On 27 January the formal signing ceremonies took place in Paris. It was a curious affair; four separate copies of the agreement—two in Vietnamese, two in English—were laid out on the table before the foreign ministers of the four "parties," but only Secretary of State William Rogers and his North Vietnamese counterpart, Nguyen Duy Trinh, signed all of them. The Foreign Ministers of the Republic of South Vietnam and the Provisional Revolutionary Government merely countersigned one each, under the signatures of their respective allies, so their names would not appear together on any single copy, for that would have implied mutual recognition.

At eight in the morning Saigon time, 28 January 1973, the cease-fire went into effect, to the melancholy wail of the city's air-raid system. I stood on the roof of the Duc Hotel and toasted the new era with a Bloody Mary.

For all its solemnity and import, the advent of peace was not without its lighter side. In his haste to conclude the agreement, Kissinger had forgotten to cable to Saigon all the changes he had made in the text during the last few days of the negotiations. Thus the document Thieu read out to his cabinet on the first day of the cease-fire was not the one Kissinger and the North Vietnamese had actually agreed upon.

The normally reticent Ellsworth Bunker had only one comment when he learned of the oversight: "I'll be goddamned!" It was a fitting prologue to all that was to follow.

Excerpts relate to CIA's use & misuse of classification for improper purposes; Secrecy stuck on it in same way; and refusal to protect sources & installations, statutory responsibility, when it has other perceived objectives

From "Blunt Instrument" by Frank Snepp

In Good Faith

During the fall and winter months that bracketed the signing of the Paris peace agreement, my overriding concern was not the coming peace at all, but a small man in a snow-white room, a North Vietnamese prisoner of war who had been in solitary confinement for the past year and a half. His name was Nguyen Van Tai.

A former deputy minister of "public security" in North Vietnam, Tai had come south in 1962 to take charge of the Communist counterespionage and terrorist network in Saigon and had helped engineer the spectacular attack on the U.S. Embassy in 1968. During his long career he had been responsible for numerous assassinations and terrorist acts, and when in December 1970 he was captured in mufti during a government dragnet south of Saigon, he had not been treated kindly. With American help the South Vietnamese had built him his own prison cell and interrogation room, both totally white, totally bare except for a table, a chair, an open hole for a toilet—and ubiquitous hidden television cameras and microphones to record his every waking and sleeping moment. His jailers had soon discovered one essential psychic-physical flaw in him. Like many Vietnamese, he believed his blood vessels contracted when he was exposed to frigid air. His quarters and interrogation room had thus been outfitted with heavy-duty air conditioners and been kept thoroughly chilled.

South Vietnamese interrogators had spent over eight months with him after his capture, trying to break him. They were unsuccessful. He told one of his tormentors, "I'll shoot you down in the street if I ever get out." In early 1972 an American specialist had been called in. He had made some progress by confronting Tai with former subordinates who had either defected to the government or had likewise been captured. Their testimony and face-to-face confrontations with him forced him to surrender part of the false identity and cover story, but once having been exposed to these accusers, he also knew just how much incriminating evidence the government had on him, how much he had to admit and how much he could continue to conceal.

• • •

In the meantime, unknown to Tai himself, he had become the focus of one of the most delicate U.S. intelligence operations ever mounted in South Vietnam, one that seemed to hold the key to the release of countless American prisoners of war. The case dated back to 1967, three years before his capture. In August of that year the head of the secret Communist party organization in Saigon, a man named Tran Bach Dang, had contacted our Embassy through an emissary in Cambodia and offered to open negotiations on a possible prisoner exchange and on other "political issues." A subsequent contact revealed that Dang was angling for the release of ten high-level Communist operatives.

Despite the significance of the overture, not everyone in Saigon and Washington was receptive. President Nguyen Van Thieu was reluctant to release the ten prisoners on Dang's list because all were dedicated Communists and foes of his regime. CIA officials in Washington sympathized with his view. Only after considerable debate was a deal arranged. In December 1967 the South Vietnamese handed two low-ranking prisoners over to the Communists, one of them Dang's own wife, and Dang in turn promptly freed two Americans. They were Corporal José Agosto-Santos and Army Private Luis Ortiz-Rivera. The Communists then released two of Dang's original nominees and two substitutes. At the same time the Embassy passed a list to the Communists of ten Americans for whom it wanted an accounting.

That ended the bargaining for the time being. Dang responded to neither the gesture nor our request. Instead, two weeks afterward, in late February 1968, Communist forces throughout South Vietnam launched the first phase of the "general offensive." There were no further private exchanges on the prisoner issue until the offensive had run its course.

Finally, a year later, contacts were reopened at the Communists' initiative. In mid-January 1969 a French-speaking female who claimed to represent Dang telephoned the Embassy and proposed renewed discussions. Fearing another communications blackout, Embassy officials decided to try to make the most of the opening. They told the caller they wished to "identify" the prisoners available for release; in other words, they wanted a list of Americans in Communist prison camps. The request evidently did not impress Dang. The emissary did not call back.

The circuits remained silent for another year and a half, then abruptly came alive again in July 1971. Quite unexpectedly the Communist Provisional Revolutionary Government sent a letter to the Embassy requesting a special telephone number that could be used for continued discussions of the prisoner issue. The Embassy duly supplied one, publishing it in a bogus newspaper ad in one of the Saigon dailies, as suggested in the letter.

For the next three months CIA operatives sat by an Embassy phone specially keyed to the number, but no one ever called. At last, in early October 1971, there was a surprise breakthrough. With almost no prior arrangement, the Communists released Army Sergeant John Sexton, who had been a prisoner of theirs for over a year. When the American trudged out of the jungle south of the small town of Snoul, Cambodia, he carried with him

a Communist request for reciprocity. In return for his freedom, Dang was demanding the release of two of his senior operatives within the next three days. One of them was a Communist labor agitator named Le Van Hoai. The other was Nguyen Van Tai, the denizen of the government's snow-white cell who had been captured the previous December.

Working against the short deadline, U.S. and South Vietnamese officials weighed every aspect of the proposal, the potential advantages and disadvantages. Ultimately Thieu, seconded by the CIA, rejected it. Sexton was a mere "sergeant"; the two prisoners the Communists wanted for him were among the highest-ranking enemy agents ever to fall into government hands.

The deadline was thus allowed to pass. For days the Communists seemed to have lost interest. Then, on 27 October 1971, Dang's emissary again contacted the Embassy. In exchange for Hoai and Tai, the caller said, the Communists were willing to offer a "high-ranking" American, Douglas K. Ramsey, a Foreign Service officer whom they had seized north of Saigon in 1966.

The proposal set off a frantic debate in the Embassy and in Washington. Clearly the Communists were raising the stakes, but if they were so anxious to get back both Hoai and Tai, then possibly the entire deal could be parlayed into something even more advantageous to "our side." Operating on this logic, United States and South Vietnamese officials decided to offer only Hoai, the labor agitator, for Ramsey. Nguyen Van Tai would remain in his exclusive white cell.

The CIA was particularly adamant against surrendering Tai. As a senior agency official later explained to me, Tai was a top Communist intelligence operative; Ramsey was "no more than a Foreign Service officer." Thus, to have exchanged one for the other would have been no act of reciprocity at all. The Communists would have gotten the better side of the deal. Besides, the agency was hoping to trade Tai for a CIA officer who had been captured during the 1968 offensive.

When Dang's emissary telephoned on 27 November 1971, Embassy officials put forward their counterproposal: Hoai alone for Ramsey. Tai's status was non-negotiable. In addition, they asked for a list of all prisoners of every nationality who were being held by the Communists. What had begun as a cautious, albeit extraordinary, series of contacts between the two sides had now escalated into a bid for the release of all prisoners of war.

Seven days later the Communists gave their answer. Dang's representative informed the Embassy that the counterproposal was unacceptable. Both Hoai and Tai would have to be traded for Ramsey. Otherwise: no deal.

Incredibly, the CIA operative on the Embassy end of the line had no fallback option to propose. He simply hung up—and that was that. In effect the government had just squandered a chance to obtain the release of a fellow American who had been a captive of the Communists for six years.

For the next few days American officials from Saigon to Washington anxiously tried to convince themselves they had done the right thing. Vietnam watchers at the CIA were particularly defensive, since they had been chief

responsible for taking Tai's name out of the bargaining. At their urging, Kissinger and the National Security Council agreed on 17 December 1971 to stick by the counterproposal if the Communists should call again. It would be Hoai for Ramsey, or nothing.

Days, then weeks, passed with no word from the other side. The Embassy tried to provoke a response through cryptically worded advertisements in the Saigon press, but the designated telephone line remained silent.

On Easter weekend 1972 North Vietnamese forces plunged across the demilitarized zone between North and South Vietnam in the most ambitious Communist offensive since Tet 1968. The Embassy and the Thieu government concluded that any further dealing on the prisoner issue was now out of the question.

In May, however, something happened to revive the prospects for Ramsey's release. Government troops captured an old and battered Communist party member—Nam Quyet, one of Dang's right-hand men and chief of the "propaganda and training" section of the Communist party in Saigon. Under interrogation, Quyet admitted that he knew of the earlier negotiations concerning Ramsey and said he himself could now be traded for the American.

