

PSYCHOLOGY

Selecting Secret Agents

Men's actions were tested for OSS service under conditions of strain and also relaxation. Method may be adapted for picking executives, diplomats.

By MARJORIE VAN DE WATER

► HOW the super-secret agents of OSS were picked for duty overseas has now been revealed. An intensive three-day test showed a staff of examiners how the candidates for delicate missions into enemy territory could work and deal with other people under grueling conditions of mental or physical strain, or under the relaxing influence of liquor and quiet conversation. The new method may in future be adapted for picking high-powered executives, diplomats, salesmen, G-men, or leaders of men for important peacetime posts.

An obstacle course, intelligence tests, cross-examination Nazi-style under blinding lights, opportunity to drink hard liquor, and casual observation while the candidates were eating or relaxing for recreation were all parts of the thorough "assessment of the whole person" that made up the OSS examination as reported by Lt.-Col. H. A. Murray, of the Office of Strategic Services, to the Military Division of the American Psychological Association. Col. Murray had the assistance of Dr. Donald W. MacKinnon.

Successful Selection

About one out of five was "not recommended" for overseas service. Another one out of five did not succeed in going for other reasons. But of those who were sent abroad on their perilous missions, only about six out of a hundred failed to make good, it was shown by a survey of the first 300 sent. Their tasks varied from parachuting into enemy territory for sabotage or subversive activity to writing propaganda leaflets in the comparative safety of London under a rain of Nazi bombs.

During the three-day test period, the candidates, in groups of 18, lived on a country estate outside Washington where they associated day and night with the senior staff of officials testing them. This staff consisted of psychologists, psychiatrists and sociologists.

The secrecy and mystery popularly attributed to OSS was extended to the examining staff who were not permitted

to know the identity of the men they were testing. The candidates arrived with fictitious names and dressed in disguising Army fatigue uniforms.

No one could tell whether a candidate was a general, a lieutenant, a private or a civilian—and all were included among those tested. No candidate knew the rank of the man next him, and that itself served as a kind of test.

The first night the candidates were given standard intelligence tests and other tests where they were required to fill in missing words designed to bring out tendencies to think in a peculiar manner. Later they were each given a one or two-hour interview by one of the staff who had previously studied the test records. They were given a test where they had to find the way out of a difficult situation; some of these were staged outdoors. They had to run a difficult obstacle course to demonstrate their physical agility and strength. A contrast to this was the task of sitting down and writing propaganda leaflets intended to break up the morale of the enemy.

Another novel test they had to face was the psycho-drama now being used widely for training purposes and as therapy for the mentally and emotionally ill. The candidates would be put on a stage to act out a drama, but instead of having fixed parts to learn, they were placed in a prearranged situation and had to make up their own lines as they spoke them. The idea was to meet the situation in the best way.

The candidates were pressed into service as examiners. Each man was asked to write a character sketch of each of five other men whom they had learned to know well. They had to answer certain questions such as whether they would pick him for a leader and whether he would do well in a perilous job.

There was a "brook test," in which they were taken to a brook running through the estate and told they had to move a heavy but very delicate instrument across the brook alone with only the aid of some boards, rope and tackle that were there on the ground. Another test was applied to them when they were required to form a group for discussion,

electing a chairman and conducting the debate. The purpose of this was to see who would assume leadership, who would try unsuccessfully to get it, who would produce the best ideas for discussion and how well all could work together without outside orders or direction.

In another test each man had to work on a construction job. He was told that it was not possible to complete the task in the time allowed but he could have the assistance of two men. The men were actually stooges who began by helping, but later one showed that he was lazy and stubborn and the other was very active but full of absurd ideas and later insulting. No one proved able to complete the construction. Some went to pieces emotionally. What they did when angry was revealing.

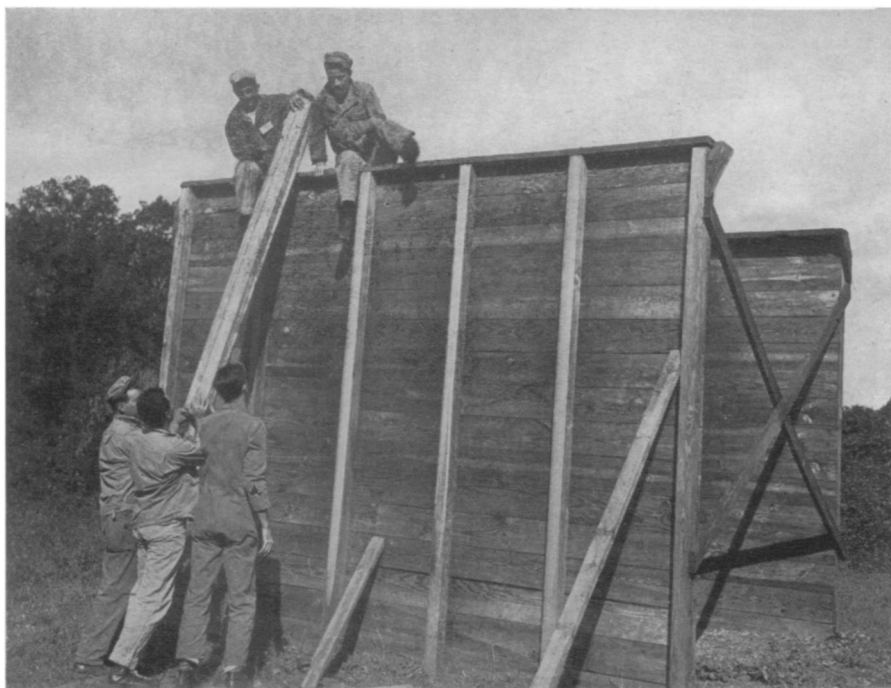
Cross-Examination

In another test each man was told to assume that he had been caught going through secret documents and had to give an explanation to officials. This was followed by the grueling cross-examination.

Final test came on the last evening when they were told that all the hard tests were over and that they might relax. Strong liquor was available to all who wanted it and an informal discussion was started on what to do with Ger-



NAZI STYLE—Agents for overseas duty had to be able to stand up under grueling cross-examination. OSS photographs.



EXACTING TEST—Ingenuity as well as agility is necessary to get this "camouflaged king-size bazooka" across the chasm between the two walls. It happens that, with care, the bazooka can be made to just reach across so that the men can use it for a bridge and this is just about the only method for getting over—a good test for candidates for the OSS.

many after the war. Liquor loosened tongues and many men expressed ideas that they might have hesitated to mention otherwise. The talks were always interesting and often continued until two or three in the morning.

Details of the testing method will be described in a book, *Assessment of Men*, now in press (Houghton-Mifflin).

It is expected that the methods worked out for selection of OSS men will have important applications in industry and civilian selection now that the war is over.

Although it is not likely that this particular test set-up would be useful in peace except perhaps for selection of FBI agents or police officers, the idea of assessing an applicant's total resources instead of some one qualification such as intelligence or speed in typing would be applicable to a multitude of selection needs.

For many jobs, personality factors are quite as important as is mental keenness or trade skills. But bravery, calmness under heckling, ability to control temper, facility in persuading a group to take some action, are much more difficult to assess than is the ability to figure

interest on an investment or sort cards alphabetically.

The testing method worked out under Col. Murray illustrates the importance of studying the job and determining the qualities needed. It shows the value of using a staff of examiners from the different fields of psychology, psychiatry and sociology with perhaps other fields represented for other types of job. It shows that you can learn something about men by living in the same house with them for a few days and associating with them at meals, over a game of tennis or chess, or relaxed in an easy chair for a friendly "bull session" in the evening.

After such social contact, the staff of examiners may place a higher evaluation on the individual worth of a particular applicant than his written examinations would lead to.

In such informal situations, the applicant for insurance salesman or college president, foreman or bank examiner, receptionist or handler of complaints, lecturer or floorwalker could "show their stuff" as they never could in the artificial situation of an examining room or brief, formal interview.

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CHEMISTRY

Mercury Chlorine Cell To Be Studied in Germany

➤ A COMMISSION representing American domestic chlorine producers will soon visit Europe to secure full technical information relative to the German mercury chlorine cell. Another group, in America, will determine the place and scope of tests for two types of the cell which will be brought to the United States by the Army Chemical Warfare Service. Both committees are sponsored by this Army service.

The program to exploit the German mercury chlorine cell and make it available to American industry was launched by the Chemical Warfare Service in cooperation with the American chemical industry. This cell has been developed much further in Germany than in the United States, it is reported. It was given impetus by war expansion of the German caustic and chlorine industry, abetted by the cheapness of mercury there due to relations with Spain, the mercury-producing country, during the war.

One advantage of the mercury cell is that it eliminates expensive evaporating equipment. A new vertical rotating type used by the Germans toward the end of the war requires much less floor space than conventional horizontal types.

A trend toward liquefaction of chlorine by means of higher compression, followed by water cooling without artificial refrigeration, was also noted in Germany by representatives of the Chemical Warfare Service in a survey of German chemical processes following VE-Day. A new type of rectifier, which was alleged to operate at high efficiency in the lower voltage range, was reported in at least two of the newer installations.

Improved methods of chlorine production will benefit the United States government, the chlorine industry and the American public. Large quantities of chlorine are now used in various industrial and other processes, particularly in bleaching and in water purification.

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Sugar is one of the four staple foods of the Iranian people, the others being bread, rice and tea; Iran produces sugar for about one-third of its requirements.

Corn in tropical countries is in danger of fermentation, due to the warm climate and the high humidity, unless it is dried immediately after harvesting.