

PAYDIRT

-^}1, ts;

Tn fact the program was already working like a machine.

1 Once the trailers and houses were in place and everyone was trained and ready to go we had got right into it. Albert had been the first to go over to the Bien Hoa Chieu Hoi Center and tell the chief we were ready to start. "We'd like to talk to some of the comrades," he said. "Do you have any here who have admitted they're members of the party?" "Sure, I've got some," came the answer. "Go ahead and take them. They're all yours."

After spending an hour or so screening his first two sources, Albert felt they were cooperative and worth talking to. He immediately took them out of the Chieu Hoi Center to his house. By chance it turned out that they were from the same village and knew each other. While one of them took a nap in a bedroom, Albert started talking to the other, feeling his way toward establishing a good rapport before he started the interrogation.

By the time I looked in on him Albert was pretty sure he was getting a straight story. The guy had been a VC local forces platoon leader who had defected only a few weeks earlier. He was fairly knowledgeable about order of battle in his area, about small-unit tactics, and about the level of VC effectiveness. "How is your recruitment going?" Albert asked. "Is your unit up to strength?" "No,

we're down," he said. They were down, we knew, well down, still suffering the aftereffects of Tet. The guy wasn't trying to mislead us. "How many did you originally have in the platoon?" "Well, originally we had about fifteen." "What about now?" "When I left we were down to six." "Come on," said Albert, uncapping another bottle of Coke (one empty bottle was already on the desk, next to a big bowl of Vietnamese peanuts), "don't kid me."

By that afternoon Mingo and Sonny were also interviewing people at the houses we had set up for them. On the Honda 90 motorcycle I had bought so I could get around fast, I'd go out to the Chieu Hoi Center to watch the screenings. Then I'd pop in at the houses to listen to the interviews. I'd come in, pat the VC on the shoulder, shake his hand, ask him how he was, make sure he knew he was dealing with an American. "Where's he from, Mingo?" "He's from Can Giouc." "Oh, hey, that's a hot little area, isn't it?" — Mingo translating—"Well, it used to be," said the VC. "It's pretty quiet now." It was an honest answer; Can Giouc had indeed been quiet for a while. So this guy too was probably leveling.

Sonny and Mingo were good—enthusiastic about the work, perceptive, and thorough. But they were not up to Albert's level. Albert was a great talker who could make friends quickly and would soon be kidding his sources about anything that came into his head, including girls. "Maybe I can arrange to get you a piece of tail," he'd say. "You know, get you a pass from the center, fix you up at a place I know right down the block from here. What do you think?" And the guy's eyes would light up. Even if he was being recalcitrant and surly, still he might not have had a girl in the last five months, or maybe the last five years if he had been a real bunker dweller out in the jungle. And these guys were just as normal as any other red-blooded male, even if they had been hardcore for a decade with a father who had fought in the Vietminh against the French. Wave something they really wanted in front of their faces and they'd grab at it. The rapport would be established. That was the key. Then the guy would get friendly and the information would start flowing.

When that happened Albert would get excited. "Ong Gia," he'd say to me, reporting on an interrogation, "I know goddam well he's telling me the truth. He's telling me about VC policies and intentions in Can Giouc district. What their capabilities are. And it jibes with the information we carded last week when Mingo had that other guy from Can Giouc. Look, here's the file. Right now their capabilities are nothing. They can't do a thing. The American Ninth has simply kicked the shit out of them. This guy says they had about eighty percent casualties and they're just hanging on by

the skin of their teeth." All this delivered in colloquial American in Albert's high, squeaky voice with the clipped British accent.

So things just fell into place. Of course we could not truly authenticate anything yet. One or two or even three sources telling us similar stories about Can Giouc did not constitute authentication. But that would come, I knew, as the data bank grew. Meanwhile I could write a report for Saigon Station that would be graded "probably true" rather than "possibly true." And that same day Sonny might have a cadre from Rach Gia, right next to Can Giouc, who talked about the difficulties they were having recruiting, that they couldn't recruit anybody there either. I would write a report on that as well, indicating that VC recruitment problems apparently were common to the entire district.

