

Nation

## Inside the Interrogation of Detainee 063

**EXCLUSIVE: TO GET THE "20TH HIJACKER" TO TALK, THE U.S. USED A WIDE RANGE OF TACTICS. A SECRET LOG REVEALS THE FIRST DOCUMENTED VIEW OF HOW GITMO REALLY WORKS**

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The prisoner known around the U.S. naval station at Guantánamo Bay as Detainee 063 was a hard man to break. Defiant from the start, he told his captors that he had been in Afghanistan to pursue his love of falconry. But the young Saudi prisoner who wouldn't talk was not just any detainee. He was Mohammed al-Qahtani, a follower of Osama bin Laden's and the man believed by many to be the so-called 20th hijacker. He had tried to enter the U.S. in August 2001, allegedly to take part in the Sept. 11 attacks. But while Mohammed Atta, the eventual leader of the hijackers, was waiting outside in the Orlando, Fla., airport parking lot, al-Qahtani was detained inside--and then deported--by an alert immigration officer who didn't buy his story.

More than a year later, after al-Qahtani had been captured in Afghanistan and transferred to Gitmo's Camp X-Ray, his interrogation was going nowhere. So in late November 2002, according to an 84-page secret interrogation log obtained by TIME, al-Qahtani's questioners switched gears. They suggested to their captive that he had been spared by Allah in order to reveal the true meaning of the Koran and help bring down bin Laden.

During a routine check of his medical condition, a sergeant approached al-Qahtani and whispered in his ear, "What is God telling you right now? Your 19 friends died in a fireball and you weren't with them. Was that God's choice? Is it God's will that you stay alive to tell us about his message?" At that point, the log states, al-Qahtani threw his head back and butted the sergeant in the eye. Two MPs wrestled al-Qahtani to the ground. The sergeant crouched down next to the thrashing terrorist, who tried to spit on him. The sergeant's response: "Go ahead and spit on me. It won't change anything. You're still here. I'm still talking to you and you won't leave until you've given God's message."

The interrogation log of Detainee 063 provides the first internal look at the highly classified realm of Gitmo interrogations since the detention camp opened four years ago. Chief Pentagon spokesman Larry DiRita tells TIME that the log was compiled by various uniformed interrogators and observers on the Pentagon's Joint Task Force at Gitmo as the interrogation proceeded. It is stamped SECRET ORCON, a military acronym for a document that is supposed to remain with the organization that created it. A Pentagon official who has seen the log describes it as the "kind of document that was never meant to leave Gitmo."

The log reads like a night watchman's diary. It is a sometimes shocking and often mundane hour-by-hour, even minute-by-minute account of a campaign to extract information. The log records every time al-Qahtani

eats, sleeps, exercises or goes to the bathroom and every time he complies with or refuses his interrogators' requests. The detainee's physical condition is frequently checked by medical corpsmen--sometimes as often as three times a day-- which indicates either spectacular concern about al-Qahtani's health or persistent worry about just how much stress he can take. Although the log does not appear obviously censored, it is also plainly incomplete: there are numerous gaps in the notes about what is said and what is happening in the interrogation booth beyond details like "Detainee taken to bathroom and walked for 10 minutes."

Despite the information gaps, the log offers a rare glimpse into the darker reaches of intelligence gathering, in which teams that specialize in extracting information by almost any means match wits and wills with men who are trained to keep quiet at almost any cost. It spans 50 days in the winter of 2002-03, from November to early January, a critical period at Gitmo, during which 16 additional interrogation techniques were approved by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld for use on a select few detainees, including al-Qahtani.

By itself, the log doesn't make clear how effective the interrogations were. The Pentagon contends that al-Qahtani has been a valuable source of information: providing details of meetings with bin Laden, naming people and financial contacts in several Arab countries, describing terrorist training camps where bin Laden lives and explaining how he may have escaped from Tora Bora in December 2001.

Pentagon officials tell TIME that most of the intelligence gleaned from those sessions was recorded in other documents. But the interrogation log gives a rare window into the techniques used by the U.S. military, suggesting at least in this case that disclosures were sometimes obtained not when al-Qahtani was under duress but when his handlers eased up on him.

