

PART THREE

THE LIMITS OF POWER

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Ecclesiastes 9:11

A man employs the full power of the state in his grief and ends up plunging his government into a fruitless and costly experiment. A woman who walks away from the promise of power finds the strength to forgive—and saves her friendship, her marriage, and her sanity. The world is turned upside down.

CHAPTER NINE

André Trocmé

“WE FEEL OBLIGED TO TELL YOU
THAT THERE ARE AMONG US A
CERTAIN NUMBER OF JEWS.”

1.

When France fell in June of 1940, the German Army allowed the French to set up a government in the city of Vichy. It was headed by the French World War One hero Marshal Philippe Pétain, who was granted the full powers of a dictator. Pétain cooperated actively with the Germans. He stripped Jews of their rights. He pushed them out of professions. Revoking laws against anti-Semitism, he rounded up French Jews and put them into internment camps and took a dozen other authoritarian steps, large and small, including instituting the requirement that every morning French schoolchildren honor the French flag with a full fascist salute—right arm outstretched, palm down. On the scale of the adjustments necessary under German occupation, saluting the flag each morning was a

small matter. Most people complied. But not those living in the town of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon.

Le Chambon is one of a dozen villages on the Vivarais Plateau, a mountainous region not far from the Italian and Swiss borders in south-central France. The winters are snowy and harsh. The area is remote, and the closest large towns are well down the mountain, miles away. The region is heavily agricultural, with farms tucked away in and around piney woods. For several centuries, Le Chambon had been home to a variety of dissident Protestant sects, chief among them the Huguenots. The local Huguenot pastor was a man named André Trocmé. He was a pacifist. On the Sunday after France fell to the Germans, Trocmé preached a sermon at the Protestant temple of Le Chambon: "Loving, forgiving, and doing good to our adversaries is our duty," he said. "Yet we must do this without giving up, and without being cowardly. We shall resist whenever our adversaries demand of us obedience contrary to the orders of the Gospel. We shall do so without fear, but also without pride and without hate."

Giving the straight-armed fascist salute to the Vichy regime was, to Trocmé's mind, a very good example of "obedience contrary to the orders of the Gospel." He and his co-pastor, Édouard Theis, had started a school in Le Chambon several years earlier called the Collège Cévenol. They decided that there would be no flagpole and no fascist salutes at Cévenol.

Vichy's next step was to require all French teachers to sign loyalty oaths to the state. Trocmé, Theis, and the entire staff of Cévenol refused. Pétain asked for a portrait of himself to be placed in every French school. Trocmé

and Theis rolled their eyes. On the one-year anniversary of the Vichy regime, Pétain ordered towns across the country to ring their church bells at noon on August 1. Trocmé told the church custodian, a woman named Amélie, not to bother. Two summer residents of the town came and complained. "The bell does not belong to the marshal, but to God," Amélie told them flatly. "It is rung for God—otherwise it is not rung."

Throughout the winter and spring of 1940, conditions for Jews across Europe grew progressively worse. A woman appeared at the Trocmés' door. She was terrified and trembling from the cold. She was Jewish, she said. Her life was in danger. She had heard Le Chambon was a welcoming place. "And I said, 'Come in,'" André Trocmé's wife, Magda, remembered years later. "And so it started."

Soon more and more Jewish refugees began showing up in Le Chambon. Trocmé took the train to Marseille to meet with a Quaker named Burns Chalmers. The Quakers provided humanitarian aid for the internment centers that had been set up in southern France. The camps were appalling places, overrun with rats, lice, and disease; at one camp alone, eleven hundred Jews died between 1940 and 1944. Many of those who survived were eventually shipped east and murdered in Nazi concentration camps. The Quakers could get people—especially children—out of the camps. But they had nowhere to send them. Trocmé volunteered Le Chambon. The trickle of Jews coming up the mountain suddenly became a flood.

In the summer of 1942, Georges Lamirand, the Vichy minister in charge of youth affairs, paid a state visit to Le Chambon. Pétain wanted him to set up youth camps

around France patterned after the Hitler Youth camps in Germany.

Lamirand swept up the mountain with his entourage, resplendent in his marine-blue uniform. His agenda called for a banquet, then a march to the town's stadium for a meeting with the local youth, then a formal reception. But the banquet did not go well. The food was barely adequate. Trocmé's daughter "accidentally" spilled soup down the back of Lamirand's uniform. During the parade, the streets were deserted. At the stadium, nothing was arranged: the children milled around, jostling and gawking. At the reception, a townsman got up and read from the New Testament Book of Romans, chapter 13, verse 8: "Owe no one anything except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law."

Then a group of students walked up to Lamirand, and in front of the entire town presented him with a letter. It had been drafted with Trocmé's help. Earlier that summer, the Vichy police had rounded up twelve thousand Jews in Paris at the request of the Nazis. Those arrested were held in horrendous conditions at the Vélodrome d'Hiver south of Paris before being sent to the concentration camp at Auschwitz. Le Chambon, the children made it clear, wanted no part in any of this. "Mr. Minister," the letter began:

We have learned of the frightening scenes which took place three weeks ago in Paris, where the French police, on orders of the occupying power, arrested in their homes all the Jewish families in Paris to hold them in the Vél d'Hiv. The fathers were torn from their families and sent to Germany. The children torn from their

mothers, who underwent the same fate as their husbands.... We are afraid that the measures of deportation of the Jews will soon be applied in the southern zone.