I went over all the interrogation reports carefully, watching for discrepancies and for signs of truth. A source would say he came from such and such hamlet and was a member of the district militia, that he started five years ago as a hamlet guerrilla, then was made a village security section guerrilla. Well, that was the way they progressed, as we knew. They were tested all along the line, then advanced. "Then later I joined the party." "Well, why did you join? What did you have to do to join?" And the source would explain why he joined and what he had to do. And a day later in another interrogation report a different source would be describing how he joined the party, what the procedure was. And it would be similar. Our understanding was growing.

We also found, somewhat to our relief, that the VC code names gave us little trouble. Each Vietcong had a *nom de guerre*, Hai Duc, for example, who was a COSVN sapper captain. His real name was Phuong Van Duc, but they called him Hai Duc—"Number Three Duc." Or Ba Tung, whose real name was Thai Van Tung. Most often they left the first name (which comes last in Vietnamese usage) the same. But since individuals were commonly known by their first names rather than their last names (Mr. Tung rather than Mr. Thai) we usually could find out who was who. For some reason that always escaped me, the Vietcong always thought that by someone's calling "Number Three Duc" they were deceiving us.

Sometimes, though, they did have a real code name. Tu Duc, for example, was a proselyting chief and his real name was not Nguyen Van Duc or some equivalent. In fact his real name never was known. But surprisingly enough we often came up with the real names even of these people because most of the sources knew true names as well as VC names.

As we started gaining experience with the *hoi chanh*, we found

we could accurately distinguish the significant sources from those who really were just suppliers or Farmer's Association members. We began looking for the hotshots. Working at the screening center in a trailer, the beautiful and industrious Chieu Hoi Lan soon had a list of fifty people who she thought were good prospects. "Ong Gia, we've got to get this guy and this guy and this guy. We've got to get them right now." So they'd bring them in and screen them, then ship them out to the houses for interrogation.

I developed a real appreciation for Albert's artistry at interrogation and reporting. This skinny, ugly, little pipe-smoking guy was absolutely brilliant, not only with defectors but with prisoners. He had a knack, a way about him of calming them down. He'd tell them, "I'm a draft dodger myself and these Americans are taking care of me. I'm not going into ARVN to fight you guys. You don't have to worry about talking to me, or to the old man either. The old man's not going to tell anyone in the GVN, not a word. He just wants the information, that's all." Albert could sell anybody a rotten piece of sausage, convince them right down to the wire. And of course we *would* protect a good source from the government.

I would walk into Albert's house while he was talking to a source. He would be able to type out a report in narrative form as he was conducting the interrogation. And on review the report would be near perfect. I would not even have to rewrite it before I submitted it to our reports officer. Given the landslide of work that had begun to engulf me, this was a talent I was grateful for.

My own days were taken up checking the progress at the center and at the houses. Then I'd go back to my office and pore over the screening and interrogation forms that were rolling across my desk, trying to decide what to do with this source or that. Who was worth pursuing? Who had given us his all and could now be returned to the Chieu Hoi system? I wanted to be extremely careful. The amount of information that had started to come in was staggering, but I did not want to miss any bit that might turn out to be significant.

Meanwhile Albert was producing twice as much as the other interpreters in number of reports as well as in discrimination and substance. He just had a gift for putting this kind of material together. After a while the other interpreters started asking his opinion on one thing or another. I might pop in on him at his apartment at eight-thirty in the evening and there he'd be, working at the typewriter. I'd pop in at eight in the morning, and he'd be at the typewriter—a true ERU workaholic.

At first I was so surprised I suspected that maybe he was making

things up, giving me partial or total fictions. So I started taking some of the sources over to another interpreter after Albert was done. But invariably the other interpreters would get the same story. Everything would check out. I did that now and then with Albert, and with the others too. Albert of course suspected that I was checking on him and asked me once, "Ong Gia, why are you looking over my shoulder?" "Albert," I told him, "we don't have a data bank yet; we don't have another way of checking on what your people are saying. I have to be satisfied that it all checks out. And I have to be satisfied that you're not playing any games with me." He accepted that.

