

L E T T E R

to the editor (U)

The Agency would appear for years to have been doing itself—and a few of its aging or deceased former staffers—a disservice by sponsoring and releasing allegations that it failed to provide any warning of, or to report out indications of, Chinese preparations for intervention in the Korean war. I would guess that the various authors failed, or were unable, to examine all the published intelligence disseminated by the Agency in 1950; that those who reviewed and those who released these histories were themselves unfamiliar with the record; that the wrong people were interviewed; or that the wrong questions were asked.

I recently read John Helgerson's thorough *Studies* article, "Truman and Eisenhower: Launching the Process." Unfortunately, I found a gap in his coverage of the Korean war period involved. He may not have examined the whole record. He talked to the right people, but he evidently failed to ask the right questions. He did not note that each week we wrote and delivered to the White House for President Truman a summary of indications of further hostile action, a summary the President had requested of the DCI.

Bertie Knapp, in her comprehensive volume, *The Central Intelligence Agency: The First Thirty Years*, also overlooked, or, rather, mischaracterized the role of this publication prepared during the first five months of the war for the personal attention of the President.

As one of those involved, indeed, completely absorbed, in that effort, I am impelled to fill out the record as best I can. Without the relevant documents, however, I have to base my recitation on recollection, before memory fades further.

Perhaps a week or so after the North Korean invasion, President Truman asked the DCI for a weekly summary of "indications." Somehow, perhaps because we had the only regular access to special intelligence, the request came down to General Division of the Office of Reports and Estimates (ORE), forerunner of the Directorate of Intelligence (DI). In General Division, J. J. Hitchcock ("J. J."), head of its EE/USSR branch, had a sideline: Agency support for the Watch Committee of the Intelligence Advisory Committee (IAC) and the development of a methodology for the detection and pursuit of indications of hostile preparations. He had a two-man staff for this purpose. With the Korean war, he was able to beef this up into an Indications Branch of some nine analysts and three secretaries, in an Economic Section, a Military Section (the minuscule forerunner of the Office of Strategic Research of the DI), and a Political Section (my empire). This branch was made responsible for meeting President Truman's request.

We had no precise instructions, and, without guidance from above, we developed our own objectives: a global survey, focusing all but exclusively on indications of any widening of the

war, particularly direct Soviet or Chinese military intervention, and on the emergence of crises the Soviets might create or exploit anywhere to the detriment of the United States and its war effort. It was not a polished or highly edited document, because time was always short. Nor were there grandiloquent conclusions. We were trying to call attention to what we regarded as indications or likely indications.

The first Situation Summary (the "Sitsum") was hand-delivered to Jimmy Lay, the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council, on a Friday morning, a day and a half after we received the request. With it went a "lap map," which we understood the President kept in his desk from one week to the next. It was typed in three copies: the original for the President—delivered to the NSC by the senior writer/editor; a carbon for the DCI, delivered generally after the President's copy; and a carbon for our files. This was the pattern for the first five months. Later, after General Smith was firmly established as DCI, he elected to deliver it himself during a weekly session he had with the President. Perhaps after the turn of the year, the President began asking that more recipients be added—most of the Cabinet members, some on a "read-while-the courier-waits" basis. And then we managed to get the publication printed.

We did our damndest, often on a seven-day-week basis, to meet what we regarded as a serious responsibility.

Letter

It was not easy. We had a difficult time getting collateral (other than special intelligence) information. General MacArthur's Far East Command (FECOM) sat on much information; the reports officers of CIA's Directorate for Plans (DDP, precursor of the DO) were most reluctant to tell us anything about their reports; and State and military cables got to us only when others were finished with them (I seem to recall that many arrived in the Agency in one copy—and office copiers were still a thing of the future). While, as I recollect, service intelligence agencies were asked by the DCI to contribute to our summary, we were not overwhelmed by contributions. Moreover, the maharajahs of ORE (regional division chiefs equivalent to today's DI Office chiefs) were suspicious of us and seemed to want only that we would go away.

At some point, the division chiefs began reviewing our draft the night before final typing and White House delivery. On one occasion, when serving as the senior writer/editor, I was faced with their recommendation that I remove what I recall as nearly a page of "Chinese indications." (One remark: "Tom, I could have written that in my rocking chair back home in Virginia.") Overwhelmed by their seniority, I removed it. But, after they left, my backbone stiffened, and I restored the offending material while my boss, Knight McMahan, chief of General Division, ORE, looked on in silent support.

Nonetheless, we were blazing a trail by putting out the first "all-source" periodic intelligence publication in town. So far as I know, it was the first one incorporating both collateral and special intelligence; during and after

World War II, the two were carefully kept divorced, although special intelligence publications would take advantage of the findings of collateral intelligence. It was in that sense the forerunner of the new Agency daily born in early 1951, the dry runs of which were done in our shop. Most important, I believe we reported out most of the indications we recognized as such, and we were particularly bothered by what we saw as possible/probable/potential indications of Chinese preparations.

On or near 14 October 1950, as best I can recall, the IAC Watch Committee held a special meeting next door to our office:

- The Watch Committee was the first community approach to a coordinated warning instrumentality, a concept devised by J. J. Hitchcock as a means of helping, if not simply enabling, the Agency and the community to deal with critical or potentially critical information of an indications nature.
- J. J.'s search for such a concept had been requested by Knight McMahan, after ORE (which kept no order-of-battle records) had demonstrated its inability to deal with special intelligence we had received on a hot day in May 1948 indicating the arrival in East Germany of several hundred Soviet Mig-15s, a deployment later appreciated as a prelude to the Berlin blockade.
- The Watch Committee concept was blessed by the IAC (predecessor to USIB and thus to the NFIB) in (I think) 1949. Its first sessions, meeting monthly under a CIA chairman (J. J. Hitchcock, I

believe), appear to have been overlooked by historians, probably because it was not a high-status, highly formal body. Recently, however, I was startled to find in Christopher Andrew's book, *For the President's Eyes Only*, a quote from the minutes of the April 1950 Watch Committee meeting reporting that Army intelligence would look into a report alleging preparations for a June invasion of South Korea. While Andrew reported the lack of an Army response, he did not include any further data on the Watch Committee. Nor did he report what I recall as an Army memo forwarded to the Committee chairman after the invasion of South Korea denying that the Army had undertaken any such charge.

- Later, beginning in 1951 with General Smith as DCI, the Committee underwent a series of command and community changes and became a formal community organization.

The mid-October Watch Committee meeting considered a piece of special intelligence indicating that the North Korean Government, by then ensconced in Manchuria, was in the throes of, or was being affected by, a major decision—nature unspecified. The Committee wrestled with this for hours. (I did not sit in because I was busy putting together the Sitsum for the week). Finally, it concluded that the Chinese had decided to, or were about to, intervene. I cannot remember the exact language, but this was the guts of it. If I am not mistaken, we learned later that Chinese forces crossed the Yalu on or about 14 October.

The Watch Committee report was delivered to the White House and to

the DCI and was reported in our Sitsum. (A week or so later, J. J. Hitchcock told me he had encountered DDCI William H. Jackson somewhere and had been twitted over the Watch conclusion—"went too far," "was off base," and so forth). In succeeding Sitsums, until FECOM began acknowledging the large-scale Chinese presence, we had to report that we had not yet received information on actual Chinese intervention, but we did not back away from the conclusion.

Later, we heard that the Sitsum record had been useful in whatever passed for a postmortem in those days. During the autumn of 1950, we had no direct signs about the nature of the principal reader's reaction to our efforts. But I recall one possibility. One Friday, after I had delivered the

Sitsum to the NSC (J. J. Hitchcock was out with a prolonged illness and I was filling in), I had left the office to run an errand, car radio on. A news broadcast reported that President Truman either had made or had issued a statement warning the Chinese Communists against intervention. I remember thinking that perhaps we had scored. But this was only my presumption.

A few months ago, however, I saw a somewhat stronger suggestion that we had been getting through. The summer 1976 edition of *Studies in Intelligence* carried the text of farewell remarks by DDCI Lieutenant General Walters. General Walters had gone along with Averill Harriman to the mid-October 1950 Wake Island meeting between President Truman and General MacArthur. The following is

excerpted from General Walters's description of that meeting as it appeared in *Studies*:

... I noticed that he [MacArthur] didn't salute him. Ten years later, I asked Mr. Truman whether he'd noticed this, and halfway into the question he said, "That he didn't salute me? You're damned right I noticed that he didn't." He [MacArthur] did not believe the Chinese were coming into the war. Mr. Truman said, "All our indications are that they are." He said, "No, they are not. This is the hour of our strength, not of our weakness. . . ."

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