you say the policy, what do you mean by the policy that was unlawful?

Antonio Taguba

The torture policy.

Interviewer

Pardon me?

Antonio Taguba

The torture policyâ€”

Interviewer

The torture policy.Â

Antonio Taguba

In February of 2002 that was generated by a legal opinion.Â

Interviewer

So weâ€™re going back to the Office of Legal Counselâ€™Â

Antonio Taguba

Right.Â

Interviewer

For the Department of Justiceâ€™John Yooâ€™

Antonio Taguba

Right.Â

Interviewer

David Addington, the legal opinions within the Bushâ€™

Antonio Taguba

Alberto Gonzales.Â

Interviewer

Alberto Gonzalesâ€™within the Bush Administrationâ€™Â

Antonio Taguba

Sure.Â

Interviewer

That refused toâ€™I mean who found that what they referred to as â€œenhanced interrogation techniquesâ€ and other methods of extracting intelligence could be seen as lawful.

Antonio Taguba

Could be seen as lawful. They deviated from the norm and found a new way to opine a methodology to extract intelligence from detainees.Â

Interviewer

And you think, then, even though we also pointed the finger at an absence of leadership here down the chain of commandâ€™Â

Antonio Taguba

Right.

Interviewer

That it wasâ€”there was a kind of blanket message conveyed from the administration that techniques usually considered to be outside the norm were acceptable.

Antonio Taguba

Right. Well, if the FBI did not want to be part of that whole aspect of interrogation, enhanced interrogation techniques, that tells you that this is not universally accepted. The military would not have universally accepted it if some of our leaders say, wouldâ€™ve just stood up and say, â€œMr. Secretary, you canâ€™t do this.â€ Basically what happened is somebody created a policy that somehow got operationalized. Policy is policy and thereâ€™s implementation that fills that in.

Antonio Taguba

But when it originates from the Defense Department or the White House all the way down to the tactical levels of combat, then you have now begun to operationalize a policy. In other words, â€œDo it the way we want you to extract it on the policy, and report directly back to me.â€ You know, there is a chain of command in there somewhere, but it was forcibly implemented, that I think was a huge mistake today.

Interviewer

Do you think others should be tried for war crimes on this?Â

Antonio Taguba

Well, letâ€™s just say, you know, we canâ€™t try anybody for war crimes, because, one, we are not a member of the International Court of the Hague. Weâ€™re not a signatoryâ€”we donâ€™t support that. But we could actuallyâ€”

Interviewer

Do you think a truth commission should be created, as some have suggested?

Antonio Taguba

[Laughs] Well, weâ€”that was tried. But, you know, the political maelstrom that happened during the election time, where there were some political agreements that were made that says, â€œDonâ€™t go after the republicans,â€ so â€œDonâ€™t go after the Bush Administration staffers who created such a horrific set of policies, because then youâ€™ll continue to divide the country.â€ Â And we are where we are todayâ€”we canâ€™t even close the Guantanamo Prison site today because of a huge backlash associated with trying people off-country, as opposed to dealing with that on the federal courts.

Antonio Taguba

But the only institution that actually paid the price was the U.S. Army and the rest of the military. Over 200 people were punished for that; a few court-martialed. Greener is free todayâ€”he servedâ€”I mean heâ€™s on parole, I think. Ten years he served; ten years. Some folks didnâ€™t get close to being court-martialed for dereliction of duty, like Karpinski. She was reduced, andâ€”oh, goshâ€”a lieutenant colonel who was involved in a shooting inside the prison site, and vehemently told me that he was not evenâ€”he was not

working at detainee operations; he was a Civil Affairs officer. Lied to me, but I couldn't provide any substantiating documentation to have him charged under court-martial. We made a finding that says, "Recommend him to be charged for making false statements," but that was thrown out because I didn't read him his rights.

Antonio Taguba

But I knew full well that he was an operative, you know "couldn't find him" he was one of the last that we interviewed. Found him masquerading as an Iraqi in Baghdad, doing undercover work, "cause he considered himself doing counterterrorism work. When I called his boss, he said, "No, he's not doing that." I said, "Well, you just told me you ordered him." "No." Told him to get his butt down to Kuwait so I can interview him, and he spent a lot of time talking around in circles, and I had facts to counter the fact that he is, or was, inside the prison site when the shooting started, and that he was in fact the deputy to Colonel Tom Pappas, conducting detainee operations.

Antonio Taguba

So I think the Senate Armed Services Committee Report basically pointed fingers, but short of "short of making a determination that the President and everybody else was responsible and accountable for a huge debacle.

"We Have Rules of Engagement"
Interviewer

Do you fear that this "because of that lack of accountability, that this could very easily happen again?

