

Review Article

The Drugs Don't Work: Intelligence, Torture and the London Cage

Dan Lomas

Helen Fry, *The London Cage: The Secret History of Britain's World War II Interrogation Centre*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press (2017), pp. 256, Hbk, £18.99, ISBN: ISBN: 9780300221930.

Prisoner of war interrogation has always been an important source of intelligence.¹ In Britain, it is a topic that has often met with controversy. Wartime interrogations at MI5's Camp 020, colonial abuses during the Mau Mau uprising and Aden campaigns, the so-called 'Five Techniques' in Northern Ireland and military interrogations in Iraq and Afghanistan, have all provoked claims of ill-treatment. The growing controversy around the ethics of interrogation and allegations of torture have led to a welcome growth in the literature, moving the subject beyond the niche it once was, even if some is often prone to hyperbole.² Helen Fry's new account of the secretive London District Cage interrogation facility, housed in buildings off Kensington Palace Gardens, located in central London, is the latest book to shed light on the subject. As with other facilities mentioned elsewhere, the work of the 'Cage' (or LDC) has long been the subject of controversy. As home to Britain's Prisoner of War Interrogation Service (PWIS), the Cage played an important role in extracting intelligence from Axis prisoners, yet developed the formidable reputation of being 'Hell in Britain'³, a place where German prisoners were 'tortured to death'⁴, undermining Britain's 'love of fair play and respect for the rule of law'.⁵ The Cage also played an important role in obtaining evidence for war crimes investigators at the end of the Second World War. From October 1945 to September 1948, a total of 3,573 prisoners were interrogated, providing 1,000 statements, with claims of prisoner abuse continuing into the courtroom.⁶ The facility was commanded by the mysterious, German-speaking Lt. Col. Alexander Paterson Scotland who, in 1954, had tried to write an account of his experiences, provoking the full wrath of Whitehall. Scotland was eventually allowed to write only part of the story, with the full manuscript locked safely away in War Office archives and released to The National Archives (TNA) long after the story had died down. Fry's book sheds important light on this controversial facility, Scotland and the prisoners and interrogators who went through the Cage.

Fry's account is the first book-length study of the LDC beyond Scotland's heavily censored memoir, filling an important gap in the writings on Second World War intelligence. Tales of spies, special operations and the codebreakers of Bletchley Park have often dominated the literature, yet Fry's book is a welcome reminder that prisoner interrogation was another important, if often overlooked, source for the Allies. As such, the book augments the important work of others such as Sonke Neitzel and Harald Welzer – as well as Fry's own work – on the secret recording of German prisoners by British intelligence.⁷ As with other interrogation facilities, the Cage gave the Allies a glimpse into Germany's war machine.

Details of the V-weapon programme, the U-Boat war, the *Luftwaffe* and Germany's economy were gleaned from interrogation, identifying, in some cases, important targets for the RAF. While ULTRA and spies were important, interrogation gave, argues Fry, a 'comprehensive understanding of the Nazi military capability' and proved vital for military planners trying to understand the *Wehrmacht's* fighting ability. The importance of the intelligence can be found in the distribution of reports: intelligence summaries were distributed as widely as 'MI5, MI6, the Foreign Office, MI3, MI10, MI14, CSDIC, Naval Intelligence Division, Air Intelligence, the Joint Intelligence Committee, the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office, and American intelligence in Washington', writes Fry.⁸ The legacy of the Cage continued into the post-war period with Scotland and his team helping investigate the killings of British prisoners during the retreat to Dunkirk in May 1940, Norway in 1942 and the murder of escapees from Stalag Luft III in 1944. But Scotland's investigations were persistently questioned over the methods used to extract evidence. Claims of physical violence, electrical devices, solitary confinement, starvation, sleep deprivation and threats against family were all alleged. Concerns about ill-treatment even made their way to the House of Commons; in February 1949, one MP called for an 'enquiry' into claims made by another prisoner.⁹ Labour MP Richard Stokes even referred to the Cage as a 'shocking disgrace'.¹⁰

The work of the London District Cage is a little known story. My own interest in the Cage stems from Scotland's attempt to tell his account. In 1953, the newly retired Scotland, having come to the attention of the national press during Britain's war crimes trials, was approached by literary agent George Greenfield for a memoir on his work as an interrogator. By 1954, a manuscript had been completed with the publisher Evans Brothers and submitted to the War Office Public Relations Department for review, where it immediately set alarm bells ringing. Both the War Office and MI5 objected to the publication of a book revealing 'the methods used in interrogating prisoners of war'. Officials were also wary of the many 'irregularities' in the manuscript referring to the treatment of prisoners of war. MI5's legal advisor Bernard Hill identified passages in the manuscript that not only breached the 'spirit' of the Geneva convention, but 'worse' while Foreign Office officials raised concerns at a book detailing war crimes investigations that could be used by groups in Germany to overturn convictions.¹¹ Scotland's naïve attempt to tell his story provoked the full wrath of Whitehall. The Official Secrets Act, threats and seizure of the manuscript itself were used to censor details of interrogation techniques and tradecraft. In the end, thanks to revelations elsewhere, Scotland was only allowed to publish a heavily redacted version, drawing on publically available information, largely hiding his wartime work. The hard-line response taken by the authorities has often been presented as an attempt to hide dirty secrets. Did Britain really torture people in the heart of wartime London, as Fry and others have suggested? Certainly the manuscript – and newly released files I looked at – highlighted irregularities when it came to interrogation, but Whitehall, fearing that others would follow in telling their own wartime stories, wanted to make Scotland an example to others. The heavy-handed response to Scotland would to 'dissuade others from exploiting their war service for financial gain', explained the Director of Military Intelligence (DMI).¹² Long-term the attempted ban only appears to have stoked the Cage's fearsome reputation even if, on closer inspection, government releases – file

material that Fry extensively uses – provide little evidence of extensive torture and physical abuse.