After the first month or two, I was convinced that we indeed had our hands on an extremely powerful tool. I asked Albert, Mingo, and Sonny to begin concentrating on Cu Chi, Trang Bang, and Go Dau Ha in Tay Ninh—all of them focal points for the Vietcong. "Don't worry about Long An or Binh Duong," I told them. "They're important, but I'm going to start others working on them. Just target these places."

Considering our limited manpower and all the information coming in, it was obvious we would have to start focusing our efforts. In addition, one or two of the Province Officers in Charge were beginning to generate good results themselves. Clint Wilson, a staff officer who had just taken over in Hau Nghia, was especially effective. He had eight hundred people in his province Chieu Hoi Center. Following our model in Bien Hoa, he put a trailer out there, assigned two case officers and several interpreters to the job, and started building up data—sending copies of their forms into our central data bank and incorporating all the intelligence and wiring diagrams we were able to send him on his area. A few of the other province officers were also doing well, despite their lack of intelligence experience. And Loren's monthly staff meetings with the Provincial Interrogation Center and special police advisers were more and more devoted to follow-ups and training on the data bank, how it was working, what we were generating from it, how the field people were integrating their work into it, and how they could do it more effectively.

As we concentrated on Trang Bang along with several other districts we found that the documentation on two villages, An Tinh and Loc Hung, was proliferating far faster than anybody might have expected. Almost before we knew it we had developed relatively detailed wiring diagrams of the Communist Party structure in those areas, diagrams that showed exactly which section was which and who were the people in those sections. Again, at this

stage we were not yet confident that the information was fully accurate. But the amount of intelligence coming in drew our attention. Watching the card catalog expand every day, it was clear that these places were swarming with legal cadres, Vietcong masquerading as normal South Vietnamese citizens.

That news itself wasn't exactly a shock, though seeing the party organization come to life under our eyes was a bit sobering. Radio Hanoi, we knew, referred to Trang Bang as a district controlled by the revolution. That wasn't exactly true, but they liked to brag about it. And within the district, An Tinh was known, again according to Radio Hanoi, as a "model revolutionary village." It was, they said, "our village."

As a result, An Tinh was a place I really wanted to go after, on the theory that if we could crack the hardest nut we could crack the rest. Major Ngo, the GVN district chief in Trang Bang, was a smart, honest individual, a real pleasure to work with, and as the card catalog grew we began meeting with some frequency. We were both sure that once we had enough information, we could bring the world down on the 101st North Vietnamese Army regiment based in the Ho Bo Woods just outside An Tinh and its neighbor, Loc Hung. The village secretaries in these places and all their key committees had to be intimately involved in the job of keeping the NVA regiment supplied and informed. If we could crack the village committees we stood a good chance of being able to pinpoint the regiment. If we were good enough, and careful enough, we could learn their MO: where they moved, when they moved, how often they moved. And once we knew that, we could let the furies loose on them.

So as our knowledge of Trang Bang filled out I kept a close watch for a likely agent there, a person in the right position to give us the information we needed. At the same time, we were making great efforts to get reports completed and sent to Saigon and Washington explaining what the war was all about in Military Region Three. We increased the number of intelligence reports coming out of Bien Hoa base fairly quickly from a couple a month to a point where the province of Tay Ninh alone was sending in a couple, Hau Nghia another two or three, and Long An two or three, while Albert was doing eight or ten by himself.

