

A frank and comradely discussion

LAWRENCE K. WHITE ON THE DIRECTORS

Dino Brugioni and Urban Linehan

Messrs. Brugioni and Linehan interviewed Colonel White, Executive Director - Comptroller of the Central Intelligence Agency, on 8 June 1972. This is a transcript of his remarks.

Your interest, as I understand it, is in my appraisal or views of the several Directors of Central Intelligence I've worked for. I've never recorded these or put them in writing but I've thought about them, and delved into history a little bit. As you probably know, Admiral Souers was the first Director of CIA and he didn't really want to be the Director. There was great controversy over who should have the job and President Truman had confidence in Souers. As Souers told me the story, he accepted primarily so the President wouldn't have to give it to somebody else, like General Donovan, for instance, whom the President did not want.

But Souers's real charge from the President was to find a Director. Souers felt that young Hoyt Vandenberg would be a good man. Vandenberg had a good record and he was a dashing and good-looking, bright and able guy. It was not unimportant that his uncle, Senator Vandenberg, was a very powerful and influential man. So Souers talked to Vandenberg, but Vandenberg didn't want to be DCI. Wasn't interested. Vandenberg saw the new Air Force being created as a separate entity, the air corps having been a part of the Army prior to 1947, and he wanted to be the Chief of Staff. Souers told me that he asked Vandenberg, "Where do you think the President of the United States is going to see more of you? As a Lieutenant General off somewhere in the Air Force or as his Director of Central Intelligence?" Vandenberg got the message and accepted the job—but the point of all this is that he really didn't want to be the Director of Central Intelligence. He was motivated in part, at least according to Souers, because he saw the job as a steppingstone to being the first Chief of Staff of the Air Force. And as you know he wasn't here too long.



Rear Admiral Sidney W. Souers, USNR
23 January 1946 - 10 June 1946

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I came into the Agency on 1 February 1947, at which time Vandenberg was still the Director. We didn't have our legislation and all that. Admiral Hillenkoetter had been nominated as his successor. I remember that Vandenberg personally approved my employment. Not long after that, I found myself on the carpet before both Vandenberg and Hillenkoetter because I had fired



Lieutenant General
Hoyt S. Vandenberg, USA
10 June 1946 - 1 May 1947

somebody in FBIS without going through the normal procedures. This fellow had written a letter that would make a Philadelphia lawyer proud. Vandenberg was politically minded and he didn't want to do anything to spoil his chances of being Chief of Staff—it seemed to me—but I said, "Well you hired me to clean up FBIS and if you don't support me in firing this fellow then you may as well get yourself somebody else because I won't have any swat left." He said, "No, I'm going to support you. There's no question about that; it's just a question of how we get into the least amount of trouble." Well, I won't belabor that I was supported and so forth, but Vandenberg already was in the process of turning over to Hillenkoetter. Vandenberg was very popular with the people in the Agency and he might

have been a great Director of Central Intelligence if his heart had been in it but it wasn't. It wasn't really for him for the long haul.

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Hillenkoetter was a fine man personally—people liked him—but he was the most junior Rear Admiral in the whole Navy, and I didn't realize at that time, that there was strong controversy in the intelligence community over



Rear Admiral
Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter, USN
1 May 1947 - 7 October 1950

what the Director of Central Intelligence should be. There were strong-minded people who felt that the DCI was the President of the Company, if you will—but not the Chairman of the Board. As a matter of fact, their concept was that the DCI should report to a Board of Directors and that the Board of Directors would consist of the intelligence chiefs of the State Department and the Army and the Navy and the Air Force. Hillenkoetter never got this settled and consequently it seems to me in retrospect he didn't really accomplish very much: he didn't have the personal clout or the backing that he needed. And it seems to me that the intelligence product at the time left a lot to be desired—both in quality and particularly in timeliness. Intelligence was so dated by the time anybody got it—staff people

pored over it and you never got the G-2 of the Army and others at his level to focus on something until it had been beaten to death by all these lower level people.

