

Mormons mistaken abroad for CIA agents

SALT LAKE CITY — Traveling in pairs, clad in distinctive white shirts and black ties and wearing their hair close-cropped, young Mormon missionaries abroad are being mistaken for CIA officers.

"I was accused of being CIA," says Floyd Rose, a former missionary in Spain who is now a student at church-owned Brigham Young University. "We were different than most Americans and some of the people really believed it." He says he was asked about the CIA at least once every two weeks.

"People were always asking us if we were CIA," agrees Mike McQuain, another BYU student who did his missionary work in France. "People would ask us at doors and yell 'CIA' at us as we went by."

Jeff Turley says the CIA label was a standing joke among missionaries in Peru. For laughs, he says, some of them would tease the Peruvians by whipping off a shoe and speaking into it, or do the same with a buzzing digital watch.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which has more than 30,000 missionaries worldwide, denies any connection with the CIA. But the confusion is understandable — the CIA does some of its most successful recruiting in predominantly Mormon Utah.

This summer, the CIA conducted an experimental radio advertising campaign in Utah. Charles Jackson, the CIA's chief recruiting officer, says "well over 100 applicants responded to the radio spots."

Jackson says the agency is looking for potential overseas case officers, intelligence analysts, scientists and computer specialists, the latter two categories difficult to recruit because of competition from industry.

"Utah is one of our good sources," says Denver CIA recruiter Jack Hansen, now in Provo to recruit at BYU, whose student newspaper — The Daily Universe — is currently running CIA job advertisements.

"A lot of people here have language or foreign culture experience," he says. "That's what we look for."

Many young Mormon men spend two years proselyting for the church. Those sent to foreign missions return with foreign language ability and know-

ledge of specific countries. BYU records indicate that about 6,700 people in its 26,000-member student body are former missionaries.

"We've never had any trouble placing anyone who has applied to the CIA," says Dr. Gary Williams, head of the BYU Asian Studies Department. "Every year, they take almost anybody who applies."

Former Mormon missionaries have the three qualities the CIA wants: foreign language ability, training in a foreign culture and former residence in a foreign country, Williams said.

In addition, he said, "our Mormon culture has always been more supportive of the government than American culture as a whole."

In the late 1960s and the

1970s, Williams says, many universities took a negative view of the CIA and other government agencies and discouraged students from accepting their jobs. Throughout those turbulent times, however, the Mormon Church continued to encourage government service, he adds.

Williams says a sense of conformity and respect for authority which Mormons learn as missionaries, along with their abstinence from drugs or alcohol, may also appeal to the CIA.

But he also says that many former BYU students who land jobs with the CIA become disillusioned and leave after about a year. They find they're stuck in a Washington office translating newspaper articles when they had hoped to go overseas.

The most prominent example of a former Mormon missionary who later worked for the CIA — but didn't much like it — is Elder Neal Maxwell, a member of the church's governing Council of the Twelve Apostles. Maxwell says he worked for the CIA in Washington for about a year, doing economic analyses. He says he didn't care for the work and hasn't been affiliated with the CIA for 30 years.

Williams admits that some governments are concerned about the "pretty good dose of returned missionaries who've gone back to the countries they were in, as Central Intelligence agents."

He says Brazil was among the countries which have questioned the church about the number of former missionaries who've returned as CIA employees, and Taiwan had expressed concern because a mission president there had worked with the CIA several years prior to his church assignment.

Stanley Taylor, director of BYU's International Relations Department and a consultant to the Senate Intelligence Committee, says he doubts many foreign governments worry about a possible CIA-Mormon connection.

