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NewsLines

THE LATEST NEWS AFFECTING YOU

War-zone drinking

By Michelle Tan and Gordon Trowbridge
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

Amid the charges that U.S. troops raped and murdered an Iraqi woman and killed her family members are allegations that the soldiers had been drinking alcohol before the incident.

Despite a general order banning use of alcohol by U.S. troops in Iraq, criminal investigators believe former Pfc. Steven D. Green and up to four other unidentified members of his unit had been drinking when they allegedly carried out the March 12 attack.

Though the drinking allegations seem almost a footnote to the gruesome details of the case, alcohol-related incidents are among the most common prosecutions in Iraq. Alcohol has played a role in roughly half the rape cases brought by prosecutors in the war zone, according to Army court-martial data.

In 2004 and 2005, prosecutors there filed 114 specifications against soldiers accused of violating regulations relating to alcohol,

according to an Army Times analysis of Army Court-Martial Information System data. About 22 percent of the more than 400 cases brought against soldiers in Iraq from the start of the war through 2005 included alcohol-related charges.

The analysis also shows 13 soldiers charged with rape in Iraq during 2004 and 2005. Four were found guilty of at least one specification of rape and seven others of lesser sexual assault charges. The charges against the other two were dismissed.

In six of the 11 convictions, prosecutors also brought alcohol-related charges against the defendant; in a seventh, the soldier was charged with illegal distribution of drugs. None of the previous cases involved assaults against Iraqi civilians.

U.S. military personnel and civilians who are "serving with, employed by, or accompanying the Armed Forces of the United States," such as Defense Department contractors, have to abide by the no-alcohol rule as outlined in

Alcohol-related charges among most common offenses by soldiers in Iraq

U.S. Central Command's General Order No. 1.

The order likely doesn't apply in the same way to coalition forces from other countries, said Coast Guard Ensign Joe Vermette, a CentCom spokesman.

"We have bilateral agreements with each one of the nations," he said. The rule about alcohol is most likely different for each nation and can also depend on where that country's troops are serving, he said.

The general order from CentCom specifically bans alcohol in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, dry Muslim countries that don't allow alcohol. It calls for troops serving in locations other than those two countries to "conform to their respective component restrictions on alcohol."

A general order issued by Multi-National Corps-Iraq — and updated May 2 — bans alcohol in the corps' area of responsibility. However, alcohol is served at hotels inside the Green Zone in Baghdad,

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PATRICK SCHNEIDER, THE CHARLOTTE (N.C.) OBSERVER VIA THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Former Pfc. Steven D. Green, center, is escorted by U.S. marshals from the federal courthouse in Charlotte, N.C., on July 3 after he was charged with murder and rape in Iraq.

Vulnerable soldiers, eroded judgment

Grief of losing buddies can overwhelm troops, experts say

By Kelly Kennedy
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Had it been a lone soldier accused of raping and murdering an innocent local woman, the mind might more easily be able to accept the shock: a criminally deranged individual who acted on opportunity.

But that up to four soldiers are

suspected of taking part in the allegedly premeditated attack March 12 in a small farming town outside Baghdad — and that no one acted to stop it — amplifies the horror of such an evil act.

To those who study the psychology of troops in the war zone, and those who have been there, such incidents are rare but beyond

explanation: Combat stress, long separations from loved ones and the deaths of comrades can erode moral judgment, they say.

Documents filed in U.S. District Court in the Western District of Kentucky on June 30 charge former Pfc. Steven D. Green, 21, with the rape and murder of an Iraqi woman, as well as the murder of three members of her family — including a 5-year-old girl. He had been released from the Army because of an unspecified "personality disorder" before he was iden-

tified as a suspect in the attack.

As many as four other soldiers from the same platoon in 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, may have participated — three in the Iraqis' house and one left behind at the checkpoint — according to the documents. Those documents portray Green as the leader in the alleged crimes. The Army has not released the names and ranks of the other soldiers.

Robert Jay Lifton, an editor of the book "Crimes of War: Iraq," which came out in March, said he

would not be surprised if it turns out that the private was indeed able to lead others in the attack. After serving as an Air Force psychiatrist in the 1950s, Lifton was a founder of the Wellfleet Psychohistory Group in the 1960s, which looked at psychological motivations for war, terrorism and genocide. He is a visiting professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School.

"It isn't just [Green] influencing them alone," Lifton said. "It's them being vulnerable to that kind of behavior. Almost all atrocities reflect some kind of group behavior."

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