

# QUEST



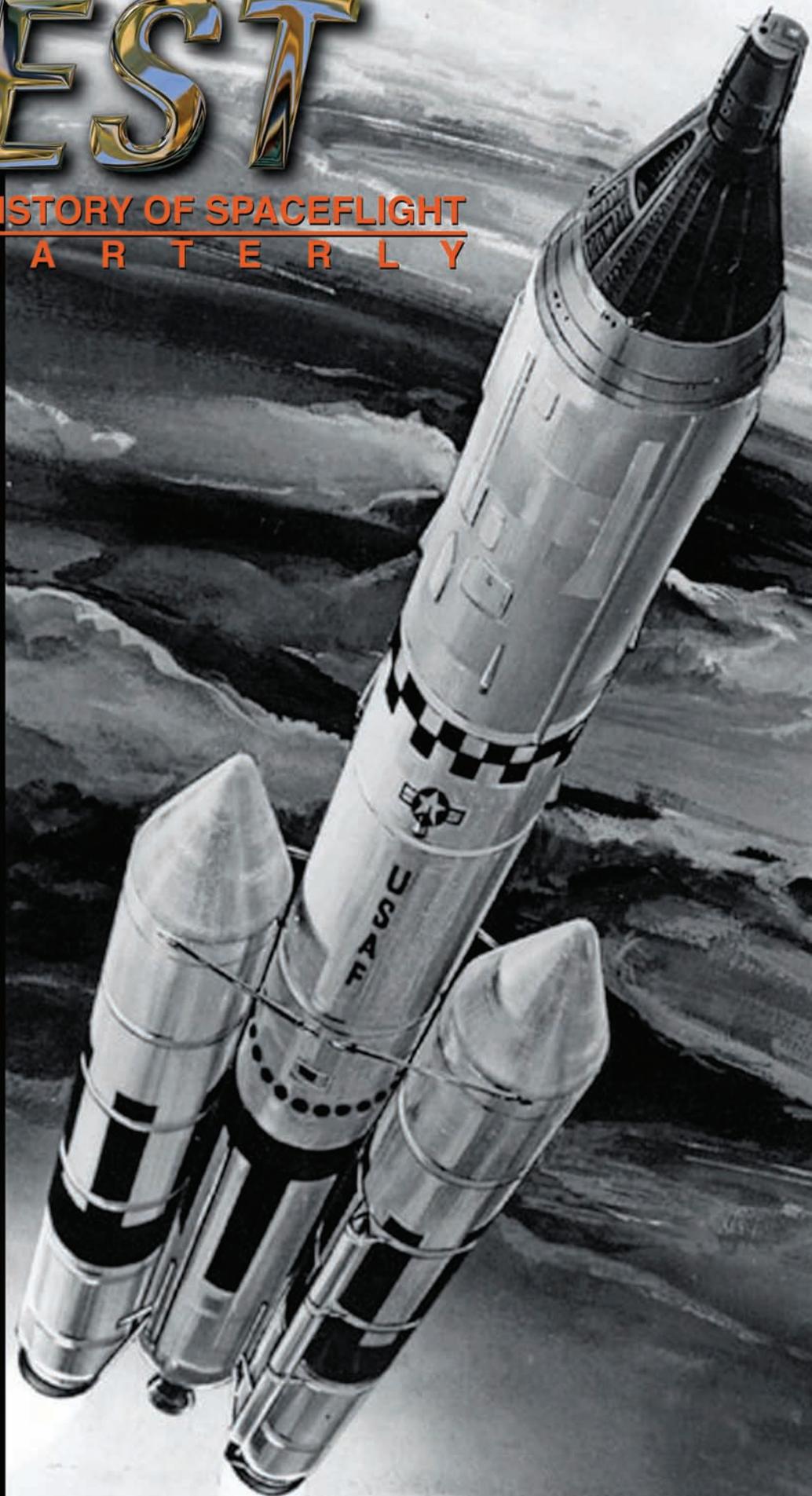
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**QUARTERLY**

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Artist concept of a launch of the Manned Orbiting Laboratory (MOL) using a Titan rocket.

