

# The Secret Team



Colonel Fletcher Prouty

On Tuesday, March 6, Jack Anderson began his nationally syndicated column. The column, under the byline of the Central Intelligence Agency, is an advance copy of a book which is being printed by the CIA's Army truck department.

The book, says Colonel F. Fletcher Prouty, "The Secret Team," due from Prentice-Hall this month (*PW* Forecast, February 25).

A week prior to Anderson's column, *PW* received a telephonic request for book galleys—purportedly from the same source as the Kramer Book Store in Washington. Anderson had learned that Prouty was being contacted by the publisher, *PW* learned of other efforts by the CIA to get hold of the Prouty galleys by numerous other unsuccessful devices. (As a regular practice, *PW* returns galleys only to the publisher of a given book, on request.)

Its curiosity about the book's author duly whetted, *PW* interviewed Colonel Prouty. Now 56 and retired from the Air Force since 1963 (he had served as a pilot in World War II), Prouty is currently employed in private business in Washington. Talking with *PW*, he proved forthcoming, both about the CIA and the genesis of his book.

"Since my retirement I've put in about eight years of work on my book," he

said, "and nearly all this work has been done in the company of the CIA. I've done it through some kind of secret arrangement. I was doing a fairly low-level job for a publisher of a security book when it started. It was in early 1970 when a Prentice-Hall editor, Bruce, contacted me in an article of mine in *The Atlantic Monthly*, that he was suited for the book by Prentice-Hall. The article was also called 'The Secret Team'—a book of good reception, no backfires."

"I was a colonel in the Air Force," Prouty said. "So there was some kind of money string attached that might have kept me from writing my book."

"But as an Air Force officer I was assigned for some of the CIA's most secret operations in other countries. When the Agency needed planes and special material for a mission, I was their man in the Air Force."

For nine years preceding his retirement, Prouty had his own office in the Pentagon's vaults, among other things, to custodian of secret CIA military files.

And so, some 60 or 70% of the Pentagon Papers were in his files. The Department of Defense segregated the CIA-type papers from regular military papers—and I had them all, and knew what was in them. When Ellsberg gave the Pentagon Papers to the *New York Times*, I was struck by how many papers he had, and the dealing with the highly secret files was extremely difficult. The papers were simply not there. I doubt Ellsberg ever had them, and I think he may have been used innocently by the CIA when he worked on the papers at Rand."

In an early chapter of "The Secret Team" Prouty writes about some remarkable coup d'etat activities in a Latin American country he calls "Gandia" (but which readers are free to identify as Guatemala) and later he describes the CIA as arming thousands of Tibetans in support of the Dalai Lama against invading Red Chinese forces (an action which a wary President Eisenhower terminated).

"I wasn't involved in the Gandia affair," Prouty said. "As a matter of fact, my description of that Latin American

country is a composite of a number of CIA operations—but the individual operations weren't, they're accurate, they happened. And the Tibet was in on it." In CIA records, Prouty says, "the year he [the Dalai Lama] was in on it." Prouty says that the famous Gary Powers U-2 incident that led to a rash of CIA operations to cancel his second meeting with Eisenhower, a CIA spy plane had been downed in Russia. Its crew captured and then interrogated by Soviet intelligence, was later quietly returned to the U.S. (where James Earl Ray, an ex-TV man, recently informed that such a pilot was among the detainees). The earlier U-2 incident is one of Prouty's more astounding revelations in his book.

"I was combat officer in charge of that plane's recovery," Prouty said. "I flew over the wreckage. And I was originally support officer in the Bay of Pigs assault—this was back in 1959."

But, Prouty says, so many Miami-based Cubans were involved then that the CIA's cover was compromised if not blown, and matters looked so dubious when Allen Dulles rushed invasion plans after JFK's 1960 presidential victory that, as Prouty put it, "I removed myself from the whole thing in a letter to the Secretary of Defense in January, 1961." Of all John F. Kennedy's intimate circle, Prouty told *PW*, "I think only Bobby Kennedy was beginning to see through what was happening."

Many of Prouty's old associates, he believes, some still active in the CIA, feel as he does now—that the CIA's operations as opposed to intelligence activities, notably from the Bay of Pigs onward, have seriously drained the nation's strength and eroded its prestige.

Prentice-Hall, beginning with a 10,000-copy first edition, is at this writing ready to start a second printing. Colonel Prouty is booked for a TV-radio tour. Meanwhile he is set to write his next book, about the period October through December, 1963, which saw numerous significant assassinations including that of John Kennedy, and which he feels may have been the most crucial brief period in modern American history.

ALBERT H. JOHNSTON