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17 August 1959

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Discussion of Area Training with
Area Division Representatives

1. In response to my informal request for an off-the-cuff sampling of Far East Division opinions on area training and through the generous help of [redacted] FE/EXO, I met with the 25X1A9A following FE officers for lunch on 13 August:

25X1A9A

[redacted]

FE/EXO
C/FE/
C/FE/

[redacted]

25X1

All of these officers have had extensive Headquarters and overseas experience, and their backgrounds include personal knowledge of

25X1A6A

[redacted]

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[redacted] as well as their current areas of interest. I asked to talk with such individuals because I believed their areas, as are Africa and the Middle East, are ones for which directed or guided area background preparation is particularly necessary.

2. This discussion was not meant to supersede that which already had been arranged by LAS with the FE Training Officer.

3. Prior to the luncheon meeting [redacted] stated his own belief 25X1A9A that, rather than attend regularly scheduled classes, FE preferred that its overseas assignees accomplish recommended and in some cases directed reading of carefully selected books and other area or subject background materials. OTR assistance in selecting such materials, in preparing bibliographies or area reading kits, etc. would be appreciated. There is apparently a growing feeling within FE that area and language training is more important--for newly-assigned case officers from other areas, anyway--than extensive operational or project-by-project briefings which they could better receive after arrival in the field.

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NO CHANGE in Class.

DECLASSIFIED

Class. CHANGED TO: TS S

DDA Memo, 4 Apr 77

Auth: DDA REG. 77/127

Date: 5 Jun 78 By: [redacted]

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4. The above-named, three officers iterated [] remarks, 25X1A9A emphasizing the essentiality not only of thorough area orientation but also of language training. With respect to area readings, one branch chief in FE goes so far as to maintain a small, highly-selective branch library and to give tests on the required reading. The prescribed reading also includes books, reports, and studies pouched in from the field, but more use probably could be made of OCI publications (handbooks, weeklies, dailies). Although the branches have been selecting their own materials (from CIA Library Accessions Lists, book reviews, and other bibliographies), OTR assistance could be valuable.

5. Two of the three officers advised that, based on the reactions of trainees sponsored by them, the OTR area training classes attended by these trainees fell short of expectations and were not of great value, that in some instances the material was "trite" or very generalized, and that some of the speakers seemed even less familiar with the areas than the trainees! (I gained the impression that shorter courses with lecture-discussions led by true experts and following up on required readings might come closer to the mark...) These officers had received and noted the announcement of the new Overseas Effectiveness Course, evinced interest in this new (for the Agency) technique for area study, but had made no effort to come up with candidates for training.

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6. With respect to language training, [] is endeavoring to or hopes to have all of its personnel going overseas take at least six months' training in []. Obviously, even with intensive study, one cannot become fluent in six months, but at least a foundation and some understanding will have been gained. This points up another and very significant factor directly affecting area-language training in particular, to wit--the area desk does not receive its new personnel sufficiently in advance of replacement time to permit the optimum ops training and area-language study necessary really to prepare its people for their overseas assignment. The problem is one of planning and lead-time. To begin with, it is strongly recommended that the Field Reassignment Questionnaire (and its Headquarters equivalent) be completed and submitted one year prior to the end of either a field or Headquarters tour.

7. All agreed, naturally, with the efficacy of introducing some area training into language study courses. They supported, too, the primary-and-secondary language concept but did not believe that it would be practicable, under our current planning system, to attempt to apply and enforce any rule requiring that a set percentage of individuals at a station have the area language. (A second language or English might suffice, even though a command of the area language is most desirable.)

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8. I should like to iterate that these personal opinions were expressed on a purely informal basis and do not reflect an official FE policy toward area-language training. They may be useful to OTR/LAS in developing its course plans but should be augmented by further and more exhaustive coordination with FE as well as other area divisions.



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Chief, Plans and Policy Staff

cc: DTR
C/LAS
D/Area Studies/LAS
D/Language Training/LAS

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