THE LUCIFER EFFECT

Understanding How Good People Turn Evil

Philip Zimbardo

RANDOM HOUSE TRADE PAPERBACKS
NEW YORK
Dedicated to the serene heroine of my life,
Christina Maslach Zimbardo

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Published in the United States by Random House Trade Paperbacks,
an imprint of The Random House Publishing Group,

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Originally published in hardcover in the United States by Random House,
an imprint of The Random House Publishing Group,

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Zimbardo, Philip G.
The Lucifer effect: understanding how good people turn evil / Philip Zimbardo.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Good and evil—Psychological aspects.  I. Title.
BF789.Z45256 2007
155.962—dc22
200605388

Printed in the United States of America

www.atrandom.com
10 12 14 16 18 17 15 13 11

Book design by Mercedes Everett

Since The Lucifer Effect (TLE) was published in late March 2007, I have given more
than a hundred media interviews and lectures at colleges and conferences, read
the many reviews of my book, and responded to much reader feedback. In the
process of doing so, I have learned that some misconceptions exist about my
views, which I will attempt to correct here. In addition, I have had some new ideas
that I want to deal with briefly before you start reading.

First, what is the Lucifer Effect? It is many different, but related, things. Initially, it is the story of the cosmic transformation of God’s favorite angel, Lucifer, aka “The Morning Star,” into Satan, the Devil, because he committed the twin sins of Disobedience to God and Pride (“that goeth before a fall”). It was God, according to ancient scriptures, who created Hell as a space to embrace all the fallen angels and those humans who would later yield to their temptations.

That is the most extreme arc of transformation imaginable, and so sets the context for my investigations into lesser human transformations of good, ordinary people, not angels, into perpetrators of evil in response to the corrosive influence of powerful situational forces. Those forces that exist in many common behavioral contexts are more likely to distort our usual good nature by pushing us toward engaging in deviant, destructive, or evil behavior when the settings are new and unfamiliar. When embedded in them, our habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting no longer function to sustain the moral compass that has guided us reliably in the past.

I challenge the traditional focus on the individual’s inner nature, dispositions, personality traits, and character as the primary and often the sole target in understanding human failings. Instead, I argue that while most people are good most of the time, they can be readily seduced into engaging in what would normally qualify as ego-alien deeds, as antisocial, as destructive of others. That seduction or initiation into evil can be understood by recognizing that most actors are not solitary figures improvising soliloquies on the empty stage of life. Rather,
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Abu Ghraib's Abuses and Tortures: Understanding and Personalizing Its Horrors

The landmark Stanford study provides a cautionary tale for all military detention operations. ... Psychologists have attempted to understand how and why individuals and groups who usually act humanely can sometimes act otherwise in certain circumstances.

—Schlesinger Independent Panel report

Washington, D.C., April 28, 2004. I was in the nation's capital representing the American Psychological Association at a meeting of the Council of Scientific Society Presidents. Except when I am traveling, I rarely have time to watch TV news midweek. When I began flipping through channels in my hotel room, I came across something that froze me. Unbelievable images were flashing across the screen from CBS's program 60 Minutes II. Naked men were stacked high in a pyramid, and American soldiers stood grinning over their prisoner pile. A female soldier was leading a naked prisoner around by a dog leash tied around his neck. Other prisoners looked horrified as they seemed on the verge of being attacked by vicious-looking German shepherd dogs. On and on they went, like a pornographic slide show: naked prisoners were made to masturbate in front of a cigarette-smoking female soldier who stood giving a high-five approval salute; prisoners were made to simulate fellatio.

It seemed inconceivable that American soldiers were torturing, humiliating, and torturing their captives by forcing homoerotic poses upon them. Yet here they were. Still other unbelievable images buzzed by: prisoners standing or bent over in stress positions with green hoods or women's pink panties covering their heads. Were these the fine young men and women sent overseas by the Pentagon on the glorious mission of bringing democracy and freedom to an Iraq recently liberated from the tyrant/torturer Saddam Hussein?

It was amazing to see that in many of the images in this horror show the perpetrators themselves appeared along with their victims. It is one thing to do evil deeds, quite another to document one's culpability in graphic, enduring photos.
need to be alarmed at the less than 1 percent of them who were defective soldiers carrying out these abominable abuses.

"Frankly, I think all of us are disappointed by the actions of the few," said Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt, interviewed on the 60 Minutes II show. "Every day we love our soldiers, but frankly, some days we’re not always proud of our soldiers." It was comforting to know that only a few rotten soldiers, serving as prison guards in America's many military prisons, were engaged in such unthinkable acts of wanton torture.

Wait a minute. How could General Myers know that this was an isolated incident before having conducted a thorough investigation of his system of military prisons in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Cuba? The exposé had just been revealed; there had not been sufficient time for anyone to have done a thorough investigation in order to make such an assertion. There was something troubling about the authoritative declaration to absolve the System and blame the few at the bottom of the barrel. His claim was reminiscent of what police chiefs tell the media whenever police abuse of criminal suspects is revealed—blame the few rotten-apple-bad-cops—to deflect the focus away from the norms and usual practices in the back rooms of police stations or the police department itself. This rush to attribute a "bad-boy" dispositional judgment to the few offenders is all too common among the guardians of the System. In the same way, school principals and teachers use that device to blame particularly "disruptive" students instead of taking the time to evaluate the alienating effects of boring curricula or poor classroom practice of specific teachers that might provoke such disruptions.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld denounced the acts as "terrible" and "inconsistent with the values of our nation." The photographic depictions of U.S. military personnel that the public has seen have unquestionably offended everyone in the Department of Defense," he said. "Any wrongdoers need to be punished, procedures evaluated, and problems corrected." Then he added a statement that obliquely took the heat off the military for their lack of appropriate training and preparation of Army Reserve Military Police for such a difficult mission: "If someone doesn't know that doing what is shown in those photos is wrong, cruel, brutal, indecent, and against American values, I am at a loss as to what kind of training could be provided to teach them." However, Rumsfeld was also quick to redefine the nature of these acts as "abuse" and not "torture." He said, "What has been charged so far is abuse, which I believe technically is different from torture. I'm not going to address the 'torture' word." Time out for another pause in this narrative: To what technicality is Rumsfeld referring?

As media carried these images worldwide on prime-time TV, on the front pages of newspapers, in magazines, and on websites for days on end, President Bush launched an immediate and unprecedented damage control program to protect the reputation of his military and his administration, especially his secretary of defense. He dutifully declared that he would form independent investigations that would get to the "bottom of this." I wondered if the president would also order investigations that might get to the "top" of this scandal so that we could see the full picture and not just its frame? It would seem so, given that his deputy director for coalition operations in Iraq, Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt, publicly declared, "I'd like to sit here and say that these were the only prisoner abuse cases that we're aware of, but we know that there have been some other ones since we've been here in Iraq." (Doesn't this contradict General Myers's assertion that it was an isolated incident and not systemic?)

In fact, there have been so many cases of abuse, torture, and homicide uncovered since the Abu Ghraib scandal blew the lid off that by April 2006 more than four hundred separate military investigations had been launched into such allegations, according to Lieutenant Colonel John Skinner, U.S. Department of Defense.

Two other public reactions to the abuse photos are worthy of our notice, one by a famous media personality, another expressing the "outrage" of a United States congressman. To the archconservative talk-show host Rush Limbaugh, the photos, such as the one of a pyramid of naked prisoners, seemed little more than a college prank: "This is no different than what happens at the Skull and Bones [a Yale University secret society] initiation, and we’re going to ruin people’s lives over it, and we’re going to hamper our military effort, and then we are going to really hammer them [the accused soldiers] because they had a good time. You know these people are being fired at every day. I’m talking about people having a good time, these people. You ever heard of emotional release? You heard of need to blow some steam off?"

Torture as emotional release? Catharsis for the stressed soldiers? Having a good time by just blowing off a little steam? Those were the justifications by this
influential celebrity for terrible acts of torture. One slight difference between the fraternity "hell night" scene and the Abu Ghraib torture scene is, of course, that fraternity pledges have the choice of whether to endure hazing as a testament of their commitment to joining a college society. They are not forcibly subjected, without their prior consent, to such humiliation and torment by a hostile, enemy occupation force.

Senator James Inhofe (Republican, Oklahoma), a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, before which Secretary Rumsfeld had testified, was outraged. However, he avered that he was "more outraged by the outrage", caused by the photographs than by what they depicted. He blamed the victims for deserving their abuse and the media for publicizing the images. "These prisoners, you know they’re not there for traffic violations. If they’re in Cellblock 1-A or 1-B, these prisoners, they’re murderers, they're terrorists, they’re insurgents. Many of them probably have American blood on their hands, and here we’re so concerned about the treatment of those individuals." He continued his attack by arguing that the media were provoking further violence against Americans around the world by publicizing the outrage caused by showing the photos.

The Pentagon used similar reasoning in its effort to block the release of these images. However, Major General Donald Ryder's internal Army report challenged the view that these prisoners were violent, noting that some Iraqis were held for long periods simply because they had expressed "displeasure or ill will" toward U.S. forces. Other accounts make it evident that many of the inmates were "innocent civilians" (according to the prison superintendent, Brigadier General Janis Karpinski). They had been picked up in military sweeps of towns where insurgent activity had occurred. In these sweeps, all the male family members, including young boys, were incarcerated in the nearest military prison and then often taken to Abu Ghraib for questioning.

Although I have seen many horrifying images of extreme abuse in conducting research on torture in Brazil and in preparing lectures on torture, something at once struck me as being different and yet familiar about the images that were emerging from the exotically named Abu Ghraib Prison. The difference had to do with the playfulness and shamelessness displayed by the perpetrators. It was just "fun and games," according to the seemingly shameless Private Lynndie England, whose smiling face belied the chaos going on around her. Nevertheless, a sense of the familiar was haunting me. With a shock of recognition, I realized that watching some of these images made me relive the worst scenes from the Stanford Prison Experiment. There were the bags over prisoners' heads; the nakedness; the sexually humiliating games that entailed camels humping or men leapingfrogging over each other with their genitals exposed. These comparable abuses had been imposed by college student guards on their college student prisoners. In addition, just as in our study, the worst abuses had occurred during the night shift! Moreover, in both cases the prisoners were being held in pretrial detention.

It was as though the worst-case scenario of our prison experiment had been carried out over months under horrendous conditions, instead of in our brief, relatively benign simulated prison. I had seen what could happen to good boys when they were immersed in a situation that granted them virtually absolute power in dealing with their charges. In our study, the guards had had no prior training for their roles and been given only minimal staff supervision to curtail their psychological abuse of prisoners. Imagining what could happen when all the constraints that operated in our experimental setting were removed, I knew that in the Abu Ghraib Prison, powerful situational forces must have been in play, and even more dominating systemic forces had to have been at work. How could I ever know the truth about the behavioral context in that far-off situation or uncover any truth about the System that had created and maintained it? It was apparent to me that the System was now struggling mightily to conceal its own complicity in torture.

**MAKING SENSE OF SENSELESS ABUSES**

The design of the Stanford Prison Experiment made it evident that initially our guards were "good apples," some of whom became soured over time by powerful situational forces. In addition, I later realized that it was I, along with my research team, who was responsible for the System that made that situation work so effectively and so destructively. We failed to provide adequate top-down constraints to prevent prisoner abuse, and we set an agenda and procedures that encouraged a process of dehumanization and depersonalization that stimulated guards to act in creatively evil ways. Further, we could harness the System’s power to terminate the experiment when it began to spin out of control and when a whistle-blower forced recognition of my personal responsibility for the abuses.

In contrast, in trying to understand the abuses that took place at Abu Ghraib, we are starting at the end of the process, with documented evil deeds. Therefore, we have to do a reverse analysis. We have to determine what those guards might have been like as people before they were assigned to guard the prisoners on those tiers of that Iraqi prison. Can we establish what pathologies, if any, the guards might have brought into the prison in order to separate their dispositional tendencies from what that particular situation might have brought out in them? Next, can we uncover what the behavioral context into which they were thrust was like? What was the social reality for the guards in that particular setting at that particular time?

Finally, we must discover something about the power structure that is responsible for creating and sustaining the working and living conditions of all the inmates of that dungeon—Iraqi prisoners and American guards alike. What justification can the System provide for using this particular prison to house "detainees" indefinitely without legal recourse and to interrogate them using "coercive tactics"? At what level was the decision made to suspend the safeguards of the Geneva Conventions and the military’s own rules of conduct regarding prisoners, namely, banning any actions that are cruel, inhuman, and degrading in the
treatment of them? Those regulations provide the most basic standards of conduct in the treatment of prisoners in any democracy whether in times of war or peace. Nations put them into practice not so much out of charitable goodwill but to ensure the decent treatment of their own soldiers should they be captured as prisoners of war.

Not trained as an investigative reporter and not having the means to travel to Abu Ghraib or to interview the key participants in these abuses, I had little reason to expect that I would be able to get to the top or to the bottom of this intriguing psychological phenomenon. It would be a shame not to be able to bring to bear an understanding of this seemingly senseless violence based on my unique, "insider" knowledge from having been the superintendent of the Stanford prison. What I learned from the SPE paradigm about investigating institutional abuses is the need to evaluate various factors (dispositional, situational, and systemic) that lead to the behavioral outcome we want to understand. I was also curious as to who it was who had shined the spotlight on the abuses going on in that prison dungeon.

Joe Darby, Heroic Whistle-Blower, Ordinary Guy

The young soldier who blew the whistle on that "little shop of horrors" and exposed its dark deeds to public scrutiny was a twenty-four-year-old Army Reservist, Joe Darby. That young man is a hero because he forced the military officials to acknowledge the existence of such abusive practices and to act to rein them in in all their prisons. Darby was in the same 372nd Military Police Company as the Military Police on night shift duty in the prison, but he was not working on that assignment.

One day, his buddy Corporal Charles Graner gave Darby a CD filled with hundreds of digital images and video clips that he and the other guards had taken. A few of the images had already made the rounds in their unit; some were even displayed on computer screen savers. Darby was at first amused looking at the pictures, thinking it was "pretty funny" to see a pile of naked Iraqis in a pyramid showing their asses. But the more he looked, the more distressed he felt at what he saw. "It didn't sit right with me," he said. He felt it was wrong for Americans to be doing such terrible things to other people even if they were foreigners imprisoned in a war zone. "I couldn't stop thinking about it. After about three days, I made a decision to turn the pictures in," Darby reported. He agonized over that decision, torn between loyalty to his friends and the urging of his moral conscience. Darby had known Lynndie England since basic training. Nevertheless, he said, what he saw "violated everything I personally believed, and all I'd been taught about the rules of law."

