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The Perils of Personal Redemption: Assessing Errol Morris’s The Fog of War

By Mark Philip Bradley

Whether confronted with the earnest somnolence of a Ken Burns PBS special or the in-your-face reductionism of Michael Moore’s latest offering, historians, myself included, are often prickly about the genre of the historical documentary. Painfully aware that such films attract a far larger public than their own work ever will, *the very reach of the documentary audience worries the conscience of the historian.* Among their common complaints: “they didn’t get the facts quite right,” “the visual footage substitutes for sustained analysis,” or “the approach is too shallow.” Errol Morris’s *The Fog of War* has proved to be something of an exception. There has certainly been some criticism, generally of the “Morris didn’t push McNamara enough” variety, but in the main the film has received a polite and sometimes quite favorable reception from the discipline. Those responses puzzle me, not so much because Morris’s film doesn’t succeed on its own limited terms. It largely does, often powerfully illustrating the complexities of McNamara’s efforts to come to terms with his past. But as history *The Fog of War* ultimately fails to place the wars for Vietnam and McNamara’s part in them in the broader sweep of post-1945 American and international history.

The American war in Vietnam in the 1960s has been at the center of McNamara’s almost decade-long redemptive quest. It began with the *mea culpas* of his 1995 *In Retrospect*—“we were wrong, terribly wrong”—and was followed up in *Argument without End* (1999), which was based on McNamara’s efforts to bring American and Vietnamese policymakers together in Hanoi to explore what he termed the “missed opportunities” on both sides. Neither project had the impact McNamara intended. *In Retrospect* was greeted with hostility from many observers, especially Vietnam war veterans, who asked why McNamara did not voice his doubts when they might have made a difference: when he was still at the center of Vietnam decision making or immediately after he left the Johnson administration. The premises of the Hanoi oral history undertaking brought a sharp and revealing critique from the Vietnamese participants in it. Perhaps there were missed opportunities on the American side, they claimed, but not for the Vietnamese. If there were lessons to be learned they were largely in the inability of Cold War U.S. policy makers to recognize the decolonizing wave in the Third World, of which the Vietnamese struggle for independence was one instantiation.

The failure of these projects clearly shapes McNamara’s presentation of the role he played in America’s Vietnam policy in *Fog of War,* and Morris casts an only partially critical gaze on that presentation. McNamara takes on the “why didn’t he say so earlier” critique by foregrounding the doubts he raised about Vietnam as secretary of defense. Here Morris largely plays along, juxtaposing selected taped conversations in which McNamara voices his hesitations to Kennedy and Johnson with McNamara’s more recent revisionism. What goes missing in both cases, of course, is McNamara’s simultaneous support for the rigorous prosecution of the war. If he voiced doubts at
particular moments, much of his private and almost all of his public statements were considerably more hawkish.

The conceit of “lessons” that frames the film, though a good fit for illuminating McNamara’s relentless didacticism, might also be viewed as an extended apologia, one which Morris does little to interrogate critically. In the lessons McNamara articulates—whether centered on the perils of World War II strategic bombing, the Cuban missile crisis, his quest for passenger safety at Ford Motor Company or the escalation of the war in Vietnam—he seeks to convey his own extraordinary Olympian detachment, common decency and public-spirited good sense. Tellingly, McNamara uses General Curtis LeMay as his foil in this endeavor. LeMay, McNamara tells us, may have enthusiastically directed the strategic bombing of Japan with its massive and unnecessary loss of life or urged the use of nuclear weapons in Cuba and Vietnam despite the potential for an atomic apocalypse. But not McNamara. Indeed, the unspoken implication is that major policy debates in the United States revolved around the clash between LeMay’s barbaric aggression and the statesman-like humanity of McNamara. We can all be glad that that McNamara usually had the upper hand (and we should be indebted to him for his efforts). The main lines of American diplomacy, of course, did not hover around this imagined LeMay/McNamara axis, and choosing LeMay as his alter ego is a bit like saying “well, compared to Genghis Khan’s reign my watch looks pretty good.” Indeed it does, but what does that really tell us? Morris obliges McNamara by never even hinting at these contradictions.

