Aging Lifestyles: A spy with a poetic license

by Joe_Volz

Now that the spy business, which took a big hit at the end of the Cold War, is fashionable again, thanks to the televised testimony of the blond femme fatale, Valerie Plame Wilson, I have a confession to make.

I was in the spy game, myself, for a couple of years in Europe. I got my snooping training at the now-defunct Fort Holabird in Baltimore in 1958.

But nobody seemed too much care about my spying career. Not the enemy, not President Eisenhower, who sent me to Cold War Germany as a draftee, not even my mother.

I certainly don't rival Wilson for sex appeal, so I have a hunch no one is going to do a book or a movie about me.

What would the title be? "The Spy Who Didn't Come in From the Cold"? "The Ancient Agent"?

Instead of 007, my number was a little longer - US 51423566 (my Army draftee number). I still remember it after all these years. Well, I should. It was stenciled on everything I owned - even my underwear.

My job was nowhere near as glamorous as Wilson's. I didn't dash around Europe making contacts with secret agents. And I was not involved with the big issue - nuclear proliferation.

I rode a desk. But my assignment was, indeed, classified. Nobody was supposed to know that I was in the espionage business as an intelligence analyst. Our entire unit, based in Stuttgart, had a cover name. We were called the 7945th Support Group. Every few months, the numbers changed. Our job was to spy on the Soviet spies to find out what they knew about us.

Eventually, somebody at the Pentagon deliberately broke our cover but nobody in Washington got arrested. We became the 66th Counterintelligence Corps Group.

Our problem wasn't national security. Our biggest problem was keeping from Congress how much money we were wasting in the name of national defense. Just look at my typical day, which I suspect, was a typical day for most of us intelligence operatives.

I started out with a half-hour coffee break, reading Stars and Stripes. It had a "Pup Tent Poets" section and I made my first newspaper contribution there. My poem was called "Chewing Gum Conquerors." I said that many Germans could not figure out how we had won the war when all of the invaders were pimply-faced gum-chewing teenagers.

I was smart enough to use a pseudonym, "Gorman Hadley." I learned later that one of my fellow privates first class had to open up a probe to find out if Hadley was a security risk. They never found me.

After coffee each morning, I went upstairs to my assignment in the German Screening section. My job was to check our records to make sure that we had not hired any ex-Nazis to clean our rooms or make our meals.

We had extensive records but since the war had ended about 15 years earlier, not too many Nazis were applying for work. A 20-year-old would have been in kindergarten when the World War II ended.

Fortunately, we had an extensive extracurricular program to keep active. I joined the football team, volunteered as a driver to take the brass "out on the economy" for lunch and even painted the colonel's office.

And I learned a lot about Army ethics. I learned that telling the truth to senior officers was not always a good idea, for example.

When a major general asked me how long my coffee breaks were, I replied, briskly, "Ten minutes in the morning and 10 minutes in the afternoon, sir." They might have sent me off to the infantry if I had told the truth.

But Valerie Plame was engaged in real espionage. So, maybe her experiences were a bit different.

Certainly, her pay was a bit better than mine. I was making $100 a month although I must also confess that I didn't make much more than that when I left the Army and got a job on a weekly paper in Mount Holly, N.J.

But I'd rather be exposing secrets than keeping them any day.

E-mail Joe Volz at jvolz2003@adelphia.net

Â© Copley News Service

Aging Lifestyles: A spy with a poetic license by Joe_Volz