

EPISODE 479

[EPISODE]

[00:00:00] AH: So, it's a pleasure to speak to you, sir. I wonder if we could just start off by just telling me a little bit more about how you get involved in the world of intelligence and espionage?

[00:00:11] BB: Well, I was a student at the University of Washington in Seattle in the '60s. I was majoring in political science and I just finished the year in Southeast Asia as a photographer for the Associated Press in Bangkok. Actually, I had just started graduate school. I finished my bachelor's. I was commissioned in the Marine Corps, and the Marine Corps graciously allowed me to stay in college for a Master's in Southeast Asian Studies. One of my senior professors at the University of Washington, an old China hand, an excellent fellow asked me one day if I had considered careers in Central Intelligence, or in intelligence, and I said, "No, I frankly, knew nothing about it." I was actually in line for a very good position with Associated Press in Tokyo, which was my first choice after I finished my military service.

So, the professor said, "Look, you've got time in Southeast Asia, you're commissioned in the Marine Corps, you might want to consider a career in intelligence." And I happen to know the local recruiter in the Pacific Northwest. So, I said, "Sure. Not a problem." So, the professor was probably an unpaid spotter for the agency, I suspect in the years since, set up the interview.

[00:01:41] AH: And what year was that, Barry?

[00:01:43] BB: That would have been '67 when I got my bachelor's degree, and I had a meeting with the fellow, he was sort of the regional recruiter for the agency, pleasant guy. He said, "Look, you're going to have your master's degree, you're going to have your military service, and you've already got field experience." I was taking Thai as my graduate language. He said, "You could go two ways in the agency. You could be an operations officer." This is your classic spoke in the field collecting intelligence, or with a master's degree, you could become a specialist for the Directorate of Intelligence, the DI, and that's the analytic side. Adopt side, you

go overseas, and the analysis side, you stay in Langley, Virginia and watch the leaves change color on the trees.

So, I said, "Well, look, if I went into the agency, I would only do it to work in Southeast Asia." I'd been there, I loved it. I wanted to go back and if the agency could help me do that, then I would be interested in the agency. He said, "We could do it." But at that point, I said, "Look, I'm a commissioned officer in the Marine Corps next year, I'm going to war in Vietnam. So, I can't talk about anything until I get out of the Marines." And the recruiter said, "Here's my card. If you live, call this number six months before you're supposed to get out." So, I survived Vietnam. I was an infantry company commander in Camp Pendleton, California and I had the man's card. I didn't think they would know who I was, or remember me. This is three years later. So now, it's the spring of '71 and I'm a captain in the Marines.

So, I call the number. The guy comes on, same guy. He said, "Let me get your file." He says, "Okay, how did you do in Vietnam?" I told him, "I'd been in the infantry. I extended my tour to work in civil affairs. I was sent to Thailand as a liaison officer because I spoke Thai. And now I'm back in the States. I've got an infantry company, and I'm getting out of the Marine Corps in six months." And the man said, he was in Portland, Oregon. He said, "Okay, I'll meet you Thursday night at the Coronado Hotel in San Diego, California." I went down there, I met him, and he recruited me. So, 15 days after I got out of the Marine Corps, I was in the CIA.

[00:04:22] AH: You survived Vietnam. What was about Southeast Asia that had this allure for you — this draw?

[00:04:30] BB: I graduated from high school in '61 and I had a four-year scholarship to the University of Illinois. My father was an officer in the United States Air Force. So, in '62, he got assigned as the civil engineer advisor to the Royal Thai Air Force. He said, "How would I like to drop out of college for one year and go to Asia with him?" So, I said, "Sure." I had no real knowledge or interest in Asia. But we'd served four years in England. I had a prep school boyhood in Kent, England, which I enjoyed, and now we're going to Asia. Since you're all dropped out for a year, which I did. So, here we are, Bangkok 1962, great town, blonde of the sports club, tennis all day, drink all night. After two weeks, my father said, "This isn't what I had in mind for your year out." So, he said, "If you don't get a job, you're going back to college in the

fall". So, at the University of Illinois, I had been a photographer for the Daily Align Eye using some skills I'd learned in high school from Air Force photographers.

So, with not many options, I went down to the local Associated Press Office with clippings from my college newspaper, talked to the bureau chief, very bright young, Filipino American from Yale and he looked at my stuff and he said, "Can you go up country tomorrow?" And I was hired by the AP as their local stringer. I spent my year with AP. I was in Saigon. I was in Phnom Penh. I was all over Thailand. I even took a sabbatical from a PA for 10 weeks to be the stills photographer, on Tarzan movie filmed up in Chiang Mai in northern Thailand.

After two weeks in Bangkok, I said, "I'm going to be an Indo-China guy." And I focused on that when I went back to college. Instead of Illinois, I went to University of Washington, we're from Washington, and they have a good school of Far Eastern Studies. So, I was an Asia hand, and I needed a vehicle. They let me live in Asia for the next 30 years and that vehicle turned out to be the – I had to say no to AP, and I said yes to CIA.

[00:07:00] AH: But you stayed on the cover with CIA for quite a long time until very recently, right?

