

Complaints allege psychologists had role in Guantanamo detainee abuse

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COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Two Army psychologists helped perpetrate abuse of detainees at Guantanamo Bay including sleep deprivation and sexual humiliation, according to complaints filed Wednesday by human rights groups trying to have the psychologists' state licenses revoked.

The San Francisco-based Center for Justice & Accountability filed a complaint against Dr. John Leso with the New York Office of the Professions, alleging professional misconduct. Leso led a behavioral science consultation team at Guantanamo in 2002 and 2003.

The complaint said Leso developed abusive interrogation techniques based on Army survival methods. Those methods, "Survive Evade Rescue and Escape" or SERE, teach soldiers how to withstand physical and psychological abuse they might face if captured by the enemy, according to the complaint against Leso.

"Evidence shows that Dr. Leso developed, recommended, and implemented psychologically and physically abusive interrogation tactics during his tenure at Guantanamo," the complaint said.

The complaint says an abuse memo Leso wrote in 2002 promoted techniques such as exposing detainees to severe cold, forcing liquids into them intravenously and sleep deprivation.

The complaint against Leso says he is stationed at Fort Rucker, Ala. He could not be immediately reached. Messages were left with the fort's public affairs office.

In a second complaint, a Toledo psychologist and others allege that retired Army Col. Larry James observed abusive interrogations and didn't do anything to stop them.

The complaint says James, dean of professional psychology at Wright State University in Dayton, oversaw abuse at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba in 2003, 2007 and 2008 when he served with the base's Behavioral Science Consultation Team.

"Detainees were systematically abused while Dr. James served on and allegedly led the Guantanamo BSCT," Wednesday's complaint said. "James participated in, ordered,

supervised, ratified, facilitated, acquiesced in, and/or failed to prevent, stop, report, and punish that abuse."

In one instance, the complaint said, James watched without intervening while an interrogator and three guards subjected a near-naked man to sexual humiliation by forcing him to wear women's underwear.

The complaint, researched by Harvard's International Human Rights Clinic, seeks to have James stripped of his license to practice psychology in Ohio.

James declined to comment through a university spokesman.

State boards in Louisiana and Ohio, where a similar complaint was filed in 2008, have declined to investigate the allegations.

James said in his 2008 book, "Fixing Hell," that the Army sent him to clean up abuses in Guantanamo and later in the Abu Ghraib detention center in Iraq.

He told the Dayton Daily News last fall that he doesn't understand why the allegations continue to come up.

"No matter what third party, objective review board or person, they've all come to the same conclusion — there's no probable cause," James said in September. "There's no detainee, there's no guard, there's no psychologist who's come forward and said, 'With my own eyes, I've seen Dr. James do X, Y or Z.'"

Complaints to state medical boards are shielded by Ohio's public records law unless the board takes disciplinary action. Ronald Ross, executive director of the Ohio state psychology board, declined to comment.

The Ohio board in 2008 "determined that no foundation exists to support the initiation of formal proceedings serving to deny Dr. James admission to the Board's licensure examination," according to a copy of the board's response provided by the Harvard clinic.

In June 2007, 350 members of the American Psychological Association signed an open letter to its then-President Sharon Brehm requesting an investigation of James and other members of the association who served at Guantanamo Bay.

The association didn't investigate, but in 2008 it voted to ban its members from taking part in interrogations at the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and other military detention sites where it believes international law is being violated.