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EXCLUSIVE: CIA Experiments on U.S. Soldiers Linked to Torture Program

Posted By [Jeffrey Kaye](#) On September 9, 2009 @ 5:00 am In [Torture](#) | [7 Comments](#)



Editor's note: Click [here](#) to listen to Jeffrey Kaye discuss his groundbreaking report with radio talk show host [Peter B. Collins](#).

A number of new articles have been published recently that have highlighted evidence of illegal human experimentation on U.S.-held "terrorism" prisoners undergoing torture. These articles followed the release of a "white paper" by Physicians for Human Rights [PHR], [Aiding Torture: Health Professionals' Ethics and Human Rights Violations Demonstrated in the May 2004 Inspector General's Report](#).

This report looks at those recent charges, and reveals that experiments by a CIA researcher on human subjects undergoing SERE training went unreported in the legal memos the Bush administration drafted to approve their torture program. It will also connect major military and intelligence figures to the SERE experiments, and tie some of them to major science and "experimental" directorates at the CIA and Special Operations Command.

An [article](#) by veteran journalist William Fisher, looking at PHR's white paper, asks, "Did physicians and psychologists help the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency develop a new research protocol to assess and refine the use of waterboarding or other harsh interrogation techniques?"

A column at [Scientific American](#) quotes PHR's medical advisor on the subject:

[PHR] also raises questions about the ethics of medical note-taking during some of the interrogations. "Medical doctors and psychologists colluded with the CIA to keep observational records about [waterboarding](#), which approaches unethical and unlawful human experimentation," Scott Allen, lead study author and PHR medical advisor, said in a prepared statement.

Finally, a story in Wednesday's [UK Guardian](#) discussed the significance of the charges of unlawful human experimentation:

Human experimentation without consent has been prohibited in any setting since 1947, when the Nuremberg Code, which resulted from the prosecution of Nazi doctors, set down 10 sacrosanct principles. The code states that voluntary consent of subjects is essential and that all unnecessary physical and mental suffering should be avoided.

The Geneva conventions also ban medical experiments on prisoners and prisoners of war, which they describe as "grave breaches".

After describing how "[h]ealth professionals in the Office of Medical Services and psychologist contractors engaged in designing and monitoring" torture, as "selecting and then rationalizing" the use of various harmful interrogation techniques, the PHR report goes on to say:

By requirement, all interrogations were monitored in real-time by health professionals. Previous reports, including the ICRC report, document allegations that a medical device called a pulse oximeter (a device to measure oxygen saturation in a subject's blood) was placed on the finger of a detainee to monitor the effectiveness of his respiration during waterboarding. In this way, medical professionals were used to calibrate physical and mental pain and suffering....

The possibility that health professionals monitored techniques to assess and improve their effectiveness, constituting possible unethical human experimentation, urgently needs to be thoroughly investigated.

An Experimental "Battle Lab"

The CIA's Office of Medical Services was supposed to be in charge of monitoring "detainee" health under interrogation. However their instructions, described in an annex to the CIA [Inspector General report](#), exemplifies the dual nature of the "monitoring," as this example from the report shows:

If there is any possibility that ambient temperatures are below the thermoneutral range, they should be monitored and the actual temperatures documented. [2 or 3 redacted lines]

At ambient temperatures below 18 [degrees]C/64 [degrees]F, detainees should be monitored for the development of hypothermia. [Four redacted paragraphs]

Rather than make changes to ambient temperatures, to prevent harm to prisoners, medical professionals are instructed to monitor and document the situation. The torture techniques used by SERE are known to cause endocrine and metabolic disorders (see section on CIA research below), prisoners tortured and subjected to cold are at [higher risk](#) of hypothermia, which for a normal person can set in at an ambient temperature of 60 degrees F. The monitoring in this case seems to be as much about experimentation as it is any concern for a prisoner's health. (For what other possible reason could this section be mostly redacted?) Parallels to the [experiments on hypothermia by Nazi scientists](#) at Dachau are chilling, as is the fact that some of these scientists were [later imported](#), along with their data, to the United States.

Questions were raised around possible human experimentation in an article last May at Firedoglake on "[The Zubaydah Torture 'Experiment,'](#)" noting, "Of the many fascinating details coming out of [the May 2009 Senate] Judiciary hearing... the references to the application of an experiment by the ex-SERE CIA contractor, most likely James Mitchell, seemed especially important."

