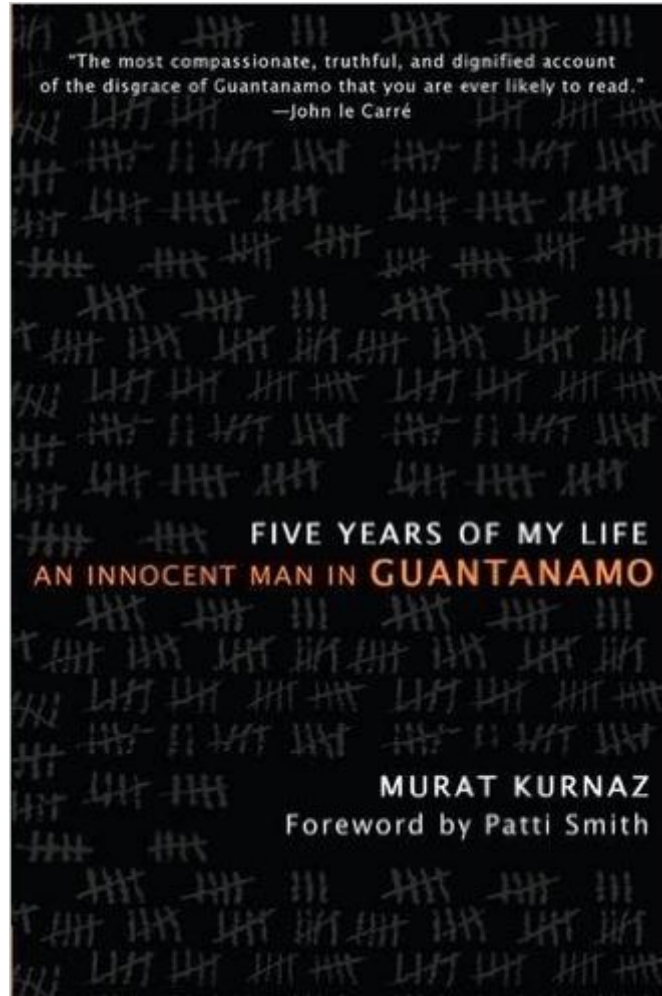


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Five Years Of My Life: An Innocent Man In Guantanamo



Synopsis

In October 2001, nineteen-year-old Murat Kurnaz traveled to Pakistan to visit a madrassa. During a security check a few weeks after his arrival, he was arrested without explanation and for a bounty of \$3,000, the Pakistani police sold him to U.S. forces. He was first taken to Kandahar, Afghanistan, where he was severely mistreated, and then two months later he was flown to Guantanamo as Prisoner #61. For more than 1,600 days, he was tortured and lived through hell. He was kept in a cage and endured daily interrogations, solitary confinement, and sleep deprivation. Finally, in August 2006, Kurnaz was released, with acknowledgment of his innocence. Told with lucidity, accuracy, and wisdom, Kurnaz's story is both sobering and poignant--an important testimony about our turbulent times when innocent people get caught in the crossfire of the war on terrorism.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It's rare (at my age, anyway!) for a book to keep me up all night. But Murat Kurnaz's memoir of his five years in the Guantanamo prison camp did just that. I spent most of the night hours reading it, alternately grateful that we finally have an insider's view of Gitmo and horrified at Kurnaz's descriptions of what he and the other prisoners endured. The rest of the night I spent pacing, too agitated by what I'd read to sleep. If even a small part of what Kurnaz says is true--and we have independent evidence that suggests his tale is accurate--the treatment of prisoners at Gitmo is indecent and, by any reasonable person's standard, illegal. Kurnaz, a German-born (in 1982) Turk, traveled to Pakistan in late 2001 to study at a madrassa. Shortly thereafter, through a combination

of false evidence, police corruption, alleged guilt by association, and bureaucratic incompetence, he was arrested and handed over to American military authorities. After a three-month imprisonment in Afghanistan, he was transferred to Gitmo, where he would stay until his exoneration and release in August 2006. (This despite the fact that the U.S. authorities quickly realized, as Kurnaz's lawyer, Baher Azmy, compellingly argues in the book's epilogue, that Kurnaz was innocent.) Kurnaz's first three months in Gitmo were spent in Camp X-Ray, so called because the prisoners were in open air cages where everything was "completely transparent" to the scrutiny of the guards. The cages were 15 square feet (smaller than German requirements for caging animals), open to the weather as well as spiders, snakes, and scorpions. Prisoners were irregularly fed, denied medical treatment, and given bad water to drink. They were also forbidden to stand, lie down during the day, or touch the sides of the cages.

In this book, translated from German, Murat Kurnaz, a German Turk, tells his tragic story. When only nineteen and an apprentice shipbuilder, while taking time off in Pakistan for religious study, he was hauled off a bus and imprisoned for a short time before being 'sold' to the US Administration for \$3,000. This was a bargain - the Americans were offering \$5,000 - \$25,000 to locals for anyone suspected of being Taliban or Al Qaeda. With such tempting offerings, many innocent men - usually foreigners - were gladly exchanged for the money which converted into huge amounts in the local currency. Murat was sent first to a prison camp in Kandahar, Afghanistan and then later to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. In both places he was repeatedly and relentlessly tortured. Among other things he was constantly beaten, often for no reason, he was water boarded, he was electrically shocked on the soles of his feet, he was hung from the ceiling by his arms tied behind him for hours on end, he was deprived of sleep for weeks at a time, he was forced to stand for days, he was starved, he was force fed, he was put in an air-tight metal container and subjected to extreme heat and cold and of course there were the months of solitary confinement. In Guantanamo he came across prisoners as young as 14 and a few even in their 80s and 90s. Like all the books on Guantanamo, there is almost a shock a page. Besides the main tortures listed above, what I found almost as deplorable was how vindictive, sadistic and cruel the soldiers were to the detainees in little ways, all the time and always there were endless lies. Also appalling were Murat's descriptions of female soldiers in one of the camps, watching while naked male prisoners defecated in a communal bucket in the open pen.

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