

Letters to the editor
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Book World's two lead reviews of October 23 illustrate how, when reviewers are underinformed and begin with prejudices despite seeming to be well credentialed, they are unfair to the books they review and mislead their readers about those books.

Neither Reviewer Richard Gid Powers nor author Mark Riebling has any knowledge of the official evidence in the JFK assassination ^{and about J. Edgar Hoover} to say what each did.

Powers: "...the FBI was ignoring even stronger indications that Oswald was a strange, dangerous character," which is entirely fictitious, and "the Bureau's failure to pay attention to the obvious was such a dereliction of duty that for months it reduced J. Edgar Hoover to a slathering, raving maniac out to wreak vengeance on every agent who worked on the case," which is also fiction.

There is absolutely nothing in Oswald's real life or in the official mythology about it that marked him as either "strange" or "dangerous."

Hoover was hysterical but not "a slathering, raving maniac", for a short period after the JFK assassination, not "for months"; there was no FBI "dereliction of duty" before the assassination; Hoover did not "wreak vengeance on every agent who worked on the case," hundreds of them, 17 only were disciplined and that unfairly; and what really bugged Hoover is that his and the FBI's reputation would suffer because they did not prevent the assassination, which was so sharply in contrast with the reputation he had built for himself and for the FBI throughout his long career of the most effective propaganda.

Riebling is also an ignoramus in saying, Powers's words, "that the Kennedy assassination could have been prevented if the CIA had only passed on to the FBI the news that Oswald spoke to a KGB agent attached to Soviet death squads" in the Mexico City consulate.

Except in the mythologies of both sides in the controversy, there is no relevance at all in that chance meeting and in fact the FBI, which had its legal attache staff in our embassy there, knew about this from the ^{CIA} ~~VIS~~ there almost as soon as it happened.

It was the FBI, in fact, that prevented the terrible consequences of the CIA's swallowing the obvious fabrication of a Dominican intelligence agent that he saw Oswald being ^{MI} paid to do the dastardly deed in the Cuban consulate in Mexico City, the canard that if Ambassador ^{Mann} had had his way when he latched onto what no intelligent child should have believed, ^{could have resulted in a real war} Hoover in particular applied pressure to have Gilberto Alvarado ^U Ugarte grilled vigorously. He then confessed to making it all up. ^{Alvarado Ugarte "lie"} He ~~did that carelessly~~ and poorly because, without ^{any} question, Oswald was in New Orleans when allegedly getting paid off in the Mexico city Cuban consulate.

Powers is also ignorant of the fact of his undescribed "well-known chestnut of Pearl Harbor conspiracy theory" in referring only to what Dushko ^Popov said, that he gave advance knowledge of it to the FBI. (I am not aware of any FBI denial of that.) There is no real question of Hoover's knowledge of Pearl Harbor in advance of the fact because the British told him after picking it up on their Enigma intercepts.

(Moreover, it was not all that hard to anticipate. I predicted it and much else the Japanese then did in an article published less than three months before it happened. Katherine C. (Casey) Blackburn, then ^{The Office of Government Reports} Number 2 in that agency, used my research ~~XXXX~~ beginning the day after that attack in planting stories in the media. If I could ~~not~~ do that, why not the pros in government and the media?)

Warner's unfair criticism of David Corn includes Corn's writing that Ted Shackley "deserves no credit whatsoever for discovering the Soviet missiles in Cuba while he was in charge of Cuban operations." Corn is 100% correct. Contrary to the official mythology about when they were discovered, they were in fact discovered earlier by Defense Intelligence Agency Colonel John Ralph Wright, Jr., and he was decorated for it after ^{the} a discrete passing of time, with a second oak leaf cluster for his Legion of Merit the next year, in June, 1963.

It is, I believe, tragic enough that our history is official ^{by} rewritten without the mythologies being added to and perpetuated by those who later write about them without really learning the actualities of what they write about.

Harold Wesley

Apologies for my typing and writing. I'm 81, in impaired health and neither my typing nor writing can be any better.

I recognize this may be a bit long for you. If it interests you feel free to cut it as long as meaning is not changed.

I'm sending a copy to Ms King for her information.

What I say comes from what I learned in writing seven published books about the JFK assassination, none ever reviewed by the Post, and from the third of a million pages of once withheld official records I obtained by a dozen or so FOIA lawsuits. Some were also precedental and one led to the 1974 amending of the Act's investigatory files exemption. My Whitewash: The Report on the Warren Report, was the first book on that subject. It was first published in August, 19⁶⁵. My current book, badly butchered in being published, is Case Open. From neither Gerald Posner of the knowingly mistitled Case Closed, to whom I referred as a syhster, as a literary thief and as a writer who has trouble telling the truth even by accident, nor from any of the innumerable others of whom I was critical in my earlier six books on the JFK assassination have I gotten any letter or phone call complaining of unfairness or inaccuracy. It may amuse you and Ms. King to know that all Posner could say ^{in his Anchor reprint} in response to my severe criticism is to prove that even by accident he cannot be truthful. He says what he knows is not true, that I am of what he refers to as "the conspiracy press," and he follows this with saying that for Case Open I "found my first publisher." It is in fact my at least 12th commercial printing, counting reprints, and my fifth original commercial publication, two abroad.