So on that day in January 2004, Joe Darby made a giant leap for mankind by first handing over a copy of the CD, with an anonymous note in a manila envelope, to an agent at the Criminal Investigation Division (CID). He later confided to Special Agent Tyler Pieron (U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command at Abu Ghraib Prison) that he was the one who put the CD in the envelope and was willing to talk to CID more fully. Darby wanted to remain anonymous as long as he continued working at Abu Ghraib, for fear of retaliation for having ratted on his buddies in this way.

It took enormous personal courage for Darby to blow the whistle so loudly, knowing that it would surely make trouble for his buddies in the 372nd who appeared on the CD. Nevertheless, when others were doing the wrong thing, Darby did the right thing.

We must also take into account that his military status was at the bottom rung, a specialist in the Army Reserve. He was openly challenging what was going on in a military-run prison—a prison, as I later discovered, a section of which was a special interrogation center created by the secretary of defense himself to elicit "actionable intelligence from terrorists and insurgents." It took fortitude for Darby to challenge the system.

Apple Blossom Time in the Nation's Capital

Chance suddenly sent good fortune my way. A former Stanford student, working at National Public Radio in Washington, D.C., recognized the parallels between the photos of Abu Ghraib and those I had shown in my course lectures about the Stanford Prison Experiment. He tracked me down in my D.C. hotel to do an NPR interview shortly after the story surfaced. The main point of my interview was to challenge the administration's "bad apple" excuse with an alternative "bad barrel" metaphor that I derived from the similarity between the Abu Ghraib situation and the Stanford Prison Experiment. Many other, TV, radio, and newspaper interviews soon fed off this first NPR interview to provide neat sound bites about assorted Apples and sordid Barrels. My commentary was sought by the media because it could be dramatized by vivid video and still footage from our experimental prison.

This national publicity, in turn, reminded Gary Myers, counsel for one of the MP guards, that my research was relevant in highlighting the external determinants of his client's alleged abusive behavior. Myers invited me to be an expert witness for Staff Sergeant Ivan "Chip" Frederick II, the military policeman who was in charge of the night shift on Tiers 1A and 1B. I agreed, in part so that I could have access to all the information I needed to fully understand the role of the triadic elements in the attributional analysis of this alien behavior: the Person, the Situation, and the System that had put this person in that place to commit such crimes.

With that background information, I hoped to more fully appreciate the dynamic transactions that had fueled these aberrations. In the process, I agreed to offer appropriate assistance to Myers's client. However, I made it clear that my sympathies were more with Joe Darby, who had been brave enough to expose the
abuses, than with anyone involved in perpetrating them. Under these conditions, I then joined Staff Sergeant Frederick’s defense team and embarked on a journey into this new heart of darkness.

Let’s begin our analysis by getting a better sense of what that place was like that Abu Ghraib Prison—geographically, historically, politically, and in its recent operational structure and function. Then we can move on to examine the soldiers and prisoners in their behavioral context.

THE PLACE: THE ABU GHRAIB PRISON

Twenty miles (32 kilometers) west of Iraq’s capital city, Baghdad, and a few miles from Fallujah lies the Iraqi city of Abu Ghraib (or Abu Ghurayb), where the prison is located. It lies within the Sunni triangle, the center of violent insurgency against the American occupation. In the past, the prison was designated by the Western media “Saddam’s Torture Central” because it was the place where, during the reign of the Ba’athist government, Saddam Hussein arranged for the torture and murder of “dissidents” in twice-weekly public executions. There are allegations that some of these political and criminal prisoners were used in Nazi-like experiments as part of Iraq’s chemical and biological weapons program.

At any one time, as many as fifty thousand people were held in the sprawling prison complex, whose name could translate into “House of Strange Fathers” or “Father of the Strange.” It had always had an unsavory reputation because it served as an insane asylum for severely disturbed inmates in the pre-Thurmer era. Built by British contractors in 1960, it covered 280 acres (1.15 square kilometers) and had a total of twenty-four guard towers encircling its perimeter. It was a sprawling small city, partitioned into five walled compounds each meant to hold particular kinds of prisoners. In the center of its open yard stood a 400-foot tower. Unlike most American prisons, which are built in remote rural areas, Abu Ghraib is located within sight of large apartment houses and offices (perhaps built after 1960). Inside, its cells were jammed as many as four people confined in a 12-foot-square (4-meter-square) space and living under inhumane conditions.

Colonel Bernard Flynn, Commander, Abu Ghraib Prison, described just how close the prison was to those attacking it: “It’s a high-visibility target because we’re in a bad neighborhood. All of Iraq is a bad neighborhood. . . . There’s no tower where it’s built so close to the neighborhood that we can look into the back rooms, you know, right there on the porches. There were snipers on these roofs and on those porches firing at the soldiers who were up there on the towers so we’re constantly on guard and trying to defend this and trying to keep the insurgents away from coming inside.”

After the U.S. forces overthrew Saddam’s government in March 2003, the name of the prison was changed from Abu Ghraib—to dissociate it from its unsavory past—to the Baghdad Central Confinement Facility (BCCF)—initially seen many of the investigative reports. When Saddam’s regime collapsed, all prisoners, including many criminals, were released, and the prison was locked; whatever could be removed was stolen—doors, windows, bricks; you name it and someone stole it. Incidentally—and not reported in the media—the Abu Ghraib city zoo was also opened and all the wild animals released. For a time, lions and tigers roamed the streets until they were captured or killed. A former CIA bureau chief, Bob Baer, described the scene he witnessed at this notorious prison: “I visited Abu Ghraib a couple of days after it was liberated. It was the most awful sight I’ve ever seen. I said, ‘If there’s ever a reason to get rid of Saddam Hussein, it’s because of Abu Ghraib.’” His grim account adds, “There were bodies that were eaten by dogs, torture. You know, electrodes coming out of the walls. It was an awful place.”

Although senior U.K. officials recommended that the prison be demolished, U.S. authorities decided to rebuild the prison as quickly as possible so that it could be used to detain all those who were suspected of vaguely defined “crimes against the Coalition,” suspected insurgents leaders, and assorted criminals. In charge of this motley group of detainees were Iraqi guards of dubious character. Many of those held in security were blameless assorted Iraqi civilians who had been picked up in random military sweeps or at highway checkpoints for “suspicious activity.” They included whole families—men, women, and adolescents—to be interrogated for information they might have about the unanticipated growing insurgency against the Coalition. Once arrested and found innocent after interrogation, they were not released because the military feared that they would then join the insurgency, or because nobody wanted to take the responsibility for making such decisions.

The Towering Target of Mortar Attacks

The imposing four-hundred-foot tower in the center of the prison soon became the sighting focus of almost nightly mortar attacks that were launched from the tops of nearby buildings. In August 2003, a mortar attack killed eleven soldiers who were sleeping in tents outside in the yard on the “soft site.” In another attack, an explosive ripped through a tent filled with soldiers, among them Colonel Thomas Pappas, the head of one of the military intelligence brigades stationed at the prison. Although Pappas was unharmed, the young soldier who was his driver was shredded and died, along with other soldiers. Pappas was so affected by this sudden horror that he never again took off his flak jacket. It was reported to me that he always wore his jacket and hard helmet even while showering. He was later declared “not combat fit” and relieved of his duties. His deteriorating mental condition did not permit him to provide the vitally necessary supervision of his soldiers working in the prison. After the terrifying mortar attack, Pappas housed most of his soldiers inside the prison walls on the “hard site,” which meant that they were usually sleeping in small prison cells, just like those of the prisoners.

Stories of their comrades’ deaths and the constant continuing sniper.
governments, and mortar attacks created an ambient sense of fear among everyone assigned to the prison, which came under hostile attack as many as twenty times a week. Both American soldiers and Iraqi prisoners and detainees were killed in this hostile fire. Over time, the attacks destroyed some of the prison complex and left buildings burned out and debris everywhere in sight.

The mortar shelling was so frequent that it became part of the surreal surrounding of the Abu Ghraib madness. Joe Darby recalls discussions with buddies as they tried to figure out the size and location of the mortar after hearing the boom of its launch; whether it was 60 or 80 mm. or even big enough to be a 120 mm. explosion. However, that psychic numbness in the face of death did not last forever. Darby confesses that “a few days before my unit left Abu Ghraib, all of a sudden people started worrying about mortar attacks for the first time. It was weird. They’d be huddling against the wall together. I found myself crouched in a corner, praying. The numbness was wearing off. That’s one of the things you have to keep in mind when you look at the pictures. We all got numb in different ways.”

According to a high-ranking informant who worked there for several years, the prison remained a very dangerous place in which to work or be housed. In 2006, the military command finally decided to abandon it, but a bit too late to undo the damage caused by its earlier decision to resurrect it.*

Compounding the woes of the soldiers, the war-torn Abu Ghraib Prison had no sewage system—only holes in the ground and port-a-potties. Even so, there were not enough outside port-a-potties to accommodate all the prisoners and soldiers. Because they were not regularly emptied, they overflowed, and in the extreme summer temperatures, the stench was horrible for everyone all the time. There was also no adequate shower system; water was rationed; there was no soap; electricity went down regularly because there were no reliably operating generators. The prisoners stank, as did the whole facility that enclosed them. Under the heavy rains of summer, when temperatures soared well above 110 degrees F (45 C.), the prison became a baking oven, or sauna. During a windstorm, fine dust particulates got into everyone’s lungs, causing congestion and viral infections.

After it was decided to demolish the tall tower in order to eliminate it as a sighting target for insurgents, mortar attacks were on target less frequently but that huge demolition added to the permanent debris in and degradation of the prison site.

Nor did the quality of the food make up for the other deficiencies in the accommodations. Even though this large facility had recently been renovated by the U.S. Army, there were no mess halls. For more than two years after the occupation of Abu Ghraib, soldiers assigned to duty there were obliged to eat T-Rations and MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) out of containers. A mess hall was finally constructed in December 2003. In summary, I cannot express the scene better than did a warrant officer in charge of military investigations who told me just how terrible it was to work in such a place “that for a long time resembled hell on earth.”

Eighty Acres of Hell

American history buffs will remind us at this point that an even more hellish prison was created and maintained by the U.S. military during and after the Civil War. Camp Douglas was the prison a few miles outside of Chicago where thousands of captured Confederate prisoners were sent for safekeeping. It was poorly conceived on reclaimed swampland, with inadequate resources, indisciptive and lax leadership, no clear guidelines for dealing with POWs, and great hostility against these Confederate “traitors” on the part of local civilians and the small battalion of guards who supervised as many as five thousand prisoners. Camp Douglas became known as “eighty acres of Hell” because thousands of prisoners died there, as slave laborers, from starvation, brutal beatings, torture, willful mistreatment, and a host of contagious diseases and viral disorders. The equivalent Bell on Earth in the South for captured Union soldiers was the better-known Andersonville Prison.15

The New Commander Arrives On-site, But Sight Unseen

In June 2003 a new officer was put in charge of the Iraqi prison disaster. Army Reserve Brigadier General Janis Karpinski was made commander of the 800th Military Police Brigade, which operated Abu Ghraib Prison and was in charge of all other military prisons in Iraq. The appointment was strange for two reasons. Karpinski was the only female commander in the war zone, and she had absolutely no experience in running any kind of prison system. Now she was supposed to command three large jails, seventeen prisons throughout Iraq, eight battalions of soldiers, hundreds of Iraqi guards, and thirty-four hundred inexperienced Army Reservists, as well as the special Interrogation Center in Tier I.A. It was an overwhelming demand to be put on the shoulders of such an inexperienced Army Reserve officer.

According to several sources, Karpinski soon abandoned her post at Abu Ghraib because of its dangers and awful living conditions and retreated to the safety and security of Camp Victory, near the Baghdad airport. Because Karpinski was off-site much of the time, traveling often to Kuwait, there was no top-down authoritative supervision of the facility on a day-to-day basis. Moreover, she claims that those higher in the chain of command told her that Tier 1A was a “special site” and was not under her direct supervision—so she never visited.

Having a woman who was only nominally in charge also encouraged sexist attitudes among the soldiers that led to a breakdown in ordinary military discipline and order. “General Karpinski’s subordinates at Abu Ghraib at times disregarded her commands and didn’t enforce codes on wearing uniforms and

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*Abu Ghraib Prison was officially closed as of August 15, 2006, and all remaining prisoners shipped to Camp Cropper, near the Baghdad airport.
Miller also insisted that the official name of the prison cease to be the Baghdad Central Confinement Facility (BCCF) and return to its original designation, which was still feared among the Iraqi population: Abu Ghraib Prison.

She also notes that Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, repeated the theme that General Miller had laid down about prisoners and detainees being nothing more than “like dogs,” and the need to get tougher in dealing with them. In Karpinski’s view, her superior officers, Generals Miller and Sanchez, set a new agenda for dehumanization and torture at Abu Ghraib.18

THE PERSON: I’D LIKE TO INTRODUCE “CHIP” FREDERICK

I first met Chip Frederick on September 30, 2004, when his legal counsel, Gary Myers, arranged for me to spend a day with him and his wife, Martha, in San Francisco. While we engaged in an in-depth, four-hour interview, Martha did a bit of sightseeing, after which we had lunch at my home in Russian Hill. Since that time I have had an active correspondence with Chip Frederick, and I have been in phone and e-mail contact with Martha and with Chip’s older sister, Mimi Frederick.

After having examined all of his records and all available reports about him, I arranged to have a military clinical psychologist (Dr. Alvin Jones) conduct a full psychological assessment of Frederick in September 2004.19 I reviewed those data as well as the independent blind evaluation of the MMPI testing that had been done by an assessment expert. In addition, I administered a measure of psychological burnout at the time of our interview, and an expert on job stress independently evaluated its results. Let’s start with some general background, add some personal input from family and some of Frederick’s recent self-evaluations, and then review the formal psychological assessments.

Chip was thirty-seven years old at that time, the son of a seventy-seven-year-old West Virginia coal miner father and a seventy-three-year-old homemaker mother. He grew up in the small town of Mt. Lake Park, Maryland. He describes his mother as very supportive and caring and his father as very good to him. One of his favorite memories is working on vehicles in the garage alongside his father. His older sister, Mimi, forty-eight, is a registered nurse. He married Martha in Virginia in June 1999; they met when she was a trainer at the correctional facility where he worked. He has become the stepfather of her two grown daughters.

