

Promises: Waiting for Abu Ghraib amends

Pete Yost

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON — Fending off demands that he resign over the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, then-Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld told Congress in 2004 that he had found a legal way to compensate Iraqi detainees who suffered "grievous and brutal abuse and cruelty at the hands of a few members of the United States armed forces."

"It's the right thing to do," Rumsfeld said. "And it is my intention to see that we do."

Six years later, the U.S. Army is unable to document a single payment for prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib.

Nor can the more than 250 Iraqis or their lawyers now seeking redress in U.S. courts. Their hopes for compensation may rest on a Supreme Court decision this week.

The Army says about 30 former Abu Ghraib prisoners are seeking compensation from the U.S. Army Claims Service. Those claims are still being investigated; many do not involve inmate abuse.

The Army said that U.S. Forces-Iraq looked at its records and could not find any payments to former detainees. The Army also cannot verify whether any such payments were made informally through Iraqi leaders.

From the budget years 2003 to 2006, the Defense Department paid \$30.9 million to Iraqi and Afghan civilians who were killed, injured, or incurred property damage due to U.S. or coalition forces' actions during combat.

The Army has found no evi-

dence any of those payments were used to compensate victims of abuse at Abu Ghraib.

So instead of compensation, the legacy of the most infamous detainee abuse episode from President George W. Bush's tenure is lawsuits, and the court battle mirrors the Iraq war — a grinding, drawn-out conflict.

At the U.S. Supreme Court, the former detainees are asking the justices to step into a case alleging that civilian interrogators and linguists conspired with soldiers to abuse the prisoners.

All the detainees, who allege they were held at Abu Ghraib or one of the other 16 detention centers in Iraq, say they were eventually released without any charges against them.

Their case presents a fundamental legal issue: Can defense contractors working side by side with military jailers be sued for claims arising in a war zone?

The U.S. government is immune from suits arising from combatant activities of the military during time of war.

The ex-detainees are suing CACI International Inc. of Arlington, Va., and L-3 Services Inc. of New York, formerly Titan Corp. of San Diego. Both companies say the suits fail to link any of their employees to abuse.

The Supreme Court considers the case in private today and could announce as early as Tuesday whether it will take the case.

"It's really outrageous that there hasn't been a widespread commitment to compensate the clear victims of this abuse, and it's extremely troubling that the government doesn't appear able to



A U.S. soldier holds a dog in front of an Iraqi detainee at Abu Ghraib prison on the outskirts of Baghdad. At the U.S. Supreme Court, the former detainees are asking the justices to step into a case alleging that civilian interrogators and linguists conspired with soldiers to abuse the prisoners.

document any compensation for victims whatsoever," said Vince Warren, executive director of the Center for Constitutional Rights, a private group overseeing lawsuits against the civilian contractors since 2004.

"The U.S. government seems to have failed miserably in securing

at least one portion of the accountability for these actions," he said.

Although the U.S. military used signs, pamphlets, broadcasts and word of mouth to let the Iraqi public know how to make claims against U.S. forces, "very few claims appear to have been made" related to Abu Ghraib inmate

abuse, Lt. Col. Craig A. Ratcliff, an Army spokesman, told The Associated Press.

"We believe there could be several reasons for this, including the cultural and social stigma of having been detained or mistreated that could be a source of embarrassment..." he said.

Experts question BP's take on Gulf oil spill

Dina Cappiello

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON — Engineering experts probing the Gulf of Mexico oil spill exposed holes in BP's internal investigation as the company was questioned Sunday for the first time in public about its findings.

BP's lead investigator acknowledged that the company's probe had limitations.

Mark Bly, head of safety and operations for BP PLC, told a National Academy of Engineering committee that a lack of physical evidence and interviews with employees from other companies limited BP's study. The internal team only looked at the immediate cause of the April disaster, which killed 11 workers and unleashed 206 million gallons of oil into the Gulf.

"It is clear that you could go further into the analysis," said Bly, who said the investigation was geared to discovering things that BP could address in the short term. "This does not represent a complete penetration into potentially deeper issues."

For example, the National Academy of Engineering panel noted that the study avoided organizational flaws that could have contributed to the blast. BP has focused much of its work on decisions made on the rig, not with the managers on shore.

