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Ralph J. Canine

He made us a National agency and he started us on many "right" roads, but that alone cannot account for the love with which he is remembered

In spite of the years that have elapsed, there are many who remember vividly the Canine era. To be sure, life was simpler—the Agency was smaller and its problems, seen in relation to those of today, appear somehow less complex. It was a time for bold action on the part of the Agency's leadership; the fate of succeeding generations of NSA'ers was being decided. Patterns of activity had to be developed and traditions molded for later hardening. Organizational schemes were propounded, argued over, and put into practice, and it now seems unlikely that we will ever be able to shake off (assuming that we wanted to) the self-evident truths which determine the separation of functions and the pattern for distribution of authority. While this was going on, our relationships with the forces "downtown" were being shaped, often as a result of politics, departmental interests, Service considerations, and the force of individual personalities.

The Canine personality had a tremendous influence on the Agency at the time, and much of what we are, thirteen years after his retirement, bears his imprint. While there is no way to assess with accuracy how much of what is done today can be attributed to him, the impression retained by many of those who remember our first NSA boss is that he started almost everything—repeat, almost everything—that was not purely technical.

When he came on the scene there were drum rolls and fanfares, make no mistake about that. The man who, in his own words, was "violently against" an assignment to the top cryptologic job, felt that "the way you get people to do things is for them to know the guy that gave the order." To make sure that there was no doubt about who was giving the orders, he started his "House Beautiful" campaign. All furniture in any grouping had to be compatible in color and size, and it all had to be aligned

with precision. There was a great deal of censorable muttering as units struggled to rearrange the contents of their motley collections of desks and cabinets to conform with the orders from their tyrannical new overlord. Someone wrote a complaint in to Jerry Kluttz which the Washington Post ran on October 8, 1951:

"Operations at the Hall have practically come to a standstill while the furniture is being shuffled around and sorted into the color scheme decided upon by the top brass. As a result, one wing will be equipped with all green steel desks, another with brown wooden desks and tables, while oak furniture will occupy another.

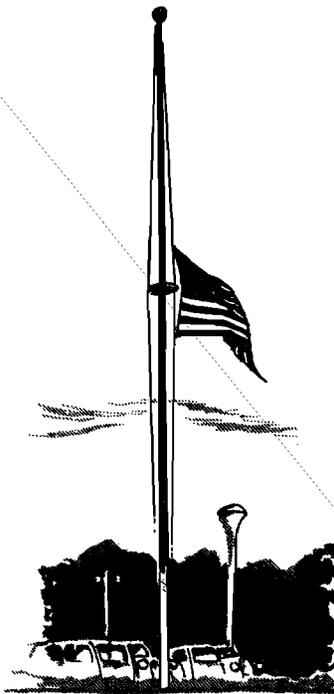
"But the toughest job is to get the personnel sorted out according to the color of their eyes, the green-eyed ones being put in the Green Room, the hazel-eyed going into the Oak Room, and the brown-eyed into the Brown Room."

Like his informant and the rest of us, Kluttz missed the point. But it is inconceivable that anyone in the Agency was unaware of the new, positive presence.

tells the story of a test run by the chief of a major office to see how well known he was to his people. He sent around a group of photographs; only about 15 percent of his people recognized the office chief and his

deputy, but almost all spotted General Canine without hesitation. Of course this pleased the Old Man, who couldn't help feeling some irritation on those occasions when he was denied entrance to a secure area because he was not recognized. There are some who swear to the truth of the story about the lady who refused to let him into the wing whose entrance she was guarding. In answer to his protest that he was General Canine, she insisted that she wouldn't let him in "even if you were a Colonel."

