

UNSWORN STATEMENT – SrA Ahmad I. Al Halabi

Your honor,

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to you today. I have much to tell you, so I hope you will be patient with me. I stand before you as a believer, a God fearing man, and I affirm that He has placed my fate in your hands. I will not try to tell you I am a perfect man, because I am not.

Ma'am, before you make your decision today, I would like to tell you about myself.

I was born in Damascus, Syria, on January 15, 1979. I was born as a Syrian because my father was Syrian. As I grew up, I realized I had a choice of what country to belong to. That may sound strange to people who are fortunate enough to be born in countries like America where there is no reason to think of becoming a citizen of another country. I made my choice to become an American with passion ... to become a United States citizen. I renounced my Syrian citizenship, and decided to wear the red, white and blue; the colors of freedom. I became an American by choice. I was, and still am, very proud of it.

I grew up in Damascus where I lived there without a father for most of my childhood. He was traveling from one country to another searching for a job that could feed our family. There were nine of us plus our mother, all living in one bedroom. I was the youngest of my five sisters and three brothers. We were poor, but we loved each other and we loved God, and we found strength in that.

These are pictures of our first house.

[slides – 2]

This is the house I lived in for most of my life. My mom still lives in it. We lived on the second floor.

[slides – 2]

Here is a picture of me on a family trip to see some of the ruins in Syria.

[slide – Palmyra]

My father, Ibrahim, traveled to more than twenty countries throughout his lifetime, until he found the United States in 1988. Once he came here, he decided to settle down and work, whether in his profession as a chef, or whatever job that would put food on the table.

It didn't take long for him to recognize the future he could build for us in the United States, which he described as a "dreamland." He would save whatever money he could to come back and visit us once in awhile. It didn't take long for him to convince me that I needed to move to the States, as well.

I remember him telling me one time that he would be very proud to see me wearing an American military uniform someday. I was only thirteen years old at the time, but what he said stuck with me.

All I could think about was coming to the United States. All my friends did too. It's every young man's dream. We used to watch American television with Arabic subtitles; one of my favorite shows was the Funniest Home Videos, as a matter of fact. At times, we'd go downtown and see American and Indian movies at the cinema. Everyone knew that my father was telling me the truth – that in America you could do anything you wanted, if you are willing to work for it.

I worked in several different jobs in Syria, but none of them had any kind of future. I worked in a barbershop which is on the left-hand side of this picture.

[slides – 2]

I also worked in this dessert shop. I would stand against the wall where the man on the far left is standing.

[slides – 2]

But you can't just move to the United States, it take a lot of preparation and perseverance to achieve such goal. I remember someone describing the States as the afternoon sun – so close, yet so far. Meanwhile, in Michigan, my father was paving the way to let me have my chance at the American Dream. And in 1994, he petitioned for all of us to come the United States. Two years later, I got word to visit the U.S. Embassy in Damascus and get the process started to immigrate. I felt like the luckiest person in the world.

The people at the Embassy gave me a list of documents I had to complete. This was the start of what would be a year-long paperwork battle.

Around my sixteenth birthday, I received the one thing I had been waiting for – a stamp from the U.S. Embassy giving me permission to travel to the United States.

They gave me an envelope to take with me on the trip. I was told to hold on to it tightly, and then hand it over when I get there. It was like a traffic light turning green; I was being handed the kind of freedom I only saw in Hollywood movies. When you come from a place like Syria, it is hard to imagine people actually having the right to say what they want, to criticize their government without being put in jail, having real freedom and real rights. You only have all these rights when you live in the United States. I wanted to have those rights for myself too.

Getting to America was an experience all by itself. February 25th of 1996 was one of the happiest days of my life. It was also one of the scariest. I had never flown on an airplane before, and there I was saying my good byes at Damascus airport; sixteen years old, didn't speak a word of English, had no guide, and no idea where I was supposed to find my plane. I almost missed the flight ... partially because I was staring out the windows, mesmerized by the giant white wings on the jets.