Credit: U.S. Air Force

MOL Artist Concept.

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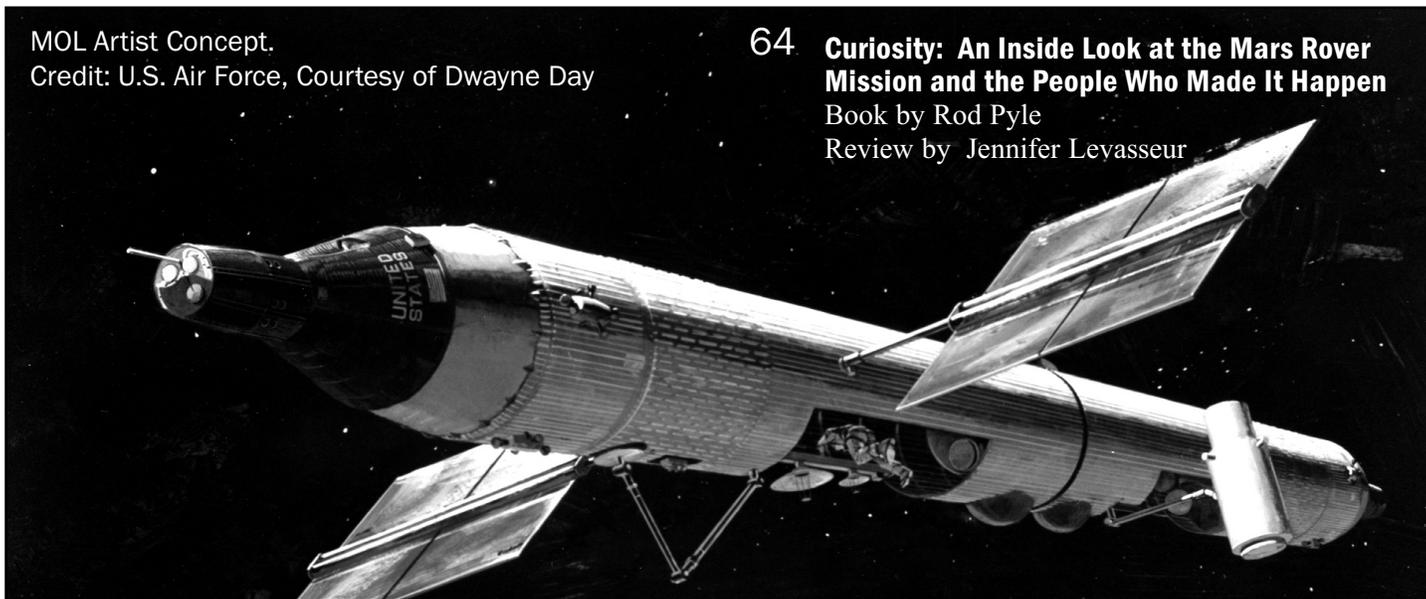
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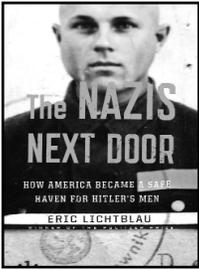
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## BOOK REVIEW

# THE NAZIS NEXT DOOR: HOW AMERICA BECAME A SAFE HAVEN FOR HITLER'S MEN



By Eric Lichtblau

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014

ISBN: 978-0-547-66919-9

Pages: 288

Price: \$28.00, hardcover

Lichtblau, a Pulitzer-Prize-winning investigative journalist for the *New York Times*, has produced the latest book in the “scandals revealed” genre about the U.S. government’s importation, exploitation, and cover-up of former Nazis. That genre lacks balance and scholarly depth, but *The Nazis Next Door* is the best book so far in that vein. It is excellently written, sometimes gripping, and reveals new information, although little of the latter is about aerospace topics. I should declare, as I did with my recent *Quest* review of Annie Jacobsen’s error-ridden *Operation Paperclip*,<sup>1</sup> that I am thanked in the Acknowledgments and provided advice to the author. While corrections I sent Lichtblau regarding space-related matters appear not to have been incorporated, the errors are irritating but not critical. However, I should note that subject-matter experts have demonstrated that Lichtblau’s harsh criticism of U.S. treatment of “displaced persons” (mostly Jewish refugees) in postwar camps is unbalanced and inaccurate.<sup>2</sup>