Inexplicably, South Vietnamese authorities did not inform the Embassy of Quyet's proposal until mid-September. By then the Communist offensive was winding down and the Kissinger–Le Duc Tho negotiations in Paris were moving into a decisive stage. Against this backdrop, the idea of trading the old Communist operative for Ramsey did not seem as attractive as it might have earlier. While delighted to have a new line on the American prisoner, U.S. officials also saw in the proposed deal the danger of acute political embarrassment to the Administration, at the very moment Kissinger least needed one. What if the Communists had briefed Ramsey on the earlier proposal and on Washington's refusal to go through with it? Once released, he might well go to the press with the story, and the result undoubtedly would be a massive popular backlash in the United States that would only add to the pressure for an immediate Vietnam peace.

There were also parochial concerns. The CIA had a special reason to fear a full public disclosure. Since it had been instrumental in persuading Kissinger and the White House not to accept the original two-for-one proposal for Ramsey's release, any public reaction would inevitably find its way to the agency's doorstep. The impact on the CIA's "public image" would be devastating.

Hastily, Administration and CIA officials devised a plan to protect themselves. Before taking action on Quyet's suggestion, they moved to build an airtight excuse for having bungled Ramsey's release in the first place. Nguyen Van Tai, the man whom they had considered "too important" to be exchanged for him in 1971, must now be shown to be the hottest property in Saigon's hands, as they claimed he was. His worth as an "intelligence source" would have to be demonstrated in the form of immediate and concrete intelligence "production" so no one could possibly object to the earlier decision not to

him for the Foreign Service officer if the story should ever become public. It was at this juncture I was brought into the case. Having just been fired the CIA's Vietnam Task Force, I was both available and qualified. Since a "specialist" on North Vietnamese affairs, it was thought I might be to prod sufficient information from Tai to establish his "strategic value." else had been able to do so.

just before I departed Washington for Saigon in October 1972, a senior official briefed me on the case, stressing the need for immediate progress. the first I had heard of Tai or the proposed prisoner exchanges, even much of the initial dickering between Dang and the Embassy had taken during my first tour in Saigon.

Ordinarily an interrogator would be given weeks to read into a case and his assault. I was thrust into Tai's frigid white chamber almost immediately upon my arrival in Saigon.

He was a small, though powerfully built, man who had kept himself in physical trim by doing hours of calisthenics each day in his thirty-by-foot cell. Only his face showed the ravages of his prolonged isolation—drawn mask, ashen-hued for lack of sunlight, the beard far heavier most Vietnamese's, since he was allowed tweezers only twice a week to it pared. Disciplined to an extreme, he awoke automatically each morning went through his exercises, read for half an hour from one of the French Vietnamese books his jailers provided him, and then awaited breakfast. ward he repeated the routine, again and again throughout the day, until put himself to bed, automatically, at ten o'clock in the evening, never once seen the rising or setting of the sun.

According to the record of the case, he had only two discernibly exploitaws, aside from his aversion to cold air. As a rising young party member Hanoi in the early 1950s he had tried to prove himself to his superiors by to prosecute and imprison his own father, a distinguished North mese writer with a bleak view of the Communist utopia. Since the mese are powerfully family-oriented, such an act, no matter what the ale, could only have been traumatic. In addition, Tai was made in the of many of our own intelligence operatives. Having sacrificed so much self to his mission, he had been obliged to convince himself of its ousness and of his own superior sense of duty and morality. Persuade the falseness of any one of these premises and the whole personality begin to crumble.

Relying both on my rusty French and a Vietnamese interpreter, I insulted goaded, playing the insolent American with no respect for age or experi-He counterattacked, clinging to what remained of his cover story, but while attempting to shield his ego with half-truths about his exploits ways told me more, always added to his dossier. I volunteered the story man who had betrayed his father, and he flashed back "Don't try to trick with such claptrap"—while denying the story was relevant to him in any

case. "I'm a simple farmer who came south to support the liberation forces," he insisted, but he could not bring himself to turn down books of French poetry I brought him—heavy fare for a simple farmer—or the Vietnamese histories of the United States. I also gave him an English grammar and he tried to teach himself some phrases between sessions.

As the weeks passed, the going got rougher—for both of us. Each day I scheduled two or three bouts with him, two or three hours each, varying their times so as to throw off his internal clock. Then, some six weeks into the case, during a morning session, I accidentally discovered a small fracture in his façade. I had been trying to spark some nostalgia by raising questions about his wife and children, whom he had not seen since he left North Vietnam in 1962. Suddenly he grew very still. "I cannot think about my wife and children," he said. "The only way I can survive this is by putting all such hope aside. Then there are no illusions or disappointments."

I spent the next few weeks trying to drive the wedge deeper. What about your wife? How old is she? Are your children still going to school? What will you do if peace ever comes to Vietnam? There was a prisoner exchange at the end of the Korean War, after all. Perhaps you will be released.

His dossier began to grow as he inadvertently let slip one detail after another in his helpless grasping after the one hope he knew he could not afford. I reported the progress to Washington. My superiors seemed satisfied.

Since I was becoming such an expert on the case, my duties were expanded. In November 1972 I was invited to take on two additional sources, Le Van Hoai and Nam Quyet, the two other prisoners who had figured in the proposals concerning Ramsey. Hoai, the labor agitator, turned out to be a sniveling and easy subject who would betray top secrets for a cigarette or a candy bar. Nam Quyet was more difficult. Whenever I prodded him with leading questions he would lapse into a fit of coughing, thereby tearing open tubercular scars in his lungs and throat. As the interrogation continued, blood would begin oozing from his nose and mouth. He couldn't resist spitting mouthfuls at me.

Nonetheless, by early January 1973 I was beginning to generate usable intelligence from all three sources. Tai seemed on the verge of collapse. Washington urged me on; the South Vietnamese advised that I apply strong-arm tactics. Then, abruptly, the cease-fire brought all these interrogations to a full stop.

In keeping with understandings reached in Paris, all prisoners of war held by the government and the Communists were to be informed of the terms of the agreement, including the provision for prisoner exchange, within several days of the signing. On 1 February 1973 I briefed Hoai and Nam Quyet. Two days later I informed Nguyen Van Tai.

He sat for a moment, trembling in the draft of the air conditioning. "If what you tell me is true," he said in French, "then this is the happiest day of my life." His face betrayed no emotion. His hands remained folded in his lap, the sleeves of the gray pajama shirt hanging limp from his shoulders. "I have

question," he said at last. "Will the 'liberation forces' be permitted participate in the great-power conference in Geneva. We must not be sold ." I said I did not know. The seasoned revolutionary, in his forty-fifth on the eve of peace, was wary of surrendering himself to the ultimate

That was the last I saw of Nguyen Van Tai. South Vietnamese authorities furious that I had informed him of the Paris accord. They grumbled that squandered the only leverage they still had with him and had betrayed good faith in me. They insisted the terms of the prisoner exchange did apply to him, since he had never acknowledged his full identity.

The Embassy took me off the case. Other American personnel likewise withdrawn from interrogation centers around the country, and the re- bility for disposing of all Communist prisoners was turned over to the Vietnamese, in accordance with the U.S. government's desire to end its role in Vietnam.

year and a half later, as analyst and briefer for the Embassy, I lectured of special visitors from Washington on the status of the cease-fire. The was unique—ten or twelve American military officers and civilian all of whom had once been prisoners of the Communists, either in or in South Vietnam. Among them was the man whose fate had been ately intertwined with that of Nguyen Van Tai and my other sources Douglas K. Ramsey. He had been released in early 1973, just after the re, pursuant to the terms of the accord. When I saw him he was still with a cane. His legs were partially disabled as a result of malnutrition suffered while a guest of Tran Bach Dang. He had spent most of those years in a small bamboo cage, just large enough for him to stand, in a nist prison camp near the Cambodian border. During my briefing he one question, which held unintended irony. "How good is the nist underground subversive apparatus?"

ot as effective as it was before Tet 1968," I replied. "Most of their operatives have been killed or captured."

year after the collapse of South Vietnam, I visited Ramsey in Washing- revealed to him the details of the intelligence operation that had very brought his release in 1971. It was the first time he had heard of it. His in the State Department had not seen fit to inform him that he had extra year in a Communist prison camp because the CIA had not him important or valuable enough to be exchanged for Nguyen Van

for Tai himself, there was no salutary ending to his ordeal. While both Nam Quyet survived the Communist takeover in April 1975, he did before North Vietnamese tanks rolled into Saigon a senior CIA uggested to South Vietnamese authorities that it would be useful if he ared." Since Tai was a trained terrorist, he could hardly be expected ganimous victor. The South Vietnamese agreed. Tai was loaded onto

an airplane and thrown out at ten thousand feet over the South China Sea. At that point he had spent over four years in solitary confinement, in a snow-white room, without ever having fully admitted who he was.

This story is not unique. On several occasions during the last years of the Vietnam war, the Communists secretly offered to release various American prisoners, only to be held off by the U.S. government as it angled for "better terms." The CIA was particularly inflexible, usually insisting on strict reciprocity, an intelligence operative for an intelligence operative, as if agency personnel deserved first consideration over any other Americans who might be prisoners of the Communists. Douglas Ramsey was lucky. He lost only one additional year of freedom as a result of such "gaming." Others were not so lucky. They lost their lives or their health, to disease, malnutrition and Communist abuse, as the haggling dragged on.*

*One other "player" in this prisoner-exchange story apparently also came to grief. A short while before the cease-fire, Tran Bach Dang was summarily removed from his post as Communist party chief in Saigon. One of the charges brought against him by his superiors was "subjectivism," a tendency to want to run the show in his own way, without due attention to mandates from above.

to them and asked for comment. A few days later they gave him one, a
him my conclusions were "about right." In other words, there was
chance for a negotiated settlement, though the level of activity was
increase in the weeks ahead.