The case of Detainee 063 is sure to add fire to the superheated debate about the use of American power in the age of terrorism. The U.S. has been criticized for mistreating Gitmo prisoners and denying their rights at a facility Amnesty International has controversially called the "gulag of our time." Along with lawmakers and human-rights groups, former President Jimmy Carter has called on Washington officials to shut the camp down. Even President George W. Bush told Fox News last week that his Administration was exploring alternatives to the detention center.

How should a democratic nation proceed when it captures a high-value prisoner like al-Qahtani, when unlocking a mind might save lives? Experts acknowledge that brute torture generally doesn't work because a person will say anything to stop the pain. So what, exactly, is effective? And when do the ends justify the means?

From the moment Mohammed al-Qahtani stepped off a Virgin Atlantic flight in Orlando back in August 2001, immigration officials noticed something troubling about him. He had arrived on a one-way ticket yet carried only \$2,800 in cash, barely enough to buy his return. When an official pressed him for details about his

destination, al-Qahtani was hostile and evasive. With an interpreter's help, the immigration agent questioned al-Qahtani for 90 min. and then sent him packing. Al-Qahtani's parting words: "I'll be back."

From London, al-Qahtani made his way to the United Arab Emirates and then to Afghanistan to fight against the U.S. He was captured fleeing Tora Bora in December 2001. When he was shipped to Guantanamo two months later, officials had not yet realized he was the presumed 20th hijacker. For weeks, he refused to give his name. But in July 2002, the feds matched his fingerprints to those of the man who had been deported from Orlando and marked him for intensive interrogation. Al-Qahtani, explains Pentagon spokesman DiRita, was "a particularly well-placed, well-connected terrorist who was believed capable of unlocking an enormous amount of specific and general insights into 9/11, al-Qaeda operations and ongoing planning for future attacks." But the initial questioning by the FBI went poorly. "We were getting nothing from him," a senior Pentagon official says. "He had been trained to resist direct questioning. And what works in a Chicago police precinct doesn't work in war."

That's where things stood in late November 2002, when the log obtained by TIME begins. At that point, tag teams of interrogators are putting al-Qahtani through a daily routine designed to drain the detainee of his autonomy. They wake him every morning at 4 and sometimes question him until midnight. Each day--and sometimes every hour--is shaped around standard Army interrogation techniques, with code names like Fear Up/Harsh, Pride/Ego Down, the Futility Approach and the Circumstantial Evidence Theme. Each day, the interrogators seem to be trying to find those that work best. They promise better treatment; they show him pictures of 9/11 victims, particularly children and the elderly. They talk about God's will and al-Qahtani's guilt. They tell him that he failed on his mission and hint that other comrades have been captured and are talking about his role in the plot. They play on his emotions, saying he should talk if he ever wants to see his family or friends or homeland again.

For days, al-Qahtani stonewalls his handlers and maintains that he went to the U.S. to get into the used-car business. "You are working with the devil," he tells his captors. The interrogators respond by forcing him to stand or sit immobile on a metal chair. He tries to deflect questions about where he went in Afghanistan with answers apparently drawn directly from an al-Qaeda handbook, given to terrorists, about how to resist interrogations. When al-Qahtani resorts to a handbook answer, his handlers reply that it amounts to another admission of guilt.

Yet in other ways, al-Qahtani emerges as an innocent abroad--uneducated, almost from another era. He asks whether the sun revolves around the earth. He wonders about dinosaurs and is told of their history and demise. He confides that he would like to marry someday--apparently not realizing how unlikely that goal now is.

The first break in al-Qahtani's facade comes with a long-delayed call of nature. When a hunger strike he has launched fizzles, he starts refusing water. That becomes a battle of wills--and teeth. Al-Qahtani quickly

becomes so dehydrated that medical corpsmen forcibly administer fluids by IV drip. He tries to fight them off with his hands and is restrained. Another time, al-Qahtani tries to rip the IV needle out; when he is cuffed to his chair, he turns his head and bites the IV line completely in two. He is then strapped down and given an undisclosed amount of fluids. An hour or so later, around 9:40 a.m., al-Qahtani tells his guards that he would be willing to talk if he is allowed to urinate. The log notes he is given 3 1/2 bags of IV fluid. He starts to moan and asks again to be allowed to relieve himself. Yes, but first he must answer questions:

Interrogator: Who do you work for?

Al-Qahtani: Al-Qaeda

Interrogator: Who was your leader?

Al-Qahtani: Osama bin Laden

Interrogator: Why did you go to Orlando?

