

In the foreword to his last book, Hoettl cautioned future historians against relying solely upon documents to the exclusion of personal accounts of eyewitnesses. He presumably was thinking ahead to the time when those (like himself) who could give first-hand accounts of World War II would no longer be alive and historians would be wholly dependent on documentary evidence.

Members of the Interagency Working Group, in an evaluation of the CIA's documents on Hoettl, offered this commentary:

*The voluminous materials in Wilhelm Hoettl's personality file provide a fascinating insight into the intrigue and drama of the era from late in World War II to the Cold War. These documents trace the activities of a notorious intelligence peddler and fabricator, who successfully convinced one intelligence service after another of his value, and then proceeded to lose such support. If reviewed cautiously, with an eye for accuracy, this file can be a treasure trove of intelligence information from an individual who navigated his way through the Nazi, US, West German, Russian, and numerous other intelligence services. The file also illustrates the difficult situation in which US post-war intelligence agents found themselves—desperate for knowledge on Soviet activities, they saw no choice other than accepting intelligence from former Nazis with offensive pasts and questionable reliability.*²⁴

¹⁹ Hoettl's claim that the Nazis killed six million Jews is generally regarded as the most authoritative source for determining Jewish deaths during the Holocaust. See Whitney R. Harris, *Tyranny on Trial: The Evidence at Nuremberg* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1954), pp. 313-314, and United States Chief Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, Volume V (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1946), pp 380-382. Hoettl also gave American investigators extensive details on Eichmann's family life. A copy of this 1946 report is found in Adolf Eichmann, CIA "Name File," NARA.

²⁰ As cited in Chief, FBM, "SS Sturmbannführer Dr. Wilhelm Hoettl," 12 June 1949, in Hoettl, CIA "Name File," NARA. According to one source in Austria, Hoettl was hated by at least one former comrade for having betrayed the Nazi cause at Nuremberg. Adolf Eichmann, for one, reportedly vowed to kill him. Former SS officers felt that Hoettl had willfully invented the number of 6 million Nazi-victims for pro-Jewish purposes. In addition, a number of former Nazis evidently regarded him as an agent of American and Israeli intelligence and claimed he had stolen SD gold and other assets in Austria.

Writing in 1953, Hoettl exclaimed: "the German Secret Service is broken and scattered both to East and West. Some serve the Americans and some the Russians. Others lie low and watch which way the wind blows. Some play with fire on both sides of the Iron Curtain, and some in South America and the Middle East have taken with them the unrest that surrounded them here."²⁵ Where did Hoettl fit in that picture? The CIA's "name file" provides leads about his wartime and postwar intelligence roles, but Hoettl's true allegiance remains a mystery even after his death.

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Before the Cuban Missile Crisis: Soviet SS-3s in East Germany?

A German historian working in the Soviet archives has stumbled onto a major Cold War story with nuclear weapons and espionage at its center. It is a well-established historical "fact" that the "missiles of October"—medium and intermediate-range rockets sent to Cuba in 1962—were the first Soviet atomic weapons deployed on foreign territory. Not so, says Matthias Uhl, a researcher at the University of Halle/Wittenberg, in an article that appeared in the German weekly *Der Spiegel*.²⁶

²¹ The CIA's extensive file on Hoettl is replete with reports about his postwar activities. Although the US Army's CIC used Hoettl in 1948-1949, the CIA regarded him as a "notorious fabricator" of intelligence. By the early 1950s, Hoettl had formed his own intelligence organization and may have been in contact with other intelligence services, including those of West Germany and possibly Israel. The US Army arrested Hoettl in 1953 on suspicion of spying for the Soviets in the Curt Ponger/Otto Verber/Walter Lauber espionage case. For further details about this fascinating but forgotten Cold War episode, see George Carpozi, Jr., *Red Spies in Washington* (New York: Trident Press, 1968), pp. 30-59.

²² Interestingly, a Hungarian war crimes investigator had interrogated Hoettl at Dachau in 1947 about his alleged involvement in the looting of a Jewish residence in Hungary three years earlier. See "Interrogation of Dr. Hoettl [sic], W.C. at Camp Dachau," 12 March 1947, in RG 260, Records of the Office of Military Government for Germany, Restitution Research Records, Box 484, NARA.

²³ Wilhelm Hoettl, *Einsatz für das Reich* (Koblenz: Verlag Siegfried Bublies, 1997). This book quickly sold out and has not yet been published in English. In it, Hoettl recounted details of his wartime exploits and postwar activities. He even drew on declassified OSS cables describing the turnover of the "Center" to the Soviets in summer 1945.

²⁴ Miriam Kleiman and Robert Skwirot, "Report on the CIA Name File of Wilhelm Hoettl," p. 10, IWG Media Briefing Book, 27 April 2001.

