

Statement of Terry Pearson to the War Contracting Commission

Monday September 14, 2009

I am 50 years old, and spent 23 years in the British Army and retired in July 1999 as Warrant officer class 2. Since January 2004, I have worked in Iraq and Afghanistan in various management roles.

I started work at Camp Sullivan in Jun 2008 as a project manager for RAI, a sub-contractor to ArmorGroup, North America.. I supervised a staff of 90, the vast majority of Afghan nationals, in support of the dining hall, maintenance, housekeeping and camp cleanliness. Almost immediately after I took over this appointment I was warned "Never ever go to any party that Charlie shift has". As you know, pictures of these parties have been prominently displayed around the world. Both as a military officer and a contractor, I have never seen anything as disgusting and, ultimately, harmful to morale and Embassy security.

AGNA and RAI had a distorted honor code -- Keep Your Mouth Shut.

One night in the summer of 2009, about 2100hrs, I was approached by a member of Charlie shift, to see if they could use the fire hoses we had at the front gate to mix cement, to fill up swimming pools they were using at their shift party. I called up one of my staff and told them to come and get them, and fill the pools up. It was about 10 minutes later; I decided to go down myself to ensure that these hoses came back. About 30 people were present.

This was the first time I had seen one of Charlie shift parties. The first thing that struck me was they had a metal container in the middle of the road, on which they were burning wooden pallets. The second thought that went through my mind was alcohol and a fire this size, looked very unsafe. Most of people there were wearing underwear, but many were also wearing coconut shell braziers and coconut shells over their groins, and were for the best part naked. Some were standing there urinating on the ground and on each other.

One person who had apparently run out of urine, took the fire hose from one of my staff and put it between his legs. It was at this stage I realised I had three Afghan nationals standing in the centre of all the activity. I told them to get the hose and go back to the front gate. This was the first time i had seen one of these parties, which had been going on since morning. I was annoyed and disgusted the way they were acting and the way some were dressed. I had 3 female third country nationals who worked about 30 ft away from where this was going on, and during the day, there were also about 60-plus Afghans present, two of whom were females. None of my staff would say anything about being offended. Like all the Afghans who work for foreign companies they will not speak out because they fear of there jobs.

I arrived back from vacation on the 14 Aug 2009. On the 15 Aug one of my staff told me of an incident that had happened on the 1 Aug 09. From what I understood at the time, 5 ex pats came in the dining room at about 1700hrs, dressed in only underwear and carrying bottles /cans of beer. The Afghans whose job was to check-in guards to the dining room, told them all they could not come in because they were not dressed correctly. They all started to abuse the Afghan national, and only one signed in, the others just walked past him. The dining room manager, who was on a day off and working out in the gym opposite the entrance to the dining room, saw the Charlie shift guards enter the facility.

He went in and asked the waiter why he had let them in. The waiter explained what had happened and the dining room manager immediately went to find someone from AGNA HQ to report it to. He found A SUPERVISOR?? and was told by him that he would deal with it. But as of now, no one had been back to this man to apologise or tell him what had happened, and he was still scared every time he saw these people come in.

I later took a brief, signed statement from the Afghan national. That statement reads:

“I would like to inform you, that two weeks ago on 01-Aug-09, after 17:00 hrs, I was sitting on the dining hall computer desk due to my Supervisor was off, five expats came to dining (hall) for having dinner which they only wear short underwear with bottles of Alcohol on their hands -- just one them signed the others didn't sign and had dinner after that start going out on the way I was by dinning entrance door [-REDACTED-] start swearing me and pulled my face, while pulling my face he was telling me that you are very good for fucking and used some other bad words, as I was too afraid of them I could not tell them any thing and after that all the time when I am facing them I am frighten of them.”

I passed this statement to Chief Admin officer and Project Manager of AGNA, and sent a copy to the temporary country manager of RAI. It was at this stage there was a change in attitude from AGNA Supervisors towards me. I later sent an e-mail to RAI saying, “I expect AGNA to ask for me to be replaced, and told them what was happening”

On the 20 Aug I had still not heard what the out come was from the complaint made by my waiter. At this stage I said I was pushing this further as it looked like someone was trying to cover this up. I informed the temporary country manager at RAI what had happened, but had still not heard any word back. I thought they just didn't want to rock the boat with AGNA. There was simply no accountability in the system, no matter how outrageous the behaviour or contract violations.

On the 21 Aug I was told that one of the Charlie Shift ringleaders had been removed from the contract. I took for granted he had been sacked. It was only later that day that I found out, he had been given the chance to resign, and people were saying that two senior members of AGNA found him a new job in Afghanistan with another US contractor. That night three senior members from AGNA headquarters took him out to celebrate with a going away meal.

On the 2 Sep I started to get e-mails from my main office in Dubai quizzing me to see if I had spoken to anyone about the incident with the waiter. In the final e-mail I was told such an action was very “serious”. This left me in no doubt that I was going to lose my job, for doing what I thought was right. I sent an e-mail giving them my 30 days notice. I retracted my notice five hours later. It took RAI 11 hours to answer, and when they did, they gave me 6 hours to pack and get out of camp Sullivan and the following day I was out of Afghanistan.

I shouldn't have been surprised by the attitude of RAI, it seemed they would do anything to keep on the right side of AGNA. Even when I told RAI that AGNA was asking us to do things that were not in the contract or sounded illegal. The answer came back: just do it. Please remember that RAI is a sub-contractor to AGNA.