LeMay aside, there is an oddly insular and sometimes distorted quality to McNamara’s telling of the cases that inform his lessons of war. For example, his rendition of the Gulf of Tonkin incidents does make it clear that they were considerably more ambiguous than they were made out to be by U.S. policymakers, himself included, at the time. Echoing the careful conclusions of Edwin E. Moïse’s close study of the incidents in *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (1996), he admits that the second incident probably didn’t happen. “Belief and seeing,” McNamara intones, “are both often wrong.” And yet he makes no mention of the escalating clandestine American war in North Vietnam itself and how it might have precipitated the first Vietnamese attack. In McNamara’s telling there is no place for real American culpability, only for the somewhat murky confusion of the fog of war.

There is also the matter of the sheer number of lessons themselves—there are eleven altogether (with an even more elaborate, and often confusing, parsing of them in the special features section of the DVD version of the film)—and their ultimate utility. Even in the most thoughtful reaches of the Bush administration, an admittedly slender territory, *it is hard to imagine Colin Powell or Condolezza Rice keeping all of them straight*. As Gary Trudeau might write: “Damn, what was number 9. CONDI!!?” “It’s OK Mr. President, I can’t always remember either.” More seriously, if we strip the United States of culpability for the Gulf of Tonkin incident and blame the fog of war, how can its lessons help us understand, for instance, the current administration’s willful misreading of the intelligence on Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction or the distressing parallels between the congressional blank check that followed the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the recent show of support for the use of force against Iraq in Congress?

While Morris leaves the problematic nature of McNamara’s lessons largely unexamined, he is considerably stronger in shaping a deft psychological portrait of the conflictual desires that appear to have shaped McNamara’s past actions and his more recent drive for redemption. One the one hand, McNamara’s imperiousness, his self-regard and the sureness of his wearying insistence that he had and has the
right answers to the big questions comes across very sharply and help us recall that many of McNamara’s contemporaries saw him as arrogant. In the sleek and arresting use of visual imagery that characterizes the film, Morris rapidly (almost eye-poppingly) projects the largely pejorative adjectives the popular press used to describe McNamara’s meteoric rise to power in Washington. In addition, McNamara’s retrospective voiceover details his service to Ford and in Washington in ways that at times support the critiques of his contemporary critics to a surprising degree.

But Morris also shows a less familiar side of McNamara and reveals insecurities that seem to lie just beneath the surface. Perhaps the most striking example of these, which leaves the viewer torn between empathy and scorn, is displayed when McNamara describes his role in the decision of where to bury President Kennedy. His clear regard and even love for Kennedy comes across in quite moving ways. Fighting back tears, he narrates how he came to choose Kennedy’s burial site at Arlington National Cemetery. And yet there is an air of self-importance here, as McNamara is determined to let his listeners know that of all the Kennedy retainers it was he that the president’s widow turned to in carrying out this symbolically fraught task. McNamara also emphasizes repeatedly that the site he selected was the “most beautiful” one at Arlington. If the audience has any doubt, he marshals the testimony of experts: the park ranger in charge of the cemetery agreed with him, as did Bobby Kennedy, who later told McNamara his brother had remarked on the beauty of the spot in one of his visits to the cemetery. In highlighting this brief story, Morris displays the ways in McNamara unconsciously reveals many of the essential contradictions of his personality. On the one hand, he conveys McNamara’s boundless capacity for loyalty and his deep admiration for the presidents whom he served; on the other, he shows McNamara’s endless craving for recognition and Svengali-like insistence on his ability to make the right choices. But he also reveals the more unexpected and endearing fragility underlying McNamara’s sense of himself and his public displays of confidence. One cannot help but think, couldn’t the site he selected for the burial have simply been beautiful? Did his choice really require the validation of experts?