In January 1959, an East German agent working for West German intelligence reported seeing Soviet soldiers offloading “big bombs” at a rail siding near an army barracks some 80 kilometers north of Berlin. The “bombs” actually turned out to be components for the R-5M missile—also known by its NATO designator as the SS-3 or “Shyster.” The R-5M was the USSR’s first medium-range missile. It was also the world’s first rocket that could carry a nuclear warhead.

The Soviet Army’s 72nd Engineers Brigade constructed two mobile launch ramps at Fürstsenberg/Havel and Vogelsang in East Germany. Six missiles were present at each site. The Soviets, according to *Spiegel*, also built a third launch site in Albania near the Adriatic port city of Vlërë. With a range of 700 kilometers, R-5Ms deployed at those sites could reach London and Paris as well as Italy—including the Naples headquarters of NATO’s Southern Command.

The 72nd Brigade was an elite unit that reported directly to the Soviet Central Committee, bypassing the regular military chain of command. It dated from 1946, when Stalin ordered the creation of a clandestine unit to gather up German rocket scientists and technology as war booty. The Brigade’s first mission was to test 12 captured German V-2 ballistic missiles that had been built by a team led by Dr. Werner von Braun—who later became the “father” of the American space program before the Germans surrendered to the US Army. (The first Soviet-made missile, the R-1, was an exact copy of the V-2.) Using camouflage and other deception ploys, the Brigade worked only at night to avoid detection by U-2 overflights.

Warheads for the R-5M arrived in April 1959. The engineers worked furiously to get the missiles operational, but they encountered significant difficulties. Soviet records now open refer to an unspecified accident that cost several lives and resulted in the destruction of one missile. In addition, two notable problems arose with the ethanol used in the rocket’s ignition system:

- It tended to vaporize.

- Russian soldiers liked to imbibe the bluish 92-proof liquid, which they dubbed “Blue Danube.”

The R-5M’s liquid fuel had a comparable problem: It evaporated after 30 days in storage. But replacement fuel was available from an East German chemical production plant.

Despite such obstacles, the missiles were operational by May 1959. Four of the deployed missiles were aimed at Thor missile sites—Britain’s nuclear deterrent—near Norfolk and Lincolnshire. The others were targeted against US airbases in Western Europe. Still others may have been aimed at key US Atlantic port cities for the purpose of dissuading the United States from intervening after a Soviet attack if deprived of troop-landing facilities.

Nikita and the Nukes

Why was Nikita Khrushchev in such a hurry to deploy these missiles abroad—something he had hitherto rejected? After all, as his son Sergei has pointed out, the Soviet leader was even hesitant to deploy the R-5M inside the USSR near its Western border, recalling how quickly German troops had overrun Red Army defenses in 1941.²⁷

Khrushchev’s sense of urgency, it seems, stemmed from the Berlin crisis, which Khrushchev had initiated in November 1958 in an effort to force the US, Britain, and France to withdraw from the post-World War II four-power division. To the Soviets, the Western presence in the divided city posed a potential challenge to their control of Eastern Europe. Khrushchev and his colleagues in the senior leadership apparently saw that presence as a Trojan horse filled with echelons of military and intelligence personnel. Additionally, many thousands of East German political and economic refugees—up to 1.5 million in the 1950s—had fled, using Berlin as an escape route to the West, where the West German *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle) was threatening to draw the East German, Polish, and Czechoslovak satellite nations away from Moscow’s orbit.

²⁵ Hoettl, *The Secret Front: The Story of Nazi Political Espionage*. Translated by R.H. Stevens. (London: Weidenfeld-Nicolson, 1954), pp.326-327

²⁶ Wolfgang Bayer, “Geheimoperation Fürstsenberg,” *Der Spiegel*, 17 January 2001, pp. 42-46.

²⁷ Sergei N. Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev and the Creation of a Superpower* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), p. 105.

Three years earlier, the mercurial Soviet leader had threatened to use nuclear weapons against Britain, France, and Israel after they seized the Suez Canal. But the threat was a hollow one at that point the R-5M was not ready yet. Even so, it apparently was far enough along to prompt Khrushchev to focus on how he might use it for diplomatic purposes. According to son Sergei: "Tests of the R-5M equipped with a nuclear warhead had a noticeable influence on my father's behavior in the subsequent negotiations with our former allies, especially with Britain and France. The Soviet Union now possessed a weapon of unsurpassed power."²⁸ How many missiles would it take to destroy England and France, Khrushchev asked missile designer Sergei Korolyov? Before Korolyov could answer, Dmitri Ustinov, chairman of the Military-Industrial Commission and a future defense minister, replied: "Five. A few more for France—seven or nine, depending on the choice of targets."

