Blood & Water

By Marc Segal
AN OVERSEAS NIS OFFICE learns that $300,000 in payroll funds, earmarked for sailors on an Indian Ocean tour of duty, is missing. NIS Special Agents quickly establish that the case was shipped via registered U.S. mail from Norfolk; that the mail bag was checked through by postal authorities at Kennedy Airport in New York; and that is in fact reached Bahrain. Conclusion? The bag was intercepted by someone in a position to realize the value of its contents. Someone in the Navy!

Within 48 hours of the initial report, five Navy men are apprehended while trying to convert the funds to a foreign currency, before fleeing the country.

The thieves are tried and convicted at court-martial. They endanger many lives to do enormous damage to property. A Navy officer is stabbed in the back and left to die late at night aboard a Navy frigate moving up the Atlantic Coast. Upon discovery of the body, the ship stops, a message goes out to the

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Investigative Service and the crime scene is secured. A quick search at the crime scene turns up an eight-inch combat knife.

An investigation uncovers evidence that a government inspector has been bribed by contract personnel. As a result of the NIS investigation, the president and project manager of the company, along with the government inspector, are found guilty of 10 counts of bribery and one count of conspiracy to commit bribery.
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Crime is an unfortunate fact of life in many segments of society, and the Navy is no exception. As the primary criminal investigative and counterintelligence agency for the Department of the Navy, the mission of the Naval Investigative Service is to support all commands in the discharge of that responsibility.

Although the organization is more than a century old, it wasn't until 1966 that it took on the name NIS. Since then it has expanded as the need for professional experience in the prevention, detection, and investigation of criminal activity against U.S. Navy personnel and property has intensified. Just about twenty years ago, a drunken sailor staggering out of a whore house would have been challenged by a member of the Shore Patrol, who’d be wearing leggins, a peacoat, and armband with the letters “S/P.” Inside his pistol belt would be a billy club. Today, the same drunken sailor would be confronted by a team of Naval Investigative Service Agents. These agents would be dressed in sharp business suits. They would be packing snub-nosed revolvers, and each would know all angles of working the streets.

Unlawful acts by or against Department of the Navy personnel (including civilian employees and contractors) that result in property damage, financial loss, or serious personal injury carry the additional threat of impairing the Navy’s ability to carry out its mission. The fleet must be protected—from inside. This is the responsibility of a rare breed of federal law enforcement officer: a Naval Investigative Service Special (NIS) Special Agent. He's James Bond, Dick Tracy, and a whole lot more.

The Naval Investigative Service is a centrally directed, largely civilian worldwide organization providing such support, both ashore and afloat, consistent with the Department of the Navy policy and with full regard for the constitutional rights of individuals. The NIS is the striking arm of the Naval Investigative and Security Command (NISC), which is headquartered in Suitland, MD just outside of Washington, D.C. NISC is commanded by a rear admiral who reports directly to the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations.

NIS operates at 170 locations around the world. Ten regional offices, six in the United States and four overseas, coordinate the activities of smaller resident agencies and units (NISRUs). A detail is assigned to every U.S. Naval Activity. Special Agents work closely with every federal law enforcement agency and also with state and local police forces in the United States and abroad. A system of on-line computers at NIS headquarters enable agents, using terminals in field offices and late-model Mercurys to enter and obtain from the FBI and other law enforcement agencies around the globe.

Crime detection and investigation are an agent’s most important responsibilities. 1.3 million sailors, marines, and civilian employees are targets for every type of crime. An NIS agent's beat runs from rape to RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations). A special NIS Fraud Squad hits contractors who have screwed Uncle Sam out of millions. Special Agents working dope details join with local police on cooperative drug sweeps just prior to U.S. Navy ship visits to foreign ports, and in major U.S. cities where they work with local police to gather evidence against dealers looking for military customers. By getting to the source and interceding the supply of drugs to U.S. Servicemen in Singapore or Subic Bay, the NIS acts to protect rather than punish Navy and Marine Corps personnel, who might otherwise indulge.