While historians are now able to read Scotland's manuscript, the full effectiveness of the London Cage is hard to assess thanks to the paucity of interrogation reports and other sources – something Fry alludes to. It is the usual story of War Office files contaminated by asbestos, missing interrogation reports and material still retained by departments across Whitehall. There are also the usual gaps, thanks to the habitual pruning of files by department. Researchers looking at the London District Cage will be undoubtedly drawn to Scotland's original manuscript seized by Special Branch, and still held by The National Archives. His story is an interesting one. Born in Middleborough in July 1882, Scotland was fascinated by a career overseas and travelled to German South-West Africa where he served as a volunteer with the Germany army until 1907. Scotland remained in South-West Africa as a trader, working for British intelligence, but was interned in 1915 and released to return to Britain. Scotland's time with the Germany army served him well in his wartime appointment as an intelligence officer attached to the headquarters of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in France, leaving with the rank of Captain in December 1918. He was recalled as an intelligence officer at the start of the Second World War, serving in France before setting up interrogation facilities for the Prisoner of War Intelligence Service with his headquarters at the London District Cage. Scotland's story is extraordinary, yet, even as Fry admits, is open to embellishment: 'one should not assume that all he recounts is accurate', she writes.¹³ Claims that he served behind German lines on the Western front, linking with the famous La Dame Blanche (or 'White Lady') network and spying in German-occupied Belgium, are fanciful in light of the already well-established Secret Service networks in the area and Scotland's experience as an interrogator. Also Scotland's claim he served on Operation Archery, a commando raid in December 1941, is a case of 'artistic licence' as are other episodes in his life.¹⁴ Scotland did little to play down his exaggerated war record. Claims of his service in the German army were repeated in the post-war trials of war criminals, resulting in the 1958 film *The Two Headed Spy* featuring Jack Hawkins as 'General Schottland' a German staff officer and British spy who 'fooled Hitler'. Researchers looking at Scotland's career and the work of the London Cage, not only have to deal with restricted sources, but also have to carefully separate truth from fiction and Scotland's embellished career, as well as claims that the London District Cage was Britain's hidden torture centre.

The London Cage played a crucial role in the war effort and helped bring to justice some of Germany's most brutal war criminals, yet Fry's book contains a number of worrying claims on the darker aspects of the Cage's activities that lack any real substantive evidence. One example is the assertion about Scotland's use of 'truth drugs'. In Fry's words, the book reveals 'for the first time ... that Colonel Scotland apparently sanctioned' the use of mind-control drugs on prisoners, though 'the matter was so classified that even Scotland dared not mention it in his memoirs'.¹⁵ Allegations that staff at the LDC used such methods did emerge; in December 1943, detainee Otto Witt complained of 'drugs' – amongst the other 'Black and Tan'¹⁶ methods used by staff – and Fry refers to an often quoted diary entry by MI5's Guy Liddell that Scotland himself had arrived at an interrogation facility holding a

syringe ‘containing some drug or other, which it was thought would induce the prisoner to speak’ in the summer of 1940.¹⁷ Liddell’s second-hand account does not elaborate whether this was a genuine ‘truth serum’ or merely a prop designed to scare the prisoner into talking. Evidence of drug use is lacking. Examples of experimental use by the British army and navy, Germany and the United States, do little, if anything, to support the claim that Scotland ‘had no qualms about using drugs on his prisoners’.¹⁸ The argument is not helped by the fact that claims about the wartime use of drugs by MI5 and the Special Operations Executive are not supported by the cited file, not the only time this happens in the book.¹⁹

References to the alleged use of truth drugs on Hitler’s deputy Rudolf Hess also do little to support Fry’s assertions – claims referenced to fifteen FO 1093 files on Hess comprising of over 2,000 documents. Officially, the use of drugs ‘has never been openly admitted by the intelligence services, but becomes apparent from a careful reading of Hess’s Foreign Office files’, Fry claims.²⁰ But problematically the files of the Foreign Office Permanent Under-Secretary’s Department, released in 1992, provided little evidence beyond Hess’s own fixation that ‘drugs have been or are being given to him to cause his brain to weaken’.²¹ Also concerning is the statement that ‘MI5 was also using truth drugs on Hess, having been encouraged by the War Office’.²² Dominic Streatfeild’s study of mind control, having consulted MI5’s files on Hess, released in 1999, includes the suggestion that Evapam Sodium could be used to ‘pick the brains’ of Hess, though drug use was quickly ruled out – a statement completely at odds with Fry’s allegation that ‘MI5 was also using drugs on Hess’.²³ Closer reading of MI5’s files show the suggestion was hardly serious. In June 1941, Home Office officials sent radio engineer Mr. M.H. Savage to Room 055 in the War Office – MI5’s interview room, with a startling suggestion. In a minute to MI5’s Guy Liddell summarising the conversation, another MI5 officer wrote that Savage proposed ‘picking ... whatever brains’ Hess possessed using drugs. ‘It appears that Mr. Savage had a nervous breakdown in 1937 and again in 1939, as a result he received medical treatment’, Liddell was told. Injections of Evapam Sodium would black-out the conscious mind and, Savage claimed, reveal the ‘absolute truth’ even if MI5 remained sceptical: ‘I do not know whether anyone in this Department has a strong.enough [sic] constitution to stand the dredging operations on the subconscious mind of Rudolf Hess’.²⁴ There was little to be gained by using drugs; interrogators found Hess’ mental state ‘abnormal’ and commented that he was ‘heading for real insanity: he is sulky and distrustful ... he fears poisoning’.²⁵ During the Nuremburg trials, Hess displayed strong psychotic tendencies, suffered from extreme amnesia and was unable to be questioned effectively.²⁶ Neither Scotland nor his team at the London District Cage were involved in the interrogation, while the use of drugs to extract information was quickly ruled out.²⁷ The truth is there is little smoking gun here, and Fry provides little hard evidence, despite claims in the book and elsewhere. In 1955, Special Branch detectives found a letter that Scotland had kept from December 1944 from Oxford University’s William Brown, then involved in the Institute of Experimental Psychology. To quote Fry all efforts to ‘trace the letter or any archives of William Brown have failed’, yet, even for Fry, the correspondence ‘raises questions about what Scotland hoped to gain from the connection’.²⁸ It’s suggested that Scotland wanted to use ‘experimental, even unorthodox, psychological methods on prisoners’, yet ‘the trail goes cold, and it is not known if the two men ever met’.²⁹ Lacking

