

Books of The Times

Wonderful Wizards of O.S.S.

By ROGER JELLINEK

O.S.S. *The Secret History of America's First Central Intelligence Agency.* By R. Harris Smith. Illustrated. 458 Pages. University of California Press. \$10.95.

In 1941 a British Naval Intelligence officer named Ian Fleming recommended to Gen. William (Wild Bill) Donovan that he recruit as American intelligence officers men of "absolute discretion, sobriety, devotion to duty, languages, and wide experience." Donovan, a World War I hero and successful Wall Street lawyer, understood the fantasies of writers and Presidents, and in a memo to President Roosevelt promised an international secret service staffed by young officers who were "calculatingly reckless," with "disciplined daring" and trained for "aggressive action."

The Office of Strategic Services came to include such James Bonds as John Birch, Norman O. Brown, David K. E. Bruce, Dr. Ralph J. Bunche, William Bundy, Michael Burke, Julia Child, Clark Clifford, John Kenneth Galbraith, John W. Gardner, Arthur J. Goldberg and Murray Gurfein. There were others—Sterling Hayden, August Heckscher, Roger O. Hilsman, Philip Horton, H. Stuart Hughes, Carl Kaysen, Clark M. MacGregor, Herbert Marcuse, Henry Ringling North, Serge Obolensky. And still others: John Oakes, Walt W. Rostow, Elmo Roper, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Paul Sweezy, Ralph de Toledano—to name just a few of the hundreds in this book by R. Harris Smith.

Mr. Smith, who was in the trade himself, resigning in 1968 after a "very brief, uneventful, and undistinguished association with the most misunderstood bureaucracy of the American Government," the Central Intelligence Agency, now lectures in political science at the University of California's Extension Division. "This history of America's first central intelligence agency" is "secret" because Mr. Smith was denied access to O.S.S. archives, and so had to rely on the existing literature supplemented by some 200 written and verbal recollections of O.S.S. alumni.

Both Ends Against the Middle

The book is densely packed with the bewildering variety of O.S.S. exploits in World War II: spying, sabotage, propaganda, military training missions, politicking and coordinating resistance groups against the Germans. "Casablanca" caught the spirit of the Byzantine plotting in French North Africa, with the O.S.S. trying to undermine the Vichy and German authorities, while various resistance groups tried to use the O.S.S. for their own ends. In Italy, Yugoslavia, China and Greece, O.S.S. agents played both ends against the middle in the virtual civil wars between conservatives and left-wing partisans. In one holy alliance worthy of Graham Greene, the O.S.S. gratefully accepted the contribution of Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, teamed with Earl Brennan, American politician and diplomat (also friend of Mussolini and the Canadian Mafia, and later registered agent for the Haitian exile lobby in Washington). They had volunteered to collect and pass on firsthand intelligence on strategic bombing targets in

Japan. Cardinal Montini is now Pope Paul VI.

O.S.S. agents had to compete as much with their allies as with their enemies. In France and Switzerland, where Allen Dulles operated, the British S.O.E. (Special Operations Executive) was especially grudging. In Germany itself, the O.S.S. lost out to more orthodox American military intelligence, though paradoxically they were strongly represented at Nuremberg, where General Donovan was himself a deputy prosecutor—at the same time that the head of the Nazi Secret Service, Gen. Reinhard Gehlen, was under O.S.S. protection in exchange for his intelligence net work in Eastern Europe and Russia.

Role in the Far East

From present perspective the most (literally) intriguing story is that of the O.S.S. in China and Indochina. There were both pro-Communists and anti-Communists in the O.S.S., and most agents sympathized with Asian nationalists, so that the O.S.S. aided Thai partisans against the British and of course more famously, the Vietminh against the French in Laos and Vietnam (an O.S.S. medic saved Ho Chi Minh's life). Mr. Smith's retelling of the tragicomedy of Indochina after the Japanese surrender in 1945, with Vichy and Gaullist French, British, Chinese and the Vietminh jockeying for control, makes a fascinating setpiece.

The book ends with an account of the transformation of the O.S.S. into its "mirror image," the C.I.A. Mr. Smith's admiration for the O.S.S.'s wartime pragmatism, its "tradition of dissent" and its anticolonialism suggests his thesis: that the O.S.S./C.I.A. has been made the straw man of the radical and liberal left. In fact, he asserts, the C.I.A. has been the principal guardian of liberal values in the "intelligence community." He reminds us that the C.I.A. fought Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, and he argues that the C.I.A.'s campaign to fund anti-Communist liberals successfully undermined international Communist organizations and disarmed the paranoid anti-Communism of the F.B.I. and others at home. He notes that C.I.A. liberals worked against Batista for Castro, who betrayed them, allowing the C.I.A. conservatives to plan the Bay of Pigs. Finally, he points to the evidence in the Pentagon Papers that the C.I.A. has been a critic of the Vietnam war from the beginning.

But the question remains whether the O.S.S. "tradition of dissent" is meaningful, whether it doesn't compromise liberals as much as aid them. Mr. Smith's book is full of cryptic references to former O.S.S. agents now prominent in international business and finance. C.I.A. liberalism has not prevented a number of C.I.A.-fomented coups d'état in favor of military regimes. Even C.I.A. liberal criticism of the war in Vietnam seems to have had little effect on policy. All might be fair in time of war, but Mr. Smith ought to have scouted the need for a permanent bureaucracy part of whose function is officially devoted to clandestine political manipulations abroad in time of "peace."