We feel obliged to tell you that there are among us a certain number of Jews. But, we make no distinction between Jews and non-Jews. It is contrary to the Gospel teaching.

If our comrades, whose only fault is to be born in another religion, received the order to let themselves be deported, or even examined, they would disobey the order received, and we would try to hide them as best we could.

We have Jews. You're not getting them.

2.

Why didn't the Nazis come to Le Chambon and make an example of the residents? The enrollment at the school started by Trocmé and Theis rose from 18 pupils on the eve of the war to 350 by 1944. It didn't take any great powers of deduction to figure out who those extra 332 children were. Nor did the town make any great secret of what it was doing. *We feel obliged to tell you that there are among us a certain number of Jews.* One aid worker described coming up on the train from Lyon several times a month with a dozen or so Jewish children in tow. She would leave them at the Hotel May by the train station and then walk around town until she found homes for them all. In France, under the laws of Vichy, transporting and hiding Jewish refugees was plainly illegal. At other points

during the war, the Nazis had demonstrated that they were not inclined to be conciliatory on the question of Jews. At one point, the Vichy police came and set up shop in Le Chambon for three weeks, searching the town and the surrounding countryside for Jewish refugees. All they could come up with were two arrests—one of whom they later released. Why didn't they just line up the whole town and ship them to Auschwitz?

Philip Hallie, who wrote the definitive history of Le Chambon, argues that the town was protected at the end of the war by Major Julius Schmeeling, a senior Gestapo official in the region. There were also many sympathetic people in the local Vichy police. Sometimes André Trocmé would get a call in the middle of the night, warning him that a raid was coming the next day. Other times a local police contingent would arrive, following up on a tip about hidden refugees, and treat themselves to a long cup of coffee at the local café first, to give everyone in town ample warning of their intentions. The Germans had enough on their plate, particularly by 1943, when the war on the Eastern Front began to go sour for them. They might not have wanted to pick a fight with a group of disputatious and disagreeable mountain folk.

But the best answer is the one that *David and Goliath* has tried to make plain—that wiping out a town or a people or a movement is never as simple as it looks. The powerful are not as powerful as they seem—nor the weak as weak. The Huguenots of Le Chambon were descendants of France's original Protestant population, and the truth is that people had tried—and failed—to wipe them out before. The Huguenots broke away from the Catholic

Church during the Reformation, which made them outlaws in the eyes of the French state. One king after another tried to make them reunite with the Catholic Church. The Huguenot movement was banned. There were public roundups and massacres. Thousands of Huguenot men were sent to the gallows. Women were imprisoned for life. Children were put in Catholic foster homes in order to rid them of their faith. The reign of terror lasted more than a century. In the late seventeenth century, two hundred thousand Huguenots fled France for other countries in Europe and North America. Those few who remained were forced underground. They worshiped in secrecy, in remote forests. They retreated to high mountain villages on the Vivarais Plateau. They formed a seminary in Switzerland and smuggled clergy across the border. They learned the arts of evasion and disguise. They stayed and learned—as the Londoners did during the Blitz—that they were not really afraid. They were just afraid of being afraid.*

"The people in our village knew already what persecutions were," Magda Trocmé said. "They talked often about their ancestors. Many years went by and they forgot, but when the Germans came, they remembered and

* The historian Christine van der Zanden calls the area the Plateau of Hospitality. The region had a long history of taking in refugees. In 1790, the French Assembly declared that all Catholic clergy, under penalty of imprisonment, had to pledge an oath to the state, making the church subordinate to the government. Those who refused to sign the pledge fled for their lives. Where did many of them go? To the Vivarais Plateau, a community already well practiced in the arts of defiance. The number of dissenters grew. During the First World War, the people of the Plateau took in refugees. During the Spanish Civil War, they took in people fleeing the fascist army of General Franco. They took in socialists and communists from Austria and Germany in the early days of the Nazi terror.

were able to understand the persecution of the Jews better perhaps than people in other villages, for they had already had a kind of preparation." When the first refugee appeared at her door, Magda Trocmé said it never occurred to her to say no. "I did not know that it would be dangerous. Nobody thought of that." *I did not know that it would be dangerous? Nobody thought of that?* In the rest of France, all people thought about was how dangerous life was. But the people of Le Chambon were past that. When the first Jewish refugees arrived, the townsfolk drew up false papers for them—not a difficult thing to do if your community has spent a century hiding its true beliefs from the government. They hid the Jews in the places they had been hiding refugees for generations and smuggled them across the border to Switzerland along the same trails they had used for three hundred years. Magda Trocmé went on: "Sometimes people ask me, 'How did you make a decision?' There was no decision to make. The issue was, Do you think we are all brothers or not? Do you think it is unjust to turn in the Jews or not? Then let us try to help!"

In attempting to wipe out the Huguenots, the French created instead a pocket in their own country that was all but impossible to wipe out.

As André Trocmé once said, "How could the Nazis ever get to the end of the resources of such a people?"

3.

André Trocmé was born in 1901. He was tall and solidly built and had a long nose and sharp blue eyes. He worked

tirelessly, lumbering from one end of Le Chambon to the other. His daughter, Nelly, writes that "a sense of duty exuded from his pores." He called himself a pacifist, but there was nothing pacifist about him. He and his wife, Magda, were famous for their shouting matches. He was often described as *un violent vaincu par Dieu*—a violent man conquered by God. "A curse on him who begins in gentleness," he wrote in his journal. "He shall finish in insipidity and cowardice, and shall never set foot in the great liberating current of Christianity."

