

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Part One

Story and photos by Army Staff Sgt. Benjamin Cossel

Standing before his guards, the assistant watch commander looks over his notes. His eyes close and a deep sigh escapes as he shakes his head from side to side.

"Be advised," he calls out in a calm voice. "All guards working on the block -- we've received word someone is getting number two-ed today."

Without even knowing, a quick glance around the room will tell you who they are. Pained expressions flash across the faces of those working the block only to be quickly replaced with solemn resignation. For these Troopers of the Naval Expeditionary Guard Battalion, it's just another day working the camps of Joint Task Force Guantanamo.

The infamous number two. A mix of feces, urine and other bodily fluids rolled into a putrid cocktail and thrown on the guards by detainees of the facility.

"They'll wait, they're very patient," the AWC explains. "You'll be talking to one detainee and get involved in a conversation with them and not be paying attention to everything that is going on around you."

That's when they strike. While the guard is preoccupied by one, another detainee will appear and deliver the foul payload.

"I try and keep my head on a swivel," the AWC says. "I try and be aware of everything that is going on around me from every direction."

Sometimes the detainees miss, but typically the fire for effect is on target. Either way, the psychological affect is the same.

Its 5:30 in the morning. This group of guards are just starting their day and already the specter of a number two weighs on their minds. The leading chief petty officer walks amongst the group inspecting uniforms, checking haircuts, ensuring every Sailor is squared-away. The AWC finishes relaying all the significant activities from the previous watch and the guards head out to assume their duties.



The day begins with breakfast. This place is like Burger King -- they make it your way, right away.

"There are some detainees who are on a very strict diet for health reasons and there are some detainees who have special requests," one of the guards explains as he lines up carts for each of the blocks at the facility.

"If you screw anything up, if a detainee doesn't get exactly what he is supposed to get, that could cause problems on the block," he says. "We don't want any problems on the block."

The two guards separating the breakfasts are experienced. They know which detainee is where and they quickly separate the meals by blocks. Finished, the convoy of carts makes its way to the rotunda from which all blocks are accessed. Breakfast goes off without a hitch but a detainee wants to talk to the AWC about his cancelled phone call.

"He's very upset and will only talk to the tall AWC," the guard explains to the AWC.

Every guard, every AWC, every watch commander has a nickname -- the stupid one, the tall one, the one who gets things done -- the detainees have devised a system shared only with the guards who work the block.

"He said the stupid AWC doesn't know

what he's doing and he wants to talk to the tall AWC," the guard explains further.

"Tell him I'll be there in a few minutes," the AWC responds.

The AWC is currently caught in a flurry of moving detainees.

"Man," the AWC exclaimed. "I know some people think the AWC doesn't do a whole lot, but moving all these detainees to their medical appointments, getting to their classes and everything else keeps me busy." "That's okay though," he says. "It makes the day go by faster."

Each of the AWC's has a system to make sure they know which detainee is out of their block and what block they're supposed to go back to.

"Putting a detainee in the wrong block is something you really don't want to do," explained the AWC.

After nearly half an hour of making sure the rotunda is clear, moving detainees to a van outside waiting to take them to an appointment, getting them to classes and the myriad of other movements that take place within a day, the AWC makes his way to another block. He knocks on the door to announce his presence to the guards inside, then asks one of the guards to step into the rotunda.

"Why was his call cancelled?" the AWC

asks the guard.

The guard explains the International Committee of the Red Cross couldn't get the detainee's family to the call location in the detainee's home country in time to make the appointment.

The AWC notes there's only one place in that country where these types of phone calls can take place. If the families don't make it to that location in time, the call doesn't go through.

"Just getting to the families and letting them know when the call is going to take place seems to be difficult," the AWC says, a sigh of exasperation punctuating his words.

Nodding to the guard in understanding, the AWC slips into the narrow passageway separating the detainee and the guards. The detainee and the AWC engage in an animated conversation while the AWC tries to explain the complications of the situation. As the AWC talks to the longhaired detainee, his eyes shift from left to right, never stopping for more than a few seconds. The conversation comes to a close and the AWC walks back into the rotunda.

Be sure to pick up a copy of next week's Wire for the conclusion to our in-depth report on the life of a Joint Task Force Guantanamo guard.





A DAY IN THE LIFE

Part Two

Story and photos by Army Staff Sgt. Benjamin Cossel

At the conclusion of A Day in The Life, part 1 in last week's edition of "The Wire," the assistant watch commander on duty had just left a block after discussing several items including a cancelled phone call with a detainee. As part 2 of our article begins, the AWC takes a request from a detainee .. one small example of the many requests the guard force tries to accommodate each and every day.

"He wants markers," the AWC seems to say to the heavens. "Markers!"

Around the rotunda, through a series of hallways, the AWC enters the office of the operations chief petty officer and asks about the markers.

"No markers yet," the ops chief explained. "Don't know when they'll be here but they aren't here yet."

"That's the way it goes," the AWC said as he walks back to the rotunda. "They ask for it, we try to get it for them but it's never fast enough."

The AWC goes back to the block and informs the detainee the markers haven't arrived yet, but he reassures the detainee they will be in soon. The detainee is clearly not happy with the situation, but the AWC can't really worry about his hurt feelings at the moment. Class – Arabic to English – is about to start and he has to move several detainees into the classroom.

