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Article by Jim Schnabel: "Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Psi"

In a desert country, a dictator is on the run. He moves from house to house, Bedouin tent to underground bunker, never staying in one place for more than a few hours. Angry at his regional bullying, his sponsorship of terrorism, his production of chemical weapons, America is armed to punish his country with bombers and cruise missiles the dictator assumes, correctly, that he himself is on the target list.

To find him, imagery satellites shift from their regular orbits to scrutinize his known hideouts. Signals, intelligence satellites and listening posts prick up their electronic ears for radio or telephone communications that might give his position away. Human agents inside the dictator's government search for their own scraps and clues.

And in a set of secluded buildings on a military base near Washington DC, a very different sort of intelligence gathering is taking place. There, a unit of officers and enlisted men are searching for the dictator by way of Extra Sensory Perception -- or as they call it, "remote-viewing". Some are lying in trance states in darkened rooms, and trying to visualise the dictator's whereabouts. Others are sitting at brightly-lit tables, sketching and verbalising whatever moves their pens or enters their minds. Round the clock they track the dictator; eventually they are asked to see into the future, to determine his movements in advance. Their findings are collected and analysed and considered, alongside those from more conventional sources. And, at the appointed hour the attack is launched.

IT SOUNDS like a futurist's fantasy, but if a number of retired servicemen and intelligence officials are to be believed, it's recent history. They say that the US intelligence community has been making serious use of psychic phenomena for the past two decades: that the DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency), the CIA, the NSA (National Security Agency), the FBI, the Secret Service, the Navy, the Army, and the Air Force have all been involved, and that "remote-viewers" have been employed on their behalf in hundreds of military and intelligence operations -- including the 1986 bombing raid on Libya, in which American bombs did indeed fall on President al-Qadhdhafi's desert encampment, though narrowly missing the dictator himself.

It all started, as so many things did, with the tit-for-tat technological competition of the Cold War. Back in the Sixties, the Soviet Union began to pour money and resources into the study of ESP and psychokinesis, phenomena collectively termed "psi" by researchers in the field. Much of this psi research came under the

control of the Soviet military and KGB, and by the early Seventies, US intelligence analysts -- formerly concerned about a possible "missile gap" -- were beginning to grow anxious about a "psi gap". An unclassified 1972 DIA report expressed concerns that "Soviet efforts in the field of psi research sooner or later, might enable them to do some of the following: (a) Know the contents of top secret US documents, the movements of our troops and ships and the location and nature of our military installations (b) Mould the thoughts of key US military and civilian leaders at a distance (c) Cause the instant death of any US official at a distance (d) Disable, at a distance, US military equipment of all types, including spacecraft."

This DIA analysis now sounds absurdly alarmist, almost a caricature of Evil Empire doomsaying; at the time, though, it genuinely did seem from both intelligence reports and the testimony of emigres that the Soviets were trying to accomplish such goals. In telepathy experiments, they decapitated baby rabbits and electrocuted kittens to see if the trauma registered simultaneously in the brain wave patterns of their mothers in distant rooms. They screened Red Army recruits for psychic abilities, and pumped talented subjects full of dangerous drugs to promote psi-conducive altered states. Subjects in psychokinesis or "remote-influencing" experiments tried to stop the hearts of small animals, or concentrated on foreign political leaders, beaming at them "negative psi particles." Soviet and Czech scientists were said to be working on electromagnetic devices that would cause strokes or heart attacks, and it was even rumoured that they had perfected a "psychotronic generator", which could scramble people's minds at great distances.

All this was enough to spur the intelligence community into action and, as well as increasing their scrutiny of Soviet and East European work in this field, the CIA and the Pentagon began overtly and covertly to fund psi research in the US. The best-known beneficiary of this finding was Stanford Research Institute (SRI), a respected, University-affiliated think-tank in Menlo Park, California. The head of the SRI psi research programme was a young laser engineer named Hal Puthoff.

"It seems like so long ago," Puthoff told me over a margarita last year. He is now better known as a theoretical physicist, with his own research institute in Texas. "It started as a lark" he says. Curious about the possible relationship between psi and quantum mechanics, he began doing experiments with a noted psychic, a New York artist by the name of Ingo Swann. After circulating reports on these experiments, Puthoff was visited at SRI by various intelligence officials who expressed interest in funding further research. He received an initial grant of $50,000 in late 1972; his government funders, he says, "wanted to know if there was anything to this stuff." Although he won't say so, the funds came from the CIA.

