



## THE LATEST VICTIM OF THE 'INVISIBLE' WAR

What Really Happened to CIA Figure John Paisley?



## Washington

**O**N THE MOONLIT NIGHT of Sept. 23, 1978, John Arthur Paisley vanished in the waters of Chesapeake bay, the silent kingdom of oysters and crabs. He was a quiet 55-year-old man who had a passion for solitary sailing; he was also an expert on Soviet nuclear capability who had worked for the Central Intelligence Agency.

Paisley was last seen that morning, crossing a narrow section of the bay aboard his sloop Brillig, a name he had picked from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*. The empty boat ran aground under full sail the following morning, its ship-to-shore radio still crackling.

A week later, on October 1, a bloated and decomposed body was found floating in the bay, a nine-millimeter gunshot wound in the back of the head, weighted diver's belts around the waist. The next day, the body was identified by Maryland's chief medical examiner as that of John Arthur Paisley. Over the next 18 days, however, fingerprint identification could not be made since neither the CIA nor the FBI could locate a set of Paisley's fingerprints. The hands were severed and sent to the FBI, and the body was cremated in a CIA-approved funeral home outside Washington, D.C.

The Maryland State Police initially suggested that death was by suicide, and the CIA, to questions posed by reporters, saw "no reason to disagree." The Maryland State Police later concluded that cause of death was "undetermined" after a belated investigation marred by what they called the "contamination" of evidence by CIA security officers, who were the first ones to search the boat. Presented with this statement by the Maryland State Police, spokesmen for the CIA said that the agency was not an investigative one and could not take part in any criminal investigation.

The CIA spokesmen were circumspect, too, when it came time to release information on John Arthur Paisley. As a matter of policy, the CIA almost never discloses complete biographical data on its officers; various aspects of their careers could provide clues about secret operations they may have been engaged in and thus compromise the agency's "sources and methods."

In its public statements, therefore, the CIA portrayed Paisley as a rather unimportant fellow as intelligence officers go. Prior to his retirement in 1974, Paisley had served as deputy chief of the CIA's Office of Strategic Research, which deals with assessments of Soviet nuclear forces, and the agency emphasized that he was just another senior analyst, having nothing to do with clandestine operations.

After further prodding by reporters, CIA spokesmen acknowledged that Paisley was still a "consultant" to the agency at the time of his disappearance, but they insisted that he had had no access to highly classified information since

his retirement. Yet from information supplied to this reporter by extremely authoritative intelligence sources in Washington, another John Arthur Paisley emerges.

Paisley was an unusually important CIA figure who was involved in some of the most sensitive agency operations since the late 1940s.

**Paisley's  
mysterious  
death  
was called  
one of the  
'spookiest'  
cases  
involving  
a CIA man**



JOHN PAISLEY

Until September 23, he was privy to highly secret intelligence materials. These are the highlights of the Paisley connection:

—Within two years of his official 1974 retirement, Paisley was brought back by the CIA to coordinate efforts to evaluate the Soviet nuclear threat — one of the agency's most secret projects. From August 1976 on, he had access to the most highly classified intelligence documents. He had been working on materials related to this project aboard his sloop at the time of his disappearance.

—When it washed ashore, the Brillig carried sophisticated communications equipment designed for secret transmissions.

—During the 1960s, Paisley helped to debrief Yuri Ivanovich Nosenko, the most senior KGB defector in the United States. Paisley and Nosenko later became friends, and the CIA officer frequently visited him in his North Carolina hideout — most recently, last spring.



—Paisley's widow, Maryann, was employed for a year in 1974 in one of the most sensitive divisions of the CIA: the office handling funds for foreign clandestine operations. Her immediate superior was Katherine Hart, wife of an agency officer who had dealt extensively with Nosenko.

—Paisley was a contributor to the top secret manual on the operations of the United States KH-11 spy-in-the-sky satellite, the most sophisticated in this generation of orbiters, targeted on Soviet strategic deployments. This was the manual sold last summer to the KGB, the Soviet secret service, by William P. Kampiles, a young CIA officer who last November was convicted on espionage charges.

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence considers the Paisley affair sufficiently significant to have launched a quiet but energetic investigation of its own to determine what exactly happened that September night on Chesapeake bay, and in the days thereafter. The committee, chaired by Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana, had hoped to come up with a report before Thanksgiving, but it has run into such difficulties trying to learn the truth of the events that it is unlikely to come up with conclusions, if any, before mid-January.