All his life, Chip has attended Baptist Church services regularly, at least every other Sunday. He considers himself a moral and spiritual person, even after his involvement in the abuses at Abu Ghraib. Before going to Iraq, he attended the local community college and went on to take courses at Allegheny College in Maryland but did not finish his degree. He was an average C student, never failed a course, and liked to learn new skills. Chip, however, is more a jock than an intellectual; he played basketball, baseball, football, and soccer in high school. As an adult, he
continued to play softball as a left fielder, hitting for a good average rather than distance. His main hobbies are hunting and fishing. He is also a "people person" who has a great many close longtime friends with whom he has stayed in touch over the years. He is very close to these friends, who are, he said, the kind of people "that you would die for." Chip indicated that he also has close relations with his niece and nephew. In general, he is a family man; he counts on his family and they have always been able to count on him. He loves his wife, Martha, whom he describes as "perfect" and a "very strong woman," and he loves her daughters "as if they were my own."

Chip is in good health and is physically fit. He has never had surgery, psychological counseling, or medication for mental problems. His only run-in with the law came when he was nineteen as a "disturbing the peace" arrest that carried a fine of $5.00, which he received for hollering too loud and long at a nighttime "hide-and-seek." He rarely smokes, drinks only a few beers a week, and has never used illegal drugs.

Chip describes himself in the following way: "very quiet, sometimes shy, down to earth, soft-hearted, very agreeable, an overall good person." However, it is important for us to note some additional self-descriptions: Chip usually feels being rejected by others, and so, in any disagreement, he often gives way in order to be accepted; he changes his mind to accommodate others so that they will not be "mad at me or hate me." Others can influence him even when he believes that he has made up his mind. He does not like to be alone: he likes to be around others, and he becomes depressed when he is alone for any length of time.

Some of my research on shyness provides empirical support for this shyness-conformity link. We have found that shy college students were likely to give in to and agree with others whose opinions were discrepant from their own when they believed they might have to defend their point of view openly, whereas they did not conform when they did not have to fear a public confrontation.

The man is superpatriotic—every day he flies the American flag in his front yard and takes it down at sunset. He gives the flag as a gift to friends and family. I bought several flags to give to family, my place of business, and I flew them in Kuwait, every one of them. I think I had nine or ten. I flew them when I was in Baghdad, and I'd send them to my wife," he said during our interview. Chip Frederick gets "goose bumps" and "teary-eyed" when he hears the National Anthem. He wrote to me recently from his prison cell, "I am proud to say that I served most of my adult life for my country. I was very prepared to die for my country, my family and friends. . . . I wanted to be the one to make a difference." (I must admit that such feelings seem a bit over the top to someone with my more cautious brand of patriotism.)

His sister, Mimi, has this to say about her kid brother:

Growing up with Chip was a delight for me. I am 3 months shy of being 11 years older than he is. Chip was a quiet person. He was considerate of his peers. Chip always was thoughtful of others' feelings and was never a vengeful type person. Chip was ornery and liked practical jokes. He would always feed the dog peanut butter and would laugh so hard he would be on the ground rolling! Chip played sports and was a team player. His philosophy of life is fairness, and he still has a strong belief in that, responsibility and accountability, he was taught good morals and values by his parents. I remember watching him go off to the army at the young age of 17, just a kid, only to return a young man all grown up and demonstrating these same skills that he values so much. Chip likes to hunt and fish in his spare time. He enjoys sports, NASCAR, motorcycling and spending time with his family.23
I was able to review many of his performance evaluations, which had been conducted annually by the Virginia Department of Corrections. A summary of key observations by various evaluating officers provides a sense of how well Chip progressed through probationary training to become a corrections officer. He typically exceeded expectations on almost all specific performance dimensions.

“C/O Frederick has been proficient in performing this [sic] assigned duties for this probationary period. Has met all established performance standards.” “Officer Frederick shows initiative and does a very good job.” (April 1997)

One negative blemish on his performance record with the Virginia Department of Corrections reads: “Employee needs to be more consistent on post assignments and enforce standing counts.” (November 1997)

On all other six dimensions, he is rated as “Meets expectations” but as only “Fair, but needs improvement” on the dimension of initiating and completing count procedures. (Recall the count procedure ordeal of the SFR?)

Otherwise, the comments are uniformly positive: “He is a very good officer and shows leadership abilities.” “His appearance exceeds expectations.” (November 1998) (This was also true of his handling keys and equipment. All the rest of the dimensions “meet expectations.”)

“Officer Frederick meets all criteria and has the potential to be an excellent officer.” “Officer Frederick does an excellent job in controlling the custody, control, and safety of inmates.” “Officer Frederick is always neat and clean, shoes polished, and appears that he takes pride in his uniform.” (November 1999)

“Officer Frederick operates and maintains post in a safe, secure and clean manner. When assigned to special housing he keeps his area clean and prepared for inspections.” “Officer Frederick is always dressed properly for his duty assignment. He maintains his professional appearance.” “He works well with both his co-workers and inmates. He has a thorough knowledge of the work to be done and established policies and procedures. He has no problem assisting others in completing their job assignments.” (October 2000)

Overall, these evaluations are increasingly positive up to the point that Chip Frederick’s performance “exceeds expectations.” However, it is instructive to note a key conclusion in one of these final reports: “There were no factors beyond the employee’s control which affected his performance.” It is important to keep this in mind precisely because I will argue that “situational factors beyond his control” did undermine his performance at Abu Ghraib.

In the final evaluations of Frederick, in May 2001, his ratings were high: “Officer Frederick does a very good job as the floor officer. He communicates well with the inmates in his area and on the strike force.” “Officer Frederick displays a high standard of professional conduct and appearance.” “Officer Frederick does a very good job enforcing all written policies.” “Officer Frederick does a very good job taking counts.”

It is obvious that Chip Frederick became a valuable corrections officer who was highly effective when he had explicit procedures and written policies to follow. He clearly learned on the job and benefited from the surveillance and feedback of his supervisors. He is also someone for whom appearance and grooming are important, as is maintaining a professional demeanor. Those qualities, which are central in Chip’s personal identity, would be under assault by the horrible conditions we have noted existed at Abu Ghraib Prison and were even worse on the night shift on Tier 1A.

Chip joined the armed forces in 1984 for the money and the experience, and to be with friends. It also seemed the patriotic thing to do at that time. He served for more than eleven years in the National Guard in a combat engineer unit and added to that service ten more years in the Military Police of the Army Reserve.

The only negative mark on his record was one he got for being late for formation early in his career. After being activated, his first tour of duty was in Kuwait in May 2003, and then in a small town, Al-Hillah, south of Baghdad, where he served with half a dozen close buddies in the 372nd MP Company. He was an operations sergeant charged with sending out patrols.24

The mission was great, the locals loved us. There were no major incidents or injuries. It was peaceful till we left [and Polish Coalition forces took over]. I made it a point to learn about the culture, I learned a little Arabic, and I made sure I interacted with the people. I sent packets full of candies to my kids [in that village]. My kids were always cheering for me.

Frederick also reported that he continues to be proud that he was able to make those children smile just by listening to them and taking the time to play with them.25

During that time, he was able to satisfy his overwhelming desire for neatness by “sempressing” his uniform. This meant that after washing and drying his uniform, he put it under a plywood board underneath his mattress and slept on it for a week. He was the only soldier who had creases in his pants, and he was ragged for it, but he didn’t care, “because that’s just me; I don’t like to be sloppy.” He describes himself as a perfectionist who always likes things to be “nice, neat and clean.” His penchant for being neat was so extreme that it would sometimes “drive his wife crazy.” Unfortunately, there was little time and no reason for such neatness in Abu Ghraib Prison, where he arrived early in October 2003.

One indication of Chip Frederick’s exemplary service as a soldier for his nation comes from a review of the many awards he has earned over the years. They include: Army Achievement Medal (awarded three times); Army Reserve Components Medal (awarded four times); National Defense Medal (awarded twice); Armed Forces Reserve Medal with “M” Device; Noncommissioned Officer’s Professional Development Ribbon; Army Service Ribbon; Army Reserve Components Overseas Training Ribbon (awarded twice); Global War on Terrorism Medal; and Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal. He was also about to receive a Bronze Star for the effective way he had dealt with a shooting incident with a Syrian detainee in Abu Ghraib, but which was not awarded after the abuse...
revelations surfaced. These are some rather impressive credentials as far as I am concerned, especially for someone later alleged to be a "rogue soldier."

Psychological Assessments

"Chip's IQ falls in the average range on the combined measures of verbal and performance intelligence on standard tests.

Three measures of personality and emotional functioning contain validity scales that assess how the person being tested portrays him or herself across all test items, picking up lying, defensiveness, and falsifying answers. Chip shows no tendency to present himself in either an overly positive or overly negative light in regard to psychological functioning. However, it is important to highlight the conclusion: "Validity scales indicate the patient presented himself as a morally virtuous individual," according to the military psychologist conducting the assessment. In addition, these standardized test results indicate that Chip Frederick has "no sadistic or pathological tendencies." That conclusion strongly suggests that the "bad apple" dispositional attribution of blame made against him by military and administration apologists has no basis in fact.

Test results suggest a core motivation for the patient to obtain and maintain nurturance and supportive relationships. He is expected to be obliging, docile, and placating, while seeking relationships in which he can lean on others for emotional support, nurture, affection, and security. His temperament will likely be pacifying and he will try to avoid conflict. In this regard, he will have a general tendency to hesitate in expressing negative feelings for fear of alienating others. He will exhibit an excessive need for both security and attachment and to be taken care of, and he will likely feel uneasy when alone. This underlies, in part, his tendency to submit to the wishes of others in order to maintain security.

The independent evaluation of Chip Frederick's personality assessment by an expert clinical psychologist, Dr. Larry Beutler, indicates substantial agreement with the conclusions by the Army clinical psychologist. First, he notes that "The results of the assessment can be considered reasonably reliable and valid indicators of his [Frederick's] current functioning."28 Dr. Beutler goes on to say, in bold type, "It should also be noted that there is no evidence of gross pathology. [He] is not manifesting serious personality or Axis I pathology."

This means that Chip shows no evidence at all of a psychopathic personality that would predispose him to be abusive without guilt in his work setting. He also falls into the "normal, healthy range" with regard to schizophrenia, depression, hysteria, and all other major forms of psychological pathology.

However, Dr. Beutler also says that in his considered opinion a syndrome of underlying psychological traits raises concerns about Chip's leadership in complex, demanding situations, such as those he encountered at Abu Ghrabi:

These symptoms [of Frederick's] are likely to impede his ability to respond to new situations and may reduce his flexibility and ability to adapt to change. He is likely to be indecisive, insecure and to rely on others to help him make decisions... He seeks assurance of his worth and acknowledgment of his efforts, and is quite dependent on others to help him set and keep an agenda or make decisions... He is easily led by others and in spite of his best efforts to "do what is right," is likely to be over controlled by circumstances, authorities, and peer pressures.

These reports make evident that Staff Sergeant Chip Frederick would make a good "social-emotional leader" but not as good a "task leader," a distinction that researchers on leadership use to distinguish two contrasting leadership styles. A social-emotional leader is sensitive to the needs of those in his organization and engages in activities that will promote a positive quality of group membership. On the other hand, a task leader focuses on the more formal aspects of leadership, setting agendas and standards, providing assignments, and giving informational feedback to achieve the group's goals. Ideally, a group leader should possess both traits, but often the job is divided among several leaders, each of whom is best at one or the other set of attributes. Groups need effective task leaders more than they do good social-emotional ones in situations that are ambiguous, that involve shifting demands, and that lack explicit objectives—a classic example of the night shift job setting on Tier 1A. As good as Chip may have been in previous leadership or correctional circumstances, he was simply the wrong person for the complex job of leader on that shift at that time in that place.

Chip Frederick also completed the primary assessment of an individual's extent and type of psychological burnout within an organizational setting. He did so by imaging his work situation as it was when he was at Abu Ghrabi. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) identifies three aspects of a person's relationship with a specific work setting: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and personal efficacy. It was developed by Christina Maslach (recall the heroine of the Stanford Prison Experiment). The measure was later refined and extended in her research with Dr. Michael Leiter, who provided a "blind" analysis of Frederick's reactions (that is, he was unaware of who the "client" was and of his specific work setting).29

According to Dr. Leiter, Chip's scores reveal an unusual profile of burnout on these three dimensions. Ordinarily, a high degree of exhaustion, elevated cynicism, and a reduced sense of personal effectiveness at work go together in characterizing job burnout. However, Chip showed few signs of cynicism or a negative evaluation of his personal work effectiveness. Nonetheless, he does show extreme emotional exhaustion:

The profile indicated a person experiencing extreme exhaustion, which is the defining quality of burnout. Specifically, the assessment indicates a person who is emotionally drained and chronically tired. His recovery cy-
cles are not providing sufficient rest or relief from work to permit him to replenish his energy, leading to a condition of chronic weariness. It is evident that his current state is contrary to the individual's identity: He thinks of himself as capable of managing serious demands, but is overwhelmed in his current circumstances. . . . Overall, this profile indicates a person experiencing job burnout that is specific to the work situation in question. The profile suggests that under different work circumstances, he could be a productive and enthusiastic contributor.

Research in cognitive psychology shows that performance on a variety of tasks is undermined by conditions, such as chronic stress and multitasking, that impose an excessive load on a person's cognitive resources. Memory and problem solving, as well as judgment and decision making, all suffer when the mind's usual capacity is overextended. I will argue that Chip's ordinary level of cognitive capacities was indeed overwhelmed by the inordinate load imposed on him by the situational demands he faced nightly at his new, overwhelming job.

With these clues in mind, let us now turn our focus on the "work circumstance" alluded to in Dr. Leiter's report. From Chip's perspective, what was it like to work on Tier 1A during the night shift? I invite you, the reader, to assume the same mindset that you used earlier in our journey, when you imagined that you were a participant, or a subject, in various social psychological experiments. Try walking in Chip Frederick's boots for a few months, from October to December 2003.

A Bad Apple or a Chip off the Best Block?

Before we leave our dispositional analysis to consider the situational forces at play, we must keep in mind that this young man brought no pathology into that situation. There is absolutely nothing in his record that I was able to uncover that would predict that Chip Frederick would engage in any form of abusive, sadistic behavior. On the contrary, there is much in his record to suggest that had he not been forced to work and live in such an abnormal situation, he might have been the military's All-American poster soldier on its recruitment ads. He could have been used honestly in place of the military's fabricated pseudoheroes, Private Jessica Lynch and Pat Tillman.1 The military could have used Staff Sergeant Ivan Frederick as a superpatriot who loved his country and was ready to serve it to the last drop of his blood. He could have been the best of apples in their good barrel.

