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CIA and Cult of Technology

Bulk of Intelligence Gathered by Equipment

By George C. Wilson

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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—Building 213 is the CIA's National Photographic Interpretation center, 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, submarine and eavesdropping radio outposts.

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.

"On a scale of 100," said another former CIA officer in an interview, "I would give at least 70 per cent to technical intelligence; 25 per cent to reading open literature and assessing information obtained through diplomatic contact. No more than 5 per cent to all the covert stuff."

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

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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 to demonstrate what the agency could do inside the intelligence factory on M Street.

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.

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

Other parts of the me-

chanical giant require personnel inside—such as the surface electronic intelligence (ELINT) 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 fighters 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—although Sen. John F. Kennedy (D-Mass.) kept charging “missile gap” even as U-2s were bringing back contrary evidence in flights from 1956 until 1960.

And it was a failure in the sense that its intrusion into Soviet airspace 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.”

He could have added that the clearest U-2 or Samos satellite photograph does not tell the United States what weapon the Soviet Union or China is working on under the laboratory roof.

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 . . . The vaguest hint that something new will afford an opportunity to open another peephole into a potential enemy’s domain prompts the loosing of intelligence money and the approval of ‘feasibility tests’—which invariably lead to ‘further development tests’ and finally implementation of a new collection program.

“Critics of these efforts are few,” McGarvey added, “for few wish to confront ‘the national security’ argument flaunted by supporters of intelligence . . . In intelligence, 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. . .

“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 . . .”

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.

Back 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.

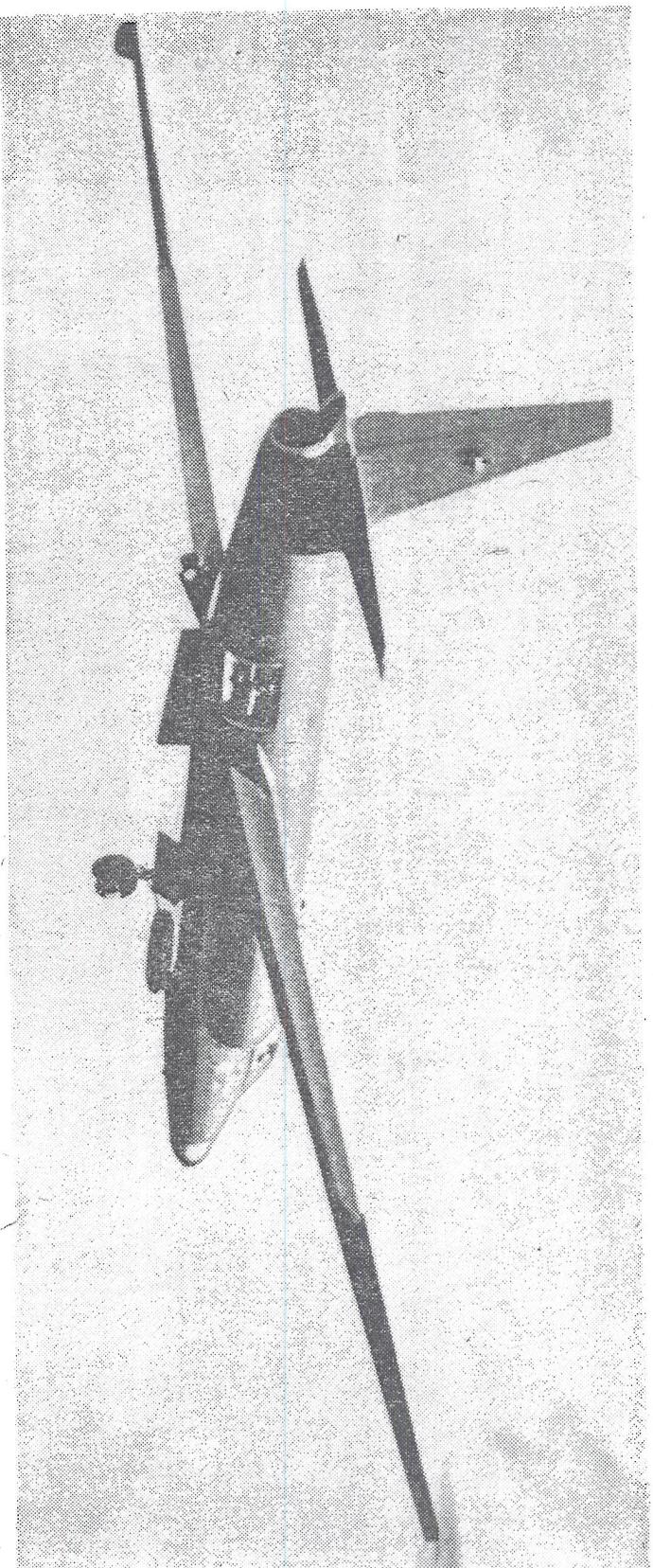
“In the autumn of 1954,” Bissell said, “the members of that intelligence panel—and with them the whole Killian surprise attack committee—endorsed a proposal that a high altitude reconnaissance aircraft configured exclusively and expressly for reconnaissance be built based on the Kelly Johnson concept—and that it be built with maximum security and maximum speed.”

