

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

Guantanamo Prisoner Says No to Tribunal

ALEXANDRA OLSON
Associated Press
January 7, 2005

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - A prisoner accused of traveling to Afghanistan for military training and staying at an al-Qaida safehouse refused Friday to attend a military review tribunal in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The 30-year-old detainee was arrested with several al-Qaida members and has been held at the naval base prison since May 2002, said Lt. Terry Green, a spokesman for the Combatant Status Review Tribunals.

The military said the prisoner had knowledge about al-Qaida's safehouse system and people it has protected. He also allegedly knew about passport forgeries used to help al-Qaida fighters travel from Afghanistan to Pakistan.

Almost half the prisoners have refused to attend the review tribunals, which are meant to determine whether more than 550 men held at Guantanamo are properly classified as "enemy combatants" or should be freed.

The military does not release their reasons for not attending their hearings. The tribunals can still rule if a detainee doesn't appear.

The government defines anyone who supported al-Qaida or the ousted Taliban regime as an "enemy combatant," a classification human rights advocates complain is vague and affords fewer legal protections than prisoner-of-war status.

The review tribunals have considered 537 cases so far, ordering two men to be released or transferred of the base as non-enemy combatants. The tribunals have ordered another 232 to remain held.

No lawyers are present during the proceedings, and prisoners are only told unclassified portions of the allegations against them.