

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 50

OUT
JANUARY 1979

THE UN- APPRECIATED ART OF CIA

They would sit around and tell stories. Weird stories. Stories I had a difficult time believing. But naturally I loved it, the casual chatter of death and international intrigue, ideological war stories laden with more blood, rape and sex than any real remembered conflict. I kept coming back for more ("Did you know that they're repaving the only road in Afghanistan? Do you know *why*?"). It got into my system; and before I knew it, I thought I had a story when, really, a story had me. And that was when I realized that these "spooks" were probably the most interesting people in all government—lethal academicians, philosopher superstars, referring to a dead enemy as someone who had to be "extracted," as if killing someone simply altered his point of view.

Oh, slick, slick, slick—your spook is so slick. I watched him with endless fascination, and the more I watched, the slicker he got ("Do you know how to kill someone with a Shell No-Pest Strip? It's so simple it scares me, and I'm fearless"). And I came to a conclusion about CIA that I feel I should share. After years of looking, I have finally figured out what CIA is.

It's art. It's like Christo hanging a 24½-mile-long curtain. Or Oldenburg building a ten-story baseball bat in Chicago. What a goof. Back in 1976, when I was hot on the spook trail, a friend of mine and I were churning out a storm of prose on the subject. We thought we were slick. Later, we would nearly bust a gut over that. Haw! We were beautiful. Hot on the trail! Shee-it. Talk about being behind the times. We were doing paleontology where spook matters were concerned. Nevertheless, we had the right instincts. We wrote this:

A CIA cover organization is a strange and very useful thing. It's like having a magic box. You can put things in and you can take things out. You can take things out that you never put in and you can put things in that will never come out. Or you can get into the box yourself and go away somewhere—

/Article by Laurence Gonzales

or perhaps go away forever. If the box is large enough, you can put an entire country inside it and no one will ever know [From "The Puppet and the Puppetmasters" by Laurence Gonzales and Larry DuBois, *Playboy*, September 1976—Ed.]

A former spook friend of mine with 13 MOSs (Military Operational Specialties—most people have only one, two at most) told me about his time in Vietnam and Laos in the early Sixties, when we didn't exist in the press as a Southeast Asian entity. If anything had happened to him over there, his family would have been told he died in an auto accident in California, where he was officially stationed. If you searched the records, you would find that he had never left the States. Officially, Wild, eh? They put him in the "magic box," where he iced the enemy for a while without officially leaving the base.

I once took a walk around a pond with a spook technical advisor. He wanted to be away from his house and he had just dumped a cache of "devices" into the pond. The BATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) was after him. He was scared. He feared for his life. He wanted to tell me some stories—to use me.

He said, "A small quantity of plutonium oxide—a very small quantity, less than a gram—let loose in the right place could kill hundreds of people. It's easily available; all you'd need is a little behavior, a lot less aggressive than what it takes to hijack an airliner. Nerve gas? You can make it in your kitchen. The essential ingredients for it are over-the-counter items these days. The literature is all there, buried. All you have to do is look for it. And the poisons you can concoct that are untraceable are staggering. The delivery systems are fabulous. That electric dart gun they showed in the Senate hearings was a joke. I worked on projects like that. There are far more sophisticated methods now."

He took out a slim cigarette lighter and showed it to me. It fired a metal dart so small you could hardly see it. It was rifled with spiral grooves, which you could see only under a microscope, and then dipped in poison. It would enter the body and not even be felt by the victim, although you

might see him idly scratch himself before checking out. It was fired by a small acorn blank, similar to those used in pistols for starting swimming races. It was made to be used on an airliner; and when he was asked to design it, he was specifically told that it should be able to penetrate the coat the Russians wear. It definitely could penetrate a Russian greatcoat. Hmmm. Remember the Cold War?

Recently, I interviewed William Colby, former director of Central Intelligence (DCI), at great length, and at the end of our sessions he remarked that there were "whole areas" I hadn't even thought to ask about, "whole systems." Imagine that. What could it be? I pointed to some satellite-photo information I had brought along, concerning a supersecret installation in Russia that the air force calls PNUT III (Possible Nuclear Underground Testing, third in a series of suspected sites). Spooks, however, say Russia is developing "directed-energy weapons" there. Death rays. Colby, the former chief spook in the world, looked at the material and hawked up a wad of "no comment." Our exchange went something like this:

"What kinds of weapons are they testing? Big weapons?"

"Big weapons."

"Directed-energy weapons?"

"I've been asked not to comment."

You want to know about the glamor of being a reporter? Here it is—the entire thing in a nutshell. You show some truly heavy government type a bit of information you're not supposed to have, and he kind of polishes his glasses real swiftly, looks a point just above your left shoulder and says, "No comment." I love it. Nothing finer. Who knows what's going on there but you can bet it is *some* shit.

CIA is a kind of realized Western Zen phenomenon. (Spook advice on avoiding a phone tap: Tap your own phone. Why? "What are the odds of having two taps on one phone?") Seymour M. Hersh of the *New York Times* recently wrote about James Angleton, former director of CIA Counterintelligence (C.I.—a meta-spook outfit, distilled essence of spook, phar-

CONTINUED