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Interrogating the Enemy

The Story of the CIA's Interrogation of Top al-Qa'ida Terrorists

(Working Title)

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With Bill Harlow

1 after waterboarding they didn't believe they could protect secrets anymore. I told Jose
2 about waterboarding at a meeting the next day.

3

4 A day or so later Rodriguez asked me if I would help put together an interrogation pro-
5 gram using EITs. I told him I would, thinking I would remain in the role I had occupied
6 during the first few months, pointing out resistance techniques employed by the detain-
7 ees and advising on the psychological aspects of interrogation. But that's not what he
8 had in mind. Jose not only wanted me to help them craft the program, he wanted me to
9 conduct the interrogations using EITs myself.

10

11 I was surprised. And reluctant. I knew that if I agreed, my life as I knew it would be over.
12 I would never again be able to work as a psychologist. Hesitantly I said, "I can help you
13 find somebody..." But then one of Jose's colleagues cut me off saying, "Knowing all you
14 know about the threat, if you're not willing to help, how can we ask someone else?"

15

16 My mind flashed to the victims of 9/11—to the "falling man" who chose to dive headfirst
17 off the Twin Towers rather than burn to death and to the passengers of United Flight 83
18 who bravely sacrificed their lives to save the lives of other Americans. I thought, if they
19 can sacrifice their lives, I can do this. I didn't want to, but I would ...

20

21 So I agreed. "But," I said, "I can't do it by myself. I need someone more familiar with the
22 techniques than I am." Rodriguez said, "Who do you need?" I said, "Bruce Jessen." He
23 was onboard by the end of the next week.

1 rector's large private office. Floor-to-ceiling windows on one side looked out toward the
2 Potomac River and beyond that to Washington, DC

3

4 It was apparent both Tenet and Rizzo had already been briefed about what CTC was
5 about to propose. So Rodriguez quickly laid out the idea of incorporating the SERE
6 techniques to the director and his chief legal advisor. In his initial remarks, Jose made it
7 clear he wanted Tenet's approval before moving ahead. And Rodriguez then asked me
8 to walk them through a brief description of each technique.

9

10 I remember illustrating some of the techniques that were harder to visualize with hand
11 gestures and occasionally getting out of my seat to demonstrate, because that some-
12 times seemed like the clearest way to get across what was being proposed. Tenet and
13 Rizzo listened intently and asked lots of questions. They were particularly interested in
14 the fact that all of the techniques we were discussing had been used on thousands of
15 high-risk of capture U.S. military personnel for fifty-plus years.

16

17 As the meeting wound down and it was obvious that Jose was waiting for Tenet to tell
18 him if he should press forward, Tenet stood up from his chair at the coffee table. He
19 made eye contact with Rizzo and motioned with his head for him to follow as Tenet
20 stepped behind a large desk located deeper in the room. Tenet began rummaging
21 around in a cigar case, he turned his head away from those of us sitting around the cof-
22 fee table and in a low voice, probably not meant to be overheard, told Rizzo "Make sure
23 this is legal before we do it." Tenet then stuck the unlit cigar in his mouth, turned to-

1 After he observed Abu Zubaydah being waterboarded, the COS set up a video confer-
2 ence with the leadership at CTC so we could discuss the issue. Those of us at the Black
3 Site thought that those at headquarters didn't have a good idea of what waterboarding
4 was really like. They talked about it like it was some kind of sterile, impersonal proce-
5 dure. So to prepare for the conference call, the criminal investigator at the site spliced
6 together a video of what a typical waterboarding session looked like and then added in
7 multiple scenes of Abu Zubaydah clearing water from his sinuses taken from several
8 different sessions.

