

Snapshots at Random

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Intelligence market for the product of the camera fan's fun.

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Everyone who has taken photographs in a foreign country has collected potential ground photographic intelligence. The traveler turns his camera upon anything that excites his interest -- the civil engineer on peculiarities in the construction of dams, roads, bridges, and city buildings; a woman perhaps on clothing, jewelry, and hair styles; a doctor on things related to disease and therapy; a farmer on crops and tools and methods of farming. The more widely traveled the man behind the camera and the broader his interests, the more discriminating he is likely to be in photographing subject matter peculiar to a particular place. But the potential intelligence thus collected is often lost; there are two minimum requirements for transforming it into actual photo intelligence. One is that the pictures must be identified, at least by the name of the place or subject, the direction the camera was facing, and the date. The other is that they must get to the market.

The most omnivorous and insatiable broker for the photo intelligence market is the CIA Graphics Register. If you have a batch of photos taken anywhere abroad, properly identified and preferably with negatives, the Register would like to look them over. If they were taken in London or Paris or Vienna, say, the pickings may be slim, but the Register would like to decide for itself. And if it knows in advance that you are going to have a tour in some less well frequented place, it may be interested enough in promoting your hobby to supply you with camera and film. With a minimum of effort, adding to the pictures you normally would

take anyway a notation of the place, time, and direction and as much descriptive data as you can, you are likely to produce some useful photos.

Targets of Opportunity

The results will be much better, however, if you add to this minimum effort a little more and become as familiar as you can with photo collection manuals and lists of requirements on the area. Graphics Register can refer you to general publications on these subjects;¹ and attaché offices in all the U.S. diplomatic missions have such manuals and requirements lists in detail for their particular areas. You can pick out of the listings a few things that are of interest to you and accessible for photographing in the course of your normal day-to-day activities. One standing requirement, for example, is photographs of prominent persons in almost any field, especially the military, political, economic, and scientific. If an election is coming up and campaigning is in progress, why not take a few pictures of the speakers? If they are within 50 feet of a 35 mm. camera, the heads can be enlarged to an identifiable likeness. The closer the better, naturally, but the main thing is to get them on film and in focus.

The fact that an object may have been photographed previously by no means disqualifies it: changes, or the absence of changes, in it over a period of years or of weeks may be important. And changes aside, it is amazing how many pictures of the same object can be taken without telling the whole story. Although I must have seen hundreds of photographs of the Eiffel Tower before I went to France, it wasn't until I walked under it that I realized the first balcony has a big hole in it. So looking up, I photographed the tower through the hole; and then, just for fun, I kept trying to find another photograph that showed there was such a hole in the middle of the balcony. It was three and a half years before I saw one. A good photographic practice is to take the normal view of an object and then try to think up a different viewpoint and take that also. Few people look up, and it is often by looking up that you find an extraordinary picture.

If a new gas storage tank is being built in the city where you are

stationed and you drive past it going to work every day, why not photograph it once a week or once a month? The photos will tell how long it takes to build it, what types of materials and methods of construction are used, and how much gas storage capacity is being added. Maybe you don't know what a gas storage tank looks like, and all you see is a big tank being built. Take a picture of it anyway; obviously it is built to store something. What you don't know about it the analyst will. That is what he is an analyst for, but he can't analyze it if you don't get him the pictures.

Captions

A bit of extra effort put into captioning your shots will pay off, too. One kind of information you may not be in the habit of noting for your own purposes, technical data, may be of importance to the Register. This includes the kind of camera and lens, the type of film, and the speed of exposure, as well as a serial number for each roll and frame. You should especially make note if you have used a telephoto or wide-angle lens. Information on the type of film and exposure speed will not only assist in its development but also make it possible for you to get advice on how to correct any mistakes you make and improve your technique.

Roll 20, frame No. 3. 2 May 1959. 1100 local time. Malaya, Kelantan state. Town, road, Main road between Kota Bharu and Kuala Trengganu looking south at ferry toward village of Jerteh. Note cut at right for bridge under construction (see frames 1 and 2 for other shots of bridge).

Most important, however, is good identifying data about each picture. The essential elements are the date (and the time of day may be useful); the precise place; the subject or subjects, with special note of particular features of intelligence interest; and the direction the camera was facing, by compass or with reference to landmarks. It might be noted, for example, that frame no. 7 of roll 2 was exposed at 1330 on 17 November, one mile east of Otaru, Hokkaido, on the road to Sapporu, looking north and showing a Soviet trawler in the bay. Or from a second-floor street window of the Hotel Europe in Bangkok, looking down on a passer-by

identified as so-and-so on his way to the corner to hail a samlor.

