

December 2022



"It's your New York!"

The Rondout Reader

CATCH-202



My **TOP SECRET** Life

by Kevin Ahearn

1963



For the very few, the very proud and the very old veterans of the

USAF SECURITY SERVICE



1

'If happy little blue birds fly, beyond the rainbow,
why, oh why, can't I?'

Judy Garland in 'Wizard of Oz'

Throughout the Cold War versus the Soviet Union, Kelly Air Force Base, a sprawling complex outside San Antonio, Texas, served a full arsenal of transport and combat aircraft, including the massive B-52 Bomber, America's prime nuclear deterrent.

Also at Kelly was the headquarters and primary tech school of the USAF Security Service, the top secret 'electronic trip-wire'; the first to alert the dashing young President in the event of a full scale attack by the Russians.

Future intelligent analysts were chosen from the top .5% of enlisted personnel, a motley collection of college drop-outs. Rarely did a candidate come straight from high school graduation.

Because I'd set an iguana loose in 7th period study hall, I was not allowed to attend my high school graduation. Two weeks later, I was in the Air Force.

I'd taken a battery of tests, but being colorblind, electronics was out. My mechanical skills were lousy and I didn't want a desk in administration. That left 'General': cook, cop, and...*intelligence*.

"Two-Oh-Two, Radio Intercept Analyst," I said to the recruiter. "*What's* a Two-Oh-Two?"

"I don't know," he said. "It's classified."

"Okay. I'll take it."

Becoming a 202 became a quest, a journey into a Top Secret world 99.99% of America knew absolutely nothing about.

At Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, I barely got through basic training. Then I got my orders.

In September of 1963, across the United States, thousands upon thousands of high school graduates attended their first college class. At Kelly Air Force Base, 28 new students ('jeeps') reported for their initial briefing.

Only one of us was black, a devout Baptist 'parachute rigger' who'd reenlisted to become a 202. He didn't graduate. Only seven would.

We faced a huge map of Russia and Warsaw Pact nations marked with symbols like a gigantic gameboard--an alien world stretching across eleven time zones bristling with fighter planes, bombers, and missiles. Soon enough, we'd be seeing it all in our sleep.

"A Two-Oh-Two in the most unique, most important, most secret job in the Air Force. You're going to be *spying* on the Soviet Union, and if you tell anyone what you're doing...ten years in Leavenworth!"

The first 202s were CIA agents.

In 1951, Radio Free Europe, a radio station set up to penetrate the 'Iron Curtain', began launching hydrogen-filled balloons from Western Europe to drift eastward.

The balloons carried two to seven pounds of 'propaganda leaflets'-- messages of support and encouragement to citizens suffering under Communist oppression, satirical criticisms of Red regimes and leaders, information about dissident movements and human rights campaigns.

Over five years, nearly 600,000 balloons carried more than 300,000,000 leaflets, posters, books, and other printed matter over Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland.

From day one, the Communists protested vigorously and began shooting down the balloons with anti-aircraft fire and fighter planes, just as the planners had hoped.

The 'leaflet campaign' was cited as 'a major part of the post-WWII psychological warfare battle between East and West'.

Such was the 'cover story' to mask the greatest intelligence-gathering operation in history. The CIA had set up 'listening posts' across West Germany, Scotland, Crete, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan to monitor Soviet communications. Staffed with Russian linguists and radio intercept operators, the data was passed to the analysts.

As the Soviet air defense system tracked the balloons, CIA 'Sherlocks' mapped out the entire network. Had war broken out, B-52 bombers, loaded with H-bombs, would follow routes avoiding Red radar to nuke Moscow, Leningrad and other Russian cities.

At the end of the 'leaflet campaign,' the Air Force Security Service took over the listening posts. The B-52 bomber crews would now be counting on us.

"To become a Two-Oh-Two, you must learn how to think like one," said our instructor that first day. "The 'Sherlock' goes his own way, using his 'cipher brains' beyond theories and figures to discover truth."

'Huh?' I wondered. 'What the hell is he talking about?'

With that he wrote on the blackboard:

8, 5, 4, 9, 1, 7, 6, 3, 2?

"You smart-ass college boys know all about number sequences. What's the last number and why?"

Like I had a prayer? As the rest of the class did the math, I decided to make my own code, seeing the numbers as words, printing them out in block letters...

EIGHT, FIVE, FOUR, NINE...

"Zero!" I shouted out. "The numbers are in *alphabetical* order."

Had the instructor praised my breakthrough, like the later Obi-Wan Kenobi 'You have taken your first step into a larger world' or perhaps that I had conjured up a moment of Harry Potter magic, things might have been different. Instead he was pissed that after six years of teaching, some punk had solved his pet puzzle.

"That fuck-up thinks he's some kind of Super Analyst," ran through the school.

'Super Analyst'? My quest had a name. No typical 202 would I become, but a Top Secret *hero*!

Later that week, we started on simple-substitution cryptograms, not unlike the kind in newspapers' puzzle sections. I had never seen one before, but my highly-competitive parents took great pains to teach me *Scrabble*. I knew all about alphabet frequency and letter groupings.

In ten seconds, I scanned the first coded 'military message', noticing the two and three-letter groupings, identifying the letter 'e', then hit the long word.

"Reinforcements!" I shouted out, breaking the code.

The whole class looked at me.

"Elementary, my dear Watsons," I said.

Roger Wilco. Remember that obnoxious, wise-ass punk from 3rd grade, always clamoring for attention? I hadn't changed much.

After the third week of class, we began to lose guys. I never saw them go; they were just *gone*. UFOlogists wrote about the 'Men in Black,' a mysterious government agency who 'cleaned up' after 'flying saucers'. I began to wonder if the Air Force didn't have 'Men in Blue' whose sole mission was to make 202s 'disappear.'

After 'boot camp', Kelly was the 'real' Air Force with the best mess hall in the country. I'd spend a lot of free time down near the runways watching the planes taking off and landing. A couple of times I'd get lucky and a mammoth B-52 *Stratofortress* would roll down, eight jet engines roaring, its span so great it needed an added landing gear, like an ostrich's leg, near each wingtip. The sight on that bomber taking to the sky made me feel so *safe*.

The school's first sergeant was full of enthusiasm and made us feel as special and as needed as bomber pilots. Unlike ordinary colleges and universities, we had no textbooks and never got any homework. We weren't even allowed to talk about class unless we were in a secure area.

Turn it off, turn it on until it became a reflex.

Becoming a 202 meant buying into the mindset---get it fast, get it right. Who?, What?, Where?, How? and Why? were not enough. What does this *mean*? Not what is, but where it's *going*. Logical inference, deductive reasoning, electronic detective work against the biggest, most dangerous military machine in the world--What the rest of America didn't 'need to know,' we were going to find out.

Then came that Friday no American ever forgot. We were about to break for lunch when a sergeant burst into the class.

"Everyone outside, *now*!" he ordered. "Double-time!"

The whole school emptied out to stand at attention on the tarmac. In a slight Texas drizzle, all eyes zeroed in on the main runway. Like freight trains with wings, the B-52s rumbled down and lifted up, one after another.

It didn't take Super Analyst to figure out that...

"President Kennedy has been shot," said an anxious captain. "Return to the barracks and await further orders."

The Air Force had gone to 'Yellow Alert', and was ready to go to 'Red'.

We went to our rooms in shock. Not to listen to the radio or to wait for the next newspaper as our parents might have; we watched it all unfold on black-and-white television

Kelly was only our primary school, designed to weed out the wannabees. By the last week, half were gone. One by one we were called in to meet with a group of officers and guys in suits.

At seventeen, I'd never been arrested. No drinks or drugs. I didn't even know how to drive or screw. And wouldn't learn how to do either for much too long. The Air Force knew all about the iguana and (Surprise, surprise!) my parents had sent me to see a psychiatrist for a while.

However 'intelligent' a 202 candidate may be, he'd be useless unless he had a 'Top Secret Codeword' security clearance. The FBI had sent a Japanese-American

agent to interview my former teachers and my neighbors, including the batty old lady three houses down. When told I had enlisted, she asked, "*Whose* air force?"

More than a few were surprised that I had survived the school at Kelly, but the next round would be much harder. And just four hours up the road.

Because it was responsible for nuclear weapons, Kelly's security was high and tight 24/7. Goodfellow Air Force Base in San Angelo, Texas, had an old runway, few airplanes, but plenty of barbed wire. 'Goodbuddy' was a Security Service *training* wing.

By the AF Specialty Code, 203s were Russian-speaking linguists who had attended American colleges and then came here. 292s were radio intercept operators, 'Ditty-bops' who carried their cumbersome gear on their belts.

