

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

U.S. Classifies 13 Guantanamo Detainees

FRANK GRIFFITHS
Associated Press
December 13, 2004

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - A U.S. military review panel ordered 13 more detainees at Guantanamo Bay held as enemy combatants as two more prisoners accused of links to the al-Qaida terror network pleaded their cases before the panel on Monday.

One prisoner, a 31-year-old who has been at the U.S. prison camp in eastern Cuba for about a year, was captured in Afghanistan shortly after an explosion, said Navy Lt. Gary Ross, a spokesman for the Combatant Status Review Tribunals.

The military said the man, whose nationality and name were withheld, planned a rocket attack and was a recruiter for the Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin terrorist group.

The second hearing involved a 25-year-old man with alleged links to Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime and al-Qaida.

Although both men attended their tribunals and provided statements, the government has not released any transcripts of the detainees' statements.

Most of the some 550 prisoners accused of links to the Taliban or al-Qaida have gone through the review hearings. Fewer than 60 remain.

The Associated Press filed a Freedom of Information Act request more than a month ago to obtain transcripts of the testimonies, as well as copies of the men's written statements.

The military does not give an explanation on their decisions to hold the men.

The review panels have released only one prisoner - a Pakistani - after deciding he was improperly held for more than two years at the prison camp.

Human rights groups and lawyers have criticized the tribunals, in part because prisoners are not allowed attorneys and their statements can be used against them in future proceedings.

The government says the proceedings are administrative.

At hearings the media have attended, many prisoners have denied the government's allegations and have questioned statements obtained during interrogations.

The government says prisoners classified as enemy combatants - a category including anyone who supported the Taliban or al-Qaida - are not entitled to the same legal protections as prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions.

The latest tribunals come against the backdrop of several documents published last week showing that FBI agents sent to Guantanamo warned the government about abuse and mistreatment at the start of the detention mission in 2002, more than a year before a scandal over mistreatment at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison.

One letter, written by a senior Justice Department official and obtained by the AP, suggested the Pentagon failed to act on the FBI complaints.

The memo, obtained by the AP, documents abuses including a female interrogator grabbing a detainee's genitals and bending back his thumbs, a prisoner being gagged with duct tape and an attack dog being used to intimidate a detainee, who later showed "extreme" psychological trauma.

The Pentagon acknowledges investigations into abuse at Guantanamo are pending.