

## AN INTERVIEW WITH GUANTANAMO GUARD BRANDON NEELY

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*I have seen and done many horrible things, either at Guantanamo or in Iraq, and I know what it is like to try and move on with your life. It's hard.*

Specialist Brandon Neely

**Tell me a bit about your life before you joined the military. Where were you born and grew up? Why and when you enrolled, and so on?**

I was born June 2, 1980 at Fort Benning, Georgia. My father was stationed there in the Army at that time. I lived at Fort Benning until I was 4; then we moved on to Fort Knox, Kentucky until I was around 10. From there we moved to Huntsville, TX. This is where my father retired as a master sergeant from the army.

Huntsville is a small town. The only thing in the town is the prison system and the college (Sam Houston State University). Growing up there was not a whole lot to do; we spent most of our time playing sports and trying to stay out of trouble. I can remember being 16 years old and telling my parents that I would never join the military. Even though I was raised in a military household, my father did not bring the army home with him. The military was not something our parents wanted us to do. We were always told "College first and, if you want the military after that, it will be there afterwards".

I graduated high school in 1998 with no plans whatsoever for my future. I was not ready for college. I was not mature enough and I knew that I could had went, but I for sure would had wasted my parents money. For almost 2 years I didn't do much other then hang out and work at a local grocery store stocking groceries 40 hours a week.

In June of 2000 I woke up one day and decided I was going to join the army as a military police officer. I knew that I needed to do something with my life. I was not sure what yet, but I knew the military would help me grow up and give me some options for my future. So I called my local recruiting station and made an appointment. When I arrived for my appointment that day I told my recruiter that I wanted to be a military police (MP) officer and that I understood I had to sign a 5 year contract to do so. And that was it; nothing else.

A couple days later I was on my way to the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS). There I enlisted for 5 years as a MP. That day was June 20, 2000. Then, on August 20, 2000, I left for Fort Leonard, Missouri, for 17 weeks for basic and advanced individual training.

**It is striking how specific your decision to become an MP was...**

Law enforcement was something I was always drawn to. It was a field I had hoped to get into ever since I was a child. At the age of 7 or 8, while we were in Fort Knox, Kentucky, I was out back down the hill with a couple other friends playing in the dirt. Suddenly, these 2 MPs came running our way chasing this guy for some reason. One of them stopped and asked us where we lived and took us home. I can remember then saying "One day I would like to be that guy."

**What are some of the strongest memories you have of your training period?**

There are a lot of memories I have from basic training. My first really strong memory is the very first day I arrived to my basic training company (Alpha Company 795 4th Platoon). We all were placed in this cattle truck at the in-processing center to go to our company. All we had was the uniform on our back and two duffel bags. Once the doors on the cattle truck were shut you quickly knew who was in charge. The drill sergeants were yelling "Get your face in your duffel bag", as to say "Don't look at me! Look down!" I looked over to my right and noticed a guy opening his duffel bag and literally putting his head inside the duffel bag. It was very hard not to laugh, but I restrained from doing so. Once we arrived to the company area the doors on the truck came swinging open and there stood more drill sergeants screaming to get off the truck. Having the two duffel bags we were instructed to put one duffel on the front of us and lay the second one horizontal on top of that duffel. Once I did this--me not being the tallest guy in the world--I could not see where I was going. I just knew I needed to move and move fast. I started to run as fast as I possible could with the duffel bags to my area still not able to see where I was going, then all of a sudden I came to a halt. I had ran into something or someone. My top duffel bag feel to the ground and that is when I noticed I had ran into the back of a drill sergeant who was in the middle of yelling at someone else. His attention quickly turned in my direction yelling "What the hell is wrong with you? What platoon are you going to, private?" I replied "1st platoon, Drill Sergeant." "Not anymore you are; you are coming to 4th platoon with me now," he said. This is when I totally realized I was no longer a civilian. I was property of the United States Army.

**What were your first assignments?**

Graduation day came in January of 2001. 17 weeks of training were finally over. It was now to time to move on to the real army. I had been assigned to go to Fort Hood, Texas. This day was a great time for me. It was a day in which I realized I had finally transformed myself from a hard headed civilian into an American soldier--something my father had been and took so much pride in. I took great pride and honor putting that uniform on, and knowing that I had accomplished something on my own. Really for the first time in my life. The funniest thing on graduation day the drill sergeant I had ran into the first day of basic training approached me and said: "Neely don't think I forgot you ran into me the first day at the company. That's something I won't forget. Take care, and good luck." This was the first and only thing he every said about it and

until that day I had just thought he forgot all about it.

### **Where were you on September 11, 2001?**

On September 11, 2001 I was in Fort Hood, Texas, assigned to the 410th military police company. I was getting dressed for the day after PT when someone came in my barracks room saying "Get over here and see the TV". When we got next door I saw the pictures of the planes crashing into the towers. We did not know what was going on, so we hurried and finished getting dressed and went downstairs to the platoon office. Once we arrived we were told to grab our Kevlar's and our gear and grab our M4 rifles and M9mm out of the armory, and that the United States was under attack by terrorists.

After gathering all my gear and weapons we were locked and load. I was placed along with many other MPs at the East side entrance of Fort Hood, where we searched every vehicle and person coming onto post. Once I found out that the United States had been attacked by terrorists I was ready for revenge. I was angry. I was ready to go to war. Someone or something had attacked my country, and I believed people needed to be held responsible for this.

Even before 9/11 had happened my company was all ready to go to Egypt in late September for a training exercise know as Operation Bright Star. Then, after the 9/11 attacks, rumors swirled around that we would be deployed somewhere else in the world. But that did not happen we went on to Egypt as scheduled, from the end of September until the end of November.

### **Anything memorable about Operation Bright Star? What was your next assignment?**

Being in Egypt and being part of Operation Bright Star was actually very boring. We returned back to Fort Hood a couple days before Thanksgiving of 2001, and I went on leave for two short weeks. When I returned to my unit I was placed on gate duty. On January 5, 2002, around 0930 hrs or so, I was sleeping in my barracks room after having just got off work a couple hours before. Then I was woke up by someone pounding on my door. It was one of the squad leaders from my platoon. He was informing me of a couple deployments that were coming down throughout the battalion. He asked if I wanted to volunteer myself to go. Being the high-spirited, motivated, soldier I was at the time, I said "Sure. Why not?" And then I went back to my bed.

Later that night, since I was off, I went out with a couple buddies. We were all at a local club just having a good ol' time when my cell-phone rang. It was my platoon sergeant telling me to get back to the company ASAP. Once I arrived back to the platoon office I was told I had been selected to go to the 401st Military Police company and deploy. I was to report there at 0700 hrs the next morning for more details.

At 0700 hrs the next day I reported like I was told, and was placed in 1st platoon. Then I was told that we would be deploying to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, within the next 24hrs. It was not until later that afternoon that we were told that we would be starting and running a detainee facility, not an EPW (or Enemy Prisoner of War) camp. We were told

that a detainee camp had never been ran before, and that this would be the first time in history this had taken place since these people would not fall under the Geneva Convention.

Later that night we were finally finished packing and loading all our stuff to deploy. I called back home to tell my folks that I would be leaving in the morning and would not be back for at least 6 months. I went and showered and just laid there that Saturday night, nervous and very anxious, wondering what I was getting myself into. I just kept thinking about what we were told all day--that we were going to come face to face with some of the worst people the world had to offer, and that these were the people who had attacked and killed so many people in our country.

Early the next morning, January 7, 2001, we had a good-bye formation and loaded up on the buses to the airstrip and boarded the plane to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba

**It doesn't seem you received a lot of training for your Guantanamo assignment. Did you receive any training on the Geneva Conventions during your basic training?**

We did not receive any kind of special training for working at Guantanamo. Nor did we receive any kind of real training on what would happen once we got there and the detainees starting arriving. No one from the top down in the company knew what was really going on or what to expect. At this time there was no standard operating procedure as we went out on a trial-and-error basis.

