

EXPLOITATION: “IN MY EARS AND IN MY EYES”

Goldman and Apuzzo, perhaps as a swan song before the former heads off to WaPo, break the story of Penny Lane – the story of the Gitmo camp where recruited double agents stayed until they were sent off to spy for the CIA.

They focus primarily on the series of perks detainees got both while at Gitmo and once they had agreed to spy.

By early 2003, Penny Lane was open for business.

Candidates were ushered from the confines of prison to Penny Lane’s relative hominess, officials said. The cottages had private kitchens, showers and televisions. Each had a small patio.

Some prisoners asked for and received pornography. One official said the biggest luxury in each cottage was the bed – not a military-issued cot but a real bed with a mattress.

The cottages were designed to feel more like hotel rooms than prison cells, and some CIA officials jokingly referred to them collectively as the Marriott.

Current and former officials said dozens of prisoners were evaluated but only a handful, from a variety of countries, were turned into spies who signed agreements to work for the CIA.

[snip]

Prisoners agreed to cooperate for a variety of reasons, officials said. Some received assurances that the U.S. would resettle their families. Another thought al-Qaida had perverted Islam and believed it was his duty as a Muslim to help the CIA destroy it. One detainee

agreed to cooperate after the CIA insinuated it would harm his children, a former official said, similar to the threats interrogators had made to admitted 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.

All were promised money. Exactly how much each was paid remains unclear. But altogether, the government paid millions of dollars for their services, officials said. The money came from a secret CIA account, codenamed Pledge, that's used to pay informants, officials said.

But there are a few details they either barely hint at or profess ignorance to.

First, that mention of threatening a detainee with harming his children? Obviously, that's coercion, not persuasion. Jason Leopold and Jeff Kaye have long focused on how our torture program aims to exploit prisoners, including "recruiting" them to be double agents, in part, by torturing them. (And this was one key purposes of torture at Abu Ghraib, too.)

The process by which we recruited detainees to turn informant was by no means solely about real mattresses.

Goldman and Apuzzo profess ignorance about whether these double agents showed up in lists of "Gitmo recidivists." They did. Remember: several Gitmo "recidivists" then "flipped back" to Saudi control and provided key information on AQAP structure and plots. Though it appears to have even taken several years before they explained to Congress that some of these recidivists were actually not – or at least were not supposed to be. So not only did these detainees serve as double agents against al Qaeda, but the existence of them as "recidivists" fed the fears about closing Gitmo.

And there are at least textual hints of whom they did flip (or think they had flipped), though I won't lay out the several places where

I've seen those hints in case these men are still out there.

Finally, Goldman and Apuzzo note this program ended in 2006, as the number of new detainees dropped (and, I might add, as the government tried to get out of the torture business).

But make no mistake. The government still aims to exploit the people it captures for counterterrorism purposes, whether in some forgotten cell in Afghanistan or on a ship. If we were only in the interrogation business, it could all take place in a traditional jail with legal representation.