Most of these reports concerned VC status, intentions, and capabilities. Could they overrun the Cu Chi base camp? Would they try to? Did they intend to cut Highway #1? If so, when and where? When could we expect the next assault on Trang Bang district? We were also learning about the functions and procedures of the party

committees, most of them manned by legals. Members of the Cu Chi district military proselyting section, for instance, liked to go to Cu Chi market to develop agents, recruiting South Vietnamese soldiers right there. On any given day all sorts of ARVN officers could be seen sitting around the market drinking coffee. A Vietcong military proselyting agent, a legal cadre who lived nearby or perhaps had a shop there, would strike up a conversation and over a period of time he would get to know the officer. Step-by-step he'd develop a relationship. Then when he saw a chance he'd insinuate a question, "Gee, there's that much fighting going on up there in Dau Tieng [or some other place]? How many guys do you have up there anyway? Are you going to have to go up yourself?" He knew exactly what to ask and how to ask it. Of course, once he found somebody who looked vulnerable, he'd throw him a pitch, and then he'd have somebody new in his network.

As we also learned, the information the Vietcong developed through their South Vietnamese army contacts and agents was remarkably detailed. This battalion, that battalion, how many personnel they have, where they're located, how many are on leave, when they go on leave, how often they go on leave, what their full strength is on Monday morning, on a holiday. This was the kind of thing the VC intelligence people were busy piecing together in the Cu Chi tunnels from reports they would get from the legals each night. And this was what we were finding out from our own sources who might have been former proselytizers or intelligence analysts or commo liaison people.

The information we were getting by now was beginning to form a fascinating picture of what made the Vietcong tick. Interestingly, in 1969 and early 1970 what we were discovering about their military capabilities was mostly negative. It was a time when they were not capable of doing much. They had been hit hard by Tet and were struggling to retrench and reestablish their pre-Tet levels.

Meanwhile the work of building up the information bank and filling in the slots bit by bit went on relentlessly. If we were not able to get three or four different sources confirming our data, we knew we were not on the right track. We had to know from several sources, for example, that the VC Trang Bang district chief's name was Ba Be, that he was still alive and healthy and working in the tunnels under the Ho Bo Woods. One might tell us that Ba Be's bunker was right on the edge of the woods near the little river that runs down that side, that the district MI (military intelligence) section was about fifty yards south in bunkers where they were holed up most of the time. But we had to have intelligence like this

confirmed beyond doubt before we could take action. And so the work went on.

The main point of this whole effort was to develop a spy. That was the objective, to get an authenticated spy, someone who really was who our sources said he was, and who filled the position they said he filled. Once we knew that for sure, we could target on him: figure out his vulnerabilities, decide how to make an approach. It was not an easy process. Everything about the potential spy had to be verified, from his family background to his position, to his access to party directives, to his MO. Then we had to have an angle or find just the right friend or relative to make the contact, then that person had to be recruited. And all this was slow, painstaking work.

Of course at the same time we continued to pick up information of all sorts, adding to our picture of the previously invisible enemy. For example, why were such large numbers of defectors coming in? What made them defect? As we were to see, at different periods there were different reasons for defections—which lasted right up to the very end of the war. But in 1969 and 1970 thousands of Vietcong and NVA were coming over for the most part because of intense American military pressure. The Chieu Hoi Centers were full of people whose units had been overrun two or three times and who had just decided they had had it. Some of the North Vietnamese defectors came in saying they were simply not going to die in the South. (The North Vietnamese slogan "Born in the North to Die in the South" conveyed the fatalism so many in the NVA felt.) Probably ninety percent of those we interviewed had been drafted. They had not volunteered out of a burning passion to save the homeland and drive out the foreigners, nothing like that. They were just inductees. Back in their homes they had known that as they came of age they'd go into the army. Their older brothers and friends had disappeared into the South; now they would too. And the longer they stayed in South Vietnam, the more some of them concluded that there was no way they were ever going to get home. They started saying to themselves, "I've been sent here to die," and the conviction grew on them. They got no R and R leave, no sick leave, nothing of that nature. They had no contact with their families, often they could neither send nor receive letters. They recognized that they had just been shipped as fodder into a great killing ground and that their government's attitude was if you survive, fine; if you don't, that's fine too. They were simply ready to hang it up.

