

JOHN RIZZO BURIES THE MOCK BURIAL

The DC elite media continues to help John Rizzo promote his misleading memoir, this time with a Politico excerpt of his claim of how the torture techniques got chosen.

Here and elsewhere, Rizzo alludes to the one torture technique John Yoo rejected, though he says “DOJ” rejected it because it was “so gruesome.” (Note the context in which this appears, though, as an afterthought to the sentence describing simulated drowning.)

Waterboarding: The interrogator would strap Zubaydah to an inclined bench, with his feet slightly elevated. A cloth would be placed over his forehead and eyes, and water would be applied to the cloth in a controlled manner—for 20 to 40 seconds from a height of 12 to 24 inches. The intention would be simulate the sensation of drowning. There was also another technique that I’m barred from describing that was so gruesome that the Justice Department later stopped short of approving it. [my emphasis]

As I reported almost 4 years ago, this technique actually should be unclassified, as DOJ released it in unredacted form in a draft of the Office of Professional Responsibility report.

The technique is mock burial.

They planned to use simulated drowning and simulated burial.

And Yoo didn’t reject it outright: he told Rizzo he would “need more time” if he wanted that technique to be approved.

Although Yoo told us that he had concluded that the mock burial technique would violate the torture statute, he

nevertheless told the client, according to Fredman and Rizzo, that he would “need more time” if they wanted it approved.

Moreover, Yoo likely rejected it not because he found it gruesome (remember, Yoo has said he would seriously consider authorizing torturers crushing a child’s testicles to make his father talk). He almost certainly rejected it because Ali Soufan called the torturers’ plan to stick Abu Zubaydah (whose gunshot wounds were still not entirely healed) into a coffin, “borderline torture,” and then left the torture site and complained to his superiors. So (again, this is supported but not confirmed by the public record) when Michael Chertoff – then head of the Criminal Division and trying to ensure he wouldn’t have to charge the torturers with torture because the FBI witnessed and then complained about it – reviewed the techniques, this one presented a problem.

That DOJ approved, instead, both small and large box confinement shows they had no squeamishness with putting someone inside a box to simulate death. And we have reports that small or large box confinement got used as mock burial later in the torture program.

Plus, Rizzo does provide one other detail that helps explain one detail of how they planned to simulate burial.

For the small box, the interrogator would have the option to place a harmless insect inside.

That is, the insect they approved for use with Zubaydah was tied to the small – not the large – box. Stick him in a box, make him think he was buried alive, only to find an insect crawling around in there, as if he were 6 feet under.

Perhaps that’s why they never used the insect? Because they could never conduct unfettered live burial like they wanted, because Ali Soufan

objected to it.

In any case, Rizzo will no doubt get a lot of mileage claiming that DOJ got squeamish about a single torture technique. But the truth is DOJ got cornered by the legal dilemma presented by a complaint about a coffin.