

It does not follow, if a case officer is not doing his job properly, that the basic task of operational security can be or should be taken over by the polygraph operator. The article, although it notes that the results obtained from the polygraph must not be credited to the machine *in vacuo*, that the interrogator using the machine is also a determinant, does not make clear the more basic fact that both polygraph and operator/interrogator constitute only one of several aids available to the case officer. Whether the machine is to be used at all and whether subsequent operational decisions or actions are to be based on its graphs are matters decided exclusively by the case officer and his supervisors in the operational chain of command.

At least the first of these sets of statistics, covering Far Eastern tests conducted under the wartime conditions of 1952-53, may not be as impressive—or depressing—as it seems. Many of the “agents and potential agents” tested may have been merely members of a large pool constituted at that time of persons recommended by indigenous principal agents and not yet subjected to any detailed case officer interview and assessment. The only information available on them, in this short-cut approach, was frequently what they themselves had supplied on a routine questionnaire. To the extent that such unknowns as these were introduced into the agent statistics, both the figures and the conclusions drawn from them are of diluted validity.

Most of what the article says about the thorough preparation of the polygraph operator to conduct a particular examination represents correctly what should be done, though all too often, through the fault of the case officer, there is no such preparation. But it is wrong to say that the polygraph operator is “prepared to probe for detail regarding the modus operandi, personnel, and tradecraft” of foreign intelligence services. Such probing requires an expert's knowledge of the sensitive practices and procedures of foreign services, internal and external, hostile and liaison. The polygraph operator's usual questioning is on the broad level of “Are you now or have you ever been employed by a Communist security or intelligence service or the intelligence service of any other country?” To suggest that he is capable of conducting an operationally sophisticated interrogation, functioning as a highly

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To the Editors: *The Polygraph*

Reservations on the Polygraph

Dear Sirs:

The comments that follow are those of an operations officer who has had a good deal of experience with the polygraph in agent interrogation and with the interpretation of polygraphic results.

Among case officers there have been a wide variety of attitudes toward the machine. There have been disbelievers, skeptics, objective appraisers, wholehearted enthusiasts, and, at an unhealthy extreme, some who embrace the comforting faith that the polygraph is a panacea for their problems. These latter tend to rely on it as a litmus paper, a short cut to secure operations, a short cut to the determination of bona fides. All too often the lazy or careless use it as an excuse to neglect their own most elementary and basic duty—to know everything possible about their agents—and shift from their own shoulders the responsibility for operational security.

A recent article in your *Studies*,¹ I am sorry to say, by citing impressive statistics and by enlarging upon the role of the polygraph operator in agent control, tends to reinforce this attitude and engender a belief that the case officer's problems can be solved by something outside himself. Or at least 95 to 98 percent solved: two to five percent of polygraph analyses were statistically tabbed inconclusive.

The statistics, taken from three studies of polygraph results, show that it produced "previously unknown information" in several critical categories in a substantial percentage of cases analyzed. No one doubts that interrogation, with or without the aid of a polygraph, will turn up new facts; but it is decidedly disturbing to learn that a polygraph operator can obtain previously unknown information on this scale in such categories as employment by other intelligence services. The fact that the information was obtained is good. But the way it was obtained is bad, because it indicates that the case officers in question were not doing their job, either with their agents or with respect to the security of their operations.

¹ "The Polygraph in Agent Interrogation," by Chester C. Crawford, *Studies* IV 3, p. 31 ff.

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specialized counterintelligence officer, depreciates the complexities of the continuing effort to acquire knowledge about foreign intelligence services.

I question also the "more general dividend" claimed near the article's conclusion, that the agent "is usually a better clandestine operator after being polygraphed." Agents are human; they do not necessarily "appreciate our attitude and look with greater respect on the American service after their 'ordeal.'" And the agent who refuses to undergo the ordeal may still be needed and in fact may prove very effective in clandestine operations.

The polygraph has a place in clandestine operations as an aid controlled by the case officer and used with discretion; but if he does his job properly he will often not have to use it, and he should always ask himself whether its use is the best way to enhance a particular operation. Most important, he cannot pass to the machine or its operator the buck of his own responsibility for acquiring a sure knowledge of his agent.

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