Suddenly, I heard my name called out over the intercom system, and I found a guard who could show me where I needed to go. When we landed in Michigan, I just followed the crowd until I saw an immigration officer in uniform.

He was trying to tell me that he needed my envelope, but I couldn't understand a word he was saying. He was reaching for the envelope, but I wasn't about to give it up; it was the most important

thing to me. It was my ticket to freedom. Fortunately, a kind person who spoke Arabic came up to me and explained what was going on.

After I made it through customs, I saw my father and ran to him. We just hugged and hugged under the dark clouds of a Detroit winter. It was cold, there was snow everywhere, and I was exhausted from the flight.

Within 48 hours of touching down in Michigan, I was standing next to my father in the restaurant he worked at with an apron on chopping vegetables and seasoning meat.

My father and I lived in Lansing, Michigan, in a house with three roommates to save money. There was a small Arabic community, which made for an easy transition. Everyone spoke Arabic, so I didn't have to know a lot of English to get by. There was always someone around who spoke enough English to help out if I got in a jam.

The restaurant I worked in was surrounded by the huge Michigan State University campus, and about half of our customers were college students.

Love was in the air. "Love of knowledge" that is. It seemed like everyone was a student where I worked – the waiters, the customers, and even the restaurant's owners.

My father kept telling me I needed to take advantage of all the opportunities for a good education, and I knew he was right. The first obstacle, of course, was that I needed to learn English before I could do anything more than work in a kitchen.

It got very frustrating and embarrassing at times when people would ask me questions, and all I could say back was "me no English" and then smile. They would smile back, but I could never tell whether they smiled with me, or if they were laughing at me.

I found a local church that had a program teaching English, and I quickly enrolled in to what would be my first step to learning the English language.

In Michigan, I saw people from all different nationalities and backgrounds who had been in the States for decades but couldn't speak hardly any English. It seemed to me that if you are going to live in this country and take advantage of the opportunities my father was talking about, you should at least learn the language. Because of this, I made a promise to myself to further my education, and strive to be the best I could be.

My father and I survived on little at first. We would ask for leftovers from the restaurant and the bakery next door. We worked relentlessly in Lansing, but my father decided to move to Dearborn about ninety miles east ... where there is a bigger Middle Eastern community, so we did move and worked at another restaurant.

Soon after we arrived in Dearborn, I decided to start school. So I enrolled at Fordson High School, starting the ninth grade in 1996 when I was seventeen. Within three years, I graduated with a 3.3 GPA at the age of twenty. It was January of 1999.

I enrolled in Henry Ford Community College for few months while still working full-time in the restaurant to pay for my increasing expenses. I saved whatever I had left over to send back to my mother and siblings back home.

The idea of earning enough money to pay my expenses, and also help my family was completely different from life in Syria, but at the same time, I knew I could do more with myself than cooking for a career. I envisioned a bigger goal, one that would make me proud and respected.

After awhile, I started receiving fliers in the mail about joining the Air Force, so I visited the local Air Force recruiter. In his office, he had a massive poster with an F-16 on it, and giant words that said "Aim High." Right away, I wanted to be part of that. By the time he explained to me I'd have a great career and be able to get a degree, I was sold. Being me, and keeping a lot of stuff, I still have the recruiters' cards today. Here is a picture of them.

[slide-recruiters' cards]

It wasn't easy to convince my father that the Air Force was the right path for me. My father was getting older, and he knew that military service meant that I would have to move away from him. It was a difficult choice for me. I hated the idea of leaving my father, but I couldn't stand watching an opportunity like the Air Force slip away. I wanted to be independent, educated, and be proud and respected in uniform. I was searching for the true me.

I experienced a connection with the Air Force unlike any other. I felt I was a part of something very unique, very important.

During the Air Show at Travis I saw F-16 fighters take off and flying above with a loud thundering roar, I saw freedom, human rights, and protection.

