

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

National Edition

Midwest: Partly to mostly sunny in most places. Showers in southern Illinois. A few flurries near the northern Great Lakes. Highs mainly 30s and 40s. Weather map is on Page A22.

VOL. CLVI . . . No. 53,797

Copyright © 2006 The New York Times

MONDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2006

Printed in Chicago

ONE DOLLAR

American Recalls Torment As a U.S. Detainee in Iraq

Informant for the F.B.I. Details 3 Sleepless Months of Begging to Be Believed

By MICHAEL MOSS

One night in mid-April, the steel door clanked shut on detainee No. 200343 at Camp Cropper, the United States military's maximum-security detention site in Baghdad.

American guards arrived at the man's cell periodically over the next several days, shackled his hands and feet, blindfolded him and took him to a padded room for interrogation, the detainee said. After an hour or two, he was returned to his cell, fatigued but unable to sleep.

The fluorescent lights in his cell were never turned off, he said. At most hours, heavy metal or country music blared in the corridor. He said he was rousted at random times without explanation and made to stand in his cell. Even lying down, he said, he was kept from covering his face to block out the light, noise and cold. And when he was released after 97 days he was exhausted, depressed and scared.

Detainee 200343 was among thousands of people who have been held and released by the American military in Iraq, and his account of his ordeal has provided one of the few detailed views of the Pentagon's detention operations since the abuse scandals at Abu Ghraib. Yet in many respects his case is unusual.

The detainee was Donald Vance, a 29-year-old Navy veteran from Chicago who went to Iraq as a security contractor. He wound up as a whistle-blower, passing information to the F.B.I. about suspicious activities at the Iraqi security firm where he worked, including what he said was possible illegal weapons trading.

But when American soldiers raided the company at his urging, Mr. Vance and another American who worked there were detained as suspects by the military, which was unaware that Mr. Vance was an informant, according to officials and military documents.

At Camp Cropper, he took notes on his imprisonment and smuggled

LAW AND DISORDER
Stuck in Camp Cropper

them out in a Bible.

"Sick, very. Vomited," he wrote July 3. The next day: "Told no more phone calls til leave."

Nathan Ertel, the American held with Mr. Vance, brought away military records that shed further light on the detention camp and its secretive tribunals. Those records include a legal memorandum explicitly denying detainees the right to a lawyer at detention hearings to determine whether they should be released or held indefinitely, perhaps for prosecution.

The story told through those records and interviews illuminates the haphazard system of detention and prosecution that has evolved in Iraq, where detainees are often held for long periods without charges or legal representation, and where the authorities struggle to sort through the endless stream of detainees to identify those who pose real threats.

"Even Saddam Hussein had more

Continued on Page A12