the contents of the letter, it is near impossible to say whether truth drugs – or controversial psychological methods – were actually used, or why Scotland exchanged correspondence with Brown.

Evidence elsewhere suggests not, even if, as Fry documents, intelligence officers considered using them early in the war.³⁰ In December 1939, the Director of Naval Intelligence Vice-Admiral John Godfrey discussed the use of ‘drugs and hypnosis’ with doctors, even leading to impromptu experiments on one Naval Intelligence Division (NID) officer.³¹ Godfrey believed such methods were justified as long as drugs and hypnosis would have ‘no permanent effect’ and the prisoner was likely to ‘respond favourably’, though evidence of actual use beyond experimentation is lacking. Even Godfrey’s precis on drug use suggests that use of Evapam Sodium for interrogation remained untested beyond the NID’s one experiment.³² In November 1943, Godfrey’s successor Rear-Admiral Edmund Rushbrook concluded that ‘third degree methods’ such as drug use ‘were tested and found wholly useless. These methods of interrogation, therefore, were fortunately abandoned’.³³ Even in cases where drug use has been alleged – most notably by the psychologist Major Alexander Kennedy working at a CSDIC facility in Cairo – the results were deemed far from effective. MI5’s Dick White commented that the prisoner became ‘mulish and indifferent to his fate and contracted pneumonia’.³⁴ Kennedy’s work appears to have been a one-off example outside the European theatre, despite Fry’s assertion that experimental use of ‘insulin and ... LSD on German prisoners of war was known to have been carried out in the Far East’.³⁵ Once again, the claim does not appear to be supported by the file material, erroneously referenced to an MI5 file on German national Otto Witt, opened in 2001, supposedly containing references to a mysterious ‘Operation Neapolitan’.³⁶ No mention of the operation can be found. For all the talk of drugs, the final word should rest with Naval Intelligence Division’s Kenneth Morgan who concluded that such methods were ‘pointless’.³⁷

Even more worrying are suggestions that the Cage was a ‘Soviet-style prison’. The LDC could be an intimidating and sometimes unpleasant experience for prisoners interrogated there. ‘Abandon hope all ye who enter here’, Scotland often thought to himself as entered the facility.³⁸ Interrogators even talked of the ‘English Gestapo’ to scare detainees, while one veteran recalls ‘delivering’ a belligerent SS sergeant to the Cage, only to pick a subdued prisoner days later. ‘I don’t know what happened to him’, said the eyewitness.³⁹ The notoriety of the London District Cage meant there were complaints of ill-treatment, yet comparisons to KGB prisons, Gestapo dungeons and torture centres are wide of the mark on closer reading, playing on modern-day conceptions of Guantanamo Bay and other abuses. In the London Cage, prisoners would often face a range of methods. Those compliant would be interrogated in Room 22 or a number of other rooms. If they refused, prisoners would be taken to the basement and Cell 14 – a dark, damp and isolated ‘dungeon’ – which smelt of ‘dead rats, wet rags and rotting flesh’.⁴⁰ If intimidation failed, Scotland’s staff resorted to ‘physical abuse and torture’. One of the more troubling of Fry’s claims refers to torture equipment. ‘MI19 files for the London Cage make three independent references to “secret control gear” – i.e. electric shock equipment and other torture apparatus’, she writes. Details of this equipment are thin, but are provided in other parts of the book. Captain Egger and

Captain Hay, described as ‘assistant interrogators’, were ‘operators of special gear’ and ‘experts on the control gear operations’, it is claimed.⁴¹ Both had worked at Latimer House, a CSDIC facility specialising in the bugging of German prisoners in the Buckinghamshire countryside, before transferring to the Cage. The secrecy of the London Cage’s ‘secret gear’ posed problems for the interrogators, Fry explains. In 1946, Red Cross inspectors wanted to access the interrogation facilities. In a letter to the War Office, Scotland wrote: ‘The secret gear which *we use to check the reliability of information obtained*⁴² must be removed ... before permission is given to inspect this building. This work will take a month to complete’.⁴³ Vague references to ‘control gear’ and ‘special’ devices are allegedly supported by the testimony of one unnamed eyewitness. ‘Torture *could* have taken place at 1 a.m. when I was asleep and I wouldn’t have known anything about it’, recalled the interviewee.⁴⁴ Yet Fry herself admits that the individual ‘never saw any torture or electric shock equipment at the London Cage and vague references to ‘control gear’ do little to support the claim that the London Cage was in any way ‘Soviet-style prison’ – not helped by the fact that, once again, Fry’s referencing, on one of the central allegations of the book, cites a file on Reich Minister Walther Funk that contains nothing on ‘control gear’, Egger or Hay.⁴⁵ Others have struggled to find the evidence. The problem is that – as in other areas of the book – terms such as ‘secret gear’ are ambiguous and open to interpretation, worsened by the fact that Scotland and others did not define what these meant. Journalist Ian Cobain, writing on the Cage, said it was ‘unclear’ what ‘secret gear’ actually meant.⁴⁶ Uncooperative prisoners would be ‘subjected to “secret control gear” – thought to be electric shock equipment’, suggests another article, drawing on Fry’s analysis.⁴⁷ The London Cage’s uncompromising reputation and a desire to prove that torture happened, cover over other more likely explanations for the sinister ‘secret control gear’ and ‘special gear’ referred to here. Unwittingly Fry herself provides a more innocent explanation in another of her studies: secret monitoring equipment.

