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Captive Attempts Suicide 9 Times

A Guantánamo captive who keeps attempting suicide claims humiliation while commanders say they provide amusements and medications, which he mostly spurns.

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A combination of isolation, despair and humiliation has driven a Bahraini captive to attempt suicide at least nine times -- one as recently as Monday -- at the U.S. interrogation center for terrorism suspects at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, his lawyer said Friday.

Jumah Dossari, 32, tried to yank stitches out of his arm from an earlier suicide attempt last month, according to U.S. military affidavits filed in federal court.

The military defends its treatment of Dossari and says it has provided him with a variety of amusements, including a screening of the Oscar-winning movie *Gladiator* and permission to chat with fellow prisoners while recovering in a hospital bed.

The Dossari case is the latest effort by civilian attorneys to get federal judges to address Guantánamo conditions by seeking injunctions in some of the 300-plus habeas corpus petitions filed in Washington. Although not yet law, legislation limiting detainees' court access was approved by the U.S. Senate last week.

Dossari's attorneys want the court to order the military to let him see a DVD recorded by family members urging him not to kill himself; let him have English-Arabic copies of children's books such as *Puss and Boots* and *Jack in the Beanstalk* to lift his spirits, and let him chat by telephone with relatives in Bahrain.

U.S. District Judge Reggie Walton has yet to rule.

Commanders at Guantánamo have consistently said certain "comfort items" are given to prisoners who are compliant with their captors, and separately defend censorship of family mail as a security measure against secret al Qaeda messages.

"He feels incredibly isolated. He's been told he'll be there for 50 years," said defense attorney Joshua Colangelo-Bryan on Friday in a telephone interview from New York.

In October, Colangelo-Bryan stepped outside a holding cell at Guantánamo so Dossari could use the bathroom, and soon discovered his client hanging from the cell, and a gash in his arm.

A guard cut him down and, according to military affidavits, his arm was sutured. His effort to yank out those stitches on Monday was the latest of nine confirmed suicide attempts, according to a news release issued last week by the Southern Command.

Now, the affidavits -- by both the attorney and commanders -- give a glimpse of the life of the 5-foot-6, 120-pound Bahraini whom the U.S. government alleges is an al Qaeda member or sympathizer who at one point was at Tora Bora, Afghanistan, where Osama bin Laden is believed to have escaped U.S. and Afghan military forces.

Dossari denies the allegations. He says a prison camp snitch framed him, according to Colangelo-Bryan, and that he was in Afghanistan supervising a Saudi mosque-building charity and was captured fleeing the U.S. war on al Qaeda and the Taliban.

Both sides agree that the case record shows the young man who worked for a Saudi insurance company has repeatedly tried to kill himself. It's something that no captive has yet succeeded in doing at the prison camp.

But military officers at the base cast Dossari's desperation as of his own making.

In the past six months, Army Col. Michael Bumgarner wrote in an affidavit, Dossari only accepted 25 of 97 offers of recreation -- a one-hour transfer to an open-air, chain-linked enclosure outside his cell.

Inside his prison building, the colonel said, Dossari has interaction with other prisoners by speaking through the steel slots in his cell and "has often led prayer periods for detainees" that way. During 29 interrogations over two years he got pizza, hamburgers and saw the films Troy and Gladiator with an intelligence team.

Navy Capt. John Edmondson, a physician, said Dossari's suicide attempts began in March 2003 and that for the past three weeks Dossari has been on a hunger strike as well. He often refuses his medications and generally shuns talk therapy, Edmondson said.

Colangelo-Bryan countered that, based on his client's accounts, "He's been subjected to some pretty serious abuse" -- both by guards and interrogators, including being wrapped in an Israeli flag, smeared with menstrual blood and beaten unconscious by a guard force at Camp X-Ray.

Military spokesmen at Guantánamo won't address specific allegations of abuse, citing privacy concerns. But senior military investigators have confirmed at least one episode of an interrogator smearing fake menstrual blood on a captive, described by Lt. Gen. Randall Schmidt as "a not-authorized event, a spontaneous act of revenge by the interrogator."