Al-Qahtani: I wasn't told the mission

Interrogator: Who was with you on the plane?

Al-Qahtani: I was by myself

That answer frustrates the interrogator--You're wasting my time, he says--and when al-Qahtani requests his promised bathroom break, he is told to go in his pants. Humiliatingly, he does. The log notes 30 minutes later, "He is beginning to understand the futility of his situation ... He is much closer to compliance and cooperation than at the beginning of the operation."

But things appear to move slowly after that. It is not clear from the log's terse entries that increased pressure is leading to new disclosures. The interrogators keep juggling techniques--giving extra sleep some days, offering a home-cooked Arab meal on another (al-Qahtani refuses it). Later that day, when a video of the destruction of the Twin Towers is played, al-Qahtani becomes so violent, he has to be restrained. "We can't say, Because we did this, we got that," a senior Pentagon official says. "If we did know what worked, we'd know exactly which pressure points to apply and when." Even al-Qahtani seems to understand that: "If you interrogate me in the right way and the right position," he taunts his questioners, "you might find some answers."

A secondary battle appears to be under way over Ramadan. At various points during the Muslim holy month, al-Qahtani claims to be either on a hunger strike, refusing all food and water, or fasting during daylight

hours, as Ramadan requires. According to the log, the interrogators tell al-Qahtani he cannot pray--a religious obligation--unless he disregards another by accepting water. So he declines to pray.

Al-Qahtani's resilience under pressure in the fall of 2002 led top officials at Gitmo to petition Washington for more muscular "counter resistance strategies." On Dec. 2, Rumsfeld approved 16 of 19 stronger coercive methods. Now the interrogators could use stress strategies like standing for prolonged periods, isolation for as long as 30 days, removal of clothing, forced shaving of facial hair, playing on "individual phobias" (such as dogs) and "mild, non-injurious physical contact such as grabbing, poking in the chest with the finger and light pushing." According to the log, al-Qahtani experienced several of those over the next five weeks. The techniques Rumsfeld balked at included "use of a wet towel or dripping water to induce the misperception of suffocation." "Our Armed Forces are trained," a Pentagon memo on the changes read, "to a standard of interrogation that reflects a tradition of restraint." Nevertheless, the log shows that interrogators poured bottles of water on al-Qahtani's head when he refused to drink. Interrogators called this game "Drink Water or Wear It."

After the new measures are approved, the mood in al-Qahtani's interrogation booth changes dramatically. The interrogation sessions lengthen. The quizzing now starts at midnight, and when Detainee 063 dozes off, interrogators rouse him by dripping water on his head or playing Christina Aguilera music. According to the log, his handlers at one point perform a puppet show "satirizing the detainee's involvement with al-Qaeda." He is taken to a new interrogation booth, which is decorated with pictures of 9/11 victims, American flags and red lights. He has to stand for the playing of the U.S. national anthem. His head and beard are shaved. He is returned to his original interrogation booth. A picture of a 9/11 victim is taped to his trousers. Al-Qahtani repeats that he will "not talk until he is interrogated the proper way." At 7 a.m. on Dec. 4, after a 12-hour, all-night session, he is put to bed for a four-hour nap.

Over the next few days, al-Qahtani is subjected to a drill known as Invasion of Space by a Female, and he becomes especially agitated by the close physical presence of a woman. Then, around 2 p.m. on Dec. 6, comes another small breakthrough. He asks his handlers for some paper. "I will tell the truth," he says. "I am doing this to get out of here." He finally explains how he got to Afghanistan in the first place and how he met with bin Laden. In return, the interrogators honor requests from him to have a blanket and to turn off the air conditioner. Soon enough, the pressure ratchets up again. Various strategies of intimidation are employed anew. The log reveals that a dog is present, but no details are given beyond a hazy reference to a disagreement between the military police and the dog handler. Agitated, al-Qahtani takes back the story he told the day before about meeting bin Laden.

But a much more serious problem develops on Dec. 7: a medical corpsman reports that al-Qahtani is becoming seriously dehydrated, the result of his refusal to take water regularly. He is given an IV drip, and a doctor is summoned. An unprecedented 24-hour time out is called, but even as al-Qahtani is put under a doctor's care, music is played to "prevent detainee from sleeping." Nine hours later, a medical corpsman

checks al-Qahtani's pulse and finds it "unusually slow." An electrocardiogram is administered by a doctor, and after al-Qahtani is transferred to a hospital, a CT scan is performed. A second doctor is consulted. Al-Qahtani's heartbeat is regular but slow: 35 beats a minute. He is placed in isolation and hooked up to a heart monitor.

