

Witness Name: Nicholas Hunt

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits: None

Dated:

**In the matter of an investigation into the death of  
Mr Nadheem Abdullah**

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF  
NICHOLAS HUNT  
BSc, MB, BS, FRCPath, DipRCPath (Forensic)**

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I, Nicholas Hunt, will say as follows:-

1. I am a Home Office accredited pathologist. I am a Fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists (FRCPath) and an Honorary Civilian Consultant Advisor to the Army in Forensic Medicine.
2. I have been asked by the Inspector to provide an expert medical opinion as a forensic pathologist in relation to the death of Mr Nadheem Abdullah on 11 May 2003 near Al-Uzayr in Maysan Province, South East Iraq.
3. In providing this opinion, I have studied the following material:
  - a) Statement of Dr Il-Maliki dated 29 May 2003;
  - b) Statements of Dr Il-Miyahi dated:
    - i. 22 May 2003
    - ii. 29 December 2003
    - iii. 31 January 2004
    - iv. 14 August 2005

- v. 12 October 2005
- c) Statements of Jusm Badr II-Mahamadawi dated:
  - i. 29 May 2003
  - ii. 20 December 2003
  - iii. 12 August 2005
  - iv. 30 September 2005
- d) Statement of Ali Al-Sager dated 2 July 2005;
- e) Death certificate of Nadheem Abdullah.

### **Opinion**

- 4. I would base my opinion on the injuries as reported in the following statements:
  - a) Swollen and bruised head; no external bleeding (Ali Al-Sager statement dated 2 July 2005)
  - b) Large haematoma on left side of the head; vomiting where the vomit was mixed with blood (Dr II-Miyahi statement dated 22 May 2003)
  - c) Swollen face; head battered; no external bleeding; blood pouring from the mouth when turned on his side (Jusm Badr II-Mahamadawi statement dated 29 May 2003).
- 5. This evidence would seem to indicate that Mr. Abdullah received blunt force trauma to the head. I say blunt to distinguish between that and, for example, a stabbing or a gunshot wound.
- 6. This leaves a number of potential explanations as to the cause of the injuries, including the use of fists through hard punching; the use of a foot in stamping or kicking; or the use of any blunt weapon (included, in a military context, an object such as the butt of a rifle). Any or all of those would be capable of leaving bruising or swelling on the head or face without necessary breaking of the surface of the skin. For the sake of completeness one should point out that such injuries may of course be seen in the context of falls, road traffic collisions, etc., but one assumes that these scenarios are excluded by other lines of evidence.
- 7. On the evidence I have seen I would find it difficult to say whether a weapon may have been used.

8. If the injuries were caused by stamping from a booted foot then it may have left subtle marks on the skin replicating the pattern of the boot. The same can also be said of a rifle butt. Such marks could be quite subtle, requiring a trained observer to see them. There was nothing about the descriptions of these injuries to indicate that the witnesses had seen anything like that, although that does not exclude the possibility of either injury being caused by stamping or a rifle butt.
9. There is the possibility that Mr Abdullah sustained a fractured skull, which would provide a potential explanation for the bleeding from the mouth. A significant skull fracture can go around the underside of the skull where the brain rests – a basal skull fracture. The base of the skull, if it is fractured, can allow blood to leak out through the back of the nasal passages and then the mouth.
10. One detail which might point to skull fracturing is the reference to bleeding on the x-rays. I find this puzzling, given that a traditional x-ray would not detect any bleeding which had occurred. A CT scan, which is a much more sophisticated investigation, would be required to do this. I have not seen anything which clarifies whether the x-rays referred to were the traditional form of x-ray or a CT scan. It may be the case that Dr Al Miyahi did indeed see a type of skull fracture which may be associated with a bleed on the brain, but the presence of such a bleed cannot really be proven based just on the x-ray.
11. In the absence of a skull fracture, a blow to the mouth splitting the lip/lining of mouth or breaking the jaw may lead to bleeding from the mouth. The other possible explanation is if Mr Abdullah had received a very hard blow to the abdomen which caused damage to the stomach, but this is very unusual. The other possibility is that he sustained a broken nose - although I would expect at least some blood to have come from the nostrils.
12. Internal bleeding in the head could have occurred without a fractured skull. Blunt injuries of some significant force could have caused that sort of internal bleeding on the brain.
13. The evidence of Jusm Al-Mahamadawi and Ali Al-Sager suggests that there was no breach of the skin, the technical term for which, in the context of blunt force injuries, is a laceration. Lacerations on the scalp in particular bleed very heavily. I would have expected if such an injury were present for it to be readily apparent, even to a lay person.
14. I have been asked by the Inspector about whether, if blunt force is used to the head which does not cause any breaking of the skin and external bleeding, that in itself is an

indicator as to the measure of force which may have been used in the blow. I would say that that it depends upon the weapon used. A hard punch with a clenched fist is capable of causing devastating and rapidly fatal brain injury without breaking the skin. There is the commonly known example of the 'one punch manslaughter' where there are in fact often two impacts; the first coming from a punch to the face or head, the second being the head hitting the ground.

