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## **A Visit to Guantanamo**

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*DW reporter Stephan Bachenheimer spent three days at the controversial US prison camp in Guantanamo Bay -- in the constant company of censors in uniform.*

"Flight 505, Paradise Island, departure 2:30," reads the monitor in the airport in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The line below gives details for a flight with "Lynx" airlines. Flight 510, Guantanamo, departure 3:00. The Caribbean -- and tropical paradise -- is only a few hours away from Fort Lauderdale by plane -- as is the nightmare that is Guantanamo. What else can you call a barbed wire prison camp in which detainees have been held for years without charges? A gulag of our times, Amnesty International says. The best recruiting tool for al Qaeda, says the New York Times. What happens in the camp at Guantanamo Bay?

The US military gave Deutsche Welle permission to visit the camp and to film there for three days. The rules were clear: we can film, but the military reserves the right to view all of our material and -- for "security" reasons -- censor it.

A military escort awaits me when I land in Cuba. From now on I'm in the care of soldiers from the press office from morning until night. I don't leave their sight until I get on the plane back to Fort Lauderdale.

### **Small-town America in Cuba**

My accommodation is a generous guest house on a street that hardly differs from residential streets anywhere in the US -- outside the prison camp the base looks like a small American town. It's virtually impossible to pick up a Cuban radio station. Instead, I have 45 US cable TV channels.

Before going to the prison camp, I'm presented with the most important facts and numbers: the intelligence services view 16 percent of the prisoners as very important, and they are held in a special high security facility. Six to eight percent of the prisoners are treated for mental illness. Some fashion weapons from things they collect. Once a noose made of the remains of food packaging was found. A photo shows the proof next to a ruler to illustrate its size. They tell me about the curiosities of Guantanamo. And about the Chinese.

### **Constant censor**

The US arrested some Chinese men, and now they'd like to get rid of them. Only, they don't know how. The men are ethnic Uighurs, a Muslim minority from China's far northwest which does brisk trade in the region bordering on Pakistan. They were picked up in the war against terror and brought to Guantanamo. The men pose no threat to the US. But they can't be deported, because China is afraid of Uighur separatists, and Guantanamo is a problematic point on a person's resume. "China would make organ donors out of them," said my escort. The Uighurs still live at Guantanamo.

The introduction to everyday life in the camp includes talking to prison guards. We meet in Club Survivor, a café right next to the camp. There's Starbucks coffee.

The prisoners throw what the soldiers call cocktails of urine and feces at the guards, I am told. The guards profess to know nothing about prisoners being tortured or abused here. The so-called Manchester document is used to counter such accusations. The al Qaeda manual that the police found in Manchester, England, recommends that if imprisoned you should accuse guards of torture.

There's no way to investigate whether people were tortured here. I'm not allowed to talk to prisoners. Even the talks with the guards take place under supervision. A woman from "Operative Security" is continually present, and my interview partner's eyes keep wandering back and forth to make sure the censor approves.

The prison gates at Camp Delta, the high security prison at Guantanamo Bay, opened twice for me.

Delta is made up of five individual camps, three of which I'm allowed to visit. There's a concrete and steel prison building for the inmates who the intelligence services consider particularly valuable. Then there are two open camps for prisoners who are cooperative and two stricter camps for prisoners who cause trouble. I can see prisoners in one of the camps where they're allowed to move freely within fenced-in areas. Some of the men hide from the camera, others ignore me, and others stare at me penetratingly. But no one gestures or calls to me.

The prison areas that I'm shown are similar to prisons in the US. Even kitchens and pantries are opened for the camera, to show that Guantanamo has high standards. Why, some soldiers ask, does the media try to manipulate the image of Guantanamo? Why does the TV media still show pictures of prisoners at Camp X-Ray -- the first camp which has been closed since then -- where the conditions were catastrophic? Another GI, who was recently sent from Giessen, Germany to Guantanamo, tells me about his daughter who's going to school in Germany. He has to continually assure her that there's no torture in Guantanamo. But even her teacher treats her unfairly because her father works in Guantanamo, the GI said.

### **Grotesque procedure**

They let me into Camp Delta the second time, to attend a Taliban's hearing. A Pentagon official briefs me on the most important charges: the prisoner was a trade minister under the Taliban and is accused of involvement in the murder of an Ecuadorian Red Cross worker. I'm assigned a table in the hearing room and have to sign a paper that says I agree to the rules, which include not crossing my legs, since Muslims consider that an affront.

"Please all rise." The three officers who lead the hearing enter the room in which the Afghani prisoner is already sitting with his interpreter. Three more soldiers responsible for formalities are there too.

"You can testify under oath, if you prefer. We've prepared an Islamic oath," the prisoner is told. "Repeat after me: In the name of Allah..."

The pseudo-trial decides whether the man will remain in prison. No lawyer is present. The greater part of the charges is kept secret. The officers' criteria in the trial also remain unclear.

The bearded prisoner in white and cream-colored camp uniform speaks with polite restraint: "I'm already old and weak. I've been here three years. That's enough for having been Taliban trade minister."

"That has nothing to do with me, sir. I was already under arrest. You gave me that information," he says.

"Then why are you here?" an officer asks him.

"The Americans blindly threw a stone and I was hit," he answers and smiles again at the perplexed-looking officers.

Shortly before my departure I film the outside of Camp Delta. Ambulances drive repeatedly into the camp. As I arrive back in Washington the Pentagon announces new facts regarding Guantanamo: The number of prisoners on hunger strike has increased to 84.