

Mighty Casey

New York Times **BOOK REVIEW** 1

The Washington Times
The Wall Street Journal
The Christian Science Monitor
New York Daily News
USA Today
The Chicago Tribune

VEIL

The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987.

By Bob Woodward.

Illustrated. 543 pp. New York:

Simon & Schuster. \$21.95.

By David C. Martin

WILLIAM CASEY, it seems, was the only member of the Reagan Cabinet who had the courage of the President's convictions. "I believed," Casey told Bob Woodward in the now disputed final scene of "Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987." Casey believed not only in the President's "evil empire" brand of anti-Communism but also in taking risks. That's what set him apart from ordinary believers like Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. Casey had the instincts of a venture capitalist; but as Director of Central Intelligence he was playing not with money but with people's lives. If Mr. Woodward has it right, Casey's penchant for running risks cost 80 innocent people their lives when an "off-the-books" attempt to assassinate Sheik Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, the spiritual leader of Hezbollah, Lebanon's Party of God, misfired.

That and the deathbed scene in which Casey confesses to knowing of the diversion of profits from the Iran arms sales to

the contras in Nicaragua are the most spectacular revelations in "Veil" and the focus of the extraordinary uproar which has attended its publication. But the revelations are not what is so captivating about this book, which reads much better in full length than in the excerpts which have appeared in newspapers and magazines. The revelations are merely the bold strokes in a penetrating, profane and sometimes brilliant portrait of what textbooks dryly call "the intelligence community."

THERE are moments when Mr. Woodward, putting himself in the mind of one of his protagonists, jots down aphorisms worthy of John le Carré: "The best spying was subtle, embedded in normal intercourse, so that everyone could say, 'Just doing my job.'" "His philosophy was simple: the more you know, the less chance of war." There are descriptions of well-known denizens of the Federal bureaucracy that will stick with them for the rest of their lives. Stanley Sporkin, Casey's general counsel at the C.I.A. and former scourge of Wall Street as the head of enforcement for the Securities and Exchange Commission, "looked like an overweight Vegas pit boss."

Adm. Stansfield Turner, the former Director of Central Intelligence, was "a man who made life hard for himself." There is even wit to leaven the secret wars and double dealings. When some of his wartime buddies come to Casey's defense in one of his many confrontations with the Senate and House Intelligence Committees, Mr. Woodward writes that "a comrade was down in enemy territory, the Congress of the United States."

Mr. Woodward, an assistant managing editor of The Washington Post, has got into the belly of the beast. It's all here, from American submarines tapping into a Soviet undersea communications cable to a slightly inebriated Barry Goldwater reading aloud from a classified document on the floor of the Senate — your tax dollars at work. This is no archeological dig through the skeletons of the past. This is real-time intelligence, right up to January of this year when Casey, no longer able to write his name, resigned. Had he lived, Casey would have spent much of his remaining time in office coping with the fallout from this book, no doubt denying steadfastly that he was one of Mr. Woodward's sources. It will be a long time, if ever, before another Director of Central Intelligence

grants a reporter the kind of access Casey apparently gave Mr. Woodward.

As Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan is quoted as saying, Casey was "what the French call fin de ligne," the last Director of Central Intelligence to have learned the craft during World War II as a member of the Office of Strategic Services. It is surely no coincidence that the directors who lasted the longest — Allen Dulles, Richard Helms and Casey — were all veterans of the O.S.S., beneficiaries of the mystique that surrounds the nation's first silent service, a mystique skillfully nurtured by a socially and politically powerful alumni organization of which Casey was a leading light. Casey's experience in running agents behind German lines was largely irrelevant to the high-tech world of 1980's espionage, yet service in O.S.S. still conferred a special, present-at-the-creation aura which guaranteed his acceptance at the C.I.A.

Mr. Woodward reports that when Richard Helms, the archetypal American spy, learned Casey was to be the new Director of the agency, he thought to himself, "Damn good. Perfect." The two men had shared an apartment in London during the war, and Mr. Helms liked "the Casey approach: quick,

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tion-defying." In taking over from Stansfield Turner, Casey was succeeding a man who "had never once seen an intelligence report that was worth risking someone's life" and who "wondered long and hard whether it was permissible to use other people's lives for the geopolitical interests of the United States." Casey was exactly what the old boys like Mr. Helms felt was needed to shock the C.I.A. out of the moralistic and legalistic paralysis to which it had supposedly succumbed under Admiral Turner. But Mr. Helms was not prepared for the lengths to which Casey was willing to go.