Morris, however, does not always appear to know what to do with this nuanced portrait of McNamara and how it might help us understand the Vietnam War and McNamara’s place in it. The trope of redemption reappears in the final frame of the film and hovers over it. In a familiar and tired cinematic convention, we are portentously told that “Robert S. McNamara served as president of the World Bank from 1968 to 1981. Since his retirement, he has continued to work on problems of poverty, world health and economic development.” This ennobling coda conceals more than it reveals. Under McNamara’s leadership, the bank and its place in America’s larger modernizing project in the non-Western world have been the subject of sustained and persuasive critical scholarship that unpacks the ways in which the failed high modernist schemes of American development experts paralleled the political and military dimensions of American Cold War diplomacy toward the Third World. (See, for example, Nils Gilman’s Mandarins of the Future [2004]). In many ways, McNamara’s tenure at the bank was less an occasion for his redemption than a continuation by other means and on other fronts of the policies that brought American defeat in Vietnam and prompted the suffering of millions of Vietnamese civilians on all sides of the conflict.

This larger context matters, not only for understanding the problematic nature of McNamara’s lesson-driven vision of the past, but more important, for contextualizing its larger significance. In the end, the Vietnam War was not, as his critics argued during the war, McNamara’s war. If personality and agency are a necessary part of assessing the war and McNamara’s culpability in it, so too are the more capacious...
structural frames of state and society in Cold War America. McNamara was perhaps an über representative of the broader social and intellectual currents circulating in and shaping the contours of post-1945 America. In critical ways his approach to the world reflects the larger patterns of the culture of manliness so eloquently captured in Robert D. Dean’s *Imperial Brotherhood* (2001). Moreover, McNamara was both a product and an agent of the exceptionalist can-do attitude that, as Dan Rodgers argues in *Atlantic Crossings* (2000), conditioned the paradoxically parochial globalism of Cold War America.

*The Fog of War*, as they say, doesn’t go there. Perhaps it would be asking too much of a film produced in a climate in which the cultural politics of the Vietnam War and its legacies remain highly unstable. And by contrast to the frustratingly one-dimensional and quasi-utopian narratives that govern popular representations of World War II, like the “Boys of Pointe du Hoc” and the “Greatest Generation,” Morris’s film does convey a more measured understanding of McNamara and the world he confronted. But if it captures aspects of the perils of McNamara’s struggle for redemption, *The Fog of War* only gets us part of the way toward apprehending the larger processes that brought McNamara and American society to war in Vietnam and the place of the war in the domestic and international history of the last half-century.

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The Fog of Self Delusion

Allen Millett

Critics of former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara still stress his middle name—Strange—when they curse his conduct of the war in Vietnam. His detractors argue that by allowing the North Vietnamese to establish sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia and by restricting Rolling Thunder air strikes to narrowly defined military targets, he doomed the American war effort. Another variant of this criticism stresses his failure to reform the South Vietnamese armed forces, to expand the pacification campaign, to push for economic development, and to introduce grass-roots democracy into Vietnamese rural society. It is not certain that McNamara understood all these non-quantifiable factors in 1961-67, and The Fog of War does not establish that he understands these issues now. The “we could have won” school of Vietnam obsessives will find more evidence in The Fog of War that Secretary McNamara knew very little about Southeast Asia and nothing about the nature of warfare.

The anti-war school of Vietnam obsessives will find plenty of evidence in the movie to confirm their view that McNamara was either a duplicitous knave or a sycophantic courtier who allowed himself to be charmed by John F. Kennedy and bullied by Lyndon Johnson. According to this school of thought, McNamara was a capitalist technocrat whose manic lust for mathematical expressions of reality blinded him to the insurmountable odds the United States was facing when it tried to stop a powerful, legitimate, revolutionary movement in postcolonial Vietnam. McNamara could have mustered enough experts to advance this view in the White House and persuade Lyndon Johnson that killing Vietnamese did nothing to contain the Chinese.

The real Robert S. McNamara remains elusive, a confessant who never quite confesses, an apostate convert to the anti-war school who remains loyal to an American commitment gone wrong. He still cannot explain why the American intervention failed. And no wonder: his background was in systems analyses, and win or lose, the United States could not justify the Vietnam War by analyzing its cost-effectiveness.

