

**Murat Kurnaz: *Five Years of My Life. A Report from Guantanamo.***

Rowohlt Berlin

285 pages

The personal account of Guantanamo prisoner Murat Kurnaz will be exclusively published by Rowohlt Berlin in April.

A young German Turk from Bremen, Murat Kurnaz was imprisoned in the notorious camp for several years. In this book, he describes what he had to endure. For the first time, readers will get an authentic insight into the "system Guantanamo", and will also read the incredible story of a man who - as the US authorities themselves acknowledge - was innocent all along. His precise and detailed descriptions go far beyond what has been made public so far.

In October 2001, Kurnaz travels to Pakistan to visit a Madrassa. During a security check a few weeks after his arrival, he is arrested and for a bounty of 3.000 dollars, the Pakistani police sell him to US forces. He is taken to Kandahar in Afghanistan where he is severely maltreated and about two months later is flown to Guantanamo. For more than 1.600 days, he lives through hell: kept in a cage, he goes through daily interrogations, torture, solitary confinement and sleep deprivation. Finally, in August 2006, Kurnaz is released. On his return to Germany he discovers that German officials had known of his innocence since 2002, but had refused to accept him back into the country, leaving him to his fate in Guantanamo for another four years.

*"Five Years of My Life. A Report from Guantanamo", 285 pages, €16.90.*

**Available from 23rd April 2007 – the first authentic inside view of the camp.**

### **III. Kandahar, Afghanistan.**

I'd been sold, for a bounty of 3000 dollars, to the Americans. That's what the Americans themselves told me in one of the endless interrogations in Guantanamo Bay. "I know," I told my interrogator, "you expected more for the 5000 dollars you paid for me."

"3000," said my interrogator. "We only paid 3000 dollars for you."

That's when I knew the story was true.

Back when I was apprehended, everyone knew that there was money to be made by turning in foreigners. Lots of Pakistanis were sold as well. Doctors, taxi drivers, fruit and vegetable sellers, whom I later met in Guantanamo. I don't care who got paid the reward money in my case. It could have been the policeman at the check point in Peshawar or equally likely the blond-haired European or American man at the villa. Maybe the officers at the police station in Peshawar split the money. 3000 dollars are worth a lot in Pakistan. A man can get married with a sum like that, or buy a car and an apartment.

Everyone, except me, knew about the reward money. I only learned later that the Americans paid for us, as though we were slaves.

Prior to the flight, not only were we shackled and chained, we were bound up like packages. I could hear the noise of the propeller and the shouts of the soldiers and the other prisoners. From beneath the sack over my head, I could see a bit of the plane's aluminum wall. We were tied tightly to the walls with long belts so that we couldn't move our lower bodies. My legs were stretched out straight and manacled. Chains bound my feet above the ankles. The only thing I could move was my head.

On board with me were the four others from my cell and around twelve further prisoners. I couldn't see how many soldiers there were, but to judge from the confusion of voices, it must have been a lot. They went from one prisoner to the next, hitting us with their fists, with billy clubs and with the butts of their rifles. It was as cold as in a refrigerator. I was sitting on bare metal; icy air was coming from a ventilation hole or from a fan. I tried to go to sleep, but they kept hitting me and waking me.

*"Keep your head up!"* they'd yell.

They never let up hitting, kicking and insulting us. Sometimes they'd forget about me for a couple of minutes, but then they'd strike me all the harder.

*"You are terrorists,"* they'd shout.

*“We are Americans! You are terrorists. We’ve got you! We are strong! And we will give it to you!”*

The never ceased screaming.

*“You fuckers!”*

Prisoners, I thought, are often beaten in Turkey. It’s a well-known fact, and so it seemed almost normal to me that the Americans would do the same thing. If I had been put in Turkish prison, they would have beaten me there as well. I also thought, at some point this will be over. But the soldiers never tired of beating us. They kept laughing as they did so. I imagine they made jokes at our expense.

