

'TOP SECRET: CODENAME JASON'

The Secret War Over Bombing

Society of Physicists Torn by Moral Question

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Every summer for the last 14 years about 40 of the best known physicists in America, their wives and children, mysteriously disappear.

They gather, under strict security, at a secret location that changes every year. While the women and children amuse themselves, the men meet to discuss matters of vital importance to the security of the nation.

Top Pentagon officials, in civilian clothes, come and go. Central Intelligence Agency officials may meet with them, carrying padlocked brief cases.

THE PHYSICISTS are part of an organization so secret its existence was completely unknown outside of top government levels for a decade. It operates under the codename Jason.

Jason took a vital role in some aspects of the Vietnam War, the anti-ballistic missile system (ABM), anti-submarine warfare and the nuclear test ban treaty.

"You can figure that any matter of great current concern to the Department of Defense will be the concern of the Jasons," a government official once said.

Yet until this week, when a series

of confrontations by radicals with several Jasons earned publicity within the scientific community, few of their co-physicists knew Jason existed.

THE LATEST CONFRONTATION, at the American Physical Association meeting in New York this week, showed clearly that not every one in Jason is proud of its role in American affairs.

In a quiet voice that seemed out of place in the garnish East Ballroom of the New York Hilton, Dr. Marvin Goldberger, chairman of the physics

Continued on Page 19-A, Col. 1

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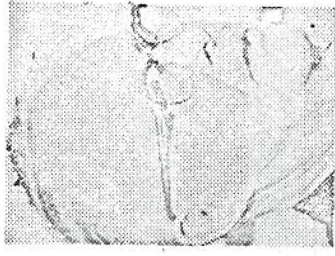
department at Princeton and a Jason founder, told 200 persons of the anguish and moral crisis he felt from his role in Jason.

Using Goldbergers' statements, research by Science Magazine, the Pentagon Papers, and background from several radical organizations, it is possible to piece together the dramatic and frustrating story of this remarkable organization.

No one on the outside knows how many scientists are members of Jason. The best guess is between 40 and 45.

One radical group has published a list of 43 men it says belong to Jason. While the list is right more than it is wrong there are several errors in it. According to Dr. H. W. Lewis, University of California at Santa Barbara, the present chairman of Jason.

It is possible to identify some names, including those of five Nobel Prize Winners: Dr. Charles Townes, University of California at Berkeley, (who won the prize in 1964 for work leading to the invention of the laser); Dr. Donald Glaser, also Berkeley (1960, invention of the bubble chamber); Dr. Luis Alvarez, also Berkeley (1968, contributions to elemental particle physics), Dr. Murray Gell-Mann, California Institute of Technology (1969, contributions to particle physics and discover of the "quark") and Dr. Eugene P. Wigner, Princeton (1963, nuclear physics).



DR. LUIS ALVAREZ
... Berkeley, '68

JASON WILL NOT GIVE OUT a complete list because of a fear that the members will be harassed by radicals. The family of one Jason has allegedly been threatened.

Jason is a division of the super-secret Institute for Defense Analyses, which works out of a 10-story, unmarked building near the Pentagon in suburban Virginia. With the possible exception of the now-defunct President's Science Advisory Committee, no other government-science organization had the influence of Jason.

Jason was founded in 1959 in Los Alamos by five scientists, most in their 30s, as a device to permit younger scientists in the country to have some influence with the government. It soon became something of a club.

"We were all bright young men together; we were all precocious," said Freeman Dyson of Princeton in an interview in Science Magazine.

ONE OF JASON'S first tasks was to study the ABM concept. They quickly concluded it would not work, a conclusion Mose Jason's sell hold, although the Nixon Administration is now installing one complex.

"We have not stopped the placement of the ABM, that is true," Goldberger said in the Hilton session. "But there are lot worse systems than the one now used."

Former Defense secretary Robert McNamara agreed with their appraisal of the ABM as did other members of the Kennedy Administration, which won them important allies for the harder days to follow.

Jason's operation became fairly standard. On some weekends and for a few months every summer Jasons and their families went into summer sessions. The site was always near a beach to keep the families busy while the men worked.

The United States was then slipping deeper and deeper into the war in Vietnam, but it was not until 1966 that Jason considered the matter.

At that time Operation Rolling Thunder—President Johnson's campaign to bomb North Vietnam into submission and end the infiltration to the South—was being esca-

lated. Despite assurances of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the bombing did not appear to be working.

