

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

Guantanamo Detainee Won't Attend Hearing

PETER PRENGAMAN
Associated Press
November 13, 2004

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - A man the United States alleges was the roommate of a suicide bomber in the attack on the USS Cole in Yemen refused to appear before a U.S. military review panel at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, an official said Saturday.

The 26-year-old detainee was accused of traveling to Afghanistan to fight for the Taliban and meet with al-Qaida recruiters, said Lt. Gary Ross, a spokesman for the Combatant Status Review Tribunals.

The attack on the USS Cole in 2000 killed 17 American sailors when a bomb-carrying boat rammed the hull of the destroyer in the port of Aden, Yemen.

Military officials declined to say when or where the detainee roomed with the suicide bomber.

They did not release his nationality, nor those of two other prisoners who refused to attend their hearings Saturday.

One of the two was a 36-year-old detainee accused of recruiting for al-Qaida and fighting against U.S. forces, Ross said. The man also was accused of housing the wives and children of al-Qaida members while terrorists carried out attacks, Ross said.

The review tribunals are meant to determine whether each of the 550 prisoners at Guantanamo is properly held as an enemy combatant - a classification that affords fewer legal protections than prisoner-of-war status - or should be freed.

Only one prisoner, a Pakistani, has been freed as a result of the tribunals, while 131 have been ordered to remain as combatants. The tribunals have considered 362 cases so far, Ross said.

More than 45 percent of detainees have refused to attend their hearings in a process that has been harshly criticized by defense lawyers and human rights groups.

Military officials have declined to release transcripts of oral statements made by detainees who do appear before the panels.

Officials said the third prisoner who declined to appear Saturday submitted a written statement, which also wasn't released.

The prisoner, 36, was accused of traveling from his home country to fight with Afghanistan's Taliban regime against U.S. troops, Ross said.

The panels are to make a ruling in each case regardless of whether the detainee appears.