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A History of U.S. Civilians in Field Comint Operations, 1953-1960

Part II

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PROD's CIFCO Task Group, April 1957

When the SCA's adopted positions so contrary to PROD's recommendations, the Director, PROD, stood by his own views. He convened another Task Group wholly within PROD and charged it with considering allocations of funds and billets, administrative procedures, career ladders, rotation systems, selection of overseas stations, and selection of the specific duties to be performed by civilians there.

The Task Group, headed by [redacted] of COLL, submitted a majority report in April 1957 that differed from the existing CIFCO (A) Program in three respects: (1) at the national center, administrative control would rest within PROD rather than PERS; (2) in the field, the chiefs of NSA field activities would be largely responsible for administration in their theaters; and (3) the civilian personnel would be confined to experts in skills which the SCA's could not obtain, or retain. A minority report did not favor a centrally located CIFCO Management and Control Desk, recommending that specialized civilian jobs attached to the NSA field activities should be administered in the same way as other jobs there. PROD elements were already manning 70-80 such billets regularly, and could foresee no advantage in handling the new positions in a different fashion. The view of the minority might have been different, as they acknowledged, if the program had applied not only to specialists but also to regular civilian intercept operators in large numbers.

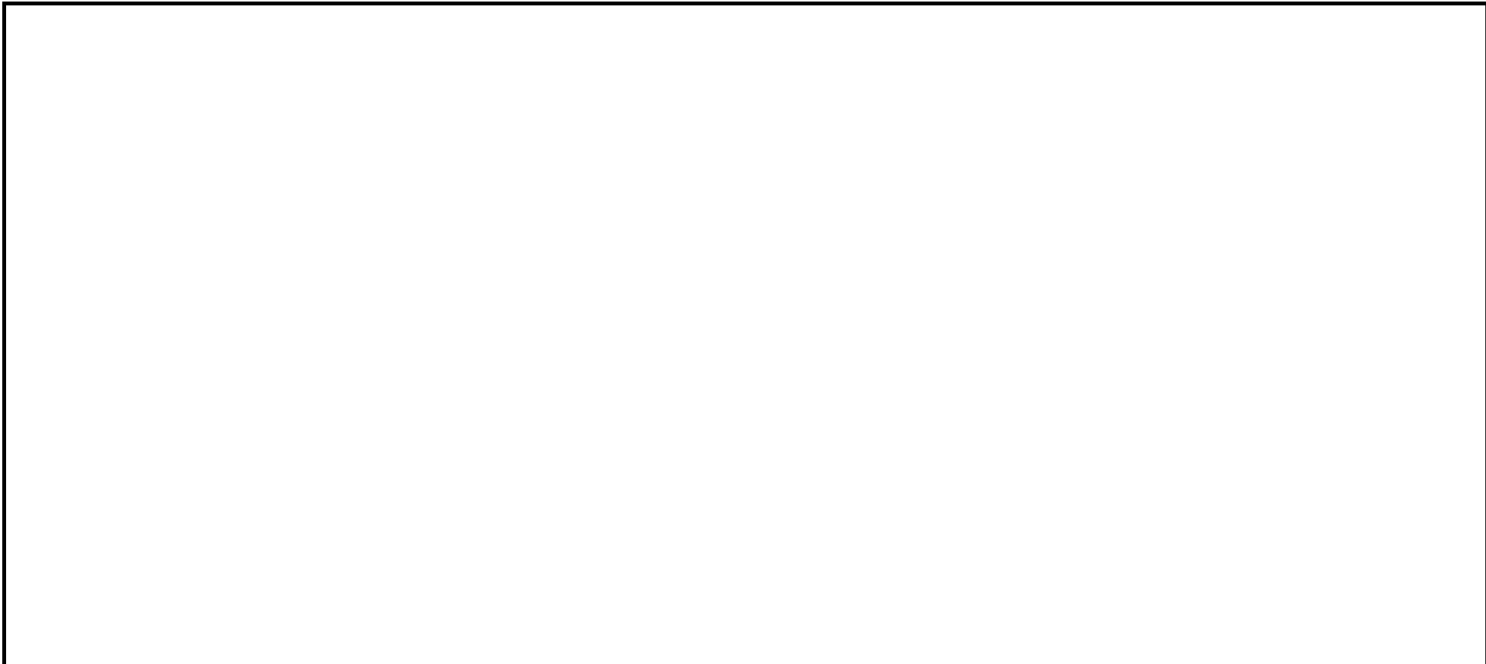
Operational control over CIFCO personnel exercised by an SCA station commander would be subject to the Terms of Reference for each position. Chiefs of NSA field activities were to monitor utilization of CIFCO personnel

to insure that no misassignments persisted. All official communications between a CIFCO civilian and Headquarters, NSA, would pass through the station commander and the chief of the appropriate NSA field activity.

