

## Camp Fear

Operation Iraqi Freedom Series

By Snake Blocker



Picture: Snake Blocker holding up a very mean Iraqi flying roach.

On 18 March 2005, I, Petty Officer Snake Blocker, sat down at a coffee shop, in Iraq, speaking with the owner. We talked for hours over a topic that had affected his life in many negative ways. His name is Basheer Galib Abdul. He was a former Iraqi soldier, a successful business man, a respected figure in his community, and a protestor of Saddam Hussein Al-Tikriti. This is his story: "July 1991, after Saddam Hussein had lost the war against the Americans over Kuwait, another "Blood Bath" (Baath Party) occurs. It took place in Al Radwanayah, Iraq, about 8 km west of Baghdad. Saddam's soldiers collected around 90,000 people from many cities over a six month period. I was one of the unlucky ones in this gathering of 'sheep to the slaughter.' The soldiers divided us up by cities. We were placed into a storage warehouse about 50 m by 12 m (165 ft. by 40 ft.). They packed as much as 3,000 of us into these warehouses. I was from the city of Ad Diwanayah, so I was in this group. Those from Babylon were in another group, and so on. I was in this one storage area all day. At night, soldiers came with weapons and began to yell at us. They cursed at us and called us very bad names. They told us to get into formation like soldiers. They took six of us at a time and began to beat us with different types of objects like kitchen kettles, tools, and riffle butts. Later on that night, we were visited by some of Saddam Hussein's family members from Al Ojah. More soldiers came with them. They randomly picked out people to beat. Afterwards, they took us to a flat area outside for a few hours until the sun came up. This entire time the soldiers and Saddam's family members would curse at us and assault us. Next, the Officer of Security came to interrogate us. He would ask many questions about what we did, what our opinions of Saddam were, who was our family, and other questions like this. There were five other guards by the officer. Their job was to beat us while we were speaking. It didn't matter what we said, the soldiers would beat us. Sometimes, they would torture a person until they fell unconscious. If this happened, the soldiers would throw water on the person to revive them, and then they would continue the interrogations and the beatings. If a person said anything bad about Saddam Hussein, the guards would tie the person's hands behind their back and attach the arms to a large hook several feet about

the ground. The person would hang off the ground like this for about five hours. Most the time, the person's neck would break during the hooking due to the gravity against the neck from this position and from the beatings they received. During this timeframe, most the people would die. I knew they were dead because I could see their faces turn blue. Everyday, not less than 200 people died from this torture. There would be about 50 people that would die everyday just from my town of Ad Diwaniyah. Thousands of Iraqis died from this camp during its operation. This camp was called Camp Al Radwaniyah. Many people I knew died in front of me. I saw my friends get tortured, and I could do nothing. One of my friends that died from being hooked up was Said Abraham. He was an Iraqi soldier.

There was another friend and relative of mine, on my mother's side, who also died from the hooking. His name was Sama Radi.

I remember, another one of my friends lived from the hooking and the beatings. His name is Said Shareff. He is still alive today. The hooks were positioned right outside the warehouses. Once you stepped outside the storage area you could see the hooks. You could also see one of Saddam's palaces about 2 km (1 ¼ mile) in the background. But this was just one of 99 palaces Saddam was building for himself. Saddam was building 99 palaces because "99" is the name of the god of the Koran. There was a large yellow truck parked to the right side of the warehouse as you stepped outside. If you were called to get on the yellow truck it meant one of two things. You were going home, or you were going to die. This day, around 6 p.m., the storage door opened. I saw the husband of Saddam's daughter. His name is Saddam Kamel and Saddam Hussein's daughter is Rana. There were many soldiers behind him. Saddam Kamel looked around at all of us. When I saw Saddam Kamel, I looked down to the floor. If you looked at him and he saw you, then this was very bad. Saddam Kamel thinks that you do not have the right, or the privilege to look at him. If you looked at him, the soldiers would beat you, maybe even kill you. The abuse would continue from 6 or 7 p.m. till around 3 a.m. So far, none of us have received any water or food all day or night. Around 5 a.m. the soldiers opened the door so we could go outside and line up for water and restrooms. The problem was that there were no restrooms. The soldiers would send several of us out at a time to 'crap,' urinate, clean ourselves, and drink water. There was no privacy, no toilets, nothing to clean ourselves with, and no dignity. I felt like a dog. The water came out of only one ½ inch PVC black pipe about two and a half feet above the ground. The soldiers would start counting because we only had a few seconds to complete all our business. We could not hide from being seen when we 'crapped' or urinated. We had to expose our genitals and buttock to everyone around us. The soldiers would laugh and curse at us. There was no hole in the ground. We had to crap or urinate on the ground-level dirt. Then we had to fight our way to get to the water. If a person wanted to clean themselves, they had to lift up their leg to wash. Again, this made us feel like animals. If you were a nice person, then you would not get water. Even the most sophisticated gentleman must become like an animal to push aside his friends. If he doesn't, he would not get water. Many did not have enough time to complete all these tasks in the little time the soldiers gave us, so many people didn't get any water. This happened every morning. We all became filthier each day. They would never remove the feces from the ground, so everyday it stunk more. More flies and sand flies would come around, and more disease and germs would spread. My skin was itching and I had rashes on my chest, face, and arms. I was a very

