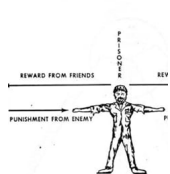


By Jason Leopold and Jeffrey Kaye

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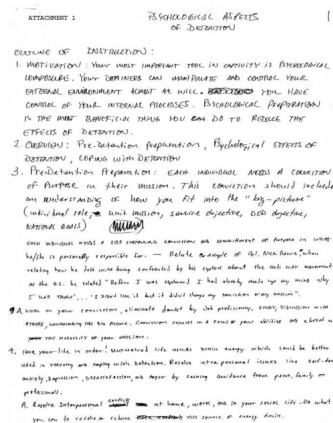
*This diagram was included in a paper written by Dr. Bruce Jessen's and shows his view of the conflicting psychological pressures bearing down on a prisoner who is held captive by an enemy. ( [Click here to view full image.](#) )*

***Dr. Bruce Jessen's handwritten notes describe some of the torture techniques that were used to "exploit" "war on terror" detainees in custody of the CIA and Department of Defense.***

Bush administration officials have long asserted that the torture techniques used on "war on terror" detainees were utilized as a last resort in an effort to gain actionable intelligence to thwart pending terrorist attacks against the United States and its interests abroad.

But the handwritten notes obtained exclusively by Truthout drafted two decades ago by Dr. John Bruce Jessen, the psychologist who was under contract to the CIA and credited as being one of the architects of the government's top-secret torture program, tell a dramatically different story about the reasons detainees were brutalized and it was not just about obtaining

intelligence. Rather, as Jessen's notes explain, torture was used to "exploit" detainees, that is, to break them down physically and mentally, in order to get them to "collaborate" with government authorities. Jessen's notes emphasize how a "detainer" uses the stresses of detention to produce the appearance of compliance in a prisoner.



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Indeed, a [report](#) released in 2009 by the Senate Armed Services Committee about the treatment of detainees in US custody noted that torture techniques approved by the Bush administration were based on survival training exercises US military personnel were taught by individuals like Jessen if they were captured by an enemy regime and subjected to "illegal exploitation" by their captors. The committee's report said Jessen wrote a "Draft Exploitation Plan" in April 2002 the US military used at Guantanamo and at prison facilities in Iraq and Afghanistan. Jessen also co-authored a memo in February 2002 on "Prisoner Handling Recommendations" at Guantanamo. Both of those documents remain classified.

Jessen's notes, prepared for an Air Force survival training course that he later "reverse engineered" when he helped design the Bush administration's torture program, go into far greater detail than the Armed Services Committee's report in explaining how prisoners would be broken down physically and psychologically by their captors. The notes say survival training students could "combat interrogation and torture" if they are captured by an enemy regime by undergoing intense training exercises, using "cognitive" and "exposure techniques" to develop "stress inoculation." [Click [here](#) to download a PDF file of Jessen's handwritten notes. Click [here](#) to download a zip file of Jessen's notes in typewritten form.]

The documents stand as the first piece of hard evidence to surface in nine years that further explains the psychological aspects of the Bush administration's torture program and the rationale for subjecting detainees to so-called "enhanced interrogation techniques."

Jessen's notes were provided to Truthout by retired Air Force Capt. Michael Kearns, a "master" SERE instructor and [decorated](#) veteran who has previously held high-ranking positions within the Air Force Headquarters Staff and Department of Defense (DoD).

Kearns and his boss, Roger Aldrich, the head of the Air Force Intelligence's Special Survival Training Program (SSTP), based out of Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, Washington, hired Jessen in May 1989. Kearns, who was head of operations at SSTP and trained thousands of service members, said Jessen was brought into the program due to an increase in the number of new survival training courses being taught and "the fact that it required psychological expertise on hand in a full-time basis."

#### **"Special Mission Units"**

Jessen, then the chief of Psychology Service at the US Air Force Survival School, immediately started to work directly with Kearns on "a new course for special mission units (SMUs), which had as its goal individual resistance to terrorist exploitation."

The course, known as SV-91, was developed for the Survival Evasion Resistance Escape (SERE) branch of the US Air Force Intelligence Agency, which acted as the Executive Agent Action Office for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Jessen's notes formed the basis for one part of SV-91, "Psychological Aspects of Detention."