It was night when we took off. It was light inside the plane. All I could see were my bare feet and the bright light. My thin overalls were no match for the cold, and my feet and hands had swollen up from being tightly bound. I was afraid I would never be able to use my hands again. I know that a hand could die, if the blood flow were cut off, and that the skin could turn black from the cold. I see my feet slowly turning dark blue. I couldn’t feel them any more. All I could feel, throughout my entire body, was pain. I was barely able to breathe.

I didn’t try to speak to any of the others. If you spoke, you would have been beaten worse, so none of us did. I was far too weak and hurt. I wasn’t afraid. But it was clear to me that I might die. I didn’t want to die, but in my situation it seemed easier. Better. I thought about my family. If I was going to die, would someone tell them how my life ended and what had happened to me? Would my family be able to live with that? Undoubtedly they had no idea where I was or what was happening to me. I thought above all about my mother. I hoped at least she would find out how I died.

I prepared myself for my death.

I didn’t cry. I’d admit it if I had, but I simply couldn’t. Even our prophet cried after the death of his son, but I couldn’t cry in the plane. I believe we have a saying: the tears of the heart are worse than the tears of the eye. But maybe this isn’t really a saying. Perhaps I invented it during the flight. In any case I kept repeating the words: *Kalbin aglamasi gözlerin aglamasin dan cok daha siddetlidir.*

I quietly prayed for patience. Allah, give me patience and strength and protect me. I know you are The Most Excellent Protector, and I expect protection only from you because you are The Most Strong.

I said prayers like this for five years.

I don't know how long the flight lasted. At some point we descended. I heard the motors cut back, and I knew the plane would soon land. I thought: Nothing can happen to me – I'm strapped in tight.

I heard the hydraulics of the rear section of the plane opening. I felt a blow to my head, and as I stood up I saw bright flashes through the sack. Flashbulbs. From beneath the sack, I could make out soldiers who were filming and photographing us. They were standing on the runway. I could look down on them from underneath the sack. They never entered the plane.

Suddenly I realized something. Just as they had repeatedly called us terrorists during the flight, they were taking photos to depict us as terrorists to the world. Either they truly believed I was a terrorist, or they knew I was innocent but needed scapegoats whom they could proudly present to the public. That made me upset. They were going to say to America and the rest of the world: „These are the terrorists we've been hunting for. These are the criminals who are responsible for the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Now we have them, and this is how they'll be treated!”

What I didn't know at that moment was that the photos were to be used as „evidence“ in the media that we had been captured in the war zone in Afghanistan by American soldiers – even though we had all been taken prisoner in Pakistan by Pakistani police. I learned all this later when I faced the military tribunal in Guantanamo.

In the plane, I had only one thing on my mind – proving to them that I was innocent. The soldiers had to assume I was a terrorist, if that's what they had been told. If that were true, they had reason to beat me. Although it was unjust, I was able to understand them. But one way or the other, so I thought back then, my innocence would be proven in the next few days, and I would be released. I intended to clear up the situation at my next interrogation.

I felt a new sense of hope.

The soldiers loosened my restraints. When they lifted me up, I felt too weak to stand on my own two legs. They linked our arms together with a thin but robust strip of plastic. I was swaying on my feet, then I felt something cut into my arm: the plastic that attached me to the prisoners in front of and behind me. I sensed a dull ache as I took a few steps. It was like walking on stilts protruding into my body. But I was lucky. Other prisoners had broken legs. Some of them were trying to walk on one leg. Two soldiers dragged one of the prisoners across the floor of the airplane. I saw his foot bent at a severe angle above the ankle.

I heard dogs barking. We stumbled out of the plane down a ramp. Whenever someone fell, the plastic strip would drag me down as well. I heard dogs growling and barking. They were everywhere around us, and I could hear them biting. You can hear a dog's bite. They

were German shepherds and Belgian shepherds, or malinois. Back in Bremen, I myself had dogs, and I was able to recognize the breeds from beneath the sack. Malinois are bigger and stronger than German shepherds. They have shorter fur and it's usually only one color.