[00:07:05] BB: Yeah, the way it works, when you're in the Clandestine Service, you have to have a cover. There are numerous covers. But in my case, I was under State Department cover, my entire career. When I retired from government in '96, I was still undercover, and that I couldn't talk about what I'd done in the agency. Then a couple years ago, I wrote a memoir, *Risk Takers*, *Spy Maker*, we call it.

[00:07:37] AH: Great title.

[00:07:40] BB: Thank you. *Tales of A Cia Case Officer*. To get that published. legally. I had to have it approved by the agency, which they did. So, at that point, I ceased to be undercover. So, now I can talk about the agency, what I did. I just can't talk about sources and methods. And so that's kind of why we're talking I think, because the book is out and people are asking me about it.

[00:08:10] AH: One of the things that struck me was when you were in Southeast Asia in the early '60s, was Vietnam on your radar is something that was becoming a focus of US foreign policy, or it was a war that was brewing that was coming over the horizon?

[00:08:27] BB: Absolutely. The reason AP hired me sight unseen at age 18 was there was a serious crisis in Laos, just across the Mekong River from Thailand. And the US Marine Corps had sent a regiment of Marines to kind of hold the fort on the river. AP needed someone speaking native English, to up and cover that stuff and that's how I got the job. So, Vietnam was coming. My father was building air strips for the Royal Thai Air Force. He was their American – it was more than one, but he was a senior adviser to them.

So, all these big air bases, U-Tapao, Korat, Takhli, Udorn, these were all being built in the early '60s and Vietnam was just warming up. I was on one assignment with AP, the first time I was shot at was in the Mekong Delta south of Saigon on an AP assignment. So, by the time I left in '63, to finish college, I was pretty sure that I would be back in Southeast Asia at some point, and sure enough, it was in the Marine Corps.

[00:09:39] AH: How do you end up in the Marine Corps? Are you drafted or did you volunteer?

[00:09:43] BB: Well, of course, in those days, we had national service. So, every able-bodied male was expected to serve. In my case, I was in the Navy ROTC, Reserve Officer Training Corps at the University of Washington. My father, oddly enough, he's an Air Force officer. He'd been a glider pilot in World War Two in England and France and in crossing the Rhine into Germany. He didn't want me to go into the Air Force. He disliked the army. I shouldn't say dislike. He preferred I go into the Navy because it's safe in the Navy. But he didn't know was that in the Navy, Navy ROTC, you have an option, Marine Corps, or Navy. I found out very early that there are no alcohol on Navy ships, and no women are Navy ships. And so, we had a war going in Vietnam and it was an easy choice for me to become a Marine officer rather than a Navy officer.

[00:10:46] AH: You're in the Vietnam War, you're an officer, you come out of it and then you join the CIA. Tell us a little bit more about some of the things that you were up to, some of the things that you discuss in the book.

[00:10:58] BB: Well, the chapter on the agency, I should mention an operation I was selected for, wherein to this day, I don't know why or how. But during an assignment in Washington, I was tapped to go on a mission with MI6, the British Secret Intelligence Service, going after what we call a hard target. A hard target usually means a communist. In this case, it was a joint operation because the British had been after this target for many years, and the target was on a short visit to the United States. So, the only chance of recruiting that target was jointly. I can't say what country the target was from. But it was a difficult country to recruit agents, and it was decided that I would go along as the American. In fact, technically I was in charge because it took place in American soil. We work closely with MI6 and many things. This was an opportunity for a joint operation in the US.

So, I met my counterpart. He came to Washington. He was an older man, could have been my father, very experienced, spoke the language that the target was from very well. I didn't speak that at all. But we hit it off. And I still think the reason I was selected was because I wasn't going to get in his way. This was really his operation. I'm just there to help it along because it happens to be in the States. I think also my English school days in prep school helped a lot. But as it happened, this chap I worked with, I call him Ian in the book, was an incredible fellow and the few weeks that we work together, tracking this target across the US, and then fine tuning the pitch that we were going to make to him, I learned a hell of a lot. Over the years as I rose in rank, my young officers, I gave them many, many hints and tips that I got from Ian. The first of which he told me was that success as a recruiting officer and only 10% of case officers actually make meaningful recruitments, and Ian himself was one of the best and brightest from MI6.

He said, "We're in the business of making dreams come true, and everybody out there that we want to recruit has a dream. They have something that they need or want and you're in a position, we're both in the position of helping those dreams come true." Now, in the operation we were on, after a couple of weeks, we tracked this chap down to a place where we could meet him alone, very briefly, and make our pitch. So, when we went in to make the pitch, the target instinctively knew something was up. Here are two foreigners, one of them speaking his language very well knowing a lot about him. And we made the pitch and the target said no. It didn't bother Ian at all. Ian said, "Look, if your wife knew what we are offering you, and you said no, and she found out, she would kill you." And target hemmed and hawed and he said, "Yes,

you're right. So, I accept." This is one of the first and best lessons I learned in making our target recruitment.

