

Operation Paperclip: The Secret Intelligence Program to Bring Nazi Scientists to America

Annie Jacobsen. (Little, Brown & Company, 2014) 575 pp., endnotes, bibliography, index.

Reviewed by Jay Watkins

As World War II ended, the race was on with the Soviet Union to seize as many German scientists as possible in anticipation of the Cold War. The full story has remained elusive until now. *Operation Paperclip*, by Annie Jacobsen, provides perhaps the most comprehensive, up-to-date narrative available to the general public. Her book is a detailed and highly readable account of the program. Jacobsen compiled extensive primary and secondary sources, duly annotated in over 100 pages of notes and bibliography. In it are many new sources, among them US government records (President Clinton's "Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act"), German archival records, first-person accounts, memoirs, and letters. The book also contains a useful index and biographies of the principal players.

Jacobsen offers a detailed chronology of events related to Operation Paperclip. Because of its scope and the introduction of so many characters, the narrative could have been improved if the author had focused on a shorter list than the 89 individuals profiled and maintained more topical continuity. Nevertheless, the book is a compelling work with interesting historical and personal revelations, for example:

- One of the most notorious cases of WMD proliferation occurred on 15 May 1945, when the German U-234 submarine, bound for Japan, was captured off Newfoundland by the USS Sutton. The U-boat carried Dr. Heinz Schlicke, Director of Naval Test Fields at Kiel, and the cargo included plans for the Hs293 glider bomb, V-1 glide bomb (forerunner to cruise missiles), V-2 rocket (forerunner to the SCUD missile), Me262 fighter aircraft (the first combat jet fighter), low observable submarine designs, and lead-lined boxes filled with 1,200 lbs. of uranium oxide, a key ingredient of atomic bombs. Schlicke, who claimed to be an electronic warfare expert, became a prisoner at Ft. Meade, MD.

- Sarin was produced at Dyhernfurth (Dyhernfurth later fell into Russian hands). Its name derives from the initials of its developers: Gerhard Schrader and Otto Ambros from the infamous IG Farben chemical company—maker of the killing gases used at concentration camps—and from the names of two German Army officers.

- Schrader tells the story of inventing "tabun," a nerve agent named after the English word "taboo." The Germans called it 9/91 and, after their defeat at Stalingrad, seriously considered using it on the Russians.

Henry Wallace, former vice president and secretary of commerce, believed the scientists' ideas could launch new civilian industries and produce jobs. Indeed, German scientists developed synthetic rubber (used in automobile tires), non-running hosiery, the ear thermometer, electromagnetic tape, and miniaturized electrical components, to name a few.

Werner von Braun is well known to those who remember the Apollo moon landing. During the Ford administration, von Braun was almost awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom—until one of Ford's senior advisors, David Gergen, objected to his Nazi past.

Less well known is that another 120 fellow German scientists, engineers, and technicians developed the Saturn V launch vehicle, or that the Launch Operations Center at Cape Canaveral, Florida, was headed by Kurt Debus, an ardent Nazi. The Vertical Assembly Building—bigger in volume than the Pentagon and almost as tall as the Washington Monument—was designed by Bernhard Tessmann, former facilities designer at the German missile launch facility at Peenemuende.

Other prominent Nazis hired under Operation Paperclip included:

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- Dr. Hubertus Strughold, who played an important role in space medicine by developing space suits and other life-support systems. In June 1948, he put a rhesus monkey named Albert in the pressurized nosecone of a V-2 rocket in a pressurized nose cone, the first step in the effort to send humans to space.
- General Reinhard Gehlen, former head of Nazi intelligence operations against the Soviets, was hired by the US Army and later by the CIA to operate 600 ex-Nazi agents in the Soviet zone of occupied Germany. In 1948, CIA Director Roscoe Hillenkoetter assumed control of the so-called Gehlen Organization.
- German biologist Dr. Kurt Blome was hired to develop offensive and defensive capabilities to counter Soviet biological warfare activities.

In 1949, the CIA created the Office of Scientific Intelligence. Its first director, Dr. Willard Machle, traveled to Germany to set up a special program to interrogate Soviet spies. The CIA believed the Russians had developed mind-control programs and wanted to know how US spies would hold up against this capability if caught. He also aimed to explore the feasibility of creating a “Manchurian candidate” through behavioral modification. Thus, Operation Bluebird was born. Bluebird, later called MKULTRA, was a research activity experimenting in

behavioral engineering of humans. The Nuremberg Code prohibits experimentation with humans without their consent. During this program, Dr. Frank Olson, a US Army biological weapons researcher, was given the drug LSD without his knowledge, leading to his death by leaping from a building. DCI Richard Helms ordered much of the documentation destroyed, and the circumstances of his demise remain controversial to this day.

Although she understandably questions the morality of the decision to hire Nazi SS scientists, Jacobsen balances her judgment with an understanding of the perceived threat of the Soviet Union under Stalin and the communists’ dialectical determination to prepare for total war with the West. The Soviets similarly captured and used German scientists for their own defense programs. That side of the story is not covered in this book.

Jacobsen provides insights on joint intelligence coordination and cooperation among US services and Allies; operational deconfliction; document and foreign materiel acquisition and exploitation; interrogation techniques; active tracking; production of foreign intelligence; surveillance and countersurveillance methods; and negotiating the sometimes conflicting objectives of the judiciary and the Intelligence Community (i.e., “hang them” vs. “hire them!”).

