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Alleged Taliban Fighter Faces U.S. Panel

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Associated Press
October 22, 2004

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - The cases of an alleged Taliban fighter and three men with suspected links to the al-Qaida terror network went before U.S. military review tribunals on Friday at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, a Pentagon official said.

A 34-year-old accused of traveling to Pakistan on a false French passport in 2001 and later entering Afghanistan did not attend his hearing, said Navy Lt. Cmdr. Daryl Borgquist, a spokesman for the Combatant Status Review Tribunals.

The military accused the man of having ties to al-Qaida and receiving weapons training in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. He fled as U.S. coalition forces approached the city in 2001 and was captured trying to enter Pakistan, Borgquist said. It was not clear if he engaged in combat.

The tribunals also reviewed the case of a 34-year-old man accused of meeting with an al-Qaida leader in Istanbul, Turkey, in April 2001, Borgquist said. There were no details on the meeting, but the military said the prisoner went on to the Republic of Georgia, where he trained at a terrorist camp.

It was not clear whether the prisoner ever traveled to Afghanistan or fought against U.S. coalition forces. The military only releases unclassified portions of the accusations against prisoners, both to journalists and to the detainees themselves.

The prisoner attended the tribunal, but the military did not provide details of his testimony.

A 49-year-old who fought against U.S. coalition forces in Afghanistan also went before the tribunal, Borgquist said. The military said the prisoner and other alleged al-Qaida members worked for Jama'at Tablighi, a Pakistan-based Islamic missionary organization, as a cover for their terrorist activities.

The panels also reviewed the case of a 34-year-old alleged Taliban fighter, though it was not immediately clear if he attended the hearing.

No nationalities or names were released.

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

Only one Pakistani prisoner has been released as a result of the tribunals, while 96 others have been ordered held. The panels have considered 212 cases so far.

Human rights advocates say the tribunals are unfair because prisoners are not allowed attorneys. They also say the hearings don't satisfy a Supreme Court ruling allowing prisoners to challenge their detentions in civilian courts.