

Chicago Reader

February 4, 2005

COVER FEATURE

Tools of Torture

Though he continues to deny it, Jon Burge tortured suspects while he was a Chicago police detective. Now his contemporaries from Vietnam reveal where he may have learned the tricks of his trade.

Author: John Conroy Date: February 4, 2005 Appeared in Section 1 Word count: 7139

Q. While you were in Vietnam on that base camp did you ever hear of any torture that went on in that POW compound?

A. No, sir, I didn't.

Q. Never had any discussions about that that whole time you were there, is that right?

A. No. I was in the U.S. Army, counselor.

--from the cross-examination of Chicago police commander Jon Burge by People's Law Office attorney Flint Taylor, March 15, 1989

Jon Burge seems to have begun abusing suspects not long after he became a Chicago police detective in 1972, but not until the late 80s was he cross-examined at length about his interrogation practices. Accused by convicted cop killer Andrew Wilson of torture, he testified fearlessly, presenting himself as guilty only of being a dedicated, resourceful policeman and an activist supervisor. He said he often stood at the door of interrogation rooms, listening to his detectives question suspects, and never saw any abuse.

Wilson had shot two officers dead in February 1982, and Burge worked five days straight to track him down, never going home. When Wilson was finally located, hiding in a west-side apartment, Burge was first at the door, attacking it with lock picks, tools rarely held by policemen. "I used a single-digit rake and tension bar," he explained in a 1988 deposition.

After his conviction, Wilson sued the city, saying he'd been tortured by Burge and detectives under his command. He wasn't the first former suspect to make this accusation, and scores have been uncovered since. Wilson said Burge wired him up to a black box and turned a crank that generated an electric shock. This technique bore a striking resemblance to what American troops in Vietnam called "the Bell telephone hour"--shocking prisoners by means of a hand-cranked army field phone. In defending himself against Wilson's suit he said he'd never seen a black box, and though he'd served as a military policeman in the Mekong delta in 1968 and '69 had never heard of field phone interrogations. He bristled at the suggestion that Americans in Vietnam had conducted them.

Burge's peers from the Ninth Military Police Company, however, remember such torture in considerable detail.

Jon Graham Burge was born on December 20, 1947. In 1989 he told the Reader that his father had a blue-collar job with the phone company and that his mother, a sometime model, wrote a fashion column for the Chicago Daily News, organized fashion shows, and once wrote a book in the "dress for success" vein. The family lived in a modest duplex at 9612 S. Luella in Merrionette Manor, an all-white postwar housing development on the southeast side.

Burge attended Luella Public School, now called Robert H. Lawrence after the first African-American astronaut, and Bowen High School, graduating in 1965. Yearbooks show he was active with the fire marshals and in the Key Club, a service organization that collected more than 900 cans of food for poor South Chicago families in 1964. Burge's primary interest, however, seems to have been the school's Reserve Officer Training Corps.

According to e-mail from Ron Buzil, a member of the Bowen ROTC from 1964 to 1968 and later an infantry captain in Korea, the program was run by two army sergeants. Activities consisted of "drill, familiarity with weapons . . . leadership, army history and lore, sports, and more drill." The cadets took target practice on a rifle range in the school's basement, firing an assortment of rifles and handguns, which were kept in a vault.

If newspaper coverage is any indication, the local community thought more of the Bowen ROTC than almost any other group or team at the high school. Burge appeared on the front page of the Daily Calumet five times during his senior year in articles about or photos of the ROTC. His final report card shows him to have been a good student, his best grades scored in the ROTC.

Despite his promise, Burge lasted just one semester at the University of Missouri. He told me in 1989 that he'd enjoyed himself too much to study. He moved back in with his parents in 1966 and went to work as a stock clerk at a south-side Jewel. That July, Richard Speck entered a town house a few blocks from Burge's home and within shouting distance of his grammar school and murdered eight student nurses. In August Martin Luther King Jr. marched on the southeast side, holding prayer vigils outside real estate offices on South Ewing. The marchers were pelted with rocks, bricks, bottles, beer cans, apples, and firecrackers.

