AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES WEBB:
ADMINISTRATION OF EXPLORATION

IGY SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITIES
AND THE PREHISTORY OF TIROS

AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE ON SOVIET MISSILE PROGRAMS, 1945-1954

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Front Cover Caption
Circa 1957, the artwork was used by Convair Astronautics (San Diego, California), a division of General Dynamics, in an advertisement celebrating the successful test flight of the Atlas Intercontinental Ballistic Missile. The first successful test launch of an SM-65 Atlas missile took place on 17 December 1957. Though the artwork is unsigned, Convair’s resident artist at that time was John Sentovic. In 1994, General Dynamics sold its Space Systems Division to Martin Marietta (now Lockheed Martin). Permission to use the image has been granted by Lockheed Martin and the original ad can be found in the personal archives of Paul Carsola, a researcher who has contributed to Quest in the past.
Several people have asked my opinion of this book, which drew favorable reviews in the New York Times and other media outlets. I should mention that I answered several inquiries from the author on the phone, I am prominently mentioned in the acknowledgments, and my Wernher von Braun biography is extensively cited in the notes. Indeed several pages in the text are essentially lifted from Von Braun (with attribution). Unfortunately, I cannot endorse Operation Paperclip because: it is error-ridden, it produces no fundamentally new information, it is unbalanced, and its notes are poor. It is not an academic work and cannot be criticized for trying to be one, but the net result is that, despite her discovery or development of several new sources, it does not advance the topic much beyond what was revealed in the muckraking Paperclip investigative journalism of the 1980s.

My negative impression of her accuracy set in early. On page 7 she calls the V-1 cruise missile the V-2’s “earlier version.” On page 8 she writes that the military leader of the German Army rocket program, Gen. Walter Dornberger, “often wore a long-shin-length leather coat to match the Reichsführer-SS [Heinrich Himmler]”—a ludicrous detail, as Dornberger wore Wehrmacht standard issue. I have written extensively about Dornberger’s collaboration with the SS in the criminal enterprise of the concentration camps connected to the V-2 program, but also about the Army-SS rivalry in the program—Dornberger was no toady of Himmler. The next several pages are an overwritten scene of Albert Speer’s presenting the Knight’s Cross to Dornberger, von Braun, and two others, based on my quotations and summary from Dornberger’s memoir. But in the process Jacobsen adds many invented details for dramatic effect. On page 13, she describes von Braun associate Arthur Rudolph (best known for being forced to leave the United States in 1984 over his involvement with the Mittelwerk V-2 factory), as a “high-school graduate,” even though he had a two-year engineering technology degree. It is a minor error, but when multiplied by a hundred it casts doubt on the whole. In my primary area of expertise, the V-2 and von Braun, every discussion of these stories throughout the book is error-ridden. Jacobsen also misidentifies Third Reich leaders and organizations, gets the details of the reorganization of the U.S. military in 1947 wrong, and misspells the name of famous diplomat George F. Kennan in every reference to him. It leads me to doubt the accuracy of every story in the book that I do not know so intimately.

The lack of any fundamentally new information is also troubling. I do not mean that there is nothing new in the book or that it is without value. Operation Paperclip is very readable and it covers many stories told in the previous literature better than they were before. Jacobsen found new sources to interview and she and her researchers (of which she lists several) have been to archives that Linda Hunt and Tom Bower, the two primary journalists of the earlier phase, have not cited. But much space is devoted to colorful and interesting descriptions of the various Allied holding facilities for Nazi leaders, the war crimes trials in Germany, and the growth of the Gehlen Organization (the ex-SS-dominated intelligence group in the U.S. occupation zone that became the West German intelligence agency BND). Most of this information is only tangentially related to Operation Overcast (the original name) or Paperclip. A large fraction of the book concentrates on chemical and biological warfare and aerospace medicine, subjects that continue to shock in the willingness of members of the U.S. military to recruit Third Reich specialists connected to concentration-camp experiments on inmates, while covering-up or whitewashing the Nazi records of those they recruited. Jacobsen develops these stories more than Hunt or Bower did, but I did not find anything that struck me as fundamentally new. The author herself acknowledges the pioneering work of Linda Hunt in using Freedom of Information Act to produce much new information in the 1980s. Her own contributions to research seem slight by comparison.

