

Edwin Rodriguez-Pazo August 2007

Featured Interview

Mr. Rodríguez-Pazo was a career HUMINT overt collector with the CIA for over twenty-four years. Throughout his career he conducted collection operations in Latin America, the Balkans, and the Middle East. Mr. Rodríguez-Pazo has extensive experience in the full scope of overt and clandestine HUMINT collection operations at the tactical, strategic, and national operational levels. In 1991, he began a gradual transition from the Directorate of Operations arena into the Directorate of Intelligence arena, serving as an intelligence analyst in various projects. In 2001, Mr. Rodríguez-Pazo was assigned as the Senior HUMINT Targeting Officer at an interagency activity in support of law enforcement and intelligence operations directed against threats to national security.

He is currently employed with Department of Homeland Security, US Citizenship and Immigration Services, where he serves as a Management and Program Analyst as well as serving as an instructor for Henley-Putnam University.

What prompted you to go into your chosen field?

I spent seven years as a multidiscipline counterintelligence analyst in essence, chasing spies. I wanted to learn how to make spies; thus, I became a HUMINT (HUMman INTelligence) collector.

What do you see as the greatest future challenges in this field?

Oversaturated collection environments and the lack of a single HUMINT asset control authority. Both of these lead to circular reporting and increase our inability to detect deception. In many instances several agencies will be using a single asset and analysts often mistakenly tag a piece of information as corroborated without the knowledge that they came for a single source.

What advice would you give to someone contemplating applying to the CIA?

Regardless of the field you plan to enter, spend twenty minutes a day reading about something you have no knowledge of. As a collector, this will equip you to build rapport quicker and establish bona fides in different situations. As an analyst, it will open your mind to different ideas and increase your critical thinking abilities.

What kind of education would give people in your field the most advantage?

Abnormal psychology and political science are the two fields that will propel a HUMINT collector into mastering advanced skills. Let's face it; anyone who is willing to compromise state secrets is mentally unstable. Abnormal psychology will give the HUMINT collector an insight of what makes a prospective HUMINT source tick. Politics drives conversations in any society, especially abroad. A sound background in political

science will allow a HUMINT collector to establish, build, and maintain rapport throughout a long-term collection operation.

What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the CIA over the next ten years?

The greatest challenge for the CIA over the next ten years is the asymmetric threat. Currently, HUMINT collectors are assigned to a geographic area and are trained on how to operate in that specific area. The asymmetric threat presents a challenge in that it is not isolated to a particular geographic area. HUMINT collectors must be trained on subject areas such as nuclear proliferation, biological weapons, chemical weapons, radical religious groups, etc. This provides the HUMINT collector with a solid background in a subject area and it is easier to adapt to geographical locations because of the common trends in the subjects.

As an expert on collecting HUMINT, what do you think are the major challenges facing HUMINT specialists today?

The major challenges facing HUMINT collectors today are their inability to speak a foreign language and their lack of knowledge on how to conduct their mission through interpreters. Both affect collection of information and often lead to inaccurate reporting. A HUMINT collector must be near native on the target country's language in order to fully exploit any communication skills that arise. A byproduct of being near native in a foreign language is in-depth knowledge in cross-cultural communications and the target country's traditions and values. This increases the effectiveness of the collector in finding a productive source and maintaining a productive relationship. If the HUMINT collector does not speak a foreign language, she must learn to collect information through an interpreter. The greatest shortcoming here is that the HUMINT collector is unable to control the interpreter and the collection plan is not appropriately executed. Again, this leads to inaccurate reporting and in many cases alienating an otherwise productive HUMINT source.

What first attracted you to Henley-Putnam University?

The fact that they offer a degree in a discipline that always lacked undergraduate or postgraduate education. To top it off, the staff and faculty are true field operators who have "walked the walk" and most definitely can "talk the talk".