Now, to finish the story, the story doesn't end with the recruitment. Frankly, I thought that the agency might not want it in my book, because when we went into recruit this chap, Ian says to me, "I feel I must tell you my secret instructions." And I said, "Well, Ian, if they're a secret, why tell me?" He said, "No, no, I think you should know." I said, "Okay." By now, we'd established a very nice working report. He said, "My secret instructions are not to let this case go to a recruitment." I was shocked. I said, "Why not?" He said, "Because MI6 doesn't want to share the take. They want it all for themselves." We know this chap is coming out again a year later. But my feeling is we have an opportunity to get him now. His quote was, "We should be robust." And I said, "Well, I'm really shocked. Now, you've told me your secret instructions. Let me tell you my secret instructions." And before I left Washington to go running around the country with Ian, the chief of my division, East Asia Division, called me in only time I'd ever met him and he said, "Barry, this is a great opportunity for you. It's a great opportunity for the agency. I only have one instruction and that is don't piss off the Brits."

So, I said, "Yeah." Now, what happens if we go and recruit this fellow, and your people are not happy? And my orders are Don't piss off the Brits. So, Ian looks at me. He looked like George Smiley, as played by Sir Alec Guinness, quiet, unflappable chap, older fellow, World War Two veteran. So, he said, "Look, you don't know my instructions and I don't know yours. Let's get him." And we got him. I got promoted and Ian got retired. So, sad story. But we stayed friends for years. We visited him in England. He visited us in the States. I saw him in Asia. He said, "I don't regret a thing. We got him. That was sort of the Daniel mall." He'd been after that particular target for 21 years and he got it. So, he didn't feel bad.

[00:17:22] AH: Wow, 21 years, and you said the only 10% of people in the Clandestine Service actually managed to recruit a meaningful source. That was the acoustic I was given as a very junior officer. Now, having said that, I have to tell you – I don't have to tell you, but I will. I've recruited 41 people at my time. But numbers can be deceiving. Of those 41, only, I would say 6 or 7, including the one with MI6, are meaningful, important. recruitments. I should also say that the best recruitment I ever made was after I retired. I came across a fellow who has had incredible access. Again, we won't say where, but we'll just say Asia. And I said to myself, "This

guy could work for the CIA.” After a very short span of time determining exactly how good his access was, to a foreign intelligence. I said, “Look, I think you should be working for us.” He said, “Well, okay.”

So, I made an introduction to one of my old colleagues, and he made the formal recruitment. I was retired, had no role in it, but the case is still running and it's by far, the best recruitment I ever made. The other thing I would say, on recruiting too much is made at CIA, I think on the formality of a full recruitment. There are many gradations of foreign asset from what we'd say, as a winning collaborator, someone who knows who you are, is sympathetic, has information, willing to share, doesn't want any money, doesn't want to be an agent. And then there's other people that are doing it for the money, that's the majority. And then they're willing to be polygraphed and have to lie detector tests and things like that.

In my career, I've made 41 recruitments. But I've got a dozen or two people that weren't recruited, who given me some of the best intelligence I ever got. In one case, I was in a station, a large station, and a requirement came in from the headquarters, a flash requirement. Flash, that's your precedents and communications or routine priority, immediate and flash. So, flash means, war is imminent. Every American casualty expected. Then you send a flash message. I've only seen three in my career, and I wrote two of them. This one came in from Washington and said, “Flash, we needed to know something.”

Now, what they needed to know from the station I was at, didn't involve me at all, that didn't involve my specialty, which is Southeast Asia. But the station didn't have anyone and it's stable of assets, who can answer the question. However, I had a friend in that country, a good friend, and official of that country, and a guy that I'd known for a number of years in Asia and in Europe, and this guy was really excellent. We had a good relationship and I felt that he would know the answer to the flash requirement from Washington. So, I went to the Chief of station and I said, “Look, if you don't have someone that can answer it, I could give it a shot.” He said, “Oh, by all means we, we don't have a clue.”

So, I went to my friend, normally, it would take a couple of weeks for me to set up a meeting. But I called him and I said, “I need to see you today and only I need to see you for 10 minutes.” He said, “I know what you're going to ask and I give you a five.” So, we made a quick – we won't

call it a brush pass, but a very short meeting. He was right. He knew my question. He gave me the answer. He said, "I will expect a very, very good meal for myself and my wife for giving you this information and he got it. And Washington got the answer. So, what I'm saying here is that there's a lot of gradation out there. You've got a lot of good information, just from people who want to help but don't want to be a spy.

[00:21:52] AH: Out of those 41 people, how would that map on to the MICE acronym, money, ideology, coercion, ego. You mentioned money. Do most of them doing it for money, or there's a variety of different ways that this can shake out?

[00:22:07] BB: There's a variety of things. When the Russians recruit Americans is because of money. I think when we recruit Russians, it's not so much a matter of money as ideology, they knew, and even now, they know they're working for a corrupt and a rotten system. Revenge. A lot of Russians like Penkovsky, one of our famous cases, we ran with a British Colonel, Oleg Penkovsky. That was revenge because I think his father had been killed on the Gulag.

So, there's a lot of motivation out there, different motivations. And a lot of the time, the best agents aren't ones that want money, they want to help. There are a lot of people that realize that, the rest of the good guys, despite what you read, sometimes, and they want to help us.

[00:22:58] AH: Did you find one particular approach more successful than others? You were mentioning about the dreams like say there was someone that you were keen to recruit with money be your default way to approach them? Or would you just feel them out first and see what they were looking for?

[00:23:16] BB: Well, you have to you have to develop people. Let's say that you see someone who's a target, this person has intelligence that we want. Then, again, following Ian's tutelage, say what is it we can give them. Sometimes it's education. Sometimes it's a medical assistance. Sometimes it's a Visa, a ticket to ride, a life in the West. They all work, you just have to pair it with the right person.