In those days, American men who flunked out of college faced serious consequences--the end of their student draft deferments. While Burge labored as a stock clerk, American troops were dying in Vietnam at a rate of 477 per month. In June 1966 Burge enlisted in the army reserve, committing himself to six years of service, including two on active duty. In a form filed that fall, shortly before he reported for basic training at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, he indicated that he had been promised law enforcement duties. His eventual goal, he would testify in a 1989 deposition, was to join the Chicago Police Department.

Army records describe the 18-year-old recruit as red-haired, blue-eyed, six feet two inches tall, 210 pounds, a member of the Congregational Church, interested in cars and baseball. After basic training, he and 98 other soldiers spent four weeks at Fort McClellan's drill corporal school in Alabama (only one other student scored better than Burge did in the course) and eight weeks at a military police school in Georgia. He became a trainer of MPs and then served as an MP in Korea, gathering five letters of appreciation from superiors that praised his loyalty, devotion to duty, outstanding performance, military bearing, appearance, attention to detail, tact, and extra effort. On June 18, 1968, with antiwar sentiment escalating back home and city officials bracing for what would be a violent Democratic convention, Burge volunteered for Vietnam. He arrived there in November as a sergeant.

Burge was assigned to the Ninth Military Police Company of the Ninth Infantry Division. He reported to division headquarters, which had moved three months earlier to a barren 600-acre island that the army had created from marshland about 50 miles southwest of Saigon. General William Westmoreland, commander of American forces in Vietnam, had named the base Dong Tam, which meant "united hearts and minds." The delta region was a maze of rivers, canals, and streams subject to seasonal flooding, and among its rice fields, swamps, rubber plantations, and dense jungle were more than 1,600

hamlets. More than 15,000 troops were assembled there, many of them moving around by boat.

According to operational reports filed in 1969, there were also 3,500 Vietnamese civilians working on the base, a fair number of them of suspect allegiance.

The Ninth Military Police Company averaged about 200 members during Burge's tour in Vietnam, some posted to the division base camp at Dong Tam, others to supporting firebases around the delta (Tan An, Tigers Lair, and Moore among them). Most veterans I interviewed had experience at both a firebase and at headquarters. The company had a broad range of responsibilities. At Dong Tam, they investigated crimes committed by soldiers and vehicle accidents on local roads, stood guard at the division's tactical operations center, manned the main gate, and provided security for visiting celebrities.

Some Ninth MP members were detailed to combat duty--reconnaissance patrols, escorting convoys and vehicles, providing security for intelligence sweeps and medical missions in the hamlets--all of it hazardous in the delta, where the Vietcong laid ambushes, planted booby traps, and mined roads. The VC regularly attacked Dong Tam with mortars and rockets, and it was also the MPs' duty to find out where they'd landed and help with damage control, casualty treatment, and evacuation. Locating an impact area had to be done quickly so return fire could be directed, and this put MPs in considerable danger, out and about before the shelling might have stopped.

During one such shelling in January 1969, one MP was killed and twelve others were wounded. Burge was given the Army Commendation Medal for his efforts that night. The general order announcing the award reads, "When his company area came under intense enemy mortar attack, Sergeant Burge, at the risk of his own life, repeatedly braved the flying shrapnel to evacuate wounded troops and fought the fires caused by the incoming rounds."

The MPs were also responsible for processing, guarding, escorting, and transporting prisoners. Chicago defense attorneys representing victims of the Burge crew have long wondered whether this duty introduced Burge to the interrogation methods that showed up at Area Two.

Members of the Ninth MP Company manned POW holding centers at the base camps and division headquarters, and a boat that carried prisoners from the countryside to Dong Tam. Not all the prisoners were enemy soldiers. Some were civilians, many of them innocent, detained in sweeps. According to a Ninth Infantry operational report from early 1969, there were 1,507 detainees interrogated in the three-month period starting on November 1, 1968. The questioning was done by the division's Military Intelligence unit with Vietnamese translators. Former Ninth Infantry MPs I interviewed said they were sometimes present during interviews and at other times stood guard nearby.

Burge has insisted that he never guarded prisoners, and in a September 1988 deposition he said he had no idea where they were interrogated. Before the Chicago Police Board in March 1992, he described his role with the MPs as "escort of convoys, security for forward support bases, supervising security for the divisional central base camp in Dong Tam, and I finished my tour as a provost marshal investigator." A company roster of key personnel as of January 31, 1969, lists Burge as head of the traffic section, but he clearly moved on to other duties: the next report has someone else in that post.