The experimentation was not limited to "high-value" CIA prisoners. Last April, another [article at Firedoglake](#) reported how the Senate Armed Services Committee [report](#) (PDF) on prisoner abuse described the creation of an experimental "battle lab" at Guantanamo, demonstrating support for the torture program from the main Army intelligence school at Ft. Huachuca.

According to the Levin report, in August 2002, "COL John P. Custer, then-assistant commandant of the U.S. Army Intelligence Center and School at Ft. Huachuca, Arizona" conducted a review of interrogations operations at Guantanamo. Custer called Guantanamo "America's 'Battle Lab'" in the war on terror, and recommended combining FBI and military techniques to extract "information by exploiting the detainee's vulnerabilities." The "Battle Lab" label stuck, though some, like Colonel Britt Mallow, of the Criminal Investigative Task Force, objected.

MG Dunlavey and later MG Miller referred to GTMO as a "Battle Lab" meaning that interrogations and other procedures there were to some degree experimental, and their lessons would benefit DOD in other places. While this was logical in terms of learning lessons, I personally objected to the implied philosophy that interrogators should experiment with untested methods, particularly those in which they were not trained.

Later, Dunlavey denied using the term, and Miller testified he couldn't remember.

Pre-9/11 Experiments on SERE Torture

The experiments on the effects of SERE-torture techniques began even earlier — upon SERE trainees themselves. An April 2009 [AlterNet article](#) reported on the history of experimentation on soldier subjects undergoing SERE training. (SERE is a military program, the acronym standing for Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape.) The article explained how the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) and the CIA “ignored a wealth of other published information about the effects of SERE ‘stress inoculation,’” citing a June 2000 article, “Assessment of Humans Experiencing Uncontrollable Stress: The SERE Course,” in [Special Warfare](#) (PDF). *Special Warfare* is “The Professional Bulletin of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School” (emphases added to following quote):

Results

As shown in the charts on page 7, SERE stress caused significant changes in students’ hormone levels. **Recorded changes in cortisol levels were some of the greatest ever documented in humans.** In some cases, the **changes noted among the trainees were greater than the changes noted in patients undergoing heart surgery....**

Changes in testosterone levels were similarly remarkable: In some cases, testosterone dropped from normal levels to castration levels within eight hours.

The Altnet article also quoted from a May 2000 article in *Biological Psychiatry*, [Hormone profiles in humans experiencing military survival training](#) (emphasis added):

Conclusions: The stress of military survival training produced dramatic alterations in cortisol, percent free cortisol, testosterone, and thyroid indices. Different types of stressors had varying effects on the neuroendocrine indices. **The degree of neuroendocrine changes observed may have significant implications for subsequent responses to stress.**

Looking beyond more than physiological symptoms, other studies have looked at purely psychological data. Consider this oft-quoted study from the [August 2001 edition of the American Journal of Psychiatry](#), which looked at dissociative symptoms, such as depersonalization, derealization, psychic or emotional numbing, and general cognitive confusion, produced in military subjects exposed to SERE torture techniques (emphasis added):

The current study was designed to assess the nature and prevalence of dissociative symptoms in healthy humans experiencing acute, uncontrollable stress during U.S. Army survival training. METHOD: In study 1, 94 subjects completed the Clinician-Administered Dissociative States Scale **after exposure to the stress of survival training.** In study 2, 59 subjects completed the Brief Trauma Questionnaire before acute stress and the dissociative states scale before and after acute stress. A randomly selected group of subjects in study 2 completed a health problems questionnaire after acute stress. RESULTS: **In study 1, 96% of subjects reported dissociative symptoms in response to acute stress.** Total scores, as well as individual item scores, on the dissociation scale were significantly lower in Special Forces soldiers compared to general infantry troops. In study 2, 42% of subjects reported dissociative symptoms before stress and 96% reported them after acute stress.



Still image taken from the Amnesty International film *Stuff Of Life*, a film about waterboarding, the

practice of torturing prisoners by partially drowning them.

