

~~TOP SECRET UMBRA~~**Long Live the King (U)**(b)(1)
(b)(3)-50 USC 403
(b)(3)-18 USC 798
(b)(3)-P.L. 86-36

GENE BECKER

(U) The following article describes the role played by SIGINT (COMINT) in influencing the course of events in the Middle East in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The article will also show how the fate of nations may hinge on a single voice transcript or translation of a decrypted message and on the actions and initiative of a few dedicated linguists and cryptanalysts. I have been able to reconstruct the following accounts from the archival records and my own recollection and that of others who were there at the time.



(U) Beginning in the mid- and late 1950s and on into the '60s, the Middle East became a focal point of competition and contention between the West and the Soviet Bloc. At the height of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union maneuvered for advantage and influence in the region where the Arab-Israeli conflict was the dominant issue. The Soviet Union had seized the opportunity presented by the Suez crisis in 1956, which had sharply divided the U.S. and Britain and France, to inject itself into the region on the side of the secular or radical Arab nations led by the UAR. The latter more and more looked to the Soviet Union for political, economic, and military support in preparation for the eventual day of reckoning with Israel.

(U) U.S. policy toward the region attempted to strike a balance between support for Israel's existence and maintaining close ties with the traditionalist Arab states of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Morocco, and the Gulf States. This balancing act was frequently under severe strain as tensions between the Arabs and Israelis over the Palestinian issue threatened to and, as happened in 1967, actually did escalate into armed conflict. A major aim of U.S. policy was containing the Arab-Israeli dispute and maintaining stability in the area to preserve the vital flow of oil to the West.

(U) In this highly charged atmosphere, King Hussein of Jordan was a stabilizing force since, despite his overt support of the Palestinian cause and the principle of Arab unity, he helped to keep tensions and confrontations on Jordan's border with Israel from getting out of control. The Israelis, for their part, viewed Hussein as an enemy with whom they could coexist in an uneasy truce. The U.S., having superseded the United Kingdom as the

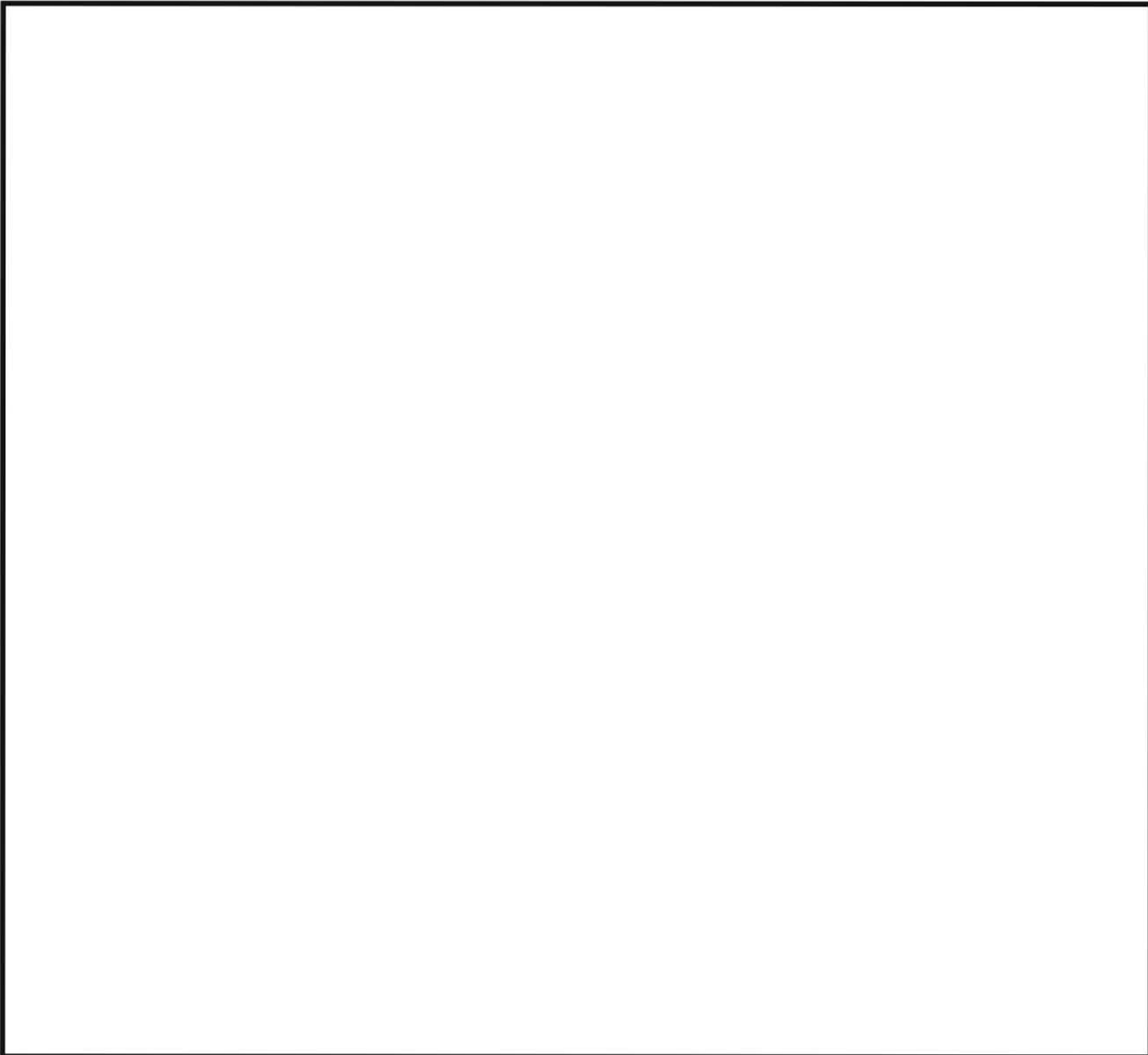
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principal power in the area, regarded King Hussein and the preservation of his regime as a vital element of U.S. Middle Eastern policy and as a key to preserving stability in the region.

