

Vietnam War

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Otto Otepka and the State Department

by Bryton Barron

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THE SENATE investigation of security matters in the State Department, which last year exposed William Wieland as a defender of Fidel Castro, has developed startling ramifications in recent months. An almost complete breakdown of security operations within State has been hinted. Otto F. Otepka, veteran security officer, has been dismissed by the Department for having cooperated with the Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security. Senators have denounced the Department's attitude as a challenge to the work of Congressional Committees and the system of checks and balances in our government. Charges of perjury are in the air, and two State Department officials — one of them said to be Bobby Kennedy's fair-haired boy — have resigned after changing their testimony.

At the request of AMERICAN OPINION, I will review the situation from a ringside seat. And as I do you will observe that what has transpired follows standard State Department practice, accentuated by the influence of recent Leftist appointees.

The latest development, as this is being written, is the resignation of the two State officials who had, under oath, denied bugging Otepka's telephone but who had later changed their testimony. Significantly enough, the two men did not correct their testimony until after the Senate Subcommittee indicated that it had proof that the testimony was false. As the case against Otepka had been largely built by one of these men, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Security John Reilly, this development blew the case against Otepka sky-high and demonstrated once again that top officials in the State Department cannot be trusted to tell the truth even under oath.

One wag has suggested that if we could somehow get the resignations of all foreign-policy officials who have lied to us in recent years we might soon have the State Department reduced to manageable proportions!

Rusk Responsible

Where does the top man in the State Department, Dean Rusk, fit into this picture? An Editorial in the *Washington Evening Star* suggested that the false testimony given the Senate Subcommittee "should be a matter of grave concern to the Secretary of State." But it added: "It is disturbing . . . that there has been no forthright official condemnation" of the testimony.

Ordinarily, of course, a Secretary of State knows little about what goes on in the vast bureaucracy under him; he is pretty much at the mercy of his subordinates. Even Dean Acheson was not told of a secret agreement one of his Assistant Secretaries made with the "United Nations." But the Otepka case is an exception. Secretary Rusk was fully apprised of the case by the Subcommittee, both in writing and in a meeting with him, before Otepka's dismissal was finally ordered by the Department. Rusk therefore cannot escape responsibility for what was done.

But what possible reason do we have for expecting better of the Secretary. Recently, for example, it was brought to light that Rusk was personally involved in the effort to whitewash William Wieland, the Department "expert" who supported Castro's rise to Power.

Vietnam War

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Our System Challenged

Senator Thurmond has well said that there is much more at stake in the Otepka case than mere justice for an individual, as important as that is. In fact, Senator Dodd, who as acting Chairman of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee is closely in touch with the situation, declared on the floor of the United States Senate that the State Department's action in the case constituted "a most serious challenge to the system of checks and balances under which our Government operates." He reiterated that "no more grievous threat to our system . . . has been postured before us in my recollection.

"If the legislative branch cannot inquire about irregularities or illegalities in Government departments," continued the Senator, "who will inquire?"

"Who will question wrongdoing if the legislative branch of the Government cannot do so?"

"If any Government employee is barred from giving vital information to a congressional committee, Senate or House, how will we ever learn of malfeasance or wrongdoing in the Government?"

"If the reward for coming forward and honestly telling Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives of wrongdoing is dismissal, something terrible has happened in our country, and we had better move before it is too late."

It is not the intent of this writer to extol Senator Dodd unduly, for on the whole the latter's voting record is far from satisfactory; but I do concur in the observation of David Lawrence that the fact that the current fight for better security is being led by a Northern Democrat who once served in the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover is assurance that the problem is not being handled in a partisan fashion.

In presenting the matter to the Senate, Senator Dodd cited from the United States Code, title 5, paragraph 652 (d), the following provision of law:

The right of persons employed in the civil service of the United States, either individually or collectively, to petition Congress, or any Member thereof, or to furnish information to either House of Congress or to any committee or member thereof, shall not be denied or interfered with.

The Senator declared that the State Department, "by its action in the Otepka case, has in effect nullified this statute and issued a warning to all Government employees that cooperation with the established committees of the Senate, if this cooperation involves testimony unpalatable at higher echelon, is a crime punishable by dismissal."

