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Every Time The Wind Blows, Part 5**The Wrong Ayoub**

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AL-QAIM, western Iraq - According to a major from the Judge Advocate General's office working on establishing an Iraqi judicial process, at least 7,000 Iraqis are being detained by US forces. Many languish in prisons indefinitely, lost in a system that imposes English-language procedures on Arabic speakers with Arabic names not easily transcribed.

Some are termed "security detainees" and held for six months pending a review to determine whether they are still a "security risk". Most are innocent. Many were arrested simply because a neighbor did not like them. A lieutenant-colonel familiar with the process adds that there is no judicial process for the thousands of detainees. If the military were to try them, that would entail a court martial, which would imply that the United States is occupying Iraq, and lawyers working for the administration are still debating whether it is an occupation or a liberation.

The 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment's (ACR) S2 section, responsible for intelligence, has not proved itself very reliable in the past and soldiers are getting frustrated. "You get all psyched up to do a hard mission," says Sergeant Scott Blow, "and it turns out to be three little girls. The little kids get to me, especially when they cry." Even the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operator could not recognize a large picture of Oday Saddam Hussein, one of Saddam's sons, hanging on a wall.

The little confidence S2 deserves is made clear by the case of a man called Ayoub. Apache Troop, acting on intelligence Captain Ray and his S2 staff have provided it, raids Ayoub's home. Tanks, Bradleys and Humvees squeeze through the neighborhood walls as the CIA operator eyes the rooftops and windows of nearby houses angrily, a silencer on his assault weapon.

Soldiers break through Ayoub's door early in the morning, and when he does not immediately respond to their orders he is shot with non-lethal ordnance, little pellets exploding like gun shot from the weapon's grenade launcher. The floor of the house is covered with his blood. He is dragged into a room and interrogated forcefully as his family is pushed back against their garden's fence.

Ayoub's frail mother, covered in a shawl, with traditional tribal tattoos marking her face, pleads with the immense soldier to spare her son's life, protesting his innocence. She takes the soldier's hand and kisses it repeatedly while on her knees. He pushes her to the grass along with Ayoub's four girls and two boys, all small, and his wife.

They squat barefoot, screaming, their eyes wide open in terror, clutching each one another as soldiers emerge with bags full of documents, photo albums and two compact discs with Saddam Hussein and his cronies on the cover. These CDs, called *The Crimes of Saddam*, are common on every Iraqi street and, as their title suggests, they were not made by Saddam supporters. But the soldiers saw only the picture of

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small hole dug into a man's back yard. "He was trying to bury it when he saw us coming," one soldier deduced confidently. He did not lift the crate up to discover that it was protecting irrigation pipes and hoses that had been dug into a pit.

Saddam bestowed his largesse on the security services that served as his Praetorian guard and executioners. Elite fighters received Jawa motorcycles. Immediately after the war, Jawa motorcycles were available in every market in Iraq that sold scooters and motorcycles. Some had been stolen from government buildings in the frenzy of looting that followed the war and which was directed primarily against institutions of the former government.

Soldiers of the 3rd ACR are always alert for Jawa motorcycles, and indeed it is true that many Iraqi paramilitaries have used them against the Americans. On a night that Apache receives RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) fire at the border checkpoint, they drive back to Tiger Base through the town. When they spot a man on a Jawa, they fire warning shots. When he does not stop, they shoot him to death. "He was up to no good," Captain Brown explains.

Reilly maintains that Jawas are *fedayeen* (paramilitaries loyal to Saddam) motorcycles and that most curfew violators and placers of improvised explosive device use them. Sheikh Mudhafar of the local Huseiba mosque claims to know the victim. "He was an innocent construction worker," he says. "I saw the dirt from the gypsum on his hands myself. Now tell me if his father or brother is going to thank the Americans."

The day after Tiger Strike, Reilly meets with the clerical and tribal leaders, deliberately arranging the meeting immediately after the operation so that he can explain to them what he has done and why. In previous meetings following operations, community leaders have informed him of innocent men he has arrested, and he has deferred to their judgment and released them.

The clerics ask Reilly to release a religious leader he has arrested. "They said it looked bad to arrest him, they didn't say it was the wrong guy," Reilly explains later. The tribal sheikhs also ask for one man to be released because his wife has kidney failure and there is nobody else to take her to Jordan for treatment. The Solomon-like Reilly discusses the issue of paying reparations for the innocent man his soldiers killed by the border checkpoint, a common way of administering justice among Arab tribes of the region.