"Gee, I wish I had a set of earphones," I'd mock them. Way ahead of their time, the 292s had the last laugh; now half the world can't function without being plugged in.

We all got security badges, black-and-yellow with our photograph. Legend had it that two 'weather analysts', 'flash-dashers' whose training only lasted seven weeks, decided to switch badges as a joke on the Air Police at the school entrance. Within seconds, both were on the floor with guns to their heads and never seen again.

Every weekday morning after breakfast in the chow hall, we'd walk along the fence to the security gate. All around us was the flat, barren, dusty Texas prairie except for a single squiggly tree maybe half a mile away.

I can still see it.

One afternoon, coming back from lunch, our 202 group approached a dozen officers, 2nd lieutenants training to be Watch Officers coming out of class. Standard Operating Procedure called for us to salute them and they would return the mandatory courtesy.

But I held back. The 202s saluted the officers, the officers saluted back. And when their hands came down, *then* I saluted and all those second lieutenants had to salute me.

I needed that.

Permanently labeled as 'a fuck-up,' I was constantly in trouble with the school and the squadron for 'chickenshit' stuff and wound up pulling groups of 'extra duty', two hours almost every day.

In the day room closet I found an old dart board and darts and brought them back to our three-man cubicle. Seven times we'd miss the board playing darts. When the Squadron found out, I wasn't given some filler and a paint brush; the three of us had to pay for the wall, in two installments taken out of our meager paychecks.

San Antonio had the Alamo and every airman turned tourist to see it. The San Angelo 'skyline' consisted of a single 6-story hotel, quite a comedown from New York City. Mexico was a constant attraction. Gas dropped to *19.9 cents* a gallon. Guys would pile in a car and head south to be with prostitutes. An innocent Catholic, I didn't see my virginity as something 'to be towed away at owner's expense.' Or was it because I was too cheap. Or afraid? It would take me a while to work out things with women and girls.

On February 9th, 1964, a bunch of us gathered in the recreation room to witness an event that would be watched by 73 million people across America: the television premiere of The Beatles. Later in the month, a 202 from Rhode Island bet his paycheck against 7-1 odds that *Cassius Clay* (Who?) would defeat Sonny Liston to become the heavyweight champion of the world.

We spent a week on rudimentary Russian and I don't remember a word of it. I'd taken the 'Language Test' in basic training to qualify for a linguist job and failed it. Later I'd learn German, then in Latin America, Spanish and Portuguese.

Soviet Air Defense Forces were known as *Voyska PVO Strany* (National Air Defense Forces - *Voiska Protivovozdushnoi Oborony Strany*). (Mikoyan-Gurevich) Mig-15s, 17s, 21s and the super-secret MiG-25, plus *Yak* and *Sukhoi* fighter aircraft whose mission was to shoot down attacking American B-52s. The 202s would know their capabilities by rote, where every airfield was and how long it would take each squadron to get into the air. Because the 'Sherlocks' had broken the grid codes, we got so good and fast that often we knew where Soviet aircraft were going and why, even before the Red pilots did.

Our instructors knew the most unbelievable secret of all; that we owed our jobs to 'space aliens'! When one of the balloons in the CIA's future 'leaflet campaign' crashed in an early test, the Company was spooked that their Top Secret mission would be blown, so they ordered the base intelligence officer to report that the Army Air Corps had captured a 'flying disc.'

Then they showed the whole world that the 'flying saucer' was actually a harmless 'weather balloon'. Dismissing the balloon as a 'CIA cover-up', UFOlogists have been looking for the Roswell 'space aliens' ever since.

My father and thousands of other WW II flyers had *trained* at Roswell.

'Soviet Supreme Rocket Forces' rated a week and a half. The Russians had the lead in long-range missile technology and the 'Space Race'. How many operational intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) did they have, where were they and how quickly could they launch them?

'This looks like a job for...Super Analyst!'

For a solid week, we were taught how to use a typewriter. I just squeezed by and have been typing 'the Air Force way' ever since.

We lost a couple more classmates, but not because of low test scores. Seems the FBI discovered, not arrest records or divorce problems, but that their families had friends or distant relatives living in Russia or Eastern Europe. The 'Men in Blue' made them disappear.

One afternoon, alone in my cubical, I thought I found a dollar bill in my back pocket. About the same size, the paper strip was a 'swamp' printout of the latest Soviet coded traffic. The 292s hacked in and the 202s broke it.

In a flash, I lit up the Top Secret text and watched it burn in my hand, then flushed the ashes down the toilet.

Every weekend half the base would go into town, trying to score with Texas women. Few succeeded. A classmate would marry one. Being a punk from NYC, I got nowhere.

In the last week of school we filled out our 'dream sheet', where we wanted to go. Most guys made Crete or England their first choice. 'The needs of the Air Force come first,' we were told. Most of the class before us got Pakistan. We got West Germany. I was ordered to the 6901st Special Communications Group in Zweibrucken.

With six others, I graduated and got my second stripe. At 18 years, 2 months and one week of age, I had become the *youngest* 'Sherlock' in American history. That never gets old.

I got a 30-day leave before reporting overseas. In uniform I felt proud in front of my family and neighbors. I visited my high school. My iguana was the star of the biology lab. Everybody looked so young.

Four miles away, the World's Fair was in Flushing Meadow. A 'Universal and International' exposition, its theme was 'Peace Through Understanding,' dedicated to 'Man's Achievement on a Shrinking Globe in an Expanding Universe'. Admission, in uniform, was \$2. I took full advantage.

The lavish IBM pavilion was an introductory lesson about...*computers* and how these machines were going to change the world---circuits and memory cores, binary language, the principles of probability, logical structure and abstraction.

In the egg-shaped "Information Machine," I watched a 15-minute show explaining 'How both the human brain and the computer obtained sensory information, fed it to the brain (central processor), and through a program interpreted it to make some decision of what to do.'

I was seeing the future and couldn't 202 how a 'fuck-up' was going to fit into it.

Seeing me in uniform, an IBM suit singled me out. "Did you know that we are working on a program for the Air Force that will instantly translate Russian into English? Are you a part of that?"

Linguists replaced by computers? No damn machine was ever going to outdo a 202! Had I told him what I knew, I'd probably still be in Leavenworth.

On June 6th, 1964, 20 years to the day Americans had stormed the beaches on D-Day, I was on a flight to West Germany. The Red Army and Air Force vastly outnumbered the democratic forces in Europe. If the Commies attacked, Super Analyst could be the 'Paul Revere' of World War Three!

2



"Listen. Do you want to know a secret?
Do you promise not to tell?"

The Beatles

'If you don't use your brain,' went my family mantra. 'You're gonna hafta use your back.'

I sure showed them! I'd become a Radio Intercept Analyst, a 'Sherlock', the most vital job in the whole United States Air Force. On the flight across the Atlantic, I imagined being 'Super Analyst - The TOP SECRET hero' at a frontline air base, with a full fighter squadron at the ready as I broke Soviet code matrixes in defense of American freedom. One drawback: if the massive Red tank armies surged into Western Europe, base commanders had standing orders: 'Shoot all the 202s.'

I lucked out. My 36-month tour would be with the 6901st Special Communications Group (SCG), a second-echelon outfit in southern West Germany, far from the front lines in the town of Zweibrücken. Not on an Air Force base, but hidden away on an Army subpost, perfect camouflage for an intelligence command center.

'Sunny Zwei' was a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) garrison town. The *Bundeswehr* (German Army) had a post up the road from us. The French Army was close by. (They'd pull out in 1966.) Canada (3 Wing) had an air base on the other side of the valley. The biggest player was the US Army with 3,000 truckers and support personnel.

Pentagon and Intelligence experts predicted that the Russians would start the next war *without* nuclear weapons. A gigantic *blitzkrieg* of millions of soldiers, tens of thousands of tanks and hundreds of jet fighters and bombers would thrust into West Germany, seeking to conquer the entire country in less than a week. France would then fall even more quickly than it had in World War II.

Only American long-range nuclear missiles launched from the United States could stop the complete Communist takeover of the continent. While the Soviet Supreme Rocket Forces waited, fingers on their H-bomb triggers...Would the US trade New York and Washington for Moscow and Leningrad? Would we sacrifice millions of American lives to save Europe?

Super Analyst added a crucial factor: the initial 'commando' strike. Flown by the prototype of the MiG-25, the 'Foxbat' would blow by NATO air defense at 1,500 mph and at 200 feet to beat radar. Loaded with rockets and bombs, in minutes the MiG would reach the Number One Target and let loose its full inventory. With the 6901st SCG destroyed, the Free World was lost!