Quite a few *hoi chanh* also talked about the B-52 bombings. They

had survived the attacks (though often with ruptured eardrums) but had witnessed the horrifying results: the concussions that killed many of their friends, or buried them alive in their bunkers. The B-52 strikes had paralyzed them with fear, and their descriptions were dramatic—the bomb path that began a mile away and walked toward them, wham, wham, wham, wham; the ground under them shaking harder with each explosion; then pitching and rocking.

While the Northerners talked about missing their homes and about their unhappy sojourn in the South, the Vietcong defectors often complained about the Northerners who were filling up their units, taking the places of their dead friends. Times were hard for the Vietcong; their units were short on food and ammo and they were finding it progressively more difficult to recruit. In many of the contested villages that had been fertile ground for the Vietcong, village boys wouldn't even talk to the recruiters and would hide when they came around. As a result North Vietnamese fillers began to play an ever greater role in the Southern revolutionary forces. We learned, for example, that the Trang Bang district unit, equivalent of a company, had a full strength of sixty men. But the unit had been decimated, and by 1969 almost half were NVA fillers. And many of the Southern Communists, whose territory it was, were fed up. They were fed up with having North Vietnamese on their backs, having a North Vietnamese as their company commander or platoon leader or squad leader. But most of the problems and stresses could be attributed to one primary cause—the aggressiveness of U.S. forces. American units would sweep through the Ho Bo Woods to mop up after a B-52 strike and they'd bury four hundred or so people. And that kind of thing would happen in place after place. All during 1969 and 1970 we kept getting reports of severe enemy casualties. The VC couldn't tie down battalion after American battalion as they did in 1966, '67, and into '68. And as they became less effective, their demoralization grew.

Within a few months after we were up and running, we began producing fairly detailed intelligence about enemy troop strength, losses, and North Vietnamese integration into VC units, among other subjects. We also started finding out about the National Liberation Front—the NLF. In June 1969, the NLF announced the establishment of the Provisional Revolutionary Government, the "sole legitimate representative" of the South Vietnamese people, as the propaganda had it. But what we were discovering was that the NLF itself, let alone its new creation, was simply a skeleton organization. As the NLF heading in the card catalog filled out, we

began to see the pattern. We would identify committees that apparently duplicated the Lao Dong (Communist Party) committees. There would be the same structure, the same sections and hierarchy. But whereas a party committee might comprise eight or ten or even fifteen people, the counterpart NLF committee would have a chief and only one other person, or perhaps no others. Even the key units—the current affairs section or the military affairs section—would have no more than one or two warm bodies. The only section that was staffed at all would be the entertainment/culture/propaganda committee—the traveling troupes of actors and musicians that sometimes included well-known performers. But other than that, the National Liberation Front was a paper organization, a magician's conjuring trick. And normally even the illusion only existed at the province level; rarely did we turn up even a paper committee in a district or a village.

Moreover, as our bank provided us with an increasing number of identities, we could see that several members on every NLF province committee were Lao Dong, Communist Party men. So even this poor skeleton of an organization was controlled by the party—in exactly the same way the Japan Soviet Society was controlled by well-placed members of the Japan Communist Party. Except, of course, that the Japan Soviet Society at least was a full-fledged organization, even if it was a front. The NLF didn't have that much dignity.

As this understanding dawned on us we were taken aback, even shocked to a certain extent. Of course we had known that the revolution in the South was controlled and supplied by the North, that is, by the Hanoi Politburo. Yet with all the worldwide information that was being cranked out (and believed) about how the NLF was a real, autonomous entity, a separate South Vietnamese nationalist movement, I don't think we were quite prepared for the full truth of it. But when you looked at the structure of the thing you could see precisely how it worked, and it was total baloney. We'd interview twenty-five or thirty cadres from a district and each one of them would tell us the same thing: The NLF? It was a laugh.

As we found out about this, we turned our attention away. There was no point in developing anybody inside the NLF. They knew nothing about what was going on. They only received propaganda material to pass out in those areas they supposedly covered. We surely didn't need any spies there. The PRP (People's Revolutionary Party, as the Lao Dong, or Communist Party, was known in the South) was the name of the game. They received the directives right down to the village level. We were looking for someone who

was in the party at a decent level; that was the individual we wanted as a spy.