Members of the Task Group believed that they had conceived a plan which would promote professionalism, establish a group of career technicians who possessed rare and valuable skills, and place no impediments in the path of service plans for career military personnel. Moreover, they believed their recommendations would lead to the availability of personnel resources to cope with temporary emergencies in which the individual SCA needed assistance.

The Robertson Committee, and its Role in the Use of Civilians in Overseas Comint Operations

During 1957 and 1958, the use of civilians in Comint operations overseas was the subject of extensive consideration by the Robertson Committee, its Committee of Alternates, and its Subcommittee (VI). In their many-faceted approach to the goal of economy and efficiency in Comint operations, professionalization was an important route. The Committee of Alternates showed enough interest in the establishment of one or more all-civilian NSA intercept stations to encourage the NSA member, Mr. Frank C. Austin (OPS), to call on PERS to produce a plan satisfactory to NSA in a form which would interest that committee. However, before the plan was completed, and as an outgrowth of the Robertson Committee's attention to the problem of resources, the Deputy Secretary of Defense instructed DIRNSA to undertake a new, experimental civilian operator program.



NSA's CIVOP Plan of January 1958

Within the Agency, preparation of the 1958 plan was handled by PROD, particularly COLL-04, and tended to sidetrack attention to the planning of an all-NSA intercept station. The document which emerged on 30 January 1958 in letters to the three services was a tentative proposal that NSA man nine different kinds of positions and provide electronic maintenance specialists in numbers varying among certain specified stations of each SCA. A total of 156 positions would be reached by annual increments over a period of five years; the requirements imposed on the SCA's under the expanded intercept program would be correspondingly lightened. The bulk of the civilian positions would be morse general search and three types of scrambler.

NSA took the position that the best results would come from placing the men in compartmented NSA units at existing stations rather than reserving them for stations operated by NSA. The Agency was ready, however, to embark on a course involving the operation of a civilianized station [redacted] when conditions made that feasible, and even more stations in [redacted] when it became necessary for U.S. Armed Forces to withdraw. The billets and funds for the NSA civilian operators were to be sought from the Secretary of Defense.

The plan endeavored to meet the view of the SCA's by keeping the NSA employees in a unit and using them apart from the military personnel at the various stations. Tactical Comint and Comint of sole interest to a single service

ordinarily would not come within the scope of the program. Each unit would have a specific and complete task within the station's mission. The NSA operators would be concerned with complex target communications which required highly specialized training and skills for their interception, which were in the common-intercept area. NSA analytic technicians would be included in units where the civilian intercept operators required on-the-spot analytic support. Operational, technical and administrative responsibilities over the units would be exercised by NSA, although all their results would be immediately available as the operations of a station required. Logistic support of each unit would be a responsibility of the services, through the station commander.

The new CIFCO Program attempted to meet the requirement placed upon DIRNSA by the Deputy Secretary of Defense in a manner which took account of the SCA's objections to any extensive use of NSA civilian operators at their intercept stations.

The Robertson Committee considered the NSA five-year plan to have 156 intercept positions operated on exacting tasks by NSA civilians (ultimately from 1,000 to 1,200) and an alternate proposal by Subcommittee (VI) to establish 23 positions manned by 204 civilians during the following year. But the Committee finally endorsed only the agreement between NSA and the SCA's. Instead of intercept operators, it identified three categories of civilians who could be used to good effect: (1) analysts, mechanics, and personnel with similar skills; (2) technical consultants

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specializing in general search, technical search, and [redacted] activities, including pairs of analysts to work with each operational shift when they were needed; and (3) "roving teams" [redacted]

[redacted] This third category would test sites, equipments and techniques and be available for assignment to "crash" collection projects. The Committee obtained statements of firm requirements for technical consultants but concluded that in the other two categories the number, types and stations would be subject to fluctuating needs and should be determined by agreement between NSA and the SCA involved.

The Robertson Committee went beyond the previous agreement, however, by concluding that, on balance, a centralized administration by NSA of all three categories of civilians would be preferable to individual service plans. Having based that appraisal on considerations of effectiveness, the Committee inserted a remark acknowledging the prerogative of a service to employ its own civilians.