The producer-director of The Fog of War, Errol Morris, is a newcomer to documentaries on foreign and military affairs. His questions for McNamara and his selection of film footage reveal a low level of preparation; he needs some lessons from Ted Koppel and Charlie Rose. Nevertheless, he makes a brave attempt to study McNamara’s pre-public life (1916-1961), his struggle with the cold war crises of the Kennedy administration and the specter of nuclear war, and his role in Vietnam decision-making. However, he beats the obvious points to death and ignores the more promising clues to McNamara’s Vietnam War experience.
Morris is fixated on isolated events that cast the armed forces senior commanders as villains and McNamara as a victim. He concentrates, for example, on the Gulf of Tonkin incident, only one of many alarming events in 1964. He also allows McNamara to focus on the air campaign against North Vietnam. With some contextual legerdemain that impresses Morris, whose light grasp of World War II history is obvious, McNamara compares the bombing of North Vietnam to the strategic bombing of Japan and makes it clear that he sees himself as having been tasked with curbing a bombing-happy Air Force. He hardly discusses the conduct of ground operations within Vietnam or the risks of a search and destroy campaign controlled by the Communists' willingness to stand and fight or to fade away to their sanctuaries in the mountains, jungles, and tunnels. In 1994 I crawled in the Cu Chi tunnels, built under an American division's base camp in Tay Ninh Province. I wish Secretary McNamara could have the same experience.

Morris wonders how someone as highly intelligent and deeply moral as McNamara could go so wrong on Vietnam. The Fog of War provides some answers that border on psychobiography. McNamara grew up poor enough to have class anxiety. He insists that he grew up in San Francisco when his home was really in Oakland. His striving at Berkeley led him to the Harvard Business School, where he taught from 1940-43. Interestingly, both before and after World War II, McNamara preferred being a HBS faculty member to being an industrial mogul. In the wartime U.S. Army Air Forces, he excelled in the operational analysis of strategic bombing, especially the bombing of Japan by Curtis E. LeMay’s Twentieth Air Force. McNamara is obviously bothered by an operation he now regards as “criminal.” He both praises and condemns LeMay, but he is clearly intimidated by LeMay’s force of character.

Morris allows McNamara to make the case that his major challenge as secretary of defense was preventing LeMay from starting World War III during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. LeMay had left the JCS by the time the great negative decisions of 1965 and 1966 were made, but McNamara still asserts that dealing with the pressure for escalations of violence from the JCS, whose members simply parroted LeMay's advice to bomb the Vietnamese "back into the stone age," was his greatest problem. H.R. McMaster's Dereliction of Duty (1997) is hard on the service chiefs, but he acknowledges that the JCS contingency plans of 1965 envisioned more than just a crushing air campaign. As in many similar cases, McNamara's recollections, unexamined by Morris, are selective and self-serving.

McNamara’s years with the Ford Motor Company did little to transform him from a great staff officer of exceptional analytic skill to a national security leader. He had been president of Ford for five whole weeks before he switched masters from Henry Ford III to JFK. His deep interest in international and defense affairs before 1961 is part of the Camelot myth. What did McNamara bring to the Office of the Secretary of Defense? He provided a method-driven approach (systems analysis) to defense problems that provided "cost-effective" solutions. However, he brought absolutely no interest or prior knowledge about wars of national liberation to his office, and he ignored expert advice on the subject from people like Edward G. Lansdale, John Mecklin, Sir Robert Thompson, and George Carver. What did he achieve? His pseudoscientific solutions of budget problems confused Congress, cowed the military departments, and corralled the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Defense spending during his tenure increased by a higher percentage than it did in the 1980s. He brought some order to strategic nuclear planning and weapons procurement, and he advanced the careers of a generation of “whiz kids,” OSD civilians, two of whom later became the secretary of defense (Harold Brown and Les Aspin).
Around 1967 McNamara developed serious doubts about the war, largely because of his study of the bombing results of Operation Rolling Thunder. By that time it was too late to get LBJ to surrender or win because of the perceived international and domestic costs. Could something have been done earlier? McNamara believes JFK had an exit strategy, but we will never know for sure. McNamara likes to draw lessons from history, but he knew nothing of Charles de Gaulle's honorable retreat from Algeria and says nothing now about the United States exiting El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, and Lebanon. Even when McNamara started the study that would come to be known as the Pentagon Papers, he was unaware that Secretary of State Dean Acheson had conducted a similar review of the Korean War in 1953-54. Spare us from political appointees (for McNamara was neither politician nor bureaucrat) who define history in terms of their personal experience.

