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Impediments to the collection of intelligence at the one-man clandestine field installation.

PRODUCTION AT SMALL POSTS

C. R. Drave

This study of factors bearing on the productivity of the small intelligence field post is based on a review of experience over the past decade with clandestine bases and stations that comprised only one or two intelligence officers, with or without an administrative and communications assistant. A one-man post was found to produce, other things being equal, only about a third as many reports as a two-man post. And although numbers of reports is only a crude quantitative measure of productivity and completely ignores quality, it will appear that the over-all value of the one-man post was on the average even lower than this 2:3 ratio would indicate. Some of the conditions that produced this result were unavoidable; others could have been obviated or mitigated.

The factors critical for productivity that emerge from the study are generally applicable to the field of covert collection, and many of them apply equally well to the lone overt collector. They fall into five categories—the validity of the post's mission, the quality of its staffing, its administrative workload, the guidance it receives, and its cover problems.

Validity of Purpose

A post's chances for high productivity were evidently prejudiced at the start if no fairly specific job that needed doing gave rise to its establishment. Of the several dozen posts here studied a large portion were independent stations, each covering one small country and responsible directly to a Washington headquarters. These, we can assume, had valid missions in the coverage of their respective countries. But an even larger number were bases in countries each already covered by a station. Some of these auxiliary bases or outposts had apparently been opened on general principles, the intelligence purpose being only dimly anticipated and the base itself

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expected to seek out a specific mission. The city to be covered was usually large and industrial; or it was thought to be a Communist stronghold; or the general area was characterized as critical or strategic.

Such generalities may seem sufficient cause for the establishment of a base. But the inescapable corollary to lack of particular purpose is an absence of specific direction. If a base chief is simply told to go out and operate, without the guidance and stimulus of defined requirements, his output is more than likely to be poor.

Instances of good planning before the opening of small bases can be cited to illustrate procedures that might profitably be imitated. A one-man base was established in 1956 on [redacted] only after the prospects for its operation had been personally explored by its future chief, [redacted].

A base near the 17th parallel in South Vietnam was opened in 1958 to debrief refugees from the north, run cross-border operations, and collect information on the Annamese area only after three years of shuttling station officers up from Saigon had failed to attain these objectives. The station in [redacted] opened a one-man outpost after actually developing a worthwhile operation in a coastal town some distance away.

A base established in 1954 near [redacted] provides an example of clear purpose and the constant measurement of cost and performance against this purpose. It was to cover [redacted] to obtain information on the activities of [redacted] troops in [redacted], and finally to infiltrate [redacted] with an early-warning network. It was successful in the first two of these purposes, and it also established [redacted]. But the development of an effective early-warning net was found infeasible, and the post was closed because accomplishment of all three objectives was considered necessary to justify the cost.

The validity of concrete purpose in a proposal for a new base was in general manifested by sufficient examination of the operational potential and conditions on the spot and, where distance did not prevent it, by an attempt to develop the required coverage working out of the station. The importance

of the purpose was reflected also in the choice of operations officers to man the base.

Staffing

The qualifications required to run a small station or base are those generally desirable in any intelligence officer anywhere; but in a large establishment the strengths and weaknesses of the different members of the staff tend to offset each other, while in a one-man post there is no remedy for a major weakness or lack of experience in the single officer. Officers on their first tours of duty overseas, who have had no experience in recruiting and directing covert sources, should not be required to mount and run their first clandestine operations in the isolation of a one-man post.

Stations were sometimes able to staff their small bases out of their own experienced staffs, as those in [redacted] did. This practice provided the bases with persons who had some knowledge of the country and the operational climate, a certain language competence, and an acquaintance with the operational outlook and the inner workings of the station. Other small bases were staffed by men who had prior knowledge of the area. The man who opened a post in [redacted] in 1950 was a geologist who had lived there many years before. The chief of a one-man station in [redacted] had spent seven years there before the war; he and his wife knew how to handle the problems of daily living, including the difficult one of safeguarding the health of their children.

Area preparation by planned effort was illustrated in the case of a chief of base sent to [redacted] having spent 20 months in [redacted] he was not ignorant about [redacted] and knowing two years in advance that he would be assigned to [redacted] he spent one year in language and area study at Yale and Cornell and the other on [redacted] affairs at headquarters. When he arrived he already knew much about the place and its personalities, and his preparation proved invaluable when the rebellion broke out and he could not get much direction from the station [redacted]

On the other hand, valuable specialists in the language and background knowledge of a hostile or target country other than the place of station were shown to be wasted at small

bases; they could generally have been used more profitably at headquarters or at the station. The smaller a post is, the greater is the necessity that such specialists, if they are sent there, do their share of all the work, and this fact of life had not always been understood by the specialist himself and by the headquarters division or desk primarily concerned with that target country.

