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WILD BILL & IRON FELIX

WILD BILL

In the lobby of the Langley offices of the Central Intelligence Agency hangs a row of paintings, portraits of the directors of the agency. However, the person represented by the first in the row, William Donovan, was never a member of the CIA, but rather the head of its precursor, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). On the wall near the paintings is inscribed a line from John (viii:32): “And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”

The real Donovan (1883 – 1959) was an American military hero, having served throughout the first half of the twentieth century. He began in the civilian cavalry unit, hunting Pancho Villa during the Mexican Revolution, and continued through WWI. He earned both the Medal of Honor for valor and the Distinguished Service Medal for service. He was a personal friend of Franklin Roosevelt and kept multiple contacts in the military. During WWII, when the OSS was created on the model of the British SIS, Donovan served as its head. His exploits span a wide variety of adventures and operations, both

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documented and institutional legends. Interestingly, his politics were relatively mild toward the Soviet Union.

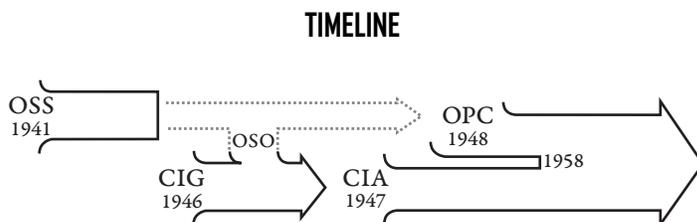
It's not the actual person who matters here, though. Instead, consider Wild Bill as an icon: the independent cowboy who led secret and crucial missions, the brave fighter, the personal friend of presidents, his unswerving loyalty to American interests, backed by force of arms. Consider the wars in which he served, best expressed in American perceptions as "We save the world from itself again," and the special ideal that some of its battles are too dark and secret for anyone to know about, ever. Consider his physical bravery and charisma. Consider that the OSS had itself been mentored by the British SIS with its own icon, Sydney Reilly, at his most shiny, as well as its model of a clandestine, unregulated, highly interventional strike-squad, and add Donovan's personal brand of unbridled improvisation.

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DONOVAN'S LEGACY

When the OSS was dissolved, the Central Intelligence Group (CIG), later named the CIA, was instituted strictly as a central coordinator for intelligence gained by other agencies, not for spying and not for operations. However, many former OSS members and functions were soon found in it, via the short-lived Office of Special Operations (OSO). and several of the most well-connected individuals were instrumental in creating a new agency, the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) before much time had passed.

This sequence of events, minus a couple of institutional details, looked like this:



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Part 1 of this story is that in 1945 President Truman disbanded the paramilitary Office of Special Services and specifically shut down Donovan's desire to head an over-arching intelligence agency. He also set up the CIG to coordinate intelligence coming in from the three military branches and the FBI. The National Security Act of 1947 renamed it the CIA, including a brief, key, vague clause permitting it to take action as well as to collate information.

Part 2 concerns two secondary organizations. The short-lived OSO effectively transferred OSS spying and counterintelligence activities into the CIG, including the key figures Richard Helms and James Jesus Angleton, respectively. The highly-secret OPC was formed in parallel by Donovan's protégés Allen Dulles and Frank Wisner, with the collusion of the Secretary of Defense and the Treasury. As Dulles was head of the foreign-espionage arm of the CIA, the OPC and the CIA were effectively merged through personal connection. They, or it, immediately swung into paramilitary action against the Reds ("Operation Rollback"), with neither budget review or any oversight worthy of the name.

The observant student of history will also spot the built-in conflict of interest that developed. The CIA chief is simultaneously head of "central intelligence" among all the agencies *and* the more localized director of foreign espionage and paramilitary operations.

Part 3 began when Allen Dulles became the new head of the CIA under Eisenhower in the early 1950s and eventually folded the OPC into the CIA by 1958. Throughout this period and beyond, covert operations constituted the main activity of the CIA, as opposed to its initially defined purpose. All of this was made possible by (a) the agency's funding being secretly laundered with no accountability, (b) its immunity from the Justice Department in all ways, and (c) Allen's brother, John Foster Dulles, as Eisenhower's Secretary of State.

During the first half of the Cold War, each incoming president was to be seduced with promises of his secret, loyal, active strike force winning the Cold War without nukes, by reading the enemy's mind and striking from the shadows.