Six months after the visit from Minister Lamirand, Trocmé and Édouard Theis were arrested and imprisoned in an internment camp (where, according to Hallie, "personal possessions were taken from them, and noses were measured to ascertain whether or not they were Jewish"). After a month, the two were told they would be released—but only on the condition that they pledged to "obey without question orders given me by governmental authorities for the safety of France, and for the good of the National Revolution of Marshal Pétain." Trocmé and Theis refused. The director of the camp came up to them in disbelief. Most of the people in the camp would end up dead in a gas chamber. In exchange for signing their names on a piece of paper, to a bit of patriotic boilerplate, the two men were getting a free ticket home.

"What is this?" the camp director shouted at them. "This oath has nothing in it contrary to your conscience! The marshal wishes only the good of France!"

"On at least one point we disagree with the marshal," Trocmé replied. "He delivers the Jews to the Germans.... When we get home we shall certainly continue to be op-

posed, and we shall certainly continue to disobey orders from the government. How could we sign this now?"

Finally the prison officials gave up and sent them home. Later in the war, when the Gestapo stepped up their scrutiny of Le Chambon, Trocmé and Theis were forced to flee. Theis joined up with the underground and spent the remainder of the war ferrying Jews across the Alps to the safety of Switzerland. ("It was not reasonable," he explained to Hallie of his decision. "But you know, I had to do it, anyway.") Trocmé moved from town to town, carrying false papers. Despite his precautions, he was arrested in a police roundup at the Lyon railway station. He was thrown into turmoil—not just at the prospect of discovery but also and more crucially at the question of what to do about his false papers. Hallie writes:

His identity card gave his name as Béguet, and they would ask him if this was indeed true. Then he would have to lie in order to hide his identity. But he was not able to lie; lying, especially to save his own skin, was "sliding toward those compromises that God had not called upon me to make," he wrote in his autobiographical notes on this incident. Saving the lives of others—and even saving his own life—with false identity cards was one thing, but standing before another human being and speaking lies to him only for the sake of self-preservation was something different.

Is there really a moral difference between giving yourself a false name on your identity card and stating that false name to a police officer? Perhaps not. Trocmé, at the time, was traveling with one of his young sons. He was still actively

engaged in the business of hiding refugees. He had plenty of extenuating circumstances, in other words, to justify a white lie.

But that is not the point. Trocmé was disagreeable in the same magnificent sense as Jay Freireich and Wyatt Walker and Fred Shuttlesworth. And the beauty of the disagreeable is that they do not make calculations like the rest of us. Walker and Shuttlesworth had nothing to lose. If your house has been bombed and the Klan has surrounded your car and pummeled you with their fists, how can things get any worse? Jay Freireich was told to stop what he was doing and warned that he was risking his career. He was heckled and abandoned by his peers. He held dying children in his arms and jabbed a thick needle into their shinbones. But he had been through worse. The Huguenots who put their own self-interest first had long ago converted to some other faith or given up or moved away. What was left was stubbornness and defiance.

The arresting officer, it turned out, never asked for Trocmé's papers. Trocmé talked the police into taking him back to the railway station, where he met up with his son and slipped out a side door. But had the police asked him if he was Béguet, he had already decided to tell the truth: "I am not Monsieur Béguet. I am Pastor André Trocmé." *He didn't care.* If you are Goliath, how on earth do you defeat someone who thinks like that? You could kill him, of course. But that is simply a variant of the same approach that backfired so spectacularly for the British in Northern Ireland and for the Three Strikes campaign in California. The excessive use of force creates legitimacy problems, and force without legitimacy leads to defiance, not submission. You could kill

André Trocmé. But in all likelihood, all that would mean is that another André Trocmé would rise in his place.

When Trocmé was ten years old, his family drove one day to their house in the country. He was in the backseat with his two brothers and a cousin. His parents were in the front. His father grew angry at a car driving too slowly in front of them and pulled out to pass. "Paul, Paul, not so fast. There's going to be an accident!" his mother cried out. The car spun out of control. The young André pushed himself away from the wreckage. His father and brothers and cousin were fine. His mother was not. He saw her lying lifeless thirty feet away. Confronting a Nazi officer paled in comparison with seeing your mother's body by the side of the road. As Trocmé wrote to his deceased mother, many years later:

If I have sinned so much, if I have been, since then, so solitary, if my soul has taken such a swirling and solitary movement, if I have doubted everything, if I have been a fatalist, and have been a pessimistic child who awaits death every day, and who almost seeks it out, if I have opened myself slowly and late to happiness, and if I am still a somber man, incapable of laughing whole-heartedly, it is because you left me that June 24th upon that road.

But if I have believed in eternal realities...if I have thrust myself toward them, it is also because I was alone, because you were no longer there to be my God, to fill my heart with your abundant and dominating life.

It was not the privileged and the fortunate who took in the Jews in France. It was the marginal and the damaged, which should remind us that there are real limits to what

evil and misfortune can accomplish. If you take away the gift of reading, you create the gift of listening. If you bomb a city, you leave behind death and destruction. But you create a community of remote misses. If you take away a mother or a father, you cause suffering and despair. But one time in ten, out of that despair rises an indomitable force. You see the giant and the shepherd in the Valley of Elah and your eye is drawn to the man with the sword and shield and the glittering armor. But so much of what is beautiful and valuable in the world comes from the shepherd, who has more strength and purpose than we ever imagine.

