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# Want to be a spy, kid?

## Edward A. Adams visits cloak-and-daggerville

# I WANT YOU

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**M**y name? Adams. Ed Adams. Despite the clipped introduction, I'm no James Bond. No British accent, no exotic cars.

Still, I am attracted to the lifestyle 007 leads. He trades in intrigue and subtle signals, set against a backdrop of exotic locales. Danger lurks around every corner, and the impossible is the expected. Not a bad existence.

For Americans, the closest thing to Her Majesty's Secret Service is the Central Intelligence Agency, which, despite damaging revelations in recent years, remains shrouded in secrecy.

For seven months, I studied the CIA and it studied me. I had wondered what went on inside the secured agency compound in Langley, Va. — what sort of work is done, what sort of people do it. To find out, I applied to the CIA for employment. What follows is a diary of that process.

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#### November: Intelligence-gathering as a way to pass time

I was a senior at Miami University in Oxford, O., looking for something to do after graduation in May. I had majored in political philosophy, but demand for that job description has been slight since 400 B.C. The world doesn't need another Plato.

With one-third of the students majoring in business, on-campus interviews at Miami run heavily toward banks and corporations. But among the Procter & Gambles and AT&Ts, I found something that piqued my interest: the CIA.

The CIA recruits on 200 college campuses each year. This year, the agency will receive an estimated 250,000 applications.

When agency representatives come calling, they sometimes encounter student demonstrations. At Miami, however, no such resistance has surfaced. More than one-third of the students belong to fraternities or sororities, and hold conservative political views that make their daddies proud. When it's morning in Ronald Reagan's America, the sun shines with particular benevolence on Miami's student body.

I signed up for a Nov. 28 interview with the CIA, during which I'd have a half-hour to present my credentials and ask questions.

Why, I asked myself, was I qualified to work at protecting our nation's

security? I wasn't exactly clear. My skills at political analysis were fairly useless; my guess was that the agency had already studied the theory of Communism, and found it wanting.

I had written for newspapers and magazines since I was 14, and had done several journalism internships. Judging by headlines about the terrorist manual the CIA had written to aid Nicaraguan contras, the agency needed a good PR man.

But me — quiet, unassuming — a spy? It was hard to imagine.

The agency's glossy, four-color brochures informed me that in the CIA, "your career is America's strength." There were pictures of the White House and the Kremlin, D.C. monuments and the agency's headquarters building. If I joined, I would be able to "build a career of uncommon dimensions."

The material emphasized that most of what the agency does is not cloak-and-dagger work; 90% of its resources go toward collecting information, not overthrowing governments.

At the appointed time, I reported to the on-campus interview looking my conservative best: navy blazer, gray slacks and rep tie. Patti Schmittle, personnel representative from the CIA's Cincinnati field office, produced a chart of the agency's hierarchy, pointing out those arms that might interest me.

There was a division that writes biographies of world leaders, and an arm that monitors foreign newspapers and television broadcasts.

"And, of course, there's Operations," she said innocently.

"Operations" is the agency's euphemism for the division that employs spies — "agents" in CIA speak.

Schmittle noted that to enter Operations, I would have to be admitted to the Career Training Program, which has requirements of its own: U.S. citizenship, a college degree, ability to write well and knowledge of or the aptitude to learn a foreign language. It helps to have a graduate degree, military service or extended residence abroad. Average age for CTP applicants is 26, she told me.

Schmittle scheduled me for an aptitude test, gave me the agency's application form and wished me well.

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#### Late December — February: Getting personal

In the post-holiday crush, I

wrestled with the agency's 20-page application. I discovered there's not much of a 21-year-old's life that can't be covered in 20 pages.

It asked for general personal data, the positions I was applying for and my educational history. It wanted to know about my military service (none), foreign-language abilities (*nada*) and relatives who are not U.S. citizens (zip).

The medical form had questions about the usual illnesses and vices:

Do you use alcohol?

*Socially.*

Do you smoke?

*Half a pack a day.*

Have you ever tried illegal drugs ("marijuana, hashish, cocaine, LSD, amphetamines, heroin or drugs of a similar nature") and, if so, when?