Polgar immediately cabled a summary of the Hungarians' remarks
Washington. The Hungarians in turn alerted Hanoi to our thinking so
Politburo could adjust its plans and strategy accordingly. In effect, out
best of motives Polgar had just handed the North Vietnamese another
gence coup, one that provided an invaluable insight into what we expected
them.

The newly highlighted prospects for a political solution did not
Polgar's drumfire about the military threat. Congress had yet to be
of the need for additional aid, and he was determined to do his part.
quently, we declassified and leaked to the press two recently captured
munist planning documents—with a commentary I had written—that
likely to convince any reader in Washington the North Vietnamese
coming over the hill. I also kept my briefings to visitors and other
personnel simplistically alarmist in line with Polgar's specifications,
the difficult and perplexing issue of Hanoi's political intentions.*

After one of my particularly vivid dissertations on the Communist
a CIA colleague threw up his hands in dismay. "Good Christ!" he
"You were telling us only a few weeks ago everything was secure. Now
as though we're facing the final reckoning."

Such sentiments soon became widespread in the Embassy, and a
of my colleagues began planning for the worst. The Station's
section proceeded to store up additional supplies of C-rations and
water, and several senior CIA officers ordered their subordinates to
gether caches of arms and ammunition just in case they had to defend
selves against the onslaught.

At the same time the Defense Attaché's Office and the Embassy's
ministrative component took an even more drastic precaution. They
updating the Embassy's standing 400-page evacuation plan. (Each U.S.
bassy in the world has one, as a matter of routine.) Colonel Garvin
and Captain Cornelius Carmody, the Air Force and Navy Attachés,
in charge of the project. Working with a small staff, they refined

*The two planning papers—COSVN Directive 08 and a Binh Dinh Province
gether with my commentary were issued as a single package through the auspices of
office in Saigon, as part of its continuing series "Vietnam: Documents and Research
the USIA, by charter, is supposed to be a vehicle for projecting America's best
involvement in disseminating intelligence to the western press on Communist
thing of an anomaly. In fact, however, throughout the cease-fire period the USIA's
frequently provided journalists through its "Documents" series intelligence which
generated and commentaries I had produced. My good friend Jim Haley of USIA
CIA's intrusion into the affairs of his agency, but was ignored.

...nt, developing a separate scenario for the evacuati
...of the four military regions and, finally, Saigon. N
...were procedural, rather than substantive, and am
...original plan they retained was its arbitrary ceiling o
...evacuees: no more than 6,800 in total, the majority o
...

...February, as the exercise continued, a DAO r
...Polgar and asked him if he wanted to participate.
...tions, DAO was drawing up a contingency plan
...intelligence agents and high-ranking government offic
...faced a similar requirement.
...Polgar said no; he saw no reason to become involved
...about the military situation, he could not bring himself
...ould ever have to be abandoned or that a full evacuat

...the majority of us in the Embassy labored over ou
...our alarmist propaganda, Ambassador Martin tri
...more profitably. In early February he packed up and
...ton to help buck up the Administration's position in t
...iately on arrival he began agitating among Admin
...Congressional contacts for a scheme close to his he
...aid program sufficient to leave Saigon "economical
...years.
...February, President Ford formally endorsed the overall
...Washington remained unimpressed. Schlesinger consid
...ennous. If the United States was prepared to cut Sai
..., he commented to a reporter, why not now? Con
...ical, and several of the more cynical legislators con
...plan was meant simply to win the Administratio
...until after the next presidential election.
...took such sniping in stride. The trouble, he assure
...in the aid proposal itself, but in Congress' perspe
...Senate could be persuaded to send an official fact
...look into the situation, the opposition would melt
...inistration in fact had long been in favor of such a C
...rly February it offered to postpone all hearings on
...veral weeks so a team could be put together an
...a few days, however, a flap developed over the m
...epresentative Tom Harkin, a young Democrat fro
...a Navy pilot in Vietnam, announced that his inter
...none other than Don Luce, constant critic of Ame
...one of Martin's pet demons. Representative Bell
...ve from Manhattan, disclosed she was planning to

Pyrrhic Victories

Graham Martin now wanted to have it out once and for all. Since Congress was still playing coy with the Administration over the supplemental aid requests, he was convinced, as he later explained to me, that the only way to force a decision was to subject the skeptics to some direct heat. He therefore was delighted when Congress decided at the end of February to send its much-delayed fact-finding team to Indochina.

The delegation seemed somewhat more manageable from Martin's viewpoint than the originally proposed one. There were only six members, instead of twenty-one, and young Congressman Harkin and his controversial aid Don Luce were not among them. Still, the group did pose a challenge. Among its more liberal constituents were Donald Fraser of Minnesota and the irrepressible Bella Abzug. The powerful and articulate "Pete" McCloskey of California also had chosen to schedule a fact-finding tour of his own to coincide with the delegation's. With so many skeptics on his hands, Martin knew he would have to do some hard and fast persuading.

Typically, he left nothing to chance. He whipped up a Barnum and Bailey extravaganza that was meant to impress through sheer spectacle. Each agency in the Embassy was called upon to contribute an act or two, in the form of briefings or position papers. My own office was slated to carry much of the show. Several of my field appraisals were declassified and mimeographed, to be handed out like programs on first night, even though the sources and information on which they were based were among our most sensitive.

I was also directed to produce several special memoranda for the occasion. One of them dealt lengthily with what Polgar liked to describe as the "strategic realities." The line it spun out could have been lifted verbatim from the Ambassador's own briefing book. The current balance of forces, I argued, should not be viewed as a measure of the strength of the two sides. Although the South Vietnamese had 300,000 combat troops (and a total of 1.1 million men under arms)—against nearly 200,000 Communist regulars in the field—

they also had more population and territory to protect. Therefore, they could hardly be expected to wage war so frugally.

The argument was sensible enough. The way we set it forth was not. The document contained a complete survey of the balance of forces between the two sides, the most valuable intelligence the North Vietnamese could have obtained. Yet nothing in the memorandum bore any kind of classification. It was all to be made freely available to the visiting Congressmen, and to accompanying journalists, with no caveats whatsoever about its use or publication.

The trifling way we handled intelligence throughout this period troubled me deeply. Seldom had the Ambassador or Polgar had any qualms about declassifying and publicizing agent reports that might win support for additional aid, but now, with the military situation so fluid and confused, the continued outpouring of confidences did our allies a considerable disservice. Not only was the average newspaper reader being treated to a running commentary on the strengths and weaknesses of the two sides, but he was also being handed large slices of our latest data on North Vietnamese intentions. And the irony was we actually thought we were helping the South Vietnamese by being so forthcoming.

Beyond the wisdom of these excesses there was also a question of their legality. Under the National Security Acts the CIA is expressly enjoined from involving itself in domestic politics in the United States. And yet every memo and briefing I prepared for the delegation was a feint in this direction—an effort to change Congressional minds on a matter of domestic concern.

As the Embassy prepared for the Congressional visit, so did Thieu and his cabinet. General Vien had subordinates put together a canned briefing on the military situation designed to convince the delegation the country was on the verge of disaster. Even Martin found it a little extreme and asked Vien to tone it down. Too much gloom, he warned, could be as harmful as too little.

Other members of the cabinet concentrated on tidying up the government's dirty laundry. Since the recent arrest of the eighteen journalists in Saigon had prompted such a hue and cry in the western news media, it was one of the items that got a thorough going-over. The Ministry of the Interior was instructed to compile a batch of dossiers proving that all eighteen were "positively" Communist agents. This turned out to be no easy task, for there was an embarrassing dearth of evidence against them. Police investigators therefore, immediately went to work on the suspects, extracting confessions from a respectable number of them and building variously defensible cases against the rest. The Station was fully aware of this rush to judgment, and the frame-ups. An agent provided us a detailed report on them. But we quickly put a classified lid on his disclosures to keep them from falling into the hands of our Congressional guests.

In Washington, meanwhile, colleagues in the State Department and the CIA were struggling through last-minute exertions of their own. For days, ever

Polgar had decided to make further use of his grit and personal c
stationing him at Nghi's imperiled headquarters.

When my own office colleague, Joe Kingsley, had first learn
assignment, he had objected vehemently. Communist forces were m
fast, he had told Polgar, they might be able to overrun Phan Rang wi
warning at all. But Polgar had refused to reconsider, and had merely
Taggart in Bien Hoa, who was "control officer" for the mission, to
James on location overnight if an attack against Phan Rang seemed

Incredibly, however, Taggart and Pittman, the backup man
had failed to take even this precaution and had left James in Phan R
after night despite the mounting Communist pressure. Taggart later
justify this to me by insisting the Station had not kept him adequately i
of the developing threat at Phan Rang. He may have had a point, par
in view of Polgar's reluctance to share alarming intelligence with hi
nates. James himself may also have contributed to the confusion
former Special Forces officer, he enjoyed a good fight and had no
keep Taggart or the Station as fully apprised of the evolving crisis as
have.

