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Further Detainee Abuse Alleged

Guantanamo Prison Cited in FBI Memos

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At least 10 current and former detainees at the U.S. military prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, have lodged allegations of abuse similar to the incidents described by FBI agents in newly released documents, claims that were denied by the government but gained credibility with the reports from the agents, their attorneys say.

In public statements after their release and in documents filed with federal courts, the detainees have said they were beaten before and during interrogations, "short-shackled" to the floor and otherwise mistreated as part of the effort to get them to confess to being members of al Qaeda or the Taliban.

Even some of the detainees' attorneys acknowledged that they were initially skeptical, mainly because there has been little evidence that captors at Guantanamo Bay engaged in the kind of abuse discovered at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison. But last Monday, the American Civil Liberties Union released FBI memos, which it obtained through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit, in which agents described witnessing or learning of serious mistreatment of detainees.

"On a couple of occasions, I entered interview rooms to find a detainee chained hand and foot in a fetal position to the floor, with no chair, food or water," an unidentified agent wrote on Aug. 2, 2004, for example. "Most times they had urinated or defecated on themselves, and had been left there for 18, 24 hours or more.

Brent Mickum, a Washington attorney for one of the detainees, said that "now there's no question these guys have been tortured. When we first got involved in this case, I wondered whether this could all be true. But every allegation that I've heard has now come to pass and been confirmed by the government's own papers."

A Pentagon spokesman has said the military has an ongoing investigation of torture claims and takes credible allegations seriously. Pentagon officials and lawyers say the military has been careful not to abuse detainees and has complied with treaties on the handling of enemy prisoners "to the extent possible" in the middle of a war.

The detainees who made public claims of torture at Guantanamo Bay describe a prison camp in which abuse is employed as a coordinated tool to aid interrogators and as punishment for minor offenses that irked prison guards. They say military personnel beat and kicked them while they had hoods on their heads and tight shackles on their legs, left them in freezing temperatures and stifling heat, subjected them to repeated, prolonged rectal exams and paraded them naked around the prison as military police snapped pictures.

In some allegations, the detainees say they have been threatened with sexual abuse. British detainee Martin Mubanga, one of Mickum's clients, wrote his sister that the American military police were treating him like a "rent boy," British slang for a male prostitute.

A group of released British detainees said that several young prisoners told them they were raped and sexually violated after guards took them to isolated sections of the prison. They said an Algerian man was "forced to watch a video supposedly showing two detainees dressed in orange, one sodomizing the other, and was told that it would happen to him if he didn't cooperate."

Another detainee, Ibrahim Ahmed Mahmoud al Qosi of Sudan, an alleged paymaster for al Qaeda, has claimed in court documents that Guantanamo Bay interrogators wrapped prisoners in an Israeli flag. In an Aug. 16 e-mail, an FBI agent reported observing a detainee sitting in an interview room "with an Israeli flag draped around him, loud music being played and a strobe light flashing."

Many of the claims were filed in federal courts as a result of a landmark Supreme Court ruling in June that gave the Guantanamo Bay detainees the right to challenge their imprisonment in court. More than 60 of the 550 men who are detained have filed claims. Some have been held at the U.S. Navy base for nearly three years.

Moazzam Begg, a British detainee first imprisoned in Egypt and kept since February 2003 in solitary confinement in Guantanamo Bay, said in a recently declassified letter to the court that he has been repeatedly beaten and has heard "the terrifying screams of fellow detainees facing similar methods." He said he witnessed two detainees die after U.S. military personnel had beaten them.

Feroz Abbasi, a British man captured in Afghanistan, has been kept in solitary confinement for more than a year. He said that on the same day U.S. officials say he "confessed" to training as a suicide bomber for al Qaeda, his captors tortured him so badly that he had to be treated for injuries at the prison hospital.

Government officials say they do not know what detainees Begg was referring to. A military tribunal concluded that Abbasi's medical treatment was not related to his confession.

In other cases, the U.S. military has declined to declassify detailed allegations of abuse, so it is not possible to know what the detainees claim happened. In recent months, the government has said Begg, Abbasi and hundreds of other detainees confessed to being Taliban and al Qaeda fighters to interrogators, but their lawyers say the statements were coerced.

Gitanjali S. Gutierrez, Abbasi's lawyer and one of the first attorneys to receive clearance to visit Guantanamo Bay, said she was convinced he and others were in grave danger in the U.S. military's hands as soon as she saw them.

"I left my first visit with them thinking the longer they are in Guantanamo, the more psychological and physical damage they are going to suffer at that place," she said.

The first public claims of U.S. torture at Guantanamo Bay were made by three Britons from Tipton, England. Shafiq Rasul, 27, and Asif Iqbal and Rhuhel Ahmed, both 22, were released without charge in March under pressure from the British government. In August, they and their lawyers presented a 115-page report on their treatment, likening it to the abuse of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

The Britons said they were beaten, shackled in painful positions, left in extreme temperatures and forcibly injected with unknown drugs while held for more than two years. At that time, the U.S. military denied the Tipton men's allegations.

"The claim that detainees have been physically abused, beaten or tortured is simply not true," said Army Col. David McWilliams, spokesman for the U.S. Southern Command, which is in charge of the prison. "From the beginning, we have taken extra steps to treat prisoners not only humanely but extra cautiously. We do not use any kind of coercive or physically harmful techniques."

Some detainees who have retained lawyers have refused to participate in military reviews of their cases at Guantanamo Bay, and have instead asked the International Committee of the Red Cross to investigate their claims of abuse.

That's the case for Mamdouh Habib, an Australian at Guantanamo Bay. Lawyers familiar with his case, and British detainees, said Habib was in "catastrophic shape" when he arrived in Cuba. Most of his fingernails were missing, and while sleeping at the prison he regularly bled from his nose, mouth and ears, but U.S. officials there denied him treatment, released British detainees said in a report. Fellow detainees said Habib asked medics for help, but they said "if you cooperate with your interrogators, then we can do something."

Habib's lawyer, Joseph Margulies, said he cannot elaborate because the records are classified. He said he will press Habib's claims in court.

"Now it's not just my allegations of torture, not just my client's -- but now it's the FBI's," Margulies said. "President Bush should make a public statement: It now appears torture is going on at Guantanamo and we won't rely on these coerced confessions."