Security Breakdown

Another vital aspect of the case has been the simultaneous revelation of what the newspapers have been willing to term "laxity" in security procedures in the State Department a situation which the Senate Subcommittee, in its last published Report on the subject, described more accurately as "the existence of an atmosphere adverse even to reasonable security."

Under circumstances in which officials concentrate effort on pleasing the Enemy — even to the nauseating spectacle of Under Secretary Harriman embracing Khrushchev publicly, and with our foreign policy geared to the submerging of our destiny through the United Nations — security procedures may appear illogical to the policy planners, even obsolete. But not so to those who want our heritage preserved.

The "security" with which the policy planners are concerned is not *national security* as you and I think of it, but freedom for them to develop their schemes without interference from the FBI or Congress or the public generally. The regular security staff has been curtailed in recent years and shunted around the Department; the attack on Otepka is part of an organized effort to further degrade the security function.

The full extent of what the Senate Subcommittee has uncovered regarding conditions in the State Department

Vietnam War

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will not be public knowledge until the full transcript of the 1963 Hearings is released, if it ever is; or a Committee Report is issued thereon. From what I know of the situation, I doubt that the Subcommittee has yet much more than scratched the surface.

Some indication of the seriousness of the situation was contained in the revelation — in earlier questioning of State witnesses — that in recent years many individuals had been given jobs in the Department without a prior security check. In many cases the papers had later been back-dated, concealing the fact that pending clearance these persons had had access to classified material. When first questioned on the subject, Department officials, as usual, did not admit existence of the practice. Later the Committee obtained information that, subsequent to January of 1961, prior clearance had been waived on 152 appointments, with more than twenty-five percent of these later backdated.

One of those appointed without prior investigation was Assistant Secretary Harlan Cleveland, who later to our shame pressed the UN war against Katanga.

Appointment of Walter M. Kotschnig as a U. S. representative on one of the UN agencies was rushed through without awaiting receipt of a pending FBI report. Kotschnig, who served with Hiss and of whom I have written, was quoted as having denounced “cheap patriotic societies” and as having urged students to “get away from this sentimental nationalism.”

What Senators and newspapers have failed to bring out is that the Otepka case is no isolated incident, that it follows the usual pattern of reprisal against a State Department official who, in forthright fashion, puts duty to country before all else. Let me give a few examples. (If incidents recounted are already familiar to you, please bear with me as we need to see several cases in juxtaposition to establish the fact of a continuing vicious practice.)

Patriotism Penalized

In the days when George Marshall was Secretary of State, a ranking official of the Visa Division, one Robert Alexander, was publicly threatened with dismissal by the Secretary because he, Alexander, had dared to tell a Congressional Committee that Soviet espionage agents were being brought into the United States through the “United Nations” (as is still the case to this very day). The protest from Capitol Hill was so intense that Marshall finally backed down, and Alexander remained to win vindication. But a reprimand — a reprimand for having done his duty — was nonetheless put into Alexander’s personal file by the Secretary.

A few years later, under Secretary John Foster Dulles, Dr. Donald Dozer and I were ousted for having protested delay in the promised housecleaning, and in the release of papers revealing details of the ugly war-time deals between FDR, Churchill, and Stalin. The suppression of the documents had continued even after Congress had requested the prompt, unexpurgated publication of the papers in question. When Dozer and I could not get a proper hearing on these matters in the Department we took it up with interested Senators. A few months thereafter the Department finally released a compilation of the Yalta papers — an expurgated edition which omitted significant matters which, on official assignment, I had included.

I was eligible for retirement but Dr. Dozer was not. The trumped-up charges against the latter were thrown out by the Civil Service Commission, whereupon the Department rehired him to fire him again, meeting technical requirements the second time. Such was the treatment accorded one of the finest men I met in all my years in the State Department.

To head off a storm from Capitol Hill, the State Department sent its operators up there to peddle petty lies about us, even offering a job to a top assistant of one Senatorial critic. And so the ousters were made to stick.

Dr. Dozer returned to the academic world, where he has since won fresh laurels as a historian, while I with my writings and from the lecture platform have in the ensuing years sought to alert the public to the developing situation in the diplomatic branch of our government. “For years Bryton stood alone,” declared Senator Mundt at

Vietnam War

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a recent anti-Communist rally in Washington. At first I was nearly alone, but the sale of my books was encouraging, and the demand for a Congressional investigation has mounted.