Reilly is very concerned about the way Iraqis perceive US troops. "I am responsible for administering justice here for the whole area," he says. "We cannot treat the Iraqis as second-class citizens." He discusses the coming holy month of Ramadan with the clerics, meeting with them at the local Islamic school and agreeing to lift the curfew that normally extends from 2300 until 0400 for that month, when Muslims fast during the day but eat and enjoy festivities at night. Three RPGs are shot at the school. "The clerics were in terror," Reilly says afterward. "They were very angry. It was good for them to feel that terror." It is the third time Reilly has personally been attacked.

The next night the 3rd ACR's Bandit Troop departs the base at 0200, hoping to find those alleged al-Qaeda suspects who were not home during Operation Tiger Strike two days before. Soldiers descend on homes in a large compound, their boots trampling over mattresses, in rooms the inhabitants do not enter with shoes on. Most of the wanted men are nowhere to be found, their women and children prevaricating about their locations. Some of their relatives are arrested instead. "That woman is annoying!" complains one young soldier of a mother's desperate ululations as her son is taken from his house. "How do you think your mother would sound if they were taking you away?" First Sergeant Clinton Reiss asks him.

They return to the base at 9am. That day there is a pizza party at the chow hall. Soldiers guard the



detainees, go out on patrols, and battle the desert, sweeping away the sand desert winds have blown on their temporary home. But the sand comes back every time the wind blows.

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Saddam and assumed they were proof of guilt.

Ayoub is brought out and pushed on to the truck. He gestures to his shrieking family to remain where they are. He is an avuncular man, small and round, balding and unshaven, with a hooked nose and slightly pockmarked face. It would be impossible for him to look more innocent. He sits frozen, staring numbly ahead as the soldiers ignore him, occasionally glancing down at their prisoner with sneering disdain. The medic looks at Ayoub's injured hand and chuckles to his friends, "It ain't my hand." The truck blasts country music on the way back to the base. Ayoub is thrown in the detainment center. After the operation there are smiles of relief among the soldiers, slaps on the back and thumbs up.

Several hours later a call is intercepted from another Ayoub. "Oh shit," says Captain Ray, "it was the wrong Ayoub." The innocent father of six who has the wrong name is not immediately let go. If he is released they risk revealing to the other Ayoub that he is sought after. The night after his arrest a relieved Ayoub can be seen escorted by soldiers to call his family and tell them he is fine, but will not be home for a few days. "It was not the wrong guy," Captain Justin Brown says defensively, shifting blame elsewhere. "We raided the house we were supposed to and arrested the man we were told to."

When the soldiers who captured Ayoub learn of the mistake, they are not surprised. "Oops," says one. Another one wonders, "What do you tell a guy like that, 'sorry'?" A third says: "It's depressing. We trashed the wrong guy's house, and the guy that's been shooting at us is out there with his house not trashed." The soldier who shot the non-lethal ordnance at Ayoub says, "I'm just glad he didn't do something that made me shoot him." Then the soldiers resume their banter. Lieutenant-Colonel Gregg Reilly, the squadron commander, acknowledges that he will have to make a big gesture of apology. "I can't just drop him off at home and say 'sorry'," he says. "We embarrassed him in front of his family."

The tapes of the other Ayoub's conversations are sent for analysis. In them he speaks of proceeding to the next level and obtaining landmines and other weapons. This rightfully alarms the army's intelligence officers. They are confounded by the meaning of the intercepted conversation until somebody realizes it is not a terrorist intent on obtaining weapons. It is a kid playing video games and talking about them with his friend on the phone.

The procrustean application of spurious information gathered by intelligence officers who cannot speak Arabic and are not familiar with Iraqi, Arab or Muslim culture is creating enemies instead of eliminating them. One intelligence officer of the 3rd ACR can barely hide his disdain for Iraqis. "Oh, he just hates anything Iraqi," explains an officer engaged in operations on Tiger Base, adding that the intelligence officers do not venture off the base or interact with Iraqis or develop any relations with the people they are expected to understand.

A lieutenant-colonel from the army's civil affairs office explains that these officers do not read about the soldiers engaging with Iraqis, sharing cigarettes, tea, meals and conversations. They only read the reports of "incidents", and they view Iraqis solely as a security threat. They do not know Iraq.

In every market in Iraq, hundreds of wooden crates can be found piled one atop the other. Sold for storage, on further examination these crates reveal themselves to be old ammunition crates. For the past 25 years Iraq has been importing weapons to feed its army's appetite for war against Iran, the Kurds, Kuwait and the United States. The empty crates are sold for domestic use. The soldiers of the 3rd ACR assume the crates they find in nearly every home implicate the owners in terrorist activities, rather than the much simpler truth.

During Operation Decapitation, one of Apache's soldiers discovered one such crate overturned above a