

Memorandum for the Record

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Event: Interview of Sheila Lawson
Type of Event: On-the-Record Interview
Date of interview: 10/3/03
Date memo prepared: 10/3/03
Special Access Issues: None
Prepared by: John Roth
Team Number: 4
Location: SIOC conference room
Classification: Secret
Present, non-Commission: Sheila Lawson, Pat O'Brien, Greg Ruppert, (all FBI)
Participants-Commission: John Roth and Doug Greenburg

This memorandum provides a summary of the most important points covered in the above-entitled interview, but is not a verbatim account. The memorandum is organized by subject and does not necessarily follow the order of the interview. All information in this memorandum was provided by the witness during the interview unless stated in brackets.

SSA Sheila Lawson was interviewed regarding her knowledge of and participation in the "Gitmo Project." During the relevant time period, Lawson was an acting Unit Chief in RF FIU II at the FBI's Terrorist Finance Operations Section (TFOS). Also present and contributing was SSA Greg Ruppert, the current SSA in RF FIU II, who was generally aware of the project but had no personal participation in the interviews described herein.

The Gitmo Project identified 19 "high value" al Qaeda and Taliban detainees at Camp Delta in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba (hereinafter, "Gitmo") who may be exploited for their knowledge concerning terrorist finance. These individuals were identified as a result of their positions within the Taliban or al Qaeda, their associations with other known terrorists and their geographical location during certain time periods.

Following D. Farrah's article in the Washington Post that al Qaeda may have been financing itself through the use of conflict diamonds, Congressman Wolf inquired as to the validity of the article and suggested that the FBI investigate. In preparation for the trip, the FBI identified 9 of the detainees who may have information concerning the issue, and arranged to travel to Gitmo for interviews, with an eye toward proving or dispelling the allegation in Farrah's article. The preparation included specific training techniques for interviewing detainees, which was held at Ft. Belvoir, as well as extensive review of Defense Intelligence Agency materials, including reports of interviews (contained in TDD's) and link analysis charts. They also conferred with DIA's group that was focused on terrorist financing. Lawson stated that they were completely prepared for these interviews, and unlike criminal post arrest interviews, involved considerable preparation.

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Lawson made the trip to Gitmo in the end of March, 2003. Lawson stated that the detainees were generally cooperative and forthcoming. Each interview lasted about four hours. Each involved a translator, who was familiar with the detainee as well. Each interview was written up on a 302, and Lawson also wrote a post trip report.

With regard to the funding of al Qaeda through conflict diamonds, specifically, Lawson stated that none of the detainees had any knowledge of such a technique, and further stated that none of the detainees believed such a scheme was likely. The detainees were even provided with a translated copy of the Farrah article. The reasons were threefold:

1. Money from conflict diamonds would have been directed internally to support the Sierra Leone/Liberia rebel conflict rather than used to fund external conflicts;
2. Such a trade would raise too many red flags and be too risky;
3. The detainees were shown pictures of some of the diamond trading suspects and they stated that such individuals were too dark skinned and would have stood out in Afghanistan.

Lawson stated that while it is difficult to prove a negative, she satisfied herself that the detainees had no involvement or knowledge concerning conflict diamonds.

A similar process, with similar results, was conducted to determine whether there was a link for gold purchases as well.

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