

Working Under Cover

By Barbara Varro

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CHICAGO — Undercover investigative work is exciting and challenging. It is also dangerous and fatiguing and sometimes even boring.

According to those in the business, working as an undercover agent for a security firm or for the Federal Bureau of Investigation is an exacting job that requires mental and physical prowess.

Among other attributes, the prospective undercover agent should have keen powers of observation, quick responses, patience, initiative, decisiveness, intelligence, an analytical mind and the ability to keep calm in a crisis.

Foster Robinson, captain in charge of training and field operations for the American Security Bureau in Maywood, Ill., says a person has to be able to play a variety of roles that are often a part of investigative work. That can range from infiltrating a narcotics ring in a hospital or a gang of thieves at a factory to tracking down shoplifters.

Though undercover work can be exciting, it can also be boring at times. Patience is essential in such jobs as surveillance. The agent can spend hours on his or her feet, or days just sitting in a car and observing. The agent also needs patience in tracking down and apprehending a suspect—which could take months or years.

Eugene Lewis Jr., a special agent for American Security, says instinct also is necessary. "You have to be able to size up a situation and know when to act and

when not to act. If you blow your cover you've wasted a lot of time. It is something that comes with experience. You have to get your act together mentally to be a successful agent."

Lewis has done a variety of investigative jobs in the last 10 years, and he says being able to act is an integral part of the work. "To observe people closely you have to know how to blend into the surroundings. So it's best to dress inconspicuously. If you are trying to catch shoplifters in a store, you have to act as though you aren't spying on them. If you have infiltrated a narcotics ring, you have to gain the confidence of its members."

To qualify as an agent for

the firm a person must be 21 years old with a high-school diploma and a clean record. He or she must have a physical examination and must submit to a lie-detector test. Training consists of 80 hours including courses in martial arts, defensive tactics and use of firearms. The prospective agent will also take courses in criminal investigation, surveillance, ethics, social psychology, theory of law and arrest and seizure law. Upon completion of the course of study with a satisfactory grade, the agent starts at a salary of \$2.80 an hour.

Clarence H. Campbell, applicant coordinator of the Chicago-area FBI, says the bureau looks for people who possess initiative and are poised, have a pleasant manner and are able to handle themselves coolly in a crisis.

FBI special agents do undercover work on a volunteer basis. Those applying must be between the ages of 23 and 35 with a minimum of a bachelor's degree. There are job positions for those with a major in science and particular jobs for those with an accounting or law degree and those with a proficiency in foreign languages (particularly Spanish and Russian at this time).

Campbell said lawyers are being recruited at the moment because the bureau is looking for people with an analytical mind and knowledge of law. Accountants are needed because of the recent high incidence of white-collar crime. "An accountant has the knowledge and background needed to investigate cases such as fraud in industry," he says.

The bureau is currently conducting a recruitment program for clerical positions, most of which are in Washington, D.C.

Training for special agents consists of 15 weeks at the FBI academy in Quantico, Va. The prospective agent takes 185 hours of such classes as federal statutes, investigative law, criminology, evidence-gathering and defense tactics. Three of the 15 weeks are devoted to training in the use of firearms.

The starting salary for a special agent is \$14,824 a year with a raise of \$3,706 21 weeks after his or her first assignment.