(U) Egypt had emerged from the Suez crisis of 1956-57 as a major power in the Middle East and its leader, Gamal Abdul-Nasser, as a principal player on the stage of world politics. Nasser, emboldened by his success in defying the West and nationalizing the Suez Canal, forged a short-lived union with Syria called the United Arab Republic (UAR). The UAR welcomed Soviet offers of military and economic assistance and began the rapid buildup of its armed forces with the aim of providing the muscle for Nasser's ambitious goal of expanding the UAR's influence in the region.

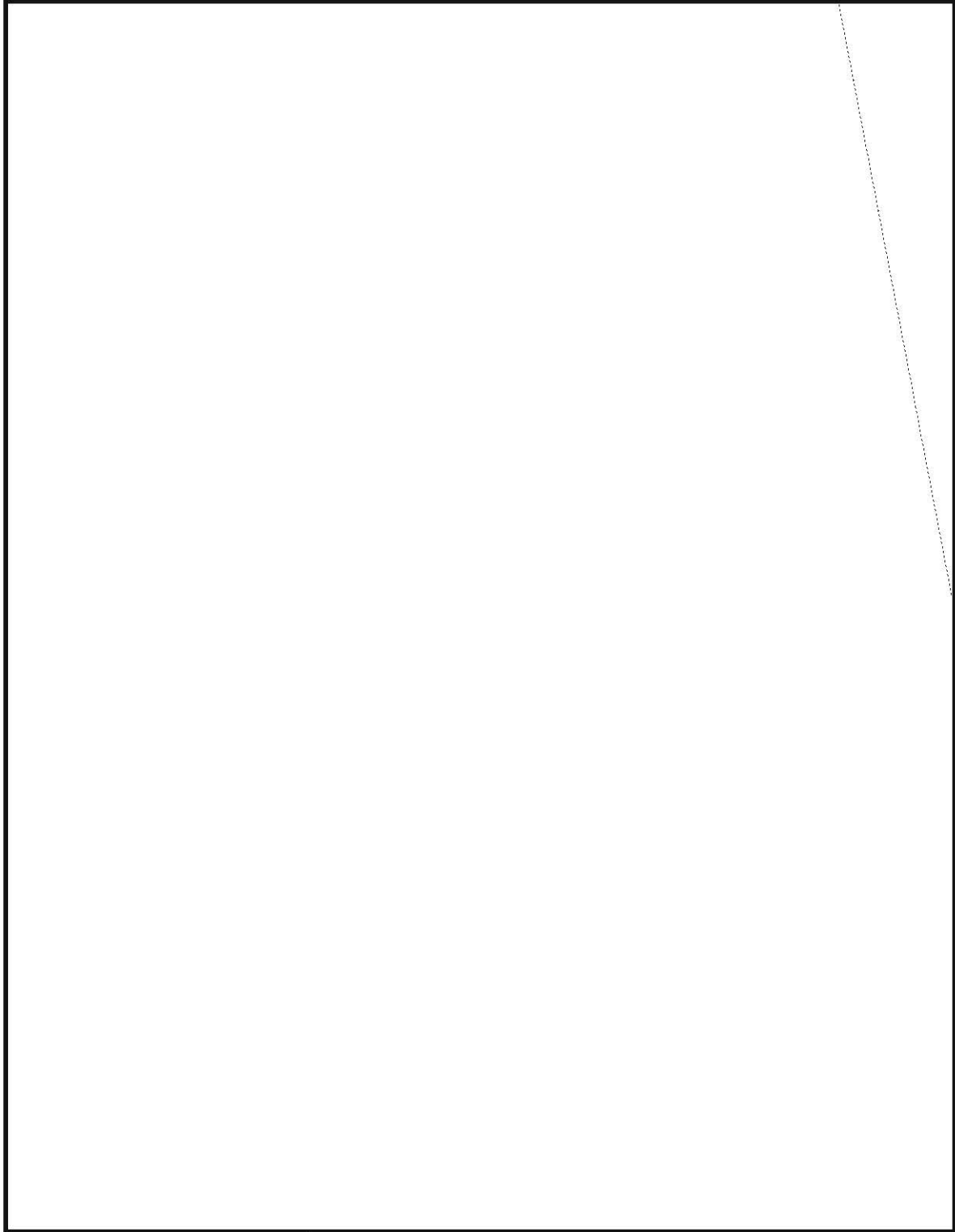