Looking over the schedule, the AWC calls ahead to the guards on a block to make sure they're ready to move the first detainee. Peering through the window, the AWC visually confirms the detainee is ready to be moved. After a semi-lengthy process of moving detainees, class is ready to start. More than nine detainees will be taking one of several classes offered at the facility.

The classes serve two purposes, the AWC explains. Detainees learn to speak English while at the same time, the classroom setting acts as something of a social hour for the detainees.

"Detainees on the block don't get to see detainees (from another block) unless it's during class," the AWC said. "So, especially when we moved detainees here from other camps, some days it seemed like a family reunion."

Already closing in on noon, the AWC dispatches two guards to prepare lunch but

there's a problem.

One of the guards explains to the AWC that a block refuses to hand over their trash from breakfast.

"What?" he responded incredulously.

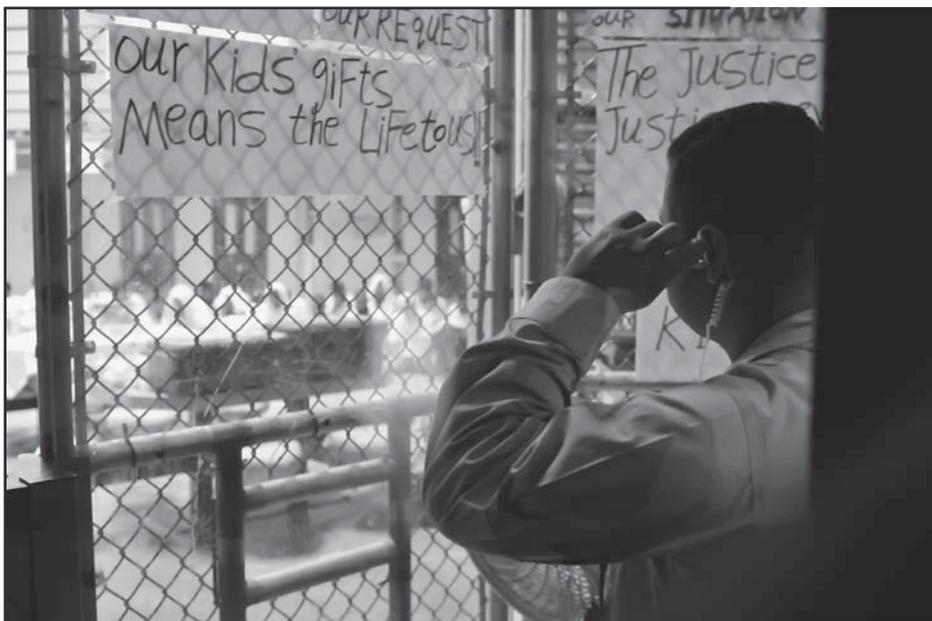
"They won't give us their trash from this morning," the guard reiterates.

"Go get the watch commander and see if he can talk to them," the AWC orders.

"Anything, anything they can do to mess up the rhythm, to throw a wrench into the system, they will do," the AWC said.

The watch commander goes in and talks to the residents of the block. After a bit of back and forth, he gets them to relinquish their trash. The war of bullets may be transpiring on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan but inside the walls of the detention facilities of Guantanamo Bay is a war of minds and wills.

Outside the camp, a guard is sitting at one of the several metal tables that serve as a



break area. He takes a long pull from a cigarette and slowly exhales

"It's not too bad really," the young guard said. His body says he's all of 19 or so but his eyes indicate years beyond his physical age.

"The shifts are pretty reasonable and you find ways to deal with the stress," the guard explains. He works out a lot on his off time and tries to take advantage of the many recreational aspects of life on Guantanamo Bay.

"Pretty much anything you can do to take your mind off being here, of dealing with the detainees and the games they play, you do," he said.

Crushing out his cigarette, the guard wanders back into the camp to try to get on one of the

three computer stations in the break room. Tomorrow a new set of guards fresh from across the ocean will arrive for their first day of work. Already the break room can barely handle the needs of the current staffing level.

"There's just not enough computers in there for all of us," he says. "Hopefully I'll be able to get on one and try to talk to my family back home." And with the words "home" the doors to the camp unlock and the guard slides inside.

The remainder of the day is reasonably quiet but the presence of someone in an Army uniform is causing a stir amongst the detainees in this Navy-run facility. "Who is he? Why is he here? What is going on?" the detainees ask at every opportunity. The AWC

assures them nothing is going on, nothing is changing, there's nothing to worry about.

Anything that disrupts the status quo and presents a new wrinkle in the day-to-day operations of the facility, the detainees see as a tactical shift on the part of the guards. It's all part of the chess match that takes place here every day.

The AWC leaves the rotunda and heads back to the main office. Before he can go home, he must do a shift hand-off with the oncoming AWC. The two Sailors compare notes. The off-going AWC, making sure every significant detail of the day is passed, unclips his duty belt and takes the radio ear piece out of his ear.

Outside, evening colors is sounding in the distance and the off-going shift stands at attention, saluting the flag. As the music fades, the guards make their way to cars or stand at bus stops waiting for a ride home. They joke and kid with each other in the rough and tumble manner familiar to anyone who's ever put on a uniform. Tonight they'll go home, they'll go to the gym, they'll hang out and try to let the day's events slip off of them. Tomorrow, they will do it all over again.