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FROM THE MAGAZINE

RORSCHACH AND AWE

America's coercive interrogation methods were reverse-engineered by two C.I.A. psychologists who had spent their careers training U.S. soldiers to endure Communist-style torture techniques. The spread of these tactics was fueled by a myth about a critical "black site" operation.

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Al-Qaeda lieutenant Abu Zubaydah. *The New York Times/Redux.*

Abu Zubaydah was a mess. It was early April 2002, and the al-Qaeda lieutenant had been shot in the groin during a firefight in Pakistan, then captured by the Special Forces and flown to a safe house in Thailand. Now he was experiencing life as America's first high-value detainee in the wake of 9/11. A medical team and a cluster of F.B.I. and C.I.A. agents stood vigil, all fearing that the next attack on America could happen at any moment. It didn't matter that Zubaydah was unable to eat, drink, sit up, or control his bowels. They wanted him to talk.

A C.I.A. interrogation team was expected but hadn't yet arrived. But the F.B.I. agents who had been nursing his wounds and cleaning him after he'd soiled himself asked Zubaydah what he knew. The detainee said something about a plot against an ally, then began slipping into sepsis. He was probably going to die.

The team cabled the morsel of intelligence to C.I.A. headquarters, where it was received with delight by Director George Tenet. "I want to congratulate our officers on the ground," he told a gathering of agents at Langley. When someone explained that the F.B.I. had obtained the information, Tenet blew up and demanded that the C.I.A. get there immediately, say those who were later told of the meeting. Tenet's instructions were clear: Zubaydah was to be kept alive at all costs. (Through his publisher, George Tenet declined to be interviewed.)

Zubaydah was stabilized at the nearest hospital, and the F.B.I. continued its questioning using its typical rapport-building techniques. An agent showed him photographs of suspected al-Qaeda members until Zubaydah finally spoke up, blurting out that "Moktar," or Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, had planned 9/11. He then proceeded to lay out the details of the plot. America learned the truth of how 9/11 was organized because a detainee had come to trust his captors after they treated him humanely.



Al-Qaeda operative Khalid Shaikh Mohammed shortly after his capture, 2003. *Corbis.*

It was an extraordinary success story. But it was one that would evaporate with the arrival of the C.I.A.'s interrogation team. At the direction of an accompanying psychologist, the team planned to conduct a psychic demolition in which they'd get Zubaydah to reveal everything by severing his sense of personality and scaring him almost to death.

This is the approach President Bush appeared to have in mind when, in a lengthy public address last year, he cited the "tough" but successful interrogation of Zubaydah to defend the C.I.A.'s secret prisons, America's use of coercive interrogation tactics, and the abolishment of habeas corpus for detainees. He said that Zubaydah had been questioned using an "alternative set" of tactics formulated by the C.I.A. This program, he said, was fully monitored by the C.I.A.'s inspector general and required extensive training for interrogators before they were allowed to question captured terrorists.

While the methods were certainly unorthodox, there is little evidence they were necessary, given the success of the rapport-building approach until that point.

I did not set out to discover how America got into the business of torturing detainees. I wasn't even trying to learn how America found out who was behind 9/11. I was attempting to explain why psychologists, alone among medical professionals, were participating in military interrogations at Guantánamo Bay and elsewhere.

Both army leaders and military psychologists say that psychologists help to make interrogations “safe, legal and effective.” But last fall, a psychologist named Jean Maria Arrigo came to see me with a disturbing claim about the American Psychological Association, her profession's 148,000-member trade group. Arrigo had sat on a specially convened A.P.A. task force that, in July 2005, had ruled that psychologists could assist in military interrogations, despite angry objections from many in the profession. The task force also determined that, in cases where international human-rights law conflicts with U.S. law, psychologists could defer to the much looser U.S. standards—what Arrigo called the “Rumsfeld definition” of humane treatment.



