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GLENN L. CARLE

THE INTERROGATOR

AN EDUCATION

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THE INTERROGATOR

To my father and mother, who taught me to question everything, to accept nothing because others do, to be willing to change my mind—and that right and wrong are independent of authority or convention

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PREFACE: LYING, HONOR, AND THE GRAY WORLD

I was a spy. I broke laws. I stole. I lied every day, about almost everything: to my family, to my friends, to my colleagues, to everyone around me. I almost never was who I said I was, or did what I claimed to be doing. Sometimes I was not American. I exploited people's deepest hopes, won their deepest trust, so that they provided me what my government wanted. I was an angel who made men's dreams come true, but my name was Faust.

I healed a father's desperately ill child, helped a frustrated employee do in his boss, or the organization that slighted him. I was sometimes a revolutionary, nodding my head as some worked to overthrow oppressive governments; sometimes I sympathized with racists; sometimes I suppressed insurgents. I was suave, intellectual, and sophisticated, talking over sparkling glasses in salons with elegant women in low-cut designer dresses, appetizing curves, and high heels, smiling at banalities as we looked past each other. I bounced around mines in a jeep, carried a weapon, wore a *keffiyah* over my face to conceal my identity and offer a less obvious Western target to snipers, spat, swore a lot, scratched my crotch, slapped my buddies on the back, and almost got shot.

Some were ruined from what I did. Some were saved; others died. Few of the living, and none of the dead, knew I had anything to do with their fates. I burgled. I listened in on men's whispered and rustled secret lives, to what they did and hoped and feared behind closed doors—the inner lives, revelatory pettinesses and quirks we all mask during the hours of light and company—so that I could manipulate them, and perhaps help them realize their private perversities. I was faceless, all-powerful, and impotent: I was unknown but could destroy people's lives or cause an international scandal, and yet often I could not even control minor details of my daily life. I held babies and soothed their fears, wiped their tears, burped them, and kept them safe.

Desperate and good men looked to me in hope. I was a shoulder to cry on, and a spur for quiet action against injustice. I was a cynic, helping near sociopaths act upon their amoral and destructive impulses. I laughed at and took advantage of dignified officials willingly abasing themselves naked on their hands and knees, wearing collars around their necks and leashes as they crawled on the floor, barking. I paid people off. I deluded men and convinced them they were acting against the United States, or one of their personal enemies, when in fact they were serving me and my country, so that we could undermine the causes in which they believed. I was a bureaucrat, and faceless, and powerless, and confused.

I made it possible for American children to sleep safe at night, and for American adults to ignore that I existed or to disdain or hate me, and to forget or never learn that the world was full of men and forces that would harm or destroy them, and our way of life. I have been called "war criminal" and "hero" to my face. I thrived in ambiguity, saw through others' eyes, saw every color of the rainbow, and realized that all the colors are just slightly different shades of gray.

All the while, to all but my colleagues I was just a wholesome, stereotypical New England Yankee, a former athlete struggling against middle age, someone always with his nose in an abstruse book, assessing, say, obscure pseudo-philosopher René Guénon's eighty-year-old musings about the death of God in modern society and how Guénon inspired Muslims to fly planes into skyscrapers. I would often seek refuge while alone somewhere—in a garret in

the red-light district of Paris, or beside a latrine outside Kabul, or in the CIA cafeteria during lunch—in my New England roots, with Emerson, say, and then realize that Emerson was an echo of Buddha and Siddhartha, their ideas brought back to Boston and New Bedford by missionaries and traders much as the West had been reborn centuries earlier from the returning Crusaders, inseminated by their Muslim adversaries, and betters. Carle? He's a nice guy. Normal. He likes the Red Sox. Hockey player. He lacks focus. Reads a lot. Smart. Arrogant. Unsure of himself. Both? His kids play baseball and ride horses.