*I tried pot my freshman year in college, but gave it up after several months of fried lungs and no buzz.*

I was asked to describe my personality. "Who are you?" the CIA wanted to know. I said I have drive, ambition, confidence in my own judgment and a sense of humor.

"I've come to understand why institutions create rules, how the application of those rules sometimes results in something different than was intended and how to correct the situation," I wrote.

Classic BS.

The aptitude test was an all-day affair. Administered at the University of Cincinnati, the test purported to determine my personality type by asking the same question, with slight variations:

Did I like to go to parties? Did I like to host parties? Did I like loud music? If I could read a book or go out, which would I choose?

I tried to be consistently social.

If the agency liked what it saw on the application and test, I'd be winging my way to Washington, D.C., at CIA expense, for an interview. A free trip to our nation's capital sounded like a good deal.

February: Moving means you're arrogant...

Unexpectedly, I was asked to meet with a representative of the

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Career Training Program in a Cincinnati hotel suite.

When I arrived at the hotel, I called the proper room. The voice that answered told me to "enter the elevator in exactly two minutes, go to the top floor, turn left, go to the end of the hall and my room is on the right."

The man who opened the door identified himself as Joseph Emmott, a case officer for 30 years. He wanted to probe my fitness for covert operations.

"Do you have any moral or ethical problems with covert work?" he asked.

"I don't believe so," I said.

"Well, sometimes case officers have qualms with what they're asked to do. You'll have to keep your job with the agency secret from everyone but your parents and, if you should marry, your wife. You won't be able to talk to anyone except your immediate superiors about the specific tasks you carry out. Will that be a problem?" he asked.

"I don't think it will," I replied.

Suddenly, he took a harsher approach. "Why is it you're not one of the people protesting our operations? Why are you in here interviewing instead?"

"Well," I began, searching for an appropriate response, "I'm a reporter, and I know that the press only tells that part of the story that it can uncover. I suppose that reports about the Nicaraguan terrorist manual, for instance, are incomplete.

I'm not willing to protest something I don't completely understand.

"Besides," I added for good measure, "I don't think that protests are very effective in changing CIA policy." I was now on record as being opposed to any demonstrations against the agency — ludicrous, but the sort of absurdity I felt the CIA would appreciate.

Emmott looked over a report on my Miami interview, written by Schmittle.

"It says here you're confident, assertive. You think that's accurate?" he

he asked. I said thought so.

"Let's see ... what do you think they could mean by those words?" he asked.

"Arrogant. Ruthless, perhaps," I responded, laughing.

"You think you're ruthless?" he asked, leaning forward so that his face was about six inches from mine.

"No," I said, "but others might."

Emmott left it at that. "I think you're cut out for the covert section. You don't want to sit behind a desk for most of your career," he said.

I had scored well on the aptitude test, he said. I was the sort of person they were looking for in covert. I wondered if I wanted to be that sort of person.

April: ... Sitting still means mush for brains

My interviews in Washington proved one point Emmott had made: I didn't, indeed, want to sit behind a desk most of my career.

That's what I would do in the agency's Foreign Broadcast Information Service. Translated articles and transcripts of broadcasts are wired from CIA bureaus around the world to the D.C. office, where employees clean up the translations and decide whether to include the dispatches in the daily briefing book, which can measure an inch thick.

The people I spoke to kept searching for words, as if their gray matter had turned to mush. I figured mine would, too, if I had to read translations of Albanian news reports for two or three years.

Over in the Office of Central Research, the troops were equally fatigued. I had lunch with a man who had spent most of his career writing biographies of leaders in countries on the southern tip of Africa.

He told me he had graduated from Georgetown University with a degree in medieval history, had a wife and two small children to support.

"I answered an ad on a bulletin board and wound up here," he said. How long ago was that? I asked.

"About 12 years ago," he said.