President George W. Bush delivers a speech acknowledging the existence of secret C.I.A. prisons such as those where Abu Zubaydah and Khalid Shaikh Mohammed were interrogated, September 2006. *Gerald Herbert/A.P. Photo.*

Arrigo and several others with her, including a representative from Physicians for Human Rights, had come to believe that the task force had been rigged—stacked with military members (6 of the 10 had ties to the armed services), monitored by observers with undisclosed conflicts of interest, and programmed to reach preordained conclusions.

One theory was that the A.P.A. had given its stamp of approval to military interrogations as part of a quid pro quo. In exchange, they suspected, the Pentagon was working to allow psychologists—who, unlike psychiatrists, are not medical doctors—to prescribe medication, dramatically increasing their income. (The military has championed modern-day psychology since World War II, and continues to be one of the largest single employers of psychologists through its network of veterans' hospitals. It also funded a prescription-drug training program for military psychologists in the early 90s.)

A.P.A. leaders deny any backroom deals and insist that psychologists have helped to stop the abuse of detainees. They say that the association will investigate any reports of ethical lapses by its members.

While there was no “smoking gun” amid the stack of documents Arrigo gave me, my reporting eventually led me to an even graver discovery. After a 10-month investigation comprising more than 70 interviews as well as a detailed review of public and confidential documents, I pieced together the account of the Abu Zubaydah interrogation that appears in this article. I also discovered that psychologists weren’t merely complicit in America’s aggressive new interrogation regime. Psychologists, working in secrecy, had actually designed the tactics and trained interrogators in them while on contract to the C.I.A.

Two psychologists in particular played a central role: James Elmer Mitchell, who was attached to the C.I.A. team that eventually arrived in Thailand, and his colleague Bruce Jessen. Neither served on the task force or are A.P.A. members. Both worked in a classified military training program known as SERE—for Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape—which trains soldiers to endure captivity in enemy hands. Mitchell and Jessen reverse-engineered the tactics inflicted on SERE trainees for use on detainees in the global war on terror, according to psychologists and others with direct knowledge of their activities. The C.I.A. put them in charge of training interrogators in the brutal techniques, including “waterboarding,” at its network of “black sites.” In a statement, Mitchell and Jessen said, “We are proud of the work we have done for our country.”

The agency had famously little experience in conducting interrogations or in eliciting “ticking time bomb” information from detainees. Yet, remarkably, it turned to Mitchell and Jessen, who were equally inexperienced and had no proof of their tactics’ effectiveness, say several of their former colleagues. Steve Kleinman, an Air Force Reserve colonel and expert in human-intelligence operations, says he finds it astonishing that the C.I.A. “chose two clinical psychologists who had no intelligence background whatsoever, who had never conducted an interrogation ... to do something that had never been proven in the real world.”

The tactics were a “voodoo science,” says Michael Rolince, former section chief of the F.B.I.’s International Terrorism Operations. According to a person familiar with the methods, the basic approach was to “break down [the detainees] through isolation, white noise, completely take away their ability to predict the future, create dependence on interrogators.”

Interrogators who were sent for classified training inevitably wound up in a Mitchell-Jessen “shop,” and some balked at their methods. Instead of the careful training touted by President Bush, some recruits allegedly received on-the-job training during brutal interrogations that effectively unfolded as live demonstrations.

Mitchell and Jessen’s methods were so controversial that, among colleagues, the reaction to their names alone became a litmus test of one’s attitude toward coercion and human rights. Their critics called them the “Mormon mafia” (a reference to their shared religion) and the “poster boys” (referring to the F.B.I.’s “most wanted” posters, which are where some thought their activities would land them).



Former director of central intelligence George Tenet, 2002. © Ron Sachs/CNP/Corbis.