The eldest son of Magda and André Trocmé was Jean-Pierre. He was a sensitive and gifted adolescent. André Trocmé was devoted to him. One evening near the end of the war, the family went to see a recital of Villon's poem "The Ballad of the Hanged Men." The next night, they came home from dinner and found Jean-Pierre hanging from a noose in the bathroom. Trocmé stumbled into the woods, crying out, "Jean-Pierre! Jean-Pierre!" Later, he wrote:

Even today I carry a death within myself, the death of my son, and I am like a decapitated pine. Pine trees do not regenerate their tops. They stay twisted, crippled.

But surely he must have paused when he wrote those words, because everything that had happened in Le Chambon suggested that there was more to the story than that. Then he wrote:

They grow in thickness, perhaps, and that is what I am doing.

AFTERWORD

Konrad Kellen

“TELL HIM HE KNOWS NOTHING
AT ALL ABOUT HIS ENEMY.”

1.

In the center of old Saigon, just down the street from the Reunification Palace, there is an old European-style villa. It dates from the days when Vietnam was a French colony—and Saigon was the closest thing on that side of the world to Paris. The address is 176 Rue Pasteur. It is a day-care center now. But for a time in the 1960s it was home to a secret Pentagon study, and the work that emerged from the villa had a profound effect on the course of the war in Vietnam waged by the U.S. military. The location 176 Pasteur also—no less importantly—started an argument. On one side of that debate was a man named Leon Gouré, who for a time lived upstairs in one of the villa's grand bedrooms and cut a wide swath through the expatriate community of Saigon. On the other side was

an equally remarkable man named Konrad Kellen, who, as a point of principle, refused to set foot in the villa at all. Kellen had been through the Second World War and believed one war was enough for one lifetime. In the fight between Gouré and Kellen, Gouré turned out to be wrong and Kellen turned out to be right. The tragedy of 176 Pasteur is that so few people realized this, at least until it was too late.

2.

Outside the highest reaches of the Pentagon and the White House, neither Kellen nor Gouré was well known—even at the height of the Vietnam War. I stumbled across them while writing *David and Goliath*. I spent weeks tracking down people who knew them. Kellen's widow lives high up in the hills overlooking the ocean in Los Angeles. Some of his former colleagues sometimes meet for lunch at a little diner in Santa Monica. The historian Mai Elliott*—who worked for Gouré's team—lives east of Los Angeles in Riverside County.

What drew me to their story was how *familiar* it was. In essence, Gouré and Kellen were arguing about a

* Elliott would go on to write the definitive history of RAND's experience in Vietnam: *RAND in Southeast Asia: A History of the Vietnam War Era* (RAND Corporation, 2010). She is also the author of a deeply moving memoir, *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family*. She is Vietnamese, by the way. Elliott is her married name, and her husband is David Elliott, himself a distinguished historian of Vietnam, who wrote *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930–1975*. If you want to learn more about that war, you could do worse than to stick with the Elliots.

modern-day version of the ancient battle between the Israelites and the Philistines in the Valley of Elah. Both men looked at the “David” of Southeast Asia and drew radically different conclusions about who he was and what he was capable of. And their disagreement was the perfect example of the question that my book leaves us with: If David beat Goliath—if, in fact, Davids beat Goliaths all the time, if adversity is a great teacher, if resources ultimately become self-defeating—why doesn’t that change the way we make sense of the world? Konrad Kellen was arguing all those things about 176 Pasteur in the 1960s and he was right. Yet everyone listened, instead, to Leon Gouré. Why?

3.

In the early 1960s, Saigon had an opera house and a grand cathedral called Notre-Dame (of course). It had boulevards lined with tamarind and flame trees, outdoor cafés and boutiques and graceful buildings built in the High French Colonial style. In the humid afternoons, Western diplomats and officers would go to the exclusive Cercle Sportif to swim or play tennis. In the evenings, they would gather at the Continental Hotel, sitting in rattan chairs on the veranda, smoking cigarettes, and drinking cocktails.

Travel outside the city, however, was risky. Vietnam had been divided into two in 1954—with Chinese-backed communists controlling the North and a pro-Western regime based in Saigon running the South—and insurgents from the North had ever since been streaming across the makeshift border, infiltrating the villages and hamlets of

the countryside. In Saigon, the government was corrupt and unpopular. There were protests and demonstrations in the streets. Occasionally bombs went off, or someone would throw a grenade into a café. Eighteen- and nineteen-year-old American GIs with crew cuts and freshly starched khakis thronged the Rue Catinat—or “Tu Do,” as the Vietnamese renamed it after the French left—through the center of the city, because the U.S. government had decided that South Vietnam needed to be defended against communism. Jeeps and armored cars clogged the roads. The war that would engulf Vietnam and its neighbors for more than a decade—leaving more than a million soldiers and civilians dead, turning U.S. society upside down, and bringing about the downfall of a president—was just beginning.

From the start it was a strange conflict—quite unlike the wars America had just fought in Korea and before that against the Germans and the Japanese in the Second World War. The United States had no intention of invading North Vietnam. They just wanted to force the North Vietnamese to stop sending guerrillas—known as the Viet Cong—across the border, and to persuade the South Vietnamese to stop joining the communists.