Puthoff's research with Swann soon
focused on a set of techniques by means of which Swann tried to pick up visual and other impressions from distant sites. Anxious to avoid the seance-room connotations of "clairvoyance" and other psychic terminology, Puthoff began to refer to the new techniques by

the more modern-sounding term "remote-viewing". At first Ingo Swann claimed that, given only the targets' precise geographical co-ordinates, he could do just that. In time, other remote-viewers would set to work even without co-ordinates. "We would just sit the viewer down and say 'Target'," remembers Puthoff. "We got some of our best results that way."

The claims of the remote-viewers initially met with scepticism from their CIA sponsors, but as stories spread of astounding successes, support gew throughout the intelligence community. The first such successes took place in early June 1973, when a retired local politician and SRI remote-viewer named Pat Price appeared psychically to "visit" a sensitive National Security Agency facility on the East Coast and sparked an investigation by enraged NSA officials. Price's verbal and graphic descriptions of the site were particularly detailed, and included an overhead view, the layout of underground offices, and even Top Secret code-word labels on file folders. "He nailed it," remembers a former senior CIA official familiar with the episode. "From that moment on, there was no trouble getting anyone to take it [SRI's remote-viewing programme] seriously."

By the late 1970s, a stable of remote-viewers had been set up at SRI, doing both experimental and operational work for government clients. Government interest was so extensive that the various agencies involved pooled their resources into one programme, managed by the Defense Intelligence Agency. The programme was codenamed "Grill Flame".

During 1978, also under Grill Flame, the Army's Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM) set up its own unit of military remote-viewers at Fort Meade, Maryland. Major General Edmund Thompson, then the Army's Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence had encouraged the unit's establishment. "I became convinced that remote-viewing was a real phenomenon, that it wasn't a hoax," he remembers. "We didn't know how to explain it but we weren't so much interested in explaining it as in determining whether there was any practical use to it."

There was, though the techniques were refined as time went by. Members of the dozen-strong Fort Meade unit, for instance, used relatively deep altered-state methods of remote-viewing, collectively known as "extended remote-viewing" or ERV. In an ERV session, the viewer would lie on a couch in a darkened room, descend into a self-hypnotic trance, and vocally describe the images and other impressions that came into his or her mind. By the early Eighties, Ingo Swann at SRI had developed what he claimed was a superior co-ordinate-based remote-viewing technique, or CRV. An ordinary, intelligent person trained in the technique could, he said, be a more effective practitioner than the best natural psychic. With CRV, the viewer went through a highly-structured set of verbalisation and sketching procedures. Although usually in an almost-normal state of consciousness, the CRVer would occasionally report a brief but unnervingly vivid "bilocation", a sensation that he or she was actually present at the target site. Swann taught the technique to five new recruits to the Fort Meade unit.

"We often used CRV for target acquisition, and ERV for in-depth

work on the target," remembers a long-time member of the unit who prefers not to give his name. "With CRV, we'd give the viewer a set of numbers or coordinates and he'd sketch some mountains, for example, and some factories, and three white buildings. The next day, we'd go back and use ERV to walk around inside the three white buildings." But how good was the information gathered that way?

"It was very good," insists the source, recalling one operation where the unit was asked to psychically investigate a foreign agent on the CIA's payroll. Clues generated by the remote-viewers he says, pointed to specific financial misconduct by the agent. During a subsequent lie-detector test conducted by his CIA handlers, the agent was confronted with the information. "He nearly fell out of his chair," says the source. And, according to Mel Riley, a former Fort Meade remote-viewer, his unit was asked to remote-view a KGB colonel who had been caught spying and was under interrogation by South African counter-intelligence officers. "He was a hard nut to crack," says Riley. "They couldn't figure out how he was getting his information out of the country. But I 'saw' him playing with a pocket calculator-type thing; it seemed to be important. Later on, someone else came up with the fact that he had a family in Russia, and it was supposed to be his last assignment, and he was looking forward to going home." As Riley tells it, the remote-viewers were right; the "pocket calculator" turned out to be a covert communications device, and the emotional reading of the KGB man was accurate, too. When the South Africans presented the data to their captive, says Riley, "he broke down and co-operated".