The reversed SERE tactics they originated have come to shatter various American communities, putting law enforcement and intelligence gathering on a collision course, fostering dissent within the C.I.A., and sparking a war among psychologists over professional identity that has even led to a threat of physical violence at a normally staid A.P.A. meeting. The spread of the tactics—and the photographs of their wild misuse at Abu Ghraib—devastated America’s reputation in the Muslim world. All the while, Mitchell and Jessen have remained more or less behind the curtain, their almost messianic belief in the value of breaking down detainees permeating interrogations throughout the war effort.

“I think [Mitchell and Jessen] have caused more harm to American national security than they’ll ever understand,” says Kleinman.

The bitterest irony is that the tactics seem to have been adopted by interrogators throughout the U.S. military in part because of a myth that whipped across continents and jumped from the intelligence to the military communities: the false impression that reverse-engineered SERE tactics were the only thing that got Abu Zubaydah to talk.

Each branch of the U.S. military offers a variant of the SERE training curriculum. The course simulates the experience of being held prisoner by enemy forces who do not observe the Geneva Conventions. The program evolved after American G.I.’s captured during the Korean War made false confessions under torture. Sure enough, those in SERE training found that they would say anything to get the torment to stop.

During a typical three-week training course, participants endure waterboarding, forced nudity, extreme temperatures, sexual and religious ridicule, agonizing stress positions, and starvation-level rations. Some lose up to 15 pounds. “You’re not going to die, but you think you are,” says Rolince.

James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen played a key role in developing the Air Force’s SERE program, which was administered in Spokane, Washington. Dr. Bryce Lefever, command psychologist on the U.S.S. *Enterprise* and a former SERE trainer who worked with Mitchell and Jessen at the Fairchild Air Base, says he was waterboarded during his own training. “It was terrifying,” he remembers. “I said to myself, ‘They can’t kill me because it’s only an exercise.’ But you’re strapped to an inclined gurney and you’re in four-point restraint, your head is almost immobilized, and they pour water between your nose and your mouth, so if you’re likely to breathe, you’re going to get a lot of water. You go into an oxygen panic.”

SERE psychologists such as Mitchell and Jessen play two crucial roles. They screen the trainers who play interrogators, to ensure that they are stable personalities who aren’t likely to drift into sadism, and they function as psychic safety officers. If a trainer emerges from an exercise unable to smile, for example, he is viewed as “too into the problem,” says Dr. Lefever, and is likely to be removed.

In an ever more dangerous world, some SERE trainers realized that they could market their

expertise to corporations and government agencies that send executives and other employees overseas, and a survival-training industry sprang into being.

Mitchell's entry into private contracting began less than three months before September 11 with a scientific consulting company called Knowledge Works, L.L.C. He registered it in North Carolina with the help of another SERE psychologist he'd worked with at Fort Bragg, Dr. John Chin. Since then, he has formed several similar companies, including the Wizard Shop (which he renamed Mind Science) and What If, L.L.C.

In Spokane, several survival companies share space with Mitchell, Jessen & Associates. The firm's executive offices sit behind a locked door with a security code that the receptionist shields from view. There, Mitchell, Jessen maintains a Secure Compartmented Information Facility, or scif, for handling classified materials under C.I.A. guidelines, says a person familiar with the facility. But instead of training C.E.O.'s to survive capture, the company principally instructs interrogators on how to break down detainees.

The SERE methods it teaches are based on Communist interrogation techniques that were never designed to get good information. Their goal, says Kleinman, was to generate propaganda by getting beaten-down American hostages to make statements against U.S. interests.

The best and most reliable information comes from people who are relaxed and perceive little threat. "Why would you use evasive training tactics to elicit information?" says Dr. Michael Gelles, former chief psychologist of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

The SERE tactics aren't just morally and legally wrong, critics say; they're tactically wrong. They produce false leads and hazy memories. "[Mitchell and Jessen] argue, 'We can make people talk,'" says Kleinman. "I have one question. 'About what?'" As one military member who worked in the SERE community says, "Getting somebody to talk and getting someone to give you valid information are two very different things."