Casey set off a firestorm among the old boys by naming Max Hugel, a businessman with no espionage experience, as his Deputy Director for Operations. With the newspapers full of headlines like "Daggers Drawn for New CIA 'Spymaster,'" Mr. Woodward writes, "Casey and Hugel discussed the matter and agreed that things were going well, not badly. They were challenging the status quo, and the status quo didn't like it." The fact that Casey finally had to cut Mr. Hugel loose in the face of allegations of impropriety in his prior business dealings did not in the least diminish the director's appetite for turning the status quo on its head.

That status quo had produced the Iran debacle — the most sophisticated and high-priced intelligence service in the world caught utterly flat-footed by a momentous political upheaval. Mr. Woodward paraphrases a top-secret "Iran Postmortem" that concludes that the C.I.A. had become just another one of Washington's paper factories. "The CIA was not set up to jump ahead on a fast-moving situation, and the analysts had become enmeshed in the daily production line . . . feeding the National Intelligence Daily or the President's Daily Brief. . . . There were few outside catalysts to jar the thinking of the analysts . . . no intellectual badminton. . . . No method existed to ponder alternative explanations of the data." One of the first intelligence estimates Casey saw was entitled "Libya: Aims and Vulnerabilities," and to his mind it was "written by equivocators for equivocators." Full of "coulds," "mights" and "possibles," Mr. Woodward writes, "the document put the intelligence agencies in the bureaucratically secure position of being able, no matter what happened, to dust off the estimate and say, 'See, we told you. We said that could happen.' To say everything was to say almost nothing, Casey thought."

Casey was not the first and certainly not the last director to be dissatisfied with the quality of intelligence estimates. Ambiguity is endemic to the business. In "A World of Secrets: The Uses and Limits of Intelligence," Walter Laqueur quotes from an internal C.I.A. publication in which a veteran estimate writer counsels that "the wise drafter will stop and point both ways." No wonder that in 1975 a Presidential commission concluded that National Intelligence Estimates "appeared to have little impact on policy makers."

For any one man could bring the C.I.A. to life, it was Casey. He had everything — physical energy, intellectual horsepower, old boy credentials, access to the President. He was vastly more impressive than the wobbly, inarticulate old man the public saw going in and out of closed-door hearings on Capitol Hill. When he prowled the corridors, "people . . . moved out of his way, very nearly saluted." He was looking for the next Iran — Mexico? the Philippines? He wanted his field stations to stop living off host-country intelligence services and start recruiting spies of their own. He wanted more agents behind the Iron Curtain. "He made it clear that he was willing to take chances. Yes, he said, there would be mistakes. He expected mistakes. . . . 'So what?' he said. 'Proves we're active.' If there were no mistakes, there was not enough effort."

But effort, particularly all the effort which went into supporting anti-Communist insurgencies, was often nothing more than an illusion of progress in making the world safe for democracy. Voicing the doubts held by former Deputy Director of Central Intelligence Bobby R. Inman, Mr. Woodward points out that "the secret covert action provided . . . an administration, particularly a new one, with the comfort of action, the feeling that there was a secret way to get things done, that there was an undercover foreign policy quietly moving U.S. interests forward." Meaningful covert action is almost a contradiction in terms. To really advance American interests — overthrow the Sandinistas, for instance — it would have to become so large that it could no longer be covert.

As all the world now knows, Casey tried too hard, made too many mistakes. Mr. Woodward's chronicle of his tenure at the C.I.A. is a case study in how much any one man can change a bureaucracy. The answer is very little. As Frank McCulloch, the editor of The

Sacramento Bee, once said in a different context, it is like trying to change the course of an aircraft carrier by sitting on the stern and trailing your hand in the water. Casey increased the intelligence budget by 50 percent and channeled hundreds of millions of dollars to anti-Communist guerrillas all over the world, but he barely budged the bureaucracy. He shook it like a limp rag, stirring up dust, but when he was finished, it resumed its prior shape. As John McMahon, a former Deputy Director of the agency, explained to a Congress that was questioning the wisdom of Casey's adventures, the task for C.I.A. careerists "was to find a way to work themselves out of this hole — to protect the CIA but obey the orders."

