

British Honors for Lundahl

APPROVED FOR RELEASE 1994
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
2 JULY 96

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20 years of leadership in photo interpretation

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Arthur C. Lundahl, Director of the National Photographic Interpretation Center from its inception to 1973, was awarded the Order of the British Empire, with rank of Honorary Knight Commander, in ceremonies at the British Embassy on 17 December 1974.

In his presentation remarks, Ambassador Sir Peter Ramsbotham commented:

"We are assembled today to do honor to a man whose devotion to his own country has been matched by remarkable services to our common good. Arthur Lundahl's work for the United States has been marked, amongst other honors, by the award of the National Security Medal, of which he was only the 15th recipient. The distinction which Her Majesty the Queen has now been pleased to confer upon him is only rarely awarded to a United States citizen. It is, indeed, one of the most senior ranks of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. ... Mr. Lundahl will be joining the honored company of those whom the British Sovereign has rewarded over the centuries for services which go far beyond the call of normal duty. The distinction is richly deserved by one whose collaboration with the United Kingdom in the field of photogrammetry, photography, and photographic interpretation dates from the wartime period."

Lundahl in his response called U.S. sharing of technical knowledge with the United Kingdom "a return on your investment in us," recalling that when World War II started, the United States:

"had nothing in this highly technical field — no photogrammetrists, no photo interpreters, no manuals, no training aids — in short, no technology. The British shared their knowledge with us, including their precious instructors, at a time when they were fighting for their very lives. Those of us who were the recipients of that knowledge will never forget this gesture."

If the United States had no such technology at the outset of World War II, Arthur Lundahl began amassing and developing the science — and winning commendations for it — almost as soon as he graduated from the University of Chicago with his geologist's degree in 1942.

As a U.S. Navy officer from 1942 to 1946, Lundahl earned the Navy Commendation Medal, awarded by Admiral Nimitz, for his photo interpretation work in antisubmarine warfare.



Arthur C. Lundahl (left) and British mathematician Sir Peter Barenhofen

From 1946 to 1953, he was a civilian with the Naval Photographic Interpretation Center, first as Chief of the Photogrammetry Division and then as Assistant Chief Engineer. In 1953 CIA picked him to direct the program which later became the National Photographic Interpretation Center. He built it into an organization of 1,000 people surrounded by complicated machinery that wasn't even dreamed of until Lundahl

decided there was need for such inventions. Under his guidance and direction, a totally new family of photo exploitation equipment was designed and developed to cope with the product of new collection technology.

In these advances, Lundahl fused the talents of seven disciplines — photo interpretation, automatic data processing, photogrammetry, graphic arts, communications, collateral research, and technical analysis — into organized NPIC teams.

Along the way, he was elected President of the American Society of Photogrammetry in 1954, played a major role in intelligence coverage of the Suez Crisis of 1956, and "surfaced" with the discovery of Soviet offensive ballistic missiles in Cuba in 1962, for which Lundahl received a personal commendation from President Kennedy and NPIC received a Presidential Unit Citation.

In January 1963, the National Civil Service League gave him its Career Service Award as the "top photographic intelligence officer in the United States Government."

On the occasion of his retirement in June 1973, Lundahl received the National Security Medal mentioned by the Ambassador, the CIA's Distinguished Intelligence Medal, and the DIA Director's Award for Exceptional Civilian Service. The rare National Security Medal, authorized by the President for "distinguished achievement or outstanding contribution in the field of intelligence relating to the national security," was presented by Acting DCI Lt. Gen. Vernon A. Walters in a July 1973 ceremony. The citation said in part:

"He has been a dynamic force for the improvement of intelligence vital to the security of the United States and world peace. His outstanding contributions have added new dimensions to the interpretation of the evidence acquired by the most sophisticated collection mechanisms.

Mr. Lundahl's 20 years of exceptionally meritorious service with the Central Intelligence Agency has been marked by outstanding ability, imagination, drive, and dedication. His professional competence and personality have made him an inspiring leader in the Intelligence Community and a key adviser to many high Government officials."

DCI William E. Colby, presenting the CIA's Distinguished Intelligence Medal, said it was awarded

"in recognition of his career with the Agency which has been marked by his outstanding achievement of a distinctly exceptional nature in positions of high responsibility. A superb technician in the field of photographic interpretation and photogrammetry with few if any peers, Mr. Lundahl has been the leader in the development of these vital tools in the interest of our national security."

At the same June ceremony, Admiral Vincent R. DePoix, Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, in making DIA's award, commented that Lundahl's contributions to the Department of Defense had been no less significant. Noting that half of the photo interpreters at NPIC were DIA personnel, Admiral DePoix said Lundahl was almost unparalleled in winning the complete respect, admiration, and devotion of those with whom he had come in contact, and that the NPIC Director had always been mindful of special intelligence needs and interests of the Department of Defense.

The future? On leaving NPIC in June, 1973, Lundahl expressed the hope that the technology developed for application to national security can now be applied to peaceful purposes in solving such problems as world hunger. He now is actively devoting his "retirement" to these goals.

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Posted: May 08, 2007 08:43 AM