

Closing Time For James Bond

By George Wilson
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Washington

THE five-story yellow building with the shrouded windows at 1st and M streets SE — just down the hill from the Capitol — is where much of the Central Intelligence Agency's super-secret and super-valuable work goes on.

Technocrats in the spy business note with pride that most of the windows are cemented over — to foil any enemy agent who might try to record conversations inside by focusing a laser beam on window panes to detect and reconstitute the vibrations voices would make on glass.

To the casual visitor the yellow edifice of secrecy is "Building 213." For some reason, the public is not supposed to know what the Soviets' counterpart agency, the KGB, knows — that CIA's National Photographic Interpretation Center is known to insiders as N-Pic.

N-Pic is just one arm of the mechanical giant the United States has built to spy on the rest of the world. This giant also has eyes in space, ears all over the globe, an operation that costs billions of dollars each year — dollars that are only minimally accountable to anybody outside the CIA.

It is this mechanical giant — not the James Bonds of the CIA who meet foreign agents at bars at midnight — which gathers the most valuable information for the United States.

"If I had to rate everything we did on an A through Z value scale," said a CIA executive who quit the agency a few months ago, "I would give A through U to technical intelligence" — gathering information by satellite, plane ship and submarine and radio outposts.

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NEXT, in terms of productivity, he listed reading foreign publications and analyzing them in a systematic way. Last, the CIA alumnus named covert operations like buying information from foreign agents.

... "Technology has revolutionized the intelligence business, there's no question, about it."

William E. Colby
CIA Director

The counterintelligence operations which have provoked the current controversy — with allegations that the CIA has put Americans under surveillance — "is not producing anything at all for the country," he said. "It's just looking up each other's sleeves — personnel management in the whole creepy, backroom world."

He added, "It's time to drop all this Mickey Mouse."

In the bland looking yellow building, N-Pic has processed film from high-flying spy satellites. These satellite and other reconnaissance pictures, analyzed by photo interpreters, have helped answer such questions as these asked by anxious Presidents and other top government officials:

- Do the Israelis have the nuclear bomb (they do) and are their nuclear-capable Jericho missiles targeted on Egypt's Aswan Dam (they once were) so Cairo and the Nile Valley could be flooded if all seemed lost?

- Is Russia mobilizing for war (a constant question)?

- Is Russia building a new missile system or just improving the old one (photographs showed the latter)? How many intercontinental ballistic missiles and bombers do the Soviets have?

- Could U.S. Green Berets rescue American prisoners from the Sontay prison camp outside Hanoi?

N-Pic, in answer to that last question, made a giant photo montage of the Sontay camp and proudly showed it off to CIA trainees.

The Pentagon, in turn, used N-Pic's montage to build a replica of Sontay at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida so the Green Berets could rehearse the POW rescue. The Sontay replica was taken down during the day so Soviet satellites would not see it and tip off Hanoi — testimony to this era of open skies where super powers keep track of each other through camera eyes in space.

N-Pic's effort proved in vain, however, because Hanoi had moved American prisoners out of Sontay by the time the raid was launched on Nov. 24, 1970.

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THUS, it can be said that the N-Pic arm of the intelligence giant stretches all the way from M Street to the cold void of outer space, where both American and Soviet cameras look down through portholes of spacecraft skipping around the earth every 90 minutes.

Other parts of the mechanical giant require personnel inside — such as the surface electronic intelligence ships that took over from the ill-fated U.S.S. Liberty and U.S. Pueblo; the American submarines which remain close to foreign shores, recording messages and radar signals; the U-2 reconnaissance plane Francis Gary Powers flew over the Soviet Union and its higher-flying successor, the SR-71; communications intelligence (COMINT) outposts around the world where specialists with earphones clamped on their heads listen hour after hour to foreign fighter pilots talking to ground commanders.

Both the successes and failures of technical intelligence have been spectacular. The U-2 was both. It brought back the hard information on Soviet missile progress. While Senator John F. Kennedy kept charging "missile gap," U-2s were bringing back contrary evidence in flights from 1956 until 1960.

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AND it was a failure in the sense that its intrusion into Soviet air space prompted Premier Khrushchev to cancel the 1960 summit conference with President Eisenhower.

Even without failures, technical intelligence has its limitations. Said one former high-ranking CIA executive: "What technology doesn't do, won't do, and can't do is tell you what people are thinking and what their plans are. We can't read minds with technology, but that's our business — reading minds. The whole purpose of espionage is to find out what people are thinking and doing."

But neither the failures — like the U-2 incident, Liberty attack and Pueblo capture — nor the built-in limitations have kept the intelligence community's technical giant in bounds, according to its critics.

Wrote former CIA officer Patrick J. McGarvey in his book, "C.I.A. — The Myth and the Madness:"

"In intelligence, the reverence accorded technology is open to serious questioning . . . technology has allied itself with bureaucracy, and together, they ride roughshod over reason and logic. The result is a maddening, self-perpetuating chaos which has distorted the entire intelligence process to the point that technology has become the goal rather than the means to a goal . . . Our almost limitless ability to collect information has prompted only a few to question the utility of the information that is collected . . .

Examiner & Chronicle, Sunday Punch, Febru

"The results are frightening . . . as the programs expand, they defy rational management. And we have international incidents resulting from collection programs designed to provide information that will allow the United States government means to avoid such incidents. Intelligence today in almost the ultimate irony . . ."

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ONE man who had a lot to do with making technology so imperious within the CIA specifically and intelligence community generally is Richard Bissell, the former head of the CIA's U-2 program who fell from official grace because of his role as operational director of the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles in 1961.

Bissell, now an executive at Pratt and Whitney Aircraft in Hartford, Conn., in an interview traced the birth of the U-2 and how its success blazed the way across the sky for such other technical collection systems, like the SR-7 and satellites.

In 1954, Bissell recalled, James R. Killian Jr. was asked by President Eisenhower to head a committee which would recommend ways to preclude another Pearl Harbor-type surprise attack on the United States.

"The intelligence panel of that committee," Bissell said, "became convinced that we needed an overflight capability. They also came on the U-2 design as it had been submitted" to the Air Force in 1953 or 1954 by Clarence L. (Kelly) Johnson of Lockheed.

Looking back over the whole U-2 program and acknowledging its value in settling the missile gap question, Bissell said "the greatest value" for the country was the "proof you could learn as much as you could by looking down from above.

"It whetted the appetite of this government and increased its willingness to develop systems of this sort of intelligence collection," Bissell said.

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The citizens commission President Ford has named to investigate the CIA is chartered to focus on the agency's domestic activities, not the overlaps in the American intelligence community as a whole. But Congress is expected to look into the duplication between CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency. The next few months will tell whether Congress, during its reappraisal of the CIA, will attempt to rein in the technical giant.

In the meantime, it will be business as usual at places like N-Pic within the CIA's far-flung complex.

"Honest, Sir," said the policeman at the gate of N-Pic. "I don't know what that place is other than Building 213." By contrast, two women behind the gate said, "Yes it is," when asked if the place was indeed N-Pic.

It doesn't take the skill of James Bond to get inside the lobby of N-Pic, note the CIA employees on coffee break in the cafeteria and read the Christmas greeting of "peace, peace, peace" and "joy, joy, joy" on the wall behind the guard.