*The Fog of War* should be retitled *The Fog of Robert McNamara*, since it deals with McNamara more than the Vietnam War. The war is a complex subject, and because Morris does not know enough about it to ask the right questions, the movie will do little to help unprepared students understand it. Yet even Morris’s portrait of McNamara is not quite convincing. Obviously, McNamara’s very selective memory is an obstacle to comprehension. The author-journalist David Halberstam, who has covered American politics and wars for forty-plus years, recently told me that McNamara had more trouble with the truth than any official he had ever met, and that is quite a universe from which to draw comparisons. Morris does his best to give us the essential Robert S. McNamara, but his subject has become an expert in making himself seem more complex than he really is. In reality McNamara is a simple technocrat seduced by the chance for historical immortality through public office. He will certainly be remembered, but the McNamara he would like us to remember—the victimized man of good intentions led astray by hubris, misplaced loyalty, and bad advice—is not the one that will go down in history.
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Mr. Secretary: A Review of Errol Morris’s The Fog of War

By Moss Roberts and Marilyn B. Young, New York University

“Never answer the question that was asked of you. Answer the question that you wish had been asked of you. It’s a good rule.” -- Robert S. McNamara

Errol Morris’s documentary The Fog of War is organized around eleven lessons that Robert Strange Mcnamara derived from his experiences as a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force in World War II and as secretary of defense under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Baines Johnson. In this review, we test some of these lessons by examining what McNamara said and did then and what he thinks now.

“I’ve been part of wars….”

Morris’s main interest is the Vietnam War, and the introductory frames of the film show the young McNamara standing and pointing didactically at a map of Vietnam with his pointer. He is every inch the war bureaucrat, suited, as always, in what Baudelaire calls “the necessary garb of our suffering age, which wears the symbol of perpetual mourning on its thin black shoulders.” The scene shifts from the map lesson to the operational theatre, in this case sailors at sea tending their weapons. The next logical image, showing the sailors’ target, does not follow; instead, Morris begins the film proper with his main subject, now in his mid-eighties, squarely facing the camera, his long fingers admonishing Morris—and the viewer—with great energy. He speaks in a tone that both pleads for understanding and exerts authority. “Any military commander, if he is honest with himself, will admit he has made mistakes in the application of military power,” he says. “He’s killed people . . . unnecessarily, hundreds or thousands or tens of thousands, even 100,000 [he is thinking of the firebombing of Tokyo]. But an atomic bomb destroys whole nations.”

His point is that nuclear war dwarfs the horrors of conventional war and continues to threaten humankind. He believes that in 1962 he and the Kennedy administration saved the world from nuclear war. Whatever he feels about the rest of his career, McNamara takes pride in the way the Cuban missile crisis was defused. Here McNamara and Morris offer Lesson Number 1: empathize with your enemy. Peace was maintained because “we got inside [the Russians’] skins. We understood that Khrushchev had to be able to say that he headed off a U.S. invasion of Cuba before he could remove the missiles.” McNamara credits the former U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, Tommy
Thompson, with having had the strength of character to oppose Kennedy’s initial belligerence toward the USSR. Yet the rest of The Fog of War demonstrates McNamara’s inability to follow Thompson’s example. Obedience—he calls it loyalty—is his credo. He has been part of two wars, but his role, he protests, was to serve his commanding officers: General Curtis LeMay in WWII, Kennedy and Johnson during the Vietnam War.

“If we had lost [World War II] we could have been tried as war criminals. He, and I’d say I, were behaving as war criminals…”

McNamara’s memories of the firebombing of Japanese cities at the end of WWII follow his account of the Cuban missile crisis. The sequence is powerful. McNamara declines the pose of moral superiority assumed to justify allied atrocities in WWII to speak bluntly about what war means to civilians. He consistently uses the words “burned to death” and corrects himself when he slips and says “bombed.” In Tokyo, the United States “burned to death 100,000 Japanese civilians in a single night—men, women, children.” Were you aware of this, Morris asks him? “I was part of a mechanism that in a sense recommended it,” McNamara replies. Morris asks why incendiaries were used, but McNamara sidesteps the question. The real issue, he asks, is whether “in order to win a war should you kill 100,000 people in a single night by firebombs or any other way?” LeMay’s answer, McNamara adds, had been an unequivocal “yes.”

