



Lie Detectors Lie (Tell the C.I.A.)

By Jeff Stein

In 1983, an Army intelligence officer made a desperate call to David Lykken, a psychology professor at the University of Minnesota and expert on polygraphs. The officer said that he had just flunked two routine lie detector tests but that he hadn't done anything illegal, and wanted to know if Mr. Lykken had

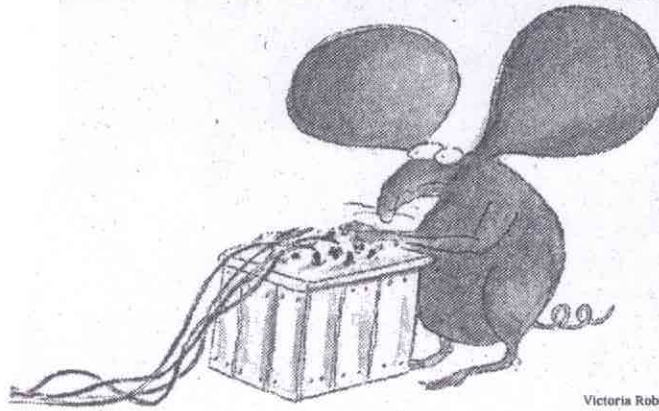
any advice on beating the machine.

Sure, the professor said, offering a few suggestions, involving altering the body's breathing rate and blood pressure at strategic times. The officer passed the next test easily. "The only hard part was learning how to keep a straight face," he later told Mr. Lykken.

Three years later, at the start of his career as a Russian mole, Aldrich Ames passed a Central Intelligence Agency lie detector test. In 1991, he passed another, even though

he was on the agency's list of suspected moles and living at a level far above his \$70,000 Government salary. Last summer, Dennis DeConcini, then chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, visited Mr. Ames in jail and asked how he passed the exams. "Well," Mr. Ames replied, "they don't work."

Well, no kidding. But tell that to the C.I.A. Astonishingly, the security experts at Langley, Va., and in the Pentagon still use the test Mr. Ames passed with no sweat, the Control



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Question Test. The F.B.I. has just started screening its applicants and employees with it. "Polygraphs are little more accurate than flipping a coin," says Dr. Lykken.

So why does the Government persist in using tests that don't work? Critics say it has to do with the millions of dollars and thousands of Government jobs invested in such testing.

There was another clue in the November 1993 issue of the *International Journal of Psychophysiology*, the professional journal of polygraphers. The article, which argues that the Control Question Test is a disaster, was credited to John J. Furedy, a psychologist at the University of Toronto. But a footnote explains that he had a co-author, Drew C. Richardson, an F.B.I. supervisor with a Ph.D. in physiology. The F.B.I. forced Mr. Richardson to remove his byline from the piece.

You'd think the F.B.I. would want to heed what Mr. Richardson, its only polygrapher with a doctorate, has discovered about the holes in its security screen. Instead, it has transferred him out of the polygraph unit and forbidden him to speak publicly on the issue. Thus the Congressional Select Intelligence Committees and the Joint Security Commission, the Government bodies that have been staring at the tea leaves at the bottom of the Aldrich Ames case, have not had the benefit of his wisdom.

Last year, however, Mr. Richardson did say at a conference of polygraphy experts that he had successfully taught his 10-year-old son the techniques to beat the Control Question Test.

"It's a fine instrument for interrogation if you already have strong evidence of someone's guilt," Dr. Furedy told me. But as a trap to catch moles randomly, he described it as "astrology," "magic," "wishful thinking" and "a lousy way of finding out if somebody is a double agent."

He said the problem stems from ignoring that the polygraph isn't

really a standardized test. It depends on the skills of its operator: a polygrapher interprets the subject's answers and alters his questions accordingly. Some operators are better than others.

Is the F.B.I.'s new test an improvement? Not according to Lawrence A. Farwell, a former C.I.A. consultant now at on the faculty at Harvard Medical School, who wrote that "if all of the hostile intelligence agencies in the world had put their heads together, they could not have come up with a program better designed to produce future Ames cases than this new F.B.I. polygraph."

What should be done? First, the Pentagon should be made to release

Cheating is easy (ask Aldrich Ames).

the polygraph study it did in the late 80's, which showed the tests to be useless in screening for moles. The report was quickly suppressed. Then the F.B.I.'s polygraph chief, David Murphy, should be asked to back up his questionable claims to Congress that F.B.I. polygraphers could have fished Aldrich Ames from the dark.

Finally, the intelligence agencies should drop their touching concern about the civil rights of their officers and start scrutinizing the bank balances and tax returns of all employees with access to secrets. That is a lot fairer than subjecting them to polygraphs, which can demean the innocent and free the guilty.

Jeff Stein, a former Army intelligence officer, is author of "A Murder in Wartime: The Untold Spy Story that Changed the Course of the Vietnam War."