

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2011/02/18/former-detainee-describes-solitary-confinement-at-guantanamo/>

Campaign and Advocacy

close

Search

close

close

by [James Ridgeway and Jean Casella](#) | February 18, 2011

On Truthout, Jason Leopold [interviews David Hicks](#), an Australian national who spent six years at Guantanamo Bay before being charged with providing material support to terrorists and convicted in a military tribunal. Now free and living in Australia, Hicks alleges that he faced torture that included beatings, shackling, forced sedation, and sleep deprivation, as well as 24-hour solitary confinement which he describes in this excerpt.

Truthout: Solitary confinement appears to be among the worst of all the terrible experiences prisoners faced at Guantanamo. Can you explain what it does to you in a way that Americans, with no experience of such things, can understand what such isolation, especially with no knowledge of how long it will last, does to a person?

David Hicks: Solitary and indefinite detention are two different things and are devastating when combined. Isolation has a powerful impact on the mind, especially when coupled with incommunicado detention as in GTMO. Everything outside the four walls is quickly forgotten. With no mental stimulation the mind becomes confused and dull. That state of mind is an advantage to interrogators who manipulate every aspect of your environment. They create a new world reality. Time ceases to exist. Talking becomes difficult, so when conversations do take place, you cannot form words or think. Even when hostility is not present such as during a visit with a lawyer or International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visit, coherent sentences become elusive and huge mental blanks become common, as though you are forgetting the very act of speaking.

Everything you think and know is dictated by the interrogators. You become fully dependent with a childlike reliance on your captors. They pull you apart and put you back together, dismantling into smaller pieces each time, until you become something different, their creation, when eventually reassembled. Indefinite detention is draining and cruel. Only after five and a half years when I had been promised a date of release did the intense battle with insanity subside, and that I started to feel a little more normal again. I finally had some certainty and felt a glimmer of control return. I began to remember that another world existed and could once again dream about what that world used to feel like.

Indefinite detention is draining because you are taken prisoner and thrown into a cage. No reason is given or any relevant information or explanation offered. There are no accusations, no court rooms or judges. Nobody informs you will be here for X amount of time. It's an impossible situation to accept and every minute is spent silently asking and hoping, this cannot last forever, I will have to be released soon. But when the mind is so desperate, when you are on your last legs, you can't let go of the thought that you could be released any moment, even if all seems lost and hopeless. In a strange way it is one of those things the mind latches onto for a source of strength, a reason to keep going: false hopes and dreams are better than nothing.

For more on the use of solitary confinement at Gitmo, see [this briefing](#) from the Center for Constitutional Rights and [this report](#) from Amnesty International.

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James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, Blood in the Face. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets @solitarywatch.

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system.

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lol now you all know my nightmare try dreaming your trial every full moon and haveing that tern out to be your sentinces every time may thare be light in the darknes of justice

so dead on thats vary dead on your mind just gos blank and yes even after your out it will happen not as bad but of ya it sucks like no other way can i have allways siad for those who say just shoot a inmate thats killed to shoot them would be mercy you want to make someone suffer give them life with out but mandate that it must be served in supermax solitary that is hell on erth but lets never do that to anyone for all you judges out thare this is not me saying give this sentinces over death me saying this is a harsher sentinces then death but still shoud never be given you can shoot my mom and i not going to wish that on you if the bibel is right by god will do ten fold what you do to others all i know is i wish no one to that fate of a sentince for i cant think of a worse fate then that

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