AT ABOUT THAT TIME, Harvard Law Professor Roger Fisher, in a letter to Assistant Secretary of Defense John T. McNaughton, suggested an electronic barrier across Vietnam to block infiltration routes.

Shortly thereafter a small group of Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) scientists (known as the "Charles River Gang") independently suggested to McNamara that a group of scientists get together to discuss Vietnam. Although the group contained such scientific luminaries as Dr. George Kistiakowsky of Harvard, it probably was not aware that just such a study group already existed.

McNamara, who according to the Pentagon Papers was growing disillusioned about the bombing, told McNaughton to put the groups to work and to look at Fisher's barricade suggestion.

McNaughton brought the "Charles River Gang" and Jason together at a girls school in Wellesley, Mass. A

total of 47 scientists attended; the Pentagon Papers said the group was the "dream of the scholarly community in technical fields."

THEY EVENTUALLY SPLIT into two groups. The Massachusetts contingent worked on the first part of the report on the bombing. The Jasons returned to their summer encampment, that year at Santa Barbara, Calif., to work on an alternative suggestion.

In the end of August, their report was ready.

Meanwhile the Pentagon had finally convinced McNamara and President Johnson that by bombing oil depots and refineries in North Vietnam the infiltration would quickly be brought to an end.

By the time the Jason-Massachusetts report was ready, it was evident to McNamara the new bombing was doing nothing of the sort. When he saw the report it confirmed his fears.

The report is document number 117 in the Pentagon Papers New York Times Edition, and page 210 of the Beacon Press Edition. It begins: turn rule turn rule

"As of July 1966 the U. S. bombing of North Vietnam (NVN) had had no measurable direct effect on Hanoi's ability to mount and support military operations in the South at the current level . . . The counter-measures introduced by Hanoi effectively reduced the impact of U. S. bombing."

Moreover, the report said, it was doubtful any bombing of the North would cut off infiltration or force the North Vietnamese to bow. The North was a small, agricultural country whose industrial base was spread out and not subject to bombing attacks.

THE DAMAGE from Rolling Thunder was being quickly offset by new shipments from China and Russia.

The report also pointed out there was no historical precedent for the notion that aerial bombardment will break the will of a people. The report, in short, flew directly into the teeth of the Pentagon's concept of how the war should be fought.

As an alternative to the bombing, Jason suggested a barrier of computer-tended sensors and land mines. The barrier, 20 kilometers by 100 kilometers would cost \$800 million.

McNamara liked what he saw. He recommended the barrier—later to be called McNamara's Wall—be built.

Goldberger says the barricade was to be an alternative to the bombing, yet, that is not what happened. The military agreed to build the wall, although in piecemeal fashion, but fought every attempt to stop the bombing. They had their reputations riding on their tactical judgment the bombing would work.

"I think we made a mistake," Goldberger said. "We misjudged the kind of people we were dealing with. Wise men would have known better but there were not many wise people in those days."

HISTORY PROVED Jason was right about the bombing and the Pentagon was wrong.

It was not constructed entirely along the lines Jason proposed, but even Jason told McNamara the North Vietnamese would probably find ways through the wall. They did.

One kind of sensor detected ammonia in human urine. Everytime a North Vietnamese soldier urinated the sensor would send a message to an IBM computer which scrambled the jets.

The North Vietnamese found out about it and sent women with buckets of urine to isolated areas away from the supply lines. The sensors picked up the smell, the computers scrambled the jets and the United States Air Force bombed and strafed buckets of urine.

Every time a water buffalo tripped on a rock he was likely to set off another bombing raid.

According to the Pentagon Papers, the Jason report was one of the reasons McNamara began to be unable to support the war and eventually left his post.

OTHER VIETNAM WORK included a report called "Tactical Weapons in Southeast Asia." The study was reportedly requested to see if nuclear weapons had a place in the war. The report said they did not.

According to Science magazine many of the Jasons were liberals who grew unhappy with the war and their role in it. In 1967 Jason reconvened another study of the bombing and produced "probably the most categorical rejection of bombing as a tool of our policy in Southeast Asia to be made before or since by an official or semi-official group," the Pentagon Papers say.

It was ignored.

By 1967 some members of the original group began dropping out, including Goldberger. He became an inactive member of the advisory committee. Glasser followed suit.

The men faced a moral question: Should they resign publicly to call the world's attention to what they called a misuse of science?