

Running Head: WHAT IS TORTURE?

What is Torture?

MSG Dennis Pearson

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

Class 58

SGM Brian Kinsey

27 November 2007

### Abstract

Influenced by hundreds of years of war in which each conflict introduced some tactic or technology more powerful and terrifying than the last, in the 20th Century, the “civilized” nations of the world united to give war a set of humane rules by which to fight by. These rules are called the Geneva and Hague Conventions and the U.S. militaries spin on these, The Law of Land Warfare. The intent with these rules was to keep to a minimum, the number of atrocities that war created. Unfortunately, today we are fighting an enemy that neither signed nor recognized these rules for fighting fare. The United States has always followed these rules and expects all who oppose us to do the same.

## What is Torture?

### Opposing View

The battlefield of today is one of the most complex that the U.S. Army has ever fought on. Information Operations are now a key component of daily missions and shape the battlefield like never before. A key ingredient of this shaping is the media. It has played a leading role in the war and in turning world opinion against the U.S. military in regards to the holding and questioning of detainees. Meanwhile, while the U.S. defends her actions, she is forced to stand by and helplessly watch her Soldiers and coalition partners senselessly and brutally tortured and murdered on national television by her enemies. Nevertheless, she has gotten smart, fast. Just like the lawyers in the U.S. who operate in and around the laws created by the constitution and the legislators, the U.S. is operating morally and legally in and around the Law of Land Warfare, in regards to interrogation tactics. The United States' intent is to defeat the forces of evil and win the War on Terror. In accomplishing this the U.S. is utilizing lawful interrogation tactics. The opposing view to this perspective is that many countries and organizations throughout the world say that the "Light" form of interrogation the U.S. military is utilizing is torture. In order to understand the legality and morality of United States's interrogation tactics we must define torture and gain a perspective of the devices and techniques used throughout history.

### Torture Defined

Merriam-Webster's Online (2007) defines torture as, "the infliction of intense pain (as from burning, crushing, or wounding) to punish, coerce, or afford sadistic pleasure." This definition gives a general sense of what torture has the potential to be but does not meet the firm interpretation that is needed to fully understand it. The following is presented as a definition to

satisfy this understanding; Torture: the infliction of physical suffering, by whatever means, on an individual who is non-consenting and defenseless.

### The History of Torture

According to written accounts, torture has been in existence since the time of the Roman Empire before the birth of Jesus Christ. Official records of its use though did not begin to appear until the middle ages when its use became more widespread.

#### *The Early Roots of Torture*

The roots of the word torture come from the Latin word “*tortus*” which means to twist. It is a French word first in use in the year 1540. This is no surprise as torture first came into widespread use during the middle ages. This was the time of the Spanish Inquisition and Joan of Arc. Christopher Columbus had discovered America and Martin Luther had begun the Protestant Reformation with the writing of his 95 Theses. There was a lot of growing civil discontent throughout the world directed at the church and the state. These entities were both slowly losing control over the masses due to human rights atrocities, economics, religion, and ethics. At this time, torture was seen as a useful method for keeping the outspoken citizens of the realm under control and at bay and as a way to excise confessions from unrepentant and heretical non-believers of the faith. Some of the more notorious devices and techniques of torture in use at this time included:

The Pear- as the name denotes this device was pear shaped with a screw that caused it to open like a flower as the screw was turned. The device was inserted into the mouth, rectum, or vagina. I will leave the rest to your imagination.

The Cats Claw- this device, once again, is duly described by its name. It was made of iron and each claw was very sharp. The claw would be raked across a portion of the body and the claws

would embed themselves in the flesh. The deliverer, of the torture, at this point would continue pulling on the Cats Claw tearing flesh from the victim's body. This was repeated over and over until the victim confessed or expired.

Flaying- Imagine a fish being filleted. A sharp knife was used to slowly peel off strips of flesh to obtain the confession.

The rack- an oblong table that the victim was fastened to using chains attached to the wrists and ankles. Each of the chains was attached to a roller with a ratchet. Pressure was applied to limbs with each turn of the roller. The victim either confessed or had their extremities torn from their body.

Toca- popular during the Spanish inquisition; the victim was placed on a table that was much like a teeter-totter. This allowed the head to be placed at an angle below the rest of the body.

The nose was clamped shut and a rag was inserted into the mouth. At this point water was continually poured into the mouth that caused drowning and suffocation. Occasional reprieves were allowed to give the victim an opportunity to confess.

Most of the devices and techniques just described were used and remained in favor throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

### *Torture in the Modern Age*

In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, humanity was busy "inventing things" and electricity had come into widespread use. The study of psychology was gaining acceptance and pharmaceuticals were being prescribed like never before. With the advent of "modern warfare", it did not take long for man to take these emerging technologies and studies and create new and more devious ways to coerce information from people. Unlike earlier times, torture was relegated to those unlucky

soldiers and spies who were unable to avoid capture and was seldom applied to civilians. Here are some of the devices and techniques used at that time:

Burning- metal rods were heated up and applied to the flesh or the nipple was pierced.