In a sense, Chip Frederick also could have been one of the participants in our Stanford Prison Experiment, who we knew were good young men, normal and healthy—before they went down into that prison basement. Although he does not share their intelligence level or middle-class background, Chip can be compared with them in starting out as a tabula rasa, a clean slate, which would soon become boldly etched upon by a pathological prison setting. What was the situation that brought out the worst in this otherwise good soldier? How could it have indisputably etched itself on him, distorting his usual mental and behavioral functioning? What was the nature of the "barrel" into which this once "good apple" was dropped?

THE SITUATION: NIGHTMARES AND NIGHT GAMES ON TIER 1A

Because he had prior experience in corrections, Staff Sergeant Frederick was assigned to be in charge of a small group of other Army Reserve Military Police on the night shift at Abu Ghraib. He had to oversee activities on four tiers in the "hard site," that is, inside the concrete structure rather than outside in the tent camps surrounded by barbed wire. One of those camps was Camp Vigilant (later changed to Camp Redemption), which had four separate compounds. Within Tier 1A (Alpha) was a special facility designed for inmate, or "detainee," interrogations. They were usually conducted by civilian contract interrogators, some aided by translators (hired by the Titan Corporation) and only loosely supervised by military intelligence, the CIA, and other service branches.

At first, Staff Sergeant Frederick was responsible for about four hundred prisoners. That was in early October 2003, when his 372nd Military Police Army Reserve Company (based in Cresaptown, Maryland) replaced the 72nd Military Police National Guard Company. Initially, he was able to handle the complex assignments handed to him, even though it was an escalation from the hundred or so medium-security prisoners he had had under his command back home. However, not long after President Bush had declared "mission accomplished," instead of the Iraqi citizenry being supportive, all hell broke loose. Insurgency and foreign infiltrations against the U.S. and Coalition occupation surged out of control. No one had anticipated how extensive, coordinated, and deadly it would be and would continue to grow out of control.

Revenge for the deaths of so many soldiers mixed freely with fear and uncertainty about how to contain this eruption. Orders were sent out to round up all likely suspects in towns where any insurgent violence had erupted. That meant widespread arrests of whole families, especially adult males. The detention system was not able to process this new load adequately. Record keeping on detainees and their likely interrogation value fell by the wayside, and basic resources became completely inadequate under the pressure of an inmate population that doubled in November and nearly tripled to more than a thousand by December.

Chip was required to be in charge of all of them and, in addition to being in charge of a dozen or so MPs, to oversee the fifty to seventy Iraqi police who were guarding more than 1,000 Iraqis imprisoned on various criminal charges. The Iraqi police, who worked Tiers 2, 3, and 4, were notorious for smuggling in weapons and other contraband to inmates for a fee. Although the average age of the prisoners was in the range of twenty, there were also up to fifty adolescents, as well as children as young as ten years old and seniors in their sixties—all housed together in huge cells. Female prisoners, prostitutes, and the wives of generals and
men who had been important leaders in Saddam’s party were housed in Tier 18 (Bravo). Each of the Alpha and Bravo tiers held about fifty prisoners at any one time. In short, being in charge of this complex facility without adequate resources and a suddenly erupting foreign prisoner population placed a heavy burden upon someone whose prior experience had been limited to policing a small number of medium-security civilian prisoners in a small town in Virginia.

Training and Accountability

Frederick: “None. No training for this job. When we mobilized at Fort Lee, we had a cultural awareness class, maybe it was about forty-five minutes long, and it was basically about not to discuss politics, not to discuss religion, and not to call ‘em ‘Jaynabs,’ don’t call ‘em ‘Camel Jockeys’; ‘Towel Heads,’ or not to call ‘em ‘Bag Heads, Ayrabs.’”

Z: “How would you describe the supervision you received and the accountability you felt you had toward your superior officers?”

Frederick: “None.”

Z: “Who was your direct superior officer to whom you reported?”

Frederick: “Sergeant First Class Snyder. I was in charge of the four tiers, and he was in charge of me and it keeps going up the chain. Next in line is Captain Brinson. Above Captain Brinson is Captain Reese; above Reese is Lieutenant Colonel Phillabaum.”

Frederick’s shift began at 4 p.m. and lasted for twelve hours, until 4 a.m. He went on to report that few of these officers were ever present on Alpha Tier at night or made even brief appearances early in the shift. He had no supervision from Sergeant Snyder because his superior had no professional training in corrections. However, at various times Chip did offer suggestions and recommended changes to Snyder, Brinson, and Reese.

Z: “You would make recommendations?”

Frederick: “Yes, about operation of the facility. Not to handcuff prisoners to cell doors, should not have prisoners nude except for self-mutilators, can handle prisoners with mental conditions. . . . One of the first things that I asked for as soon as I got there was regulations, operating procedures. . . . I was housing juveniles, men, women, and mentally ill prisoners all in the same thing; it’s a violation of the military code.”

Z: “So you would try to get up the chain of command?”

Frederick: “I would tell anybody that would come in who I thought had some ranking. . . . Usually they would tell me, ‘Just see what you can come up with, keep up the good work; this is the way Military Intelligence wants it done.’

At other times, Chip said that he would be scoffed at or reprimanded by higher-ups for complaining. Given the combat zone conditions, they told him he would have to make do as best possible. He was surely not in Kansas or the Dillwyn, Virginia, Prison. There would never be any clear written procedures, no formal policies, and no structured guidelines. There was none of the procedural support that Chip Frederick needed to follow in order to be the kind of leader he hoped to be in this most important mission in his life. He was on his own, without any support system upon which he could rely. This was exactly the worst working condition for him, given Chip Frederick’s basic needs and values, which we have just reviewed from his assessments. It was a sure recipe for failure. And that was only the beginning.

Nonstop Night Work

Not only did this soldier work halfway around the clock, he did so seven days a week without a single day off for a full forty days! Then he had only one day off, followed by two more solid weeks on, before he could get a regular day off after four nights on. I can’t imagine any job where such a work schedule would not be seen as inhumane. Given the shortage of trained corrections personnel and perhaps the failure of his superiors to appreciate the extent of this overwhelming daily workload, there was no recognition of or concern for Chip Frederick’s job stress and burnout potential. He had to do what they wanted him to do and simply stop complaining to his superiors.

Where did he go at 4 a.m., when his long twelve-hour shift was over? He simply went to sleep in another part of the prison—in a prison cell! He slept in a sixty-nine-foot prison cell that had no toilet but did have plenty of rodents running around it. It was dirty because there were not enough cleaning supplies and not enough water to clean it up. Chip Frederick told me during our interview, “I couldn’t find supplies to keep the facilities clean. The plumbing was bad. Shit was backed up in the porta-potties. There was trash and mold everywhere. . . . It was nasty in there. There were human body parts in the facility. . . . There was a pack of wild dogs running around [still present from the days when prisoners executed by Saddam were buried in part of the prison and wild dogs would dig up their remains]. You know I was so mentally drained when I got off in the morning, all I wanted to do is sleep.”

He missed breakfast, lunch, often had only one meal a day, which consisted of Tater-tot and not-so-tasty MREs—the Army-issue meals ready to be eaten out of containers. “Portions were small due to the large number of soldiers that had to be fed. I ate a lot of cheese and crackers,” Chip reported. Other emerging health problems for this athletic, socially minded young man were that he stopped exercising because he was always tired and he was not able to socialize with buddies because of work schedule conflicts. More and more his life revolved entirely around his prison supervision and the MP Reservists working there under his command. They soon became what political psychologists refer to as his “reference group,” a new in-group that would come to have a big influence on him. He was
enmeshed in a "total situation," of the kind that the psychologist Robert Jay Lifton had earlier described as facilitating mind control in cults and in the North Korean prisoner-of-war camps.

Many Others on the All-Night Scene

The two MP reservists who served most often on the night shift in Alpha Tier were Corporal Charles Graner, Jr., and Specialist Megan Ambuhl. Graner was in direct charge of Tier 1A during the night shift, given that Chip had to move around to supervise the other tiers. When they were off duty, Specialist Sabrina Harman replaced them. Sometimes Sergeant Javal Davis would fill in. Private First Class Lynndie England was a file clerk who was not assigned to this duty but visited often to be with her boyfriend, Charles Graner. She celebrated her twenty-first birthday on the tier. Specialist Armin Cruz, of the 325th Military Intelligence Battalion, was also frequently around that tier.

There were also "dog handlers," soldiers who came on the tier to use their dogs either to intimidate prisoners into talking or to force prisoners out of their cells if they were suspected of having weapons, or just for a show of force. But such teams were sent to Abu Ghraib in November 2003, having had practice at the Guantanamo Bay Prison. (Two of these dog handlers, who were later found guilty of prisoner abuse, were Sergeant Michael Smith and Staff Sergeant Sanchez Cardona.) Nurses and medics also visited on occasion, when some medical problem arose. Also present were a number of civilian contractors from the Titan Corporation, who did the interrogation of those detainees suspected of having information about insurgent activities or knowledge of terrorist activities. They often required translators to assist them in their interactions with the detainees. FBI, CIA, and military intelligence personnel were also around at times for special interrogations.

As might be expected, high-ranking military visitors were rarely around in the middle of the night. Commander Karpinski never visited Tiers 1A/B during the months that Chip was on duty, except once when giving a TV tour. One reservist in that unit reported seeing Karpinski only twice in the five months he was at Abu Ghraib. A few other officers made brief appearances in the late afternoon; Chip used those rare occasions to report problems with the facility and to suggest changes he hoped could be made; none ever was. Various other people, who were not in uniform and had no identification, came and went to and from these tiers. No one was supposed to ask to see their credentials, so they operated in total anonymity. Against the rules of military conduct, civilian contractors gave orders to the MP guards about things they wanted done to prepare particular prisoners for interrogation. Soldiers on duty are not supposed to take orders from civilians. This line has become increasingly blurred with the rise in use of civilian contract personnel to fulfill roles previously handled by military intelligence.

Chip’s letters and e-mail messages home clearly told that a key function he and the other MP reservists on Tier 1A/Alpha served was to help the interrogators do their job more effectively. "Military intelligence has encouraged and told us ‘Great job.’ " "They usually don’t allow others to watch them interrogate. But since they like the way I ran the prison, they have made an exception." He was proud to report that his men were good at doing what they were asked to do, softening up detainees so they would give up the information interrogators wanted. "We help getting them to talk with the way we handle them. ... We’ve had a very high rate with our style of getting them to break. They usually end up breaking within hours."

Chip’s messages home repeatedly noted that military intelligence teams, which included CIA officers and linguists and interrogators from private defense contractors, dominated all of the action that occurred in that dungeon facility of Abu Ghraib. He told me that he could not identify any of these interrogators because they had deliberately made themselves anonymous. They rarely gave their names and had no IDs on their uniforms; in fact, most of them did not even wear a military outfit. Chip’s account squares with media accounts about the climate created by General Sanchez’s insistence that the best way to get actionable intelligence from detainees was by extreme methods of interrogation and secrecy.

Some rules for U.S. military personnel at the prison made it easy for people to take responsibility for their actions, a factor that may also have opened the door to abuse. According to an undated prison memo titled “Operational Guidelines,” which covered the high-security cell block (Tier 1A), the acronym "MI [Military Intelligence]" will not be used in the area.

"Additionally, it is recommended that all military personnel in the segregation area reduce knowledge of their true identities to these specialized detainees. Use of sterilized uniforms [cleansing of all identification] is highly suggested and personnel should NOT address each other by true name and rank in the segregation area."

The Army’s own investigations revealed the truth of Frederick’s descriptions about the extreme strategies that were employed in the prison. They found that interrogators had encouraged MP reservists working in the prison to prepare Iraqi detainees for questioning, physically and mentally. The traditionally established line between MPs dealing only with detention procedures and military intelligence personnel working on intelligence gathering was blurred when these reservists were recruited to assist in preparing detainees for coercive interrogation. Military intelligence agents were also guilty of some of the worst abuses. For example, in order to obtain information from one Iraqi general, interrogators soaked down his sixteen-year-old son, smeared him with mud, and then drove him naked out into the cold. Sergeant Samuel Provenance (Alpha Company, 302nd Military Intelligence Battalion) reported to several news agencies that two of the interrogators had sexually abused a female teenager and that other personnel were aware of this abuse. We will see in the next chapter that much worse abuses were committed by any number of soldiers and civilians, in addition to those by Chip Frederick’s MP night shift crew.
“I hope the investigation [of inmate abuses] is including not only the people who committed the crimes, but some of the people that might have encouraged these crimes as well,” said Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt, deputy director for Coalition operations in Iraq. In an interview with Dan Ruther on 60 Minutes II, “Because they certainly share some level of responsibility as well.” (We will note that the System has been slow in accusing and investigating its own officials.)

Chip Frederick also had general custody of fifteen to twenty “ghost detainees,” prisoners who were listed only as OGA—Other Government Agency—property. Because they were assumed to be high-ranking officials who had valuable information to give, the interrogators were given latitude to use all means necessary to extract that actionable information. These detainees were “ghosts” because there was no official record of them ever having been at the site, never officially listed, without any ID. During our interview, Chip confided, “I saw one of them after he was killed by Delta Force soldiers. They killed this guy, I got the impression that nobody cared. Nobody cared what happened to them.”

That “guy” was a ghost detainee who had been severely beaten by a Navy SEALs unit, then hung on a rack during interrogation by a CIA agent, suffocated to death, then packed in ice and put into a body bag with an IV inserted in his arm (by a medic) so that his murderers could pretend he was sick and being taken to the hospital in the morning. Before he was dumped somewhere by a car driven by some of the MPs (Graner and Harman) on the night shift had their pictures taken with him as souvenirs, just for the record. (We will revisit this case in more detail in the following chapter.) However, the effect of the MPs on night shift witnessing these and other instances of grim abuse by a variety of visitors to their “jar 1a was certainly to establish a new social norm of abuse acceptability. It was possible to get away with murder, what harm was there in just smacking around some resistant detainees or embarrassing them by making their humble living positions? they reasoned.