In any case, the end came, on the morning of the sixteenth, fa
any of us had anticipated. I had just finished reading the morning inte
file when a radio message from James flooded in over the "Diamond
transceiver in the communications room next to my office. Joe King
I were at the console immediately. Through a hash of static James c
that he, Nghi and Brigadier General Pham Ngoc Sang, commander o
Air Division, were in a bunker together. They were all right, he said, bu
Vietnamese tanks were even then probing the perimeter. Joe told
would send a chopper to pull him out at once. No, James replied, that
necessary, not yet anyway. ARVN forces were still holding. Besides, N
his own chopper.

At that moment Howard Archer, the former Nha Trang Bas
walked in on us. Seizing the microphone, he asked James to descr
predicament. He then made a decision, one that left Kingsley and
tounded. James was to stay in place for the time being, he said, but w
in every half-hour to assure us he was okay. So ended our last radio
with Lew James.

When Communist forces moved into the city hours later, they pu
Nghi and Sang under arrest. Liberation Radio soon disclosed the ca
the two Vietnamese, but failed to mention the American. In Saigon
the omission as a sign the CIA man had escaped—or had been killed. A
the North Vietnamese were keeping silent about him until they dete
who he was.

Unraveling his identity turned out to be fairly easy. Like so many
James had been sent to Vietnam under "light cover," his official "I.D
describing him as an "employee of the U.S. Embassy" and a "Foreign
Reserve Officer." These titles were transparent. Journalists, Vietnam

and almost anyone else with an interest in ferreting out the Embassy's CIA contingent had long ago seen through them.*

In James' case, the cover problem had been compounded by bureaucratic stupidity. Within hours of his disappearance Station administrators discovered that no one could be quite sure what his cover was, whether he had been given the "Embassy employee" designation or something more elaborate.

Officials at CIA headquarters immediately began building a new cover for him, labeling him a "U.S. consular officer" so that if the press discovered he was missing, his agency affiliation could be concealed. This could hardly benefit James himself, of course. On the contrary, it could only do him harm, for having no idea what new label the CIA had given him, he could scarcely defend it—or himself—credibly to his North Vietnamese interrogators.

The day after his capture NVA officers began grilling James on the spot. At first they threatened to beat him, then made good on their threat. Despite the harsh treatment, he initially held firm, relying on the technique, so favored by Soviet agents, of feigning ignorance of anything but a fragment of the "big picture."

After a week or so his captors, frustrated but determined to break him, trucked him and the two South Vietnamese generals to Hanoi. There they jammed them up in Son Tay Prison, where countless American fliers had waited out their capture years before, and began putting James through intensive interrogation, eventually confronting him with a large dossier that had been compiled from "sources" in Laos, where he had once served. The file identified him unequivocably as a CIA officer, largely on the basis of testimony from a Laotian who had known him well. From that point on, it was utterly futile for him to try to deny knowledge of the CIA, its operations or its agents.

The breaking of Lew James was, in large measure, a reflection on the ineptitude of those for whom he worked. The young CIA officer had been sent on a useless and dangerous assignment with little guidance or protection from the Station. If he betrayed certain "secrets," CIA management, not James, should answer first.

Over a half year after the fall of South Vietnam, James was freed by Hanoi (along with the handful of westerners captured at Ban Me Thuot) under a "professional arrangement" worked out by the CIA through another western intelligence organization. He was indeed the last CIA operative in Vietnam.

*The flimsiness of such "cover" apparently had never troubled CIA headquarters, at least not enough to prompt a change. With the departure of the U.S. military in the wake of the cease-fire, the CIA had lost most of its military cover "slots" in Vietnam. (Many of us had been masqueraded as civilian employees of the Army.) Since then, the personnel office in Langley had been unable to dream up a credible alternative. As a result, many CIA officers ended up with almost no cover at all and constantly faced exposure by Vietnamese, Hungarian or Polish intelligence operatives.

New York Times bureau chief, wrote that Giang's remarks "implied there was still time to meet" Communist conditions. It was a precise echo of Polgar's own views. This convergence of opinion, in fact, was no accident. During the past several days Polgar had been feeding the newsman opinions and classified information. The two had become confidants.

Polgar had always liked playing pundit, so his affinity for Browne, his willingness to leak data to him was understandable. Browne, moreover, was a natural ally, for some of his own "sources" were saying precisely what Polgar wanted to hear. One of them, a PRG delegate at Tan Son Nhut, had been hinting for days that a negotiated ending might be possible. Like any responsible journalist, Browne had cross-checked the story with a man in the Embassy, Polgar, who was in a position to render judgment on it. Polgar's observations apparently strengthened him in his own belief in the source's veracity, and since Browne had no way of separating Polgar's speculation from fact, he was misled into overplaying the prospects for a settlement in his own news dispatches. Hanoi could not have put together a more effective team of disinformation specialists if it had tried.

Soon after Giang's press conference, one of Polgar's own "sources" provided a further "clarification" of the North Vietnamese position. Colonel Toth, the Hungarian Military Attaché, called Polgar around midmorning and asked for a meeting. When the two got together an hour or so later, he offered the Station Chief a tantalizing new peace formula. There might be grounds for a "deal," he asserted, provided Thieu resigned "expeditiously," the Americans ended all military "intervention," and a regime "dedicated to peace, independence and neutrality" was installed at once. As Polgar later recounted the conversation to me, Toth also indicated that Minh might be an acceptable replacement for Thieu.

In addition, he assured Polgar that the Communists had no desire to "humiliate" the United States and would permit the Americans to retain an Embassy in Saigon. He emphasized that the PRG, not Hanoi, was the author of all he said.

At a compact two hundred pounds Polgar was not one to orbit easily. Yet when he bounded back into the Embassy after the meeting his feet were hardly touching ground. He felt he had been handed the key to salvation. Till now, Hanoi had been offering merely "peace" in exchange for Thieu's removal. Toth had promised much more—an actual political solution that would enable the United States to get out without humiliation or bloodshed.

Polgar immediately cabled a gist of the conversation to Washington. He then went to brief the Ambassador.

Martin was less enthusiastic. Implicit in Toth's scenario was a complete dismantling of Saigon's constitutional structure, something Martin was certain would bring on a final confrontation between the Americans and the population. Still, there was enough in what the Hungarian had said to tempt him. He therefore urged Polgar to continue the contact and to solicit more information,

and fell one story to the parapet around the roof of the building. He [illegible] several broken bones and was medevacked out at once. As Moorefield [illegible] dered up to the sixth floor one of the marines collared him and asked [illegible] stand in for the injured trooper. Moorefield wearily agreed.

"It really wasn't much of a job," he later explained. "As each little [illegible] of evacuees got to the door leading up to the roof, I'd brief them, then [illegible] them up to the pad itself and help them onto the chopper.

"My most vivid memory is of how tired I was, so very tired. I hadn't [illegible] in over two days, except for that one hour I'd caught at home the night [illegible] But I knew I couldn't fall asleep. There was no one to take my place.

"It was all business up there on the roof. No one spoke and we all [illegible] about our work with extreme care and attention. The prop blast from [illegible] choppers was, of course, gale force, and since there were no guard rails around the pad, you had to be careful you didn't stumble and get blown over the side like the marine.

"At the edge of the roof the smokestacks from incinerators on the floors below were still going full blast, belching flames and smoke high into the air. And on takeoff the chopper pilots had to veer sharply away from them to avoid being blinded. The scene kinda reminded me of a funeral pyre, the roof of the Embassy flaming away into the night.

"Soon after I took up station on the roof, the marines severed the Embassy grounds from the recreation compound out back and sealed the door. But the lights stayed on over there, and from my airy perch I could see the looters gleefully picking through the ruins. The atmosphere was almost carnival-like. The mama-sans were carrying away everything that wasn't bolted down—curtains, chairs, silverware, literally everything! The swimming pool was filled with junk, and in the parking lot beside the restaurant all the abandoned automobiles were running. The looters were playing bumper cars with them.

"On the other side of the Embassy, out front in the street, I could see what I believed to be VC political cadres haranguing the crowds. There'd be a long oration—five to ten minutes—periodically interrupted by a round of applause. I couldn't catch what was being said, but the irony was impressive nonetheless. Just imagine it: to the rear, part of the citadel was being looted by old women and young boys, and out front, heresy of heresies, political cadres were doing their deed on the Embassy's own doorstep.

"In the distance I could see fires still burning in the Tan Son Nhut–Bien Hoa area, and tracer rounds sporadically reaching up after our jets. Over the trees I caught glimpses of the city itself—so dead, so quiet. It was as if we were in an interlude between the changing of the guard, the old regime, the old way of life giving way to the new."

Below the helicopter pad, in his abandoned office on the sixth floor of the Embassy, Tom Polgar had just finished beating out a cable to Washington on his old manual typewriter. It was something of a historic communication, as he pointed out in the first few lines: "With receipt presidential message advis-

ing that evacuation American Embassy must be complete [illegible] time 30 April, wish to advise that this will be final message from Saigon Station. It will take us about twenty minutes to destroy equipment. Accordingly, approximately 0320 hours local time we must terminate classified transmission."

In the next paragraph he turned eloquently philosophical, as if he knew he was writing for posterity. But like so many other messages he had sent to Washington in recent weeks, what he said revealed more about his own illusions than about the circumstances and realities of the moment. For now, as at the beginning of the Communist offensive three months before, Polgar remained convinced that Congressional parsimony—"niggardly half measures" was his catch phrase—was the cause of Saigon's undoing. "It has been a long and hard fight and we have lost," he wrote. "This experience unique in the history of the United States does not signal necessarily the demise of the United States as a world power. The severity of the defeat and the circumstances of it, however, would seem to call for a reassessment of the policies of niggardly half measures which have characterized much of our participation here despite the commitment of manpower and resources which were certainly generous. Those who fail to learn from history are forced to repeat it. Let us hope that we will not have another Vietnam experience and that we have learned our lesson.