In basic we did receive training on EPWs, but it was more for setting up a hasty EPW camp. Something you would put together really fast to hold some prisoners in a combat situation for a short time until you could get them moved to a more permanent place. As far as the Geneva Conventions, we touched very shortly on that in training. Most of what people knew about them was from their own readings.

**Can you describe your arrival in Guantanamo?**

We arrived in Guantanamo early on the afternoon of January 7, 2001. Coming from Texas in January it was quite cold, so everyone had their field jackets and their cold weather BDUs on. Once we got off that plane I quickly realized I was not in Texas anymore. It was warm. Very warm from what I remember. Here we were dressed for cold weather carrying all these weapons like we were going to a fight a war somewhere. All the Navy guys who were stationed there and in charge on in-processing us just kind of chuckled. We quickly turned our weapons in to the local armory where they would stay for the next 6 months. Went through an in processing briefing filled out some paper work and boarded a ferry that would take us to the other side of Guantanamo.

Once on the other side we were boarded on a bunch of buses. During the bus ride we drove right through the naval base. I remember seeing all the post housing the BX (or Base Exchange), McDonald's, bowling alley, the gym. I remember thinking "Man! This is going to be a really nice deployment. We have all we need.

But we kept driving further and further, until there was nothing around us anymore, and in the distance you could see all these tents lined up in a row. We turned up going up the dirt road towards the tents. Off to the left you could see sparks coming from this area where it looked like people were welding. We got off the buses and formed a big line where we were issued one cot and one MRE (or Meal Ready to Eat) and told to find a tent. After we got everything situated we were told right down the hill was the detainee camp we would be operating out of. This was the same camp the Haitians were held out in the 90s. The Navy Sea Bees were down in the camp welding more cages and fixing the old ones that had already been there.

I laid down that first night not knowing at all what to expect. No one knew what really was going on.

### **How did you spend the rest of your time before the detainees arrived?**

The next day [January 8, 2001] brought us nothing. We did not hear anything more. We just sat around in our tents and sleep most of the day. Later that night we were told the next morning we would be going down to Camp X-Ray for a walk-through and start some training with some Marines who were correctional officers for a couple days. No one was allowed to leave or go to the main part of post where everything was. Not even to shower or eat. For the first week or so, when we showered, it was behind a wall with a water hose.

On January 9 we all got together and marched down to Camp X-Ray and walked around for a quick tour. It was nothing like I had ever seen before. The cells--or cages as I call them--were small. "Something like you would put a dog in," I thought. And, on top of that, it was all outdoors. Except for a small metal roof. The whole camp was rocks. No matter where you stepped you were stepping on rocks. But, "Oh well," I thought, "I was not going to be staying in there."

We started our training with the Marine correctional officers. We were broken down into groups as to what you would be doing inside the camp. I was placed with the group that would be doing the guarding (walking around the different blocks).

Since we were all MPs we were pretty well trained in handcuffing. But we covered it anyways: how to properly handcuff (hand restraints) and leg shackles. Over and over.

We went over escorting procedures. Since they would be wearing a belt with cuffs we were to grab the back of the belt with one hand and, with the other hand, grab their arm. Since escorting was a two-man job, one of the people escorting would force the detainees' head down while we walked so he could not see where he was going.

Some of use also went through the five man internal reaction force training. This team would be called upon supposedly when a detainee was out of control. The Number 1 Man would have the shield. Once the cage door was open he would go in and hit the detainee as hard as he could with the shield. Number 2 Man would go in and gain control of the detainee's left arm; Number 3 Man would gain control of the right arm; Number 4 Man would go for the left leg, and Number 5 Man would go for the right leg,

take him down, and handcuff him. This training went on for the next 2 days and, on January 10, we were told that the first batch of detainees would be arriving sometime the next day, so we would be on standby the next day.

**Again, not much in the way of training regarding the humane treatment of prisoners...**

The training I mentioned was all we got. It was nothing, really, that we hadn't had before. Except for the leg shackling and the IRFing. As far as the Geneva Convention, we were told the reason we had to live in an old trash dump in tents was due to the fact we could only live one step above the detainees. I did not understand this, as we were told on numerous occasions they did not fall under the Geneva Convention.

**Did you get any briefing on who the soon-to-arrive prisoners were?**

The only thing I can recall being told about the detainees that would arrive was that they were captured fighting the Americans in Afghanistan. And that they were known terrorists. And that many of them helped in the planning of the 9/11 attacks. We would be coming face-to-face with the worst people the world had to offer. Our mission would be to guard these terrorists so the United States could get more info on attacks and, possibly, stop more terrorist attacks.

As to us, we talked a lot about the detainees before they arrived. About them and what they had probably been involved in. A lot of us, including myself, were pissed off, and many people were out to get revenge for the havoc the United States had been through in recent months by these people.

But, as the months went on, one or two of us would actually question what was going on here, the way the detainees were being treated and if they were actually terrorists or not, but being no-ones, and young, and dumb, we never questioned anything further; just did our time until we went home.

**A number of sources, including Standard Operating Procedures which are now public, mention pepper-spraying as part of IRFings. Were you trained in the proper use of pepper-spray?**

I have seen many of the Standard Operating Procedures (or SOPs) that are now out, and many of them that were written only in late 2002. There was no SOP when we got there, and there was not an official one when I left in June of 2002. We were trained on pepper-spraying, but only for working patrol back at Fort Hood. When I was at Camp X-Ray and for the couple months I was at Camp Delta, pepper-spray was never used. Or even thought of.

Camp Delta SOPs also require IRF teams to give repeated verbal warnings to the detainee before engaging him physically.

As far as IRFing, when I was there, it went somewhat in this order: (1) The block guards would have a problem with a detainee (not listening, maybe saying something, or not following rules). The guards would then contact the duty officer for that shift. We were told "If you were working a block and was having a problem with one of the detainees, and you couldn't handle it, or get it under control, you should call the duty officer," who was usually a E-7 (Sergeant First Class) or a 0-1 or 0-2 (First and Second LT). They would come to the block, assess the situation, and make the decision whether to take "comfort items" away or call the IRF team into play. If the latter, then (2) The duty officer would come to the block with an interpreter and tell the detainee to do whatever he was told to and, if not, the IRF team would be called upon. (3) Once the IRF team was called upon and arrived on the block there was no "I am sorry I will do it" from the detainee; the IRF team was going to enter that cage and hog tie that detainee.

**And what about minimal force? SOPs say IRFings have to use the minimal amount of force necessary. And guards' reports that have been released say they were conducted in this way as well. On the other hand, you say that the Number 1 Man of the IRF team had to "hit the detainee as hard as he could with the shield". That does not seem consistent with minimal force...**

All I can say to this question is I am sure a lot really has changed in the way the day-to-day activities take place. Especially with regards to IRFing. But at Camp X-Ray, especially before ICRC (or International Committee of the Red Cross) arrived, I heard many times the IRF team being told (and telling each other before they went to get a detainee) that it was their time to "get some," which is to say inflict pain, get revenge. But we were instructed that the Number 1 Man on the IRF team was to hit the detainees as hard as possible.

**So January 11, 2002 finally arrives. This is the day the first batch of detainees would arrive. What was the atmosphere like that day?**

On January 11, 2002 everyone, including myself, was very nervous. We did not know when or how many detainees would be arriving that day to Camp X-Ray. I was on standby the whole day when, early that afternoon, we were told the first detainees would be arriving in a couple hours. The people who were on this shift went ahead and went down to Camp X-Ray to wait and be told what our duties would be that day. The duty officer called off names for people working all the blocks. My name was not called. Then, when the names were read for the people who would be doing the escorting that day I was called and paired with a buddy that had come over to the 410th MP company with me from the 401st. We were glad to be paired with one another. At least we were familiar with each other; at this time most of the people in the company were all new faces.

