

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

All employees of the Central Intelligence Agency must sign a confidentiality agreement that requires that they submit their writings to the CIA for prepublication review. Valerie Plame Wilson, whose work for the CIA entailed covert operations, of course abided by this agreement, and her manuscript was reviewed by the CIA and returned to her with numerous redactions—cuts—that the CIA determined were necessary. Many of these cuts related to material that would disclose Ms. Wilson's dates of service, information that has already been widely disseminated.

As has been reported, Simon & Schuster and Ms. Wilson brought a legal action against the CIA; we felt that the redactions required by the CIA went beyond any reasonable requirements of national security and impaired important First Amendment rights. A federal district court has disagreed, determining, essentially, that while Ms. Wilson's dates of service may be in the public domain, they cannot be reported by Ms. Wilson. Accordingly, Ms. Wilson's portion of this book contains only that information that the CIA has deemed unclassified and has allowed her to include.

The sections of *Fair Game* that have been blacked out indicate the places where the CIA has ordered cuts. Still, even with these substantial redactions, we believe the book conveys the power of Ms. Wilson's story, if, alas, not all its details.

To enhance the reader's experience Simon & Schuster has added an afterword by reporter Laura Rozen. Drawn from interviews and public sources, it provides historical background and recounts portions of Ms. Wilson's life and career that she was unable to include herself. When the afterword is read together with *Fair Game*, a full and vivid picture of Valerie Plame Wilson emerges. Ms. Wilson has had no input or involvement in the creation of the afterword, which she has not seen before the publication of this book.

Simon & Schuster has also added an appendix of relevant documents.

We thank you for your understanding and look forward to your enjoyment of this important book.

## CHAPTER 1

# Joining the CIA

Our group of five—three men and two women—trekked through an empty tract of wooded land and swamp, known in CIA terms as the “Farm.” It was 4 A.M. and we had been on the move all night. Having practiced escape and evasion from an ostensible hostile force—our instructors—we were close to meeting up with our other classmates. Together we would attack the enemy, then board a helicopter to safety. This exercise, called the final assault, was the climax of our paramilitary training. Each of us carried eighty-pound backpacks, filled with essential survival gear: tents, freeze-dried food, tablets to purify drinking water, and 5.56 mm ammunition for our M-16s. The late fall weather was bitter, and slimy water sloshed in our combat boots. A blister on my heel radiated little jabs of stinging pain. My friend Pete, a former Army officer, usually ready with a wisecrack and a smirk, hadn’t spoken in hours, while John, our resident beer guzzler, carried not only his backpack but at least fifty extra pounds of body weight. His round face was covered with mud and sweat.

When our point man gave the hand signal, we gratefully

stopped, shrugged off our backpacks, and slumped together for a moment against a small protected knoll. Then we fell into formation again and moved toward the landing zone. When we finally reached a clearing at dawn, I could barely make out the blades of an enormous helicopter rotating slowly, and the friendly faces of my other classmates, Sharon, David, and Tex. I heard Pete mutter, "Finally." We all surged forward, energized by relief and hope. I began to imagine the hot shower I would enjoy when this was over. Then suddenly the sharp firecrackers of light from magnesium flares exploded over our heads and the repetitive sound of machine-gun fire sent adrenaline rushing through my veins.

I dropped to the ground and crawled over to Pete, thinking he would know what to do. Despite three months of hard training, my idyllic suburban upbringing had not prepared me for incoming fire and the overwhelming physical sensations that accompanied it. Dragging me a few yards away to a crest of land, Pete pointed at the helicopter. "Get your ass over there!"

