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## Book Review

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# War-time controversy over Vatican-OSS relations renewed by 'declassification'

by Max Corvo

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### Wild Bill Donovan: The Last Hero

by Anthony Cave Brown

New York Times Books, 1982

\$29.95 891 pages

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*Max Corvo was war-time operations officer for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Italian Section. This article originally appeared in his Middletown Bulletin (Middletown, Connecticut), and focuses on the role of James Jesus Angleton, whom, in his later role as chief of counterintelligence, CIA, Corvo accuses of stultifying offensive intelligence missions on the enemy's terrain on the pretext that these opened the CIA to penetration by NKVD, GRU, KGB and other Soviet intelligence services. As a result, American intelligence came increasingly to rely on defectors or third-party (e.g., British, Israeli, etc.) intelligence services.*

The publication of three biographical works on the life of William J. Donovan, war-time director of the Office of Strategic Services and considered by many to have been the original moving force behind the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency, has focused attention on the accomplishments and failures of the intelligence community.

Espionage has always been an imprecise activity which has been conducted from earliest times for the purpose of gaining advantage through foreknowledge of an adversary's intentions.

It has never been a profession, as many practitioners of this activity in the post World War II era have attempted to make us believe, nor has it been a *craft* as Allen Dulles attempted to pun with the word in his book, *The Craft of Intelligence*.

It is and has been a most tedious pursuit of knowledge in all spheres of endeavor which must be carried on relentlessly and with singular purpose (not to mention luck) if it is to succeed.

The war-time Office of Strategic Services, brainchild of William J. Donovan, sought to put together a huge cast of people from all walks of life, to undertake in a compressed and emotionally charged period of time a massive intelligence job to assist the worldwide struggle for democratic survival.

It is about this effort that Anthony Cave Brown has written a massive, 800-page-plus tome which is entitled *Wild Bill Donovan: The Last Hero*.

Mr. Brown's literary effort was aided by Otto Doering, one of Donovan's law partners and associates, who turned over to him the voluminous records and microfilms of the Donovan files. Doering died before the publication of the book, but others who were privy to information relative to sensitive operations conducted by the various branches of OSS, provided Brown with details to round out the tale.

These personal recollections, warped by the passage of time which has wrought changing perceptions of events, as well as occasional mental lapses, have served to reduce the historical value of the book.

Cave Brown's value as an historian was already under serious doubt with the publication in 1976 of his book, *The Secret War Report of the OSS* (published by Berkeley Medallion Books), which was culled from the declassified history of the OSS and other miscellaneous sources.

The *report* was rife with historical fabrications and inaccuracies, many of which had been wholly lifted from R. Harris Smith's *O.S.S.* (Berkeley University Press, 1972).

The most startling of the intelligence adventures recounted by Cave Brown has to do with the Vatican. It regards the operation code-named *Vessel*.

Brown wrote about this operation in his *Secret OSS War Report* in 1976, lifting the subject almost verbatim from Smith's book and adding a few gratuitous comments of his own.

For his book on Donovan, he has revised his material on *Vessel* with the input of James J. Angleton, former chief of CIA, Counter Espionage Branch, and from documents declassified at the National Archives in 1978 and 1979.

Vatican officials have long been disturbed by the publication of a number of books which have charged or implied that Msgr. Gianbattista Montini, later to become Pope Paul VI, provided the United States government during 1944-1945 with critical military intelligence from Japan by making available confidential reports from various diplomatic missions of the Holy See. This information purportedly facilitated U.S. Air Force bombing missions over Japan.

So disturbed was the Vatican by these reports that it

assigned a team of researchers that included the Rev. Robert Graham, S.J., to investigate and to counteract the negative reaction that was anticipated by the impending declassification of OSS records and the stories being spun around them.

In Volume 59 (January 1974) of the *Catholic Historical Review*, Reverend Graham charged that the documents in question were the fabrication of the imagination of one "Virgilio Scattolini, the prince of Vatican misinformers."

