



(U) Job Offer from 'No Such Agency'

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Here's another tale of how an employee wound up here at NSA... (U)

(U) I'm not quite sure how I came to work at NSA. It all happened so quickly and through the haze of time, it's all a bit of a blur. I do know that I never had any real ambition to be a spy when I grew up. To be honest, I guess I wound up here on a whim.

(U) A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away -- my senior year in high school, that is -- we received notice that the Government (I don't believe they specified NSA. It was 1977 after all and NSA still stood for No Such Agency) would be conducting some aptitude tests, or more accurately, Career Qualifications Batteries (CQB). Anyone interested could sign up to take the tests. So, on a whim, I did.

(U) The tests were given in April and a group of my classmates and I gathered in a classroom to have our aptitudes tested. If my memory serves correctly, the CQB's were administered by a man wearing a trench coat, dark glasses and a fedora, but after so many years, I may be a bit fuzzy on this point. Several hours and many hundreds of ovals neatly filled in with my number 2 pencil later, I left the testing room and returned to the business of finishing high school. I had absolutely no idea what the test results would be used for. I still had no idea what NSA was or what NSA did. But at that time, neither did James Bamford.

(U) I scarcely gave the CQB's a second thought as I successfully graduated and then began to prepare myself for the next great life step -- college. At the time I'd decided to study journalism or at least something to do with English. I'd secured some scholarship money and I was all set to attend Western Maryland College in the fall. Then, in July I received that fateful phone call that would forever change my life. Through the fog of so many years, I think it went something like this:

- NSA Guy: "This is NSA calling. You did very well on the Artificial Language portion of the CQB and we'd like to offer you a place in a language training program. Can you start in August?"
- Me: "OK"

(U) Well what else would an 18-year old kid say when offered money to attend school? So I went through all the background checks (that didn't take long, given my rather brief background) and in-processing. I was told at one briefing that we'd be contacted telephonically about the starting date for the course. I wondered why they just couldn't call us.

(U) In August, I arrived at the National Cryptologic School as a member of the first RS-15A Russian Language Program class exclusively for high school graduates. At the end of an intensive (and enjoyable) 58 weeks, I was a full-fledged Russian transcriber.

(U//FOUO) Now, nearly 28 years, many jobs (linguist, collector, staff officer, manager) and four overseas tours later, I'm the Deputy SIGINT National Intelligence Officer for Russia and Eurasia. I'm still not quite sure how I wound up at NSA, but I do know why I stayed. Working for NSA has afforded me the opportunity to see a big chunk of the world and have a front-row seat to many history-altering events. I'm glad I stumbled across that obscure opportunity all those years ago. I'm also glad that I paid attention in Spanish class -- it certainly helped me to score well in the artificial language test.

(U//FOUO) Did YOU have an unusual career path to NSA? Tell us your story! Send your tale to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

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