The Fear Factor

There was much to fear within those prison walls—not only for the prisoners but also for Chip Frederick and all the other guards. As is the case in most prisons, prisoners with time on their hands and ingenuity will fashion weapons out of virtually anything available to them. Here their weapons were made from metal broken off from beds or windows, broken glass, and sharpened toothbrushes. With less ingenuity and some money prisoners could bribe the Iraqi guards to supply them with guns, knives, bayonets, and ammunition. For a fee, these guards would also transfer notes and letters to and from family members. Frederick had been warned by guys in the 72nd MP Company, which his unit replaced, that many of the Iraqi guards were very corrupt—they even assisted escape attempts by providing security information, facility maps, clothes, and weapons. They also smuggled in drugs to the detainees. Although Frederick was nominally in charge of these guards, they would refuse to make rounds of the tiers, and usually just sat around on tables outside the tier smoking and talking. This must be added to all the other sources of Chip Frederick’s constant frustrations and stress in running a secure facility.

Prisoners regularly assaulted the guards verbally and physically; some threw feces at them, and others used their long fingernails to scratch the guards’ faces. One of the most frightening and unexpected series of events on the tier happened on November 24, 2003, when Iraqi police smuggled a handgun, ammo, and bayonets into the cell of a suspected Syrian insurgent. Chip’s small force had a shoot-out with him, and they were able to subdue him without killing him. However, that event raised the bar for everyone in that place to be eternally vigilant and even more fearful of lethal attacks against them.

Prisoner riots occurred over the poor quality of the food, which was often inedible and insufficient. Riots were also likely to erupt when mortar attacks exploded nearby in Abu Ghraib’s “soft site.” As noted earlier, the facility was under daily bombardment, and both guards and prisoners were wounded and some killed by these mortar attacks. “I was always fearful,” Chip confessed to me. “The mortar and rocket attacks and the firesights were very scary for me. I had never been in a combat zone before Iraq.” Nevertheless, he had to suck it up and act brave, given his position of authority over the detainees, his fellow MPs, and the Iraqi police. The situation demanded that Chip Frederick pretend not to be afraid but instead to appear calm, cool, and collected. This conflict between his outer, seemingly composed manner and his inner turmoil worsened as more inmates were constantly added to the ranks and demands from higher-ups escalated to get more “actionable intelligence” from the detainees.

In addition to its bottled-up fear, Chip Frederick endured the stress and exhaustion generated by the excessive demands of this complex new job, for which he was totally unprepared and untrained. Consider, too, the wide discrepancy between his core values—order, neatness, and cleanliness—and the chaos, filth, and disorder that surrounded him all the time. Although he was supposed to be in charge of the entire compound, he reported that he had felt “weak” because “no one would work with me. I couldn’t make any changes about how to run this place.” He also began to feel anonymous because “no one was listening to my position.” It was clear that there was no accountability. Moreover, the physical setting in which he found himself conferred total anonymity by its barren ugliness. Anonymity of place combined with anonymity of person, given that it became the norm to stop wearing their full military uniforms while on duty. And all around them, most visitors and the civilian interrogators came and went unnamed. No one in charge was readily identifiable, and the seemingly endless mass of prisoners, wearing orange jump suits or totally naked, were also indistinguishable from one another. It was as extreme a setting for creating deindividuation as I can imagine.
Parallels with the Guards in the Stanford Prison Experiment

Now that we have surveyed the work setting, we can begin to see parallels between the psychological states experienced by Chip Frederick and his fellow guards with those of the guards in the Stanford Prison Experiment. Deindividuation processes created by anonymity of person and anonymity of place are evident. Dehumanization of prisoners is apparent by virtue of their sheer numbers, enforced nakedness, and uniform appearance, as well as by the guards’ inability to understand their language. One of the night shift MPs, Ken Davis, reported in a later television documentary about how dehumanization had been bred into their thinking: “We were never trained to be guards. The higher-ups said, ‘Be your imagination. Break them. We want them broke by the time we come back. As soon as we’d have prisoners come in, we’d grab them instantly on their head. They would flexicuff ‘em; throw ‘em down to the ground; some would be stripped, it was told to all of us, they’re nothing but dogs [familiar phrase?]. So you start breeding that picture to people, then all of a sudden, you start looking at these people as less than human, and you start doing things to ‘em that you would never dream of. And that’s where it got scary.”

Boredom operated in both prison settings, bred by long shift hours on these nights when everything was under control. Boredom was a potent motivator to take actions that might bring some excitement, some controlled sensation seeking. Both sets of guards decided on their own initiative “to make things happen” that they thought would be interesting or fun.

All this was aggravated, of course, by the lack of mission-specific training for a difficult and complex job and the lack of oversight by a supervisory staff, which rendered accountability unnecessary. In both prisons, the system’s operators gave permission for the guards to maintain total power over the prisoners. In addition, the guards feared that the prisoners would escape or riot, as did our Stanford guards, although of course with less deadly consequences. Obviously, Abu Ghraib Prison was a far more lethal environment than our relatively benign prison at Stanford. However, as the experiment showed, the abusiveness of guards and their aggression toward the prisoners escalated nightly, culminating in a series of sexual, homophobic acts imposed upon the prisoners. The same was true in even more perverse and extreme ways. On Tier 1A. Moreover, in both cases, the worst abuses occurred during the night shift, when the guards felt that the authorities noticed them least; thus, free from their elemental constraints.

It should be made clear that such situational forces as those described here did not directly prod the guards into doing bad things, as in the Milgram research paradigm. Except for the encouragement given by some civilian interrogators to “soften up” detainees in order to render them vulnerable, it was the situational forces at Abu Ghraib—as in the Stanford prison—that created freedom from the usual social and moral constraints on abusive actions. It became apparent to both sets of night shift guards that they could get away with many taboo behaviors because responsibility was diffused: no one challenged them when newly emergent norms made acceptable once unthinkable behavior. It is the phenomenon of “when the cat’s away, the mice will play.” It is reminiscent of Golding’s Lord of the Flies, where supervising grown-ups were absent as the masked marauders created havoc. It should also remind you of the research on anonymity and aggression reported in the previous chapter.

It is instructive to note some of the conclusions reached by the independent panel headed by James Schlesinger that compared the two prison situations. I was surprised to discover the parallels drawn in that report between our simulated prison conditions at Stanford and the all-too-real prison conditions at Abu Ghraib. In a three-page Appendix (G), the report describes psychological stressors, the bases for inhumane treatment of prisoners, and the social psychological factors that are involved when ordinarily humane people behave inhumanely toward others:

The potential for abusive treatment of detainees during the Global War on Terrorism was entirely predictable based on a fundamental understanding of social psychology principles coupled with an awareness of numerous known environmental risk factors. [Most of the leaders were unacquainted with these risk factors.]

Such conditions neither excuse nor absolve the individuals who engaged in deliberate immoral or illegal behaviors [even though] certain conditions heightened the possibility of abusive treatment.

Findings from the field of social psychology suggest that the conditions of war and the dynamics of detainee operations carry inherent risks for human mistreatment, and therefore must be approached with great caution and careful planning and training.

[The] landmark Stanford study ... provides a cautionary tale for all military detention operations, which were relatively benign. In contrast, in military detention operations, soldiers work under stressful combat conditions that are far from benign.

Psychologists have attempted to understand how and why individuals and groups who usually act humanely can sometimes act otherwise in certain circumstances.

Among the social psychological concepts identified by the Schlesinger investigation that help explain why abusive behaviors occur include deindividuation, dehumanization, enemy image, groupthink, moral disengagement, and social facilitation. We have discussed all of these processes earlier with regard to the Stanford Prison Experiment, and they were operating as well in Abu
Ghraib, with the exception of “groupthink.” I do not believe that this biased way of thinking (that promotes a group’s consensus with the leader’s position) was played among the night shift guards, because they were not systematically planning their abuses.

“Groupthink” is a concept developed by my former Yale teacher, the psychologist Irving Janis to account for bad decisions made in groups composed of intelligent people. Such groups suppress dissent in the interest of group harmony when they are an amiable, cohesive group that does not include dissenting viewpoints and has a directive leader. The disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba (1961) is a prime example of groupthink by President John Kennedy’s cabinet. More recently, groupthink was at work in the shared belief within the American intelligence community (IC) and the Bush cabinet that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, which, in turn, led to the war against Iraq: “IC personnel involved in the Iraq WMD issue demonstrated several aspects of groupthink: examining few alternatives, selective gathering of information, pressure to conform within the group or withhold criticism, and collective rationalization.” The background for this conclusion by the Senate Intelligence Committee is available online; see the Notes.57

In an independent analysis published in the Journal Science, the social psychologist Susan Fiske and her colleagues supported the position taken by the Schlesinger Investigation. They concluded that “Abu Ghraib resulted in part from ordinary social processes, not just extraordinary individual evil.” Among the social processes identified are conformity, socialized obedience to authority, desecration, emotional prejudices, situational stressors, and gradual escalation of abuses from minimal to extremes.58 A former soldier in Iraq offers further documentation of the relevance of the SPE to understanding the behavioral dynamics at work in Iraq military prisons and also why strong leadership is crucial.

Professor Zimbardo,

I was a soldier [lead counterintelligence agent] in the unit that established Camp Cropper, the first detention facility set up in Baghdad after the Baath Regime fell. I can definitely relate the lessons from your prison study to my observations on the ground in Iraq. I dealt extensively with both the Military Police and detainees throughout my tour and saw many examples of the situations you described from the study.

However, unlike the soldiers at Abu Ghraib our unit had very competent leadership and things never got anywhere near the level as at Abu Ghraib. Our leaders knew the rules, set the standards, and supervised to ensure that the rules were followed. Infractions of the rules were investigated and when appropriate, violators were punished. Detention missions are dehumanizing for everyone involved. I think I went numb after the first two weeks. Active involvement by our leaders kept us from forgetting who we were and why we were there. Anyhow, I enjoyed reading the summary of your experiment; it brought more clarity to my thinking.

Sincerely,
Terrence Plakias59

Sexual Dynamics on Tier 2A

One of the unusual features of the night shift staff on Alpha Tier was the mixture of young female and male guards. It is noteworthy that, in this culture of supervised young adults, the women were quite attractive. Add to this emotionally charged mix young Lyndie England, who hung out with that shift to be with her new boyfriend, Charles Graner. England and Graner soon began engaging in torturous sexual escapades, which they documented in digital photos and videos. Eventually, she became pregnant and subsequently gave birth to his child. However, there must have been something else going on between Graner and the twenty-nine-year-old MP guard Megan Ambuhl, because they later got married—after he was sentenced to prison.

The media, which focused on the England-Graner-Ambuhl triangle, gave little coverage to the fact that there were prostitutes among the Iraqi criminal prisoners, who are seen posing with bare breasts for the Army Reservists who took their pictures. In addition, there were scores of naked Iraqi male detainees, partly because of the humiliation strategy imposed upon them by orders from higher authorities and partly because there were not enough orange prison suits to go around. Remarkably, some of the prisoners had to wear women’s pink panties instead of male underwear because of a mistake in the supply order. It was a short step down to force some prisoners to wear them over the head as a funny form of humiliation.

Despite Chip Frederick’s requests to separate young and adult detainees, a group of Iraqi prisoners allegedly raped a fifteen-year-old boy who had been housed with them. Specialist Sabrina Harman marked one of these men on his leg with a Sharpie pen. “I am a Rapist” [sic]. On another of them, a lipstick face was drawn around his nipples with his prison ID number also marked with lipstick across his bare chest. The sexual atmosphere was explosive. There is evidence that one MP sodomized a male detainee with a chemical light and perhaps with a broomstick as well. Male detainees were frequently threatened with rape by certain guards. Other evidence implicates a male MP in raping a female detainee. It was becoming more like a porn palace than a military prison.

James Schlesinger, who headed one of the many independent investigations, described what he saw and heard about that night shift’s nightly activities. “It was like Animal House” (the movie). It was a Situation spiraling out of the control of any person.
Chip Frederick remembers that the abuses occurred in the following clustered chronological order:

1–10 October 2003: Nudity, handcuffing to cell doors, wearing women’s underwear. This was carried over from the relief in place with the 72nd MP Company.

1 October to 25 October. Sexual poses (in presence of MI—handcuffed together naked). Also an unknown soldier who was there claimed he was from GITMO and showed Graner some stress positions that were used at GITMO.

8 November. Riot at Ganci compound [one of the separate compounds within Abu Ghraib Prison]. Seven detainees being moved to the hard site (Tier 1A). Were in possession of multiple weapons and was planning to take an MP Hostage and kill the MP. This was the night of the pyramid, assaults, sexual poses and masturbation. Dogs came around this time.

Following a thorough investigation, General Antonio Taguba’s report itemizes a long set of abuses and torture practices attributed to various members of this MP unit on Tiers 1A and 1B. The charges in his damning report include the following:

- Breaking chemical lights and pouring the phosphoric liquid on detainees;
- Threatening detainees with a charged 9mm pistol;
- Pouring cold water on naked detainees;
- Beating detainees with a broom handle and a chair;
- Threatening male detainees with rape;
- Allowing a military police guard to stitch the wound of a detainee who was injured after being slammed against the wall in his cell;
- Sodomizing a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broomstick;
- Using military working dogs to frighten and intimidate detainees with threats of attack, who in one instance actually bit a detainee.

Intentional abuse of detainees by military police personnel included the following acts:

- Punching, slapping, and kicking detainees; jumping on their naked feet;
- Videotaping and photographing naked male and female detainees;
- Forcibly arranging detainees in various sexually explicit positions for photographing;
- Forcing detainees to remove their clothing and keeping them naked for several days at a time;
- Forcing naked male detainees to wear women’s underwear;
- Forcing groups of male detainees to masturbate themselves while being photographed and videotaped;
- Arranging naked male detainees in a pile and then jumping on them;
- Positioning a naked detainee on a MRE Box, with a sandbag on his head, and attaching wires to his fingers, toes, and penis to simulate electric torture;
- Placing a dog chain or strap around a naked detainee’s neck and having a female soldier pose for a picture;
- A male MP guard having sex with a female detainee;
- Using military working dogs (without muzzles) to intimidate and frighten detainees, and in at least one case biting and severely injuring a detainee;
- Taking photographs of dead Iraqi detainees.

“These findings are amply supported by written confessions provided by several of the suspects, written statements provided by detainees, and witness statements,” concludes General Taguba.40
Cautionary Notes

It would seem that such a list of military infractions and crimes would close the case on the accused. However, in that same report, General Taguba concludes that these MPs were set up to engage in some of these abuses by higher-ups. He states that "Military Intelligence (MI) interrogators and other US Government agency's interrogators actively requested that MP guards set physical and mental conditions for favourable interrogation of witnesses."

Major General George Fay's investigative report goes even further in providing a more damning statement about the active role that MI personnel played in these abuses. His report notes that for a period of seven months, "Military Intelligence personnel allegedly requested, encouraged, condoned or solicited Military Police personnel [the Army Reserve night shift guards] to abuse detainees, and/or participated in detainee abuse, and/or violated established interrogation procedures and applicable law." We will review both generals' reports more fully in the next chapter to highlight our focus on system failures and command complicity in the abuses.