I took a test to measure my ability to crank out the mini-bios. From a folder containing about 100 pages of documents — cables from embassies, New York Times articles, economic reports from the State Department, etc. — I was supposed to compose a

two-page biography on a former, prime minister of Zaire for use by the secretary of state. I fell asleep twice during the two-hour ordeal.

Clearly, this was not my niche.

### June: Truth and consequences

Another week of interviews in D.C., this time with the covert section, began with a trip to one of the handful of CIA installations scattered around the Virginia suburbs. The seven-story glass-and-concrete building was neighbor to branch offices of GTE and TRW Inc. Except for the street number, the building was unmarked.

I was greeted by another Career Training Program interviewer, who called himself Eric Lund. He looked like the Hollywood stereotype of a case officer: blue pin-stripe suit, button-down collar, gray receding hairline and a mustache, which he said he had grown many years earlier to look older.

He explained that the program begins with two months of classroom instruction, followed by a six-month internship in various divisions within the CIA. Then come two months of exercises at "The Farm," the agency's military camp.

"You'll learn escape and evasion, how to use foreign weapons, how to set up a drop zone so that you could get supplies to Afghan rebels, for instance," Lund told me. Two weeks of parachute training are optional, he added.

After The Farm come four months of role-playing. Instructors impersonate prospective agents, and trainees practice recruiting and handling spies.

"The simulations can last anywhere from a few minutes to up to a week," Lund said.

Before being assigned overseas, trainees get intensive language instruction, he said. For the easy languages like French and Spanish, that means six months; for the most difficult languages, such as Korean and Arabic, training can last up to two years.

Trainees finally are assigned to embassies, Lund said, as Defense or State Department officials.

"Your supervisor will know you're with CIA, but your co-workers will have to be kept in the dark. It's like holding down two jobs," he said.

As he described a typical day, I

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began to feel a case of mononucleosis coming on. At 10 a.m. I have an interview at a cafe with a Romanian diplomat, for my embassy job. Back at the embassy, I handle some of the visa and legal problems U.S. citizens abroad encounter.

At 1 p.m., there's lunch with a finance ministry official, during which I dig for material the CIA can use. Back to the embassy for more work. At 4, I have a tennis appointment with a highly placed government official from the country in which I'm stationed.

At 7:30, after my co-workers have long since left the office, I dash to cocktails at a friend's house, where I'll be "trolling," as Lund put it — looking for sources and contacts the CIA might exploit.

Then at 9, I'm hosting a catered dinner ("which the agency will pay for") for six friends, one of whom I'm cultivating as a source. At 11:30, there's a meeting at a "safe house" to find out what an agent has to report. After writing up the report, I'm asleep at 1 a.m.

"The job is heavy on social skills," Lund said. "You'll have to attract people, make friends and, eventually, exploit and manipulate them."

Once again, I was cautioned that I would have to keep my employment with the agency secret.

"You'll have to make sure that the people you tell will be willing to lie for you," Lund said. "If your aunt asks what you're doing, your mother can't say, 'Well, I'm not supposed to tell you this, but he's working for the CIA.' We consider these to be lies without moral consequence."

If I passed the psychological and polygraph tests later in the week, I'd get a job offer in about a month, he said. Annual starting salary would be \$22,372.

The next day, I was subjected to a battery of tests that constituted my psychological assessment. The day concluded with an interview with a psychologist called Dr. Mooney, a rotund man whose voice sounded like it was being processed through a blender.

He had a few questions about my answers on the tests. In one section, I had had to complete sentences with the first thing that had come to my mind. I had taken these instructions at face value.

"The sentence read, 'What is your most secret anxiety?' You responded, 'Anthony Perkins,'" Mooney said.

"Well, I suppose I wrote that

because I think of the shower scene in 'Psycho' whenever I check into a hotel room," I offered.

"So it's Anthony Perkins as Norman Bates that frightens you, not Perkins himself?" Mooney asked.

"Right," I responded.

I asked Mooney what he saw in my test results that would recommend me for a job in covert operations.

"You're obviously smart, verbally facile and you have a high energy level. But if I were your CIA station chief, I'd keep a damned close eye on you," he said. I asked why.