The investigation could hardly have come at a worse time. Cracks in internal security have been bedeviling the agency in recent years amid the mysteries of other disappearances, thefts of top-secret documents and all the current talk about whether a Soviet "mole" — a deep-cover operative in a high-level position — has penetrated the American intelligence community. In addition, the CIA's ability to collect and effectively evaluate vital foreign intelligence is now under attack.

Policy-making officials in many parts of the administration are unhappy with the agency's assessment of Soviet missilery, and the CIA failed to anticipate the present crises in Iran and Nicaragua, despite clear signals. In November, in a most unusual move, President Carter reprimanded Admiral Stansfield Turner, the director of Central Intelligence, for these shortcomings, further damaging morale in the agency, which has not fully recovered from the congressional investigations of its past scandals, the massive firings of its clandestine-services officers under

the Turner regime, and the new constraints placed on its overseas sleuthing.

Not least among the CIA's problems is Paisley's widow, whose loyalty to the agency seems to be flagging. Having first worked closely with CIA security officers after Paisley's disappearance, she recently retained Bernard Fensterwald, a well-known Washington attorney, to help her find out what happened to her husband. Mrs. Paisley refuses to talk to reporters, but friends say that she questions both the suicide theory and the identity of the body found in the bay. She did not see Paisley's body, nor the photographs of it. Actually, no one who had known Paisley in life is reported to have been shown the body before the cremation.

From the accounts of the Maryland State Police, the FBI, the Coast Guard, the medical examiners, sources in the intelligence community, and from people who knew him, it is possible to reconstruct events leading to what Senate investigators familiar with the case have described as one of the "spookiest" cases ever involving a CIA officer.

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**J**OHAN ARTHUR PAISLEY'S final drama began in the late afternoon of Saturday, September 23, a warm autumn day. He had sailed aboard the sloop Brillig that morning from a mooring on Solomons Island, at the mouth of Patuxent river, to Hooper Island on the eastern shore of Chesapeake bay — a short and easy easterly crossing — with friend or friends unknown. The mooring belongs to Colonel Norman Wilson, a retired Air Force officer who had served in a top-secret post in the Defense Intelligence Agency and had been Paisley's friend for about ten years.

According to Colonel Wilson, he was told by a person (whom he will not identify) sometime during the day that Paisley wanted to be called on the radio. Colonel Wilson contacted the Brillig, as he recalls, between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. and Paisley advised him that "he would be in after dark," asking that the dock lights be left on. This was the last anyone heard from Paisley.

At 10:30 a.m. the next day, Sunday, September 24, the Coast Guard station at Inigoes on Chesapeake bay was notified by telephone by a

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National Park Police ranger that two separate pleasure craft had informed him of sighting a vessel under full sail aground at Point Lookout where the Potomac river runs into the bay.

The ranger had driven to Point Lookout. He had ascertained that nobody was aboard, and "that there were no tracks in the sand, leading to or from the boat." He then put in the call to the Coast Guard. Shortly afterward, the Coast Guard refloated the Brillig and towed her to Ingoes.

Paisley's disappearance went unreported publicly for the rest of the week. Then, at 3:48 p.m. on Sunday, October 1, the Coast Guard station on Taylors island, on the bay's eastern shore, received a radio message from the pleasure craft Ramada that a body was floating in the water east of the mouth of the Patuxent river, just a few miles from the Solomons island mooring. A Coast Guard utility boat picked up the frightfully decomposed body at 5:15 p.m., taking it to the Naval Ordnance Dock on Solomons island.

The Maryland State Police had been notified by radio. A Maryland state trooper and Dr. George Weems, assistant state medical examiner, were awaiting the body's arrival. Dr. Weems spent 30 minutes in a preliminary examination, then had the body dispatched to the office of the state medical examiner in Baltimore. The autopsy was apparently performed the next day; the death certificate, made out in the name of John Arthur Paisley, was signed on October 2 by Dr. Russell Fisher, the chief medical examiner.

At this point, the immediate question that comes to mind is this: How could Dr. Fisher be sure that the body was Paisley's? It was decomposed beyond recognition, and the top layer of skin on one hand had been eroded. All hair, including Paisley's scraggly beard, was gone. Fingerprint identification was still possible since one hand was relatively unscathed, but, incredibly, neither the CIA nor the FBI had Paisley's fingerprint sets in their records. A CIA spokesman explained to this reporter that while all agency employees are fingerprinted and that the impressions are sent to the FBI, in this instance they had been "inadvertently destroyed" in the bureau.