Now, in the days of Secretary Dean Rusk, we come to the case of Otto Otepka. The late Scott McLeod, formerly top security official of that Department — on the witness stand in 1961 — described Otepka as “the best evaluator [of security data] in the Government today.” In 1958 the Department did in fact give Mr. Otepka an award for meritorious service. But that was before he pressed the case against William Wieland.

Despite the damage done our national interest by the Communist take-over in Cuba, which came as a result of Wieland’s advice in these matters, Wieland was given a clean bill of health and retained on the payroll. But Otepka, who had developed the evidence against Wieland, was — in the viciously topsy-turvy State Department — the one penalized. First they demoted him. For Otepka (who is a career civil servant, not one of the Foreign Service elite) had committed the inexcusable sin of having put a member of the Foreign Service corps in a bad light. The Senate Internal Security Subcommittee protested in these words of a 1962 Report:

“The committee agrees with counsel’s conclusion . . . that the conduct of Mr. Otto Otepka in the Wieland case and other cases, and his insistence upon what he considered good security, has, without fault on his part, brought harm to his career in the State Department, and that this is a situation greatly to be deplored. The committee urges that, as a minimum, Mr. Otepka be restored to his former position of Deputy Director of the Office of Security, where his expertise, born of many years of highly responsible experience as a security officer will be of inestimable value to the Department of State and, not less importantly, to the security of this country.”

The wild boys in Foggy Bottom thumbed their noses at this advice. And when the Committee continued its interrogation of officials from State in 1963, following the adverse Report in 1962, orders were issued in the Department barring security officials from giving further testimony. The conclusion was inevitable: Much remained to be revealed.

Steps were taken to have Otepka fired; it being charged that he had revealed confidential material to the Senate investigators. For the average citizen it may be a little hard to see who has a better right to any and all official information than the elected representatives of the people — but the bureaucrats see it otherwise. In an attempt to establish its dubious charge, the Department claimed incriminating evidence had been found in Otepka’s burnbag. The charge, of course, fell flat when Otepka and his lawyer pointed out that other individuals had access to the container.

It reminded me of the Department’s claim, back in 1955, that I had surreptitiously given secret material from the Yalta file to a weekly news magazine. I had not done so, and I was very positive on the point when questioned; but I readily admitted at the same time that I was pleased to see the material made known to the public, because I felt the American people have a right to such information. The Department was on the verge of asking me to take a lie-detector test when, on further checking, it was found that there were, as I recall, 119 other individuals who had had access to the material and who might therefore conceivably have “leaked” it. The prospect of giving the test to 120 persons, one by one, was too much for even the State Department, especially since the publishers denied in writing that they got the dope from me.

Otepka and his lawyer, Roger Robb, found the charges against Otepka utterly without foundation. (The name of Roger Robb, who with his associate, Kenneth Parkinson, advised Dozer and myself back in 1955 and who earlier had won plaudits for his skill in prosecuting the Oppenheimer case, is assurance that Otepka’s case is being ably handled). Otepka and Robb made clear from the outset that they would fight the case all the way, into the courts if necessary.

Undesirables Protected

Like Bob Alexander and Don Dozer and myself in turn, Otto Otepka would have been false to his oath to defend the Constitution if he had not done as he did. But contrast the treatment received with that accorded by the

Vietnam War

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Department to those who have pursued an opposite course, as in the case of Alger Hiss, John Stewart Service, and William Wieland, to name only three.

When Alger Hiss went on trial, State Department officials made every effort to clear him even though the FBI reports exposing his espionage activities had long been on file in the Department. Still, after Hiss had been found guilty by orderly judicial processes, the then Secretary of State, as we all know, declared that he would not turn his back on the convicted perjurer. In the years that followed, officials of the Department were frequently heard asserting privately that Hiss had done nothing wrong.

There is a story going the rounds now that the present gang has tried to bring the ex-convict back into the Department at this time. My information does not support this story. But then, they really don't need him there; enough of his type are already in the Department. I doubt that there are many tricks that even Hiss could teach them. Certainly there has been no lack of activity lately in Hiss' special field. In fact, after what has transpired in the Senate hearing room, someone is likely to suggest that the name be changed from State to *Perjury* Department.

No doubt his buddies want to do what they can to help "rehabilitate" Hiss, as they are doing for others of his ilk. Fortunately in this case there is the little matter of his disqualification through having been convicted of a felony.