It is hard to be a spy. I was one for twenty-three years. Yet, my colleagues and I share a devotion to mission, to ideals larger than ourselves, that inspired us to join the Agency, and then to serve for our careers. America is better served than it knows by its intelligence officers. Reflective people will usually seek meaning in actions and a framework for life larger than one's self. Many find fulfillment in the military, social service, or teaching. I found a direction, a way to get beyond myself, in public service, as a spy. I loved my work, even when I was bored, and even when I failed. Intelligence officers fail often, while successes come slowly and sporadically. And through it all, over the decades, many of them far away and alone, I always honored my oath, acted with integrity, protected and defended the Constitution of the United States, and never lost sight of home, or of human decency.

And yet, sometimes one finds more than one seeks. I sought mental, substantive, policy-relevant, moral, and physical challenges in my career. The Agency hires its case officers in part for their ability to thrive in ambiguity, to see clearly what decision to make, where all decisions contradict one's values and obligations; it chooses officers who will make the honorable and right decision beyond one's chain of command, when one is out of sight of anyone else, and when no decision is "right."

I love the "gray world." It is multifaceted and complex, obscure—and hard. It transcends the lie of moral purity, of good and evil, of a simple world. This is our daily challenge, if we are honest: to accept doubt, to realize there is no certainty, and yet to act with principle, finding meaning and purpose in confusion. Inhabiting the "gray world" with clear eyes has often fulfilled me.

And then I was "surged" to become an interrogator in the Global War on Terror. I traveled to a far and dark place, where I found the limits of human endurance, that zeal can blight integrity, and that with a "terrorist's" life in my hands—and perhaps the lives of many Americans—alone I had to decide how to fulfill my mission, what was legal, what was right . . . and at what point I had to oppose the orders of an administration whose actions corrupted the flag I had sworn to serve.

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INTRODUCTION: WHICH FLAG DO YOU SERVE?

"Joe, I don't do nuance."

—President Bush, *Time*, February 15, 2004

Il n'y a que les fous qui soient certains et résolus.
(Only fools are certain and resolved.)

—Montaigne, *Essais*, *I.26*

My involvement with what some will consider torture began as I was working at my desk on the second floor of CIA Headquarters, about 9:15, a normal Indian Summer morning in 2002. My papers, interview notes with senior officers about how to improve leadership behavior and skills among the CIA's Directorate of Operations (DO) officers, were strewn about my desk.

The chief of my component poked his head inside my office.

"Glenn. Good morning."

This was a surprise. Rob Richer, then the Directorate of Operations Chief of Human Resources, and later Associate Deputy Director of Operations,

never came back to my end of the office suite. One of the only other times he had done so I had asked him, "What are you doing here, slumming?" He had smiled after a moment, at first bemused, thinking my comment had made no sense whatsoever.

"Good morning," I said, looking up.

Rob never spent more than five seconds on small talk and was always in hurried, if good-natured, highly focused motion.

"How's your language? It's about a three level?"[1]

Three level in a language, according to the CIA's language scale, is supposed to be that of a university-educated speaker, who makes some errors and has a distinct accent, but can conduct a professional or a social meeting. A Foreign Service or CIA officer will not be assigned overseas to a designated "language use position"—a slot that requires language ability to perform one's job successfully—until he or she attains a three level or above.

Something was up. Why was he at my office, asking me about my language ability? My language skills had nothing to do with my current assignment. This was not the time to make some wiseass or self-deprecating remark that shaped others' perceptions of my abilities or character. I looked him in the eye and spoke calmly, with as much matter-of-fact authority as I could muster.

"No, I speak the language very well. I'm really a five. It's very good. Depending on the circumstances, sometimes I am taken for a native speaker."

Five level in a language is what a university-educated native speaker of a language with no or almost no accent speaks. By the Department's standards, Henry Kissinger might not receive a five in English. I had a very slight accent and made occasional errors; sometimes native speakers recognized me as foreign after the first word out of my mouth. My language was not perfect, but it was outstanding. Certainly I was one of the best speakers of the language in the DO, although I decided not to say this just yet to Rob. I did not want to come across as over-eager and boastful.

"Can you go TDY?[2] There is an urgent need for a case officer who is an excellent linguist. It would be for thirty days, as an initial deployment. It could

1 The CIA redacted which language was mentioned.

2 TDY: temporary duty. This is the ubiquitous CIA, military, and Department of State acronym for any official trip.

extend well beyond that. How would a TDY affect your family?" Rob was alluding to my wife's serious illness of the previous couple of years.

