

# Job of a Special Agent With NIS Goes Beyond The Solving of Crimes

WASHINGTON — NIS — an acronym known probably to only a small portion of today's Navy and Marine Corps. One of the primary operating arms of the Office of Naval Intelligence, the Naval Investigative Service has held a "cloak and dagger" image for years.

To find out more about this intriguing organization, *Navy Times* recently visited NIS Headquarters in Suitland, Md., and several diverse NIS resident agencies in the Norfolk area.

Founded in 1915, NIS basically is a civilian organization that provides investigative support to the Department of the Navy in matters concerning serious crimes committed by or against its personnel at facilities throughout the world. A second and equally important mission involves NIS's counterintelligence role in neutralizing attempts by hostile forces to obtain sensitive defense information concerning the Navy and Marine Corps.

NIS operates at more than 140 locations throughout the world, including every major Navy and Marine installation. About 600



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By ROSEMARY PURCELL

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Photos by PH1 Dale Anderson

civilian special agents support the Naval establishment, including a resident agent assigned to every aircraft carrier and to some fleet flagships.

These special agents must be U.S. citizens, age 21 to 35 years, be in excellent physical condition,

hold a bachelor's degree, have unquestioned integrity and be willing to serve ashore and afloat in both the United States and at overseas locations.

An NIS special agent is most often seen in his role as a criminal investigator looking into such varied activity as homicide, robbery, narcotics trafficking, destruction or theft of government property, arson and the like. In all these cases, the agent investigates to try to determine "who did it" and thereafter assists the command and its legal professionals in the proper settlement of the matter.

Although NIS predominately investigates military people, Navy Department civilian employees also come under its jurisdiction, as do contractors and other classes of people in certain cases.

NIS is a centrally directed organization, headed by Capt. J.R. Soriano, with headquarters in the Washington, D.C., suburbs. Ten regional offices, also commanded by Navy captains, are at such diverse locations as New York City, New Orleans, San



NIS Agent Conducts a Lie Detector Test

Diego and Yokosuka, and oversee the 140 resident agencies scattered throughout the world. These field units range in strength from one to 20 or more special agents. The NIS cadre of professional investigators is backed up by more than 200 support people including communicators, typists, forensic chemists, evidence technicians and a host of typical headquarters staffers.

The heart of the NIS is its corps of civilian special agents — men and women. Trainees go through a rigorous seven-week course at the NIS Academy in Suitland, Md.

"The curriculum is geared to what we call multi-phased training," according to Bill Hudson, special agent in charge of the Headquarters Training Academy. "It's a combination of classroom training, then demonstrating what they've learned through practical exercise," he told *Navy Times*.

The classroom instruction includes constitutional rights, unarmed self defense, firearms, apprehension methods, investigative techniques, criminal law, and much more.

After their initial or probationary assignment in the field, the agents go into specialized training in areas such as protective service operations (providing "bodyguard" protection to high ranking U.S. officials and foreign dignitaries and providing direct on scene assistance to the U.S. Secret Service), crime scene processing, counterespionage operations and white collar crime task force operations.

Agents also take part in periodic in-service seminars, a continuing requirement throughout an agent's professional career. In addition, NIS sponsors candidates to the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, the National War College and many private educational institutions for job related training.

Hudson said that NIS's top priorities are combating fraud, waste and abuse and the suppression of drug use and trafficking in the Navy and Marine Corps.

NIS considers its agents "generalists."

"We work every kind of case from the burglary of a supply warehouse to murder and rape. We are active in hostage negotiations, protective service operations and counterespionage projects," Hudson said.

NIS differs from other military investigative agencies in that its special agent corps is predominantly civilian. Some Navy and Marine military people do serve rotational tours with NIS. Those coming from Marine Criminal Investigation Division (CID) and the Marine counterintelligence teams carry NIS credentials and work side by side with the NIS special agents.

In addition to normal government benefits, public law permits retirement for the NIS civilian special agent at age 50 with 20 years of service at a special, increased law enforcement pension rate. Retirement is mandatory at age 55.

The criminal investigations department at NIS Headquarters monitored some 21,000 investigations last year and, with more agents on the street, that figure should jump to about 27,000 cases this year. Of note, NIS does not normally enter the investigation of a crime unless it is one that provides for imprisonment of one year or more. This is similar to the "felony" description used in the civilian court system.

