









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 if 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.

## Leaves from a Pocket Notebook

January 29, 1973: Long live the Vietnam peace, but keep your head down. Twenty-four hours after the cease-fire the outgoing's still rattling Saigon's windows.

Reports have it that the PRG delegates to the Joint Military Commission refused to disembark at Tan Son Nhut air base in protest over government customs regulations (to submit to them, they claim, would imply recognition of Thieu and his "clique"). To add to the confusion, the Hungarian and Czech representatives to the International Commission of Control and Supervision apparently are put out over their living accommodations at Tan Son Nhut. Thieu has offered them billets usually reserved for South Vietnamese army dependents, but the proletarians from Eastern Europe feel they deserve better.

Group of Poles downtown yesterday: they nearly broke their necks cranched after the local beauties. A bunch of them apparently got thoroughly blitzed in the "Golden Hands" Steam and Massage Parlor.

The first wave of prisoner exchanges went off like clockwork yesterday. No one in the Embassy seems interested. Despite the general elation about peace and all that, some of us are suffering a kind of lover's letdown. The man's all spent. No great storm and strife to justify further self-indulgence. The pleasures are becoming dully routinized. Each evening the same group of hard-bound colleagues gather at the rooftop bar on the restaurant at the Embassy for a few laughs and some booze. The jokes are as stale as popcorn, and promptly at 7 P.M. the usual swarm of bats materializes channel of activity over the swimming pool in the courtyard.

"It's hard to accept," the Vietnamese girl I had known during my previous year missed this afternoon over tea on the veranda of the Continental. "but the soothsayers around town say the Americans' time has come. Over you touch you now leave tainted and broken." She's an educated

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

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

The newly highlighted prospects for a political solution did not mean Polgar's drumfire about the military threat. Congress had yet to be persuaded of the need for additional aid, and he was determined to do his part. Consequently, we declassified and leaked to the press two recently captured Communist planning documents—with a commentary I had written—that were likely to convince any reader in Washington the North Vietnamese were coming over the hill. I also kept my briefings to visitors and other Embassy 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 line, a CIA colleague threw up his hands in dismay. "Good Christ!" he exclaimed. "You were telling us only a few weeks ago everything was secure. Now it's as though we're facing the final reckoning."

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

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

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

developing a separate scenario for the evacuation of the four military regions and, finally, Saigon. The procedural, rather than substantive, and a plan they retained was its arbitrary ceiling of no more than 6,800 in total, the majority

as the exercise continued, a DAO officer and asked him if he wanted to participate in the exercise. DAO was drawing up a contingency plan for the evacuation of high-ranking government officials and high-ranking government officials. I said no; he saw no reason to become involved in the military situation, he could not bring himself to have to be abandoned or that a full evacuation was a similar requirement.

majority of us in the Embassy labored over our alarmist propaganda, Ambassador Martin probably. In early February he packed up and left to help back up the Administration's position in the event of an arrival he began agitating among Administration contacts for a scheme close to his program sufficient to leave Saigon "economically empty."

President Ford formally endorsed the overall evacuation remained unimpressed. Schlesinger commented to a reporter, why not now? Corbett and several of the more cynical legislators commented that the next presidential election would be held after the next presidential election.

each sniping in stride. The trouble, he assured the aid proposal itself, but in Congress' perspective could be persuaded to send an official fact-finding mission into the situation, the opposition would melt away. In fact had long been in favor of such a mission. February it offered to postpone all hearings on the evacuation until the next presidential election. A few days, however, a flap developed over the resignation of Tom Harlin, a young Democratic Navy pilot in Vietnam, announced that his interview with Don Luce, constant critic of America in Vietnam's pet demons. Representative Belmont from Manhattan, disclosed she was planning to

# Pyrrhic Victories

Urban Martin now wanted to have it out once and for all. Since Congress was still playing coy with the Administration over the supplemental aid request, 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 Harbin and his controversial aid Don Pace 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 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 Barium and Ballykinnagh 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 readings 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—

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quest, he was convinced, as he later explained to me, that the only way to force  
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they also had more population and territory to protect. Therefore, they hardly be expected to wage war so frugally.

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

The trifling way we handled intelligence throughout this period was me deeply. Seldom had the Ambassador or Polgar had any qualms about declassifying and publicizing agent reports that might win support for national aid, but now, with the military situation so fluid and confused, 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 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 legality. Under the National Security Acts the CIA is expressly enjoined from involving itself in domestic politics in the United States. And yet every and briefing I prepared for the delegation was a feat in this direction. I had to 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 the military situation designed to convince the delegation the country was the verge of disaster. Even Martin found it a little extreme and asked Vien 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, 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 investigations therefore, immediately went to work on the suspects, extracting defensible numbers 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 CIA were struggling through last-minute exertions of their own. For days, we



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

When my own office colleague, Joe Kingsley, had first learned assignment, he had objected vehemently. Communist forces were on the move, he had told Polgar, they might be able to overrun Phan Rang without warning at all. But Polgar had refused to reconsider, and had merely said, "Taggart in Bien Hoa, who was 'control officer' for the mission, and James on location overnight if an attack against Phan Rang seemed likely. Incredibly, however, Taggart and Pritman, the backup man for Taggart, had failed to take even this precaution and had left James in Phan Rang after night despite the mounting Communist pressure. Taggart later justified this to me by insisting the Station had not kept him adequately informed of the developing threat at Phan Rang. He may have had a point, particularly in view of Polgar's reluctance to share alarming intelligence with his subordinates. James himself may also have contributed to the confusion, former Special Forces officer, he enjoyed a good fight and had neglected to keep Taggart or the Station as fully apprised of the evolving crisis as he should have.