Burge's insistence that he didn't know where prisoners were interrogated seems peculiar. According to Edwin Freeman, the company commander during part of Burge's tour, the interrogation rooms at Dong Tam were adjacent to the POW compound and 20 steps from the MP command post. Prisoners were questioned individually in one of five interrogation rooms, and MPs escorted them back and forth. Freeman says the compound could hold 300 prisoners and at times was full. Given the statistics in the available Ninth Infantry operational reports, it's likely that several thousand prisoners were moved back and forth between the compound and the interrogation room during Burge's tour of duty. Would a man praised by his superiors in Korea for his "attention to detail" and "extra effort," who would go on to become such a resourceful detective, not notice his fellow MPs moving handcuffed detainees--the enemy--back and forth, perhaps a hundred trips or more on some days? Would he not know that prisoners were being interrogated 20 steps from the MP command post?

Burge has also insisted, under oath, that he never heard any talk about brutality in the treatment of prisoners, that he never heard any allegations of such brutality, that he never heard of the use of electric shock on Vietnamese detainees.

My attempts to locate Ninth MP Company veterans whose service approximated or overlapped Burge's turned up several others who said they'd never seen a prisoner abused. Former deputy provost marshal Ray Merrill, now responsible for the training of General Motors security officers, was a 25-year-old captain when he served with the Ninth MPs at Dong Tam in 1968. Merrill told me he classified reports of field telephone torture as "urban legends."

Merrill, who was outraged by the abuses committed by MPs at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq last year, says he would have given no quarter to anyone abusing prisoners. "If you wouldn't want it done to you, you wouldn't want it done to somebody else. Period. Anybody that operates beyond that would be subject to the same law that everybody else is subject to."

Philip Ash, provost marshal of the Ninth MPs during most of Burge's tour, said he'd received no reports of any such torture of prisoners during his year of service from May 1968 to May 1969. He said his compound at Dong Tam was inspected regularly, and he thought it was one of the better-run facilities in Vietnam.

"Would I have been informed if there was something going wrong like that? I think maybe I would have, but I can't guarantee it," said Ash, who retired from the army as a colonel and served three cities as police chief. "You know, I think I was pretty much a straight arrow, and I don't know what that contributed to what I heard and what I didn't hear. There was in my mind always the possibility that I was not getting all of the information that I should get. There is always the potential for a gap between what the boss knows and what is happening."

Ash and his deputy, Merrill, topped the Ninth MPs' chain of command. Officers and enlisted men who'd served under Ash as company commander, executive officer, lieutenant, and sergeant all told the Reader they'd heard of or witnessed field phone interrogations. These men, some outranking Burge and others beneath him, told stories set both at outlying firebases and at Dong Tam.

Former lieutenant David Rudoi, now 66 and living in Florida, immediately recognized a description of the abuse that Burge has been accused of at Area Two. "What you are talking about here, overseas in Vietnam, a lot of that went on," Rudoi said. "Can I tell you a little story? We were building this POW compound out at firebase Moore, a brand-new base. A patrol went out in front to a village and settled in. In the middle of the night they all got zapped. The villagers didn't tell them that Charlie was around them. They just let these people go and 11 people died. Eleven guys. Next morning, Americans went out and brought in all the villagers. They also had Vietnamese soldiers with them. . . . And to get information from these people . . . they wired them up, and they did it in one of the buildings that we built."

While the interrogation was going on, Rudoi said, he was putting up wire outside the building. "Soldiers that were bringing stuff in and out was telling us what was going on. And then almost at the same time--remember Jimmy Stewart, the actor? He come in on two choppers on a glad-handing tour, and he come in basically just about this time. He come walking through shaking hands. When he walked up to where we were at and got to talking to us, for some reason or another he wanted to look at the inside of the building, and we kind of had to steer him away from the building because we didn't, you know--just don't know nothin', don't want to see nothin', that's it. But at that point, as far as we were concerned, after all those Americans died, it really didn't make any difference. But it happened a lot. . . . I just didn't want to know. My people didn't want to know. That was it, basically.

"But I can understand, if they did something like that and they were trying to get some fast information, that was the way to do it."

