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David Henry Blee

**CAREER: FORTY YEARS IN INTELLIGENCE**

(b)(3)(c)

David Henry Blee retired from the Central Intelligence Agency on 2 March 1985. He served more than 40 years in American intelligence. At the time of his retirement, he was one of only four former Office of Strategic Services officers still on duty with the Agency. His extraordinary record included service as Chief of Station in three countries, as Chief of two area divisions, as Associate Deputy Director for Operations, as National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia and, for the last seven years, as Chief of the Counterintelligence Staff. He was awarded two Distinguished Intelligence Medals—one for [redacted] (b)(1) [redacted] (b)(3)(n) and one for his vigorous rebuilding of the Operations Directorate's counterintelligence program from 1978 to 1985.

Dave's first award for his work in intelligence, the Bronze Star, was presented to him by General William J. Donovan at OSS Southeast Asia Command Headquarters in Ceylon in July of 1945. He was cited for his initiative, courage, and devotion to duty in his first field operation—deep behind enemy lines in Japanese-occupied Thailand. In November 1944, together with a small team made up of several nationalities, Dave was put ashore by submarine on Chance Island in the Mergui Archipelago 600 miles from the nearest Allied forces and more than a 1,000 miles from his supply base. On landing, his first responsibility was to supervise the transfer of six thousand pounds of supplies by rubber boat across a coral reef to the shore. A falling tide continually forced the submarine farther out to sea and made passage of the rubber boats over the reef exceedingly perilous. Dave's unstinting exertion and good judgment were considered to be the determining factors in making the landing a success. For much of the next six months Dave worked on Chance Island collecting intelligence on the enemy whose nearest base was only 40 miles away at Victoria Point. He sent out his reports by clandestine radio. He also managed to make contact with the Thai underground and provided support for its resistance activities. As part of a long range plan to set up a permanent OSS base on the Thai mainland, Dave reconnoitered nearby islands for future infiltration sites. Commenting on these missions, a fellow officer wrote that he believed Dave was the first person ever to make a reconnaissance of Japanese territory in a kayak in broad daylight.

**California**

Dave was born and raised in California. After graduating from Stanford\* in 1938 with a bachelor's degree in political science, he entered Harvard Law School and received his LLB in 1942. During the summers while still in school,

\* His roommate at Stanford was Allen Drury, who a few years later wrote the best-selling novel *Advise and Consent*.

~~SECRET NOFORN~~

SECRET NOFORN

Blee

Dave picked up some engineering and surveying experience with the Interior Department at Shasta Dam in California and with the Highway and Parks Commission in Bryson City, North Carolina. He also worked in personnel for the Federal Security Agency, a predecessor of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, in Washington. In 1942 Dave entered on duty with the Army as a private. A year later he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Army Corps of Engineers and assigned to OSS. He was released from OSS in late 1945 and discharged from the Army as a captain soon thereafter. In addition to the Bronze Star, Dave received the Air Medal for his participation in hazardous air resupply flights into enemy territory in Southeast Asia.

When he returned to California at the end of the war, Dave intended to resume his career as a lawyer. He was admitted to the California bar and practiced briefly before he was lured to Washington to work for the Central Intelligence Group in December 1946. If he ever regretted his choice of intelligence over the law, he never said so. He often mentioned that his legal training came in handy in the intelligence business. On occasion, Dave was known to muse about retiring to practice law in Southern California to represent the interests of the poor and disadvantaged Hispanic population there. He once joked about a similar idea with Red White.\* Dave suggested the two of them retire to open a law firm to be called "Red White and Blee."

(b)(1) Dave made another major change in his life in 1947 when he married  
(b)(3)(n) Margaret Gauer, a young school teacher whom he had known and courted for some time. Ten years later the Blee family had grown by five children.\*\* In 1953, the expanding number of Blee children prompted a colleague to chide Dave about his first major intelligence failure. Dave failed to anticipate the arrival of twins and the obvious need to have two of everything to handle the situation. Today, the five talented Blee children are all engaged in a variety of promising careers of their own.