The Night of October 25, 2003

Around midnight on Tier 1A, three Iraqi detainees were dragged from their cells, made to crawl on the floor naked, chained together, and forced into simulated sexual acts. One of the abuse photos shows this cluster of prisoners surrounded by about seven soldiers looking down on them. The key protagonists were an interrogator, Ramon Kroll, and MI Specialist Armin Cruz. Among those identified as a passive observer was MP Ken Davis. He watched it all and just walked away from it (forever sorry now that he did not intervene immediately). Another observer was MI Reservist Israel Rivera, who described it as a *Lord of the Flies* incident. He also did not intervene, but the next day Rivera blew the whistle on Cruz and Kroll. They were subsequently court-martialed, with Cruz getting eight months in prison and Kroll ten months in detention. Cruz's father had been the first Cuban to graduate from the United States Military Academy at West Point. Graner was also reported to have taken part in this incident but was not singled out as one of the abusers.

The trigger of this particular abuse was the rumor circulating that these prisoners had raped a boy detainee, and this was payback for that offense. Frederick also noted that he too had been upset by this incident because he had complained to superiors that such rapes would happen if youths were housed with adult prisoners. Ironically, a subsequent military investigation indicated that the rumor was false, or at least that these three prisoners had not been involved in any rape.

A powerful documentary about this event as an example of the night shift abuses was aired by the Canadian Broadcast Company's *Fifth Estate* television news (November 16, 2005). The full story, with moving testimonies and detailed background, is available from its website (see Notes).42

The Graner Catalyst

Reserve Corporal Charles Graner is to the Abu Ghraib Prison night shift what our "John Wayne" guard was to the night shift in the Stanford prison. Both were catalysts for making things happen. "John Wayne" went far beyond the margins of the role assigned him as he conducted "little experiments" of his own. Corporal Graner far exceeded his role in abusing prisoners both physically and psychologically. Significantly, both Graner and "John Wayne" are charismatic characters who radiated confidence and a tough-nosed, no-nonsense attitude that influenced others on their shift. Although Staff Sergeant Frederick was his military superior, Graner really took charge of Tier 1A even when Chip was present. It seems as though the original idea of taking the photos came from him, and many of the photos were made with his digital camera.

Graner, a member of the Marine Corps Reserve, had served as a prison guard in the Persian Gulf War—without incident. During Operation Desert Storm he worked the largest prisoner-of-war camp for about six weeks, again without incident. "He was one of the guys who kept our spirits up," a member of that company recalled. Another buddy remembered Graner as "a funny guy, outgoing, and quick to crack a joke." He added, "From what I saw, he did not have a malicious side." However, according to another member of Graner's unit, a potentially violent confrontation between him and some other soldiers with Iraqi prisoners was averted solely by field commanders who took charge and directed the unit's well-disciplined soldiers to take over.

A longtime neighbor who had known Graner for thirty years added to the
positive evaluation: "He was a real good guy. I have nothing but good things to say about Chuck. Never once did he give anyone a problem." His mother recorded his pride in his high school yearbook: "You have always made your father and me proud of you. You are the best." 43

However, on the other side of the ledger is a Graner who is reported to have physically abused his wife, who finally divorced him. Media accounts indicate that he also disciplined several times when he worked as a maximum-security prison corrections officer.

On the Tier 1A night shift, all external constraints on Graner's antisocial behavior were gone with the wind. Chaos and casual intimacies replaced military discipline; any semblance of a strong authority structure was nowhere in sight, and with the constant encouragement by military intelligence and civilian contract interrogators for him to "soften up" detainees prior to interrogation, Graner was readily led into temptation.

Charles Graner was totally sexualized in that permissively volatile setting. He was having a sexual affair with Lynndie England, documenting it in many photos. He made an Iraqi woman prisoner expose her breasts and genitals while he photographed her. It is reported that Graner forced group masturbation among the prisoners and ordered naked male prisoners to crawl around on the ground so that their genitals had to drag along the floor," while he shouted at them that they were "f*cking fags." 44 In addition, Graner was the one who first thought of piling naked prisoners in a pyramid. And when a group of naked prisoners with bags over their heads was forced to masturbate in front of male and female soldiers, Graner jokingly told Lynndie England that "the line of masturbating detainees was a gift for her birthday." 45

After his trial, Chip Frederick wrote to me about Graner. "I don't put all the blame on him. He just had a way about him to get you to think that everything was Okay. I am very sorry for my actions and if I could go back to Oct 2003 I would do things differently. . . . I wish that I could have been stronger . . . ." 46

Specialist Matthew Wisdom, who first reported the abuses to his superiors in November 2003 (though his complaint was ignored), gave testimony in Graner's trial. He said that Graner enjoyed beating inmates and moreover that he had laughed, whistled, and sung while abusing them. When Specialist Joe Darby asked Graner about a shooting that had taken place on the tier, Graner handed him two CDs filled with the incriminating photographs. Upset at the immorality of the scenes they depicted, Darby asked Graner what they signified to him. Graner replied, "The Christian in me says it's wrong, but the corrections officer in me says, I love to make a grown man piss himself."

Chip Frederick still regrets coming under Graner's influence. Here is one instance where there was predictive validity of Chip's personality tendencies to conform and comply. Recall the conclusions from his psychological assessment: Chip usually fears being rejected by others, and so in any disagreement, he often gives way in order to be accepted; he changes his mind to accommodate others so that they will not be "mad at me or hate me." Others can influence him even when he believes that he has made up his mind. Sadly, his mind was undermined by stress, fear, exhaustion, and Graner's influence.

An Alternative Take on Charles Graner

In Akira Kurosawa's classic Japanese movie Rashomon, the same event is described in very different ways by a group of people who all experienced it. I have mentioned that that was the case with the Stanford Prison Experiment. Guard "John Wayne" and Prisoner Doug-861.2 later told the media that they had only been "acting" sadistic or pretending to go crazy, respectively. More recently, former Guard Hellmann, gave yet another version of his actions:

At the time, if you had questioned me about the effect I was having, I would say, well, they must be a wimp, They're weak or they're faking. Because I wouldn't believe that what I was doing could actually cause somebody to have a nervous breakdown. It was just us sorta getting our jollies with it. You know. Let's be like puppeteers here. Let's make these people do things. 47

Other SPE prisoners and guards reported that it was either a terrible experience or no big deal. Reality, to some extent, is in the mind of the beholder. However, at Abu Ghrabi, people's lives were dramatically impacted by the reality consensus of the military, the military court, and the media.

Charles Graner was portrayed from the outset of the investigation as the true "bad apple." In the bunch—sed, evil, engaging in wanton abuses against detainees. His past record of trouble in a previous corrections facility in the United States was presented as evidence that he had brought a violent, antisocial nature into Tier 1A. It was irresponsible media hype.

To the contrary, an examination of Graner's performance file from the Corrections Institute in Greene County, Pennsylvania, reveals that he had never been accused, suspected of, or disciplined for any offense or maltreatment of any inmate.

An even more dramatic contrast between Graner as irresponsible officer and Graner as good soldier is found in his performance evaluation during the key month of the prisoner abuses. On November 16, 2003, in a Developmental Counseling Form (4856) given to Graner by the platoon leader Captain Brinson, he is singled out for the fine job he has been doing:

Cpl. Graner, you are doing a fine job in Tier 1 of the BCF as the NCOIC of the "MI Hold" area. You have received many accolades from the MI units here and specifically from LTC [blackened: likely Lt. Col. Jordan]. Continue to perform at this level and it will help us succeed at our overall mission.

He is then cautioned to wear his military uniform and to maintain proper military appearance (which no one on that tier had been doing). A second cau-
tion recognizes the high stress level that he and others have been operating under on that tier. Graner is asked to be aware of effects that such stress might have on his behavior, specifically with regard to the use of force in dealing with a particular detainee. However, Graner’s version of the appropriate use of force is accepted by this officer. “I 100 percent support your decision when you believe you must defend yourself,” adds the officer. (A PDF file of this counseling statement is available; see the Notes, p. 518.)

MP Reservist Ken Davis recently gave a surprisingly supportive account of an interaction he had with Graner:

One evening, after he got off of his shift, he [Graner] was hoarse.

And I said: “Graner, are you getting sick?”

And he goes, “No.”

And I said, “Well, what’s going on?”

And, he said, “Well, I’m havin’ to yell, and do other things to detainees that I feel are morally and ethically wrong. What do you think I should do?”

I said, “Then don’t do ‘em.”

And he goes, “I don’t have a choice.”

And I said, “What do you mean?”

He says, “Every time a bomb goes off outside the wire, or outside the fence, they come in, and they tell me, that’s another American losin’ their life. And unless you help us, their blood’s on your hands as well.”

Given this awareness of the high stress levels on Tier 1A, one might assume that some mental health personnel would be called in to help the soldiers in dealing constructively with the turmoil. A psychiatrist was assigned to Abu Ghraib for several months, but he did not treat or counsel any of the MPs who needed such expertise or work with any of the mentally ill detainees. Instead, it is reported that his main function was to assist military intelligence in making its interrogations more effective. Megan Ambuhl has asserted that “There were no credible claims of sodomy, or rape, nor were there pictures or videos of such, at least not by any of the 7 MP’s involved in this investigation.” She continued, “I have all the pictures and videos from the beginning of the investigation. I spent almost 13 hours a day on that block. No rapes or sodomy occurred.” Will we ever know what really happened there, and who and what was to blame for the horrors of Abu Ghraib?

THE “TROPHY PHOTOS”: DIGITALLY DOCUMENTED DEPR AVITY

In wars between nations and in confrontations with criminals, soldiers, police, and prison guards have often been brutal in their abuse, torture, and murder of their “enemies,” suspects, or captives. Such actions are to be expected (but not accepted) in war zones, when lives are risked in the line of duty and when “foreigners” conduct the abuse against our soldiers. We do not expect or accept such behavior by agents of democratic governments when there is no imminent threat to their lives and when captives are vulnerable and unarmed.

Accordingly, many Americans were distressed some years back, in March 1991, when a televised videotape showed a group of Los Angeles police officers (LAPD) repeatedly beating an unarmed African-American motorist, Rodney King. More than fifty blows of their nightsticks were inflicted upon him as he lay on the ground helpless, while two dozen law enforcement officers watched the beating, and some of them assisted in holding King down by placing their feet on his back.

In her analysis of the power of visual images in modern society, novelist Susan Sontag wrote:

For a long time—at least six decades—photographs have laid down the tracks of how important conflicts are judged and remembered. The Western memory museum is now mostly a visual one. Photographs have an insuperable power to determine what we recall of events, and it now seems probable that the defining association of people everywhere with the war that the United States launched pre-emptively in Iraq last year will be photographs of the torture of Iraqi prisoners by Americans in the most infamous of Saddam Hussein’s prisons, Abu Ghraib.

Sontag went on to highlight the content of those images as indicative of the worst excesses of a culture grown shameless as its citizens are exposed daily to TV shows like Jerry Springer’s and others where participants are vying to humiliate themselves publicly. She indict American culture as one that admires unrestrained power and dominance. Sontag illustrates its shamelessness further with reference to the Pentagon’s “Shock and Awe” label of its assault against Baghdad in March 2003 in advance of the battle. (Since then, some critics have proposed an alternative of “Shame and Awful” to characterize what has been done since then to Iraq by the military and irresponsible civilian corporations.)

The digital images coming out of Abu Ghraib had a unique impact on people throughout the world. Never before had we seen such visual evidence of sexual abuse and torture by prison guards or of men and women apparently enjoying their heinous deeds and then having the audacity to pose themselves and record their brutal actions. How could they have done it? Why did they give these abuses their personal visual signatures? Let’s consider some possible explanations.

Digital Power

One simple answer is that new digital technology makes everyone an instant photographer. It provides immediate feedback and no development waiting time, and its images can easily be readily shared online without being censored by film-developing laboratories. Because these cameras are conveniently small in size, large in capacity, and relatively inexpensive, they are so ubiquitous that it is easy for anyone to take hundreds of photos on the spot. Just as Web logs (blogs) and
personal webcasts allow ordinary people to experience unedited moments of fleeting fame, so too does "owning" unusual photo images that can be distributed worldwide via a host of websites gives others their moment of glory.

Consider the fact that one amateur porn site encouraged its male viewers to submit nude images of their wives and girlfriends to be posted in exchange for free access to the porn videos it made available. Soldiers were invited also to exchange war zone photos for the same free access to porn, and many did. A "zero" warning was put on some of those images, such as the one of a group of American soldiers smiling and giving high fives in front of the burned remains of an Iraqi, with the caption "Burn Baby Burn."

**Trophy Photos from Other Eras**

Such images are reminiscent of the "trophy photos" of black men and women being lynched or burned alive in the United States between the 1880s and 1930s as onlookers and perpetrators posed for the camera. We saw in the last chapter that such images are emblematic of dehumanization at its worst, because, in addition to depicting the torture and murder of black Americans for often spurious "crimes" against whites, the photos that documented these unholy events were made into postcards to be bought and sent to friends and relatives. Some of the images included smiling young children brought along by their parents to witness the torment of black men and women being violently murdered. A documentary catalogue of many of these postcards is found in the recent book *Without Sanctuary.*

Other such trophy photos were taken by German soldiers during the Second World War of their personal atrocities against Polish Jews and Russians. We noted in the previous chapter that even "ordinary men," old German policeman who had initially resisted shooting to death families of Jews, over time came to document their murderous deeds as executioners. Still other visual repositories exist of such executions with their executioners, as can be seen in Janina Struk's *Photographing the Holocaust.* The Turks' massacre of Armenians is also documented in photographs contained in a website devoted to that genocide.

Another genre of trophy photos common in pre-animal-rights era is that of big-game hunters and sports fishermen exulting over their marlin, tigers, or grizzly bears. I recall seeing a photo of Ernest Hemingway in such a pose. However, the classic iconic image of the fearless safari hunter is that of the American president Teddy Roosevelt proudly standing behind a huge rhino that he had just bagged. Another shows the former president and son Kermit sitting atop a water buffalo in a nonchalant pose with legs crossed, big gun in hand. Such trophy photos were public statements of man's power and mastery over nature's mighty beasts—overcome by his skill, courage, and technology. Curiously, in those photos, the victors appear rather grim, rarely are they smiling; they are victors in a battle against formidable adversaries. In a sense, they pose like the young David with his sling shot before the fallen giant Goliath.