Prospective NIS agents come from a wide variety of backgrounds: law enforcement, the bar, engineering, the military, and from other sections of public and private business and industry. Applications for NIS careers are open to male and female citizens between 21 and 35 who have no criminal record. All are college graduates and each is required to complete a rigorous 11-week basic agent course at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center at Glynco, Georgia.

Candidates are carefully screened and only the best are selected because they must meet exacting standards of alertness, intelligence and temperament. They must exhibit a willingness to undergo a rigorous training program, travel frequently and devote long hours to very dangerous assignments.

Agents-to-be receive instruction in three blocks of subject matter at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center: physical specialties and firearms, law enforcement, and practical exercises. Classroom instruction goes into basic investigative techniques, criminal law and procedure, and the rules of evidence. Practical exercises cover surveillance, fingerprinting, raids & busts, courtroom testimony, and crime scene examinations. Trainees quickly become versatile crime technicians with a working knowledge of a wide variety of weapons, devices, and techniques. But for an NIS Special Agent, training never ends.

Physical specialties cover conditioning and unarmed self defense. Agents learn the proper techniques for kicking-in a door.

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and the best way to pin a suspect to the ground. They practice with gadgets and realistic scenarios. NIS stresses the Uzi, the .38 caliber revolver and the Remington 870 shotgun with folding stock. Surviving under various tactical conditions is also covered.

Agents learn about Naval and Marine Corps customs and traditions, and the military system of justice from career Navy and Marine Corps Special Agents. Advanced NIS training covers undercover operations, white-collar crime, computer fraud, technical surveillance countermeasures, forensic pathology, and counterespionage techniques.

NIS instructors are experienced Special Agents drawn from all over the world. Instructors are selected based on demonstrated expertise in diverse areas such as narcotics suppression, protective operations, interrogation techniques, anti-terrorism tactics and hostage negotiations, port security, and major procurement fraud investigation.

An NIS Special Agent then operates in unusual environments with unusual responsibilities: enforcing the laws that protect the people, the property, and security of the United States Navy and Marine Corps. Today's special agent is a special breed. He might find himself assigned to a major shore command like Pearl Harbor or San Diego, where he would provide fleet support services. Agents review records, conduct interviews, write reports, and testify in court. Other NIS Special Agents ride shot-gun on aircraft carriers for a one-year tour of duty. As one of only a handful of civilians aboard, this agent is responsible for all major criminal investigations and counterintelligence matters on the carrier and on all other ships of the accompanying battle group. NIS Special Agents frequently investigate sudden or suspicious deaths in boot camp training. They are also the ones who brief and debrief American civilian and military officials who make visits to Communist-bloc areas. NIS Special Agents are backed-up by an infrastructure of people: evidence technicians, Reserve Agents, electronics experts, and forensic chemists who are capable of solving any problem that an agent cannot handle at a crime scene.

Over a 20-year career period, an NIS Agent sees at least six permanent tours of duty. A career path includes one or more foreign tours, generally for three years. An agent may live within the civilian economy or aboard base. An investigative assignment could be aboard a submarine or at the Mexican border checkpoint.

Service as an NIS Special Agent is more than a career. It's a commitment. Agents earn incentive pay for putting in long and irregular hours. They are classified in the GS-18 Criminal Investigator Series and once they attain the age of 50 and complete 20 years they are entitled to full retirement benefits.

Major Navy ports in the United States are more than likely centers of International commerce visited by the ships of may nations. Some of these nations have more than a passing interest in U.S. ports and in the comings and goings of Navy civilian vessels. Merchant ships from some Communist countries are prohibited from entering U.S. ports while others are closely watched. Some are fitted with snooping devices capable of picking up a ton of information merely by approaching a harbor and observing activity like the readiness of the fleet, shipbuilding, current weaponry, and personnel movements. To help the NIS take steps against the collection of such information, teams of NIS agents swoop down on selected ports. Findings are turned over the appropriate Naval commands so they can protect their own sensitive operations as well as recommend corrective action to civilian contractors working on site.