Characteristically, McNamara’s attempts at moral reasoning abort. He neither agrees nor disagrees with LeMay but instead describes the toll the attack on Japan took: sixty-seven cities destroyed, two with nuclear bombs. He names the Japanese cities and their U.S. equivalents, by population and by area destroyed: 58% of Yokohama, McNamara intones, a city the size of Cleveland. As he speaks, the bombs, represented as numerals, descend in slow motion, soundlessly, without landing, upon aerial scans of the devastated areas. They fall slowly, then faster and faster, the data flitting by. McNamara’s lesson? “Proportionality should be a guideline in war.” (In the DVD supplement this is Lesson Number 1.)

“In the minds of some people” (but not himself), the use of two nuclear bombs was overkill, McNamara says. Nevertheless, he doesn’t “fault Truman.” Answering a question he had not been asked, he merely says that the “U.S.–Japan war was one of the most brutal in human history,” and he advises Morris to look beyond tactics to the failure of humanity to grapple with the rules of war. But does not this statement undermine the concept of agency and therefore responsibility, drawing no distinction between victim and perpetrator? McNamara says he agrees with LeMay: had the U.S. lost, “we’d all have been prosecuted as war criminals.” But then he asks, “what makes it immoral if you lose and not if you win?” The camera moves closer to McNamara’s clean-shaven, sad-eyed, compressed face. He does not answer his own question. Morris seems to honor him for having asked it. The question of Vietnam has now reappeared, silent as Banquo’s ghost.

Morris’s next frames quote taped telephone exchanges between Johnson and McNamara in the spring of 1964. They are fretting over public relations tactics. Then suddenly we are back in the present moment. Morris’s voice is distant and tentative, as if the director were afraid McNamara might turn skittish. “At some point we have to approach Vietnam and I wonder how you can best set that up for me,” he says. McNamara’s eyes shift away from the camera and back again. “It’s a hard question,” he answers after a long pause. “We have to approach it in the context of the Cold War—but first I’ll have to talk about Ford [the words tumble out]. I’ve got to go back to the end of the war.” Logical enough: after all, 1945 was the real beginning of the Vietnam War, when the U.S. government began to support the return of French
forces. But McNamara is not thinking of Vietnam. At this moment he is remembering himself as a victim, because autumn 1945 is the time when he and his wife were stricken with polio. He does not dwell on their illness, however, but moves the story swiftly forward to his years at Ford, where he tried to reduce auto injuries and fatalities by promoting safety features like seat belts and cushioned dash boards. Ten handsomely illustrated minutes go by before McNamara returns to the business at hand.

The discussion then focuses on the incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin in early August 1964, which the administration exploited to convince Congress to issue a war resolution. McNamara had earlier misrepresented the Cuban missile crisis by failing to provide the context of U.S. sabotage in which it arose. Similarly, he now avoids any mention of the provocative behavior of U.S. and South Vietnamese forces that preceded the only Vietnamese PT boat attack in the Gulf. Instead, he recalls Johnson’s stated belief that the Vietnamese attack was a deliberate escalation that indicated “they would not stop short of winning.” The point is puzzling: why would they be fighting, if not to win? After a pause McNamara says, “We were wrong.” The Vietnamese attack on August 2 did not signal deliberate escalation; and the second attack, on August 4, never occurred at all. The report of that attack stemmed from a misreading of sonar data. “We see what we want to believe,” Morris suggests helpfully. Emphatically agreeing, McNamara adds another lesson, sometimes “belief [and] seeing, are both wrong.” Neither McNamara nor Morris asks what causes beliefs to be wrong.

Throughout this and the following sequences McNamara blames the escalating war squarely on President Johnson. His own role is supportive, but also questioning. However, in a forthcoming study, Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam, Gareth Porter argues the opposite, that McNamara and the National Security Council insistently pushed a reluctant president towards ever more daring and decisive military action and may even have concealed relevant information from him.

"Each of us could have achieved our objectives without the terrible loss of life."