We walked for a few minutes, accompanied by barks and bites from the dogs, then they threw us on the ground. We were ordered to lie on our stomachs. A soldier sat down on my back. My breath condensed under the sack. I felt the cold of the freezing stone surface. As far as I could understand what the soldiers were saying, they were going to come collect us one by one and take us away. I heard helicopters and the motors of jeeps and trucks. First one, then the next, then a third. It took a long time. I might have laid on the ground for hours, or it could have been minutes. Without noticing, I lost consciousness. Probably because of the cold.

I woke up when someone hit me in the face.

*"I feel his heart beat again,"* said the soldier who had been sitting on my back.

It was my turn.

Someone picked me up, and I tried to walk. The soldier rammed his fist into my back, and I pressed forward until someone stopped me. The sack was removed from my head. I was in a tent. In front of me sat a man at a table with paper and a pen. Two soldiers cut open my overalls so that they wouldn't have to loosen my bonds. I was naked. I saw some other clothes, orange overalls, lying on a chair.

„Name?"

"Age?"

"Place of birth?"

Someone pulled out some of my hair. I was weighed, and a saliva sample was taken. Soldiers motioned for me to pick up the orange overalls. I heard shots outside and what I believed to be a bomb exploding. The man on the chair flinched at the bangs. Then I was given the number 53. I was the 53rd prisoner. There was another muffled bang. The same number was imprinted on the green plastic band that they fastened round my wrist. The soldiers seemed nervous.

*"Hurry!"*

I heard the unmistakable sounds of airplanes and battle. Rockets that hissed and whistled, then muffled bangs on impact.

It was then that I realized I wasn't in Turkey but in some sort of war zone.

*"Hurry up!"*

The Americans were being attacked, and they were returning fire. Planes and helicopters took off and landed. The impact sounds of the rockets were close. The man at the table looked pale.

*“Look down!”* he yelled.

I felt the soldiers’ fear as they grabbed me in their arms. They pushed my head to the ground with all their might. It seemed to me that they were less afraid of the bombs than of me, although I was naked, bound and unarmed.

[...]

The officer asked me some more questions, but I wasn’t able to answer them. I could hardly stand and lacked the strength for anything more than yes or no answers. They led me back out of the tent.

It was nighttime.

I saw a barricade made of coiled layers of barbed wire. The barricade was out in the open in the middle of a pen, measuring around ten by five meters, which was guarded by soldiers in groups of two. There was no door to the pen, only two poles on chains that could be raised and lowered. Twenty to thirty prisoners crouched inside. A soldier hit me in the back of the head with the butt of his rifle. I fell to the ground.

*“See that?!”*

He motioned with his weapon.

*“Can you see that?!”* he yelled.

*“Don’t move!”*

I understood. If I moved, he was going to shoot me. Other soldiers took off my restraints. When they removed the handcuffs, I found I could no longer move my fingers. They were dark blue and numb, as were my feet. They threw the overalls on the ground. I started to pick them up and put them on.

They pointed their rifles at me.

*“Don’t move!”*

*“Sit!”* they yelled.

I sat down. Edging backwards, the soldiers began to exit the pen.

*“Sit! Don’t move!”* they kept yelling even after they were outside.

I was forced to remain seated like that, naked, with the overalls beside me, until the following day. I was terribly cold. After a while, I lay down. I was tired and fell asleep. I slept very well.

When it became light, I looked around. I saw tents, chain-link fence and a tall structure, perhaps a guard tower. The landing strip, where their planes and helicopters took off and landed, couldn't have been far away. There was a lengthy hangar made of wood and corrugated metal as well as the frame work for a second hangar. The metal of the first hangar was full of holes. Bullet holes, I thought.

Alongside the closed tents, I could see other open tents that consisted merely of olive-green tarpaulin on wooden poles. There were soldiers hammering and drilling everywhere. I saw bulldozers. The camp seemed to be still under construction. Next to the tower I could make out a kind of wall of metal or tin. It could have run all the way around the camp, but I couldn't see that far. In the distance, behind the hangars, there were white shafts that looked like crosses on graves. But they couldn't have been graves because the shafts were at least three meters high. On the other side, somewhat distant, we could see a second chain-link fence pen with other prisoners.