Dennis Carstens, a draftee who served as specialist fourth class with the Ninth MPs, returned to the U.S. on Thanksgiving Day 1969 after 14 months in Vietnam. He spent part of his tour at firebase Tigers Lair, where the MPs, two interrogators from Military Intelligence, and the interpreters all lived in the same bunker. It was the custom there, he said, for MPs to be present during interrogations. "We would pretty much do

anything as long as we didn't leave scars on the people," Carstens said. Field phone interrogations were common, he said. The device gave "a pretty good jolt, kind of like if you've ever had an electric fence charge."

Carstens, now a postman in Minnesota, also served as a guard at Dong Tam, where he said that in addition to watching for escape attempts the MPs had to protect the prisoners from GIs. "It wasn't unusual for our MP area to get CS'd [teargassed] from grunts thinking they were getting the POWs, 'the gooks.' They would get us gassed as well."

Former sergeant D.J. Lewis, who served with the Ninth MPs from February 1968 to January 1969, said field phone interrogations were "not uncommon." Lewis, who retired last year from his job as an engineer at a VA hospital in Wisconsin, spent part of his tour at firebase Tan An, where he was among the MPs present during the questioning of a group of Vietcong in a tent away from the base. "We were attached to this field unit out there, and they would take them in and they had a kind of large tent, and they would tie them up to the poles right in the center there, their hands behind them and their feet strapped to the pole. And they would give them treatment, and it was not uncommon for them to rig up a field telephone and put one [wire] around a finger and the other around the scrotum and start cranking. And they would eventually tell you what you wanted to know . . .

"It was Military Intelligence that done it, them and the ARVNs [the Army of the Republic of Vietnam]. The ARVNs are the ones that hooked the wire up and did the cranking, but it was with the blessing of the MI."

Was it painful? "Oh, hell yes, it's painful. I mean, you can hold the two wires and barely crank it and get a jolt. The more you crank the higher the voltage, and it's DC voltage, so that's more intense shock."

Were the interrogators at all leery about MPs observing what went on?

"They didn't really seem to mind. They didn't want anybody else to see it, you know, but I guess since we were supposed to be, you know, we would keep our mouth shut, I guess, for lack of a better explanation. They wouldn't let anyone else in, though, and we actually escorted the prisoners in and out."

Wasn't MI taking a chance that an MP would file charges?

"It would have been my word against an officer's word, which the officer is always going to win. So what do you do? And at that time CID [Criminal Investigation Division] and Military Intelligence, they were held in the highest regard, they could walk on the clouds."

So if some MP got it in his head to report the incident, what would happen to him?

"It would probably be swept under the rug, and he would either be sent to another duty station or put on shit duty the rest of the time--KP, picking up cigarette butts--anything they can think of that can keep him quiet and keep him in a certain place. Usually what they did, they sent him to a different destination. There were some instances where the guys came back to the States or wound up in Korea. There was a lieutenant, can't think of his name, and he knew that there was a black market going on, and he started investigating it and he got close to them in Saigon in the upper echelon, and he wound up being a prisoner escort at Fort Leavenworth. He would come back to Vietnam, pick up prisoner GIs, and take them back to Leavenworth. That was his function in the army. It's kind of degrading from where he was. And that happened rapidly. It didn't take any time. 'Well, here, you're going to Leavenworth, pack your bags, be on the next plane out.'"

Former company commander Edwin Freeman said that MPs at Dong Tam brought prisoners to interrogation rooms and stayed during the questioning, but did not interrogate themselves. (Two members of the company who served at Dong Tam recalled MPs standing guard outside the interrogation rooms. It's possible that procedures varied with interrogators and over time. According to David Rudo, at firebase Moore it was up to the interrogator.) Asked about the use of field phones as torture devices in interrogations, Freeman said, "It was common, but it was not common with my people." When asked to define "common," he said, "Well, common is a bad word--I shouldn't have said that. I have heard of it happening, I had one observation of it happening, and I put a stop to it."

Freeman, a police officer in Portland, Oregon, before and after his Vietnam service, said the incident he heard about was reported by one of his guards, but no one was punished because Freeman didn't know who the perpetrator was. He said he called a meeting of the MI interrogators and "made it clear that it wasn't going to happen in my cage. I was a professional cop. My training was not to do that to people, even if they are combatants. They are just soldiers like we were."

