

# Black Briefcase

*Gish Devlaminck, retired from Lockheed Martin as a Senior Systems Engineer*

## INTRODUCTION

It is not unusual for an employee to undertake a task that was not in his/her job description. Hereunder is another story of an individual taking care of the customer's needs.

## TRUSTED WITH THE PACKAGE!

My current project was nearing completion in fall of 1980. My manager told me they needed someone to work a Contract Research and Development (CRAD) project. I met with the CRAD person at Corporate Center Building C<sup>1</sup>. He briefed me on the program and said we would be developing a secret software tool to be hosted on Digital Equipment Corporation VAX that would finger print communication signals. The software would be written in C. I told him, "I've never heard of C." He said, "That's OK. It is a relatively low-level language for applications like this." He handed me *The C Programming Language* book by Brian Kernighan and Dennis Ritchie and said, "Based on what I've been told about you, you'll figure it out."

A month into the project, a second person was assigned who had her Masters of Statistics degree. She would be writing the data analysis code, but like me, she had never heard of the C programming language. So, I taught her what I knew about C. We spent many long days in one of the secure vaults in the basement of Plant 8. Eight months into the program, we were required to do a Phase 1 demonstration at an Air Research laboratory located at Griffiss Air Force Base (AFB), which today is Griffiss International Airport by Rome, NY (RME).

We were in a mad scramble to get the final touches done. Our flight to Griffiss was on a Sunday, so we could be there to start the demonstration on Monday morning. Late on Saturday afternoon I met with Security to get the users' manual and two eight-inch floppy disks wrapped in a secure package that was then put back into the safe with the courier letter I needed to carry secret documents from Eagan to Griffiss.

My coworker lived in an apartment near Plant 8. On Sunday afternoon, I stopped to pick her up on my way to Plant 8 where we picked up the secure package and courier letter from the safe. I put the secure package in my black briefcase, and we headed to the airport. Carrying the secret package required me to always hold on to my briefcase. It was even with me in the public restroom stall, and I could not go to bed until I had the package locked in a safe at Griffiss AFB. We flew to Syracuse, NY via Detroit. Instead of staying in Rome, NY, my partner had requested to stay in Utica, NY, because she had a sister living there. I was fine with this arrangement. Our plan was to drive from Syracuse to Griffiss, drop off the secret package, and then head down to the hotel in Utica, about 15 miles from Rome, NY.



---

<sup>1</sup> Corporate Square C was a leased building in the 80s, <http://vipclubmn.org/TwinCities.html#TablePlt>.

Established in 1980

In Syracuse, walking from the arrival gate to the rental car desk, my travel partner stopped at every restroom. I wasn't sure what was wrong, but at the rental car counter she told me she had forgotten to bring her Dramamine. She said she had a history of getting airsick, but she'd be OK. As darkness was setting in, we left Syracuse, but we had to make a few stops along the tollway so she could clear her upset stomach issue. We changed our plan. Instead of going to Griffiss first, we decided to go directly to our hotel in Utica. We had no cell phones at that time, so we had the hotel front desk person call her sister to come to the hotel. I was worried about dehydration and thought that someone should be with her while I took care of the secret stuff in the black briefcase. When her sister arrived at the hotel, we briefed her on the situation and then I headed to Griffiss AFB.

Arriving at Griffiss AFB, I showed my courier letter to the security guard at the main gate. He said, "I don't know what to do with this; come back in the morning." I explained to him that I could not do that and asked him to call someone on his walkie talkie that was in charge. An officer drove up to the gate in a pickup truck and told me I had to go to the control tower.

Pointing down the road from the main gate he said, "Go down this road toward the hangars. There will be another gate with a guard. He'll tell you where to park."

I got to the second guard. Pointing to the hangar he said, "Park over there, walk through the hangar and then across the tarmac to the control tower where the B-52s are parked. There are guards walking the tarmac."

I looked at him with his M-16 rifle slung over his shoulder and asked, "Are those guards on the tarmac carrying M-16 rifles? Could you get on your walkie-talkie and tell them there is a civilian crossing the tarmac and heading for the control tower?"



He got on his walkie-talkie and after a bunch of back-and-forth chatter, he said, "Go ahead, they know you're coming." When I pulled up to the hangar, one of the guards met me at the car, escorted me across the hangar and tarmac to the tower, where I dropped off the secret package and got my letter signed.

Heading back to Utica I thought I made a wrong turn coming out of the base. I ended up in an unfamiliar deserted strip mall parking lot. I parked under one of the parking lot's lights to figure out where I was. As I was standing outside of the car looking at my rental car-provided map, I noticed three guys wandering toward me at 11:00 p.m. on that Sunday night. I hopped in the car, turned onto the street, and at the stop sign saw the street sign which said Highway 49. *I wasn't lost after all!* That was the highway I had taken from Utica to Griffiss! I was comfortably on my way then, an hour later was peacefully asleep in my hotel room, secret package-free.

Editor's Notes: 1) Gish's Navy experiences provided him the knowledge as to what to do with classified information. 2) Article formatted for the web with illustration insertions by LABenson.