CIA OPERATIONS CENTER

NEWS SERVICE

Date. 9 Jan
Item No. 2
Ref. No.

DISTRIBUTION II

The attached are from today's Star.

Charles Bartlett

Two flailing Carter appointees

President Carter has been impressive for the alacrity with which he concedes and corrects his own mistakes, but so far he has seemed distressingly tolerant of two bad personnel choices.

The CIA and Action, agencies with diverse but sensitive roles, are being ground into a morbid state of morale by the maladministration of the Carter appointees, Stansfield Turner and Samuel Brown. In both cases the damage to morale has stemmed from suspicions that they regard their agencies as stepping-stones.

Hopes that Carter is moving to curb Turner, whose management decisions are highly controversial, have been stirred by the White House's insistence on naming Frank Carlucci as his deputy director. Turner wanted rotating deputies who would not intrude on him, but in Carlucci he will confront a strong and independent spirit.

Although a deputy can lean against the director's mistakes, he is unlikely, however, to change the course of an ambitious admiral who pulls away from the voices of experience within the agency. Surrounded by an inner circle of his own selection and preoccupied with speeches and public relations gestures, Turner is not creating a climate in which he is likely to learn from his mistakes.

There is great commotion in both agencies, but much of it is change for the sake of change. In both places the new leadership has imposed reorganizations which are widely perceived as impulsive lurches that reflect the directors' anxiety to assert their power more than their concern with the morale and performance of their subordinates.

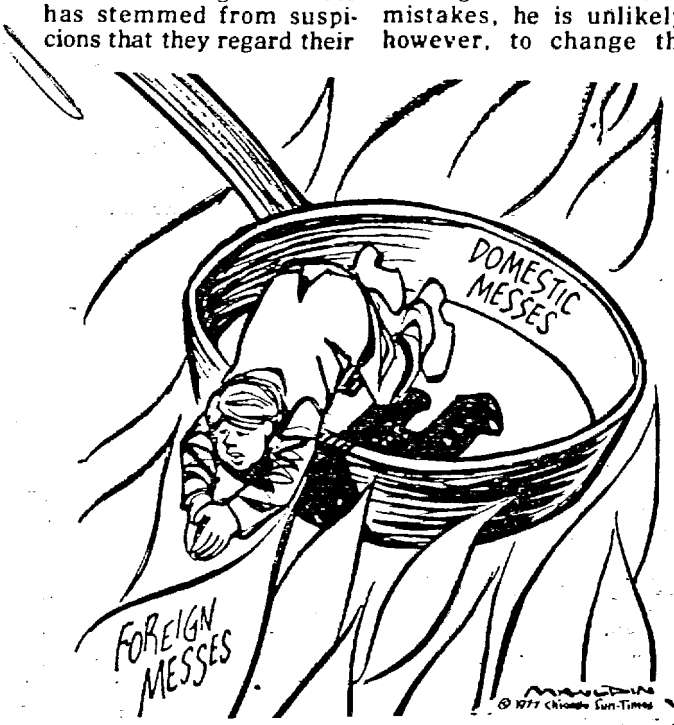
Reporters are bustling now around Washington to nail down allegations that Brown, who gained fame as a mobilizer of Vietnam protests, is using the agency as a personal vehicle. Embittered employees are anxious to show that Brown has been softening ground rules drafted to protect the volunteer spirit from sullying involvement with the pressure groups.

The impact upon the Peace Corps, still lustrous after 17 years as an expression of American idealism, has been especially negative. To give validity to his boast that he has rescued the Peace Corps from the oblivion of the Nixon-Ford years, he has given top priority to efforts to swell the numbers of volunteers dispatched to developing nations.

In every change of administration, the newcomers are tempted by what is known to civil servants as "re-inventing the wheel." This is an exercise in which the newly installed administrators discard the experience of their predecessors in order to gain the look of innovators. It is part of the price of democracy.

But the silliness at Action and CIA reflects more than the usual ego exertions and is causing more than the usual damage. Turner took over the CIA at a delicate point, when it had begun, under George Bush, to recover from the trauma of a national re-thinking of intelligence activities. The Peace Corps had been submerged by its incorporation into Action, so it was particularly vulnerable to the adversities and neglect of the past 11 months.

Bad performances by key appointees pose a vexing problem for presidents. But the unhappiness in these two agencies is swelling to a point at which it deserves to be weighed against Carter's instinct to be loyal to these two men.



Page 1 of 4

Chinks in the Doors to Our Atom Arsenal

By Joseph Albright

As an imposter I talked my way past the security guards at two highly secret Air Force nuclear weapons depots last month and was given a tour of the weak links in their defenses against terrorist attacks.