A Red Cross team visited the Dong Tam POW compound in June 1968, five months before Burge arrived. They met with Freeman, other Ninth Infantry officers, and three prisoners. According to their report, the prisoners complained of having been slapped when captured. The Red Cross team, however, held that the officer in charge of the compound wasn't responsible for what might have been done to a prisoner in the field at the time he was detained. They concluded that the compound met all the Geneva Convention requirements, and that they were "well satisfied with their visit."

But Philip Wolever, an army Ranger who served as executive officer of the Ninth MPs after Freeman left, believes field phone torture at the division base camp at Dong Tam was probably common. Wolever was in Vietnam from May 1968 to May 1969, and after being wounded with four or five months left in his tour he was named the company's executive officer--third in command behind the provost marshal and company commander. Wolever said he then invited himself in to observe an interrogation. He saw the field phone put to use.

"I am closing my eyes trying to visualize that room," he said. "But the pain, I know it is strong enough to where after a couple jolts you can fake a crank because the victim would be looking right at you, and the guy would go into convulsions." Told that Andrew Wilson had come out of Chicago police custody with marks on his ears in the shape of alligator clips, Wolever said, "The contacts were attached to breasts, testicles. I don't think I ever saw an ear."

As a reconnaissance platoon leader Wolever had become familiar with the emotions and perceptions that accompany field operations. At firebase Tigers Lair, he said, it wasn't uncommon to find that soldiers in the lead element had used their rifle butts on the people they captured. "I have seen them with broken cheeks and broken arms, and you know, that is understandable," he said.

"I heard one report--and again, this is just a report. If I had witnessed it I would have pressed charges--[that] a hammer was used to interrogate a female prisoner. It was placed right in the vagina. And something like that you just do not do. I mean a field telephone, if it wasn't overused--I'd have used it because, I mean, in the field, if you had contact, if somebody was just shooting at you, you'd want information. The field telephone is, you know, I think on the lower end of the list of things that probably was used."

This isn't to say that the use of a field telephone as a torture device was peculiar to members of the Ninth Infantry and their ARVN translators. Veterans from other units have admitted taking part in electrical interrogations. (See, for example, "Infantry Officer by Trade, Intelligence Officer by Accident," a boastful account online by marine vet Dick Culver of a 1967 interrogation in which the Vietnamese suspect was forced to turn the crank himself.) In a 1971 report to President Nixon on war crimes allegations, the army's judge advocate general, Kenneth Hodson, said that Vietnamese had been tortured with electrical devices "on occasion." Security forces of other nations have used the device, and Philip Ash, the former Ninth MP Company provost marshal, said he'd heard stories of Americans inflicting such torture during World War II and the Korean war.

Americans captured in Vietnam were commonly tortured. But though it is typical of torturers--both individuals and nations--to defend themselves by saying that someone else is doing or has done something worse, that's not the human-rights standard to which U.S. military and police forces are held. "To use a field telephone to interrogate somebody is a grave breach of the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to prisoners of war," said Gary Solis. In a recent interview, Solis, a Vietnam veteran, Georgetown University

law professor, and historian of Vietnam-era courts-martial, went on to call a field phone interview "a war crime, punishable under the Uniform Code of Military Justice as aggravated assault."

Larry Booker, a private with the Ninth MP Company from August 1968 to August 1969, spent most of his time on reconnaissance missions. In an interview last spring he said he had no direct knowledge of field phone interviews but had certainly heard of them. In subsequent e-mail he added, "It would not take much effort however for someone like Burge to pick up this knowledge even if he were not directly involved. It's not rocket science. . . ."

"While I find what Burge is alleged to have done reprehensible, I am equally disturbed by the impression it leaves that we were all somehow involved in this behavior. It further perpetuates the perception of the Vietnam vet as either a pathetic character or something worse who can't move beyond those experiences. The vast majority of us simply did our jobs there as best we could to survive and get on with our lives."

In June 1969 President Nixon announced large-scale troop withdrawals from Vietnam. Ninth Infantry troops were among the first to leave, and Dong Tam was turned over to South Vietnamese forces. Burge was honorably discharged on August 25, 1969. He returned to his parents' home in Merrionette Manor, took a job as a mechanic and gas station attendant, and watched his old neighborhood change from white to black.