**Exhibitionists Performing for Voyeurs**

The grinning faces of many of the night shift guards at Abu Ghraib suggest a different dimension of trophy photos: the exhibitionistic. Some photos seem as though the abuses were merely available props for the exhibitionists to document the extremes to which they could go in that unusual setting. These exhibitionists also seem to anticipate an audience of eager voyeurs who would enjoy the sight of these antics. However, they failed to realize that file sharing and easy distribution would make the digital images independent of the photographers: they would lose control over who would get to view them—and thus they were caught red-handed by the authorities.

With the exception of the iconic image of torture of the hooded man with electrodes on his hands and the photos of dogs menacing prisoners, most of the other trophy pictures are sexual in nature. The link between torture and sexuality gives them a pornographic quality that is disturbing, yet fascinating, for many viewers. We are all invited down into that sadomasochistic dungeon to get a close look at these excesses in action. Though it is horrible to view these abuses, people keep looking at them.

I was surprised to discover the extent of voyeurism that is now being satisfied via the World Wide Web. A website named simply www.voyeurweb.com claims to attract 2.2 million unique visitors daily to its free amateur porn site for Web surfers.

**Complex Motives and Social Dynamics**

Human behavior is complex, so there is often more than one reason for any given act, and in Abu Ghraib, I believe these digital images were the product of multiple
motives and interpersonal dynamics in addition to the sexuality and exhibitionism. Status and power, revenge and retaliation, deindividuation of the helpless—it is likely that all were involved in the abuses and the photo taking. In addition, we must consider that some of them were actually condoned and staged by the interrogators.

**Staged Photos Used to Threaten Detainees**

There is one simple reason for the trophy photos at Abu Ghraib: the MPs were told to pose for them by the interrogators, civilian and military. One version of the story, according to retired officer Janis Karpinski and reported earlier by some of the accused soldiers, was that initially the idea for taking the posed photos was used as threats to aid interrogations. “They set those photos up to get confessions, 'to cut to the chase',” said Karpinski on May 4, 2006, during a panel held at Stanford University. They would take out the laptops, show the photos, and tell the prisoners, ‘Start talking or tomorrow you are at the bottom of the pit.’ It was done intentionally, methodically.”

Surely, some of the photos are clearly posed for someone’s camera, with MPs smiling for the camera, giving high fives, and pointing at something to notice in the scene. The dehumanizing photo of Lynndie England dragging a detainee on the ground with a dog leash around his neck is most likely of that origin. It is unlikely she went to Iraq with a dog leash in her duty bag. However, all that was necessary for social facilitation to take over was for any official to give the MPs permission to take even one such photo of abuse. That permission opened the doors to this new nightly activity of ever more scenes of creative evil at work.

**Abu Ghraib Photos**

Comparative literature professor Judith Butler invites us to reconsider the significance of the Abu Ghraib photographs not as coming from the whims of particular MPs taking them. Rather, she argues that the MPs were “embedding photographers” whose images reflected the basic values of their military—homophobia, misogyny, and dominance over all enemies.

**Getting Status, Getting Revenge**

Let’s acknowledge the generally low status of Army Reservists within the military hierarchy, which was further degrading for a reservist MP assigned to the night shift in a horrible prison. They realized that they were at the bottom of the barrel, working under awful conditions, taking orders from civilians, and without recourse to authorities that cared enough to check out what was going on there. The only ones on the scene with lower status were the prisoners themselves.

Therefore, the nature of the abuses as well as their documentation served to establish the unequivocal social dominance of every guard over all of their prisoners through this downward comparison. The torture and abuse were an exercise of pure power for the sake of demonstrating their absolute control over their inferiors. The photos were needed by some of these guards to convince themselves of their superiority, as well as to broadcast their dominant status to their peers. The photos gave them “bragging rights.” It is also likely that racism was involved to some extent, with generally negative attitudes toward Arabs as a very different “other.” This was a carryover of hostility from the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against all brown-skinned men of any Arabic background.

A more immediate motive shared by many soldiers was revenge for fellow soldiers who had been killed or seriously wounded by Iraqi insurgents. It is apparent that revenge led to retaliation against innocence who had killed their or who had allegedly raped a boy. For example, the seven prisoners arrayed in the pyramid had been sent to Tier 1A after rioting in Camp Xan and hurting a female MP in the process. Humiliating and beating them up was “teaching them a lesson” about the consequences of getting out of control. For instance, the only prisoner Chip Frederick ever hit was the one he punched hard in the chest because he allegedly threw a rock that hurt the female MP. Forcing detainees to simulate fellatio or to masturbate in public in front of women soldiers and then documenting this humiliation was more than just a tactic of embarrassment. It was the MPs’ sexual scenarios as payback for detainees they felt had gone over the line.

**Deindividuation and the Mardi Gras Effect**

Nevertheless, how do we account for Lynndie England’s conception that it was all just fun and games? In this case, I believe, deindividuation is involved. The anonymity of person and place that we noted earlier can create an altered state of mind, which, when combined with diffused responsibility for one’s actions, induces deindividuation. Actors become immersed in their high-intensity physical actions without rational planning or regard for consequences. The past and future give way to an immediate-present, hedonistic time perspective. It is a mind space in which emotion rules reason, and constraints on passion are loosened.

It is the “Mardi Gras effect” of living for the moment behind a mask that conceals one’s identity and gives vent to licentious, violent, and selfish impulses that are ordinarily contained. Behavior then erupts in response to immediate situational demands, without planned conspiracy or malicious forethought. We saw what happened when this Lord of the Flies phenomenon was brought into my NYU laboratory as deindividuated women gave ever-increasing shocks to innocent victims. It was also re-created by some of the guards in our Stanford prison. In these situations, as in Abu Ghraib, standard social constraints against aggression and antisocial action were suspended as people experienced extended latitudes of behavioral freedom.

Just as I did not encourage my guards to act sadistically, neither did the military encourage its guards to engage in sexual abuse against prisoners. Never-
theless, in both situations a general norm of permissiveness prevailed that created a sense that the guards could do pretty much whatever they felt like doing because they were not personally accountable and could get away with anything because no one was watching. In that context, traditional moral reasoning diminished. actions speak louder than old learned lessons, and Dionysian impulses suppress Apollonian rationality. Moral disengagement operated then to change the mental and emotional landscape of those caught up in its web.

Comparable Abuses by British and Elite U.S. Soldiers

If the social psychological principles that I argue were operating on that Tier 1A night shift are not person-specific but situation-specific, we should find similar abuses in other similar settings perpetrated by very different soldiers in that same combat zone. Indeed, there are at least two verified instances of such behavior—both of which were hardly noticed by the U.S. media.

British soldiers stationed at the Basra Prison in Iraq also sexually abused their captives, forcing them to simulate sodomy on each other after stripping them naked. Their photos shocked the British public, who could not believe that these young men would ever do such terrible deeds and then even document them. The fact that one of the abusers was a decorated hero from earlier combat was an even greater violation of the British public’s expectations. Even worse and more to the point was what BBC News reported on June 29, 2004: “UK troops swapped abuse photos.” The subtitle added, “British soldiers have swapped hundreds of photos showing brutality against Iraqi captives.” Several soldiers who were serving as members of the elite Queen’s Lancashire Regiment gave some of the images to the Daily Mirror, one of which showed a hooded prisoner being struck with a rifle butt, urinated on, and with a gun held to his head. The soldiers claimed that there were many more pictures of such abuse that they shared in a “culture of trading pictures.” However, their Army commanders destroyed them when they were found in their luggage as they were leaving Iraq.

On the May 12, 2004, edition of 60 Minutes II, CBS’s Dan Rather ran a home video made by an American soldier that revealed what conditions were like at both Camp Bucca and Abu Ghraib. The video segment shows a young soldier’s disdain for the Iraqi prisoners. She says: “We’ve already had two prisoners die… but who cares? That’s two less for me to worry about.” Several other soldiers who were at Camp Bucca and are accused of abusing prisoners there told Rather that “the problems began with the chain of command—the same chain of command that was in charge of Abu Ghraib when the pictures of torture and abuse were taken.”

Another documented instance of this loss of control involved U.S. soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division who were stationed at the forward operating base (FOB) Mercury, near Fallujah. It was the place where insurgents and other captives were temporarily imprisoned before being shipped off to Abu Ghraib. “The murderous maniacs” is what they [Fallujah citizens] called us because the
We will meet the captain again in the next chapter, where his detailed description of the abuses perpetrated by his unit matches those in Tier 1A, with the exception of the sexual abuse.

PUTTING SERGEANT IVAN FREDERICK ON TRIAL

The team of military investigators and prosecutors invested considerable zeal in preparing the cases against each of the seven accused MPs. (Had the military command responsible for Abu Ghraib invested a fraction of that attention, concern, and resources in oversight and maintenance of discipline, there would have been no need for these trials.) Their game plan was simple and compelling: After gathering sufficient evidence and testimonies, they worked out plea bargain deals with each of the defendants whereby the most extreme sentences possible would be reduced if they pled guilty and testified against their fellow MPs. The trials began with those most minimally involved, such as Specialist Jeremy Sivits, to "give it up" on each of the others, working up to the big three: Frederick, Graner, and England.

Five charges were leveled against Frederick. In a Stipulation of Fact, as part of his plea bargain, the accused accepted them as true, susceptible to proof, and also admissible in evidence:

**Conspiracy to Maltreat Detainees.** Conspiracy charges are usually difficult to prove in civilian courts without hard evidence, in writing or in audio- or videotape.

The planning. However, in this case the MPs' conspiracy consisted of entering into a "nonverbal agreement" with other MPs on Tier 1A of the hard site. That means a "wordless conspiracy" existed among the accused and with Davis, Graner, Ambuhl, Harman, Sivits, and England. They are alleged to have agreed as a group "to engage in specific acts which served to maltreat detainees (subordinates), which is a violation of Article 93 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice" (Stipulation of Fact, p. 3). Does that mean by a wink and a nod or hand gestures? Alternatively, does it mean that they engaged in these documented activities in concert and therefore, in retrospect, there must have been an a priori conspiracy?

**Dereliction of Duty.** As the noncommissioned officer in charge, Frederick "had a duty to treat all detainees with dignity and respect and to protect detainees and prisoners in his presence from illegal abuse, cruelty, and maltreatment" (Stipulation of Fact, p. 6). He was derelict in all these duties.

**Maltreatment of Detainees.** This refers to the hooded prisoner with electrodes attached to his fingers, who was led to believe that if he fell off the box he was forced to stand on, he would be electrocuted. Frederick attached one of those wires to the prisoner's left hand and took a photo of it as a "souvenir." (Also mentioned in this charge as background is the reason that this detainee, nicknamed "Gilligan," was made to stand on the box for long periods in a stress position. He was being kept "awake as part of a sleep management program. Sleep management normally includes rigorous physical exercise to keep a detainee awake before being interrogated" [Stipulation of Fact, p. 6]). There are other specifications of maltreatment of several detainees in the human pyramid and putting a detainee, nicknamed "shitboy" (because he covered himself with feces), between two medical litters (in an attempt to get him to stop defecating) and then Frederick had his photo taken sitting on top of the detainee. (It should be mentioned that the medic advised this treatment of putting the mentally unstable detainee strapped between two litters to keep him from harming himself; it was not Frederick's idea but rather following medical protocol.)

**Assault Consummated by Battery.** Frederick once punched a detainee in the chest "with enough force to cause the detainee to have difficulty breathing" (Stipulation of Fact, p. 8). (This detainee was one of the rioters brought to Tier 1A after their attempted escape and battery against a female MP at Camp Ganci.)

**Indecent Acts with Another.** This refers to the accused forcing several detainees to masturbate in front of male and female soldiers and other detainees, while they were being photographed. "Under the circumstances, the conduct of the accused was of a nature to bring discredit upon the armed forces and was prejudicial to good order and discipline," the stipulation goes on. "These photographs and other images captured by the accused and his co-conspirators were taken for personal..."
reasons. The images were saved on personal computers and not for official purposes" (Stipulation of Fact, p. 9).

The Trial

Frederick's trial was held in Baghdad on October 20 and 21, 2004, despite the defense counsel's motion for a change of venue to the United States. Since I refused to go to such a dangerous place, I went instead to the naval base in Naples, Italy, where I gave my testimony in a videoconference in a highly secured room. It was a difficult setting because, first, my testimony was being disrupted by delayed audio feedback, and second, the images of the trial on the video screen sometimes froze. Compounding the difficulty was the fact that I was talking to a TV screen and not interacting directly with the judge. To make it even more difficult, I was told not to use notes during my testimony, which meant that I had to recall from memory the hundreds of pages of the five investigative reports that I had carefully read plus all the other background information I had amassed on Frederick and the Tier 1A conditions.

Given that Frederick had already entered a guilty plea, my testimony was focused entirely on specifying the situational and systemic influences on his behavior that had been induced by the impact of an abnormal setting on a very normal young man. I also outlined the psychological assessment results, the positive aspects of his background before he was assigned to Tier 1A, and highlights from my interview with him. This was done in an effort to support the conclusion that Frederick had brought no pathological tendencies into that behavioral context. Rather, I argued that the situation had brought out the aberrant behaviors in which he engaged and for which he is both sorry and guilty.

I also made clear that, in trying to understand how Frederick's actions were impacted by situational social dynamics, I was engaging not in "excusology" but rather in a conceptual analysis that is not usually considered serious enough in sentencing decisions. In addition, in giving my credentials and relevance to this case, I outlined the main features and findings and some parallels between the Stanford Prison Experiment and the environment of abuse at Abu Ghraib Prison. (My full testimony appears on pages 294 to 330 of "Ivan Chip Frederick's Trial Transcripts," October 2004. Unfortunately, it is not available online.)

The prosecutor, Major Michael Holley, dismissed the thrust of my situational argument. He argued that Frederick knew right from wrong, had adequate military training for the job, and essentially had made a rational decision to engage in the immoral, detrimental behaviors with which he was charged. Thus he put all the blame on Frederick's disposition to knowingly do evil, while pushing any situational or systemic influences out of consideration by the court. He also implied that the Geneva Conventions was in effect and that these soldiers should have known its constraints. That is not true, as we will see in the next chapter: President George Bush and his legal advisers changed the definition of these detainees and of torture in a set of legal memos that rendered the Geneva Conventions obsolete during this "war on terror."