Electric Shock- a source of electricity was connected to a baton. The current passed through the baton, often in excess of 300,000 volts. Some sensitive areas where the shock was often applied included the bottoms of the feet, nipples, and genitalia.

Chemotherapy- powerful psychotropic drugs were introduced into the body. They had the capability to alter the perception, mood, consciousness, and behavior of an individual. Some of them were extremely addictive and even short-term use was known to cause irreparable damage to the body. Many of these drugs are still in use today. An example of this type of drug would be sodium pentothal also known as truth serum.

### *Light Interrogation*

In 1937, the phrase "Verschärfte Vernehmung" or "enhanced interrogation" was introduced to the world by the Nazis. It described interrogating someone so as to leave no marks. The Russian KGB learned these principles and enhanced them further. From all of this was born the enhanced form of interrogation used throughout the world today. The term in use today for this form of interrogation is "Torture Light". Let us take a closer look at some examples of this acceptable form of interrogation:

Exploiting individual phobias- is using one's fears against them i.e. presenting an aggressive dog to someone who has a fear of dogs. The follow up would be to bring the dog back and threaten to release it. This can cause emotional distress and paranoia and in extreme cases uncontrollable urination and defecation.

Mild Physical Contact- such as grabbing, shoving, slapping is invoked. It is never taken beyond the point of causing slight bruising, scrapes, cuts, and abrasions. This can cause emotional distress and paranoia and in extreme cases uncontrollable urination and defecation. This type of interrogation is considered appropriate following capture but is frowned upon the longer the person is held.

Sleep adjustment- refers to the method of altering ones sleep cycle to induce disorientation. The effect would be similar to when a person gets jet lagged from a trip. This can cause a drop in cognitive function and reduce the person's ability to resist suggestion.

Stress positions- refer to placing a person in a particular position for an extended period such as standing in one place for 4 hours. This causes the ankles to swell and can cause extreme pain in the extremities.

Isolation- this can mean placing people in a cell by themselves for extended periods not to exceed 30 days. It can also be as slight as placing a hood over a person's head and depriving them of light and sound stimuli. This can cause emotional distress and paranoia.

### Conclusion

Since the beginning of recorded history, torture has been used as a means to an end. Is it immoral? Is it ever morally correct? The answers to these questions tend to be of a subjective nature and not easily decided upon. Many personal, social, religious, and political influences tug us in different directions both individually and as a society. Now, media exposure also plays a large part in this decision like never before and is a key factor in how the world views the perpetrators of torture and their nations or organizations. In engaging the enemy the U.S. must use ever lawful and legal means available to subdue a crafty and ever evolving foe. As the cliché says the U.S. must take the gloves off, roll up her sleeves, and engage in some good old fist to

cuffs with her sworn adversary, the terrorists. Karl Von Clausewitz (n.d.) wrote, "If the enemy is to be coerced, you must put him in a situation that is even more unpleasant than the sacrifice you call on him to make. The hardships of the situation must not be merely transient - at least not in appearance. Otherwise, the enemy would not give in, but would wait for things to improve." The U.S. has committed mistakes in interrogating detainees in the past. Those mistakes have been corrected and they are currently interrogating detainees correctly and within the boundaries of the law in order to justly win the War on Terror.



## References

- Bazelon, E., Carter, P., & Lithwick, D. (2005). What is Torture? *Slate Magazine*. Retrieved October 25, 2007, from <http://slate.com/id/2119122/>
- Clausewitz, K. (n.d.). Retrieved November 4, 2007, from <http://www.military-quotes.com/Clausewitz.htm>
- Hentoff, N. (2007). The Gestapo Inheritance. *Village Voice Online*. Retrieved November 4, 2007, from <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0743,hentoff,78153,6.html>
- Historical Methods of Torture and Execution*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 4, 2007, from <http://www.geocities.com/drkglaive/torture.html>
- McCoy, A. W. (2006). *A Question of Torture*. New York: Metropolitan Books
- Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, (2007). The definition of Torture [Electronic Version]. Retrieved October 25, 2007, from <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/torture>
- Sullivan, A. (2007). Verschärfte Vernehmung. *Atlantic Magazine*. Retrieved October 25, 2007, from [http://andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com/the\\_daily\\_dish/2007/05/verschfte\\_verne.html](http://andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com/the_daily_dish/2007/05/verschfte_verne.html)
- Falun Data Information Center. (n.d.) *Torture methods*. Retrieved October 25, 2007, from <http://www.faluninfo.net/torturemethods2/>