

Khalid al-Sharif (Commander of the Libyan National Guard, former detainee in Afghanistan)
9.2.12

Q: You were waterboarded?

A: They lay you down this way, on your back. On a big piece of plastic and there will be personnel holding the plastic from the corner so the water wouldn't get out. The piece of plastic. It's like a carpet but it's made out of plastic.

Q: Are you laying on this?

A (clarification by translator): He's laying on this.

A: There are people holding the plastic from the edges so the water doesn't get out. And then the interrogator starts pouring the water on your face and your face is, of course, covered - there's a cover on your face.

Q: Covered like with a cloth?

A: It's that bag that they put on the detainees.

Q: A hood?

A: (clarification by translator) The whole face.

Q: What is it made of, is it cloth?

A: Yeah, it's cloth. You can't see from it but you can breath and water could obviously come in.

Q: Bag on your face and the water is poured on it?

A: Yes. So with the constant pouring of water on your face you start suffocating.

Q: Did you think you were going to drown?

A: Of course because you start moving your face to the right and left and looking to breathe and you completely smothered by the water pouring on you.

Q: How long did this go on?

A: Depends on the interrogation.

Q: How many times did it happen? They were asking questions at the same time?

A: While pouring the water they are asking questions.

Q: How many times?

A: I don't remember. It was several times. So you can say that the torture was continuous for three months. Torture in general, not the water – in general.

Q: Was the water part all in the beginning?

A: Yeah, it was all in the beginning.

Q: After it was repeated, did you know they weren't going to kill you?

A: It wasn't the idea of dying or killing me, the problem was how many times they bring you close to death because you start looking for air.

Q: It did not make it better that you knew you weren't going to die?

A: You know the person doesn't want to kill you, but the torture is harder than death.

Q: This was at the airbase? Americans? In uniform?

A: Some people were wearing the uniform some people weren't. For example, one of the people who were torturing was the prison warden and he was wearing a uniform.

Q: American?

A: Yes.

Q: And this was Afghanistan?

A: Yes.

Q: What was the room like where this occurred?

A: There were basically two rooms. The first room was for when they ask you the questions. The room had carpets all over its walls – red carpets – all over its walls. The wall and the ceiling, it was all covered with carpet. Red carpet, to be exact. And it had headlights pointed at you.

Q: Sitting in a chair?

A: So it was wooden chair, but they would nail a piece of wood into it so you wouldn't feel comfortable.

Q: Shackled?

A: Yes. That's for the interrogation.

Q: [Where was the] room for the water?

A: The other room was for the torture.

Q: Questions asked in the interrogation? Asked about Al Qaeda?

A: Basically they would ask you - the first question is whether you're Al Qaeda and they would ask you about what are the next operations that Al Qaeda will carry out in the States. All the questions about the operations and people from Al Qaeda even though I told them from the first day that I was not Al Qaeda, that I belong to a different group. This group is solely an opponent to the Libyan regime. We left our country in the 1980s and couldn't go back - that's why we live here.

Q: Where were you living on 9/11?

A: I was living in Pakistan.

Q: Did you have a reaction?

A: As soon as I saw the news I felt that there will be a black cloud that will pass above us. And I felt that the situation was going to be dangerous and the situation will affect all of us because America was going to strike back with an iron fist. Because it was a big tragedy and it involved a lot of civilians - children, women, men.

Q: Had you heard of Osama bin Laden by then?

A: I knew Osama bin Laden because he was in Afghanistan for a long time, he was a part of the jihad against the Soviets in the 80s and we knew him, but after that he disappeared, he went to Saudi Arabia and disappeared in Saudi Arabia and then he was in Sudan and he was moving around.

Q: Did you meet him?

A: Yes, in Afghanistan I used to see him.

Q: What location?

A: (translator) He's (Khalid) talking about back in 88, 89 in Jalalabad when there was a front line, basically. And the battles of Jalalabad.

Q: Did you make war against American soldiers or no?

A: No. And during interrogation I was repeatedly telling them "If you have any proof that I did anything against America then present it. All I am doing is that I live in Pakistan because I can't go back to Libya. And I was doing my private business and also working on toppling the regime. I admit to you that I'm only against the Libyan regime – working against the Libyan regime.

Q: How do you feel about the U.S. now?

A: After the stand that some of the Western countries took during the revolution and now because of my obligations and my line of work, we meet with a lot of Americans from the American government and it doesn't mean we – you can't think of retaliation of revenge against everybody that harms you. The whole idea is the position now.

Q: In the National Guard?

A: (clarification by translator) In the National Guard, they deal with a lot of....

Q: Is he an officer?

A (translator): He is the Commander of the [Libyan] National Guard.

A: For example, my phone was ringing, and I was speaking with the U.S. Embassy and we are constantly meeting with the U.S. Embassy and with the U.S. Government. They share their expertise, we share our views on how things should be.

Q: How many men in the National Guard?

A: About 8,000.

Q: You said it's not possible to seek revenge against everyone who harms you. But you did always seek revenge against Gadhafi, is that not so?

A: The case with Gadhafi, it wasn't a matter of revenge because I was a student and he didn't personally harm me, but my issue was with the whole regime because the regime harmed a lot of people. It was just to seek change.

I would like to add one point. In the National Guard we have managed to capture and arrest a lot of people who were torturing us in prison.

Q: Libyans?

A: Libyans and we presented them for trials and we didn't treat them the same way we were treating us. We treated them well. We just presented them for trials according to the crimes they did against some people. And a lot of Gaddafi high officials, one of which is the Prime Minister Baghdadi – ex-Prime Minister, Gaddafi's Prime Minister – he is now under my custody and we treat him very well, we provide him with medical attention, we provide him with the best food, we provide him with the best shelter, because we don't want to seek revenge from him we just want to present him for trials.

Q: Seek justice?

A: Uh huh, justice.