Jacobsen, following the tradition of Hunt and Bower, concentrates on the scandals, which inevitably leads to an imbalance in presentation. Little is said about the substantive contributions of von Braun and company to U.S. ballistic missile and space programs, and the same is true of the specialists the U.S. military to recruit Third Reich specialists connected to concentration-camp experiments on inmates, while covering-up or whitewashing the Nazi records of those they recruited. Jacobsen develops these stories more than Hunt or Bower did, but I did not find anything that struck me as fundamentally new. The author herself acknowledges the pioneering work of Linda Hunt in using Freedom of Information Act to produce much new information in the 1980s. Her own contributions to research seem slight by comparison.

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and-white judgments are easy—and a tradition for this topic—but it hardly leads to a balanced assessment.

As for the notes, they are in the unfortunate trade-press tradition of page references in the back, primarily for quotations—but not even consistently for those. Despite the impressive looking bibliography, the notes are mostly to secondary sources, and proper archival citations to Paperclip and other documents are never given—that too continues the tradition of Hunt and Bower. And I cannot help remarking that, when she uses a note to make an (irrelevant) aside about the bombing of Auschwitz question (regarding John J. McCloy, who was U.S. High Commissioner to Germany in the early fifties), it has at least two factual errors [518].

Operation Paperclip is not the book that the scholarly world, or the general public, need on this topic. It is unfortunate that the first scholarly work, by Clarence G. Lasby, remains the only balanced one, although it is completely dated by the revelations of the 1980s and the scholarship that has appeared since. A new study is needed, one informed by new historiographic perspectives, as well as by all the archival sources that have become available. I am not going to write that book, so I hope somebody does. It could make a fruitful doctoral dissertation.

Michael J. Neufeld
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Notes

2 I decided that the Soviet term “specialists” was more useful in my global survey of the recruitment of German and Austrian aerospace experts: “The Nazi Aerospace Exodus: Towards a Global, Transnational History,” History and Technology 28 (2012), 49-67.

From the Archives

The Spirit of St. Louis

In October of 1968 I finished my work on the Support Crew of Apollo 10 and then was assigned to the Support Crew of Apollo 11. At that time, Apollo 8, 9, 10, and 11 were “queued” up to challenge the Moon. In December I flew to Patrick Air Force Base and awaited the launch of Apollo 8, the first launch to the Moon. I was invited to the pre-launch party for Apollo 8 but had to miss it because of an unwise social commitment. However on launch morning I and all the other observing astronauts viewed a picture-perfect launch of Apollo 8 and 2 1/2 days later were all in the Observing room at Mission Control to “witness” Apollo 8’s entry into lunar orbit based on observations of data and conversations of the flight controller in the Control Center.

Everything went well and hours later we were treated to on-board video and verbal descriptions of their view of Earth and areas near the United States. Jim Lovell was captivated by the clarity of the view he had of the Bahamas. The crew read from the first chapter of Genesis and sent heart-felt greetings to those of us who looked-on and listened in awe-struck silence.

The return trip was made without incident and the crew was welcomed home by many grateful loved ones. The crew was feted at the White House and then sent on a goodwill tour of their home planet which went off without a hitch.

Two spectators at the pre-launch party, launch, and the return to Earth were Eddie Richenbacker and Charles Lindbergh both of whom were highly grateful for the recognition. In January 1969 a large box arrived at the Astronaut Office. The staff opened the box and discovered copies of The Spirit of St. Louis addressed to all the astronauts and NASA VIPs.

In reading Lindbergh’s account of his navigation across the Atlantic, I was amazed by the similarity of his description of the “dead reckoning” navigation technique he described and the method we were taught 25 years later in flying school. I really felt a kinship with a man I had always admired greatly.

Bill Pogue, Pilot, Skylab 4 courtesy: Heritage Auctions lot 40525
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