"Saigon signing off."

In Washington, almost at the same moment, CIA Director Colby was completing his own final message to Polgar, which in its way was equally memorable. "As we approach end of communication with Saigon," he asserted, "I would like to record Agency's pride and satisfaction with the job that its representatives did there, and at no time during its twenty-odd-year history is this more true than in these past few weeks. The courage, integrity, dedication and high competence the Agency displayed in a variety of situations over these years has been fully matched and even surpassed by your performance during this difficult final phase. Thousands of Vietnamese owe their lives and future hopes to your efforts, your Government has profited immensely from the accuracy and breadth of your reporting and your country will one day learn with admiration of the way you represented its best instincts and ideals. Good luck and many thanks."

Shortly before 3 A.M. there was another brief lull in the helo-lift from the courtyard. Martin, fearful that the U.S. military had finally reached the end of its tether, pleaded for at least six more big CH-53s—a number which, he insisted, would finally accommodate all the civilians in the compound. Reluctantly Whitmire agreed. Within the next forty minutes the half-dozen choppers landed in quick succession. In the meantime, the Embassy's remaining communications officers smashed what was left of their radio gear and joined the diminishing passenger lines on the sixth floor.

Since George Jacobson, the Ambassador's Special Assistant for Field Operations (SAFFO) was technically in charge of the latter phases of the evacuation, it is noteworthy that such a large number of his own evacuees (600) failed to get out. That in itself provides a telling commentary on the kind of leadership the Ambassador imposed on us in Saigon's final days.

Among those on Jacobson's own evacuee rolls who were left behind was a highly knowledgeable Communist defector who had provided us over the years with our most comprehensive data on COSVN and its personalities. In late April, Jacobson had offered to evacuate him, but not his two sons, since they were of draft age. The defector, needless to say, had refused to leave without them.

Jacobson also bungled the evacuation of Nay Luette, the montagnard leader, for whom he had assumed responsibility. Luette went to a designated rendezvous point on the final day of the war, but was never picked up. The Communists later jailed him.*

Because of the sensitivity of their jobs, the list of CIA locals who were evacuated, or left behind, remained hidden away in agency vaults in the months following the Communist victory. Yet several of my former colleagues, who were outraged at what had taken place, saw to it that some basic statistics were made available to me. According to these tabulations, only about 537 of the Station's 1,900 "indigenous employees" were finally evacuated, together with 2,000 others—including family members—who had enjoyed privileged contacts with the agency over the years.

As was true of other elements of the Mission, individual initiative accounted for the Station's most successful rescue efforts. By defying Consul General MacNamara and orders from Saigon, "Larry Downs" of the CIA base in Can Tho managed to evacuate by helicopter all 300 Vietnamese on his roster. Similarly, by ignoring Polgar and operating in secret, Bill Johnson succeeded in moving the employees of the radio station House 7 and their families (roughly 1,000 people) to Phu Quoc Island, from which they were later rescued. Countless other CIA men, often working on their own or with minimal guidance, also made certain that Vietnamese friends and co-workers got aboard an evacuation flight.

Unfortunately, however, the imagination and perseverence of such individuals could not compensate for the ineptitude of Station management as a whole. Consequently, large categories of Vietnamese who faced untold dan-

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same kind of results. Of the 573 locals on the consulate's evacuee lists (excluding those who worked for the CIA), only 47 were among the 200 people who sailed with MacNamara down the Bassac River to the sea.

*Luette's fellow montagnard tribesmen fared no better, though Jacobson certainly does not bear sole responsibility for this. Of the estimated 5,000 montagnards who had escaped from the highlands in mid- and late-March, only around eighty had been logged in at the Guamian reception center as of 8 July 1975. As for Vietnam's other ethnic minorities: only about seventy Chinese Nungs and forty northern "black Thais" had turned up on Guam by the same date. Since then, an unknown number have escaped from Vietnam on their own.

ger from the Communists or whose capture could prejudice American intelligence interests were left behind. Among them: the 400 members of the Special Police Branch, whose training the CIA had financed and supervised; 400 working echelon members of the Central Intelligence Organization, also our protégés; a large staff of clerks and computer operators which the Station had set up to keep book on PRG personalities; the young Vietnamese who served as our clandestine radio operators at the Embassy; the staff which maintained our special radio links with Vietnamese police headquarters; the hundred or more Vietnamese, including maids, waitresses and agents, who had collected at the Duc Hotel on the final day; several agents from Bien Hoa; the 70 translators whom "Harry Linden" had tried to rescue; literally hundreds of high-level defectors who had worked closely with the Station over the years to pinpoint and hunt down their former Communist comrades; and countless counterterrorist agents—perhaps numbering as high as 30,000—specially trained to operate with the Phoenix Program.

Then too, to compound our errors and their costs, we committed that unpardonable mistake of failing to ensure the destruction of the personnel files and intelligence dossiers we had helped the government assemble—and which identified so many of those left on the tarmac or outside the gates of the Embassy. Equally unfortunate, the capture and interrogation of the young CIA officer "Lew James," led to the exposure of information that struck directly at our own operations.

Although the Station bore no immediate responsibility, another authority on agency activities also was lost to the Communists at the time of the collapse. During the last week in April a retired CIA officer named Tucker Gougelmann, who had previously worked in Saigon, returned to look for Vietnamese friends, somehow missed the final helo-lift, and was later captured by the North Vietnamese. Interrogated by the Soviet KGB and other intelligence organizations, he died in captivity a year later. What he disclosed under questioning has not been determined. His knowledge of CIA operations and personnel both in Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia was considerable.

The full impact of CIA losses and failures in Vietnam will probably never be known. There are too many unanswered questions. But based on what can be ascertained, it is not too much to say that in terms of squandered lives, blown secrets and the betrayal of agents, friends and collaborators, our handling of the evacuation was an institutional disgrace. Not since the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961 had the agency put so much on the line, and lost it through stupidity and mismanagement.

But lives and secrets were not the only items of value forfeited to poor American planning. Despite Erich Von Marbod's last-minute salvage efforts, equipment losses resulting from Saigon's defeat were massive. NVA forces, according to Pentagon estimates, captured over $5 billion in U.S.-supplied military hardware, including 550 tanks, 73 F-5 jet fighters, 1,300 artillery pieces, 1,600,000 rifles and enough other matériel to field an entire army, air

force and navy. Although the Pentagon claimed that much of this equipment would soon become unserviceable without American spare parts, even a fraction of it would keep insurgent or terrorist movements in Asia or the Middle East in business for some time.

AFTERMATH

In the months immediately following the Communist victory, those of us who had been involved in the evacuation and who knew of its failings anxiously scanned the refugee reports from Vietnam for some clue to how the Communists meant to dispose of the friends and the country we had left behind. From all signs, the blood bath the White House had predicted never materialized. Yet few of us could take any comfort from what actually did take place. For if the Communists refrained from the most extreme "solutions," there was ample evidence that they intended to crush every vestige of independent thought and action in the south.

The NVA 324th Division was the first major Communist unit to enter Saigon on the morning of 30 April. At 12:15 P.M., local time, the flag of the National Liberation Front was hoisted over the Presidential Palace and "Big" Minh was placed under arrest. Soon afterward the American Embassy was ransacked. An American journalist, who had stayed behind to cover the takeover, managed to save the metal plaque that had hung in the downstairs foyer to commemorate the five servicemen killed in the Communist attack on the Embassy in 1968.

The following day General Dung drove to Saigon from his headquarters at Ben Cat. No doubt he treated himself to a cigarette or two to celebrate his extraordinary victory. Within the next few days Le Duan and various other North Vietnamese notables also showed up to survey the spoils. In practical terms their arrival marked the beginning of the absorption process that would produce a formally unified Vietnam a year later.

At the time of the Communist victory the party apparatus in the south was in shambles, thanks in part to the depredations of the Phoenix Program. The army thus remained the primary instrument of control. Although one or two NVA divisions would be withdrawn in the next two years, over 150,000 troops stayed on to ensure the loyalty of Hanoi's new subjects. There was also an influx of secret police and some 30,000 administrative cadres from the north to help buttress the party structure and reorganize the economy.

During the first nine months General Tran Van Tra, Dung's principal deputy, served as Hanoi's front man in Saigon, although Pham Hung and Le Duc Tho remained the actual formulators of policy. When a civilian administrative apparatus was finally set up in the city in early 1976, the three top posts all went to former COSVN officials.

The PRG meanwhile was swept into the dustbin of history. In March 1976 the entire population of Vietnam went to the polls to elect a new national assembly, but only a scattering of PRG or "third force neutralists" were on

the ballots, and the lists of candidates had all been carefully screened by the party beforehand. A few weeks later, on 2 July, the eclipse of the southern "revolution" and its spokesmen became complete. Hanoi formally declared the country unified under its control. The president of the National Liberation Front was reduced to a ceremonial vice-presidential post in Hanoi and the PRG's well-known Foreign Minister, Nguyen Thi Binh, likewise found herself in a position of minor consequence. Eventually the National Liberation Front was dissolved.