"Well, I'll have to call Sally. I think it would be fine."

He looked at me. "Call your wife. Let me know before noon. I'm not promising anything, but I'll let you know. This is important for the Agency, and it could be important for you, too."

Rob didn't have to tell me it was important for me. The DO had been running flat-out all around the world since 9/11, in the biggest series of programs since the Vietnam War, if not in its history. Almost all operations allowed some lead time to prepare. This one did not. Obviously he was debating taking me out of my nonoperational, Headquarters assignment and "surging" me into a sensitive, important operation for the Global War on Terror (GWOT in Agency parlance). He was also giving me an assignment that would begin, perhaps, the long, tentative process of rehabilitating me for operational work, a year after I had made a career-harming mistake in the field and been brought back to Headquarters to work for him. That was why he had added the assignment "could be important for you, too." But, for anyone this was the kind of opportunity every officer hoped for, and that came one's way only once or twice in a career, if ever. Almost no one wants to work at Headquarters, especially during a time of national crisis. The whole point of signing up was to try to be the pointy end of the spear. I sensed a sharp edge ahead.

This would be my third opportunity to become involved in a war. I had been deeply involved in the Contra-Sandinista operations early in my career, working for a time on a special project for Alan Fiers, Chief of our Central American Task Force. The job was fascinating, and a superb opportunity for a very junior officer. Most career trainees do interim training assignments that consist of filing, reading the flow of traffic to learn the ropes, doing "scutt work"—menial tasks like photocopying, or looking up phone numbers—around the office or, if they are fortunate, conducting traces—file checks—of individuals of interest. I worked directly for the chief, in the task force's front office. While most of my fellow trainees were rooting about the file room in the bowels of Headquarters, looking for records to establish whether the Agency had ever met a particular individual prior to that week and, if so, whether the individual was of "operational interest" or had "derogatory information" in his

file that the field would need to know about, Fiers sent me on TDY assignment to Costa Rica and Honduras, and on various errands down to the Office of the Secretary of Defense or the West Wing of the White House to hand-deliver a document to National Security Advisor Admiral John Poindexter.

Among the reasons I won such a significant assignment was that Fiers wanted a case officer (C/O)[3] with strong academic credentials who, in theory, could write better than the average C/O and who had Spanish skills, too; this proved to be one of the few times during my career in the DO that my degree obtained something for me other than good-natured (and sometimes not so good-natured) ribbing about being a "Harvard man," witticisms along the lines of "*What* are you doing here? Couldn't you get any other job?" or "You *are* a throwback to an earlier era, aren't you? Those days are done now. . . ." It is not especially career-enhancing in the DO to appear too cerebral, to read too many books; in this way, at least, I was always a slightly different-colored horse in the DO. I spent twenty-three years trying, but failing, to mask my reading habits from my peers.

I had a presage of this nascent hallway reputation my first day in San José, Costa Rica. I knew no one in the station and had sent only a routine one- or two-sentence cable from Headquarters describing the reason for my visit and requesting Chief of Station (COS) approval for my TDY:

> C/O SPORTINK[4] REQUESTS PERMISSION TO TDY TO COSTA RICA AND HONDURAS ON SUCH AND SUCH A DATE, TO MEET WITH COS AND OFFICERS INVOLVED IN [the issue I was working on] . . .

Midway through my first meeting with a second-tour C/O close enough in age and rank to speak with me as a peer, we took a little break and chatted

3 In DO usage one generally writes "C/O's" for the plural, rather than "C/Os," a senseless legacy, I think, of the days when the DO's cable and encryption system was transmitted by radio, and perhaps typed in by someone who did not distinguish possessives from plurals.

