

Almost half of surveyed troops say some torture OK

Officials concerned with their feelings on treatment of noncombatants

By Kimberly Johnson
kjohanson@militarytimes.com
and Kelly Kennedy
kellykennedy@militarytimes.com

More than 40 percent of soldiers and Marines who recently served in the war zone believe torture should be allowed if it would save the life of a comrade, according to a 2006 military mental health assessment.

In addition, fewer than half the 1,350 soldiers and only about one-third of the nearly 450 Marines polled anonymously in Iraq from August to October 2006 told members of Mental Health Advisory Team IV they believe all noncombatants should be treated with dignity and respect.

The team was commissioned by U.S. Central Command. A copy of the team's findings was obtained by Army Times on April 30, and then released to the public May 4

at a Pentagon news briefing.

The study also found that 36 percent of soldiers and 39 percent of Marines believe torture should be allowed to gather information about insurgents, and 17 percent said all noncombatants should be treated as insurgents.

Of surveyed soldiers, 4 percent reported hitting or kicking noncombatants when it was not necessary; among Marines, 7 percent reported doing so.

This is the first time questions about ethics have been asked during any combat situation, Pentagon officials said, adding that the questions came at the request of Army Gen. George Casey, the former senior U.S. commander in Iraq who recently took over as Army chief of staff.

Maj. Gen. Gale Pollock, acting Army Surgeon General, said she

tried to put herself in the service members' shoes when considering the assessment team's findings.

"These men and women have been seeing their friends injured, and I think having that thought is normal," she said.

The military needs to enhance its training to ensure service members don't act on such thoughts, Pollock said.

Service members who had spent the most time in combat were most likely to hurt innocent people, the study showed.

Col. Carl Castro, one of the study's authors, said most service members know that if they injure an innocent Iraqi, they'll have problems the next time they go outside the wire.

Castro's team recommended shorter tours and at least 18 to 36 months downtime at home between tours. "We know the longer a soldier is deployed, the more likely he is to have a mental health issue," he said.

But Pollock said the current reality makes shortened tours

and lengthened home time impossible until the services add tens of thousands of troops, as planned.

Matthew Freedus, adviser for the Washington-based National Institute of Military Justice, said what he found troubling was the baseline account that, at most, little more than half of soldiers would be willing to turn in a fellow soldier for injuring or killing a noncombatant.

"There needs to be better training at the front end so people don't think it is inconsistent to report," he said.

Among those surveyed, 29 percent of soldiers and 31 percent of Marines had been deployed to Iraq two or more times. The study showed that deployment length and family separation were top noncombat concerns for soldiers and that "Marines had

fewer noncombat deployment concerns, perhaps due to shorter deployment lengths."

Marines typically serve seven-month deployments; soldiers had been serving one-year tours, though that recently was increased to 15 months.

The 2006 Operation Iraqi Freedom adjusted suicide rate was 17.3 per 100,000 soldiers, versus the Armywide average of 11.6. Marine Corps suicide rates were not included in the study.

Maj. Gen. Robert Scales, a former Army War College commander, said the study's findings point to a need during a period of extended warfare to frequently regenerate "that crucible of courage and morale."

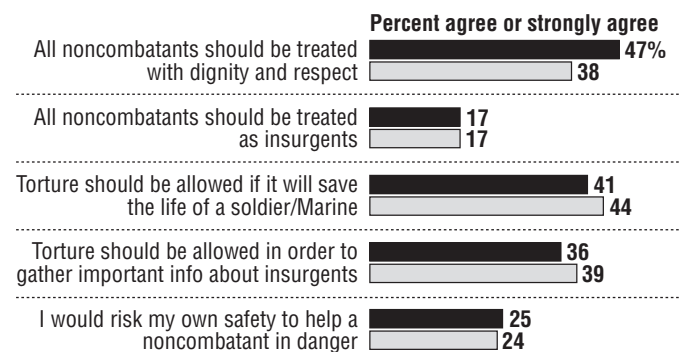
"Every soldier and Marine knows what's right, but once combat fatigue sets in, that starts to fall away," he said. □

VIEWS FROM THE WAR ZONE

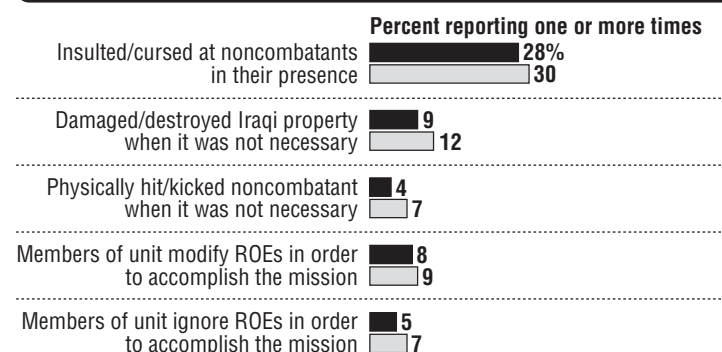
An advisory team assessed the mental health and well-being of soldiers and Marines participating in Operation Iraqi Freedom. The team's April 18 report included a look at these behaviors and viewpoints from those troops:

■ OIF 05-07 soldiers
□ OIF 05-07 Marines

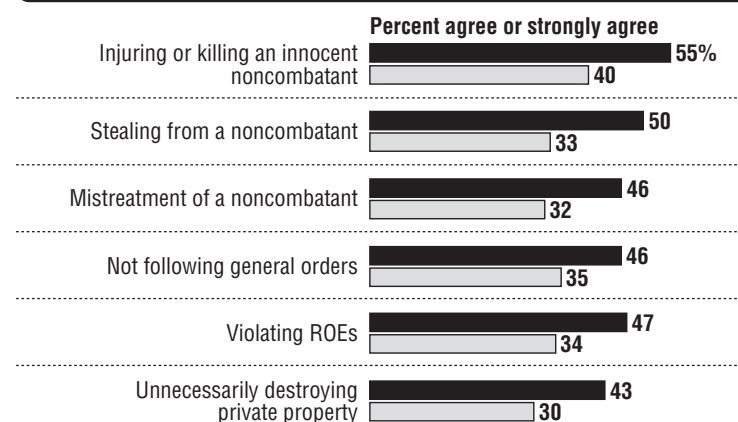
TREATMENT OF NONCOMBATANTS AND VIEWS ON TORTURE



TREATMENT OF NONCOMBATANTS AND RULES OF ENGAGEMENT



I WOULD REPORT A UNIT MEMBER FOR:



Source: Army

JOHN HARMAN/STAFF

SCAD (n.)
See e-Learning.

Advance your career by furthering your education completely online through SCAD's award-winning e-Learning degree programs. Scholarships available.
www.scadelearning.org

Brad Bartholomew
Denver, Colo.
SCAD e-Learning student

Savannah College
of Art and Design®
ATLANTA • LACOSTE • SAVANNAH • E-LEARNING