I entered basic military training at Lackland AFB on January 26th of 2000, and graduated six weeks later. It was tough, especially with my accent, but the last thing on my mind was to quit. My father taught me that quitting is never a solution. I finally made it through.

[slides – Basic training 2x]

I was so proud I felt like I was ten feet tall. I finished Tech School in May of 2000 – I kept a copy of the service songs they gave me, which you have in the exhibits. Then, I was assigned to the 60th Supply Squadron here at Travis Air Force Base. For the first time in my life, I had my own place. This is a picture of my room.

[Slide – room]

Many people would say my life was pretty dull. I worked hard during the day; I studied in the evenings and on weekends. I also went to the local mosque to pray. I don't drink, so I wasn't going to the dorm parties.

And then came the horrible terrorist attacks on September eleventh, which changed everything. I was as appalled as anyone by what happened, but a lot of people looked at me, as an Arab and a Muslim, as if it was all my fault. I constantly had to justify to people that I was an American and an Airman. I didn't understand the hostility that people had toward me.

I practice the true and peaceful religion of Islam, but I don't think most people got beyond my accent back then. It really hurt me, because I was horrified by what happened on September 11th, and I hated the fact my religion was being blamed for it all by so many people.

In the U.S., you have to wait five years before you become an American citizen, and in November of 2001, I was naturalized. Here's my certificate.

[slide-naturalization certificate]

It was, and still is, one of the proudest days of my life. I studied things like the Constitution, The Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence. I learned a lot about American history. I learned the Star-Spangled Banner, and I volunteered to sing it for our tech school graduation. As usual, I kept the copy I used to learn the anthem from. That copy is in the materials I have submitted to you.

But with the September eleventh attacks being so recent, being an airman and an American citizen wasn't enough. I encountered prejudice frequently. Maybe I was being naive, but I tried not to take it seriously. I kept thinking it would just go away.

It didn't.

One time on a deployment in Kuwait, a master sergeant came up to me and asked how to pronounce my name. So I told him, then he said, "sounds like Airman Al-Qaeda to me." Another time, a co-worker at Travis called me "Sand Nigger." I had never heard that phrase before, and I didn't even understand what he meant – I just knew that the "N" word shouldn't be used to describe anyone.

I felt like my allegiance to the United States was questioned without justification, and was based only upon the fact that I wasn't born in the United States, and I had an accent.

[slide – Kuwait]

During my deployment to Kuwait, I was asked to help in translations for the Security Forces and other command communications between US forces and the Kuwaitis in addition to my supply duties. I enjoyed doing it, but people were uneasy around me because I spoke Arabic.

Things like that made me want to finish my degree as fast as possible and apply for Officer Training School. I tried to apply to the Air Force Academy, but I was too old. I thought that if I became an officer then people would stop questioning my loyalty.

Since then, I've started to realize that a lot of this prejudice isn't because people are mean-hearted – it just comes from the fear of the unknown. Many people in America know very little about the religion of Islam or life in the Middle East.

Because of September 11th and other attacks around the world, a lot of people seem to jump to the conclusion that everyone from the Middle East and everyone who is a Muslim is either a terrorist or someone who supports terrorism. This is wrong.

There are extremists and radicals, but these people hide their faces behind Islam. The things they do are not permitted by God, or members of the mainstream Islamic community ... including myself ... we do not support their actions in the name of our religion. I condemn their actions. I am in the Air Force, because I support the fight against these people.

[BREAK]

Your honor ... I would like to tell you about my fiancee and being down at Guantanamo.

My mother proposed that I consider marrying Rana Al Dali ... my family had known her family for quite some time.

[slide – Rana pictures x2]

She's Syrian, but her family was living in the United Arab Emirates, where her father was working. My mother gave me her family's phone number, and I called her; we talked about my job in the Air Force, how my family was doing, how far along I was in my education and what my goals were. We found that we had a lot in common.

We started talking on the phone almost every week, and we exchanged e-mails, and pictures of each other, during my deployment to Kuwait.