Hillenkoetter was successful in getting the legislation that set the Agency up in its present form. Larry Houston, of course, deserves tremendous credit because it has never been amended. There are two reasons for this: a) it's broad

enough to do almost anything you want to do. You can interpret it in a way that gives you the greatest latitude, so it isn't really necessary to amend it. And, b), the other reason is that you could never get a piece of legislation like it through the Congress now or at any time within the last 10 years. So any time you go up and talk to senior people in the Congress, those who have been our overseers, they tell you, "Don't come up here with any legislation if you can possibly find some other way to do what you want. If you ever seek to amend that Act it's going to be so emasculated you will have lost everything."

That was one of Hillenkoetter's great accomplishments, but insofar as bringing harmony and efficiency and professionalism to the community it seemed most of their time was spent arguing about jurisdictional and organizational problems and I would say that at the end of Hillenkoetter's regime CIA was looked upon as a "Johnny-Come-Lately" and with great reservations in the community about whether it would survive.

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General Bedell Smith came then. Smith came with a great reputation. Not only had he been Eisenhower's Chief of Staff during World War II, he had been Ambassador to Moscow, and he had the strongest backing from Eisenhower. That Eisenhower backed him was important. Even more important was the fact that General Marshall was a very strong backer of General Smith. President Truman, as you know, had almost unlimited confidence in General Marshall. Marshall served as both Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State. General Smith also had a lot of guts and he was a tough guy. To him goes the credit for establishing CIA and a Director in a preeminent position for CIA. He didn't just come out and say "this is the way it's going to be" but over a period of months he made it come out that way. And there has never been any, as far as I know, serious question about this since. I believe Monty* in his history relates the turning out of what really amounted to a National Estimate done for President Truman when he went out to meet General MacArthur at the famous Wake Island Conference. In a word, Smith assembled the principals—the G-2, the A-2 and all the rest—and said, "We're going to turn out this estimate and we're going to be here until it's turned out." He set up the United States Intelligence Board and its predecessor in which the principals had to come together once a week to approve estimates, whereas up to that point the staff people were negotiating on some watered-down version. Smith was tough and he acted with great authority.

Sherman Kent and others were great advocates of markings analysis, where you photograph captured equipment, and try to estimate production rates, and so forth. I was in what was then the Office of Operations, which had FBIS and the Foreign Documents Division and Domestic Contact Service, and I was trying to negotiate this out with the military and everybody had agreed except the Army. For some reason, the Army denied us permission to go and look at their captured equipment and photograph the serial numbers. The issue showed up on the USIB or whatever they called it then (Intelligence Advisory Committee) agenda and General Smith asked, "What's this doing on the

* Ludwell Lee Montague.

agenda? Who's handling this for the Army?" They said, "Lieutenant Colonel So and So." "Well who is the CIA representative?" They said, "Colonel White." General Smith said, "Can't White and this fellow get together and settle this? Do we have to discuss it here?" Jim Reber, who was the secretary I believe, spoke up and said, "Well, the reason it's here is that they've been together and they can't agree." So General Smith looked at Alex Boley, who was the G-2, and he said, "Alex, I see you signed this memorandum of nonconurrence." and Boley said, "Yes, sir," and Smith said, "I suppose you know what would have happened to the signers of the Declaration of Independence if the British had ever caught them, don't you?" Alex Boley said, "I'll take care of it, General." So that was the end of that.

When I would be in his office, I would hear him talk to congressmen and to senior people in the military. This was later on after I was transferred up to the administrative side of the house. I heard him talk and he could change his personality in a wink. I mean, he started out in the most friendly way so that butter would melt in his mouth and, if they didn't tumble, he could turn it over and I tell you be really brutal. And he got away with it. My point is Hillenkoetter couldn't have gotten away with it. He tended to try to negotiate everything out and to get everybody to agree and so forth. Bedell Smith didn't do that. He made decisions and he decided that somebody was going to move. Several times a fellow would come into his office on Monday—having left on Friday night—and there wasn't any furniture—he'd been moved someplace else. General Smith ruled with authority.