[00:23:44] AH: Did you ever turned the tradecraft back on yourself and think to yourself, "What's the one thing that I really want that could make me vulnerable?"

[00:23:52] **BB:** No, I don't think so. I mean, that's not really the way the game is played.

[00:23:59] **AH:** I'm just being playful.

[00:24:01] **BB:** I spend a lot of time eyeball to eyeball with Ivan, the Russian. And then I find them, some of them are just absolutely boorish and some of them are very, very interesting people. These are the ones I want to make a deal with, that's a long-term thing. They have to trust you. They don't have to like you, but their life is in your hands. So, you have to be cognizant of that this isn't a game. We call it a game, but it's a game of life and death. It's a game that's being played every day, today, around the world. Although some of the rules have changed, and I don't know the pictures. Don't ask me anything about the agency today.

But I would like to mention, everybody has, all the case officers I know have a favorite agent, and I have one and I want to tell you about him. This guy, again is an older man, old enough to be my father. He was spotted at a cocktail party by a friend of mine who is a State, a real State Department Officer, and the next day at work in the embassy, this chap says to me, "You won't believe the guy that I met last night." And he said, "It's so much bullshit that he was putting out." And I mentioned that to you, because he was heavily involved in one of the countries that I had served in. He said, "You should meet this guy and kind of put him in his place." And when he had described him, I thought, you know, this guy is, it's got to be – and for every good agent out there, there are hundred fabricators, and there's bullshit artists and guys that you don't really want to know and I thought he was one of them. As a favor to this guy, and he says, "You'll enjoy him. He's very entertaining." But he can't be telling the truth.

So anyway, he set up a lunch and I met the guy. I said to myself, "This is too good to be true." And then I told my, my friend, I agreed with him that this was bullshit, but that I met the fellow one on one and he spun one of his stories for me. And I said, "The only way I can believe that is by seeing your photos from that event." He had a portfolio in his briefcase and it was all true. And I then I said, "Okay, now this guy, there's got to be a problem. There's got to be something wrong with this guy." I developed him carefully. I vetted him. All of the stories that he claimed he would be involved in were checkable. I checked them, and they were true.

So finally, I got permission. I decided we could get him and money wasn't an issue. When I recruited him, and I broke cover, and he said, "Oh, I'm so happy. I was afraid you work for the State Department and the State Department can't help me. Because I want to do this, I want to do that." All of these dangerous things, that state doesn't get involved. So, I said, "Well, I can assure you." Right up front, I named one assignment that I had in mind for him and he said, "That would be good. That would be good." Then he said, "But I have one condition." And then I knew it. I knew there was something that had to be wrong. And I said, "Okay, what's your condition?" He said, "I will only accept missions that are life threatening. If it's not life threatening, you get somebody else to do it. I want dangerous missions."

So, I said, "Well, I could probably accommodate that." On the very first mission, I sent him off. It was absolutely life threatening, and he almost got killed. But he talked his way out of the – sadly, I can't tell you. It's a hell of a story. I can't tell you, what it is that almost got him killed. But it was his fast thinking that saved his life. So, from that mission, I sent him on another mission, let's say behind enemy lines, and he had very specific, limited instructions on what to do. He didn't come back. He was supposed to go in for, I'm going to say two to three weeks, and he came back and I thought he was dead, because he wanted life threatening situations and I sent him on one. I felt badly about it. But that's what he wanted.

He came back after two months. And I said, "Jesus, I was expecting you weeks ago." He said, "Yeah, I was having too much fun. I could have come back anytime I wanted. In fact, I'm going to go back again after you debrief me." I've got all this stuff and he had exceeded his brief 300%, and then he went back. Whenever he would go off on a mission, he didn't take a salary, and he didn't ask for anything, except upfront expense money. He said, "When I come back, give me what it's worth." The first mission, I was handling the whole thing. Second mission, he was working in another area division, and they were astounded that he could A, survived and B, whatever it was. They offered him a big pile of money. And when I told him, that's what he was going to get. He said, "That's twice as much as it was worth. But I'll take it because you never know in this business." And then the third mission, I'm only going to mention three, the third mission, he came to me and said, "I have an opportunity to go in with this group of terrorists." And I said, "Jesus!" I knew who they were. They weren't in my turf, but I said, "Okay, I'll run that by headquarters", which I did. And headquarters came back and said, "Absolutely not. We've never had anybody survive, come back alive, going into that group. We're not going to send

anybody else in.” So, I told my friend, and he said, “Okay, okay, okay. I expected that, but anyway, I’m going. I’m going to pay my own way. I’ve always wanted to see these guys. I have a friend who is in there and he’s getting me in. It’s too good a chance to miss.”

