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Two Detainees Refuse Guantanamo Hearing

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - Two prisoners with alleged ties to the al-Qaida terrorist network refused Thursday to appear before U.S. military review tribunals in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, while a third detainee did attend.

A 26-year-old prisoner accused of traveling to Afghanistan with the help of an al-Qaida facilitator did not attend his hearing, said Lt. Cmdr. Daryl Borgquist, a spokesman for the Combatant Status Review Tribunals.

In his home country, the prisoner attended a mosque "believed to be a major transit point for Islamic fundamentalists volunteering for combat operations," Borgquist said. The detainee's home country was not disclosed.

The unclassified allegations against the prisoner did not specify whether he engaged in combat in Afghanistan, saying only that he was arrested with 30 others trying to cross the border into Pakistan.

A 36-year-old man who was arrested while living in a suspected al-Qaida safe house also did not attend his hearing, Borgquist said.

The military did not say why the two did not appear.

A 24-year-old accused of joining a terrorist organization with links to al-Qaida attended his tribunal and called another detainee as a witness, Borgquist said.

No details of the testimonies were released, and no press attended the tribunal.

The prisoner was recruited by the HIG terrorist organization while living at the Shamshato refugee camp in Pakistan, Borgquist said. He allegedly received military training in Pakistan, including learning to make bombs from parts of disassembled land mines.

The review tribunals are intended to determine whether 550 detainees from more than 40 countries at the U.S. naval base are properly held as "enemy combatants" or should be released. The U.S. government considers anyone who supported al-Qaida or the Taliban an "enemy combatant," a classification that human rights groups complain is vague and confers fewer legal protections than prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions.

Prisoners are not allowed to have attorneys present at the tribunals and are only told unclassified portions of the allegations against them.

The government has released no transcripts of testimonies. The Associated Press filed a Freedom of Information Act request more than a month ago to obtain transcripts.

The tribunals are nearly done, with only about 30 cases left to be heard. They have ordered two prisoners released and another 226 to remain in custody.

All the detainees are accused of links to al-Qaida or the Taliban. Many have been held for nearly three years without charge.