"Because I'd never know what you're going to do next. You have a very independent mode of operation. For some case officers, that's good. If we put them out there and they don't hear from us for 10 years, it's fine," he said.

The third day, I took the polygraph test, administered by a man who identified himself simply as George. I sat in a straight-backed chair while two rubber belts were hooked around my chest, two sensors were attached to my fingers and a pressure cuff was fastened around my arm.

George told me the questions in advance, explaining that the initial ones would have obvious answers. I was to answer yes or no, and try to relax.

Is your name Edward Adams?

Yes.

Is today Monday?

No.

Were you born Sept. 28, 1963?

Yes.

I had some irregular breathing during these questions, so George ran the series again. He said I did better the second time.

The remainder of the questions were asked to verify items I had filled out on the 20-page application in December. After he had asked each question twice, George turned off the machine, deflated the pressure cuff and said, "The test is over. We have a lot to talk about."

In the two hours that followed, George and his supervisor (who refused to identify himself) grilled me on my answers to three questions on which I had shown "a significant reaction," in George's words:

After age 18, have you ever had a physical relationship with another man?

Other than those experiences you've told us about, have you ever used ille-

gal drugs?

Have you ever committed an unlawful act?

I had answered an honest "no" to all three.

"I'm here to help you get a positive reading from the machine," George said. "But you have to tell me what your concerns are about the questions. What were you thinking about when I asked the homosexuality question?"

I told him I was thinking how nervous I was and how to control my breathing, as I had done earlier.

"That won't wash," he said, adding, "Obviously, the agency doesn't want to hire someone who will go down to 14th Street and have casual sex with men every night." His reference was to the red-light district in Washington.

"But we recognize that everyone experiments. College is the sort of place you try new things. But if you want a job here, you have to tell me what your concerns were with the question." George would repeat that line so many times, it would become his mantra.

"I was also thinking that I have friends who are homosexuals," I said.

"Where did you meet these people?" he asked.

At college.

How many contacts have you had with them?

They lived in my dorm, and I took classes with them. Countless contacts, I suppose.

Well, give me a number.

Five hundred, 600, I suppose.

And did you go to bars with these friends? Did you talk privately in their rooms?

Sure.

Did you talk about homosexuality? What did you say?

I asked what attracted them to it. It was something I couldn't understand. They asked me what attracted me to heterosexuality. They said it was something that baffled them.

What do you think about homosexuality?

I think it's not for me.

Have your friends ever propositioned you?

No. I think they thought of me as a friend. They knew I wasn't interested.

You mean to tell me that you have

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known these friends for four years, and they never propositioned you? If a heterosexual man goes to bars with a woman and talks to her in private over a period of time, he's going to make a pass at her.

*Perhaps, but these friends have never made one at me.*

"Only an idiot would believe that," George shouted. "If you want a job, you have to be straightforward with me. You're not facing reality; you're being childish."

The conversation turned to my drug usage.

"How often have you had contact with people using drugs?" I was asked.

*Countless times.*

What sort of drugs, besides pot?

*Speed, Quaaludes, LSD, cocaine, heroin.*

Heroin? George's eyes bugged out.

*Yes, heroin.*

And you never used any yourself?

*No, I didn't. Your machine may not indicate this, but I have a morality, or a set of standards or whatever, that rejects drugs as an option.*

After hours of this back-and-forth, it seemed pointless to continue. I signed a form that stated I wished to terminate the testing procedure. Without passing the polygraph, I could not be employed by the CIA.

As he escorted me out of the building, George dropped the prosecutorial demeanor and became almost friendly.

"Have you ever thought about law as a career?" he asked. "You handled yourself quite well in there."

Yes, I said, I plan to attend Columbia Law School in the fall.

"Well, if it means anything, I respect you quite a bit," George said as he waved goodbye.

Respected me as what? I wondered. As the thieving, homosexual drug-user his machine said I was?

With that, I was no longer a CIA applicant. As I walked out the doors of the headquarters, over the agency's inlaid seal, I flicked cigarette ash on the marble eagle's head and realized that I'll never be James Bond.