

UNCLASSIFIED

DAILY ENTERPRISE



(U) HISTORY TODAY - December 16, 2015

FROM: CCH

Run Date(s): 12/16/2015

(U) A look back: a COMINT solution to shortage of linguists



(U) One of the persistent problems in COMINT production has been the shortage of linguists. Particularly when an unanticipated crisis erupts, the production organization may not have any linguists fluent in a needed language, or may not have enough to cover the amount of traffic available.

(U) Often, NSA and the Service Cryptologic Components would seek to train military personnel in the language. It took considerable time, however, to set up a program at the Defense Language Institute, and managers recognized that linguists had to have experience in addition to schooling before they could be effective.

(U) Sometimes this lack has been made up by hiring temps. The pattern has been to hire native speakers of the newly required language, give them a limited security clearance, and put them to work away from the main COMINT location. The type of material they were given to transcribe or translate was carefully limited.

(U) In the Korean War, for example, the U.S. was fortunate to come across two South Korean COMINT units that had been adrift since the Republic of Korea Army disintegrated in the North Korean attack.

(U) A similar program was essential during the Cuban Missile Crisis and its aftermath, a number of Hispanics were hastily recruited and hired. The new recruits were U.S. citizens, but they were put to work on intercept before there was time to go through the normal clearance process.

(U) In 1964, NSA and the Service Cryptologic Components confronted a language problem in Vietnam. Prior to that time, most intercept had been in Morse Code. However, improved intercept acquired large volumes of voice cuts. The problem worsened when the Vinh Window opened in 1967, a COMINT source on infiltration from North Vietnam down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the south. (Read about the Vinh Window in [this History Today article from March 23, 2010.](#))



(U) Historical photo: office-bound DANCER transcriber.

(U) NSA and the Air Force Security Service (AFSS) discussed the possibility of using South Vietnamese native speakers of the language as transcribers. Once they agreed on the program, at NSA's insistence, a pilot effort was established in Saigon; the AFSS had wanted it at Da Nang, near the major AFSS collection site at Monkey Mountain.

(U) The South Vietnamese linguists were vetted by the Republic of Vietnam's SIGINT organization.

(U) The program in Vietnam was called DANCER. The Army Security Agency (ASA), predecessor to INSCOM, also took advantage of the DANCERS' language knowledge.

Approved for Release by NSA on 04-12-2019, FOIA Case # 84783

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

10/26/2018

(U) Eventually, the program was moved north to Da Nang, and another DANCER installation was set up at the ASA base at Phu Bai.

(U) Although the original task for the DANCERS was strictly language-oriented, many of them proved good at related tasks, such as traffic analysis, and they soon provided a wider range of cryptologic support. The ASA even went so far as to take DANCERS with them into the field for tactical intercept support.

(U) To discuss historical topics with interesting folks, visit the Center for Cryptologic History's blog, [History Rocks](#) ("go history rocks").

(U) Have a question or comment on *History Today*? Contact us at [DL cch](#) or

Information Owner
Page Publisher
Last Modified: December 15, 2015
Last Reviewed: December 15, 2015

~~DERIVED FROM: NSA/CSSM 1-52, DATED: 20180110, DECLASSIFY ON: 20430110~~
UNCLASSIFIED