Although the Lao Dong controlled Vietcong activity, that did not mean that most of the VC were Communists. Some of the regrouppees from the North could talk to you ad nauseam about dialectical materialism, the oppression of the workers and peasants, the worldwide struggle against imperialism, and so on. But the fighters for the most part wouldn't know dialectical materialism from a rice bowl, as one Phoenix adviser put it. You'd mention a term to them, ask them about it, they'd look at you blankly and say, "Huh?" They didn't know anything about it. Nor did they know much about the Communist Party. What they did know was their political officer, and they would go to some lengths to stay out of trouble with him. "No, no," they'd say, "I never wanted any problems with that guy." So while ideology was not a motivator, party discipline unquestionably was. All the Vietcong cadres understood that the Lao Dong had the control, and that it was the party political officer who was the key man.

Other information we were able to provide during this period included targeting data for the B-52 Arc Light bombings of enemy base areas in Military Region Three and across the border in Cambodia. Many of our sources had been in Cambodia with their units or in hospitals, and from our debriefings we were able to specify coordinates, especially in Mimot, the site of Hanoi's Central Office for South Vietnam, COSVN, and north of Mimot along the Mekong River. By the spring of 1970 we had become quite good at this; we were able to identify enemy units, approximate numbers in units, and quite exact coordinates. Our sources would come in from one of these areas and they would draw us maps. (Vietnamese, especially those who had been guerrillas for any length of time, tended to be excellent map readers and map drawers.) Sources could (and did), for example, point out precisely where COSVN was located; they would draw it, indicating trees and streams and other specific features. And they could tell us precise distances—from this point here it is twelve clicks due north to the COSVN alternate headquarters below where the Mekong makes a U-bend, or five clicks west to a trail terminus and rest area, or twelve clicks southeast to a certain supply dump.

Often they knew the region intimately. They had been chased from one side of the border to the other by American actions and they had had a bellyful of experience moving around frantically in an attempt to avoid bombing raids. We were able to take the maps they drew, transpose their drawings onto our own detailed maps

and come up with precisely located targets, which we then sent in by cable, providing a "box" of coordinates for the bombers. These included the Ho Bo Woods, the Straight Edge Woods near Go Dau Ha (which the B-52s just blew away), and Mimot, as well as other North Vietnamese Army and Vietcong bases on both sides of the border, from Parrot's Beak up to Fishhook. Despite the domestic furor over the "secret bombings," that sector of Cambodia was, exactly as the United States government said it was, almost entirely a sanctuary, supply center, and concentration area for North Vietnamese units. The targeting requests we received through the commanding general of U.S. Second Field Forces at Long Binh included explicit instructions that civilian populations were not to be endangered. We were to limit ourselves strictly to military targets. It required care to comply with those instructions on targeting inside Vietnam, but on the other side of the border there was very little civilian population and almost nothing in terms of innocent peasants. Any Cambodians in that area were likely to be Khmer Rouge, and no one had any compunctions about hitting them along with the VC and NVA.

We were also able to report the consequences of Arc Light strikes, as well as provide targeting for them. Within weeks of a significant series of strikes, we would be interrogating a new batch of defectors for whom those strikes had proved the last straw. One interesting fact was that most often they knew when the bombers were on their way and they knew the general direction of the attack, although not the exact target. From our own headquarters we were aware that Russian radar trawlers located in the Pacific beyond the Philippines tracked the bombers, checking speed, altitude, and headings, and relayed the information to the North. Commonly, the targeted base areas would receive word an hour or so ahead of time. But still the VC and NVA units couldn't run fast enough. And we learned too about their evasive procedures; if, for example, they thought a strike was heading for Mimot, they would take off to the northwest, toward the secondary complexes. Of course we included that in the targeting information.