The General was always ready to admit how impressed he was with the talent of the denizens of the Agency. But



he often punctuated his praise of our cryptologic prowess with pithy comments such as "We are long on technical brains and short on management brains." He felt strongly about developing careers for Agency employees and succeeded in convincing the DOD that our top people deserved a share of the jealously guarded supergrades. He often reminded those around him that what qualified him to be the Director of NSA was his long experience in the Army with pack mules. He was especially tough on what he called unreconstructed rebels. Questioned on this topic last year in a television interview here at NSA, he admitted that some he had never converted. "I asked for advice but I didn't guarantee to take it," he went on. His nature required him to take a positive stand on each issue. Determined to hear both sides of any question brought to him, he would then take a position in which he would "keep both of my goddamn feet on the same side of the goddamn fence at any one time."

Recognizing that the revolution in cryptologic technology and the expansion of the Agency called for a reevaluation of our organization and methods of operation, General Canine was eager to employ all the talent he could to help with the solution of these problems. Well knowing how many eyebrows he would raise among the cryptologic professionals, he brought in outside consultants on a variety of problems. He was never intimidated by them, however, and after one firm had made an exhaustive study, developed a new organization scheme, and written a list of recommended appointments for the key jobs on his blackboard, he asked for an eraser. "I make my own choices," he said. "I did some of the things they recommended," he said later, "and threw some of them in the wastebasket." But he sought professional advice on lighting, on the colors of walls and draperies, and on such things as management engineering.

Jack Gurin is a confessed Canine hero-worshiper. He entered Sigint with ASA in 1946, having previously been a Japanese linguist in Military Intelligence. The line, staff and technical jobs he has held are too numerous to reflect in this space, but his experience is well reflected in cryptologic literature, to which he has contributed generously. In addition to his professional writings, he collaborated in a recently published translation of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. He is a fixture in the NSA Men's Chorus, and in the Agency's instrumental groups he is known for his ability to play almost any unoccupied instrument.

[redacted] referred to elsewhere as *Spectrum's* lady reporter, is a graduate of the Penn State journalism school. She joined the Agency as a linguist in 1964 and since April 1968 has been a member of the D1 editorial staff, writing *Cryptologic Milestones* and *Newsletter* articles.

Once he was defending the Agency's budget before a Congressional committee when one of the Congressmen challenged a request for 111 management engineers, with the pointed observation that General Motors employed only 10 such specialists. The Old Man defended the item so persuasively that it was approved, but after the hearing our Comptroller admitted that there had been a typing error and that the number should have read 11.

On days when no meetings were scheduled at his Nebraska Avenue office, the General made a point of visiting either the Agency school, then on U Street, or Arlington Hall. He liked to chat informally with Agency people at all levels, discussing with them why they did their jobs and how they did them. General Burgess, when he was Director of Production, left strict instructions with the guards at the Hall that he was to be informed the moment the Director entered either A or B Building, in which PROD's operations were being conducted. The Director repeatedly told General Burgess, without disguising the irritation he felt, to stay in his office on these occasions, but to no avail. To avoid being escorted, he tried to enter the side doors inconspicuously. (If you've never been a general, you have no idea how difficult it is to be inconspicuous.) On one occasion he warned the Pfc at the gate: "Don't you dare call Burgess, or you'll lose that stripe on your arm!"

He was anxious to get the best equipment for the Agency to use in performing its mission, but his attitude on expenditures was the same as if he had been dispensing his own funds. The story is told of his asking a high-ranking official: "How many pens on your desk?" The answer was: "Two." "What color ink is in the right one?" "Black." "Left?" "Black." "You only need one."

When General Canine first came to the Agency, he found out, he said, that "people are either born first-class cryptanalysts or they ain't." He was concerned about increasing the work force to cope with increasing commitments but insisted on maintaining the high level of professionalism he found here. "I wasted a lot of money," he admitted, "trying to find out what made a good cryptanalyst. I tried hiring mathematicians, but I found that some of my best cripplies couldn't add up their own checkbooks." He did, however, build up the NSA school into an impressive institution, and made major investments in managerial and executive training programs. Of his own experience with cryptologic schooling, he confessed that "Bill Friedman tried to teach me C/A, but I gave up after the first lesson."