Special Agent Dan Sweeney, assistant director in charge of criminal investigations, said that, for example, NIS investigated 2400 fraud cases, 400 arsons, 3000 burglaries, 6000 larcenies, 450 homicides, 400 rapes, 800 robberies and more than 4000 narcotics violations last year.

"We saw a surge in crime statistics last year after a drop from 1974. The increase is due, in the main, to our increased emphasis in countering fraud, waste and abuse in the Navy," Sweeney said.

He noted that his department also supervises the protective service efforts within the Navy

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Trainees Learn Apprehension Techniques in Realistic Training



# NIS

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and that special agents undergo intensive protective service training. They often assist the U.S. Secret Service in its protection of the President, members of his family and visiting heads of state.

"We run our own protective service details when the Navy is responsible for the protection of a foreign dignitary coming into the United States. When Prince Charles arrived in Norfolk earlier this year, the NIS was a very large part of that protective detail," he said.

The NIS also figured prominently in the protection of the Pope during his visit to Guam earlier this year.

Sweeney said the incidence of crime in the Navy is no more serious than in the civilian sector.

"The Navy is nothing more than a microcosm of our society as a whole. We get the same young people that are out on the streets. But when they come in the Navy, they usually behave themselves a little better than they did on the street. I think statistically, our crime rate is below the national average," he said.

The criminal investigations department also oversees the NIS drug suppression operations in ports where narcotics are readily available — particularly in Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean ports and throughout the Mediterranean.

"In advance of a fleet visit, or at least coincident with the arrival of the fleet, depending on what tactic is best, we'll put in a team of NIS agents and a team of NIS controlled sources who are good at buying illicit narcotics," Sweeney said.

"These are people who know the street language, they know narcotics and they can make the deals," he said.

Working with local law enforcement agencies of the host country, they will buy narcotics where they can. As soon as the "buy" is consummated, the local police arrest the seller. In some liberty areas, police often arrest 30 or more people a night.

"That has a measurable effect because on the second night, our people will go out and find that

drugs are more difficult to obtain. Then, on the third night, there are no narcotics available at all. In effect, what these suppression operations accomplish is to dry up the sources of the illicit narcotics and help remove the temptations from the fleet sailors," Sweeney said.

Special agents E.C. Howerton and Tom Liehr of the criminal investigations department specialize in crimes against the person, including homicide, narcotics violations, assault, robbery and rape.

Howerton and Liehr said the Navy is experiencing the same types of offenses as those found in the civilian community.

"There are assaults in the military, but I don't think it's anything astronomical. And I say it's because they (Navy officials) do something about it more quickly than they do in the civilian world," Howerton said.

NIS agents investigate only felonious assaults, where there is a weapon involved or serious bodily injury. They do not investigate routine domestic disturbances or fistfights.

Sexual assaults do not seem to be on the upswing, even though the navy is enlisting more and more NIS agents investigate all reported sexual offenses. A "sexual assault kit," devised and provided by the NIS, is maintained at all naval hospitals to assist the medical examiner and physician in gathering evidence which later will be a key to the successful resolution of NIS of its investigation.

Special agent Liehr said he has talked to many rape victims over the years.

"It goes without saying that the victim of a rape suffers a traumatic experience. From the time of the rape, through the investigation and into the courtroom, the woman undergoes a difficult time," he said.

NIS has been providing more and more rape sensitivity training for its agents so they can work with the victims to help them cope with these situations.

Agents do not become involved in routine family squabbles, but they do investigate cases of aggravated assault.

"We are not going to get involved in family rehabilitation, but when a felony offense is committed, we'll investigate it," Howerton said.

The internal security department at NIS Headquarters is responsible for protecting classified information against disclosure to hostile intelligence agents and for investigating subversion of naval personnel and sabotage of Navy installations.

"We coordinate closely with the CIA in operations overseas and with the FBI in operations in the States," said special agent Dan Foley, assistant head of the department.

Foley said that NIS would not investigate a sailor simply because of his alleged membership in the Ku Klux Klan, for example, because such membership does not violate any law. The NIS

would, however, open an investigation if the suspect went beyond pure membership and became involved in on-base recruiting, defacing property or otherwise engaged in conduct violating regulations ensuring good order and discipline.