In an age of rapidly advancing technology, the protection of top-secret naval information from peeping eyes is vital to national security, as is the safeguarding of naval material from damage or destruction. NIS assists the Navy and Marine Corps in protecting such information and apprehends those who would allow it to be compromised. Agents are authorized to use aggressive measures against organizations hostile to the interests of the United States. In the States, NIS counterintelligence investigations are
coordinated with the FBI; overseas they go through the Central Intelligence Agency. Agents prepare foreign port briefs and overviews of countries where naval units will be visiting. They also produce threat assessments resulting from advance visits to areas where critical naval activities will take place. Special agents also monitor attempts by hostile agencies to pry classified information from Navy and Marine Corps personnel.

The Naval Investigative Service labs constantly test, evaluate, and upgrade equipment packages so that today's special agents have the best possible gear. Scientists have refined techniques for processing voiceprints from tape recordings of bomb threats and extortion demands. Chemists working at a regional drug identification lab in Norfolk can identify packets of coke seized at the Naval Air Development Center in Warminster, Pa. practically overnight. An evidence kit developed by the NIS is kept in Naval Hospital emergency rooms to help doctors and medical examiners gather evidence on sex sickness.

Kidnapping, assassination, and hostage taking are three hazards faced by American military personnel on overseas bases and diplomatic posts, and sometimes by foreign visitors in the United States. NIS Special Agents are frequently called upon to help deter these acts by providing Protective Service Details (PSDs). During the 1986 Fourth of July Statue of Liberty festivities in New York City, 200 NIS Special Agents provided protective service for the events, and United States, Department of the Navy, and foreign VIP's Colonel Oliver North's bodyguards come from the Protective Services Detail.

Overseas, these agents work closely with security and police forces of the host country. In the United States, they often work with the Secret Service. The PSD is a two-phased operation. Phase one involves one of a comprehensive threat assessment to identify potential threats to the person being protected. The second phase is his-or-her around the clock protection by a specially trained team of NIS agents. Every high-ranking Naval officer has a civilian bodyguard.

Assignment to Protective Services requires extensive training in the use of firearms, anti-terrorist procedures, and teamwork operations. Training starts with classroom briefings and enactments of realistic scenarios at Glyncor. Agents are cross-trained by the U.S. Secret Service.

As the use of terror, and threats of terror, against American military personnel in the United States and overseas has intensified in recent years, so has the need for a system that can rapidly analyze, evaluate, warn about, and then take effective measures against terrorist activity. The Anti-Terrorist Alert Center at NIS Headquarters is the nerve center of that system. ATAC does things like keeping tabs on terrorist in the U.S. and the Caribbean and monitors Syrian and Iraqi poison gas production. Threats relayed to the Anti-Terrorist Alert Center from the United States and foreign intelligence communities and from NIS and Naval Units around the world are quickly examined and researched by civilian analysts, checked out with other agencies and evaluated in terms of their potential danger and likelihood of being carried out. Information is then reported back to the originators and to other pertinent agencies in the shortest possible time.

Terrorist Alerts put out by ATAC are sent on a need-to-know basis to Navy and Marine Corps C/O's, the senior military advisors and attaches at U.S. embassies and to selected "Friendly Countries." NIS Special Agents in the United States and overseas then provide tactical follow-through on these alerts, advising and working with appropriate commands on specific anti-terrorist measures. To develop and sharpen skills needed for these assignments, NIS agents train at three stages. First, in basic courses at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, then at NISC Headquarters, and at seminars given by the NIS. Sometimes, agents train in the classroom, on other occasions, they deal with actual states of siege.

At this moment, there are about 1,110 NIS Special Agents on the job. Top secret, yet highly visible, the Naval Investigative Service is an organization that means something special to the Navy, to the country, and to its special agents.