John Stewart Service is one of the same breed. He was welcomed back into the Department in 1957, after the Warren Court ordered him restored to duty. A veteran Foreign Service officer, Service had been arrested in 1945 — but never brought to trial — on the charge of violating the Espionage Act by transmitting top-secret material to a pro-Communist magazine. General Hurley, who was burdened with Service as an adviser in China, declared that the latter had passed secret information to the Chinese Communists while on duty there; and General Wedemeyer, under whom he also served, named Service as one whose sympathies lay with the Chinese Communists and who either consciously or unwittingly disseminated exaggerated or false Communist-inspired reports. Otepka noted that Service had admitted giving classified information to an unauthorized person. Nevertheless, as was brought out in Otepka's testimony, Deputy Under Secretary Loy Henderson — the officer who in 1955 told me that I must go because I had "embarrassed" the Department by insisting on the release of papers regarding ugly, secret, diplomatic deals — overruled the recommendation of Otepka and others and gave Service a clean bill of health. In 1959, Service was assigned to Liverpool, England, as U. S. Consul.

And then there is the recent case already mentioned; that of William Wieland, the Foreign Service officer who aided and abetted Castro's rise to power but who was publicly defended by the Department (and the President) following his exposure in extensive Hearings conducted by the Senate Internal Security Committee. When asked in the recent Hearings whether Wieland had been promoted since he helped Castro, the Department witness (following the pattern set by Hiss as a witness years ago) denied it. The printed *Register of the Department*, which I have before me, gives the date of the promotion as March 18, 1960. The fact of the promotion was also confirmed by Wieland himself when he appeared before the Committee.

Wieland was given a clean bill of health by the Department in this fashion (in the words of the Committee): ". . . He was 'cleared' improperly (in the name of the Secretary) by an official who made no concurrent written record of either the clearance or the reasons therefor, and who at the time of the clearance had not read . . . the security file on Wieland, or even the official summary and evaluation of that file."

They Destroy Critics

The conclusion is inescapable. There are no limits to what the gang will do to shield one of their own kind when exposure is threatened. But let an individual staff member, faithful to his highest duty and the national interest, speak up in opposition to dangerous practices and thereby open the Department to merited criticism and the offended bureaucrats will try by every means to discredit and destroy him.

In the case of Otepka it was alleged that he had breached "the standard of conduct expected of an officer of the

Vietnam War

Author: [Sam Mittelsteadt](#)

Date: January 18, 2025



Department of State.” Otepka’s answer was direct and to the point:

“The vagueness of the standard of conduct to which you refer and the need for a more precise definition and explanation of that standard are well illustrated by the facts of this case. In addition to the surveillance of my activities disclosed by your letter, I have reason to believe that in recent months employees of the Department of State have secretly employed listening devices to eavesdrop on conversations in my office. I have reason to believe that my office telephone has been tapped and that my desk and my safe have been surreptitiously opened and searched. These things have been done with the knowledge and approval of my superiors, if not by their express direction. They were done in the absence of any effort whatever to secure from me, by direct and open means, the information which was desired and which I would have been glad to furnish. When the Department of State approves such conduct and adopts such methods the meaning of your phrase ‘the standard of conduct expected of an officer of the Department’ becomes lost in obscurity...

“Whatever the standard of conduct expected of an officer of the Department of State may be, it is my conviction that any standard of conduct worthy of the name demands honesty and integrity. Certainly, honesty and integrity are the fundamental tenets of my personal standard of conduct. Consistently with this belief, I hold that when one is called upon to speak he must speak the whole truth; he must not attempt to pervert or suppress the truth by concealment, evasion, half-truths, or misleading silence. I believe that every man has the right to defend himself against false accusations. I believe in the Code of Ethics for Government Service, expressed in the House Concurrent Resolution agreed to on July 11, 1958, and promulgated by the United States Civil Service Commission in Departmental Circular 982 on December 2, 1958. That Code states that ‘any person in Government service should put loyalty to the highest moral principles and to country above loyalty to persons, party, or Government department.’ . . . I would have been derelict in my duty, if by my silence I had permitted untrue and inaccurate statements, of which I had personal knowledge, to remain unchallenged in the Committee record, or if I had otherwise failed to give the Committee my full cooperation in its search for the truth....”