I'd run FBIS for almost four years. Then I went up to be the Deputy to George Carey in Administration. A wonderful job. I loved it. George Carey kept telling me that word had gotten around that I had done a pretty good management job straightening up FBIS and there was interest in having me come up to the administrative side. I told him several times that I really wasn't interested. He called me one day in Houston while I was on a trip and said, "They're really hot after you" and I said, "Well, just tell them I'm not interested." He said, "You can tell them yourself when you get back." So I marched myself over to see General Smith at the appointed time, fully prepared to tell him I didn't want the job—I had my speech all ready. Well, of course, he didn't ask me, he just said, "White, this is what you're going to do." I said, "Yes, sir."

I think the most important thing in which I was personally involved was the decision by General Smith in December 1951 that there would be a centralized administrative or support organization from which the entire Agency would draw its administrative support. When I was appointed to this job I had no idea how strong the feeling was that the Clandestine Services should have their own support services I could have joined their side easily. I didn't have any opinions, I didn't know anything about it really. But I was told that I would report to the Office of the Deputy for Administration on the first day of January 1952.

And in the middle of 1951, General Smith called a meeting of the top command of the whole Agency. Bill Jackson, who was then the Deputy Director (DDCI), Allen Dulles, Frank Wisner, who was the OPC, I guess it was, I've forgotten who had what was then called OSO, and I were sitting there.

Harry Little was supposed to be there, but they had gotten the wrong Little and had Tex Little, instead, and General or then Colonel VonKan was there. Harry Little was at that time the administrative officer in OSO, and Colonel VonKan was the administrative officer in what was then OPC. I didn't know the agenda. General Smith took his seat and took a very firm bite in his lip and said, "Gentlemen, I have heard so goddamn much about administration around here. I am sick to the teeth, fed to the teeth, and I have called you together today to tell you how it's going to be." And he proceeded to lay it out. The gist was that the argument was ended. Clandestine Services was not going to have its own and that it was going to have central administration and that is why I had been selected to come up there because I could do this and he threw my name around with reckless abandon. "White is going to do this and White is going to do that," and my boss, Mr. Wolf, was sitting there. As General Smith told me later, "Walter Wolf is a fine fellow but he's a banker. He doesn't know anything about this." He went around the table and he polled each member asking two questions: "Do you understand what I have said?" and they all answered, "Yes, sir," and the second question was "Do you agree with it?" and they all answered "Yes, sir," until they got to Pat Johnson. He was in OPC, I don't know if he had taken over from Wisner or not, but he was there. Pat Johnson was the son of old General Hugh Johnson and he was a pretty outspoken, loquacious fellow, a retired Army Colonel. General Smith said, "You understand what I have said, Johnson?" And Pat said, "Yes, sir." And he said, "Do you agree with it?" And Pat said, "Well now, General, there may be just one small place where you and I disagree." And Bedell Smith hit the table and said, "Goddammit, Johnson, you don't disagree with me, do you understand that?" Johnson said, "Yes sir," and so we went on and nobody else dared say anything until it got to Allen Dulles, who was last. General Smith had drawn three boxes on the blackboard, one box which said "VonKan", one said "Little", and one said "White". That's all there was to the chart. But he used this chart to explain how I was the place where everyone came with all these problems and that I was in charge. So he said, "Allen, do you understand what I have said?" Mr. Dulles said, "Yes, Bedell." "Well, do you agree with it?" Mr. Dulles said, "Oh, of course, of course, Bedell, but I have one suggestion. This chart here has been very helpful and you have explained all of it to us very well. I would like to recommend that you reproduce this chart and have it mimeographed and passed all around so that we can have it to refer to." General Smith said, "I will not reproduce that goddamn chart. We will all sit here in silence until you have committed it to memory." And here are all these great men. Allen Dulles wasn't even the senior person there. And they all sat there in silence for about three minutes and then Bedell said, "Have you got it?" And we all got up and left.



General Walter Bedell Smith, USA
7 October 1950 - 9 February 1953

Sometime in the course of the meeting, General Smith asked if there was anyone in the room who thought he could put in writing what he had said and nobody volunteered, so I did. With considerable editing by General Smith later, I wrote the directive that he signed which, no doubt, was the single major decision as far as administration and support is concerned that has been made to this day. So for the next 13 years I spent my life trying to make it so and I guess others can judge how well we did.