So, he went, and he came back. He gave all of this great information, which I sent them headquarters, and they gave him another pile of money. So anyway, that’s my favorite agent. And years went by, I only handled him for a few years, and I turned him over. A long time went by. And in the early ‘90s, ‘92, ‘94, I was chief of the Thai-Burma branch at headquarters. I get a phone call one day, parenthetically. You want to spend all your time in the field, no time in headquarters. That’s the best way to have a good career and that’s what I did. So, I got a phone call one day, and it’s an officer I never heard of and he mentioned, it’s a covered line. It’s a secure line. He mentioned this agent, my favorite agent, mentioned says, described him on the phone. He said, “Did you recruit that man?” I said, “I did.” He said, “Well, he’s retiring soon.” I recruited him in the ‘80s, and so let’s say 15 years went by, and he said he’s retiring. We’re giving him a major award at headquarters and he wants you to be there. The agent wants you to be there. So, I said, “That’s great. That’s great. I haven’t heard from him for years, I thought he was dead.” And then the officer said, “I’m going to come see you.” So, he came to my office and he was responsible for this award ceremony. He said, “I also want your help in writing the citation that we’re going to present”, which I did. I gave him a couple of paragraphs.

And then, I was at the ceremony, up on the seventh floor of the agency. It’s a very distinguished award, which I’d never heard of. And I met some very senior people that I never would have met, and they were in the room. The agent was there and he hadn’t changed a bit now. He’s an old man and he was about to retire. So, he was there. I brought him into the building black, brought him up in the director’s elevator. They had the ceremony. They presented the decoration, took photos. And then they took the decoration back because it’s secret and he knew that. It was just sort of a symbolic thing for him. He liked to be appreciated. And then we went out. We had a very small dinner about six of us. I would say four are his old case officers and then I learned stories that I never knew because it was after my watch. But I was honored because I was the guy that recruited him. We stayed in touch for years and years. On every mission, I said, “Now, what happens if you’re killed?” He wasn’t married. He had a girlfriend, and he said, “Bury me where I fall. That’s all I ask and don’t say anything to anybody.”

When he was old, and he passed away, some years ago, I said, "What about your wife?" He married the girlfriend. He said, "No, no, she doesn't need to know". She never knew he was off of these bizarre missions around the world. She never knew it was for the CIA. So, he was my favorite agent.

[00:33:28] AH: You're unable to disclose which country this was in?

[00:33:32] BB: No, I can't say where I recruited him. I can't say what his nationality was. He's a European. His missions, wherever there's a little war in the world that you don't want to know about, he was there.

[00:33:46] AH: The process of making a spy, do some people just have a knack for it? Can you just small out someone that could be a good asset or an agent or how does it work? Do some people just have a certain kind of sensitivity towards making kind of spot the people that would be a good source? Or how do you read through all of the wackadoodles and wannabes and **[inaudible 00:34:09]**, and how do you know who's the real deal then? Help me understand that a little bit more.

[00:34:15] BB: Yeah, it's not easy, Andrew. A good case officer is a salesman. So, you got to be a people person. You have to respect these people. You have to like them. You have to respect them. Especially, when you're asking them to put their life on the line. Recruiting is difficult. You have to be tenacious. You have to be sure, someone who was an FI reporter, a foreign intelligence reporter, I wouldn't recruit him until he given me half a dozen reports for free, because you want to be sure that he's got the goods. You don't want to hire somebody and find out that he doesn't really have access to the kind of stuff we want. And then if you get it for free, that makes it easier to recruit him when you're setting up a scholarship fund for him or something like that.

So, it's not easy. That's why there's only about 10% that really come through with the goods. But then the other thing is many, many people that can't recruit, make their careers in handling. I had a friend who recruited so many people in one tour, he had to be replaced by two officers because he has so many agents. Now, that guy, I mean, he is a hero. He is one of my good friends. It was a knack. This is a guy like Captain America, everybody liked him. And unlike me,

if you pitch somebody that doesn't work, that refuse, you can be in real trouble. Now, they could report to the local government. Let's say the guy's a diplomat, and he can report to his government, and you're gone in 48 hours, persona non grata, PNG, out. You can never go back to that country again.

So, you've got to be careful. Your kids are out of school. Your wife got a job. Your gone. Your life is going to be turned upside down if they say no. So, in the 41, I had 41, say yes. And that's good. I didn't have to pack my bags and move on.

[00:36:20] AH: In this process, cut a long story short, you're exploiting human vulnerabilities. I'm trying to find out a diplomatic way to say this. Is there a predatory component to it?

[00:36:31] BB: There's an ethical issue here, Andrew, and you can't resolve the requirement to turn someone into a traitor for their own country, then you're in the wrong business, then you shouldn't be doing it. I've got friends who've quit because of that issue.

Now, in my case, I will recruit any – we don't black male people. Russians blackmail people. We don't. It's not part of our stick. So, when I look at someone that I feel would be an asset to the US government is an intelligence source, I have to say, would this guy be willing to do it for certain things, and that's the dream issue. There's a lot of things that we can change people's lives and they're grateful. I've recruited one guy, who had already given me good intelligence. He was a senior diplomat. And I knew he needed money for his children's education. I arranged the scholarship for him. When I saw them, he and his wife at a dinner party or national day reception, some months after the recruitment, the wife, very pleasant woman, but reserved, she came up to me with tears in her eyes to thank me for saving their family.

So, no, I don't trouble going to sleep over people I recruited, and I've never had anybody say that they wish they hadn't done it.

[00:38:05] AH: One of the things that you mentioned a moment ago, I find particularly fascinating, and you don't hear a lot about it. You spoke about recruiters and handlers, you get to be a great handler, who wasn't very successful at recruiting, is that right?