A rapid and bitter population shift was under way. Bowen High School, which had been 93 percent white when Burge graduated in 1965, was only 36 percent white in 1970 and 14 percent white in 1972. Burge's neighbors joined the flight. According to Fred Boland, a retired fireman and former president of the Manors' Community Assembly, the first African-Americans moved into Merrionette and adjacent Jeffery Manor in 1966 or 1967, and the two communities were predominantly black by 1971. Burge's parents sold their home in 1973.

While working at the gas station in 1969, Burge applied to the police department. Detective Joseph Martin, assigned to conduct the department's customary background check, praised the applicant as neat, polite, honest, well built, and a pleasure to deal with. "It may appear I went overboard for this young man," Martin said, "and he is all man."

Burge became a police officer in March 1970. In November 1971 the Third District commander recommended him and his partner for an outstanding-performance award given by the Jaycees. The press took notice of the young officer in January 1972, after he saved a 22-year-old African-American woman in Woodlawn from committing suicide. An instant before she squeezed the trigger, Burge jammed his thumb into the firing mechanism.

Four months later, after little more than two years on the job, the 24-year-old Burge was promoted to detective and assigned to Area Two Robbery. Area Two covers a large swath of the far south side from the lake to Cicero Avenue, an area that included Burge's high school and his parents' home.

The total number of men tortured by Burge and detectives under his command will probably never be known. The People's Law Office has a chronological list of more than 60 alleged victims from 1972 to 1991. It was provided to special prosecutor Edward Egan in 2002, and Egan, appointed to investigate the torture allegations, has added other names. His list, which has not been made public, has grown to 118.

In the People's Law Office chronology, the first to receive electrical treatment was Anthony "Satan" Holmes, now 59 and serving a 75-year sentence in the Dixon Correctional Center. Holmes says he was tortured with a hand-cranked device after his arrest in 1973. According to police documents, Holmes was a leader of the Royal Family, a gang formed in prison that specialized in armed robbery. He was arrested by Area Two detectives Michael Hoke, William Wagner, and Burge and charged with the murder of Joe Murphy, a prospective witness in a murder case against Holmes's brother-in-law. Attorney William Murphy, who represented Holmes, remembers him as a "tough guy," a weight-lifting champion "built like Arnold Schwarzenegger."

In a statement given to People's Law Office attorney Flint Taylor last spring, Holmes said he was taken to an Area Two interrogation room, where detectives put a plastic bag over his head. Holmes said that after he bit through the bag in order to breathe, Burge put a second bag over the first. Holmes told Taylor that he remembered hearing a crank turning and Burge saying, "You going to talk, nigger, you going to talk."

"It feel like a thousand needles going through my body," Holmes said. "And then after that, it just feel like, you know--it feel like something just burning me from inside, and um, I shook, I gritted, I hollered, then I passed out. . . . They put the bag back on me, took me through the same thing again. They did that I don't know how many times. . . . I said to myself, 'Man, he trying to kill me.' And I thought I was dead because all I could see was blackness, and I said, 'Man, this is it. I'm gone.' When I looked up, they brought me back again. Burge was the one that was . . . bringing me back. Every time I come to, he be the one standing over me.

"But the point is, when you see police doing you like this here and there's nobody there to help you, you like, 'Man, is this real?' You know it can't be real. . . . But then you realize it ain't no dream state because you started feeling this pain, just like somebody stabbing you in your heart, you know, and you fixing to die, but you won't die. You just still there. . . . Ain't nothing like it. It's just like, you know, just diving in some water that's ice-cold and it hits you at one time and it take your breath away and you get pain. It freezes you up. It's just like somebody just cut away everything that's inside you and there's nothing to hold you back. . . . When they got through with me, I didn't care what it

was--if they said I killed Bob or the president or anybody, I would say, 'Yeah, how do you want me to say this? This the way I did it? Yeah, this the way I did it.' . . .

"When I tried to tell people that they did me like this, ain't nobody want to listen to me. When I go to the parole board, I tell them the same thing. They look at me like, you know, 'You got jailhouse slick.'"

According to a commendation the three detectives received, Holmes gave a statement admitting "his guilt in the murder and numerous other unsolved felonies. In addition, he implicated many members of the Royal Family who were also involved in the crimes. . . . They were charged with numerous felonies, including five murders and an armed robbery in which an off-duty police officer was shot."