9
10 Jose Rodriguez chaired the video conference. My take was that he was trying to be an
11 honest arbitrator of the issue. He seemed focused on preventing another attack inside
12 the United States, and wanted to do it in the most straightforward way possible. He was
13 being assailed by advocates on both side of the argument, but seemed objective and
14 not locked in on any one approach. We showed the video tape and voiced our opinion
15 that we didn't need to continue using EITs, especially waterboarding. Not surprisingly
16 some in the room with Rodriguez objected. One or two, objected vigorously. They in-
17 sisted we continue waterboarding Abu Zubaydah for at least 30 days. That's when it
18 dawned on me that my answer months before to Jose Rodriguez's question about how
19 long it would take for me to believe a person subjected to EITs "either didn't have the
20 information or was going to take it to the grave with them" had come back to haunt us. I
21 pointed out that comment was made before waterboarding was incorporated into the list
22 of potential EITs and didn't apply anymore. Bruce and I told them we would not continue
23 routinely waterboarding Abu Zubaydah. We asked them to send their "most skeptical"

1 phenomena. Here is a simple textbook description of how classical condition can be
2 used to get a previously neutral stimulus (like the sound of a buzzer) to evoke fear. In
3 the description, the person is hooked up to a machine that delivers mild, but aversive
4 shocks. The buzzer sounds and a shock is delivered. After a few presentations (or pair-
5 ings) of the buzzer followed by a shock, the sound of the previously neutral buzzer
6 starts to evoke fear. Eventually the sound of the buzzer alone evokes a conditioned fear
7 response, even if the shock doesn't follow. In the end, the success or failure of the con-
8 ditioning process depends on the timing of the buzzer and the shock. The shock has to
9 occur within a few moments after the buzzer sounds, or the buzzer won't come to elicit
10 fear.

11
12 To condition KSM and the other detainees to experience fear and emotional discomfort
13 when they thought about being deceitful, we had to time the application of an aversive
14 EIT, like walling, to start when they were thinking about withholding information and stop
15 when they were thinking about *anything* else. We couldn't know for sure what they were
16 thinking, but we could judge from their behavior when they were looking for a way out of
17 the situation. If they showed any sign, no matter how small, that they were genuinely
18 looking for some way to cooperate, we would reinforce that. But the primary object at
19 this point is to pair the naturally occurring discomfort and distress of the EITs with the
20 urge to deceive. 'Pair' in the sense that I'm using it means to be sure both occur at ap-
21 proximately the same time, 'contiguous' is a word psychologists use to describe this re-
22 lationship. It worked best when the effort to be deceptive occurred first and EITs were

1 SASC investigators showed me several documents written by Dr. Jerald Ogrisseg, a
2 civilian SERE research psychologist working for JPRA, and Daniel Baumgartner, former
3 Chief of Staff for JPRA. My recollection is that one of documents said that SERE inter-
4 rogation methods, including the waterboard, could be used on detainees with minimal
5 risk of physical or mental harm. That floored me. I told the investigators that I couldn't
6 imagine that anyone in the DOD would write a document like that, given the President's
7 directive regarding the Geneva Conventions. They asked me why Baumgartner and
8 Ogrisseg might have written the documents. I told them I didn't know because this was
9 the first I'd heard about it. They asked me to speculate. I said my guess was that some-
10 body in authority made the request. I couldn't imagine it originated with JPRA. At the
11 time I had no knowledge of who was behind the requests. Subsequently I learned from
12 the SASC report that the DOD, Office of General Counsel requested that information.
13
14 The investigators asked other questions. Most addressed work I'd done for DOD in the
15 past. A few addressed issues that I was completely unaware of, such as the alleged use
16 of EITs by DOD interrogators and survival instructors interrogating detainees. They
17 didn't ask and I didn't answer any questions about the CIA's interrogation program.
18 When my SASC interview was over and I was leaving the room, I asked one of the
19 staffers, in passing, where certain libelous news stories about me and Bruce that had
20 recently started popping up were coming from. He said some Democrat SASC commit-
21 tee staffers had been telling their friends in the media what horrible people Bruce and I
22 were.