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Detainee Goes Before Guantanamo Panel

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Associated Press
December 14, 2004

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - With only a month left of U.S. military hearings in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, a detainee accused of staging a rocket attack near American troops made a statement before a military review panel Tuesday, an official said.

The 27-year-old prisoner worked for a military commander of the ousted Taliban regime in Afghanistan and belonged to a special unit that trained in light weapons, machine guns and missiles, said Navy Lt. Gary Ross, a spokesman for the Combatant Status Review Tribunals.

The man, whose nationality was withheld, was detained while preparing to launch rockets in Afghanistan, Ross said. The military accused him of being behind a previous rocket attack in Afghanistan that exploded near U.S. troops.

No details of the prisoner's statement were released.

Ross could not say whether the attack wounded any Americans. The man also helped fire rockets at government officials in Afghanistan, he said.

The detainee was the 494th to go before the review panel, Ross said. Some 550 prisoners at the naval base in remote eastern Cuba are accused of links to the Taliban or the al-Qaida terror network. About 55 tribunals remain.

The hearings, which began July 30, will most likely finish by the end of January, Ross said. "We'll slow down for the Christmas season, but we should be done by the third week of January," Ross said.

The military has announced 207 decisions, ordering all but one prisoner to remain in detention. The review panels released a Pakistani after deciding he was improperly held for more than two years at the prison camp.

The Associated Press filed a Freedom of Information Act request more than a month ago to obtain transcripts of the testimonies, as well as copies of the men's written statements.

Human rights groups and lawyers have criticized the tribunals, in part because prisoners are not allowed to have attorneys and their statements can be used against them in future proceedings.

The government says the proceedings are administrative.

At hearings the media have attended, many prisoners have denied the government's allegations and questioned statements obtained during interrogations.

The government defines enemy combatants as anyone who supported the Taliban or al-Qaida. Human rights groups complain the classification is vague and does not allow the same legal protections as prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions.