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August 13, 2009

INTERROGATION INC.

A Window Into C.I.A.'s Embrace of Secret Jails

By **DAVID JOHNSTON** and [MARK MAZZETTI](#)

WASHINGTON — In March 2003, two [C.I.A.](#) officials surprised [Kyle D. Foggo](#), then the chief of the agency's main European supply base, with an unusual request. They wanted his help building secret prisons to hold some of the world's most threatening terrorists.

Mr. Foggo, nicknamed Dusty, was known inside the agency as a cigar-waving, bourbon-drinking operator, someone who could get a cargo plane flying anywhere in the world or quickly obtain weapons, food, money — whatever the C.I.A. needed. His unit in Frankfurt, Germany, was strained by the spy agency's operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, but Mr. Foggo agreed to the assignment.

"It was too sensitive to be handled by headquarters," he said in an interview. "I was proud to help my nation."

With that, [Mr. Foggo went on to oversee construction of three detention centers, each built to house about a half-dozen detainees, according to former intelligence officials and others briefed on the matter. One jail was a renovated building on a busy street in Bucharest, Romania, the officials disclosed. Another was a steel-beam structure at a remote site in Morocco that was apparently never used. The third, another remodeling project, was outside another former Eastern bloc city. They were designed to appear identical, so prisoners would be disoriented and not know where they were if they were shuttled back and forth. They were kept in isolated cells.](#)

The existence of the network of prisons to detain and interrogate senior operatives of [Al Qaeda](#) has long been known, but details about them have been a closely guarded secret. In recent interviews, though, several former intelligence officials have provided a fuller account of how they were built, where they were located and life inside them.

Mr. Foggo acknowledged a role, which has never been previously reported. [He pleaded guilty last year](#) to a fraud charge involving a contractor that equipped the C.I.A. jails and provided other supplies to the agency, and he is now serving a three-year sentence in [a Kentucky prison](#).

The C.I.A. prisons would become one of the Bush administration's most extraordinary counterterrorism programs, but setting them up was fairly mundane, according to the intelligence officials.

Mr. Foggo relied on C.I.A. finance officers, engineers and contract workers to build the jails. As they neared completion, he turned to a small company linked to Brent R. Wilkes, an old friend and a San Diego military contractor.

The business provided toilets, plumbing equipment, stereos, video games, bedding, night vision goggles, earplugs and wrap-around sunglasses. Some products were bought at Target and Wal-Mart, among other vendors, and flown overseas. **Nothing exotic was required for the infamous waterboards — they were built on the spot from locally available materials, the officials said.**

Mr. Foggo, 55, would not discuss classified details about the jails. He was not charged with wrongdoing in connection with the secret prisons, but instead accused of steering other C.I.A. business to Mr. Wilkes' companies in exchange for expensive vacations and other favors. Before leaving the C.I.A. in 2006, he had become its third-highest official, and his plea was an embarrassment for the agency.

After the 2001 terrorist attacks, the intelligence world's embrace of dark-of-night snatch-and-grabs, hidden prisons and [interrogation](#) tactics that critics condemned as torture has stained the C.I.A.'s reputation and led to legal challenges, investigations and internal divisions that may take years to resolve. The Justice Department is now considering opening a criminal investigation, with much of the attention focused on the agency's network of secret prisons, which have become known as the "[black sites](#)."

From Fringes to Spotlight

The demands of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had transformed Mr. Foggo from a fringe player into the C.I.A.'s indispensable man. Before the 9/11 attacks, the Frankfurt base was a relatively sleepy resupply center, running one or two flights a month to outlying stations. Within days of the attacks, Mr. Foggo had a budget of \$7 million, which quickly tripled.

He managed dozens of employees, directing nearly daily flights of cargo planes loaded with pallets of supplies, including saddles, bridles and horse feed for the mounted tribal forces that the spy agency recruited. Within weeks, he emptied the C.I.A.'s stockpile of AK-47s and ammunition at a Midwest depot.

He was **a logical choice for the prison project: aggressive, resourceful, patriotic, ready to dispense a favor; some inside the C.I.A. jokingly compared him to Milo Minderbinder, the fictional character who rose from mess hall officer to the black-market magnate of Joseph Heller's World War II novel "Catch-22."**

Early in the fight against Al Qaeda, agency officials relied heavily on American allies to help detain people suspected of terrorism in **makeshift facilities in countries like Thailand. But by the time two C.I.A. officials met with Mr. Foggo in 2003, that arrangement was under threat, according to people briefed on the situation. In Thailand, for example, local officials were said to be growing uneasy about a black site outside Bangkok code-named Cat's Eye. (The agency would eventually change the code name for the Thai prison, fearing it would appear racially insensitive.)** The C.I.A. wanted its own, more permanent detention centers.