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Mr. McMahon could backfill. Mr. McMahon, like Admiral Inman before him, finally left, bullied into submission by a man whom both seemed to regard with equal parts awe and distaste. Mr. McMahon called Casey "a unique asset." Admiral Inman said he was "a piece of work," a phrase Casey himself often applied to oddballs. Casey was serving Ronald Reagan not wisely but too well, laboring tirelessly for a President he seemed to regard as nothing more than a failed actor whose only talent was the ability to memorize a script at a glance. Casey's loyalty was to the cause, not the man, and his *modus operandi* was that of a spy, not a Cabinet member. "One of the first rules of espionage was the protection of good sources," Mr. Woodward writes. "Elaborate diversions and false trails were often constructed to protect such sources. To lie was nothing, even to lie in public or under oath was perhaps insignificant compared to the risks the source had taken."

"To lie was nothing." How much of what Casey told Mr. Woodward was a lie? Although Mr. Woodward's access to Casey and their love-hate, reporter-spy relationship are central to the book, it remains unclear exactly what Casey told him. Mr. Woodward is alone with Casey for two hours on a flight from Boston to Washington. "He proceeded to answer most questions as we ranged over subjects including General Donovan, the new all-weather satellite Lacrosse, the Nicaraguan operation, his kidnapped Beirut station chief." Exactly what Casey said about these subjects is left to the reader to wonder. Elsewhere in the book, Mr. Woodward reveals that Lacrosse is a new reconnaissance satellite that uses radar imaging to see through clouds and darkness. That would seem to be an extraordinary revelation, telling the Russians they can no longer count on night or bad weather to conceal their activities. Did the Director of Central Intelligence, a man sworn to protect intelligence sources and methods, give that secret away?

With Casey dead, why is Mr.

what the Director told him? He seems to be teasing the reader deliberately, much as he and his Watergate partner Carl Bernstein did in "All the President's Men," dropping just enough clues to the identity of their anonymous source Deep Throat to keep the guessing game alive without revealing the secret. It is an effective novelistic technique but less than satisfactory journalism — titillating without informing. There was no doubt good reason for protecting Deep Throat, but Casey is beyond protecting. There is too much mystery here.

Even the title of the book, "Veil," a code word for covert action, was kept secret by Simon & Schuster right up to publication date, purportedly on the grounds that the publisher did not want to alert the spies to how deeply Mr. Woodward had penetrated their operations. In fact, the code word "Veil" and an explanation of its significance appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* on July 17. Mystery about the title can be excused as prepublication hype. Mystery about what Casey told Mr. Woodward goes to the heart of the matter. One of the great difficulties in writing about intelligence operations is knowing for certain when you have hit truth or just another cover story. In the end, you have to take other people's word for it. How extensively did Mr. Woodward rely on the word of a man for whom "to lie was nothing"?

M describes two run-ins between the C.I.A. and the press in which I was a participant. In one case, he's got it flat wrong. In the other, it's garbled. In another instance, Mr. Woodward reports that a C.I.A. officer named Vincent Cannistraro traveled under an assumed name to Arizona to brief Senator Barry Goldwater on a controversial guerrilla manual provided to the Nicaraguan contras. Mr. Cannistraro, who now works at the Pentagon, says he never made such a trip. Small matters, none of them central to Mr. Woodward's story. The question only Mr. Woodward can answer is: how thoroughly did he verify the more sensational elements of his story?

Casey's widow claims the deathbed scene never took place and that her late husband was too much the patriot to reveal secrets to a journalist or speak ill of the President. She is a poignant figure, blindsided in her mourning by a hard-nosed reporter, but Sophia Casey has been too quick to denounce what is largely a sympathetic portrait, certainly more sympathetic than the one likely to be painted by the final report of the Iran-contra committees. "He was a man who found the world, its books, its ideas and its challenges more interesting than he found himself," Mr. Woodward writes. Not even a widow could object to that. □

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The Chief Plants a Bug

Casey decided he would have to set an example. For some time, one of his Middle East stations had been talking about placing an eavesdropping device in the office of one of the senior officials in that country. At the station it was back and forth about the risk assessment; there was hesitancy and floundering as the DO [Directorate of Operations] officers debated how to make an entry into the office. They had raised irresolution to an art form. "I'll do it myself, goddamn it," Casey said. Though it was totally against tradecraft practice to use even a DO officer for such a mission, [Casey], insisting,



Bob Woodward
— GORDON LEBLANC

placed the bug during a courtesy visit to the official — another violation of tradecraft. By one account, he inserted a thin, miniaturized, long-stemmed microphone and transmitting device shaped like a large needle in a sofa cushion during his visit. By another account [it] was built, Trojan-horse style, into the binding of a book that Casey brought as a gift for the official. One senior agency officer insisted that the story was apocryphal, but others said it was true. Among DO officers it was accepted as gospel. Casey only smiled when I asked him about the incident several years later.

From "Veil"