Najmedin Meshkati, a professor at the Viterbi School of Engineering at the University of Southern California, said he wondered why BP named its report an accident investigation when it left critical elements out. He asked BP to turn over information on shift duration and worker fatigue.

"How could you call this great work accident investigation ... (without) addressing human performance issues and organizational issues and decision-making issues?" Meshkati asked.

He referred specifically to the confusion that occurred leading up to the explosion, when many workers aboard the rig were busy with work associated with finishing up a well. This distraction could have led to missed signs that something was wrong.

"It wasn't intended to be anything that it isn't," Bly responded. "It was a good contribution and a good foundation for further work for BP itself and others."

Other experts questioned one of BP's central conclusions that the oil and gas traveled up the center pipe, rather than the space outside the pipe. One wanted to know whether a device designed to shut off an engine when it starts to rev — as it would in the presence of gas — failed. BP said it didn't know if the device worked or not.

BP's testimony, and the ques-



Cliff Owen/Associated Press

Kent Corser, Drilling Engineering Manager, BP North America Gas, testifies before the National Academy of Engineering committee on Sunday. Experts recently exposed holes in BP's internal investigation.

tioning, lasted more than three hours on Sunday. It was the first time BP's six-person investigation team was questioned publicly about its findings. Today and Tuesday in Washington, investigators will turn their attention to the government's response to the spill and its impact on the economy and environment at a hearing of the national spill commission set up by President Barack Obama.

BP's study found eight separate failures led to the oil rig accident. The report blamed BP and other companies, including Transocean, the rig's owner, and Halliburton Co., which was hired to do the cement work.

But the conclusions were made without examining the drilling rig, which remains on the sea floor, or

the blowout preventer, a key safety device that was brought to shore only recently. Instead, the company relied extensively on real-time data collected aboard the rig to reconstruct what happened. BP also did not have access to samples of the cement used to seal the well, and said Halliburton refused to supply a similar mix for testing. BP has said the cement failed.

Halliburton officials criticized the methodology that BP used to draw its conclusions and claim that the well's design played no role in the incident.

Thomas Roth, a Halliburton vice president, took aim at testing by a company hired by BP that found Halliburton's cement, which was injected with nitrogen to form a foam, was unstable.

Doctors use Web to help patients

Jennifer C. Yates

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

PITTSBURGH — Dr. Ricardo Munoz goes from room to room, examining three infants, one just three days old. He watches their chests to see how they are breathing, checks their vital signs flashing on monitors above their hospital beds and views x-rays and electrocardiograms.

And he does it all from more than 2,500 miles away.

Wearing a headset and looking at his laptop screen, the chief of cardiac intensive care at Pittsburgh's Hospital of Children checks on pediatric heart patients weekly at Fundacion Valle el Lili, a hospital in Cali, Colombia. The pilot program started earlier this year as a way to share the expertise of rare pediatric specialists with hospitals all over the world.

"Basically, this is globalization of medicine," Munoz said. "I don't need to travel. Via telemedicine, everything is possible."

Munoz, a native of Colombia, had visited the 700-bed adult and pediatric hospital before and worked with doctors there. From time to time, he would consult on pediatric heart cases but found himself at a disadvantage.

"I was not able to see the patient. I was not able to see the monitors. So my advice was somehow a guess," Munoz said.

So instead the hospital explored a technological solution and started their pilot telemedicine program to set it up cost about \$15,000.

The system is similar to a teleconference: A camera on Munoz's laptop beams his picture to a monitor attached to a wireless cart at the hospital in Cali, and doctors there can wheel it from room to room. Microphones allow Munoz to talk to the doctors and patient's family, and he can control a camera on the cart that can zoom in to give him a better look at whatever he wants.

Munoz is able to give advice in real time, something doctors in Colombia say is vital to these critically ill children. The hospital's medical director, Dr. Martin Waternberg, calls it more than getting a second opinion — it's a "simultaneous opinion."

"We can take care of the patients just the same way as they would be by being in Pittsburgh," Waternberg said. And the advice of the Pittsburgh doctors is just that; it's up to the doctors in Colombia to make the final decisions on patient care.

Telemedicine has existed in one form or another for about 30 years, but has gained significantly in popularity recently.

