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Communist China inspired interrogations at Guantanamo

Methods obtained false confessions from U.S. prisoners

By SCOTT SHANE
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WASHINGTON — The military trainers who came to Guantanamo Bay in December 2002 based an entire interrogation class on a chart showing the effects of “coercive management techniques” for possible use on prisoners, including “sleep deprivation,” “prolonged constraint” and “exposure.”

What the trainers did not say, and may not have known, was that their chart had been copied verbatim from a 1957 Air Force study of Chinese communist techniques used during the Korean War to obtain confessions, many of them false, from American prisoners.

The recycled chart is the latest and most vivid evidence of the way communist interrogation methods that the United

States long described as torture became the basis for interrogations both by the military at the base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and by the CIA.

Some methods were used against a small number of prisoners at Guantanamo before 2005, when Congress banned the use of coercion by the military. The CIA is still authorized by President Bush to use a number of secret “alternative” interrogation methods.

Several Guantanamo documents, including the chart outlining coercive methods, were made public at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on June 17 that examined how such tactics came to be employed.

But committee investigators were not aware of the chart’s source in the half-century-old journal article, a connection pointed out to *The New York Times* by an independent expert on interrogation who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The 1957 article from which the chart was copied was titled “Communist Attempts to Elicit False Confessions From the Air

Force Prisoners of War” and written by Alfred D. Biderman, a sociologist then working for the Air Force, who died in 2003. Biderman had interviewed American prisoners returning from North Korea, some of whom had been filmed by their Chinese interrogators confessing to germ warfare and other atrocities.

Those orchestrated confessions led to allegations that the American prisoners had been “brainwashed” and provoked the military to revamp its training to give some military personnel a taste of the enemies’ harsh methods to inoculate them against quick capitulation if captured.

In 2002, the training program, known as SERE, for Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape, became a source of interrogation methods both for the CIA and the military.

In what critics describe as a remarkable case of historical amnesia, officials who drew on the SERE program appear to have been unaware that it had been created as a result of concern about false confessions by American prisoners.

AN EXCERPT FROM THE CHART

This is one of eight “Communist Coercive Methods for Eliciting Individual Compliance”

GENERAL METHOD

Induced debilitation; exhaustion

EFFECTS

Weakens mental and physical ability to resist

VARIANTS

Semi-starvation

Exposure

Exploitation of wounds; induced illness

Sleep deprivation

Prolonged constraint

Prolonged interrogation or forced writing

Overexertion

Source: “Communist Attempts to Elicit False Confessions from the Air Force Prisoners of War” by Albert Biderman