Foley's department also investigates incidents that involve giving information to a foreign intelligence service, the loss, compromise or leaking of classified material to unauthorized persons and out and out sabotage by a foreign agent.

"We also provide threat assessments concerning ports where there is going to be some type of naval activity such as the transfer of nuclear weapons. We go out ahead of time and assess what that threat would be," he said.

The internal security department also has a port security program.

"In 1972, we signed a maritime agreement which allowed certain communist country ships to come into U.S. ports," Foley said.

Currently there is no prohibition against ships from the Peoples Republic of China coming into U.S. ports, but there are seven or eight other communist countries that are prohibited or closely controlled. NIS agents go into these ports ahead of time to see what a merchant ship from a communist country could learn, and give this information to naval commanders so that they can take steps to protect their sensitive operations.

"We also give briefings to people who are going to visit communist countries. We tell them what to expect, and when they come back, we debrief them to find out who they have had contact with," Foley said.

The technical services department at Headquarters provides support to its field agents. It develops the aids that agents use in their investigations — crime scene kits, evidence collection kits, drug testing kits, etc. And, it conducts research and development, testing and evaluation on the equipment used in the field.

"A major area of support that this department is concerned with is communications," according to agent Bill Donovan, assistant department head. "We have a communications system associated with our operations control center, a 24-hour manned facility, that provides instant communications with virtually every major law enforcement agency in the world as well as with our 140-plus NIS field offices."

The center contains computer terminals that allow NIS offices in the field to interface with the National Crime Information Center at FBI Headquarters and the National Law Enforcement Telecommunication System, a switching center capable of almost instant contact with every police department in the United States and many foreign countries. NIS also has access to various Navy and Marine Corps record systems.

The technical services department also oversees NIS's new regional forensic laboratories.

"We were recently directed by



Agents Bob Sotack, center, and Ed Bourgugnon, right, provide protection for Turkish Minister of Defense Hayuk Bayulken on a visit to Washington.

the CNO to establish four regional drug identification labs. They are now located at Norfolk, San Diego, Pearl Harbor and Naples," Donovan said.

The forensic chemists have been hired and the new labs are scheduled to open soon.

"These labs will relieve us to a great extent of having to rely upon outside facilities and should greatly reduce the previous waiting time for laboratory results," Donovan explained.

NIS agents are federal officers and their careers are individually developed within the civil service structure, with advancement based on ability and potential. Positions range from GS-7 to GS-16, depending on the level of management responsibility. The vast majority of the NIS journeyman agents are GS-11 and GS-12, with 15 percent additional "premium pay" for the uncontrolled overtime and very irregular working hours of NIS personnel.

The Naval Investigative Service now employs about 610 civilian special agents with another 250 agents and support people being phased into the agency within the next two years.

"That figure includes agents and support personnel, but the overwhelming percentage of them will be agents," said M. Sherman Bliss, deputy director of the Naval Investigative Service.

"That certainly is going to impact on us in many less visible ways than one might suspect in terms of our entire organizational structure, where we are going to have these people located and the potential capability to sophisticate some elements of our mission," he said. "And, it certainly will make a positive contribution to our effort to support the Chief of Naval Operations in his goal of improving the state of good order and discipline within the Navy."

Director Soriano added "that the CNO's goals of good order and discipline and improvement in the quality of life for all U.S. Navy personnel are the primary goals of this organization."

NIS officials feel that the new agents coming in will help solve some of the Navy's narcotics

problems, assaults, burglaries and personal thefts.

Bliss said that NIS agents are very concerned about the number of thefts of personal property in the Navy.

"We want Navy people to know that NIS is trying to do something about it. We have not been very good about feedback to the man who is victimized, but we're trying to get better. We frequently go off and do our thing, but that man is not in our reporting chain, and he doesn't know what it is that we've done," he said. "But if we solve the case and he gets his property back, he knows that. He probably is unaware of how hard we tried in those cases that we don't solve and get no personal property back."

Bliss said that more and more Navy bases are opening up to the general public and to the civilian community at large, and this increases the potential for more burglaries and assaults.

