

file CIA - general or noise.

Twilight of The Shadow Empire

INSIDE THE CIA
Revealing the Secrets of the
World's Most Powerful Spy Agency

By Ronald Kessler
Pocket Books. 283 pp. \$23

ECLIPSE
The Last Days of the CIA

By Mark Perry
Morrow. 528 pp. \$25

By Glenn Garvin

IN 1964, as Random House was about to go to press with an exposé of the CIA by David Wise and Thomas B. Ross titled *The Invisible Government*, the publisher got a call from chief spook John McCone. It's not a good idea to be blabbing about what we do out at Langley, McCone explained. But we don't want to be ugly about it. How about if the CIA just buys up the first printing of this book?

That's an excellent suggestion, agreed Random House president Bennett Cerf. Of course, after that we'll have a second printing. And a third. And a . . . At that point McCone bowed out, and a truly novel approach to government funding for the arts was forever lost.

Just as well. Over the next couple of years we're going to see a bumper crop of CIA books that might strain even Langley's billion-dollar annual budget. There are several reasons. One is that the agency's second-generation officers, those recruited in the late 1950s and early 1960s, are hitting retirement age. A lot of them will have tales to tell and public scores to settle.

Those officers joined the CIA when it was a fiery adolescent, when somebody could still propose feeding Fidel Castro chemicals to make his beard fall out without half the room looking away in embarrassment while the other half nervously phoned the general counsel's office. Now, as the last of those free-swingers departs, a paunchy and middle-aged CIA faces an uncertain future. Can an outfit that long considered itself a modern incarnation of the Knights Templar survive as a graying bureaucracy? And, perhaps more to the point, should it? Does the CIA still serve a serious purpose now that the Cold War, its original *raison d'être*, is over?

Books that try to answer those questions will probably kill a fearful number of trees over the next couple of years. Veteran spook-watcher Ronald Kessler's *Inside the CIA* doesn't totally succeed with answers, but it's nonetheless an unusually thoughtful and evenhanded discussion in a field that ordinarily breeds polarity.

Kessler's earlier works (including *Moscow Station*



WIDE WORLD PHOTO

Former CIA director William J. Casey

and *Escape From the CIA*) have mostly concentrated on hideous American intelligence screw-ups. *Inside the CIA*, however, is quite unlike anything that Kessler—or anybody else, for that matter—has ever authored. Written with the limited cooperation of the CIA, it's a detailed examination of what the agency actually does on a day-to-day basis.

Most writing on the CIA has concentrated on the adventures (and misadventures) of the agency's operations directorate, which is responsible for recruiting traitors in other governments, setting up covert guerrilla armies, and all the other bare-knuckle stuff that we associate with spying. Kessler doesn't neglect operations, but he also illuminates the agency's lesser-known corners: the crystal-ball-gazing analysts who must try to make sense out of all the raw intelligence the CIA gathers; the techno-nerds who devise ways to conceal microphones in fake olives; the lucky lab assistants who get to analyze the stolen feces of world leaders. There's even a chapter titled "Crateology" on the obscure science of divining the contents of shipping containers.

Kessler's prose, though not always elegant ("like an

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elephant crapping during a circus, covert action is a sideshow to the CIA's main activities") is brisk and clear. And his account is studded with anecdotes that are always instructive and often funny. My favorite was the tale of a joint CIA/FBI counterintelligence team that tried to recruit a KGB officer with a \$20 million bribe as he squeezed oranges in the produce section at the Safeway on Wisconsin Avenue. "Young man, I appreciate the offer," the Soviet replied as he walked away. "If I were 20 years younger, I'd give it serious consideration." If only they'd waited until after he'd seen the meat prices . . .

Kessler's analysis, however, is at times not up to the standards of his reporting. After surveying the CIA's vast empire— 22,000 full-time employees scattered across 22 offices in Washington and 130 others around the world—he concludes that the question of the agency's direction in a post-Soviet world is irrelevant. "Even at the height of the Cold War," he argues, "the CIA had allocated no more than 12 percent of its budget to spying on the Soviets."

That's nonsense. The CIA was set up in 1947 specifically because the Truman administration believed that the traditional organs of U.S. intelligence collection—the State Department and the military—were not capable of penetrating the Iron Curtain. In the beginning, 100 percent of the CIA's budget was devoted to the Soviet bloc. Later, the agency expanded, but its focus never shifted. Practically everything that went on in the African and Latin American divisions for the past 30 years, for example, was aimed at countering communist influence.

KESSLER's argument, however, looks considerably stronger when counterpoised against the daft notions in Mark Perry's *Eclipse*. Perry, as may be inferred from his title, believes the CIA is already dead, poisoned by William Casey, George Bush and all the usual suspects of the past 12 years. They did it by introducing the virus of politics into the agency's virginal bloodstream.

There is something endearing, I suppose, about Perry's insistence that the CIA until recently was run by chaste technocrats with a mystic ability to glide untouched above the political bloodletting. But we're all getting a little old for fairy tales. A CIA director works for the president, and presidents are never shy about giving orders. The Kennedy brothers bullied the agency ceaselessly on the subject of Castro. The Johnson administration successfully demanded that the CIA drop its estimate of Viet Cong strength. And Nixon ordered the agency to embark on a campaign against Salvador Allende in Chile that everyone at the agency knew would fail.

Alas, Perry's fanciful theories are the high points of his tedious, error-ridden *Eclipse*. He's done what I hadn't thought possible: written a book about the CIA that is totally, painfully *dull*. The only way bookstores are going to move this snoozer is if John McCone comes calling with a bag of cash. ■