

Peloquin of Intertel: Intelligence, Security, 'Targets of Opportunity'

By Tom Zito
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CHRISTMAS MORNING, 1972. A damp, chilly fog covered Brighton, the Atlantic City of the British Isles. Not the best of Christmas days. Still, there was dinner with the family to warm the spirits and Sir Randolph Bacon, retired commissioner of Scotland Yard, had just sat down at the table. "I had barely gotten my fork in the turkey," he recalls, "when the phone bell rang. Yes, I would say it was one of the more unusual calls I have had in my life.

"We have a client arriving at Gatweick airport in about two hours," said the caller, Robert Dolan Peloquin, the president of Intertel, one of the world's leading private intelligence and security firms. "He's in the air now. His passports has expired and I'd like you to help him through immigration."

"How will I know him?" asked Bacon, a member of Intertel's board of directors and a former president of Interpol, the international organization of law enforcers.

"He'll be in a private jet. One of our men on the plane will contact you at Gatwick."

"Very well. I can be there in about an hour. By the way, who is hte client?"

"Howard Hughes."

Two hours later, Bacon had made the necessary arrangements with the British Home Office. Hughes and his entourage walked through immigration and into a waiting fleet of six Rolls Royce limousines that sped the group to London's Inn at the Park.

All this was No Big Deal for Intertel or Bob Peloquin. Just another day's work. Like meeting with the King of Spain in Madrid last month. Drafting plans for an airport security system in Detroit. Locating and destroying a million-dollar lost shipment of American drugs that had turned into deadly poison in a tiny African nation. Sweeping the phones of a large corporation for phone taps. Designing a prison security system in Rhode Island. Policing the gambling casinos at Paradise Island in the Bahamas. Digging up evidence and witnesses for a London newspaper slapped with a libel suit. Checking out real estate agents buying properties for a giant hamburger chain. Or - the one Peloquin considers his biggest personal coup - tracking down in Switzerland the mysterious person who posed as H.R. Hughes and endorsed \$650,000 in checks from McGraw-Hill: checks intended as payment to the reclusive millionaire for collaborating with Clifford Irving on an autobiography; but in fact cashed by Irving's wife, Edith, while posing as "Helga Hughes."

Peloquin is a crafty man, ex-Justice Department investigator who realized that there were millions to be made parlaying investigative skills learned within the federal bureaucracy into a lucrative private enterprise. At 48, he heads one of the world's largest private intelligence networks, orchestrating a staff of 50 professionals, most of them ex-FBI, IRS and CIA agents.

"It's not really that much of a chance to come here from the FBI or the IRS," says Peloquin. "Intertel is basically a collection of people who have succeeded reasonably well in government and have a desire for a second career. I get 'em cheap. I capitalize on government training."

peloquin's best friend and neighbor, Washington lawyer Eddie O'Connell, calls Intertel "a civilian FBI." Peloquin's wife, Margaret, whom he met here i n 1948 while she was studying at the now-defunct Dunbarton College and he was a student at Georgetown, says her husband neve talks about his work.

"He's very close-mouthed," she says. "Well, maybe that's good. If they ever get me on the witness stand. I can honestly say I don't know anything."

Intertel's vice-president, Tom McKeon, recalls a phrase Peloquin used to teach his students when he was a Naval intelligence officer, and says it still characterizes the boss' attitude toward work: "Loose lips sink ships."

But when Peloquin wants to talk, he can. He knows how to give and take to get what he wants. "A lot of investigative reporters have lived off Bob Peloquin," says Seymour Hersh, the New York Times investigative reporter who broke the My Lai massacre and Glomar Explorer stories.

Peloquin looks and acts the part of the wheeler-dealer sleuth: 6 feet-1 inch, with deep-set searing brown eyes that constantly scan the space around him. Conservative suits and ties. A large, black attache case. Cups and cups of coffee. He wakes up restless at 4 in the mornig and reads: American Heritage, "Roots," National Geographic, "The Raising of the Titanic," "The Eagle Has Landed." "None of that Ellery Queen crap," he says. He takes a sauna in the family's Lux manor rambler in Bethesda. At 6:30 he's on the tennis court. He complains about the morning paper boy, that the paper isn't on the door step until he's back from tennis.



bet on anything that can talk."

At Justice, Peloquin led the first Organized Crime Strike Force in Buffalo, where he went after the Magaddino and Profaci Mafia families. He worked on the "Get Hoffa" squad. In Mississippi, he was charged with investigating the murders of civil-rights workers Goodman, Schwerner and Chaney. ("Real sweethearts," he says. "Sheriff Rainey and Sheriff Price," referring to two defendants in the case.) In the Bahamas he looked into possible Mob control of gambling casinos.

He always found a way to do things. When a witness he had rounded up ripped his pants right before his testimony was needed. Peloquin produced a sewing kit and stitched up the damage. From then on he was dubbed. "The Needle."