Within a year of their victory the Communists also moved decisively to crush all potential or actual opposition. Organized religion was among their first targets. The leaders of the bitterly anti-Communist Hoa Hao Buddhist sect in the delta were jailed; the An Quang Buddhist Pagoda, once the center of militant opposition to the Saigon regime, was closed down; religious publications were stopped and over 200 Catholic prelates were arrested and imprisoned, including the Bishops of Danang and Nha Trang and the Reverend Tran Huu Thanh, the fire-breathing priest who had led the anti-corruption drive against Thieu in the fall of 1974. Ironically, the Communists arrested Thanh on charges of being a "CIA agent."

The most draconian of Hanoi's security measures, however, were directed at former government officials and military personnel. By Hanoi's own admission, over 200,000 of them were sent to reeducation camps in the first year. Located in remote areas, often close to former Communist bases, the camps resembled something out of Solzhenitsyn. In one, near Tay Ninh, inmates were obliged to perform every manner of demeaning and dangerous task, from cleaning out the toilets of party cadres to deactivating minefields, often with no training or proper equipment. In another, outside Nha Trang, over fifty people were assigned to each cell. The daily food ration amounted to no more than 200 grams of rice, barely enough for subsistence, with seldom any meat or even fish sauce to provide needed protein. Malnutrition and attendant diseases like beriberi thus became widespread. Every six months each inmate received a change of pajamas, and once a week a bucket of water to cleanse himself. Every two months he and his family were allowed to exchange short letters, the format of which was dictated by authorities.

Occasionally torture and even execution were meted out to intransigents. According to one widely repeated refugee account, a camp near Saigon, which had been given over to former police officials, was burned to the ground with the inmates inside after the authorities discovered that privation alone could not break their spirit. It was also reported that NVA forces systematically eliminated many of those who had "rallied" to the government from their ranks during the war.

In June 1976 Hanoi announced that twelve categories of people still under detention (unofficially a Communist official in Saigon acknowledged that the number still approximated 200,000) were to be tried by people's courts and "severely punished." Among those singled out were "lackeys of imperialism" and veterans of Thieu's puppet regime who refused "to repent their crimes"

or who "owed blood debts to the people." The list read like a roster of those the CIA Station and the Embassy had left behind. In fact, some of the names that surfaced in subsequent refugee reports were not unfamiliar to CIA management. One of them was that of Tran Ngoc Chau—the opposition leader whom the CIA had helped frame as a Communist in the early 1970s and whom it had refused to evacuate in the final days of the war.

In addition to cracking down on real or imagined opponents, the Communists attempted in the two years following their takeover to revamp the society and the economy of the south according to their ideological lights. The problems they faced were staggering. Over 3,500,000 people had been left unemployed by the dissolution of Thieu's government and army, and despite the massive foreign aid that had been lavished on Hanoi and Saigon during the war, unified Vietnam was among the twenty-five poorest countries in the world.

One of the Communists' first (unspoken) objectives was to try to equalize the poverty. In June 1975 all bank accounts in the south were frozen, and four months later all citizens were given exactly twelve hours to exchange old currency for new. The conversion effectively reduced most people's life savings to less than forty dollars. At the same time the south's middle class, long the staunchest anti-Communist force in the country, was effectively disenfranchised, stripped of jobs, pensions and state housing, and denied access to hospitals and universities.

Meanwhile, as the new authorities moved to take over the rationing and marketing of vital commodities, inflation jumped by fifty percent. By the summer of 1977 one chicken, at ten dollars, cost half of a southerner's average monthly wage, and a shirt roughly double.

To meet the awesome problems of the cities the Communists also attempted to pare the urban population down to manageable size. Over 1,500,000 city dwellers—including 200,000 from Saigon—were forcibly moved to so-called "new economic zones" in the countryside, with over 5,000,000 more to be resettled by 1980. In spite of official claims, these wilderness redoubts were a far cry from any Communist utopia. Housing, food and medical facilities were almost nonexistent, and diseases like malaria, which had been contained by the Americans, quickly revived.

The policies of the Communist regime did not go totally unnoticed in the United States. In December 1976 a group of former anti-war activists issued a public appeal calling on Hanoi "to honor the concern for human rights which you have expressed both in formal agreements and in countless conversations with peace activists." The Politburo, however, ignored these pleas and rejected all charges of wrongdoing. As Hanoi's army newspaper later declared defiantly, the regime would continue to "deprive all rights of freedom to those who look at socialism with a grudging eye or who describe all aspects of socialism in a passive manner."

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The trends that emerged during the first two years of Communist rule were not passing aberrations. In the winter of 1976 a party Congress, the first since 1960, was convened in Hanoi to ratify a five-year development program that preserved and elaborated on the policies that had already been set out. The Politburo and the party Central Committee also were expanded to include allies and protégés of hard-liners like Le Duan. One of the newly appointed Politburo members, a man named Le Van Luong, was of special interest to me. An old-line Stalinist who had engineered the bloody land-reform program in North Vietnam in the mid-1950s, Luong happened to be the uncle of someone I had known well at the time of the cease-fire—Nguyen Van Tai, the man in the snow-white cell who had been executed just hours before Communist forces rolled into Saigon.

Although the rulers of the new Vietnam continued in the wake of their victory to pay lip service to the ideal of Communist solidarity, they soon discovered that they could not count on the kind of support from their allies they had enjoyed in the past. Indeed, once the war had been won and the humiliation of the United States was complete, the Soviets and the Chinese began cutting back their aid to Hanoi, canceling non-refundable grants altogether, and it quickly became apparent to Le Duan and his colleagues that they would have to look elsewhere for benefactors. The prospect of seeking assistance even from the United States itself became a very real consideration.

The Americans themselves made the first overtures. A select Congressional delegation visited Hanoi in December 1975 to seek information on the 2,700 American servicemen still missing in action, and several weeks later Senator Edward Kennedy asked the Communists to repatriate the remains of the two young marines who had been killed in the shelling of Tan Son Nhut on the last day of the war. In March 1976 Kissinger himself initiated a secret exchange of diplomatic notes. "The interests of peace and security," he wrote to Hanoi, "will benefit from placing the past behind us and developing the basis for a new relationship between the two countries." For the next few months the dialogue continued sporadically as Hanoi insisted on $4.2 billion in aid from the United States—a figure Nixon had mentioned secretly at the time of the cease-fire—as the price for further dealings. By August, however, it was apparent that Washington would not bend to this demand, and Hanoi in a dramatic turnabout released the names of twelve missing American pilots as a gesture of good will.

That opened the door. When the Carter Administration took office several months later, it chose to overlook the human-rights problems in Vietnam and soon sent a presidential commission to Hanoi to explore new avenues of conciliation. In May 1977 American and Vietnamese negotiators met around an oval table in Paris to begin concrete discussions.

The bargaining was bound to be difficult, particularly since a majority in Congress remained opposed to Hanoi's aid demands, and Le Duan was deter-

mined to hold out for maximum concessions. Yet a beginning had been made, and that was invaluable, for once Hanoi could be made to believe it had been accepted in the West, and could expect some measure of assistance, its temptation to seek retribution against those tens of thousands the Americans had left behind might well be allayed.

COVER-UP

While official Washington labored quietly in the two years following Hanoi's victory to establish a new relationship with the Vietnamese, most Americans tried to forget about Vietnam altogether. The amnesia was understandable. After all the bloodshed and bitterness of the war, who could be blamed for wanting to put it out of mind?

Yet there was also, behind the silence and public indifference, a bit of official conjuring. Those who had made cease-fire policy in Vietnam wanted us to forget how it had ended—or at least to remember only what best suited their versions of the truth.

The cover-up and the cosmeticizing of events began almost immediately. Meeting with newsmen in the final hours of the airlift, Kissinger insisted that there had been a chance for a negotiated settlement up until 27 April, whereupon, he maintained, the North Vietnamese had shifted course and opted for a military solution. He did not choose to acknowledge that the intelligence told a different story. Nor was he candid enough to admit that the Soviets, with the help of the Hungarians, Poles and the French, had played him and so many others for fools. By his lights (as he put it later, in another press conference) the Soviets had played "a moderately constructive role in enabling us to understand the possibilities there were for the evacuation, both of Americans and South Vietnamese, and the possibilities that might exist for a political solution."

While still on board the USS *Blueridge,* Polgar gave an elaborate press briefing of his own which essentially corroborated Kissinger's story. There was in fact only one significant difference between their separate accounts. Polgar could not resist taking verbal swipes at the Ambassador, intimating that Martin had never appreciated the gravity of the military situation, as he had. This was true, of course, as far as it went. But what Polgar failed to mention was that he himself had contributed mightily to Martin and Kissinger's second illusion: the notion that there was a chance for a Vichy-type peace.

Once the Administration had established its own slant on reality, Kissinger acted promptly to forestall contradictions. He cabled Martin on shipboard, ordering him to say nothing to the press. He also made it clear to former President Thieu in Taiwan that he could expect no entry visa to the United States (where his daughter was in school) until after the American presidential elections.

In the meantime, other Vietnamese notables were given a devastating lesson in humility. Shortly after arriving in Guam several of the defeated

ARVN generals were brought together in one of the old metal barracks. An exhausted General Toan, the former MR 3 commander, was pushed into the meeting in a wheelchair, and General Truong, the defender of Danang, was suffering from such an acute case of conjunctivitis he could not find his way to a chair. Moments later an American naval officer marched in and demanded that the generals remove their uniforms. "Can't we at least keep our shoulder stars?" one of them asked. "No," the American replied. "You have no army, no country any more." It was as if the Republic of Vietnam had never existed at all.