Americans, Syrians collaborate in designing hero

Edith Lederer

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

NEW YORK — Comic book fans will soon be getting their first glimpse at an unlikely new superhero — a Muslim boy in a wheelchair with superpowers.

The new superhero is the brainchild of disabled young Americans and Syrians who were brought together last month in Damascus by the Open Hands Initiative, a non-profit organization founded by U.S. philanthropist and businessman Jay T. Snyder.

The superhero's appearance hasn't been finalized, but an early sketch shows a Muslim boy who lost his legs in a landmine accident and later becomes the Silver Scorpion after discovering he has the power to control metal with his mind.

Sharad Devarajan, co-founder and CEO of Liquid Comics whose company is now turning the young people's ideas into pictures and a story line, said the goal is to release the first comic book — launching the disabled Muslim superhero — in early November in both Arabic and English.

Snyder says he was inspired by President Barack Obama's effort to reach out to the Muslim world in his January 2009 inaugural address.

Last month, Snyder flew 12 disabled Americans to Damascus to meet their Syrian peers, and one of their main goals was to come

up with ideas and story lines for the new superhero.

"The only limit was the imagination these kids had — the opportunity for a great story," said Snyder, a comic book collector who heads HBJ Investments LLC. "They helped create something by their combined talents, and that becomes a gift to the world."

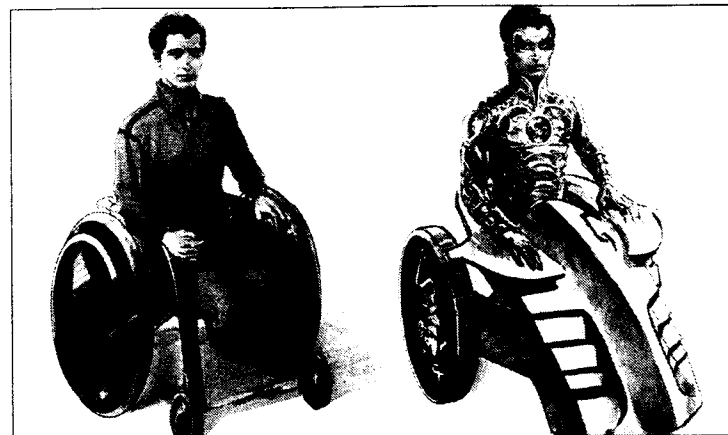
Devarajan found the young people's imagination to be quite amazing. "The opening question we asked the kids was if you could have any superpower what would it be? I've asked that question in many different groups before and the typical answers are always the ones you'd expect — flying, reading minds, or being super strong," Devarajan said.

"The fascinating thing about this group was that I don't think I heard any one of those three," he said.

"Each of their ideas was so originally distinct, whether the Syrian kids or the U.S. kids," he said, adding that perhaps because of their disabilities, the young people think as individuals without being influenced by outsiders. One girl, for example, wanted to have the power to combine the energy of the moon and the sun.

Devarajan said it was noteworthy that none of the young people wanted the hero's power to be something that cured their disability.

"They were empowered by their own disabilities, and they



Courtesy of Liquid Comics, LLC.

The "Silver Scorpion," the new Muslim superhero, loses his legs in a tragic landmine accident and must learn to come to terms with the reality of his disability while learning to use his newfound power.

should not be seen as a source of weakness," he said.

Initially, 50,000 Arabic-language comics will be distributed throughout Syria, and subsequent issues will be distributed elsewhere in the Middle East, Snyder said. The comic will also be available worldwide in digital formats.

It will be the first in a series of comics with international superheroes, and while one will have disabilities others will not, Devarajan said. He added that almost all the characters being planned "are based on the seeds that were created by these kids together in this trip."

The dozen Americans were selected after a national call for applications by The Victor

Penada Foundation, a non-profit educational organization that promotes the rights of young people with disabilities. They included youths who were blind, deaf, using wheelchairs, or suffering from Down syndrome, autism and cognitive disabilities.

The Syrians were invited by the Al-Amal school for the disabled whose chairwoman, Asma Assad, the wife of Syrian president Bashar Assad, spent an afternoon meeting with the youngsters.

"It must be every child's dream to create a superhero," the Syrian first lady said. "But I really do hope that we can bring our powers together — our human powers together — to be able to make a difference."