Mr. Dulles had succeeded Bill Jackson, by the time I got it drafted, and he was going to be Deputy and so forth. I took it into Mr. Dulles so he could take a look at it. I bumped into General Smith the next morning and he said, "Where's the paper?" I said I gave it to Mr. Dulles. "What the hell did you give it to him for? Get it away from him!"

Well now, on the more fundamental side. The organization we have today is pretty much the concept of the organization that General Smith had. We didn't have Deputy Directors before he came. We had Assistant Directors scattered around. It was his idea to set up Directorates, each headed by a Deputy. And it was his idea to have a Board of National Estimates which was broken out from the analytical and current intelligence side. And to set up an Office of Current Intelligence and an Office of Scientific Intelligence. At any rate, the basic organization which we have today was General Smith's concept and there has been very little change fundamentally. We have a new directorate, the S&T Directorate, and new things like NPIC have come along, but basically his management technique has pretty well stuck for over 20 years now.

To summarize, he was a very strong man—smart and decisive, and to him goes the credit for setting up an organization that has stood the test of time. But probably his most important contribution was in establishing the Agency and the Director of Central Intelligence as preeminent in the community.

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I don't think Allen Dulles could ever have done that because Allen Dulles, for whom I have the greatest admiration, was not a decisive man. He liked to have everybody agree, you know, or else slip it down camouflaged in some way that they didn't really know what kind of medicine they were getting until it came along. I don't think he could have done what General Smith did. I just doubt it very seriously. He wasn't an organizer at all; he dealt almost completely in personalities and I don't think he could have drawn you an organization chart two steps down from the top when he left here after nine years. If he wanted to talk about something, whether it was an economic matter or a clandestine matter or whatever, he knew the people he wanted to talk with but didn't know or care where they fit into the organization. Dulles drove everybody crazy trying to figure out whom he'd told to do what. To him goes the credit, in my estimation, of attracting a lot of fine people and holding them long enough for them to make a commitment. He brought in scholars that I doubt that General Smith could have attracted. And, of course, during a long part of his tenure his brother was Secretary of State and he drew great strength from that. He got along well with President Eisenhower. Probably he was the greatest intelligence officer we had had up to that point and, excluding Mr. Helms, probably the greatest intelligence officer we have had to date.

We had plenty of money in those days; there were no constraints on money and manpower. I used to talk with him about money and manpower, you know, and when the great fight was on about whether the Defense Department or CIA was going to be responsible for the National Photographic Interpretation Center, I went to him one day and said, "Mr. Dulles, I think this thing is going to cost a lot of money and use up a lot of people. And I'm not sure that you want to fight so hard for it. The Air Force has got photographic laboratories running out of their ears, you know, if you're really worried about your budget." (He used to tell me in those days that our budget would be maybe \$300 million and he'd say, you know, keep it down to \$298. There's a big difference between \$298 and \$301.) I guess it was on one of these occasions when I said to him, "Maybe NPIC is something you ought to let the Defense Department have." And he put his glasses up on his forehead like he did so often and he said to me, just the two of us in the room, "Red, you don't think after I've taken all these pictures I'm going to let somebody else develop them?"



The Honorable Allen W. Dulles
26 February 1953 - 29 November 1961

Well, okay, that was his way of making decisions; it was clear to me that I'd never want to raise that question again. So we all put our shoulders to the wheel and you undoubtedly know the President signed the National Security Council Intelligence Directive (NSCID)—probably the last document he signed before he went out to ride down Pennsylvania Avenue with President Kennedy.

