

CIA Agents: In From the Cold,

By Bill Peterson

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No one is sure who tacked up the red, white and blue "George Bush for President" poster beside the entrance to the CIA headquarters in Langley, Va., recently.

Workmen quickly tore it down on the mistaken assumption that the poster was on CIA property. "We're studiously staying neutral in presidential politics," said press spokesman Dale Peterson.

But the poster was an important symbolic gesture, a commentary on the 1980 presidential race and the changing attitudes about the CIA.

Simply put, no presidential campaign in recent memory—perhaps ever—has attracted as much support from the intelligence community as the campaign of former CIA director Bush.

One top foreign policy and defense adviser is Ray Cline, a former deputy director of the CIA and director of intelligence and research at the State Department. Another defense adviser is Lt. Gen. Sam V. Wilson, a former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

Lt. Gen. Harold A. Aaron, a former deputy director of DIA, is on Bush's national steering committee. Henry Knoche, Bush's right-hand man at the CIA and later acting director of the agency, is quietly campaigning for Bush in the West. And Robert Gambino recently left his job as CIA director of security to work full-time for Bush.

At least 20 other former intelligence officers are working in various volunteer capacities with the Bush campaign. Bruce Rounds, director of operations for Bush in New Hampshire, is a former CIA officer. So is Tennessee finance chairman John Thomas. Virginia coordinator Jack Coakley is a past executive director of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers. And at least three retired CIA officers work on Bush's research staff.

"It's sure as hell not a CIA coup or

anything like that," says Coakley, formerly with DIA. "But I can tell you there is a very high level of support for George Bush among current and former CIA employees."

A few years ago when the CIA was under almost daily attack for its abuses and excesses, no candidate would have dared accept such support. But today Bush openly welcomes it, and at almost every stop he receives his loudest applause when he calls for a stronger CIA.

Bush's political advisers originally were wary of their candidates' CIA ties. In a world where secret police forces routinely overthrow governments, they obviously didn't want him to become labeled "the CIA candidate."

Some of the ex-employees themselves worried about a backlash. "I could see the headlines: Bush Sprinkles Campaign With Former Spooks," says one former covert operator.

But Bush's old CIA associates argued that the public mood on the CIA was shifting. Foreign policy adviser Cline, now director of the Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown University, had been delivering pro-CIA lectures on college campuses and elsewhere since 1973 when he left the government in disgust "over what they were doing to the intelligence agencies."

For years, he was heckled at almost every stop. "I don't get any heckling now. In fact, I'm quite popular," he says. "I found there was a tremendous constituency for the CIA in the sticks when everyone in Washington was still urinating all over it."

Bush bought Cline's argument. "He felt he did a good job at the CIA, and the support of retired officers was a reflection of that," says press secretary Peter Teeley. "Quite frankly, Bush was upset with our concerns. He thought it was unfair."

The Iran and Afghanistan crisis have heightened interest still further in recent months, says Cline, a 20-year CIA veteran. "I've been beating this bush since 1974 and it's just dawning

on people that we need stronger intelligence gathering.

"It's panned out almost too good to be true," he adds. "The country is waking up just in time for George's candidacy."

There certainly isn't anything improper about the involvement of former intelligence officers in a political campaign. All of those working for Bush appear to be retired or ex-intelligence officers. And the "old boy" intelligence network doesn't dominate the Bush campaign any more than other networks of former associates Bush developed in his days at Yale University, the Republican National Committee of which he was chairman, the State Department (Bush was U.N. ambassador and envoy to China), Congress or in the oil business.

But there were some rumblings of uneasiness in the intelligence network. When the Association of Former Intelligence Officers held its an-

Out to the Bush Campaign

Coakley estimates there are about 25 former intelligence officers actively involved in the Bush effort, most on a part-time, volunteer basis. As the Virginia campaign coordinator, he is one of the highest placed former intelligence officers in the Bush campaign.

Cline, Wilson, Aaron and Gen. Richard Stillwell, once the CIA's chief of covert operations for the Far East, are considered top-level advisors on foreign policy and defense matters. Cline's role is probably the most important here. He has helped organize groups of experts for Bush to meet with, talks frequently with the candidate, and recommended his son-in-law, Stefan A. Halper, a former Nixon White House aide, be hired as Bush's director of policy development and research.

Up to this point, the advisers have worked on a very informal basis, says, Cline. "When the right time comes, I'd like to organize something like one of my old CIA staffs."

Only two of the former intelligence officers are on the Bush payroll. Former CIA security director Gambino functions as a traveling bodyguard for Bush, who has refused the Secret Service protection offered presidential candidates. The other paid worker is Harry Webster, who worked in clandestine operations during 25 years with the CIA, a Bush field coordinator in northern Florida.

More typical is Evan Parker, a CIA retiree, who has worked three days a week in Bush's research department since last fall. Few of the ex-intelligence officers knew Bush personally before the campaign; most say their CIA background never comes up in their work.

John Thomas, Bush's Tennessee finance chairman, is an exception. He was working in the CIA's clandestine operations division in Madrid when Bush was CIA director, and he uses his experience as an endorsement of

Bush's capacity to be a good president.

"When Bush became director, the agency had been dragged across the coals in all directions for several years. There was disastrously low morale, and our efficiency had fallen way off. You just couldn't get anything done.

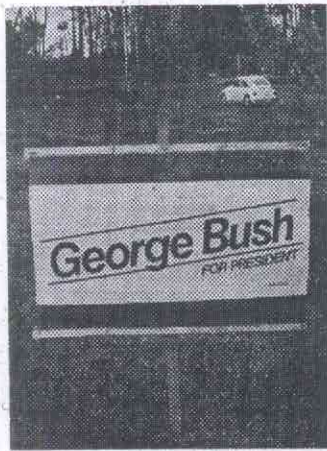
"Bush turned it around in about 90 days. He was very human and very effective, just what the agency needed at that point," he says. "I firmly believe we wouldn't be in the trouble we're in today in Iran and Afghanistan if George Bush had stayed at the CIA."

Staff writer Ronald White contributed to this report.

nual banquet last October, former executive director Coakley counted 180 of the 240 persons present wearing George Bush buttons. And he recalls David Phillips, the association founder, declaring: "Ladies and gentlemen, we have a problem and that problem is George Bush."

Coakley and other former intelligence officers see the support for Bush as a perfectly natural phenomenon. "This is the first time any significant number of us have ever gotten involved in a presidential race. I don't think it's because he's one of us. After all, he was only at the CIA one year."

"But he was there when everything was going downhill. People there perceived him as someone who did a very good job under difficult circumstances," he continues. "Maybe more important, he's the only candidate any of us can remember who has made the agency an issue. He's the guy who raised the intelligence community to a national campaign issue."



~ This Bush sign, photographed last week on the median strip of Dolley Madison Boulevard near the CIA's front entrance, has since been taken down.