

How Agent 33 Found Career of



By Doug Chevalier—The Washington Post

Ex-policeman Binsted, now private detective

By William Claiborne
Washington Post Staff Writer

On the afternoon of Sept. 5, 1970, undercover Agent No. 33 strolled casually to a mailbox in Georgetown and posted a letter to a general delivery box at Union Station.

Agent 33's long red hair and drooping red mustache blended nicely with the usual Wisconsin Avenue scene—the constantly shuffling crowds plying the boutiques and “in” novelty shops between M Street and Dunbarton.

The steel lid clanged shut on Agent 33's secret message. It was picked up by the U.S. Postal Service and delivered to what No. 33 thought would be the highly trained interpreters of national secrets.

“Visited all area campuses and found them extremely inactive,” Agent 33 reported. “The only flyer was one announcing the Women's Liberation meeting tonight at the George Washington University student center.

“Since 33's wife is president of the GW Women's Liberation, there is no cause for panic.”

As if to cover any eventuality, Agent 33 declared in a postscript to his superiors:

“My (33) wife attended this meeting and made plans with other members to have another meeting Sept. 9 to discuss having a mass rally

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at GW in October with a guest speaker named Jane Fonda.”

Agent No. 33 is an affable and sardonic young man named Jim Binsted, who volunteered in April, 1970, for special duty as an intelligence officer for the District of Columbia metropolitan police department.

His hair was short when he joined the D.C. force in 1969, and he went through the usual apprenticeship of a rookie cop: uniformed patrol duty, station assignments and traffic details.

In 1970, he joined the elite, riot-trained Special Operation Division (S.O.D.) and asked to be assigned to crowd control duty during major antiwar disturbances.

He got what he wanted, and in February, 1970, was assigned to an antiwar demonstration at the Watergate apartment complex. The then Attorney General, John N. Mitchell, was living in the Watergate, and Binsted's job was to coordinate electronic surveillance of the demonstrators.

“I was on top of the Howard Johnson's (motel) across the street. You can't believe what it was like. I almost fell off the roof because of the crowd up there,” said Binsted.

“There was FBI, Secret

Boredom in Intelligence

Service, Metropolitan Police Department, Central Intelligence Agency, Executive Protective Service and some special White House group. I heard a sergeant say, 'The White House has their own intelligence net here.'

Binsted said his job was to aim "shotgun microphone" equipment at specific antiwar leaders and keep a log of what was being said during the demonstration.

Later, he said, he and a friend volunteered for full-time duty as police intelligence officers. It was then, Binsted said, he began getting "strange assignments."

According to a chronology supplied by Binsted—who has since resigned from the police force—the "strange assignments" coincided with the creation of a White House interagency committee that was appointed in the wake of antiwar demonstrations in the spring and summer of 1970. However, Binsted was unable to offer anything more than a suspicion that his intelligence data was being routed to the White House.

In his explanation of the Watergate scandal on Tuesday, President Nixon said the "rioting and violence (that) reached a new peak after the Cambodian operation" stimulated a concentrated government effort to pinpoint subversive provocation on college campuses here and elsewhere.

Mr. Nixon, in discussing the efforts to coordinate domestic intelligence, cited what he said was a wave of local bombings, campus disturbances and gunbattles in early 1970. He added: "Some of the disruptive activities were receiving foreign support."

Binsted, now working parttime as a private detective and process server, said in an interview that he knows he was being paid by the D.C. police department, but that he is less certain about the person to whom he was supposed to be reporting.

He said he was given a secret post office box number at Union Station and told to mail all his weekly intelligence reports. He said he was also given an unlisted telephone number, but that whenever he called in with information, he was put in

touch with a person whose voice he did not recognize.

"It seemed the (police) intelligence division didn't even know we were there. Someone else was calling the shots and our reports were not going through the usual channels," said Binsted.

He said he was once told by one of his superiors that his reports were going to a "special White House unit."

It is not unusual for the FBI or the Secret Service to enlist the help of the metropolitan police department's intelligence officers during major antiwar demonstrations. But, according to Binsted and police sources, it is unusual for weekly intelligence reports to be sent to any other place than the D.C. police intelligence offices at 300 Indiana Ave. NW.

Also, according to police sources, it is unusual for local plainclothes intelligence officers to be sent on the kind of assignments that Binsted described.

Binsted showed a reporter a file of weekly intelligence reports that included a summary of various "shadowing" assignments. One of them described police efforts on July 29, 1970, to "tail" Sargent Shriver, former am-

bassador to France and later a Democratic vice presidential candidate.

Binsted wrote in his report: "Attended the National Vista Alliance meeting at George Washington University... Heard speech by ex-Ambassador Shriver... Shriver advised them to organize themselves... made a political anti-Nixon administration speech."

"My partner and I were told to pick up Shriver and

stay with him, particularly if he was making anti-Nixon statements... It seemed like an unusual type of request for a D.C. cop," said Binsted.

In another instance, Binsted said, he received written instructions to "try to confirm an armed solidarity between U.S. radical groups and Latin American guerrillas." He said he never established such a link.

But, for the most part, Binsted's assignments were

more mundane. In some cases, he and his partner found themselves in what Binsted described as near-burlesque situations "wasting taxpayers' money to satisfy somebody's paranoia."

His weekly reports described regular visits to Dupont Circle, where, according to Binsted, Agents 33 and 34 "watched hippies and bought underground newspapers."

In a "special report"

mailed to the secret Union Station post office box number, Binsted offered a "prognostication of activity on D.C. campuses this fall." The document contained a paragraph of vagaries for each of Washington's universities, and ended with the observation, "In all, it looks like a real active semester."

A week later, the agents visited the campuses again and reported, "In short, this has been the most boring

week we have spent thus far. But we believe it is merely the lull before the storm, as the prophetic saying goes."

Other "centers of activity" visited by the agents, according to the intelligence reports, included the Institute for Policy Studies, 1520 New Hampshire Ave. NW (to "look into Marxist and revolutionary philosophy courses"), Fort Reno Park (for a rock concert), Dunbar-ton Methodist Church (for a

Black Panther film), and a grape boycott picket line at a Safeway store at 1747 Columbia Road NW.

Binsted said he received orders to join the antiwar movement and, as a result, he joined the Student Mobilization Committee.

Paradoxically, the committee assigned its new member to what essentially was police work — security at strategy meetings and rallies.

"My job was muscle work.

I was a bouncer, or a guard at meetings," Binsted said.

At times, Binsted said, the constant shadowing of antiwar groups became tedious. The agents wrote a report on a "caravan of love" rock concert at L'Enfant Plaza; they then wrote to their superiors, "It was a long day. Wish you were there."

Binsted left the intelligence division in October, 1970, and quit the police force in February, 1972.