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Panel Orders 17 Detainees to Remain Held

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Associated Press
November 29, 2004

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - A U.S. military review panel on Monday issued decisions on 17 detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, ordering their continued incarceration as enemy combatants, an official said.

There have been at least 430 review hearings so far and 161 decisions have been announced, said Navy Lt. Gary Ross, a spokesman for the Combatant Status Review Tribunals. The military did not give an explanation on the 17 decisions.

The review panels have released only one prisoner so far - a Pakistani - after deciding he was improperly held for more than two years as an "enemy combatant," a classification giving fewer legal protections than that of a prisoner of war. Others have been ordered to remain in detention.

At least two tribunals were held Monday. The first detainee was allegedly a director of cell operations for a terrorist group and a front-line commander for Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime in charge of a 50-man unit, which was trained to bomb and carry out strikes, Ross said.

The second detainee, a 31-year-old man, was associated with the Taliban and al-Qaida terror network, Ross said. He received military training at a camp in Afghanistan run by the Taliban, he said. Both men appeared at the tribunal.

Although the two men spoke at their hearings, the military does not provide transcripts of statements made at the review tribunals. No names or nationalities were released.

Human rights groups and defense lawyers have criticized the proceedings as unfair, in part because prisoners are not allowed to have attorneys present.

The government says the tribunals are administrative.

All of the approximately 550 prisoners at Guantanamo are suspected of links to al-Qaida or the Taliban.