After the deployment, I returned to Travis for about three months, and we continued talking on a weekly basis and sending more e-mails back and forth. After awhile, I was invited by her parents to visit them, and get to know her more, then make a decision on where this relationship is going.

I received an e-mail calling for Arabic speakers to volunteer for an assignment, without stating the location. Even though I had just come back from Kuwait, the job sounded like a good way to save up money, especially since I was hoping that my relationship with Rana would end up in marriage. After awhile, I learned that the assignment was going to be to Guantanamo, which I was excited about because of the joint mission down there. I was looking forward to being part of it.

I went to the Emirates just prior to my tour at Guantanamo to see Rana and her family. I stayed there for almost two weeks, which we spent more time getting to know each other, discussing what kinds of goals we had, and whether our goals were compatible with each other. One of my biggest concerns was whether she'd be willing to move to the United States. I asked her if she would, and she said she'd love to.

I asked her parents if they would agree to us marrying. They said yes, and that they would be happy to have me in their family. My family was so happy to hear that I was getting married. It was hard to tell who was more excited – them or me.

Although our marriage was set up through family connections, Rana and I were not obligated to get married. If she had told her parents she didn't want to marry me, they would have put me on the first plane home. Fortunately for me, she said yes.

We had a small party to celebrate the engagement in the Emirates, and then we started doing the paperwork for her Fiancée Visa. Once approved, she would have a six-month window to fly to the United States and change her status.

I left the Emirates and came back to Travis for two days, and then I took off for Gitmo.

I liked the work I did at Gitmo a lot, and I was proud of being able to contribute my skills to the mission. I didn't receive any training before I left, and I had never worked with classified information before ... so I wasn't sure what to expect. There wasn't any training when I got there, either. We had to just figure things out as we went. I tried to help by coming up with better ways to process the mail there, because we were so far behind.

It was tough being a linguist there, because we were looked down upon by some of the guards. I think a lot of it was because we spoke the same languages the detainees spoke. The guards accused all the linguists of sympathizing with the detainees, whether the linguists were Muslim or not. They called

us names like detainee lovers, and sympathizers, even though we went through the same riots and strikes they did and had urine thrown at us just like they did. Sometimes the linguists were treated worse than the guards by the detainees who saw us as traitors.

We were often the only means of communication to calm down angry detainees, or convince others to stop resisting, but it was like we were never trusted. I think that was because we had the ability to have direct communication with the detainees, which the guards didn't have. I saw my role as to support the mission which included helping the guards be safe and not be attacked by the detainees. There were awful things that took place. Some detainees threw urine and feces at guards. I tried as hard as I could to intervene and stop anything bad from happening to any one of our troops. I was called to come and translate when there was an uprising. I did my job to protect the troops and keep calm in a high-pressure environment.

One time I was tasked to help with a detainee who attempted to commit suicide. His attempt almost succeeded, and he was paralyzed and had brain damage. He was only expected to live for a few months. After a while, he beat the odds and he started trying to talk. I was tasked to go there and talk to him on a daily basis. I was translating for the physical therapists and teaching them simple phrases to use to talk to him. I also read him stories and passages from the Quran, even though I knew he couldn't understand. I asked him about things like his family. He rarely responded, but he looked at me as if he understood.

The division between the linguists and the guards got even worse for those of us who were practicing Islam. Because of that, we were seen as practicing the same religion as the detainees and having the same God. Those of us who didn't drink and party tended to keep to ourselves, so we really found ourselves on the outside. By the time I left, morale had really gone down hill.

As I mentioned before, I liked working at Gitmo. In the beginning of this case, people seemed to make a big deal out of the fact I said some of the detainees didn't belong at Gitmo. I don't know why, because everyone knew that some of the detainees were in fact innocent down there. That was the whole point of some of the Airbridge missions: to take home detainees who weren't really enemy combatants. Besides, it was common knowledge the intelligence office had determined that some people at Gitmo had been accused of being Al Qaeda by people in their homeland just to get the rewards that were offered.

