

The following text may be printed, copy/pasted, or downloaded and emailed.

Guantanamo Detainee Details Mistreatment

PAISLEY DODDS
Associated Press
December 9, 2004

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - Prisoners at the U.S. detention center in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, have been beaten while blindfolded and handcuffed, terrorized by attack dogs and forced to take drugs, an Australian detainee said in an affidavit released Thursday.

David Hicks, 29, was one of the first prisoners to arrive at the camp in January 2002, accused of fighting for the Taliban. He is one of only four terror suspects who have been formally charged among 550 detainees there accused of links to Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime or the al-Qaida terror network.

"At one point, a group of detainees, including myself, were subjected to being randomly hit over an eight-hour session while handcuffed and blindfolded," Hicks said in an affidavit sealed in August and released by his attorneys Thursday. "I have been struck with hands, fists, and other objects, including rifle butts. I have also been kicked."

The government maintains prisoners are treated in accordance with the Geneva Conventions. U.S. policy condemns and prohibits torture.

"When we have credible allegations of detainee abuse, we take those very seriously and investigate them," Pentagon spokesman Maj. Michael Shavers said.

Some of the allegations made by Hicks and others would be investigated, he added.

The release of the affidavit comes the same week as the publication of several documents that show FBI agents sent to Guantanamo Bay warned the government of abuse and mistreatment as early as the start of the detention mission. One letter, written by a senior Justice Department official and obtained by The Associated Press, suggested the Pentagon did not act on the FBI complaints.

The memos document abuses, including a female interrogator grabbing a detainee's genitals and bending back his thumbs, most of a prisoner's head being covered with duct tape because he would not stop quoting from the Quran and an attack dog used to intimidate a detainee, who later showed "extreme" psychological trauma.

"They (the government) put up this stone wall of denial and what this shows was not only that they were wrong but they were disingenuous," said Joshua Dratel, Hicks' civilian defense attorney. "They were getting these reports all along."

Hicks is scheduled to be tried in a military commission in March.

Hicks' affidavit said he was forcibly injected with sedatives and then struck. He said he reported the abuse to the International Committee of the Red Cross, the only independent organization with access to the detainees.

The Geneva-based group refused to comment, citing the policy of confidentiality that it maintains in exchange for access.

Hicks said his hands went numb after he was handcuffed for as many as 14 hours.

He also said he watched members of the Internal Reaction Force - a military squad used to subdue problem detainees - enter a man's cell, "brutalizing him with an attack dog."

"I have seen detainees suffer serious injuries as a result," the affidavit said.

Hicks also said he saw detainees subjected to IRF teams while they were praying or for refusing medication.

He said he was told there was an "easy way" and a "hard way" to respond.

"Interrogators once offered me the services of a prostitute for 15 minutes if I would spy on other detainees. I refused. Failure to cooperate meant the loss of the ordinary necessities of living, such as showers, sufficient food ...," he said.

During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, food also was withheld after the daily break in the fast "to coerce cooperation with interrogators," the former cowboy said.

Dratel said Hicks' conditions have improved, although he would not say whether any of the alleged abuse or mistreatment has continued.

Another charged detainee - accused al-Qaida paymaster Ibrahim Ahmed Mahmoud al Qosi of Sudan - alleged in a habeas corpus petition last month that interrogators wrapped prisoners in an Israeli flag, showed them pornographic photographs and forced them to watch military personnel having sex.

The military has acknowledged 10 cases of abuse since the detention mission began at Guantanamo, including a female interrogator climbing onto a detainee's lap and a detainee whose knees were bruised from being forced to kneel repeatedly.

Those cases are not among three incidents detailed in the FBI letter to Maj. Gen. Donald J. Ryder, the Army's chief law enforcement officer investigating abuses at U.S.-run prisons in Afghanistan, Iraq and at Guantanamo.