

Psychic Spying?

Wilhelm is a former national science correspondent for Time magazine. His boo...

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FOUR YEARS ago, officers of the Central Intelligence Agency and National Security Agency participated in a series of unusual experiments run by Stanford Research Institute (SRI) to verify claims that certain people have psychic abilities. The results SRI reported were astonishing.

The SRI investigators, physicists Harold E. Puthoff (a former NSA research engineer) and Russell Targ, set out to demonstrate to their CIA sponsor that their subjects, a noted psychic named Ingo Swann and a middle-aged businessman named Pat Price, could describe distant locations merely by knowing which geographic coordinates to "look at." Some parapsychologists call this alleged ability "astral projection," or "out of body experience." Puthoff and Targ prefer the term "remote viewing."

To check such startling claims, a "rigorous test under control of the sponsor" was conducted, according to the experimenters' report, entitled "Project Scanate." The geographic coordinates of target sites chosen by the NSA monitor were encoded to ensure their security, then transmitted from his Washington-area location to a CIA scientist in Menlo Park, Calif., where SRI headquarters is located. The CIA man decoded the coordinates, passed them to Dr. Puthoff, who then presented them to the subjects. In one case, Swann described and sketched with reasonable accuracy a target island in the South Indian Ocean. In another instance, Pat Price gave an incredibly detailed description of a supposedly secret, underground military installation in Virginia. But there was more. According to the SRI report:

"On a later date Pat was asked to return [mentally] to the Virginia site with the goal of obtaining codeword information, if possible. In response, Pat supplied the following information:

Top of desk had papers labeled:

Flytrap
Minerva

File cabinet on north wall labeled:

Operation Pool — (2nd word unreadable)

Folders inside cabinet labeled:

Cueball
14 Ball
4 Ball
8 Ball
Rackup

Name of site vaguely seems like Hayfork or Haystack

Personnel:

Col. R. J. Hamilton
Maj. Gen. George R. Nash
Major John C. Calhoun??[sic]"

"Hell, there's no security left," a government security officer exclaimed upon hearing of Price's alleged success at psychic spying. According to a military source who requests anonymity, the site Price described was a satellite interrogation station which eavesdrops on Soviet space vehicles, and the code words referred to those operations. A security investigation was launched to determine whether the sensitive information had been leaked to Price or others involved in the tests. "The security men wouldn't buy the idea of remote viewing," he says. Neither would CIA psychologists who have examined the evidence with considerable skepticism.

But Price had more surprises in store. He volunteered to scan "the other side of the globe for a [Soviet] Bloc

Psychic Spying?

The CIA, the Pentagon And the Russians Probe The Military Potential Of Parapsychology

By John L. Wilhelm

Wilhelm is a former national science correspondent for Time magazine. His book on psychic research, "The Search for Superman," was published last year.

equivalent, and found one in the Urals," continues the SRI report. In addition to giving geographic coordinates for this Soviet installation, Price described it in minute detail, including visions of helipads, rail tracks leading into a mountainside, radar antennae and even the observation of an "unusually high ratio of women to men, at least at night."

The CIA scientist monitoring the tests, a physiologist from the research and development side of the agency, believed he had a potential class A espionage agent who could roam psychically anywhere in the world, ferreting secrets undetected — in effect, the perfect spy.

A Murky Business

FOR THE PAST 25 years, various branches of the military and intelligence communities have actively investigated this highly controversial field of parapsychology. Their interest, which parallels recently revealed accounts of drug and mind control experiments, ranges

from intelligence reports on foreign developments and theoretical background studies to funding of original experiments and even semi-operational tests of psychic espionage abroad.

The frequently grandiose claims made for parapsychology include reading or controlling people's thoughts (telepathy), gaining information about distant persons, places and things (clairvoyance), predicting the future (precognition), and influencing physical objects (psychokinesis) — all by unknown, extrasensory or psychic means. Such claims are by no means well established scientifically, and they have stimulated raucous debates between "believers" and "debunkers" within the agencies charged with evaluating whether parapsychology holds any promise (or danger) for mind warfare.