Before I knew it, we brushed aside any pretense of military discipline and made a dead run at the helicopter. As we careened down the hill at full speed, M-16s blazing, I caught the eye of a classmate running alongside me. His expression suggested a hint of enjoyment, or at least his awareness of the absurdity of the situation. Soon enough, I threw myself into the open door of the helicopter and caught my breath beneath the noise of artillery and the deafening sounds of the rotors and engines. I shrugged off my pack, and as we were lifted to safety, I marveled at how I came to be at the Farm.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] As a teenager, I read William Stevenson's *A Man Called Intrepid*, about the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) days during World War II. The OSS was the predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency. I loved the book and I found the history intriguing. I began to seriously consider what working for the CIA meant. If I joined, what would I be asked to do? Was it dangerous? Did I believe in what the CIA did? My family had always valued public service and kept a quiet patriotism. On Memorial Day and the Fourth of July we always put out the flag in a big flowerpot. My father, Samuel Plame, was a retired Air Force colonel. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941, he was studying at the University of Illinois in Champaign. He remembers that the next day the campus was a ghost town; all the eligible male students had left to sign up for military ser-

vice. He was soon on his own way to enlist in the Army Air Corps—the Air Force predecessor—in San Diego. He served in the South Pacific during World War II and has a seemingly inexhaustible supply of corny jokes, stories, and songs from his time there. My brother, Robert Plame, older than me by sixteen years, joined the Marines in 1966 and was promptly sent to Vietnam. One day in 1967, as my parents and I returned home from some errands, the neighbors told us that two uniformed Marines had been knocking at our door. We learned that Bob was MIA. My stricken parents assumed the worst and, for a few days, we did not know if Bob was dead or alive. He was finally located on a hospital ship. During a reconnaissance mission behind enemy lines, he had been badly wounded in his right arm. He endured years of multiple, painful operations to restore some sensation in his limb. Incredibly, with just one working arm and hand, he went on to learn how to fly, ski, write, and tie shoelaces. He has been happily married to Christie, a nurse, for nearly thirty years and is the proud father of two bright and beautiful girls. I thought that if I served in the CIA it would extend a family tradition. Still, I had my nagging doubts. Hadn't the CIA tried to kill Castro with an exploding cigar?

“Imagine you are meeting an agent in a foreign hotel room and there is suddenly a loud banging at the door. You hear ‘Police, let us in!’ What do you do?” This question was being put to me by a kindly looking older woman wearing pearls and a surprisingly bright yellow blouse during my initial CIA interview in Washington. I [REDACTED] had checked into a modest—well, seedy—hotel in Arlington, Virginia. I had no idea what to expect but the interview the next day, in a beige building in the suburbs of Washington, followed along the traditional lines of “What are your strengths, what are your weaknesses,



[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I nervously settled into my chair in a nondescript government classroom in a bland office building in a congested Virginia suburb. I took in my [REDACTED] classmates in our CIA introduction course. Many of the young men were clearly ex-military types, some still sporting regulation buzz cuts. Just less than half were women, but as I later learned, only a fraction of those were destined, like me, to work in the Directorate of Operations (DO). The rest were pegged to become analysts in the Directorate of Intelligence (DI) or administrative/logistical officers and the like in the Directorate of Administration (DA). A few were engineers who would ultimately work in the Directorate of Science and Technology (DST), the Agency's research arm. It looked like I was the [REDACTED] by far and this suspicion was confirmed when a tiny woman, nearly as wide as she was tall, took me and three other (male) classmates into her office during a break. She was the DO liaison to the Career Trainees (CTs)—in other words, she would be our den mother as we worked through the initial training. It was hard to believe that this matronly woman had actually been an operator in “the field,” but she certainly knew a lot more about the CIA than any of us did. “[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] PCS meant “permanent change of Station,” in other words, assignment abroad. As the acronyms flew around us, it was clear that a paramilitary culture reigned at the CIA.