The military camp was surrounded, as far the eye could see, by mountains. They were gigantic. I'd never seen so many mountains of that height. I was sitting in a camp in the desert surrounded by silvery grey mountains. There was snow on their peaks. The camp grounds were of frozen soil that had been dug up. It was like the rock bed of a dried-up river. I could still here helicopters taking off and landing. Fog rolled in.

Some of the prisoners were sitting on the ground naked like me. Others had already put on overalls. Some of them were still wearing the rusty metal shackles from Pakistan, thick rings around their ankles with a bar in between. I saw that the guards were occupied by a prisoner a way off from me and quickly put on my overalls. They didn't say anything. I buried my chin beneath the material and blew my breath across my chest. That warmed me up a bit. I moved my hands, flexing them. But it would be days before the feeling returned to my fingers.

I tried to speak to the other. We were forbidden from talking, but we did anyway. Whenever the soldiers would stray from the fence, we tried to exchange a few words. But I didn't know either Arabic or Farsi, the Afghan language, and my English was poor. I couldn't find Salah or any of the others from the prison in Pakistan. They must have been put in another pen. But I did learn that the Americans were using this as a base to fight the Taliban in the mountains. So we had to be somewhere in Afghanistan. Was this perhaps an old Russian airbase? We talked in English as best we could, occasionally using our hands and feet. But that was conspicuous.

Some of the people in the pen were Arabs who lived in Afghanistan. Others were Arabs from Pakistan, taxi drivers or shopkeepers or small entrepreneurs. One was a doctor, so that's what we called him: the doctor. He, too, was a foreigner who had been sold to the Americans. He was in orthopedics. He communicated this by tapping on his elbows and knees. As far as I could gather, he had been brought here as part of the first group, twelve hours ahead of me. I was part of the second group that had come from Pakistan. If I interpreted his gestures correctly, this first group had been beaten even worse than we had.

I also encountered the doctor later in Guantanamo, and we spoke often. I asked him a lot of questions, including medicinal ones. He was an orthopedist, as I had gleaned in Kandahar, and he was also an expert on nutrition. I found that interesting. I asked him what you should eat and not eat if you'd broken a bone. What a layman should do to treat a broken bone and stuff like that. Broken bones were a constant possibility in Guantanamo. The doctor had lived in Pakistan for twenty years. His children had grown up and gone to school there. Almost everyone in the city where he lived knew him. One night, the Pakistani police had hauled him out bed. They had kicked in the doors and broken the windows of his house, then entered his bedroom from every direction. He had been tied up on the ground. His wife and children were terrified. He had been imprisoned for a while in Pakistani jails, then they handed him over to the Americans, claiming he was a terrorist who had worked together with other terrorists. But it was really only about the reward money.

I didn't care about that on this particular morning. I was hungry and I had to go to the toilet. But there was no toilet.

I tried to ask one of the soldiers on guard.

*"Toilet, toilet,"* I said.

*"Shut up! Sit down!"*

He pointed his gun at me.

I couldn't sit down because I had to go so badly. I just didn't care anymore. I approached the fence. The soldier yelled at me, as though he were about to shoot me.

I ignored him and let it all out.

The soldier disappeared and returned a few moments later, accompanied by an officer. The officer was carrying a blue plastic bucket. He threw it over the fence and said we could use it. Almost all the prisoners got up and made use of the bucket. It was humiliating. Whether they were young or old, religious or not, all of had to strip naked to do our business in the bucket. Men who follow the rules of Islam are forbidden from exposing our bodies

between the navel and the knees. It's also prohibited in the *hamam* or Turkish bath. Even in my fitness club back in Bremen, I used to shower with my shorts on.

Female guards also patrolled the grounds outside our pen. It wasn't easy.

We sat the whole day in the pen. Other groups of prisoners were put in with us and in the other pens. They, too, were naked and initially had to leave their overalls lying beside them. I'd estimate the total number of prisoners at around 60.

At sunset, soldiers would come and lead us away in groups of about ten. On average, around a dozen soldiers would enter the pen waving machine guns. We stood up one by one and approached the fence. Our hands and feet were bound, and they led us to the hangar. The hangar was empty – there were no planes there. All I could see was a long corridor, a number of pens with walls of corrugated metal, topped by barbed wire. We were herded toward the spaces enclosed by the metal walls and made to sit on the ground. It consisted of sand, rocks and frozen soil just like our pen. The space was locked from the outside. Each of us received an MRE in a plastic container, which was thrown over the chain-link fence.