I passed within a stone's throw of six metal tubes that appeared to be hydrogen bombs. I could not tell whether the tubes were real bombs or training devices.

Without doing anything illegal, I also purchased a set of government blueprints showing the exact layout of the weapons compounds and the nearby alert areas where bomb-laden B-52s of the Strategic Air Command are ready to take off in case of nuclear war.

One blueprint disclosed a method of knocking out the alarm circuits. Another diagram showed two unguarded gates through the innermost security fence.

Reporter-Imposter

Discovers Secrets Easily

CARRYING A Brooks Brothers topcoat and a yellow plastic hardhat, I appeared at the first base last month and claimed to be a potential bidder on a construction contract.

No one questioned me or asked for any credentials except for my District of Columbia driver's license. No one searched me or demanded to inspect my bulky briefcase. As far as the guards knew, I could have been carrying hand grendades.

Looking equally amateurish, I entered another SAC base a few weeks later and joined a tour of its weapons' compound that had been organized for prospective contractors. This time, guards required two ID's — a credit card and my driver's license. They also manifested a considerable interest in my middle initial. They even went so far as to search all briefcases. However, no one asked whether I really was a contractor.

The first SAC base is less than 10 miles from a medium-sized American city, in a region that has been beset by terrorist dynamitings. The second SAC base is about 20 miles from a major state university.

(This story deliberately omits the identity of the two SAC bases mentioned as well as a precise account of their security arrangements. The names of weapons custodians and other base officials have been changed.)

The exercise was part of a two-month investigation into one of the ghastly, yet unavoidable, questions of the nuclear age: are Americans safe from their own nuclear weapons? Without succumbing to hand-wringing or hysteria, it is fair to conclude that there are some inexcusable chinks in the doors to the U.S. atomic arsenal.

Informed in advance about this story, Pentagon nuclear weapons chief Donald R. Cotter ordered an immediate investigation into Defense Department construction procedures involving weapon sites. As part of the inquiry, Cotter phoned Air Force Gen. Richard Ellis, SAC commander in Omaha, to find the exact circumstances of my unwanted visits.

"You did find a considerable chink in the security system," acknowl-

See BASES, A-6

Continued From A-1

edged Cotter, who is Secretary of Defense Harold Brown's assistant for atomic energy.

"THIS WAS TOO goddamn simple," said Cotter. "This story should be a plus for our security efforts."

In recent years, Cotter explained, construction jobs at weapon's sites have been opened to contractors without security clearances in an effort to avoid concentrating too much business among a small "club" of high-priced builders.

My nuclear excursion was only one piece in a disturbing pattern. Other evidence, found in government documents and in interviews with Pentagon and Department of Energy weapons experts, includes:

- The CIA, Defense Department and key members of Congress are clearly concerned about the possibility of terrorist groups seizing weapons of mass destruction for high-stakes political extortion. "It seems prudent to assume that sooner or later some group is bound to take the plunge," an unclassified CIA study declared in 1976.
- Although no one has ever stolen a nuclear weapon, there have been troubling incidents which have received little or no publicity. Thus in 1974, guards at an Nike-Hercules anti-aircraft battery near Baltimore were unable to capture an intruder whom they saw near the corner of a warhead building. In 1975 a terrorist group affiliated with the West German Baader-Meinhof gang reportedly stole some mustard gas from a munitions depot in France. In 1976, an unidentified Army unit found what the Defense Nuclear Agency calls "indications of possible attempts to reconnoiter or photograph a storage site." Last year, according to the Defense Nuclear Agency, an Army unit reported that two individuals attempted penetration of the outer boundaries of a security area."
- Despite these warnings, the Defense Department is relying on relatively unsophisticated devices to keep intruders out. When the military finishes its $300 million program to "harden" weapons storage sites, they will have stronger fences, better lighting and bullet-resistant glass in the guard shacks. But in many cases, the sites will not be protected with the most modern electronic sensors, such as those which make up the Sinai early warning system operated by a U.S. support mission to detect an attack from either side.
- Officially, the Defense Department tries to keep secret the location of nuclear storage sites by refusing to confirm or deny the presence of nuclear weapons. However, in congressional testimony, the Air Force published a list of 16 of its bases where it sought funds for "nuclear weapons security improvements."