The Maryland State Police, which made no

attempt to lift fingerprints from the boat (none were lifted from Paisley's apartment or office, either), said that on October 19 the FBI came up with a set of prints. They are said by the

**Paisley  
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by Kampiles**



WILLIAM KAMPILES

Maryland State Police to have been voluntarily given to the bureau by Paisley when he was 17 years old; the fingerprints were filed under the name of "Jack Paisley." It is not known why Paisley, if that's who "Jack Paisley" was, would wish to volunteer a set of his fingerprints — a most unusual occurrence. If indeed John Paisley's fingerprints were not lifted from his boat, office or apartment, it is impossible to determine whether the "Jack Paisley" fingerprints belonged to John Arthur Paisley.

Five days after the autopsy, a dentist who had treated Paisley reportedly identified as his work an upper plate removed from the body's mouth. The dentist has refused to discuss his findings with reporters.

The body identified as Paisley's was cremated a few days following the autopsy at a funeral home in suburban Virginia, apparently on Mrs. Paisley's instructions. But the hands were first severed (it is not known who had ordered this), and sent to the FBI Spokesmen for federal agencies have refused to discuss the reasons for this unusual procedure, seemingly unnecessary if

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the body had been positively identified. To date, the FBI has not disclosed the disposition of the severed hands.

Also puzzling are the details of Paisley's demise. The bullet that killed him entered his head behind his left ear, an unusual form of suicide, if suicide it was. Paisley's body was weighted with two 38-pound diver's belts. If Paisley had shot himself, then he must have done it with his left hand while using his right hand to hold on to the boat's railing, a rather improbable position.

The only conceivable reason for wearing the diver's belts would be to make sure that his body would not surface — to conceal the fact of suicide. But it remains unclear why Paisley would have wished this. Paisley family attorneys say that insurance payments on his two policies

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ADMIRAL TURNER

would have been made even if there had been a finding of suicide. In newspaper interviews, Paisley's psychiatrist and a woman friend whom he saw often before his disappearance said that he had given no "clues" of contemplating suicide, although they say he may have undergone an "emotional crisis" that September weekend.

There is still another mystery. Intelligence sources say that Paisley's sloop was equipped with a "burst transceiver," a radio device designed to transmit and receive tens of thousands of words or signals on a preset frequency. Burst transceivers are, in effect, scramblers for top-secret communication, normally used by the CIA and the National Security Agency, which is in charge of classified intelligence communications for the United States

government. They can receive and decode, through tape transcripts, transmissions from surveillance satellites.

CIA spokesmen, admitting that the sloop Brillig carried "sophisticated" radio equipment, have denied that the equipment had been issued by the agency. Burst transceivers, however, are not available commercially. (One cannot rule out the possibility that the equipment was supplied by the top-secret National Security Agency.)

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**W**HAT, THEN, ACTUALLY did happen to Paisley on the night of Sept. 23? Although suicide cannot be wholly ruled out, motivational clues are missing. Paisley was in good health, and his family attorneys firmly deny he faced financial problems. He had an income well over \$50,000 annually, from his government pension, CIA consulting fees and his accountancy job. He and Maryann were making efforts to mend their marriage. Paisley was close to his two grown-up children.

If suicide it was, why did Paisley attempt to prevent the discovery of the body by wearing the diver's belts over his dungarees and T-shirt? The nine-millimeter pistol he usually kept aboard the Brillig was gone; the Coast Guard says it is virtually impossible to look for it in 150 feet of water. A theory with very little currency was that Paisley might have killed himself in this fashion because in some unknown way he had been compromised with Soviet intelligence.

If it was not suicide, who pulled the trigger? There has been some speculation that if Paisley was murdered, whoever killed him captured him on the Brillig, and moved him to another craft for the execution. Some intelligence experts say that Paisley's profound knowledge of the CIA's methods of acquiring and evaluating secret data on Soviet nuclear forces could make him an inviting target for the KGB. But agency people doubt this. It is an unwritten code of behavior that the CIA and the KGB do not murder each other's operatives — except under the most extraordinary circumstances. Numerous interviews within the intelligence community offer no suggestions as to why the KGB would be interested in Paisley's death.

In the end we do not know, and we may never know, what happened to John Arthur Paisley. However he met his fate, in some sense he is the latest casualty of the great intelligence wars that are invisibly waged around us.

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