MRE stands for “Meal Ready to Eat.” Pronounced in Arabic, the acronym sounds like “Emarie,” so that's what we called the packages. They were supposed to contain around 2000 calories. Typical foods were potatoes packed in tin foil or rice, meat or chicken, some vegetables and pudding, porridge, crackers and something sweet. The forks, spoons and knives were made of plastic. There was also a small flameless heater for warming the food up. Each Emarie was numbered from 1 to more than 30. Some of them contained pork. The Emaries that they threw to us over the chain-link fence contained only a bit of rice or porridge and a couple of pieces of meat. They were mashed together. The other food had been removed from the plastic containers. Less than 600 calories were left. But human beings need more than 1500 calories a day to survive. I knew that from the time I spent as a fitness coach in Bremen.

My first Emarie happened to contain pork. The word was written on the side of the package. It was just a couple of cold, dried-out pieces pork in rice. But I couldn't eat that and tried to get something else. I got up, went to the door in the fence and attempted to speak to one of the soldiers.

“*Shut up!*” he yelled at me.

I was boiling with rage.

In Bremen, I competed in a few boxing tournaments. I used to do karate and had worked as a bouncer. When I looked at the guards, I knew that I could have any of them on the ground within a couple of seconds. That made me even more enraged. There was this

soldier behind a wall of chain-link fence who, despite his machine gun, seemed to be afraid of me and kept yelling at me. But he had the right to abuse me. Maybe it sounds juvenile when I describe my rage as a nineteenth-year-old in this situation. People may see things differently. For me it was difficult to take.

I took a seat back on the ground and ate the crackers.

One of the younger prisoners had witnessed the scene. He edged over to me and offered to share his Emarie. I tried to refuse, but he insisted. His Emarie was printed with the word chicken. I realized then that there were good people among the prisoners. In a situation like this, food is all you have, your sole possession. And although he was hungry, this young man still had it within him to share his food with me. He couldn't have been more than 16 or 17 – he didn't even have a beard. But he did have a good heart. I was moved. There were people here with whom I could get along.

The door in the chain-link fence opened. They hit the boy for sharing his food with me. That was difficult for me to watch.

I never saw the boy again. Perhaps he is dead. Or perhaps I didn't recognize him in Cuba. Torture changes people.

That night we were moved. We were led away in groups of twenty to a new chain-link fence pen, holding about sixty of us. I tried to go to sleep. But that was the night of my first interrogation. Two soldiers came into the pen.

The Americans called them the “escort team.”

I knew the word escort from my time in Bremen as a bouncer at discotheques. It referred to women who would accompany gentlemen for an evening. Now I was being taken away by escorts. It was always the same procedure.

They call my number.

*“Zero Five Three, get ready!”*

I have to lie down on my stomach near the entrance through the chain-link fence, my hands behind my back. Everyone else gets up and goes to the opposite side of the pen, their faces turned toward the fence. The escort team storms in and puts me in handcuffs and shackles. One of them punches me in the back with his fist. The other picks me up in his arms. Then one of them grabs my hair from the back and pushes my head down. I'm frog marched out.

I'm led to a tent. There are several officers there. They speak to me in English, although I can hardly speak a word of the language. They ask:

Where is Osama?  
Are you part of Al Qaida?  
Are you a Taliban?  
That's as much I understand.  
They keep repeating the same questions.  
"Are you part of Al Qaida?"  
"No."  
One of the soldiers punches me in the face.  
"Are you a Taliban?"  
"No."  
The soldier punches me again.  
"Where is Osama?"  
"I don't know."  
The other soldier punches me, this time right on the chin.  
"Are you part of Al Qaida?"  
"No..."  
Another punch to the face. My lips are split, and blood drips from my nose.  
"Are you a Taliban?"  
"No!!!"  
Every time I say no, they hit me.  
"Do you know Mohammed Atta," one of the officers suddenly asks.  
The name seems familiar. I think it over. My head is pounding. Where have I heard this name before? Everything is spinning.  
"*One moment,*" I say.  
"*Yes, I know. I hear. That name. I don't know where...*"  
Then I remember. In the news. That's the name of the man who was supposedly behind the attacks on September 11th. I try to explain in English.  
"Yes," I understand the officer as saying. "He was a friend of yours."  
"What?"  
"He was your friend!"  
"No, I only know him from the news..."  
I feel the next blow.  
"TV! TV! News! You understand?"  
"You're friends with him!"