Another illustration of Mr. Dulles's decisionmaking style which is very similar to this: I had charge of building the new Headquarters, and he wanted to have a cornerstone ceremony. That meant a lot of work for me, organizing thousands of people to go out there, parking them, getting them all on the platform, a lot of dignitaries and what not. So I went to him one day, and said, "Mr. Dulles, you know we don't really have to have this cornerstone ceremony. We don't really have to do this you know. Often if you wait until you have your building all finished you can have a dedication and a cornerstone all at the same time. By then we'll have all our people out there, or most of them, and there won't be so much of a problem." Dulles said, "But the building's all finished. There won't be any place to put the cornerstone." I said, "Oh, we could put the cornerstone in now or for that matter you could put a bronze plaque on the wall saying whatever you want to say." He said, "Look, Red, you may have forgotten that there's going to be a presidential election. We're going to have a new president. And when we have a new president I may not be the Director of Central Intelligence. God damn, Red, I want my name on that cornerstone and I don't want it on any bronze plaque that somebody can take down." I said, "All right, sir, I understand." This is more the way he did things.

We had a Deputy for Administration in those days and when I came into that Directorate they had everything in it that is now in it, except Communications and Training. In addition, we had the General Counsel and the Audit Staff. In those days the Office of Personnel was everybody's whipping boy and everything was wrong. One day, unbeknownst to me—at least the background was unbeknownst to me—the DCI called me into his office and he and General Cabell were there. Mr. Dulles told me that he was going to remove Personnel from my jurisdiction and have it report to the Office of the Director. He was going to appoint _____ to be the head of it. He said he would like



President Eisenhower, with Dulles looking on, lays the cornerstone on 3 November 1959.

to have my views. "Well," I said, "if you have already decided it doesn't make any difference what I say, but if you really want to hear my views I'll tell you." "Oh sure," he said. I told him I thought this was a mistake. I didn't think that organizational line-up was too important and if that was what he wanted it certainly could work and I'd do everything I could to make it work. "But," I said, "the man you have chosen to head it is the worst choice you could possibly have made." Typically of Mr. Dulles, when the discussion got a little heated with General Cabell on one side and me on the other, Dulles would look at the clock and

say, "Well, I've got to see an Ambassador," and shoo us out of the room. We went out of the room and I asked General Cabell if he wanted to discuss it anymore. He said "No." This was on a Friday, I think, and I brooded about it, and on Saturday morning I went back in and got to General Cabell again and had another half hour with him.

About a year later something went awry with some personnel matter, I don't remember what, and we were with Mr. Dulles and I had the temerity to say that I thought the personnel situation was worse than it was when he took it away from me a year earlier. Kirkpatrick, then the Inspector General, was there, and said he thought so too. Mr. Dulles said, "I think I made a mistake and I want you to take it back now." Kirkpatrick spoke up and said, "If you really want to do that, why don't you give Red Communications and Training and call him the Deputy Director for Support?" Everybody thought this made sense. And, of course, it gave both General Cabell and Mr. Dulles a chance to avoid being tagged with having made an earlier mistake because this was a new concept, you see. So this was done and as far as I know there wasn't much more

background or staff work than just that. General Cabell was given the job of talking to Matt Baird, who was then the Director of Training, and General McClellum, who was the Director of Communications, and bringing them along. That's the way the support organization came about.

At the same time, or a little later, there was a thing called DDP Admin, which was headed by Ted Shannon. DDP Admin was supposed to arrange the administrative support for the Clandestine Services. They were on the TO of the DDP and responsible to him. It was never totally satisfactory because DDP Admin fellows didn't command. I had command of all the support units and they couldn't order the support units to do anything. So if the support unit thought they were off base, they would turn them down and then it all had to come up to me and I'd have to make some decision and it wasn't really too satisfactory. One day something fell between two stools and Dulles had me and Frank Wisner and General Cabell in to talk. Frank thought it all my fault and I said it wasn't—that it was *his* fault. Mr. Dulles said, "Well I'll tell you, the next time something like this happens, I'm going to blame one fellow for it, and I'll tell you who it's going to be. It's going to be you, Red. I want you to take over the DDP Admin Staff." This hadn't been staffed out in any way and so I said, "Yes sir," and Frank Wisner and I walked out. Frank was nonplused, and I guess to the day he died he didn't believe me when I told him I didn't have anything to do with it, it just came out.

