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## **U.S.: Guantanamo Protests Weren't Suicide Attempts**

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Reuters  
January 26, 2005

MIAMI - Twenty-three prisoners at the Guantanamo detention camp staged a mass protest in 2003 in which some tried to strangle themselves, but the U.S. military said on Tuesday it did not publicize it at the time because it did not consider most of them genuine suicide attempts.

All but two were classified as "self-harm incidents" aimed at causing injury rather than death, said a spokesman for the military's Southern Command, which oversees the controversial U.S. military prison in eastern Cuba.

The mass protest took place between Aug. 18 and 28, 2003, with 10 occurring on a single day, Aug. 22. SouthCom called it "a coordinated effort to disrupt camp operations."

"Some of them did attempt to strangle themselves," said a SouthCom spokesman, Lt. Cmdr. Chris Loundermon.

Two of them were treated at the camp hospital for minor injuries, he said.

"They remained in the detention hospital for less than 48 hours for observation and subsequently were transferred to the behavioral health services unit," Loundermon said.

Those two incidents were among the 34 suicide attempts by 21 prisoners the military has previously acknowledged have occurred at Guantanamo since the prison camp opened in January 2002. The rest were considered "self-harm attempts" rather than attempts to cause death, Loundermon said.

"A (press) release would not be made for every self-harm incident," he said.

The United States holds about 545 foreign terrorism suspects at Guantanamo, some of whom have been there more than three years. Only four have been charged with crimes and their trials are on hold pending the outcome of U.S. court challenges.

The mass protest occurred during a rotation when new guards were brought in. The prisoners were in cellblocks where they could talk with their neighbors through the metal mesh walls.

Jumana Musa, an Amnesty International director who has visited Guantanamo, said the hanging attempts were "just yet another indication of what indefinite detention does to people."

"No matter what you call it, that's a very extreme response to extreme conditions," Musa said. "It's just another example of the Pentagon trying to delay the release of damning information and once it comes out, trying to minimize it."

Guantanamo officials acknowledged this week there had been 460 "self-harm incidents" by prisoners in the past two years, including 120 "hanging gestures" with clothing or bedding.

Those were in addition to the 34 previously acknowledged suicide attempts, many of which Guantanamo doctors had said were aimed at expressing frustration over their indefinite detention.

Loudermon said the last suicide attempt by a Guantanamo prisoner was in January 2004 but could not provide details. None of the prisoners had succeeded in killing himself, but one was in a coma and hospitalized for several months after a hanging attempt. He had since mostly recovered, doctors said.

SouthCom's commander appointed two officers earlier this month to investigate allegations by FBI agents that interrogators abused the prisoners at Guantanamo and used torture techniques. Loudermon said he did not know if the self-harm and suicide attempts would be part of the investigation.