McNamara is blind to the realities of U.S. foreign policy; for him, the Cold War absolves the United States from any charge of colonialism. He expresses astonishment at the Vietnamese belief that “we had simply replaced the French as a colonial power . . . [That] was absolutely absurd.” Even today the simple truth about his government’s colonial policies, obvious to people around the world, escapes him. When he meets his Vietnamese counterparts in Hanoi, almost thirty years after leaving office, McNamara asks what they thought they had achieved with all that death. “You didn’t get any more than we were willing to give you at the beginning of the war. You could have had the whole damn thing: independence, unification.” This statement is as false as it is condescending. Vietnamese and U.S. goals were opposed, not identical. McNamara’s meaning, it emerges, is that for the United States, Vietnam was not a war of colonization but a Cold War front or, as McNamara puts it, a “Cold War activity.” The former foreign minister of the DRV spoke from a more local perspective and mocked McNamara’s ignorance: China was Vietnam’s historical enemy, and Vietnam had never been a Chinese pawn. The Vietnamese fought for their independence; the United States tried to enslave them.

Despite the lesson that McNamara says he drew from the Cuban missile crisis, “empathize with the enemy,” he still cannot empathize, cannot get inside the skin of the colonized. Neither McNamara nor his colleagues at the war table showed anything but boundless indifference to the
Vietnamese, or for that matter the Cubans. Does McNamara intend the audience to believe that Johnson’s war council, and he himself, could have forestalled the escalation of 1964-65 by empathizing with the Vietnamese? If so, it is a case he does not make. Indeed, the manner in which McNamara laughs off the idea that the Americans were conquerors like the French, as he does when meeting with Vietnamese historians and officials in 1995, suggests that he will never be able to see the United States and the war as the Vietnamese did and do. At best, his visits to Vietnam and to Cuba can be read as gestures towards empathy in hindsight, gambits in his ongoing effort at self-justification.

Reflecting on the Hanoi meeting, McNamara insists that the United States must never engage in unilateral military action. No ally supported the United States in its war in Vietnam, he claims, forgetting the three hundred thousand South Korean troops and smaller contingents of Australians, Filipinos and other nationals who fought there. “If we had not acted unilaterally, we wouldn’t have been there.” But what if there had been greater international support for the Vietnam War, as there was for the Korean and other U.S.–dominated wars? Would that alone have justified it? Unilateral action has always characterized U.S. foreign policy, as it has the foreign policies of other nations.

Morris asks McNamara if he felt that he was “the author of stuff, or that you were an instrument of things outside your control.” Neither, McNamara answers. “I was serving an elected president and my responsibility was to help him carry out policies he believed were in the interests of the country.” Although he has long been out of government, he also uses this answer to explain his reticence on the war in Iraq. At a Berkeley campus forum on The Fog of War held in February, 2004, MacNamara tells the host, Mark Danner, and fellow guest Errol Morris that he has declined more than 170 invitations from reporters to share his thoughts on Iraq. When he deflects Danner’s invitation as well, Danner confronts MacNamara with a statement he had given to the Toronto Globe and Mail a week before. “It’s just wrong what we’re doing [in Iraq],” MacNamara had said, “It’s morally wrong, it’s politically wrong, it’s economically wrong.” To the American audience he refused these plain truths and justified himself on the grounds that his criticism would endanger American soldiers. The opposite is as true for Iraq as it was for Vietnam.

MacNamara has arrived where he started but knows the place no better, unable to live up to T.S. Eliot’s words of wisdom from a poem that he professes to admire: “We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time (“Little Gidding”).

“We have certain ideals, certain responsibilities. Recognize that at times you will have to engage in evil, but minimize it.”

McNamara draws this moral from Sherman’s torching of Atlanta, LeMay’s fire bombing of Japan and, surprisingly, Norman Morrison’s self-immolation. Morrison, he reminds the viewer, was a Quaker who burned himself to death in front of the Pentagon. He was carrying his infant daughter and in McNamara’s version of the story (which is at odds with Paul Hendrickson’s detailed account) released her only in response to a bystander’s appeal. At the time of his death, Morrison’s wife had issued a statement that moved McNamara: “Human beings,” she said, “must stop killing other human beings.” It’s a belief McNamara says he shares, but he then observes again that evil must be done “in order to do good.” This is a “very, very difficult position for sensitive people to be in. Morrison was one of those people. I think I was.” He does not explain what good the war wrought. On one subject McNamara maintains his silence: asked what effect the anti-war movement had on his
views, McNamara denies there was any, adding brusquely that it was a “tense” time within his family and that he won’t discuss it further.