Nor did the U.S. military know anything about Vietnam. “Who are the Viet Cong? What makes them tick?” the American Defense Secretary Robert McNamara famously asked before sending the first shiploads of troops to the country. It was an honest question. He didn’t know who the Viet Cong were. No one did. The chief advisor to the American general in South Vietnam at the time was an Australian called Colonel Serong, and the best he could do was to say, “These people are simply what we call in many

countries juvenile delinquents.” McNamara and President Lyndon Johnson decided to launch an air campaign against the North, which they called Operation Rolling Thunder. They would bomb those areas controlled by the Viet Cong until the North gave up and sued for peace. But if you didn't know your enemy, how could you know if your strategy would work? McNamara and Johnson wanted to win over the peasants of Vietnam. But how could anyone siting at a desk in Washington, DC, or even on a rattan chair on the veranda of the Continental Hotel, know how a peasant in a remote corner of Vietnam *felt* when the Air Force dropped a bomb on his village? The Pentagon needed answers, and for that they turned to Leon Gouré.

Leon Gouré was born in 1922 in Russia. His parents were Mensheviks—a branch of socialists who split off from the dominant Bolsheviks during the Russian Revolution. After Lenin purged the Mensheviks, the Gourés moved to Berlin, then fled Berlin for Paris when the Nazis came to power, then fled Paris for New Jersey on the last train out when France fell to Germany. Gouré used to refer to himself as a “professional refugee.” He was charismatic and powerful, with thick, wavy black hair that was graying at the temples. He spoke with a Parisian accent and had a PhD in political science. He worked for the influential California think tank the RAND Corporation out of their Saigon office at 176 Rue Pasteur.

“Gouré was the stereotypical continental professor,” one of his longtime coworkers put it, “and the wrinkle in his eyes denoted an unmistakable *joie de vivre*.” Women loved him. “Leon always had mistresses,” another of Gouré’s colleagues remembers. “He had a wife and kids but he didn’t

think anything of it. It was just part of his culture. I remember the two RAND secretaries came out to Saigon from California on the same airplane, both thinking they were going to be Leon’s girl. He had to pick one of them.” Early in his time in Vietnam, Gouré visited the seaside town of Vung Tau—which the French had called Cap Saint Jacques. He sat on the beach, eating steak and lobster, watching B-52 bombers destroy a village on the other side of the bay. In front of him, children played soccer on the beach and teenagers flirted. In the distance, planes roared, black clouds filled the sky, and the ground rocked with explosions. Gouré found Vietnam intoxicating.

In March of 1965, Leon Gouré flew to Washington, DC, to meet with the U.S. secretary of defense, Robert McNamara. For a year, RAND had been running a small research project. Gouré was starting to tell McNamara what they had learned by interviewing captured Viet Cong soldiers and defectors, when McNamara interrupted him.

“What’s your budget?” he asked.

“About one hundred thousand dollars,” Gouré replied. “OK. What can you do with a million?” McNamara responded.

A million dollars in 1964—particularly in a country as impoverished as Vietnam—was a king’s ransom. And thus was the Viet Cong Motivation and Morale Project born.

4.

RAND’s Morale Project consisted of several dozen Vietnamese interviewers organized into groups of three or

four. Sometimes the groups would stay in Saigon and go to the prison where captured Viet Cong were held. More often, they would head out into the countryside to conduct their interviews, driving into the Mekong Delta or taking military planes to the highlands to visit what were called “Chieu Hoi,” camps for people who had defected from the Viet Cong. The teams would land at a local airfield and find a driver to take them to the closest camp, or sometimes they would hitchhike. They would look for people who had played a meaningful role in the insurgency. The interviews were taped. If the subject was uninteresting or reluctant, the sessions would be short. Other times, they lasted for days. Then it was back to Saigon, where the interviews would be transcribed, translated, and analyzed. The trips could be arduous. Once, an interviewer’s only option was standing up on a cargo plane that was shipping the bodies of South Vietnamese officers back to Saigon for burial. The bodies had been left out in the sun. The interviewer smoked his pipe “furiously” all the way home.

Some of the subjects had been tortured—with *di tau bay*, “flying the airplane,” as it was known—and often they were wary. So the interviewer would always start by explaining that they were not from the military or an intelligence agency. They were from an independent research organization. They just wanted to hear personal stories. If you were South Vietnamese, why did you join the Viet Cong? And why did you stay in the Viet Cong?—because the life of an insurgent was full of danger and hardship. The interviews might take place outside under a tree or over beers at a nearby restaurant. The interviewer would offer the subject cigarettes. Many of the subjects were pris-

oners. No one had shown any interest in their lives and experiences for a long time, so when the interviewer sat and listened patiently, their stories would come tumbling out.

To American political and military leaders accustomed to dry, colorless reports, the Morale Project must have seemed heaven sent: a living, breathing portrait of the enemy. When the Pentagon would finally make the rue Pasteur archive public, the transcripts would total sixty-one thousand pages—a gold mine of information. Gouré would brief the Air Force, the Army, and the U.S. embassy on what he found. Then he would fly to Honolulu, where the U.S. military Pacific forces were headquartered. From there he would go to the RAND offices in Santa Monica, and then to Washington, DC, where he would make the rounds of the Pentagon and the White House. Back again in Saigon, Gouré would host a cocktail party or a small dinner almost every night at rue Pasteur. “The people who came were the people who ‘ran’ Vietnam,” Tony Russo, one of Gouré’s deputies, remembered years later. “These were the men who were the assistants to the top military and embassy brass.” Henry Kissinger, who would later serve as Richard Nixon’s secretary of state during the height of the Vietnam War, would drop by when he was in the country. So would Walter Mondale, later to be Jimmy Carter’s vice president. George Carver, one of the senior CIA officers in the region, was a regular. For visiting journalists, it was an essential part of the Vietnam itinerary. When a group of South Vietnamese generals were thinking of staging a coup d’état, they went to Gouré to sound him out first. On each occasion, Gouré held forth: fluent, pas-

sionate, incisive, and, most of all, *convincing*, because while everyone else sat at a desk or dropped bombs from high in the sky, he had a direct line to what the Viet Cong were really thinking.