He made good friends along the way. In Buffalo, Commissioner M.F.A. Lindsay, former head of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and now a member of Intertel's board of directors. In the Bahamas, Scotland Yard's Bacon. In Washington, J. Edgar Hoover's only nephew, Fred Robinette, now Intertel's director of "Internal Operations."

By the time Peloquin left Justice in 1968, his own experience and connections were a solid base for creating a company like Intertel. At first he teamed up with another Justice alumnus, Bill Hundley, to form a law firm and represent the National Football League. The two were to advise the league on security matters, and one NFL player recalls Peloquin standing in front of training camp locker rooms and giving lectures on how to stave off mobsters offering would-be bribes to fix games. Later the firm picked up Life magazines as a client, gathering evidence for law suits filed against Life's investigative team - a group of reporters who had examined gambling in the Bahamas, among other things. In 1970 Peloquin left the firm by Resorts International, a U.S. corporation running the major casino in the Bahamas at Paradise Island. Resorts currently owns 81 per cent of Intertel's stock.

This succession of jobs, particularly the closeness of Peloquin's employment by Life and Resorts International, piqued some people.

"It sort of bothered me when I found out about Peloquin's association with Resorts," says a former member of the Life investigative team. "Probably there was no conflict of interest, but it was a little weird when I discovered it in retrospect."

"I can understand that point of view," Peloquin says. "We certainly had both of them as clients at the same time, but I checked with Life before we took Resorts on as a client."

"You work for the Justice Department that long and you get a lot of inside tracks," says William Lynch, a former Justice associate of Peloquin's who now heads the department's Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Division. "It makes me a little nervous when I think about the contacts these guys still have when they're out there in the private sector. Nobody really knows what they know. And Bob really likes that spectre of mystery."

"When I was at Justice," says Peloquin, "I probably had the best system of informers that anybody ever had. They were my sources; not the department's. If I need information, I don't need the department. I need those sources. If I hire some guy out of Justice, I want expertise. I buy that guy for his knowledge. But the knowledge is in his head, not in some file at the department."

Investigative reporters Les Whitten says ITT hired Intertel to spy on Jack Anderson's office after staffer Britt Hume revealed the Dita Beard-ITT memo linking corporate political favors with a contribution to the Nixon campaign. Whitten says Intertel was trying to find out who leaked the memo.

"Bob Peloquin was a terrific worker with the Justice Department," Whitten says. "But I hate to see a guy that good become a hired gun for outfits like ITT and Howard Hughes, which have a lot of nefarious trappings about them."

"False," says Peloquin. "We never spied on Les. In order to survive in this business, you have to have some pretty tight rules. Rule number one is you can't spy on reporters. Rule number two is you can't use offensive electronic devices (wire-taps)."

To Peloquin himself, all this is folderol. His job is more a state of mind than a series of actions. A state of mind spawned probably 25 years ago when he studied history at Georgetown and became interested in the way individuals changed the fates of nations with backroom politics and military tactics and intelligence operations - men like Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr, whose conflicts still fascinate him. A state of mind sharpened by Jesuit training in philosophy, training that in the days of the Inquisition developed equivocation into a fine art. A state of mind reinforced as a Naval intelligence officer. A state of mind honed at Georgetown Law School, and later at the Justice Department, where Peloquin discovered that being a lawyer didn't necessarily mean writing arcane briefs all day. Thus the creation of Intertel.

In its promotional literature, the firm is described as "a unique organization whose services focus on investigating, analyzing and resolving issues pertaining to the protection, preservation and enhancement of corporate assets." The company offers a score of services, including "Defensive Electronic Countermeasures."

"Attitude Assessment," "Questioned Document Examination," "Inventory Control Systems" and an "Executive Protection Program" to guard against "corporate extortion."

Less explicit is a service that's natural outgrowth of the staff's heavy Justice Department background: protecting clients from mergers with Mafia-controlled corporations. More recently Intertel represented the interests of its parent company, Resorts International, in successfully campaigning for legalized gambling

in Atlantic City, N.J.

The company discourages written contracts, and will not track cheating spouses as fodder for divorce attorneys. Peloquin says Intertel refuses work of a political nature. Days after the Watergate break-in, both Edward Bennett Williams and Murray Chotiner contacted the company to request help for the Democrats and the Republicans respectively. Both were turned down.

Intertel eventually was mentioned twice in the Senate Watergate hearings. John Dean told of an attempt by Jack Caufield to form a "Republican Intertel" called the Security Consultation Group "to provide private security for all phases of the campaign." Later Intertel itself was almost humorously described as "a commercial firm specializing in the identification of typewriters."

Former Intertel employees say the company has provided services in large company that wanted to get into the trash hauling business but wondered whether organized crime already controlled the field; a Washington vending machine firm that was interested in taking over an operation in Indians, numerous corporations that have experienced sudden inventory shortages; attorneys defending ex-Illinois Gov. Otto Kenner in a race track kickback case; and insurance company investigating an explosion in a grain elevator.