Antonio Taguba

Well, yeah. I mean, My Lai happened then. We had some segments of mini-My Lais throughout the Marines killing "you know, indiscriminate killings of Iraqi people. You have fratricide that's going on, that sort of thing. A senator once said, "Well, that's the consequence of war." You know, obviously, spoken from somebody who's never been shot at, or has never lugged a rucksack, or shot at an enemy of our nation, doing what our troops are doing today. You just can't make a comment that way "I mean we have laws of war. We have the Geneva Convention. We train our units, we train our people, we train our soldiers to follow the rule of law. We have rules of engagement. We have operations order. You know, there's management and organization in chaos, for example, and we are defending, and people did get killed.

Antonio Taguba

But there's a commission that was stood up, that's being held, being conducted by the Constitution Project, which is a human rights, a nonprofit policy advocate, in Washington, D.C. They're doing task force-level "they have some high-powered people on there "Ambassador Pickering is one of them. Lots of lawyers and former associates "I think, Supreme Court justices. They're doing some fact-finding, I think, but I'm not so sure "cause I've spoken to them "of what the outcome would be, whether it would lead to legislative changes, or would lead to policy changes, or lead to something. I think it's probably lead to more studying, for that matter.

Antonio Taguba

But one thing for sure, though, that I really like is that Abu Ghraib is an incredible case

study of leadership at all levels, and I've spoken throughout our universities—Berkley; tried to get John Yoo to come and hear me speak about his involvement—he decided not to. I asked if he was here at West Point when I came here to speak at their conference on the law—armed conflict—he didn't show up, either. I've spoken at the Harvard Law Center, for example, for that matter; Catholic University, University of San Francisco, and just, you know, over 30 now, that I can count. The Markkula Center for Business Ethics was the latest one that I did, or even Southern Virginia University—has something to do with leadership and accountability. And more importantly and how the military act and behave themselves, both in peacetime and in combat, because we are the nation where everybody looks upon, right?

Antonio Taguba

The drama that happened at Abu Ghraib, what people have forgotten is that when that all happened, four of our contractors were ambushed, killed, beheaded, and burnt. That happened in April. Nick Berg was beheaded, right? Zarqawi went into a rampage. Muqtada al-?adr went into a rampage. Dempsey was a CG of First Armored Division at the time, and we were sending troops home. This is now around the May timeframe, and people were coming across the border—April-May timeframe—and somebody knew what was going on at Abu Ghraib.

Antonio Taguba

I'll tell you why they knew: because twice a week, there were visitors that goes to that prison, and Camp Bucca, Ashraf, and Camp Cropper. And you can't deny the fact that there are Iraqi prisoners that were not comingled with the U.S. or detainees or whatever, that's being operated especially at Abu Ghraib, and guards will talk. And next thing you know, Al-Jazeera has a story—then they propagate that. And so when that's all coming about, we were turning troops around—I know, because I was there—to re-cross back into Iraq to help quell what is now known as the insurgency. They're very vicious people.

Interviewer

So you could see a direct—

Antonio Taguba

I see a direct link. The unit that came around, the 372nd MP Company, they were not decimated because their leadership were being relieved—the MP Company—I think it was the 372nd, I may be mistaken. My mind kind of wanders a little bit. So they just crossed the border; they were ready to turn in their equipment, and we tasked them to go back. And I remember our command gave them a captain to be the company commander, and a master sergeant to be their first sergeant. To turn that whole unit back, re-cross the border, and go out there and kill insurgents. And the comment that was made to me was, "Give me more ammunition and give me the best guns, or the bigger guns that we had, .50 caliber so we can help defend our soldiers." That's how dramatic it was, and everything, how it went, you know. And when did we turn in the prison to the Iraqis? September of 2006.

Antonio Taguba

I want to give credit to Major General Quantock, then-Colonel Quantock, at the time—did a good job. Brigadier General Dave Phillips, who was a colonel—the two great MP Commanders. Cause when we were doing our investigation and finding out things

were not right, I went back to Abu Ghraib, to Cropper, to Bucca, and to tell the Commanders, "Take these corrective actions now, because I'm not going to wait" well, you can't wait until the report is done to wait for that corrective action."

Antonio Taguba

There was a lot of resistance to ask for more help, like a mobile training team. We were finding out that our Army guards were infantrymen, field artillerymen—they're not MPs. Okay, fine, but did they go to the right set of training how to conduct detainee operations? That's the reason why we asked for a mobile training team, to train them on the spot. Resistance in that—"We don't have that nowadays. We can't task any more units." I said, "No, no, you don't understand." This is another two-star that I have to deal with, in Atlanta, Georgia. "You don't understand. We're not asking you. We're telling you, send them over here and train these units, so we don't have a reoccurrence of this."

Interviewer

Thank you very much, this was great—"appreciate it.

Antonio Taguba

You're very welcome."