

# Confessions of A Master Spy

By Andrew Gibson

Many centuries ago, before our imaginations were curbed by scientific fact, people got a lot of pleasure dreaming about certain self-serving miracles. For example, Ponce de Leon, feeling a twinge of arthritis, and in the medieval absence of Geritol, discovered the Fountain of Youth. Ponce planned to dive in himself, and, even more importantly, to immerse his wife too, for she had become a scold. According to the blue-print, they were to come up as a Castilian Romeo and Juliet, or Sonny and Cher. History does not record what actually happened--there may have been piranhas in the pool.

Then again, there was the philosopher's stone, used by stoned philosophers to change pennies into pieces of eight. There were magic words--"Open sesame" would dislodge seeds from one's teeth, and "Bubble, bubble, toil and trouble,

Let me win the daily double," would overcome poverty.

And there were incantations, called spells by those who couldn't spell incantations. These changed princes into frogs, until such time as a weirdo frog-kissing princess happened along. It strains credulity.

But the most interesting notion was the cloak of invisibility--a fabric which allowed its wearer to sleep on the job, look at his competitor's bank balance or, if he were a sheikh, creep into his inamorata's harem and observe what she looked like without her veil. Whereupon he either carried her off on his dromedary, or went off on a pilgrimage to Mecca--alone.

The cloak itself may be a fable, but it is common knowledge that invisibility can strike a person at almost any moment. I myself frequently become invisible in restaurants, and am forced to blow my police whistle to attract the waitress' attention. Just because I'm invisible doesn't mean that I'm inaudible . . . . but I digress. My point is that a cloak of invisibility is unnecessary. A theodolite on the shoulder, coupled with a purposeful expression, intelligent if possible, says to the world that the bearer and his companions are where they are on official business, and are

properly authorized to go about their mysterious rites in peace. This aura of legitimacy is a more powerful magic than invisibility. I was once permitted, without question, to do a centre-line of wall survey of a highly active brothel--we rushed through our work with averted eyes and flaming cheeks, but to the young ladies and their friends, we were clearly no more than depersonalized robots, like efficiency experts.

A few years ago I had the job of locating the main dish of the Goldstone Radio Telescope Tracking Station, in the Southern California desert. It was rather intriguing that the terrestrial co-ordinates weren't known, although it was, at the time, tracking one of the rockets orbiting the moon--this was some time before the moon landing, but my job was simple enough--to locate the rotational-centre of the dish with respect to the geodetic monuments in the area. So early one morning we arrived at the gates, expecting to drive right through and go about our business. But we had forgotten that this was a heavily guarded NASA installation, and therefore there was a gauntlet to run, of crew-cut and efficient looking security officers. We fumbled in our wallets for papers which would prove that we were land surveyors of impeccable political credentials, completely devoted to the free enterprise system and the retention of the oil depletion allowance.

We were given the usual forms to fill out--the standard stuff--height, 5'8"; weight, 170 lbs.; sex, yes, but three clauses filled me with terror. One was a regulation that only U.S. citizens would be allowed on the base, the next was the place of birth of the applicant, and a third was a recital of the horrors which would follow upon a false statement.

I knew that any orbital data I might see was safe. My memory for figures, including my telephone number, is, while excellent, very short, and certainly proof against anything the NKVD, Fu Manchu, or even the RCMP can do. My lips were sealed, and anyway, if we didn't do the job, I didn't get paid. This last is a powerful, indeed compelling argument in the mysterious West. There had to be a way out.

There was. I was born in Ontario, and to a Californian, there is only one Ontario--a citrus grove town in San Bernardino County. I completed the form, and, after a little small-talk about the incidence of green orange blight in my home town, we were waved through. You see, the theodolite had done its work, and the security people obviously thought it a waste of time to question such obviously solid citizens.

The young officer in charge of the complex was interested in our work, and, in return for our showing him the intricacies of the geodimeter, he gave us a guided tour through the holy-of-holies of Goldstone--the computer room--a fair exchange, we thought. It was full of chattering machines, all discharging reams of data locating the moon rocket. Technically, it meant nothing to me. I have trouble locating the data on bearing trees. But the secret of Goldstone was revealed to me. Come close, and I'll whisper it to you----lots and lots of money . . . sssh!

It was an interesting day. We had to interrupt the moon rocket tracking to get the dish in the proper position for our measurements, and you can imagine the feeling of power as the huge parabola swung in response to our signals. For a long time after that I interspersed my conversation with "A O.K.", "One minute and counting", and "Wow!", all bona-fide astronaut talk, executed in a Texas drawl.

Next issue, pursuing my thesis that in a free country security precautions can lead to absurdity, I will reveal how, with the aid of my magic theodolite, I penetrated the nuclear mysteries of the San Francisco Naval Base, and emerged, possibly mutated, but intact.

O money, money, money, I'm not necessarily one of those who think thee holy,

But I often stop to wonder how thou can't go out so fast. When thou comest in so slowly.

Ogden Nash

We should be careful to get out of an experience only the wisdom that is in it--and stop there; lest we be like the cat that sits down on a hot stove lid. She will never sit down on a hot stove lid again--and that is well; but also she will never sit down on a cold one any more.

Mark Twain