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Torture, Death for CIA Operatives



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OFFICIALS of the CIA, whose lips have been sealed for two decades, are now beginning to talk about the clandestine operations of the Cold War.

They have told us grim tales of terrible torture, violent death, low treachery and high courage. In the 1950s, dozens of CIA infiltrators were slipped behind the iron curtain. Rarely did anyone make it back alive.

Invariably, they were caught and executed. But first, they were subjected to the most skillful torture the human mind has devised. Only after they were more dead than alive, the last fragment of information extracted from them, were they allowed to die, our sources report.

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WE GOT the first inkling of this from former Defense Secretary Clark Clifford, who once headed the civilian advisory board which watches over the CIA. He told us that undercover men had been caught and subjected to cruel torture. He praised these unsung heroes whose deeds, he said, surpass the most valorous in our history.

From other sources, we have now learned more about these daring infiltrators, some of them aliens, others Americans of East European ancestry. Some were parachuted behind the iron curtain; others slipped ashore from boats; some simply sneaked across the Iranian border on foot.

Using the Army as a cover, the CIA scoured military records to find servicemen and veterans who could speak Russian and other East European tongues. Those who could be recruited were given "hot training" in infiltration and espionage.

In addition to language experts, the CIA also keeps files on other contract workers with unusual professions. If a belly dancer or crop duster should be needed for a special assignment, the CIA can usually find a trusted operative on its lists. Our sources say that the locksmith's name, provided to the Watergate break-in team by the CIA, must have come from these lists.

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TWO KEY FILES are used by the CIA. One is the enormous "RI" (Records Integration) file, in which millions of names are meticulously cross-indexed. Almost every game the CIA has ever come across, innocent or suspicious, can be found in the "RI."

A more refined file, once called the "Staff D" index and more recently the "Green List," contains the names picked up from intercepted phone calls, opened mail, wiretaps and other surveillance activities.

In sworn testimony, CIA chief William Colby has said these files are vital to intelligence work, but he agreed some material obviously gets into the files by "mistake."

(Written with Les Whitten)