The Verdict

The military judge, Colonel James Pohl, took only one hour to return his verdict of guilty as charged on all counts. Frederick's prison sentence was set at eight years. My testimony apparently had a minimal effect on the severity of his sentence, as did the eloquent plea of his attorney, Gary Myers. All of the situational and systemic factors that I detailed were worth little on the international public relations stage that had been established by the military and the Bush administration chains of command. They had to show the world and the Iraqi people that they were "tough on crime" and would swiftly punish these few rogue soldiers, the "bad apples" in the otherwise good U.S. Army barrel. Once all of them had been tried, sentenced, and jailed, only then might this stain on the American military fade away.

Charles Graner refused to plead guilty and got a ten-year sentence. Lynndie England, in a complicated series of trials, was sentenced to three years in prison. Jeremy Sivits got one year, while Javal Davis got six months. Sabrina Harman got off with a light sentence of six months based on evidence of her prior kindness to Iraqis before she was assigned to Abu Ghraib. Finally, Megan Ambuhl was discharged without any prison time.

Some Relevant Comparisons

There is no question that the abuses engaged in by Chip Frederick brought physical and emotional suffering to prisoners under his charge and enduring humiliation and anger to their families. He pled guilty, was found guilty as charged and given a stern sentence. From the Iraqis' perspective it was too lenient: from my perspective it was too severe, given the circumstances that had precipitated and sustained the abuses. However, it is instructive to compare his sentence to that of another soldier in another war who was found guilty of capital offenses against civilians.

One of the earlier stains on the pride of the U.S. military came during the Vietnam War, when soldiers in Charlie Company invaded the village of My Lai in search of Viet Cong fighters. None were found there, but the chronic stresses, frustrations, and fears of these soldiers erupted in unimaginable fury against the local civilians. More than five hundred Vietnamese women, children, and elderly people were murdered in close-up machine-gun barrages or burned alive in their huts, and many women were raped and dismembered. Some of them were even scalped! Terrifying descriptions of these cruelties were voiced in a matter-of-fact way by some of the soldiers in the film, Interviews with My Lai Vets. Seymour Hersh provided a detailed account of the atrocities in his book, My Lai 4, which publicly exposed them for the first time a year later.

Only one soldier was found guilty for these crimes, Lieutenant William Cal-
ley, Jr. His senior officer, Captain Ernest Medina, who was on site during his "search-and-destroy mission," and reported to be personally firing at the civilians, was acquitted of all charges and he resigned from service. Captain Medina, nicknamed "Mad Dog," had been really proud of his men in Charlie Company claiming, "We had become the best company in the battalion." Perhaps this was a premature rush to judgment.

Lieutenant Calley was found guilty of the premeditated murder of more than a hundred Vietnamese civilians at My Lai. His original life sentence was reduced to three and a half years, which he served in the barracks under house arrest—never spending a day in prison. Most people don't know that he subsequently received a pardon for these mass murders and returned to his community to become a paid after-dinner speaker and honored businessman. Might it have been different if Calley had been just an enlisted man and not an officer? Might it have also been different if "trophy photos" had been taken by the soldiers of Charlie Company that would have made vivid and real what words about such rural atrocities failed to convey? I think so.

Another set of relevant comparisons comes from lining up some of these night shift MPs against other soldiers who have been recently charged and sentenced by military courts for various crimes. It becomes apparent that though convicted for similar or even worse crimes, the sentences handed down to these other soldiers were much more lenient.

**Staff Sergeant Frederick**'s maximum sentence for his crimes was 10 years in prison, dishonourable discharge (DD), and reduction to the lowest rank, E1. With his plea bargain, he received 8 years in prison, DD, demotion to E1, and forfeiture of all pay and allowances, including 22 years of his saved retirement income.

**Corporal Berg** was found guilty of negligent homicide, self-injury, and false statements. Maximum sentence: 11 years in prison. Received: 18 months and E1.

**Sergeant First Class Price** was found guilty of assault, maltreatment, and obstruction of justice. Maximum sentence: 8 years in prison, DD, and E1. Received: reduction in rank to SSG, no prison time, no DD.

**Corporal Graner** was found guilty of assault, maltreatment, nonverbal conspiracy, indecent acts, and dereliction of duty. Maximum sentence: 15 years in prison, DD, and E1. Received: 10 years in prison, DD, E1, and a fine.

**Private Brant** was found guilty of assault, maltreatment, false swearing, and maiming. Maximum sentence: 16 years in prison, DD, and E1. Received: only reduction in rank to E1.

**Sergeant (name withheld)** was found guilty of assault, unlawful discharge of firearm, robbery, and dereliction of duty. Maximum sentence: 24.5 years in prison, DD, and E1. Received: only a letter of reprimand.

**Private England** was found guilty of conspiracy, maltreatment, and indecent act. Maximum sentence: 10 years in prison, DD, and E1. Received: 3 years in prison.

**Sergeant First Class Perkins** was found guilty of aggravated assault, assault and battery, and obstruction of justice. Maximum sentence: 11.5 years in prison, DD, and E1. Received: 6 months in prison and reduction in rank to staff sergeant.

**Captain Martin** was found guilty of aggravated assault, assault, obstruction of justice, and conduct unbecoming of an officer. Maximum sentence: 9 years in prison. Received: 45 days in prison.

Clearly, then, the scales of military justice were not even balanced for these comparable crimes. I believe it was the trophy photos that added considerable weight to bias the legal decisions against the night shift MPs. For a fuller set of such comparisons and a listing of sixty soldiers who have been court-martialed and their dispositions, as well as other clarifications to the record on the Abu Ghraib abuses, please see the interesting website www.supportmpcircumstance.com.

**THE TRANSFORMATION OF PRISON GUARD IVAN FREDERICK INTO PRISONER NUMBER 789689**

Our focus in attempting to describe the Lucifer Effect has been on understanding transformations of human character. Perhaps one of the most extreme and rare transformations imaginable takes place in someone going from a position of power as a prison guard to a position of total powerlessness as a prisoner. That is sadly so in the case of this once fine corrections officer, dedicated soldier, and loving husband. He has been battered and nearly broken by the verdict against him from the military court and his subsequent cruel treatment in confinement. Chip Frederick is now reduced to a number—789689—as an inmate on "Warehouse Road" in the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth. After being sentenced in Baghdad, Chip was shipped off to Kuwait, where he was put in solitary confinement, even though he posed no danger to himself or others. He describes conditions there as being reminiscent of his tiers at Abu Ghraib, but his situation got worse when he was imprisoned at Fort Leavenworth.

Chip had been given medications for the insomnia, depression, and anxiety attacks that he suffered in the year since the scandal broke. However, in the Kansas prison he was denied all meds, forced to "go cold turkey." That meant not
The Lucifer Effect

sleeping and being under constant stress. "I don't think I can do it. I don't think that I can take it anymore."
he wrote to me on Christmas 2004. He was put in a small, cold cell, given only two thin blankets and no pillow, and forced to wear dirty, worn socks and underwear with fecal and urine stains. His subhuman treatment was extended when he went to Texas for the trial of a fellow MP. The military publicly stripped his uniform of the nine honor medals and ribbons he had worn over twenty years of military service while he watched in tears. Moreover, to ease his salt into his wounds, he was brought in front of the courthouse so the media could see him in his shackles. He is reminded daily that you do not do things that humiliate the U.S. Army without suffering payback.

Now that all the trials of the "Abu Ghraib Seven" are over, Chip Frederick's treatment has improved. He is going to barber school in the prison to learn a new trade because he can never serve as a corrections officer again. "I would love to be reinstated back into the Army to go back over there and prove myself I was the one to never give up on anything and that it was me that could make a difference. ... I was very prepared to die for my country, my family and my friends. I wanted to be the one to make a difference. ... I am proud that I served much of my adult life for my country."64

Do you see the parallel with Stew-819, the SPE prisoner who insisted on going back into our prison to show his mates that he was not a bad prisoner? It's also reminiscent of a classic social psychological experiment that showed greater loyalty to one's group the more severe the initiation into it.65

Martha Frederick's life has also been shattered by these trials and tribulations. You may recall that she is a corrections officer in the Pennsylvania prison where they met. "Abu-Iraq is the pit of inhumanity and Abu has become the graveyard where my life as I know it was laid to rest 'Uncle Phil.' ... Normal life as I once knew it will NEVER be again. Life now is broken, I thought there was no hope of any change, but I was wrong. There is hope."66

Another side effect of this sad story is Martha's recent decision to divorce Chip because of the financial and emotional burdens she has had to endure. The decision has been yet another devastating blow to him. However, she remains steadfast in her support of him. She wrote me, "I have stood beside him, in front of him and behind him through all that has occurred. And I will continue to do so even separate from the bonds of marriage. But I just can't go on living in this vacuum."67

Finally, there is another sad answer to the question of whether the abuses interrogations were worth it. Did they yield the actionable intelligence being sought by the military and civilian command? Perhaps, but no, not likely, maybe a bit, but hardly worth justifying the irreparable damage to America's moral image, or the suffering of those interrogated and the lasting psychological impact on the interrogators. Of course, administration sources will say that they did get what they were looking for, but it is classified so they can never tell us how much the coercive interrogations helped in their war on terror and secondary war on insurgents. They are not immune to lying to cover their tracks. However, most experts on torture and on police interrogations agree that such physical abuse committed with humiliating and degrading tactics rarely yields trustworthy evidence. You get confessions and admissions by building rapport not by bullying, by earning trust not by fostering hatred.

We have seen earlier the negative reactions of some of the soldiers who participated in these military interrogations. Too many innocents were detained who had no useful information to offer; too few trained interrogators, fewer trained translators, and too great a demand from top down to get information immediately—no questions asked. Political scientist and torture expert Darius Rejali has gone on record doubting the reliability of such interrogation procedures used throughout military bases in Iraq, Gitmo, and Afghanistan. He contends there is a consensus that people will say anything under conditions of physical coercion. You will find statements to this effect from official U.S. government documents, including the U.S. Army Field Manual for Interrogation (FM 30-15), the CIA "Kubark Manual (1963), and the Human Resources Exploitation Manual (1985). In one of his essays on Salon.com, Rejali asserts that torture may have a dark allure, giving the interrogator a druglike rush while immersed in the process, but leaving a legacy of destruction that takes generations to undo.68

FINAL NOTES

In the next chapter, we will move from our focus on individual soldiers caught up in an inhuman behavioral setting to consider the role that the System played in creating the conditions that fostered the abuses and torture at Abu Ghraib and in many other military prisons. There we will examine the complexities of systemic influences that operated to create and sustain a "culture of abuse." First, we will review highlights of the many independent military investigations into these abuses. That will allow us to measure the extent to which those investigations implicate System variables, such as leadership failures, little or no mission specific training, inadequate resources, and interrogation-confession priorities, as major contributors to what occurred on that night shift in Abu Ghraib. Then we will examine reports from Human Rights Watch of other comparable—and some even worse—abuses reported by officers in the Army's elite 82nd Airborne Division in Iraq. We will broaden our search to investigate the ways in which military and government chains of command created similar situations in other military prisons to facilitate their "war on terrorism" and "war on insurgency." We will do so with the help of interviews and analyses reported in a PBS Frontline documentary, "A Question of Torture" (October 18, 2005), which details the role of the Bush administration and the military's chain of command in first sanctioning such torture in Guantánamo Bay Prison and then transporting it to Abu Ghraib and beyond.

I will shift roles from behavioral scientist turned psychological investigative
reporter in the current chapter to that of prosecutor in the next. I will charge selected members of the military chain of command with misusing their authority to make torture operational at Guantánamo Bay Prison and then exporting those tactics to Abu Ghraib. They gave permission to the Military Police and military intelligence to employ these torture tactics—under sanitized terms—and failed to provide the leadership, oversight, accountability, and mission-specific training necessary for the MPs on the night shift on Tier 1A. I will argue that they are thus guilty of sins of both commission and omission.

In putting the System on hypothetical trial, we end by putting President Bush and his advisers in the dock for their role in redefining torture as an acceptable necessary tactic in their ubiquitous and nebulous war on terror. They are also charged with exempting captured insurgents and all “foreigners” under military arrest from the safeguards provided by the Geneva Conventions. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld is charged with creating the interrogation centers where “detainees” were subjected to a host of extremely coercive “abuses” for the dubious purpose of eliciting confessions and information. He is probably also responsible for other violations of American moral standards, such as “outsourcing the torture” of high-value detainees to foreign countries in the government’s “extraordinary rendition” program.

I intend to show that the System, from Bush to Cheney to Rumsfeld and down the hierarchy of command, laid the foundation for these abuses. If so, then we, as a democratic society, have much to do to ensure that future abuses are prevented by insisting that the System modify the structural features and operational policies of its interrogation centers.

We will end the next chapter on an upbeat note because in fact, a plan was put into place at Abu Ghraib to better train MPs, MI personnel, and interrogators in the exercise of their power. My psychologist colleague Colonel Larry James was sent to that prison recently (May 2004) to install a new set of operational procedures intended to deter the kind of violence we have examined in this chapter. Of special interest is the provision that all MPs and other relevant personnel view the DVD of the Stanford Prison Experiment as part of their training. How that came about and what effects it is having will be part of the good news to come out of this bad-news place.

That positive outlook will then carry us into the final chapter. There, I will try to balance some of the negativity with which we have been dealing in our long journey by offering two encouraging perspectives on learning ways to resist unwanted influences and on celebrating heroes and heroism.

Finally, I recognize that it may seem a stretch to some readers that I emphasize parallels between our little Stanford experiment in a simulated prison and the dangerous realities of a combat zone prison. It is not the physical dissimilarities that matter but the basic psychological dynamics that are comparable in both. I would point out farther that several independent investigators have made such comparisons, as in the Schlesinger report (quoted at the start of this chapter) and in a report by former Naval Cryptologist Alan Hensley. In his analysis of the defendants charged with the abuses, he concluded:

In the case of Abu Ghraib, a model described in detail in the Zimbardo Study, constructed of virtually identical factors, and resulting empirical evidence existed beforehand to predict with utmost certainty this chain of events would occur without conscious deliberation on the part of the participants.”

I want to end this phase of our journey with the analysis of Newsweek magazine’s Baghdad bureau chief, Ron Nordland, about what he thinks went wrong in a war that began with good intentions:

What went wrong? A lot, but the biggest turning point was the Abu Ghraib scandal. Since April 2004, the liberation of Iraq has become a desperate exercise in damage control. The abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib alienated a broad swath of the Iraqi public. On top of that it didn’t work. There is no evidence that all the mistreatment and humiliation saved a single American life or led to the capture of any major terrorist, despite claims by the military that the prison produced “actionable intelligence.”