During our lunch breaks, taken at our desks or in nearby cafes, I got to know my classmates. I couldn't help but feel intimidated—most either had gone to prestigious universities, or had at least a master's degree or some years of military experi-

ence. All seemed much more sophisticated, smarter, better traveled, and wittier than I was. Feeling overwhelmed, I vowed to keep my mouth shut and learn as much as possible. Perhaps no one would notice that I had precious little meaningful life experience and was educated at a state school. Over the next few weeks, an interesting dynamic emerged. We had all taken the Myers-Briggs psychological profile test during the interview process. Most of the future operations officers, myself included, scored varying degrees of “ENTJ”—Extrovert, Intuitive, Thinking, Judgmental. ENTJ personality types tend to be strong leaders and feel the need to take command of a situation. The Myers-Briggs description of an ENTJ says that “although ENTJs are tolerant of established procedures, they can abandon any procedure when it can be shown to be indifferent to the goal it seemingly serves . . . They are tireless in the devotion to their jobs and can easily block out other areas of life for the sake of work. The ENTJ female may find it difficult to select a mate who is not overwhelmed by her strong personality and will.” ENTJs appear in approximately 5 percent of the population; apparently, that’s what the CIA was looking for in its future operations officers. We were drawn to one another, not just because we would be doing the same training and ultimately the same job, but because we had similar personalities. Wherever the future case officers gathered on breaks, they were usually the loudest, most social, and I thought, most entertaining. The air seemed to crackle with excitement. I began making friends in the class and despite our different backgrounds, we began to form deep bonds. I looked forward to attending the CIA introductory course every day where we learned how the Agency was organized, how intelligence was collected and analyzed, and how the wider intelligence community functioned. One of the most gripping guest speakers was a woman who had served her first tour as a case officer in Moscow. She told us in harrowing detail how she had been sur-



[REDACTED]

female case officers were either former secretaries who doggedly worked their way out from behind their desks to field work, or the wives of case officers who got tired of being the only ones at home with the children while their husbands were out having all the fun being spymasters. There were a rare few who did not fit into these categories, but these older, tough-as-nails women who had triumphed through the entrenched discrimination scared me. I occasionally came into contact with them during my early interims, and I admired their ambition and perseverance, but it was clear that they paid for it with their personal happiness. Most went home in the late evening to a cat. In my class of fifty or so, just fewer than half were female. Of that number, about four were destined to go into operations. Either through ignorance of youth or naïveté, I did not see myself in the vanguard of a new CIA; I simply wanted to do well at my job and did not expect to find any sort of discrimination because of my gender.

I was assigned to interims mostly in the European Division of the DO. I generally enjoyed my work, menial as it was, but was anxiously counting the days until we could go to the Farm for our paramilitary training. Finally, the time arrived for me to pack a few items in my car and head south with the other young CTs. I had more and longer interims than most of my original classmates— [REDACTED] and as a consequence, I joined another training class. As instructed early on by the Agency, I had told my friends and family that [REDACTED]

my time away from Washington was for some vague, undefined “training.” No one questioned this, or at least did so directly to me. All my friends outside the Agency were busy starting their own careers and so training was part of everyone’s early professional life. Only my parents and brother knew where I really worked. My mother and I agreed not to tell my uncle: her brother was an early Air Force jet jockey and would have been so proud of my career choice he could not have kept it to himself. As I sped along the highway toward the Farm, I was looking forward to this next phase of training, one that would move me much closer to a field assignment as a case officer.

“Check your sizes, only take one, keep the line moving! Let’s go!” barked the instructor in camouflage fatigues as we shuffled into a cavernous corrugated-tin warehouse in an open field at the Farm. In the dim light of the warehouse we picked combat boots, fatigues, webbed belts, caps, canteens, backpack gear, and other paraphernalia out of enormous bins. This stuff would see us through the next three months of military training. As our arms overflowed with equipment, the instructors, all ex-military types, took us next to the Quonset huts located deep in the scruffy pine woods. These would be our sleeping quarters. The women’s barracks was lined on both sides with bunk beds and had a spartan bathroom at the end. I had never had to wear a uniform at school, but as I changed into my fatigues, I liked the idea of not having to figure out my outfit every day—which shoes and belt would go together—for the next few months.

