

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

Inside the Prison at Guantanamo Bay

Paul Brandus
WTOP Radio
July 12, 2005

GUANTANAMO BAY, Cuba - To paraphrase Churchill (sort of), Camp Delta is an enclave inside a fiefdom, wrapped around one corner of an island. The island is Cuba, the fiefdom is a 45-square-mile U.S. Navy base - and within that, surrounded by tall walls topped with razor-sharp concertina wire, and watched constantly by American sharpshooters, is Camp Delta itself - arguably the largest concentration of alleged terrorists in the world.

It offers a lovely view: the bluest of ocean waters, a sky straight out of an Edward Hopper painting, and lush green hills rising to the north and west. Some U.S. guests apparently are so enchanted with it they've stayed for years.

Camp Delta has been open since 2002, replacing Camp X-Ray, where the first Taliban and al-Qaida prisoners were taken the previous fall. There are five camps within Delta, named for the order in which they were built: Camps 1, 2 and 3 are maximum security facilities; Camp 4 is a medium security facility; and Camp 5, the newest, is a more permanent concrete and steel structure, modeled after a federal prison in Indiana.

Delta is a melting pot of sorts. Its 520 prisoners come from some 42 Muslim and Arab countries and speak a collective 17 languages. This is a problem for the federal government, which -- nearly five years into the war on terror -- has roughly the same number of Arabic, Farsi and Pashto speakers, as it had on Sept. 10, 2001.

Walking through Camp 4, I'm told that some of these guys speak English. No one said anything to me. I wasn't allowed to speak with them anyway. From the other side of two layers of fencing, I did get some close up views: inmates eating, reading, kicking a soccer ball. They eyed me right back. One smiled, or perhaps was squinting in the noontime sun. I didn't smile back. All I could think was: these guys would slice my throat in a second if given the chance. And their buddies hit the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

And Camp 4 housed the so-called "best" inmates at Gitmo! "Best" defined as those who comply with guards. It also means they're more likely to pass along intelligence. In return for playing ball, they're allowed perks that probably loom large within their steel confines -- more recreation time and the ability to live with nine others in a dorm-like room, where they can eat, pray and play together. They're given plastic chess and checkers sets and two decks of playing cards. They also have access to ping-pong tables and even movies. One recent hit: a dubbed version of "Finding Nemo." Think of that irony: a bunch of prisoners from Afghanistan and God knows where else watching a movie where a fish is caught, tossed into a tiny aquarium far from home where he dreams of escape.

Message to you Nemo lovers in Camp 4: Sorry, Charlie, you ain't going anywhere.

But there are no flicks, ping-pong or checkers for the so-called "non-compliance" of Camps 2 and 3. These guys disobey rules, argue, and show few, if any signs of cooperating. One U.S. official calls them the "dregs of Delta." How disgusting is the following: One of their favorite ways of rebelling is to mix up a "Cocktail No. 4" - a concoction of urine, feces, spit and semen, mixed together and tossed at the nearest American soldier. The U.S. has responded by putting up plexiglass shields. Yes, it's U.S. troops that are being abused - yet they keep delivering the

meals, delivering the water, delivering the toilet paper - and doing so in the professional manner that exemplifies the American soldier.

Even so, all inmates - including the inhabitants of Camps 2 and 3 - are given a Koran and prayer rug, and the opportunity to pray five times a day. Cells have arrows pointing to Mecca.

Now what about those stories of disrespecting the Koran? They've been discredited, as you know - but there's another chapter to the Koran saga that I'll bet you didn't know...and you can read about it in an upcoming blog.

Also, what's REALLY happening at those interrogation sessions at Camp Delta? I'll have that story too.