

By David Rose

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Bound ankle to wrist and left to writhe in agony... his head slammed repeatedly against concrete walls... subjected to cruel psychological games by his captors: Shaker Aamer's suffering began before he even set foot in Cuba.

In some of the most painful testimony he has given to The Mail on Sunday, Aamer tells here of the torture meted out to him at his first prison – the US's Bagram air base near Kabul – under the noses of British intelligence officers. And to those who still question whether he is truly innocent – despite the US with all its limitless resources emphatically clearing him – he gives a vivid account of how he came to fall into the hands of America...

MI5 fly in - on Blair's jet

The man known as detainee 005 was being held at Bagram air base, just north of Kabul in Afghanistan, penned in a freezing cage.

His American guards and interrogators had beaten him, deprived him of sleep for days, and 'hog-tied' him on the ground. But now, just before 11pm on January 7, 2002, Shaker Aamer dared to hope.

A guard told him that arriving on an RAF plane that night was Tony Blair, then Prime Minister, the first Western leader to travel to Afghanistan since the ousting of the Taliban regime weeks earlier. Aamer believed if someone in Blair's entourage saw his desperate condition, they would help him. They could reassure the Americans he was no terrorist. Maybe the PM would even take him home. In the coming days, Aamer met three British plainclothed officials who he believed to have arrived on Blair's flight. By now Aamer had lost weight, had frostbitten feet,

and bore bruises from repeated beatings.

'The first British guy said his name was John; he said he knew about me from London,' Aamer said. 'He told me openly he was from MI5, and that he had a file on me. But the first thing he said when he saw me was, 'Shaker, you look like a ghost.' With the torture, with the beating, I didn't even know what I looked like. I hadn't seen my face in months.'



False hope: Tony Blair visiting Bagram in January 2002 - on the same day MI5 saw Aamer's torture

But 'John' did nothing to assist him. Worse, later in the course of the British officers' visit, Aamer said, one of John's colleagues was present in an interrogation room when he was subjected to the torture known as 'walling' – having his head smashed against a wall while he sat shackled in a chair. The Americans called this an 'enhanced interrogation technique', and though it was never approved for use by British officers, it had been authorised by the Bush administration.

Inside the interrogation room, said Aamer, 'They were shooting questions without listening to answers. 'You did this or that, why did you do that, where did you go.'

'You fought at Tora Bora'

'They were accusing me of fighting with Bin Laden in the battle of Tora Bora; of being in charge of weapons stores; of being a terrorist recruiter – though I'd only been in Afghanistan for a few weeks. I start to try to talk but everybody is just shouting and screaming around me. Then suddenly I feel it – douff – this American guy grabs me by the head, and he slams it backwards against the wall. In my mind I think I must try to save my head so I tried to bring it forwards, but as soon as I do he grabs it again and bashes it: douff, then back again, douff, douff, douff.'

Aamer said he didn't fully lose consciousness. 'But I was completely disorientated. So I sat like this, dizzy and disorientated, my eyes shut, and the guards moved me back to the cage.' According to Aamer, the British officer who witnessed this assault had a 'posh English accent, a very white guy with blond hair'. He did nothing to object or intervene. More details of alleged complicity by UK personnel in Aamer's ill-treatment cannot yet be published for legal reasons, pending his current lawsuit against the British government.

AC/DC fan who worked in a diner

Though Aamer may have been born Saudi Arabia – in Medina in 1966 – extraordinarily, at one stage of his life, he was not a target of the US military, but its employee. From 1989 to 1995 Aamer lived mostly in Atlanta, in the US state of Georgia, working as a chef in restaurants. In those days he lived a Westernised life: a lover of rock music, he often attended concerts by his favourite bands – including AC/DC and Ozzy Osbourne. In this period, in 1990, he responded to a US army recruitment drive for Arabic/English translators during the first Gulf War – which is how he came to find himself working for the US infantry in Saudi.