I knew the detainees were accused of terrible things, but I still thought they deserved to be treated like humans and with dignity, which wasn't always the case down there.

To me, one of the most important things America stands for is human rights, something that wasn't so important in Syria.

The tour was supposed to be for ninety days, meaning I'd be back at Travis in February of 2003.

However, as the 90th day was approaching, and we started hearing word of a war in Iraq, then an order of "Stay in Place" was put into effect. We were told the order would most likely last 179 days – up to April. But when April came, they said we couldn't leave. Everyone was getting frustrated, because we didn't know when we would be able to go home.

Finally, we were told that we probably be able to leave at the eight-month mark, which was mid-July. When I heard that, I made plane reservations for my wedding ceremony with Rana back in Syria.

I needed to buy my ticket as far in advance as possible to save money. I also bought her a ticket back to California, and started making reservations and arrangements for the wedding. Here's one of the invitations.

[Slide – invitation]

I also started buying things for a house back here and making arrangements to move out of the dorms and into base housing.

During my time there, I was having my mail forwarded to my sister who lives in Anaheim. She's an American citizen, too.

[Slide – 3 letters]

We never were given an exact date of departure... they told us to out process, but not go anywhere. So I started outprocessing in June, and then I was told I can not go anywhere until my replacement showed up. My replacement got there the week before the 23rd of July, so I started working on getting home. I kept being told there was no room on the flights out of Guantanamo. The flights out of Gitmo were on Wednesdays and Saturdays only, and my flight to Syria was scheduled for Sunday.

I started worrying that I wasn't going to make it back to Travis in time to in-process and get my leave approved to go to Syria, so I called all over trying to get help to get home. I called Travis and the airlift element at Guantanamo and asked my officer in charge for help. I even tried to get leave approved at Guantanamo so that I could just fly straight to Syria, but that wasn't allowed. Finally told me on the 22nd of July that I could fly standby.

I really hoped to make the flight to Syria, since I paid more than \$1400 in non-refundable airline tickets alone, and especially because I was going to meet up with my mother in London and fly the rest of the way to Syria with her. She had just undergone surgery to remove cancer tumors from her back, and I wanted to make at least part of the flight with her.

I was afraid I wasn't going to make it, and the next flight wasn't until Saturday, which meant I wouldn't be able to in-process at Travis in time to make the flight to Syria, because no one would be at work on Saturday. Fortunately, I got on the flight, but of course, I didn't make it past Jacksonville because I was arrested.

When I arrived at Jacksonville, I was approached by OSI agents. They called my name, and when I approached, two agents shoved me into a men's restroom and searched me. I thought it was all a joke, but when I was handcuffed I didn't think so any more.

We walked through the terminal with people staring at me. I was ashamed and terrified. We drove to the local NCIS office, and I answered questions for about five hours. I was cold, and hungry. The Agents said food will arrive soon, but soon was hours. Then they put a cold fish sandwich front of me. They kept saying when we're done, you can eat. I was scared out of my mind.

The worst part was that I couldn't call my family and tell them I couldn't make the flight, and that I was OK.

They flew me from Jacksonville to California on a commercial plane, and I had to walk around the airports and sit on the plane for the whole flight in handcuffs. I even had to sit in the Dallas/Fort-Worth

airport for a layover with handcuffs on. It was very embarrassing. Eventually, I got to California, and I was put in Solano County jail.

I could only make collect calls from the jail, and my sister's phone service didn't accept collect calls. My father and brother were already in Syria getting ready for the wedding, so I couldn't call them. It was about a week before I could reach my sister, and tell her I was all right.

I was moved to Vandenberg AFB, and they had a rule against me speaking Arabic in jail, which was tough because my father hardly speaks any English at all, and Rana only understands very simple English. It was heartbreaking trying to have conversations with them. Even when my father and brother flew to California to visit me in confinement, I couldn't speak to them in Arabic. I had to have my sister translate what I said, and my father would respond in Arabic, which I understood.

