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## **Casios Cited as Evidence at Guantanamo**

Use of watches in plots documented

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico -- Are they bomb timers or just timepieces? Casio watches, some worth less than \$30, have become part of the often ambiguous web of evidence against prisoners at Guantanamo Bay.

The U.S. military cites the digital watches worn by prisoners when they were captured as possible evidence of terrorist ties. Casios have been used in bombs, including one used by the architect of the 1993 World Trade Center attack.

Wearing a Casio is cited among unclassified evidence against at least eight of the prisoners whose transcripts were released by the Pentagon after a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit.

The prisoners, who stand accused of links to Al Qaeda or to the Taliban in Afghanistan, say they've been shocked that wearing a cheap watch sold worldwide could be used against them.

"Millions and millions of people have these types of Casio watches," Mazin Salih Musaid, a Saudi, told his military tribunal.

Even guards at Guantanamo wear Casios, noted Usama Hassan Ahmend Abu Kabir, a Jordanian accused of belonging to a group linked to Al Qaeda.

"I like my watch because it is durable," the 34-year-old told a tribunal. "It had a calculator and was waterproof, and before prayers we have to wash up all the way to my elbows."

### **U.S. tribunals note watches**

Like owning an automatic weapon or wearing olive drab clothing -- both common in Afghanistan -- the Casios have become further pieces of evidence that the U.S. tribunals are weighing in these so-called enemy combatant hearings.

The sessions are held partly to determine whether those held at the U.S. military prison in Cuba pose a threat to the United States.

"The problem for military intelligence in a war like this is determining who is the enemy," said Mark Ensalaco, an international terrorism expert at the University of Dayton in Ohio.

But for prisoners, citing ownership of a Casio watch as evidence amounts to profiling, sweeping up the innocent.

"This watch is not from Al Qaeda; it's not used for a bomb," protested Abdul Matin, a prisoner from Afghanistan. "This is just a regular watch. All older, younger men and women use this watch everywhere."

However, authorities have documented the use of the watches in terrorist acts.

In the 1996 trial of Ramzi Yousef, the alleged mastermind of the first attack on the World Trade Center, a prosecutor described how a Casio attached to a timing device using 9-volt batteries became the "calling card" of Yousef's Philippines-based terror cell.

Yousef tested the method with a bomb under a seat on Philippine Airlines Flight 434, killing one passenger.

Ahmed Ressay, an Algerian convicted in 2001 of plotting to bomb Los Angeles International Airport, bought two Casio watches at a Canadian electronics store to use as timers, according to court records.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security advised airport screeners and law enforcement in January 2005 to be aware that some altimeter-equipped Casios could be used in explosives, as could another unspecified brand of watch that doubled as a butane lighter.

### **Casios have popular features**

The advisory singled out Casio because it's inexpensive, widely used and easy to find, Homeland Security spokeswoman Michelle Petrovich said.

But many household items with timing functions can be modified to set off bombs, said David Williams, a retired FBI agent who worked on the first World Trade Center bombing investigation.

Yousef's terror cell used Casios that were easy to buy and reconfigure into bomb parts, Williams said. The cell also prized the watches for their accuracy and long-lasting batteries, he said.

"You can have a time delay for up to three years that's accurate to the second, as long as the battery lasts in the watch," said Williams, who now runs a counterterrorism consulting business.

Even if Casios were pulled off the market worldwide, terrorists could easily switch to other common products to make timers for bombs, he said. "You give me a half-hour in a supermarket, and I can blow up your garage."