The most frequent complaint made by returnees from one-man posts concerned the isolation to which they felt relegated there. Some had felt alone and forgotten in spite of the fact that they visited the main station at least once a month and someone from the station occasionally came to see them. The solitary post is no place for the organization man who needs the daily presence of colleagues to give him assurance.¹

The essential qualities for such an assignment emerged as the self-reliance and resourcefulness to reach decisions alone, with deliberation but without hesitation or anxiety. One out-post chief found that the best way to get direction from his station was to present his intentions and say that unless he heard to the contrary by a certain date he would assume approval. Another, even though he was on his first tour, showed the same self-reliance: in presenting problems to the station or to headquarters he made up his own mind first and submitted recommendations instead of questions. Another, who lost contact with his station after a political coup and from then on was under the immediate direction of headquarters, says he received little guidance from headquarters because no one there had any solid knowledge of his area, but he did not miss it; he preferred to be left to work alone.

Another important requisite was evidently an equable temperament and faculty for adjusting not only to the physical and operational circumstances of the post but also to the character and attitude of the cover chief; in a small post the intelligence officer is constantly exposed to the limelight of his cover chief's attention. Agreeability in interpersonal relations must be complemented by firmness, but tact and

¹For a full discussion of this psychological hazard, see Martin L. Schatz' "Psychological Problems in Singleton Cover Assignments," *Studies* II 3, p. 31 ff.

equanimity are important ingredients in avoiding difficulties with a mission chief.

A few chiefs of small bases demonstrated that a good supply of self-reliance and ingenuity could make up for a lack of operational experience and area knowledge. But when inexperienced officers did not possess these compensating qualities, the odds against success were prohibitive. The practice of staffing small bases out of the sponsoring station had clear advantages in this as in other respects.

Administrative Workload

Most of the small stations and bases under study had an administrative assistant, but about one-sixth were dependent on working wives for secretarial and administrative support, and at another sixth the single operations officer was all alone. It was clear that the productivity of a post in one of the first two categories depended in large part on the caliber of the administrative assistant or the ability of the officer's wife to step into the breach. The large amount of administrative work required of all stations and bases, regardless of size, tended to be given de facto priority over operations because, as one base chief put it, "It takes some courage to omit administrative requirements in order to carry out operations; you can let operations slide without headquarters' knowledge, but omitting an efficiency or property report will invariably bring a rap on the knuckles."

At some bases the administrative load did not interfere with the chief's intelligence work because his administrative assistant, as one of them reports, "was outstanding: she took over all the administrative work except for the accounting; she was a good secretary, a good reports officer, a top-notch communications clerk, and she had no personal problems; she was really too good for a mere base!" Others had to neglect operations because they did not have a good administrative assistant. Most frustrated were the base chiefs who had had and then lost one, as when a male administrative assistant proved so valuable to a one-man base during its first year that he was pulled back to the station "because he was so good."

There were a few men among the administrative assistants at the small stations, most of them in [redacted] where the operating division encouraged those who showed aptitude

for becoming junior case officers to attempt the transition at its small posts. One of these who showed promise in minor operational tasks later became a case officer in his own right. But there were not many male administrative assistants available. There was only one in all Asia, where they were most needed because, as a chief of base there remarked, "of the position of women in society in this part of the world; a man can walk alone down the street without attracting undue attention and he can call at a house alone without jarring local mores." Another described his location as "very trying for a single woman; the hostile populace restricts her activities greatly, there are no social outlets, not even stores or eating places. The one eligible social contact in town for her is a British bachelor, and a close relationship with him creates a security concern. It is difficult to find a girl who will come here and stick out a full tour."

One solution in areas difficult for women was illustrated at a two-man post in [redacted] where the second officer was a junior trainee who did administrative as well as intelligence work. At the same time that he was thus learning the basic clerical functions of the station—accounting, cryptography, the preparation of pouches, and so on—he progressed operationally to the point of handling an outside penetration and doing much of the liaison work. Elsewhere, small stations that lacked an administrative assistant but had a communications man let him double in the administrative work.