After waiting a couple hours we got the call that the detainees were at the air strip and being loaded up to bring to the camp. I started getting really nervous; almost scared. I keep thinking "Here it comes; I am fixing to see what a terrorist looks like face-to-face." I remember my escort partner saying over and over "I got your back, man, if anything happens." I could tell he was as nervous as I was. Everyone in the camp that day was

nervous and scared; you could literally hear a pin drop moments before that bus full of detainees arrived.

### **Describe the arrival of the bus transporting the detainees.**

Marine humvees with .50 caliber guns mounted on them led the bus to the camp. The sally port gates were open, and the bus pulled in just feet within the main gate, right next to the temporary holding pen in which they would be until they were taken, first for in-processing, and then to their cages.

The bus doors opened, the escort teams were lined up right next to the bus to take the detainees off the bus and put them in the holding area. You could hear the Marines screaming at them "Shut the fuck up! You're property of the United States of America now." We were not allowed to step onto the bus. The Marines would push them towards us down the bus stairs and we would catch them. The first person who got off the bus, I will never forget. It was a man with one leg. He was later called Stumpy by everyone. I don't know his name, but he was around 5'7 and at least 250lbs. He was the biggest guy we had for a long time. Grabbed by the escorting MPs, Stumpy was jumping on one leg, MPs screaming at him to walk faster towards the holding area when, from inside the bus, someone threw his prosthetic leg out onto the ground. Myself and my partner were next. The second detainee came off the bus. We grabbed him like we were trained and took him into the holding area, yelling at him to get on his knees and to shut up.

Also in this bunch of detainees was an Australian. We were told he was a mercenary who was caught fighting against the Americans in Afghanistan. His name was David Hicks. Throughout the months I would talk to him plenty of times and hear his story, along with many others, including that of Feroz Ali Abbasi. He was British and was held on Bravo Block along with David Hicks.

This went on until all the detainees were taken off the bus and placed in the holding area.

### **What did the detainees have on as they came off the bus?**

The prisoners arrived in orange suits. Some had orange ski caps. They had goggles on their eyes, earmuffs on their ears, surgical masks on their faces, and black gloves on their arms. They were handcuffed and leg-shackled. They had chains around their waists with a padlock on the back. The handcuffs were attached to the waist chain.

### **How did the in-processing take place?**

After all the detainees were in the holding pen, half of the teams would take them out of the holding pen and bring them into the tent to be in-processed. One by one the detainees were taken from the holding area to the back side of the camp, where in-processing happened very quickly. Ear muffs, goggles and masks were taken off, their pictures were taken, and ID bracelets were made and placed on their wrists. Then the



goggles and the surgical mask were placed back on until they got to their cages. Meanwhile, the other half of the escort teams, including my own, had gone to the back side of the camp and waited on the outside of the tent for the detainees to come out after being in-processed and be taken to their cages.

### **How were the detainees taken to their cages?**

After being in-processed we escorted the detainees to the various blocks. We would take them to their assigned blocks, walking at a very fast pace. If they couldn't keep up with our pace or attempt to fall we would yell, scream, and carry them to their cages. We were told one would go to Alpha block, next one would go to Bravo block and so on. We were spreading them all out since there was very few of them.

Once in the cages they were placed on their knees. One MP would remove the goggles, throw them outside the cage, kneel down, remove the leg irons, and throw them outside. Then the person in charge of the block would unlock the padlock that was on the waist chains and then their handcuffs would be removed. After one hand was removed from the cuffs the detainee was told through an interpreter to place his hand on top of his head and not move. Once everything was removed, one MP would back out of the cage; the other one would still have control and then slowly back out, always keeping eyes on the detainee. Then the cage would be closed and locked.

The interpreters would then tell the detainees what items were in their cages. They were given 2 buckets (one for water and one to use as a toilet), a green army mat, a small tooth brush, and a sheet. From what I can remember, they were also told not to move and no talking was allowed.

### **Did any of the detainees arrive with serious injuries?**

Later that day, after my shift was over, the detainees would be taken out of their cages and go through some sort of physical examination, as many of them arriving had injuries. I don't necessarily remember the injuries of the detainees of the first group, but many of them came with injuries such as gunshot wounds, broken arms, legs. One injury that sticks out in my mind was on a very slight, malnourished detainee, who had been grazed by a .50 caliber fighting the Americans in Afghanistan (supposedly). He arrived with the first or the second batch of detainees. When he arrived, his right arm was in a sling. I took him to medical a couple times throughout my time at Camp X-Ray. I will try to explain his injury as best as I can. Take your arm and fold it like it was in a sling against your chest. The hole was in his bicep area. Due to the fact his arm was in a sling, and in that position so long, the muscle had attached to his forearm somewhat, and he would go to medical so they could stretch it out. It was a very painful time every time he went.

### **How did your day end?**

After we got off that day it was late. No one really spoke much. I went back to my tent

and laid down to go to sleep. I was thinking "those were the worst people the world had to offer? Not what I expected." I guess I was expecting people who looked like monsters or what-not.

So much happened on that very first day... A lot of it is a blur...

But more detainees would be coming the next day. We had to get up early and head to camp.



Here is a picture of the holding area that I found on the net. This picture was taken the very first day. To your right of the detainees are the outdoor cages of Alpha Block. If you look closely you will see a soldier that is actually standing in one of the cages on Alpha block. To the left, past the soldiers standing there, are the cages of Bravo Block. In the back, to your left, with the people on the roof, is the makeshift hospital. Directly behind Bravo Block would stand the future Delta Block. At this time there were tents there to in-process the detainees.

**[At this point in the interview, Mr. Neely volunteered the following, unprompted statement]**

Even though I reached out to talk to you about Guantanamo and wanting to tell what it was really like inside the camp at the beginning when I was there, I am not a totally innocent person as far as what happened inside the wire. I am very ashamed to admit it and tell you that I was involved in the very first IRFing incident at Camp X-Ray. I left it out of what happened on Day 1, and I apologize for that. It's just something that I am very ashamed of. Here is what happened.

On the first day we had been taking detainees from the in-processing center to their cages for quite a while when myself and the guy that was my escorting partner grabbed the next detainee to be taken. He was an older man. Probably in his mid to late 50s--short and kind of a husky build. I remember grabbing him and then starting to walk first through the rocks and then through the sally port (a long walk way with gates on both sides) heading towards Alpha Block. Then I noticed he was really tense, shaking really bad, and not wanting to walk or move without being forced to do so. We made our way to Alpha Block to the cage he would be placed in. He was instructed to go to his knees, which he did. My partner then went down and took off his leg shackles. I still had control of his upper body, and I could still feel him tensing up. Once the shackles were off my partner started to take off the hand cuffs. The detainee got really tense and started to pull away. We yelled at him a couple times "Stop moving!" Over and over. Then he stopped moving, and when my partner went to put the key in that first handcuff, the detainee jerked hard to the left towards me. Before I knew it, I threw the detainee to the ground and was on top of him holding his face to the cement floor.

At this time my partner had left the cage. The block NCOIC (or Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge) was on the radio yelling code red which meant emergency on the block. Before I knew, I was being grabbed from behind and pulled out of the cage by the IRF team. They grabbed this man and hog-tied him. He laid there like that for hours that day before he was released from that position.