"After the briefings military officers would crowd around, asking specific questions," Russo went on. "What was the effect of anti-personnel weapons?' 'Did the Viet Cong use water buffalo as pack animals?' 'What is the best approach to take in psychwar?' Gouré had an answer for everything." And always his answer was the same: American bombing "had radically altered the balance of military power." People were defecting from the insurgency in droves. Villagers in the countryside welcomed U.S. troops and hoped they "would bring about a speedy victory." When RAND started its study, 65 percent of defectors and prisoners believed the Viet Cong would win. After a year of heavy U.S. bombing, Gouré reported that that number was 20 percent. The morale of the Viet Cong was so precarious, he claimed, that even the slightest push—cracking up the bombing campaign against Viet Cong targets—would bring the insurgency to its knees. The enemy was on the ropes. In 1965 and 1966, when President Johnson was making the decision to pull the United States deeper and deeper into Vietnam, he walked around with a copy of Gouré's findings in his pocket.

In the years that followed, after Vietnam had descended into unending chaos and it became clear how catastrophically wrong Gouré had been, people would try to second-guess his motives. Had he really believed what he was saying? The evidence from the transcripts was not nearly as straightforward as he had made it out to be. One of the

people who worked on the Morale Project was Mai Elliott. "There was one interview I did with a high-ranking Viet Cong," she remembers. "I spent days talking to him. He grew up in central Vietnam, in one of the coastal provinces. The region was very poor, and a lot of people joined the revolution early on in the thirties and forties. He was one of those people. He was a peasant who didn't have much education. He was very articulate. He was somebody who had sacrificed his life to an ideal, regardless of the cost to his family. With no personal benefit, except this cause that he called 'the just cause'—reunifying Vietnam, throwing out the Americans, setting up a government that would bring economic and social political justice. He really believed that. And I remember thinking—Gee, he's so much better than all the leaders in Saigon." He should have been broken—he'd been captured and humiliated and probably tortured—but he wasn't. He was defiant.

Then there was a woman who took Elliott through the story of her life. She had been forced out of her village by the Americans because it was suspected of being controlled by the enemy. She was relocated and required to help build a "safe" hamlet. It sounded to Elliott like the forced labor that built the Great Wall of China. That was when the woman joined the Viet Cong. "At first I think I felt astonishment that these people had real reasons to do what they were doing," Elliott said, "then sympathy—and even admiration. It wasn't that I was supporting communism. It's just that I realized that it was going to be very difficult for the Americans to defeat the communists. The war would last a long time because the communists were never going to give up, despite what the Americans were hoping."

Buried in sixty-one thousand pages, there were plenty of stories like this. Gouré certainly must have read some of them. Did he just ignore them? Had he made up his mind in advance?

There is a story—perhaps apocryphal—about Gouré being picked up from the airport after he first arrived in Saigon. The woman driving him to the villa asked him about the direction he saw for the Morale Project. “I have the answer right here,” he is supposed to have said, patting his briefcase. “When the Air Force is paying the bills, the answer is always bombing.” For some, Gouré was simply an opportunist. He wanted to be important, and the way to be important in 1965, as Rolling Thunder was getting under way, was to tell the Air Force that Rolling Thunder was working.

That answer, however, does not do justice to Gouré’s conviction. He was not a cynic. He truly believed in American military might. Why would he not? Gouré concluded that the Viet Cong had to be faltering, because, on the face of it, they *were* faltering. The insurgency was centered in the villages of the Vietnamese countryside, places the modern world had scarcely touched. To Gouré and his team, an insurgent was someone poor and illiterate and naive, who had been duped by the communists. The phrase they used was *dau tran mat ngua*—“people with the head of a buffalo and the face of a horse.”

Rolling Thunder, by contrast, was a staggering show of force by the world’s greatest power. The B-52 bombers, with special “big belly” modifications to increase their payload, took off from Andersen Air Force base in Guam and flew twelve-hour missions over Vietnam, leaving giant

craters in their wake. From 1965 to 1968, 643,000 tons of bombs were dropped on North Vietnam. That is four times the tonnage dropped on Japan by the U.S. Air Force over the entire course of the Pacific War. An even better point of comparison is the Allied bombing campaign over Nazi-occupied Europe in the last year of the Second World War. That was an epic aerial assault. It obliterated an entire swath of Eastern and Western Europe. That was 1,200,000 tons of bombs. Against a tiny country with an economy that had barely entered the twentieth century, Rolling Thunder directed half as much airpower as the Allies did against all of Europe between 1944 and 1945. Gouré may well have read the interview Elliott conducted with the Viet Cong leader. But then he must have filtered what he learned through the overpowering logic of military force, which said that if one side was big enough and strong enough, then the weaker party eventually *had* to give in.