The "Centralized Program"

The NSA CIVOP Program which was proposed to the SCA's in January 1958 as an implementation of the Deputy Secretary of Defense's instructions went into an eclipse the following June. What came to be called the "Centralized Program" superseded it. Since the bulk of the personnel would not be intercept operators, but specialists in other activities, responsibility for the "Centralized Program" was shifted from COLL-04 to PROD-04. The SCA's were asked to review the requirements that they had defined for the Robertson Committee and then to confer with representatives of NSA at the end of June 1958.

During the following summer, representatives from NSA and the SCA's negotiated concerning the types of civilian specialists to be used and the places where they should be assigned. ADVA in particular expressed strong interest in utilizing civilian experts to collect traffic of concern to that office from major links in both Europe and the Far East.

Two obstacles to agreement were encountered. Although the Naval Security Group was prepared to support the Robertson Committee's recommendations, both the other SCA's resisted the concept of a Centralized Program. Rather, they wanted to acquire their own civilian employees. To obtain them they sought transfers from the rolls of NSA by men already overseas up to the limit of the billets provided by their services. Requirements which could not be met under this arrangement would be satisfied by the loan of NSA civilians. However, the scarcity of competent men in several of these specialties was severe, and NSA was reluctant to release or loan them.

Before the end of the year, PROD encountered budget and personnel restrictions at the same time that it was charged by USIB with contributing maximum results to intelligence [redacted]

Consequently, new billets and funds for the overseas civilians were not forthcoming from the Department of Defense; rather, they had to be taken from resources allocated to NSA elements. Requirements for the expanded intercept program for each of the SCA's were also cut back, and the Centralized Program was, of necessity, abandoned.

Plans for an NSA Intercept Station

Plans for an all-civilian NSA intercept station [redacted] were carried forward by NSA during the summer of 1958. ASA planned to relinquish its station at [redacted] and AFSS was to give up a larger base at [redacted]. Both sites were considered, but a third, at [redacted] was preferred, in order to be near the NSA Field Activity, Pacific. The Director approved the [redacted] site for planning purposes.

A shrinkage of funds and billets undermined NSA's ability to establish 15 positions [redacted] for operation by NSA civilians. But early in 1959, the momentum behind the concept of a CIVOP or CIFCO program brought about the establishment of [redacted]

[redacted] For PROD, COSA was the executive agent in managing [redacted] although COSA, ADVA, GENS and ACOM provided billets and named incumbents. It was a base from which "roving teams" of intercept specialists could go to SCA units to assist with difficult problems, and a base for training service personnel in operating new and complex collection systems. New types of radio equipment, systems, and antennas were also operationally tested there. Late in 1959, it was redesignated the [redacted]

In the European area, [redacted] was approved by DIRNSA on 4 May 1960. It became known as the [redacted]

[redacted] However, opposition from Chief, ASA, Europe, to an NSA overseas operating unit resulted in dual control by CHNSAEUR and CHUSASAEUR, effective 1 July 1960. The latter was to exercise command, the former operational and technical control.

Summary of CIFCO Projects, 1953-1960

Civilians began participating overseas in Comint operations (on more than TDY trips), and more were added by the establishment of NSA area field activities. Though the number increased with expansion of the U.S. intercept and field-processing effort, it remained small.

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When deployment of civilians to intercept stations was proposed after the Pilot test had begun in 1955, the SCA's rejected it in favor of continued reliance on military operators. As communications electronics became more complex, however, the SCA's accepted NSA civilian technical specialists able to cope with the advances. The SCA's also endeavored to have them transferred to their own rolls, except in the Naval Security Group.

One reason for opposition to the CIVOP Pilot Program that began in 1955 was the interspersal of military with civilian intercept operators at the stations. The new NSA CIVOP Plan of 1958 attempted to remedy this problem by separating NSA civilians from military personnel at the SCA stations; however, that too was opposed. When NSA planned to establish an intercept facility [redacted] [redacted] as a component or neighbor of NSAPAC, that project drew opposition from the SCA's. Finally, NSA

created units of specialists in [redacted] European area [redacted].

Utilization of civilians in field Comint operations under the Centralized Program tended to become simply another aspect of the staffing of area field activities. As matters stood at the close of Fiscal Year 1960, the field activities were standing up under strong incentives to reduce their personnel strengths, and SCA intercept positions were still being manned predominantly by recently trained one-tour military operators.

George F. Howe retired in 1971 after serving over fifteen years as NSA Historian. He is the author of many studies and histories of cryptologic operations, a biography of Chester A. Arthur, a history of the United States, and the official Army history of U.S. operations in North-west Africa in World War II.

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