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The climax of the process I'm trying to illustrate is certainly the Bay of Pigs (1961), but that's not the end of the story. Within a few years, Director Richard Helms was another OSS/OPC boy, and he kept trucking along in the same way, burying the covert/OPC-type stuff very deep.

Furthermore, James Jesus Angleton, yet another OSS veteran, ran a counterintelligence "CIA inside the CIA" in many ways throughout all this, especially in collusion with the British MI-5. Many of his practices were dubious, including extensive surveillance of American citizens. The real fallout from his activities wouldn't come until the Church investigation of the agency in 1974-1975.

The take-home point is that the OSS and its ideals (or the darker side thereof) had infiltrated the CIA much as the CIA would infiltrate its targets abroad, and the agency charter's key supplementary line "...to perform such other functions and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security as the National Security Council may from time to time direct ..." became its main *raison d'être*.

Stated as an anthem, it might read as follows.

We are fighting WWII right here and right now, as the Nazis we defeated were instantly replaced by an equally grim oppressor. We are the President's personal quick-acting weapon, independent of the slow and limited military. Our foes have infiltrated and deceived nearly every nation on earth, taking advantage of the credulous, the idealistic, and the lazy. We must strike like lightning, transform a target in our interests, and vanish. Any action we take to succeed is justified, as our foe is unspeakably dangerous, and he is winning; we must fight fire with fire. Our virtues are our boldness, our capacity to learn, our energy, and our unswerving integrity as shown by loyalty to our nation's interests. No one knows what the real war is, except for us. Our missions are not set by politicians, but by our own special knowledge, in the personal service of the President, as we interpret his best interest. Our missions must be unknown to the general public and to their representatives, as they underestimate the threat and their knowledge compromises our effectiveness.

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IRON FELIX

In Moscow, in Dzerzhinsky Square in front of the Lubyanka, the Moscow KGB headquarters, stands a statue (or did, until 1991). The person it represents was not a member of the KGB by that name, but rather the head of the Cheka, the abbreviated name of its precursor. His name was Feliks Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky. It carried no special inscription; it didn't need to – “Iron Felix” was known to and feared by every Soviet citizen, no matter how low or how high.

The real Dzerzhinsky (1877 - 1926) was a classic eastern European communist revolutionary of the Marxist-Bakunin school. He fought Czarist oppression with demonstrations, bombs, pamphlets, riots, strikes, and bullets. He survived decades of imprisonment, including two terms in Siberia, emerging with unswerving faith in the cause to join Lenin's inner circle at the crest of the Revolution. His brooding zeal served well as the head of the Party's internal security, combined with his imagination (he was a noted inventor) and utter lack of personal ambition. He refined the Czarist techniques he'd suffered under, including information gathering, coercion, terror, and murder, into the Cheka, a nationwide, institutionalized, politically unchallengeable scourge.

But again, the man isn't the point of interest. Consider, instead, Iron Felix the icon: the scarred, ill, and zealous guardian, the unrepentant fiery-eyed ex-prisoner, the close confidante and personal bodyguard of the Premier, the ruthless terror-master and self-proclaimed “sword and shield” of the state. Consider that the Czarist prisons were as near to hell on earth as can be imagined. Consider that the Bolshevik Revolution included nearly a decade of savage politics and military action, and that Lenin was nearly killed by a bullet to the head due in part to British agents. Consider that Bolshevism was universally proclaimed criminal in nearly every country outside of Russia. Finally (and after Dzerzhinsky's death), consider that the U.S.S.R. manned the single army to defeat the Axis forces on the ground at a near-unimaginable human cost, including over one million Soviet soldiers killed at Stalingrad.

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DZERZHINSKY'S LEGACY

Soviet unity relied on three things: the Red Army, the bureaucracy, and the secret police. The transformations that led the latter from the Cheka through several organizational and name changes, ultimately to the KGB, were as equally characteristic, even self-referential, as the CIA's origins. Specifically, it emerged through a series of unbridled, ruthless, interior purges.

Dzerzhinsky's era (1917) included the founding of the Cheka, the Red Terror, and the Trust, a successful disinformation operation against British intelligence, from which the latter would not recover for half a century. From these roots emerged what would eventually become the 2nd Directorate of the KGB.

In the 1920s, the Cheka was renamed the GPU and then the OGPU, both subordinate to the more general NKVD (which would subsume both in 1934). A specialized agency, the INO, was established in 1920 as part of the GPU, for foreign espionage. It therefore "poached" this activity from military intelligence (GRU), and the agencies' rivalry never healed, even as the INO eventually developed into the 1st Directorate of the KGB. During the 1930s, the INO's astounding recruiting success among British and American scientists and civil servants, including those nations' spies, has not been equalled by any agency to date.