Eventually, the agency's network would encompass at least eight detention centers, including one in the Middle East, one each in Iraq and Afghanistan and **a maximum-security long-term site at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, that was dubbed Strawberry Fields, officials said. (It was named after a Beatles song after C.I.A. officials joked that the detainees would be held there, as the lyric put it, "forever.")**

The C.I.A. has never officially disclosed the exact number of prisoners it once held, but top officials have put the figure at fewer than 100.

At the detention centers Mr. Foggo helped build, several former intelligence officials said, the jails were small, and though they were built to house about a half-dozen detainees they rarely held more than four.

The cells were constructed with special features to prevent injury to the prisoners during interrogations: nonslip floors and flexible, plywood-covered walls to soften the impact of being slammed into the wall.

The detainees, held in cells far enough apart to prevent communication with one another, were kept in solitary confinement 23 hours a day. For their one hour of daily exercise, they were taken out of their cells by C.I.A. security officers wearing black ski masks to hide their identities and to intimidate the detainees, according to the intelligence officials.

Just like prisons in the United States, the jailers imposed a reward and punishment system: well-behaved detainees received books, DVDs and other forms of entertainment, which were taken away if they misbehaved, the officials said.

C.I.A. analysts served 90-day tours at the prison sites to assist the interrogations. But by the time the new prisons were built in mid-2003 or later, the harshest [C.I.A. interrogation](#) practices — including [waterboarding](#) — had been discontinued.

Winning a Promotion

Mr. Foggo's success in Frankfurt, including his work on the prisons, won him a promotion back in Washington. In November 2004, he was named the C.I.A.'s executive director, in effect its day-to-day administrative chief.

The appointment raised some eyebrows at the agency. "It was like taking a senior NCO and telling him he now runs the regiment," said A. B. Krongard, the C.I.A.'s executive director from 2001 to 2004. "It popped people's eyes."

Mr. Foggo soon became embroiled in agency infighting. The C.I.A. was reeling from criticism that it had exaggerated Iraq's weapons programs. Mr. Foggo came to Washington as part of a new team that almost immediately began firing top C.I.A. officials, causing anger among veteran clandestine officers. Mr. Foggo's fast rise and blunt approach unsettled some headquarters officials, according to Brant G. Bassett, a former agency officer and friend who served with Mr. Foggo.

"Dusty went in there with a blowtorch," Mr. Bassett said. "Some people were overjoyed, but there were a few others who said, we've got to take this guy down."

In 2005, before he came under investigation, Mr. Foggo and other officials, including [John Rizzo](#), the agency's top lawyer, paid a rare visit to some of the prison sites, assuring C.I.A. employees that their activities were legal, according to former intelligence officials. Mr. Foggo also met with representatives of Eastern European security services that had helped with the prisons. He expressed gratitude and offered assistance — a gesture the officials politely declined.

In February 2007, Mr. Foggo and Mr. Wilkes were indicted. Prosecutors believed that the C.I.A. had paid an inflated price to Archer Logistics, a business connected to Mr. Wilkes that had a \$1.7 million C.I.A. supply

contract. In return, the prosecutors claimed, Mr. Wilkes had taken Mr. Foggo on expensive vacations, paid for his meals at expensive restaurants and promised him a lucrative job when he retired.

"I was taking a trip with my best friend," Mr. Foggo said in his defense. "It looked bad, but we had been taking trips together since we were 17 years old."

Mr. Foggo said he had turned to Mr. Wilkes' companies to bypass the cumbersome C.I.A. bureaucracy, not to provide a sweetheart deal to his oldest friend. "I needed something done by someone I trusted in private industry," Mr. Foggo said.

Downfall in Court

Mr. Wilkes maintains his innocence, but he was eventually convicted in a bribery scandal involving former Representative Randall Cunningham of California. Mr. Foggo pleaded guilty and is serving a sentence on the fraud count, but he still maintains that he was unfairly prosecuted.

His lawyer, Mark J. MacDougall, said he believed that Mr. Foggo's legal problems stemmed in part from controversies over his stint as executive director. "Nobody ever accused [Dusty Foggo](#) of putting a dime in his pocket, failing to do his job, or compromising national security," Mr. MacDougall said. "Dusty may have made some mistakes, but this case was driven by professional animosity at C.I.A. and personal ambition."

When Mr. Foggo's lawyers tried unsuccessfully to obtain access to agency files about his role in the prison program, prosecutors complained that he was trying to disclose a secret program. Mr. Foggo claimed that he was reluctant to divulge his role in classified programs and pleaded guilty, in part, to avoid revealing his secrets.

In an Aug. 1, 2007, letter, a C.I.A. lawyer informed Mr. Foggo's lawyers that they could not review any classified files related to the prisons. The agency's letter concluded, "In light of the president's statements regarding the extraordinary value and sensitivity of the C.I.A. terrorist detention and interrogation program, the C.I.A. denies your request in its entirety."

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