

THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE

**'GEORGE  
BUSH,' C.I.A.  
OPERATIVE**

JOSEPH McBRIDE

The Washington Post \_\_\_\_\_  
 The New York Times \_\_\_\_\_  
 The Washington Times \_\_\_\_\_  
 The Wall Street Journal \_\_\_\_\_  
 The Christian Science Monitor \_\_\_\_\_  
 New York Daily News \_\_\_\_\_  
 USA Today \_\_\_\_\_  
 The Chicago Tribune \_\_\_\_\_  
**THE NATION** \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date 16-23 July 1988

Vice President George Bush's résumé is his most highly touted asset as a candidate. But a recently discovered F.B.I. memorandum raises the possibility that, like many résumés, it omits some facts the applicant would rather not talk about: specifically, that he worked for the Central Intelligence Agency in 1963, more than a decade before he became its director.

The F.B.I. memorandum, dated November 29, 1963, is from Director J. Edgar Hoover to the State Department and is subject-headed "Assassination of President John F. Kennedy November 22, 1963." In it, Hoover reports that the Bureau had briefed "Mr. George Bush of the Central Intelligence Agency" shortly after the assassination on the reaction of Cuban exiles in Miami. A source with close connections to the intelligence community confirms that Bush started working for the agency in 1960 or 1961, using his oil business as a cover for clandestine activities.

Informed of this memorandum, the Vice President's spokesman, Stephen Hart, asked, "Are you sure it's the same George Bush?" After talking to the Vice President, Hart quoted him as follows: "I was in Houston, Texas, at the time and involved in the independent oil drilling business. And I was running for the Senate in late '63." "Must be another George Bush," added Hart.

Because the Vice President's response seemed something of a non-denial denial (he described what else he was doing rather than specifically denying C.I.A. involvement), I put the following queries to him via Hart:

Did you do any work with or for the C.I.A. prior to the time you became its director?

If so, what was the nature of your relationship with the agency, and how long did it last?

Did you receive a briefing by a member of the F.B.I. on anti-Castro Cuban activities in the aftermath of the assassination of President Kennedy?

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Half an hour later, Hart called me back to say that he had not spoken again to the Vice President about the matter, but would answer the questions himself. The answer to the first question was no, he said, and so he would skip number two. To the third, he repeated Bush's answer quoted above, but added that Bush had also said, "I don't have any idea of what he's talking about." However, when Bush's denial was read back to him, Hart said he preferred that it not be quoted directly, explaining, "It's a week old now, and I'm going off my notes." When I reminded him that we wanted to quote Bush directly, Hart said, "I am a spokesman. However you want to write it, the answer is no" regarding Bush's alleged 1963 involvement with the C.I.A.

"This is the first time I've ever heard this," C.I.A. spokesman Bill Devine said when confronted with the allegation of the Vice President's involvement with the agency in the early 1960s. "I'll see what I can find out and call you back." The next day Devine called back with the terse official response: "I can neither confirm nor deny." Told what the Vice President's office had said, and asked if he could check whether there had been another George Bush in the C.I.A., Devine seemed to become a bit nonplussed: "Twenty-seven years ago? I doubt that very much. In any event, we just have a standard policy of not confirming that anyone is involved with the C.I.A."

Richard Helms, who was deputy director for plans at the agency in 1963, said the appearance of Bush's name in the memo "must have been some kind of misprint. I don't recall anyone by that name working for the agency. . . . He certainly never worked for me."

Hoover's memo, which was written to the director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, was buried among the 98,755 pages of F.B.I. documents released to the public in 1977 and 1978 as a result of Freedom of Information Act suits. It was written to summarize the briefing given to Bush and Capt. William Edwards of the Defense Intelligence Agency by the F.B.I.'s W.T. Forsyth on November 23, the day after the assassination, when Lee Harvey Oswald was still alive to be interrogated about his connections to Cuban exiles and the C.I.A. The briefing was held, according to the F.B.I. director, because the State Department feared that "some misguided anti-Castro group might capitalize on the present situation and undertake an unauthorized raid against Cuba, believing that the assassination of President John F. Kennedy might herald a change in U.S. policy, which is not true." Hoover continues:

Our sources and informants familiar with Cuban matters in the Miami area advise that the general feeling in the anti-Castro Cuban community is one of stunned disbelief and, even among those who did not entirely agree with the President's policy concerning Cuba, the feeling is that the President's death represents a great loss not only to the U.S. but to all of Latin America. These sources know of no plans for unauthorized action against Cuba.

An informant who has furnished reliable information in the past and who is close to a small pro-Castro group in Miami has advised that these individuals are afraid that the assassination of the President may result in strong repressive measures being taken against them and, although pro-Castro in their feelings, regret the assassination.

The substance of the foregoing information was orally furnished to Mr. George Bush of the Central Intelligence Agency. . . .

(We attempted to locate William T. Forsyth, but learned that he is dead. Forsyth worked out of the Washington F.B.I. headquarters and was best known for running the investigation of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in the Bureau's subversive control section. Efforts to locate Captain Edwards by press time were unsuccessful.)