Our training quickly assumed a pattern: up at 5 A.M. for physical training, which involved running or walking in formation while singing bawdy songs to keep tempo, just as military recruits have done for decades; followed by a quick breakfast,

then a morning class in a military discipline. Lunch [REDACTED] [REDACTED] a throwback to traditional southern cooking. Almost everything was dipped in batter and deep-fried, and a salad bar was considered newfangled. This was usually followed by an outdoor activity, then dinner—more deep-fried food—then some brief free time before lights-out at nine. There was naturally plenty of complaining—some good-natured, some bitter—among the class members, but the instructors, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] were more than capable of subduing a bunch of whiny suburbanites and kept us in line. For many the physical demands of the course were tough—running at least three miles in the morning, trekking through the woods with eighty-pound backpacks and an M-16 rifle—and more than one overweight trainee gave up in the middle of a march or quit well before completing the required sit-up reps. Fortunately, I had always been athletic, and though the physical requirements of the course were a challenge I was able to do them all. I began to see the Farm experience as camp for adults.

Each week was devoted to a different topic [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and the instructors struggled to whip our class into shape and instill some military discipline. The Agency clearly understood that we were rarely, if ever, going to be called upon to use these skills, but the Farm paramilitary course remained a popular class for Agency recruits because management realized it forged an esprit de corps that would last throughout one's career. Moreover, it gave the Agency another opportunity to evaluate a new employee's strength of character, ability to work in a team, and dedication—all skills critical to success in the Agency, no matter what your career path.

One of our first sessions involved learning about weapons and how to use them. Unlike some of my ex-military classmates, my exposure to guns had been limited: I knew that my father

kept his World War II service pistol strapped to the back of the bed headboard, in the event an intruder got into the house. Learning about [REDACTED] guns was completely new to me and to my astonishment, I found I was pretty good at it [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Probably aided by beginner's luck, I simply followed the instructions: hold your breath steady, take careful aim, and pull the trigger slowly. I was apparently the best in our class [REDACTED], which I am sure many of my male colleagues found unnerving. My proudest moment came when I managed to score very high on a handgun test, despite having to balance on crutches after spraining an ankle during a morning run in the dark.

As the weeks went by and we learned [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] skills perhaps more appropriate for an Army ranger than a CIA case officer lurking around bars, a vague understanding hung over us that at some point we would face an interrogation exercise designed to simulate POW captivity. From the beginning we had been taught how to build and sustain our cover and we knew that we would be severely tested toward the end of the course, but we had no idea where or when this would happen. Before dawn one Monday morning, after all the students had returned from their weekend break, we were awakened with war cries and curses and flashlights being shoved in our faces as we were pulled from our bunks.

Although we had known this challenging portion of the course was coming, it was unnerving to look around and not see our instructors' familiar faces. They were unknown authorities dressed in fatigues, most with black hoods with eyeholes. As I hurried to dress, I kept telling myself that this was just an exercise, but their rough taunts and shoves as we moved out of the Quonset hut to the woods were realistic enough to set off a surge of adrenaline. For hours in the dark, we were forced to crawl on

the ground and do push-ups and sit-ups—and if you faltered in any way, you were kicked or subjected to brutal verbal abuse. After a long, exhausting march through the woods, each of us with one hand on the shoulder of the student ahead, we were thrown into a waiting army truck. We bounced over dirt roads and stopped at a small white concrete-block building surrounded by pine trees. The real fun was about to begin.

[REDACTED] at the time I had no idea what had happened to the [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The combination of factors [REDACTED] really got to you psychologically. Your rational mind kept saying that this was just an exercise, one that you had known was coming, but another small voice in your head wondered what the hell was going on. It was certainly realistic.