Anyway, I can remember Frank saying to me on the steps of the building, "Red, what does management mean anyway?" And I said, "Well, big subject but to oversimplify it I guess it means administration." He said, "I'm not sure what it means, but I know one thing. If you put what I know and what Allen Dulles knows together you don't get very much." I just relate these things to show you how some of the decisions which Allen Dulles made came about.

I was responsible for the money when they first talked about flying a satellite. As I remember it, the Navy was running around trying to get people to give a million or two million, or whatever, to get enough money in the pot to fly the first satellite, whatever it was. My attitude was that if the Navy wanted to fly the thing they could find the money or the Defense Department could find the money. Why should they come to CIA and get a couple of million dollars from us? So I went to Mr. Dulles and told him about it. He said, "Now just a minute, Red. If they're going to fly this thing, I'd like to own a little stock in it." Well, that was pretty farsighted—pretty farsighted.

I was also responsible to him for Air America—a big project. He used to say to me, "You've got to have some helicopters—get some helicopters." And I'd say, "Mr. Dulles, what am I going to do with helicopters? I haven't got any place to use helicopters." Dulles would say, "I don't know what you're going to do with them but I'm just sure that in the future you're going to need them." Well, look what we're doing with helicopters today. So, as I say, these decisions didn't always come about in a logical way, or after careful study, but he was wise and his intuition was very good. No matter who you were, he made you feel at home and that he was interested in what you were saying. He treated everybody with great dignity. You didn't go in his office feeling as though you were a subordinate way down the line and that you were standing there

shivering and saluting and so forth and so on. To get to his office you never went through a secretary's office to see him. If you had an appointment, you waited until he was ready and then you went right into his office. This is my home. Welcome. Come in. A very great man.

I think he would have been there till we carried him out feet first if he hadn't been told after the Bay of Pigs and all of that that he had been there long enough.

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Then comes John McCone. McCone is a great executive, probably as great as you'll ever see. But cold-blooded. I think that man has got ice in his veins. He inherited all these fine people and he took a position that General Smith had made possible and no other position would have satisfied someone like McCone. Mr. McCone is a very dedicated and patriotic man, I think, but he wears it on his sleeve. And he's either going to be the number 1 man or he isn't going to be anything. General Smith made this possible. And McCone took the fine people that Allen Dulles attracted and probably got more mileage out of them than Dulles ever did. He knew exactly what he wanted and when, could make decisions, and he cared not how much trouble or inconvenience it was to anybody else to produce it. He was absolutely a first-rate manager and an able man, but very cold-blooded. As a matter of fact, I think he had less compassion by far for people than General Smith. And of course he had great rapport with President Kennedy. Later he didn't enjoy the same rapport with President Johnson, which was probably one reason why he didn't stay around.

McCone had to have this kind of contact to satisfy himself and he had the guts to pick up the phone and demand to talk to the President. Of course, in his administration, President Kennedy talked to a lot of people. He'd call up Dick Bissell or Art Lundahl or somebody else. But McCone was very close to President Kennedy and he and Bobby Kennedy saw a lot of each other. I think he saw the President any time he wanted to. He was definitely part of the inner circle. This is necessary if a Director is going to be successful. You cannot, in our business, I contend, sit over across the river or anywhere else and wait for the President to tell you what he wants. You've got to be close enough to the President to anticipate what he wants. Even more than that you've got to anticipate what he ought to want because he may not know he wants it. The President doesn't know the capability you've got over here. And the only way the Director is ever going to be successful is to be close enough to the inner circle and its daily deliberations and so forth so that he anticipates the President's needs. And serves both from the seventh floor. This is one of the reasons why I think that Allen Dulles, John McCone, and everybody else who has had the job of DCI refused to move off downtown someplace. You've got to be close enough to the CIA and your own shop to know what your capabilities are. You can't meld these by moving off someplace and just becoming another figurehead.

McCone had an appreciation of scientific and technical intelligence, as well. Dulles was more of a cloak-and-dagger man. This is one of those things that has happened over the years. Earlier, people thought of intelligence only in military terms, almost pure military terms. Are their weapons bigger than