Otepka conceded that he had “cooperated with the Committee counsel by suggesting to him fair, proper, and impersonal questions designed to bring the truth to light.” But he added: “It is difficult to understand why the Department and the witnesses did not welcome such questions.” The irony of that is devastating.

The attempt to besmirch Otepka’s character was in line, of course, with standard practices in the State Department in such circumstances. They did it to the late Senator McCarthy and they tried it on Donald Dozer and myself; in fact, they are still trying to do it to me in an effort to blind people to my revelations regarding the mess there. State Department partisans have slyly hinted, for example, that there was an FBI report on me. But J. Edgar Hoover himself nailed that one in a letter to Mrs. Virginia I. Cassill of 2055 Minoru Drive, Altadena, California, dated last September twenty-third. He made it clear that the stuff the Department was circulating was not prepared under FBI direction or supervision and not submitted to his Bureau. The Department subsequently attempted to defend its slander-mongering on the grounds that it was based on the “findings” of the House Appropriations Subcommittee. But examination shows that the material quoted was nothing more than a staff report ghost-written in the State Department some years ago and submitted in connection with Hearings on an appropriation bill; the alleged “findings” being ignored by the Committee in its Report on the bill. Only two of the Department’s assertions regarding myself merit consideration as touching on basic issues, and here again we see the inability of the Department to present the truth.

More Lies!

One assertion was that I had failed to supply House-Appropriations staff members with facts to justify my recommendation of a fifty percent reduction in Department of State personnel. That is a lie, as will be recognized by everyone who read Chapter IV in my book, *Inside the State Department*, where I quote page after page of detailed testimony I presented.

The other contention, a fundamental one, was summarized in these words: “Investigation concerning Barron’s

Vietnam War

Author: [Sam Mittelsteadt](#)

Date: January 18, 2025



charges relative to alleged attempts to shield the previous Administration by distorting and suppression of documents relating to wartime conferences shows them to be unfounded.” That claim was knocked into a cocked hat in 1960 by Congressman Bow of Ohio, who is a ranking member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the State Department and therefore familiar with the problem. Congressman Bow put it into the Hearing Record that he had reached the unhappy conclusion that what is given the American people by the State Department in this matter of documentation is limited to what the officials feel the public should be told.

As a further illustration of the way that officials sit on the documents, let me tell you that the story of what happened at Teheran, the first of the wartime secret meetings between FDR, Churchill, and Stalin, was not released until 1961 — which was eighteen long years after the event and five years after the Yalta papers had been released — and even then it was not until after a citizens committee (composed of members of The John Birch Society) had brought pressure directly on members of the Senate and on the White House! Why were these papers so long suppressed? Not to keep them secret from the Russians, because Stalin was there and knew what happened.

You will begin to understand the reason for the suppression if you look on Page 595 of the papers, where you ‘ll find that FDR called Stalin in, privately, at Teheran and told him that he [President Roosevelt] “personally . . . agreed with the views of Marshal Stalin” regarding Polish boundaries but that he didn’t want this to become known because there was an election coming up in the United States. “He [FDR] added that there were in the United States from six to seven million Americans of Polish extraction, and as a practical man he did not wish to lose their vote.” As a result of that underhanded dealing, when Poland’s patriotic leaders resisted Russia’s demands a year later they found themselves in an impossible situation.

The Need Summarized

Why does one fight, as Otto Otepka has done, for proper security procedures in the State Department?

The answer was never better put in brief form than during the course of testimony by the late Scott McLeod before the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee:

Mr. McLEOD. . . . I think it is generally agreed among the security people in the Government that the testimony of defectors has pointed to the fact that we had at least three spy rings in our Government, and to my knowledge we have only been able to identify two of these. So we must presume that the third still exists. . . .

Mr. SOURWINE [General Counsel of the Subcommittee]. Are you aware that at least since 1952 the emphasis on espionage from the Russian standpoint has stressed more and more the matter of Policy control above the mere stealing of documents?Mr. MCLEOD. I do not know how you can fix the date. I think that has been their target right along.

Mr. SOURWINE.They seek more and more, do they not, to try to get people into a position where they can either influence action or stop action, where they can either “use inaction or cause action which in the long run will be favorable to themselves?

Mr. MCLEOD. I think that is a fair appraisal of their targets.