The Pentagon agreed. “We’ll just go on bleeding them until Hanoi wakes up to the fact that they have bled their country to the point of national disaster for generations” is how General William Westmoreland, head of the American military effort in Vietnam, put it. The key to the war was simple, in the words of another general. It was about the “three M’s: men, money, and matériel,” and on every one of those fronts the United States had the overwhelming advantage. In 1965, the first American troops arrived in Vietnam. The Air Force began bombing. Optimism was everywhere. One senior military officer said that if “one good American battalion” started at Cam Au, on the southernmost tip of Vietnam, they would “walk all the way to Hanoi without resistance.”

It is always easy to explain the follies of the powerful in terms of a deficit in their character, like arrogance or complacency. But the truth is that you or I would almost certainly have thought the same way had we been sitting in Washington in 1965. We instinctively measure advantage in terms of the three M's because men, money, and matériel are the easiest and most obvious ways to make sense of a battle. The only way to appreciate the threat that the Viet Cong posed was to actually *listen* to what they had to say—to look past the armor and see the man.

The book you have just read has tried to persuade you to think that way. Men, money, and matériel *aren't* always the deciding factors in a battle. In fact, what the inverted U-shaped curve tells us is that having *too* much money and matériel is as debilitating as having too little. Being an underdog—having nothing to lose—opens up possibilities. The Impressionists were better for shunning the Salon. History and experience ought to teach us to be suspicious of Goliaths, because the very thing that makes the giant so terrifying is also the source of his weakness. David understood that, as he sized up his opponent long ago in the Valley of Elah. And in a different time and in a very different age, so did Leon Gouré's great rival, Konrad Kellen.

5.

Konrad Kellen was a substantial man with the bearing of an aristocrat. He was born in Berlin in 1913 into one of the great Jewish families of Europe—the Karzenel-

lenbogens. His father ran the Schultheiss Brewery. His stepmother was painted by Renoir, a family friend. (Her portrait now hangs in the Metropolitan Museum in New York City.) He was an expert in Ferraris, golf, and handwriting analysis. (He asked his future wife, Patricia, on a date after scrutinizing a note she'd written.) He read widely and deeply. "We would quote passages of Thucydides to each other," a friend remembers. Both his sisters earned PhDs from Berkeley—one in chemistry, the other in biology. Einstein was a cousin.* His mother, on her hundredth birthday, remarked, "It went so fast." The Kellens were like that.

Kellen left Germany in 1933, at the age of nineteen, and moved to Paris with his family, where he became friends with the French artist and writer Jean Cocteau. From Paris, he moved to America, and on the boat ride over the Atlantic, he met Dutch Schultz, one of the most infamous of the Depression-era gangsters, who offered him a job. Upon his arrival in New York, he worked for Ben Graham, the legendary investor who would later hire the young Warren Buffett. He moved to Los Angeles in the late 1930s and in 1941 became the private secretary to the Nobel Prize-winning novelist Thomas Mann. To say people were drawn to Kellen would be an understatement. In Paris, just after the end of the Second World War, he met the artist Marc Chagall's daughter at a

* Another cousin was Albert O. Hirschman, one of the greatest economists of the post-war era. Hirschman fought in the Spanish Civil War, smuggled Jews out of Nazi Europe, and then wrote several masterpieces in economic theory, including *The Strategy of Economic Development* and *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*. His story is told in Jeremy Adelman's brilliant *Worldly Philosopher: The Odyssey of Albert O. Hirschman*.

café, who persuaded him to smuggle some of her father's paintings into the United States. In exchange, she said, he could take one of the paintings for himself. He did. (Kellen turned around and sold the painting for \$5,000. "It's a famous piece," Kellen's son, David, remembers, laughing. "And of course, it's worth many millions now. Every time there was a new art book with Chagalls in it, he'd see it and hold his head in his hands and go 'Oooooohh.'")

Kellen served in U.S. Army Intelligence. After the Second World War he was based in his native Berlin, and his job was to interview captured German soldiers. The Americans "were trying to figure out what had happened," Kellen's wife remembers. "How could Hitler have done it? How could the Germans live like that for so long? Why didn't they get rid of the Nazis? It was hours and hours of interviewing people, then analyzing what people said and writing reports."

Kellen came back from the war and worked in New York City for Radio Free Europe, where he spent much of his time conducting interviews again—this time with refugees and defectors from behind the Iron Curtain. Americans wanted to believe that everyone in Eastern Europe hated their communist masters. Kellen spent his days trying to paint a more nuanced picture.

Then in late 1966, Kellen got a call from the RAND Corporation. Leon Gouré was still the star of the Pentagon briefing circuit. But there was a low-level revolt at 176 Pasteur. No one was sure how Gouré was using the interviews. RAND was a place of great intellectual rigor, where everyone's reports and ideas were subject to critical scru-

tiny. Gouré was increasingly off on his own. His reports needed a second set of eyes.

At the RAND office in Santa Monica, Kellen worked his way through one interview after another, some of them twenty or thirty pages single spaced. He read thousands of pages. He read Mai Elliott's interview with the high-ranking Viet Cong leader and the story of the woman who was forced to rebuild her own village. He read accounts of unimaginable hardships—of hunger and suffering and injury and family members, including children, lost to war.

By the end, he found himself disagreeing with almost everything Gouré had said. He saw little evidence that those hardships were considered unendurable. The Viet Cong were not on the verge of giving up. The Viet Cong would never give up. One of Kellen's colleagues described his position simply: "There is nothing, no how, nowhere, no time, that's going to make these guys quit that it's within our power to do or within our will to do."