With all the information gathering and analysis we were doing in the months after setting up the system, I barely had time to look around. Working twelve or more hours a day I oversaw the interrogations and pored over the forms and reports coming in from our own operation and from the provinces, trying always to focus the effort more effectively and identify operational leads and potentially significant sources. I was always strapped for time and so was not happy when one day a cable came in from Saigon Station

asking me to fly down to the Phoenix school in Vung Tau to give a class of new Phoenix advisers a lecture on how best to utilize the Provincial Interrogation Centers to obtain intelligence for their program.

My first impulse when I read it was to make a paper airplane out of the cable and toss it out the window. This PIC thing just would not die, however fervent my wishes. And the centers were not only a worthless pain in the ass, they were also a minefield. Whatever Charlie Timmes's report to Ted Shackley had been like, the PIC program was still considered a hinge of Agency-special police cooperation. And, in the Vietnamization phase we had recently entered, all the emphasis was on expanding the Vietnamese role in operations, exactly contrary to the direction I was taking in Bien Hoa. Bad-mouthing Vietnamese capabilities and running down a highly visible Vietnamese-led program in public was an excellent way to get persona non grata'd out of the country. I did not want to go down to Vung Tau in the worst way, as I told Loren. "You have to do it," he said, "you have no choice. They want you; they feel you're the most knowledgeable about this. But you will have to smooth it over a little. Don't lie to them, but try to give them some hope. Just don't blow the PICs out of the water." "But, Loren, really," I began, "what the hell am I supposed to say?" "Tell them about the design," Loren answered, his face deadpan. "Tell them about the wonderful concept, tell them where the PICs are located, tell them any damn thing. Just don't go overboard."

At the Vung Tau airport the officer in charge picked me up, a little bald-headed fat guy. "Oh, Orrin," he said, "you're going to enjoy this. This is really a fine group of officers." I knew that, he didn't have to tell me. Almost always the Phoenix advisers were very fine officers, and after a short time on the job they became very frustrated officers. My idea was to address these officers in a leisurely manner. I was the last speaker of the afternoon and I was supposed to be on for an hour. But I would try to go on late and leave early, using the excuse that I had to catch the last courier back to Bien Hoa.

In the lecture room of the Phoenix school there were twenty-five or thirty captains and majors waiting for me. And in the back of the room sat one of Ted Coleburne's staff officers from Saigon, there to listen to and report whatever it was that I said. I started, as I had planned, to talk about the interrogation centers in a general way, describing their history, the concept behind them, the special construction, and so on. But the Phoenix officers weren't dummies. and before long some loudmouthed major butted in with

"For Chrissakes, Mr. DeForest, you're not telling us very much. How the hell do the goddam things work?"

He was right, of course, so I decided to shove it, just go through the process for them, though I'd still try to keep it relatively low-keyed. "Well," I said, "when prisoners are picked up or captured, they're usually beaten by ARVN field intelligence to get immediately useful information. Then they go into the interrogation center. But as you know, or as you will soon learn, most of them are categorized as 'Vietcong suspects.' There are very few captures of Class A or Class B prisoners, so usually they do not have much information. When you visit the centers you will find that conditions are harsh; they're not the most conducive to gathering intelligence. I believe that is a mistake and that we ought to correct it. Consequently, when you are out in a district or a village, you are going to have to start working on penetrating the local party committee yourselves. That's what Phoenix needs to do, and that's the direction we're taking in Bien Hoa."

Beyond that I wasn't interested in discussing our program. I did not want some partial report getting back to Saigon Station about an unauthorized, unilateral operation going on in Region Three, so I evaded most of the questions. Nothing worthwhile could come out of a more detailed description of what we were doing, and with the Station guy sitting in the back of the room I did not want to come out flatly and say that Ted Shackley's PICs were no good. So the general tenor was "get out there and give it your best shot. Talk to them, get some rapport established, give them some cookies and a Coke. Anything to get them talking." And that's all I could tell them.