Main Operations was two huge brick buildings linked by a 'leaning' ramp, a covered bridge connecting uneven floors. I was impressed by ordinariness of it all. Not an intercept site and before satellite communications, there were no 'dishes' or fancy antennae. A tall fence topped with barbed wire surrounded the complex. From every other fencepost, a mounted speaker played music as broadcast by the nearby Royal Canadian Air Force Base.

I'd be told soon enough that the KGB's Eighth Directorate, the Soviets' communications intelligence branch, had infiltrated West Germany to aim listening devices at the 6901st. Rock n' Roll jammed the Commies' 'ears.'

Up the stairs to the gatehouse manned by the Air Police. I got my yellow-and-black 'Top Secret Codeword' badge with my picture on it. (Later we'd get pure green.) Up three flights of stairs, above admin and crypto and the comm center to the Watch Command, the very heart, not only of the SCG, but of NATO's Early Warning System.

As advised, I gave the duty sergeant my firmest handshake. Shown through the Watch Command, Top Secret maps and Soviet aircraft photos, the elite 202s were at their desks, analyzing the combined data from the Western Europe Theater. A New

York City boy, I felt like I was being given a tour of the Yankee dugout. These were the best Radio Intercept Analysts in the world and one of these days, one of those desks would be mine.

But first I had to prove myself in the place where all 'jeeps' got their start.

"I didn't start using e-mail until I was eighteen," sounds unthinkable today, but in Opscomm, it was standard operating procedure.

Two rows of a dozen clattering teletype machines, the whole intelligence network was seemingly alive with flowing data, breaking texts with yellow 5-level perforated tape winding round and round. Bells sounded as messages were sent, including football scores during the season. Long reports were ripped off, separated into the different colors of paper, and put into bins to go where I didn't 'need to know'. Carbon paper was shoved into paper bags blackening our hands.

To become an elite Watch Command 202, 'jeeps' had to spend months and months toiling in Opscomm. Not me. I was out in three weeks. Because I had shown the 6901st that I was Super Analyst?

Exactly the opposite. I couldn't do anything right. So bad that I had to be removed.

"You've been transferred to the EDP division," said the Watch Commander, happy to be rid of me.

"EDP?"

"Electronic Data Processing," he said bluntly. "With the rest of the fuck-ups."

EDP was in the second building. The first time I walked down the tilted walkway, I felt a bit like Dorothy starting on the Yellow Brick Road.

The sergeant in charge was taller than I with flaming red hair. He'd married an English woman from an earlier tour. Introductions were somewhat awkward. All were 202s and drunks.

The thin, gaunt airman who beat up a West German music machine was 'Jukebox.'

'Harry High School' was almost twenty, but that's what they called him.

'King Dude' was the Country & Western lover who wore cowboy boots out of uniform.

None were about to call me 'Super Analyst.'

'Notre Dame', a proud alumnus from California, had it all 202ed.

"We're the white collar executives around here," he said. "Those guys in Machines are nothing but blue collar keypunchers."

Opening the heavy door, entering the big, air-conditioned Computer Room, I found myself in the second largest data processing center in Europe. Two giant IBM mainframe computers made a buzzing sound I'd quickly get used to. Rows of whirring tape units, boxes the size of telephone booths, ran in two rows on the carpeted floor. The giant printer could be programmed to play, of all things, 'Anchors Aweigh.'

Later I'd watch sci-fi movies and TV shows with futuristic sets and remark, "I used to work there."

Work clattered off the printer--The 'DRIVE'--A thick run of data on big, connecting pages compiled by 202s throughout the USAFSS network, up-to-the-minute info--Soviet air defense, bomber wings, missile bases. My job was 'quality control'--to proofread the proof--that the Russians could attack at any moment.

On the job training took about an hour and half; Super Analyst was ready to roll.

I tried to believe that being a 202 was a little bit like being a fighter pilot. Reporting for work, showing my badge to the AP at the security gate was like coming on the flight line. 'Machines' was my 'cockpit'. At my desk with my special half red, half blue pencil working the DRIVE, I was defending my country with all the vigor and brains I could muster.

One night, halfway through a midnight shift, an incident about which I didn't 'need to know' brought the Watch Commander and his elite 202, plus a couple of other officers called to duty, into the computer room.

'Jukebox' was out sick, yet another intolerable hangover, and I was alone, a 'teenage trick chief.'

Had the KGB hacked into our system and corrupted the intelligence?

As the DRIVE was placed in front of me, all looked over my shoulders and I felt like I was holding the original manuscript of *War and Peace* and I was the only one in the room who could read it. But I didn't know what it *meant!* Intelligence reporting had become a gigantic, unbreakable number sequence.

"Looks good to me," I said and there were immediate sighs of relief. The sergeant patted me on the back. A few handshakes and back we went to deterring Communist aggression.

Only the privileged worked 'straight days', a forty-hour week. The rest of us were 'trick trash' on a set schedule: four 'swings' - 4PM till midnight, 24 hours off, four 'mids' - midnight till 7AM, 24 hours off, four 'days' - 8AM till 4PM, *96 hours off*. The knot in the string was coming off that fourth 'mid'--how many times do you go to sleep before working the next day?

When the weather was right....Softball game!

Parkbrau, the local brew, cost \$2.35 a case after deposit. We'd buy a stack of beer and...playing the field while drinking a bottle of beer has become a lost art. Just before the pitcher goes into his wind-up, take a good slug, then place the bottle to the side and assume the 'NY Yankee infield crouch.'

If the batter doesn't hit, grab and drink, repeat, repeat.

The first game would go okay, but in the middle of the second, play got a little sloppy. That's when I hit the only home run of my life!

Every Wednesday at the beginning of Lent, you could tell the practicing Catholics by the ashes on their foreheads. And by the ash residue around the eyes or fingernails, who had 'burn detail' the day before.

The 6901st was a paper-heavy operation--texums, reports, print-outs, administration forms and reams of carbon paper. In the secure area, all paper waste was put into paper bags, then dropped into chutes in Building One.

In the basement was the incinerator, a furnace that resembled a cast iron boiler on a steam-engine locomotive. Fired up, bag after bag was thrown in, all day, day after day. One rule: never open a bag of chad, the tiny paper chips from thousands upon thousands of punched IBM cards or tiny circles from five-level tape.

The bag was to be tossed into the fire unopened, then 'duck and cover' as it ignited and roared like a bushel of dry pine needles.

After eight hours of feeding the furnace, the two-man 'burn detail' staggered out, looking like they'd been fighting a forest fire. Rub-a-dub-dub all you want in shower after shower, but the ash residue took a couple of days to wash away.

'Burn detail' was the bane of 202s, but the 'burn bag' cart almost made up for it. A four-by-eight 'flatbed' with a rear 'rollbar' handle, the front wheels rotated like a supermarket shopping basket.

I'd volunteer to push the cart loaded with bags up the connecting ramp and then, one by one, drop them down the chute in Building One. Then I got to ride *down* the ramp.

Standing on the cart, I start rolling down, feeling like a surfer, a juke of my body to the left or right, steering the front wheels. 'Back to the Future' on a giant skateboard, rolling back to Machines. It was the air-conditioning assembly that stuck out into the hallway which took some avoiding.

The National Security Agency (NSA), not the CIA, maintained civilian control over the USAFSS. One morning, an NSA GS-14, the equivalent of a brigadier general, arrived at Machines to upgrade our operation. Mr. Smith was short and wore glasses and looked like Joe Flynn, the frustrated captain in *McHale's Navy*. He and our sergeant would be working together on a program to simplify the DRIVE and eliminate 202 jobs.

Mr. Smith briefed the rest of the shop and then stepped into the hallway.

"Howya doin', Smitty!" I waved, rolling by on the burn bag cart.

After an introduction like that, we almost got along,

I lived on the third floor of the barracks building which also housed squadron headquarters, the commander's and first sergeant's offices and the orderly room on the first floor.

In front of the entranceway stood the sign displaying the USAFSS emblem, designed by an airman and chosen from a command-wide contest of entries. The blue and yellow shield was divided into quarters. The globe represented our worldwide reach, the sword and shield symbolized strength and the winged foot and the lightning bolt our most important quality: speed.

There was no symbol in the USAFSS emblem for truth, but you can't please everybody.

I passed by the sign daily and it made me proud to belong to be part of a Top Secret mission defending America and its NATO allies.

The best beer in the world is free beer. The best parties: *promotion* parties! Every four months when the added stripes were announced, we'd gather at the NCO/Officers' to celebrate or freeload.