What did Kellen understand that Gouré did not? The answer is that—unlike Leon Gouré—he did not filter what he heard or read through the overwhelming logic of military power. Gouré would go and see the Air Force generals. They would tell him how many bombers they were going to unleash on Hanoi, and that fact dominated the way Gouré saw the war. Kellen, in contrast, regarded the numbers and varieties of American weapons as almost a distraction. He focused not on the three M's but on the *people*—on their stories and motivations. Dropping bomb after bomb on a civilian population could

leave them so demoralized that they give up. Or it could make them hate you so much that they never stop fighting. Being poor and having few weapons of your own could mean you were hopelessly overmatched in a battle with a much bigger foe. But David was hopelessly overmatched, wasn't he? And all that did was encourage him to use his wits instead.

Kellen was living in Berlin when Hitler came to power. The Führer was a ridiculous figure at that point: a short, hysterical megalomaniac backed by little more than a band of street hoodligans.⁴⁶ But the minute Hitler became chancellor, Kellen packed his bags and fled and did not return to his homeland until the war was over. "I had a feeling," he said, "right from the beginning . . . that Hitler would last, at least long enough to destroy or ruin millions of lives." Most of Kellen's contemporaries did not share his feeling about Hitler. They were comfortable and privileged and didn't feel they had to pay attention to the lunatic on their doorstep.

When Kellen went back to Berlin after the war, he was convinced that the way to understand what had just happened was to *listen* to the German people. But he was never sure his superiors in Washington understood that. "It took people a dozen years to accept the plain truth of what the Nazis were really doing," he once said, "and only

* At Kellen's school, the children used to shout out the famous first line of the poem "Erkönig" by Goethe: "Who rides, so late, through night and wind?" But instead of completing the couplet properly ("It is the father with his child"), they would chant, laughing hysterically as they did: "Vatürlich wieder die Juden!" (Once again the Jews, of course!) In those years, anti-Semitism was something that privileged young Jews could still laugh about.

a few years to forget it again, because these facts do not fit into our hard-won general thoughts of what man is and should be."⁴⁷

At RAND, he quickly saw what Gouré had done. "We ask our Viet Cong respondents as a matter of routine who they think will win the war," Kellen explained. "Very, very few think the Viet Cong will win it." Clearly Leon Gouré stopped reading at that point, satisfied that his question had been answered. Kellen kept probing. "But somewhat surprisingly," he continued, "very, very few think the [United States] will win it either. The majority of those whom we have asked the question profess that they think neither side will win."

It was not that the Viet Cong thought they were going to lose. It was that they did not think in terms of winning and losing at all—which was a profoundly different proposition. An enemy who is indifferent to the outcome of a battle is the most dangerous enemy of all. In order to understand the true significance of the first answer (that very few thought that the Viet Cong would win), you had to be willing to listen to the second (that very, very few thought the United States would win either)—and to push aside thoughts of the three M's and appreciate how formidable a shepherd boy can be, even though he looks like the most harmless opponent of all.

In *David and Goliath*, I've tried to persuade you to

* His time as a soldier haunted him. "He had terrible, terrible memories of the war," Patricia Kellen said. "It affected him deeply. And at the end of his life, it all came back." Kellen had a difficult last few years. "He thought the Nazis were outside," she went on. "He started talking about soldiers and Nazis and he was worried they were right outside. He was terrified."

see the world as Konrad Kellen saw it—to look at the shepherd and the giant and understand where power and advantage really lie. It matters, in a hundred specific and practical ways. It affects the decisions we make as parents, the schools we choose to attend, and the way we fight wars and battle crime. It shapes the way we understand creativity and entrepreneurship and the way the oppressed seek to take on bullies and tyrants.

We aren't very good at confronting these lessons about power. Think of all the extraordinary things that had to happen to Kellen over the course of his life for him to see the truth in Vietnam. Understanding the power of the underdog requires an effort. It requires standing up to conventional wisdom. It was Leon Gouré, not Konrad Kellen, who was the toast of the White House. Gouré made the circuit of every conference and think tank. Kellen was a footnote. What Gouré said was common sense. What Kellen said was not—at least not until much later, after the war had claimed a million lives and it became clear that sometimes shepherd boys aren't underdogs at all.

"In 1970, I was scheduled to see Henry Kissinger," one of Kellen's colleagues at RAND, Daniel Ellsberg, said.^{*} This was years after Kellen had first examined the Morale Project interviews. Kissinger was now the architect of the American military effort, and in the interim the war had gone from bad to worse. "I talked to Konrad. I said, 'I'm

^{*} Ellsberg would later become famous because he made a photocopy of a top-secret military study of U.S. involvement in Vietnam called "United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967: A Study Prepared by the Department of Defense," later referred to as the "Pentagon Papers," and leaked it to the press. To those who were opposed to the war, Ellsberg was a hero.

meeting Kissinger tomorrow—what would you want to tell him if you were seeing him? So he said—and let me see if I can get his words exactly right, because Konrad had a German accent—'First of all, tell him he knows nothing at all about his enemy, the Viet Cong. And what he doesn't know about them is, they cannot be defeated, and they cannot be coerced.'"

Leon Gouré got picked up by helicopters and whisked away for briefings on aircraft carriers. President Johnson carried a summary of his findings in his back pocket. But Konrad Kellen was saying something that made no sense.

"I told Kissinger, 'you've got to talk to Konrad Kellen,'" Ellsberg said. "He wrote down the name, and said he would. But he never did."