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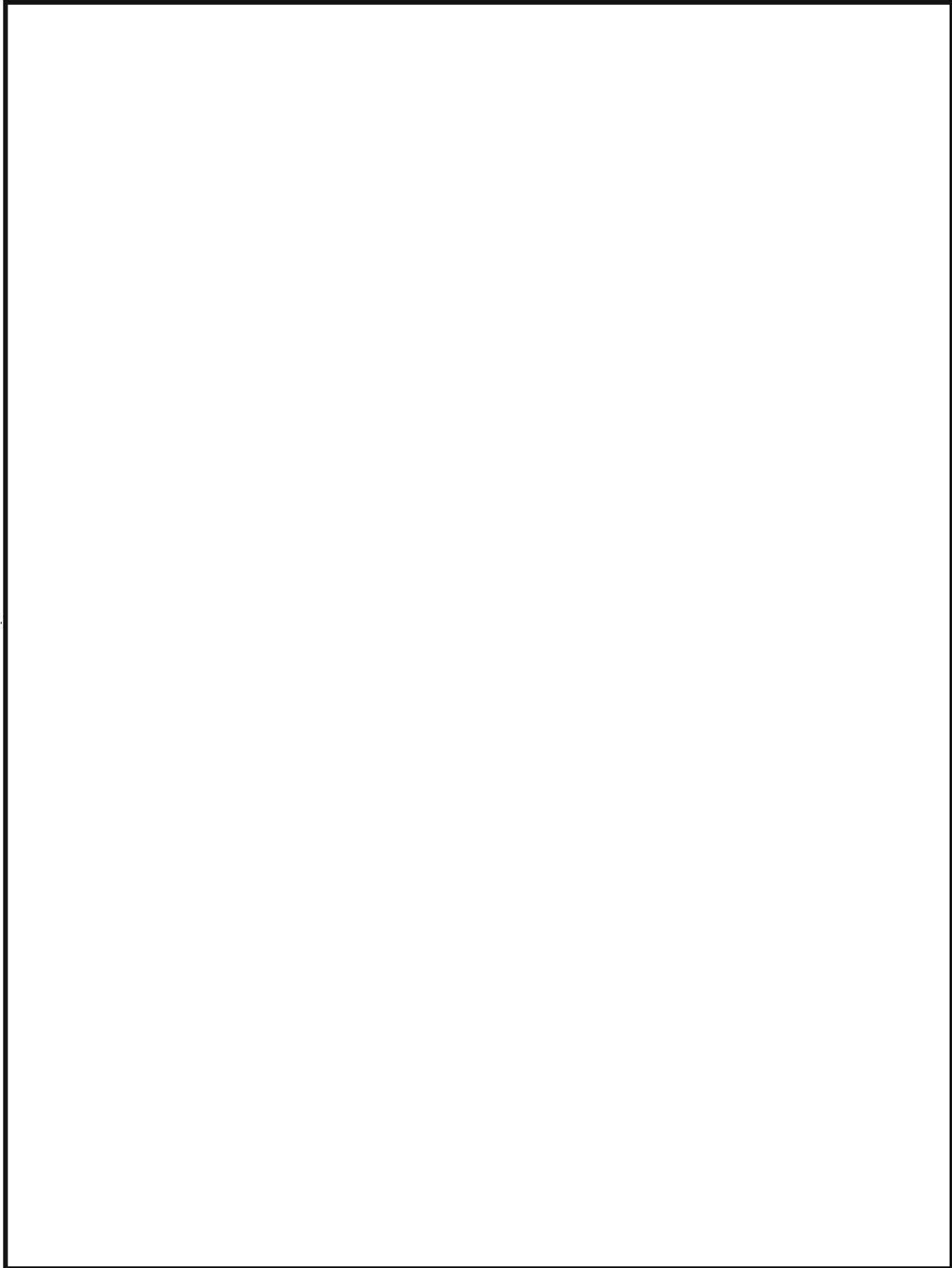
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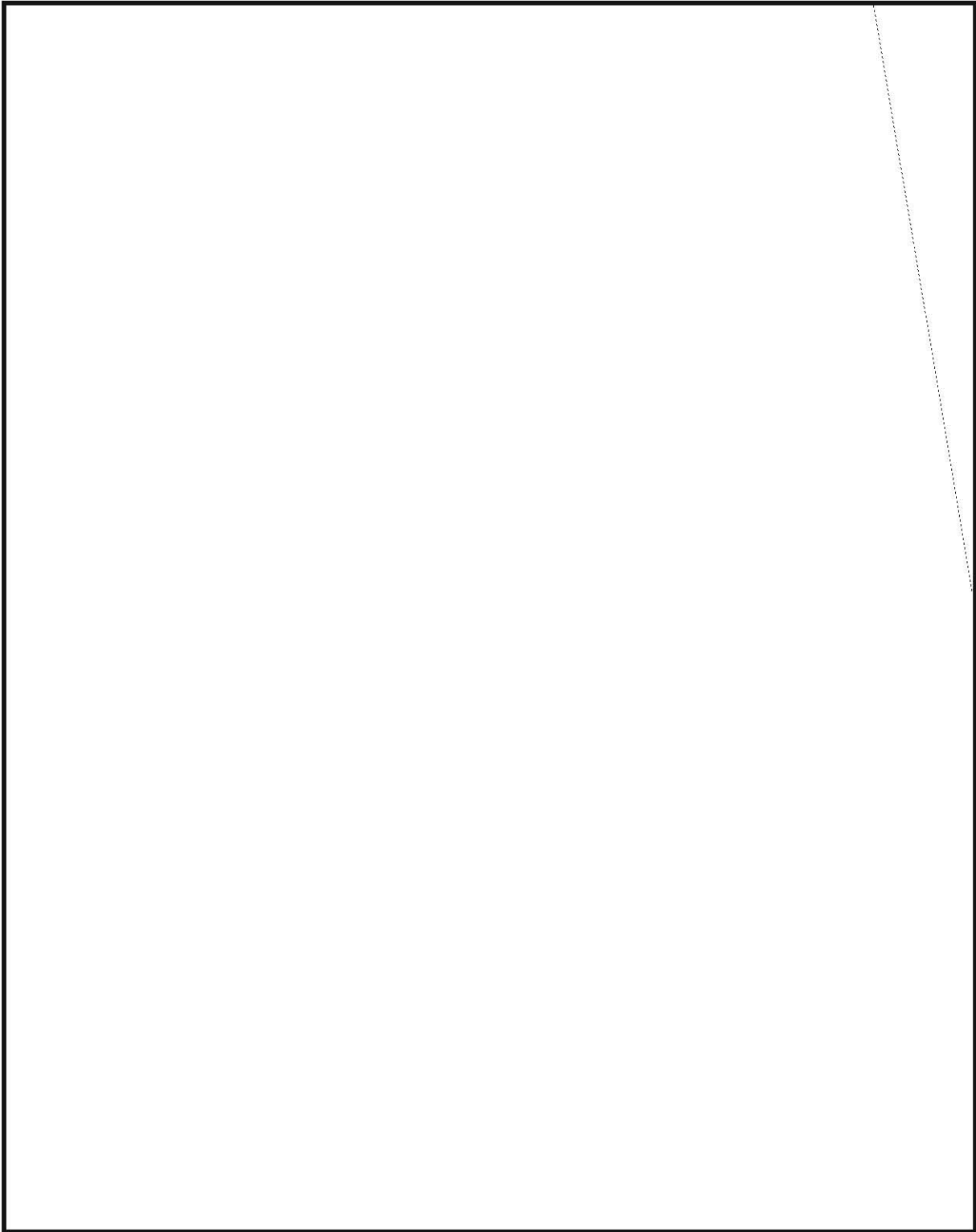
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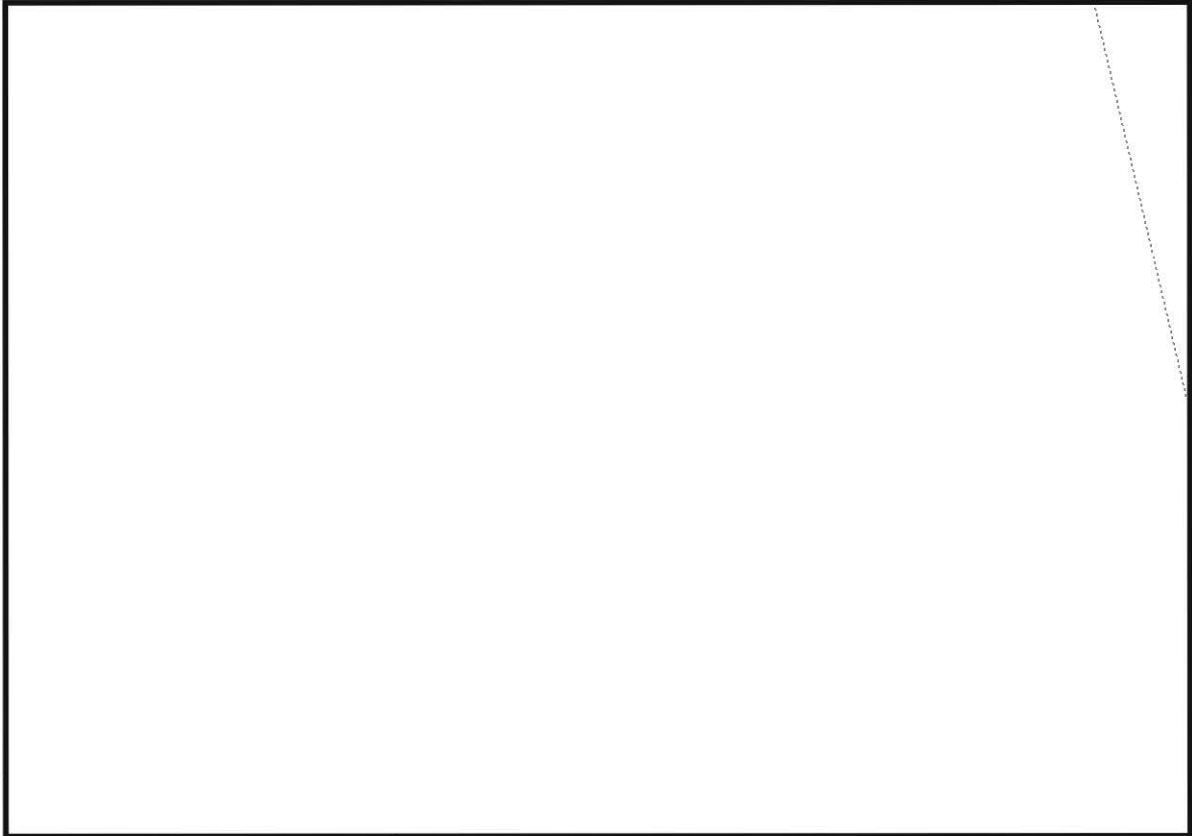
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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In preparing this article, I was not certain, after the passage of so many years, of just when the events I describe had occurred. Consequently, I had to scan hundreds and hundreds of classified messages in hard copy and on microfiche covering roughly the period 1958 through 1963 to find the few items I was seeking. I was assisted in my search foremost by [redacted] of the NSA Archives (she described me as her "worst nightmare"), who devoted hours of her time helping in the search; [redacted] who insured that I had whatever support I needed whenever I showed up; [redacted] and [redacted] who were always ready to pinch hit when Jeanette wasn't around; and the many others in the Archives who lent me their support. I wish to also thank Dave Hatch, chief of the Center for Cryptologic History, and Barry Carleen, [redacted] and [redacted] all of whom provided valuable assistance in the preparation of this article. [redacted] of M5 and [redacted]

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~~(FOUO)~~ Gene Becker retired in December 1993 after more than forty years of service with the Agency. He held a number of key positions during his career, including Deputy Director for Administration, Director of Training, and Inspector General. He was a member of the Senior Executive Service and a recipient of numerous awards, including the Presidential Distinguished Executive Rank Award, the National Intelligence Distinguished Service medal, and the Agency's Exceptional Service Award.

Derived from: NSA/CSSM 123-2,
Dated 3 September 1991
Declassify On: Source Marked "OADR"
Date of Source: 3 Sep 91