Other research results include the effects of SERE-style torture upon the immune system and other biological markers. The findings regarding high levels of cortisol upon subjects was corroborated by a SERE psychologist at the Navy Brunswick, Maine, SERE school, who — according to an unclassified, undated Talking Paper from the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency — found “empirical medical data... [of] elevated levels of cortisol in the brain stem caused by stress levels incurred during waterboarding.” The Brunswick school subsequently discontinued waterboarding as part of its SERE training, as it created a “negative learning environment.” The other Navy SERE school, in North Island, California, refuses to eliminate exposure to waterboarding as part of its training program, despite the opposition of JPRA and the other SERE schools, which believe it can induce a “learned helplessness” state in students.

SERE Research and the Development of the Torture Program

One of the lead researchers in a number of these studies is Yale psychiatrist Charles A. Morgan, III. According to [one source](#), “Over the past 10 years, Dr. Morgan has served as a Subject Matter Expert to the US Special Operations Command.” But at a June 2004 symposium on [“The Nature and Influence of Intuition in Law Enforcement,”](#) sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice, the Behavioral Analysis Unit of the FBI, and the American Psychological Association, Dr. Morgan is listed as affiliated with “Behavioral Science, CIA.”

Additionally, in the Information Science Board (ISB) document, [Educating Information](#) — which was heavily [drawn upon](#) by President Obama’s task force on interrogations, for recommendations on the interrogations issue — Dr. Morgan is identified as a member of the 11-person “Government Experts Committee,” and listed as affiliated with the Intelligence Technology Innovation Center (ITIC). According to [Intelligence Online](#), ITIC is “a research organization under the CIA’s authority,” which “answers directly to the CIA’s Science and Technology directorate.”

The Obama [Interrogations Task Force](#) recently made clear they found a lot to value in the ISB study (emphasis added):

The Task Force concluded... that the United States could improve its ability to interrogate the most dangerous terrorists by forming a specialized interrogation group, or High-Value Detainee Interrogation Group (HIG), that would bring together the most effective and experienced interrogators and support personnel from across the Intelligence Community, the Department of Defense and law enforcement. **The creation of the HIG would build upon a proposal developed by the Intelligence Science Board.**

Whatever the fate of the HIG, what is noteworthy here is that the Office of Technical Services (OTS), which was cited in the recently released 2004 CIA [Inspector General report](#) as having vetted the aggressive SERE interrogation techniques, is, along with the ITIC, also *a part of the Science and Technology directorate*. OTS, formerly the Technical Services Division (or Technical Services Staff), was the branch of the CIA in charge of [torture](#) and [assassination](#). It was also in charge of the experimental mind control and interrogation program known as [MKULTRA](#).

Dr. Morgan’s online profile states that between 1998 and 2002 he received over \$400,000 in research grants from the Army and the Office of Naval Research (ONR) for studies on “Psychobiological Assessment of High Intensity Military Training” and “Neuro endocrine assessment of Survival School Training.” A 1977 [Washington Post expose](#) — those were the days of scandalous revelations surrounding the CIA’s MKULTRA program — describes CIA use of ONR to funnel funds for secret experiments in the 1950s and 1960s. The same relationship was also explored during a 1977 [Senate Intelligence Committee hearing](#). This is not evidence that Morgan’s research was paid for by the CIA, but along with his institutional affiliation, it is suggestive of possible CIA involvement.

While it is unknown to what degree the CIA was directly involved in the SERE research (outside of Dr. Morgan’s affiliation), Special Operations Command reportedly was a major supporter.



A U.S. soldier undergoing SERE training.

The co-author of the *Special Warfare* article referenced above, and working with Dr. Morgan on a number of other SERE research papers looking at physiological and psychological effects of SERE techniques, was Gary Hazlett, a clinical psychologist with the Psychological Applications Directorate at U.S. Army Special Operations Command. Moreover, Morgan and Hazlett cited "the approval and support [for their research] of Lieutenant General William Tangney, Major General Kenneth Bowra, Major General William G. [B]oykin and many others..."

Maj. Gen. Bowra retired from the military in 2003, after serving as Commanding General of Army Special Operations Command South, U.S. Southern Command. Following the military, he went to work as [Senior Program Director](#) with Oak Ridge National Laboratory, serving as national laboratory liaison to [U.S. Joint Forces Command, J9 Directorate](#). Another source [states](#) that currently Bowra is senior mentor/concept developer at USJFCOM J9 for Joint Urban Operations and Homeland Security experimentation. J9 stands for the Joint Concept Development and Experimentation Directorate ([JCD&E](#)). It "leads the development of emerging joint concepts, conducts and enables joint experimentation, and coordinates DoD JCD&E efforts in order to provide joint capabilities to support the current and future joint force commander in meeting security challenges."