That's where I premiered my 'stage act.' I'd been writing 'ditties' since basic training. Jimmy Dean's 'Big John' became 'Big Sarge', the Orlons' 'Don't Hang Up' - 'Don't Re-Up' and the classic Barry Sandler's 'Green Berets' - 'The Ballad of the Green Badge' which concluded, 'Make my son a college grad, don't make him wear the green badge.'

Not that I was any good. It was my timing--waiting till everyone was even drunker than I was.

Singing songs about USAFSS was nothing new. Years before, Airman Jim Lowe became frustrated and curious about the super-secret 'CommCenter', a mysterious, restricted place he was not authorized to enter. That inspired 'Green Door' ('What's that secret you're keepin?') which he wrote and sang to 'Top 40' fame.

Then there was this Radio Intercept Operator stationed in Landsberg, who brought his guitar and country band and sang on the very same stage. A 'dittybop' by the name of Johnny Cash.

We got a new First Sergeant, 'Tommy', who laid out his policy on Day One.

"I don't play favorites, won't tolerate favoritism," he told us all. "You obey, you'll do fine. But if you screw up, you pay the price, I don't care who you are."

Our older Squadron Commander shipped out and was replaced by a young lieutenant. "You want to survive here," he was told by a superior officer. "You put that First Sergeant in your back pocket." Then came the *Beetle Bailey* comic strip reference.

'Lt. Fuzz,' he became.

The very first time 'Lt Fuzz' reported to work, we almost collided as I came sliding down the long banister rather than walk down the stairs. He promptly ordered me into his office and gave me '2 & 2', two hours of extra duty for two days.

In my four-year Air Force enlistment, I pulled nearly 1000 hours of 'extra detail'. A consistent 'fuck-up'.

For my first three months in Zweibrucken, I went into town only once, with other 'jeeps', to a *Gasthaus* where 'the natives pissed against a wall'. I had too many delicious beers, and had to be helped back up the hill. After that, I stayed on post and drank, still in uniform, like almost everybody else.

Was this going to be my life for the next three years? Cigarettes cost \$1.20 a *carton* and a bottle of beer over the bar, fifteen cents. What's not to like?

It would have been so easy to be like so many other guys, but it wouldn't have been me. I bought some clothes and began exploring a world as new and as strange as the EDP computer shop. Around Zweibrucken, through the beautiful, green meadows wound a walking path, and every couple of hundred yards loomed the broken remains of a reinforced-concrete bunker from the Nazi *Siegfried Line*. After the war ended, the French first filled them with water, then blew them up.

For the most part, I found Germans of all ages to be friendly and polite, and I'm sure they were to the French and the Canadians, too. We weren't quite family, but way better than having the Red Army run their lives.

In downtown Zweibrucken, a couple of blocks from the church with the highest steeple for miles, lay the burnt and gutted ruins of a three-story building, victim of the war. Looking at it I hoped it would never be rebuilt or built over, but left to serve as a memorial, and a *reminder*.

In WW II, my father had flown 57 missions in four-engine bombers, earning a DFC and an Air Medal with clusters, and came home 100% disabled. Which made me wonder how Americans might have felt, their county bombed to rubble and then occupied by the sons of the bombers.

'Deaf and dumb', I felt disabled. I enrolled in the onpost branch of the 'University of Maryland' to take German, a 'system of systems' which I attacked as if it were a Russian crypto-language. I worked and I studied and practiced downtown. Within six months, my drinking buddies swore that I was 'fluent.'

Serious drinking in Zweibrucken was a pick-and-chose process as there were bars that catered to American soldiers, American and Canadian airman, and one strictly for African-Americans. I preferred the genuine German *Gasthauses*, especially the *Winzer Stube* which stayed open till 3AM, and best of all, would sell me 'bottles to go'.

And after getting very drunk, very late during the summer...skinny-dipping!

A lazy, polluted river some forty yards across flowed through Zweibrucken, past the town park, and the *Schwimmbad*, the public swimming pool and the best place to ogle German women.

But in the middle of the night...As we had done before, 'Andy', 'Bronco' and I left the bar at closing, carefully carrying full bottles of beer, and needing a 'quick dip' to sober up. (*Nein*, we never did persuade any *Fraulein* to join us.)

Climbing over the fence, a tragedy occurred; a beer bottle fell and broke. On we went, stripped naked and jumped in the pool. Noisy drunks playing and splashing like little boys...That's when the *Polizei* car, its toplight flashing, pulled up to the front entrance.

Out of the water in a flash, we dressed and made for the bushes on the river bank. Flashlight in hand, the cop came closer and closer. Not about to get caught, I ran, leaped over my startled buddies and shallow-dived into the river. Swimming madly for the other side, I looked back once. 'Andy' and 'Bronco' had been caught, but the *Polizei* would let them go, perhaps embarrassed by the one that got away.

I scrambled ashore on the other side in the bowels of a muddy construction site. Slogging through, I lost a shoe and had to dig for it. Out of breath, I got behind a heavy bush and hid there as dawn broke.

A couple of hours later, the walk up the hill seemed to take forever. I arrived at the gate covered head to foot in caking mud just as a lone car pulled up. The driver was an officer reporting early for work: 'Lt. Fuzz.'

I snapped to attention and gave him a muddy salute. He just shook his head and drove through without returning it.

Every airmen in the 6901st SCG knew two things for sure: his AF service number and how many days he had left, a longtime military tradition especially overseas. Machines would print-out every month telling every man his number. I started below the heading near the bottom of the chart. *What! Nobody goes home in 1967!*

Other guys left early to join the '2T Program' which meant a remote assignment and an added stripe to go with it. If you married a German, you automatically lost your TOP SECRET Codeword clearance and got shipped out.

And then there were those who 'disappeared', courtesy of the 'Men in Blue.' One old roommate told a bunch at the EM Club that he wanted to climb the church steeple and shoot people like that fanatic sniper in Texas...*Gone!* A 'jeep' reported from the States packing two pistols and a couple of switchblades...*Poo!*

But neither was 'Enemy Number One.' In 1960 a pair of high-level codebreakers defected to the Soviet Union. Both were homosexuals and the intelligence community had been homophobic ever since.

When a pair of Watch Command 202s got so drunk that they passed out in the same bed, their clearances were suspended until an investigation confirmed their heterosexuality. Another 202 built a snow woman with boobs and added stones for nipples...*Gone!* A new guy 'showed feminine tendencies'...*Poof!*

Were any of them queer and subject to Soviet blackmail? National security was taking no chances. Any time we met a civilian who even appeared gay, we ran the other way.

Across the street from the *Jeagerhof*, a *Gasthaus* that served Lowenbrau from wooden kegs in monogrammed half-liter glasses (Of course, I stole one and brought it home. When it broke, I almost cried.), was a cafe that served no alcohol and was frequented by young shopgirls.

It was there that I saw *her*. She was maybe a year younger than I with a clear, quintessential German face. And those incredible blue eyes! The sight of her hit me like a Russian H-bomb.

As she was wearing a smock and her blond highlights looked professionally done, I 202ed that she worked at a nearby beauty salon. I would soon find out her name, but to me, she would always be 'Betty Barbershop.'

What used to be a hassle became a joy. Every two weeks without fail, she would cut my hair. Oh, 'Betty Barbershop'! That lovely teenager had no idea of how lucky she was going to be.

'Oh!' said the GI in Paris. 'You mean Notre Dame's a...*church!*'

The 'Fighting Irish' had returned to legendary prowess in 1966 and about to play Duke, a 24-point underdog. Going beer for beer with my fellow 202 'Notre Dame', I got him to give me 30, then 35, and finally forty points.

If I had truly wanted to take advantage of a falling down drunk, I would have pushed him to 50, even 60 points. Imagine, five dollars on Duke and 60.

Notre Dame beat Duke 64-0.

To see a movie at the post theater cost \$.25, but we had to pay a full dollar to see **Ten Commandments**. Finally, around Thanksgiving in 1966, the film I had been dying to see: **Ghidrah, the Three-Headed Monster**. I arrived about ten minutes before showtime and was astonished; the theater was crammed, all seats and standing room full up except for a single chair in the first row. Then again, the film co-starred Godzilla, Rodan and Mothra.

Lucky to get a seat, I stood for the National Anthem, then sat for *News of the World*, black and white clips from DC, Vietnam and maybe 30 seconds from the Notre Dame, Michigan State 10-10 tie.

During the coming attractions, I turned around; the theater was almost empty! The guys just wanted to see the college football highlights and then left, leaving **Ghidrah**, mothers, young children and me behind.

One lunch, going through the 'chow hall' line, one of the soldiers said, "You're a pleasure to serve"; the other Army cooks nodded in agreement--I was in the habit of saying 'Please' and 'Thank you' and always cleaning my plate.