Scattolini, who had worked for *Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican's official newspaper, and who had access to the offices of the Secretariat of State in the Vatican, was eventually prosecuted and sentenced to seven months and four days in jail. "Upon his release from jail, Scattolini reportedly vanished without leaving a trace."

In early 1976, the Vatican was further disturbed when left-wing authors Marco Fini and Roberto Faenza waded through OSS declassified material, made xerox copies of everything they could lay their hands on, and came up with a volume entitled, *The Americans in Italy*, which was published by Feltrinelli, a pro-communist publisher in Milan. All of the xerox copies, according to the authors, were later deposited in the archives of the Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Foundation.

Fini and Faenza were assisted in their effort by Edward J. Becker and Mark Lynch of Ralph Nader's Center for the Study of Responsive Law, who helped with research and wrote an explanatory note for the book. The preface was written by G. William Dumhoff of the University of California.

Among the many charges made by Fini and Faenza was the repetition of the reputed war-time collaboration between the Vatican's Montini and the OSS.

The Cave Brown book on Donovan devotes an entire chapter to *Vessel*. His obvious source of information on the subject is James J. Angleton, who in late 1944 and 1945 had been assigned to X-2 in Rome. X-2 was the Counter Intelligence (CI) branch of OSS.

Cave Brown has undertaken a massive revision of the story, which he attempts to buttress with quotations from documents and information from a number of OSS veterans whose participation and recollections of the events are, at best, remote.

The original version of the *Vessel* story which Brown included in his 1976 book was a total fabrication which could not possibly stand up to the light of day and had its origins in the 1972 Smith book on OSS.

Cave Brown's version, which appeared on page 156 of *Secret History*, was completely in parenthesis and commented that the official OSS historian did not discuss the involvement of the Irish government with the Vatican in the *Vessel* project in 1942. This version stated that Montini was in touch with Earl Bennis of OSS Secret Intelligence (SI) Washington and was transmitting information from the Holy See's Tokyo diplomatic representative, which included bombing targets.

This information was then passed from the Irish embassy, with the knowledge and approval of Eamon DeValera, to the SI representative, Richard Mazzarini (who was in London), and who then sent it on through special navy cipher to Washington.

It is obvious that no such tortuous intelligence routing existed and that only Smith's and Cave Brown's absolute naiveté could lead them to even repeat the absurdity, let alone publish it as part of a history of OSS. As a matter of fact, OSS had just emerged from COI in 1942 and was primarily involved in a battle for survival and the eventual North African invasion. Mazzarini, who then worked for the PanAm Freight division in New York, was not brought into OSS until later.

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The version of the *Vessel* affair in Brown's book makes no effort to correct the serious implications of the first version. Rather, the inclusion of *Vessel* in the Donovan biography must be attributed to the author's contact with Jim Angleton, and the assumptions and conclusions arrived at in this chapter should probably also be credited to the former X-2 operator.

Angleton has made a life-time career of counter-intelligence/espionage obsessions, and more than any other top CIA official during the post-World War II era, he served to inhibit "humint" operations (human intelligence, i.e., active agent) of CIA against Russia and the Communist world. This inhibition took the form of a maximum fear of KGB penetration, and this obsession was to finally destroy his career when

he and members of his staff were made to resign unceremoniously by CIA Director Bill Colby during the 1974-75 congressional investigation of CIA.

It is obvious from the documentary file on *Vessel* which was finally partially declassified in 1978 and 1979 that:

1) There was never any involvement by Msgr. Montini (later Pope Paul VI) in *Vessel*;

2) None of the evidence points to the inclusion of military intelligence, let alone bombing targets, in any of the messages that purportedly originated from the Vatican's Tokyo representative or any of his contacts;

3) The importance attached to source material at all OSS, White House, and military levels was due to the fact that there was an utter lack of high-level intelligence from Japan (Magic excepted);

4) The *Vessel* source, while it may have embellished the information which was made available to OSS (and perhaps, as Angleton asserted, to other interested parties), could not have been fabricating it out of whole cloth, since part of the information was verified by succeeding events and corroboration.