Even bigger fish were fried. According to several former remote-viewers, as well as officials familiar with the programme, America's psychic spies were used to gather information on: key facilities in Tehran during the 1979-81 hostage crisis, terrorists and Western hostages in the Middle East; the location of Manuel Noriega during the US raid on Panama in 1989; and, of course, the location of Mu'ammar al-Qadhdhafi prior to the 1986 bombing raid on Libya. Other targets over the years included nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons facilities in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; Silkworm missiles along the Persian Gulf during the Iran- Iraq war; drug-smuggling ships approaching US coasts; and the locations of Scud missiles during Desert Storm.

Remote-viewers weren't always successful, and their findings were often used only to help direct more mundane intelligence-gathering systems. But they enjoyed powerful support in Washington, and their budgets continued year after year. "It was so small, and so closely-held," remembers General Thompson, "that it wasn't a big controversy." A number of congressmen who were prepared to believe in remote-viewing were "read on" to the programme, and became staunch supporters. These included Rhode Island Senator Claiborne Pell and North Carolina Representative Charlie Rose, who told an interviewer in 1979 that "if the Russians have remote-viewing, and we don't, we're in trouble."

"I've briefed senators in their offices," says a retired Army officer who was a member of the unit during the Eighties. "And I know that Bush [as Vice President and a member of Reagan's National Security Council] read some of our reports... He might have said,

'they're doing what [preceding word in italics]! That's the craziest thing I've ever heard!' The fact that he didn't say that tells you something."

MEL RILEY was working as an apprentice machine repairman in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, when, in 1969, he was called up by the Army. He joined the intelligence corps, and eventually wound up at Fort Meade as an imagery interpreter, a specialist in the analysis of overhead reconnaissance photographs. In 1977, he heard about plans for a remote-viewing unit, and got himself selected as one of its founder members. From an early age, he had considered himself open to such things, for he had had his own premonitions and quiet visions.

Seventeen years and thousands of remote-viewing sessions later, Riley is retired from the Army. He lives in rural Wisconsin, amid woods and lakes and quiet farm communities. He canoes, fishes, and goes hunting for deer in the winter. He helps run a local museum, and shares a comfortable house on the banks of a river with his wife. He is also an expert on local Indian lore, and although he has not a drop of Native American blood in him, he belongs to a "medicine society" - a kind of club for properly initiated Native American seers and healers, medicine men. "There are no lasting side-effects to remote-viewing," Mel Riley has told me, "other than the fact that it may change your whole life..."

Hal Puthoff saw a number of people changed in this way at SRI, and he generally considers the changes to have been positive. "Experiencing remote-viewing broadened their perspective," he says. "They seemed to be warmer, more generous, more excited about life."

But can this personal transformation also have its dark side? Can a life of introspection, half-lived in what remote-viewers call "the ether", or "the matrix", warp the mind in ways that may not be desirable? Every remote-viewer knows, for example, the case of Bert Stubblebine.

Bert Stubblebine - Major-General Albert N. Stubblebine III - became head of INSCOM (the Army's Intelligence and Security Command) in 1981, the year that General Thompson (who as Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence co-managed the Army's spy network) departed for another posting. With Thompson gone, Stubblebine was remote-viewing's chief supporter in the Army.

Stubblebine had a reputation as a lateral thinker, creative and unafraid to take risks. Concerned about hidebound thinking among his INSCOM staff officers, he would hold psychokinetic "spoon-bending" sessions with them, just to shake up their world views. There were also "neurolinguistic programming" sessions for marksmen, and charisma-building courses for generals, making use of "firewalks" and the wisdom of self-help gurus. Stubblebine himself liked to engage in remote-viewing sessions.

Any of these exercises might have been defensible, in the proper context, but as time went on, the perception grew that the general had become obsessed by the paranormal and esoteric, above and beyond any military justification. He had embarked on some kind of spiritual journey and it seemed that he was trying to take the Army with him.