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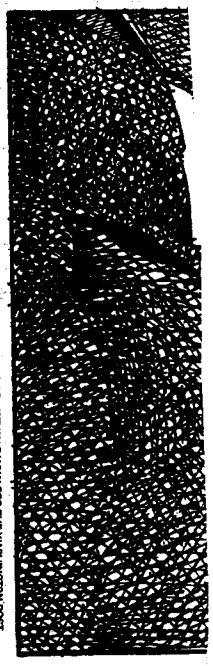
Book World

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23, 1994



Ted Shackley and J. Edgar Hoover

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVAN BANYAL FOR THE WASHINGTON POST



The Spy as Bureaucrat

BLOND GHOST

Ted Shackley and the CIA's Crusades

By David Corn

Simon & Schuster. 509 pp. \$27.50

By Roger Warner

"PEOPLE WHO HOLD the secrets do not have to be deep or interesting," writes David Corn, and he should know. The Washington editor of the *Nation* magazine, Corn has used the career of Theodore G. Shackley, a cold, bland Central Intelligence Agency bureaucrat, as the centerpiece for an important new book on the CIA.

Ted Shackley is not a household name, but it rings a bell with those who are fascinated by the hidden world of intelligence-gathering and covert operations. As Corn puts it, Shackley lived the Cold War. "He sent foreign intelligence agents to their doom in Germany in the 1950s. He managed a small secret war against Cuba, then oversaw a larger one in Laos. He directed intelligence in Vietnam during a war of profound intelligence failures. In Washington, Shackley signed the orders for scores of espionage and covert action operations around the globe." If Jimmy Carter hadn't won the 1976 presidential election, Shackley might well have become director of Central Intelligence, the nation's top spook. Instead, due to his association with Edwin Wilson, a rogue CIA operative, his career stalled.

Entering private business, Shackley met in 1984 with Manucher Ghorbanifar, an Iranian who proposed swapping U.S.-made TOW missiles for American hostages in Lebanon. Though Shackley quickly bowed out, the Ghorbanifar

Roger Warner is a journalist and the author of a forthcoming book on the American covert war in Laos.

meeting was an antecedent of the Iran-contra operation, in which some of his old colleagues, such as Richard Secord, played major roles.

Does Shackley, then, have the kind of resumé to interest John le Carre? Probably not. As a character, Shackley is less interesting than the covert world of which he was a part, neither likable enough to admire nor evil enough to consider a satisfactory villain. He was an organization man, an American *apparatchik*. From Corn's book emerges a portrait of a bureaucrat-as-climber, a man with great ambition but little compassion; an exceptionally smart man, but one who seldom thought about the wider consequences of the operations he oversaw.

Discovering this dismal truth early on, Corn plowed ahead where the faint of heart would have given up. A diligent researcher, aided by interns for the *Nation*, he dug up everything he could find on Shackley, talked to people who had worked with Shackley, and wrote a book in which the real subject is the CIA as a working bureaucracy. This is a crucial point. Knowing that the CIA is a bureaucracy makes it easier to understand its institutional blunders, such as its failure to forecast the crumbling of the Soviet empire, and the recent Aldrich Ames fiasco, in which insiders who could have and should have discovered a traitor in their midst neglected to do so for years on end. It also helps explain how someone like Shackley could nearly make it to the top—according to Corn, as a self-promoting manager who cared less about the real world of grassroots field operations than he did about looking good to his superiors.

Blond Ghost—the title refers to a nickname bestowed on the light-haired Shackley during his tour in South Vietnam—is not a page-turner. Its writing style veers from the competent to the eloquent and back again. It is an impres-

Continued on page 14

Blond Ghost

Continued from page 1

sive feat of research, considering that most of the government documents on the subject are still secret and unobtainable. (In the part of Shackley's career I am most familiar with, his role in the CIA's covert war in Laos, Corn makes a few minor errors but gets the big picture quite right.)

THE BOOK'S only noteworthy flaw, in my opinion, is that in spite of a studious attempt to be evenhanded, Corn appears to have a latent personal bias against Shackley that surfaces periodically and colors his judgments of Shackley's successes and failures. Thus—I am only slightly exaggerating—it would be possible to read *Blond Ghost* and conclude that Shackley should have known at the time about the Soviet penetration of the Berlin tunnel wire-

tapping of the 1950s; that he deserves no credit whatsoever for discovering the Soviet missiles in Cuba while he was in charge of Cuban operations; that he personally ruined the CIA's war in Laos; that if he had been doing his job better, the CIA would have acted with greater honor in its evacuation of Saigon in 1975; that a Shackley goof made it financially possible for Phillip Agee to write his revelation of CIA secrets, and so on. "In the intelligence business," an anonymous source laments to Corn, "nothing works very well," and this point could have borne even more examination than it received.