(b)(1) [redacted]  
(b)(3)(c) The CIA was barely two years old in 1949 when Dave was sent [redacted]  
(b)(3)(n) [redacted] Starting with little more than a safe and a set of one-time pads, he quickly built [redacted] into one of the most operationally active and productive components [redacted]  
(b)(1) [redacted]  
(b)(3)(c) [redacted]  
(b)(3)(n) [redacted]  
These ties proved to be of exceptional value to Agency operations long after Dave had left the scene. [redacted] (b)(1) [redacted]  
(b)(3)(n) [redacted]  
[redacted] In one of these recruitments, Dave gained an early reputation for [redacted]

\* Colonel Lawrence K. "Red" White was Executive Director—Comptroller for CIA. An account of his career was published in the Winter 1981 issue of *Studies in Intelligence*, Volume 25, Number 4.

\*\* The arrangements necessary to move his good-sized family around the world may account for Dave's well known avocation as an expert in airline schedules. Many who worked for Dave over the years learned not to seek his advice on their travel itineraries unless they wanted the most exhausting, sleepless direct connections possible.

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SECRET NOFORN

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SECRET NOFORN

being ingeniously, if not irritatingly, resourceful.

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(b)(1)  
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In 1954, Dave began his second overseas assignment

It was a small station principally engaged in liaison with He is often remembered during this period for yet another example of his resourcefulness. Dave had made repeated pleas to Headquarters to send him a secure direct communications system for use between and

When his pleas went unanswered, he solved the problem himself by manufacturing his own one-time pads which he used to open the needed channel. When he reported this to Headquarters the Office of Communications reacted with indignation. He was instructed to cease using the system which according to Headquarters obviously was insecure and could easily be broken. Headquarters asked for a full report on Dave's system, how it was generated, and for copies of all his original messages. He gave a detailed explanation of how he made the pads

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Blee

SECRET NOFORN

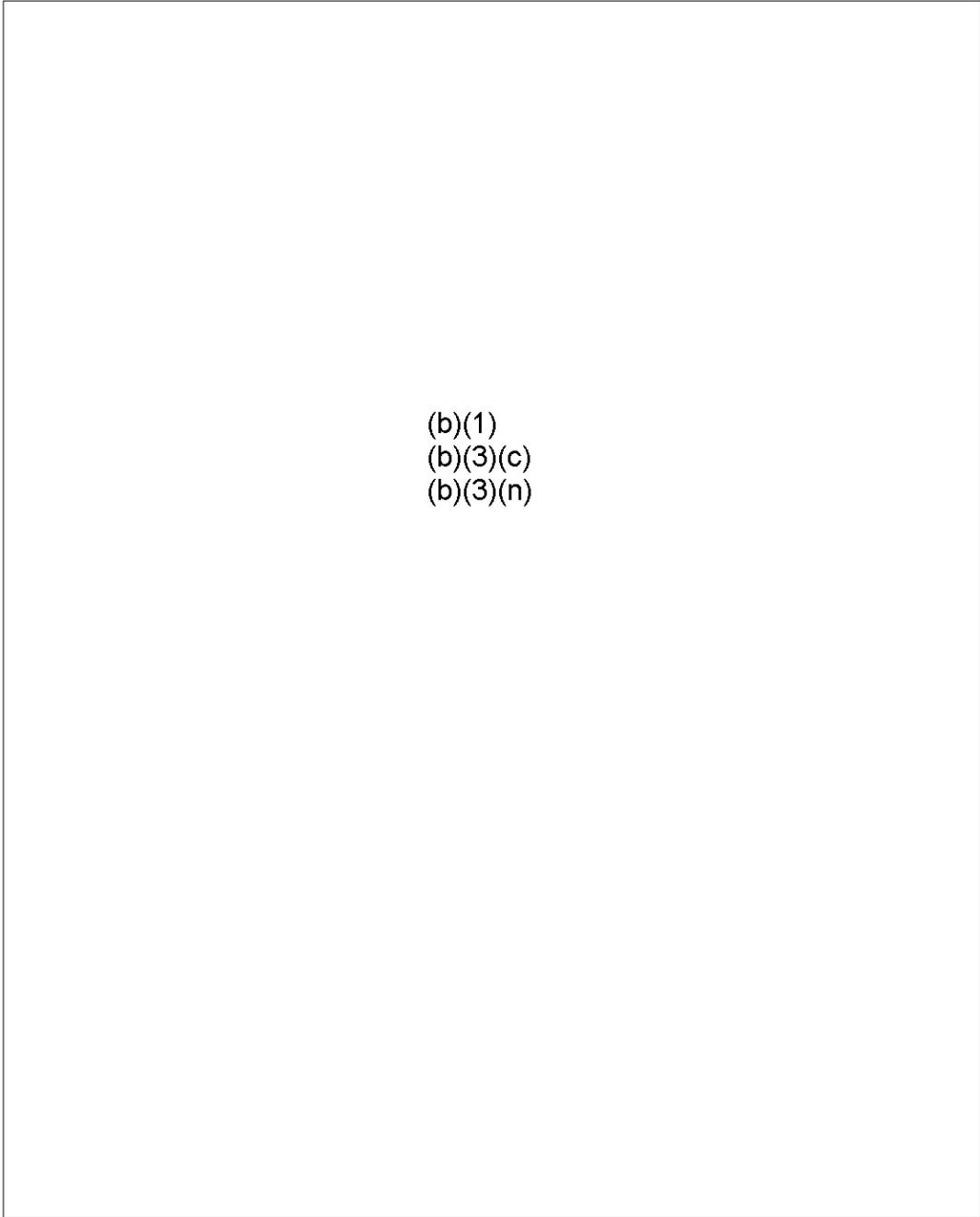
(b)(3)(n) [redacted] He regretted that he had destroyed everything but the enciphered texts which he forwarded with the suggestion that Headquarters break them out.

