

Covert Operator in Dechhen Ling Monastery<sup>1</sup>  
Music by John Crigler

He fears their eyes,  
he fears their ears —  
except right here,  
in Dechhen Ling.

A throwaway boy  
from covert ops,<sup>2</sup>  
in irrelevant wars.  
Served his country well.

Went in whole.  
Came out half.  
Came out half.  
Came out half.

Ghosts attend him.  
Who? Where?  
When? How? Why?

The lama forbids  
his stories here.  
Again he speaks.  
Still he speaks

His army pal says,  
“They take an oath  
and if they talk  
can end up dead.

“But he’s all gone by now,  
‘lazy, alcoholic, junkie,’<sup>3</sup> \_\_\_\_\_,<sup>4</sup>  
except right here  
in Dechhen Ling.

[Recitations of 100 syllable mantra]<sup>5</sup>

He fears their eyes,  
he fears their ears —  
except right here,  
in Dechhen Ling.

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<sup>1</sup> A Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Cottage Grove, OR.

<sup>2</sup> I.e., covert operations. Among his devastating experiences in the Vietnam War, the subject of the song served as unwilling translator for a fatal interrogation of four detainees and refused to serve as translator subsequently.

<sup>3</sup> Paraphrased from John Giorno’s poem, “The Death of William Burroughs.”

<sup>4</sup> Name withheld.

<sup>5</sup> Sung in Tibetan.

Performed at "Torture is a Moral Issue" Multifaith Service on June 27, 2009 in Palo Alto, CA

Program Notes for:

**Covert Operator at Dechhen Ling Monastery**

John Crigler

This song commemorates a young U.S. Army medic from the Vietnam War who was drawn into illegal CIA covert operations. The song does not speak of the war traumas and crimes of this "throwaway boy" but of his fear of punishment for revealing secrets: "They take an oath and if they talk can end up dead."

He takes refuge, from time to time, in a Tibetan Buddhist meditation center, whose lama also forbids him to speak of his experiences. The meditation center is represented midway in the song by the Hundred Syllable Chant (in Sanskrit, pronounced in phonetic Tibetan).

An army comrade describes his devastation, "He's all gone by now, 'lazy, alcoholic, junkie" — "except," as the song reveals, "right here in Decchen Ling."

Vietnamese singer Michelle Thuy, a member of John's Tibetan Buddhist practice group, joins him in this performance, reaching out to medic/covert operator.

The song lyrics were derived from an oral history of the medic (Mercier, 2007), then modified by Crigler and reviewed by the medic.

Reference: Mercier, Paul (pseudonym). (2003, August 24 & 27; 2006, December 9). *Covert collections in Laos*. Interviews conducted by Jean Maria Arrigo, by telephone. *Intelligence Ethics Collection*, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, Stanford, CA.