While I was in pre-trial confinement, I had a lot of time on my hands, so I tried to take college classes, but that wasn't allowed.

I was supposed to test for staff sergeant, but I was told I wouldn't be allowed to do that until the trial is over.

As things wore on, I realized that the case wasn't going to be resolved quickly. I was worried about what kind of stress I was putting on Rana and our relationship. I told her I didn't want to be an obstacle in her life, and I would understand if she left me.

Thankfully, she said she would wait for me – she said she loved me and that I was her destiny and that she'd wait forever. I have a letter she sent me in pre-trial confinement.

[Slide – Rana letter]

[Maj London reads translation]

It's hard to really put into words how scared I was at the beginning of this case when Major London and Major Key told me that I am facing the death penalty. That was the worst feeling in the world ... I started losing sleep to a point I was provided with a medication to help me sleep. I took it for about 4 months or so. I had no appetite and I lost about 10 pounds because I was eating so little. I was waking up every day wondering if I was going to die for what I did. I even started wondering if they would use an electric chair or firing squad to execute me. I was scared I would be dead before they figured out that I wasn't a spy or a terrorist like I was accused of at first.

My faith helped me push those thoughts out of my mind. I wasn't allowed to talk to any of the other people in the jail at Vandenberg. I felt really lonely.

I would read anything I could get my hands on. I never read so many books in my life. I started trying to memorize the Koran, and I spent a lot of time praying.

Finally, they let me start talking to the other inmates after 6 months, which was a huge relief. There was a chess set in the jail, so I taught other inmates how to play chess.

I know that I haven't been perfect, and I haven't always made the right decisions, but I'll tell you that I have never once wanted to do anything that would hurt the United States. I love this country. That's why I became a citizen. Moving here was a dream come true.

And that's what made this whole process extremely difficult for me. I joined the Air Force to serve the United States, and I thought I was doing a good job at it. I was repeatedly involuntarily extended at Guantanamo, and I believe I kept working as hard as I could. Then I was accused of being a spy, which just crushed me.

I never had any intention of giving those documents to anyone at all. No one told me to take them. They were interesting to me, and they were about the work I did at Gitmo. I thought they would be nice memorabilia from my time there. They were my war trophies.

There were three documents in that box from the air-bridge mission I went on. That mission was really cool – we were flying to Afghanistan in a C-17 to pick up 34 new detainees.

I got the Airbridge mission documents as part of my duties prior to the mission. I took them back to my house and locked them in my wall locker and forgot about them until it was time to pack my things up to come home. I found them in my locker, put them in a box with clothes and a few other things and sent them to my address at Travis.

On our way back from Afghanistan on the mission, we were told to take two of those detainees back to Afghanistan. After we dropped off those detainees, the aircrew started pulling out American flags and all sorts of food, and we had a big celebration for completing the mission.

[slide – Airbridge group]

The aircrew even opened the back doors as we taxied so that we could see the sun rise over Bagram Air Base. This was another day I was really proud to be in the Air Force.

[slide – Airbridge sunset]

The detainee rosters were something I worked with every day. When I worked in the library, I got a new one almost everyday, because detainees were always changing cells. The roster I had has a bunch of letters and numbers on it, which were books numbers in the library. The notes I made were to show which detainee had which library book.

I found the memorandum about the investigation in a file cabinet in our offices. It made me curious, because it was an inquiry into one of my linguist roommates at Gitmo. He was given an Article 15. From this memorandum, I learned that he got into an argument with a guard and got in trouble for it.

I also had a diagram of the new camp that was being built. I don't recall specifically where it came from, because we had lots of loose documents in the DOC-EX office. We had everything from drawings done by detainees to bad translations to things like the camp map. There was one drawer that had nothing but things like this.