Holmes's confession, given to an assistant state's attorney in Burge's presence, ran more than 40 pages. It offered incriminating statements about tavern robberies and crimes having nothing to do with the Murphy murder. The department commendation praised Burge, Hoke, and Wagner for their "skillful questioning."

Accounts of electroshock torture by police in large American cities are rare, and the cases that have surfaced in the last 25 years typically involve stun guns, Tasers, and stun belts. As those weapons belong to some law enforcement arsenals, it seems safe to conclude that spontaneity and impulsiveness might figure in their abuse. The devices used under Burge at Area Two, however, included a cattle prod, a field telephone, and an unidentified instrument that plugged into a wall outlet (see sidebar). They suggest planning and considered intent. Reed College political science professor Darius Rejali, a historian of torture methods and author of the forthcoming *Torture and Democracy* (Princeton University Press), said cattle prod use by U.S. law enforcement authorities first came to public attention in 1963, when Alabama troopers and policemen openly used prods on civil rights demonstrators. New York Times reporter Austin Wehrwein purposely shocked himself on the palm with one. He wrote that the shock "felt as strong as that from a home electric light socket," that he jumped a foot, that the two prongs left painful marks that lasted more than a half hour, and that his arm ached afterward. Those who allegedly used the device at Area Two were accused of targeting the genital area, not the hand.

Extrapolating from the number of excessive-force complaints filed against Chicago police over the last ten years (roughly 2,800 a year), it seems likely that far more than a million complaints of excessive force have been filed against law enforcement and prison authorities in the U.S. in the last 40 years. Yet there have been only a handful of reports of authorities using cattle prods on human beings. Professor Rejali says that when complaints about cattle prod use have surfaced, typically the device was alleged to have been used to control, move, or punish prisoners or demonstrators. The Burge crew used the prod to extort confessions--and in that, Rejali says, they were pioneers.

As for police use of a hand-cranked generator on suspects--that's virtually unheard-of except in Chicago.

Prison authorities at the Tucker State Prison Farm in Arkansas used such a device to torture inmates until the mid-1960s (it was referred to as the "Tucker telephone"). But national authorities on excessive force, including Professor Rejali, New York University law professor Paul Chevigny, University of California criminology professor Richard Leo, and Allyson Collins, who wrote a 1998 Human Rights Watch report on U.S. police brutality, were unable to name a single other instance in which such a device was used by police officers in the U.S. in the last half century.

In the 18 years that followed Holmes's interrogation, electrical torture gave way to other means to the same ends in Chicago. At Area Two, the three electrical devices seem to have been retired in 1984, around the time that a defense attorney told local reporters that Area Two detectives were using a black box to attack the genitals of suspects. The plastic bag, which in Holmes's statement seemed an accessory to electric shock, later became a primary tool. The shock devices, however, were what did Burge in.

On the witness stand in 1989, Andrew Wilson seemed untroubled by having been beaten. It was the electric shock that seemed to feed his determination to proceed with his civil suit. The trial prompted someone to send anonymous letters in police department envelopes to the People's Law Office, which was representing Wilson. The letters said that "almost all of the detectives and police officers involved" knew Wilson had committed the murders but did "not approve of the beatings and torture." The letters went on to say "Burge hates black people" and that "he was always present, the machines and the plastic bags were his and he is the person who encouraged their use. You will find that the people with him were either weak and easily led or sadists." The letter writer, who seemed highly knowledgeable about Burge, his gang of torturers, and those who did and didn't belong to it, told the lawyers to talk to a Cook County jail inmate named Melvin Jones. Jones said he'd been given electric shock nine days before Wilson was arrested. The People's Law Office located the transcript of Jones's testimony about the interrogation. In it Jones said that Burge had mentioned two members of the Royal Family as having received the same electrical treatment. Those men led the lawyers to other victims, and eventually the notion that Wilson had made up his story became so untenable that even the city of Chicago's attorneys acknowledged that electric shock had taken place. Burge was fired in 1993.

Burge declined to be interviewed for this story. In September he was deposed at length in four civil suits and one parole board hearing, cases involving five men who said they'd been tortured by Area Two detectives. He gave his name, said he'd worked for the police department, agreed that he'd received a subpoena to testify, and responded to all further questions by invoking his Fifth Amendment right to remain silent.

