

June 21, 2007

Sharon Brehm, Ph.D.
President
American Psychological Association

Dear President Brehm:

We write to you as the principal authors of the June 6, 2007 [Open Letter to President Sharon Brehm of the American Psychological Association](#), now signed by over 350 psychologists. Colonel Larry James has written a letter to you objecting to statements in the Open Letter.

To be clear, the Open Letter simply reproduces information that has long been on the public record. Principally, we drew upon the Pentagon's Office of Inspector General [OIG] revelations that BSCT psychologists were involved in SERE-based interrogation methods at Guantánamo, and on other government documents, that Colonel James, reporting to Major General Geoffrey Miller, had command responsibility for the BSCTs during the period documented in the OIG's report ([Review of DoD-Directed Investigations of Detainee Abuse](#)).

These facts, which Colonel James did not refute in his letter, raise serious and valid questions about the role of psychology and psychologists in abusive interrogations. (In this case, the application "abusive" to these interrogation tactics comes from the OIG report.) It would indeed be irresponsible for those of us in the APA to leave these and many other questions unanswered. As the open letter acknowledges, we do not know precisely what role(s) Colonel James or other military/intelligence psychologists played in the abusive interrogation regime documented by numerous sources over the past half decade, and which, we cannot emphasize enough, have now been definitively confirmed by the Department of Defense's own Inspector General based on years of internal Pentagon investigations.

The facts in the public record speak for themselves, highlighting the continued need for an independent inquiry by Congress and the APA itself.

In that letter we stated:

"Colonel Larry James, a second PENS member, "was the Chief Psychologist for the Joint Intelligence Group at GTMO, Cuba" (PENS Task Force member biographies) starting in January 2003. Col. Larry James has often been cited by Gerald Koocher, Stephen Behnke, and others, as the one who 'cleaned up' Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib. The OIG report, however, makes it clear that Guantánamo BSCTs played an essential role in transforming SERE techniques into standard operating interrogation procedure; that the Commander of Guantánamo detainee operations requested official approval for the use of these torture techniques in October, 2002; and that permission was granted by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld in December 2002. Additionally, as stated in his PENS biography, in 2003 James "was the Chief Psychologist for the Joint Intelligence Group at GTMO, Cuba." In 2004, James was Director, Behavioral Science Unit, Joint Interrogation and Debriefing Center at Abu

Ghraib. It should be noted that that in 2004, according to many sources, Gen. Geoffrey Miller, Guantánamo Commander, too, went from Guantánamo to Iraq, and brought the SERE techniques with him. James was the commander of the BSCTs at the time the FBI and other law enforcement agents were reporting that severe abuses were occurring at Guantánamo. The FBI and other Criminal Investigative Task Force agents reporting these abuses referred to them as "SERE" and "counter-resistance" tactics in documents obtained by the ACLU under the Freedom of Information Act."

In his reply, Colonel James states that he was always opposed to torture. He asserts:

"I strongly object to, have never used, and will never use torture, cruel, or abusive treatment or punishment of any kind, for any reason, in any setting."

He further states:

"I do not use nor have I ever used 'SERE' techniques in any aspect of my work related to interrogations. Dr. Morgan Banks has emphasized repeatedly that in addition to being unethical, using a 'SERE' approach in an interrogation would be counterproductive to obtaining useful information. I strongly suspect that using a 'SERE' approach to an interrogation would yield data worthless for investigative and destructive for adjudicatory purposes."

The OIG report, which should be read by all psychologists, documents in detail the central role of SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape) techniques in the development of interrogation doctrine at Guantanamo:

"Counterresistance techniques taught by the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency [the agency responsible for SERE training] contributed to the development of interrogation policy at the U.S. Southern Command [i.e., Guantanamo]." OIG Report, p. 24)

"[These] Counterresistance techniques were introduced because personnel believed that interrogation methods used were no longer effective in obtaining useful information from some detainees." (OIG Report, p. 24)

"JTF-170 [the command overseeing interrogations at Guantánamo] requested that Joint Personnel Recovery Agency instructors be sent to Guantánamo to instruct interrogators in SERE counterresistance interrogation techniques. SERE instructors from Fort Bragg responded to Guantánamo requests for instructors trained in the use of SERE interrogation resistance techniques" (OIG Report, p. 26).

Further, the OIG report clarifies the central role of military psychologists in this process:

"On September 16, 2002, the Army Special Operations Command and the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency co-hosted a **SERE psychologist** conference at Fort Bragg for JTF-170 interrogation personnel. The Army's **Behavioral Science Consultation Team** [BSCT] from Guantánamo Bay also attended the conference. Joint Personnel Recovery Agency personnel briefed JTF-170 representatives on the exploitation techniques and methods used in resistance (to interrogation) training at SERE schools. The JTF-170 personnel understood that they were to become familiar with

SERE training and be capable of determining which SERE information and techniques might be useful in interrogations at Guantánamo. Guantánamo **Behavioral Science Consultation Team** personnel understood that they were to review documentation and standard operating procedures for SERE training in developing the standard operating procedure for the JTF-170, if the command approved those practices. The Army Special Operations Command was examining the role of interrogation support as a '**SERE Psychologist competency area.**'" (OIG Report, p. 25, emphasis added.)

