

Guantanamo: Horrors of Camp Delta Exposed by British Victims

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Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

An award-winning film director who reconstructed scenes of torture and abuse at Guantanamo Bay has called for the immediate closure of the US-run camp.

Michael Winterbottom's film shows prisoners in orange jumpsuits beaten, manacled to floors and subjected to deafening music in solitary confinement. It tells the story of Asif Iqbal, Ruhel Ahmed and Shafiq Rasul, the so-called Tipton Three, who set off for Pakistan in September 2001 and ended up in Camp Delta, in Cuba's Guantanamo Bay. They were released without charge after more than two years' imprisonment.

Mr Winterbottom said: "What's most shocking isn't the torture or the shackling, it's that Guantanamo Bay exists at all. I think it should be closed down, and last week the United Nations said it should be closed down."

He criticised the Government's "perverse" refusal to come to the aid of the eight British residents still incarcerated in the camp in Cuba. Mr Winterbottom added: "There are still 500 people in Guantanamo. They are still experiencing all the things that we filmed."

The White House appears oblivious to the growing international outcry in recent weeks about conditions in Guantanamo Bay.

Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary, sidestepped an opportunity yesterday to support his cabinet colleague Peter Hain, who called for closure last week.

Mr Straw said on Radio 4: "I am absolutely clear the US has no intention of maintaining a gulag in Guantanamo Bay. They want to see the situation resolved and they would like it other than it is. However, that is the situation that they have."

He said the US was reducing the numbers held there, but added: "The problem is what to do with those that are left, and that is a matter which the US administration are going to have to take their own decisions on, and frankly I'm not going to second-guess the decisions they make."

Mr Winterbottom's film, *The Road to Guantanamo*, mixes interviews with the Tipton Three with dramatised reconstructions of how they ended up in US military hands. They say that they decided to travel to Afghanistan after hearing a preacher in a Pakistani mosque call for volunteers to help with conducting aid work in the neighbouring country. When the war started they were trapped and ended up being captured by Northern Alliance fighters who handed them over to US military forces.

The film won the Silver Bear award for direction at the Berlin Film Festival last week and will

be shown on Channel 4 next month. Four or five distributors are considering showing the film in the US.

It was also revealed yesterday that two actors and the former Guantanamo Bay detainees who they played in the film were stopped by police under anti-terror laws when they returned from Berlin. Reprieve, a human rights group, said Mr Ahmed and Mr Rasul and the actors who played them – Rizwan Ahmed and Farhad Harun – were among a group of six “detained” at Luton airport last Thursday.

The charity issued a statement on behalf of Rizwan Ahmed, which said he had been interrogated by three Special Branch officers. It is claimed they went through his wallet and mobile phone to note personal details. Mr Ahmed said: “[A female officer] asked me if I intended to do more documentary films, specifically more political ones like *The Road to Guantanamo*. She asked, ‘Did you become an actor mainly to do films like this, to publicise the struggles of Muslims?’”

Bedfordshire Police said that four people had been stopped at Luton airport on 16 February under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. It said they were taken to a nearby room where their identities were confirmed and questions about their journey and reasons for travelling established. They left the airport within an hour.

Nearly 100 prisoners have died in American custody in the “war on terror” in Iraq and Afghanistan since August 2002, according to BBC Newsnight last night. The figures were obtained from the Pentagon in Washington by the Human Rights First organisation. Of the 98 deaths, at least 34 are suspected or confirmed murders.

The director’s view

“We’d heard about the Tipton Three, so we got in contact with their lawyer, to arrange a meeting. Luckily they were interested in telling us their story. What was fascinating about the way they described the experience was that two of them were teenagers when they left, and one of them was 21, and none of them were particularly religious or political before they left; even when they were talking about it with us, after the event. And when they described it, it was in a matter-of-fact way, like someone telling you about their holiday – the holiday from hell.

“They were just ordinary British teens who got caught up in these events. We wanted to show the gap between what you thought people would be like in Guantanamo and the reality of meeting them.

“It’s good that people see that these are ordinary guys; to contrast the messiness of reality and real people’s lives with the simplicity of Bush and Blair’s insistence that they know these people, they’re bad people, and that it’s a fight of good against evil, it’s a war against terror. All these absolutes are so deceptive and so misleading. Things are not like that in the real world.”

Michael Winterbottom is director of *The Road To Guantanamo*, to be shown on Channel 4 on 9 March

‘They chained you to a hook on the floor’

SHAFIQ RASUL: “[In Guantanamo] You were sitting on your knees for ages. It was hot and you felt the sun burning your head. For the first month and a half, we never went out of our cells. They wouldn’t let us pray; you couldn’t stand up in your cell for the first two weeks. You weren’t allowed to speak to the guy next to you.

There was a hook on the floor and leg irons attached to the hook, and they put your hands between your ankles on the floor and chained you to the hook on the floor as well. They’d keep you there for five hours, six hours – you couldn’t go to the toilet, you’d have to urinate, defecate where you are.”

‘The camp reminded me of a zoo’

RUHEL AHMED: “[When we got to the Afghan border] they came on motorbikes, we paid them 200 rupees. They took us across. When we got to Kandahar, that’s when the bombing started. You see something like that in the movies only.

“[In US custody in Afghanistan] you weren’t allowed to talk, you weren’t allowed to walk, you weren’t allowed to look at the soldiers. If you looked at them, that was it, you would get punished.

“[In Guantanamo] we used to walk five minutes every week – they used to take us out for five minutes every week. It reminded me of a zoo... there were rats, mice, snakes, scorpions..”

‘In prison everyone told you not to say you were English’

ASIF IQBAL: “My parents went to Pakistan and my mum came back and said I should go there to get married, so I went. I didn’t really want to go because I had a job. But she was telling me it was time to go to Pakistan. The preacher [at a Karachi mosque] was saying we should help the Afghan people in whatever way we can. So we got a bus and off we went.”

[In prison in Afghanistan] “At night it was so crowded we had to take turns at sleeping. In prison, everyone told you not to say you were English.”

[In Guantanamo Bay] They wanted to say I was a fighter. The next thing was: ‘Were you a member of al-Qa’ida?’ Once you say you were a member of al-Qa’ida, that was it. It either destroys you or it makes you stronger. I think it made me stronger. It destroyed me for a few weeks, after that I was all right. It’s changed my life, the way I look at things. The world’s not a nice place.”

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