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Interrogator Shares Saddam's Confessions

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(CBS) For a man who drew America into two wars and countless military engagements, we never knew what Saddam Hussein was thinking. But you are going to hear more than has ever been revealed before.

After his capture, Saddam met every day with one man, an American he knew as "Mr. George." George is FBI agent George Piro, who was the front man for a team of FBI and CIA analysts who were trying to answer some of the great mysteries of recent history. What happened to the weapons of mass destruction? Was Saddam in league with al Qaeda? Why did he choose war with the United States?

As **correspondent Scott Pelley** reports, Piro is the man who came to know Saddam better than anyone, as they sat face to face in a windowless room.

"I purposely put his back against the wall. And then mine against the door, psychologically to tell him that his back was against the wall in the interview room. And that I stood between him and the door, psychologically. Between him whether it's to go back to his cell, freedom, whatever he was projecting to be outside of that door. I was kind of that psychological barrier between him and the door," Piro recalls.

Just weeks after being pulled from a hole in the ground by U.S. Special Forces after a nine-month manhunt, Saddam Hussein was placed in the hands of George Piro.

Piro says he called the former dictator "Mr. Saddam," and that Hussein began to call the agent "Mr. George." "Over time though, in private, it changed to just Saddam and George," Piro remembers.

Asked if Hussein ever knew who Piro really was, the agent says, "No."

Piro is an American success story. Born in Lebanon, his family escaped the civil war there and moved to the States when he was 12. After enlisting in the Air Force, Piro became a policeman in California. He went to night school to earn the college degree required to apply to the FBI. Piro had been an agent only five years at the time, but was chosen for this assignment for his native Arabic and because it was thought Saddam would identify with a young Arab man on his way up.

Piro's first trick was to make himself appear to be much more powerful than he was. "He didn't know I worked for the FBI, he didn't know I was a field agent," Piro explains.

"If he found out you were a field agent for the FBI, what do you think his reaction would have been?" Pelley asks.

"I think initially he would have been angry. He would feel that I was way beneath him, and would not respond well to the interrogation. Or even to me," Piro says.

"I wonder who did Saddam think you were answering to?" Pelley asks.

"I think he thought, and actually on a couple of occasions talked around the issue that I was directly answering to the president," Piro says.

Piro says Saddam thought "Mr. George" was in direct contact with President Bush, but that in reality he never was.

But Saddam wouldn't have guessed, especially after seeing the charade Piro rehearsed with the guards in the jail. "At times we would rehearse where I would yell out some instructions, and they would literally start running around in panic, trying to accomplish it. And it was all part of our strategy," Piro explains.

Piro says it was all a show for Hussein, and that he established at the very beginning that he was going to be in charge of the dictator.

What did Piro tell Saddam?

"I basically said that I was gonna be responsible for every aspect of his life, and that if he needed anything I was gonna be the person that he needed to talk to," he recalls.

"He would be beholden to you for everything," Pelley remarks.

"Yes," Piro says.

Mr. George controlled the baby wipes that Saddam was fond of. Saddam was a clean freak and he used the wipes to clean his cell and wipe off

fresh fruit. Saddam wrote poetry every day, but Mr. George controlled the pen and paper. And in a cell with no windows, Mr. George had the power over day and night.

"We had the guards remove their watches. And the only person that was wearing a watch was me. And it was very evident to him, 'cause I was wearing the largest wristwatch you could imagine. And it was just the act of him asking for the time -- was critical in our plan," Piro says.

"So you controlled time itself," Pelley says.

"Yes," Piro says.

Piro says no coercive interrogation techniques, like sleep deprivation, heat, cold, loud noises, or water boarding were ever used. "It's against FBI policy, first. And wouldn't have really benefited us with someone like Saddam," Piro says.

Why not?

"I think Saddam clearly had demonstrated over his legacy that he would not respond to threats, to any type of fear-based approach," Piro explains.

"So how do you crack a guy like that?" Pelley asks.

"Time," Piro says.

Months of time, during which Piro manipulated Saddam, creating a relationship based on dependency, trust and emotion. Piro alternated between acts of kindness and provocation. He would jar Saddam with video, including pictures of his fall, and the pulling down of his statues.

"I wanted him to get angry. I wanted him to see those videos and to get angry," Piro explains. "You want to take him through those various emotions. Happy, angry, sad. When you have someone going through those emotions they're not able to really control themselves. And they're more vulnerable during the interview."

"When he was watching his statue being pulled down, what did you see?" Pelley asks.