A couple days later I found out from a detainee who was on that block that the older detainee was just scared and that when we placed him on his knees he thought he was going to be executed. He then went on to tell me that this man had seen some of his friends and family members executed on their knees. I can remember guys coming up to me after it was over that night and said "Man, that was a good job; you got you some".

I did not feel good about what I did. It felt wrong. This man was old enough to be my father, and I had just beaten up on him. I still to this day don't know who was more scared before and during this incident me or the detainee.

I remember seeing him the next day when I walked into camp. His face was all bruised and scraped up. I was young and didn't question anything back then. As I do nowadays. But even then, when I was as pissed off as anyone there, I felt ashamed of what I did. As the years have went on and the more I learn the more guilt I feel. This is one of the incidents from my time at Guantanamo that haunts me.

**I am in no position to judge you, and I will not dare to do so. All I can say is that it is well known that good people can do evil things in evil environments (what psychologists call the Lucifer Effect). Or when people in authority order them to do so (the Stanford Obedience Experiment). You were in both situations. In any event, if you are OK with it, I have a couple of questions about this incident.**

I am fine with this being part of my testimony. I want it to be told no matter how it makes me look. I believe it's very important people know what happened there. I am

sure there were (and are) a lot of detainees in Guantanamo that are guilty of something. But, on the other hand, there are a lot that are not guilty of nothing at all other than being in the wrong place at the wrong time. And no one, guilty or innocent, should be treated in the manner they have been.

**I appreciate that very much. Would you say this was the first IRFing incident in Guantanamo?**

I really don't see this as the first IRF incident as much. When my partner put out the Code Red on the radio, anyone and everyone would respond. It just so happened that most of the IRF team was right outside Alpha Block at this time.

**Got it. It is still not clear to me, though, how the detainee got the scrapes and bruises on his face. You say you were holding his head against the cement floor, but this does not cause scrapes and bruises in and of itself.**

I had a hold of the detainee's left arm, with my left hand grabbing around the bicep area and had my right hand grabbing the back on his shirt. When he pulled away I just pushed or slammed him forward, with his face hitting the cement and me going on top of him. I did not strike him with an open or closed fist. He was moving his head and this is why I was holding his head to the ground. When I was pulled out of the cage and the members of the IRF team were hog-tying him I could not see if any one of them were striking him, as they were all on top of him. I just know that his face was scraped and bruised, and I am sure the initial hit to the pavement caused some if not all those marks.

**Any incidents of abuse soon after the arrival of detainees?**

There are a couple things that I remember seeing first-hand that come to my mind and that I believe were totally unjust and just plain abuse. I am not sure of the dates or times when they occurred, but it wasn't too long into the beginning of Camp X-Ray.

One night I was assigned to Charlie Block as a block guard. The medic was handing medication out on the block. He made his way over to one detainee on the block and instructed him to drink a can of Ensure (a lot of detainees were given this since they were underweight and malnourished). The detainee refused to take the Ensure. The medic told him multiple times to take it and the detainee still refused. The medic then went and told the block NCOIC of the situation. The block NCOIC then went to the detainee and gave him the same instructions to take the can of Ensure. Once again the detainee refused to follow these orders. Next the on duty OIC (or Officer in Charge) was notified of the situation. The OIC then made his way to the block where a discussion went on about the situation and the conclusion was that the detainee could not refuse any medications at all. The camp OIC then went over to the detainee and gave him the same instruction to drink the Ensure or, if he refused, he would be forced to take it. Once again he refused to drink it.

The call was made on the radio for the IRF team. The IRF team entered the block where they were met by the OIC and the medic. They were told of the situation and advised once they entered the cell they were to restraint the detainee so the medic could give him the can of Ensure. The IRF team then started to approach the cage the detainee was in. Since I was on the block I walked on the other side of the cage so I could watch what was going on. Once the IRF team was lined up and got in position to enter the cell the OIC unlocked the lock and pulled it off and opened the cage door. The detainee just stood there, facing the IRF team. BOOM! the Number One Man hit the detainee with shield causing him to fall to the cement floor of the cage. Quickly the whole team was on top of the detainee. I could not see exactly what they were doing. They stood him up and hand-cuffed him to fence in the cage. The person who had the shield held the detainee's head so he could not move. The medic then entered the cage with the can of Ensure. Once he entered the cage he looked up and saw me. He then motioned for me to move over to my left (his right). So I moved over. I did not think anything about it. He then opened the Ensure can, grabbed the detainee by the neck, and started to pour it down his throat. The detainee was attempting to move his head, and he wouldn't swallow any of it. The Ensure just ran down his face all over him.

The medic looked up one quick time and punched the detainee twice on the left side of his face with his right fist. The medic then just turned around and walked out of the cage like nothing happened. The detainee was then un-handcuffed from the cage and laid down on the cement in the cage. He was then hog-tied. He laid in this position for a couple hours.

When the whole incident was over I turned around and noticed the guard tower where the Marines were stationed watching over and realized that the medic had placed me in front of the view of the tower and I had not even realized it.

I later learned through other detainees on the block the reason the man refused the Ensure was that he thought he was being poisoned.

### **That was a ghastly incident...**

One day, while on duty at Camp X-Ray, I was assigned to escorting duties. I was at the very back of the camp. There was like a big shed there. This was also where the IRF team was stationed at until called upon. On this day the call came for the IRF team to come to Bravo Block. They made their way to the block and, at the time, I was not doing anything, so I made my way down to the block to watch from the outside of the block. The situation on the block was that a detainee had called a female MP "bitch" a couple times. For punishment, the IRF team was called upon to enter the cage and hog-tie the detainee. The female MP was very upset, yelling "Whip his ass!"

The IRF team, along with the camp OIC, approached the detainee's cage and told him to stop yelling and lay down so he could be restrained. The detainee just stood there, staring at them. The IRF team lined up in position to enter the cage. The OIC unlocked the lock on the cage door and, when this was done, the detainee turned around, went to his knees and placed his hands on the top of his head. The lock was taken off and the cage door was opened. The Number One Man on the IRF team tossed his shield to the

side and, with a quick run towards the detainee, hopped in the air and came down on the back of the detainee with his knee (the Number One guy on the IRF team was no small guy). This caused the detainee to fall to the cement floor of the cage with the Number One Man on top of him. Then the whole IRF team was on top of him hitting, punching, and kicking him. It seemed like a long time, but in reality it lasted 15-20 seconds.

While the IRF team was still on top of the detainee someone yelled for the female MP that was called a bitch. She entered the cage and she punched the detainee a couple times in the head and then left the cage. Everyone in the cage stood up and the detainee laid there cuffed-up but motionless and unresponsive. Next thing I saw were medics coming from the medical house with a stretcher. They left the block with the detainee on the stretcher; they took him to a waiting military ambulance and was transported to the main hospital. The IRF team would ride along with the detainee. I went back to work not fully knowing what was wrong or what happened to the detainee.

Later that night, after we had been off for a while, the IRF team came back from the hospital. They would go on and talk about how they hit and punched the detainee and how they held him down so the female MP could hit him a couple times. They went on to talk about the ambulance ride saying no one spoke and it was a very silent ride. One of them even stated the detainee went into cardiac arrest in the ambulance. I do not know if this statement is true or not. I know the camp OIC of this incident would joke many times about how he never heard his name and "war crimes" in the same sentence so many times in his life.

Eventually the detainee would return back to the camp from the hospital. About a week or so later I was assigned to work Bravo Block, and the block NCOIC happened to be a member of the IRF team. He was the Number One Man of the day of this incident. When the NCOIC walked onto the block a detainee named Feroz Abbasi yelled "Sergeant, have you come back to finish him off?"

**You say someone was using the camp OIC's name in the same sentence as the phrase war crimes. Who was that? Was the camp OIC being reprimanded?**

I do not know for sure who was telling him that. I would figure it would have been the Colonel who was in charge. After this day you never heard anything more about it. No one was reprimanded for what happened.