Colonel James arrived at GTMO [Guantánamo] in January of 2003. The OIG report reveals the continued use of SERE-type "counterresistance" techniques well past this point:

"In response to Service-level concerns, a Working Group was formed to examine counterresistance techniques, leading to the Secretary of Defense, April 16, 2003, memorandum that approved counterresistance techniques for U.S. Southern Command." (OIG Report, p. 26)

"Application of these interrogation techniques is subject to the following general safeguards: (i) limited to use only at strategic interrogation facilities; (ii) there is a good basis to believe that detainee possesses critical intelligence; (iii) the detainee is medically and operationally evaluated as suitable (considering all techniques to be used in combination); (iv) interrogators are specifically trained for the techniques; (v) a specific interrogation plan (including reasonable safeguards, limits on duration, intervals between applications, termination criteria and the presence or availability of qualified medical personnel) has been developed; (vi) there is appropriate supervision; and, (vii) there is appropriate, specified senior approval for use with any specific detainee(after considering the foregoing and receiving legal advice)."
(Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's "Memorandum for the Commander, US Southern Command. Subject: Counter-Resistance Techniques in the War on Terrorism (S). April 16, 2003, p. 5.)

Colonel James asserts that great progress was made against torture and abusive treatment during his tenure at Guantanamo, progress which, he assures us, is continuing. Why then, did two inspections of Guantanamo by International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) team in January 2003 and June 2004, at the beginning and end of Colonel James' time as Chief Psychologist with the intelligence group, find that abuse 'tantamount to torture' was occurring? [Neil Lewis: [Red Cross Finds Detainee Abuse in Guantanamo](#), *New York Times*, November 30, 2004.] In January, 2003, the *New York Times* reports, the ICRC "raised questions of whether 'psychological torture' was taking place."

While Colonel James claims progress against abuse, the ICRC in June 2004, as reported by the *New York Times*, "said investigators had found a system devised to break the will of the prisoners at Guantánamo, who now number about 550, and make them wholly dependent on their interrogators through 'humiliating acts, solitary confinement, temperature extremes, use of forced positions.' Investigators said that the methods used were increasingly 'more refined and repressive' than learned about on previous visits." So, during Colonel James' tenure as Chief Psychologist, the interrogations, rather than becoming more humane, became, as the ICRC alerted, "more refined and more repressive."

This evidence in the public record clearly disputes Colonel James' claims that abuses at Guantánamo ended by the time that he was there as Chief Psychologist with the interrogation group, including BSCT psychologists. If Colonel James wishes to dispute these facts, it would seem his most effective outlet would be the Office of the Inspector General, the Red Cross, and the press, all of which flatly contradict his unsupported claims.

The OIG report confirms what should have been apparent when the PENS task force report was written: that members of the PENS Task Force were in the chain of command precisely when abusive techniques were translated for use in detainee interrogations.

We do acknowledge one error of fact in the Open Letter. It was in the summer of 2003, while Colonel James was Chief Psychologist at Guantánamo, that General Geoffrey Miller was sent to Abu Ghraib to "Gitmoize" the prison, bringing the harsh SERE-type techniques from Guantánamo to Abu Ghraib. It was in 2004 that the same General Miller who brought the harsh techniques to Abu Ghraib returned to Iraq to "oversee the military's prisons in Iraq" [Sewell Chan, [Rage is on Display During Prison Tour](#), *Washington Post*, May 6, 2004].

The history of America's abusive detentions in the War on Terror is a history of evasion and denial. Every government and military official states that he or she is "against torture." We are well aware that this administration claims never to have engaged in "torture" or in "cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment." But we are aware, too, that to make this claim, this administration has undertaken a campaign to redefine these terms such that they are completely unrecognizable. Over and over again, every media article, every account by detainees or their attorneys, every report by a human rights organization claiming abuse or torture has been met by denial. Yet, repeatedly these articles, these reports, these accounts have proven true. A denial is not evidence.

It is long past time for Colonel James and all the other psychologists involved in interrogations at Guantánamo, in Iraq, and Afghanistan to stop asserting what they "did not" do and start telling us what they did do and what they do know about what transpired in the interrogation rooms. It is time, too, for the APA to be working with governmental and non-governmental investigative organizations to facilitate the collection of such critical pieces of information.

We close by noting two points where we believe we are in complete agreement with Colonel James:

First, we believe that SERE interrogation methods constitute torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment and should be prohibited, as should any involvement of psychologists in their use. We agree with the OIG that many of the techniques approved by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld for use at Guantánamo, in his memos of December 2002 and April 2003, constitute such abuse. We hope in the coming months that Colonel James clarifies whether he, too views these techniques as abuse and whether he will join us in working to ensure a complete end to these tactics and similarly abusive interrogation techniques by all branches of the US Government.

Second, we also welcome the imminent Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) hearings on US interrogation practices. We hope that during the course of those hearings, if not before, Colonel James will tell Congress and the American public all he knows about the interrogation techniques at Guantanamo, the role of SERE methods, the involvement of SERE psychologists in developing those techniques, the specific directives on these techniques given to BSCTs under his command, and the conduct of BSCTs during these interrogations.

We would also like to take this opportunity to call your attention to a new report by Mark Benjamin in *Salon* [[“CIA’s Torture Teachers: Psychologists helped the CIA exploit a secret military program to develop brutal interrogation tactics -- likely with the approval of the Bush White House”](#)]. This article documents the central role of psychologists from the Department of Defense’s SERE program in implementing abusive interrogation tactics for the CIA.

We continue to hope that APA will, at last, make a break with its recent history of turning a blind eye to repeated accounts of abuse involving psychologists. We look forward to your leadership on this critical issue and remain open to a meeting to discuss these matters further.

Sincerely,

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