4 SPORTINK is a pseudonym. We always used our pseudonym, never our true name, in cable traffic. At work, I was never known as Glenn, always by my pseudonym. Mine was a somewhat strange-sounding name, similar to SPORTINK, which made me sound vaguely ethnic, a little irony for the quintessential WASP. Of course, this led to colleagues calling me from time to time, "Hey, Rinky-Dink!"

over coffee. The ice had been broken, and our initial business conversation had established in his eyes my bona fides as a legitimate and solid C/O, not as some ferreting and unwelcome outsider. He told me that he and his colleagues had been wondering why Headquarters seemed to be sending some "professor" down to the station to pry into their work. I still have not figured out how my simple, one-sentence, declaratory cable could possibly have given that impression. I think that there must have been a back-channel cable saying that I was coming to interview people, and that must have created the "professor" impression. We got on fine, conducted our business, and I had a successful TDY. Establishing a fellow officer's bona fides in direct conversation—measuring him or her personally and not relying on formal, guarded, and largely bloodless traffic or authorizations—is standard DO culture. Yet, this business of somehow conveying a slightly more intellectual character than the norm in the DO was to recur over the years. It helped me with the brighter of my peers (of whom there are many), and from time to time did not help me so much with a few of my knuckle-dragger colleagues. All groups have their cliques, tribal allegiances, and thumbnail judgments.

And yet, having a nature (and hallway reputation) that crossed the culture line from the quasi-military "can-do" approach of the DO into the intellectual bent of the Directorate of Intelligence (DI) was a major factor two decades later in my appointment as Deputy National Intelligence Officer (DNIO) for transnational threats (i.e., terrorism) on the National Intelligence Council, one of the three seniormost officers for terrorism analysis in the intelligence community (IC).[5] My career as a C/O in the field and as DNIO for terrorism was highly unusual, as few officers can cross or are interested in crossing from one career specialization to another, particularly at such a senior level, coordinating and shaping the work of the sixteen agencies and for years writing many of the National Intelligence Estimates on terrorism.

5 I was Acting National Intelligence Officer for transnational threats for four months, then Deputy for the remainder of my tenure on the National Intelligence Council. There was one other deputy with me most of my time there; thus, I was one of the three most senior officers for terrorism analysis in the U.S. government. We had a third deputy with us for the last six months or so of my time there.

In the end, Fiers was one of the victims of the Iran-Contra scandal. On July 9, 1991, years after I had moved on to subsequent assignments, he pleaded guilty to two misdemeanor counts of withholding information from Congress about secret efforts to aid the Nicaraguan Contras. He was later pardoned by the first President Bush. A number of our officers were indicted from the fallout of the CIA's involvement in Ollie North's schemes, several of whom had been my colleagues or superiors (everyone was a superior of mine at that stage of my career . . .). I had had a stroke of luck when Iran-Contra exploded: Still a trainee (CT in DO parlance) during my time working for Fiers on the Central American Task Force, I appeared on no manning tables. I did not formally exist. I could feel anonymous compassion from a distance for the travails of my erstwhile colleagues and superiors, finish my training, and get on with my career without becoming involved in the after-fiasco investigations and commissions.

The second "surge" situation that had come my way was during the war in Bosnia, in late 1995. I was offered the chance to work in the Bosnian war zone in the wake of the Dayton Peace Accords. In standard surge practice, the DO was going to rotate officers through the assignment for several-month TDYs. Such assignments can make a career, as well as be the most challenging and meaningful assignments one can find. Standard DO advice on how to get promoted has always been to "go where the bombs go off." When promotion panels sift through our files and compare an officer who did a solid job in Beirut, say, with an officer who did a solid job in a city in Europe, the inclination is invariably to reward the officer who has filled the more dangerous or arduous assignment. This is one of the reasons that NE officers—officers from the DO's Near East Division—have for decades been the cocks of the walk in the DO, with faster promotions on the whole, and more senior assignments.

The psychiatric evaluations for prospective case officers when you apply to the Agency harp on stressful situations, to see how stable we are, I suppose, and to measure our respective ways of perceiving and handling stress. "Would you mind sleeping in a jungle without any soap, for days on end?" This question and variants cropped up over and over in the long written psychological questionnaire. Most questions were straightforward: "Do you like crowds? Rate how much on a scale of 1 to 4. . . . Have you ever been institutionalized?"