"You could see the anger in his face. He would try not to watch. Look down," Piro remembers. "But you could tell he was angered by it. But at the same time he was trying to keep himself under control."

"What does an angry Saddam look like? Angriest you ever saw him," Pelley asks.

"The angriest you ever saw him, his face got extremely red. And his voice changed," Piro recalls.

"The eyes?" Pelley asks.

"A lot of hate in those eyes. We were talking about what led to the invasion of Kuwait. What led him to want to invade Kuwait," Piro says.

That invasion was in 1990. Back then, Saddam accused Kuwait of wrecking Iraq's economy by stealing oil and demanding repayment of loans. But Piro learned, for the first time, that the brutal invasion was triggered by personal insult.

"What really triggered it for him, according to Saddam, was he had sent his foreign minister to Kuwait to meet with the Emir Al Sabah, the former leader of Kuwait, to try to resolve some of these issues. And the Emir told the foreign minister of Iraq that he would not stop doing what he was doing until he turned every Iraqi woman into a \$10 prostitute. And that really sealed it for him, to invade Kuwait. He wanted to punish, he told me, Emir Al Sabah, for saying that," Piro explains.

The U.S. ejected Saddam from Kuwait, leaving the dictator with no love lost for the Bush family. "He didn't like President [George W.] Bush. He would have liked meeting President Reagan. He thought he was a great leader. Honorable man. He liked President Clinton. But he did not like President Bush, the first or the current," Piro says.

Getting to Saddam's secrets depended on patiently undermining the self confidence of a man who was used to total control. Piro saw an opportunity one night when they flew Saddam to a hospital. They loaded him on a helicopter, manacled and wearing a blindfold.

"And once I saw how beautiful Baghdad was in the middle of the night, so I took advantage of it. I allowed him to look out and the lights were on. There was traffic. And it looked like any other major metropolitan city around the world. And for him to see that. And as I mentioned, you know, big Baghdad is moving forward without you. I mean, little things like that didn't require a lot of suggestion on our part. It made its point," Piro recalls.

Piro even used Saddam's birthday, a former national holiday, to drive home another painful point. "In 2004, no one celebrated his birthday on April 28th. So the only one that really knew and cared was us. I'd brought him some cookies, and we, the FBI, celebrated his birthday for him."

The cookies, Piro says, he got from his own mother. "He loved 'em. I told them they were Lebanese cookies, which, of course, he was a big fan of the Lebanese people, as he said."

Piro says he told Saddam the cookies were from his mother, and that he appreciated it. But when he told his mom about the cookie gift on his return, Piro says, "She actually slapped me. In the back of the head."

Piro's mother supplied another gift unwittingly: flower seeds. Saddam was given a small plot behind a high fence where he gardened with his bare hands because he couldn't have tools. Piro and Saddam took walks in the tiny garden and what flowed was a series of revelations.

First, how could U.S. forces have missed him when he was the chief target of 50 air strikes in the shock and awe campaign?

"He said that he was at one of the locations. He said it in a kind of a bragging fashion, that he was there, but that we missed him," Piro says. "He told me he changed the way he traveled. He got rid of his normal vehicles. He got rid of the protective detail he traveled with. Really just to change his signature so he would be much harder to identify."

And what about the body doubles, the decoys? There had been so much intelligence analysis of suspicious video, the man in the river and the man in the glasses.

"I asked him if he had used body doubles and he said no. And never had been any body doubles," Piro says.

"That was an urban legend?" Pelley asks.

"Yes. That's what he claimed. And I pressed him on it and he said that, really there weren't anybody that could play him. No one could fit the role of being Saddam's double," Piro says.

"I wonder, did Saddam appreciate how well you got to know him?" Pelley asks.

"I think he did. He told me that I knew him better than his own sons. Because I actually spent more time with him, than his own sons had as adults," Piro explains.

Piro established complete control, but Saddam had one act of defiance left in him: he staged a hunger strike. "Well, I, as you can imagine I was extremely nervous. I didn't want to be the guy to screw this up," Piro says.

He didn't eat for five days.

Asked how it ended, Piro says, "He eventually did eat. He said that he was so concerned for me because I was, he could clearly tell that I was concerned for his health. And it was starting to affect me. That he was going to eat for me."

"So he did you a favor?" Pelley asks.

"Yes, he did," Piro says.

Asked if anything changed after the hunger strike, Piro says, "Yes. I saw kind of a change in him at that point where he was becoming more and more attached to me emotionally."