NIS agents come from varied backgrounds — law enforcement agencies, engineering, as well as the arts and sciences. The fact that the NIS has a very strict screening process for its agents accounts for its very low attrition rate, officials say.

"Our attrition rate is one of the lowest in the federal government," Bliss told Navy Times. "It's about six percent and that's from all causes, including retirement, voluntary resignation, medical reasons and involuntary terminations."

"What this proves to us is that we're doing a pretty good job in our initial screening. We really are attracting good people who are motivated toward making a career of NIS and trying to make the Navy and Marine Corps a better place to serve," Bliss said.

He said that most of those who leave voluntarily do so after about their second or third year.

"The most frequent reason for leaving employment," he said, "is the realization that the family can't cope with the mobility requirements."

**NEXT WEEK:** An interview with NIS special agent Bill Thomas, assigned to carrier Nimitz.

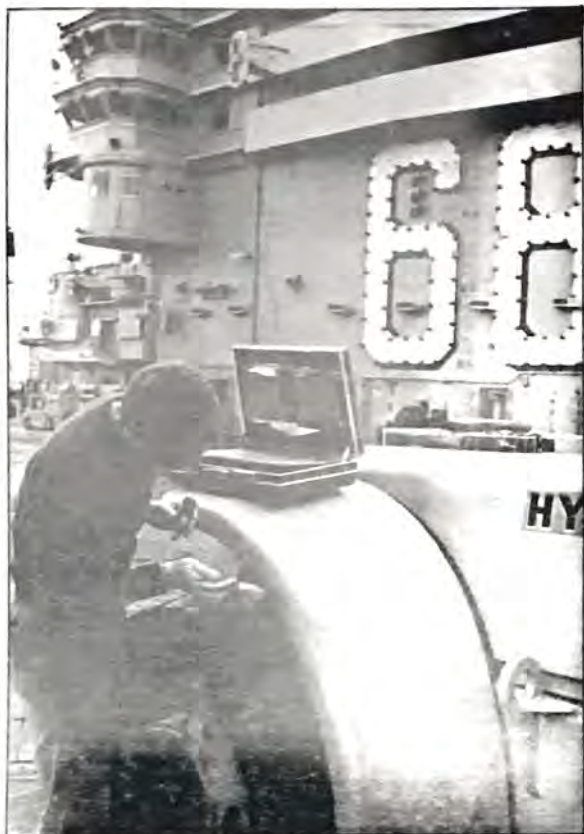
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# Special Agent on Carrier Is on Independent Duty

NORFOLK — Bill Thomas' duty assignment as a Navy Department employee is unusual. He's stationed aboard the aircraft carrier Nimitz. He's a full time "resident" and is responsible to the ship's commanding officer. But Thomas is a civilian, one of a handful of Naval Investigative Service special agents assigned to shipboard duty.

Thomas discussed his NIS assignment with Navy Times aboard Nimitz before she left on her most recent deployment.

He explained that he worked in the sheriff's office in Orlando, Fla., for 20 years before joining NIS about a year ago. He had earlier served a stint in the Navy.

"It's unique for an investigator with as limited NIS experience as I have to be assigned such a responsibility. I'm on independent, detached duty. I'm by myself and I have to make case decisions by myself... My previous experience counted," he said.

Thomas answers operationally and administratively to the special agent in charge of the NIS resident agency in the Fleet Support Office in Norfolk. NIS headquarters provides policy and technical guidance to all field activities.

"However, as a practical matter, I am also responsible to the CO of the ship. I'm his guest. I'm part of the ship's company and wherever the ship goes, I go too," he told Navy Times.

Thomas' investigative caseload includes crimes against persons, property crimes and narcotics. He works on 35 to 40 felony cases at any given time.

"Of all the criminal cases I work, property crimes (such as larcenies) amount to about 60 percent, and narcotics crimes run another 30 percent," he said.

Thomas said crimes against persons, such as robbery or assault, do not take a long time to investigate because of the person-to-person confrontation.

He said that false claims against the government are very time consuming. For example, if a person manipulates his pay record or submits a false claim for lost or stolen property or for travel expenses that were never incurred, he would investigate.

Some of the more complicated cases involve false dependency assistance claims — claiming a non-existent dependent in order to draw extra money from the government.