Over the course of the past eight months, 30 other men who served with and under Burge have also taken the Fifth in depositions for the same cases. Thus far, all have been white. (James Sotos, who represents Burge and other Chicago police officers in one of those civil suits, claims the officers were willing to testify until he told them not to.)

However, four black officers who served at Area Two with Burge have recently given sworn statements providing new information about the Burge era. Former detective Melvin Duncan, who worked at Area Two from 1971 to 1978, gave the People's Law Office's Flint Taylor an affidavit saying he'd seen a dark wooden box in the Robbery Unit office when Burge served there. The box, he said, reminded him of a hand-cranked electrical device his father had made and had demonstrated by giving him and his brother "little shocks." Duncan's sworn statement also says, "While working at Area 2, I heard that certain Robbery detectives used an electrical box and cattle prods on people to get confessions from them."

Sammy Lacey Jr., now an attorney, worked as a detective in Area Two for about seven years, moving on to the Seventh District in 1988 when he was promoted to sergeant. In a sworn statement on October 12, Lacey said that even officers outside the unit noticed that detectives on Burge's "A team," most of whom worked the midnight shift, seemed to be getting a lot of confessions. There seemed to be a certain recognition, he said, "that something was not going right on the midnights."

Lacey noted that the black detectives who worked under Burge in the Violent Crimes unit were not assigned homicides. "Every time he would give us our detective division evaluations, we would always be rated low. I don't care what we did, how many arrests we made, he would always throw this in our faces, that 'you didn't do any homicides.' [We'd say,] 'But you didn't assign homicides to blacks.' He said, 'Well, that's your problem,' or something like that."

In those years, low efficiency ratings put a detective's job in jeopardy, and Lacey recalled that the black detectives were always the lowest rated. He said that in 1983 they complained to Burge's immediate superior, future police superintendent LeRoy Martin, about how they were being treated. The sole result, Lacey said, was that they were chewed out by Burge for taking their complaints up the chain of command. Martin did not return calls for comment.

In a sworn statement on November 9, retired sergeant Doris Byrd, who had been Lacey's partner at Area Two Violent Crimes in the early 80s, recalled that black detectives were given unsolvable and unnewsworthy cases, and that their names were ranked lowest on the efficiency reports until Deputy Chief James O'Reilly interceded on their behalf.

Byrd said that she could hear screaming coming from interview rooms while Burge's A team was on duty. She said suspects told her they had been beaten with a telephone book and had had bags put over their heads. She said she had not seen the black box, but had heard that it was "running rampantly through the little unit up there."

When asked why she hadn't said anything about this before, she replied, "We would have been frozen out of the police system. We would have been ostracized. We definitely wouldn't have made rank. We probably would have been stuck in some do-nothing assignment."

Byrd cited the example of Area Two Violent Crimes detective Frank Lavery, legendary within the department for testifying against his colleagues in the case of George Jones. Jones, the teenage son of an African-American Chicago police officer, was put on trial for a 1981 murder though Lavery had uncovered exculpatory information and had submitted a memo to his commanding officer naming a more likely culprit. Lavery was on leave when he learned Jones was on trial, and he came forward, revealed his role in the case, testified in Jones's defense, and thereafter was ostracized at Area Two. When Lavery requested a transfer, he was moved to police headquarters and assigned the job of watching police recruits give urine samples.

Byrd recalled a day when she was in a room with Burge and other detectives, and Lavery was present, looking for a file. "When he left the room," Byrd said, "Burge drew his weapon and pointed it at the back of Lavery and said 'Bang.'"

Retired officer Walter Young, who served with the Chicago police for nearly 36 years, also worked as a detective under Burge in the early 80s. In a sworn statement given to Taylor on November 2, Young said he had no problem with his efficiency ratings during the decade he worked as a detective before coming to Area Two, but once there his ratings plummeted and he was ultimately busted down to patrolman. Young said he took an ostrich approach to the brutality, that when he thought something might happen he would "vanish." He particularly didn't want to be around when Andrew Wilson came out of the interrogation room. He said he had seen a hand-cranked device in the basement of Area Two but didn't know what it was at the time. He wasn't told the specifics of the techniques then in use, he said, but he heard them referred to as the "Vietnam special" or the "Vietnamese treatment."

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