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The Washington Bureau
THE MOUTH OF THE POTOMAC

How the FBI Broke Saddam - Part 2

June 27, 2009

Saddam Hussein was defiant in his first meetings with his American captors. But soon it was time to begin whittling down his ego, bloated by decades of absolute power in Iraq. Brute force, however, was not in the gameplan.

By mid-February 2004, FBI Supervisory Special Agent George Piro had sat down with Saddam Hussein three times - as [The Mouth reported on Friday](#) - and listened to the toppled tyrant yap away about his great accomplishments leading ragtag Iraq out of the Stone Age.



The FBI prides itself on "rapport-based" interrogations that have a high success rate for yielding confessions from the likes of 1993 World Trade Center bomber Ramzi Yousef and CIA headquarters killer Mir Aimal Kasi. There was no "ticking bomb" scenario with Saddam - just inherent political pressure - so the interrogation proceeded carefully and cautiously over months.

The strategy involved executing a subtle emotional attack, digging out Saddam's soft spots and exploiting them. Prick his ego.

Saddam had revealed little, so far - and neither had Piro - other than stating he remained in Baghdad until the day before his capital fell to American-led forces in April 2003. He said he instructed his henchmen in a final meeting, "We will struggle in secret." After fleeing Baghdad, he gradually dispersed his bodyguards one

by one to avoid drawing Coalition forces' attention. Saddam had evaded capture for nine months, until U.S. viceroy Paul Bremer made his famous exultation in December 2003: "Ladies and gentlemen, we got him!"

Piro asked if Saddam ever used body doubles, as was widely believed. "No, of course not," he scoffed. "This is movie magic, not reality."

But as the fourth interrogation began on Feb. 13, Saddam wanted answers from Piro.

"Let me ask a direct question. I want to ask where ... has the information been going? For our relationship to remain clear, I want to know," he demanded. Piro replied that he was a "representative of the U.S. Government" and told Saddam many U.S. officials saw his reports, and that readership "may include the President of the United States." Saddam seemed pleased, commenting that he did "not mind" if the interviews were published.

Piro turned to Saddam's WMD stockpiles but his quarry brushed it off, saying, "We destroyed them. We told you... By God, if I had such weapons, I would have used them in the fight against the U.S." Hadn't Saddam's own decision to defy the UN on WMD inspections led to crippling sanctions and then a war that ousted him from power? "This is your opinion. I answered," the stonewaller said. "We (Iraqis) are among the few remaining cavaliers."

More on how the FBI began to whittle away at Saddam's ego after the jump.

As the meetings continued through February, Saddam grew increasingly insistent on getting news of the outside world, saying he felt like an imprisoned character in "A Tale of Two Cities" deprived of any news. But Piro was intentionally vague, telling him only that "efforts are underway to rebuild Iraq."

"Over time, some things have changed; others have not," he told the prisoner.

They discussed Saddam's ascendancy to power in the late 1960s, and Piro listened to him rant about "Zionist" influence over western policies. He often described key dramatic moments in his rise from revolutionary to dictator as being "just like a movie," pleading with Piro, "I hope you will be just in what history you write."

"Fortunately or unfortunately, I will have a major impact on your history," Piro replied.

In their tenth meeting on Feb. 27, Piro pressed Saddam about the 1990 invasion of neighboring Kuwait and atrocities his troops committed there, describing a litany of horrors to Iraq's disgraced leader. "This is the first time I have ever heard of this," the former Iraqi strongman said, shrugging it off.

Then Piro casually - no doubt in a well thought out ploy - referred to Saddam as Iraq's "ex-president."

"I am not the ex-president of Iraq," Saddam snarled. "I am still the President of Iraq."

Piro also sought the answer to one of the biggest lingering mysteries of the 1991 Gulf war: the fate of Navy Capt. Scott Speicher, a fighter pilot listed at times by the Pentagon as either as missing in action or captured, and whose remains

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have never been recovered. Saddam said he recalled a "an American prisoner, not a prisoner, excuse me, but an American person. I think an officer," whose plane went down in the western desert. "The Americans were looking for him," he said, adding that he had granted permission for a search and told U.S. teams that "they are welcome."

"Hussein does not remember the pilot's name, including whether it was Speicher," the FBI's Baghdad Operations Center reported back to Washington.

- James Gordon Meek

Next week: *The FBI and CIA plan to "overwhelm" Saddam with his crimes.*

DOWNLOAD FBI Supervisory Special Agent George Piro's interrogation reports:

[FBI-Baghdad 302 reports from Feb. 13-Feb. 27, 2004](#)

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By James Gordon Meek on June 27, 2009 7:47 AM | [Comments \(0\)](#)



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