At the height of the Berlin crisis in 1959, Khrushchev was claiming that the USSR could produce rockets "like sausages on an assembly line." That proved to be just another Soviet bluff, but one that the United States took seriously until the 1960s, when CORONA satellite imagery eased the "missile gap" fears. Four of the missiles deployed in East Germany were aimed at Thor missile sites—Britain's nuclear deterrent—near Norfolk and Lincolnshire; others were targeted against US airbases in Western Europe. Some may have been aimed at key Atlantic port cities to dissuade the United States from intervening after a Soviet attack if it were deprived of troop-landing facilities.

Khrushchev Abruptly Backs Off: "Live Oak" a Factor?

Notwithstanding the frenetic activity, the Soviet leader suddenly changed his mind and ordered the missiles withdrawn. During August and September 1959, the 72nd Engineers Brigade pulled back to Kaliningrad, the Baltic port city and Soviet enclave in the former East Prussia. Why the retreat? The archives do not give an answer. But we can speculate. The Berlin crisis had reached a fever pitch, and the West seemed determined to stand its ground despite—or perhaps because

of—Soviet harassment of US, British, and French convoys making the 100-mile trip along the Helmstedt-Berlin Autobahn.

When his senior advisers said the Americans would fight rather than acquiesce, Khrushchev dismissed the warning as "nonsense." Now, however, his worst fear war with the West threatened to become a reality. In April 1959, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had created a secret NATO staff codenamed "Live Oak" which, in the event of a repeat of the 1948 Berlin Blockade, was to challenge the Soviets while reasserting Western access rights to Berlin. (Eisenhower's military planners doubted that the United States could replicate the 1948-1949 airlifts, concluding that the United States would have to withdraw from Berlin or fight for the right to remain there.)

The "Live Oak" organization was one of the Cold War's most closely guarded secrets. It was not officially acknowledged until 1987 and did not disband until minutes before Germany was reunified on 3 October 1990. Although not part of NATO, NATO's commander-in-chief, always an American four-star general, commanded "Live Oak," which was staffed by American, British, and French officers and soldiers. "Live Oak" war planners devised options to assert four-power rights in Berlin that encompassed "a range of plans, from sending an unarmed convoy down the autobahn to see whether the Soviets really were blocking access, to increasing levels of force," according to Dr. Gregory Pedlow, NATO's official historian and a former CIA historian.²⁹

One option called for sending an entire division into East Germany, with orders to engage the Soviets if they resisted. The possibility of using tactical nuclear weapons was kept open. In addition, a year earlier the Strategic Air Command had instituted a new alert system that featured keeping B-52s armed with atomic bombs in the air on a 24/7 basis.

If "Live Oak" was such a closely guarded secret, how did Khrushchev find out about it? In his memoirs, East German spymaster Markus Wolf claims he obtained "Live Oak" planning documents, signed by NATO commander Gen. Lauris Norstad, from an agent inside British military

²⁸ With a range of 2,700 kilometers, the Thor could not reach the Soviet Union from the United States. But Britain deployed 60 of the US missiles between 1959 and 1964.

²⁹ Nicholas Doughty, "Live Oak—An Untold Story from the Cold War," Reuters Library Service, 5 March 1993.

headquarters in West Germany.³⁰ If the plans were meant to intimidate the Soviets and their allies, they appear to have succeeded. "I am not prone to panic, but Live Oak chilled me to the core," Wolf wrote.³¹ Khrushchev scared him as much, if not more, by committing his personal prestige to expelling the three Western powers from Berlin. "Great powers," Wolf observed, "have gone to war often enough to protect the fragile prestige of their leaders."

Khrushchev may have concluded that discretion and concessions were the better part of valor. In July 1959, President Eisenhower invited him to Washington. Arriving in September, he became the first Soviet leader to visit the United States. His decision to withdraw the missiles may have been a tacit signal of his desire to end the crisis. He also withdrew his Berlin ultimatum during the summit. But less than two years later, with Kremlin approval, the East Germans erected the Berlin Wall to halt the flow of refugees.

Khrushchev's colleagues on the Presidium removed him from power in 1964. Those who spoke against him focused on his failed domestic policies, but they also noted that he had taken the USSR to the brink of war three times—over Suez, Berlin, and Cuba—in less than a decade. His strategy of bluff and bluster had failed. Ironically, it also contributed to the subsequent nuclear arms race, as the new regime under Leonid Brezhnev sought to fill in the gaps in Khrushchev's missile strategy.

Lesson: Role of Intelligence

This episode underscores the important but often hidden role intelligence played during the Cold War. It also shows how factoring in the intelligence variable can give an old story new twists and revise what was once conventional wisdom. In the case at hand, it took more than ten years and an accidental discovery in the Soviet archives

to bring new information to light. One wonders how many historical examples are waiting to be discovered.

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³⁰ Another version has the Soviets first learning about "Live Oak" in July 1961 from KGB sources inside NATO.

³¹ Markus Wolf, *Man Without a Face: The Autobiography of Communism's Greatest Spymaster* (New York: Random House/Times Books, 1997, p. 96