The Cave Brown/Angleton conclusions on *Vessel* are based on declassified X-2 and other files, many of which are, or were classified "Secret Control—For X-2 Only."

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After having examined and analyzed these files, the Reverend Graham made the following comment in a letter to me on Sept. 20, 1979:

*The perplexities include the question, already alluded to, of why these messages continued to be dispatched, even after grave doubts about their authenticity were entertained. Also, the S.I. side of this exposé, herewith enclosed, which is of X-2 origin and naturally unilateral.*

The X-2 file, which is overzealous in its needless excision of large portions of its *Vessel* analysis, comes to a series of conclusions which have conveniently been completely obliterated by the censor's black marker.

The black marker is obviously a self-serving device of a defensive nature because:

a) At the time that X-2's (Angleton's) conclusions were arrived at, there was no one from SI around to contest their validity or challenge the evidence;

b) SI Italy was ordered to turn over *Vessel* to X-2 by July 15 of 1945 (which it did), but X-2, by its own admission (page 4 of its *Plan Dusty*), admits that it continued to distribute the reports and that between September and December 1945, "the operation produced 435 reports" (para 19). It then goes on to say, "Of this total, 35% of the information was partially or wholly true, while 16% had been definitely proved false. The remainder could not properly be evaluated. . . ."

The X-2 conclusions were that *Vessel* was a service distributed to the intelligence agents of a number of nations by Scattolini and his assistant Setaccioli for the purpose of:

1) Obtaining money;

2) Conducting anti-Vatican propaganda as an ancillary service to the Communists;

3) Helping the Italian counter-espionage organization spot foreign intelligence organizations in Italy and to accumulate hard currency for its operations.

These are all hypotheses which Cave Brown seems to espouse in his book. However, there is clear evidence that rebuts the most damning of these hypotheses:

1) At the time that X-2 arrived at these conclusions in 1949, there was no one around from Italian Secret Intelligence in CIA to contest the validity of the assumptions;

2) SI Italy terminated its operations in Italy in July of 1945 and was ordered by radio signal from Col. Maddox, Chief SI Med: "As of July 15 full control of *Vessel* should be transferred to Chief X-2 Rome [Angleton] for such final disposition as he, in consultation with Washington, determines."

However, in Angleton's summary report filed in 1949, *Dusty Plan* (page 4, para 19), X-2 admits that it continued to distribute the *Vessel/Dusty* reports, and that between September and December 1945, "the operation produced 435 reports." It goes on to state "that of this total 35% of the information was partially or wholly true, while 16% had been definitely proved false." The report then states that "the remainder could not properly be evaluated."

It seems incredible that 49% of the information being distributed could not be evaluated.

Angleton's reason for the continued distribution of the *Vessel* reports are really unintelligible, if he was convinced that they were fraudulent and plants.

From the legible portions of the 1949 summary he became lost in the convoluted counter-intelligence skein that, in para 12, led *Dusty* (X-2 designation for the *Vessel* source) to the OSS Mission in Berne, Switzerland and "was once again a bone of contention between S.I. and X-2 elements." He then points out that "it was later learned by X-2 Rome that the source of the Berne *Dusty* was an Italian intelligence officer" (1946).

In para 13 he states, "Later in 1946, a French Intelligence officer received some *Dusty* materials which were identified by X-2 Rome as originating with Italian Military Intelligence."

In para 14 he charges that in early 1947 *Dusty* intelligence was arriving at the Vienna station via Trieste through contact with Italian Military Intelligence.