The CIA, in its 1976 study, "International and Transnational Terrorism," said it would be "a few years yet" before any terrorist group would be able to manufacture or steal a nuclear weapon. But the CIA study chillingly added:

". . . a more likely scenario — at

least in the short term — would seem to be a terrorist seizure of nuclear weapons storage facility or a nuclear power plant in a straightforward barricade operation. Such a group need not threaten a nuclear holocaust (although that possibility would be in the back of everyone's mind), just the destruction of the bunker or reactor with the attendant danger of radiological pollution. The publicity would be enormous. And if their demands were to be denied, the terrorists would be in a position to tailor the amount of damage they actually inflicted to their appreciation of the existing circumstances."

U.S. BOMB EXPERTS insist that American nuclear weapons are designed so that the nuclear components can not be detonated by an external shock or fire. However, nuclear weapons contain powerful TNT charges, which can explode and scatter plutonium into the atmosphere even though there is no nuclear blast.

The destruction of a bunker containing "several" nuclear weapons could scatter tiny but measurable amounts of plutonium downwind over a 100-square mile area, according to a recent calculation by government bomb experts at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, made at the request of Cox Newspapers.

Within that area — roughly 50 miles long and two miles wide — the plutonium contamination of the soil would exceed the plutonium "screening level" recently proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency as safe for permanent human habitation. In the event of such a nuclear accident, the government would move in and strip away the most heavily contaminated soil, ploughing under areas with minor radiation levels. However, it would be virtually impossible to render a 100-square mile area completely safe by EPA's proposed plutonium "screening level."

Specifically, the EPA proposed a "screening level" of two-tenths of a millicurie of plutonium radioactivity per square meter of soil. The EPA noted that even at this very low level of plutonium contamination, residents would incur a slight extra risk of developing cancer. The EPA estimated that someone exposed to that much plutonium for a lifetime would have something less than a one-in-ten-thousand chance of getting cancer from it. The EPA notice added: "It must be recognized that these estimates are not precise, and have an uncertainly of at least a factor of three for cancer risk."

Yet last year, Joe F. Meis, a ranking Pentagon logistics expert, acknowledged to the House Appropriations Committee that some of our stockpiled tactical nuclear weapons — those with destructive power equivalent to Hiroshima — are not fully safe.

"It is remote, but it is conceivable," Meis said, "that an attempt to capture a tactical nuclear weapon might succeed against the limited existing security systems. The latter were designed for a quieter age and not configured to meet the bold and sophisticated operations of today's highly organized revolutionary groups."

The official assumption is that no one could ever penetrate a SAC base and seize a strategic weapon — a weapon which could explode with the force of 50 Hiroshima-sized bombs. As Alfred D. Starbird, the retired Army general who heads the nuclear weapons program in the Department of Energy, put it, bombs stored at SAC bases "are secure at this time."

If my experience means anything, the average commercial airport in America is in some ways better prepared against terrorists today than some of SAC's bomb storage sites. This is due, in part, to revealing bits of information in unclassified government publications.

LAST FALL, A U.S. Commerce Department magazine published a notice to prospective bidders entitled, "Weapons System Security Improvements." According to the notice, the successful bidder would provide "lighting, fencing and security entry control facilities of both the bomber alert area (apron) and weapons storage area." The cost estimate for this job was given at $1,000,000 to $5,000,000.

What was dangerous about the notice was that it named the base where this construction would take place. By referring to published congressional testimony, anyone could readily deduce that this was a nuclear weapons storage site.

The Army Corps of Engineers, which placed the contract notice, included an inviting sentence: "Plans and specifications available on or about 14 Nov. 77 at a cost of $5.30 per set (non-refundable)."

Curious about whether the Corps of Engineers could distinguish between a legitimate contractor and a phony, I mailed them my personal check for $5.30. It was accompanied by a five-line letter, typed on my personal stationery in which my non-existent "assistant" asked for the plans without specifying that I was a contractor.

A fat brown envelope, stamped "Priority Mail," arrived at my home the following week. Inside was a large book of 53 blueprints showing how the weapons storage area is presently protected and how it would be following planned security renovations. Also enclosed was about 300 pages of technical specifications for the contract, including instructions on how workmen can get credentials to enter the base.

Amid the dense language of the specifications one passage stood out: "Bidders are urged and expected to inspect the site where services are to be performed and to satisfy themselves as to all general and local conditions that may affect the cost of the contract..."

It took me three phone calls to reach a Mrs. Hilda Ferry, a kindly secretary who works in the base construction office. Could she, I wondered, arrange to tour the site next Tuesday? She asked for my social security number and told me to call back in 24 hours so she could check it with her boss, Capt. William Branford. The following day, I telephoned Mrs. Ferry once again. No problem, she said. Be here at 1:30 p.m. and ask for a Mr. Wilmer.

