

Went down to Guantánamo expecting to meet some poor wretch beaten down and wasting away from years of solitary confinement. I even took with me a field questionnaire designed to assess the degree of a prisoner's mental deterioration.

I was surprised then, when ushered into one of the cells in Camp Echo, to be greeted by a mature, grey-bearded gentleman radiating self-confidence and obviously delighted to see me. This was Saifullah Paracha. He was then fifty-eight years old. He had lived in New York for sixteen years and has many relatives in the U.S. I said to him once, "You're half American and half Pakistani." He answered, "No. I am entirely American and entirely Pakistani." He has an American green card, and as far as we know, he is the only man at Guantanamo that holds one. Before he was seized, he was a businessman and a TV producer. His first thought when a gang of masked men jumped him and took him prisoner was, "This is an American operation. I'll be alright."

I spent several days with him on my first visit. Not only was the mental deterioration questionnaire forgotten, I enjoyed our talks immensely. Paracha had been at Bagram for about a year before he was transferred to GTMO. He had had a Bible there, in addition to his Quran. He explained that the unity of the Abrahamic traditions is a big thing with him. Not that he was any less of a devout Muslim. He told how much making the Hajj had meant to him. He wore the white garment, made the circumambulations, and did everything tradition required. Also, it was a special occasion, so he got the rare honor of seeing inside the Ka'bah. But Paracha is a moderate. He was quick to add, "When I lived in New York, I once went to a gay wedding." A Muslim for the twenty-first century.

At GTMO he had asked for the Bible, which he believed had come with him in a box from Bagram. So he had requested the Bible repeatedly—weekly for a while. The sergeant of the guard

Gaillard Hunt: Narrative

had told him he couldn't have it unless the interrogation team authorized it. But the interrogation team had long ago departed, declaring that he had told them all he knew and would be released soon. So he got no Bible.

When I got back home, I bought a ten-dollar Bible. King James Version, for style. I left it in the publisher's shrink wrap. I learned from the Internet that a Unitarian-Universalist chaplain had recently been posted to Guantánamo, a woman named Chaplain Cynthia Kane. So I wrote her a note explaining that one prisoner at least would appreciate a pastoral visit, and asking her to deliver the Bible to Paracha. I threw in paperback copies of Hamlet and Julius Caesar.

I have no idea what happened. Possibly Chaplain Kane got neither the Bible nor my letter, nor Hamlet nor Julius Caesar. After all, what kind of security system would let a chaplain receive such dangerous stuff through the mail from just anybody? When I next visited Paracha he had neither seen nor heard of my intellectual care package.

As I was leaving, a Staff Judge Advocate came onto the bus. He was livid with controlled anger. I had breached the protective order. My communication with a chaplain was a serious breach of security. "We're trying to run a prison here," he explained through gritted teeth. I soon gave up trying to defend myself and let the chewing-out run its course. (I would use the SJA's name, but I never got it right. It's a tricky Italian name.) It's a good anecdote and I've dined out on it ever since as an illustration of why Guantánamo is an interrogation facility, not a prison.

But it turns out that life repeats itself, first as farce and then as litigation. I filed a motion to allow delivery of the Bible to Paracha. The government filed an answer seriously defending the refusal to let him have one. And the courts have yet to take any of the cases out of deep freeze, much less act on my motion. First as farce and then as tragedy.