Working midnight to 7AM, I'd eat at 'Midnight chow', again at 3AM and then have another breakfast after the shift. I fell in love with SOS, 'Shit on a Shingle', cream beef on toast with scrambled eggs on top.

One Christmas Eve, 'Notre Dame' and I had 'lunch' at 3AM. When I went back for my usual third serving, Dan, 'the Scrambled Egg Man' threw two dozen on the fryer and said, "You're going to eat every one of these or you're never getting seconds here again."

Later, for Christmas dinner at a sergeant's house, his wife had heard about my legendary appetite and was somewhat insulted that I barely touched the meal she had worked so hard to prepare.

The mid-1960s was a great time for music. The coming of the Beatles, the Stones, and the Kinks. I'd also learn to love the Drifters, the Impressions, and the Temptations. Then there was this folk singer whose name we never heard spoken. We called him Bob *Dye-lan*.

My music collection was paltry, but I did have '*Victory at Sea*, Volume III,' the Richard Rogers' score from the WW II TV documentary which opened with big naval guns booming and bombs exploding, which gave me an idea...

Almost every morning the German Army would come marching by on the road behind our barracks. This time we were ready for them, with Hi-Fi speakers positioned at the windows.

In full combat gear, the *Bundeswehr* was still a fearsome sight less than twenty years after WW II. In lockstep, weapons on their shoulders, the column approached. At just the right moment, we hit the *Victory at Sea* 'sound effects.'

I was hoping the German soldiers would scatter in panic, but we did get a lot of helmeted heads looking around.

We slept six in a room, six beds, six lockers. When two airmen shipped out, we knew the beds wouldn't be empty long. My personal area was a mess, part of my 'lack of military bearing'. Was that why my other three roommates suddenly moved, leaving me alone? I should have '202ed the situation' and known better. My new roomies arrived; both were black.

Back in basic training, I had bunked on the first floor of a two-story barracks. After screwing up and spoiling an inspection, that night my fellow airmen decided I needed some justice; a 'blanket party'.

They surrounded my bed, threw a blanket over my head and were about to beat the shit out of me, when the guys from upstairs came charging down.

"No," said one of them. "You leave him alone."

I never did find out why these men had put their own Air Force careers on the line to save my life, but all were black.

For welcoming my new roommates, I got a promotion, sort of. Before I had just been 'a fuck-up'; my new rank: 'nigger-loving fuck-up.'

"What did you expect?" thought many of my fellow airmen when race riots broke out in 1966 and we saw Negroes burning and looting. "You know how *they* are."

In the eyes of my black roommates I saw shame and fear, as if they wanted to cry out, "Not us. We're not like that!"

'202ing the situation' - White people have been committing unforgivable atrocities throughout history, yet I never felt the need to say, "Not me. I'm not one of *them*."

Our redhead sergeant shipped out and we got a new boss. And new orders. From now on, 202s would correct and *keypunch* the DRIVE.

None of us were happy with our new job description. 'Notre Dame' was outraged; 'keypuncher' wouldn't look good on his resume.

As the Air Force had taught me to type, how hard could keypunching be? I had some problems at first, especially my right hand with the numbers pad, but within a week or so, I got the hang of it.

Then one 'mid', I loaded a full deck of IBM cards into the hopper. Instead of first using my special red at one end, blue at the other end pencil to correct the DRIVE, I'd do it straight on the keypunch machine.

A full ream of *PVO Strany*, Supreme Rocket Forces, Long-Range Bomber Wings...Each format embedded in my head. Code sequence, Consec Number, quick correction, but usually *Delete*.

Dupe, Consec Number, *Delete*.

Dupe, Consec Number, *Delete*.

Dupe, Consec Number, *Delete*.

I couldn't help myself. I started to daydream, about frolicking joyously with 'Betty Barbershop' or maybe Raquel Welsh. When I came back to my senses, I had gone through more than fifty cards. What the hell was I doing?

Checking every last one, I found I had punched them all correctly.

That's when it hit me: I could be a 202 without using my brain *or* my back. I had enlisted to be a TOP SECRET hero, only to become a common 'blue collar' keypuncher.

'Mother of Mercy!' Was this the end of Super Analyst?

3



**"Superman or Green Lantern
ain't got a-nothin' on me."**

Donovan

In every American boy who volunteers to defend his country against a merciless enemy, there burns the dream of becoming a hero. Maybe not like Sergeant York or Audie Murphy, brave soldiers who won the Medal of Honor fighting at the front, but in some way, making a difference.

My father, and so many other men who never got to be fathers, took on the Nazi *Luftwaffe*, and fought and sacrificed so that the next Air Force generation could be...at the dawn of the Computer Age, common keypunchers? Were we all doomed to become nameless, faceless cogs ruled by Machines?

Not me! I was specially chosen from the 'cream of the crud' and expertly trained to be a Radio Intercept Analyst. Was it all a lie? Or worse, a joke? No way was I going to stand by as the legacy and tradition and honor and glory of being a 202 faded into the dustbin of Cold War history.

But what could I do?

Back in 5th Grade I had drawn a black duck and a white duck, who looked a lot like Daffy and Donald, shaking wings. My teacher saw it and remarked 'Birds in their nest agree, why can't we?'

Her catchy slogan rather than my mediocre artwork won first prize in a 'Brotherhood' poster contest sponsored by B'nai B'rith, a Jewish youth organization and in the eyes of my parents, got me anointed as the 'family artist.'

In sixth grade, I played the title role in the class play, *Johnny Has Comicopia*, about a boy addicted to comic books, (Mom took pictures.)

I kept drawing. I was hardly a rare talent, but I could *copy* well, and in high school, sketched portraits of my teachers.

My 'comicopia' had no cure. My favorite was *Blackhawk*, a team of heroic fighter pilots, six white guys from different countries and a Chinese cook who first took wing against the Nazis and then the Commies to fight for the freedom of all of us.

The *Blackhawks* wore cool blue uniforms topped with 'bus driver' hats, almost like the Air Force...but I didn't join up to become a common keypuncher.

If I *could* be a hero, defending humanity, not just against Communist Aggression, but the new, burgeoning power of the computer, a heartless technology threatening to rob us of our souls and spirits, and worst of all, our jobs...*Who* would I be?

With a 'No.2' pencil on standard typing paper, I began sketching on a 'mid' shift. Of course, my comic book-inspired character would wear a mask and have a cape, and an 'initial' on his chest. For protection against the fierce foes he'd be fighting...an IBM card shield. And because his 'secret identity' would be a 202, he'd be armed with a special red and blue 'Piercing Pencil'.

As I only had two colors, his superhero tights would be blue, and his cape and mask and boots, red. I made a couple of sketches and then a few more. Finally, just as the sun was coming up, my alter ego had been born...*'Super Analyst - The TOP SECRET Hero'*!

During my next three 'mids' in the Computer Room, I made 'still life' sketches of the various machines and giving the technology evil faces and menacing arms and legs, had them attack my fledgling hero.

'The Terrible Tape Unit', 'Pernicious Printer,' and the 'Malicious Mainframe' battling in red and blue with *Super Analyst* were drawn on separate pages and each resembled a comic book cover. I wasn't ready to do a story yet, but the individual

cartoons with captions were somewhat amusing. I inserted each in a plastic liner that fit into a loose-leaf book reserved for classified manuals.

What was missing...an 'origin tale'. *Superman* and *Bat-Man* had theirs. How did *Super Analyst* come to be?

In the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the *Article 15* is 'non-judicial punishment' awarded for minor disciplinary offenses by a commanding officer. I don't remember what I got my first one for. Not work or downtown stuff, but squadron 'chickenshit'. My drinking was at the core of it.

I got a suspended bust and 14 days of extra duty. The *Article 15* meant I'd get no 'Good Conduct' medal and killed any chance I had for a third stripe. But as things shook out, being a 'fuck-up' may have saved my life.

From the day I arrived there'd been buzz that the group would be moving. By the spring of 1966, maybe the Air Force was getting serious. Every 202 was interviewed individually and given a 'dream sheet'. Anywhere from Crete to Japan, even Hawaii was open for reassignment. For my top three choices, I wrote VIETNAM.

Because I had an *Article 15*, I didn't 'qualify' to go to a war zone. Four others did. I don't remember any of the names. All are etched into that long, black wall in DC; their helicopter was shot down before they got to ops.

On the first floor of Building #1, in the hallway of the Admin Section, framed pictures on the wall personalized the 6901st SCG chain of command, including the 'Airman of the Year' (A Negro!). Above the others was Colonel Carl B. Munson, 'CB' to his airmen, the Group Commander, a tall, skinny, graying 'full bird' who could have flown with my father had he earned wings.