Wading through all the dubious claims, conflicting reports and deliberate disinformation is mushy business at best. Much of the research in this country is classified or buried behind innocuous-sounding investigations of

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dreams, biofeedback, human factors, biocybernetics and non-ionizing radiation. For example, one \$30,000 CIA contract study published last year is ingeniously camouflaged by the title, "Novel Biophysical Information Transfer Mechanisms (NBIT)." Funding officers prefer to shelter these "high giggle factor" programs from Congress (and sometimes their own bosses) to avoid public embarrassment as well as to conceal what some project managers fervently believe may be breakthrough military/intelligence capabilities equal to the discovery of atomic energy.

There is particular concern about Soviet psychic capabilities, including allegations that the Russians are able telepathically to influence the behavior of others, alter their emotions or health, knock them out or even kill by directing a kind of psychic double-whammy at them. A recent report by the Defense Intelligence Agency states:

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"Other Soviet tests included sending to the percipient the anxiety associated with suffocation and the sensation of a dizzying blow to the head. . . . Some Western followers of psychic phenomena research are concerned, for example, with the detrimental effects of subliminal perception techniques being targeted against U.S. or allied personnel in nuclear missile silos. The subliminal message could be 'carried' by television signals or by telepathic means.

"The potential applications of focusing mental influences on an enemy through hypnotic telepathy have surely occurred to the Soviets. . . . Control and manipulation of the human consciousness must be considered a primary goal."

A few analysts even fear that the President and other leaders could become the telepathic targets of Soviet mind control efforts. They argue that defensive measures need to be researched to prevent such apparent science-fiction possibilities. One speculation voiced in support of this thesis is that the decade-old microwave signals beamed against the U.S. embassy in Moscow might have been an operational experiment in behavior modification using "psychotronic" methods — that is, involving psychic powers amplified by special devices. Wild as this sounds, the CIA's "NBIT" study lends some credence to the hypothesis: "The Russians may now be implementing the next logical step [to experiments proposed five years earlier], namely to reinforce, enhance, or aid NBIT in certain trained or gifted individuals after having discovered the basic communication carriers." And the DIA reports:

"Soviet or Czech perfection of psychotronic weapons would pose a severe threat to enemy military, embassy or security functions. The emitted energy would be silent and difficult to detect electronically (although the Soviets claim to have developed effective biological energy sensors) and the only power source required would be the human operator."

Most experts publicly discount the idea, however, countering with the argument that the Moscow signals involve jamming devices or scanners that "see" inside the embassy.

The Soviets have a special laboratory dedicated to parapsychology, according to some intelligence analysts. The CIA report estimates that the laboratory may have a technical staff as large as 300 physicists, doctors, biochemists and electrical engineers, all studying the theory and applications of psychic functioning. A Soviet physicist now living in Paris, August Shtern, recently claimed that he had worked for several years in a secret laboratory in Siberia trying to find a physical basis for psychic energies. Shtern also said that, before leaving Russia two years ago, he had heard that an even more secret laboratory under direction of the KGB now is pursuing similar research in Moscow.

In June, Los Angeles Times correspondent Robert Toth was detained in Moscow by the KGB, allegedly for receiving "state secrets" about parapsychology research. The paper given to Toth by a scientist said to be laboratory chief at the Moscow Institute of Medical-Biological Preparations described a theory of psychic functioning called "mitogenetic radiation" which has been discussed publicly for years and largely discounted by others in the field. One theory is that the Russians hope to mislead the United States into believing that they are far ahead in parapsychology research so that we will either (1) waste scientific resources trying to find out what they are up to, or (2) do productive research which they then can tap into because of our more open system of scientific reporting. It is indeed a murky business.

From ESP to Voodoo

FOR MANY YEARS, small groups within the U.S. government have taken seriously the speculations about using psychic powers for mind warfare:

- Dr. J. B. Rhine, the dean of American parapsychology, conducted extrasensory perception (ESP) tests for the Army as far back as 1952. In the early 1960s, a team of Air Force scientists tested junior college coeds for ESP in an effort to develop a strict experimental method that others might follow.

- During the Vietnam War, the Marine Corps tried dowsing or "water witching" as a technique to uncover hidden mines and tunnels in the mountainous I Corps area west of Hue.