**Were these IRFings filmed?**

When an IRFing took place a camera was supposed to be present to capture the IRFing. Every time I witnessed an IRFing a camera was present, but one of two things would happen: (1) the camera would never be turned on, or (2) the camera would be on, but pointed straight at the ground. In the incident on Bravo Block I spoke about I found out through talking to people and hearing them joke that the video of the incident was destroyed.

**Do you remember other IRFing incidents?**

When new detainees arrived to the camp, a detainee on Alpha Block began to yell so loudly that you could hear him all over camp. Every time we would take a new detainee to Alpha Block he would get even louder. Eventually, the IRF team was called in to restrain this detainee. You could always tell when someone got IRFed, as the detainees throughout the camp would start chanting and screaming. So I could tell when the detainee on Alpha Block was IRFed that day. By the time the IRF team was coming off the block and I was walking back towards Alpha Block I noticed a couple of the guys had blood on their arms, hands, and uniforms. They were washing their hands with water. The detainee was escorted off the block to medical, where he was given stitches for multiple lacerations to his head. Later that day I came back on the block and saw the cage this detainee was IRFed in. The cement floor was a dull red color from the blood. You could tell at one point before it was washed out that there was a lot of blood on the floor of that cage.

**How often did IRFings take place?**

From what I recall, IRFings didn't happen all that often. Especially once the ICRC came to the camp. There were other IRFings, but nothing like these I have mentioned. These are probably the most brutal that I can remember from when I was there. But I am only talking about the times I was on camp grounds. I am sure IRFings happened on other shifts.

**You say things changed when the ICRC was around. Can you elaborate?**

Everything in the Camp changed once the ICRC showed up. At first detainees were not allowed to talk or get up and walk around inside their cages. They were not even allowed to cover themselves up when they used the bathroom in their buckets. They were told to sit in the middle of the cage unless told otherwise or face punishment. They did not even know where they were at. They would ask and we would just lie to them and tell them they were in Russia or some other place. Many times they would ask about what happened to their country, and many of the soldiers including myself at times would tell them their country was destroyed by a nuclear bomb. Once the ICRC came they were told where they were at, allowed to talk, allowed to get up and walk around. The chain of command was really careful when the ICRC was around.

**Anything you want to add about IRFings?**

I don't believe the IRF team was used for the right reasons at all. At least the people on the team used it for the wrong reasons. It was their way to beat up on someone who was smaller and weaker than them. I have often wondered why you would need 5 healthy, grown men, in riot gear, to go take a down a detainee who was most likely underweight and very weak.

**Continuing on the subject of physical abuse, there is a lot of testimony about shackles being placed needlessly tight. So much so that this might qualify as a form of binding torture. And shackling in such uncomfortable positions that this could count as positional torture...**

I do know that shackles were put on very tight in some cases, really depending on who put them on. You are taught to leave enough room for a finger to go between the cuff and the part you cuff up. I know many detainees, when they arrived, were bleeding or had bruises from the handcuffs or leg shackles. And some could not even walk--the leg shackles were so tight. Yes: some soldiers did place the cuffs and leg shackles overly tight.

On the blocks detainees would be hog-tied for punishment and left that way for hours. Sometimes 2 hours, sometimes 4 hours, all depending on when they felt like releasing them from that position, as the call to release them came from the OIC.

**Did you witness waterboarding (allegedly known as "drown-proofing" in Guantánamo)?**

I did not witness any waterboarding or drown-proofing. I did not even here anyone speak about it during my time at Guantánamo. This could be due to the fact that we did not interact with the people doing the interrogations, and we did not even escort the detainees to interrogations. Another military police company from Fort Stewart would come and take the detainees to the interrogation rooms.

**What about medical abuse?**

I know that detainees could not refuse medication or it would be forced upon them as I stated in previous incidents. The detainees knew they would be IRFed if they refused, so many of them just took the medications so they would not be IRFed. And I know this since I was told tis many times from some of the detainees there.

I talked about the detainee who came to Camp X-Ray wounded from a .50 caliber. His bicep had attached to his forearm due to the fact his arm was in the sling for so long. I escorted this detainee to medical a couple times for physical therapy as he could not bend his arm down at all. On one occasion, when I escorted him there the medic began to massage the area that was attached and he keep rubbing harder and harder to the point the detainee started to cry and squirm all over the bed. The medic stopped massaging and started to stretch the detainee's arm down a little at a time. You could tell this was very painful and uncomfortable for him. The medic said "You really want to watch him scream." Then he stretched the arm all the way down until it was straight out on the bed. The detainee started screaming loud and crying. The medic finally put his arm back up and did it again. And then he said he was finished with the physical therapy. The whole time the medic just laughed at what he was doing. We then escorted the detainee back to his cage.



I witnessed the "physical therapy" sessions a couple of times, and never had it went the way I described it above. Usually they would just massage the area for a bit, then stretch the arm a little bit just to the point it got uncomfortable to him. But the medic that did this therapy was not the same one that I saw before.

**Did you witness forced feedings?**

I did not witness any forced feedings other than the one I described [see the Ensure incident]. But it was done especially during a hunger strike. After so many days they would be escorted to medical and fed through a tube or put on a IV. I know this from talking to people who would talk about it. And during a hunger strike the medics would always say if they don't [eat] after--30 days I believe it was--they would just force-feed them. I am not totally sure of the time frame for forced feedings, but I remember hearing 30 days somewhere in there.

**Do you know of other forms of medical abuse? There is some testimony, for example, of abusive drugging of detainees.**

I don't. At least that I witnessed. At Camp X-Ray we had a medical facility, but it was more a clinic than anything. If a detainee had anything serious, or surgery, they would be taken to the Hospital, and I never worked there as far as guarding detainees. I have no knowledge of any drugging that may had happened at the camp.

**You have described now four incidents of abuse by medical personnel (two "rectal exams," one session of "physical therapy," and one incident of punching a detainee after a failed attempt at forced feeding). Was the same individual involved in all four?**

The physical therapy exam and the punching were done by completely different male medics. The two "rectal exams" were done by the same Navy doctor (all the rectal exams were done by Navy doctors stationed there). So there were three different individuals involved; two medics and one doctor.

**I am surprised there were hunger strikes that early.**

Yes, there where hunger strikes in the early days. Some detainees started out on hunger strike. I believe it was early February when, on Charlie Block, a Koran was thrown to the floor during a cell search. This caused the whole camp to go in a massive uproar, screaming and yelling to the point all MPs came out of the blocks. Due to this incident most of the detainees went on hunger strike. I remember some of the detainees being so weak they could not move and every hour or so if I was on assigned to a block I would try and get a response out of them as some of them were so weak that they looked as if they were dead.

**Was this the first hunger strike at Guantánamo?**

This was the first hunger strike that happened at Camp X-Ray. There were maybe one or two detainees who would not eat, but that wouldn't last very long. When the incident with the Koran happened, the whole camp pretty much went on a hunger strike that lasted a week or so. What ended the hungry strike was the Marine General who was over the camp at a time brought all the detainee block leaders to meet with him. I am not sure what was said either way as I was not present for this discussion. All I know is later that day the detainees began to eat once again.

The detainees where fed 3 times a day. For the first week or so detainees where giving MREs (meals ready to eat). We would strip the MREs of everything other then the main meal. Stuff we would take out was like matches, coffee, gum and anything else that was considered extra. After a week or so of MREs 3 times a day, hot chow started to come twice a day from the Navy chow hall. Also pork MREs were not to be given out for obvious reasons, but I do know that some guards handed them out and laughed if a detainee was to eat it.