"The mission is paramount," he would begin his speech to inspire the troops at the monthly 'Commander's Call.'

Which gave me an idea...

The *Super Analyst* 'origin story' would run six pages, beginning with a young 202 overwhelmed by computerization. Facing a national security crisis, how could an ordinary keypuncher hope to save the world?

Just when all seems lost, the 202 begs the heavenly 'Radio Intercept Gods' for help. Suddenly there is magic from the sky --- a bolt out of the blue turns him into 'The TOP SECRET Hero'!

The first airman to see it was a 202 I had graduated with. I gave him the 'book' to read and walked into the hallway.

"Holy shit!" he shouted. "You're gonna get court martialed!"

On Page 5, 'Nosnum,' the Savoir of Security, a well-copied portrait of CB, complete with his chestful of decorations, shot lightning from his open hand to create *Super Analyst* .

Then it hit me - the badge rack. I had every face in the 6901st at the tip of my 'Piercing Pencil.'

An erratic athlete, in my three years with the 6901st, I only had one 'ESPN Highlight.'

I grew up playing stickball in NYC, and had a quick, accurate arm, but I was nowhere near good enough to play on the post softball team. The *Jaguars* were carried by Watch Command 202s. One year they won a championship.

Early on, I tried karate in the gym, sticking with the program through the tough opening phase. But 'playing' began to interfere with my drinking; I missed too many sessions and the coach cut me.

Because I was tall, had a good arm, could speak German, and the American coach was desperate, I made the 'Team Handball' squad. An Olympic sport, a soccer/basketball hybrid played with a volleyball, I did a lot of singing and drinking, but I never scored a goal. *Scheisse!*

When snow fell, men thought of the hassle of driving and the thrill of skiing; little boys only cared about the 'packing'; I *loved* to throw snowballs. And I had plenty of targets. Going for 3AM 'lunch' on a 'mid', I searched out the Army barracks on the way to the chow hall, looking for open windows. My accuracy impressed even 'Notre Dame.'

One winter's morning, I was heading to the Orderly Room with Maurice, a 202 I'd later be locked up with. I was feeling cocky when I spotted an Army window ajar on the third floor of the barracks some 30 yards away. I pointed to my target, maybe 6 inches by 3 feet and let fly a well-packed snowball.

Touchdown! Nothing but Army floor. Maurice looked at me like I was Alabama's Joe Namath.

Major Brumfield, the commander of the newly-renamed *Automatic Data Processing* (ADP), was a smart guy with a few extra pounds and an easy face to draw. As the legend goes, after a few beers, he had hoisted one at a shop party and exclaimed, "**IBM. Isn't Brumfield Magnificent!**"

His arm around the Top Secret hero, the caption: *'Isn't Super Analyst magnificent!'*

I got a full box of colored pencils from a 'Sheens' sergeant whose young daughter had 'outgrown' them. Before 'Tommy', the First Sergeant and 'Lt. Fuzz', got to see their 'badge portraits' as cartoons in a comic strip, I went on a 30-day leave with my good friend 'Ditchie,' a small 'swamp' 202 with a faraway look in his eyes. With money in my pocket and \$368 in my American Express savings account, every capital in the British Isles was ours for the exploring.

But the *real* reason I wanted to go to Great Britain was not to see Big Ben or Buckingham Palace, but...*Bat-Man!* The BBC played the new American TV show and West Germany didn't.

London, Dublin, Liverpool, Glasgow, after staying at a 'bed & breakfast' in Edinburgh, I went to the American Express office with my bank book to get some needed cash and was told that they did not honor 'foreign savings accounts.'

Suddenly, we were dead broke and out of *cigarettes!*

We went to the American consulate and got no help at all. Heading into a three-day weekend, he could have advanced us some money with my bank book as collateral, but did nothing.

We were hungry with no place to sleep. I approached a Scottish 'Bobbie' and briefed him. Taking pity on a couple of stranded Yanks, he invited us to lunch at the main police station on the Royal Mile, then offered us 'accommodations': a jail cell.

During the day, we had the run of the city, and for three nights slept in an old stone jail, making me feel like Robin Hood. And the 'Sheriff of Nottingham' - the American Consul.

When the banks reopened, American Express phoned their Zweibrücken branch, confirmed my savings account, gave me \$100, then charged me for the call.

Back in the black, 'Ditchie' and I should have skipped, but we returned to the Consulate to straighten things out. No way. The 6901st had been telegraphed, and the message sat in a box all weekend.

"Your leave has been cancelled," said the Consul. "You are ordered to report back immediately."

"My god!" said 'Ditchie' on the way home. "I've never been in trouble like this in my life. When my parents find out..."

Tears came to his eyes. I was afraid he'd lose it.

"We're gonna be all right," I assured him. "Not our fault. We didn't do anything wrong."

"Well, you've really done it this time," said Lt Fuzz as I stood before him in Class-A blues. "What the hell happened?"

He and the JAG captain wanted answers. The Consul had named me 'The spokesman of the group.'

I took the 5th and was told to change into fatigues. When I left, they interrogated 'Ditchie'. Under pressure, he cracked and gave up the whole story.

The Air Force had nothing to charge us with and sent us back to work.

"Super Analyst in jail," said 'Notre Dame'. "That's the biggest news to hit the squadron since a two-oh-two ran with the bulls in Spain."

The 'Men in Blue' let him finish his tour.

Would they be coming for me one day?

For Christmas, I had given 'Betty Barbershop' and her staff cards and inside, the silver profile of the most popular American in Germany: John Kennedy half dollars.

Still I didn't ask her out because I was afraid; one more rejection might have broken me.

As for my virginity problem, I considered a 'professional solution'. Not in West Germany, but in the Holy City.

The Squadron Chaplin's Assistant was a blond, blue-eyed, Irishman from Boston, and a drunk. One night, downtown at a *Gasthaus*, a table of Americans sang a verse of their favorite country tune. West German soldiers then did a song in *Deutsch*. Not to be outdone, the French soldiers did a number in their tongue.

What language was left?

"*Sallas honor bit tu por grey*," I began a hymn in Latin I had learned in Novena.

The Chaplin's Assistant chimed in and we brought down the house.

When he had to go back to the States on emergency leave, the squadron was compelled to replace him temporarily. In alphabetical order, the First Sergeant checked the roster, and chose the first qualified candidate.

Miracle of miracles! For 30 days, I was the Chaplin's Assistant.

Which meant I got to go on a *second* 'religious retreat'. God bless the Air Force! For \$55, hotel and train travel included, an airman could spend a week in Rome and it wouldn't count as leave time.

The first time I went to the Eternal City, I took in all the sights. In St. Peter's Basilica, standing with a huge crowd waiting for a glimpse of Pope Paul VI, a woman put a move on me. This little, old French lady shoved a camera in my face and begged me in a language I didn't understand, to reach up and take a picture of the Pontiff. After I did, she gave me a lovely smile and an innocent kiss.

We drank as the Romans did, paying a quarter a liter for 'railroad wine' at the train station. On the ride home, I downed six *fiascos* of *Chianti*. The next morning, I had a horrible headache and couldn't see my teeth. My tongue was black and for two days I shit 'tar'.

My second trip came with a sinful mission. On *Via Vineto*, one of Rome's most famous streets, a fellow 202 and I were sharing a bottle of wine at a sidewalk cafe.

Not far from here, on a previous 'religious retreat', 'Notre Dame's' father had flown over to meet up with his son. At a pricey nightclub, Dad paid the band to play a very special song.

"Cheer, cheer for ol'...", the alumni duo sang in 'Fighting Irish' harmony.

I was the one who saw her first. Young and alluring with golden Italian skin, her long shapely legs owning the street. Then she began twirling her hotel key. A 'pro'! Would she be the one?

He who hesitates is lost. While I contemplated, my fellow 202 took off after her. Not too much later he reported back. Her naked body was as beautiful as we both had imagined. She knew two phrases in English she kept repeating: "More money" and "Are you done yet?"

Better him than me. Never again would I consider paying for sex.

Was the 6901st, with its computer-generated intel 'texums', at the very 'nexus of a new technological paradigm'? For some reason, the Air Force must not have thought so. Instead of injecting young, ambitious hotshots into ADP, the 'Sheens' division became a dumping ground for overweight, undertrained 'dead end' sergeants counting the days to retirement.

One got to me; with the 'Piercing Pencil', I went after him. From his badge, I got his pudgy face, then dressed up his bloated body in a Super Analyst costume.