“No...”

The officer gets up. I'm kneeling on the ground, my hands bound behind my back. The officer comes up and punches me in the face. He's not old, maybe in his early thirties. He asks me what I was doing in Pakistan. I tell him, as best I can, about the Tablighis and Mohammed. He says: You're lying! Your visa is a fake! I say: You can check it. You've got it! He goes back to the table and picks a file off the ground. He empties out the contents on the table's surface. There are my wallet, my plane tickets, my passport and my German identity card.

“There,” I say. “Look in my passport. My visa is in there.”

He examines my passport.

“It's faked,” he says.

He shows me the stamp from the consulate.

“You made that yourself.”

“Call them up. I got it from the Pakistani consulate in Germany. I was there! Why would I fake my visa?”

“You wanted to go to Afghanistan!”

“No” – the next blow rains down.

“You know Osama!”

“No, no! Call Germany! Call my mother, my school...”

“Where is Osama?”

“No, no...”

He punches me.

“You're a Taliban!”

“No, no...”

He punches me.

Suddenly the American asks me about a name I do know. It's the name of a friend of mine from school. He recites a number that I can't understand. Is it a telephone number?

“Zero-zero-four-nine-four-two-one...”

“I know ... friend! He's a friend from school!”

He recites a second name. It's a friend of mine from the mosque in Hemelingen. Again he reads out a number, first the name, than a number from a piece of paper.

“Yes, I know, friend ...”

He repeats the numbers. I can make out the area code for Bremen and a couple of the other digits. How did he get these telephone numbers?

*“Fatima. Zero-zero-nine-zero...”* the American says.

*“My wife! My wife! In Turkey...”*

Suddenly he asks:

*“You sold your cell phone before you left Germany. Why did you sell your cell phone?”*

That I understand. Yes, that’s right. I sold my mobile before I flew off.

*“Yes! I sell handy. How you know?”*

He punches me in the face.

*“Whom did you sell it to?”*

I can’t remember who I sold my mobile to. I’ve bought a lot of new mobiles and always sold off my old one. Was it to a second-hand electronics store? Or to one of my buddies? I don’t know. But I did sell it. That much is true...

I feel a blow on the back of my head.

*“I don’t know... I always sell mobile ...”*

I ask myself: How does he know these things? But I don’t have time to ponder the question because someone is hitting me again. I’m seeing stars.

*“You took money from your bank. 1,100 German Marks from Bremer Bank. I know that. What did you use it for?”* the officer asks.

The only words I understand are Bremer Bank. That’s my bank. How does he know this? I didn’t take along my cash machine card!

*“Quick! Answer! What did you use that money for?”*

Money?

*“1,100 German Marks!”*

*“Ticket! I buy ticket to Pakistan and back!”*

*“Who is Selcuk Bilgin?”*

Selcuk? How does he know about Selcuk? I’ve never told anyone about Selcuk. Why would I? They wouldn’t have understood me—

*“Quick!”*

I feel a kick to the stomach. I collapse and I feel like I’m going to be sick.

*“Friend! My friend! Together to Pakistan ... but no come ... ”*

Hour upon hour always the same questions accompanied by punches and kicks. It’s no use. The officer simply refuses to understand who I am and what I intended to do with Selcuk in Pakistan. We wanted to go to the Koran school. I waited for Selcuk for days at the airport in Karachi, but he never arrived, as he had promised in Frankfurt. It’s no use. He’s not listening. He just asks the same questions and recites the same names and numbers, and then

they hit me. I don't know how long I was interrogated that day. But I can still remember sentences that he kept repeating.