Stubblebine's journey eventually took him to the Monroe Institute, a privately-owned centre for investigation into the

paranormal near Charlottesville, Virginia. At the Monroe Institute, an audio process known as "hemi-sync" was used to help induce deep altered states, which led in some cases to so-called out-of-body experiences. Stubblebine began to send his INSCOM staff officers there. And ripples of annoyance began to spread. "You wear your pyjamas around every morning and hug each other," says Skip Atwater, who is now the research director at Monroe. "You can't have that in a military setting."

Stubblebine's own frequent trips to Monroe gave rise to more serious concerns among some of his superiors at the Pentagon, whom he was obliged to brief regularly on INSCOM operations. "He had 30,000 men and women out m the field," remembers Ed Dames, a former Army major and remote-viewer, "and instead of talking about all his units and field stations and things like that, he would spend half the time in these briefings talking about the significance of the yellow salamander that had walked across the road when he was down at the Monroe Institute."

Stubblebine had other problems, including a financial corruption scandal involving some of his covert-action squads. But according to former colleagues, the fatal blow to his career came in 1983 when an INSCOM staff officer, Lieutenant Doug P-, visited the Monroe Institute for the hemi-sync treatment. Shortly after he had started the process, Lt P- emerged from his darkened room and began to wander through the Monroe hallways, naked and incoherent. "He was taken away literally in a straightjacket," says Dames. "He had some stability problems ever before he got here," notes Atwater. "There are thousands of people who come through the Institute and don't have psychotic breaks."

Lt P- recovered, and remains on active duty but Stubblebine retired from the Army in 1984 to become an executive at BDM Corporation a Washington-area defence and intelligence contractor. He left BDM a few years ago, and now lives in New York, where he is married to Rima Laibow, a controversial psychiatrist who has claimed that she is a UFO abduction victim. But the damage had been done. "Bert gave remote-viewing a bad name, because of all the other stuff he was involved in," says a former senior Pentagon official who knew him. And although the unit never left its offices at Fort Meade, by 1986 it had been expelled from the Army. It still had its supporters, notably Jack Vorona, chief of the DIA's science and technology directorate, who had since 1978 been the overall head of the remote-viewing programme. The DIA took the Fort Meade unit under its wing, the project was renamed Center Lane, and later, Sun Streak, and Vorona now exerted more direct control of the Fort Meade unit. For the remote-viewers, this was a fortunate development. Vorona was a man who was widely respected throughout the intelligence community, and with him watching over it, the unit seemed safe from outside threats.

But what of inside threats? Although Stubblebine was gone, his spirit lingered, and in the mid and late 1980s, the unit seemed to take on a garish tinge. In its first few years under DIA management the unit included the "witches,", two women called Angela Dellafiora and **Robin Dahlgren**. Dellafiora eschewed remote-viewing and instead "channelled" her psychic data through a group of entities with names like "Maurice" and "George". **Dahlgren** practiced tarot-card reading.

In the eyes of Ed Dames and Mel Riley, Angela achieved an undue influence on the unit when she began to give personal channelling sessions, featuring advice on the most intimate matters of their lives, to Jack Vorona and other officials. "Jack Vorona would sit at one end of the table, and Angela at the other," recalls Dames. "She would say, 'Good morning, Dr Vorona. Maurice says hello!'"

"Their eyes would be shining when they came out of those sessions," recalls Riley. "They were told all the nice things they wanted to hear, which reinforced Angela's position within the unit."

"Psychic blowjobs," says Ed Dames, referring to the activities of Angela and **Robin**. To witness them, he told me, and the other antics of "the witches", was "too much to bear for professional military officers". But Dames as much as anyone was caught up in the transformational dynamic of remote-viewing.

A linguist - his forte was Chinese - and former INSCOM intelligence officer, Ed Dames was one of the group that had been trained in the early Eighties by Ingo Swann at SRI. With his blond hair, California accent, and preternaturally boyish face, he looked more like a teenage surfer than a soldier. Although widely considered intelligent and creative, he also seemed, like Stubblebine, to have an impulsive streak. "Everybody sort of looked at Ed as a loose cannon," says Mel Riley. "I was in trouble all the time, anywhere I went," agrees Dames. "I was always pushing the envelope."