At some point, hours later, I was pulled into my first interrogation. I struggled to keep my wits about me. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] As I sat down—a slight concession that they had given us a few hours earlier—I dared [REDACTED] check my surroundings. To my delight, a classmate who had

become a friend had chosen that moment as well to defy the rules. The brief smile and eye rolls we exchanged renewed my confidence that I would get through this.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I fainted—from low blood sugar—and fell backward. When I came to, I was mortified to find myself being held by the elderly director of the Farm, someone I had only seen at a distance and when he addressed our class the first day. The good news was that at least I knew it was still an exercise. My relief was short-lived [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I liked the quiet and dark of my new small wooden home. I began to think about who I should put on my Christmas card list that year and how much of each address I could remember. Finally, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] we were “freed” by our regular instructors and after another bumpy ride in the back of an army truck, we arrived at our Quonset huts. We were filthy, disoriented, and famished. As I stood under the hot shower, luxuriating in being clean, the nightmarish capture exercise faded quickly to a surreal memory. I had passed another of the Agency’s tests, had not ratted out my classmates, and after a good weekend of sleep, would be ready for the next challenge.

“One, two, three, *go!*” yelled an instructor in my ear, wind ripping around us, as my legs dangled out the airplane’s open door. I was terrified beyond anything I had felt before, but the instructor

had vowed when he checked our parachutes and tightened our webbing that if we went up in the airplane, the only way we would come down was by parachute. There was no backing out now and so I lurched forward—helped by a strong shove from instructor “Red”—and plunged toward the earth at 120 mph. As the instructors had predicted, my mind froze during the first jump, and that’s where the training on the ground is indispensable. All the jumps from shoulder-high platforms and then from the tower, in which you hurtle toward a padded truck at the end of a long cable, forms muscle memory that takes over when the brain fails. As the parachute opened above me and I drifted slowly down, I reached up, grabbed the toggles, and tried to steer away from the electrical lines that were racing toward me at an alarming speed and land in the zone marked with white chalk. The jump instructors had drilled us to land on our feet and immediately absorb the ground’s impact up the side of our body and then roll. At 118 pounds, I was so light that I could have just stayed upright on my feet when I hit the ground, but went through the motions of dropping and rolling so I wouldn’t be chewed out by the instructors. My relief at being on the ground somewhere inside that chalk circle was overpowering and gave way to a huge surge of ego and pride. “I did it!” Only four more jumps and I would have my much-coveted “jump wings.” It was exhilarating and I was sure I was having a better time at work than anyone else I knew.

When the paramilitary course ended, we were given the option of attending jump school—provided we could pass our physical tests and standards. I knew from the moment I heard about this opportunity that it was something I would try for. After nearly ten weeks of physical conditioning [REDACTED] we felt we could eat nails for breakfast. Still, not everyone opted to jump and some of those who tried, failed. One woman, Karen, whom I had come to regard warily

because of her overly ambitious nature, clearly wanted to jump. She was not a nemesis per se, but her superior airs got my competitive spirit going and I passed the test with flying colors, if only because I didn't want her to beat me. After a few days of training, we were told that we would make five jumps over a period of three days to earn our wings. I dared not tell my parents about my latest "job opportunity"—my mother would not have slept for the entire week.

The day of the first jump dawned gray and cool with light wind gusts. Our group of six went through the safety procedures and scrambled, two at a time, into the light aircraft with our craggy jump instructor, Red, who never went anywhere without a full cheek of tobacco. I was dismayed that my ultracompetitive classmate, Karen, was in the planeload with me. As I watched her tumble out first, again with a helping hand from Red, I thought, If she can do it, so can I, and a few minutes later, out I went, too.

Once everyone came down—from a speck in the sky to a heap of nylon on the ground—we cheered and high-fived one another, feeling cocksure and very cool. Then Red walked out from the airplane hangar with his unmistakable swagger. He had just heard that a storm was coming in for the next few days and he wanted to know if we were willing to complete all five of our jumps that afternoon. We all looked at one another—there was no question. We gathered up our parachutes without a word and hustled over to the hangar to prepare for our next jumps. We weren't about to leave the Farm without pinning those little silver wings on our fatigues.