[00:38:20] BB: Right. That's absolutely right. And that's a person who's got maybe excellent language skills, organizational skills, writing skills, people handling skills, but not recruiting skills. Now, an officer can come to a station, and immediately be given three or four agents to handle, to run. That process to do out and get the intelligence. Now, what could be difficult, and this happened to me more than once. Okay, I go out and I recruit a guy, does a great job, typically is a guy that I like. In one case, in particular, I recruited a very senior officer, who did a tremendous job, didn't take money, but he needed insurance, and we got insurance. When I pitched them, he said, "Look, I have no problem working for you. We're going against a mutual target." And his country, my country both benefited. But he exceeded his brief by doing things that his country probably wouldn't have liked, but he did in anyway because he had a tremendous amount of fortitude. He's very brave, a great guy. I'm still in touch with him. He's an old, old man, a great guy.

But he said, "Look, I'm willing to do this for you, but you don't plan to turn me over to anybody else." Okay, this is one on one and this is not uncommon, and especially at hard targets. A Russian might be willing to deal with one person, one person only. And I've known people that handle one asset for years and years and years because of that reason. I know another guy who made a hard target recruitment made a turnover and it didn't take and so the case officer had to come back into the picture and do it again, and then turn them over to another guy. And that didn't take because the agent only trusted the guy that recruited him, and he was so valuable that the case officer had to adjust his own career progression to handle that one case.

Now, in the case of my friend, I said, "Sure, sure, no problem, no problem." And this guy was a very, very important guy in the country. So, when it came for, my tour to end, and I was going home. I said, "I want you to meet my friend." And he said, he laughed, "I told you. I told you on day one, no turnover." And I said, No, no, no, this isn't a turnover. I want you to meet my friend. He's a great guy. You'll like him." So, the asset said, "Okay. Just as a favor to you, I'll meet this guy. But I'm telling you, as I told you, I'm not going to be turned over."

Now, I had handpicked the guy he was going to meet and that guy was an outstanding officer, low key, area skills, language skills. So, we had a very pleasant lunch. And at no point in the lunch, we just talked about politics and general and this and that, nothing to do with intelligence, and certainly nothing to do with CIA. At the end of the lunch, we're saying goodbye and the

asset turns to my friend, and he said, "Well, when are we going to meet again?" And my friend said, "No, no, no, this isn't a turnover." And the officer, the the agent said, "I want to know you." So, he became a good friend, just like I had been a good friend.

So, it was a turnover, that probably wouldn't have worked for 98% of the people coming in. But I knew that the agent would like my friend, and he did, and they became good friends. So, there's a lot of human interaction, knowing people goes into being a successful case officer. Finally, when I say my book, *Risk Taker, Spy Maker*, too many people in my experience, especially in the senior officers, the more time I spent in the agency, the fewer risk takers I met. Too many people covering their ass didn't want to take the chance. We're a risk-taking organization by definition. So, I was surprised that there wasn't more of that out there. The other thing is, when we say spies, I casually I say, spy maker, I'm not a spy. I hire spies. I recruit spies. I run spies. I'm not a spy. I'm a case officer and that's how it is. But in general parlance, and I'm willing to go along with it. But we're spies, but actually were spy makers.

[00:43:00] AH: You mentioned like staying friends with some of the people that get recruited. For those that are part of this world, like help them understand that process. I guess some people would maybe assume that it was like very transactional. Tell us about that process of aftercare or handing them off to someone else and staying in touch and so forth.

[00:43:24] BB: Well, generally speaking, you go out to a post, you meet people, and you recruit some of them, and you handle them, and then you turn them over and you never see them again, you don't really care. You just want to make sure that everything is done securely and there's no fabricators involved, and it's professional. But rarely, and I mentioned a couple of cases, there are guys that I really invested a lot of my own, not just time, but the energy in and caring about them and keeping them alive, keeping them safe. Like the British officer were like my favorite agent, they became lifelong friends.

Now, that's not normal, and certainly of the 41 people I recruited, I can't remember the names of 15 of them now. They were there. Some of them are support assets. They were safe housekeepers or whatever. And they've you know, they've gone off and done their own thing. But a few people, I'm still in touch with them. When I go abroad, sometimes I'll see them or we'll

have a lunch. Some of them, one guy became prime minister and I hear him from time to time. So, it's just part of the life of the case officer.

[00:44:42] AH: I was thinking there when you were speaking to, are there particular advantages the American case officers have when compared to other countries? The reason why I say that as the I'm thinking America is often known as the land of dreams, the American dream for people around the world, that's one of the things that's associated with. It's often associated as being a very affluent country compared to most other countries in the world. It's also, rightly or wrongly, one of the stereotypes overseas is that Americans are all good salespeople, they're all very good at selling themselves and selling things. So, I just wondered if culturally that combination of affluence, dreams and salesmanship, does that mean that American case officers are particularly successful, or they've got like a really good product that they can sell out in the open market of intelligence?

[00:45:39] BB: Yeah, I think that it's very easy to be an American case officer, because we're the good guys. I've always felt that. The last few years, I haven't been so sure, because things fell apart during the Trump administration. But I think we're on the road to recovery right now. But America is a success story. Many of the assets that I recruited, they didn't all want to come to the States, maybe two, or three, independent of me and the agency, they've ended up in the States, refugees or whatever. But there are people that want to do the right thing. I'm including some communists here. These are people that know they're working for a bad regime.