well respected figure in my city along with several others. It was disgraceful for us to remove our clothes, 'crap,' and urinate in the dirt like a dog in front of thousands of people. It was very shameful to have to fight for a position to get water. I thought to myself that it would be better if the soldiers killed me, than to be treated like an animal. When they finally fed us, they would separate us into groups of eight people and put us in a small circle. The area was very small for eight people. We only had enough room to squat down facing each other's back in this circle with one arm towards the inside of the circle and one arm towards the outside of the circle. The soldiers would take a shovel and throw the food in one pile in the center of each group. The food was rice and bread mixed together. We had no forks or spoons...only our fingers and hands. We had no table or chairs...we squatted on the dirt floor. Our food was thrown on the dirt in the center of our circle. I did not think this was good for me, so I did not eat for 3 days. But after the 3 days I was so hungry that I didn't care anymore. I ate like a dog. I thought that whoever organized this camp was very smart in thinking everything out. They thought of many ways to make us feel like animals and we DID feel like animals. We were given two minutes to sit down in the circle and eat our food. The commander of this camp was a man named Abass. Two weeks went by with the same routine, except this one day when my name was called out by a soldier. I heard my name called out in a harsh voice, Basheer...Basheer Galib Abdul. I thought today was the day I was going to die. I walked towards the soldier not knowing what was going to happen next. The Chief Officer came over to me. Now I was even more frightened. He asked, "Do you know Haky Hafed Mahdy?" I said, "Yes." He asked, "Is he a relative?" I said, "No." He asked, "How do you know Haky Hafed Mahdy?" I said, "He is my friend, he is part of the Special Security Office of Saddam Hussein (SSO)." He asked, "Are you sure he is not a relative?" I said, "I have no reason to lie." I still did not know what was going to happen to me. My friend, Haky, was part of the Iraqi CIA, then, right after the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein started a new elite security force called the SSO (Special Security Office of Saddam). This was the highest level of Secret Security in Iraq. Haky was promoted to this department. I knew Haky was always an honest person and he was also a very important man in Saddam's regime. After the questioning, I then saw Haky. Haky and Abass, the commander, came over to me. Haky told him to release me. Haky said it was a mistake that I was here. He said he has known me for a very long time and I have done nothing wrong. The commander said, "I am very sorry, but I cannot release him. We are not done questioning him, and if I release him to you, then others will think you gave me money to release him." Haky and Abass walked away from me to talk. I could no longer hear their conversation. They came back after a few minutes and Abass told me to go with Haky. I was still nervous because I didn't know what was said or why Abass released me to Haky so soon. I got into Haky's black Altima, and shortly afterwards, we drove away. As we drove out of the compound, Haky asked me, "Basheer, I am your friend, don't you trust me?" I said, "I am sorry Haky, but I cannot trust anyone right now." Haky asked me, "Do you want me to stop the car on the side of this road and let you out?" I said, "Yes." He pulled over in front of a mosque and said, "Basheer, you can get out, clean up a little, and pray, but I need you to come back to the car afterwards. Your father asked me to bring you back, and if you were already dead, he wanted me to bring your body to him. I promised your father I would do this." I said, "Okay, I'll stay in the car," (but I was still uncertain about the situation). Camp Al Radwaniyah took away

all my trust. Haky drove to his house first. I didn't like this because I thought he was going to take me to my father's house. As we drove closer, I saw Haky's mother run out. I now felt allot safer and more relaxed. His mother was a very kind person. She was always good to me. She came up to me and gave me a big hug. She asked me, "Why were you at that camp, what do you have against Saddam?" I said, "Saddam shouldn't have invaded Kuwait. This was a big mistake. I do not agree with how Saddam handled this war." She said, "Basheer, why do you still say these things about Saddam, even when you could have been killed at that camp?" I said, "It is how I feel. I will not change my mind." Haky asked me if I wanted to wash up first. I said, "No, just take me to my father's house, so I can see my family." He did. One year later, I found out that Haky made a deal with Commander Abass for my release that day. Abass had a brother in prison because he stole some gold from Saddam Hussein. Abass wanted Haky to write a report stating his brother was found not guilty of the crimes charged against him. Haky knew Abass and his brother, and he knew that this man was a criminal and should stay in prison or die. Haky knew that this man did many bad things and he was in the process of writing a report for Saddam. Haky allowed the brother of Abass to be set free and all charges against him were dropped in exchange for my release. I was given the release paperwork signed by the officers of the camp and I still have them to this day. I always carried them with me in case someone said I'd escaped. Haky Hafed Mandy is a true friend. After Saddam Hussein was captured and the United States invaded Iraq, Haky had no job and he went home. All of the members of the SSO are all from the same city Saddam was from. Saddam didn't want any other regions to be part of his "inner circle." Haky is still alive today, but he is a very poor man. He could have stolen many things from Saddam's palaces or vaults if he wanted to when Saddam was captured, but he didn't. Haky is an honest man. I send Haky a little money every month to help him out. He is a true friend. He is a friend who never betrayed me. He is the friend that saved my life."