



(S) NSAer Investigates Computers Seized in Raids in Iraq (repost)

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(U//FOUO) An Agency employee deploys to Iraq as part of DIA/CIA-led team, does a job not for the faint-hearted... First published on August 4, 2005.

(S//REL) Last summer I was preparing for a 120-day deployment to Iraq, but I wasn't part of the [Cryptologic Support Teams](#) (CST) that have been deployed. I don't even work in SID. I wasn't even "technically" deployed for NSA. I was one of several NSA volunteers providing technical expertise to the Iraq Survey Group, a mission co-led by DIA and CIA. The mission began as a HUMINT operation, but it became clear that SIGINT would play a large part in exploiting the target. I had no idea that I was in for the experience of a lifetime.

(S//REL) After a few minor travel glitches (and several days in Qatar), I arrived in Baghdad, grungy and tired. It was still pretty hot in September. I met up with my NSA counterparts who were already in theater, and was informed that I would be taking over as Chief of the Media Exploitation shop for the Combined Media Processing Center -- Baghdad. That was news to me, but I was up for the challenge. I soon discovered that my lead analyst, one of the other NSA'ers, was so smart that his talents would have been wasted sitting in management meetings anyway.

(S//REL) Our office was made up of mostly contractors and 2 or 3 NSA'ers (one completed his tour shortly after I arrived.) The contractors were linguists and other computer personnel. Our mission was to do forensic investigations on computers that were seized in raids, or taken from detainees. We were originally looking for evidence of crimes, primarily relating to weapons of mass destruction and insurgency. This mission was expanded to include Counterterrorism and Counterintelligence by the time I got there.

(S//REL) What we mostly found was jokingly referred to as the three big "P"s - porn, propaganda, and prayers. We pored over thousands of .wav files of the Quran and sermons, sifted through hundreds of pictures and videos of pornography (one of our "customers", the 5th Special Forces, said that the porn was extremely useful in breaking down the detainees who maintained that they were devout Muslims, but had porn on their computers.) The propaganda was often CDs designed to recruit young men to become insurgents, and featured weapons practice, bombings, and the worst, beheadings and tortures. (A steady diet of that often required the office to take time out for a mental break.)

(S//REL) Some of our discoveries were sent back to NSA for further exploitation, and some of our reports were distributed to the CST teams for distribution. Most of our data was sent back to the National Media Exploitation Center to make available for any other agency that needed it. And all of our reports were returned to our "customers" to aid in their interrogations of the detainees, some of whom remained in jail because of our efforts.

(S//REL) After two months, the two NSA'ers were asked to participate in a forward-deployed mission. We were the only two in the office with the necessary TS clearances, so we took turns on 2-week rotations to Camp Fallujah, during Operation Phantom Fury/Al Fajr. During our time there, the conditions were quite different than the "resort" we had at Camp Slayer in Baghdad. For one thing, we didn't have any heat much of the time, and it was cold! (It was late November and the weather had suddenly chilled.) We often sat in the office wearing gloves and hats and typing away on our computers. You could see your breath in our tent at night. Not to mention the outgoing mortars that occurred with startling regularity, and shook our office door so hard we were waiting for the windows to break.

(S//REL) To enter and exit our office, you had to wind your way through the M-16s and flak

vests that lined the hallway and try not to kick the vests that still had live grenades hanging from them -- the Marines were actively going on operations during this stage, and coming into the office afterward. They brought us laptops, hard drives, CDs, phones and radios, all covered in the Iraqi desert dust that permeated everything, but some were also covered in blood. We had several good finds while we were there, but one of the most noteworthy was the discovery of original footage of well-publicized beheading.

(S//REL) I think our time in Iraq, and more importantly, in Fallujah (while it was a combat zone), gave us all a different perspective on NSA's support to the warfighter. Not only do we serve a cryptologic function, but we also provide support in other ways that are important, such as enabling the Marines to better complete their mission. And although we didn't find the smoking "WMD", we provided support to another intelligence agency, and managed to gain a whole new outlook on the situation in Iraq that you could only get from being there, and working side by side with the men and women of the U.S. military. The credit goes to the cavalries and special forces units for capturing the bad guys, but our work helped to keep them behind bars.



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