In wartime, British intelligence mastered the art of prisoner of war eavesdropping. Prisoners would often be recorded in cells unknowingly giving the secret listeners important intelligence. This was not a new trick. During the First World War, British intelligence had used ‘stool pigeons’ – native speakers or compliant prisoners – to trick captives into unwittingly revealing secrets, using listening devices to pick up their responses.⁴⁸ The practice was used extensively during the Second World War. As early as October 1939, the Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre, initially under MI9 and later moved under the jurisdiction of the War Office’s MI19, planned to use secret listening devices to gather intelligence from newly captured prisoners. By December 1939, CSDIC had established Trent Park, a mansion cited in large grounds near Cockfosters, north of London, for the task with other facilities at Latimer House on the outskirts of London and Wilton Park, near Beaconsfield, used to house prisoners for interrogation and intensive listening. The scale of the work was enormous. By 1945, over 10,000 German and 560 Italian prisoners had passed through CSDIC, which had recorded a total of 64,427 conversations.⁴⁹ Secretive eavesdropping was an extremely important source of intelligence. The transcripts of thousands of bugged conversations show that ‘M’ (or miked) operations gave the Allies important information on all aspects of the Wehrmacht, including tactics, motivation, and technical specifications of their equipment, proving particularly useful in gathering

intelligence on Germany's V-weapons programme.⁵⁰ In February 1945, the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee noted that CSDIC was 'one of our most valuable sources of intelligence and has proved to be the best means of obtaining intelligence on rockets, flying bombs, jet propelled aircraft and submarines'.⁵¹ Secret microphones also formed an important part of the interrogation process at MI5's facility at Latchmere House in West London, known as Camp 020.⁵²

Yet the evidence of hidden microphones being used at the Cage has been disputed. Former Latimer House and Wilton Park interrogator Matthew Barry Sullivan believed the Cage had 'no microphones' resulting in 'less subtle' methods of interrogation being used, yet, he adds, 'brain-washing techniques ... truth drugs, hypnotism, long solitary confinement or starvation' were never employed.⁵³ Sullivan was not intimately involved with the LDC, and Fry herself suggests that prisoner conversations were secretly recorded – as at other wartime interrogation facilities.⁵⁴ Scotland himself referred to the LDC's 'smaller rooms' that were useful for 'segregating men undergoing special interrogation' – 'special' being used as a cover term for a range of activities.⁵⁵ The 1922 Manual of Military Intelligence referred to 'special' interrogation as the use of 'pigeons'.⁵⁶ This could also be extended to the use of listening devices; the transcripts of CSDIC's bugged conversations were often referred to as 'Special Reports' or 'SRs'.⁵⁷ One of those interviewed for the book confirms the use of 'M' techniques by Scotland's team: 'They [the prisoners] chatted up the chimney to each other. They thought they were so clever, but they gave away all kinds of information because we had placed bugging devices in the chimney and were able to record their conversations. It was wired back to an M Room in the basement'.⁵⁸ Captain Egger – one of those identified by Fry as a 'special gear' operator, an expert in 'control gear operations' and someone supposedly involved in the inhumane treatment of prisoners – was, it seems, transferred to the LDC as part of the operation. Egger (then a Lieutenant) has been listed by Fry in another book as one of the army officers working at CSDIC's Latimer House facility where listening devices were used.⁵⁹ A fluent German speaker, Egger was commissioned into the Intelligence Corps in September 1941, promoted to Captain in August 1944, before leaving in 1946.⁶⁰ Cyril Hay had been recruited into the Metropolitan Police at the outbreak of war only to be commissioned into the Intelligence Corps in November 1940 thanks to his fluent German and posted to CSDIC, the Intelligence Corps Depot, Scotland's PWIS and the War Office's MI19 dealing with prisoner interrogation.⁶¹ By the 1950s, Hay was described by Cyril Cunningham, then a young psychologist and an advisor to the War Office prisoner intelligence unit, who later wrote about the mistreatment of British prisoners during the Korean War, as MI19's 'most senior interrogator' who was 'masterly multilingual'. Hay was promoted Major, passing away in 1995.⁶² In November 1945, both men were described as 'experts in control gear operations and have had much service with C.S.D.I.C. (U.K.). They are bi-lingual German speakers and are proving very useful as interrogators of the willing type of P.W'.⁶³ It would take a leap of the imagination to support the claim that Egger or Hay (likely responsible for bugging or interpreting intelligence from this secret source) could also apply their trade to torture on a part-time basis.

References to ‘secret gear’ – rather than torture equipment – may simply be a euphemism for bugging operations, given the secrecy surrounding this form of intelligence gathering. MI5’s interrogators at Camp 020 – like their counterparts elsewhere – were alive to the need of ‘protecting “M” sources.’⁶⁴ At the end of the war Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee were even concerned that the use of CSDIC’s intelligence in the prosecution of German war criminals could undermine the ‘future use’ of secret recordings.⁶⁵ The JIC was fully aware that using CSDIC’s intelligence in court ‘would disclose the extent to which we had been successful in recording the conversations of prisoners of war’. As a result, CSDIC’s intelligence was to be used as a ‘last resort’ in a limited number of cases, with every effort made to disguise ‘how the information had been obtained’.⁶⁶ By 1947 intelligence from ‘Secret sources’, including CSDIC’s interrogation reports, were given the highest security classification possible – ‘Top Secret’, alongside strategic deception, signals intelligence, sabotage operations and the wartime activities of MI5 and Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI6).⁶⁷ In effect, the secret bugging of prisoners was one of the most sensitive sources of intelligence – and something likely to be used by Britain’s spies should the Cold War turn hot. Visits by Red Cross inspectors could certainly undermine this secret source. As a result, every effort was made to protect the information. Secret ‘control gear’ could be another vague reference to the sophisticated recording technology used by interrogators to listen to their German captors, rather than ‘electric shock equipment and other torture apparatus’.⁶⁸ Scotland’s referral to ‘secret gear’ being used to ‘check the reliability of information obtained’ – a document quoted by Fry in the context of ‘control gear’ – suggests bugging devices.⁶⁹ Certainly the claim that torture equipment was used at the LDC – and the claim that electric shock equipment was used – is questionable and appears to be based on guesswork rather than the careful reading of the file material available.

The Cage was dragged into more controversial territory in the post-war trials of suspected war criminals when numerous allegations emerged of ill-treatment. These claims were not unique to British investigators: US investigations into the killing of prisoners by 1st SS Panzer Division *Leibstandarte* Adolf Hitler in December 1944 faced similar allegations of ill-treatment.⁷⁰ During the investigation into the killing of British prisoners of war by German forces, SS *Obersturmbannführer* Fritz Knöchlein claimed in a seven-page indictment to have been subjected to sleep deprivation for ‘four days and nights’ with one interrogator reportedly proudly referring to the ‘Gestapo methods’ employed to extract evidence. One prisoner was ‘repeatedly hit in the face ... He came back into our room from his interrogation with his face smashed and his eyes bleeding’, Knöchlein recorded.⁷¹ Knöchlein was subsequently hanged in January 1949. Others claimed similar treatment. Defendant Erich Zacharias claimed that he was ‘beaten several times about the face’ and starved during another investigation into the killing of Allied prisoners – claims repeated by Scotland in his memoir, but dismissed as a ‘last desperate fling to avoid the hangman’s noose’.⁷² Yet the claims are hard to verify – something even recognised at the time. The British Military Governor in Germany Field Marshall Sir Brian Robertson admitted it was difficult to investigate Knöchlein’s claims of abuse, with his execution ending any likely enquiry. ‘I would accept Lieutenant-Colonel Scotland’s word before that of Knoechlein or any of these various Germans he mentions’.⁷³ Even discounting Robertson’s bias, it’s hard to get to the truth. One internal inquiry found it

was hard to find evidence that a prisoner had been abused, even if it could not be ruled out completely that ‘violence was ... used’.⁷⁴

Whatever the truth about Britain’s post-war investigations, wartime interrogators relied more on the psychological than sheer physical abuse. Scotland and his interrogators certainly pushed boundaries, yet, for all talk of the Cage employing torture, most prisoners were treated with respect.⁷⁵ German officers Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin and Friedrich August Freiherr von der Heydte testified they were looked after, while Field Marshall Albert Kesselring wrote of the ‘various opinions’ of the Cage, but commented on the ‘remarkable consideration’ shown by Scotland and his team.⁷⁶ But Scotland did resort to physical violence – even if this was the extreme exception, rather than the rule. Scotland displayed a fiery temper and ‘really exploded’ if a prisoner ‘tried to make a fool of him’.⁷⁷ In September 1940, during the interrogation of German agent Wulf Schmidt at MI5’s Camp 020 facility, Scotland had been found by staff in Schmidt’s cell ‘hitting’ the prisoner. ‘It was quite clear to me that we cannot have this sort of thing going on ... these Gestapo methods do not pay in the long run’, MI5’s Guy Liddell confided to his diary.⁷⁸ The ‘deplorable incident’ resulted in Home Office protests and threats to remove MI5 officers.⁷⁹ The case of German national Otto Witt also raises questions about the use of torture, suggests Fry.⁸⁰ Witt had been tricked into coming to Britain from neutral Sweden in May 1942, only to be accused of being a German agent and interrogated. In March 1943, with interrogators unable to prove anything, Witt was transferred to the London Cage where, in a protest at his treatment there, he claim sleep deprivation, starvation, threats against his family and ‘torture with an electrical instrument’.⁸¹ In a further complaint, he pointed to the ‘Black and Tan’ methods employed by interrogators: ‘starvation, physical exhaustion, continuous lack of sleep, infamous shamelessness such as stripping, insults and threats, by annoyances and drugs, by blows to the face and body and by physical and mental torture’.⁸² One MI19 officer told Witt ‘we ... would prefer to execute nine innocent men than allow one guilty one to get off’.⁸³ Home Office Permanent Under-Secretary Sir Alexander Maxwell found the claims ‘disquieting’ while MI5, in a later report two years after the incident, admitted Witt’s questioning ‘tended to exceed the bounds of legitimate interrogation’.⁸⁴ Yet some of the claims appear to be exaggerated. In his testimony, Witt complained of threats of torture using an ‘electrical instrument’ which was said to have made a ‘German prisoner of war, a major’ collapse and reveal everything. Another prisoner – possibly even a stool pigeon – told Witt the instrument ‘had been used against him although not by English officers’.⁸⁵ MI5 were unable to verify the claims, with some officers openly sceptical that such interrogation methods had been used at all. MI5’s Helenus ‘Buster’ Milmo – a future judge – concluded ‘It may well be that the limits of legitimate interrogation were exceeded to some extent’, yet added that Witt’s claims lack ‘substance’ and were little more than a ‘storm in a rather small tea-cup’.⁸⁶ Guy Liddell was equally cynical. ‘... it seems an incredible thing that two Secretaries of State should be drawn into a matter that involves a little lying Nazi having his face slapped’, he wrote in his diary.⁸⁷