And when you're going against a Russian, let's say, Soviet, in the old days, you didn't have to convince him that Marxism, Leninism didn't work. He knew that. He knew he worked for a corrupt violent group, murdered millions of people. It was to our benefit. The West, it was easy for us to sell our program, and to a certain extent, it's still easy today. America still represents to many people in the world a hope. I think we have a big advantage, we Americans, but not just Americans. But say Western Europeans have a big advantage over the opposition because they are the bad guys or bad guys around China today is killing, imprisoning many people. They're subverting countries, trying to subvert this country. Russians even know they – today, Russia is essentially considered the gas station of Europe. They don't produce anything. They don't make anything.

I was talking to a retired senior Soviet official couple years ago and he was trying to assure me that Russia is no threat because nothing works. They build something it doesn't work. They don't have the technicians to maintain what they made before when they made good things. China's the threat nowadays, and so we have to adapt.

[00:47:48] AH: Were there particular components of the job that you've found more gratifying than others? What gave you a buzz? Was it recruiting someone? Or did you enjoy the handling? Or was that just kind of a pain in the ass. Tell us the things that really flip your switch, so to speak, and the things that were more mundane.

[00:48:11] BB: One of the things I liked about being in the associated press, being in the United States Marine Corps and being in the CIA, were the people I worked with, men and women, old and young. I mean, they were high quality people in every case. So, that alone was a good reason to go to work happy.

Now, when I make a recruitment, that's good. That's a plus and that's just day one of a long process. I'm making that recruitment turning to be a solid asset to the agency. But the other thing is, as I said, at the beginning, I wanted to go back to Asia. I told the agency, if anything but East Asia, I'm gone. I don't want to go to Europe, when you're a Latin American, you don't want to Eastern Europe. I want to go to Asia and specifically Southeast Asia. My countries are Thailand, Burma, Cambodia and I spent 20 years in Southeast Asia, including three years in Indonesia, but mostly Thailand, Cambodia, and most recently, Burma. Most of my books have been about Burma, and films about Burma, which is under a sad situation right now. But has nothing to do with me or the CIA.

So, I like Asia and I go back. I travel a lot. I met a lot of people. I ate some great meals around the world. I have no regrets.

[00:49:42] AH: Did you pick up any other languages, Barry? You mentioned Thai –

[00:49:46] BB: Thai is my grad school language, but I use French in Cambodia. I went to State Department language school, outstanding school, Foreign Service Institute. 20 weeks of French, 6 hours a day, no English spoken. Maximum class size five is brutal. I use French in

Cambodia to my great advantage. And then I was three years in Paris, I use French. But I can speak maybe 500 words of Khmer, Cambodian, 2,000 words of Bahasa, Indonesia, the easiest language in the world, essentially, Malay. And then may be 500 words of Burmese. So, I can get around.

[00:50:32] AH: Just to continue the focus on Southeast Asia, I know that you end up in Cambodia a very interesting time as well. So, your first post then, is to Cambodia until it falls in 1973. If you can give everyone a refresher on what happens after that, but it's a particularly harrowing time and place.

[00:50:56] BB: Yeah, I was in and out of Cambodia a lot. I covered the country a lot. I don't go back to Cambodia anymore because the peasant regime or a bunch of Khmer Rouge thugs, but the country is great, the people are great. My first time I was in Cambodia was with AP and '63, and I was the only Western photographer at the visit of the red Chinese president. That was great. It was great, interesting stuff. 10 years later – that was '63. '73, I was in the embassy, county is at war, we're take a couple 100 rockets a day in the city, surrounded by the Khmer Rouge. It was probably my most interesting posting, my two years in Cambodia. I made a couple of recruitments nothing major, but it got me – I honed my skills. I worked for some great people. I worked with some great people. I handled some great people. My main job was to handle recruited assets, including the station's most, not most, but senior assets and biggest producers of intelligence. Some of those guys I stayed in touch with.

So, when Cambodia fell in '75, I was over in Thailand for about five years, much of my time was working on Cambodia, and I was running cross border operations. And so, then I was sort of going against the Khmer Rouge. Later, when I was in France, I was again heavily involved in Cambodia where we're in the process of supporting the noncommunist resistance against the Vietnamese. I made a number of good recruitments there. Then in 1990, I was leaving Indonesia. I had three great years in Indonesia. I accepted a very good job in Washington. I had realized it was my turn in the barrel. But chief of station in Bangkok, who I had served with when I was in China operations, invited me to come back to Bangkok to run this paramilitary project that we had been working on. I've been working on for years since its inception and whatnot, fighting the Vietnamese and their puppet government.

So, I turned down the Washington job, and I went to Bangkok. And that was, again, a very fulfilling assignment, where we go into Cambodia, where the resistance or two resistance groups we supported, totaling 25,000 men. We had Asian allies we're working very closely with, especially the Thai. I mean, this was launched out of Thailand, and tremendous support from the Thai. The four generals that I worked with, all retired as four-star generals, and every one of them was a great guy. That was fun and we won. The Vietnamese were forced out. In '91, they signed a peace agreement, which then brought in free and fair elections under the auspices of the UN, and our people won. So, that was good. In 20 some years of working the Cambodian target, it was nice to go out with a win.