It wasn't smart to keep these things. In fact, it was a dumb thing to do, but I never meant to harm the Air Force or the United States. If I had any idea it would cause such a problem, I never would have even touched these things.

It probably sounds strange, but I keep a lot of things. I'm sure the OSI agents who searched my room would tell you the same thing. I keep a lot of stuff. I still have homework from high school, business cards from shops in Syria, utility bills almost 8 years old from our house in Detroit, phone bills from years ago, stamps, coins and, of course, expired credit cards. I just collect and keep things. Just last week, I found a book of checks from a bank account I had in 1996 ... that account was closed 7

years ago. I never really thought about it, but if something seemed meaningful, something that was a part of my life or something I enjoyed ... I kept it. I wouldn't throw stuff away, because I never knew if I would ever need it again. I did that with this material from GTMO. That's not an excuse, but it is part of my personality.

I realize I should never have kept such materials. I am ashamed. It was the wrong thing to do. I never ever wanted to do anything to hurt the Air Force, my country or my family.

I have done my best to keep my head up during the past year and a half, but it's been very hard on me, and my family ... they've been completely terrified. My sister's house was broken into by the FBI during the Article 32 investigation ... they were so scared when they got home, they called the police, because they thought they had been robbed. People won't visit my father any more in Dearborn just because they're afraid of being arrested for associating with him.

Many of my friends stopped calling me just because they are afraid of what will happen to them if they talk to me.

My family in Syria is scared of what the Syrian government might do to them due to the allegation of spying for the Syrian government, or for defacing the country's name.

And it was all because I took these things from Gitmo. It was all my fault.

[slides – Travis jail]

Here are pictures of the jail cell here at Travis I had to stay in. I know I was in jail, but it was really awful. There was a camera on me 24 hours a day in there, even when I was going to the bathroom. The toilet they gave me was a small portable camping toilet. The guards would make me wash those steel walls with Windex and paper towels.

Ma'am, as you know, I have already spent nine and a half months in jail. Whenever they took me anywhere, I was handcuffed and wearing a bullet-proof vest. Everything I did or said was looked at in the most suspicious way.

During the drives back and forth between Travis and Vandenberg for the court hearings, I was handcuffed for the whole trip hands and feet. In one of our trips, I was bored and started playing with my watch, which was a plain five-dollar watch. The security personnel took it and sent it to the lab for analysis. I got it back a few months later.

After you let me out of pretrial confinement, ma'am, I have been trying to do my best with the jobs I have been assigned.

I wanted to try and finish my information systems degree, but I'm still under an order not to use any computers with access to the internet, or take classes off base, so I couldn't take any of the required classes for my degree.

Because I have been restricted to the base, I have not been allowed to attend any Islamic religious services off-base. There are no services on-base. I asked to be escorted to the local mosque, but that was not allowed. My commander said he would bring a local religious leader on base to meet with me, but that never happened.

My love for the United States and the Air Force has been, and still is enormous. I know the Air Force isn't out to get me, even though it seemed like it at first.

I believe I can continue to contribute to the Air Force mission, especially when the Air Force needs people with my skills. I think I did an excellent job throughout my career, and I would like to continue to do the same.

I have dedicated my life to the United States – my country – and our Constitution. I was, and I still am, willing to put my life on the line for what the United States stands for and for the people of this great nation.

No matter kind of punishment you choose to give me, I would like you to know that no one will ever take my memories of my service in the Air Force away from me. I still get goose bumps when I remember hearing the Air Force band playing the Star-Spangled Banner. It was so exciting to see the fighter jets scrambling in the sky of Kuwait during Operation Southern Watch and the F-16s roaring through the sky of Turkey on their mission to liberate Iraq and Afghanistan. And I will never forget how proud I was when I got my citizenship, or when my squadron picked me as Airman of the year, and later get promoted Below the Zone.

[slide – BTZ promotion]

All I've ever wanted was to help the Air Force and the United States. I'm sorry for all the trouble I caused, and I would like to ask you to give me a second chance.

Thank you.