Although he would never hesitate to go downtown to fight (or plead) for what the Agency needed, he was careful about the connection between those needs and his own relationships with the military and civilian hierarchy.

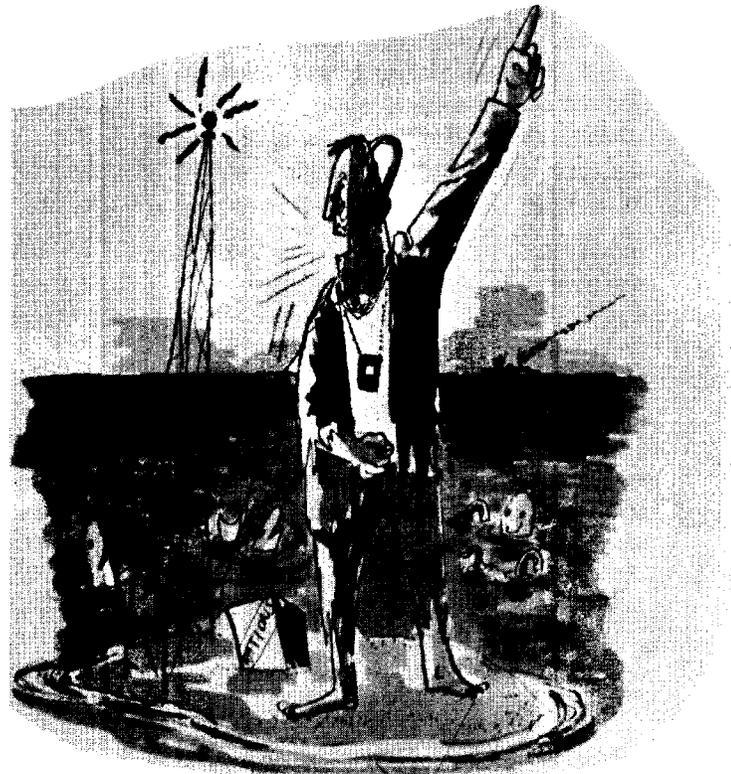
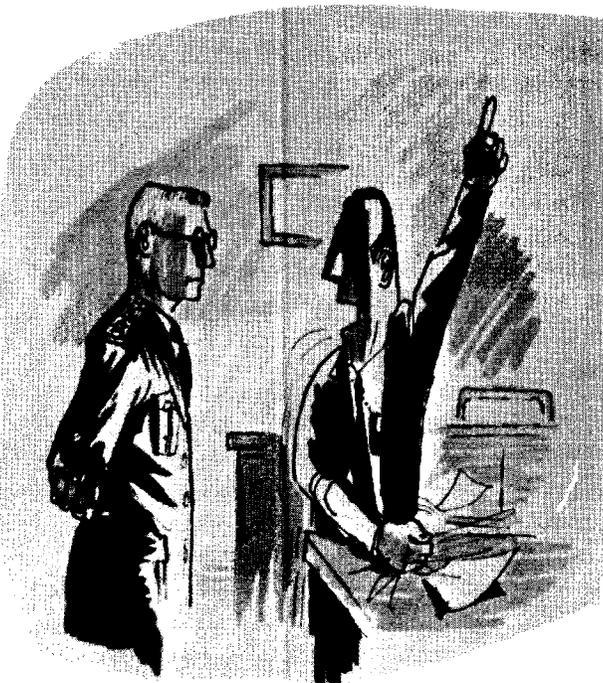
On one occasion he admitted sadly that the Joint Chiefs wanted something done that he was reluctant to do. When someone asked why he didn't just say no to the request, he pointed to the stars on his shoulder and said: "I didn't get these by saying no to the JCS."

He respected the technical prowess of the professionals around him but he never let anyone forget who was the boss. "You may vote but I don't have to count the votes." "You guys give me a hard time and you'll wind up on an island so far out that it'll take you six months to get a message back." He could use a military or academic title as an epithet; the higher the rank attached to it, the greater the scorn, the more like a dirty name it sounded.

