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Peeping For Pay

By JIM BISHOP

Before there was a CIA, prowling and plotting, there was an OSS and, before that, Lincoln had his Pinkertons. Spying must always be fascinating because it's the only career where a "Peeping Tom" gets paid. It was "Wild Bill" Donovan who organized the Office of Strategic Services for Franklin D. Roosevelt, a super-duper espionage agency where the personnel were so well camouflaged that they didn't know each other.



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It did more than its share of intelligence work in World War II, but, in rare instances, it had its amusing side, too. There is an articulate gentleman named Horace Schmahl, for example, who is now a shipping and insurance executive, who was once part of Donovan's OSS. Early in the war, an admiral at a formal dinner told Donovan that his OSS was nothing more than a Tinker Toy outfit, spying on spies.

Donovan said: "I don't know, Admiral. I think that we could get your secret files and blow up your ammunition dump on the other side of the river before midnight." "Ha!" said the admiral. Donovan went to the men's room and called Schmahl.

Within an hour, an array of ranking Navy officers were at the Navy Building demanding to see the admiral. The sentry saluted, and said he wasn't in his office. "Then," they said imperiously, shifting their briefcases, "we'll wait in his office." They went upstairs. One of the officers was a safe cracker. They opened the admiral's top-secret safe, took everything, and departed, getting a salute from the sentry.

They took empty dynamite tubes, drove to the ammunition dump, bawled out the officer of the day for not demanding their security clearances, and planted the phony dynamite. Before the dinner was over, Donovan handed the admiral his top-secret file and told him where to find the explosives. In the morning, there were red faces and Navy heads rolled.

THE OSS DROPPED men behind German

lines and learned more about Nazi troop movements in a half-hour chat with a railroad man over a bottle of wine than if they spent the same time with Adolf Hitler. OSS men got jobs as German filling station attendants, and put gasoline in Tiger tanks and deposited a little rubber ring. Hours later, when the ring swelled, the tank blew up.

The OSS also made a small anerometer, which was deposited in the tail sections of warplanes. Nothing happened until the aircraft reached 5,000 feet. Then the anerometer tripped the explosive. Ach, du lieber!

Dr. Stanley Lovell, who was in charge of the OSS "Dirty Tricks" department, found that the Japanese were hypersensitive about personal cleanliness. They felt that any contact with human fecal matter was a disgrace. So Lovell had chemists work on a compound, which was an ideal imitation.

It was distributed to Chinese children in Japanese-occupied areas. The stuff was in a tube, and the kids crept up behind officers, squirted it at the back of their breeches, and fled. It was called "Who? Me?"

Few men passed OSS training because it required intellect, ingenuity, character and stoicism. An editor friend of mine, a huge character with blond hair and big mustache, made it. The OSS didn't know what I knew — he was brilliant but he had an eccentric wheel in his head.

He was told, in OSS school, that if he was behind enemy lines and he thought that someone suspected him, to send an anonymous letter to the Gestapo stating two checkable truths about the person who was tailing him, and one lie. If the Gestapo found the first two to be accurate, they'd believe the third and arrest the man.

THE EDITOR'S class was told they all had new names, new home towns, new I.D. cards, new clothing labels, new occupations. They would meet in one week at a downtown Philadelphia hotel. They would sit in the lobby and wait for a stranger to walk in at 7 p.m., buy a cigar, snip the end off, and leave without lighting it. That would be their new boss.

My dummy friend decided to put this "two truths" thing to the test. He sent an anonymous note to the FBI. "Saboteurs will meet at the Hotel lobby at 7 p.m., Wednesday. They will wait for a man to come in, buy a cigar, snip the end off without lighting it, and leave. Then they will go to the Philadelphia Navy Yard and blow up the battleship Iowa."

It worked beautifully. My friend sat in the lobby, not talking to the other OSS agents, and saw sneaky faces behind every palm frond. A man walked in, bought a cigar, snipped the end off, and walked out. The FBI nabbed the entire group.

In jail, the FBI found they had fake names, fake addresses. Saboteurs for sure. It required "Wild Bill" Donovan himself to get them out. "I was only putting the theory to the test," my friend said. They put him to the test. He was in charge of a file cabinet marked "B" for blunders.