- The National Institutes of Health has supported a few studies in parapsychology. Funding for one of these programs, experiments in dream telepathy at Brooklyn's Maimonides Hospital, now has been taken over by the McDonnell Aerospace Foundation, founded by James McDonnell of McDonnell Douglas Corp., one of the country's largest defense contractors.

- Three years ago, NASA paid \$80,000 to see if machines could teach ESP (they could not) and for some pilot studies that attempted brain waves during alleged telepathic/clairvoyant communications.

- Last year, the Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) sponsored a \$145,000 contract to determine whether the Soviet-discovered Kirlian photography really depicted the glowing "aura" of a person's "etheric body." The study found that Kirlian pictures are related to the moisture content in a person's skin, a conclusion which is scientifically interesting but certainly not grist for occult lovers.

- One West Coast Veterans Administration hospital harbors secret biofeedback/telepathy experiments; another VA hospital in the Midwest conducts "out of body" investigations. Whether these are officially sanctioned projects or just bootstrap investigations is undetermined, since the investigators refuse to discuss their research publicly.

CIA psychologists are swamped with proposals for psychic studies, including one this spring which offered to study a Trinidadian voodoo specialist who reportedly flattens automobile tires — and presumably people — merely by sticking pins in their photographs.

Ron Robertson, a security officer at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory in California, one of the country's primary nuclear weapons arsenals, has acknowledged that "some of the [government's] interest in psi [psychic studies] ties into classified intelligence areas, for example, the security of nuclear weapons." Robertson, who has followed psychic developments on an official basis, seriously fears that a talented psychic might trigger or disable a warhead merely by psychokinetic force of mind. "All it takes is the ability to move one-eighth of an ounce a quarter of an inch at a distance of one foot," he has warned.

Physicists at Livermore, the University of California and elsewhere believe that psychic functioning — including Robertson's fears of nuclear sabotage by psychokinesis — can be explained by electromagnetic, quantum mechanics or relativity theories. The scientists at Livermore have conducted psychokinetic tests with the young Israeli stage performer, Uri Geller, all on an "informal" basis, they insist. According to Robertson, the excitement over "psi" at Livermore "seems to be paral-

leling the activity we had here when lasers were just getting started." Investigators at the Navy's Surface Weapons Center and NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center also have run "informal" tests on Geller, with dubious results.

The Geller Tests

THE GROWING governmental interest in psychic possibilities had been accelerated in 1972 when Dr. Andrija Puharich, a longtime researcher in the field, brought Geller to be studied at Stanford Research Institute. This \$100-million-a-year think tank south of San Francisco (just renamed SRI International) conducts a wide variety of studies for both government and business. SRI has evaluated the potential of LSD and other drugs for the CIA, forecast world trade in the year 2000 for multinational companies, even analyzed an 18½ minute tape gap for just one customer, Richard Nixon. SRI scientists are no strangers when it comes to dealing with hush-hush projects.

Neither is Puharich. His connections with the military/intelligence communities go back to the early 1950s when he worked in the Army's Chemical and Biological Warfare Center at Ft. Detrick, Md., site of the CIA's now famous shellfish toxin repository. He presented a paper entitled "On the Possible Usefulness of Extrasensory Perception in Psychological Warfare" to a Pentagon conference in 1952 and later lectured the Army, Air Force and Navy on other possibilities for mind warfare. Expert in hypnotism as well as microelectronics, Puharich also invented a miniature tooth radio, reported for the CIA.

So it was Puharich who netted Geller for study, for a few small, private foundations for the purpose of funding such research, including one headed by former astronaut Edgar Mitchell. In addition to telepathy and clairvoyance, SRI researchers claimed that Geller could erase magnetic tapes, levitate tiny weights, even materialize and dematerialize small objects.

Pentagon's DARPA sent a team of consultants to SRI to see if such bizarre claims rated their funding. But DARPA consultants concluded that SRI's work with Geller was conducted with "incredible sloppiness." The brief now is largely discounted as merely an extremely flimsy conjurer.

While Geller and others were undergoing tests at SRI, CIA scientists were canvassing the country for additional evaluations, prowling parapsychology meetings and tapping experts in an effort to fathom the conditions describing SRI's work was labeled: "ELF AND MIND CONTROL."