And yet, when it came time to extract intelligence from suspected al-Qaeda detainees, SERE experts became "the only other game in town," according to a report, "Educating Information, Interrogation: Science and Art," put out last December by the Intelligence Science Board of the National Defense Intelligence College.

Exactly how that happened remains unclear. Many people assume that Special Forces operatives looked around for interrogation methods, recalled their SERE training, and decided to try the techniques. But the introduction and spread of the tactics were more purposeful, and therefore "far more sinister," says John Sifton, a senior researcher at Human Rights Watch.

Mitchell and Jessen, Sifton says, offered a "patina of pseudo-science that made the C.I.A. and military officials think these guys were experts in unlocking the human mind. It's one thing to say, 'Take off the gloves.' It's another to say there was a science to it. SERE came in as the science."

The use of "scientific credentials in the service of cruel and unlawful practices" harkens back to the Cold War, according to Leonard Rubenstein, executive director of Physicians for Human Rights. Back then, mental-health professionals working with the C.I.A. used hallucinogenic drugs, hypnosis, and extreme sensory deprivation on unwitting subjects to develop mind-control techniques. "We really thought we learned this lesson—that ambition to help national security is no excuse for throwing out ethics and science," Rubenstein says.

Some of those who encountered Mitchell and Jessen at the annual conference of all the military's SERE programs were skeptical of their assertions. "Jim would make statements like, 'We know how people are responding to stress,'" one SERE researcher recalls. "He always said he would show us data, but it would never arrive."

In truth, many did not consider Mitchell and Jessen to be scientists. They possessed no data about the impact of SERE training on the human psyche, say former associates. Nor were they "operational psychologists," like the profilers who work for law enforcement. (Think of Jodie Foster's character in *The Silence of the Lambs*.) But they wanted to be, according to several former colleagues.

"It's a seductive role if you work with [elite] combat-type guys," says the military member who works in the SERE community. "There is this wannabe kind of phenomenon. You lose role identity."

Dr. Gelles, who had been at the forefront of trying to stop coercive interrogations at Guantánamo, calls it the "op-doc syndrome": "These SERE guys, who were essentially like school counselors, wanted to be in a position where they had the solution to the operational challenge. They cannot help themselves."

But in the incestuous world of the Special Forces, where all psychologists are referred to as "Doc" and revered as experts, "no one ever questions that you might not have a clue what you're talking about," says an intelligence expert who opposed the use of SERE tactics.

For a 2005 article in *The New Yorker* that raised the question of whether SERE tactics had been reverse-engineered, Jane Mayer asked Mitchell if he was a C.I.A. contractor. He refused to confirm or deny the claim. But the newly minted op-docs Mitchell and Jessen had been among the experts who gathered at a daylong workshop in Arlington, Virginia, in July 2003, to debate the effectiveness of truth serum and other coercive techniques. The conference, titled "Science of Deception: Integration of Practice and Theory," was funded by the C.I.A. and co-hosted by the American Psychological Association and the Rand Corporation. One of its organizers was Kirk Hubbard, then chief of the C.I.A.'s Research and Analysis Branch. Mitchell and Jessen were named on the attendance list as C.I.A. contractors.

A key participant said that, before the conference, Hubbard called and warned him not to publicly identify attendees from the C.I.A. or ask them what they do, saying, "These people have jobs where deception and interviewing is very important."

Hubbard, who recently retired from the C.I.A., told me when I called him at his home in Montana that he has "no use for liberals who think we should be soft on terrorists." Asked about the work of Mitchell and Jessen, he was silent for a long time, then said, "I can't tell you anything about that."

Mitchell left one clue to his activities in corporate records. In 2004, he filed a notice with North Carolina's secretary of state formally dissolving Knowledge Works. In it, he wrote, "All members of this LLC moved out of the state of NC in March 2002, and subsequently Knowledge Works, LLC ceased to do business 29 March 2002."

