

## CHAPTER 7

# Myths of Guantanamo

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Guantanamo Bay isn't run by the CIA, the FBI, or private contractors. It is run by men and women in the armed services. They are the guards, the administrators, the doctors, the engineers, the lawyers, and the chaplains. They're the ones in charge. And their work is hardly hidden: The Pentagon has invited a steady stream of reporters, politicians, human-rights groups, and the representatives of other governments to visit the detention facilities—and judge what is being done there for themselves.

Unlike others who have taken the Pentagon up on its offer, I have to admit that when I went recently, I didn't go as an unprejudiced judge. I know these people. They are the kinds of people I worked with during my 25 years of military service. In fact, some of the folks working at Guantanamo I have served with before. I feel like I have spent enough time around soldiers to know when I'm being told the truth, and I have spent enough time around the Pentagon to know not to believe everything I'm told.

I'm also a military historian, and I know sometimes even good armies do bad things. There are, in fact, more than a few examples in America's military past. I have little tolerance for these travesties. Nothing angers me more than dishonorable service in the name of an honorable cause.

We were shown all the facilities, how the prisoners were being treated, and permitted to talk freely to any soldier we came across. I chatted with reservists who had been there a few months and quizzed professional interrogators who had spent their whole careers talking to bad people.

I found nothing at Guantanamo to be ashamed of. The most common criticisms, from what I saw, have little basis in fact.

### **Myth #1: Detainees are abused and tortured.**

According to the officers I talked to, high-value detainees were interviewed, on average, about once a week for two to four hours. They are handcuffed to the floor, and the interrogators talk to them. That's about it. There is no torture or inhuman punishment. There are no solitary confinement facilities at Guantanamo. The detainees have more access and better access to health care than the soldiers and the dependents on the island. The new detention facilities built at the camp are exactly like the most modern federal prison facilities in the United States.

### **Myth #2: Detainees are forgotten and abandoned.**

There are, on average, two lawyers and three reporters for every detainee in Guantanamo. The International Committee of the Red Cross has a presence there, on average, about one out of every three days. And committee representatives have unaccompanied access to the detainees whenever they want it. International organizations, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Parliament, have inspected the facilities as well.

### **Myth #3: Detainees have no rights.**

Every detainee at Guantanamo has had his detention status reviewed by a formal board. Of the 400 or so detainees still there, about 120 have been determined to be eligible to be released to their home country or other country.

## **Treatment of Detainees and Unlawful Combatants: Selected Writings on Guantanamo Bay**

They are being sent home as soon as countries agree to accept them and not torture them. Three hundred and fifteen have already been released from Guantanamo, including five in the month I visited. The others are given an annual review board to determine if detention is still warranted. In addition, the detainees have the right to challenge their detention in U.S. federal civilian courts.

### **Myth #4: Detainees are not dangerous.**

Some of the evidence against the vast majority of Guantanamo's remaining detainees is classified, but some of it is not, including some 100,000 documents, articles and equipment in the detainees' personal effects. Included in this cache is a fax addressed to one detainee who claimed he was a cook. The fax addressed him as the head of Taliban intelligence operations. There is enough evidence to try at least three dozen of them with major war crimes (once Congress approves the military commissions to try them).

Even inside the razor wire at Guantanamo, the detainees are dangerous. There are, on average, 10 incidents a day at Guantanamo, ranging from verbally threatening U.S. soldiers to attacking them with homemade weapons. Even the doctors have to wear body armor when they attend to their patients.

### **Myth #5: Detainees have no intelligence value.**

Even though they have been off the battlefield for some time, the integrators told us that almost every week they learn something important that helps fight the war on terror. Recently, through interrogations, the intelligence team at Guantanamo assembled a composite sketch that's being used to track down a Taliban warlord in Afghanistan.

From what I saw at Guantanamo what our soldiers are doing is humane and just. Instead of criticism, the United States and the military should be honored for investing the resources and resolve to do the job right.

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