In the main, his book is about the CIA and FBI using and protecting ex-Nazis or former Eastern European collaborators who came to the United States, and the subsequent investigations of those people by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) or the Justice Department’s Office of Special Investigations (OSI). The latter was formed in 1979 specifically to pursue Nazi perpetrators in view of the inadequacy of earlier efforts.

The only parts of this book relevant to space history are the sections on Arthur Rudolph and Hubertus Strughold. Rudolph, a close associate of Wernher von Braun, famously returned to Germany and renounced his citizenship in 1984 in a voluntary agreement to avoid a denaturalization trial over his role as the production manager of the underground, slave-labor Mittelwerk V-2 factory. It was the only OSI investigation of a former Paperclip engineer or scientist that ever came to fruition. The facts of Rudolph’s case have been extensively discussed earlier by other authors in the genre, so what is most new in *The Nazis Next Door* is an evocative description of OSI’s questioning of Rudolph in San Jose, California, in 1982 and 1983, clearly from the viewpoint of the investigators (chapter 10). Rudolph’s complete lack of guilt about the crimes committed in the Mittelwerk is striking. It naively led him to come to the interviews without a lawyer on the assumption that

he was only giving information, a massive present to the investigators. While he eventually became alarmed and got legal representation, he had already given too much away. He decided to emigrate to protect his only income, a civil service pension. In my opinion he got exactly what he deserved, but it is also clear that if he had stonewalled OSI from the outset, he might have been able to drag out the case in court and quite possibly never have been denaturalized and deported.

As for Strughold, the most famous space medicine specialist in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, OSI never brought a case as it lacked sufficient evidence of his specific knowledge of, and implication in, the horrible experiments on prisoners in Dachau. Only posthumously has scholarship, and changing values, led to the un-naming of various facilities and awards after him. Lichtblau briefly discusses the information about Strughold, including new evidence that shows his institute performed unethical, non-fatal altitude experiments on epileptic children.

The primary CIA cases Lichtblau covers seem worse, involving significant, if distinctly second-rank, Holocaust perpetrators involved in mass murders who served the agency as paid informants. Some were recruited in the United States after they had arrived under false pretenses, and some were helped by the CIA to bypass immigration hurdles despite the agency being aware of their crimes. Such was the anti-Communist fervor and fear in the two decades after World War II, however, that almost anyone who appeared able to penetrate Soviet secrecy or spy networks, however dirty, was exploited. How much that was required is debatable, but I, for one, find these cases indefensible.

Lichtblau’s readable book is most useful as an examination of the rise of “Nazi hunting” from the lonely and frustrated efforts of a handful of journalists and INS investigators to the much more systematic work of the OSI, an organization that has always been under political attack. However, *The Nazis Next Door* does not fulfill the need for more scholarly and balanced research into that phenomenon, nor is it the first to examine the topic.<sup>3</sup> By far the majority of OSI cases came from its research into camp guards and participants in mass shootings who immigrated by lying about their past. That story still needs to be comprehensively examined.

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National Air and Space Museum  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, DC

1 Vol. 21, no. 3, 51-52.

2 Harold Marcuse, “Eric Lichtblau’s book, *The Nazis Next Door: How America Became a Safe Haven for Hitler’s Men*” <https://networks.h-net.org/node/35008/blog/h-german-blog-responses->

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**Quest on the Internet**

www.spacehistory101.com

ISSN: 1065-7738

**Publisher:** Scott Sacknoff  
**Editor:** Dr. David Arnold

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