[00:54:05] AH: You mentioned cross border operations there. What would that involve, Barry?

[00:54:09] BB: Well, that means you're recruiting people in Thailand, some Cambodians primarily. I mean, almost always Cambodians to go back inside and then report on what's happening inside. In those days, the Khmer Rouge were in the process of killing two million people. So, a lot of people, the biggest Cambodian city in the world, in let's say 1976, '77, '78, was not Phnom Penh because the Khmer Rouge kicked everybody out. The biggest city was a refugee camp in Thailand, Khao-I-Dang refugee camp. So, we would recruit Cambodians to go back inside and report or we would be working with – sometimes we could recruit Khmer Rouge through a false flag. I don't want to get into too much tradecraft here, but we ran agents inside and sometimes we recruited people. Sometimes we had people stayed behind that were reporting. But anyway, the focus was to find out how bad the situation was in Cambodia and it was very bad. And a lot of people didn't believe us.

[00:55:18] AH: How do you navigate when you were in Southeast Asia? How do you go unnoticed? Or how do you conduct your job without sticking out like a sore thumb,

[00:55:26] BB: You have a 9 to 5 job. You're a diplomat working in the embassy. And the job in an embassy is to meet other diplomats. Now, a bunch of these other diplomats are people that would make good agents. So, one thing we did, I should mention now, as I did in the book, my wife, BJ, a Hawaiian girl, University of Washington graduate. I met her when she was studying Japanese. I was studying Thai. We're married 52 years now. She did a tremendous job as a diplomatic wife, as a CIA wife, as a mother. One boy born in Bangkok, one boy born in Paris,

and she would host a dinner party, or a sit-down diplomatic dinner every week, for 25 years. And then you bring in your targets into the house and she was always good as I never pitched someone until BJ said they're ready.

[00:56:25] AH: Oh, wow.

[00:56:27] BB: And no one ever said no. Sure, but you have a normal life. You just get on with your life and you don't run around and do things in the dark. It's over.

[00:56:36] AH: It's basically just turning up and doing a regular job. The course of that regular job, you try to do your other job?

[00:56:44] BB: Yeah, that's right. That's exactly right. The daytime, you're a diplomat and nighttime, you're a spy and you meet agents after dark. We have cases, safe houses for things like that. We have indirect communication. So, it's a long day. I mean, we're working a 16-hour day, every day, and there's no weekends off.

[00:57:04] AH: This is your diplomatic cover, but you're actually working for the CIA. So, let's just say you're posted to Rangoon, or you're posted to Jakarta or not. You're ostensibly working for state, but you're really working for the CIA. But there's also diplomats from other embassies from all over the world there as well. So, what's the experience like being in a foreign country with all of these other diplomats, some of whom are spies? Some people just think, "Oh, well, diplomats." So, dinner parties and cocktail parties and stuff. Is it kind of like a light-hearted thing or is a very like less than this is basically a viper's nest and you have to watch what you're doing at every turn, because there's spies everywhere and you don't know what you're hearing, interlocutors are actually diplomats and which of them are actually foreign intelligence officers?

[00:58:03] BB: It's actually, Andrew, a very easy, pleasant life. You've got servants, you've got duty free privileges. You've got good housing. I mean, being a diplomat. Now, things have changed since I retired, I think it's a lot more dangerous, especially for Americans, especially in the Middle East in certain places than it was. But again, my house was hit four times by rockets in Phnom Penh. BJ wasn't allowed. I mean, we didn't have wives. BJ was teaching school in Bangkok when I was in Cambodia. But for 90% of the people, that's a very quiet, sometimes

boring life, going to diplomatic receptions. Then I would typically go to, let's say, a National Day, let's say the Sri Lanka National Day. I knew the ambassador, and they would invite me and so I go, but I go for one reason. There's a guy I want to see who is a Russian. I'm using this as just an example. I would go there, and I would make sure that the ambassador knew I was there and have a drink with him and toast his country. And then I would track down to Russia and he would see me coming. We would laugh and we'd have a drink together and then I'd leave.

This is what they call it DB, a drop by. I didn't waste any time. Then I go off to a dinner party at eight o'clock and at that dinner party, I'm interested in another diplomat of another country, and like that. So, you're juggling a lot of – there are a lot of balls in the air, but it's not onerous. And wives don't have to participate. Many, many times BJ wouldn't go to receptions and things like that. It was just boring and very often she was doing a job herself. Sometimes she worked for the State Department, sometimes she taught at international schools and things like that. So, it's a very pleasant life. I enjoyed it.

[01:00:00] AH: I think I have managed to cover most of the ground that I was hoping to cover. This could easily be like a five-hour conversation, and I've really enjoyed speaking to you. But I'm wondering, is there any ingredients that you think I should have been cooking with that I haven't incorporated into the meal already?

[01:00:18] BB: I don't think so. Andrew. I would just leave by saying that I enjoyed my time in government and in the agency. If you don't know when you're working and playing, then you're doing the right thing.

[01:00:26] AH: Well, it's been a pleasure to speak to you. Thanks so much for your time, sir.

[01:00:31] BB: Thank you very much, Andrew. I hope to meet you in Washington someday.

[01:00:32] AH: Absolutely.

[END]