The narcotics problem aboard Nimitz is no more serious than aboard any other ship, according to Thomas.

"It may seem larger only because of the size of the ship's crew. We have a very aggressive master-at-arms force and they work very tenaciously in curbing the problem."

Nimitz' crewmen are aware that Thomas is an NIS special



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Times Staff Photos  
By Joseph Madera



Agent Thomas

with its activities.

The mission of NIS is to provide a professional criminal investigative and counterintelligence capability to Navy and Marine Corps commands.

NIS differs from other military investigative agencies since its special agent corps is predominantly civilian. Some Navy and Marine Corps military people also serve rotational tours with the agency. They carry NIS credentials and operate on an equal footing with civilian agents.

The average agent may expect some six or more duty assignments during his career, with at least one of them being aboard ship.

The "Special Agent Afloat" program is unique to the Navy. Although agents are civilians, they serve on all carriers, whether in port or at sea.

The agency's "Port Brief Program" is another important service to fleet commands. Agents provide information on criminal and security conditions at foreign ports. This includes learning of terrorist or criminal elements known to target Navy and Marine people and areas or situations that should be avoided by Navy people on liberty in foreign countries.

Relevant facts are compiled at NIS headquarters and provided to the fleet to help commanding officers in their planning. Afloat agents normally are a part of advance landing parties and handle liaison with shore law enforcement and security officials.

The services performed by NIS agents are not always in the form of criminal investigative support. They also involve counterintelligence activities.

The main purpose of the counterintelligence program is to protect U.S. military installations, equipment and people against espionage, sabotage and other clandestine intelligence or international terrorist activities.

NIS gives top priority, however, to any criminal incident that will affect the Navy's operational readiness.

**NEXT WEEK: Interviews with four female agents who are assigned to the Norfolk area.**

agent. He could be covert about it, but he isn't.

"My philosophy is that I would like to be accessible to those people who have information to offer me," he explained.

Thomas said he feels that he has a very close working relationship with the department heads, division officers and with other key personnel aboard the carrier.

"I don't lock myself in my office. I go out and try to be part of the community and I try to get involved with the ship's activities."

Thomas' stateroom also doubles as his office. When the carrier is at sea for more than two weeks, in addition to investigating, he does his own typing, duplicating, stuffing envelopes, mailing material and file work.

He said he likes shipboard duty — something that not all NIS special agents can say.

"The fact that I had previous law enforcement experience and previous Navy experience is probably why I'm here instead of someone else," he said.

Thomas is involved in martial arts and has started a small group aboard Nimitz. He says it's not only for his own benefit, but it also offers a means of communicating with other elements of the ship. His group works out on the flight deck or the hangar deck.

"Surprisingly, the fact that one is involved in something physical, brings you a little closer to the crew and encourages communication, and that's how I know what's going on," he said.

Only carriers and some of the major flagships have NIS agents aboard. Normally, while ships are tied up to the pier, they call the NIS resident agency ashore — the Fleet Support Office — for assistance.

When other types of ships are at sea in company with a carrier, they call the afloat agent who is flown out to investigate a felony.

The Naval Investigative Service is anxious to dispel the "cloak and dagger" myth long associated



# Women Play Important Role In Range of NIS Operations

NORFOLK — They don't wear police uniforms or drive marked police cruisers. Nor do they operate like Angie Dickinson in "Policewoman." But they play an important role in solving crimes nevertheless.

The four female Naval Investigative Service special agents in the Norfolk area work directly with Navy and Marine Corps officials trying to solve cases such as damage to government property, fraud, burglaries and crimes against persons which affect the quality of life in the naval service.

Investigations of robbery, rape, arson and homicide are not unknown to these civilian employees of the Navy.

"Many people have no insight into what NIS special agents do and sometimes tend to overglamorize it," said special agent Signe Johnson, who, until recently, was assigned to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

Before joining NIS, special agent Gwen Grear worked in a juvenile court in North Carolina investigating child abuse cases and doing pre-sentencing investigations.

"I worked on cases concurrently with NIS at Camp Lejeune and in Jacksonville and became interested in what NIS was doing," she told Navy Times.

Agent Grear works in the NIS office at the Norfolk Naval Air Station.