Certainly, despite his professed distaste for the New Ageishness of Vorona and the "Witches", Dames was frustrated by the increasing scarcity of operational taskings. In his ample spare time at the unit, he began to use remote-viewing techniques to exercise his own spiritual and extraterrestrial interests. "Under the guise of 'advanced training,'" he says, "I began to see what [remote-viewing] could do. You know what I mean?" Dames's advanced training "targets" included apparitions of the Virgin Mary, the demise of Atlantis ("it's at the bottom of Lake Titicaca," says Dames), the Loch Ness monster ("a dinosaur's ghost"), and a great many flying saucers. "He would tell me a lot of things about Martians," remembers Dames's now estranged wife Christine. "I didn't want to hear about it."

While Dames was at the Fort Meade unit, stories began to circulate about certain "unusual experiences" during remote-viewing sessions, particularly those engaged on "advanced training" targets. "I think he had some kind of experiences, some kind of disturbances from unknown spirits," remembers Christine Dames. "But he didn't care -- he welcomed the challenge."

"We thrived on adventure," Dames remembers proudly. "You get men of action -- we're not satisfied with sitting around and twiddling our thumbs year after year," says Dames. "Unless something happens, you're going to lose our interest. But there was enough happening in there to hold our interest."

Dames left the unit in 1989, and formed a company, Psi Tech, to make commercial use of his remote-viewing skills. But his clients were few and far between. He separated from his wife and moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, believing that the nearby deserts harboured a hidden Martian civilisation. A wilderness prophet for our time, he predicted to the local media that in August 1992, the aliens

would arise from their desert dwellings, shocking the world. When I saw him in 1994, Ed Dames was almost out of money.

MOST OF the remote-viewers I've talked to are willing to admit, when pressed, that their craft does have its psychiatric hazards. As with any prolonged and forced alteration of consciousness, it promotes altered states and a general mental instability, and thus can be dangerous for those who are inherently unstable. They also point out that in the absence of regular independent verification, remote-viewing can quick}y become a generator of idiosyncratic fantasy. As Mel Riley says, "Without feedback, your remote-viewing turns to shit."

And without proper oversight, it seems, the remote-viewing programme turned foul, too, slowly strangled by its own isolation.

Following the Irangate scandal of 1987, Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci had instituted a wide-ranging review of potentially embarrassing Pentagon programs, and in 1988, a Defense Department Inspector General's (IG) team descended on the remote-viewing unit's offices, demanding to see the files.

Dames and Riley both claim that some of those responsible for the unit responded very much in the spirit of Oliver North. "A lot of things," says Riley, "were being shredded and disposed of which probably would not have been appropriate had the IG team come across them." Dames remembers: "They were burning the shredders all day and some of the night."

What the IG team finally reported is unclear, but Fort Meade's contacts with operational intelligence consumers were curtailed, and recruiting of new remote-viewers was suspended. The unit received a further blow when its protector Jack Vorona retired from the DIA at the end of 1989. The SRI remote-viewing programme also died that year, was resurrected briefly at another think-tank, Scientific Applications International Corporation, and then died again in 1994. The Russian programme is rumoured to have met a similar fate, now that the winds of the Cold War have abated.

Remote-viewing has not been abandoned, however. Ed Dames lives in Beverly Hills now, with Joni Dourif, the wife of the actor Brad Dourif. They continue to run Psi Tech as a company which provides a private remote-viewing service, as well as training courses for people who want to become remote-viewers themselves - Joni Dourif was one such. Dames himself is now pursuing, he says, his own film and television projects. He and Dourif plan to marry, following the respective divorces they now await; the two say that they will eventually open a remote-viewing training centre in Hawaii.

The DIA remote-viewing unit is still alive, but is, so to speak, but a ghost of its former self. Recently transferred from its long-time quarters at Fort Meade, it is now buried somewhere in the maze of the Pentagon's bureaucracy. "The word is that they're going to kill it," says Mel Riley, but a former colleague, who didn't want his name used, is more optimistic: "It's gone through these cycles before and survived, quite surprisingly, so I hope that happens this time. It's got a lot of enemies, but it's also got a lot of friends."

None of those were in evidence on a recent afternoon this summer, when I visited the buildings at Fort Meade where the unit was housed for most of its existence. Low wooden structures hastily built in

the Second World War, but ideal in their isolation, they now sit mouldering amid a quiet clump of trees. Their only inhabitants now, one could say, are all those spirits evoked in remote-viewers' reveries. What fantastic stories they could tell.

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