In para 14 he states: "By September 1947, Scattolini's activities were so widespread that at OSS's request, Scattolini was arrested by the Italian counter-espionage officials . . . and . . . [massive excision]"

One is left to wonder how in September 1947 a non-existent OSS (OSS was dissolved in 1945) could request

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Scattolini's arrest on grounds that have conveniently been expunged from the evidentiary record. However, a clue to some of the excisions was provided by Angleton to Cave Brown, who makes the unequivocal statement in his book (page 702) that "Scattolini was arrested and indicted under an old Fascist law, never before used, that made it an offense to commit hostile acts against a foreign country—i.e., the Vatican. Two CIA officers were said to have attended the trial." This quotation could not have come from any declassified records or the Donovan files.

The truth of the authenticity of the *Vessel* reports cannot be found in either Cave Brown's book or in the documents which have been declassified after having been deliberately and artfully censored to prevent the real story from being reconstructed. (It might be pointed out that in 1947 it would not have been difficult for Angleton to have asked SIM to arrest Scattolini under any pretext and they would quickly have complied because of the previous working arrangement between OSS and SIM.)

As to the Cave Brown/Angleton hypothesis for the *raison d'être* of *Vessel*, it is silly to even imagine that the agent(s) disseminating the information were either left-wing or Communists, because there was little or nothing to be gained in 1944-45 from the limited dissemination of such information by the Communists.

It is even more far-fetched to believe that the SIM (Italian Military Intelligence) was in control of *Vessel* during the period in question. The SIM people knew and worked closely with OSS personnel in Italy (including Angleton who had

only recently arrived, but whose father had preceded him as an OSS officer in Rome by more than a year.)

Even more ludicrous is the assumption that SIM was in need of the ridiculously paltry sum paid by OSS to the *Vessel* informer. All SIM had to do was go to its own treasury to borrow currency from OSS under the bilateral agreement which existed at that time but was never utilized by SIM.

It therefore must be obvious that the agent(s) who moved about the Vatican secretariat were rounding out their meager income through the dissemination of insider information, but while they gave no military information, they did give forewarning on many key political events from many parts of the world, sometimes even in an obvious effort to influence the process of war strategy and aims.

It is not inconceivable that the diplomatic representatives of the warring nations, thrown together in the small piece of real estate that is Vatican City, could occasionally have been brought together to discuss the probabilities of ending the calamitous conflict that was World War II.

After the fall of Rome, the pre-war ambassador to Germany, Hugh Wilson, was reported to have had a most friendly reunion with Germany's ambassador to the Vatican, Baron Ernst von Weizsacker, whom Mr. Wilson had known as an anti-Nazi in Berlin. They reportedly had a most cordial chat about events, past, present, and future.

A possibility that evidently might well have been overlooked by Angleton in his unilateral examination of *Vessel* was that the Vatican may have allowed this information to leak out in order to indirectly influence world policies, and that in furtherance of this objective, it did not shut off the valve. (It was CIA that had Scattolini arrested and not the Vatican. X-2 documents clearly indicate that in November 1944, Scattolini had free access to the Vatican Secretariat (para 24, 25, and 26, page 5, Report JZX-6318, 27 February 1946) and as a matter of fact, Scattolini is reported to have seen *Dusty* reports lying on the desk while Monsignor Montini was attempting to compare handwriting in order to ascertain the source of information leaks.

Paragraph 25 of X-2's *Plan Dusty* Summary (1949) would seem to outline clearly Angleton's obtuse approach to intelligence gathering. It is a view that guided his life-long career in the intelligence community. It is a view that unfortunately was allowed to prevail, but which CIA Director Bill Colby finally brought to a close at the end of 1974.

Angleton's view was and continues to be, that the product of intelligence operations should not be secured without adequate counter-intelligence or counter-espionage controls.

This is to say that (offensive) intelligence gathering must be made totally subservient to (defensive, anti-penetration) counter-intelligence controls, thus stultifying intelligence-gathering operations. It is a view that is held by all counter-espionage "experts" who would soon be out of work if those responsible for offensive espionage on opposing sides, were to pay any mind to that dictum.