

Me and the FBI or The Day I (Almost) Shot Jesus

At a recent gathering of old troopers, I was somewhat surprised to hear one of our more hard core guys speaking kindly of various FBI agents. He even maintains a friendship with one after their mutual retirements. In addition to being surprised, I also felt somewhat relieved, maybe even vindicated, since there are several FBI agents I count among my friends.

Fed bashing has always been popular among some segments of the state and local law enforcement community. Although I've probably been guilty of dropping a few one liners myself, I never really got down on the FBI for several reasons.

First off, I figure if we could hear what the deputies and the locals were saying about us, our comments about the Feebs would probably pale by comparison.

Secondly, during my recruit tour in Ulster County our friendly neighborhood resident FBI Agent had been a New York State Trooper in a previous life. He had free run of the barracks and in his never ending quest to make sure there were no federal felons lurking in our file cabinets, would pour over our arrest and investigative reports every week or two to see whether there might be a paper case or two secreted therein. Since he was a good guy and probably knew more guys in the zone than I did, it didn't seem wise - or even desirable - to bad mouth the Bureau.

Lastly, on a couple of occasions when the chips were down, the FBI had saved the day. Most notable was the Eng Chinese Kidnaping caper. Without going into great detail about a case which went on for months, suffice it to say that Chinese Kidnapings have rules which are known both to the perps and the victim's family. Intervention by Occidentals is not in the rule book and anyone cooperating with them, them being the police, will immediately receive a Red Card and will be ejected from the game.

When the kidnaping occurred we didn't know that, it was our first one. Nor did we really give much thought to the fact that there are several dialects of the Chinese language which are not mutually intelligible. Three of them, plus Malaysian, came into the mix in our case. Our translators could only decipher about a quarter of the conversations we intercepted. When we presented this problem to the Bureau, even they were hard put to come up with people who were fluent in the requisite dialects. Eventually, however, they came up with and supplied to us some agents from the intelligence side of the house who could fill in the gaps. Then the Bureau sent us an American Born Chinese agent from the criminal side of the house who was a jewel. Not only did he fill us in on the protocols of a Chinaman kidnaping another Chinaman, he was a good cop and a cool guy.

Years later I also discovered that the Bureau guys enjoyed giving us a little jab when the opportunity arose just as we did them. When I was a troop commander, Tom Constantine, our superintendent and a politically savvy guy, came up with the idea that every troop commander should personally visit every state senator and assemblyman within his troop. Initially I wasn't too keen on this, but as the meetings progressed I began to realize that the boss was onto something. I fielded some good questions and squelched some crazy rumors. Nevertheless, there were a few politicians in the southern end of the troop whom I had bad feelings about and wasn't all that anxious to visit.

One such visit occurred in Yonkers at about ten in the morning. By the time I got through it and back to troop headquarters, Jim Kallstrom, a friend who would later become the Assistant Director of the FBI in charge of the New York Office, had left a message asking me to call him on his private line. When I called, Jim asked whether I had done anything interesting that morning. When I kind of danced around his question, he said "I have some very nice eight by ten glossies of a guy who looks very much like you coming out of Senator So and So's office." I quickly explained that it wasn't my idea - I guess I could have used the old "just following orders" defense - and also hoped he noticed I didn't emerge with a large bag of hundred dollar bills under my arm. It was nice to know somebody was watching the store and had the same feelings I did. Thanks to the work of Jim and his people, the good senator later had a chance to work on his golf game at Allenwood FCI.

Anyway, back to one of my earlier not so high profile interactions with the Bureau. It occurred one evening when Jim Curtis, a fellow zone commander of an adjoining zone, called me at home. Jim said that he happened to be at the Monroe Barracks when three FBI agents walked in. They were looking for a location which Jim believed was probably in my zone. Jim had given them directions to the Wurtsboro Satellite Office and said they would probably be there in about twenty minutes. I called Ferndale and asked the deskman to have a couple of the post cars return to Wurtsboro, then I headed over myself.

A short while later three guys wearing suits knocked on the satellite door. I could tell by the looks on their faces when they walked in and looked around that this was their first exposure to rural policing. Hey, the town gave us the building for free; it wasn't exactly a palace. I could also tell that they didn't think that dungarees, sneakers and a windbreaker were appropriate attire for a guy who seemed to outrank the two neatly uniformed troopers.

Although none of the agents wore the snap brimmed Fedoras of the Hoover days, two of them were wearing white shirts and three piece tailored suits. The third guy was a few years older, a little slimmer and more tanned and wrinkled and was wearing a blue and white striped shirt and an off-the-rack suit. He looked like he had been around the block once or twice and I later learned he had been a local cop before becoming an agent. The other two guys didn't look like they spent a lot of time in the field, at least not this far afield.

One of the three-piecers was the spokesman and, alien to all my prior experiences with Feds, was totally candid. Perhaps desperation is the mother of disclosure. The agents were out of Brooklyn or Queens or someplace on Long Island. They were looking for a mob guy whose front job was owning a string of funeral homes on the island. Not only was the FBI looking for him, but it was believed that some folk from another family were looking to chat with him also. The guy, whose name was Guido or something similar, had decided to get out of Dodge for a week or so and had talked a funeral home employee into taking Guido to the guy's summer home on Pine Hill Road, upstate. The employee was not to be believed to know about Guido's extracurricular activities or why

Guido had a sudden interest in observing nature firsthand. The agents had developed some information about where on Pine Hill Road the house was and what it looked like, but were unable to get the name of the community, or even the county, in which it was located.

As J. Edgar Junior was filling us in on the outstanding investigative techniques which led them to Guido, Agent Blue Shirt was sitting behind him with his arms folded, shaking his head slightly and studying the ceiling tiles. Perhaps he was considering a post retirement job in home repair.

They had left Long Island early in the morning and had checked out every Pine Hill Road in Westchester, Putnam, Rockland and Orange County, all with negative results. In desperation they had stopped at the Monroe Barracks and had fortuitously encountered Lieutenant Curtis, who, after listening to their plight, realized that they were probably talking about Pine KILL Road in Sullivan County. After listening to their story, I concurred that it certainly sounded like the Pine Kill Road, which was in an extremely rural area not all that far from the Wurtsboro Satellite.

We decided that they would follow us to an intersection about a quarter mile from where we believed Guido and his host were, then proceed on foot from there. J. Edgar Junior suggested that we drive by the house several times to map out a plan of attack. I nixed that plan, pointing out that in that neighborhood anything more than one car a day took on the appearance of a parade. "You get one drive by, make it good." I sent a trooper off with him in his Bureau car and the rest of us headed to the meeting place. The older, real police guy, agent rode with me and filled in a few gaps, but all in all it was pretty much as originally stated.

Once we got to the meeting site there was much slamming of doors and murmured discussions. A porch light a few hundred feet away went on. A voice asked "Who's there?" I replied "Troopers." The voice inquired as to what we wanted. I replied "We're looking for deer jackers." J. Edgar Junior whispered "He'll never believe that. He's probably figured out who we are." The voice replied "You should have been here last night" and the light went out.

I didn't want to damage J. Junior's ego, but I was thinking we would have been there for quite some time before the homeowner guessed "FBI Agents in three piece suits." It might have been the next choice after "Rumpelstiltskin."

The agents opened their car trunks and began to gear up. They had a pretty impressive array of stuff including shotguns and automatic weapons. Perhaps they figured if the fugitive gig didn't go well, they could at least get in a little deer hunting while they were upstate. Their body armor included groin protection. Maybe Guido had a history of laying land mines around his hooch.

The Feebs topped off everything with impressive raid jackets. Blue with large yellow letters, FBI, on the back. My jacket had a small tab identifying me as "LL Bean". Feel free to call me "L". About this time one of the agents noticed that I wasn't armed. I admitted that I in fact did not have a gun. After all, I got called from home. I've pretty much gotten out of the habit of sitting around the house in my skivvies with the ole Roscoe strapped to my hip. But I did have a flashlight, did they have flashlights? Apparently not. J. Junior suggested that maybe they could work off the streetlights. I hated to break his bubble. Electricity in itself was a luxury in this neighborhood, street lights were unheard of. They admired - and coveted - my flashlight, a five cell Maglite with my name engraved in it, the kind that sometimes leaves a bias relief mirror image of your name imprinted on some guy's temple when used as a defensive instrument.

J. Junior suggested that they would hit the door with weapons at high port. I suggested that, based on what they had told me, Guido might be in fear of guys in plain clothes who could just as well be from the other family as from the Bureau. Perhaps guys in uniform would be a better approach. Also, since the homeowner was believed to be a good guy, it might be a good idea to get him out of the house before we did the weapons thing. The troopers were up for this approach and the other two agents jumped in too.

The lightless agents stuck close to us and our flashlights during our hike to the target residence, but were somewhat disappointed to learn that us country folk don't use flashlights while walking on roads so our eyes can become accustomed to the dark.

Once we got to the house, the troopers stepped up on the porch and employed an old state police ploy to get the occupants' attention, they knocked on the door. When the homeowner answered, they got him out on the porch using some pretext and asked him if Guido was inside. The guy said that Guido was inside lying on the sofa watching TV. I think he was watching *All in the Family*, but if we ever make a movie out of this, it's gonna' be *The Untouchables*.

The troopers walked in and said "Guido, when the next commercial rolls around, consider yourself under arrest." The agents rushed in behind them and did the obligatory pat down, handcuffing and Miranda Warning.

I stood in the background and kind of hung out and looked around. There, standing in a corner of the unlit adjoining dining room, was a guy with a blanket draped over his head and shoulders. No one saw him but me, and I didn't have a gun. I swung the beam of my flashlight towards him and yelled "FREEZE" at the top of my lungs, which definitely got everyone's attention. It was a life sized statue of Christ. Had I had a firearm, there probably would have been chunks of Plaster of Paris all over the dining room.

I'm sure both the troopers and the agents related various versions of this story at a later time. Neither group would have had to embellish the story very much to make it a good one.

As we were leaving, I asked J. Junior whether they were going to interview the homeowner. He replied that they were not, since he wasn't a target. After they left with Guido en route to the satellite to regroup I grabbed Agent Blue Shirt and suggested that the homeowner, who was supposedly a good guy, might be amenable to being interviewed. The agent took copious notes as they spoke for about twenty minutes before we left to join the rest of the group.

As we drove back down the Pine Kill Road, two deer loped across the road in front of my troop car. The agent said “Nice touch.” I agreed, although I was thinking “Nice touch, we didn’t hit ‘em.”