Few of the posts studied had regular communicators, however, and this was another job that fell to the administrative assistant or to the operations officer himself. It was apparent that the officer should, in view of the uncertainty of his always having an assistant, have communications training in any case; a man sent without such training to reopen a base in [redacted] 1958 was unable to get away afterwards to take the six-weeks communications course.

Wives working as administrative assistants offered the advantage of not needing cover positions. This solution, of course, was not always available; frequently the officer's wife, for one reason or another, could not help out. But all the wives who did assist at the posts under study apparently did very well, and some were former staff employees who could

help even in cryptographic work. They seem all to have been, as they had to be, stable, self-sufficient, and willing to endure the hardships of a small post in one of the less desirable areas, for the posts that depended solely on wives for administrative support were almost all in out-of-the-way places.

The officers at one-man bases that had no administrative help at all generally fared better than those with mediocre assistance because they were supported administratively by their sponsoring stations; even the intelligence reports of the outposts were prepared in final form by the stations. Such an arrangement worked well when frequent visits to and from the station were possible. It was suggested that if the station itself is a small post without clerical help, its reports might even be sent to headquarters in rough draft.

On whether the administrative workload itself could and should be reduced, opinion among the base chiefs was divided. Those that had good administrative assistants or their administrative work done by their station had no complaints, one of them concluding that "the administrative requirements of a base as a drain on a case officer's time are exaggerated as a problem." But the less fortunate, particularly where operational demands were heavy, complained vehemently about the administrative burden and urged that it be reduced. Logistic matters were especially singled out, and one base chief said he spent half his day answering dispatches on vehicles, schools, property, and so on.

Toward the end of the period under review, however, there was some reduction in the administrative demands placed on small posts, and a thorough streamlining of their administrative procedures was reported to be in prospect.

Direction and Guidance

The study disclosed a wide variety of experience with the direction and guidance provided by headquarters to small stations and by headquarters and stations to small bases. Headquarters direction, since the "go-out-and-operate" days of the early fifties, was shown on the whole to have improved "with the improvement in its education," as one chief of station said. Some of the best teachers were the very officers who served at small posts and knew what was needed; some

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branches adopted the excellent practice of having selected returnees serve one year on the desk supporting their former post before being released for assignment elsewhere.

One form of guidance particularly appreciated at small posts was the timely evaluation of their work and production, and a number of base chiefs felt that headquarters was delinquent in this respect. They remarked that "an occasional pat on the back would have been overwhelmingly welcomed," and recalled that "there were times when evaluations of our intelligence reports were far behind, with a backlog of 100 reports still unevaluated, and the base was in the dark concerning the usefulness of its reporting."

The lack of specific guidance from some stations regarding the current plans and operations of their subordinate bases was a serious problem. The base chief who "preferred to be left to work alone" was a rare exception; most of the officers who had little guidance said they needed it badly. Distance was sometimes a factor; yet a base in [redacted] more than a thousand miles from its station "received good month-to-month guidance despite infrequent visits," and some bases located relatively close to their stations received so little guidance they felt that "the station did not give a damn about the base from the start."

The bases that did receive the necessary guidance were generally in frequent contact with the station through a pattern of visits arranged in advance. The base chief visited the station every month or two for a period of two or three days, the frequency being determined in each case by operational need as modified by cover and travel conditions; in one case it was as often as every two weeks. Sometimes the travel burden was divided by meeting in alternate months at the base and at the station.

Visits to the station offered base chiefs the chance to get full and current political briefings to obviate the collection deficiencies which can be caused by an isolated base's lack of sensitivity as to what is timely and new. Copies of intelligence reports produced by a station were also regarded as a source of inspiration and guidance when transmitted regularly to its base. Some stations designated one officer to look after all matters pertaining to a base and to visit it periodically.

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Cover Problems

The old adage about safety in numbers applied to cover; in a small mission where relationships among the staff are close and the work each member does is apparent to observers, the intelligence officer must spend more time on cover duties if he is to maintain any semblance of cover. Moreover, lack of privacy can make such activities as enciphering messages or preparing pouches difficult and time-consuming, and lack of anonymity demands greater care in blending one's comings and goings with the general pattern of the installation. One base chief was a [redacted] officer; his cover work took only about one-fourth of his time and it made his position look genuine. But even in this favorable setup he found it awkward to have to clear his desk of intelligence materials every time a [redacted] came in and get them out again after taking care of him.