Abu Zubaydah had been captured in Pakistan the day before.

One of the first on-the-ground tests for Mitchell's theories was the interrogation of Zubaydah. When he and the other members of the C.I.A. team arrived in Thailand, they immediately put a stop to the efforts at rapport building (which would also yield the name of José Padilla, an American citizen and supposed al-Qaeda operative now on trial in Miami for conspiring to murder and maim people in a foreign country).

Mitchell had a tougher approach in mind. The C.I.A. interrogators explained that they were going to become Zubaydah's "God." If he refused to cooperate, he would lose his clothes and his comforts one by one. At the safe house, the interrogators isolated him. They would enter his room just once a day to say, "You know what I want," then leave again.

As Zubaydah clammed up, Mitchell seemed to conclude that Zubaydah would talk only when he had been reduced to complete helplessness and dependence. With that goal in mind, the C.I.A. team began building a coffin in which they planned to bury the detainee alive.

A furor erupted over the legality of this move, which does not appear to have been carried out. (Every human-rights treaty and American law governing the treatment of prisoners prohibits death threats and simulated killings.) But the C.I.A. had a ready rejoinder: the methods had already been approved by White House lawyers. Mitchell was accompanied by another psychologist, Dr. R. Scott Shumate, then chief operational psychologist for the C.I.A.'s counterterrorism center. Surprisingly, Shumate opposed the extreme methods and packed his bags in disgust, leaving before the most dire tactics had commenced. He later told associates that it had been a mistake for the C.I.A. to hire Mitchell.

With Shumate gone, the interrogators were free to unleash what they called the "SERE school" techniques. These included blasting the Red Hot Chili Peppers at top volume, stripping Zubaydah naked, and making his room so cold that his body turned blue, as *The New York Times* reported last year.

Ultimately, the F.B.I. pulled its agents from the scene and ruled that they could not be present any time coercive tactics were used, says Michael Rolince. It was a momentous decision that effectively gave the C.I.A. complete control of interrogations.

While it was the F.B.I.'s rapport-building that had prompted Zubaydah to talk, the C.I.A. would go on to claim credit for breaking Zubaydah, and celebrate Mitchell as a psychological wizard who held the key to getting hardened terrorists to talk. Word soon spread that Mitchell and Jessen had been awarded a medal by the C.I.A. for their advanced interrogation techniques. While the claim is impossible to confirm, what matters is that others believed it. The reputed success of the tactics was "absolutely in the ether," says one Pentagon civilian who worked on detainee policy.

In response to detailed questions from *Vanity Fair*, Mitchell and Jessen said in a statement, "The

advice we have provided, and the actions we have taken have been legal and ethical. We resolutely oppose torture. Under no circumstances have we ever endorsed, nor would we endorse, the use of interrogation methods designed to do physical or psychological harm."

The C.I.A. would not comment on Mitchell's and Jessen's role. However, a C.I.A. spokesman said the agency's interrogation program was implemented lawfully and had produced vital intelligence.

Dr. Shumate, who now works in the Defense Department as director of the Behavioral Sciences Directorate within the Counterintelligence Field Activity (CIFA), did not respond to interview requests. But a CIFA spokesman said that Dr. Shumate, who served on the A.P.A.'s task force, supported the association's "guidelines that psychologists conduct themselves in an ethical and professional manner regardless of mission assignment or activity."

Colonel Brittain P. Mallow, 51, was the ultimate straight-up soldier: blue-eyed and poker-faced, with a winning if seldom-seen smile. After 9/11, he was put in command of the Defense Department's Criminal Investigative Task Force (C.I.T.F.), which was charged with assessing which detainees at Guantánamo Bay should be prosecuted. Mallow, who has an advanced degree in Middle East studies and a working knowledge of Arabic, foresaw that the interrogations would be culturally difficult. So his team called on Dr. Michael Gelles, of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, to form a Behavioral Science Consultation Team (BSCT, pronounced "biscuit") of non-clinical psychologists. Its mission was to help establish rapport with detainees.

