



Media Advisory

Joint Task Force Guantanamo

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Statement on Suicide Attempts at Guantanamo

Transcript of statement by Rear Admiral Harry B. Harris, Jr., Commander, Joint Task Force Guantanamo at media availability held at 3 pm, 19 May 2006.

Good afternoon. I'm glad to have this opportunity to talk with all of you to tell you what happened yesterday.

Yesterday morning (May 18, 2006) we responded to a medical emergency in Camp 1. A detainee was discovered unconscious after missing Morning Prayer.

Medical response teams arrived on scene and he was taken to the Detention Hospital where it was determined that he had poisoned himself. He has since been transferred to the Naval Hospital here, in the Acute Care Unit. He is stable but remains unconscious. Initial tests indicate he ingested a large quantity of the Benzodiazepine family of drugs. Typical examples include Xanax® and Klonopin®.

Later that morning, around noon, a second detainee in Camp 5 complained of dizziness and nausea after taking 5 pills. Not knowing if this was another suicide attempt, we locked down the Camps and began a total search of each cell, realizing this would take several hours to complete. As it turns out, this detainee simply had a bad reaction to drugs correctly prescribed to him for latent tuberculosis. This was not a suicide attempt. He is fine.

Then, early that afternoon, immediately after prayer call, during the cell searches we'd ordered earlier we found a cache of drugs hidden in the toilet of a detainee. Minutes later, another detainee was discovered frothing at the mouth when the guard force arrived to search his cell. This was the second suicide attempt. This detainee is also stable and unconscious in the Naval Hospital.

Two other detainees complained of nausea and dizziness. One of them told us he tried to kill himself but did not have enough drugs. However, our medical and psychiatric staffs now believe both of these to be attention-seeking sympathizers who were not trying to actually commit suicide.

Now we move to Camp 4 and the disturbance of last night.

Camp 4 is a medium-security facility where detainees live in a communal-living arrangement. Detainees in Camp 4 have the most privileges and are assigned to the camp when they have demonstrated continuous compliance with camp rules. However, we consider it to be the most dangerous camp because detainees have the opportunity to plan and act in groups.

At about 6:30, while continuing the searches we ordered earlier in the day, a detainee in Camp 4 was observed preparing to hang himself. Our quick-reaction force was immediately sent to the compound.

Our policy is to intervene to save the life of a detainee. Because of the dangerous nature of the men in our custody, we train for the possibility that a suicide attempt may be used by the detainees to create an opportunity to assault, take hostage or kill the guards. That was exactly the case here.

When the guard force entered the compound to intervene to save the detainee's life, the detainees assaulted them. The detainees had slickened the floor of the block with feces, urine, and soapy water in an attempt to trip the guards. Detainees then assaulted the guards with broken light fixtures, fan blades and bits of metal. I have some of the actual improvised weapons here that, unfortunately, most of you can't see. (Photos provided)

Minimum force was used to quell the disturbance, using a continuum beginning with verbal commands to OC pepper spray to physical force and finally, non-lethal crowd control measures. (Clarification: The altercation itself lasted about 4-5 minutes.) Over the next hour, the area was secured and the detainees were examined for injuries. Six detainees were treated for minor injuries. No service member was injured.

Let me summarize, before I turn it over to you for questions.

- We have determined that this incident (clarification: Camp 4) was not a suicide attempt but rather a ruse to get the guards to enter the compound in order to be attacked. So, at the end of the day, we have 2 confirmed suicide attempts (clarification: in Camp 1) ...again, both are alive and stable in the Naval Hospital here.
- I believe the guard force performed magnificently yesterday, showing remarkable restraint in the face of considerable danger. They were, in fact, heroic. The young men and women here are doing a magnificent job and I am proud of each of them.
- Equally tremendous work was done by the Medical Group. They saved the lives of the two would-be suicides.
- Finally, this illustrates to me the true nature of the men we have detained here. They are dangerous men and committed jihadists willing to die and order others to commit suicide.

Thank you and I'll now take your questions.

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