“You're a terrorist! We know that. We're going to keep you forever. You're never going home!”

When I regain my senses, I'm lying in the pen. My face is swollen, and every bone in my body aches. I hear them call out the number of another of the prisoners. The escort team comes and leads him away.

The escort team was always arriving at the pen to bring someone back from or take someone away to interrogation. I, too, was interrogated again that first day. Or was it the next morning? In any case it had been dark for a while. It was always the same game with a different officer asking the questions and different soldiers hitting me. Names, numbers, accusations, blows. By the time I got back to the pen, I already couldn't remember a thing.

But I tried to concentrate. How did they know the names and telephone numbers of my friends? Where did they get Selcuk's name? Then it occurred to me. Germany and America are allies! They probably cut a deal. They probably called up the German authorities. There was no reason for them not to. They probably called up and said: We've got someone here from Germany, and we'd like some information about him. Who is he?

That's how I imagined it. But if they knew that I'd sold my mobile phone, surely they'd have to know I was innocent? They might have gotten the telephone numbers and the names from my mobile. Maybe they were still saved there. I had saved the names of my friends and relatives, my brother-in-law and my sister in Sebaldsbrück. They could have also gotten many of the names from business cards in my wallet. All of us in Bremen had business cards. I had several of them with me, from colleagues from work and school friends. It doesn't cost much to have them printed.

But they also knew the name of one of the Tablighis from Bremen. I didn't have a business card from him. Of course, they knew who I was! It had been several days since the American had interrogated me in Peshawar. Surely they had gotten in touch with the relevant authorities in Germany to check that everything I was saying was the truth! That I came from Germany, that I wanted to visit a Koran school, that I was an apprentice... but that would also mean that the German authorities had called up my family and Selcuk. They must have found out that I'm not a terrorist! I heard a number being called. It wasn't mine.

The following day, I was interrogated three times for between one and two hours each. In between interrogations, I sat in the pen. It was bitterly cold. I could hardly feel my toes, which were still blue. Sometimes I thought back to how my mother used to bring me back

warm socks when she went to the shopping mall in Bremen. I hated wearing thick woolen socks with my sneakers. They were itchy. But when I thought of those socks, it was enough to drive me half-crazy. How nice it would have been to have a pair of those woolen socks.

At the appointed hours of the day, we prayed, telling the time from the position of the sun: in the morning, when it was light but before sunrise, at noon, when the sun was at its peak, in the evening, after sunset but before it had gotten completely dark, and at night. Each of us prayed on his own, either quietly or silently, and we remained seated.

One early morning, as we prayed together for the first time, they threatened to shoot us. But we kept praying. If they wanted to shoot us, we thought, let them shoot. But they didn't. They just yelled and made threats. Then a commander or some high-ranking officer came and spoke to us. He said we would be allowed to pray at the appointed times. Not because he wanted to do us any favors, but because he realized that we would rather die than not say our prayers. And they didn't want us to die because they still intended to interrogate us. From then on, we started prayers by standing, then knelt down and bowed our heads toward the East. We weren't able to wash our hands, but our faith allows us to use sand if there isn't any water. That is called *teyamum*. We cleansed our hands with sand.

When it rained, the drop of water would sting our faces and skin like needles. Everything turned to mud. The ground was pure sludge, and you felt like you might get washed away yourself in the mud and the water. Often we'd huddle together to keep ourselves warm. Then the rain would stop, the wind would kick up again, and the cold would creep into my head. The ground froze. My overalls remained wet and clammy. You could even see the cold. I saw it in the thick gloves, jackets and overcoats worn by the soldiers and the face masks they had under their motorcycle helmets. Their entire faces were covered by the masks, with mere slits for their eyes.

We weren't allowed to get up and move around except for prayers, no matter how badly we froze. But we could hardly move anyway because we were so undernourished. There were weak, older men in the pen. Men with broken bones in their feet, men whose legs and arms were broken or had turned blue, red or yellow from pus. There were prisoners with broken jaws, fingers and noses, and with terribly swollen faces like mine was.