I know nothing at all about soil compaction, mitering of joints, electromagnetic capability or anything else about the construction industry. I thought I might pick up some of the jargon by visiting the Washington library of the Association of General Contractors. As it turned out, I spent two hours reading an encyclopedia of construction terms and got no further than the "B"s.

Steve Wilmer, a civilian construc-

tion employee at the base since 1966, was mostly interested in talking about the weather. At one point he said something about electrical generators I did not understand. I said I was deaf in one ear. He nodded. He suggested that I could leave my yellow hardhat in my car.

Under the specifications for the contract, the Corps of Engineers had the right to ask for a list of my other construction contracts before showing me the site. No one asked. Nor was I asked to prove that I was a licensed contractor. Although many states require contruction contractors to be licensed, it turns out that the federal government does not.

EVEN SO, I thought the game was up when Wilmer led me into a windowless room inside the SAC security detachment and we stood waiting for 20 minutes. The only trouble, it finally developed, was that the sergeant who was supposed to escort us was out to lunch. So Lt. Andrew Ford, the chief Air Force security man on duty, offered to drive us around the post in his pickup truck.

First stop was the bomber alert apron, a fenced-in airplane parking lot where I counted the row of jungle-camouflaged B-52s. Before entering the area, Ford spent almost a minute checking under the hood of his truck and inside each of the wheel covers to find if anyone was hiding there. If he had any curiosity about me, he satisfied it by examining my D.C. driver's license.

Inside the alert apron, I asked Wilmer why the Corps of Engineers had decided to bulldoze one area near the fence. "We have to get rid of those hiding places" said Wilmer, pointing to several erosion-caused ditches. "We wanted to do a little more work over there, but it was cut out." I asked why. "Money," said Wilmer.

Ford now drove us a mile down a isolated road to a weapons depot, a fenced compound about the size of six football fields. Inside the fence were about half a dozen earth-covered mounds, known in the Air Force as igloos, which serve as warehouses for city-buster bombs. At Ford's suggestion, we began by slowly driving around the outside of the fence.

"You know how long it would take to get over that?" Ford asked, nodding at the chain link fence topped with barbed wire.

I said I didn't have any idea.

"Three seconds," Ford said. "If you know what you are doing — three seconds."

Just then, I noticed a small tractor hauling an open trailer inside the weapons compound about 150 feet away. On the trailer were four torpedo-shaped cylinders, each painted silver, with metalic fins on their tails. The tractor driver was slowly maneuvering the cylinders into what looked like a cinderblock garage.

At that moment, I was holding my briefcase, which no one had bothered to examine. Ford, who had a pistol on his hip, had both hands on the wheel.

Based on unclassified Atomic Energy Commission photographs which I had examined before my visit, the cylinders looked exactly like model MK-28 hydrogen bombs, each packing the equivalent of at least one million tons of TNT. Four such bombs is the typical payload of a B-52 bomber when on nuclear alert.

"Seen enough?" asked Ford. One more thing, I said: how about letting me inside the security guard house in the weapons compound? He looked sideways at me but agreed, after once again asking for my social security number. I stayed inside the guard house long enough to count the guards and to find the button which opens the turnstile to the weapons' compound.

Then, on my way out, I asked whether "my" work crews would have to worry about guard dogs. No, replied Wilmer. He proceeded to tell me the hours when the dogs are kept in their cages.

Could it have been a one-time fluke that no one saw through this pose?

TO FIND OUT, I mailed $6 to another regional office of the Corps of Engineers and asked for plans and specifications for a similar construction job at yet another SAC base. Back came an equally revealing set of blueprints, along with an invitation to bidders to join a tour of the site.

For me, the highlight of touring inside the second weapons storage area was the sight of an unattended red trailer on the west side of building 323, about 100 feet away. The trailer could have carried two canoes. Instead, it held two tapered cylinders which looked considerably like the official photographs of B-43 hydrogen bombs.

My host, an Air Force sergeant, was also good enough to tell me the route and approximate daily schedule of the vehicles that carry nuclear weapons between the storage site and the B-52s.

Upon learning of my tour, the Air Force issued a statement declaring that its records indicate the objects I saw were dummy training bombs and not live nuclear weapons.

Could I have seized a nuclear weapon? Not at the second SAC base, where the guards were careful to search all briefcases. And even at the first base, where the security verged on lackadaisical, the odds would have been against me.

If I had overcome the first set of guards, backup troops would probably have surrounded the compound in a few minutes. Escaping with a hydrogen bomb is not a simple matter since the MK-28 model weighs one ton.

But, there was a chance I might have succeeded. Given a few suicidal confederates, a CB radio and a fast getaway helicopter, there is no telling how far I might have gone.