These essentials can frequently be supplemented to advantage with additional comments or with printed matter bearing on a particular picture. Perhaps the idea of the target came from facts you read in the newspaper; clip the article out and send it along. You find your way around unfamiliar cities with the help of guidebooks, free tourist maps, and maps bought at local survey offices or book stores. The analyst can use the same material to find his way around your photographs; if you can't send copies, at least make reference to the tools of travel you used. In the absence of printed material it is extremely useful to draw a sketch showing the relationship of pictured objects. A sketch is particularly good when there are several shots of the same subject from different vantage points, or of different subjects near each other, or of subjects that are not mapped. The analyst never complains that he is given too many facts about a picture.

Spies and People

You may want to shoot beyond your targets of casual opportunity and make trips or excursions expressly for the purpose of getting useful pictures. Fine; but since you are presumably abroad on some other government business, it is paramount that you remember you are taking pictures for fun. You should never take photos at the risk of your proper work, your purpose in being there. This need for discretion is of course a greater limitation in some places than in others. Once you have decided upon a target, the thing to do is become as familiar with it as possible, learn for sure just what the limitations of law and discretion are, and forget completely why you want the pictures. Try to take them for some other reason than intelligence collection.

I once wanted to photograph a new electric power plant in Malaya. So far as I knew, nobody would question my taking the pictures; but it is a little odd for a girl to go around photographing power plants. First, I had to find it, somewhere around a certain town. I drove out the main road from that town, which finally passed under some high power wires. After taking pictures of the road in both directions, and the wires and towers in both directions, I drove on, planning to take the next road turning off

either right or left parallel with the wires. But at the next turn a sign pointed to the power plant.

I photographed the side road and then drove down it until I came to a one-way bridge with a policeman at each end and the power plant on the other side. The first policeman waved me to a stop. I got out of the car, camera in hand, and went up and asked him why. He said I had to wait a few minutes, the Sultan was coming. I asked what was the big building on the other side of the river. "That's our new power plant," he said proudly. "That's nice," I said, "Does it work now?" "Oh, yes." "Golly," I said, "Can I take a picture of it?" "Sure, why don't you go to the other end of the bridge, you get a better shot." So I shot a lot of pictures, some including the bridge and a nearby railway bridge, with a lot of kibitzing, until the Sultan came past in his Mercedes. Then I thanked the policeman and left, congratulating myself that nothing could have been easier. If I'd been as smart as I thought I was I'd have got a good picture of the Sultan and one of the policeman. No matter how much you see, if it isn't in your camera it's worthless.

The biggest hazard to the camera fan who has ulterior motives is people-himself, ordinary people, and people who might suspect him. If you act suspicious even the ordinary people will become suspicious. If you act quite ordinary even the suspicious people will think you quite ordinary. That is why it is important for you to forget the reason you are taking your pictures. Just take them; but know what you will say if you are questioned. Sometimes if people are watching me take pictures it makes me nervous, so I retaliate by turning my camera on them to make *them* nervous. In the places I've been they are either so pleased they stop being inquisitive or suspicious or else they are embarrassed and go away. I have been told that in the Middle East they often throw things, and that in the Soviet bloc it can be quite dangerous; but in Asia usually they giggle. Some friends of mine in Borneo used a polaroid camera to divert the people with pictures of themselves while they took candid shots. One Dyak requested a photo of the tattoo on his back; he had never seen it!

The necessary equipment for ground intelligence photography consists of one camera and plenty of film. A camera, like a pair of shoes, is an individual and personal matter. I prefer a 35 mm. negative because its 20 or 36 frames per standard roll last longer without changing film, and

larger cameras are too heavy and bulky. I would not use a smaller one, of the subminiature class, except for some special reason; the negative is so small that enlargement potential is seriously limited. And ordinary people, if they bother to think about it, think spies use tiny cameras that can be hidden. If you go around more or less like a tourist with a popular-sized one you avoid being conspicuous.

There are many publications on cameras and photographic techniques, on special lenses, on the respective advantages of black-and-white and color, of fine-grain and fast film. I haven't tried to touch on these subjects. All I have tried to do is point out that an opportunity exists for travelers interested in photography to make a considerable contribution to basic intelligence through collecting ground photos. I collected them because I thought it important, because it helped me learn about the place where I was living, and because it was fun.

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1 See appended bibliography for a sample list.

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