When a detainee or detainees were on hunger strike, nothing really changed. We would still make an attempt to feed the detainees. If they refused, we just left them alone and noted it in the block log. Each block and the command post had a green notebook that was used to document all activities on the block and camp. This was to hold information like who was working the block and when and who relieved you on duty, when the detainees where fed or showered, who left the block and to where, and when the buckets of human waste where emptied.

**You say the Koran was thrown to the floor. That suggests it was done intentionally...**

When the incident happened with the Koran I was on Alpha Block working that day. All of a sudden detainees started to yell and chant, and it spread around the camp in a second. Next thing I know, detainees where throwing their mats out of the cage. Some were throwing their water out of their bucket out of the cage. Everyone was going off. Then we heard that on Charlie Block, during cell search, a guard had thrown the Koran to the ground, and that was the cause of this.

Well, the guard that threw the Koran to the ground was a really good friend of mine, and the same MP I escorted with on the first day the detainees arrived. I talked to him that night about what happened. He swears he didn't throw the Koran to the ground being hateful. He told me he was just doing a cell search--as was to be done every time a detainee left the cage. We were told to search the Korans and that's what he did. And he said that, before thinking about it, he tossed it to the side, hitting the ground. And that's when all hell broke loose in the camp. He was very upset about the whole thing. He was really worried something would happen to him as far as disciplinary [action] through the chain of command, mainly due to the fact the Colonel had stated he wanted that soldier who was responsible for this to be punished. But he never was and, after a while, it was all forgotten about.

**You say that pork was given to a detainee--without warning him and knowing that this violated religious rules. Did you witness other forms of religious abuse?**

### **Disrespecting the call to prayer or the prayer proper? The Koran being kicked or thrown into the waste bucket?**

Yes there was loud rock music that was played throughout the camp. Especially in the early days of X-Ray. Over time this seemed to stop, but the National Anthem was played every morning at 0630. Muslim calls to prayer were broadcast after the first week of Camp X-Ray. During call to prayer many times soldiers would mock and laugh at the detainees. Many would also try to sing along to the call for prayer trying to be funny. I also know that sometimes, during call for prayer, water would be given out to the detainees in their bucket, and some would spray the detainees with water during prayer, then stating it was an accident.

I did not hear (or know) of any dropping Korans in the waste bucket. Or kicking it.

I do not recall any more religion abuse other than what I have already stated. I remember just talking to some detainees and them telling me that, since they had nothing else to do, that they were studying their religion more and reading the Koran to better understand their religion. I remember thinking I couldn't believe how dedicated these people were to their religion; always reading the Koran, always praying. I actually admired them for this, as you don't see a lot of people take religion so seriously.

### **Did you witness sexual abuse?**

The in-processing changed a bit, especially once Delta block was finished. The detainees were still taken off the bus and placed in the holding pen, but instead of walking way to the back of the camp, directly across the holding area was an open spot of the camp where a big tent was put up. And this became the new in-processing area. Now, when they were taken out of the holding area, the escort team would take them to this tent where they would go through the same in-processing, except now there was a doctor who would check their rectum area (we were told the rectal exam was to check for any kind of weapons that could be hidden there; we were told that, in Afghanistan, a grenade had been found in the rectum of a detainee).

So an escorting MP would pull the detainee's pants down and the doctor would instruct the detainee to lean over the table. Then, with a surgical glove on his hand, the doctor shoved his finger in the rectum of the detainee. Both times I witnessed this I never once saw any kind of lubrication used; they did not use the lube that was on the table to perform this. This exam was not done in any gentle manner whatsoever. It seemed to me that the doctor just reached back and shoved his finger as hard as he could in the rectum of the detainee. I witnessed this twice with my own eyes (at this time I was working blocks more). But I heard it talked about many times from other soldiers.

Even when I was not witness to these exams, but was still within earshot of the tent they were performed in, I could hear the detainees scream and cry out during the exam. I even remember one detainee coming out of the tent after this looking like he was in tears. I know through talking with other people who witnessed this that the doctor would make little smart comments before he did the exam like "this won't hurt; it will

only take a minute," in a very sarcastic manner. And that sometimes the doctor would even be laughing.

Also, each detainee was searched when he left his cage and when he returned to his cage. In the process of searching or patting-down the detainee we were taught a technique which we called the "credit card swipe". You would take your hand put all your fingers straight together and go straight up the backside of a person. If this was done the correct way just a quick swipe it really was no big deal, but some people took it to the extreme, and would do it so hard--in effect just hitting the detainee in the private area to cause pain.

### **Did you take detainees to shower or to recreation?**

Yes, I did take detainees to shower. Usually, if you were assigned to escorting duties for a block for a day, you would do all the escorting for it. And if it was that block's day to shower, you would run all the showers. At X-Ray there would be one escorting team that would go to every cage and ask the detainees if they wanted to shower. If they did, you would place handcuffs and leg restraints on them and take them to the shower that was located on the block. The showers were outside. They were just a smaller version of the cage they lived in, and had a shower head. We as soldiers controlled when the water was turned on and off, as there was a valve that was located outside of the shower. Detainees were supposed to be given 5 minutes to shower but, depending on who was doing the escorting and their moods, that would change. I had seen many times--and worked with--people who would turn off the water while the detainees were still all soaped up and tell them it was time to get out. At X-Ray detainees probably showered at the most 3 times a week but usually twice a week.

As far as recreation, I know that, for a long time (2 or 3 months), there was no recreation whatsoever. After a while we used to get a detainee to volunteer to empty the waste buckets and give them candy and this was considered some form of recreation for a while. I know there was a little recreation given when I was there but I can't remember how it was run or when it really happened.

### **You got detainees to volunteer to empty the waste buckets?**

The waste buckets were to be emptied at the end of every shift--so around every 8 hours. Us guards would empty the buckets, but eventually we started to refuse to do so, due to health reasons and it was just plain nasty. A whole bucket full of human waste we would pick up just wearing gloves and carry to a port potty and empty. Eventually detainees were bribed with candy from the MREs to empty them, and many of them did this, many stating they did so just to get out of there cage and move around.

### **Did female guards escort prisoners to shower?**

Female guards escorted the detainees to shower as well. And with the shower being somewhat open, especially at X-Ray, the females where always within eyevuew of the

shower. Also, when I talked about detainees being searched before entering their cages, females would perform these searches as well. The detainees were very upset when a female guard came to escort them to the shower or to the port potty. Some of them would not even go to shower due to this. They explained many times why they did not want female guards to escort them, but no one really cared what they said, so it was go shower with a female guard or don't shower at all.

**Do you know anything about the "frequent flier program"? Or prisoners moved at night for shower or cell transfers?**

I do not know anything about the "frequent flier program". As far as detainees being moved around, yes. Even at Camp X-Ray detainees were moved to different cages. But I could not tell you who or how often. Honestly, at the time I didn't think about that kind of stuff to realize the big picture.

I only worked the night hours a handful of times, but showers were usually done during the day shift. I do remember on occasion, sometimes moving a detainee to a different cage at night. Also, the detainees were not allowed to cover their hands or face with their sheets, so at night we were constantly waking them up to tell them to show their hands and face.

**Were there any old timers or children in Guantanamo during your tour of duty? Were they afforded any special treatment on account of their ages?**

I did see a couple older people, probably in late 50s or 60s. They were not given any special treatment at all. They were treated just like the rest of the detainees there. As for children, I never saw any, but there was talk that some had come to Guantanamo during our time there, and that they were being kept at the Navy Brig on the base, where it was all isolation cells. There was a lot of talk about that. We used to have to send a couple MPs to the Navy brig to watch the detainees there, but I never had the chance to go there myself; I was never assigned to the Navy Brig; I do know from talking to some people who worked at the brig that the detainees there were kept in isolation cells, though. We were told by an E-7 (Sergeant First Class) that detainees were coming off the plane straight to the brig, and that they were being kept at the Brig and not at the camp due to their status, and that they didn't want them around the other detainees. No one actually ever said there were children being held there. There was just a lot of talk from the people who worked at the Brig that some of the detainees looked really young...