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

At that moment Howard Archer, the former Nha Trang Base commander, walked in on us. Seizing the microphone, he asked James to describe the predicament. He then made a decision, one that left Kingsley and I stunned. James was to stay in place for the time being, he said, but we would send a chopper to assure us he was okay. So ended our last radio contact with Lew James.

When Communist forces moved into the city hours later, they captured Nghi and Sang under arrest. Liberation Radio soon disclosed the capture of 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. In Hanoi, the North Vietnamese were keeping silent about him until they discovered who he was.

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

and almost anyone else with an interest in ferreting out the Embassy's cover-up had long ago seen through them.\*

In James' case, the cover problem had been compounded by bureaucratic inertia. Within hours of his disappearance Station administrators discovered his name, but so one could be quite sure what his cover was, whether he had been given "Embassy employee" designation or something more elaborate.

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

The day after his capture NVA officers began grilling James on the spot. 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, asked him and the two South Vietnamese generals to Hanoi. There they pressed them up in Son Tay Prison, where countless American fliers had ended out their capture years before, and began putting James through intense 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 unequivocally 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 magnitude of those for whom he worked. The young CIA officer had been sent to 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 business of such "cover" apparently had never troubled CIA headquarters, at least not to prompt a change. With the departure of the U.S. military in the wake of the cease-fire, CIA had lost most of its military cover "holes" in Vietnam. (Many of us had been managed by civilian employees of the Army.) Since then, the personnel office in Langley had been unable to come up with 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 all 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 newsmen 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 waiting 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.

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and fell one story to the parapet around the roof of the building. He several broken bones and was medevacked out at once. As Moorehead stood in for the injured trooper, Moorehead wearily agreed.

"It really wasn't much of a job," he later explained. "As each little of evacuees got to the door leading up to the roof, I'd brief them, then 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 had, in over two days, except for that one hour I'd caught at home the night. But I knew I couldn't fall asleep. There was no one to take my place about our work with extreme care and attention. The prop blast from choppers was, of course, gale force, and since there were no guard rails on the pad, you had to be careful you didn't stumble and get blown over like the marine."

"At the edge of the roof the smokestacks from incinerators on the below were still going full blast, belching flames and smoke high into the And on takeoff the chopper pilots had to veer sharply away from them to being blinded. The scene kinda reminded me of a funeral pyre, the roof of Embassy flaring 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 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. The mama-sans were carrying away everything that wasn't bolted down—curtains, chairs, silverware, literally everything! The swimming pool was full with junk, and in the parking lot beside the restaurant all the abandoned automobiles were running. The looters were playing bumper cars with the "On the other side of the Embassy, out front in the street, I could see I believed to be VC political cadres haranguing the crowds. There'd be a ker-ration—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 advi-

ing that evacuation American Embassy must be completed before 0345 local 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, 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 fall 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 Whitmore 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 Operations (SAFRO) was technically in charge of the latter phase of evacuation, it is noteworthy that such a large number of his own evacuees failed to get out. That in itself provides a telling commentary on the 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 for years with our most comprehensive data on COSVN and its personnel. In late April, Jacobson had offered to evacuate him, but not his two sons, they were of draft age. The defector, needless to say, had refused to go without them.

Jacobson also bungled the evacuation of Nay Luette, the monist 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. Communist 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 for 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 1,000 of the Station's 1,900 "indigenous employees" were finally evacuated, together with 2,000 others—including family members—who had enjoyed private contacts with the agency over the years.

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

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

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

Tueter's fellow mountaineer tribesmen fared no better, though Jacobson certainly does not share the blame for this. Of the estimated 5,000 mountaineers who had escaped from the highlands in mid- and late-March, only around eighty had logged in at the Quang Nam-Despatch center as of 8 July 1975. As for Vietnam's other ethnic minorities: only about 100 Chinese Nung and forty northern Black Thai had turned up on Guam by the same date. Then, an unknown number have escaped from Vietnam on their own.

per 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 PRC personalities; the staff which maintained as our clandestine radio operators at the Embassy; the hundred or so 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 Lindert" 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 Gotschmann, who had previously worked in Saigon, and was later captured by a nameless friend, 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 and 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 Marbood'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 material 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 if 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 who had been involved in the evacuation and who knew of its failings and 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. Yet few of us could take any comfort from what actually did take place. If the Communists refrained from the most extreme "solutions," there is 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 the 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 doorway 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 an 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 Phan Hung and 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

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 buried 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 "jackboots of imperialism" and veterans of Thieu's puppet regime who refused "to repent their crimes"

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or who "owed blood debts to the people." The list read like a roster of 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 who 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 economy 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 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 for 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 dismantled, 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."

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 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, many Americans tried to forget about Vietnam altogether. The amnesia it had produced 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 bitter 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 there had been a chance for a negotiated settlement up until 27 April, when, upon, he maintained, the North Vietnamese had shifted course and opted for a military solution. He did not choose to acknowledge that the intelligence on 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 *Billeridge*, 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 ship-board, 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 ferry 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 chuffed 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 Wolfgang Lehmann and was treated to another shock. After a few minutes, 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 its 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, likewise, Colby and two top assistants met with one of them, attempted to clean 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 Jazyka 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 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 Moore, co-author of the Moose-Messner report for the Senate Foreign Relations Commi-

Brunson McKinley, Al Francis and several of Francis' own subordinates from Danang were given the State Department's highest award for valor. Major field, 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 myself, immediately set to work to rectify this injustice. Eventually, the list of awardees was expanded to include Moorehead, 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 naively, 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 revision 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 consequence 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.

In