After Dzerzhinsky died in 1926, V. R. Menzhinsky headed the OGPU; he died in 1934, the same year that the OGPU was subsumed by the NKVD. During this time, the Gulag was established by his ambitious underling Genrikh Yagoda, who became the next chief.

Stalin's Great Terror did not spare the security services, who took it to a fine art concerning their own ranks. Dzerzhinsky's and Menzhinsky's deaths by natural causes quickly proved to be flukes. In 1937, Yagoda was denounced, replaced as NKVD chief, and finally executed by Nikolai Yezhov, who himself "disappeared" in 1939 and was succeeded by Lavrenty Beria. Beria became NKVD chief and slowly, surely increased and consolidated his control over the entire society's security services, including the border guards (armies, really), police, militia, espionage, and secret police. By the early 1950s, after a decade of splits and reunifications too confusing to recount

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here, they were very nearly one organization, the MGB/MVD.

Upon Stalin's death in 1953, Beria briefly united all the services into one, the MVD. In one of the least surprising political moves of the entire twentieth century, Beria's rivals instantly deposed and executed him, and yet another purge separated and reorganized the diverse services into the structure that would last throughout the Cold War.

The MVD was entirely split from the rest, concerned solely with police functions at the "citizen safety" level of crime: assault, murder, and similar. The KGB's functions, divided into Directorates, concerned foreign espionage (1st Directorate), internal state security or "political police" (2nd Directorate), the border guards (effectively an army), and more, among at least eight Directorates in total. The others were mainly concerned with developing surveillance technology and penetrating specific target groups in the USSR itself.

Therefore the KGB in the Cold War sense took on its "shape" in the early 1950s, just about exactly when the CIA did. The name changes leading up to this structure were not trivial at all, as the final product, especially the first two directorates, represented a finely-honed and specialized culture-within-a-culture with a surprisingly political consequence.

Throughout the Cold War, the power structure of the Soviet Union tended to alternate between partial reform and partial return to Stalinism. With each shift, the KGB served as haven for the establishment opposition, almost like an alternative political party. This occurred both in terms of placing powerful individuals where they had responsibility but could not officially hold office, and in terms of where dissenting but careful young civil servants often found a home. Thus under Khrushchev, the KGB tended toward rabid retro-Stalinism; under Brezhnev, it tended toward intellectualism and, unevenly, a subtler touch.

This pattern not only applied at a slow, decades-long pace as befits a monstrous political institution, but also, amazingly, as a rapid-fire flip-flop of premiers and power bases in the mid-1980s as well. Under Andropov, the KGB Stalinized; under Chernenko, it liberalized; all in a matter of months.

Gorbachev might have done well to have kept a closer eye on his KGB chief Kryuchkov, who engineered the coup against him in 1991, for exactly this reason.

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Name changes and reorganizations aside, though, throughout the KGB's history, the Iron Felix philosophy was institutionalized to the point of fanaticism. It might be stated as:

We are fighting foreign wars against the same enemies we overthrew at home, because they rule every nation except ours. We won against the Nazis, at terrible cost, but their new equivalents are wealthier and more influential – wholly corrupt adults, rather than the raving children the Nazi leaders were. These new foes are subtler, but also more deadly. Their pernicious doctrine has already caused untold misery throughout human history, because people are too easily swayed by the lure of greed and advantage over others. Our progress is young and precarious, therefore dissidence is treason – the people must continually be watched, tested, and when necessary, purged. The enemy stops at nothing; neither must we. Our virtues are our ruthlessness, our vigilance, and our patience. We learn everything and hold it in readiness. Our presence must be known, but never understood, because our chiefest weapon is our foes' fear and hesitation.

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This outlook eventually found its most extreme expression not in Russia or other Soviet republics, but in the non-Soviet Warsaw Pact states, like Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and the GDR.

TWENTIETH CENTURY CULT WARS

So there's the painting and there's the statue, and arty comparisons between them are irresistible. However, simply to call them "mirror images" is too easy. What matters is understanding the respective ideals they represent, in three ways.

First, in how those ideals persisted through multiple decades, changes in leadership, and the ups and downs of the Cold War.

Second, in how agents of both espionage cultures were taught to make a virtue out of over-stepping the bounds of decency even as construed by one's own home culture. In the agency's service, literally any abuse, betrayal, or harm is justified, even noble.

