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The torture practices used in interrogations of al-Qaida prisoners were not developed by government officials in Washington, but by private security experts. In return for a daily consulting fee, they personally supervised the program at the CIA's secret prisons from the very beginning.

James Mitchell's new life begins with the same ritual every morning: He goes jogging, wearing Adidas shorts and a black tank top, his iPod in his ear. Then he gets into his luxury SUV and drives back to luxury home on Lake Vienna Drive in Pasco County, Florida.

The hacienda-style house, with a natural stone façade, columned walkways and palm trees in front of the door is brand-new. Mitchell has just had it built, in the midst of an upscale, gated community.

The freestanding garage to the right of the house is big enough for three or four cars, and a mountain bike is mounted to the back of the SUV. Mitchell, a tanned man in his late 50s with silver-gray hair, a neatly trimmed beard and trendy sunglasses, spends two hours a day exercising. In fact, exercise plays an important role in his new life under Florida's blue skies.

Mitchell is the man who, on the behalf of the administration of former President George W. Bush, developed the rules of the program that was somewhat shamefacedly referred to as "special interrogation techniques" and was authorized by the president in the summer of 2002. In truth, Mitchell developed a torture manual. His client was the CIA. The American foreign intelligence agency has engaged in its own share of dubious practices over the years, activities it initially treated as praiseworthy and would later come to bitterly regret. But now it has become clear that the CIA, ironically enough, outsourced its torture practices in interrogations during the darkest years of the Bush administration. It entrusted the development and supervision of these interrogations to a private security firm run by James Mitchell and his partner, Bruce Jessen.

The two psychologists, who had never even conducted an interrogation before -- in other words, two amateurs -- were largely responsible for developing the CIA's prisoner interrogation program. The recently published report of the Committee on Armed Services of the US Senate came out with new proof and details about this collaboration, ABC News succeeded in filming both Jessen and Mitchell who both refused to answer any questions concerning their past saying that they were not allow to speak about it.

WASHINGTON, DECEMBER 2001

Three months after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Bush drove the Taliban out of Afghanistan and assigned the task of interrogating senior al-Qaida prisoners to the CIA. The agency, which had little experience with interrogation, turned to officials at the Defense Department for help. They, in turn, contacted the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency, a division of the Defense Department responsible for Americans captured abroad and the US Army's secret SERE training program.

SERE, which stands for Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape, is a program designed to prepare US soldiers, especially pilots, for situations after being taken prisoner. In various training seminars, they learn how to improve their ability to withstand mistreatment by the enemy and, in the worst case, torture.

Most of the methods are based on experiences from the Korean War. During SERE training, US soldiers are stripped naked, exposed to extreme temperatures and loud music and thrown against walls. They are kept in so-called stress positions for hours and were also subjected to waterboarding, at least until 2007.

The CIA request for possible new interrogation methods also reached James Mitchell. He had worked as a military psychologist for years and had trained soldiers in the SERE program. Mitchell deserves a lot of credit in this area, says US Air Force Colonel Steven Kleinman. "Had Dr. Mitchell continued his work in SERE training, his considerable contribution to that noble effort would have served as a lasting legacy to him.," Kleinman said. "Unfortunately, there wasn't anyone at the higher echelons in the Intelligence Community to recognize that his involvement in interrogations would be well outside his area of expertise. They should have stopped it before it began."

Getting Involved in the War on Terror

When Mitchell learned of the inquiry coming from Washington, he had already been retired from the military for six months. For the first time in his life, he had founded his own, small company: Knowledge Works, a consulting company, at least on paper. He was clearly happy to accept new customers and contracts.

SPOKANE, WASHINGTON, EARLY 2002.

Around the beginning of 2002, Mitchell contacted an old colleague who was still working in the SERE training program as Senior Psychologist. Bruce Jessen was in his early 50s at the time and married with one son. Both Mitchell and Jessen are Mormons. And both men, say colleagues, are deeply religious and ardent patriots -- like so many Mormons.

Mitchell asked Jessen for help. He wanted him to review the al-Qaida resistance training methods. Afterwards, the two men wrote an initial recommendation of measures designed to break the resistance of al-Qaida prisoners. On Feb. 12, 2002 they sent the paper to JPRA Commander Colonel John "Randy" Moulton who forwarded it to his chain of command at JFCOM.

In April, they presented their first draft, "The Exploitation Draft Plan," of a new interrogation program to the CIA and proposed that an "exploitation facility" should be established. The draft already included some of the methods that have since come to light, including sleep deprivation, the use of physical violence and waterboarding. According to someone who was involved in the program at the time, both Mitchell and Jessen were eager to get involved in the War on Terror as advisors to the CIA. And the CIA? According to the informant, it was seeking scientific and

psychological justification for what it intended to do.

FAISALABAD, PAKISTAN, MARCH 28, 2002

At 2 a.m., FBI agents and Pakistani police units raided a two-story house on the outskirts of the city, arresting Abu Zubaydah, an al-Qaida logistics expert. The Americans had their most important prisoner to date. At the time, they believed that Abu Zubaydah was the number-four man in the al-Qaida hierarchy.

The arrest of Abu Zubaydah was the source of great nervousness in Washington. "Now that we had an undoubted resource in our hands -- the highest-ranking al-Qaida official captured to date -- we opened discussions within the National Security Council as to how to handle him, since holding and interrogating large numbers of al-Qaida operatives has never been part of our plan," former CIA Director George Tenet later wrote in his memoir. "We wondered what we could legitimately do to get that information."

