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PBS' 'Now' Visits Guantanamo Prison

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Associated Press
April 27, 2005

A former prisoner who says he was the man under the black hood in the gruesome photo from Abu Ghraib speaks out on this week's edition of the PBS newsmagazine "Now."

"I remember the box, the pipes, even the two wires," Haj Ali says in reference to the photo which, with others like it, showed the world how U.S. soldiers were abusing Iraqi inmates.

"They made me stand on a box with my hands hooked to wires and shocked me with electricity," Ali recalls through an interpreter in his first in-depth American TV interview. "It felt like my eyeballs were coming out of their sockets. I fell, and they put me back up again for more."

Then mayor of a Baghdad suburb and a member of the ruling Baath Party, he was snatched off the street in late 2003 and transported to the prison, despite denying involvement in the insurgency. During his almost three months at Abu Ghraib, Ali's family had no idea where he was.

The "Now" story, which airs 9 p.m. EDT Friday (check local listings), examines legal and human rights issues surrounding U.S. policy for handling suspected terrorists.

"How we treat those we regard as our enemies says a lot about who we are as Americans, and as ethical people who live by our own rules," says host David Brancaccio, reporting from the U.S. military camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where more than 500 suspected terrorists are being held indefinitely in what he calls a "legal blackhole."

Meanwhile, FBI e-mails allege that many of those detainees have been physically abused, possibly even tortured, as part of their interrogation.

"We were shocked," says Anthony Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, which successfully sued to get the documents made public. "Our worst fears about what was going on in Iraq and Afghanistan and elsewhere were confirmed in the government's very own reports."

Some of the allegations regarding Guantanamo Bay are similar to those from Abu Ghraib: Prisoners chained in painful positions, deprived of sleep for days and exposed to extremes in temperature.

"Now" is granted a tour of the Guantanamo Bay prison, which for the past year has been under the command of Brig. Gen. Jay Hood.

"The detainees under our charge are well cared for, physically and mentally," Hood tells Brancaccio, who notes that it's unclear whether any abuses alleged in the e-mails occurred during Hood's watch.

But attorney Tom Wilner, who has filed suit on behalf of several detainees, argues they "are being held in conditions that are worse than the worst convicted murderer or rapist in the United States. Charles Manson lives in much better conditions than these people, and they haven't even been charged with a crime."

Haj Ali was released from Abu Ghraib as abruptly as he was arrested, "Now" reports - he was tossed off the back of a truck. He now runs a program to document accounts of continuing torture at the prison.