As controversial as these episodes are, Scotland’s team, like other interrogators, definitely used intimidation and psychological pressure – though whether these should be considered torture, especially in the context of the Second World War, remains open to discussion. By

today's standards, Scotland's use of mental pressure would certainly fall under any definition. The 1984 United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT) refers to it as 'severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental ... intentionally inflicted on a person' to obtain intelligence, a confession or to intimidate and coerce.⁸⁸ But in wartime Britain's interrogators saw a distinction between the physical and mental – however unpalatable that seems now. British interrogators often saw torture as physical abuse, while forms of mental pressure such as disorientation, sleep deprivation, threats and humiliation fell outside this. One problem of Fry's study – as with others in the field – is that there is no explanation of what is meant by 'torture'. Closer reading of the book suggests that a modern definition is used, even though this is anachronistic, as others have explained elsewhere.⁸⁹ The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 reminded signatories that prisoners were to be 'humanely treated' with the 'Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War' signed at Geneva in July 1929 including provisions on the capture, treatment of prisoners in camps and the types of work they could do.⁹⁰ Unlike other prisoner of war facilities in Britain, the London District Cage and MI5's Camp 020 were remained hidden from the inspections of the International Red Cross. Even CSDIC's Latimer House appears to have been off limits at least until 1944. 'We didn't want the Swiss Red Cross nosing around', recalled former intelligence officer John Whitten.⁹¹ This may have been more down to the secrecy surrounding the interrogations and bugging operations, than anything more sinister. MI5's Colonel 'Tin Eye' Stephens recognised that violence was often counterproductive. 'Violence is taboo, for not only does it produce answers to please, but it lowers the standard of information', MI5's in-house history of Camp 020 makes clear.⁹² Even Scotland wrote in his final published memoirs that staff in the London Cage 'were not so foolish as to imagine that petty violence, not even violence of a stronger character, was likely to produce the results we hoped for in dealing with some of the toughest creatures of the Hitler regime'.⁹³ In his unpublished memoirs, Scotland maintained that 'No physical force was used during our interrogations to obtain information, no cold water treatment, no third degrees, nor any other "refinements" ... I have always considered it to be useless as well as unnecessary'.⁹⁴ These views did not extend to psychological pressures. MI5's interrogators at Camp 020 found that the threat of execution usually made suspected spies talk. Interrogators would also play on the mysterious 'Cell Fourteen' to break a prisoner's silence. The whole process was 'formidable'.⁹⁵ The cell was no different to any other. In peacetime it had been padded to protect psychiatric patients, yet remained a remote, cold and dark room where interrogators would play on a prisoner's 'psychology'. Cell Fourteen was 'sheer unadulterated melodrama'.⁹⁶ The London Cage also had a Cell 14. 'But nothing actually happened there', recalled one former interrogator quoted by Fry.⁹⁷ As at Camp 020, Scotland's team would use psychological pressures; in one instance, German prisoners would be threatened with the transfer to Soviet captivity and, while making explicit denials about the use of physical violence, Scotland's memoir makes no such denials of the psychological pressures applied to prisoners.⁹⁸ During an argument with a German naval officer, accused of being a member of the Nazi Party, Scotland claimed the prisoner was a spy who could be tried and shot 'like a dog'.⁹⁹ In another case, faced by a prisoner who was wrongly claiming to be a 'qualified doctor', Scotland called his bluff by asking him to operate on another prisoners 'appendix'.¹⁰⁰ Post-war guidance to interrogators maintained that 'Rigid discipline will be enforced ... guards will be firm, smart and decisive'

with the interrogator needing to ‘impose his will on the prisoner’. An ideal interrogator would ‘suit his technique to the individual psychology of the prisoner; he must use cunning, firmness and flattery in just proportion’.¹⁰¹ This was all part of the psychological game played by wartime interrogators – however unpleasant it seems now

Fry’s study of the London District Cage rightly highlights the importance of prisoner of war interrogation as a valuable source of intelligence, adding to the multifaceted intelligence picture obtained during the Second World War. This is certainly a valuable message to take away from this book-length study of the Cage, yet the book is problematic when moving into the area of truth drugs and torture. Britain’s recent past provides examples where intelligence officers have crossed red lines. Extraordinary rendition, Mau Mau and Northern Ireland provide some notable examples. But historians need to be careful in drawing a line from modern-day torture to wartime interrogation. The activities of Scotland and his interrogators breached lines, yet care needs to be taken when talking of shock equipment, secret Soviet-style dungeons, drugs and Gestapo methods. Understandably it’s difficult to extract what actually happened from the unpleasant aura of the Cage – something Scotland actively encouraged, but some of the claims are far from conclusive. While Fry is right to acknowledge the incomplete nature of the intelligence archive as one hindrance to a full history of the Cage, her argument – that Britain’s interrogators drifted into Gestapo methods to achieve results – is not helped by deficient referencing. Anyone wanting to explore Fry’s claims further has to cope with vague references to files (and even whole file series) containing hundreds of documents for the reader to painstakingly read, while some files – even on some of the central claims of the book – provide little evidence. The lesson is that, if making such claims, historians need to provide an almost forensic-like approach. While an absorbing read, closer inspection also suggests that all is not what it seems here. Secret control gear is most likely monitoring equipment. Captain Egger and Captain Hay may have been trained interrogators not torture specialists, while the use of truth drugs is far from definite with the evidence lacking. Interrogation rightly deserves greater academic focus, yet Fry’s study, however interestingly it reads, raises more questions than it answers. The history of wartime interrogation still needs to be written.