By the summer of 2002, Mallow was hearing disturbing reports of blasting music and strobe lights coming from the interrogation booths. This was the work of Task Force 170, the Pentagon unit in charge of intelligence gathering in the Southern Command. According to one of Mallow's deputies, the members of Task Force 170 considered the C.I.T.F. to be soft on detainees. They were "hell-bent" on using harsher tactics, another C.I.T.F. official says.

"There were a number of claims that coercive methods had achieved results" during "interrogations in other places," Mallow says. The other C.I.T.F. official recalls that a Task Force 170 officer told him, "Other people are using this stuff, and they're getting praised." (A Pentagon spokesman said all questioning at Guantánamo is lawful and falls within the limits set by the army field manual.)

At a Pentagon meeting where Mallow protested the methods, he says that a civilian official named

Marshall Billingslea told him, "You don't know what you're talking about." Billingslea insisted that the coercive approach worked.

Just months after Zubaydah's interrogation, the myth of Mitchell and Jessen's success in breaking him had made its way from Thailand to Guantánamo to Washington, and the reversed SERE tactics had become associated with recognition and inside knowledge.

In late spring, Mallow met with Major General Michael E. Dunlavey, who was about to take over as commander of the newly combined JTF-GTMO 170 (Joint Task Force Guantánamo). Mallow briefed Dunlavey on his BSCT team's rapport-building efforts and offered him full access to the psychologists. About a month later, he claims, Dunlavey had appropriated the acronym but set up a separate BSCT team, cobbled together in part from clinical psychologists already at Guantánamo. Before activating the new BSCT team, Dunlavey sent its members to Fort Bragg for a four-day SERE-school workshop. (Dunlavey, now a juvenile-court judge in Erie, Pennsylvania, did not respond to requests for comment.)

On December 2, 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld granted JTF-GTMO 170's request to apply coercive tactics in interrogations. The only techniques he rejected were waterboarding and death threats. Within a week, the task force had drafted a five-page, typo-ridden document entitled "JTF GTMO 'SERE' Interrogation Standard Operating Procedure."

The document, which has never before been made public, states, "The premise behind this is that the interrogation tactics used at US military SERE schools are appropriate for use in real-world interrogations" and "can be used to break real detainees."

The document is divided into four categories: "Degradation," "Physical Debilitation," "Isolation and Monopolization [sic] of Perception," and "Demonstrated Omnipotence." The tactics include "slaps," "forceful removal of detainees' clothing," "stress positions," "hooding," "manhandling," and "walling," which entails grabbing the detainee by his shirt and hoisting him against a specially constructed wall.

"Note that all tactics are strictly non-lethal," the memo states, adding, "IT IS CRITICAL THAT INTERROGATORS DO 'CROSS THE LINE' WHEN UTILIZING THE TACTICS." The word "NOT" was presumably omitted by accident.

It is not clear whether the guidelines were ever formally adopted. But the instructions suggest that the military command wanted psychologists to be involved so they could lead interrogators up to the line, then stop them from crossing it.

In a bizarre mixture of solicitude and sadism, the memo details how to calibrate the infliction of harm. It dictates that the "[insult] slap will be initiated no more than 12–14 inches (or one shoulder width) from the detainee's face ... to preclude any tendency to wind up or uppercut." And interrogators are advised that, when stripping off a prisoner's clothes, "tearing motions shall be downward to prevent pulling the detainee off balance." In short, the SERE-inspired interrogations would be violent. And therefore, psychologists were needed to help make these more dangerous interrogations safer.