I tapped lightly on the door at 7:30 A.M. and pushed it open a little way. I heard "come in" and stepped into the office for a meeting with my operations course adviser. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Dick sat behind his desk, smoking a cigarette. The heavy pall of tobacco already filled the small space. His salt-and-pepper buzz cut, short-sleeved plaid shirt, and thick glasses completed the look. Next to the ashtray was his customary can of Coke. Breakfast of Champions. "How's it going?" he rasped as his hand shook on the way to his mouth to take another drag. Dick was not a bad adviser, but he was not terribly effective. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. Years of living abroad, dealing with agents, and juggling the demands of a demanding double life inevitably took their toll on officers' health, marriages, and families. The Agency's frequent solution was to send its troubled officers to the quiet of the Farm, which perhaps helped restore the officers' balance, but the result was that many broken-down officers taught the new, idealistic students that a life in the CIA was a tough one. Senior management periodically vowed to put only their brightest stars at the Farm and reward them with a promotion for their stateside tours so the junior officers could be taught by the best. But the reality was that most of the time the best and most effective officers wanted to be in the field recruiting spies.

Still, Dick had significant field experience and I asked him how to pace an upcoming exercise. He exhaled smoke over my shoulder and looked down through his heavy glasses to read my latest report, written late the night before [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Although it was easy to make fun of the make-believe world [REDACTED] passing the course was deadly serious if you ever wanted to serve in the field. Through short deadlines, sleep deprivation, constant surprises, and changes in the scenarios, the instructors ratcheted up the pressure on the student cadre. I felt like I was living under a microscope, and all my interactions—even in rare moments of relaxation—were under close scrutiny from the invariable edits on our reports to follow-up debriefing sessions with instructors after operational exercises, to the feeling that we were being watched by instructors even when we shared a beer with them in the evening. We knew we were being evaluated: Did we have “the right stuff”?

The kickoff exercise for the operations course a few weeks earlier had been surprisingly easy. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



Over the next few weeks, I met regularly with Gary and got to know more than I ever wanted [REDACTED]. More important for the point of the exercise, I was learning what made him tick: his motivations, prejudices, and aspirations both personally and professionally. He was quite engaging and had obviously perfected the role of Gary. After much practice, he was great at tossing out details, some meaningful, some useless, to see how much I would pick up. After each meeting, I scrambled back to our “Station offices [REDACTED] and wrote reports on the [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] At each meeting, as we got to know each other better, Gary provided me with tantalizing tidbits [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In the early meetings, I usually excused myself to go to the ladies’ room during the meal and furiously scribbled down all the facts and figures and names he had given me on the little pad I kept in my purse. This is crazy, I thought more than once as I sat inside the bathroom stall, fishing around in my bag, but just as in paramilitary training, I was playing on the instructors’ game board and I had no choice but to follow their rules if I ever wanted to become a case officer. Over time, I got better at retaining the flood of information, but it was a relief later when [REDACTED] I could sit in hotel rooms with a real recruited asset and openly take notes without resorting to the ladies’ room subterfuge.

While this exercise [REDACTED] was being played out over a course of weeks, we were simultaneously receiving training in [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] how to write an intelligence report and a slew of operational cables were all topics. Lectures in the auditorium, given by the resident instructor staff, were often supplemented

by Agency officers visiting from Headquarters or the field who had relevant experience to impart. The best speakers were invariably surrounded by curious students later that evening [REDACTED] [REDACTED] where if your schedule allowed and you didn't have any ops meetings or intel reports to write up, you could drop by for a beer, play Ping-Pong on a battered table, and socialize a bit. Visitors delighted in regaling their adoring audience with real-life war stories [REDACTED]

We were being inculcated into the Agency culture and through these stories we learned what we might face and what might or might not work once we got into the field.

