

# Chapter Ten

## *Iran, A Protracted Stay, 1979–81*

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Iranian radicals storming the US embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979.  
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## ***A Shift in Focus***

I had been running the North Africa branch for only a few months when word came down that I was to go to Tehran as DCOS to Horace, who had been my COS in Manila. Although I did not know him well, I respected him for his intelligence and calm and his composed management style. Farsi language training would precede my move, and a course was about to begin.

Iran had undergone major changes in the years since 1941, when the United Kingdom and the USSR combined to replace the then shah with his son, Reza Shah Pahlavi. The new ruler made modernization of the economy his first and most consistent priority, proceeding in a way that threatened the position of the one potentially competing power center, the Shia Muslim clergy. Like many CIA officers, I knew of our role in the 1953 overthrow of the elected president, Mohamad Mossadeq, but I knew very little about the shah's rule or the evolution of his relationship with the United States. Specifically, I was unaware of the growing opposition—mainly from Shia clergy and their followers—to the shah's distaste for a religious role in government and to the fact that this development had been accompanied by a growing US commitment to support him as the protector of the Persian Gulf region against Soviet expansion.

In mid-1978, gradually spreading opposition to the shah had produced riots and demonstrations. The Carter administration, led in this matter by its pugnacious national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, reasserted its faith in the shah's staying power. By this time, the dissident Muslims had coalesced behind a fundamentalist cleric named Ruhollah Khomeini. In November, the shah's troops fired on several demonstrations, killing numerous dissidents and launching the escalation that would force the shah into exile in early 1979.

With the shah gone, some of the mobs that had intimidated his security forces turned their attention to US facilities, especially the embassy. On February 14, 1979, they attacked and briefly occupied it before the new, transitional, and, for the moment, secular government called them off. The incident dispelled any notion that diplomatic business would continue as usual, and families and non-essential personnel departed for the United States. Most of the remaining staff followed as soon as replacements could be found for the few declared to be essential.

The station required a chief, however, and I expected there would be competition for the job among veterans of Near East operations. It seemed, however, that the can-do style I had encountered in my brief assignment to the division was either a figment of my imagination or merely a matter of style, one that did not extend to volunteering for service in what amounted to a war zone. Management informed me that I would be the next COS as it tried to restaff the station on a permanent basis. Families would stay behind, and the length of the tour remained unspecified.

The appeal of a COS position is strong but not unlimited, and I considered declining the honor. Two considerations induced me to accept. First was the certainty that, if I turned it down, any prospects for advancement would disappear. I had already demurred once and doing so twice would relegate me to some bureaucratic dead end. The other factor was the recognition that, if someone had to go, the present DCOS-designate was a perfectly reasonable choice, at least from a protocol standpoint.

Whether it was right to dispatch a neophyte to the region, especially one with a very limited command of Farsi, into an extraordinarily tense place is a separate question. My predecessor had no Farsi at all, but he had been administering a large station and conducting liaison primarily with the shah and so was minimally affected. A COS running a much smaller station and handling a few cases himself could expect to be handicapped if he did not have a working knowledge of the language. This was not as clear to me then as it became, however, so I didn't pose the question. Now, 40 years later, the lip service then paid by Near East (NE) Division reminds me of a mantra I had heard repeatedly from Bill Wells, a chief of EA Division during my service there. Although he spoke Chinese fluently, he maintained that "English is the world language" and spoken by anyone of potential interest to the Agency. Proficiency in the local tongue, from that perspective, was an expendable convenience.

The occupation of the embassy had made a joke of diplomatic immunity, and I wondered what effect it had had on the attitudes of the staffers who had stayed in Tehran. I got a chance to explore the issue when one of a series of temporary chiefs of station returned to Headquarters as I was about to leave for Tehran. Ken Haas had been a professor of philosophy at Hamline University in Minnesota when I first saw his application for the JOTP in 1974. He claimed no foreign language skills or foreign travel, and I was at first tempted to reject it as frivolous. A young tenured professor presumably had more serious qualifications—he certainly didn't need a job—and I decided to find out what they were. Interviews revealed a thoughtful young man with a very persuasive strength of purpose; he deeply wanted to contribute. Ken entered the JOTP class of 1974, and during our association there we developed a cordial connection that transcended the conventional roles of senior and junior.

In 1979, Ken had been a case officer in Tehran for a year or so and had already served with distinction at a couple of other NE stations. He understood both the DO and Foreign Service cultures. I posed the question: “If the mobs seize the embassy again and line the staff along the embassy wall demanding the identities of CIA personnel, what will happen? Will our colleagues protect our cover?” Ken’s response was a rueful laugh, “No.” I was not to expect protection from that quarter, he said, and he was at least partly right, although even partly was enough to sink us after the embassy was overrun again on November 4, 1979. I was not surprised. Foreign Service hiring criteria emphasize observation and reporting skills, not risk-taking. Even so, and even though it came as no surprise, Ken’s assessment added nothing to the desirability of the assignment.

Neither did the prospect of getting additional staff as no case officers had yet been named to accompany or even follow me to Tehran. I discovered the priority being given this matter on my farewell visit to DO management, when my old friend and boss John Stein was now associate deputy director of operations under DDO John McMahon. The session with them had a pro forma tone, replete with chitchat about the likely impediments to resuscitating Tehran Station. Both seemed a little startled when I raised the staffing issue; they had probably assumed that NE Division was on top of the matter. McMahon responded by instructing Stein to remind him of the requirement before the next DO staff meeting, the weekly convocation of division chiefs.

I knew I could count on their goodwill, especially Stein’s, but their stated intention to relegate the matter to a staff meeting was more than a little disconcerting. They would, I knew, issue a plea for suitable candidates. They might even explicitly solicit risk-takers inspired by the embassy’s vulnerable position. If their efforts ran true to DO management form, however, they would not impose any minimum qualifications or order any assignments. If NE Division couldn’t staff the new station, it would have to settle for what other divisions were willing to offer.

There was no further discussion before I left, and a couple of months later word came that they had in fact taken that route. The oldest of the three case officers eventually deployed to Tehran was a paramilitary officer with limited exposure to intelligence collection operations. The youngest had not even finished the Operations Course when he responded to an appeal made to his class. The third was an Air Force officer who was to oversee the operation of whatever missile surveillance capability we might succeed in reactivating. None had ever been to Iran or anywhere in the Middle East.

The raid on the Operations Course raised again the question of the DO’s Iran priority—it had surfaced first with my selection to head the station—but Bill Daugherty, the young volunteer, took exactly the right approach, eager and

responsive but sensible and careful. I was more concerned about the paramilitary officer, Malcolm Kalp, not because I had reason to doubt him as an individual but because of his scant exposure to collection operations. He arrived just before the roof collapsed, and I had not yet assigned him a collection project before we were overrun. He did, however, display his paramilitary *élan* with three escape attempts, all of them foiled and rewarded with severe beatings.

### *Arrival in Tehran*

As had been the case in Phnom Penh, my arrival in Tehran was followed by several weeks in a hotel, the difference being that the facilities in Tehran, financed by Iranian oil, were far more comfortable—comfortable enough that I dragged my feet when it came time to move into the perfectly adequate apartment the embassy had leased for me. The embassy's administrative officer, Bert, was admirably competent and hard-working but slightly grouchy and, provoked by my procrastination, threatened to leave me to the vagaries of the real estate market if I didn't move. I duly took up residence in the high-rise he'd chosen for me—or tried to. Bert had just had the apartment cleaned, but I arrived to discover that the crew had left enough windows open to invite a thick layer of desert dust to settle in every room. Bert had to call them in again to make the place habitable.

Geographical references claim the elevation of Tehran to be 4,200 feet above sea level as if the city were more or less level. In fact, it lies at the edge of the southern foothills of the Alborz mountains and rises, I would guess, several hundred feet from south to north. My apartment was high enough to have a view of a skyline speckled with the dozens of construction cranes abandoned when the shah's departure ended his expansion program. From this perspective, the city looked dead. For a pedestrian, however, the crush of traffic made merely trying to cross the street an adventure. Conventional wisdom forbade meeting the eye of an approaching driver as doing so would invest him with right of way, which he would then claim without mercy (I don't think I ever saw a woman driving a car in Tehran).

I was walking toward the embassy one morning when two cars approached, side by side and both crowded with young men shaking their fists and screaming insults. Just as they were passing me, the cars started sideswiping each other, not trying to pass but rather attempting to do as much damage as possible. This went on until they were out of sight. I mentioned the incident to an Iranian contact who just shook his head; he saw this kind of tension and hostility as now typical of life in Tehran.

No one in Tehran looked happy. Service at the neighborhood grocery store was not hostile, just sullenly indifferent. I had the impression that the woman at the cash

register, in traditional female attire, had nothing in particular against this foreigner but was just deeply unhappy.

### ***Station Missions***

My principal tasks were to help determine, as best I could, the intentions of the new regime with respect to the United States. I was to explore potential dissident elements, especially among conventionally conservative clergy, i.e., the mullahs who maintained traditional Shi'a hostility to clerical involvement in government and opposed Khomeini's drive for power. I was also to try to restore at least part of the surveillance capability, sanctioned by the shah, that enabled us to monitor Soviet missile testing from northern Iran. At first, I had no other case officers than my omniscient intelligence assistant. That meant that I had to handle all HUMINT cases myself until I got some help. I no longer remember the cases assumed by new arrivals, but I continued to manage whatever number I could while I had freedom to do so.

The government was at the time composed of secular Shiite Muslims, several of whom had been station contacts, although not agents, during the shah's last years. One was a Tehran businessman who had acquaintances in the government and who had been tasked with finding out whether they were telling each other useful things that they withheld from their station contacts. Operational correspondence touted him as a prolific source, but Ken Haas had warned me that he believed this to be one of those rare cases in which a case officer embellished the product of an operation to promote his own career.

Ken cited enough chapter and verse, including confrontations with the alleged guilty party, to incline me to accept his description of the case, but the record did not confirm it. Lacking positive evidence of wrongdoing, Ken himself had had no basis for a formal complaint, and I had no choice but to pursue the contact. The case officer had left no emergency contact plans for any of his sources other than phone numbers, obtained before the revolution, to be used in case of emergency. Having no alternative, I called this source at his office, using a pay phone but still uneasy about resorting to open communication. He sounded surprised by my call but agreed to meet.

Sitting with him in his office, I found him just as ill at ease as he had been on the phone. I quickly discovered the reason: although Western-oriented and sympathetic to my desire to learn more about the functioning of the new government, he operated on its fringes and was not privy to any of its policy deliberations.

We were periodically interrupted by an elderly clerk carrying material in and out of the office, and my host had asked me at the beginning to change the subject to

foreign business prospects in Iran when we were not alone. During the intervals when we had some privacy, I probed the basis for his reticence. He said he'd tried to persuade my predecessor that his government connections were personal and social, not political. He had given us the few tidbits of information that came his way, but his station contact had pressed him for more.

I couldn't be sure that he didn't have access he was now afraid or unwilling to exploit on our behalf. In the newly hostile atmosphere that prevailed under the Ayatollah Khomeini, he might have seen the risks as just too high. Either that or Ken Haas was right, and he had never had anything to give us. Either way, it was clear that the contact had no future, and, after satisfying myself that I had everything he could or would give me on the subject, I bade the gentleman goodbye.

The second case involved a young Iranian who had been educated in the United States. I don't remember why he'd been recruited, but he was mobile and resourceful, and I tasked him with finding a new site from which to monitor Soviet missile testing. He obtained very gratifying results, and we had been planning the reinstallation of the collection gear when the embassy was overrun. The agent escaped, and the last I heard of him was back at Headquarters, where an officer was trying to advance a compensation package that was stuck in the bureaucracy.

A third case involved one of the leaders of a tribal minority in southern Iran. Our one meeting demonstrated the perils of assigning linguistically challenged officers to work in a hostile environment. I don't recall how we arranged the meeting—again, there was no emergency contact plan—but it involved my picking him up and taking him to my apartment. We were in the elevator on the way up when the power went out. We spent some time in introductory small talk while waiting for it to come back on. It didn't, and we decided to conduct our business while waiting to see what would happen.

The various ethnic minorities had always had tenuous, if not positively hostile, relationships with the Iranian majority, and this man's principal concern was the attitude of the Khomeini clergy toward his people. He made no explicit request for US support, and I was able to keep the conversation focused on the intelligence that he might be able to provide. We talked for perhaps an hour, but the lights stayed off and the elevator remained stuck. We finally decided to ask for help. My contact shouted into the elevator shaft until a female voice responded. Suddenly—perhaps she knew of an emergency power source, or maybe the power just came back on at that point—the elevator was back in operation, and I escorted him downstairs.

It was not until the next day that someone—probably another tenant—pointed out to me the notice posted in the lobby advising of the scheduled interruption of power. My contact had not noticed it, and my language training was limited to the

spoken mode. Even a fluent command of Farsi would thus not have avoided this confusion.

Like everything the station was doing, this operation ended with the second embassy takeover. It was not until after our release that I learned of the man's subsequent arrest and execution. The pretext, it seems, was not our relationship, which as far as I know was never compromised, but accusations of planning tribal mischief against the new regime.

A colonel in the now defunct SAVAK, the national intelligence and security organ that had been taken over by the new regime and was now possibly under the Revolutionary Guard, offered the most promise for intelligence on the mullahs. Until the revolution, he had been reporting to us, I believe, on the Soviet presence in Iran. Had he been involved in domestic counterintelligence, he would have been in grave danger from the newly empowered religious militants. When I made contact in the now familiar extemporaneous way, I found that he was still employed and still disposed to talk to us.

I don't recall whether the colonel had previously revealed to us his clerical contacts, but he almost immediately surfaced his friendship with an ayatollah he thought it would be worth my while to meet. I knew that a window on the intentions of the conservative clergy and of any potential opposition would be well received in Washington; the only drawback was the difficulty of arranging a secure contact. The best we could come up with was for the colonel to take me, hidden in the trunk of his car, to the cleric's house. In late October, he set up the introduction for the evening of November 10. The precise mechanics were still undetermined when the plan evaporated with the takeover of the embassy on the 4th. It was at best a risky ploy—ineffably stupid, some might say—and I still wonder if I would have gone through with it. I'm sure that apprising Headquarters of what I had in mind would have drawn an immediate veto—the DO's appetite for risk-taking had and has its limits—but I had not yet contemplated doing so when the question became moot.

The last of my cases was a reporter for a Tehran newspaper who had useful contacts in the government. He had been reporting for some time, and there was no need for me to probe his motivation. He was Jewish, however, and I assumed that, whatever had motivated his recruitment, he was now mainly concerned to do what he could to keep the United States informed of the stability of the new regime and the danger of a takeover by politically ambitious mullahs. Like the tribal leader, he was eventually arrested and executed, and I still fear that even the minimal information in his file led to his identification.

*Sunday November 4, 1979*

The mood in the embassy was not as tense as that in the street, but the knowledge that what had transpired in February could easily happen again had everyone a little on edge. Bruce Laingen, the *chargé d'affaires*, worked hard at maintaining a normal working atmosphere. Coming into the embassy one afternoon, I found him kneeling on the ground next to the gardener explaining how he wanted some flowers planted along the wall. I kidded him about his devotion to the fine arts commission, but it was clear that his purpose was to keep things as relaxed as possible for the staff and perhaps also for himself.

On Sunday morning of the 4th of November, I was pacing my office as I dictated the reports of my weekend meetings. It must have been between 10 and 11 o'clock when I noticed several young Iranians drifting around below my second-story window. It had already become routine to see them at the gate house, along with embassy guards, but as far as I knew this was their first incursion onto the grounds. They looked harmless, but I kept an eye on them as I continued with my dictation.

As time passed, their numbers increased. There was still nothing threatening about their behavior, but they now looked capable of laying siege to the chancery if that turned out to be their purpose. I called embassy security, and Mike Howell, the assistant security officer, told me he had confronted two or three of them and slammed the door on them when they demanded access to the chancery. It was at this point that I decided to destroy the station's modest document holdings, and my intelligence assistant and I set up our two destruction devices. One of these was a disintegrator, designed to reduce paper to the consistency of powder; the other was an old-fashioned shredder that cut documents into thin strips. The shredder's limitations were well known—with enough patience, its product could be reassembled—so we began work with the new, putatively superior, disintegrator. We had destroyed maybe a third of our holdings when it suddenly died. First aid—checking all connections and the power outlet—produced nothing, and we turned to the old shredder. It worked fine within its limits, and we got rid of the remaining paper.

Before the intrusion onto the embassy grounds, Bruce Laingen had left for a meeting at the Foreign Ministry, taking with him the political counselor and primary security officer. I had given the matter of seniority no thought until one of the remaining Foreign Service staffers, looking for guidance on the embassy's reaction to the growing threat, came to inform me that I was now the ranking officer in the embassy. This conferred no particular authority, as all of us were now improvising our respective responses to an unprecedented challenge, and I could claim no unique expertise. Even with classified material disposed of—as I thought—I was still fully occupied with ensuring that my staff was as ready as it could be to confront what

now looked like a forced entry. I also had to keep Headquarters informed of our deteriorating security situation.

Having confirmed that all safes were locked, I went to the commo center, where I discovered that an NCO from the military aid section had unilaterally brought in his unit's defensive weapons. Whether this was at the order of his commanding officer or on his own authority I never discovered; I knew only that I did not propose to have him endanger me and my people by creating the impression that we were in charge of embassy defenses when the chancery was overrun. The soldier argued that my commo section was more secure than the aid section's office, and I had to issue a categorical order. He complied, but I discovered after our release that he was one of the two embassy personnel who betrayed my identity to the militants.

As their numbers increased, the militants became increasingly aggressive, and Mike or one of the marine guards fired tear gas at those who had breached the rear entrance. I was already in the communications center on the top floor giving Headquarters a running description of events. The tear gas halted more forced entry for the time being, and, by dispensing with classified transmission, I could maintain real-time communication with Langley. There was, of course, nothing Headquarters could do for us, and my attention turned to the question of what we could or should do in the time left before the militants took the embassy by force.

By now, I had taken it as certain that we would be overrun. The militants held the grounds and perhaps parts of the chancery, although we didn't know just which. If I ordered our Marine guards to open fire on the intruders, the act would certainly have provoked a bloodier attack. Accordingly, I told the gunnery sergeant—or whichever of the Marines I was still in touch with—under no circumstances to start a firefight. Back at the transmitter, I heard militants pounding on the commo shack door. I signed off and moved to ensure that my communicators had destroyed or at least disabled all the classified encryption and radio gear.

My case officers were in their offices, and I hadn't wanted to compromise their security by bringing them to mine. I surveyed the commo shack and told my people and the other Americans who'd taken refuge with us that I proposed to open the door. None of them disagreed that we had no choice, and, not without some trepidation, I opened up. There to greet me were a dozen or so young militants, all excited to the point of hysteria. They jammed through the door, one pausing to give me an elbow in the ribs so hard that only the adrenaline rush of the last frantic hours kept me from going down. At least for the time being, there were lots of threatening gestures but no more blows as some of the militants explored the radio gear and others tried to open the safes. I don't think any of them had any more than rudimentary English, and I had no Farsi speakers with me. My own was entirely inadequate,

so hand gestures accounted for much of what we managed to communicate, mostly on my part, to protest this act of piracy.

What followed for the next hour or two is just a blur in my memory at least partly because of what looked like the militants' disorganized treatment of us. I do remember spending perhaps half an hour in a line of hostages against the wall in a chancery corridor. We had not yet been blindfolded, but talking was forbidden. Otherwise, our captors were content to mill around as if waiting for guidance from some absent authority. Some of us were then moved across the embassy compound into the dining room of Bruce Laingen's quarters, that is, the ambassador's residence. It was there, as best I recall, that we were first blindfolded, at least for visits to the bathroom.

The youngest of my case officers, Bill Daugherty, had been placed next to me as we stood around the dining room table, and we were able to summarize in whispers how we'd fared up to that point. I doubt that our hosts had then already determined our connection, but Bill was soon taken out, and I did not see him again for 14 months. I saw none of the others even once. There was still no physical abuse, and our captors found blankets—Bruce Laingen's, I guess—to mitigate the discomfort of sleeping on the floor. The hardship was all psychological, at least for me, and, I assumed, my people. Iranian nationalists had despised and feared the CIA since the early 1950s, and we could expect to get the least pleasant of whatever treatment the militants were planning for anyone they considered an agent of the Great Satan.

### ***“More Boring than Threatening,” At First***

For several days, our captivity was more boring than threatening. The atmosphere began to change when hostages started disappearing, taken out one by one and never brought back. There were perhaps a dozen of us at first, and the number declined by one or two a day. It didn't take me long to see that my future was going to be determined by my place in line; the longer I had to wait, the more likely that I was at least under suspicion—and more probably betrayed.

Sure enough, I was the last to be blindfolded and led out of the residence back into the chancery. We went up to the secure conference room, the SCIF, on the second floor, and, when I was relieved of the blindfold, I found several militants staring at me from the other side of the conference table. The atmosphere was entirely civil as one of them began to question me about my position in the embassy. I responded with my cover job—adviser on control of narcotics trafficking—and described the details of my contact with the responsible element in the Iranian police. After perhaps an hour of this, I was taken back to the empty dining room in the residence.

The captors let me stew for another day or two before taking me back to the chancery conference room, where I was not surprised to find the substance and tone of the questioning entirely transformed. The same group of militants began by demanding that I admit to being a CIA spy, which I declined to do. They pursued this line for half an hour or so until the principal interrogator, Hussein, lost patience and picked up a heavy rubber hose lying on the conference table. Forcing me to sit with palms up, he slammed it down onto one hand, then the other. The pain was intense, and each blow forced a kind of scream out of me. It was not unendurable, however, and Hussein, who seemed to be enjoying himself, chose another target. I was placed face down on the floor, and my shoes taken off to expose the soles of my feet to the same treatment given my hands.

I had already noticed that one of the militants was looking distressed, and, as I was being positioned for this next round, it was clear that he was objecting to the violence. There followed some intense discussion among them, and, in the end, Hussein refrained from resuming the beating. This episode became the only use of force that I experienced during captivity. At our next session, a couple of days later, Hussein had rid himself of the hangers-on, and, with the two of us alone, he turned to psychological attacks, the most viciously calculated of which soon inflicted more torment than use of the hose ever approached.

It was at about this time that I was moved out of the residence and back to the chancery—and not just to the chancery but to my own office on the second floor. The students who would now serve as my keepers between interrogations said nothing about this, and I inferred that this was intended to provoke me into acknowledging that I was the tenant of record. Inference became certitude when, as I sat in the outer office, I made the horrifying discovery that an envelope I knew contained a cable to Headquarters was standing in plain sight in a file holder on a desk. Somehow, both my assistant and I had overlooked it as the tension grew on the day the embassy was seized. Its contents could not have been much more damning; my first quarterly report of the kind that every COS sent to the DCI, it summarized the collection activity now underway and described the preparations to restore the missile monitoring. There was also mention of anti-Khomeini sentiment among the clergy, although I had decided not to reveal my proposed meeting.

The letter left no doubt about its author's affiliation and not much doubt that I was the author, given its presence with me in the same room, but it was not the document that betrayed me. I had signed it with my pseudonym, and that could not have identified me. I think it was there as a ploy to get me to reveal my CIA connection. I kept silent, and no one ever asked me about it, perhaps on the theory that I had not spotted it and didn't know they had it.

I will probably never know with absolute certainty how my jailers learned of my role as COS. Perhaps when the interrogation began to focus on that point, I was seeing the proof that Ken Haas had been right when he warned me about what to expect in this situation, or they might, as Bill Daugherty learned later, have already discovered the embassy file that identified all CIA personnel at the embassy.

Whatever the basis for their certitude, the militants implicitly revealed their knowledge that the office was mine when they began demanding I give them the combination to the safe. I told them I couldn't as we were not in my office. One of the hardliners—in his thirties and surely not a student—was sitting at a desk. He pulled out a revolver, pointed it at me, and threatened to shoot me if I didn't comply. I could see that he was bluffing—killing me would not open the safe—and simply repeated my denial that I even knew the office. He stood up, glowered at me, and left. If memory serves, I never saw him again.

At one point in this series of interrogations, which were usually two days or so apart, my interrogator, Hussein, came in with a triumphant look on his face. Some of the students tending to us had been put to work reassembling the documents we had shredded. They had contained the minimum information necessary to maintain agent communications; none included a true name. Their very purpose meant they could not be perfectly sterile, however, and enough had been gleaned from the contents of one document to permit the inference that its subject was our Tehran newspaperman.

Hussein spent two or three sessions working on me to identify the agent, and, when I continued to deny having seen the document, he temporarily changed the subject to what he alleged was my role in plotting the restoration of the shah. The letter to DCI Turner had indeed alluded to my intention to look for dissident clergy, but I recall it as having been clear that no such contacts had been made. The intensity of the questioning seemed more like an obsession on the part of Hussein and the other hardliners, a conviction that we had to be doing what they expected of a mortal enemy who had connived in the destruction of the Mossadeq government.

The pressure grew. At one point, Hussein asserted that his masters had had enough. If I didn't tell them what I knew about the planned undermining of the new regime, they would stage a public execution. They knew I had a widowed mother, he said (my father had passed away in 1974), and would distribute the film to ensure it was seen in the United States. I don't know if I would have given the information to them even if I'd had it to give, but I was certainly feeling the pressure. As it was, I could only repeat my denials of any knowledge of hostile US intentions.

The intensity of these sessions with Hussein—my only interrogator throughout the ordeal—combined with the numbing effect of solitary confinement to prevent me from recognizing what I now see was probably just an interrogation tactic. I don't

mean that I took his threats as a definitive statement of Khomeini's intentions; I could see from the start that he might be merely bluffing. The fact remained, however, that, if they wished, they could exterminate this agent of the Great Satan at will. In the weeks before the takeover, the press had been full of reports of politico-religious executions. That and the total isolation that deprived me of any supportive human contact may well have affected my perception of my captors' intentions.

This is a subject I still find painful. With some of the material I was shown, Hussein got me to confirm a few identities. I know that on occasion, I gave them more than I wanted to, though I never simply opened the book on them. But for me, in retrospect years after, mine was a rather pathetic effort to defend both my agents and myself, resting as it did on the unfortunately flawed calculation that by late 1979 and early 1980 the agents would already have fled.

In any case, as time passed and threats of execution continued, I became seized with the determination to foil any decision to stage a public execution. The exact mechanics of the plan I worked out have long since faded from memory, but they involved an electric cord and an accessible water supply. If they came for me—I assumed, I guess, that I would perceive their intention—I would seize the cable, already plugged into a wall circuit, and plunge the end into a container of water.

Twice, I grew sufficiently pessimistic about my survival prospects to go on a hunger strike. I could, of course, have tried self-electrocution, but this seemed too drastic at a time when execution did not seem imminent; preemptive suicide was not on my agenda. I decided instead to try to force my release by means of a hunger strike. I didn't know much about the physiology of starvation but assumed that, to get quick results, I would have to eschew liquids. I began returning my meals uneaten but scattered enough to give the appearance of having been partly consumed. The guards did not challenge this ploy. After four days without food or drink, however, the only effect was an uncomfortably dry mouth. I started fantasizing about the permanent effects on mental function that might precede the physical but gave up until several weeks later when, in another fit of desperation, I tried again and got the same result.

These many years later, my mental state during captivity defies reconstruction. The beatings, death threats, and isolation are now only abstractions, and it is hard to imagine just what kind of psychological preparation might have made the experience more tolerable. I know now that training programs designed for this purpose exist, but no such help was offered at the time my colleagues and I were held.

### ***Enduring the Long Haul***

My watch had been confiscated at the outset, so I can only estimate that the intermittent interrogation by my tormentor, Hussein, continued for about three

to four months. He then disappeared. His interrogations had become increasingly irregular and mostly devoted to an obsession with a CIA plot against Khomeini. The unpredictability of his appearances in my cell initially made me cautious about interpreting his extended absence as a tacit assurance of ultimate release. Even so, I found myself better able to concentrate on maintaining a reasonable level of physical and mental fitness. I was never allowed outside, and cardiovascular conditioning was therefore limited. I had always been physically active, if not highly athletic, however, and I had worked out a daily regimen that included half an hour of jogging the length of whatever room was at the moment serving as a cell. Despite its limitations, this produced a relaxing effect that helped me immerse myself in a routine that would serve what I had early on decided was the single, vital imperative for psychological survival: use your time in such a way that, if and when you are freed, you won't have to accuse yourself of having wasted it.

One of the three amenities offered during my captivity was the use of the international school's library, which had been moved to the embassy after the February seizure. Most, if not all, of the books were stored in the chancery, and, every week or two after interrogation ceased, I would be taken to exchange old for new reading material. In addition to saving me from death by boredom, this practice afforded an occasional insight into the mechanics of our incarceration. It confirmed, to begin with, that we were not all in solitary confinement. When I was taken into the room that served as the library, for example, all of the seats would still be warm. It did not surprise me to learn that I was the last to be brought there, a realization that seemed confirmed by my gradual discovery that the most popular books of classical authors were never on the shelf. Charles Dickens, for example, was represented by *Our Mutual Friend* but not by *Oliver Twist* or *Great Expectations*. This discrimination did have its advantages, as I wound up reading Shakespeare tragedies that I might otherwise never have known. I don't think I had ever even heard of *Cymbeline* or *Troilus and Cressida*.

The second civilized gesture was the loan of a tape player and one or two tapes from a small collection of classical music. My reaction was mixed when I was offered a tape of Schubert's 5th symphony. I almost turned it down because the piece was a favorite of my mother, and I feared that listening to it would cost me the equanimity that was still shaky after the abuses of the first months. Nevertheless, I recognized that staying mentally intact through a captivity of still-unknown duration required taking advantage of any available distractions, so I accepted the tape and player. It took a conscious act of will, but, having suppressed my first emotional reaction to the sentiment of the Schubert, I learned to welcome the sporadic visits of the music man.

On one occasion, the practice gave me the opportunity to point out an irony in their treatment of me. One of the tapes—I forget which—was a particular favorite, and I asked one of our keepers if I could mark it to ensure I got it again. He let me

put my first name on it then took it away along with the player and tapes. This was followed a day or so later by a final visit from an enraged Hussein. What was I trying to do, tell the other hostages where I was? And who had allowed me to do it? I took that opening to inquire if he was asking me to spy on his own people, and he sputtered, looking for something to say, before making an embarrassed departure.

It must have been a little later that the final increment of my survival program was added. One of the guards informed me that I could now ask for personal items left in my apartment. He mentioned seeing my piano. It instantly occurred to me that having my sheet music would give a big boost to my mental equilibrium, and I asked for its return. I had expected to be ignored—it was all too easy to imagine their paranoid reaction to all that printed text, surely a code system—and I was pleasantly surprised when, a week or so later, it was delivered intact. It came along with the reappearance of my watch, which I later learned was returned only because it had a steel case; the owners of gold watches, I was told, never saw them again.

I had guessed right about the music, and its presence became the single most effective way of passing time doing something that felt useful. By the time of our release, I had memorized the entire text of Schumann's *Carnaval* suite. I would visualize first the right-hand notes of a given passage, then the left, and then in combination before moving on to the next section. The musical utility of the exercise turned out to be minimal, however, as I discovered when I got home. For any benefit to performance, I would have had to memorize not only the notes but their designated fingering. Nevertheless, it offered real comfort when it was needed.

Although I never developed any personal affection for even the gentlest of our guards, there were naïfs among them who gave the impression that they wanted me to like them—or at least to give them credit for services rendered. One was the kitchen's most regular delivery boy, who would always stay long enough for me to sample the meal and then ask (I think it was his only English), "Is good?" "Is enough?" Such tentative displays of concern for my morale naturally had just the opposite effect, only emphasizing my helplessness.

### ***Operation Eagle Claw—A Psychic Earthquake***

In the spring of 1980—only later did I learn it had been the 24th of April, the day of the Eagle Claw rescue attempt—I was engaged in my usual morning reading session when two or three guards burst into my cell (still my own office, as I recall) and ordered me to get ready to leave the embassy. Unless it was to go home, I was not particularly interested and preferred to be left alone, but my keepers were in a state of high excitement, threatening to force me out empty-handed if I didn't move

faster. They pushed me into the back seat of a car, and we made our way through Tehran's chaotic traffic into the countryside.

After what seemed like hours, we turned into the driveway of a pleasant suburban house, and my keepers took me into my new quarters, where I found myself the only hostage. Although the surroundings were not uncomfortable, there were no longer any books or music, and by then I had come to depend on my sheet music for mental stimulation. This dearth of activity made me sensitive to what soon became an almost unbearable racket from the hundreds of small birds in a fruit tree just outside. Almost soothing at first, within a week or two this nonstop entertainment became something closer to psychological torture.

Having little to do and being always alone, I could indulge my curiosity about the ownership of the house. It was still furnished but had no decorations, at least in the room that served as my cell. The most likely source of clues was the chest of drawers that would have held my personal items if I had had any. Regrettably, I had no choice but to wear my one set of socks and underwear until it was my time for a shower, every week to 10 days; I would then wash them along with myself. I had not shaved since the act of piracy that had brought me here, a practice that I continued until told of our impending release. After two or three forays into the chest of drawers, I found a small photograph wedged into the corner of a drawer. It showed a family in Western dress, and, although it was too small to allow anything but guesswork, I thought the man's bearing suggested a military background. I surmised he was an officer in the shah's army or security apparatus who had been dispossessed—or worse—when the new regime came to power.

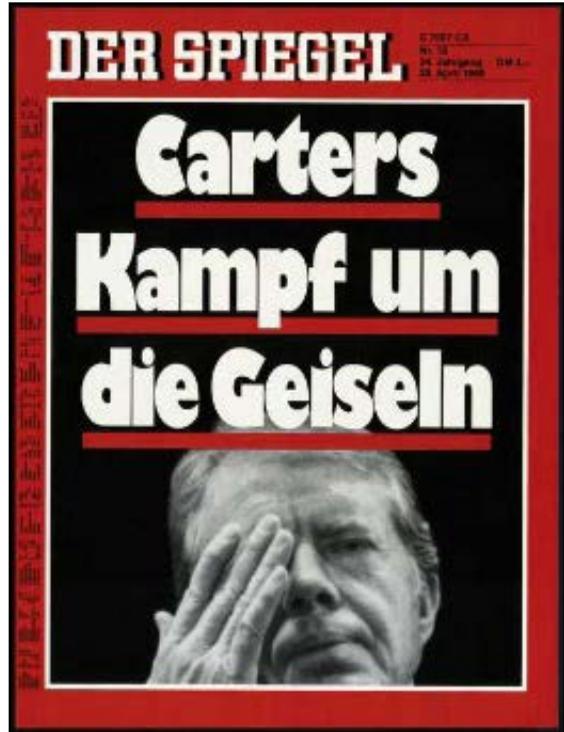
My stay in the bird sanctuary lasted, I think, a few weeks before my keepers bundled me into a car for a second trip that, like the first, seemed to last hours before we arrived at a destination that instantly made me wish I still had the birds. I don't remember the approach to the building or what it looked like—I was probably blindfolded—but I'll never forget my introduction to the only authentic prison cell of the entire hostage episode. The very sight of my cell in what I later learned was the notorious Evin political prison multiplied every fear, every fantasy, of a dreadful outcome, that had intermittently threatened my self-possession. No light, no chair, just a mat on the floor. Sleep, if it came, was subject to interruption by the screams of prisoners—presumably Iranians—whom I could safely assume were being tortured. The irony in that did not offer much comfort, but it did remind me of the remarkable similarity between the practices of my jailers and those of the SAVAK they so bitterly hated.

The depressing environment was aggravated by what passed for food. It arrived in cans resembling US military "C" rations but—consisting of animal, probably sheep, guts—was too nauseating to be eaten. I survived on bread for the duration. It

was an enormous relief when, after only a couple of weeks, they moved me again. I might have learned to eat the stuff before starving to death, but it would have been a near thing. At this point, I discovered that my earlier resolve to be ready to take my own life was probably just a fantasy.

Just where I was taken after Evin has faded from my memory. Indeed, from that point, I cannot for the most part associate events with the places where they occurred. It's certain that at one point I was back in the embassy because a visit to the library gave me a clue to what had provoked my evacuation. The embassy's magazine subscriptions had apparently not yet expired, and I found a fairly recent edition of the German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel*. Our keepers always censored news publications, but they had missed this one. Although I had not yet learned German, the combination of photographs, cognate words, and place names gave me the gist of the Eagle Claw disaster.

The effect of this discovery was a psychic earthquake. After the first weeks in solitary confinement, I had developed a growing—and deeply depressing—sense that our country would lose interest in us if our captivity dragged on without resolution. Learning that we were not forgotten raised my spirits in a way that nothing short of actual liberation could have matched. By this time, I had not seen or had contact with any of my fellow hostages since the first days after the embassy was seized.



I can't explain why, if there was any reason, a copy of the April 27 issue of *Der Spiegel* was left in a place where I and others could learn about the Eagle Claw rescue attempt. If it was meant to demonstrate the inability of the US military to come to our rescue and demoralize us, it had quite the opposite effect on me. Photo: Der Spiegel Archive.

My captors moved me yet again, this time to a site about which I remember only one thing: it was an office building with windows that extended across two rooms and had a space between the window glass and the end of the partition separating my cell from its neighbor. I could hear faint sounds through this aperture, and I pressed my face to the window and whispered to get the attention of its occupant. That brought Tom Schaeffer, the air attaché, within inches of my face, and the whispered conversation that followed suggested that he was as happy as I to be reunited,

however furtively, with one of his own. We spent much of the next few days sharing our experiences before another move separated us.

I now regret not having spent more time comparing notes with Tom and a few others after liberation, but, except for members of the station, I soon lost track of them as we all dispersed homeward. Now, more than 40 years later, not all of them are still with us.

Another unexpected contact, this one with a perfect stranger, involved a clergyman—perhaps an Eastern Orthodox priest—around Christmas in 1980. He was standing at a makeshift altar in a room that served as a chapel. I was his entire congregation after what I assumed had been an earlier session for my unsegregated compatriots. He proceeded to say Mass, or what I assumed was Mass; it certainly was not said in Latin. I got no particular comfort from the ceremony, but that would not have mattered to my jailers, who were surely motivated more by admiration of their own ecumenical generosity than by any concern for my spiritual welfare.

It was not until after the presidential election that I was put in the company of other hostages. Defense attachés Don Sharer, US Navy, and Chuck Scott, US Army, were already sharing a roomy cell, and I was moved in with them. Having their company was a real treat after so many months in solitary. When we ran out of conversation, there were cards for cribbage and, I think, a board game or two.

Their company would have smoothed the transition to release had it continued, but it lasted only a day or two. One morning, a cleric appeared at our door and stared at us—especially at me—with the coldest eyes I'd ever seen then left without a word. By the end of the day, I was back in solitary. This return to form was unpleasant but tolerable for, by this time, we were reasonably assured of eventual release even if the timing was still uncertain.

It must have been mid-January when, one day, the guards simply disappeared from their stations outside our cells. We had all become so accustomed to acting only on command that it took us awhile to venture out to see what this portended. I was able to talk briefly with six or eight of the others—none of them station people—before the guards came back and we were returned to *durance vile*. The atmosphere became palpably more relaxed, however, and liberation began to feel imminent.

### ***Freedom at Last***

The day finally arrived. We had no baggage to pack, of course, so preparations were minimal. I was awaiting word of the next move when a guard led me to an

office in the same building—still the Foreign Ministry guest house—where I found my old nemesis Hussein sitting at a desk. There were no threats this time. Instead, he launched into a rather inarticulate apology for the beating he had given me on that day in the embassy SCIF. It was wrong, he said, and to prove his regret he was inviting me to do to him what he'd done to me.

I'd noticed a shapeless object lying next to his hand, and, when he picked it up, I saw a coiled length of what looked like a light-weight cotton cord, rather like clothes-line. He offered it to me, and I remember wondering how he'd react if I accepted and told him to extend his hands. He had clearly foreseen that possibility because the cord was obviously light cotton and close to harmless. The Iraq invasion and Abu Ghraib were still well in the future, and the moral high ground was mine, so I took the opportunity to stare at him a few seconds before saying, "We don't do stuff like that." He got up and left.

If Hussein had given me the same rubber hose he'd beaten me with, I'd have been tempted to take him up on his offer, but it wasn't hard to turn him down. Like the gift of a Christmas Mass, his gesture seemed to me designed to soothe a guilty conscience, and I saw no reason to collude in his self-justification. In any case, by this point he was surely hardened enough that it didn't even occur to him that his crime, for me, had to have been the repeated threat of recording my execution for the benefit of my family. For that, there could be no balancing of accounts.

We were taken by bus to the Tehran airport. I was seated, by accident, next to an enlisted member of the Defense Attaché's office. I hardly knew the young man except for the episode when I opened the door to the communications room on November 4, so it was a bit startling to hear him urge me not to believe everything I might hear about him. I didn't care enough to press him to explain this odd appeal, and it was only later that I learned from the Office of Security that it was he who had given my identity to our captors.<sup>a</sup>

Most of my colleagues had presumably resisted interrogation on that and other subjects, but State Department and OS later gave me the names of two people, one of them the soldier and the other an FSO, who had volunteered station identities to the Iranians. I never tried to determine which, if any, of our other colleagues had done the same. Revenge probably is a dish best served cold, and I never developed enough objectivity on the subject to be sure I could meet that criterion if I discovered more. The two cases I did know about—I prefer to think there were no others—sufficed to validate Ken Haas's prediction of what I could expect if the earlier seizure of the embassy was repeated.

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a. The soldier would be the only Defense Attache Office member not awarded a medal because he "did not behave under stress the way noncommissioned officers are expected to act." *New York Times*, June 2, 1981.

When my turn came to leave the bus at Mehrabad Airport, I was seized with a vision of some hardliner exploiting a final opportunity to exterminate this agent of the Great Satan, and I scuttled in quite undignified fashion onto the plane. I could have imagined a frosty reception from the presumably Muslim crew, but they were all very hospitable, inviting me into the cockpit and offering generous servings of spirits.

The flight to Algiers was the first chance I'd had in 14 months to see what was left of my staff. It was an odd experience. The only one I really knew was Bill Daugherty (my assistant had been released) as we had worked together for some weeks before being separated. Malcolm Kalp, who had arrived just before the hijacking, was a near stranger, and seeing him was more like an introduction than a reunion. My communicators, in Tehran on TDY, had not been there long enough for me to get well acquainted with them. The result was that I had had more contact with Bruce Laingen, the FSOs, and the defense attachés than with the succession of CIA people.

Our reception in Algiers had a festive quality, thanks mainly to the throng of journalists covering our release. The highlight came as we were about to enter the terminal. I heard my name repeated several times in an intense near whisper. I looked around and saw a colleague, presumably then stationed in Algiers, who had worked for me during my assignment to the North Africa Branch, where we had been good friends. I couldn't resist joining this breach of his security and gave him a mock salute. I hadn't seen the nearby photographer whose shot of my response (my colleague fortunately not included) appeared the next day in newspapers around the world. Researchers on Iran still occasionally ask me who it was who got the salute. One of my editors in this project observed after looking through a collection of family photographs for this memoir that only one other smile captured in a photograph equaled the one in that photograph—the smile I wore the day of my marriage to Gisela.

### *Returning Home, in Stages*

Our return home took place in distinct phases. After landing in Algiers and changing planes, we flew to Wiesbaden, West Germany, and the hospital at the US Air Force Base there. Given my eagerness—and that of all of us—to get home, the intensive medical workup there became a little burdensome, but the unfailingly gracious reception from the staff included the assignment to each of us of a doctor charged with seeing to our needs and preferences. I told mine that my German in-laws lived not far away in Offenbach, and he arranged for them to come to a restaurant in Wiesbaden, where we met for a welcoming dinner (The Air Force picked up the tab; at this point I had not a penny). My work on German grammar

had not added a great deal to my vocabulary (its utility emerged later, in language school), and I anticipated some communication problems, but my young brother-in-law, Guenter, saved the evening with his affable, gentle personality and impressive command of English.

On our second or third day at Wiesbaden, we received a visit from Jimmy Carter, now our ex-president, and former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, who had resigned in protest of Operation Eagle Claw, which he considered to be an ill-advised rescue attempt. Beyond conventional expressions of admiration for our powers of endurance and a tribute to the intended rescuers of Operation Eagle Claw, Carter had little to say and, after just a few minutes, invited questions. I had no doubt that all of us harbored the same question, but no one posed it. The atmosphere was growing quite uncomfortable, and, although I had no desire to act as spokesman for the group, I realized that I wasn't ready to let the session end with the question unasked. I inquired whether Mr. Carter still believed that accepting the shah into the United States in 1979 had been a wise thing to do.

His reply was notable more for length than for clarity, and it was obvious that he was not prepared to defend the reasoning behind the decision. I remember trying to recall the logic of his remarks shortly after the event and being unable to do so; they were just too diffuse. The exchange did, however, satisfy my need to ensure his awareness that the hostages fully understood the role of the White House in provoking the seizure of the embassy that day in November 1979.

The flight back to the United States included a stop at Shannon Airport in Ireland, where the welcome resembled a tourist event. Several Irish officials did us the courtesy of coming out to greet us, each bearing a gift of decorative glassware. Very nice, everyone thought, although we did notice that each item was engraved with a Christmas design and the year 1980. It seemed that our hosts were using the occasion partly to dispose of some overstock from the recent Christmas, but their jovial welcome nevertheless made it an enjoyable interlude.

Home was not our first stop even after we reached the States. If anyone ever explained why a visit to a military academy had to take precedence over seeing home again, I missed it. Presumably, it had to do with the proximity of Stewart Air Base to the US Military Academy at West Point. Our home agencies did, however, bring our immediate families to meet us for the most intensely emotional event in the series of celebrations that followed both in Washington and in our respective hometowns. In addition to Gisela and Christine, my mother and all four siblings were there, an assemblage that made the tarmac at Stewart seem something like home.

After the picture-taking, all by military staff, we moved by bus to the mess hall, where the cadets had gathered to greet us. The drop-off point was a block or two

away, and, as we left the buses, we heard a strange droning sound. The closer we came to the mess hall, the louder it got, and, when we entered the building, we were met by an almost overwhelming roar. Even after the warm reception at Wiesbaden, I had no real idea of the intensity of my country's obsession with the hostages' plight until we entered that mess hall. The cadets, all standing at their assigned tables, were giving us the most powerful in the series of welcomes that occupied much of our time over the next few weeks; not even the subsequent ticker tape parade down Broadway equaled it.

The city had assigned one of its employees to escort each hostage family to city-sponsored events. The cool reception we got from our guide left the initial impression that he would just as soon be at work. We were careful not to be demanding, however, and the atmosphere warmed to the extent that, when we left, he presented us with a book that had long been in his family and whose Middle Eastern setting he thought fitting for the occasion: a beautifully illustrated antique edition of *A Thousand and One Nights*. The gesture was all the more touching for being spontaneous, and I saw no reason to note the irony of being presented with a gift of stories being told under threat of execution.

The succession of celebratory events in New York and, later, at home in Northern Virginia and Wisconsin became a little wearing. Wearing, not boring; it would have been impossible to resist the evident goodwill, even adulation, of all those cheering people. At the same time, the constant references to us as "heroes" struck a discordant note. I understand now, if I didn't then, that celebrity in American culture is often identified with heroism. To be well-known without any of the standard credentials of celebrity—fame, riches, political power, etc.—requires a substitute, and heroism offers an easy surrogate. I don't know any hostage who accepted this kind of praise as his due, and those whose views on the subject I heard all echoed mine: having survived a trying experience did not make us heroes. We had not, after all, actually *done* anything to merit applause. Surviving beatings and threats of execution might qualify, but I never heard any suggestion that this was in the minds of any of our well-wishers.

With this mental reservation, I listened to welcoming crowds at Stewart Air Base, in New York, at home in McLean, Virginia, and finally on a visit to my hometown in Wisconsin. The New York portion featured a performance at the Metropolitan Opera and a traditional ticker tape parade. The timing of the parade required a trip back up to New York, and Gisela and I considered staying home. We eventually decided to go and were happy we did when, at one point on the parade route, we heard a woman's voice screaming our names over the noise of the throng surrounding her. It belonged to the wife of Bill Hawley, my friend from the JOTP and Army days, who had taken the trouble to navigate the crowds just to welcome us home.

The final event in Washington, on January 28, was a reception at the Reagan White House. Like the ticker tape parade in New York, it was impressive in a formulaic way, but the emotional welcome from the president and Mrs. Reagan seemed entirely genuine. The receptions in McLean and Fond du Lac featured relatives and friends, which lent them an even greater personal warmth that I still recall with gratitude. The band at Christine's future high school in McLean marched by the house, and I was called on for remarks in which I emphasized, of course, the thoughtfulness of the substantial crowd gathered in our cul-de-sac. I also took the opportunity offered by the presence of reporters to express regret that so few of the veterans of combat in Vietnam had enjoyed a similar welcome.

The reception in Fond du Lac was the same in spirit but took place indoors in the reception hall of St. Mary's church, which I had attended so many years earlier. The event there was positively embarrassing in its generosity and included the gift of a boat and outboard motor. Lacking any use for such equipment, I applied my clandestine operational skills to finding a deserving recipient and donating it in a way that kept the gift anonymous.

It was only after the celebration had subsided that I saw the first and only hostile reception of the entire homecoming experience. The Naval Academy invited the embassy's military officers and at least those civilians living in the Washington area to visit the Naval Academy at Annapolis. The military officers among the hostages were seated on the stage of the auditorium, with the rest of us—only a few, as I recall—down in front. The only part of the session I remember was devoted to questions from the midshipmen, who immediately established their skepticism about our conduct or at least that of their military counterparts during the siege of the embassy. We had Marine guards, after all, and other staff also had weapons, and the basic question was why they had not been used.

The midshipman's assumption seemed to be that at least the embassy's military component should have fought to the death rather than surrender. My colleagues on the stage were obviously at a loss about how to explain that diplomatic facilities had no combat missions and the resulting irrelevance of the question and how to do so without looking defensive or evasive about their own performance. They were in an unhappy situation, and I was content not to be a target of the midshipman's ill-informed questions.

The atmosphere at Headquarters offered its own challenges. Senior management seemed to think that, after months of press coverage, my Agency affiliation could still be concealed if I avoided the Headquarters compound, and I was encouraged to stay home until the dust settled. The NE Division chief, who came to the house for a security debriefing, naturally wanted to know about the station's operations, but he startled me with his concern also for Wisp, the African diplomat whose recruitment

I had furthered in West Africa and whose CIA connection had surfaced in press coverage during my captivity. He wanted to know if the Iranians had squeezed this out of me, and I explained to him their exclusive preoccupation with presumed CIA plotting against Khomeini.

Reporting later revealed that Wisp had engaged in extramarital adventures that eventually came to the attention of his wife. Knowing of both his American and Soviet connections and wanting revenge, she revealed the former to the latter, and the Soviets put it into cooperative press channels, presumably ending his diplomatic career. I winced when I heard about this outcome because I had recognized early on his need for excitement—it was surely an important reason for his work on our behalf—and it was now clear that my efforts to encourage a less devil-may-care attitude toward risk-taking had not taken root.

Chief NE conducted a rather summary interview on security issues that proved to be the closest thing to a debriefing about captivity that I ever received. I was never debriefed about the circumstances of captivity itself. I never learned if or how my experience and that of my station colleagues contributed to the Agency's recognition that bad things do happen and that taking measures to prevent them or mitigate their damage is not a preemptive admission of weakness or defeat.

It took other, more grievous, incidents to generate an effective program to protect CIA officers serving in the Middle East. The April 1983 Hezbollah suicide bombing of the embassy in Beirut killed COS Ken Haas, renowned Middle East analyst Robert Ames, and several other CIA officers.<sup>a</sup> The following year, also in Beirut, COS William Buckley was abducted from his apartment; he died in captivity in 1985. There have since been other fatalities, but it would probably be fair to attribute those not to weak defensive efforts but to intensified conflicts in the Middle East and deeper US involvement in coping with them.

### *A Difficult 14 months for My Family*

The whole episode was, of course, hard on my family. The prolonged uncertainty about when—or even if—the hostages would be released and the absence of any communication with us was a very wearing experience. A picture of Gisela taken perhaps halfway through the ordeal reveals an almost gaunt face, one that I hardly recognized. She was still very much in charge of her agenda, however, continuing her CIA job and becoming vice president of the family association that she founded with Penny Laingen, Bruce's wife and the group's president. In that position, she helped

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a. CIA marked the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that tragic day with a commemorative article on its public website: Never Forgotten: The Deadliest Day in CIA History - CIA <https://www.cia.gov/stories/story/beirut-embassy-attack-40th-anniversary/>



Homecoming to McLean in the last weekend of January 1981 brought one more celebration shown in the above weathered copy of the *Washington Post* of February 5.

ensure that our plight was kept in the public eye and that the families' concerns voiced to those government agencies with employees among us.

Gisela's deep engagement with the hostage families ended upon my return. She made a conscious decision to put the entire experience behind her, gently declining the suggestion even of her closest contact among the wives that they maintain their connection. Her attitude meshed perfectly with mine, as I too simply wanted the thing behind me. In this we differed from some of the other couples, who as time passed seemed to be making our captivity the center of the rest of their lives. Forty years later, several of them are still leading an effort, admirable in its own way, to secure for all of us assets seized by the United States from various Iranian entities, but that would prevent the closure that Gisela and I most wanted.

Gisela and Christine had devoted themselves to supporting my mother, who had been widowed in 1974 and found living alone during my captivity very trying. She made frequent visits to McLean, and, after I got home, she often alluded to the extraordinary consideration shown by her daughter-in-law and granddaughter. Her life back in Fond du Lac was complicated by well-intentioned but not always helpful relatives. I remember her telling me later about the almost obsessive concern for me of her older sister Stelle—the favorite among our many aunts—who had lost her two

sons, each at 49. I had reached that age during captivity, and Stelle's fantasy that I was doomed to the same fate did nothing to assuage mother's anxiety.

Although still only 13, Christine displayed the composure under pressure that became one of her most distinctive qualities. Schooling proceeded in a more or less normal way, and the press did not intrude on home life in the way that became standard at my mother's house in Fond du Lac. Our neighborhood also differed from a good many others in not having its trees festooned with yellow ribbons.

As an only child, Christine recalls the pressure created by the absence of siblings with whom to vent her feelings. She understood the sensitivity of my position in Tehran and readily complied with her mother's urging to avoid open discussion of my plight. She remembers nothing about CIA's handling of the family but did recall an interview with a State Department physician or psychiatrist whose impersonal manner provoked her into a refusal to answer his questions.

Christine did need relief from outside the family, however, and found some in the weekly journal entry mandated by her 8th-grade English teacher. The students' contributions were read or discussed only between teacher and student, not in class, but Christine obtained an assurance of confidentiality before using the exercise as an outlet for her feelings about being the daughter of a hostage.



# Chapter Eleven

## *More Forays into Personnel Management, 1981–84*

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*D*uring this period [after my return], John Stein, still ADDO, was generous with his attention to my future. While my next assignment was still open, he would often drop by the house on his way to work to give me a little pep talk and sound me out on my thinking about the future.



## *Facing Uncertainty*

In my first weeks back home, I experienced the professional uncertainty of those who return from an extreme experience such as severe illness or injury or, as in my case, prolonged captivity by an authoritarian regime that harbored special hatred for CIA and therefore for me. During this period, John Stein, still the assistant DDO (ADDO), was generous with his attention to my future. While my next assignment was still open, he would often drop by the house on his way to work to give me a little pep talk and sound me out on my thinking about the future. It was during one of these visits that he mentioned the planning for another rescue attempt already well advanced when Tehran agreed to our release. He assured me that it would have been a vastly more sophisticated operation and that we'd have been freed whether the mullahs liked it or not. Thinking about the constant moves from one cell—even one city—to another prompted me to say that I was content not to have had his optimism tested.

A bit later, John offered a recuperative agenda of a year in language training followed by transfer to a European country, where the main order of business would be managing our relationship with that country's intelligence service. With no operations targeted at the host government and of course no paramilitary dimension, it would be the least challenging of all my tours, but I was no longer looking for excitement, and Gisela was delighted.

John submitted my name to the country's intelligence service, which responded that I'd be welcome but that it feared the publicity surrounding my captivity would pose both a danger for me and, although this was unspoken, a problem for them. The terrorist Red Army Faction was at its peak of activity, and the possibility that the publicity surrounding the hostage episode might lead to my being identified and targeted was substantial enough to be worrisome. That ended, at least for the time being, the prospect of another move to abroad. The job that John then came up with almost provoked me to retire. I was to go back into personnel management, although this time in the DO, as deputy to David Duberman, who managed one of CIA's specialized collection programs.

During these discussions, John kept insisting that Dave was a "class act" with whom I would enjoy working. People's judgments in these matters vary enormously, so I was delighted to discover that in this case John's view and mine coincided

exactly. David and I went on to establish the most productive boss-to-deputy relationship of my entire career.

### ***Back to Managing Career Training, Successor to JOTP***

In the spring of 1983, almost two years after my introduction to David Duberman, John Stein, now the DDO, called me to his office. He was worried about reports of dysfunction in the Office of Personnel's Career Training Division (CTD) and thought a change of leadership was needed. It was customary for the DDO to have a voice in choosing the CTD chief, as had been the case with the JOT Program, and it was clearly John's intention not merely to have a voice in this case but to make the selection himself.

Theoretically, the call belonged to the Chief of Personnel, Robert Magee, himself a DO officer, whose assignment to the Office of Personnel (OP) was an example of the new practice of assigning officers from one directorate to positions—sometimes very senior—in another. Magee and I had worked together briefly when he was deputy chief of NE Division and I had a branch there, so I was familiar with his swashbuckling style and he with my more conservative approach. Indeed, although we'd had no falling out, I thought he might reject me in the pursuit of someone more like himself. He didn't, and I embarked on the third installment—as unsolicited as the others—of my experience in personnel management. The whole transaction had taken place while Dave Duberman was absent on a temporary assignment, and the only real heat that it generated came from him when he got back and discovered that a deputy he'd entrusted with managing a substantial part of his program was no longer his.

Bob Magee had been tapped—coincidentally, I'm sure—to head the personnel office during a surge of interest in business as a model for DO administration. This consisted of a belief, almost a fetish in some cases, that the structure and practices of American business were transferable to government and could make it more flexible and adaptable. It was not a formally promulgated doctrine—the ever pragmatic John Stein just ignored it—that allowed its advocates to apply it as they wished. I don't remember whether the deputy director for support, Magee's boss, had adopted this new dogma, but he let Bob import it from the DO. It had been the master plan in the Office of Personnel (OP) for a year or so when I arrived.

The key feature of the business model, as Magee applied it, was reverence for competition. OP's network of recruiters, not part of my CTD, often struggled to meet hiring quotas, and Bob found himself dealing with a recurrence of this early in his tenure. He believed that reorganizing the mechanism in order to generate competition among his recruiters would produce more referrals to Headquarters and

thus more new employees. He brought in his most productive source of referrals to generate more job applications from his recruiter colleagues.

Bob had applied the same principle to CTD. In his view, the division of its functional organization into three new geographical units would stimulate an internal competition that would ultimately raise the number of offers of employment. Instead, the result was something close to chaos, in part because of the inefficiency of the fragmented new organization but mainly because of Bob's infatuation with a business model that overlooked the main cause of hiring shortfalls, the seemingly interminable security clearance process. The endemic delays in that process persist, as I understand it, to this day. The byproduct is that many people with superior qualifications and therefore more opportunities become impatient with the long wait and withdraw their applications. My charter as CTD chief did not extend to clearing the backlog except when Bob would press me to help reduce it by accepting a weak candidate. A more ambitious agenda would have run up against management's reluctance to devote the additional resources—especially background investigators—needed to accelerate the processing of applications.

Successful resistance to an ill-conceived policy requires committed backup from supportive subordinates. With the same luck that greeted David Duberman when he took over his program, I inherited a good staff at CTD, especially Larry Newhouse, my deputy chief and a career personnel officer. He had had long experience with the JOTP, was certainly qualified to run the new CTD version, and was notable for his honesty and candor. He was visibly disappointed at not being named division chief, and I urged him to consider the advantage of continuing the practice of having a DO officer in charge, someone who could insulate him from pressure for such things as expedient hiring decisions. I don't know if Larry was persuaded, but he accepted me with good grace, and I had learned enough from David Duberman's management style to take full advantage of the expertise of this superb staff officer.

Immediately after my arrival, Larry pointed out the confusion caused by CTD's newly instituted geographical organization established with a view to creating competing components. Restoring the original configuration would not solve all of the hiring problems, but it was clearly an indispensable beginning. Simplifying the structure meant reducing the number of supervisory positions, but some of the incumbents were already about to retire, and I got no serious resistance. The physical reintegration of applicant files was a little more of a challenge. Once started, the process had to be finished promptly in order to avoid aggravating the confusion it was intended to help solve. Accordingly, I joined Larry and the staff in sorting the files—everything was in hard copy in that era—and carrying them back to their original storage sites.

Even here, Bob Magee had followed the business will-o'-the-wisp, judging his success on the number of applicants accepted. Unsympathetic to my stubborn

emphasis on quality, he would call me to his office to protest my rejection of this or that applicant. He never overrode me but would devote the last hour or so of many a workday to persuading me of the merits of greater emphasis on quantity.

Our debates were lively, even intense, but mutually respectful and surprisingly cordial and without any effect on either party. I could never persuade Bob that hiring candidates with known flaws produced mediocrity at best and sometimes real trouble. He was equally unsuccessful with his standard rebuttal that the employee performance evaluation system would disgorge any real losers with no harm done. Meanwhile, he insisted, tolerating a certain number of innocuous nonperformers was just part of the cost of doing business. There were, after all, jobs that required no great energy or initiative. That I was not hiring for any of those jobs was irrelevant to Bob, and both of us knew of cases of incompetence or dishonesty—even a couple of defections to the Soviets—among graduates of the JOT/CT programs.

Whether all or any of these derelictions would have been prevented by a more uncompromising application of hiring standards remains unknown. In any case, standards had not always been as liberal as those now being urged on me—they certainly weren't under John Hopkins—and it was incontestable that the system had allowed at least a few catastrophic failures.

Everything stayed cordial with Magee even after I torpedoed an application sponsored by John McMahan, then deputy director of central intelligence. The son of a McMahan friend had completed the evaluation process when I received the report of my officer's interview with him; my okay would result in a job offer. The report did not call for rejection but did describe in some detail the applicant's indifferent attitude, which had permeated their session, and I thought this a sign of something amiss. Serious job applicants may say self-damaging things in an interview, but they never look bored. I had the young man called in for a talk. I went immediately to the point at issue and was struck by the way his reaction mirrored that of his earlier CTD interview. Polite, even deferential, but almost apathetic, he did not give me any reason to think he would prosper in a profession in which he had so little apparent interest. Indeed, he didn't display an active interest in anything.

The candidate had already completed the medical and psychological workups, which flagged no objections to his being hired. The only basis I had for rejecting this otherwise qualified applicant was his listless demeanor. Wanting some expert judgment on the matter, I sent my account of our session to the psychologists, asking them to take another look at him. Just a day or two later, they called to say that he had been disqualified on medical grounds. I wanted to know how they could have moved that fast, and they said another interview had not been needed. My report had given them reason to suspect a psychiatric disorder, something they had missed in their shorter interview with him, and this sufficed to disqualify him.

Whatever that said about the rigor of their own examination, the episode left me with enhanced confidence in the power of a non-specialist to contribute to a searching evaluation process. McMahon was unhappy with the outcome, but, the man of integrity he was, let it stand.

A rule-bound, mechanical approach to work is not unknown in any bureaucracy, even in an organization, such as CIA which likes to see itself as the home of self-starters who do vitally important work. I encountered it occasionally in the Office of Personnel, but, with no chance of persuading people who didn't even work for me to take on new risks and on whose support I depended, I realized that I had to work with what I had.

I did occasionally challenge the system. For example, I made an effort to attract more applicants with relevant real-life experience. To that end, I tried early on to persuade OP to waive the requirement for a college degree in otherwise promising applicants. The unanimous reaction was that it was the worst idea they had ever heard. OP would be flooded with frivolous applications, and the processing backlog would explode. Partly because of the intensity of this response, but also because I couldn't be sure it wasn't on the mark, I settled for the status quo.

There was sufficient time before the end of my tenure at CTD to proceed with the effort I'd begun with the JOTP to bring some conceptual order to the DO case officer recruitment process. The DO had never displayed any interest in helping shape hiring standards (or, as mentioned, promotion standards, either), and the psychologists were better at detecting bad apples than at recognizing potential winners. The result was a system that gave the JOTP or CTD chief no systematic guidance for his selections. Given their total authority for hiring into the program, this seemed dangerous. I had admired John Hopkins's shrewd judgment of people, and I appreciated his respect for my views on candidates for the DO. Nevertheless, I knew that our successors might or might not match his insights or even mine, and the system needed to be structured in a way that allowed it to function under managers who needed guidance.

My effort failed, at least in the sense that I never came up with a comprehensive set of guidelines for the evaluation of the qualities relevant to success in covert operations. I did produce a comparative study of recruiting practices—military, business, and that of the Agency—based on a paper I had done during my year at the National War College in 1978. It offered some suggestions, mainly about mistakes to be avoided, but certainly did not revolutionize the process of evaluating applications for work in operations. It may, however, have been a modest contribution to CIA's budding recognition in the 1980s that the health of the institution required its leaders' continuous and rigorous attention, without submitting to any business management fads.



# Chapter Twelve

## *EUROPE 1985–88*

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**W**e had originally expected a more tranquil life in this posting than we'd known in Indochina and Africa, but, as already noted, terrorist campaigns were in full swing well before we got there.



### *A Chance for a Pleasant Tour*

In the spring of 1984, with CTD functioning to his and my satisfaction, John Stein asked if I was still interested in the European posting, which would open in 1985. Gisela and I both still found it attractive, and this time, despite the continuing high level of terrorism, the country's intelligence service raised no objection. I enrolled in language training, which, despite its repetitious memorization exercises, I had always found rather enjoyable. I still remembered a few words of the local language my mother had taught me. My work on grammar while a hostage in Tehran eased the progress, and I managed to leave language school at a three, i.e., intermediate, level, which would suffice to handle the basic requirements of the job while I worked at my new post to build vocabulary.

Christine was about to start college at the University of Virginia and persuaded us to let her go ahead with that. A couple we knew from our tour in the Philippines had retired near Charlottesville and kindly volunteered to give her a little stand-in familial support. It was just as well that she didn't make the move with us, as we once again encountered one of the housing glitches that seemed to have become our way of life. We were to have an apartment in one of two US government-leased housing compounds in the city's suburbs, but, when we arrived in August, it wasn't ready. We spent the first weeks of our tour in a small apartment near my office.

We would not see our furniture or personal effects until permanent quarters became available. This made for some inconvenience, largely offset by the charms of the old city, which we got to know more intimately than we would have had we immediately moved to the suburbs. The city's iconic architecture and parks were nearby and enhanced the year-round beauty of our surroundings.

It was nevertheless pleasant to move into the much more spacious suburban apartment. The consulate housing compound was in a residential neighborhood, which contributed to a feeling that we were establishing a new home. An ice-cold and perfectly clear river passed close enough to our house for its left bank to become my favorite jogging route. The daily commute to the old city could be a nuisance because traffic congestion was entirely unpredictable. Nevertheless, we found that even the morning traffic sometimes offered a glimpse of the city's style, which included workers going in and out of the saloons that supplied their wake-up beer.

The consulate's location also offered opportunities for scenic lunchtime walks. It was most popular in the warmest weather, which attracted a good many nude sunbathers. A mountain range visible from various locales, including the consulate's top floor, and the river gave the city an extraordinary feeling of unity that remains vivid in my memory despite the passage of time. The city became, and remains, my favorite in Europe and all the places where I traveled or resided. It was my first and only assignment to a country with a European culture and adjusting to life there was quick and easy. It was certainly the only place where I could be mistaken for a native, as I was a number of times. A couple of these occasions involved elderly citizens who approached me on the street to ask, in the local language of course, for directions to one or another intersection or public building. I liked being able to respond with something more useful than a blank look.

Dealing with confrontation, especially when one must remain civil, is perhaps one of the last things to be mastered in a foreign language. It was a year or so into our stay that, as I was driving my family in the countryside, I coped with such an instance in a way that encouraged me to think that I was now really comfortable in the language. We had turned into a roadside restaurant for lunch, and the proprietor, standing on the balcony, motioned me to a spot directly in front of the building. As I moved forward, I saw that another driver wanted to compete for it, but I was far enough ahead to have established right of way and went to park as instructed. The driver reproached me for my alleged affront, and I pointed out that I'd done nothing but follow instructions. If he was unhappy about that, I said, he should take his complaint to the innkeeper. The latter ended the episode by taking my side, and my in-laws complimented my handling of it.

I had expected my professional contacts in the city to be competent in English, and I quickly found nearly all of them to be highly fluent. Those who had learned English in order to function in the United States clearly expected Americans stationed in their country to return the courtesy. In any case, one of the functions of a liaison job is to cultivate one's counterparts, and, without proficiency in their language, social life with them would have been impossible.

The prevailing fixation on international terrorism meant that I had an equally close relationship with the service similar to our FBI. Several professional contacts that Gisela and I developed became long-term friendships.

The capital was far too small to accommodate all the agencies of government of a modern industrial state, and these were therefore scattered around the country. My charter was the same as that of my predecessors—to supervise liaison with these services. The main item on our shared agenda was the reciprocal sharing of intelligence. Some of this took place at Langley, but I had two Directorate of Intelligence analysts on my staff who kept busy handling the transfer of material for the host service and

processing what it gave them. Meanwhile, I had regular meetings with a senior intelligence service officer and a senior police official. The former spoke English fluently and never addressed me in the local language. I, of course, reciprocated.

My senior police contact was entirely different and this in a way that demonstrated why language proficiency was mandatory for officers assigned to this post. He had served in the Navy during World War II and had a heavy accent that at first made conversation difficult. I soon realized, however, that he was not at all indifferent to establishing a working and even a social relationship. My very amiable father-in-law was exactly the same in his reliance on dialect, in his case Hessian. Both were just speaking the language they knew, and even my limited proficiency was much better than none at all.

The police official was not just a cop but a concerned observer of postwar Europe. At dinner at his home one evening, he expatiated on the country's prospects for consolidation of new political values. An impassioned declaration, "Europa! Europa!" began a summary of his formula for ensuring that his country would remain a democracy integrated with the anticommunist West.

### *Still Worries About Security*

We had originally expected a more tranquil life in this posting than we'd known in Indochina and Africa, but, as already noted, terrorist campaigns were in full swing well before we got there. Consulate security, aware of my hostage background, encouraged me to take advantage of the standard license plates that the local police offered to replace the more conspicuous US diplomatic plates. There seemed no direct connection with my status as a hostage—"dip" plates were no more a threat to me than to anyone else in the consulate—but I saw no reason to refuse.

The arrangement offered a measure of anonymity, but at one point it also brought me to the attention of those very police. I got a call from consulate security saying that someone in the Interior Ministry would like to talk to me. The ministry stood almost next door to the consulate, and one morning I walked over and introduced myself. I got a cordial welcome from an official who began by apologizing for the need to admonish me about my apparent indifference to speed limits. He said the city's ubiquitous CCTV network had indicated that I drove like a local and that it hadn't even occurred to him I might be a US official. Because my case had been entered into the record, however, he'd had to call me in. I had indeed been rather casual about the matter, but I promised to mend my ways, and we ended the session with a friendly handshake.

An interesting aspect of work with the intelligence service was the insights it offered into both its internal politics and its understanding of our mutual adversary,

the Warsaw Pact. As I developed relationships with both its liaison staff and various substantive experts, I was struck by the casual way in which several of my intel contacts criticized their own colleagues. To an old DO hand, it was truly unthinkable behavior; whatever our intramural tensions, we keep them to ourselves. It was offered in such a matter-of-fact way that there seemed to be no malice, however, and it must surely have been a common practice. Another exotic aspect of the service's culture was the identification—not necessarily based on fact—of senior officers with one or another of the country's political parties. I never got a detailed description of this phenomenon, but it seemed to involve informal exchanges of information of interest with political parties that were not conveyed in official channels.

The country's officialdom was much bigger and more complex than the kind I had seen in Africa and Southeast Asia, and its inner workings were even more opaque. I thus got real pleasure from an opportunity as a foreigner to improve its internal communications. It was standard practice for a chief of base occasionally to invite the intelligence service chief to dinner, the only complication being the choice of company. Inviting the consul general was *de rigueur*, but, on one occasion, I wanted to avoid another evening of stilted diplomatic formalities. With the ConGen couple as the only American guests, I invited the senior police official and his wife to join us. To my surprise, he said he'd never met the intelligence service chief but looked forward to doing so. Although they were so completely different in style they might well have had little to say to each other, they were soon deep in an intense conversation that left the rest of us out for almost the entire evening. I didn't mind for myself; rather, I was glad things had worked out so well. My only regret—it amused me, too, I admit—was the discomfiture of an embassy official who was accustomed to being the life of the party but who now found himself pretty much ignored by the foreign guests so absorbed in each other's company. Afterward, when I escorted the intelligence service chief to his limo, he complimented me on my friendship with the police official, who had clearly impressed him. Although the police office and I had barely spoken that evening, when we did so we used the informal verb forms, unknown in purely business relationships, that identified for the intelligence chief a genuine friendship.

Despite similarly cordial connections with the country's intelligence service, it took a while to develop a feel for things such as its perception of the Soviet Union as an intelligence target. Our intelligence interests were for all practical purposes identical, but I could never be sure that there were not particular areas—really sensitive sources, perhaps—whose product was too delicate to be shared. Maybe there were, but I was struck by the similarity of our reactions to the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. I would have expected the country's proximity to Russia to encourage a more nuanced interpretation of internal Warsaw Pact political dynamics. What I found when I visited past European intelligence service friends after the end of my tour

was that we had all shared a sense of a solid if sclerotic USSR that would be around more or less indefinitely.

The country's intelligence service support staff had proved so cordial and helpful that, when it came time to give the customary farewell party, I decided to include these people. On my own, I might have been deterred by protocol concerns, but Gisela encouraged me, and I rented a barge for an afternoon river cruise. The scenery was captivating; the beer flowed freely; and my staff and I later got many expressions of approval, including some from locals who had never before taken the trip. The cordial tone of the event set the atmosphere for our preparations to leave.



# Chapter Thirteen

## *A Look into the Rearview Mirror*

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**M**y long exposure as an operations officer and experience with the evolution of DO management practices left me optimistic about CIA's capacity to meet the complex challenges, ranging from terrorism to the digital revolution, of the 21st century.



### *A Second CIA Career as a Historian*

I had accepted the European assignment with the understanding that a tour of duty there could mark the end of my CIA career, and in fact I stayed on for only a year after our return before retiring. The tour had provided both a welcome change of scene and professional satisfaction. Once back in the States, however, I found myself among the majority of supergrades for whom advancement opportunities were disproportionately fewer than those for employees at lower grades.

After exploring possibilities from a placeholder perch in a communications collection element, I retired in 1989 and accepted an offer of a contract with CIA's History Staff. It came from Ken McDonald, one of my professors at the National War College. He had later joined CIA to head the staff and was now looking for someone to help him modify what he considered its excessively Eurocentric orientation.

Gisela had returned to the Headquarters office of the same project in which she had excelled during our last tour. In accordance with protocol, I had not been her supervisor. Meanwhile, Ken put me to work on what developed into a six-volume series on CIA's various roles in the Second Indochina War, i.e., the prolonged North Vietnamese campaign to dominate South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Interviews with colleagues who had also served in one or two of them—I am one of the only two or three officers ever to have been stationed in all three—supplemented the voluminous written record, and the series took almost twelve years to complete. With varying degrees of redactions, the entire package was posted in CIA's Freedom of Information Act Reading Room in 2009.

It was not mere vanity that made me think I brought some useful knowledge to the task—field experience is in some respects simply irreplaceable, and I had spent six years in Indochina. My historical endeavors clarified for me that such experience can also be vastly overvalued and perhaps even misleading. It was only while drafting the first volume, on CIA's involvement in Ngo Dinh Diem's presidency in South Vietnam, that I began to comprehend how little I—and, I think, my colleagues—understood what we were dealing with in Vietnam. Even had we devoted some time to learning its history, we might still not have done a better analysis. The intensity of Cold War animosities might have prevented that. Nevertheless, attention to things like the tortured relationship between Ngo Dinh Diem and his Buddhist

constituency and to the history of Ho Chi Minh's revolutionary Viet Minh would certainly have facilitated a more realistic perception of Diem's prospects and of the ways, if there were any, to improve them.

As it was, facts on the ground in 1964 and 1965 had forced us to recognize the immediate threat to South Vietnam's survival, but, even so, we in the field never examined the assumptions that shaped our programs, and I doubt we could have given a coherent account of them if asked to do so. As far as I know, no one at Headquarters did any more than we did; were it otherwise, we'd have been given a more sophisticated view of the problem and its possible solution than in fact was offered.

It took my examination of Vietnam operations to force my attention to the ignorance that impeded both intelligence judgments and operational planning. Analysis did indeed improve over time while the action programs fell victim to Vietnamization on the US side and a lack of commitment to them by the Vietnamese. George Allen's lament about the absence of zero-based analysis and a rigorous examination of the evolving balance of forces before the Johnson administration's dispatch of major US ground forces in 1965 still encapsulates the conceptual failures that shaped US action in Vietnam.

Another example of the danger of indifference to history, even current history, is CIA's role in the US effort to solidify the rule of the shah in Iran and establish him as the guarantor of Western interests in the Persian Gulf region. Throughout the shah's tenure and up until early 1979, the Agency dealt with his known defects only by denying or rationalizing the gradual decay of his authority. Even toward the end, the analysts insisted that his reign was secure for the next six months or a year or whatever. His prospects of survival beyond these arbitrary projections were ignored.

As in Vietnam, a preoccupation with Soviet ambitions may have deterred analysts from doing a rigorous examination of the shah's prospects. Similarly, the DO might have devoted some attention to correcting his weaknesses, even at the risk of straining its favored relationship with him. In practice, Tehran Station's attention remained fixed on ensuring the continued operation of the collection sites that covered Soviet rocket launches and on the plethora of issues related to US support of the Iranian military. Unwavering support of the throne became an imperative. Neither analysts nor operators were disposed—or encouraged—to recognize the threat to the shah's tenure posed by popular and religious disaffection. When I arrived in Tehran five months after his overthrow, all signs of his absolute monarchy—of his existence—had disappeared.

### *The Evolution of the “Company”*

The duration and variety of my career provide the basis for a few other observations about the evolution of the “company,” a common allusion to CIA years ago, during my tenure. I can, of course, offer no more than a personal view, but I did develop an abiding interest in a few of the organization’s idiosyncrasies that invite a brief look. The extent to which I could indulge this curiosity depended on the circumstances of my assignments.

Despite my lingering infatuation with the conduct of covert operations, I became increasingly interested in other aspects of our organizational practices, especially personnel acquisition and management and training. One such topic is the poor quality of training in CIA’s early years. At least partially the product of a more generally anti-intellectual climate, its aftereffects compelled my contemporaries and me to learn by experience a good many things that could have been more quickly and economically taught—with fewer risks and mistakes—in a well-designed and well-staffed program of instruction. On the operational side, for example, the “rapport” mantra drove out serious attention to such niceties of agent acquisition as the psychologies of prospective agents. A better calculated approach would surely have increased the ratio of productive recruitments.

On the other hand, experience, especially field experience, reduces dependence on doctrine that may be outdated or simply irrelevant. An example on the operational side is the pacification campaigns in Vietnam and the differences between CIA’s programs and those run by other US agencies, both military and civilian. The very absence of any formal doctrine led Bill Colby to delegate the design of station programs to officers in the field, and they in turn recognized the need for a major Vietnamese role. We did not entirely escape the trap posed by our confidence in the American way, but we did work to enlist Vietnamese participation. In the work of leaders like Tran Ngoc Chau and Nguyen Be, this paid substantial dividends despite their failure—and ours—to articulate a political program attractive to the peasantry. Whether the ARVN-dominated GVN would ever have bought into such a scheme is of course a separate issue.

By contrast, the US military and civilian economic aid programs—with allowance for local exceptions—were hobbled by conventional modes of operation. The Army saw information operations and economic development as adjuncts to a fundamentally military effort aimed at neutralizing North Vietnamese and Viet Cong military capabilities. The Marines had tried to incorporate the approach of our People’s Action Teams, but the Tet offensive revealed how far they had been from having created local Vietnamese leadership loyal to Saigon.

Economic aid officers often seemed to believe that a higher standard of living would win the peasants' loyalty to the GVN—despite the paucity of evidence for that proposition. There was a corresponding faith among information officers that exposure to US political values and institutions would, or at least should, immunize the peasantry against the appeal of communist propaganda.

Ultimately, the can-do spirit prevailed. No CIA analyses of the 1960s acknowledged that the Agency's or other US pacification efforts had only slim prospects of success. The tone gradually darkened after the NVA offensive in 1972, but outright acceptance of the probability of a communist victory did not come almost until the end.

### ***An Optimistic Bottom Line***

Our performance in Vietnam is one of many that might have led an observer to despair of ever seeing a serious-minded Agency capable of recognizing its own limitations. It was my good fortune to conclude my service with two assignments in personnel management and 32 years researching and writing ten volumes of CIA history. My long exposure as an operations officer and experience with the evolution of DO management practices left me optimistic about CIA's capacity to meet the complex challenges, ranging from terrorism to the digital revolution, of the 21st century.

This maturation began, I think, with a bit of serendipity, namely, CIA's capacity, probably inherited from the OSS, to recruit and keep talented, energetic people who do their best to fulfill demanding, even when ill-rewarded, tasks. In the DO, one of these is the more systematic exploitation and evaluation of agents once the adrenaline of a successful recruitment pitch has worn off. Here and elsewhere, CIA's new self-understanding has made for better use of all its talent, notably in the welcome acceptance—belated in the DO, which trailed the DI—that management is itself an art that needs cultivation, especially in a complex organization coping with a fluid working environment.

I am aware that, at least as recently as 2018, there were pockets of discontent with the quality of Agency management, especially mid-management, and I am not claiming the arrival of some kind of managerial Nirvana. Nevertheless, my access to the record of and participants in recent major covert activity does permit a reasoned comparison of past and present-day operations. My volume on Iraq, which begins with the 2002 run-up to the invasion the following year, records a new (at least to me) CIA disposition to tell truth to power and to acknowledge that some goals may be unattainable at any acceptable price.

My research on Iraq emphasized CIA's role in the DO's "nation-building" and internal security programs that followed the collapse of the Saddam regime. Here too I encountered what to me was a new management style, one that mirrored the development of the Directorate of Intelligence/Analysis. Of the dozens of managers and case officers I interviewed, exactly one displayed the damn-the-torpedoes attitude so dominant in CIA's earlier years. All had served at great personal risk in Iraq and had every reason to want to see their efforts as having succeeded.

Instead, they acknowledged that the wishful thinking at the policy level that underlay nation-building efforts inevitably rendered their results tenuous at best. What I did not encounter was the naïve, sometimes tortured, optimism so familiar in the record of similar efforts as recently as those in Iran and Vietnam.

NE Division's abandonment of the macho style it had inherited from EA Division in favor of a more sober calculation of risks and benefits is all the more remarkable for having been achieved under intense political pressure. The near anarchy in Iraq unleashed when tensions between Sunni and Shia sects exploded into violence exposed as a fantasy the George W. Bush administration's confidence in a smooth transition to democracy. The atmosphere of near desperation that prevailed in Washington for the next several years produced massive requirements on the DO to help save the situation. That the directorate responded with energy, imagination, and determination and without a trace of self-deception about the chances of success is to me a tribute to both its respect for the chain of command and its professional integrity. That is why my history of its efforts in that area is entitled *A Good Faith Effort*.

The adoption of a more fact-based approach to judging the balance of forces in Iraq was not merely a one-off aberration as demonstrated by the Agency's tempered view on the subsequent campaign in Afghanistan, which began in 2003. There again, sober analysis accompanied a good-faith effort to help execute a policy based on another administration fantasy—that the United States could give the Afghans a functioning democracy.

It cannot be coincidental that this new realism about covert action planning for Third World conflicts coincided with the qualitative change in CIA managerial philosophy regarding intelligence analysis. Public attention to CIA and Iraq is usually focused on the flawed intelligence on Saddam Hussein's alleged intentions to turn Iraq into a nuclear power. Although the intelligence was indeed wrong (allegations about fabrication display nothing but ignorance of the profession), DCI George Tenet and his staff resisted any temptation they may have felt to double down on the faulty analysis to support the policymakers. Instead, they acknowledged the blunder, perhaps more slowly than they might have, and, more importantly, they continued to pursue a line of analysis on events within Iraq that pointed out the obstacles

to transforming that country into a Jeffersonian democracy eager for American guidance.

In 2002, before the imbroglio over Saddam's putative nukes, analysts had already adopted a skeptical stance about the prospects of a post-Saddam Iraq. They shared those views with the policymakers, who responded by excluding CIA from the deliberations that ended with the decision to invade. This represented a sea change from the approach in Vietnam. There, analysts had tended to look for reasons for optimism, shying away from an unsparing judgment about the prospects of ultimate victory and its attendant risk of losing a place at the table.

The same mindset prevailed in analysis on Iran under the shah. The successors of those analysts, by contrast, no longer see themselves merely as loyal members of the team; their job is not to support a given policy but to assess its progress and prospects. I don't know what produced this transformation of both operational and analytic management styles—it cannot be attributed to any single director—but I do fear for its long-term survival. Telling truth to power is a difficult and professionally risky business, and the Agency perpetually faces the demands of policymakers who bring their own perceptions—and preconceptions and misconceptions—to the search for answers to the crises that bedevil every administration.

A CIA veteran curious about the origins and evolution of the Agency's values and practices might be tempted to try listing the factors that produced them. This would probably generate an inconclusive argument about their relevance and comparative importance, but CIA's origins in the OSS were surely a major factor in the emergence of CIA culture. During my early years in the DO, the sense of being almost a separate tribe, the few against the many, determined much of what we did and failed to do both internally and in our dealings with other US agencies.

Although the OSS legacy was a major factor in this mindset, it exerted its influence in a highly selective way. The early dominance of covert action on CIA's agenda echoed the numerous paeans, especially in early CIA historical documents, to the military operations of the OSS. These gave correspondingly short shrift to its intelligence arm, the Research and Analysis Branch. I can't prove it, but I think it likely that RAB's superb work in Europe contributed a good deal more to victory in World War II than did the harassing operations in Europe and Southeast Asia.

The action bias dominated the Agency's—and especially the DO's—agenda from the late 1940s well into the 1970s. Nevertheless, despite the stubborn resilience of this mindset, the defining quality of the CIA remains, in my judgment, its mutability. This may be less visible to people of relatively short tenure, but it seems to me that today's CIA has undergone a qualitative transformation since my entry on duty 66 years ago. It may sound condescending toward earlier generations to call it

maturity, but this is not out of lack of my regard for colleagues—many of them friends—of earlier years. Nevertheless, the changes are palpable, and they suggest to me the emergence of an organization better capable of meeting a variety of unprecedented challenges.

### *A Last Thought*

When I got home from Laos in 1962, I regaled my family with some of my adventures, and my father listened with intense interest. He also asked, after one such account, when I might be returning to Fond du Lac. He seemed to be suggesting that my years with CIA had been something of a lark to be replaced in due course by truly adult employment. Circumstance made it the worst possible time to induce a son back into the fold. I didn't expect or even want the thrill of running my own paramilitary operation to become a matter of routine but to leave while still on an emotional high was unimaginable. I was right about the uniqueness of my tour in Laos and also, I think, about the sense that I had now found what I wanted to do. That is what I told him. As always, in matters of real import to me, he honored my preference, and I stayed on the path that ends with this set of recollections.



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