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THE C.I.A.'S TRAVEL AGENT

by Jane Mayer

OCTOBER 30, 2006

On the official Web site of Boeing, the world's largest aerospace company, there is a section devoted to a subsidiary called Jeppesen International Trip Planning, based in San Jose, California. The write-up mentions that the division "offers everything needed for efficient, hassle-free, international flight operations," spanning the globe "from Aachen to Zhengzhou." The paragraph concludes, "Jeppesen has done it all."

Boeing does not mention, either on its Web site or in its annual report, that Jeppesen's clients include the C.I.A., and that among the international trips that the company plans for the agency are secret "extraordinary rendition" flights for terrorism suspects. Most of the planes used in rendition flights are owned and operated by tiny charter airlines that function as C.I.A. front companies, but it is not widely known that the agency has turned to a division of Boeing, the publicly traded blue-chip behemoth, to handle many of the logistical and navigational details for these trips, including flight plans, clearance to fly over other countries, hotel reservations, and ground-crew arrangements.

The Bush Administration has defended the clandestine rendition program, which began during the Clinton years, as an effective method of transporting terrorists to countries where they can be questioned or held. Human-rights activists and others have said the program's primary intent is to send suspects to detention centers where they can be interrogated harshly, and have criticized it as an illegal means of "outsourcing torture."

A former Jeppesen employee, who asked not to be identified, said recently that he had been startled to learn, during an internal corporate meeting, about the company's involvement with the rendition flights. At the meeting, he recalled, Bob Overby, the managing director of Jeppesen International Trip Planning, said, "We do all of the extraordinary rendition flights—you know, the torture flights. Let's face it, some of these flights end up that way." The former employee said that another executive told him, "We do the spook flights." He was told that two of the company's trip planners were specially designated to handle renditions. He was deeply troubled by the rendition program, he said, and eventually quit his job. He recalled Overby saying, "It certainly pays well. They"—the C.I.A.—"spare no expense. They have absolutely no worry about costs. What they have to get done, they get done."

Overby, who was travelling last week, did not return several phone calls. Mike Pound, the head of corporate communications for Jeppesen, said that he would have no comment, and he added, "Bob Overby will have no comment as well." Tim Neale, the director of media relations for Boeing's corporate office in Chicago, said, "The flight-planning services we provide our customers are confidential, and we do not comment publicly on any work done for any customer without their consent." The C.I.A. had no comment.

The British journalist Stephen Grey, in a new book, "Ghost Plane," refers to documents obtained by Spanish law-enforcement officials, along with flight logs, which indicate that international flight planners provided essential logistical support for many of the C.I.A.'s renditions, including that of Khaled el-Masri, a German car salesman who was apparently mistaken for an Al Qaeda suspect with a similar name, in January of 2004. (Although documents show that Jeppesen

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provided this support, Grey's book does not mention the company.) Masri, who is a Muslim, was arrested at the border while crossing from Serbia into Macedonia by bus. He has alleged in court papers that Macedonian authorities turned him over to a C.I.A. rendition team. Then, he said, masked figures stripped him naked, shackled him, and led him onto a Boeing 737 business jet. Flight plans prepared by Jeppesen show that from Skopje, Macedonia, the 737 flew to Baghdad, where it had military clearance to land, and then on to Kabul. On board, Masri has said, he was chained to the floor and injected with sedatives. After landing, he was put in the trunk of a car and driven to a building where he was placed in a dank cell. He spent the next four months there, under interrogation. Masri was released in May, 2004, on the orders of Condoleezza Rice, then the national-security adviser, after she learned that he had mistakenly been identified as a terrorism suspect.

Ben Wizner, an A.C.L.U. attorney who is representing Masri in his lawsuit against the former C.I.A. director George Tenet and private aviation companies, says that if Boeing can be proved to have played a role in Masri's rendition the A.C.L.U. may amend the lawsuit to name the company as a defendant.

The American flight crew fared better than their passenger. Documents show that after the 737 delivered Masri to the Afghan prison it flew to the resort island of Majorca, where, for two nights, crew members stayed at a luxury hotel, at taxpayers' expense.

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