Although the pressure to perform was intense, and the feeling of being constantly observed and judged could be oppressive, there was no doubt that learning some of these spy skills was fun [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] My friend David and I briefly considered using our new skills to clandestinely photograph two students who everyone knew were carrying on a torrid affair, even though one of them was seriously involved with yet another student in the same class. Max, a mild-mannered but obnoxious type, had apparently no idea that his "friend," Tim, was making passionate love to his girlfriend. We thought some well-timed photos would help set the record straight but finally decided to let Max find out the truth for himself.

Some lighthearted moments occurred [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The cameraman laughed so hard the picture went out of focus.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Methodology and theory [REDACTED] in the classroom was followed by plenty of on-the-road experience [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



the prospect of working for the Agency, living abroad, and perhaps even having my own war stories to tell one day was simply too enticing. I didn't want to be asked to leave. One night, [REDACTED], I got out of my car and gathered my purse and notes. The June air was so heavily humid that my silk blouse stuck to my skin and my feet ached in my high heels (we had to dress up [REDACTED] when appropriate [REDACTED]). I had at least three hours of work ahead of me to get all my report writing done; it was due to the instructors by 7 A.M. the next day. I paused to look up at the starry sky. I laughed at the absurdity of my situation, but at that moment, even when exhausted from the work I had done and still had to do, I had no doubts that I would pass the course.

During the final weeks of the [REDACTED] course, the students were divided into small teams [REDACTED]. Each team member needed to work closely with others to help solve operational problems and make sure that U.S. policymakers received the good intelligence they needed and deserved. Fortunately, my team was a strong one, its members all students I had become friendly with. The only exception was Gerry, a bespeckled, rather goofy-looking guy whom we all saw as the weak link. He never seemed to put two and two together and it was a mystery to us why he hadn't been booted out. We just rolled our eyes whenever he made another incredibly stupid suggestion and we tried to work around him the best we could. As the operational pace was ratcheted up even further during the weeks of the final exercise, our classroom, the Station, became a hive of activity at all hours. At 2 A.M. you could go to the room and no doubt find someone from the team finishing up a report [REDACTED]. Vicious summer thunderstorms cut out the power several times and rendered our [REDACTED] useless, so on a few nights our classroom looked like a twisted tableau from a

medieval monastery—we were bent over yellow legal pads writing out our reports in longhand while candles flickered in the middle of the table. We joked that the adverse conditions were preparing us for future assignments to Africa or parts of Asia.

The climax of the final exercise [REDACTED] was to test our skills in an environment where presumably we'd never been. We were supposed to [REDACTED] pull together all the loose threads we left dangling [REDACTED] in order to make the final week a success. Working both as a team and individually, we got to work [REDACTED] trying to figure out what surprises the instructors had in store for us. However, despite the instructors' best efforts to keep us under control, the months of pressure had taken their toll and [REDACTED] we acted like eighth-graders on a class field trip. Coming down to the wire, we were giddy, feeling like we had completed a master's course in an eighth of the time. Although my team had no major screw-ups, our heretofore ironclad discipline broke down a little bit and we attended more than a few operational meetings with raging hangovers.

[REDACTED] the instructors met one final time to vote on whether to pass a student, fail him, or assign him probationary status. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] As we finished up one of our last fried lunches in the mess hall and waited for the graduation ceremony, we heard that the instructors had voted out two more students and given three probationary status. The pain and humiliation of not graduating after completing the course would have been ter-

rible, and I was glad that everyone on our team, even Gerry, passed.

That evening [REDACTED] our class graduated. This time I did not trade in my wineglass for water with a twist. [REDACTED], I had gone from an idealistic and intimidated [REDACTED] woman overwhelmed by my new surroundings, to an idealistic [REDACTED] woman who had been challenged and had thrived. I had jumped out of airplanes, [REDACTED] walked miles in pitch-black woods, knew how to write an intelligence report really fast, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I was simultaneously exhausted and exhilarated. So far though, all these skills had been used [REDACTED]; calling on them in the real world would be the genuine test, but it was one that I welcomed. I was ready [REDACTED]