In some places the intelligence officers were easily spotted because of departures from the norm. In one [redacted] one of the two secretaries worked exclusively for the intelligence officer, though he was junior in rank to several others on the staff. In a number of instances when a cover mission had to curtail travel because of a shortage of funds the intelligence officer was still required to make long trips. In one case the intelligence officer was quickly exposed among the genuine members of the cover organization because he was not familiar with its administrative and operating procedures and its peculiar jargon.

Cover positions varied widely in their demands on time and in the extent to which they furthered intelligence operations. One base chief had across-the-board [redacted] duties which generally took between 40% and 50% of his time, and some days he had to devote entirely to cover work. Another was the [redacted] in a [redacted], and when the principal [redacted] was traveling, about three months a year, this man had to spend over 50% of his time on work of no intelligence value. But the rest of the time the two jobs meshed very well; he had to spend only about 10% of his time on strictly cover duties, and because there was a close parallel between his intelligence and cover interests he often obtained from a single source both overt and covert informa-

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tion and used it for two different reports. Another base chief remarked that his load of work was heavy but his cover job of [redacted] reporting helped him operationally and permitted him to travel. Another's cover position as [redacted] and status as [redacted] gained him invitations to many functions of the [redacted] and a chance to make contacts; but his assistant, whose cover was that of an [redacted], did not share in these.

Cover problems were accentuated when the chief of the cover installation was hostile or uneasy about clandestine operations. In one instance the antagonism was so great that the [redacted] of the mission deliberately exposed a going intelligence operation. In less extreme cases the cover chief would frown on clandestine agent contacts or forbid contact with high government officials except by prior approval. Others levied requirements that seemed inappropriate and of doubtful value. At most posts, however, relationships with the cover chief were reported good to excellent. There was a consensus that the quality of this relationship was of paramount importance to the conduct of operations.

Conclusions

A one-man post is best suited for an intelligence purpose that is circumscribed in advance; the intelligence targets in the area may be few, or the post may be intended to do its collection job primarily or exclusively through liaison with a local service. If the targets are many and varied and have to be reached through independent operations, two intelligence officers will on the average be three times as productive as a single one.

There are three main reasons why the addition of a second man should generally more than double the productivity of a post's operations. First, the daily exchange of operational views is a valuable catalyst for both officers in the development of operational approaches. Second, the number of equally important targets in one place may be too much for one man to handle effectively, and if these targets are in widely diversified environments secure contact by the same officer can be difficult. Third, certain bases expected to provide effective, not merely nominal, coverage of targets located at a considerable distance need one officer to man the base

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while the other undertakes the travel necessary to develop contacts, recruit agents, and maintain regular contact with them in the outlying places. The man at a base in northern [redacted] for example, was frustrated at being unable "to spend two or three weeks at a time in the frontier area, giving continuous attention to spotting and developing there."

The addition of a second intelligence officer doubles the case-officer potential, generally with a decrease in the per capita administrative burden. In some cases it may mean the difference between a productive post and one that could just as well be closed. But it must be justified by operational opportunity and need. And even when operations justify a second man it is sometimes impossible to add a cover position for him; here operations must be expanded through the use of nonofficial-cover agents.

The productivity of a base is conditioned not only by the number of operators, but by their competence and experience, their relative freedom from administrative work and from incompatible cover duties, the direction they receive, and the validity of the base's purpose. The officer at a one-man post or the chief of a two-man post should have prior intelligence experience and some area preparation, but his indispensable qualifications are resourcefulness and self-reliance; they can even make up for lack of experience. He should also be selected, if the post's cover chief is known to be difficult, for his ability to deal with such a man.

Cover problems are too variegated to admit of integral solution, but more imaginative thought should be put into improving the cover arrangements in individual instances. Sometimes the addition of a nonofficial cover man would give more operational flexibility than another officer under official cover.

Any practices which lead a small base to feel ignored by headquarters and its station should be eliminated. Regular visits between base and station and the practice of designating a station officer to look after matters affecting a base should be encouraged.

An officer at a one-man base who has to do his own administrative work and some cover work in addition has little time for intelligence operations and is therefore of little use to his organization. If he cannot be given a competent ad-

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ministrative assistant and his wife cannot fill the gap, his paper work should be done by the sponsoring station. The administrative workload of small bases should in any case be reduced to the indispensable minimum.

The factors which inhibit the productivity of small posts appear sometimes singly, sometimes in combination. Combinations are most frequent at posts opened in undesirable areas for no cogent intelligence purpose. When the need for a post has not been thoroughly investigated and only generalities are adduced to justify an expansion, the inevitable corollaries are poor staffing and lack of direction. Productivity can hardly be expected.

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