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The Nation

Spooked Spooks at the CIA

Dismissal by Xerox and unauthorized history

What's a spy to do when he gets fired? Some 200 CIA secret agents who have received pink slips in the first wave of a planned two-year cutback in covert personnel have been hitting the streets in search of jobs. But who really needs experts on secret information gathering, conspiracy and political subversion? "Hell, we are simply unemployable," complains one such agent. "No one will have us."

A number of the fired intelligence officers are fluent in difficult languages—Hindustani, Arabic, Japanese, and so forth—but colleges are reluctant to hire CIA veterans as teachers. Some of the agents have hopes of selling their services to industrial-security companies that offer protection for multinational executives and their plants. The CIA is trying to help its cashiered officers, instructing them in how to write a résumé without explaining in detail that a previous job, for example, was to lead airborne missions that used infrared devices to spot the cooking pots of Che Guevara's guerrillas in Bolivia. Concludes one angry agent: "A lot of guys will wind up selling real estate."

The agency is in turmoil because at least 800 of its employees are to be "terminated." All are members of the CIA's 4,500-man Directorate of Operations, the clandestine branch whose activities, such as trying to overthrow governments and spying on U.S. citizens, have damaged the reputation of the CIA. But only a small minority of agents were involved in such skulduggery, and a far larger part of the directorate's job has been the basic covert gathering of intelligence about potential enemies. Among those being fired are veteran officers with distinguished careers as undercover agents abroad.

CIA Director Stansfield Turner and his top aides have been jolted by the intensity of the protests from the fired spies. Yet the outcry is partly Turner's fault. He had William Wells, his deputy director for operations, send out brusque photocopied dismissal slips that began "Subject: Notice of Intent to Recommend Separation." The typical reaction of one recipient: "All there was in that goddamn piece of Xerox was my notice of termination. Nothing about what I had done, not even a 'Thank you and go to hell.'"

Four successive CIA directors—James Schlesinger, William



CIA Director Stansfield Turner

Below, copy-machine dismissal memo sent to some 200 agents. Blacked-out words contain name of employee's supervisor.

MEMORANDUM FOR :

FROM : William W. Wells
Deputy Director for Operations

SUBJECT : Notification of Intent to Recommend Separation

REFERENCE : Memorandum for all DO Employees from DDO dated 7 October 1977; Subject: FY 78 and FY 79 Reductions -- Implementation Procedures

This is to inform you of my intent to recommend to the Director of Personnel your separation in order to achieve the reduction in Operations Directorate strength ordered by the DCL. [REDACTED], I or my designee will first review your case with the Director of Personnel or his designee.

William W. Wells

of paring. In a post-Viet Nam retrenchment ordered by President Nixon, Schlesinger chopped 750 Operations employees. Colby and Bush passed on to Turner a plan to cut another 1,400—roughly 30% of the branch—over five years. Turner reduced that cutback to 820, but is trying to win a reputation for efficient management by carrying it out in just two years. Insiders in the agency insist that the dis-

technological capability for gathering intelligence had improved so much that far fewer field agents were needed.

The CIA has become proficient with observation satellites, interception of foreign radar and microwave communications, and other secret esoterica, but the notion that technology can extensively replace manpower in intelligence work is hotly disputed. Contends James Angleton, former chief of counterintelligence at the agency: "Technical intelligence devoid of human intelligence is dangerous. Lacking vital on-site inspection, you must have the capability to penetrate the enemy's deception plans." Agents also argue that U.S. satellites can now be knocked out by Soviet "hunter-killer" satellites and thus could be rendered useless in a crisis. One former high-level insider warns: "We would be blinded. We would have no adequate staff on the ground to do intelligence or counterintelligence."

Despite all the complaints, the cutbacks will continue, and the CIA's covert branch will grow leaner, if not tougher. Perhaps the ultimate worry is one raised by a U.S. counterintelligence expert: "If the situation were reversed, and I learned that the Soviet KGB was firing more than 800 people, I would expect our Moscow station chief to recruit somebody—or be fired himself."

Carrying complaints to the point of disloyalty may be hard to imagine, but the CIA got a firm reminder that not all its ex-agents play by the old-boy-network rules. Last week Random House published *Decent Interval*, a 592-page book by Frank Snepp, 36, an eight-year CIA veteran who had been a senior analyst in Viet Nam and was one of the last Americans to leave Saigon as it was falling to the Communists in 1975. Snepp charges that the CIA and the State Department inexcusably botched the evacuation. He

claims that the U.S. not only abandoned about 60,000 Vietnamese who had served American agencies, including, in some cases, the CIA, but also failed to destroy secret intelligence documents identifying many CIA informers who were left behind.

Snepp quit the agency in 1976. The CIA charges that he has both violated his secrecy agreement and gone back on a promise to Turner that he would submit