Nevertheless, *Blond Ghost* greatly enlarges our understanding of the CIA as an organization, and deserves a space on that small shelf of worthwhile books about the agency. Shackley himself is said to be upset about the book, and no wonder. Old spies hate being spied upon, even if—perhaps especially if—the intelligence developed against them is largely accurate. ■

Undercover Rivalries

WEDGE
The Secret War Between
The FBI and the CIA

By Mark Riebling
Knopf. 563 pp. \$27.50

By Richard Gid Powers

NOBODY IN American history ever fought more viciously to protect bureaucratic turf than J. Edgar Hoover, which in no small measure was why he lasted as FBI director for 48 years. The idea of a rival organization to gather foreign intelligence was an outrage to Hoover. When such came to pass in the form of William B. Donovan's office of the "Coordinator of Intelligence" (the Office of Strategic Services during the war) and was then made permanent in 1947 as the Central Intelligence Agency, Hoover looked upon it with loathing and threw his considerable talents into battling it every step of the way.

It is Mark Riebling's thesis in *Wedge* that "the failure to solve [the conflict between the CIA and FBI] has damaged the national security and, to that extent, imperiled the Re-

Richard Gid Powers is the author of "Secrecy and Power: The Life of J. Edgar Hoover" and the forthcoming "Not Without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism."

Wedge

*British did tell Hoover
how they learned from
them. Every one, including
the CIA.*

Continued from page 1

with a questionnaire the Germans had given him outlining the intelligence they wanted him to gather in America. As Riebling (following Popov and John Toland) tells the story, this was a "Pearl Harbor Questionnaire," and if a benighted J. Edgar Hoover had only done his job and trotted the thing over to Bill Donovan, the Pearl Harbor disaster could have been averted. But as Gordon Prange demonstrated in his *Pearl Harbor: The Verdict of History*, the Popov questionnaire was not exclusively or even mostly about Pearl Harbor—it was a general shopping list of information on many American installations.

Just as misguided and illogical is his thesis that the Kennedy assassination could have been prevented if the CIA had only passed on to the FBI the news that an official at the Soviet embassy in Mexico City who talked to Oswald shortly before the assassination was a KGB agent attached to Soviet death squads. But the FBI was ignoring even stronger indications that Oswald was a strange, dangerous character, and the Bureau's failure to pay attention to the obvious was such a dereliction of duty that for months it reduced J. Edgar Hoover to a slathering, raving maniac out to wreak vengeance on every agent who worked on the case.

This points to Riebling's failure to understand the signal/noise problem in intelligence post-mortems—that only after the fact can the signal (true information) be separated from the meaningless facts (noise)—and to his unfamiliarity with authorities like Gordon Prange or Gerald Posner, who have laid to rest so much of this tedious conspiracy-theorizing.

public." He supports this argument with a lively and engaging narrative of interagency bungling, infighting, malfeasance and nonfeasance in every well-known intelligence case in the history of the CIA and the FBI, providing fresh and well-rounded portraits of well-known and ought-to-be-well-known counterintelligence agents, drawing on scores of original and rewarding interviews.

But unfortunately, Riebling has taken his material and turned it into a series of "for the loss of a nail the war was lost" stories in which the missing nail is the lack of effective coordination between the CIA and FBI. Anyone who knows the literature of counterintelligence gets the sinking sensation that what starts badly is going to end badly when Riebling's first case study is that well-known chestnut of Pearl Harbor conspiracy theory, the old yarn about a double agent for the British and the Germans, Dusko Popov (nicknamed "Tricycle"), who showed up at the FBI in 1941

Continued on page 14

Riebling does a nice job of guiding the reader through the Byzantine disagreements between the CIA and the FBI over the reliability of notable Soviet defectors, but his argument that interagency rivalries kept the government from reaching accurate analysis of their revelations begs the question: The true loyalty of these double agents was and is still fundamentally unknowable. It was probably wise to have some disagreement as to the reliability of their stories.

POPULAR CULTURE may well believe that the underlying explanation for great public events is the devious machinations of secretive elites, but the world doesn't work that way. The real story in these superficially exciting revelations of official secrets is that there is no story—the squabbles between J. Edgar Hoover and Wild Bill Donovan's many successors do not explain the history of our times. As the old truism has it, what is amazing is not true, and what is true is not amazing.

After nearly 500 pages of breathless revelations of how the nation was nearly destroyed by the "Wedge" between the FBI and CIA, the reader better brace himself against whiplash before reading Riebling's final paragraph:

"And yet, paradoxically, the FBI-CIA war may also be seen as a cause and a symptom of national strength. . . . If our pragmatism suggests that the best remedy for the FBI-CIA war is probably some sort of superagency, our idealism guarantees that no such final solution will ever be tried. If we fear a police state where the potential for it does not really exist, perhaps that is one of the better sides to err on." But if, after all, that inefficiency is the price of freedom, why then all the fuss?