Intertel still controls the security for much of the Hughes empire. In fact, one former employee says that working for Howard Hughes "was really nothing, even when we were with him personally, because most of us had been around Presidents, other heads of State and people like Hoover in jobs with the FBI, IRS and Secret Service."

But Peloquin is not particularly fond of talking about his work or his clients. He knows that Washington is a city full of spilled secrets, and that, spilled secrets are no secrets at all. He must think about others here who have tried to do work like Intertel's, only less successfully:

The public relations firm of Robert R. Mullen & Co., which employed Watergate burglar E. Howard Hunt and was exposed as a CIA front;

James McCord Associates, a security outfit run by a former FBI and CIA agent also convicted for the Watergate breakin, the area responsible for the 1972 Negro campaign shortly organizations.

Robert A. [WORD ILLEGIBLE] headed by the [WORD ILLEGIBLE] fired by Howard Hughes when he pushed Intertel for his security, and involved in a CIA plot to assassinate Fidel Castro.

"I don't think Rob will ever be satisfied just being a lawyer," ex-law partner Rudley says now. "There's too much gunshots in him looking for the big challenge; I wanted to practice law. So we went our own ways."

Peloquin's way includes arriving at 9:30 every morning in his office, the fourth floor of an H street law building. There are antique maps hanging on the walls in [WORD ILLEGIBLE] Fancies. His desk is [WORD ILLEGIBLE] an adding machine, a telephone, a calendar, a few ash trays (no longer used; he gave up his four-pack-a-day habit last year. It's all very functional, a place to get work done. And he only uses it when he's not off somewhere else in the world. A long way from being the only son of a grocer in Fall River, Mass. He refuses to say how much the company pulls to, by former employees put the income from Intertel's 200-plus clients around the world at about \$2 [WORD ILLEGIBLE]

"The guy is a perpetual motion machine," says neighbor O'Connell. "He wants to relax. To go on vacation with him like being on a forced march. We went to Nassau one time and he did a 60-hour course in scuba diving in one week."

"He's the most competitive guy I know," says plaot Cacheris, another Washington lawyer and cubicle-mate of Peloquin's at Justice in the '50s. The two play squash every Saturday at the Pentagon.

"We always start off with excuses," says Cacheris. "His gout is up. I partied the night before. They're tough games, real grudge matches. If I win, I always call up mutual friends and say, 'Call Peloquin and ask him what the score was.' I ride him a lot. Like about his birthday. It's the same as Nixon's - Jan. 9"

Peloquin's only sister, Elizabeth, now a Fall River school principal, remembers her brother reading "Hardy Boys" mysteries and shooting clay pigeons as a boy. Bob Mullen, a high-school buddy who's now a Fall River jewelry merchant, recalls Peloquin being a unusually industrious and cunning teen-ager:

"We'd couple-date all the time," says Mullen. "My father was real tough, and he'd say things to me like, 'You can't go out until the lawn is cut.' So Bob would hop on his father's grocery truck and bring over their mower and the two of us would race through the job and then run off to New Bedford to pick up our dates. Other times we'd sneak out late at night. We'd push the car down the driveway and away from the house about two blocks before we'd start up the engine."

In off moments now, Peloquin putters around the house and spends time with his six kids. Recently he bought two junked '61 Mercedes that he's a melding into one usable car. He's fixing up three abandoned townhouses on U Street with one of his sons, on the theory that "it teaches the kid economics and street sense." He builds cabinets. He loves to go skiing and sailing. He wants to learn to fly, but his wife won't let him. (Still, he sneaks in lessons when he's the only passenger on a small commuter airline owned by one of his clients.)

Says peloquin:

"If some guy came in my office and said, 'I'll give you X number of dollars to put a man onMars in 20 years,' I'd sure as hell have a shot at it. I don't know why I do these things. I just take targets of opportunity.People talk about the morality of working for Howard Hughes. One day I get this call and some guy asks me if I'd like to take care of Hughes' security. Well, that's challenge I can't pass up."

To some this smacks of classic private eye amorality. Yet there is a part of Peloquin that does respond to right and wrong. Maybe it's all those years of Jesuit schooling, where as an undergraduate he was a daily Communicant. (He still goes to Mass every Sunday at St. Elizabeth's Parish in Bethesda, and serves on the board of trustees for the Seminary of the Oblates of St. Francis de Salles.)

"We had once case involving parents whose kid had run off to the Children of God in Holland," Pelquin says. "I told them, 'We'll find the kid and tell you where he is an how you can get in touch with him, but we won't nab him.' That would create a real moral problem for me. In the history of the Catholic Church, you'll find many people who wanted to rescue their daughters from the convent. Now we call the daughters saints."

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