Third, in how the ideals interacted so poisonously when their

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agents clashed, whether physically, ideologically, or tactically. Given these points of view, any action taken is automatically perceived as defensive by its own side, and offensive by the other, such that both are in a constant state of provocation.

There's no pretty way to say it. More than any other espionage service or twentieth-century institution I can think of, the CIA and the main directorates of the KGB represented two international, immensely-powerful *cults*, in the most literal sense of the word.

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- ♦ Both indoctrinated their officers and general staff into a secret-knowledge elite, emphasizing the importance of a mission that no one else may comprehend.
- ♦ Both actively recruited bright, manipulative young people who sought a purpose in life, and instructed them intensively in methods of deception and further recruitment.
- ♦ Both enjoyed a considerable domestic political presence and general freedom from the nation's justice system.
- ♦ Both adapted easily to new venues of conflict and new issues, willing to re-cast whatever they confronted in terms of the basic ideological dichotomy regardless of contradictions.
- ♦ Both cultures embraced adversity as a spur for greater effort, prolonging struggle rather than resolving it.

None of the above is fundamental to the basic acts of spying. Nor is it fair to accuse *all* officers, analysts, and leaders of these two agencies of being cultists.

However, all of it reached a fever pitch in both agencies frequently enough that they sometimes represented the most significant political entities in their respective nations and in international events, for no purpose beyond imposing their internal values and preserving their continued existence.

So imagine the spy game lasting from 1945 through 1989 in Cold War Berlin ... and imagine Wild Bill and Iron Felix both looming throughout most of it. I'd say it's kind of creepy.

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BOOKS ABOUT THE CIA AND THE KGB

Basic texts on the KGB should be read in order of publication date, beginning with Jeffrey T. Richelson, *Sword and Shield*; John Prados, *The Soviet Estimate*; and Amy W. Knight, *The KGB: Police and Politics in the Soviet Union*. From there, all of the following are astounding reading: Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story*; Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, and *The World Was Going Our Way*; and Milt Bearden and James Risen, *The Main Enemy: the Inside Story of the CIA's Final Showdown with the KGB*. For accounts of post-1991 Russian intelligence services, see Martin Ebon, *KGB: Death and Rebirth*, and Amy Knight, *Spies Without Cloaks*.

Pure and simple anti-Russki Cold War screeds, which provided generations of Americans with what they “needed to know,” are found in John Barron, *KGB: The Secret Work of Soviet Secret Agents* and *KGB Today: The Hidden Hand*.

Defectors’ personal accounts include Victor Cherkashin and Gregory Feifer, *Spy Handler: Memoirs of a KGB Officer*; Oleg Kalugin, *Spymaster* and *The First Directorate*, and Stanislav Levchenko, *On the Wrong Side: My Life in the KGB*. I’m a little suspicious of most of these; they share a sameness of phrasing and of general CIA-friendly points that give off a kind of institutionally-vetted smell.

The essential CIA reading is found in a kind of unintentional series: Burton Hersh, *The Old Boys: The American Elite and the Origins of the CIA*; Thomas Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets*; John Prados, *Lost Crusader: The Private Wars of CIA Director William Colby*; and Bob Woodward, *Veil*. Other relevant books include David F. Rudgers, *Creating the Secret State*; Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *The CIA and American Democracy*, and Martin Riebling, *Wedge: From Pearl Harbor to 9/11*.

The library of official CIA presentations of its own history and culture includes Evan Thomas, *The Very Best Men*; Elizabeth McIntosh, *Sisterhood of Spies: The Women of the OSS*; Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback*; David Murphy, Sergei Kondrashev, and George Bailey, *Battleground Berlin: CIA vs. KGB in the Cold War*; Ronald Kessler, *Inside the CIA*; Patrick K. O’Donnell, *Operatives, Spies, and Sabo-*

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teurs: The Unknown Story of the Men and Women of WWII's OSS; Ralph E. Weber, Spymasters: Ten CIA Officers in Their Own Words; H. Bradford Westerfield, Inside CIA's Private World: Declassified Articles from the Agency's Internal Journal, 1955-1992; Clarence Ashley and Leonard McCoy, CIA Spymaster; Richard Helms and William Hood, A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency; and Roger Hall, You're Stepping On My Cloak and Dagger. The standout contrary voice from this level of insider is by former CIA director Stansfield Turner, Secrecy and Democracy and Burn Before Reading.

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