"I had two men from the CIA come down and try to sell me," recalls Dr. Robert Van de Castle, at the time a member of the Virginia psychologist and also a member of the DARPA team that investigated Geller. "One of them wanted to know was if Geller could jam computers. But they were particularly interested in out-of-body experiences. They were concerned that the Russians had developed it to such an extent that they were using it for intelligence monitoring. They seemed to think that psychic intelligence gathering was not beyond the realm of possibility," continues Van de Castle, adding quickly that he gave more serious weight to that possibility than would as a parapsychologist.

"Remote Viewing" PERHAPS the CIA investigators were just better informed. About the same time that Van de Castle was being interviewed, the CIA was closely monitoring SRI's "remote viewing" experiments with Ingo Swann and Pat Price. Specialists from the operational side of the agency were brought in to attempt to confirm the "remote viewing" effect, and did so, according to Swann's sources, by testing both Swann and Price, and other given foreign targets to focus on, including some in Russia and China. Though there were frequent mistakes, enough accurate information was gleaned to please the CIA, according to the reports. How did the monitors know that the information was accurate? Sometimes the answers were not known until after the remote viewing descriptions had been given and "ground truth" checks were made by agents operating abroad.

Swann denies ever having worked for the CIA, and may have been unaware of the identity of the test sponsor. "If anybody gets the idea that there's psychic warfare going on, I could get killed in the streets," Swann has said.

The project did suffer one notable failure. When Air Force officer was kidnapped by Turkish terrorists a few years back, Price and some others attempted to "see" where he was being held captive. Acting on their psychic tipsters' information, intelligence operatives checked the site, but to no avail. But that did not deter the psychic spy enthusiasts.

In a self-proclaimed "independent and somewhat critical study of extrasensory perception," intelligence consultant Joseph A. Ball of Santa Barbara, Calif., concluded in 1975 that the work at SRI "produced manifestations of extrasensory perception sufficiently sharp and clear-cut to justify serious consideration of possible applications," that is, psychic spying.

Under a section headed "Practical Applications," Ball writes: "No matter how gifted the paragnost [psychic] existing ignorance of the basis of paranormal phenomena together with the capricious and unreliable nature of the channel dictate that information derived from this source can never stand alone and must be used with caution. Extrasensory information should be [his emphasis] supplement normal information or given as a collection, but should never serve in place of it." But his point is that espionage by ESP is a reasonable expectation.

SRI's highly advertised "Project Scanate" results served the crucial purpose of garnering further government funding. Legitimized by the participation of the CIA and NSA personnel in their tests, SRI's Puthoff and Targ, a briefed "every government agency you can name" looking for further support. One that bit was the Special Warfare Branch of the Naval Electronics Systems Command. The decision to fund was taken largely on the basis of an impressive briefing on "Project Scanate" the SRI experimenters which their CIA monitor attended.

In October, 1975, the Navy let a \$50,703 contract to SRI for psychic sensing of remote electromagnetic sources, a continuation of earlier work supported by NASA in which subjects allegedly used their powers to detect the not only flashing lights. Most of the experiments were carried out under subcontract to Langley Polytechnic Institute in San Francisco — and were a bust. Early in 1976, Puthoff and Targ received \$26,000 in supplemental money from the Navy to see if magnets could be affected by human beings. The CIA and NSA researchers already had reported that some of their subjects could indeed affect the workings of a shielded magnetometer.

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"Hawker here's convinced the dam Commies have invented a secret brain-washing ray that's beamed in on Jimmy Carter."

Electronics Systems Command, explaining the Navy's interest. "I've thought for 20 years that ESP is the way to fight submarines." In fact, one of Ingo Swann's remote viewing demonstrations at SRI was to pinpoint the location of Soviet submarines around the world.

Within the past few weeks, Swann and five other SRI subjects descended some 2,000 feet below the Pacific inside a tiny submersible to try to their remote viewing on the sea floor. According to a scientist from NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, who also made the psychics correctly predicted — prior to diving — where to find various man-made objects such as anchors and parts of sunken ships.

Mind Trips to Jupiter?