Vice President Bush's autobiography, *Looking Forward*, written with Victor Gold (Doubleday, 1987), is vague to the point of being cryptic about his activities in the early 1960s, when he was running the Houston-based Zapata Off-Shore Company. ("Running an offshore oil company," he writes, "would mean days spent on or over water: not only the Gulf of Mexico but oceans and seas the world over.") But the 1972 profile of Bush in *Current Biography* provides more details of his itinerary in those years: "Bush travelled throughout the world to sell Zapata's oil-drilling services. Under his direction it grew to be a multimillion-dollar concern, with operations in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Japan, Australia, and Western Europe." And according to Nicholas King's *George Bush: A Biography*, Zapata was concentrating its business in the Caribbean and off South America in the early 1960s, a piece of information that meshes neatly with the available data on Bush's early C.I.A. responsibilities.

Bush's duties with the C.I.A. in 1963—whether he was an agent, for example, or merely an "asset"—cannot be determined from Hoover's memo. However, the intelligence source (who worked with the agency in the late 1950s and through the 1960s) said of the Vice President: "I know he was involved in the Caribbean. I know he was involved in the suppression of things after the Kennedy assassination

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There was a very definite worry that some Cuban groups were going to move against Castro and attempt to blame it on the C.I.A."

The initial reaction of Senator Frank Church, chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, to the firing of William Colby and the naming of Bush as Director of Central Intelligence in 1975 was to complain that it was part of a pattern of attempts by President Gerald Ford (a former member of the Warren commission) to impede the Church committee's nearly concluded investigation into C.I.A. assassination plots, with which Colby was cooperating but which Ford was trying vainly to keep secret.

Bush's autobiography skips capriciously over the period of the early 1960s, easing back into coherence only when he makes his official entry into public life as chair of the Harris County, Texas, Republican Party in 1963-64, runs unsuccessfully for the Senate in 1964 against Democratic incumbent Ralph Yarborough, quits the oil business in 1966 and becomes the victorious candidate for Congress from Houston, serving two terms before losing the 1970 Senate race to Lloyd Bentsen, who had defeated Yarborough in the primary. Asked recently about Bush's early C.I.A. connections, Yarborough said, "I never heard anything about it. It doesn't surprise me. What surprised me was they picked him for Director of Central Intelligence—how in hell he was appointed head of the C.I.A. without any experience or knowledge." Hoover's memo "explains something to me that I've always wondered about. It *does* make sense to have a trained C.I.A. man, with experience, appointed to the job."

Bush's appointment as the agency's director in 1975 was widely criticized because, as Bush writes, "Bill Colby, a professional in the intelligence field, was being replaced by a nonprofessional outsider—and a politician to boot." Senator Church commented: "It appears as though the White House may be using this important post merely as a grooming room before he is brought on stage next year as a vice-presidential running mate." Speaking against the appointment, Church said he knew of "no particular reason why [Bush] is qualified" for the job; Bush himself characterized the appointment as a "real shocker." In his autobiography Bush points out, "I'd come to the CIA with some general knowledge of how it operated." His remark in the book that his "overseas contacts as a businessman" helped qualify him for the controversial appointment by President Nixon to the post of ambassador to the United Nations could also refer to previous C.I.A. experience. Agents often adopt the cover of a businessman. And business people have also served as informants for the agency, passing along information picked up on their travels.

Bush's C.I.A. connections might throw new light on his knowledge of the *contra* funding and supply operation, and his alleged knowledge of *contra* drug smuggling and the activities of General Noriega. It is worth noting in this context that, as Leslie Cockburn writes in *Out of Control*, "The anti-Castro C.I.A. team in Florida were already drawing attention to their drug-smuggling activities by 1963," and that it was Felix Rodriguez, the C.I.A. "alumnus who wore Che Guevara's watch and counted George Bush among his friends," who allegedly coordinated a \$10 million payment to the *contras* by the Colombian cocaine cartel.

"Do the American people really want to elect a former director of the C.I.A. as their President?" Tom Wicker asked in *The New York Times* on April 29. "That's hardly been discussed so far; but it seems obvious that a C.I.A. chief might well be privy to the kind of 'black' secrets that could later make him—as a public figure—subject to blackmail. Given the agency's worldwide reputation for covert intervention and political meddling, moreover, one of its former directors in the White House certainly would be the object of suspicion and mistrust in numerous parts of the globe. And well he might be."

It was characteristic of George Bush, when sworn in as Director of Central Intelligence in 1976, to declare: "I am determined to protect those things that must be kept secret, and I am more determined to protect those unselfish and patriotic people who, with total dedication, serve their country, often putting their lives on the line, only to have some people bent on destroying this agency expose their names."

Bush has absorbed the code of the C.I.A. well, and he may feel that he is duty-bound to draw a veil of secrecy over his activities of the early 1960s. But now, as candidate for the presidency, he has a higher duty of honesty to the American people. If the man who would be President has a longstanding history of involvement in covert activities, then the people are entitled to know about it. Thus far Bush has refused to directly deny such involvement. Either he is intentionally misleading us, or he is a victim of mistaken identity. If it's the latter, he or President Reagan should instruct the gnomes of Langley to turn over the personnel records of the *other* George Bush. The claims of national security pale beside the overriding national interest in the truth.

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*Joseph McBride is the author of a biography of Frank Capra, to be published by Alfred A. Knopf.*