Notes

¹ See Andrew, ‘Introduction’, in Andrew and Tobia, *Interrogation in War and Conflict*.

² The literature on interrogation has certainly expanded in recent years. For just a selection of the material, see Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*; Wisniewski and Emerick, *The Ethics of Torture*; Cobain, *Cruel Britannia*; Elkins, *Britain’s Gulag*; Newbery, *Interrogation, Intelligence and Security*.

³ Jackson, *British Interrogation Techniques in the Second World War*, 132.

⁴ Ben Clerkin, ‘REVEALED: The two Nazi officers suspected of being tortured to death’.

⁵ Cobain, ‘How Britain tortured Nazi PoWs’.

⁶ The National Archives (hereafter TNA): WO 208/4294, Note on the operations of the War Crimes Investigation Unit, November 30, 1948.

⁷ Neitzel, *Tapping Hitler’s Generals*; Neitzel and Welzer, *Soldaten*, 351; Fry, *The M Room*.

⁸ Fry, *The London Cage*, 61.

⁹ Hansard, HC. Deb, 8 February 1949, vol. 461, cols. 45–6W.

¹⁰ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LHCMA): Liddell 9/24/195, Stokes to Bevin, November 25, 1948.

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- ¹¹ See TNA WO 208/5381, 'Note on The London Cage', January 1955. See also Lomas, 'A Tale of Torture', 251 – 262.
- ¹² TNA: WO 208/5381, Boucher to Vice Chief Imperial General Staff, August 16, 1954.
- ¹³ Fry, *The London Cage*, 54.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 54.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 86. The claim that Scotland 'sanctioned the use of experimental truth drugs and hypnosis on prisoners' appears in Clerkin, 'REVEALED: The two Nazi officers suspected of being tortured to death'.
- ¹⁶ The term 'Black and Tan' refers to a force of temporary constables recruited to the Royal Irish Constabulary by the British government during the Irish War of Independence. The Black and Tans were infamous for their attacks on civilians and their property responding to attacks by Republican paramilitaries, even if many excesses can be linked to the RIC's Auxiliary Division. For more, read Leeson, *The Black and Tans*.
- ¹⁷ TNA: KV 4/186, entry for September 22, 1940.
- ¹⁸ Fry, *The London Cage*, 100.
- ¹⁹ See Ibid., 90, 92. WO 208/4661 contains interrogation reports from the LDC about the killing and ill-treatment of allied prisoners at Auschwitz Concentration Camp. There are no references to 'truth drugs'.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 98.
- ²¹ TNA: FO 1093/14, Report, March 15, 1942. The Foreign Office's Robert Bruce Lockhart wrote in his diary that Hess had written a 'rambling document showing that ... [he] thought he was being given dope to make him insane' (Young, *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart*, 255).
- ²² Fry, *The London Cage*, 98.
- ²³ Read Streatfeild, *Brainwash*, 41.
- ²⁴ TNA: KV 2/36, G.L.1221/41, letter to Guy Liddell, June 7, 1941.
- ²⁵ TNA: KV 2/36, B.L. ME/AD to Major Stephens, June 10, 1941.
- ²⁶ Overy, *Interrogations*, 403.
- ²⁷ In his final published memoir Scotland says that 'my associates' met Hess, but there is little evidence to suggest that staff from the LDC ever did (Scotland, *The London Cage*, 69).
- ²⁸ Fry, *The London Cage*, 95–96.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 96.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 88–89.
- ³¹ TNA: ADM 223/475, 'Drugs on Prisoners of War', December 12, 1939.
- ³² TNA: ADM 223/475, 'Precis of two discussions regarding interrogation of German prisoners', December 12, 1939.
- ³³ Falko Bell, "'One of our Most Valuable Sources of Intelligence": British Intelligence and the Prisoner of War System in 1944', *Intelligence and National Security* 31(4) (2016), 567.
- ³⁴ See Mike Thomson, 'Britain's WWII brainwashing', *BBC News*, November 16, 2009 < <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8361655.stm> >
- ³⁵ Fry, *The London Cage*, 90.
- ³⁶ See Ibid., 227. The reference is 'KV 2/471, Operation Neapolitan'. Reference KV 2/471 is titled 'Otto WITT, alias WEGENER: German'.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 61.
- ³⁸ TNA: WO 208/5381, 'Manuscript: The London Cage', 32.
- ³⁹ Cobain, 'The Secrets of the London Cage'.
- ⁴⁰ Fry, *The London Cage*, 81.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Authors own italics added.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 198.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 82.
- ⁴⁵ Fry cites TNA WO 208/4461 as the source for these claims, yet there are no references to 'control gear' or 'special' equipment. The file is an MI14 dossier on Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs Walther Funk. Scotland's letter and details about Hay and Egger can be found in TNA WO 311/61, Scotland to Brigadier H. Shapcott, April 29, 1946.
- ⁴⁶ Cobain, 'The Secrets of the London Cage'.
- ⁴⁷ Clerkin, 'The two Nazi officers suspected of being tortured to death'.
- ⁴⁸ See Beach, *Haig's Intelligence*, 103.
- ⁴⁹ Neitzel, *Tapping Hitler's Generals*, 19.
- ⁵⁰ Neitzel and Welzer, *Soldaten*, 351.
- ⁵¹ TNA: CAB 81/127, J.I.C. (45) 54 (0), Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee: Personnel for the Combined Services Detailed Detailed Interrogation Centre, February 15, 1945.
- ⁵² See Hoare, *Camp 020*.

