

THINGS LOOK BLACK FOR AGING U.S. AGENTS

'Poor' CIA Spies Receive Few Extra Benefits

BY TED SELL

Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — Pity the poor U.S. spy. He has the kind of problems that the normal government employe does not have.

For instance, he doesn't have the same retirement options. He doesn't have the same liberal leave and other fringe benefits.

Now the Central Intelligence Agency is trying to bring about some equity, at least in some cases.

The CIA has been able to recruit, according to knowledgeable sources, such highly motivated young people that retirement — or leave — provisions are the farthest things from their minds.

But for the aging spy—things turn a little blacker.

One of the problems is that the Central Intelligence Agency is a government employer.

That means that a lot of liberal Civil Service provisions ought to apply.

For most CIA employes, they do. But for others—probably about 10% of the overseas CIA people—they don't.

That's because the smaller percentage of government employes can't be identified as such.

These are the real spies.

They aren't likely to carry on James Bond affairs. They're more likely to be specialists in a small firm or foundation. Chances are, they'll be about 30 to 40 years old. They'll probably have masters' degrees.

And while they work for the government, they'll see other government employes trotting off from "hardship posts" for paid vacations at nearby spas.

There's not only an inequity within the government, CIA officials feel. There's even an inequity within the CIA.

Adm. William F. Raborn is now trying to correct it. He has asked Congress for legislation to bring CIA into line with other government agencies.

CIA employes who are assigned "official cover" abroad—as embassy second secretaries, or special assistants to ambassadors, or Treasury representatives — enjoy the same fringe benefits as the agency they

ostensibly work for. That means that in those posts officially designated as "hardship" assignments, they get the same home leave and vacation benefits as the foreign service officers of the State Department assigned to the post.

The CIA reimburses the "cover" agency.

But the poor spy in the same country who has no official cover labors in the espionage vineyard with no such benefits.

Take Southeast Asia.

Realizing the extremities of climate and the resulting hardships on family life, most government agencies periodically finance a trip to Baguio—up in the mountains of Luzon in the Philippines — or some other such spot every two years, or once in three years for extended assignments.

But not the CIA—unless the CIA man is listed on the books as an embassy employe.

If the CIA man is posing as an anthropologist for an obscure foundation, or a free-lance writer, or a sales representative for a new firm—he sweats it out, picking grapes in the vineyard.

This, to CIA management, is unfair.

But government service being what it is, the agency needs legislation to correct the inequity.

The request is in now.

In brief, it asks that the CIA be given authority to pay for leave for its employes on the same basis that the State Department possesses—and from the same posts that the State Department recognizes as hardship assignments.

Earlier, in 1963, CIA was able to bring special recognition in retirement benefits for its overseas operatives and stateside specialists.

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What it permitted, in brief, was for CIA to offer early retirement to specialists it once had to have, but no longer needs.

Hence, the legislation then recognized the peculiar needs of an intelligence agency and the self-serving — if ever an agency which serves the nation can be described as

self-serving—nature of intelligence employment.

CIA has never been able to pay American spies much. Its salary scales are about like those of other government agencies.

Instead, it appeals to a desire for national service.

It washes out those who have other motives.

And the CIA has a voracious appetite for people with special skills—sometimes esoteric skills.

In fairness the agency has felt it has to provide some benefits for the people it has used—people who are bound to secrecy about their past employment and who may have passed beyond the age of easy reemployment in civilian industry.

But designation of which employes can receive this early retirement is up to the director of Central Intelligence and the number is limited—again, for budgetary reasons.

Thanks to a large CIA expansion in the Korean war era—and the fact that most men then signed up were veterans whose military service counts toward government retirement—the number of people moving toward retirement age or passing beyond the civilian reemployment age is now a problem.