



Guantanamo: Inside the prison where the US government keeps its 13 most dangerous terrorists

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By Kate Mansey

First British reporter to go inside Barack Obama's Guantanamo jails.

DEEP inside the cactus hills of Guantanamo Bay, a disturbing secret lurks at the heart of Barack Obama's Government. Out of the sight of prying eyes, the USA has caged 13 of the planets most dangerous terrorists in a hidden location.

Some call it Camp 7, others Camp No because NO ONE is allowed to know where it is or what it is, except top military commanders at Guantanamo and the White House. And today for the first time we can reveal details of this camp we operates alongside the six official ones at the US naval base on the tip of Cuba. Guantanamo chief Commander Thomas Copeman III confirmed: "Camp 7 is a very high-security camp and it houses the high- value detainees. For national security reasons the physical location of it is considered secret. Very few people know where it is."

The mysterious camp is shrouded in secrecy and kept out of view but we have found out what life is like inside. A complex CCTV operation lets staff monitor detainees 24/7 even in the shower. Riot shields, helmets and pepper spray are kept to hand. It is patrolled by Emergency Reaction Force guards, trained to step in and restrain the prisoners.

The multi-million-dollar building is even designed so that if there is a fire inside there would be no need to evacuate it due to fire- proof doors and sprinklers. And anti-helicopter wires running across the top are designed to rule out any airborne breakout attempt. Camp 7's total secrecy is because of one very high-profile resident 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who has confessed to his part in planning the attacks on NewYorks World Trade Centre. Incredibly, KSM, as he is known to staff, has access to a TV and newspapers.

But he is the only Guantanamo or Gitmo resident to face terror charges the others still have not been granted a trial. However, Gitmo bosses are keen to move away from the iconic image of Camp X-Ray plastered across the media in February 2002, which showed detainees in orange jumpsuits hunched over, their legs and arms bound.

Today the Camp X-Ray detention centre is no longer in use. But Gitmo guards revealed that non-compliant prisoners still wear the infamous orange clothing and are shackled to the floor by their legs. In some cases, including British resident Shaker Aamer, detainees are left in isolation locked in a cell for 22 hours a day.

When President Obama took office in January 2009 he vowed that Guantanamo shall be closed as soon as practicable no later than one year from the date of his order. Yet dismantling the 45 square-mile fortress set up by George W. Bush in the wake of 9/11 has proved almost impossible, with 181 prisoners still languishing inside.

As the first British journalist to see inside Obamas remodelled Guantanamo, I took a three-hour flight on a propeller jet from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, followed by a ferry to the US naval base. Turkey vultures circled over the bay as a giant USA flag fluttered on a hilltop. Upon my arrival, Brigadier General Timothy Lake said: Welcome to Guantanamo, the doors are open.

But Camp 7 remains off-limits to all but the top staff. And as conditions appear to improve in the other camps, there is still no answer as to why, eight years after their arrest, the USA still holds these men without telling them what charges they face.

Cdr Copeman told the Sunday Mirror: "Guantanamo is keeping some pretty dangerous enemy combatants off the battlefield. That's the purpose of the place. "This place didn't exist when 9/11 occurred. Some of the folks here are extremely dedicated to Al Qaeda they will tell you, You're my enemy and you will always be my enemy. Some will yell, Get me my rights.

"But we don't have big long discussions on geo-political issues."

Since the naval base started taking prisoners on January 21, 2002, six have died. The US government classed five as suicides and one as natural causes. But worrying questions remain unanswered about how some of the deaths came about. These incidents plus what Cdr Copeman describes as some pretty severe riots in 2006 where the detainees tried to kill a couple of guards over in Camp 4 are considered setbacks by management. Today, five detainees are currently on hunger strike one has been refusing food for more than four years. Weighing just six stone, he is kept alive by doctors who force-feed him butter-pecan flavoured liquid {nutrients through a tube in his nose.

Lights shine 24/7 into cells but a guard insists: We give them eye masks so they can sleep. The camp is enclosed by two 15ft barbed-wire-topped fences, 6ft apart. The detainees and guards share their space with huge iguanas and 2ft-long banana rats. Yet while it remains open, Guantanamo does appear to have changed at least in some part for the better. Torture is out and games consoles are in. As well as an all-American diet of up to 6,500 calories a day, the detainees who abide by the camp rules can snack on Pringles and get treats such as ice cream and Pepsi every Friday and Sunday. Prisoners have access to a dentist and a psychiatrist prescribes anti-depressants to the seven per cent of detainees who want them. Guards even claim inmates are allowed to call their families back home on video conference calls, although they admit this rarely happens because the majority of these families do not have broadband internet access or a computer.