**Were detainees verbally abused?**

Upon arrival, detainees were screamed at throughout the whole process. They were told to shut up, walk faster, and what not. Some guards would call them "Sand Niggers." I never heard that phrase until I was at Guantanamo. Detainees would be told that their country had been nuked and nothing was left, and that their families were dead. I know of some guards even telling detainees they could be executed at any

time. This all was being said on the blocks by fellow MPs.

**You said that you talked plenty of times with Guantanamo prisoner David Hicks. What did you two talk about?**

I remember David Hicks very clearly as, to me, he is one of the two most memorable detainees I came across. Due to him being able to communicate so clearly with us. And because he just reminded me of a guy I would have just gone out and have a beer with.

Over time I would talk to him a couple times while at Camp X-Ray. He would talk about how he was from Australia. He would say sometimes how he couldn't wait to receive news from back home from his parents. I can remember him mentioning a couple times that he was divorced and I believe he had one or two kids from what I recall.

Even to me he never denied being in Afghanistan, but he would make it a point to emphasize that he was not fighting the Americans, and said on many occasions he would not fight the Americans. He said he was there fighting in the country before the United States started to attack. He then went on to say he was attempting to leave the Afghanistan when, one night, he was on board a taxi and the taxi was stopped by the Northern Alliance. He was captured from there. He then stated that the Northern Alliance didn't treat him too badly and that, the next thing he knew, he was told he was being sold to the Americans for \$1500 (there were many detainees during my time at Guantanamo who stated that they had been sold as well to the Americans; they said that the more valuable the Americans thought you were, the more they payed for them).

One time David Hicks asked me and another guard I was walking around with if we knew he was once on the cover of Soldier of Fortune. He said an interrogator had told him he was. In the picture on the cover he was holding an RPG, and he stated the interrogators said it was him shooting at Americans. He told us yes, that was him in the picture with the RPG, but that was not even Afghanistan; the picture had been taken in Kosovo--I believe he said.

Hicks did not come across as the cold-blooded killer we were told all these guys were. He was a normal guy like me. And not much older. He would sit there, crack a joke, and make small talk. Just like any other normal person would. During these times is when I really started to look at the detainees as real people and not just monsters, as I had been told they were. This man had a family and people that loved him as I had. And we both missed them greatly and we both wanted to return back to our families as soon as we could.

**What other prisoners did you talk to?**

I remember Feroz Abbasi. I can picture him at X-Ray. He was on Bravo Block, but I cannot recall any conversations that I had with him that stick out. Most of the conversations I had with him were small talk. Nothing that really sticks out.

I talked probably the most to Ruhah Ahmed, one of the Tipton Three, as he was on Alpha block, a block I worked quite often. He said that he, Asif Iqbal, and Shafiq Rasul had gone to Pakistan for a wedding, and then went on over to Afghanistan to help with humanitarian aid for villages. Then all three were captured by the Northern Alliance. He told me during their time with the Northern Alliance that they were placed into a big container with so many people that they could not move and it was very hard to breathe. While in one of these containers he told me they started to shoot into the container, killing most of the people inside. He stated that not very many people survived this. Ruhah said they were treated very badly by the Northern Alliance, and that they were sold to the Americans for money as well.

On a personal side Ruhah and I spoke of music quite often, as he was very aware of American music and would often try to rap or sing on the block. It was quite funny. We talked about Eminem and many other artists. I remember him always talking about the James Bond movies and how he liked them. Ruhah was a very funny guy. Even locked up behind that cage, and angry as I am sure he was, he always seemed to keep upbeat--at least when I was around. One day I had left the rank on my collar by mistake (we didn't wear rank at Guantanamo for the most part). I was assigned to Alpha block that day, and I remember Ruhah saying "Hey, look! Neely's a general now!" laughing. It was a funny joke that went on the rest of the day.

**You talked a lot about music with Ruhah. Are you a musician now?**

I am by no way a musician at all. I think being around the same age as him--and since I listened to a lot of music--we could connect on that level. We also talked about normal stuff guys our age did. Everything from girls, to what we did when we went out on the town.

Many times, while working Alpha block, if I didn't understand someone, or wanted to know what was going on, I would ask him for help. I was actually older than he was by a year. And I was only 21 at the time. I could not imagine at that age suffering what he went through. The Ruhah Ahmed I saw and spoke with was just a normal, every day young guy like I was. If I had seen him walking down the street or at a bar I would not think twice, and I definitely would not have thought he was a terrorist.

I know that being in the position I was in as an active duty military police officer guarding the MOST dangerous men in the world that I was not supposed to really interact with the detainees. But it's hard. Especially when you realize that some of these guys are no different than yourself. The military trains you not to think and just to react and not feel any compassion for anyone or anybody. And do what you are told. No questions asked.

**Did any of these prisoners tell you they were abused?**

Hicks never mentioned any abuse to me. Or to anyone else I knew he spoke with. I never asked about the interrogations he endured as, honestly, I did not want to know.

Ruhal never mentioned any abuse he endured while at Camp X-Ray to me. He did state that while he was in Afghanistan, held by the Americans, a lot of the Military Police officers there were very abusive to the detainees.

**Any forms of prisoner abuse you have not mentioned so far?**

Many of the detainees said that they were kicked, punched, and hit on the plane trip to Guantanamo. What I do know about the plane ride to Guantanamo was that all the detainees were tied to the floor of the plane and were told if they had to go to the bathroom, they were to do it on themselves. The Military Police Company that did the transporting the first 45 days or so were also from Fort Hood, in the same battalion as I was. It was the 64th Military Police Company.

**Were you ever on those plane rides?**

I never was on the plane ride. A different MP company did that. I know the detainees that say what happened on the plane ride. All said they were kicked, and punched and told just to go to the bathroom on themselves. Over time, back at Fort Hood, people moved company to company, and you would get people in your company who had actually been a part of escorting the detainees on the plane, and they would state the same thing, that some of the MPs on the plane kicked and punched the detainees.

**Any other form of abuse?**

There is one other thing I would like to mention. There was a mentally ill detainee who arrived to Guantanamo somewhat earlier on in the process. I did not recall his name or detainee number. He arrived during the day, and during this period I had been assigned to nights for a week or so. I was working Charlie Block; just walking around, talking to the other guard on the block. Most of the detainees were laying down or reading their Koran. As we were walking around we noticed this one detainee who was squatted down talking to his self. We walked around and came back again and noticed he was drinking his shampoo out of the bottle. We tried to talk to him, but all he did was jibber-jabber. We notified the block NCOIC and he notified medical, which said it was "just shampoo", and that "it's nothing to worry about." He stayed up all night just walking around talking to himself.

Over time this detainee was to be nicknamed "Number 1," because he used to always scream "I am Number 1!" He never slept but maybe an hour or two a day. It seemed he was loud, always talking to himself. No one understood him--including the detainees. On many occasions we would ask other detainees "What's he saying?" and they would say "I have no clue; something's wrong with him". It was very obvious this man was mentally ill. Other times guards would find him drinking his own urine.

