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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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Architect of the CIA Interrogation Program

With Bill Harlow

1 Jose asked how long I thought it would take to know whether a detainee exposed to
2 these techniques would be willing to cooperate or would “take his secrets to the grave.”
3 I told him thirty days. In my mind that was the upper limit. I fully expected it would take a
4 lot less time than that for hard-case high-value detainees initially intent on withholding
5 information to begin engaging with interrogators and debriefers in ways that allowed a
6 switch to “social influence” based approaches. Social influence tactics are defined as
7 “non-coercive techniques, devices, procedures and manipulations a person or a group
8 can use to change the thoughts, feelings and actions of another individual or group.”

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10 In that meeting I described some of the techniques that were in use for SERE training,
11 but the topic of waterboarding had not come up. In fact, I didn’t think of waterboarding
12 until later that night back in my hotel room. I was mulling over the different SERE tech-
13 niques, making a short list of the ones I thought were most effective when it dawned on
14 me that I had left waterboarding, the most effective SERE technique I knew of, off the
15 list I discussed with Rodriguez earlier that day.

16
17 As senior SERE psychologists, Bruce Jessen and I had spent several years trying to get
18 the Navy SERE School to abandon its use of waterboarding, not because it didn’t work
19 but because we thought it was *too* effective. One-hundred percent of the warfighters
20 exposed to it in training capitulated, even if it cost them their jobs. In my view, water-
21 boarding students did the enemy’s job for them. The point of resistance training is to
22 teach students that they can protect secrets. But my personal experience interviewing
23 POWs and warfighters who had been waterboarded at the Navy SERE School is that

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.

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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 ...

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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 who are actively withholding information that could disrupt a potentially catastrophic at-
2 tack was justified as long as those methods are lawful, authorized and carefully moni-
3 tored. I dismissed the notion, later put forward by some, that it was somehow unfair or
4 unethical to put the lives of thousands of innocent Americans ahead of the interests of a
5 handful of Islamic terrorists who had not only made the personal decision to attack us
6 and continue to try to mount terror attacks, but continued to deliberately withhold infor-
7 mation that could stop attacks and save lives. No, instead, I concluded that it would be
8 immoral and unethical to ignore my obligation to use what I know to defend our citizens
9 and our way of life against enemies who themselves initiated the conflict and whose
10 stated goal was to destroy us.

11

12 So in the end I decided I should do it. This wouldn't be the last time I had to examine the
13 ethics and morality of what I was being asked to do.

14

15 Less than a week later after CTC had decided to move ahead with efforts to incorporate
16 SERE interrogation techniques in to the CIA's interrogation program, Jose asked me to
17 accompany him to go see CIA Director, George Tenet. That meeting took place some-
18 time in the early evening in Tenet's wood-paneled office on the seventh floor of Agency
19 headquarters. John Rizzo, the CIA's chief legal advisor, was also there. Rodriguez in-
20 troduced me and said that I was the person who had agreed to help them put together
21 the CIA's interrogation program. Tenet and Rizzo greeted me graciously and we shook
22 hands. Then we all sat down around a coffee table located in the front section of the Di-