ABOUT THE SAME time that the second Navy contract was given to SRI, the scientific assistant to the Secretary of the Navy, Dr. Sam Koslov, received a routine briefing on various research projects, including SRI's. As the briefer flashed his chart onto the screen and began to speak, Koslov stormily interrupted: "What the hell is that about?"

Among the glowing words on the projected chart, the condition describing SRI's work was labeled: "ELF AND MIND CONTROL."

"ELF" stands for "extremely low frequency" electromagnetic waves, from the very slow brain frequencies up to about 100 cycles per second. The Navy is interested in ELF because its Project Seafarer (formerly Project Sanguine) is a proposed communications system using a network of ELF antennas to broadcast to submarines underwater. Psychic researchers are interested in ELF because many theorists believe that radiation at the ELF frequencies is responsible for psychic communications.

The "Mind Control" label really upset Koslov. He cancelled the SRI investigations for the Navy stopped, and cancelled another \$35,000 in Navy funds slated for more remote viewing work. "We [Koslov's emphasis] do not fund programs in this area," the outspoken scientist states. "If you ask me, 'Do you think it's a pile of crap?' I and you can quote me." In March of this year, Koslov insisted that the Navy is "simply out of this business. I don't believe it's the function of the military to support parapsychology research."

Contrary to Koslov's assertion, the Navy still is supporting psychic research. An interdisciplinary team at the Navy's Electronics Laboratory Center in San Diego has been continuing some of the work begun at SRI. Led by an expert in bionics, the \$100,000, two-year project is unfortunate, since the experiments seem far better developed than earlier ones elsewhere.

This spring, SRI's Puthoff and Targ again made the rounds of Washington drumming up sponsorship. One proposal that they hoped to sell to NASA was a \$100,000 program precognitively to predict eclipses of the four major Jovian moons by having a subject fly his consciousness to the giant planet to "record the actual time of the eclipse as observed on Jupiter [SRI's emphasis]." Through SRI's proposal claimed that "pilot studies have been encouraging," NASA declined.

The SRI investigators also sent feelers to DARPA in hopes of winning long-term support for their work. Politics at the agency quickly flew in an outside team of debunkers to brief engineers in the strategic and tactical offices who were considering funding SRI's psychic work. Just three days after the debunkers presented their case, DARPA spokesperson Jane Smith flatly denied that the agency had any interest in psychic research or in Puthoff and Targ. Queried repeatedly, she stood on the statement from DARPA Director George H. Gilmer: "DARPA has not received and is not considering a proposal, formal or informal, on psychic research."

According to one of the paid consultants who briefed DARPA, SRI had proposed a \$3.5 million program on "remote viewing."

"Scanate" or "Bullpasture?"

ON THE SURFACE, all this government interest in parapsychology strongly supports the "believers" in their heated debate with the skeptics over the reality of psychic functioning. Price's apparent hit on the alleged secret military installation in their demonstration test for the CIA is particularly impressive — until one other government funders touting the test, "Did you ever check it out?" The answer is "no."

So on Sunday, March 13, with compass, topographic maps and aerial photographs in hand, I drove to an area some 135 miles west southwest of Washington, the site identified by the coordinates given in the SRI report. A NASA official and his two sons accompanied me. From the secrecy surrounding this test we half-expected to discover the base camp of an extraterrestrial scouting party or, at the very least, the command center for World War III.

No such luck. Just a sparse hillside, a few flocks of sheep, and lots of droppings. No "underground storage tanks," no "computers, communication equipment" or "Army Signal Corps" personnel, as reported by Price. The only "codeword" was the name of the place, Bullpasture Mountain. Under the circumstances, it seems that SRI's "Project Scanate" would be named more appropriately, "Project Bullpasture."

When told of the results of our hike, James Foote, the project manager for the SRI tests, was astonished: "I'm just chagrined that we didn't catch this. It wasn't tometers could be affected by human beings. The CIA and NSA [that told us this [the test results] but the CIA and NSA] sponsors, otherwise I wouldn't have taken it so much for granted. . . . There's definitely some fallacy in this Scanate report."

reversed himself completely: "From what I have seen it was a valid test as far as the investigators are concerned." The excuses range from: (1) the NSA or CIA man "couldn't read a map" and therefore the coordinates got confused; and/or (2) the psychic subjects zoomed in on the nearby Sugar Grove space communications center (which does have a few similarities to the described target, but is in West Virginia, has public tours through it and so is not secret, and is manned by Navy, not Army, personnel); and/or (3) the subjects read the mind of the NSA officer rather than the coordinates. Says Foote: "There may have been a slight exaggeration, but it was a matter of degree rather than a deliberate falsehood."