A prison library lends books including Harry Potter, Indiana Jones and Agatha Christie novels. Librarian Rosario says: "Political biographies of Tony Blair or someone like that are not very popular. Most people ask for magazines about cars or books about the Muslim Prophet Mohammed." The number of detainees who have access to a communal TV room or exercise yard has doubled in the past year. Now 88 per cent of inmates can wander in and out of their cells to chat or play football. This week Gitmo added a sports channel so inmates will be able to watch World Cup matches. Educational courses they even include one in life skills where detainees are taught how to write their CV and apply for jobs have also started. Other medium-security detainees have jobs during the day such as sweeping the common rooms. Others busy themselves by doing their own laundry. Cdr Copeman said classes and treats were part of the carrot and stick incentives for detainees. He said: "There's no time off for good behaviour because they've not been sentenced to anything. You can't add time on to a sentence if they assault the guards so they have privileges with the TV and books and chewing tobacco if they agree to interrogation, that's all designed to give them an environment they want to live in."

Yet an Arabic translator who has been travelling to Guantanamo for the past five years to work with prisoners and their lawyers said: "Things are much better than they used to be for the detainees, but they are forever playing mind games with them. The translator, who did not want to be named, added: "They will tell them they have a reservation when their attorney arrives. Reservation is also the term for when they want to interrogate them so they refuse to go and later realized they missed their chance with their lawyer.

"In one of the camps they have a body scanner so you can really see what the person looks like naked to see if they are hiding anything. To humiliate the detainee they will put a woman on the machine small things like this to mess with their mind and demoralise them, dehumanise them."

During my four-day stay on the base it became clear very quickly there is a huge gulf between the Guantanamo they want the world to see and the one they don't. Four months before my visit I began along drawn-out process for security clearance where I was told what to do and what to wear, including a ban on showing any bare toes. While on the base I was escorted every minute of the day with a guard even standing outside the toilet block. At the end of each day the military deleted scores of shots taken by Sunday Mirror photographer Roland Leon because they threatened national security.

One was a photograph of me with an iguana erased because my media pass was on show. The paranoia continued. When we walked through the Commanders office building a trooper shouted Media on deck and red flashing lights in the ceiling alerted staff to my presence, presumably so they would halt any classified conversations. Yet over the whole base there's atypically American community spirit. Outside the Commanders personal room there is a notice letting staff know Krispy Kreme donuts are on special offer. Army and Navy troopers enjoy every trapping of corporate America. Fast-food outlets include KFC, McDonalds, Taco Bell and Pizza Hut which will deliver to the barracks.

There is an American football pitch, a paintball range, skateboard park, golf course, scuba-diving centre, open-air cinema, Caribbean Jerk House restaurant and an Irish bar. Commander Copeman admits that even if an order came from the White House tomorrow to close the world's most infamous detention facility it would take at least nine months to complete the job not to mention shipping out 700 vehicles and 2,000 computers. President Obama might be disturbed to learn the views of those in charge and their grudging adherence to the Geneva Convention, a summary of which sits on Commander Copeman's desk. As he says: "You've got a group of folks here that don't fall into the traditional Geneva Conventions." "Osama Bin Laden is not a signatory."

Guantanamo Bay, a name synonymous with torture and human rights abuses, was the brainchild of the George W. Bush administration amid the fear and panic which followed the 9/11 terror atrocities. On January 21, 2002, the first plane-load of detainees were shackled to the floor of an aircraft and flown to Guantanamo, where they were housed in the now notorious metal cages of Camp X-Ray. Rounding up people it claimed were terrorists often on the flimsiest of evidence flying them halfway round the world then dumping them at Guantanamo allowed the US to evade the rules of the 1949 Geneva Convention.

The convention says prisoners of war should be treated humanely and protected from violence and torture. But the US Government insisted to the outrage of much of the rest of the world that the convention did not apply to terrorists or Al-Qaeda because they don't follow the rules of war. In 2002 the White House said: Al Qaeda is an international terrorist group and cannot be considered a state party to the Geneva Convention. Its members, therefore, are not covered by the Geneva Convention and are not entitled to Prisoner of War status under the treaty.

When Obama came to power and announced that Guantanamo would close, it was promised that detainees would face a proper trial in a civilian courtroom rather than in military tribunals used to convict detainees away from the normal legal process. But so far, no trials have begun. Among the few people charged is 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and the US authorities are said to be having second thoughts about whether his case will ever go before a court. The site of the Guantanamo detention facility is known as Camp America. Thanks to a 100-year-old treaty, the USA leases the land on the south-eastern tip of Communist Cuba for the paltry sum of \$4,085 a year an annual cheque which leader Fidel Castro refuses to cash.