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- ⁵³ Sullivan, *Thresholds of Peace*, 49.
- ⁵⁴ Fry, *The London Cage*, 78-79.
- ⁵⁵ TNA: WO 208/5381, 'Manuscript: The London Cage', 33.
- ⁵⁶ TNA: WO 287/228, *Manual of military intelligence in the field* (1922).
- ⁵⁷ Fry, *The M Room*, 30, Fry, *The London Cage*, 81.
- ⁵⁸ Fry, *The London Cage*, 127.
- ⁵⁹ Fry, *The M Room*, 275.
- ⁶⁰ *Quarterly Army Lists (Second Series), July 1940 to December 1950*, 1945, Fourth Quarter, Part 2, Volume 1, 468.
- ⁶¹ Private Information and *Quarterly Army Lists (Second Series), July 1940 to December 1950*, 1946, Part 2, Volume 1, 460.
- ⁶² Cunningham, *No Mercy, No Leniency*, xiii, 158.
- ⁶³ TNA: WO 311/61, 'Personalities in P.W.I.S. (H) at 30 November 1945'.
- ⁶⁴ Hoare, *Camp 020*, 119.
- ⁶⁵ See Tyas, 'Allied Intelligence Agencies and the Holocaust', 16.
- ⁶⁶ TNA: CAB 81/93, J.I.C. (45) 38th Meeting (0), minutes of meeting, June 5, 1945.
- ⁶⁷ TNA: CAB 176/16, 'ANNEX "B": Subjects which must retain a high security classification', May 1947.
- ⁶⁸ Fry, *The M Room*, 30, Fry, *The London Cage*, 81.
- ⁶⁹ Fry, *The London Cage*, 198. The reference can be found in WO 311/61, 'Personalities in P.W.I.S. (H) at 30 November 1945' rather than Fry's reference to WO 208/4461. See endnote 45.
- ⁷⁰ On the claims, read Weingartner, *A Peculiar Crusade*.
- ⁷¹ LHCMA: Liddell 9/24/195, statement about occurrences in the London District Cage.
- ⁷² Scotland, *The London Cage*, 150-156.
- ⁷³ TNA: WO 208/4685, note on the complaint made by Fritz Knöchlein.
- ⁷⁴ TNA: WO 208/4685, court of inquiry into claims made by Heins Druwe, September 2, 1947.
- ⁷⁵ Sullivan, *Thresholds of Peace*, 50. See also Lingen, *Kesselrings letzte Schlacht*.
- ⁷⁶ Scotland, *The London Cage*, 185.
- ⁷⁷ Fry, *The London Cage*, 78.
- ⁷⁸ TNA: KV 4/186, entry for September 22, 1940.
- ⁷⁹ Hoare, *Camp 020*, 20.
- ⁸⁰ Fry, *The London Cage*, 70-75.
- ⁸¹ TNA: KV 2/477, Otto Witt: Petition, June 4, 1943.
- ⁸² TNA: KV 2/477, Witt to Chief of the British Secret Service, December 30, 1944.
- ⁸³ TNA: KV 2/477, Maxwell to Petrie, July 15, 1943.
- ⁸⁴ TNA: KV 2/479, report concerning Witt case, December 17, 1945.
- ⁸⁵ TNA: KV 2/477, Otto Witt: Petition, June 4, 1943.
- ⁸⁶ TNA: KV 2/477, Note by Milmo, July 3, 1943.
- ⁸⁷ TNA: KV 4/191, entry for June 26, 1943.
- ⁸⁸ 'Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment' < <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CAT.aspx> >. For a wider discussion, read in Newbery, 'The study of interrogation', in Moran and Murphy, *Intelligence Studies in Britain and the US*, 224-5.
- ⁸⁹ See Walton, 'British ways with torture?' and Walton, 'Torture and intelligence gathering in Western democracies'.
- ⁹⁰ 'Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 27 July 1929' < <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/305> >
- ⁹¹ Fry, *Spymaster*, 337. Fry includes a reference to the Red Cross visiting Latimer House in 1944 (Fry, *The M Room*, 113).
- ⁹² Hoare, *Camp 020: MI5 and the Nazi Spies*, 57-8.
- ⁹³ Scotland, *The London Cage*, 159.
- ⁹⁴ TNA: WO 208/5381, 'Manuscript: The London Cage', 32.
- ⁹⁵ Hinsley and Simkins, *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, 342.
- ⁹⁶ Hoare, *Camp 020*, 126-7.
- ⁹⁷ Fry, *The London Cage*, 82.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid., 64. See Scotland, *The London Cage*.
- ⁹⁹ TNA: WO 208/5381, 'Manuscript: The London Cage', 73.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 78-9.
- ¹⁰¹ TNA: WO 279/373, *Manual of Military Intelligence 1946, Pamphlet No. 7 PW Intelligence*, 16
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Dan Lomas
University of Salford
E-mail: D.W.B.Lomas@salford.ac.uk