The CIA, NSA and SRI have not responded to requests to clarify the discrepancies. Puthoff and Targ continue to stand by the "Project Scanate" report, and maintain that their investigations "are among the most severely monitored in the history of science."

The Scientology Link

ONE ITEM that continues to trouble those in government who follow the SRI work is the unusually large number of Scientologists involved with the psychic tests there.

SRI's chief researcher, Dr. Harold Puthoff, is a high-ranking Scientologist and has written defenses of his organization's methods and beliefs. Scientologists' beliefs include the development of personal psychic powers, such as "remote viewing." SRI's two star subjects were both high-ranking Scientologists. Ingo Swann is a "Class VII Operating Thetan," the highest rung on the movement's complex ladder of achievements; Pat Price, who died two years ago, also was a high-level "Operating Thetan." The laboratory assistant to Puthoff and Targ during many of the Geller experiments was a Scientologist married to a "minister" of Scientology.

Some of the initial funding for SRI's experiments came from a ranking Scientologist who had established his Science Unlimited Research Foundation "at Hal Puthoff's suggestion," according to the foundation's executive director at the time. Ingo Swann helped to establish Scientology's "Celebrity Center" in Los Angeles, the headquarters recently raided by the FBI. At the time of his original testing, Swann revealed that there are "fourteen Clears [a medium-high level of Scientology achievement], more than I would suspect," working at SRI.

The involvement of Scientologists in the tests at SRI partially accounts for at least two government agencies pulling back from funding further work there. Sociologist Marcello Truzzi, one of the consultants called in last March to brief DARPA on Puthoff's and Targ's experiments, says letting Scientologists conduct ESP research is "like giving money to a cardinal of the Church to do experimentation into the veracity of transubstantiation."

On the other hand, some within government argue that it makes sense to let Scientologists investigate the psychic claims subscribed to by members of the organization. But at best, this is questionable science.

Bad Drives Out Good

ONE EVEN MORE confusing possibility is that the SRI experimenters may to some extent be unwitting participants in a deliberate put-on, a consideration they themselves have raised. Col. Austin Kibler, director of DARPA's human resources division in 1973, confided to one of his consulting psychologists that "it could be that we are pretending to support this [psychic] work to throw off the Russians." One ranking CIA scientist privately voiced the same possibility just a few months back.

But there is a core of dedicated believers inside several government agencies who are intensively reviewing parapsychology research, weeding through the mass of conflicting opinion, biased reports and inconclusive experiments in an attempt to determine what next steps should be taken, if any.

The authors of the CIA's two-volume study urge "that it is worthwhile for the United States government to initiate and support systematic research in this [psychic] area. . . . Thus, it is recommended that a system integration and research planning analysis team be formed to evaluate research work completed, update an overall NBIT research system model, identify and outline new areas of research and organize interdisciplinary meetings between different research groups so that they are continuously updated and educated about the state of the art."

Those are strong recommendations for such flimsy evidence, at least such flimsy public evidence. Regrettably, most scientists operating within the mainstream refuse to involve themselves in the contorted debates over psychic phenomena. And, if they do stir themselves to opinion, it is generally formed on the basis of emotion, not experiment. They fear loss of "legitimate" research grants and stigmatization for showing interest in such a taboo subject. Thus, bad science drives out the good.

If there is reason to believe that psychic functioning performs according to the "mind war" scenarios described in the few classified studies that have leaked out, public debate can help shape safeguards to insure benign application. If there is the slightest shred of evidence that psychotronic weaponry is at all possible, it should be considered biological warfare and banned in accordance with existing agreements.

Whether psychic phenomena are nothing but hoax and laboratory artifact or the gateway to new dimensions of human experience are questions that should be pursued by the very best laboratories, basing their publicly reported conclusions on rigorous experiment, unaltered by prejudice and rhetoric.