

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

## **Detainee: They Blinded Me**

LETTA TAYLER  
New York Newsday  
October 3, 2005

The allegations read like a deranged horror novel.

First, prisoner Omar Deghayes said, he was tortured with electric shocks and placed in a room with caged snakes in Pakistan. He likens his next stop, a U.S. military base in Afghanistan, to a "Nazi camp."

And at the U.S. military base at Guantanamo Bay, he says, troops marched into his cellblock "singing and laughing" before spraying his face with mace and digging their fingers into his eyes as an officer shouted "More! More."

He says his right eye, already weak from a childhood accident, has been blind ever since.

That alleged assault "was the saddest," Deghayes wrote in recently declassified notes. "My eye has gone a milky white color ... After all I have been through in my life to save it."

Deghayes' staggering allegations are virtually impossible to verify because the Pentagon bars independent observers from prisons holding terror suspects. Though abuse has been unearthed at U.S.-run prisons for terror suspects at Abu Ghraib and Baghram Air Force base in Afghanistan, Pentagon officials insist mistreatment is extremely rare and vigorously prosecuted.

"The United States operates a safe, humane and professional detention operation at Guantanamo," said Navy Lt. Cmdr. Flex Plexico, a Pentagon spokesman. Plexico also noted that al-Qaida manuals instruct prisoners to make up stories of abuse to create world outrage.

Nevertheless, human rights groups, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other detainees also say prisoners have been abused at the base.

Deghayes' attorney, the British human rights activist Clive Stafford Smith, says his client isn't asking anyone to take his word. "He only asks for an independent investigation," Stafford Smith said, "which will establish what he says is true."

The Pentagon declined specific comment on Deghayes. One Guantanamo official said no inmate had been blinded at the base but that one entered with one blind eye from a childhood accident. Deghayes and his family insist he still had sight in his right eye before he was seized in 2002.

Even Stafford Smith acknowledges Deghayes is "stubborn" and was made to wear an orange uniform that designated him "non-compliant" - Guantanamo's word for trouble-makers.

However, in his prison notes, Deghayes insists he never picked a fight and was instead punished for refusing to submit to humiliation. Thus, he says, troops pushed their fingers in his eyes in 2003 because he refused a rectal search - a controversial procedure that Guantanamo has discontinued.

Deghayes' mindboggling allegations about Guantanamo include having his head flushed in a toilet, feces smeared on his face and water forced up his nose with a pressure hose.

At the "Nazi camp" in Baghram, he says he was kept naked, threatened with sodomy, chained to a wall with his hands high above his head, and denied food for a week.

Deghayes claimed the abuse was also psychological. In Pakistan, in addition to being subjected to electric shocks and repeatedly dunked into a tub of water until he nearly drowned, he said he was placed in a "snake room."

The room "had very large snakes in glass boxes ... with dim lights," he wrote. "They threatened to leave me there, and let the snakes out."