A number of meetings and presentations followed, attended by Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and CIA Director Tenet and his deputy. Tenet explained that, after careful study, the CIA had concluded that the only way to obtain the details of the terrorist organization's future plans from al-Qaida fanatics was to use the SERE methods. Tenet assured the group that these interrogation practices had already been tested in the training of thousands of Americans.

But someone should have told the Washington politicians about the many warnings the Defense Department had received from half a dozen SERE trainers. In a letter written in December, Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Baumgartner, who oversaw SERE training, had already requested that the program's methods should not be used in interrogations. Baumgartner noted that they were "less reliable" and could in fact achieve the opposite of the intended effect, that is, increase a prisoner's resistance. He also warned they would have an "intolerable public and political backlash when discovered."

On March 29, 2002, a day after the Zubaydah arrest, James Mitchell closed Knowledge Works, the company he had just founded. He and Bruce Jessen, who would resign from military service a few months later, founded a new company, Mitchell Jessen & Associates. The men became

contractors for the CIA, charging a rate of \$1,000 (€746) a day, not including special fees.

CIA SECRET PRISON IN THAILAND, APRIL 2002

Only a few days after his arrest, Zubaydah, a Palestinian born in Saudi Arabia, was flown to a CIA secret prison in Thailand, accompanied by FBI agents. One of the FBI men, Ali Soufan, a native of Lebanon and a Muslim who speaks fluent Arabic, moved to the United States in 1987. In 2000, he was involved in an investigation of al-Qaeda's role in the attack on the *USS Cole*, an American destroyer, in Yemen.

Soufan, in his early 30s at the time, was an advocate of the traditional FBI strategy known as "rapport building," which is based on the notion that an interrogation can only produce the desired results once a rapport has been developed with the prisoner. Soufan dressed the fresh gunshot wounds Zubaydah had received during the arrest. He told Zubaydah that he even knew the nickname he had been given by his mother.

For seven years, Soufan remained silent about his role in the interrogation in Thailand. But last week he decided to give an exclusive interview to *Newsweek* because "I was in the middle of this, and it's not true that these [aggressive] techniques were effective."

Soufan showed Zubaydah photos of al-Qaida members. When he saw a photo of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the prisoner identified him as the man who had planned and organized the Sept. 11 attacks. Later the Bush administration -- with no justification whatsoever -- would celebrate this piece of information from the FBI interrogation as a significant breakthrough and evidence of the effectiveness of its new interrogation techniques.

A few days later, CIA agents arrived in Thailand. They had brought along James Mitchell, the architect of the new interrogation methods. Suddenly the tone changed dramatically. Mitchell gave orders to intensify Zubaydah's treatment if he did not respond to questions.

One day Soufan, seeing that the prisoner was naked, threw him a towel. Later on, he and Mitchell argued heatedly over the prisoner's treatment. "We're the United States of America,

and we don't do that kind of thing," Soufan recalls shouting at Mitchell. He also asked Mitchell who had authorized him to use the aggressive methods. Mitchell responded that he had received approval from the "highest levels" in Washington. All this happened in April 2002, four months before the Bush administration issued its first torture memorandum to legally justify the interrogation techniques.

The FBI finally broke with the CIA on the day Soufan discovered a wooden box that looked like a coffin. Was it meant to be used for a mock burial? Soufan called his superior in Washington. The then FBI Director Robert Mueller decided that his staff would no longer take part in these interrogations and ordered Soufan and the rest of the FBI- team to return to Washington. Mitchell and the CIA had free rein from then on.

Zubaydah later told Red Cross staff that he had been repeatedly locked into the box, where he had had difficulty breathing. He said he had also been thrown against a wall repeatedly, prevented from sleeping, doused in ice-cold water and subjected to extremely loud music. He was waterboarded 83 times.

"I was told during this period," he said years later, "that I was one of the first to receive these interrogation techniques, so no rules applied. It felt like they were experimenting and trying out techniques to be used later on other people."

Zubaydah was Mitchell's laboratory experiment. The psychologist allegedly told FBI agents who were present that Zubaydah had to be kept in a cage like a dog, and that it was indeed like an experiment. If dogs were subjected to electroshocks, Mitchell said, they too would give up in the end.

For a short time, the interrogations of Abu Zubaydah were the most well documented of all interrogations. The CIA once had 92 videotapes of the interrogations, which included waterboarding. But 90 of the videos were destroyed in November 2005. This Wednesday, however, FBI agent Soufan is scheduled to testify before the US Senate Judiciary Committee.

SPOKANE, WASHINGTON, APRIL 2009

Business is still going well for Mitchell Jessen & Associates. The company now has 120 employees, and most of them have security clearances at levels normally reserved for government employees. Many former members of the SERE program now work for the company, which now occupies two floors of an office building in downtown Spokane, including the top floor. It is bugproof and equipped with special, high-security doors -- a standard the CIA requires from its civilian contractors.

Abu Zubaydah's attorney, Brent Mickum, plans to file a civil suit against Mitchell and Jessen, unless US President Barack Obama chooses to file criminal charges against the contractors.

When questioned by journalists recently, Mitchell said that he would be happy to talk about these issues, but that a confidentiality agreement he had signed prevents him from doing so.

Translated from the German by Christopher Sultan