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WikiLeaks suspect now 'medium custody' prisoner

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NCR Today

FORT LEAVENWORTH, Kan. -- Suspected WikiLeaks source Bradley Manning, whose treatment in custody has spurred protests from supporters and human rights groups, is now considered a 'medium custody' prisoner and is allowed three hours of recreation a day, the U.S. Army announced this afternoon.

The announcement came at the end of a morning press tour of the facility here where Manning is being held. NCR was part of the tour, which included about a dozen representatives from local, national, and international press organizations.

Manning was moved to the Joint Regional Correctional Facility here April 20 from the Marine brig in Quantico, Va. where he had been held since July, 2010.

The conditions of his imprisonment at Quantico spurred the wide-ranging protests. While at the Virginia facility, Manning was placed into solitary confinement for 23 hours each day and forced to wear only a suicide-proof smock each night.

The commandant of the Fort Leavenworth facility, Lt. Col. Dawn Hilton, said the suspected Army private's new classification -- which 'starts tomorrow morning' -- allows Manning to receive Army inspected mail freely, make phone calls, and meet with preapproved visitors.

Prisoners at the facility are housed separately depending on whether they have or haven't faced trial. There are currently ten 'pre-trial' prisoners at the facility, said Hilton. Each are placed in individual 80 square foot cells and are connected by a shared common room to three other cells.

During the tour of the six-month-old facility, members of the press were able to see its indoor recreation center, work rooms, outside recreation area, medical facilities, and an empty cell block which Army

officials said was similar to the one where Manning is housed.

Each of the cells contained a metallic toilet and sink, along with a bed and metal seat attached to the wall. There was a light switch on the wall inside the cell. Army officials said the space gives the prisoner 35 square feet of "unencumbered space" which can be used for exercise, including jogging in place.

Medium custody prisoners are afforded three hours of recreation each day, one hour of which is outdoors, Hilton said. They also have allotted time each day to use a recreational library. No internet use is allowed by inmates.

The indoor recreation facility was housed inside a large, gym-like structure with six basketball hoops and about a dozen stationary exercise machines. The outdoor area, located on the north side of the complex, was about a football field long, with an open grass field, two basketball courts, and more exercise equipment.

Hilton said prisoners' visitors must be approved by the facility. While visits by journalists are forbidden, visits from nongovernmental organizations such as Amnesty International are decided "on a case by case basis." Prisoners are allowed to have up to five visitors at one time.

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While one of Manning's key supporters hailed today's announcement as "very good news," he called for those responsible for Manning's treatment at Quantico to be "held accountable."

"Solitary confinement is a form of torture and to punish [Manning] pre-trial as he was amounted to mistreatment and punishment before conviction," Kevin Zeese, the operator of the Bradley Manning Support Network, wrote in an email to NCR.

"The UN rapporteur on torture should now be allowed an official visit with Manning, an unmoitored visit, where his new conditions can be confirmed and where he can be interviewed about his treatment over the last year.

"While this is good news today, we do not forget that Bradley Manning is still incarcerated for nearly a year without trial. The documents he is accused of leaking show war crimes and other crimes....None of these people are being punished in any way, while Manning who has not been convicted of anything remains in confinement."

The press tour of the facility has also already spurred a series of questions from another of Manning's supporters.

Congressman Dennis Kucinich, who was denied the ability to visit Manning while he was imprisoned at Quantico, asks in an online column posted this morning:

?How was Pfc. Manning treated during his long, solitary pretrial confinement at Quantico? What is his mental state after suffering the indignity of being left naked for an undetermined period of time, and after being continually disrupted in the manner of a continuous interrogation??

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