When the U.S. naval task force docked in Manila on 5 May, I was flown immediately to Thailand on "special assignment," to debrief journalists and refugees still trickling out of Vietnam.*

From my interviews I produced the first intelligence on the Communist takeover, and was instrumental in setting up a kind of underground railway back into Vietnam to ferret out other refugees. My diligence, however, was not appreciated at CIA headquarters. Some of the information I gathered only served to highlight the failures of agency management. After a month I was called home.

I reached CIA headquarters in August after a brief vacation (my first in two and a half years) and was "processed in" through Ted Shackley's East Asia Division. Like all returnees, I was directed to fill out an affidavit which in effect attributed the breakdown of the evacuation to "local enemy action." I refused to sign it. Instead I went from office to office, asking for permission to do a real "damage assessment" so that the agency could learn from its mistakes. I was told no one was interested in anything so "controversial."

Polgar, meanwhile, was quickly shunted off into a new assignment. Not one ranking official in Shackley's division ever bothered to question him on the evacuation or on the personalities or documents left behind.

Having spent so much time overseas, I was virtually unknown to my fellow CIA "analysts" when I returned to Langley and could find no job in my own old "home" office. Out of sympathy for my predicament, Polgar invited me to accompany him to his own next posting abroad. I agreed and was immediately placed in special language training.

But soon several things happened to cause me to reconsider. In mid-August the Foreign Service Institute invited Polgar to deliver a lecture on the evacuation to a "cleared" audience of State Department officers. He was unable to oblige, but asked me to stand in for him. I did so, turning the briefing into a full-fledged commentary on what had taken place during Saigon's final days. When Shackley learned of it he was furious.

*My reassignment was not without complications. So confused had the evacuation been, the CIA lost track of me between Manila and Bangkok. Before thinking to consult the cable traffic to pinpoint my whereabouts, agency officials contacted my parents to tell them I was missing in action. The error was not corrected for several days.

Soon afterward, at a cocktail party for old "Vietnam hands," I ran into Wolfgang Lehmann and was treated to another shock. After a few minutes of polite chitchat Lehmann pulled me aside and began questioning me on several aspects of Hanoi's military strategy. He confided he was in the process of briefing two journalists, both Kissinger favorites, on the evacuation and the collapse, and he wanted to refresh his memory. I was appalled at what he told me. His version of the truth, as he spun it out that evening, bore little relation to what I remembered. Nor could I understand why Administration officials were "leaking" to the press before either the CIA or the State Department had completed an assessment of its own.

I soon discovered that Lehmann's briefing was only the beginning. In the next week or so Vietnam specialists in the State Department and the Pentagon were directed to open their files (selectively) to the two newsmen. The CIA did likewise. Colby and two top assistants met with one of them, attempted to dress up the agency's role in the evacuation, and provided the journalist with a compilation of our top-secret reporting from Vietnam, a document which dealt explicitly with both our intelligence "sources" and "methods." In its zeal to protect its image, the CIA in effect was jeopardizing the few secrets that had survived the collapse.

In early fall my confidence in my colleagues and superiors suffered a mortal blow. Several former Saigon Station officers, myself included, were called in by the CIA's Inspector General and asked to provide "background" on Polgar's reporting habits and biases. Despite my personal feelings for Polgar, I felt I had no choice but to be candid, particularly since I had been pressing for a thorough review of what had gone wrong. I acknowledged that Polgar had at times blocked reports—on the grounds of poor sourcing or quality—that might have put the South Vietnamese government in an unfavorable light.

As my interview drew to a close, I asked to be allowed to file a full accounting of the Station's performance in the final days so that the "blame" could be spread around, as it should be. But my interviewer rejected the project as "too complicated." He explained that his own inquiry was meant simply to give Colby "ammunition" with which to fend off any Congressional probes into CIA activities in Vietnam.

His remarks confirmed all of my grimmest suspicions. I resolved then to write a damage assessment on my own, whether the agency liked it or not, even if I had to go "outside" to do so.

Throughout the fall and winter of 1975 the Administration continued to do what it could to blank Vietnam out of the public memory. The Pentagon contracted several former Saigon generals to write a history of the final campaign, then promptly slapped a classified label on the project so that none of the participants could talk to newsmen without authorization. In the meantime, the White House and the State Department parceled out honors and choice jobs to members of Martin's immediate entourage to keep them content

—and silent. Martin himself, briefly hospitalized as the result of complications stemming from his pneumonia, was given a presidential citation. Lehmann was designated Consul General in Frankfurt, and Boudreau and Jazynka were assigned to plush administrative posts in Paris.

Several Kissinger associates suggested that the young State Department officers whose diligence and imagination had actually saved the evacuation be rewarded as well. But Martin and Lehmann (with Kissinger's support) balked at this, claiming that there were simply "too many." As a result, prior to Gerald Ford's defeat in the 1976 presidential elections, only two of the middle-level State Department officers who had taken part in the evacuation were given any recognition at all. The Foreign Service Association, in effect the State Department union, cited both Lionel Rosenblatt and Craig Johnstone, organizers of the luncheon group "conspirators," for their services during the crisis.

The CIA, to its credit, was more generous in honoring its Vietnam "heroes," though at times it gave less than due attention to matching rewards with deserts. "Howard Archer," the former Base Chief in Nha Trang who had abandoned both employees and documents, was elevated to the staff Colby created to defend the agency against Congressional inquiries, and "Custer," his counterpart from Danang, was named Chief of an important CIA Station in Asia. In late December 1975 agency management called other Vietnam veterans together in the CIA's bubble-shaped auditorium and handed out a variety of classified medals—secret awards for secret accomplishments. The citation which accompanied my own Medal of Merit applauded my analytical acuity during the final month of the war.

In his remarks at the ceremony Colby commended us all for our sacrifice and service and vigorously defended American policies in Vietnam, particularly the Phoenix and pacification programs, which he suggested would have won the war had it not been for the North Vietnamese army. I sat there, listening to this nonsense and wondering what had happened to the CIA I had thought I was serving.

A few days later I advised George Carver, co-author of the Weyand Report, that I would like to write a book on the cease-fire period, with the agency's blessings and help. Carver gave me no encouragement. Not long afterward I was summoned to the office of the CIA's chief legal counsel and put through a classic interrogation, one interviewer playing the sympathetic listener, the other the accuser. My motives and my integrity were impugned. I was ordered to submit to a lie-detector test to "ensure" I had leaked no classified information to the press, and to turn over any personal notes or diaries I might have kept while in Vietnam. That evening, three weeks after the CIA had given me one of its highest awards, I announced to my immediate superior that I was resigning in protest.

Once I had severed my ties, CIA officials tried to discredit me with former colleagues. Memos advising everyone not to talk with me were circulated around the headquarters building, as if I were on the verge of betraying

national secrets. CIA officials who had known or worked with me, including a former girl friend, were called in, interrogated and threatened with firing if they did not inform on me.

Meanwhile, public discussion of Saigon's demise flared briefly. On 27 January 1976 Ambassador Martin appeared before members of the House International Relations Committee to offer his first extended public comment on the fiasco. It was a masterful performance. Without pointing an accusatory finger at anyone, he said just enough to obscure his own mistakes and to convey the impression that Kissinger, Polgar and Congress had all been responsible for Saigon's collapse and for the problems surrounding the evacuation.

As Martin later explained to me, his testimony was carefully calculated. Despite the presidential citation, and the awards for his top subordinates, he felt the Administration had ignored and even slighted him in recent months, letting him take all the blame for what had gone sour in Vietnam. Kissinger, by his account, had even spread rumors around Washington that Martin was a little "insane." Now the Ambassador was determined to have his revenge. His testimony to Congress, so subtle yet pointed in its insinuations, was his opening shot.

The maneuver paid off. Soon afterward Kissinger appointed him "special assistant," as if to subdue him through kindness. But Martin would not be so easily appeased. He began talking with me and various journalists at length, always embellishing on the notion that he had done "one hell of a job" in Saigon. He also quietly squirreled away secret papers to buttress his case.

While Martin jockeyed for advantage, my own problems with the CIA came to a head. In the spring of 1976 the NVA commander, General Dung, published his memoirs, indirectly confirming many of the Embassy's mistakes and misjudgments in Saigon's final days. A journalist for the *Washington Post*, who had long known me, called and asked if I would comment on the disclosures, particularly Dung's assertion that NVA forces had captured many intelligence files intact. Since the CIA had been unwilling to give me a hearing, I agreed. The resulting newspaper story, headlined "Saigon's Secrets Lost," marked the first time any former Embassy officer had openly and for the record challenged the Administration's line on the collapse.

From that point on I was a public enemy in the eyes of some Administration officials. Assistant Secretary Habib, in a memo to Kissinger, described my comments to the press as "tendentious," and George Carver went so far as to suggest that the CIA assign a "case officer" to look over my shoulder, as if I were a foreign spy. The action was not only an insult to me, it was of questionable legality, since the National Security Acts rule out any domestic police activities by the CIA.