"He would want me to spend more time with him. If I didn't spend what he thought was enough quality time I would hear about it. He would want me to spend hours with him. Because I was the only person that was really talking to him. He could share things with me. He would write poetry and then share that poetry with me. Things like that," Piro remembers. "His poetry, which he at that point was writing on a daily basis and reading to me was the means I used to introduce the subject of WMD."

The subject of weapons of mass destruction was the most important mystery Piro was trying to answer. It would take him five months to bring up the question.

Piro debriefed Saddam for the Iraq Survey Group, the people President Bush sent to figure out what had happened to the weapons of mass destruction. Piro's goal was to sit with Saddam month after month to tease out the truth over time and it dawned on Piro that Saddam fancied himself quite a writer: he wrote poetry every day, and in Saddam's pride of authorship Piro found an opening.

"What did you think of the poetry?" Pelley asks.

"Most of them [the poems] were actually terrible," Piro says, laughing. "Some days I thought I didn't get paid enough to listen to them."

But Piro didn't tell Saddam his real opinion. "I told him they were great," he says.

And with that flattery, Saddam began to boast that he wrote all his own speeches too. That was Piro's chance.

"And I said, absolutely. I saw that. Except there was a couple of speeches that I really didn't see the same writing style. That same passion, emotion that I had seen in his poetry. So I figured those speeches must have been written by someone else. By a speechwriter. And he was kind of surprised. And he asked me what speeches. And I said, 'Well, funny you should ask. And in June 2000 you gave a speech in where you said Iraq would not disarm until others in the region did. A rifle for a rifle, a stick for a stick, a stone for a stone,'" Piro recalls.

That June 2000 speech was about weapons of mass destruction. In talking casually about that speech, Saddam began to tell the story of his

weapons. It was a breakthrough that had taken five months.

"Oh, you couldn't imagine the excitement that I was feeling at that point," Piro remembers.

"And what did he tell you about how his weapons of mass destruction had been destroyed?" Pelley asks.

"He told me that most of the WMD had been destroyed by the U.N. inspectors in the '90s. And those that hadn't been destroyed by the inspectors were unilaterally destroyed by Iraq," Piro says.

"So why keep the secret? Why put your nation at risk, why put your own life at risk to maintain this charade?" Pelley asks.

"It was very important for him to project that because that was what kept him, in his mind, in power. That capability kept the Iranians away. It kept them from reinvading Iraq," Piro says.

Before his wars with America, Saddam had fought a ruinous eight year war with Iran and it was Iran he still feared the most.

"He believed that he couldn't survive without the perception that he had weapons of mass destruction?" Pelley asks.

"Absolutely," Piro says.

"As the U.S. marched toward war and we began massing troops on his border, why didn't he stop it then? And say, 'Look, I have no weapons of mass destruction.' I mean, how could he have wanted his country to be invaded?" Pelley asks.

"He didn't. But he told me he initially miscalculated President Bush. And President Bush's intentions. He thought the United States would retaliate with the same type of attack as we did in 1998 under Operation Desert Fox. Which was a four-day aerial attack. So you expected that initially," Piro says.

Piro says Saddam expected some kind of an air campaign and that he could survive that. "He survived that once. And then he was willing to accept that type of attack. That type of damage," he says.

"Saddam didn't believe that the United States would invade," Pelley remarks.

"Not initially, no," Piro says.

"Once it was clear to him that there was going to be an invasion of the country. I mean, did he actually believe that his armies could win?" Pelley asks.

"No," Piro says. "What he had asked of his military leaders and senior government officials was to give him two weeks. And at that point it would go into what he called the secret war."

"The secret war. What did he mean?" Pelley asks.

"Going from a conventional to an unconventional war," Piro says.

"So the insurgency was part of his plan from the very beginning," Pelley remarks.

"Well, he would like to take credit for the insurgency," Piro says.

Central to that insurgency were Saddam's sons, that is, before they were killed by U.S. forces.

Asked how Saddam reacted to the deaths of his two sons, Uday and Qusay, Piro says, "I was surprised. He didn't show any remorse. He told me that he was, of course, proud of his sons. They died believing, or fighting, for what they believed."

Piro asked Saddam about his son Uday, a notorious rapist and murderer. He pressed him until Saddam didn't want to hear anymore. "He tells me to stop. Basically stop asking these questions. You don't get to pick your kids. You're kind of stuck with what you get," Piro recalls.

Among the most important questions for U.S. intelligence was whether Saddam was supporting al Qaeda, as had been claimed by some in the Bush administration.

What was Saddam's opinion of Osama Bin Laden?