Given my performance in that lecture, I was a little surprised when a few weeks later our good old jarhead Captain Zale in Saigon sent a cable asking me to lecture the special police trainees on the techniques of interrogation. Resigned, I took Sonny along as an interpreter for a presentation to about a hundred cadets at the Special Branch training compound in Saigon. But when I got up on the podium, I found myself looking out at a hundred zombies sitting there staring off into space. They didn't move, didn't hear a thing. They just stared at the ceiling, or out the window, or sat there deeply enmeshed in their own little world with their eyes glazed over. There wasn't an ounce of enthusiasm or interest in the whole crowd, and not a single question, during or after. The special police trainees didn't care in the least about "techniques of interrogation." What did it matter how you might establish rapport with a prisoner or authenticate a story? Just slap the dogshit out of

him, that's the whole ball game. Pour water down his throat, he'll start talking. It's an old Asian custom.

Toward the end of 1969 I was so loaded down with intelligence I couldn't get out from under it. We were getting reports out as fast as we could type them. The bank was growing by leaps and bounds, with more and more authenticated information. The subject files on Cu Chi, Trang Bang, and other focal spots were burgeoning. I knew I needed to be able to step back, spend more time going over records carefully to identify operational leads, and especially to look for that opening, for a spy, for someone to develop.

So it came as tremendous news to hear at the end of the year that I would be getting some help. Lou Bishop, a contract officer who had already spent two tours in Vietnam, was being assigned to the Bien Hoa Provincial Interrogation Center, which meant, of course, that I could grab him myself. The cable announcing Lou's arrival also included a partial bio; the full 201 file would be sent later. The bio revealed that in civilian life Bishop had been a teacher; he had an M.A. in English. With all the information waiting to be reported, the thought of having a good writer on board made me want to shout for joy.

My first impressions of Lou Bishop were positive. He was quiet, soft-spoken and bright; he had a self-effacing manner and seemed as if he'd be an easy person to work with. When Bill tested him he came out as well above average intelligence, but also a real loner, a double plus loner. When I asked what he had done in Four Corps, his previous assignment, he said he had assisted the regional interrogator and had also worked as a special police adviser. "In essence," he said, "I did nothing." This was obviously not a person gilding the lily or building himself up for a new boss. "I knew the special police were lying to me about everything. We couldn't check anything; we certainly never authenticated anything. You know what happens when you send the traces in to Saigon, what you get back? That's the kind of checking we could do."

Over the next month or two I found that behind his retiring manner Lou was indeed sharp and perceptive. He picked things up quickly. He was also quite a good, fast writer. Before long he understood what I was trying to do and how I wanted it done. He grasped the entire concept of the data bank and the interrogation techniques. And he was good at them himself. He was capable of working on his own, initiating ideas and implementing them independently. In a short time I knew I had found not just another employee but a deputy.

In early 1970 Loren Snowcroft left the Bien Hoa base to become CIA chief of Station in Taiwan. He made his G-16, a promotion he had not been at all sure of, given Ted Shackley's earlier unhappiness with him. Still, by the time Loren left, base reporting was up to twenty a month. With the continued growth of the data bank, more effective interrogations, and the deepening of our understanding and knowledge, even more productive times were ahead. Loren was leaving the base in far better shape than he found it.

We had a lovely farewell party for Loren, then Bill Todd and I drove him to the airport. "Well, Orrin," he said, "now you can fight with the new guy about where you go from here. You do have to stop by and see me, though, on some of your travels. You know I'll want to hear how things are coming along." On that note Loren Snowcroft left and the new man, Don Gregg, came in. There was no transition period; Gregg hadn't wanted one. I could appreciate the new chief's wanting to start with a clean slate, but the abruptness seemed strange. "I talked to him on the telephone," said Loren. "He'll be coming out after I leave. The guy doesn't even want to sit down and chat with me I guess." Loren took it as a kind of slap in the face. And it was unusual that a new man wouldn't want to have even a brief orientation from his predecessor. Bill and I wondered what kind of person we were about to welcome as our boss. All we knew about him was that he had been chief of operations in another Asian country—the third man—so this was a promotion. Oddly, the grapevine was silent; his reputation had not preceded him. Don Gregg was a mystery man.