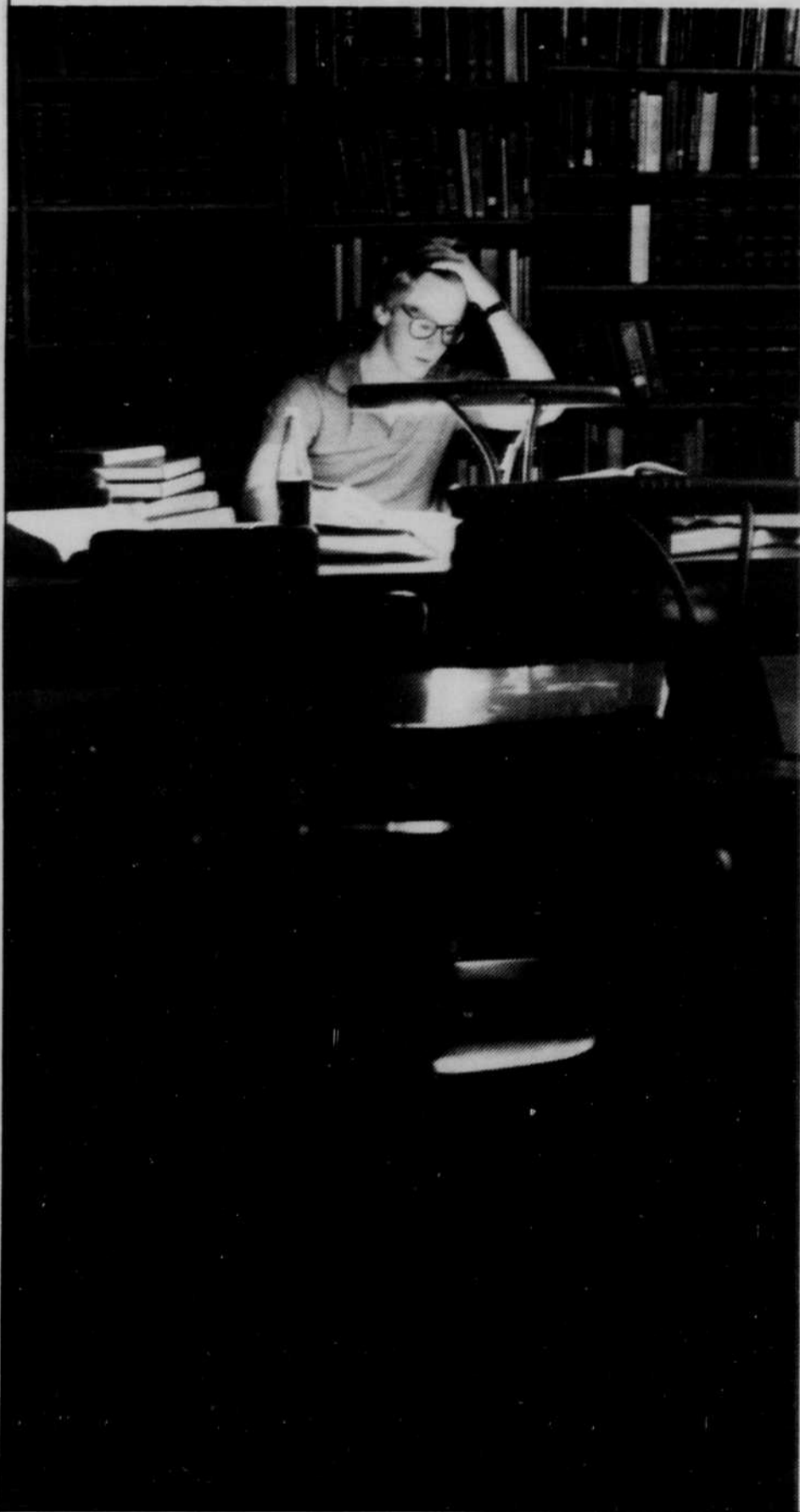
"The governments are sophisticated enough that they know better," he says. "I don't think they take it very seriously, (but) I don't doubt for a minute that a lot of the people may."

Young Mormons leaving on missions for the church have sometimes been approached to work concurrently for the CIA, Williams says, adding that he knew of none who had ever accepted the offer.

F. LaMond Tullis, professor of Latin American government at BYU, agrees.

"I don't know of any Mormon missionary who has ever been involved with the CIA," he says. "But they are out there, knocking on doors and talking to people in a way that would lead people to believe they are finding things out about the country."

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