Finally, in the summer of 1976, Polgar was called home to lecture and threaten me. During our meeting my old mentor accused me of a lack of patriotism for daring to criticize the agency and intimated that I was "a little crazy." He also attempted to put a favorable gloss on his own performance during the evacuation, even to the point of claiming credit for the rescue of

the 1,000 Vietnamese employees of House 7, the clandestine radio station, whom in fact Bill Johnson had evacuated over Polgar's objections. On this somewhat melancholy note, our conversation ended. I never saw Polgar again.

Several weeks later I traveled to Paris to seek background material for my book. Among others, I talked with officials of the Vietnamese Communist Embassy. I asked them to convey a list of questions from me to General Dung in Hanoi and requested that as a gesture of good will they arrange for the return of some of Ambassador Martin's household belongings, which he had abandoned in Saigon. In a more general vein I urged them to be more forthcoming with the United States on the issue of American servicemen missing in action and provided them with some information on current public attitudes in the United States, particularly the apathy toward Vietnam, about which they knew nothing. Soon afterward, whether by coincidence or not, Hanoi provided Washington with the list of twelve missing servicemen that was to open the way to more candid dealings.

When I returned home I informed both the CIA and the State Department of my activities and pleaded with friends in the Administration to accelerate official contacts with Hanoi, if only to provide the Communists with an incentive to ease up on their treatment of those we had left behind. For my trouble the CIA stepped up its harassment tactics against me.

Because of its continued assaults on my integrity, and its reluctance to deal candidly with the Vietnam issue, I eventually stopped meeting with the case officer the agency had assigned to me. I also resolved not to submit my manuscript to the agency for clearance and censorship, as all former employees-turned-author are required to do. In my view, if the CIA could officially leak to the press to whitewash its role in Vietnam, it had forfeited the right to censor me in the name of security or national interest.

While I struggled over draft after draft of my book, Graham Martin continued his quest for public vindication. At his insistence, the White House nominated him in the fall of 1976, just prior to the presidential elections, for the post of ambassador-at-large. Once the proposal was submitted to Congress, however, some of Martin's old enemies managed to tie it up in committee, where it languished.

The presidential elections wrote an end to Martin's hopes, and from then on he could only reconcile himself to the prospect of retirement.* He made one last effort, however, to refurbish his image. In the final days of the Ford Administration he recommended to Kissinger that some of the young State Department officers from Saigon be finally recognized for their services. Yet even in this moment of magnanimity Martin could not quite divest himself of the prejudices and parochialism that had so marred his management of the Embassy. Many of those he recommended for citation were old protégés.

*Two of Martin's severest critics rose to top posts in the Carter Administration. Habib was appointed Undersecretary of State—the second highest position in the State Department—and Dick Moose, co-author of the Moose-Miessner report for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, became an Assistant Secretary.

Brunson McKinley, Al Francis and several of Francis' own subordinates from Danang were given the State Department's highest award for valor. Moorefield, Don Hays and countless others who were equally deserving did not receive even a note of thanks.

Several State Department officers, encouraged and aided by outsiders like myself, immediately set to work to rectify this injustice. Eventually, the list of awardees was expanded to include Moorefield, Hays and many others.

My own Vietnam adventure effectively came to an end on a Friday afternoon in late February 1977—appropriately, in the presence of Martin himself. He had called me that morning and asked me to visit him in his office on the top floor of the State Department.

The specter who greeted me at the door was merely a shadow of the swashbuckling diplomat I remembered from those exciting first encounters in Saigon in the summer of 1973. Weary, his face parched and old, Martin motioned me to the couch facing his desk. It was his last day in the Department, he told me, and he wanted to make sure that I had the facts "straight" for my book. He then proceeded to review much of what we had discussed in our many previous interviews, attempting as usual to put a favorable construction on all his actions and decisions in Saigon's final days. By the time he had finished, an hour and a half had passed—but I had hardly written a note. After sitting at the man's elbow for over four years, I knew all his arguments and rationalizations by heart.

As he stood up to usher me out, the intensity he had always displayed during our interviews suddenly vanished, and a look of sadness flickered momentarily in the tired, dull eyes. "You know," he said, "I'm going out of here almost as I came in. I was sworn into government service by an old country preacher over forty years ago, and today I'm leaving it without any more ceremony. After all my years here in the Department, my colleagues didn't even give me a farewell luncheon."

I stared at him a moment, not quite sure whether to smile or sympathize. Was he still the consummate actor, playing for effect? Before I could make up my mind, the face became a mask again. I shook his hand and left.

I remembered as I walked to the elevator what one of my former colleagues had said about Martin. It seemed only too apropos, a kind of final tribute to him. "He was a lot like American policy in Vietnam," my friend had said. "He saw himself as an old swamp fox, able through wit and cunning to alter anything he wanted. But in fact he was much more akin to swamp fire, an illusory if brilliant light, darting from point to point but altering very little at all."

There are some who say that the Vietnam the Americans nurtured and supported was destined to end as it did, that our policies were so flawed and ill-advised from the very beginning, they could only have produced a Communist victory.

While I cannot in conscience defend those policies, I reject such logic. As

a former intelligence officer I must believe, perhaps naïvely, that right decisions taken at appropriate moments on the basis of accurate information might have averted the outcome, or at least have modified it. This view would undoubtedly find favor among many Vietnamese, both North and South. For it is one of the ancient tenets of their culture that while there may be a predisposition toward certain events, nothing is predetermined and men who understand the forces at work can alter their direction.

Clearly, Henry Kissinger was the American who most directly affected the forces at work in Vietnam as it emerged from the cease-fire. He negotiated the "peace" and shaped American policies in the aftermath. In both instances his handiwork was faulty and too hastily done. But was he to be blamed for that? The American people wanted out of Vietnam under any circumstances, as quickly as possible, and if Kissinger erred in obliging them, he did so in deference to sensitivities and frustrations that traced back to the mistakes of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations before him.

Following the cease-fire, Kissinger erred again by placing his trust in Soviet and Chinese cooperation and in the efficacy—and continued availability—of American aid to Saigon as a shield against North Vietnamese aggressiveness. But he could not have known at the time that the very underpinnings of these policies and premises would be destroyed by Watergate.

Of all of Kissinger's mistakes in the realm of Vietnam policy, perhaps only two fit clearly into the category of "all his own." One of them stemmed from his way of doing business, his penchant for the virtuoso performance. Determined to do just about everything himself, he failed to delegate any real oversight responsibility for Vietnam to his subordinates. Consequently, as his own attention became diverted by the Middle East and other problems, Washington lost sight, and control, of its most enduring crisis. By the time the crisis boiled over, there was only one perspective on it—Graham Martin's.

Then, too, Kissinger, with his addiction to secrecy, never quite leveled with Congress or the American people about what was essential to preserving his imperfect peace. Martin once remarked to me that the greatest tragedy of the cease-fire period was that the Paris agreement had never been submitted to Congress for approval, like the peace treaty it was supposed to be. If it had been, Congress at least would have known what was at stake in Vietnam as it moved to circumscribe the President's war-making powers in reaction to Watergate.

Next to Kissinger, Martin must of course bear primary responsibility for what occurred in the end. The Administration's stalking horse, he was sent to Saigon in the wake of the cease-fire to make sure that Kissinger's peace did not become the ticket for a Communist takeover. His "mistake" was that he did his job too well—and too long. His hard-line views, a reflection of Nixon's, strengthened the South Vietnamese in their own intransigence and in their dependence on the United States, and when finally the bombing was halted and Nixon succumbed to his own excesses, neither the protégés nor the Ambassador was able to shift course in time, in the direction of compromise. On the

contrary, Martin through manipulation and force of will tried to create an illusion of continued support in Washington to stiffen Thieu's back, only to drive him further into his stubbornness and misapprehension. Martin erred in this, to be sure. But was he to blame? If he continued to try to remold reality in the image of what he thought it should be, it was because Kissinger and eventually President Ford were only too willing to share his illusions.

Beyond the phalanx of known names and reputations, there are others who must answer for Saigon's demise and for the way it happened. Not the least of these are the American people themselves. True, the sense of revulsion that spread through the country in the late 1960s and early '70s helped to bring the Vietnam war to its first tentative conclusion and forced an end to the barbarity of the American involvement. But once the boys had come home, that "gone-with-the-wind" syndrome that eventually afflicted much of the foreign policy establishment itself also took its toll on the population at large, sweeping Vietnam from our collective consciousness and giving rise to a complacency and indifference among us that enabled a few very powerful men to continue pursuing policies and tactics that had already been brought into question. The consequences of our forgetfulness should be a warning, for by the time General Dung's forces moved on Saigon in April 1975 many of the mistakes and omissions that had plunged us into Vietnam in the first place had been replayed in miniature. Two Presidents had misled Congress; the Ambassador had overdrawn the prospects for success; and our protégés in Saigon had been tolerated in their most self-defeating policies. It was as if the lessons of the past had already been forgotten at the top levels of our government.

Hopefully, with the passage of time and healing of the national trauma inflicted by the war, we will be able to give history its due, a complete and unflinching retrospective, extending beyond the platitudes and recriminations that till now have blinded so many of us to what actually happened to Vietnam, and to ourselves, in the two years following the Paris peace agreement. If we fail to seize the opportunity, and continue to treat Vietnam as an aberration, painfully remembered and best forgotten, particularly in its death throes, then we cannot hope to escape the kind of leadership both in the intelligence field and in the policy-making arena that made Saigon's "decent interval" such an indecent end to this American tragedy.