## Last of 3 Articles

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Times Staff Photos  
By Joseph Matera

Special agent Deborah Burgess, also assigned to Portsmouth, was a police officer in Tallahassee, Fla., working on criminal and traffic investigations. She also worked on the state level with the Department of Professional Regulations.

Comparing the work she does now with what she did on the Tallahassee police force, she said there's nothing unusual or different except that NIS work is on a federal level.

"This to me is not nearly as dangerous, however, as municipal police work. When I was a local uniformed police officer, I used to have to fight people and drag them out of bars. I don't do that in my job now," she said.

Agent Johnson says there are situations where there conceivably could be danger in making an apprehension.

"But generally speaking, NIS agents — be they male or female — don't make arrests without backup assistance. There usually are two agents on each arrest," Johnson said.

Bernye Ayer, an agent assigned to the Amphibious Base at Little Creek, agrees that an NIS agent's job is not "Angie Dickinson super-dangerous work."

"I think we're a little more fortunate in that we deal primarily with the military and I think the work is a little easier for us," she said. "We're not dealing with John Doe criminal out in the street and we usually don't go into bars and wrestle drunks."

Johnson believes there's a bit of mystique associated with the Naval Investigative Service.

"I guess over the years the myth has sort of grown. When I first came to NIS there were accusations that we spend a lot of time surveilling people. But, in fact, most of our cases are based on complaints," she said.

"Unusual cases materialize on occasion, but, by and large, and this isn't meant in a negative way, there is a certain amount of repetition in the types of cases we handle."

Johnson said that names and circumstances of the crimes handled by special agents change, but essentially they deal with cases such as serious intentional damage to government equipment, assaults, burglaries and things of that nature.

"Every now and then, like last year, we have a rash of arsons aboard some of the ships. Those types of things are out of the ordinary," Johnson said.

NIS special agents work closely with other law enforcement agencies, according to agent Ayer.

"We work some concurrent cases with local police departments. We also work with Customs, the Secret Service, Drug Enforcement and Immigration authorities," she said.

All NIS special agents are armed and have ready access to a wide range of technical investigative aids. Agent Grear showed some of the equipment contained in the crime scene kit to Navy Times.

The kit contains fingerprint powders, bags and containers for evidence collected at a crime scene, photographic gear, etc.



Agent Ayer relaxes at Little Creek.

"The crime scene kit has been developed to aid us," according to agent Ayer. "I can't think of too many instances where you would need something other than what is in it. It's gone through a lot of growing and a lot of research and we feel it's the most ideal type of thing to aid us on a crime scene."

Women have been part of NIS's corps of agents since 1978.

They receive the same training as their male counterparts. They attend the basic seven-week school at NIS Headquarters in Suitland, Md.

They also attend in-service training on a scheduled basis and can be ordered to an advanced criminal investigator's seminar; fraud school; a hostage negotiation course; counterespionage/counterintelligence school; polygraph exams school; an investigative supervisory/management seminar, and firearms, apprehension and unarmed self-defense instructors school.

New agents at the NIS Academy are taught to accomplish tasks, and in turn must demonstrate their ability to perform those tasks through practical exercises.

This systematic approach to bring about desired learning has been incorporated into the Basic Course Syllabus through a multiple phase program with a strong emphasis on realism that combines instructional, behavioral and audio-visual strategies and role play.

NIS officials say this method increases the man-hours of instruction considerably since several instructors often are involved in one practical exercise along with several "role players."

One advantage to this method, officials say, is the ability to observe a "team" of student special agents working together under controlled conditions with individual agents tasked and observed on specific assignments that can be measured and evaluated through their performance.

The students are videotaped

while conducting various practical exercises and then have the benefit of watching themselves perform what they were taught in the classroom, observing their strengths and weaknesses.

Many tasks in law enforcement involve human interaction skills, the kind in which it's impossible to follow a formula. NIS officials say. These are the tasks that demand different responses to each situation and from different individuals.

Agents also have ample opportunities for training at other agencies — the protective operations course offered by the U.S. Secret Service; the narcotics training course at the Drug Enforcement Administration; the questioned document examination course given by the Treasury Department; forensic pathology at the Armed Forces Institute of Forensic Pathology, and the latent fingerprints seminars given by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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Agent Grear with a crime scene kit.