Soon, the reverse-engineered SERE tactics that had been designed by Mitchell and Jessen, road-tested in the C.I.A.'s black sites, and adopted in Guantánamo were being used in Iraq as well. One intelligence officer recalled witnessing a live demonstration of the tactics. The detainee was on his knees in a room painted black and forced to hold an iron bar in his extended hands while interrogators slapped him repeatedly. The man was then taken into a bunker, where he was stripped naked, blindfolded, and shackled. He was ordered to be left that way for 12 hours.

At the Abu Ghraib prison, military policemen on the night shift adopted the tactics to hideous effect. In what amounted to a down-market parody of the praise heaped on Mitchell and Jessen, Specialist Charles A. Graner Jr., a former prison guard from Pennsylvania, received a commendation for his work "softening up" detainees, according to the documentary *The Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*. He appears repeatedly in photographs, smiling and giving thumbs-up before human pyramids of naked detainees. In 2005, he was convicted on charges of abuse. In their statement, Mitchell and Jessen said that they were "appalled by reports" of alleged abuses at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo and had not been involved with them in any way.

Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia recently made his case for heavy-handed interrogation tactics via a surprisingly current pop-culture reference. "Jack Bauer saved Los Angeles," he told a panel of judges, referring to the torturer protagonist of the Fox series *24*. "Are you going to convict Jack Bauer?"

In the real world, however, it is increasingly clear that the U.S. has sacrificed its global image for tactics that are at best ineffective. "We are not aware of any convincing evidence that coercive

tactics work better than other methods of obtaining actionable intelligence," said Senator Carl Levin, Democrat of Michigan.

Under Levin's leadership, the Senate Armed Services Committee has been probing the military's alleged mistreatment of detainees and intends to hold hearings. In a statement to *Vanity Fair*, Levin says that he finds the reported use of SERE tactics in interrogations "very troubling," and that his committee is looking specifically at "the accountability of officials for actions or failures to act."

Mitchell and Jessen have become a focus of the investigation. In June, the online news magazine *Salon* reported that the Defense Department, responding to a request from Levin's committee, ordered top Pentagon officials to preserve any documents mentioning the two psychologists or their company in Spokane.

Meanwhile, business appears to be booming at Mitchell, Jessen & Associates. It has 120 employees and specializes in "understanding, predicting, and improving performance in high-risk and extreme situations," according to a recruitment ad at a recent job fair for people with top security clearances.

The principals of Mitchell, Jessen & Associates are raking in money. According to people familiar with their compensation, they get paid more than \$1,000 per day plus expenses, tax free, for their overseas work. It beats military pay. Mitchell has built his dream house in Florida. He also purchased a BMW through one of his companies. "Taxpayers are paying at least half a million dollars a year for these two knuckleheads to do voodoo," says one of the people familiar with their pay arrangements.

Last December, the nation's best-known interrogation experts joined together to release a report, called "Educing Information," that sought to comprehensively address the question of which methods work in interrogations.

Scott Shumate served as an adviser to the report, which concluded that there is no evidence that reverse-engineered SERE tactics work, or that SERE psychologists make for capable interrogators. One chapter, authored by Kleinman, concludes: "Employment of resistance interrogators—whether as consultants or as practitioners—is an example of the proverbial attempt to place the square peg in the round hole."

But it is one of the features of our war on terror that myths die hard. Just think of the al-Qaeda–Iraq connection, or Saddam Hussein’s W.M.D. In late 2005, as Senator John McCain was pressing the Bush administration to ban torture techniques, one of the nation’s top researchers of stress in SERE trainees claims to have received a call from Samantha Ravitch, the deputy assistant for national security in Vice President Dick Cheney’s office. She wanted to know if the researcher had found any evidence that uncontrollable stress would make people more likely to talk.

Katherine Eban is a Brooklyn-based journalist and Alicia Patterson fellow who writes about issues of public health and homeland security. Her book, *Dangerous Doses: A True Story of Cops, Counterfeiters, and the Contamination of America’s Drug Supply*, was excerpted in the May 2005 issue of *Vanity Fair*.



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