In the evening, we were herded into the hangar and given an Emarie. In the morning we were given some Afghan bread – white bread to be split between five prisoners per loaf. They simply threw the loaves of bread over the fence. Sometimes they'd land in the dirt. Then they come and throw plastic bottle of water over wire. A half-liter per man, per day. Sometimes they didn't give us any water or any bread. One morning each of us was given a

blanket. From then on we were allowed to use the blanket for a couple of hours. Then we had to hand them back or leave them lying on the ground next to us.

At night we had no blankets. But there was little chance to sleep one way or the other. The soldiers came at night and made us stand for hours on end at gunpoint. Every prisoner was interrogated at least once a day. Interrogations also took place at night. We had to stand up and sit down. There were interrogations and beating. Then we'd have to sit down and stand up again. When we were allowed to use the blankets, I would pull mine up over my head. After a while, my breath would warm the air underneath. But the blanket would get clammy and moist, and moistness freezes.

We hardly had a moment of rest. When I was lucky, I could lie down for half an hour. My breath froze to my overalls. Sometimes I asked myself which was better: the interrogations and beatings in the tents, or crouching around outside in the pen, where every few minutes we had to get up and line up against the fence. At least it was warm in the tents. But you also had to deal with the uncertainty. Many people never came back from the interrogations. Had they been brought somewhere else? If so, where?

One time when the escort team came, the soldiers were carrying a long crate that looked like a coffin. But there were holes in it. They called out a number, and the rest of us had to line up against the fence. I bent my head and peeped over my shoulder. The prisoner whose number had been called was lying on his stomach. The soldiers bound him, picked him up and put him in the crate. I heard them speaking to one another, but I only understand isolated words: *dangerous* and *caution*. They were saying the man was dangerous. They used belts inside the crate to tie the prisoner up like a package. Then they put down the lid and took him away.

That was how it went, day in, day out.

Nonetheless, I still hoped that I would get an interrogator whom I could convince of my innocence. I still thought they would find out that I had gotten married shortly before my trip, that my visa was legitimate, that I'd never been in Afghanistan, and that I was doing job training. A few more calls to Germany and they would find this out, and then they'd send me back home.

But every time I was brought to an interrogation, they didn't listen to me, and I didn't understand much of what they said and asked me anyway. I could only answer things I had understood. They often acted as if I spoke perfect English. Sometimes they even said: You speak perfect English. We know you do. Don't try to fool us. Sometimes I recognized the officer who was interrogating me. Then there would be some new faces. But they were all the

same. They recited the names and telephone numbers of my friends and tried to get me to admit to being a Taliban. They hit me and tried to get me to say: “Yes, I’m a Taliban,” or “Yes, I’m from al Qaida” or “Yes, I know where Osama is.” They weren’t interested in hearing anything else.

I had no chance. My only hope was that someone from the German authorities or the German military would turn up.

We changed pens almost every day, moving from one barbed-wire enclosure to the next, and finally to ones that the soldiers had built under tarpaulin roofs. Around two weeks after I arrived in the camp, I met a couple of Turkish men. Finally I could make myself understood and understand what someone else was saying. It was like salvation. And not only did they speak my language, they could also speak some Arabic, so they were informed about practically everything. I learned a lot from them. Where I was, what was going to be done with us, and what they thought of us.

The Turks said we were in Kandahar.

I asked how they knew that. The camp could have been anywhere. All we could see were mountains!

They said, the Afghans knew exactly what region we were in. I had no doubts any more. I thought, at least I’ve seen another country. And I didn’t even have to pay for the trip.

I knew the two Turks had been taken prisoner in Pakistan just as I had. They told me. I didn’t ask where and how that had happened, or what they were doing there. You don’t ask things like that in a detention camp. The Americans asked us everyday where and how we were captured and what business we had in Pakistan. If you come back and ask your fellow prisoners the same questions, you quickly get a reputation as a spy. Then you’re shunned. In all the years, I always behaved the same way. I listened if someone wanted to tell me something, but I didn’t ask any funny questions. The two Turks are still in Guantanamo today. To protect them, I’m going to call them Erhan and Serkan. I’d like to see them again.

[...]

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(Epilog)

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