

HONOR BOUND

By Command Sergeant Major Jeffrey Plemmons

“Honor Bound to Defend Freedom” is the motto of the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coast Guard personnel who perform the detention operation mission of Joint Task Force (JTF) Guantanamo, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Their primary concern is the safe, humane, lawful care and custody of enemy combatants. In this case, the enemy combatants are terrorist radicals (including al-Qaida) who believe that it is their duty to carry out jihad, or holy war, against the “tyrants.” Descriptions of al-Qaida tactics and procedures can be found in the “Manchester Document,” an al-Qaida training manual discovered by police from Manchester, England, during a search of an al-Qaida home in 2000. According to the manual, the al-Qaida call for a confrontation that “knows the dialogue of bullets; ideals of assassination, bombing, and destruction; and diplomacy of the cannon and machine gun.”

The United States has established a humane and secure facility for the detention of captured enemy combatants at Guantanamo Bay. Domestic and international visitors have noted that the conditions at Guantanamo Bay meet or exceed those of prisons elsewhere. Following a March 2006 inspection by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, a Belgian police official said, “At the level of detention facilities, it is a model prison, where people are better treated than in Belgian prisons.” Comments like this are a testament to the discipline and professionalism which our young men and women in uniform display while carrying out their everyday duties.

The first detainees arrived at Guantanamo Bay in early 2002. And after seven years of captivity, most are still committed to the cause. Joint Detention Group staff members are subjected to intimidation, threats, and assault on a daily basis. Guantanamo Bay detainees play the same games as any other inmates, with one major difference—they have a real hatred for Americans, and they actively look for opportunities to hurt or kill staff members.

The Guantanamo Bay operation is not easy, and any mistake or error in judgment can potentially result in international criticism. Under these difficult conditions, Service members operate a professional detention center, demonstrating considerable respect for the physical and mental welfare of the detainees. Despite the difficulty of the mission, our Service members are committed to keeping dangerous terrorists from planning, financing, and executing further attacks against the United States. In short, they live up to the JTF motto.

Notwithstanding the humane conditions, the U.S. administration has acknowledged that the continued operation of Guantanamo Bay remains a source of controversy. Of course, some of these criticisms would persist no matter where the detainees were housed, but some pertain specifically to the past operation of the facility at Guantanamo Bay. Regardless of your personal feelings about Guantanamo Bay, you can sleep well at night knowing that the Service members of JTF Guantanamo are “Honor Bound to Defend Freedom” and committed to protecting U.S. citizens around the world.

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