The next day, a radiologist is flown in from Roosevelt Roads Naval Air Station in Puerto Rico, 600 miles away, to read the CT scan. The log reports, "No anomalies were found." Nonetheless, al-Qahtani is given an ultrasound for blood clots. For the first time since the log began, al-Qahtani is given an entire day to sleep. The next evening, the log reports that his medical "checks are all good." Al-Qahtani is "hooded, shackled and restrained in a litter" and transported back to Camp X-Ray in an ambulance.

Over the next month, the interrogators experiment with other tactics. They strip-search him and briefly make him stand nude. They tell him to bark like a dog and growl at pictures of terrorists. They hang pictures of scantily clad women around his neck. A female interrogator so annoys al-Qahtani that he tells his captors he wants to commit suicide and asks for a crayon to write a will. At one stage, an Arabic-speaking serviceman, posing as a fellow detainee, is brought to Camp X-Ray for a short stay in an effort to gain al-Qahtani's confidence. The log reports that al-Qahtani makes several comments to interrogators that imply he has a big story to tell, but interrogators report that he seems either too scared or simply unwilling, to tell it. On Jan. 10, 2003, al-Qahtani says he knows nothing of terrorists but volunteers to return to the gulf states and act as a double agent for the U.S. in exchange for his freedom. Five days later, Rumsfeld's harsher measures are revoked after military lawyers in Washington raised questions about their use and efficacy.

It's unclear how al-Qahtani's interrogation proceeded from that point and whether it is still continuing. Senior Pentagon officials told TIME that some of his most valuable confessions came not during the period covered in the log or as a result of any particular technique but when al-Qahtani was presented with evidence coughed up by others in detention, especially Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, or KSM, the alleged mastermind of 9/11. The intelligence take was more cumulative than anything else, says a Pentagon official. Once al-Qahtani realized KSM was talking, the official speculates, al-Qahtani may have felt he had the green light to follow suit.

Al-Qahtani has never been charged with a crime, has no lawyer and remains in detention at Guantánamo. But his case is already the subject of several probes in Washington. A year ago, a senior FBI counterterrorism official wrote the Pentagon complaining of abuses that FBI agents said they witnessed at the naval base. The agents reported seeing or hearing of "highly aggressive interrogation techniques." The letter singles out the treatment of al-Qahtani in September and October of 2002--before the log obtained by TIME begins--saying a dog was used "in an aggressive manner to intimidate Detainee #63." The FBI letter said al-Qahtani had been "subjected to intense isolation for over three months" and "was evidencing behavior consistent with extreme psychological trauma (talking to non-existent people, reporting hearing voices, crouching in a cell covered with a sheet for hours on end)." The Justice Department and the

Pentagon have opened separate investigations into the charges. A Pentagon official tells TIME he expects that many of those charges will prove to be unfounded.

Interrogators eventually compelled al-Qahtani to focus on his fellow detainees at Guantánamo. In that process, he implicated more than 20 other Gitmo prisoners as members of al-Qaeda or associates of bin Laden's, according to the Los Angeles Times. A military board has since used al-Qahtani's identification as a factor in prolonging the detention of some of them. Whether he has won more favorable treatment in return for his cooperation is unknown. But at least one of those he named, a Yemeni, is now claiming in a U.S. federal court that al-Qahtani's statements about him are unreliable because they "appear to have been obtained by the use of torture."

President Bush has said the U.S. would apply principals consistent with the Geneva Conventions to "unlawful combatants," subject to military necessity, at Guantánamo and elsewhere. The Pentagon argues that al-Qahtani's treatment was always "humane." But the Geneva Conventions forbid any "outrage on personal dignity." Eric Freedman, a constitutional-law expert and consultant in some of the growing number of federal lawsuits challenging U.S. treatment of these detainees, says, "If the techniques described in this interrogation log are not outrages to personal dignity, then words have no meaning." Then again, in the war on terrorism, the personal dignity of a fanatic trained for mass murder may be an inevitable casualty. --With reporting by Brian Bennett, Timothy J. Burger, Sally B. Donnelly and Viveca Novak/Washington