

Froot Loops, prayer, not much else

Shackled Guantanamo detainees settle into austere, dreary routine

By Warren Richey

GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba—It's probably not the endorsement Kellogg's was looking for.

But by far, the most popular item on the detention camp menu for suspected al-Qaida and Taliban fighters is the cereal Froot Loops.

"It is apparently their favorite snack," said Army Maj. Rumi Nielson-Green. "They immediately were asking folks for the Froot Loops—and, when offered a choice of cereal, they'll take Froot Loops."

It would appear that the role once played by cigarettes and chocolate in wartime detention camps in past conflicts has now been eclipsed by puffed corn and sugar in a virtual rainbow of fruity colors.

Two months after Camp X-Ray opened its chain-link and razor-wire gates to suspected terrorists and their supporters captured in Afghanistan, the detainees are settling into a routine that is austere enough to make a single-serving box of cereal the high point of the day.

A typical day for an al-Qaida detainee starts just before dawn with the call to prayer. Breakfast at 6:30 a.m. is served to each prisoner in his cell on paper plates passed through a slot in the cell door. The menu: oatmeal, an orange, fresh bread and a bottle of water.

The center of every detainee's universe is a 64-square-foot slab of concrete enclosed by walls and ceiling of chain-link fencing. Among the various activities prisoners engage in in their cells: standing, sitting, squatting, lying down, pacing, reading the Quran, talking to their neighbors and sleeping.

"They spend the vast majority of their day inside those units," said Marine Maj. Stephen Cox. "Their activity is not that much different than inmates in a maximum-security prison."

From 7:30 to noon, the detainee may be involved in any one of four activities outside their cells: showering, sick call, recreation, or interrogation.

Each detainee is required to bathe at least once every two days. This is more challenging than it sounds because prisoners must first master the art of scrubbing and shampooing with both hands shackled together.

Whenever a detainee leaves his cell, his wrists and ankles must be shackled. The wrist cuffs are attached to a belt at the waist to prevent any swinging of both arms together (although this waist restraint is removed at shower time). Any detainee outside his cell is escorted by at least two guards.

While in the recreation area near the center of the camp, detainees have 15 minutes

outside their cells during which their leg shackles are removed. There are no recreation facilities or sports equipment. No soccer balls, Ping-Pong tables, lawn darts, croquet mallets. Instead, detainees have the option of either standing still, walking, or jogging, all with their wrists still shackled. Detainees are scheduled for two 15-minute recreation experiences per week.

Also in this period, detainees may be called into one of five air-conditioned interrogation huts on the south side of Camp X-Ray. One of the primary purposes of the camp is to extract information that might help prevent future terrorist attacks and identify al-Qaida operatives both in the camp and elsewhere.

Officials aren't sharing their success stories, if any, with the media. But there have been widespread problems with detainees refusing to cooperate, or even correctly identifying themselves. The problem was apparently serious enough that Brig. Gen. Michael Lehnert, commander of the detention camp, recently lectured the self-proclaimed Holy Warriors about the importance of being truthful.

"You must tell the truth during questioning," the general said in his talk to the detainees. "Then, and only then, will we be able to determine who will be allowed to return home."

He added: "We know a great deal about many of you, and lying to us will only make your stay here longer."

After the noon prayer, lunch is served at 12:30. It consists of the same MRE (meal ready to eat) that is served to U.S. service members wishing to comply with either Islamic or Jewish dietary restrictions. The "halal" lunches cost twice as much as regular MREs, officials say.

A halal lunch includes pasta or a stew free of any pork products, as well as an assort-



A detainee from Afghanistan is taken from a questioning session at Camp X-Ray in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, on Feb. 6. The captives are shackled whenever they leave their cells.

ment of snacks. These include the much-coveted Froot Loops.

Other snacks include granola bars, raisins, sunflower kernels, peanuts and a bag of New York style baked bagel chips with garlic. The bag depicts New York's skyline, but at midtown around the Empire

State Building, rather than downtown where the World Trade Center stood.

From 1:30 to 5 p.m., the detainees may meet with representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, which has been granted open access to the camp and the detainees. Also, a U.S. Navy chaplain, who is a Muslim cleric, frequently visits the detainees. When the chaplain is present at the camp, he issues the call to prayer via the camp public-address system. When he isn't present, a recording of the call is played. The detainees are offered the opportunity to pray five times each day.

Dinner is served at 5 p.m.—typically white rice, red beans, a banana, bread and a bottle of water.

For the last two weeks, various detainees have engaged in a hunger strike. At one point, almost two-thirds of the 300 men refused food.

Now it is down to about a dozen, with three detainees having eaten nothing since the start of the month.

Lehnert says he will not allow anyone to starve or die of dehydration. Intravenous nutrient solutions have been administered to more than 20 detainees in the last two weeks.

In contrast to the hunger strikers, most of the detainees at Camp X-Ray are eating, consuming about 2,700 calories per day. They have gained an average of 10 pounds in the last month, military officials say.



Clothing, a sleeping mat, food, sandals, a canteen, soap and buckets are the standard issue for detainees at Camp X-Ray in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.