Talking the Talk, for Would-Be Intelligence Officers

By R. Keith Ogden, Lt Col, USA, (Ret)

It is a fact of life that most American journalists and other media folk “… would not know a spy if he (she) jumped up and bit them on the butt”. ¹

A good example of this is the use, or misuse, of the term agent. American newspapers and magazines habitually apply the term agent to CIA officers. Unless said CIA officer happens to be working for another agency at the same time, he is not an agent. The term agent is reserved for individuals recruited by a professional staff member of an organization such as CIA, Army Intelligence, and yes, now, DIA. The name for those who recruit and handle agents has changed through the years. Up until 1965, Agent Handler or “AH” was the common US Army term. It then became Case Officer. The British frequently used the term Agent Runner or handling officer, while the Germans liked Agentenfuhrer.

There are many types of agents, to include:

- **Penetration Agent** - attempts to penetrate or otherwise cover the target assigned. He (she) may not be able to effect a penetration, and must rely on elicitation or observation, the three ways to cover a target. The more general term is Collection Agent which may mean Penetration Agent, Elicitation Agent or Observation Agent.

- **Principal Agent** – An agent who recruits other agents and runs them for the benefit of the Case Officer who runs him. This is common in places where because of race or lack of language capability, the Case Officer must rely on a Principal Agent who is less conspicuous and more fluent in the local language.

- **Support Agent** – performs such tasks as finds and maintains safe houses, transfers money, supplies other needed items, such as weapons.

- **Spotter/Assessor** – Spots likely target personalities, and may actually meet them for an initial assessment before turning them over to another agent, or Case Officer, who will affect the recruitment.

- **Mole** – Frequently misused term. Moles are recruited, trained, and dispatched to the “denied area” with no specific function to be performed until further contact is made with them. To say that there is a mole in the CIA or FBI is erroneous. If the mole has already penetrated the target organization he is active, and is now a penetrant.

- **Double Agent** – Another frequently misused term. For example, Aldrich “Rick” Ames, the CIA officer who volunteered his services to the KGB, and Robert P. Hanssen, the FBI Special Agent who likewise volunteered his services to KGB, were not double agents – they were agents of the KGB, coincidentally recruited by Victor Cherkashin, Chief of Line KR (Counterintelligence) at the Soviet Embassy in Washington, DC. Cherkashin was their Case Officer.

An example of a double agent would be any of the numerous personalities initially recruited by the Germans during and before WWII, who were discovered and “turned” or “doubled” by the British XX Committee, one of the most successful of all the WWII Allies intelligence operations.

¹ Attributed to a near-legendary US Army Case Officer at the United States Army Intelligence Training School (USAINTS) when it was still at Fort Holabird, Md.
An example of misuse of the term may be found on page 13 of *Hidden Secrets: A Complete History of Espionage and the Technology Used to Support It*, by David Owen. There a photograph of Aldrich “Rick” Ames is captioned:

“Aldrich and Rosario Ames stood trial for spying in 1985. He was found to be a successful double agent.”

Pathetic, but all too typical of American usage by people who should know better.

*Induced Double Agent* (sometimes called a *Dangle*) – This is an individual who is spotted, recruited and trained by one service who then “dangles” him (her) in front of another service, hoping they will recruit the dangle. The purposes of such an operation include: determining what the other service’s requirements are, or establishing a conduit to pass false or deceptive information to the other service, or even to tie up the other service’s case officer with a useless asset.

*Agent of Influence* – Someone recruited because of his (her) position and status, thus enabling the recruiting service to influence the actions of the agent’s government, party, tribe, cult, et al. Such an agent would be used in what is described as “covert political action.”

*Walk–In* – Someone who, on his own volition, contacts an intelligence service and offers to become a reporting agent or source. The Walk-In may either be a staff member of an intelligence or security agency, a military organization, or some other branch of his government, or even a recruited agent of another intelligence or security agency. In this latter case, the walk-in offers to become a double agent, while in the first instance, the Walk-In is not a double agent, but offers to become a penetrant of his own organization. A more definitive term for the first example, who agrees to remain in his agency, but to report to another, hostile, agency is a *defector in place*, as opposed to merely a *defector*, someone who wishes immediate sanctuary. The receiving organization will generally try to get the would-be defector to stay in place, if at all possible.

Historically, in the secret war between the Soviet Union and the US, both sides have had walk-ins who wished to defect, either immediately, or were willing to remain in place for an agreed upon time. On the US side, there have been Rick Ames, of CIA, Robert Hanssen of the FBI, and John Walker of the US Navy. From the USSR, there has been Oleg Penkovsky from the GRU, Anatoliy Golitsyn from the KGB and Yuri Nosenko, also from the KGB. All these individuals were Walk-ins; all provided amazingly important and significant information to their new employers.

Ironically, some of the most valuable Soviet and Soviet Bloc walk-ins had difficulty at first in convincing the US Embassy officials whom they first met that they were the real thing, and not a provocation. Both Penkovsky and Popov were initially turned away by the US military attaches whom they first met on their walk-in. In some cases, it was fear of a provocation, or unwillingness to take the task of dealing with a would-be Soviet or Soviet Bloc. In some cases, it was apparently sheer ignorance of what the walk-in was trying to accomplish. We (USI) do not know how many times this occurred in the post WWII period, but we do know of the difficulties some Soviet walk-ins experienced and later told their eventual handler of their initial difficulties. In 1974-1975, steps were taken to train US military attaché designates how to recognize a walk-in, the initial steps to handle him, and the reporting necessary to allow the national level agencies to assess the value of the walk-in.