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Mohamed Jawad was a teenager living in a Pakistani refugee camp when he was recruited by Afghan militia, drugged and forced into combat in Afghanistan. Eventually, he was captured. Afghan authorities beat him and made him confess to throwing a grenade at a US military vehicle, which he did by putting his thumbprint on a document written in a language he could not read or speak.

Jawad was handed to the Americans and transferred to Guantanamo, where he was isolated from other Pashto speakers and put through a rigorous program of sleep deprivation. His mental health deteriorated so badly that interrogators soon saw him talking to the posters on his wall. On Christmas Day 2003, he tried to commit suicide.

In 2007, Jawad was tried before a military commission at Guantanamo. Prosecutors thought this was just the kind of case the public would rally behind once they found out that two US servicemen had been wounded in the grenade attack Jawad allegedly committed.

Yet the government's case faltered as soon as Jawad showed up. "We're sitting there in the courtroom and in walks this kid," says Human Rights Watch's Stacy Sullivan, who traveled to Guantanamo to observe the proceedings. "He was clearly very young and, by that point, he had already been at Guantanamo for five years."

In the courtroom, Jawad appeared uneasy-burying his face in his hands and losing his train of thought mid-sentence. Over and over, he said he did not understand why he was at Guantanamo.

Jawad doesn't know his birth date but thinks he was 16 when he was arrested. The US military claims he was 17. By any account, he was under 18 and should not have been detained with adults. Under US and international law, juveniles must be held in separate facilities, given educational opportunities, and allowed to contact their families.

Sullivan wrote an article, "The Forgotten Kid at Guantanamo," for Salon.com, which first brought attention to the case. At that point, Omar Khadr, a 15-year-old Canadian, was the only known teenager in custody. "Until Jawad appeared in court, nobody knew there was another kid at Guantanamo," she said. The US military had failed to list Jawad as a minor.

At the military commission, Jawad's lawyer, US Air Force Maj. David Frakt, mounted a vigorous defense, exposing how Jawad was abused in Afghan and US custody. The military judge ruled that Jawad's confession was inadmissible because he had been tortured, and said that throwing a grenade at US troops was not a war crime anyway.

With no crime and no confession, the government's case was unraveling. Disturbed by the revelation of torture, the chief prosecutor, Col. Darrel Vandeveld, recommended the government negotiate a plea and send Jawad home. But Vandeveld's superiors insisted on pressing forward. Eventually, Vandeveld chose to resign rather than prosecute Jawad.

Sullivan penned a piece about Vandeveld's struggle and later suggested he write about the experience himself. Vandeveld's own opinion piece, "I Was Slow to Recognize the Stain of Guantanamo," appeared in the *Washington Post* in January, just as President Obama took office and was deciding whether to allow military commission trials to proceed. Obama suspended the commissions, and Sullivan helped arrange for Vandeveld to testify before Congress as it began to debate whether or not the suspension would be made permanent.

In the meantime, Jawad's lawyer, Maj. Frakt, teamed up with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to challenge Jawad's detention. In July, Jawad was released and returned to Afghanistan.

While we cheered Jawad's release, we feared what would become of him once he reached Afghanistan. Jawad's military defense team had requested and been denied permission from the US government to travel to Afghanistan to make sure the Afghan authorities did not imprison Jawad upon his arrival. The defense team then decided to travel on its own, not in an official capacity. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the ACLU appealed to our donors and managed to raise enough money to finance the defense team's trip.

When Jawad's lawyers landed in Kabul, their fears were confirmed. Jawad was on his way to prison. Because the lawyers were on the scene, they were able to act. They persuaded the Afghan attorney general to send Jawad back to his family in Kabul. Now in his early 20s, Jawad is finally free and starting to rebuild his life.

In a thank-you note to Human Rights Watch, Maj. Frakt wrote, "Were it not for the presence of ... the Jawad defense team, things might have gone very differently."

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