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10 April 1956

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director/Plans
VIA : Chief, Foreign Intelligence
SUBJECT : Exfiltration Operation into Latvia

DECLASSIFIED AND RELEASED BY
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
SOURCE METHOD EXEMPTION 3B2B
NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT
DATE 2007

A. BACKGROUND

1. Two of our Agency-trained agents in illegal status in Latvia, whose mission was to recruit legal-resident agents, hereinafter called assets, completed their assignment in September 1954 and were directed to exfiltrate. They reported setting off overland with the aim of crossing the border, on foot, into Norway. A month later they advised us of abandoning their exfiltration attempt when the physical and security obstacles encountered by them on their journey proved insurmountable.

2. On studying their problem it became evident the chances of our agents getting out of the USSR on their own resources were very slim. On the other hand, their exfiltration was judged essential to the preservation of our assets in Latvia. On this score, authority was granted us to evacuate them by means of an aircraft landing and pick-up in a designated landing zone (LZ) in Latvia.

3. Through negotiations with the Danish Intelligence Service (DIS) a staging and communications base was established on the Island of Bornholm. A sanitized aircraft, manned by two agent-aviators, took off on the evacuation mission on the night of 10-11 September 1955 and returned to base according to plan, but without our agents. On the basis of the crew's debriefing and information from other sources it was concluded that, although the aircraft had penetrated the target area, the crew failed to locate the true LZ.

4. Since the requirement for exfiltrating our agents remained unchanged, and the situation did not differ materially from that estimated for the initial attempt, save for the apparent deterioration of our agents' morale, we recommended that the operation be relaunched at the earliest practicable date. Approval to rerun the mission was granted on 21 November 1955 but by this time the DIS was not prepared to authorize us use of Bornholm. This caused us to fall back on Bremerhaven as a base, extending the flight range to a considerable extent but still within the estimated tolerable limits for the aircraft and crew under the circumstances.

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5. The second mission was launched on the night of 20-21 December 1955. This one aborted. The aircraft returned to base after traversing less than one-third the outbound leg. The agent-aviators claimed they got lost. Their debriefing, however, did not substantiate their claim. It suggested, moreover, their story was fabricated by motives of fear, and established their intent of refusing another try. At a subsequent date the service of these agent-aviators was terminated.

B. ESTIMATE OF THE SITUATION

1. We are in contact with both of our agents at the present time. Information in our possession gives us no reason to believe these agents are not clean.

2. The need for evacuating them grows rather than lessens. With their finances exhausted from an overextended stay and their morale damaged by repeated failure in attempts at exfiltration, their vulnerability to despair may be expected to increase with the possibility of leading them to an unfortunate, desperate, act which we fear might break down our total developing structure of covert assets in Latvia.

3. If we are to take advantage of the spring operational season, the exfiltration should be effected prior to mid-May. The period of darkness subsequent to this date, decreases to the extent that it would not provide sufficient cover for the flight.

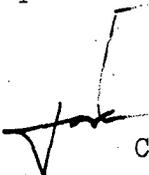
4. The September evacuation attempt demonstrated the feasibility of airborne penetration of the Latvian area. Information in our possession gives us no reason to believe that this situation has altered.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In light of the facts and our estimate of the situation, presented above, the following courses of action are recommended and authority is requested to initiate them:

a. Air Maritime Division to recruit and train a new crew of agent-aviators with capability to rerun an evacuation mission similar to the two attempted in September and December 1955.

b. Prior to the time that the above agent-aviators are available and capable to fly the evacuation mission, mount an air-resupply drop operation as soon as possible to provide our agents with funds, supplies and equipment, the latter to include a homing device for facilitating a subsequent air or sea exfiltration operation.


Chief, SR Division

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