The caption: *'Is this the man behind the mask? **Fat chance!**'*

Had the offended made a case, I could have been court martialed for insubordination. But instead, the 'dead end' sarge caught me completely by surprise.

"First thing you've said in weeks," he congratulated me. "All the rest is a waste of paper."

I took a hard look back at my work. Dammit if he wasn't right.

Super Analyst was created to embody the fighting spirit on the 202, the humanity in all of us threatened by the new technology. Was 'The TOP SECRET Hero' relevant to anyone beyond the secure area?

Was I?

As USAFSS seemed to believe, if the computer was a 'dead end', then so was Super Analyst!

Speaking *Deutsch* had another 'bennie': it got me a part-time job *downtown*. John Deere Lanz, the West German subsidiary of the American tractor company, had a

factory in Zweibrucken producing combine harvesters, and was converting to 'automatic data processing' and needed keypunchers at 16 *Deutsche Marks* (\$4) an hour.

After my Air Force shift, I'd go down the hill to my 'other job'. Maybe computers would catch on. When word got out, I had sergeants begging me to get them an interview, but none of them had bothered to learn the language.

Alas, I was a lousy keypuncher and didn't last long, but I did get a chance to flirt with the female staff. Every one of them shot me down.

My African-American roommates shipped out in the same week. I got three new replacements, led by a 202 from Kansas.

"One good thing about the Vietnam War," said 'Jayhawk', first off. "It kills a lot of niggers."

Lt Fuzz was not one of those 'chickenshit' squadron commanders who'd pull a surprise inspection and then hand out 'extra detail'. When he came into my room one morning, I was either sleeping off a 'mid' or a long night of drinking.

"It's 'Ditchie,'" he said, shaking me awake. "He's had a breakdown. They took him to Landstuhl."

"The 'loonie bin'?" I said.

"I have to visit him," said Fuzz. "I want you to come with me."

The ride took a half hour and I can't remember what we talked about. The trip back would be worse.

'Ditchie' was confined with a half dozen mentally ill soldiers in the 'Behavioral Health Division'. One young corporal stood in the corner, facing the wall and mumbling.

We sat with 'Ditchie' and tried to figure out what had happened. Was it the drinking or the job pressure?

"I don't know anymore," said 'Ditchie.' "It's all Top Secret."

Calm, serene, and completely lost, the 202 I knew had shipped out, the 'faraway look' in his eyes gone to a new place only he could call home.

If 'Ditchie' ever recovered, the 6901st was not advised. We never saw him again.

On June 8th, 1966, the XB-70 *Valkyrie*, the prototype of the nuclear-armed deep penetration bomber for the United States Air Force's Strategic Air Command, crashed. Already canceled as 'obsolete,' the future of the manned bomber as a prime first strike weapon was over.

Originally conceived and created by the CIA to support the B-52, USAFSS was becoming as redundant as a 'weather balloon.'

The 6901st 'social event of the year' was the Fourth of July Weekend when the whole squadron, especially wives and families, would throw a picnic, complete with a full keg of beer under a tent borrowed from the Army. The main attraction was a softball game between 'flights', the ragtag 'Dogs' of 'D-shift' versus the fearsome Baker Flight 'Bombers'.

And I would be the starting pitcher. But just showing up was not enough. I had to show the 69 'Oh-worst' that they were not a faceless, anonymous group performing a vital classified mission nobody else knew about. Not us! The USAF Security Service was America's frontline defense in the Cold War against the Commies, embodied by 'Super Analyst - The TOP SECRET Hero!'

I had this heavy bright red cotton shirt better suited for a lumberjack that got me imagining. I took a scissor to it, cutting around the collar and top button. That would be my 'cape.' From one of the discarded long sleeves, I cut out a 'mask' with 'triangle eyes', just like my drawings, held together behind my head with paperclips.

It would have been fabulous if I could have made an IBM card 'shield' out of cardboard and painted a long broom handle for my 'Piercing Pencil', but in full regalia, Super Analyst was classified; I'd be compromising national security.

The picnic area was packed, wives mostly on one side with children serving food and gossip, the men on the other side in front of the beer tent talking shop. What would they make of one of their own wearing a mask and cape?

I proudly strode out to the mound, hoping for a standing ovation or at least a few good-natured laughs. Instead I was either ignored or mocked.

"Who's that, Mama?" a kid may have asked.

"Some Yankee 'foul-up' tryin' to be somebody," a parent might have replied.

Didn't anybody understand? No Dickens' boy who'd 'set out to be the hero of my own life', but the superhero of my imagination! Up against the Baker Flight 'Bombers'!

I got shelled. Every guy who stepped up to the plate killed my pitching. It got so bad, I couldn't even walk anybody. The ballfield became a driving range. By the third inning, the game was called via the 'mercy rule '. Made to feel like 'Charlie Brown' pitching for *Peanuts*, Super Analyst would never again appear 'in person'. Only on paper and his pages were numbered.

The morning of my second *Article 15* began when I awoke in the West German Army barracks. Drinking with the *Bundeswehr*, I crashed at their place. Walking back to the 6901st, I was late for something or guilty of 'conduct unbecoming a member of the Air Force.' I lost a stripe, got 14 days of 'extra duty', and worst of all, my TOP SECRET 'codeword' security clearance was suspended for three months.

"How *does* it feel?" asked 'Notre Dame'. "Now that more than one hundred million Americans no longer trust you?"

My schedule was straight days. I pulled a couple of weeks at the rifle range and the motor pool where the captain kept his red 1956 Thunderbird that he raced during the season.

Then I got to be the most powerful airman in the 6901st - the 'Company Clerk' who typed up the duty roster. All in turn, every airman pulled either 'hall detail', a janitorial joke, or 'burn detail.' I would chose which. Revenge served hot - Watch Command 202s, the elitists who constantly put me down, got 8 hours feeding the furnace.

I returned to Ops to start a brand new job arranged by Major Brumfield, who wanted to promote ADP in new way. I'd be the 'Group Artist', creating all kinds of charts and graphs for the 6901st. My 'studio' was just across the hall from 'Quality Control' and I was the 'Airman in Charge'.

Super Analyst got me this gig and I wanted to 'Push the envelope'. Created at the very epicenter of the new computer age, I could have a career here. Roger Wilco, my drawings were crude and my stories primitive at best, but early on, so were *Bat-Man's* and *Superman's*.

I dreamed of becoming a comic book artist and writer. I'd send samples of my work to Marvel and DC. They'd take one look at my 'alter ego' and hire me the moment I got my discharge.

But there was a catch: I was a 202. USAFSS had officially designated Super Analyst as 'classified material.' Drawing, writing, even talking about 'The TOP SECRET Hero' outside the secure area - ten years in Leavenworth!

Thirty miles away by shuttle bus, Ramstein was a 'real' Air Force base with a big BX, the closest thing we had to a shopping mall. Every year, there was an air show.

My new roommates and I went to see the Thunderbirds, the precision aerobatic team, flying F-100 *Super Sabres*. Heading back to the bus, an older man came by. Afflicted with multiple sclerosis, his gait like a gyrating corkscrew.

"Some people will do anything for attention," said 'Jayhawk.'

My studio was operational less than a month when the order came in. Should take me less than hour, but I'd first have to change into fatigues. Instead of going back to my room to switch uniforms, I reported to Lt. Fuzz.

"Sir, the motor pool captain wants me to paint his name on the side of his Thunderbird for this weekend's drag race," I said. "On Air Force time."

"And you refuse to do it?" said Lt. Fuzz. "Is that it?"

"No, sir. I'll be happy to paint the captain's race car *after hours*," I said. "Cost him a couple of beers."

The first sergeant heard it all. "You really want to go through with this?"

"If I don't, what's next? You and the lieutenant want your cars painted? No reason the captain should get favorable treatment, right sarge?"

'Tommy' smiled.

"I'll inform the captain," said Lt. Fuzz. "Go back to work."

"Super Analyst disobeyed a direct order!" buzzed through the group.

The 6901st 'art studio' was shut down immediately. Next day, I was back in my old slot, 'trick trash' yet again.

Should I have kept my mouth shut and painted the damn car? Heroes don't bend over to be exploited. Besides, once a 202, always a 202.

I should have done an 8-page 'Super Analyst versus Captain Thunderbird' story. Instead, at the next promotion party, to a Beach Boys' tune, *"And he'll have fun, fun, fun, till the colonel takes his T-Bird away-yay!"*

There was a new hairstylist in the downtown beauty salon. I hardly saw 'Betty Barbershop' anymore. What a pathetic joke. I'd been eying her for years and never had the nerve to even talk to her.