Later on, on Charlie Block, this detainee stripped down naked (which he did on many occasions). When we went to try and tell him to get his clothes on we noticed he had tied a string around his penis very tight. To the point where his penis was turning



colors. We tried to tell him to take it off, but he just laughed yelling "Number 1!" Finally, about 20 to 30 minutes later, he took it off, got dressed, and went to sleep. Eventually he would have to be placed in a cage with no one on any sides of him due to the fact he would just stand up and urinate on the person next to him. And it seemed like he didn't even realize he was doing this. When he was taken to showers, he was like a little kid. The water would turn on and he would jump into the middle of the water and start yelling "I am number 1!" It really seemed like he had the mind of a child. It seemed like he was always on an emotional roller-coaster, one minute he's laughing, next he's asleep, 5 minutes later he would be awake, curled up in a ball, in the corner of his cage, crying like a little child.

During the time I spent there, many of the other detainees tried to help him out by telling him when it was time to pray and reading the Koran to him.

Many guards questioned why he was there if he was so mentally ill that it was obvious. We were just told that he was putting on an act, that he wasn't really mentally ill. If he was acting, he sure did fool me and a lot of other people. Including most of the detainees.

### **Did you witness any acts of kindness there, either by the guards or the prisoners?**

Just because many of us were guards at Guantanamo does not make us automatically bad people. I know for a fact one or two people, including myself, felt sorry for these people--and very ashamed of what we were taking part in. But what could we say? If we questioned anything or talked out against what we thought was wrong, we would have been ridiculed. And who knows what else we would have had to face. So we kept our mouths shut and went work every day, counting down the days until we could return home to our families and just could forget about this time we spent in Guantanamo.

Some of the guards would do little stuff in acts of kindness. Like handing out extra food. Candy from the MREs would be handed out. I remember for their meals there would be a big container with tea in it and they loved it. Every person would only be allowed one cup of tea and that's it. And the container would still be half full, so it would go to waste. Many times we would just refill their cups until the tea was gone. And if there was extra food, we would hand that out as well.

### **How were your last days at Guantanamo?**

My last month and half or so was spent at Camp Delta. Here I spent my time mostly working in the sally ports (turning keys) and very little time on the blocks. I couldn't even tell who was where on the blocks at Camp Delta, as everyone had been spread out to different blocks than Camp X-Ray. Most of the last days were training the reserve company of MPs who were relieving us of our duties so we could go back to Fort Hood.

At Delta Block on Camp X-Ray there was a detainee whose name I never could remember due to the fact it was long and I couldn't pronounce it. He would always yell

"Oh Neeeeeeely!" every time he saw me--whether I was walking where he could see me or working the block. And when I left the block he would always yell "Oh Neely!" again. And everyone, including the detainee, would laugh. The best way to physically describe him would be as a tall, middle-aged, heavy set, bald guy. I could never understand him due to the language barrier, but we always would joke with each other, and if he needed something, if I was around, he would ask me.

Well, at Camp Delta he was put into an isolation cage. I only worked one time in there when I was there. You had to open the little door to see inside and, when I did open it, he would say "Oh Neely!" and just laugh. My last day working on Camp Delta I was assigned to a sally port turning keys. The last day I was ready to get out of there and head home the next day or so. So I got relieved for the last time and instead of leaving I walked onto the isolation block and opened the little window to his cage, and he said "Oh Neely!" to me for the last time. I then closed the little window and left. I guess that was my way of saying good-bye. Still to this day, if I talk to people who I was with in Guantanamo, they remember the detainee yelling "Oh Neely!"

I also want it to be known that we were told by the United States Army that, if we did not sign this piece of paper that stated we would not talk to the press, write a book, or make a movie, we could not leave and go back home. This happened the day before we left.

**Although you have already begun to do so, can you tell me how you came to think the way you do about Guantanamo? How did your views change?**

When I initially learned of my deployment to Guantanamo and for the purpose we were going for, I was ready to go and face the world's most dangerous men; these terrorists who had plotted and killed thousands of people in my country on September 11th, 2001. I was ready to seek my own personal revenge on these people in whatever manner I could.

Then the day came when these world's most dangerous men arrived, and they were not what I expected to see. Most of them were small, underweight, very scared, and injured. I was expecting these people to come off that bus looking like vicious monsters. Then I was one of the people responsible for the older detainee being injured. And seeing the abuse these detainees went through. . . The same people I worked with every day, the same people I went to sleep with every night, were the same people mistreating these detainees. After speaking with the detainees and realizing they had families who loved them, just as I had, I started to realize that these people are no different than me. Hell! I was older than some of the ones there.

I also grew to respect the Muslim culture during my time at Guantanamo. I greatly admired the detainees for praying all the time and being true to their religion. You don't see that in America much anymore.

I think everyone can agree that at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, there are some really bad people. And there are a lot of good people there as well. But innocent, guilty, black, white, Muslim, or Jew, no matter what you are there is no excuse to treat people in the

manner that I and other people did. It's wrong and just downright criminal, and it goes against everything that the United States of America stands for.

**Is there anything else that I should have asked but haven't?**

I can't think of anything else, but if you ever have any more questions, don't hesitate to ask.

**Thank you. And finally, can you comment on this interview? Was it hard for you to do?**

Almerindo, I would sincerely like to thank you for taking the time out to listen to what I had to say. It's been a long time coming that I spoke out about this issue, as doing so at times was hard, especially to remember the things I try so hard to forget. But this is a part of my personal healing process. To me, speaking out and letting people know my story, whether in Iraq or Guantanamo, helps me deal with everything in a positive manner.

. . .

I came home in March of 2004 from a year tour in Iraq to a wife and three beautiful children I did not even know and who didn't even know the man I came home as. It was--and continues to be--a struggle every day of our lives. I went through many times of deep depression which turned into me turning to alcohol to comfort me. It was easier to do this than to deal with what I was feeling inside. I was destroying not only myself but my family as well. I woke up one morning and realized I needed to get my life back in order not just for myself, but my family as well. I left the Army in August of 2005 and was ready to start my new life; just leave the Army and all the good and bad times I had went through behind me. That is easier said than done. There has not been a day that goes by I have not re-lived what I did or saw in Guantanamo or Iraq. It does not get any easier; it just eats you up inside day by day. I have spoken out against the Iraq war and took a stand when I was recalled in 2007 and refused to go back and I decided that I needed to tell my story about Guantanamo as well. How can I as a father tell my children to tell the truth and stand up for what they believe in if I was not willing to do the same?

I often think of the detainees who have been released or continue to be caged there like animals. I don't think people realize these caged individuals' lives have been changed forever. The innocent people who were wrongfully held have lost so much. Some of them have lost family members, jobs, and money. And for what? No matter what happens in their future, they will not be able to get that lost time back that we took from them.

Since we started this interview President Barack Obama has said the detention facility in Guantanamo Bay will be closed within a year. That's great, but what are WE as the United States of America, the people who kidnapped and tortured these people going to do for them? Just send them home like nothing happened? In the USA if you are

sentenced to prison and later on you are found not to be guilty through DNA or what not you are given compensation. Are we going to give compensation to these individuals that were so wrongfully held for so many years? We should. We started this mess and it's time we attempt to help this people move on with their lives. The sad part of this all is the people who are responsible. Former President George Bush and Former Vice President Dick Cheney will never be held accountable for the decisions they made. It's the detainees and the guards like myself that will have to live every day with what they went through, saw, and did while there.

**Would you recommend other military personnel to give testimony to the Guantanamo Testimonials Project?**

I would greatly encourage any other military members who spent time at Guantanamo at any time to tell their story of what they went through, good or bad. It's important that our stories are told. It's history, and the people have the right to know. It's a hard decision to tell your side of the story when you're not sure of how it will be received, but it's the right thing to do.

*I wish to thank Specialist Brandon Neely for this illuminating and courageous interview. And to invite anyone else with first-hand knowledge of Guantanamo to contribute testimony to the Guantanamo Testimonials Project. We can be reached electronically at the following email address: [humanrights@ucdavis.edu](mailto:humanrights@ucdavis.edu).*

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Other graphics:





