

# EVERY SWINGING DICK

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O the way back from the states I considered the best way ‘./ to hit Loren with all this. Everything seemed pretty cut and dried. Loren would just have to be brought to see that there was nothing else to do. I'd put it as strongly as I could: this is the way we're going to do it, if we don't we might as well give up the whole thing. He ought to be amenable, I thought. He knows better than anyone that we're just spinning our wheels.

At the Monastery I collared Bill Todd first. Before my leave Bill and I had spent hours and hours discussing the problems, discussions that always centered on the lack of information and the need for a data bank. Now he completely agreed with the idea of developing one ourselves and attacking the Vietcong from an intelligence standpoint completely independent of the South Vietnamese. We both knew this would not fit in with any of the Agency's guidelines or even with the acknowledged understanding that we were only to act in an advisory capacity—especially now that "Vietnamization" had begun. What I had in mind would be unilateral and covert, a CIA do-it-yourself activity. Yet we felt we had no choice. All the other programs were worthless. If we wanted

Neither Todd nor I was quite sure how Loren would react to this. Our boss was smart, sensitive to the needs, and immensely frustrated. And he was a friend. But he was also an Agency GS-15 looking to become a 16. "Bill," I said, "come with me to Loren on this. You know me, I'll lay it on the line. I'll be outspoken about it. But I need your support, especially now." (Bill had just been appointed base chief of operations, third man at Bien Hoa.) Bill hadn't a moment's hesitation, as I knew he wouldn't. Without so much as a blink of an eye he said, "Sure, Orrin, I'm right with you." We asked Susie to lay on a meeting with Loren, preferably late that afternoon, in case he might want to extend the discussion into the usual social hour.

When we walked into his office for the meeting Loren knew something was cooking. I was just back from leave, so obviously I was planning to tear up the world, and now here I was with Bill Todd standing next to me, fairly bursting his seams. He looked at us and laughed. "Whatever this is, it's obvious I've got the deck stacked against me. I guess you want me to be all ears, is that it?" "Yes," I said, "and then I want you to concur. Because what I'm about to tell you is the only solution to our problems. Bill and I are totally convinced that the proposals we are about to make to you will give us the one method of turning this nonproductive office into something that functions the way it's supposed to. Frankly, it's the only reason I decided to come back.

"Loren, we all want to develop intelligence, report intelligence, and develop spies. We especially want to develop the spies. But under the present circumstances there is no way for us to even try to penetrate the Vietcong. We can't go into a single district and look for a penetration—not Trang Bang, Cu Chi, Tan Uyen, Duc Hoa, none of them. The system we have now with the interrogation centers, the special police, the RD and CG and PRU simply does not work. Not one CIA program works. And they will not work." "Yes," Loren said, "I know. Nothing except Forcie. And it bugs my ass day and night." "So what we need," I went on, "is to gather the information first. Once we have that, then we can get the spies. But we have to do it ourselves, we have to do it our own way, by cross-checking from the very beginning. None of this cutout baloney from the police or these unverified stories from the prisoners."

Then I explained the concept to him. I told him about my experience in Japan, about the way Japanese intelligence had had everything down on paper: the entire committee structure of the Japanese Communist Party on a ward-by-ward basis. all of it down

to the individual members. "That's exactly what I want," I said. "The only way we are going to crack this thing, the only way we are going to be able to target on an agent, is to have all that information. [That was Bill Todd's favorite word: Who are we going to TARGET on? We need to TARGET on someone.] We are never going to pick up an agent at random without knowing what we are doing. So we have to collect the data. We have to concentrate on Tay Ninh province, Hau Nghia, Duc Hue, Duc Hoa, Binh Duong, Bien Hoa, and COSVN, and get our data. Binh Long, Phuoc Long, Long Khanh, and Binh Tuy we can forget about. There's nothing going on in those places anyway. So forget about them and concentrate on the provinces that are important to us.

"We can start collecting the data at the Chieu Hoi Centers. We've got thousands of defectors, and each one of them is chock-full of information. We'll have to screen them all. It'll be a massive job, but we can do it. We can exploit them and build up a data bank arranged by Vietcong structure. If we start right now, in a few months we can have a card file so big well all be amazed."

Loren asked me to explain it further, and I was pretty sure we had him committed. He had seen right off that this would be a significant deviation from the standard CIA modus operandi, but it hadn't fazed him a bit. "This is what I want it to look like," I said. "Here is, let's say, 'An Tinh Village,' that will be a subject heading in our card catalog. Behind 'An Tinh Village' the first card will be 'Party Secretary.' Once we interview enough defectors and prisoners from An Tinh we are going to know who the party secretary is. We'll have his name, date of birth, place of birth, family members, close friends, and associates. We'll have something about his history: his first assignment—'village guerrilla' or whatever—his other assignments, right up to where he is now. All of it cited as source of information. Then behind 'Party Secretary' we'll have 'Current Affairs Section,' with all the members listed on separate cards and all the information we can get on each one of them, also cited by source. Then the 'Military Affairs Section' with cards on the members, then the 'Political Section,' and so on for each of the sections right down the line according to the organizational hierarchy. And I want this for every village, district, province, and subregion that we're focusing on. Each new source we interview is going to tell us something; he'll corroborate what we have or give us something additional. So we might end up with eight different cards on the An Tinh secretary, each one giving us the information derived from an individual source. What we'll eventually have is the structure of the Vietcong on every level as well as identities and

backgrounds of the members. Not just a wiring diagram but a goddam super wiring diagram.

"That will be our subject file. We'll also keep personal dossiers—201 files—on each of the sources. The case file numbers of each of the sources who provided information on a particular subject will be cited in the subject file. So we'll be able to see at a glance that, say, the head of the Duc Hue civilian proselyting committee was identified by sources A, B, and C, who had this, that, or the other relationship with him during this, that, or some other period of time.

"Loren"—I was getting excited by now—"this cannot miss." In my mind I was picturing that Japanese KGB-GRU section, all those guys working away on their files and diagrams in that giant room. "We just cannot miss. We have thirteen hundred sources sitting in Bien Hoa alone right now, with more coming in every day. If we only get a hundred of those guys to talk it'll be a major victory. But I think we're going to get every single one of them. One way or another there's no question we'll get their cooperation. And we'll begin to get authentication, one to the next, back and forth. Everybody who was in one of their sections is going to know everybody else in that section plus people in other sections. And all these section chiefs know one another. It might come slowly, but it will come. We can build this thing. We're going to start with a partial breakdown of a village party committee, then we're going to add and add."

By this time Loren's eyes were practically glowing and he had started saying "Uh huh, uh huh" as I hit each of the points. "OK," he said finally, "I think you're on the right track. Now how do you intend to do it? Is this something that's going to cost the Agency a million dollars, and cost me my job while you're at it?"

"Not at all," I said. "With your help I want to go to the regional Chieu Hoi Center and set up some kind of an office. They have a lot of equipment out there, CORDS has a lot of equipment, trailer houses and furniture and other things. Put some of those trailer houses up there for me, desks, typewriters, partitions. Let's set it up so we can do initial screenings of four people at a time, or eight at a time, with different interpreters. Chieu Hoi Lan can oversee all of this, make sure it's running smoothly; she's tremendously capable.

"So I need interpreters, desks, file cabinets, trailer houses. CORDS has these big forty-foot trailers. I need a couple of them, maybe three. Why can't you go to your friend Charlie Whitehouse [director of CORDS at that time]? He'll do it for you. Inside the

Chieu Hoi Center, I need some kind of fenced-in compound for security. I'll want to rent two or three houses where I can interrogate sources after they've been screened. I can put them up at the houses to get them away from the Chieu Hoi Center, and have my interpreters handle the interrogations there. We're going to have to pay rent and we're going to have to feed them, but it won't come to very much.

"First we'll set our people up. Then we'll get the Three Corps Chieu Hoi chief to help us select defectors according to what he says they used to be. Of course most all of them will claim they were members of the Farmer's Association, or that they were suppliers, always the lowest level. You should hear them. 'Yes, I was a member,' they'll tell you, 'but I never knew anything. All I did was carry rice from the village into the boonies.' But you can bet your ass they weren't all farmers and suppliers. We've got lots of significant people in those centers, there's no question at all in my mind about it.

"I know that Bill supports me one hundred percent on this. We've already discussed it thoroughly, his ideas and mine."

"That's right, Loren," Bill put in. "If we had a card file on a village so that I knew who every swinging dick was in the party committee, then I could finally target on somebody. I could find somebody who had some contact with one of the chiefs, say the head of the military proselyting section. And once I found somebody in the Chieu Hoi Center who knows him, then I could check out the target's background, who he knows in the area, his family and friends, and we could find the proper cutout to approach him, a relative, or someone else he trusts. We'll have an idea of who might be approachable and why, what kind of lever to use. Of course we can't take the word of one source for anything. But sooner or later somebody's going to come through the system who will corroborate the first guy's information. Someone who knows the same military proselyting guy. So, you see, we'd have a start, we'd have something to work on. Right now we've got nothing, zilch."

"That's right," I said. "Nothing. We don't even know the strength of a village party committee or a district party committee. Loren, the special police don't even know how many people they're dealing with on these committees. I've asked all over, not just in Three Corps, but also in Two Corps. 'Come on guys, how many do they have in this committee? How many?' You know what I get from the police? 'I don't know.' 'Well, do you have any names?' 'Yeah, a couple that we suspect are on it.' 'Well how do you know

they're on it?' 'I don't know.' That's all we ever get from them, don't know.' And you know what? They're telling the truth: they *don't* know. Because they never had a data bank. So that's what we're talking about here, creating our own data bank."

"OK," Loren said, interrupting me, "you've sold me. Let's do it. Let's start tomorrow morning and do it. I'll go see Charlie Whitehouse tonight and I'm sure he'll tell Rudy [the CORDS Military Region Three Chieu Hoi Center adviser] to let us have whatever we need." "All right," said Bill Todd, "that's terrific. Let's assume that CORDS will go along; it's really no skin off their backs anyway. But that still leaves us with a problem. Namely, what are we going to do with your buddies in Saigon Station?" Loren hesitated for a moment, then said, "Bill, fuck'em. I'm not even going to mention it to them. We can do this with our own special police money. We're going to scrounge most of the material. Everything's already funded. We've got the desks, the typewriters, the people. You're just going to put them to work on this project instead of letting them go on doing what they've been doing, which has been getting us nowhere. So what does Saigon Station have to know? They can find out later, after you've got it up and running and we're getting results. Now, Orrin, what's your first step? What procedures are you going to follow?"

"I've been thinking about it," I said. "First I'm going to draw up a screening form, then I'll do an interrogation form. The screening form's the most important. That's what I want to have rolling across my desk immediately, something that's going to tell me who these *hoi chanh* defectors are. Name, home address, date of birth, place of birth, position in VC, VC code name. I'll put these forms together, then I'll train our interpreters about how I want them to handle the defectors and use the forms. One thing I'll need is a special interpreter for myself, someone who's going to be smart enough to understand exactly what I want, then act as a leader for the other interpreters. I've been thinking of Lam Number One. Do you mind if I take him?"

"Mind?" Loren's eyebrows shot up three inches. "You know Lam handles all the Forcie material. You've got to be kidding. But now that you mention it, I think I might have exactly the person for you. In fact I'm expecting him in on the courier plane later this afternoon.

"Let me tell you about this guy," Loren said. "He's been working for us down in Vung Tau, and we've been protecting him from the draft. He's ethnic Chinese, bright, brought up in Hong Kong, as articulate in English as the average American. maybe more so. I

hear he's a good writer too. But the officer in charge down there doesn't like him, thinks he's a wiseass and lazy. So I arranged for him to come up here. Try this guy out, Orrin. I think he's your lead interpreter, he's really good." "Great," I said, "I'll take him. I've also asked Mingo and Sonny and Dat if they would like to work with me on this. I hope that's OK. They've all said yes."

An hour later Tran Van Minh stepped off the courier from Vung Tau, the man I would know as Albert for the next six years, one of the sharpest, most effective interrogators in Vietnam. He was maybe five feet tall if he stretched, and he might have weighed ninety pounds or so dripping wet. He had a big smile plastered permanently on his face, and his English, which he spoke with an upper-crust British accent, was perfect. Although he was twenty-seven years old, he hardly looked a day over fifteen. He had a smart aleck, joking way about him, with a sense of humor that was constantly on display. I could see why the Vung Tau officer might have found him annoying. But his manner didn't put me off at all. He was sassy but he seemed ready to work. I liked him immediately.

The next day I had Saigon Station run traces on Albert, which turned up some interesting information. His mother lived in Hong Kong, where Albert had graduated from high school. His father, dead now, had been one of Ho Chi Minh's top financial officers after World War Two. But in 1946 he had stolen ten million piasters from the Vietminh finance section—a lot of piasters in those days—and fled to Hong Kong. Albert's old man hadn't been a Communist after all, just a crafty Viet-Chinese ready to play the game until he saw his big chance. Albert had grown up around money and had acquired at least one expensive habit himself: opium. Not that I cared, as long as he kept it under control. But it was something I'd have to watch out for.

I also asked Bill to run Albert through the Gittinger test, which he did late that afternoon. Bill was astounded when he came to me with the results. "Orrin," he stated, "you're not going to believe it. This Albert of yours tests out at over a hundred fifty IQ. He's brilliant. Not only that, he's an ERU plus—externalizer, regulated, uniform plus. He will love to be given projects, he'll work like hell to get them done, and he'll do them by himself. The man does not need people. [Most Vietnamese were not role uniform but role adaptive or role adaptive plus—intensely sociable people who badly needed company.] You put him in a room by himself where he can just work and he'll flourish, he'll produce like mad for you."

The next morning over breakfast Loren told me he had spoken to Charlie Whitehouse at CORDS and that Charlie had agreed to

help. Rudy, his deputy in Region Three, would get us whatever we needed—trailers, furniture, and space at the Chieu Hoi Center. When I spoke with Rudy personally he couldn't have been more forthcoming, and later that day three big trucks maneuvered forty-foot trailers into place inside a little compound that had been created for me at the center. Within a couple of days the furniture was in place, including a large card file cabinet, and I had organized my staff—ten female secretary/translators and five male interpreters who would do the screening and interrogating under my direction.

While this was going on Loren set up a meeting for Bill, me, and Colonel Thao, the ARVN regional G-2, Colonel Hien, the regional National Police chief, the Vietnamese regional Chieu Hoi director, and Colonel Dinh, commander of the Corps Interrogation Center. Loren introduced things, laying out the general concept of what I wanted to do, then turned the meeting over to me. I knew all these guys and got along with all of them. Colonel Thao, the regional G-2, was an especially outstanding officer—dedicated, smart, and a straight arrow. The same for Colonel Dinh. Both these guys were incorruptible, and worked their fannies off all the time.

I told them that I wanted to screen all the *hoi chanh* we now had on hand and then I wanted to have access to all new sources as they came in. I told them that we wanted to set up our own intelligence-gathering program and that we hoped to develop agents. Of course, I said, we would share everything worthwhile with ARVN intelligence. We would feed them our reports directly or translate them, then ship them over—whichever they preferred. "The only thing I'd like is to have access to whatever good sources come in as soon as they come in, prisoners as well as defectors. We'll take these people just as soon as you can let us have them, get them into our own houses, and interrogate them." Colonel Dinh, I knew, had some intelligence—sketchy information on the enemy units operating in the region: he knew something about unit identification, maybe a few guys in the unit, the commander, executive officer, and several other key people. I knew he would love to have anything more he could get along those lines. We would go after order of battle too, I told him. We intended to set up files on all military units as well as political units and this too we would share. Dinh and Thao were enthusiastic, and the others were happy enough to go along. They, of all people, knew exactly how bad the current situation was.

A few days later I sent Mingo and Sonny out to rent houses where we could put up our sources and interrogate them. I also



gave Albert twenty thousand piasters to rent a two-bedroom apartment down some little alley that he could live in as well as use for interrogation. I gave him some furniture, a typewriter, and pots and pans so that he could do his cooking at home. And I told him to get his girlfriend in there—I knew he had a girlfriend in Vung Tau and that he didn't know what to do with her. "I'll have our commo man put in a call to Vung Tau to have her sent up," I told him. "Put her in the back room, she can cook for you, whatever. I don't care about it." I wanted to fix this guy up with all the amenities, give him a kind of self-sustaining environment. After Bill's assessment I was sure he'd be happiest that way and that he'd work better for it.

By now I had developed my SOP (standard operating procedure) forms for screening and interrogation and I began training my interpreters in how to use them. I also brought in the Provincial Interrogation Center officers and special police advisers from all the provinces to brief them on the new setup and how I wanted things done. With the help of a blackboard I laid out what I was after in terms of our own data bank and I told them that in a matter of a few months each of them (in the provinces) would have their own smaller versions of the data bank. They would send me copies of their forms and whatever wiring diagrams they were able to get. Our secretaries would type cards from their sources, along with 201 files. So it would all be retrievable, a kind of manually operated computer system. I told them that Loren had okayed everything, and if they needed to hire more people, an additional secretary or translator, they should do it.

I explained in detail to the advisers and interpreters how a 201 file works, what we wanted in there, all the biographical data, plus whatever wiring diagram the source was able to generate. If the source knew only one section of the village committee, we wanted it there. Also any intelligence the person might report should be in there. What I was looking for, I told them, was the ability for an interrogator to go down to the subject file and the 201 file and review them before he talked to the next source from the same general area. Then the interrogator would have something to work with. He'd be able to say, "Do you know so-and-so or so-and-so? What about the propaganda section, who do you know in that? You say you were in the Farmer's Association, but two people told us you were really deputy chief of the cultural section, so why don't you level with us?"

The response from the field officers was enthusiastic. "Why the hell didn't somebody do this before?" one of them said. "What are

we waiting for?" Larry Rather's response was typical, though a little more outspoken than the others (Larry was the former San Diego cop who had been so demoralized). "This is just what I was looking for," he said. "This is the kind of help I've needed. I don't know anything about the Communist Party. How am I gonna talk to somebody? I hate sitting there like a dumbbell."

I briefed them on the concept and organization of the data bank, then followed it up with descriptions on paper, one, two, three, four, five for the R-tested rote-memory guys. [By now Bill had put almost everyone on base through the Gittinger test. "I know who you are," I'd tell them, "you rote-memory guys."] I explained interrogation techniques to them, and over a period of time I trained them that the first thing they had to do was establish rapport with their source. To learn from your source you have to have some feeling for him, you have to demonstrate a real interest in him and his family. "Where's your family? What do they do for a living? How much do they earn? Are they making it all right out where they are? Does ARVN bother them? Does the VC bother them? Do the Vietcong come around at night and take rice from them? Are you Buddhist, or mainly ancestor worshiper, or what? What kind of a Buddhist?" Be interested, I told them, that's the essence of it. Does the guy really have a religious nature or is it just superficial? Talk to him about his brothers, his sisters. Get into the guy. Don't even ask him about anything that might be construed as intelligence. Get into him enough so you can decide whether or not he is being honest with you. Is he trying to be evasive, sucking the air in through his teeth? Or is he telling you, "Yes, I do have a sister in such and such a hamlet. Yes, my brother and his family live over in that hamlet." You'll be able to tell, to feel it.

"So the first job is to establish rapport and get a feeling if your source is really going to level with you. He knows and you know that you are not asking him anything sensitive, anything that's going to compromise his friends. But keep in mind while you're doing this that even this kind of personal information might be usable at some point. For example, it might help us decide if this guy might be a good contact to someone else, or if he's got a family member who might be the right person to make an approach to somebody, or it might give us an important piece of background information on VC thinking or procedures."

We trained our interpreters to tell the source exactly whom they were working for, that they were with American intelligence, not with the Government of Vietnam (the GVN) in any way. We had nothing to do with Saigon: we were not sending reports to the

special police (we weren't). We were completely independent and we were just trying to understand things. Then follow it up with the point that this American I'm working for told me that if he'd grown up where you have, with your background, he would have joined the VC too. We know how corrupt the government is. "Always lay that out for these guys," I told my people. "We know how corrupt Saigon has been and how corrupt it still is. It's one of our main concerns."

Basically, I'd say the same thing to the interrogation center and special police advisers. "Level with your subjects. Tell them you're an American intelligence officer and that this interpreter works for you. He does not work for the GVN; he does not work for the special police. He works for you alone. We do not send our reports to the police. We want you to understand our position. Then give them something good to eat. When it's lunchtime tell them you have to go to eat your American-style food, but you're having something special made up for them. Then bring them a real meal, lay it on."

Rapport was the object, and a major road to that object was being honest. The second was TLC—tender loving care. That was a constant theme. "Don't be hard nose on any of these guys," I'd tell the interrogators and advisers. "It's not going to get you anywhere. You have to have some compassion for your subject. You have to have sympathy for him. You have to be in the frame of mind where you're saying to yourself, 'I want to talk to this fella. I want to understand why he was a guerrilla. He's got a story to tell and I want to hear it.' That's the way you'll get them thinking, 'I don't mind talking to this guy, to tell him why I was a guerrilla. I'm not ashamed of it; I'm proud of it.' And then they hear you say, 'Sure, in your pants I would have been a guerrilla too. Against those bandits in Saigon? Of course I would have.'"

In fact, this approach was something I felt especially strongly about, partly because I really was sympathetic. Of course the atrocities and assassinations the Vietcong perpetrated were unpardonable. But in general terms I wasn't at all sure that if I had been in these villagers' places I wouldn't have been VC myself. But my approach went well beyond this kind of consideration. I had been convinced for a long time that the way to treat an Asian if you want something out of one—man or woman—is with decency and respect. These sources of ours had usually been whacked around pretty good by the police or South Vietnamese army intelligence. When they found themselves in my system, I wanted them to be treated differently, and I wanted them surprised by the treatment.

I had given quite a lot of thought to this TLC approach over the years. In a way I suppose it came naturally to me because of my own upbringing; my parents and grandparents, with whom we also lived, had always been affectionate, loving people. Some of that had no doubt rubbed off on me in my childhood. But it was also something I had become conscious of when I went to Japan and started to learn Japanese. If you want to see how the Asian mind responds to kindness all you have to do is get to know Japanese women. Kindness tears them up. It overwhelms them. Very small things: sympathy, interest, a basic decency toward them as human beings; they responded to this in an unbelievable way. It was easy to be cynical about it, to use the approach as a means to an end, but in fact many Westerners' natural orientation toward Japanese women was one of interest and friendship, in addition to the sexual motive. Thanking a waitress for bringing a *tokuri* of sake, for example, where what she was used to was a harsh grunt, if that. And the waitress, or the potential girlfriend, or the casual acquaintance would be smitten. It never failed, very likely, I thought, because Japanese men so rarely treat their women that way.

Strangely enough, over time, I began to realize that Japanese men were no different underneath. My work in that country put me in the company of detectives and intelligence agents, tough guys who walked around with frowns and macho swaggers. But behind that exterior—that *bush ido*—was something very different altogether. And it wasn't that hard to crack. Simple consideration and decency, an expression of concern or a favor so insignificant that you might not even notice you were doing it, these were things that affected them deeply, and persuaded them to respond. There was some basic dichotomy at work within these men. They were hard cases, yet they also harbored a deep streak of sentimentality and affection that surfaced in response to friendship and warmth. The simplicity of it never ceased to amaze me.

Though different from the Japanese in many ways, the Vietnamese responded similarly when confronted with a little human sympathy. They were absolute suckers for affection. They couldn't stand it, couldn't say no to it. Many Americans did not understand this at all. And as far as the Vietnamese themselves went, they did not have the cultural distance to see it. Their own traditions of dealing with enemies emphasized brutality and cruelty. What went on in the South Vietnamese prisons was abominable. But it had absolutely nothing on the torture the North Vietnamese doled out to their prisoners, including Americans. My Vietnamese interpreters had to be trained in the art of sympathetic interrogation. And

they learned, though sometimes slowly. But with time and the right kind of reinforcement they got accustomed to it, and I'd hear from them sometimes when they picked up a prisoner, "Oh, he didn't look so good, Ong Gia [pronounced "Ohm Yah"—"old man"—my nickname in Vietnamese]. Not good at all. They beat the hell out of him in the interrogation center." They'd be disturbed about it. And I'd think, smiling to myself, Yes, this interpreter is disturbed about it now. But six months ago he wouldn't have been disturbed. Six months ago he would have got in a few whacks himself.

My lead interpreter, Albert, was especially fast at picking up the idea. He was the biggest sucker of all and understood the power of the process. He knew that if he had one or two sources at his house the best way of getting to them was to feed them, let them watch television, maybe even take them out to a movie. Early on he came to me asking for money for three or four soccer balls. "Those guys at the Chieu Hoi Center don't have anything to do all day," he said. "I know we can score some points with a few soccer balls." So he got them, and from that point on his defectors had soccer games constantly. They were just fanatics about soccer. So when Albert brought *hoi chanh* to his house for interrogation, it was "Hi, Albert, how are you?" They knew him and liked him. And when Albert began asking where they were born and who their parents were, it was "Oh, sure, Albert. I was born in Trang Bang. My dad was so-and-so and my mom was so-and-so." Answer, answer, answer instead of nothing, nothing, nothing.

TLC would not have gone over well in New York City. Give a bad guy there a little loving kindness and see what happens. But it would work on an Asian almost every time. It disoriented them and brought out that deep desire for contact and communication. You could practically see it going through their heads: "These guys are feeding me like I haven't eaten in years. They're dealing with me honestly. They're not slamming me around or electrocuting my balls. Why shouldn't I talk to them?" TLC was a fantastic thing in the context of Vietnam, especially when you put TLC together with the ultimate interrogation tool—knowledge of your source and his background, the kind of knowledge the data bank began to give us in greater and greater quantities.

One morning shortly after we had the system up and running, Loren announced that he had asked all the province case officers to come in; we would be having a special visitor that day: Theodore Shackley, chief of Saigon Station, the head of all CIA operations in Vietnam. Several hours later all the base officers gathered in the

large conference room to hear the tall, eloquent Shackley address us. It was not exactly a laudatory speech. Three Corps had, as we knew, only one developmental agent (although Forcie had been delivering first-rate information for months, he was not yet fully authenticated—that process might take years). One Corps and Two Corps had none, but Four Corps, according to Shackley, had almost fifty developmentals. If Four Corps was doing so well, there was no reason the others couldn't do well also. "What exactly is wrong with Three Corps, Mr. Snowcroft? You people seem to be batting zero out here." Perhaps the time had come, Shackley remarked, glancing sharply from Loren to the rest of us, to take a good long look at our procedures.

I watched Shackley carefully as he said this, aware that the only developmentals in Four Corps were those reported by the special police. Four Corps, like One Corps and Two Corps, had no data bank, and from my occasional meetings with the Four Corps interrogation chief (a classmate of mine at Langley), I knew that the programs there were as bankrupt as they were elsewhere. The so-called fifty developmentals in Four Corps were undoubtedly all police fabrications.

At the end of the general meeting Loren announced that he, George Tanaka, Bill Todd, and I would meet with Shackley privately in Loren's office after lunch. Apparently the Station chief wanted a briefing on the status of the interrogation centers. Oh, Lord, I thought, what do we do now? Tell him the truth? Loren, as concerned as I was and aware that the centers were a favorite program at Station, suggested that I skirt the situation as well as I could. "Tell him we're working hard on them, Orrin, but explain how difficult it is to take a prisoner out of a PIC and make him into an agent. Try to cool it until we can start reporting intelligence from the new system."

That was fine as general advice. But it was I, not Loren, who had to actually brief Shackley, and skirting the issue was not easy. In my description of how the special police ran the PICs I tried to tread softly, but I could not hide the truth, nor did I really want to. The special police, I told him, generally lack an understanding of operations, so they aren't extremely effective interrogators, nor do they have a great desire to work. While I was going through my little presentation, choosing my words as tactfully as I could, an expression of disdain spread across Shackley's face. Obviously the man didn't believe a thing I was saying.

Trying to get the meeting back on a positive track, Loren inter-runed to explain that we were starting a new program to screen

and exploit the defectors and we hoped to make some progress shortly. But when he stopped short of going into details, Shackley turned to me and asked, "What are the VC vulnerabilities?" "The only apparent vulnerabilities," I said, "are the legal cadre, but to this point we have not been able to penetrate the structure. We are working on it though." I was not any more inclined than Loren to discuss what we were doing at this stage. I certainly was not about to make any claims. "Well, what about special police operations in this region?" asked Shackley after a moment of silence. He was not going to leave the special police alone. It seemed clear to me, and I was sure it was equally clear to Loren, Bill, and George, that in Saigon the Station chief was being fed a strong, positive line about the police, probably by my old friend Ted Coleburne. Although Shackley had directed the question at me, I wasn't about to answer it and looked at George Tanaka instead. He was supposed to be the special police adviser, let him handle it.

Somewhat to my surprise, George took the bull by the horns. "Ted," he said, "the special police here always use three or four cutouts whom they never make available for interviews. So we really don't know how to evaluate them. I worked with Japanese intelligence for fifteen years, and frankly, there's just no comparison. I have never seen such incompetence as we have here in Vietnam." George was a good guy, though I never thought much of his decision to just hunker down and endure his tour in Vietnam. But this performance earned him very high grades as far as I was concerned.

Shackley just looked at George, his face registering dismissal of what he had just been told. He was hearing differently from people he trusted more, and that was all there was to it. As far as he was concerned, Four Corps was doing splendidly. We were just not living up to its performance. A minute or two later the meeting came to an end, and that was the last we saw of him.

That was not the end of the subject though. A few days later Steamboat Charlie Timmes showed up at the base for a little chat. Charlie Timmes was a retired major general who had been the MACV commander in 1963 and 1964 and had now gone to work as a kind of roving troubleshooter for the Agency. A grand old man, he had an encyclopedic knowledge of the country and its people. His vast acquaintance included every leading officer in the South Vietnamese army and every province chief.

"Orrin," Timmes said over lunch in the dining room, "you know that I'm a kind of liaison man for the chief of Station. I try to help him resolve problems and right now the interrogation centers are

bugging him. What he asked me to do was to come out here and try to clarify the situation with you, then give him a written report on it. So why don't you explain what your position is on them and tell me what you see as the major problems." "Charlie," I said, "let's talk honestly and off the record. I can't simply tell Shackley the god-awful truth; there is no way he'll accept it." "OK," Timmes said—he may well have heard this kind of thing more than once—"tell me the straight story, off the record. Let me worry about putting it in a way that Ted Shackley can accept."

I did. I came down as hard as I could on what I considered the dumbest setup imaginable for exploiting prisoners of war. Nor did I spare the special police in their treatment of prisoners or in the greed and corruption that stood behind almost everything they did. "Charlie," I said, finishing up the whole sad tale, "I know this Provincial Interrogation Center program was somebody's brain-child and that it has found favor in high places. That's why I don't like to sound entirely negative. But what I've told you is the truth, unfortunate as it is. I'm relying on you to write it up in a way that's going to get me off the hook with Shackley."

As soon as Timmes left I sat down with Loren and Bill, who were dying to hear what had gone on. When I described our discussion Loren seemed relieved. "I think you handled it well," he told me. "But I'd also like you to dictate a memo to Susie for the record, just in case Steamboat Charlie decides to slip us the green weenie and write something derogatory. After that, let's all have a drink and you can bring me up to date on where your program stands."