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Detainee Who Was Forced to Bark Like a Dog Sues for His Freedom

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MIAMI - A New York law group has filed suit seeking release of Guantanamo captive Mohammed al-Qahtani - the Saudi man who was subjected to some of the most intensive, Pentagon-approved interrogation tactics as a suspected 20th hijacker in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Al-Qahtani's case focused attention on the prison in June when Time magazine published excerpts from a military log of his Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, interrogation - showing that U.S. troops told him to bark like a dog and left him to urinate on himself.

In the log, U.S. interrogators describe how they ratcheted up techniques on their captive during 50 days starting in November 2002 to extract a confession - by using sleep deprivation, leaving him strapped to an intravenous drip without bathroom breaks and having him strip naked.

Attorney Gita Gutierrez at the New York Center for Constitutional Rights said this week that she filed al-Qahtani's habeas corpus petition in U.S. District Court in Washington once his father, in Saudi Arabia, empowered the firm to act on his son's behalf.

No lawyer has met the captive yet, although Gutierrez said she hoped to travel to the Navy base in Cuba in coming weeks to see him.

U.S. officials have at times said they suspected al-Qahtani was meant to be the 20th hijacker in the Sept. 11 attacks, in part because immigration authorities turned him away from Orlando Airport in August 2001. They have likewise identified Frenchman Zaccarias Moussaoui as a possible, derailed 20th hijacker.

U.S. troops took custody of al-Qahtani in Afghanistan and in February 2002 he was sent to Guantanamo, where he was subjected to humiliating interrogations under special protocols that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld approved at one point, withdrew and then revised.

Al-Qahtani's lawyers assert he was neither a member of Afghanistan's Taliban movement nor of al-Qaida, and is unlawfully held as an enemy combatant.

Moreover, al-Qahtani alleges he was forced to undergo a phony kidnapping from Guantanamo, was injected with tranquilizers and was so mistreated that his "physical and mental health has been severely endangered."

This summer, when Time published al-Qahtani's interrogation as Detainee 063, the Pentagon issued an unusual, lengthy defense, saying that al-Qahtani provided the United States with a "clear picture" of his links to al-Qaida and to Osama bin Laden.

A special Guantanamo investigator, Air Force Lt. Gen. Randall Schmidt, subsequently told Congress that al-Qahtani was also forced to wear a woman's bra, dance with a male guard, "perform dog tricks" and was smeared with fake menstrual blood to lower his self-esteem - techniques the general described as "degrading and abusive" but not inhumane.

U.S. District Judge Rosemary Collyer was assigned the case - the 228th by a Guantanamo captive at the federal court since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the U.S.-held captives in Cuba can sue in civilian courts for their freedom. Federal appeals courts are now deciding whether or how the cases can go forward.