His favorite position when at his desk was with both shoes up on the blotter. It was between those shoes that he would set his sights on the man briefing him. On one occasion one of PROD's more persuasive spokesmen was soaring aloft on some impassioned rhetoric in praise of a proposed reorganization. The General favored him with rapt attention and was all smiles. Pleased by this response, the speaker finished with a flourish and stepped back with triumph on his face—to hear the Old Man release a two-syllable expletive he retained from the horse artillery which even a classified magazine can't print. The meeting collapsed and the proposal was not mentioned again. And the General could let fly an awesome temper, as on one occasion when he was shouting at a senior official,

accusing him of being the cause of just about everything that had ever gone wrong in the Agency. When his victim remonstrated by saying he didn't know what the hell the General was talking about, General Canine answered: "I know you don't, goddammit! It's your boss I'm mad at, not you. But he's not here!"

Who would have thought he would be as effective as he was? On the face of it, he was an unlikely choice for Director. He had little background in intelligence, little in communications, and none whatsoever in cryptology. He came from a long career of directing the activities of military men; his previous experience with civilians had been limited almost exclusively to secretaries. In the Army, as he put it, "at least I knew what the problem was." But whoever saw beyond these surface limitations knew his man. General Canine soon found out about the problems of the Agency, quickly grasped the essentials of the technical aspects of its work, asked perceptive questions, and became disturbingly effective in judging whether the job was being done properly or not. He molded a proud, sometimes arrogant group of technicians into an agency; he instilled a unity of purpose and a sense of achievement into a group of individualists. He was willing to accept new tools for management, and was enthusiastic about many of the new and somewhat wild-eyed attempts to systematize management techniques. But he drew the line at some and maintained his position



CANINE-ISMS

A standard greeting:

"Are you earning your pay?"

On protracted indecision:

"When are we going to stop rolling from cheek to cheek and get moving on this?"

Considering someone for promotion:

"How often does he walk on water?"

Another promotion question:

"What does he do for the man who shoots the cannonballs?"

After a management lecture:

"Forget everything he told you and listen to me."

On cryptologic strategy:

"Don't forget, the Russians also have to put on their pants one leg at a time."

In response to an unfortunate question from a member of a Congressional committee:

"I don't think you would want to be burdened with the responsibility of that information."

On briefings:

"I don't mind the long-hairs coming in and giving me a lot of baloney. When they believe their own baloney, though, they're dangerous."



After a visit to R&D where he was unseen by geniuses lost in thought:

"The only way you can tell whether someone in R&D is working or dead is when he shifts from cheek to cheek."

On changes in uniforms:

"Forty years in the Army and I wind up wearing black shoes!"

stubbornly. "I don't believe in cost-effectiveness," he once remarked. "If you need something, you need it. When I was in the artillery and they asked for 10 rounds I gave them 100."

He never missed any of the Agency's social events—moonlight cruises, dances or whatever. He deeply admired the competence and dedication of those who really made the organization function and he was vocally and shamelessly proud of his association with them. There was little that escaped his eye or ear, and when he heard that a remarkably attractive secretary, a runner-up to the title of Miss District of Columbia, was to be transferred from the office directly opposite his, he saw to it that the action was cancelled. At one of the Agency dances he

insisted on a small table just for Mrs. Canine and himself, refusing to be seated with his aides and principal staff officers. "I work with these guys all day," he said. "I'm not going to sit with them all night." What he was driving at, but could never have brought himself to say, was that they could kick their heels higher if the Old Man wasn't too close by.

So he hid his soft side when he could; many times he couldn't. On one occasion one of his assistants read to him a list of tasks which another assistant, whose father had recently died, was to perform on a proposed TDY. The list was loaded with policy problems. The Old Man had just one question: "Is his mother all right?"