Imagine if I had had the confidence and the charm to pursue and win her. Our consummation would have been glorious! I'd have married her, taken her back to The States and ruined both our lives.

She's probably a grandmother now. How much better that I'm not even a memory.

'CB' left and was replaced by a 'light colonel,' not a 'full bird'. Major Brumfield's successor was also a rank below. The status of the 6901st SCG was sinking fast.

'Sonny' was a churchgoing, Bible-raised 202 and the Number One Fan of the Space Program. On January 27, 1967, I saw him crying; a fire in the *Apollo 1* test capsule had killed three astronauts.

Bob Dye-lan had it right: *'The times, they are a-changin''* America were striving to beat the Russians to the moon with a giant rocketship while 'radio intercept analysis' dated back before the Wright Brothers. Spy satellites, advanced radar and computers had left us behind. Once the prime weapon of the Cold War, the B-52 had been downgraded to 'carpet-bombing' missions in Southeast Asia.

'Freedom Through Vigilance,' said the USAFSS emblem. 'Boredom Without Ambivalence' was more like it.

An attitude set in, with a slogan, delivered in a cynical, sarcastic tone: *'First, ya gotta care!'*

So prevalent did the malaise become, that words were soon unnecessary. A shrug, a roll of the eyes, or a throwing up of the hands said it all.

Even Super Analyst felt it. I hadn't drawn a decent page in far too long.

When I went under 1000 days a couple of years before, it called for a celebration, yet another excuse to get drunk. Under a hundred days, I was officially a 'short-timer.' Plus, as I was the only lowly airman eligible for a second stripe, I got promoted.

What to do with the days I had left? I had both money and leave time and longed to travel, but nobody would want to go anywhere with me. Take 30 days and tour the

continent alone? I didn't have the confidence or the courage to do anything like that. Not yet.

Lt. Fuzz came up to my room again, but this time he had great news. A committee of officers had gotten together and voted me the minimum points; I had been selected for reenlistment - the Air Force still wanted me.

"If you stay in," said Lt. Fuzz. "They'll probably give you choice of assignment."

For a moment he had me. Crete, Taiwan, Japan, be a USAFSS 'lifer' and see the world.

"Roger Wilco, sir," I said. "Send me to the moon and I'll re-up!"

He shook his head and walked away. The next time we talked he would not be in a good mood at all.

Hard and soft drugs of all kinds would soon be having a devastating effect on American armed forces around the world, but in my three years in West Germany, I never had, nor was I ever offered, coke, heroin, hash or grass.

Imagine ordering 30 12-ounce bottles of cold *Lowenbrau* over the bar; your beer tab - \$1.50. Welcome to 'Nickel Beer Night', every Thursday from noon to midnight at the onpost Rod & Gun Club. That's how many bottles a three-stripe lifer bet me I couldn't drink.

I came in when the bar opened and kept going.

"I had a couple of cheeseburgers and went with you for eighteen," said 'Jayhawk'. "Then I went home and rested my eyes."

Drinking had become a ritual; I'd rip a crease in the label with my fingernail to mark my bottle. Happy, loud, confident, I was a great drunk, so how could I have a drinking problem?

The last ten got counted down, and sticking with tradition, as the club closed, the final bottle got stuffed in my pants. The barracks was less than 100 yards away. I reached for the last bottle, got it, but my pants fell around my ankles. I gave a toast to the USAFSS emblem as I shuffled by the sign.

I remember getting to the second floor. Problem was, I lived on the third. Later they'd tell me that I had thrown about my comic book collection, ranting on 'the Sixty-Nine Oh, Worst and Super Analyst, the TOP SECRET hero.'

An alcoholic 'black-out.' The first time? And next time? Was this the way 'Ditchie' went?

On a springtime Friday afternoon, I had the weekend off. After lunch at 'Mom's', I went directly to the R&G Club. I never ate at the Club; free food was just a walk away. I either played cards or just drank and shot the breeze. I really don't remember what started it.

I was depressed and frustrated sober. Some Super Analyst I turned out to be. A 'fuck up' forever on 'extra duty', I'd buffed more hallways and cleaned more toilets than anybody else in USAFSS.

The more I drank, the worse I felt. Took another walk for dinner, then back, buying three bottles at a time.

I hadn't done enough. Zweibrucken was at the center of everything, and most of the time, I was in the middle of nowhere. I didn't even go to Paris. Not for the Eiffel Tower, the prostitutes! Seems like everybody else did. But not me, I never got to know a woman. I'd be going home a 21-year old veteran virgin!

Nobody's fault but my own, but I wasn't Man enough to blame myself. Had to strike out, wanted a target to show the whole damn group how I felt.

At midnight, I headed for the barracks. Looming larger and larger in my drunken eyes, the USAFSS emblem on proud display.

I went inside and returned with a broom. Swinging it like a hammer, I pounded the symbol again and again.

"I hate this fucking place!"

Blam!

"I hate this fucking place!"

Blam! Blam! Blam!

"Your 'Spidey Sense' should have warned you," said 'Jayhawk', waking me up with a comic book quip. "Super Analyst is in a world of hurt!"

"First, ya gotta care!" I shot back.

The Air Police could arrive at any minute to arrest me. 'Willful destruction of government property' was a mandatory court martial offense. Six months in Leavenworth and a 'Bad Conduct' discharge.

Or worse. They could take me to the Landstuhl 'loonie bin' and never let me out.

Or finally, I'd meet the 'Men in Blue'. I pictured them as a field grade officer and a burly tech sergeant. They'd be polite and professional and take me to that place 202s disappeared to.

No one came.

By regulation, a third *Article 15* meant a 'less than Honorable Discharge' due to 'inability to conform to military bearing'. And it took Air Force intelligence more than three and a half years to figure *that* out?

There would be no court martial. The Air Force had enough problems in Vietnam. 'Super Analyst attacks USAFSS!' The kind of trial the media might run with.

Or was CIA afraid that a disgruntled 202 would fall prey to KGB?

Ordered to report to the squadron commander, Lt. Fuzz had nothing memorable to say until, "You are hereby reduced."

That meant I lost a stripe. Then he called for the Air Police sergeant. He drove me to Ramstein where I'd serve seven days in jail.

A convicted child molester, a couple of thieves, and Maurice, a 202 who had thrown a punch at an NCO; when they found out that I had 'beat up a sign', they laughed at me.

I survived the week, but not my 'alter ego'.

'Top Secret Codeword' to 'Top Secret Codeword.' *Super Analyst* was gone. With the loss of my clearance, his books were stuffed in a 'burn bag' and first on the cart. Down the chute and into the furnace, his ashes amix with the charred waste of USAFSS.

'The TOP SECRET Hero' was born and burned ahead of his time.

I finished up as the squadron's chief lawnmower and groundskeeper. My last day in West Germany was the first day of the 'Six-Day War.' Catching USAFSS, CIA, NSA and KGB radio intercept intelligence by surprise, Israel launched a killer *blitzkrieg* against Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq.

The Israelis also attacked the USS *Liberty*, killing 34 Navy 292s, 203s and 202s. For much of the Cold War, USAFSS personnel have flown 'picket flights' close to the border of the Soviet Union. Those shot down by MiGs died TOP SECRET deaths. They are the genuine heroes whose sacrifice must never be forgotten.

The 6901st Special Communications Group was closed down in March, 1968. USAFSS was redesignated the 'Electronic Security Command' in 1979 and is now called the 'Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Agency'.

My 'lottery' Draft Number would be 363. If not for USAFSS, maybe I never would have served my country. Not for anything in the world would I have missed *being a 202!*

Welcomed back to NYC, I called a number of girls I knew from high school. All said, "Thanks, but no thanks."

I saw a 'Help Wanted' ad and went in for an interview. With my military experience, computer knowledge and language-learning skills, I'd make an ideal Peace Corps Volunteer.

Then came the question: "Have you ever been a member of an intelligence-gathering organization?"

"Yes, *ma'm!*" I replied eagerly. "For the last three years I was an analyst with the US Air Force Security Service."

With that, she tore up my application. "Sorry, no *spies* in the Peace Corps. Try again in eight years."

My next quest would be delayed a bit.

It took me two years to flunk out of art school, but I started working with kids. That got me to VISTA during the Civil Rights Movement. Thanks to the GI Bill, I got my degree. Between teaching jobs, I spent nearly a year riding around the US alone on a bicycle.

Finally cleared, I served in Costa Rica and then Brazil with the Peace Corps.

Along the way, I got to know a fair number of pretty girls and beautiful women.

'First, ya gotta care!'

Coming Next Year...

Whatever Happened to Eddyville?



The *SHADOW* Knows!

americananthologies.wordpress.com

