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Psychologists helped the CIA exploit a secret military program to develop brutal interrogation tactics -- likely with the approval of the Bush White House.

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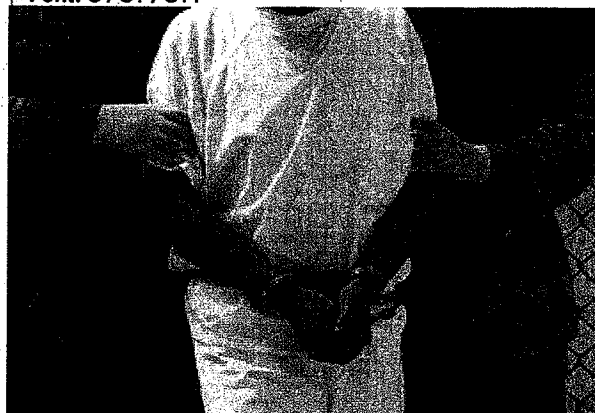
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June 21, 2007 | WASHINGTON -- There is growing evidence of high-level coordination between the Central Intelligence Agency and the U.S. military in developing abusive interrogation techniques used



Reuters/Mark Wilson

A detainee is escorted by military police at Camp 4 of the maximum security prison Camp Delta at Guantanamo Naval Base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, Aug. 26, 2004.

on terrorist suspects. After the Sept. 11 attacks, both turned to a small cadre of psychologists linked to the military's secretive Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape program to "reverse-engineer" techniques originally designed to train U.S. soldiers to resist torture if captured, by exposing them to brutal treatment. The military's use of SERE training for interrogations in the war on terror was revealed in detail in a recently declassified report. But the CIA's use of such tactics - - working in close coordination with the military -- until now has remained largely unknown.

According to congressional sources and mental healthcare

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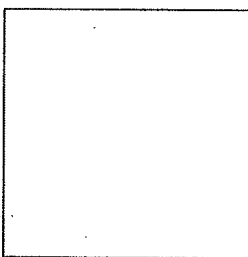
What has Bush done
now?

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professionals knowledgeable about the secret program who spoke with Salon, two CIA-employed psychologists, James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen, were at the center of the program, which likely violated the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners. The two are currently under investigation: Salon has learned that Daniel Dell'Orto, the principal deputy general counsel at the Department of Defense, sent a "document preservation" order on May 15 to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other top Pentagon officials forbidding the destruction of any document mentioning Mitchell and Jessen or their psychological consulting firm, Mitchell, Jessen and Associates, based in Spokane, Wash. Dell'Orto's order was in response to a May 1 request from Sen. Carl Levin, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who is investigating the abuse of prisoners in U.S. custody.

Mitchell and Jessen have worked as contractors for the CIA since 9/11. Both were previously affiliated with the military's SERE program, which at its main school at Fort Bragg puts elite special operations forces through brutal mock interrogations, from sensory deprivation to simulated drowning.

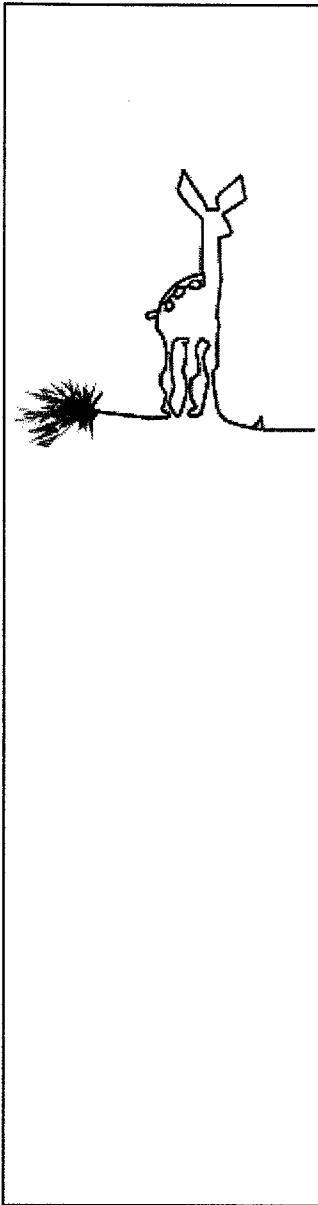
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A previously classified report by the Defense Department's inspector general, made public last month, revealed in vivid detail how the military -- in flat contradiction to previous denials -- used SERE as a basis for interrogating suspected al-Qaida prisoners at Guantánamo Bay, and later in Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, the involvement of the CIA, which was secretly granted broad authority by President Bush days after 9/11 to target terrorists worldwide, suggests that both the military and the spy agency were following a policy approved by senior Bush administration officials.

Close coordination between the CIA and the Pentagon is referred to in military lingo as "jointness." A retired high-level military official, familiar with the detainee abuse scandals, confirmed that such "jointness" requires orchestration at the top levels of



government. "This says that somebody is acting as a bridge between the CIA and the Defense Department," he said, "because you've got the [CIA] side and the military side, and they are collaborating." Human-rights expert Scott Horton, who chairs the International Law Committee at the New York City Bar Association, also says that the cross-agency coordination "reflects the fact that the decision to introduce and develop these methods was made at a very high level."

On Wednesday, dozens of psychologists made public a joint letter to American Psychological Association president Sharon Brehm fingering another CIA-employed psychologist, R. Scott Shumate. Previous news reports led the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association to ban their members from participating in interrogations, but the issue has remained divisive within the American Psychological Association, which has not forbidden the practice. "We write you as psychologists concerned about the participation of our profession in abusive interrogations of national security detainees at Guantanamo, in Iraq and Afghanistan, and at the so-called CIA 'black sites,'" the psychologists wrote. In violation of APA ethics, they said, "It is now indisputable that psychologists and psychology were directly and officially responsible for the development and migration of abusive interrogation techniques, techniques which the International Committee of the Red Cross has labeled 'tantamount to torture.'" [Ed. note: The full letter detailing the allegations of APA complicity can be read here.]

The letter cites a previously public biographical statement on Shumate that listed his position from April 2001 to May 2003 as "the chief operational psychologist for the CIA's Counter Terrorism Center."

The bio also noted that Shumate "has been with several of the key apprehended terrorists" who have been held and interrogated by the agency since 9/11. At CTC, Shumate reported to Cofer Black, the former head of CTC who famously told Congress in September 2002, "There was a before 9/11, and there was an after 9/11. After 9/11 the gloves come off." Shumate's bio, obtained by Salon, has

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been removed from the InfowarCon 2007 conference Web site. Shumate did not return a phone call seeking comment.

The SERE-based program undermines assertions made for years by Bush administration officials that interrogations conducted by U.S. personnel are safe, effective and legal. SERE training, according to the Department of Defense inspector general's report, is specifically designed "to replicate harsh conditions that the service member might encounter if they are held by forces that do not abide by the Geneva Conventions."

"The irony -- and ultimately the tragedy -- in the migration of SERE techniques is that the program was specifically designed to protect our soldiers from countries that violated the Geneva Conventions," says Brad Olson, president of the Divisions for Social Justice within the American Psychological Association. "The result of the reverse-engineering, however, was that by making foreign detainees the target, it made us the country that violated the Geneva Conventions," he says.

Next page: One CIA psychologist's specialty: The maddening effects of prisoner isolation

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