15. It would not necessarily require a punch of considerable force to cause injury such as that sustained by Mr Abdullah. In some of the one punch manslaughter cases the force used was not terribly great. In essence, the assessment is dependent on what weapon is likely to have been used. Another possibility is that there were repeated blows of a lesser degree to the same area.
16. I have been asked about situations where a person can die from brain injury incurred from the use of a blunt force blow and where there is bleeding on the brain. There are a number of possibilities where this can occur and they include:
  - a) The brain is injured in such a way that many of the connecting fibres between nerve cells are severed. There may be and often is some bleeding associated with this, but it may not be very dramatic. This is referred to as traumatic axonal injury which may be of varying degree and when very severe may lead to rapid death.
  - b) Damage is caused to one of the vertebral arteries which run deep in the neck and inside the skull which then bleeds out around the base of the brain so that, although there is relatively limited bleeding, it is in a very sensitive part of the brain. This is referred to as a traumatic basal subarachnoid haemorrhage and is often seen in so-called one punch manslaughter cases. It typically, however, leads to near instantaneous loss of consciousness and very rapid death.
  - c) The impact of blunt force injury causes bruising to the brain as well as bleeding. That then causes the brain to swell, which in turn stops the brain from functioning. In that sort of scenario, there may well be a delay before the person dies. I would expect such a person to become progressively more deeply unconscious and then die at a later stage.
  - d) There may be a build up of blood in the space between the brain and its outer covering membrane called the dura mater. This is referred to as a subdural haematoma and again may be associated with a period of survival prior to clinical deterioration and death.
  - e) There may be a break in the bone which, if it is in the side of the head, may cause bleeding to build up in the skull and again stop the brain from functioning. This is

referred to as an extradural haematoma and is the entity I am considering in Point 10.

17. Another matter which I should consider is that, where somebody is rendered deeply unconscious through head injuries, that person may still survive with appropriate treatment. However, the possibility exists that unless care is taken of that person's airway, chiefly by putting them in the recovery position, removing any obstruction and use of an artificial airway, that person may still end up dying as the brain is starved of oxygen even if the original brain injury was not very severe. This is particularly the case where there is blood in the mouth and the upper part of the airway. Forensic pathologists often encounter a situation whereby someone has received blunt force injuries and a detailed examination of the brain does not reveal an overwhelming amount of direct brain injury, such as bruising and tearing of the brain, but the person has died as a result of oxygen deprivation.
18. Those are the main ways in which a fatal outcome may occur following blunt force injury to the head.
19. I have been asked about the bleeding from Mr Abdullah's mouth as seen by his mother, Jusm Il-Mahamadawi, as recorded in her statement, which she says continues after his condition deteriorates. I would say that this depends on whether the bleeding in the mouth was a result of local trauma, i.e. the mouth or the nose, or whether it was the result of a fracture at the base of the skull. Those two possibilities lead to different interpretations:
  - a. Blood from Mr Abdullah's mouth or nose got into his airways and interfered with the mechanism of breathing and this has played a significant part in causing death.
  - b. If it was a basal skull fracture, that would imply much more violence and a much more significant impact to the head. If that were the case I would expect there to be more direct brain injury contributing to death (although airway obstruction may also have played a part).
20. On the evidence it is difficult to express an opinion as to the degree of force used. The injuries could have occurred as in the 'one punch manslaughter' scenario or as the result of multiple blunt impacts.
21. I have been asked about whether I would expect the use of a rifle butt to the head with some considerable force would cause external injury. In general terms, I would expect external injury. The butt of a rifle is a relatively small area, and the chances of a significant blow tearing the skin would certainly be increased. If it is used in that way

there may be an impression of the end of the rifle butt on the skin, but the skin would not break if the force used was not particularly great. If great force was used, it would be quite likely to break the skin. If a rifle butt is used not in a straight downward motion but is swung more like a club, there would be a wider surface area impacting the skin and it would then deliver a reasonable degree of force without necessarily causing laceration. I therefore cannot discount the use of a rifle butt merely because the skin is not broken.

22. If a person's head is relatively mobile, for example if the person is on their hands and knees, and then a weapon such as a rifle butt is swung against their head, this can result in quite devastating brain injury. This is due to the fact that there the striking of a more mobile head causes more acceleration of the head, and thus also of the brain. The brain injury sustained can be more severe than if the person being struck is lying on the ground and thus the head has no scope for movement.
23. If a person's head is on hard ground and there is a sufficiently heavy blow to the side of the head that is uppermost, I would expect to see some abrasion and potentially a splitting of the skin of the side of the head that is against the ground. On the evidence that I have been shown there is nothing to suggest that this was the case.
24. Vomiting can occur for a number of reasons. In the context of this case, blood is an irritant to the stomach, and blood from the nose or the mouth may induce vomiting if swallowed in sufficient quantity. Vomiting can also be induced by a head injury.

**Statement of Truth**

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true

Signed ...  .....

Dated 10<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2014 .....