The possible involvement of USJFCOM's J9 in research upon SERE follows upon the revelation, discussed above, that CIA's OTS, part of CIA's Science and Technology directorate, was heavily involved in the implementation of the SERE techniques for use by the CIA. While the use of the term "experimentation" appears to have a broad meaning in military usage, beyond that of conducting scientific experiments, given the charges surrounding human experimentation upon torture victims, any connections between these secretive "experimental" directorates and the SERE torture program, or research upon it, is worrisome.

Maj. Gen. Boykin was the [controversial](#) former commander of Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, who resigned over statements that indicated he saw the "war on terror" as a religious war. At the time he was Special Operations commander at Fort Bragg, according to a recent [New York Times](#) article, SERE psychologist James Mitchell was completing his last military assignment as "psychologist to an elite special operations unit in North Carolina." Boykin previously served as CIA Deputy Director of Special Activities, and in June 2003, became Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence under Donald Rumsfeld right-hand man, Stephen Cambone.

Lt. Gen. Tangney is yet another former commanding general at Army Special Operations Command. Also retired from the military, he is currently Senior Vice President for Intelligence, Security, and Special Operations, at [Future Technologies, Inc.](#), a supplier of, among other things, a "well-developed global network of experienced intelligence, security and special operations professionals" working with Special Operations, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and other military customers.

While Dr. Morgan appears to be well-connected among the military and intelligence elite, it is important to remember that there is no reason to conclude that Dr. Morgan or his co-researchers have ever been involved in torture or experiments meant to be used for torture. (We cannot say the same for CIA or military medical or psychological personnel, however.) In fact, it is possible that Dr. Morgan's research has led him to oppose coercive interrogation techniques, as his published research documents the debilitating effects of SERE torture, which utilized against a prisoner could only be considered cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, if not torture. (Although, at the 2007 convention of the American Psychological Association, Dr. Morgan indicated he was against the idea of removing

psychologists from national security interrogations, which was being considered in a motion before APA at that time.)

A 2007 [New York Times](#) article quotes Dr. Morgan:

Many SERE veterans were appalled at the “reverse engineering” of their methods, said Charles A. Morgan III, a Yale psychiatrist who has worked closely with SERE trainers for a decade.

“How did something used as an example of what an unethical government would do become something we do?” he asked.

Dr. Morgan’s comments appear to put him at odds with other members of the CIA’s Science and Technology directorate, particularly those who work for OTS, as well as individuals within the Pentagon and Special Operations Command, who have been [tied to](#) elements of the U.S. torture program.

The Suppression of Research on SERE in the OLC Memos

What *is* clear is that the CIA and the Pentagon had plenty of experimental evidence from the peer-reviewed, published research of Dr. Morgan and his associates (and possibly others), both before and after 9/11, that SERE techniques had serious, debilitating effects on individuals subjected to them. As this research is never cited in any of the Office of Legal Counsel memos issued to the CIA around their torture program, it appears such research was deliberately withheld from government attorneys as the CIA sought approval for the use of SERE-style torture. Nor was this obscure research, but had been funded by the government at a minimum of hundreds of thousands of dollars, and promoted by some of the Pentagon’s highest generals.

The frenzied search for data on waterboarding, sleep deprivation, isolation, confinement in a small box, etc., to submit to OLC attorneys making legal determinations on whether proposed interrogation techniques constituted torture, was a kabuki organized by the CIA. The OLC attorneys involved — John Yoo, Stephen Bradbury, Jay Bybee, and others — were witting or unwitting partners in suppression of CIA research on torture (as future investigations will disclose). Given the participation of members of the Office of the Vice President, [particularly David Addington](#) and Vice President Cheney himself, in the promulgation of the torture program, and the composition of the memos, it seems likely they were also involved in the suppression of this material. *As a result, the memos produced authorizing the “enhanced interrogation techniques” were composed as the result of fraud and bad faith, the result of a criminal conspiracy to implement illegal torture techniques.*

The public response to the recent “white paper” by Physicians for Human Rights shows there is great interest in following up on charges of human experimentation upon torture victims of the U.S. government. The Congress and Department of Justice should move swiftly to initiate full, open investigations and charges against those involved.

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