

The Conning Tower

by

Harold Weisberg

(The writer is a former Senate investigator and intelligence analyst whose decade-long investigation of political assassinations has centered on inquiries into federal investigative agencies.)

The late Allen Dulles, once our chiefest spook, used to call intelligence a craft.

This may apply to what the Central Intelligence Agency calls "operations" and "plans," but the most important and productive aspect of intelligence -- analysis -- is an art. The essence of that art, when clues are few, is to sieze upon a single fact and, with the mind, bulldog it to death.

In the now-fading debate over "Operation Jennifer," (the recovery of part of a Soviet submarine by Howard Hughes' Glomar Explorer) all sides appear to have overlooked or ignored a crucial false premise. And, in the midst of talk that the Glomar Explorer may sail again this summer, it ought to be kept in mind that the media and most politicians, whether praising or criticizing the Explorer's feat, all managed to miss that single, to-be-bulldogged fact: What the Glomar Explorer was doing was no secret to the Russians. It was withheld from the American people only.

.... people only.

This truth rests not only upon such informed opinions as that of former Defense Secretary Melvin Laird. Satellites told the Russians the entire story. Can it be imagined that they made no sense out of the travels of the Glomar Explorer and its monstrous barge? If they somehow missed this, could they possibly have found no meaning in the total disappearance of that enormous barge in the middle of the Pacific where they knew their submarine had gone down?

The realities of intelligence are such that the Russians could not have helped being alerted with the first news account of the Explorer's announced purpose of mining the ocean bottom. The realities are that battalions of people just can't and don't keep secrets. And a reality worth recalling is that more than a decade ago President Eisenhower told us that the science of satellite photography was such that from the stratosphere the white lines in parking lots are clearly discerned.

But if we are asked to assume that the Russians didn't notice the disappearance of a barge the size of a football field, this is no more outrageous than the expectation that all the major media in the United States would go along with the gag. The truth is that the media not only went along, they got hornswoggled in a special gambit of vital importance to their own competence and self-respect.

By some special new magic of the "craft" (domestic operations having been foresworn), CIA director William Colby knew as soon as each publication, wire service and network learned of the Glomar Explorer's so-special and so-supersecret project.

There was nothing unusual about Colby's asking each to withhold the story "in the national interest." What was new was that he went out of his way to give each a full account on "Operation Jennifer," ostensibly so that the urgency of keeping it secret could be appreciated fully. Actually, a potential scoop was dangled before each.

.... before each.

The Los Angeles Times broke it first, with a front page story. But the Russians are supposed to have missed that. Then they are supposed to have missed the same story when the Times, importuned by Colby, moved it back to an inside page in later editions. Time magazine assures us in its March 31 issue that there were all these "nervous KGB agents," leaving us to infer that none could read any edition of the Los Angeles Times. The same nervous agents also are supposed to have missed all the various syndicated stories distributed throughout the country, based on the Times' story.

How fortunate that the fantastic secret continued secret, with virtually every major element among our news media fully informed about all the fascinating details of the CIA's unprecedented accomplishment. To say that the media should have known better is to beg the question.

Editors seem not to have recognized the special clue they all had: Colby didn't have to tell all in order to persuade them to respect "national security." In the fullness of his briefings, he actually prepared all for the detailed accounts that became probably the best public relations available to the CIA in its time of crisis when it was coming under multiple investigation.

Allen Dulles himself has made it plain how no public statement by a high intelligence official on matters capable of being related to national security can be accepted uncritically.

On Jan. 27, 1964, he told the Warren Commission, of which he was a member, that CIA operatives could not be expected, even under oath, to tell the truth without fail. In an executive session never expected to be made public, Dulles was dealing with reports more than a month old that Lee Harvey Oswald had had connections with both the CIA and the FBI.

.... the FBI.

Would his (CIA) people tell the truth ? Commission chairman Earl Warren wanted to know.

No, said Dulles.

"Wouldn't tell it under oath ?" Warren persisted.

"I wouldn't think he would tell it under oath, no ..... he ought not to tell it under oath....," said Dulles.

In my Whitewash IV: Top Secret JFK Assassination Transcript, " I reproduce in facsimile 90 formerly top-secret pages of this transcript. This same material was denied me for eight years after the government swore it was classified properly as top-secret, which means it could have caused a war. Actually the classification was unjustified, and for ordinary citizens the false swearing involved would have been felony or perjury.

The mystery of "Project Jennifer" is not in the alleged secrets recovered from the outdated Russian submarine's conning tower full of outdated warheads. The mystery is that sophisticated editors, to a man, were conned. And that they could be.

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