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Behind Psychological Assessments' Door, A CIA Operation

By Laurence Stern
Washington Post Staff Writer

At first glance the interior of the room on the fourth floor of the Van Ness Shopping Center office building looks like the many dozens of private consulting firms scattered in their smartly appointed quarters throughout Washington.

The neat lettering on the door says: "Psychological Assessments Associates, Inc." Admission is gained by pushing a buzzer and waiting for someone to unlock the door from the inside.

But Walter P. Pasternak, the operating head of Psychological Assessments, is not anxious to see unscheduled visitors. "We have nothing to say," he told a visiting reporter in terse and angry tones, moving immediately toward the door.

The reason for Pasternak's reticence is that Psychological Assessments is unlike most other businesses. From the time of its incorporation in 1965, its principal source of funding has been the Central Intelligence Agency, which is what Pasternak does not want to talk about.

"We could never have existed without this support," acknowledges the firm's retiring president, John W. Gittinger, who founded it with two other former CIA psychologists after they left full-time employment with the agency.

Gittinger is less reluctant to talk because he is disassociating himself from Psychological Assessments on July 1 and is proud of the work it has done as well as his long years of service to the CIA, to which he is still personally under contract as a consultant.

The company won an obscure and perhaps unjustified mention in the case of former White House special counsel Charles Colson, who pleaded guilty on June 6 to an obstruction of justice charge growing out of his role in the Daniel Ellsberg break-in case.

Colson had asked the office of the Watergate special prosecutor to provide "docu-

ments or records concerning the psychological profile of Dr. Ellsberg compiled by Psychological Assessments, Inc., for the CIA."

Gittinger heatedly denies any association with the Ellsberg profile or, indeed, any involvement with the White House on Watergate or national security matters. "It's an absolute, positive lie," said the 57-year-old psychologist of Colson's implication of the company's involvement in the 1971 "plumbers'" break-in of Dr. Lewis Fielding's office in Los Angeles. Fielding was Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

A CIA spokesman said yesterday the agency will not comment on whether it has financial or operational relationships with Psychological Assessments. The CIA has a policy of saying nothing about its links with U.S. domestic concerns.

Gittinger acknowledges that the company behind the unobtrusive door at 4301 Connecticut Ave. NW has conducted training programs for CIA operatives abroad and performed psychological evaluations for overseas employees of American firms with foreign-based offices or subsidiaries.

The rubric of "psychological assessments" covers a variety of services which both the firm and Gittinger, in his private consulting role, have provided the CIA.

It covers the study of brainwashing techniques by foreign intelligence organizations that was carried out by a New York-based predecessor organization to PAA called the Human Ecology Fund.

It also provides training to CIA employees for assessing the credibility of foreign intelligence informants. "It's a question of trying to understand whether someone is lying or telling the truth when he comes through the door and says he wants to give you information," Gittinger explained.

The beginning of the psychological assessment program, Gittinger related, goes back to the early 1960s when former CIA Director Allen W. Dulles sought new personnel for his

son, Allen M., who was seriously injured in Korea, from a New York neurologist, Dr. Harold G. Wolfe.

Dulles became interested in Wolfe's research into Chinese indoctrination of captured American pilots during the Korean war. CIA began financing the research work through first the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology, with which Wolfe was associated, and then the Human Ecology Fund, according to Gittinger.

Both operated a private research organization with headquarters in New York and with branches overseas.

"This whole project was Allen Dulles' baby," Gittinger explained. "It grew out of his son's injury in Korea."

Because of the growing controversy over CIA financing of private organizations in the mid-1960s, the Human Ecology Fund was abandoned. The controversy was touched off by disclosure that the agency was funding activities of U.S.-based student, labor, journalistic and cultural organizations.

The Human Ecology Fund was spared public mention during the furor over clandestine CIA financing. It folded quietly after Gittinger moved to Washington to start Psychological Assessments Associates Inc.

Current programs by PAA, said Gittinger, are strongly pointed toward Soviet, Chinese and Arab cultural training. He declined to discuss the specific nature of the programs or whether PAA carried out such programs for foreign intelligence or security organizations.

The commercial side of PAA's activities—screening foreign employees of American firms—has shrunk in recent years, making the com-

pany almost wholly dependent on its CIA contracts.

He emphasized that the company has never taken a government or private contract which involved the "assessment" of an American citizen. "We do absolutely no domestic advising," Gittinger said. "We have never been asked to evaluate an American."

Gittinger and the two other ex-CIA founders of PAA, Robert E. Goodnow and Samuel B. Lyerly, have ended their active association with the company. It was understood that the new operating group is seeking to divest itself of the CIA financial sponsorship.

"I am very proud of what I have done for the agency over a long period of time in the assessments field," said Gittinger. "There is nothing I am ashamed of, nothing I have to hide."

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