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2 Guantanamo Detainees Go Before Tribunal

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - Two men accused by the United States of fighting with the Taliban appeared before a U.S. military review panel at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to determine whether they should remain held as enemy combatants, an official said Thursday.

Two others also accused of fighting with the Taliban chose not to appear, said Navy Capt. Beci Brenton, a spokeswoman for the Combatant Status Review Tribunals. The nationalities of the four were not released.

A 27-year-old detainee was accused of firing on U.S. forces in the Tora Bora mountains in Afghanistan, where he also allegedly received training on the AK-47 assault rifle, Brenton said.

The military said he was captured in Tora Bora by Pakistani forces. Brenton said the man made a statement during his appearance, though details weren't available.

Another detainee whose age was not released was accused of traveling to Afghanistan in 2001, where he allegedly received training in using a Kalashnikov rifle at the al-Farouk terrorist training camp. The man, who also made a statement at his hearing, was arrested by U.S. forces while guarding the airport in Kandahar, Brenton said.

A 32-year-old detainee who decided not to appear was accused of fighting against U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan, by operating an anti-aircraft rocket launcher, Brenton said.

She said the man also was accused of being a member of al-Qaida and receiving explosive training at the al-Farouk camp.

Military officials said a 27-year-old detainee who didn't appear was accused of firing on U.S. and coalition troops at an undisclosed location. The man, accused of receiving munitions training from al-Qaida at the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba camp, said upon his capture by U.S. forces that he had been hit by shrapnel while in battle, Brenton said.

The review tribunals are meant to determine whether some 550 men at Guantanamo should be freed or are held properly as enemy combatants, a classification that affords fewer legal protections than prisoners of war.

All of the prisoners at the U.S. base in Cuba are suspected of links to the Taliban or al-Qaida terror network.

So far more than 260 cases have been heard, including nearly 100 in which detainees declined to attend, officials say.

The review tribunals are separate from military commissions that began with pretrial hearings in August. The first commission trial is due to start in December.

Defense attorneys and human rights groups say the review hearings are a sham because they don't satisfy a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling allowing detainees to challenge their detentions in civilian courts, where they would be allowed lawyers.

The government says the hearings are administrative. Nothing prohibits prosecutors from using testimony given at the proceedings during the military commissions, or trials.