"He considered him to be a fanatic. And as such was very wary of him. He told me, 'You can't really trust fanatics,'" Piro says.

"Didn't think of Bin Laden as an ally in his effort against the United States in this war against the United States?" Pelley asks.

"No. No. He didn't wanna be seen with Bin Laden. And didn't want to associate with Bin Laden," Piro explains.

Piro says Saddam thought that Bin Laden was a threat to him and his regime.

Saddam's story was verified in interrogations with other former high-ranking members of his government. One striking theme that emerged was just how little we knew about Saddam and how little he knew about us.

"He couldn't understand why we would re-elect our president every four years. In his opinion, it takes years to really understand the job and to be able to do it effectively. So every four years he was joking that he'd have to break in a new president," Piro explains.

"So he didn't have a good understanding of how our system worked?" Pelley asks.

"No. Again, he was relying on movies to get an insight into the American culture," Piro says.

Piro's interrogation of Saddam Hussein gets strong praise from Charles Duelfer, the former weapons inspector who headed the Iraq Survey Group.

Piro's boss at the Washington field office of the FBI is also highly complimentary.

"The FBI will be celebrating its 100th anniversary this year and I would have to say that the interview with Saddam Hussein is one of the top accomplishments of our agency in the last 100 years," FBI Assistant Director Joe Persichini, who is Piro's boss.

It is an accomplishment made possible by Piro's language skills, Persichini says, noting that out of 10,000 FBI agents, only about 50 speak Arabic. "We're out recruiting aggressively in our Middle Eastern communities I think it's very important that we mirror the demographics of society today in the war on terror its imperative that we're out recruiting and hiring Arabic speaking agents and linguists," he explains.

For his part, Piro credits the team of analysts from the FBI and CIA who helped support his work, providing him with information on a daily basis that allowed him to have extensive knowledge about Saddam. Being a subject matter expert was crucial, says Piro.

"The more you know about your subject, the better of an interview ...that you're gonna conduct. You'll be able to recognize inconsistencies, deception, things like that. Plus it really establishes your credibility within the interview," he says.

The Piro interviews with Saddam turned up other revelations about one of the most notorious war crimes of his regime: the use of chemical weapons on Kurdish civilians in 1988. Iraq gassed its own people in something called the Anfal campaign to counter Iranian incursions and Kurdish resistance to his rule.

Piro says Saddam told him he himself gave the orders to use chemical weapons against the Kurds in the North. When shown the graphic pictures of the aftermath, Piro says Saddam reacted by saying, "Necessary."

In fact, Piro says Saddam intended to produce weapons of mass destruction again, some day. "The folks that he needed to reconstitute his program are still there," Piro says.

"And that was his intention?" Pelley asks.

"Yes," Piro says.

"What weapons of mass destruction did he intend to pursue again once he had the opportunity?" Pelley asks.

"He wanted to pursue all of WMD. So he wanted to reconstitute his entire WMD program," says Piro.

"Chemical, biological, even nuclear," Pelley asks.

"Yes," Piro says.

In the summer of 2004, legal custody of Saddam transferred from the U.S. to Iraq. And Saddam had no illusions about what that meant. "Prosecution and execution," Piro says.

When he appeared in court, Piro wanted to show that Saddam had been well treated, so Piro bought him a new suit and an FBI intelligence analyst cut his hair. On Piro's last day in Baghdad, he brought two Cuban cigars to the jail and sat with Saddam in his tiny garden.

"He told me that we would see each other again, which I knew wasn't going to happen. And then he said goodbye in the traditional Arab manner. And I was a little surprised. I kind of saw him tear up," Piro remembers.

The traditional Arab manner of saying goodbye - three kisses on the cheeks - surprised Piro. "And it made me feel somewhat awkward. To be saying goodbye to Saddam Hussein in that fashion," he recalls.

More than two years later, Saddam went to the gallows. Piro says that Saddam calculated his performance - his defiance, his refusal to wear a hood, so that the last picture for history would not be those humiliating images of his capture. It was, Saddam understood, the last thing he could control.

Piro says Saddam expected to die and that it didn't bother him.

Why not?

"Well, his answer was is he was 67 at the time. He had lived longer than the average Arab male lived in the Middle East. He had a wonderful life. Got to be the leader of the cradle of civilization. And in his opinion, of course, had a significant impact on that country. The region. The world. So he was not bothered by having to face death," Piro says.

"No remorse? No concern for the kinds of things that he had ordered and done?" Pelley asks.

"No. No remorse," Piro says. "No regret."

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