(b)(1) The link [redacted] was approved without further delay or mention of  
(b)(3)(c) whether Headquarters had succeeded in breaking Dave's system.

For the first two years after he returned from [redacted] Dave was (b)(3)(c)  
Branch Chief for three Near East Division branches: [redacted] (b)(3)(c)

(b)(1) [redacted] In 1959 he was made Chief of  
Operations for the Division, the position he held until he was named [redacted]

(b)(3)(c) [redacted]  
(b)(3)(n) [redacted]



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SECRET NOFORN

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SECRET NOFORN

19

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(b)(1) **Compatible and Incompatible**

(b)(3)(c) [redacted] Dave was  
 (b)(3)(n) often faced with the conventional wisdom that preserving a successful liaison relationship would force him to close down all but the most innocent unilateral operations.

(b)(1) This was indeed the pattern in many countries at this time, notably in  
 (b)(3)(n) [redacted] for many years, we generally shied away from unilateral operations for fear of jeopardizing our technical collection facilities there. As the need for an independent reading on [redacted (b)(3)(n)] became more urgent, we found that our ability to fill this gap was frustratingly limited.

In considering how to deal with the problem [redacted (b)(3)(n)] Dave chose to view the options not as liaison versus unilateral but rather as compatible and incompatible activities. [redacted]

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No recounting of Dave's years  could be complete without some mention of two cases in which he was deeply involved personally.

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(b)(3)(n)

Dave's relatively short term as head of (b)(3)(c) demonstrated again that he was often out ahead of the rest of us. In retrospect, we were surprised that his common sense approach to our apparently insoluble problems had taken so long to come about.

As Associate Deputy Director for Operations from 1973 to 1976, among his other duties Dave was able to oversee many of the programs he had originated in the Near East Division and (b)(3)(c) on a world-wide basis. He was next assigned as National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia from 1976 to 1978.

### Counterintelligence

In July of 1978, Dave was asked to become Chief of the Counterintelligence Staff to undertake the rebuilding of the Directorate of Operations counterintelligence program. Taking a cue from his success in (b)(3)(c) Division, he started with the premise that counterintelligence was the business of the Agency as a whole. He promoted an open atmosphere about counterintelligence to encourage a broad-based approach to offensive as well as defensive programs. Many hostile operations against the US Government were identified and neutralized through his efforts.

Dave rebuilt sound working relationships with other parts of the US counterintelligence community and with selected foreign liaison services. He became an articulate champion of the military counterintelligence global double agent operations. His earlier liaison experience, as Chief of SE Division, with the FBI proved to be of special value in uncovering Soviet agents around the world.

Two cases deserve special mention. The first was the identification and neutralization through arrest, trial, and conviction of Dieter Gerhardt, the South African naval commodore who was a trusted Soviet GRU agent for more than 19 years. It was through Dave's personal involvement and his excellent relations with the FBI and cooperating liaison services that this case was successfully resolved.

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(b)(3)(n)

This was a totally new departure in counterintelligence, yet another example of Dave's creative operational style.

The Distinguished Intelligence Medal awarded to Dave for these productive years of leadership in counterintelligence speaks for itself and, undoubtedly, for many things too current and too sensitive to be mentioned here. This latest tribute also reminds us that Dave's career ended\* as it began—in recognition for uncommon achievements in intelligence.

*This article is classified SECRET NOFORN.*

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SECRET NOFORN

25