The concept was to put glider-like wings on a jet aircraft so it could fly in the thin air of high altitude, out of the range of anti-aircraft guns and rockets. Also, the theory was that the new spy

plane would be safe from other interceptor fighters because their engines could not push them to the 14-mile altitude of the U-2.

Put in direct charge of the U-2 project Bissell in the spring of 1955 placed an order with Lockheed for 20 U-2s at a total cost of 21 million.

The U-2 contract may



Associated Press

The high-flying subsonic reconnaissance plane developed and built for CIA work by Lockheed was a major technical success.

have been the last time a military plane was built for less than the agreed upon amount. Bissell said "there was a \$3 million underrun." Today, each reconnaissance plane and satellite — like the Big Bird satellite lofted into space this year by the giant Titan IIAD rocket— costs more than the whole \$18 million paid for the first

20 U-2s, minus engines. With the U-2 on the way CIA photo-interpretation, the one in Building 213, studied photographs of the Soviet SA-2 Guideline rocket that Russian gunners would shoot at the U-2 if their radar detected it. The missile's fins, the specialists concluded, were too small to guide it accurately in the

thin air where the U-2 would fly.

"This was one of those things they call a calculated risk," said Bissell in discussing the conclusions about the threat of the SA-2 to the U-2.

The CIA's U-2 started flying over Russia in June,

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CIA Collects Bulk Of Its Intelligence With Hardware

SPY, From A6

1956, Bissell said, and enjoyed success until May 1, 1960, when one of those supposedly inaccurate SA-2 rockets shot Powers out of the sky and into a diplomatic uproar.

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.

Given this appetite, the Soviets' Sputnik I, launched on Oct. 4, 1957, looked appealing as another way to look down on the other country.

Aerial intelligence-collection in the two decades since the U-2's birth quickly advanced to the SR-71 and an entire family of satellites ranging from the comparatively simple Samos to the sophisticated Big Bird which can take pictures and do various other things—like intercept communications.

The technological explosion also advanced to intelligence-collecting from ships, submarines and land listening posts. The CIA, National Security Agency (NSA) Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Army, Navy, Air Force and the military-industrial-scientific academic complex have become enmeshed in the American intelligence collection effort over the last 20 years.

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. NSA is the sprawling intelligence complex headquartered at Fort

Meade, Md., which is believed to have a world wide payroll of 100,000 people, one big reason the total bill for American intelligence agencies is estimated at around \$15 billion, not counting the missiles and ships and other support the Pentagon furnishes.

The intertwining, charge congressional and other critics, is inefficient, costly, and sometimes fatal. The overlapping showed up embarrassingly for the intelligence community when NSA's warning against sending the Pueblo out on a mission off North Korea in 1968 got lost in the DIA maze in the Pentagon.

Also, the post-mortems on the Pueblo spy mission failed to show that the trip was necessary from an electronic intelligence standpoint—bitter news for the Navy crew imprisoned and tortured in North Korea for 11 months and the family of the sailor who was killed during the ship's capture off Wonsan in January, 1968.

The late Sen. Allen J. Ellender (D-La.), while chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, told a reporter that the amount of money the intelligence community spends for information nobody has time to process or read is "a national scandal."

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.