*Capt. Michael Kearns (left) and Dr. Bruce Jessen at Fort Bragg's Nick Rowe SERE Training Center, 1989 (Photo courtesy of retired Air Force Capt. Michael Kearns)*

Special mission units fall under the guise of the DoD's clandestine Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) and engage in a wide-range of highly classified counterterrorist and covert operations, or "special missions," around the world, hundreds of who were personally trained by Kearns. The SV-91 course Jessen and Kearns were developing back in 1989 would later become known as "Special Survival for Special Mission Units."

Before the inception of SV-91, the primary SERE course was SV-80, or Basic Combat Survival School for Resistance to Interrogation, which is where Jessen formerly worked. When Jessen was hired to work on SV-91, the vacancy at SV-80 was filled by psychologist Dr. James Mitchell, who was also contracted by the CIA to work at the agency's top-secret black site prisons in Europe employing SERE torture techniques, such as waterboarding, against detainees.

While they were still under contract to the CIA, the two men formed the "consulting" firm [Mitchell, Jessen & Associates](#) in March 2005. The "governing persons" of the company included Kearns' former boss, Aldrich, SERE contractor David Tate, Joseph Matarazzo, a former president of the American Psychological Association and Randall Spivey, the ex-chief of Operations, Policy and Oversight Division of JPRA.

Mitchell, Jessen & Associates' articles of incorporation have been "inactive" since October 22, 2009 and the business is now listed as "[dissolved](#)," according to Washington state's Secretary of State [website](#).

### **Lifting the "Veil of Secrecy"**

Kearns was one of only two officers within DoD qualified to teach all three SERE-related courses within SSTEP on a worldwide basis, according to a copy of a 1989 letter written Aldrich, who [nominated him](#) officer of the year.

He said he decided to come forward because he is outraged that Jessen used their work to help design the Bush administration's torture program.

"I think it's about time for SERE to come out from behind the veil of secrecy if we are to progress as a moral nation of laws," Kearns said during a wide-ranging interview with Truthout. "To take this survival training program and turn it into some form of nationally sanctioned, purposeful program for the extraction of information, or to apply exploitation, is in total contradiction to human morality, and defies basic logic. When I first learned about interrogation, at basic intelligence training school, I read about Hans Scharff, a Nazi interrogator who later wrote an article for Argosy Magazine titled 'Without Torture.' That's what I was taught - torture doesn't work."

What stands out in Jessen's notes is that he believed torture was often used to produce false confessions. That was the end result after one high-value detainee who was tortured in early 2002 confessed to having information proving a link between the late Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, [according to one former Bush administration official](#) .

It was later revealed, however, that the prisoner, Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, had simply provided his captors a false confession so they would stop torturing him. Jessen appeared to be concerned with protecting the US military against falling victim to this exact kind of physical and psychological pressure in a hostile detention environment, recognizing that it would lead to, among other things, false confessions.

In a paper Jessen wrote accompanying his notes, "Psychological Advances in Training to Survive Captivity, Interrogation and Torture," which was prepared for the symposium: "Advances in Clinical Psychological Support of National Security Affairs, Operational Problems in the Behavioral Sciences Course," he suggested that additional "research" should be undertaken to determine "the measurability of optimum stress levels in training students to resist captivity."

"The avenues appear inexhaustible" for further research in human exploitation, Jessen wrote.

Such "research" appears to have been the main underpinning of the Bush administration's torture program. The experimental nature of these interrogation methods used on detainees

held at Guantanamo and at CIA black site prisons have been noted by military and intelligence officials. The Armed Services Committee report cited a statement from Col. Britt Mallow, the commander of the Criminal Investigative Task Force (CITF), who noted that Guantanamo officials Maj. Gen. Mike Dunleavy and Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller used the term "battle lab" to describe the facility, meaning "that interrogations and other procedures there were to some degree experimental, and their lessons would benefit [the Department of Defense] in other places."

What remains a mystery is why Jessen took a defensive survival training course and assisted in turning it into an offensive torture program.

Truthout attempted to reach Jessen over the past two months for comment, but we were unable to track him down. Messages left for him at a security firm in Alexandria, Virginia he has been affiliated with were not returned and phone numbers listed for him in Spokane were disconnected.

#### **A New Emphasis on Terrorism**

SV-91 was developed to place a new emphasis on terrorism as SERE-related courses pertaining to the cold war, such as SV-83, Special Survival for Sensitive Reconnaissance Operations (SRO), whose students flew secret missions over the Soviet Union, Eastern Bloc, and other communist countries, were being scaled back.