Whatever he believed, McNamara resigned, or was fired, or both, in the midst of the Vietnam and Cold Wars. In a “beautiful ceremony,” Johnson gave him the Medal of Freedom, but when McNamara tried to express his thanks, he could not speak. In contemporary footage, he seems hardly to be able to stand up straight. As Johnson eyes him intently from the side, McNamara manages only to say that he “cannot find the words to express what is in his heart” and that he would “respond on another occasion.” In 1995 he finally did so. “We were wrong, terribly wrong,” he wrote. “We owe it to future generations to find out why.” It seems likely, in retrospect, that what was in McNamara’s heart in 1967 could not be spoken or expressed because he had lost faith in the cause.

In the epilogue McNamara is behind the wheel of his car; sitting beside him as they drive, Morris presses him to explain why didn’t he speak out after his resignation. “I’m not going to say any more than I have,” McNamara replies curtly. “These are the kinds of questions that get me in trouble. You don’t know how inflammatory my words can appear. A lot of people misunderstand the war, misunderstand me. Some people think I’m a son of a bitch.” Morris is relentless here. Does McNamara feel any guilt or responsibility? McNamara stonewalls. “I don’t want to go any further in the discussion. It just adds to the controversy. It’s too complex.” Morris, with a pang of empathy for his subject, suggests that “you’re damned if you do and damned if you don’t.” “Yeah,” McNamara agrees, “and I’d rather be damned if I don’t.” These are McNamara’s last words in the film.

Released during the war in Iraq, The Fog of War raises many conveniently forgotten questions for what Gore Vidal calls “the United States of Amnesia.” McNamara’s lessons—proportionality, empathy, skepticism—have immediate and obvious significance. His appearance in this film, in the course of which he reveals so much of his divided self, is a gesture not lightly made, nor should we take it lightly.
April 2005 Newsletter

New Evidence on the Secret Nuclear Alert of October 1969:
The Henry A. Kissinger Telcons

William Burr and Jeffrey Kimball

In two articles we published in January 2003 on President Richard M. Nixon’s secret nuclear alert of October 13-28, 1969, we were able to establish that the rumored operation had in fact taken place, to describe the manner of its execution, and to solve the mystery of why Nixon ordered it.(1) Intent upon settling the Vietnam War on his own terms, Nixon hoped the alert would “jar” both the Soviet Union and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) into making concessions. The alert, whose official name was “Joint Chiefs of Staff Readiness Test,” failed in its purpose, but it was one of the early exercises of Nixon’s self-styled “madman theory”—“the principle of the threat of excessive force.”(2)

Even though our articles drew on a substantial body of recently declassified documents in the archives of the White House, several military headquarters commands, and the office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, important questions remained partially or wholly unanswered. Did anyone else know about the purpose of the alert besides a small inner circle composed of President Nixon, his assistant for national security affairs Henry A. Kissinger, Kissinger’s aide Colonel Alexander M. Haig, Nixon’s chief of staff H. R. Haldeman, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, and Laird’s aide Colonel Robert E. Pursley? On precisely what date did Nixon and Kissinger order Laird and Earle J. Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to begin planning the alert? When and how did the Department of State learn about the alert? Did the White House inform Secretary of State William P. Rogers about the purpose of the alert? How did the Soviets, Chinese, and North Vietnamese interpret the alert and respond to it? Did American military intelligence detect Soviet, Chinese, and North Vietnamese reactions? To what extent were Nixon and Kissinger concerned about the anti-Vietnam War movement and the larger American public learning of their strategy? Released by the National Archives and Records Administration on May 26, 2004, Henry A. Kissinger’s Telephone Conversation Transcripts (telcons) shed more light on these questions, provide surprising answers to some of them, and raise additional questions about the history of the alert. (3)

Previously declassified documents had led us to conclude that it was President Nixon who had ordered Laird on the evening of October 6 to begin planning the secret nuclear alert. His purpose was to compensate for having recently decided to cancel the massive bombing and mining operation—secretly code-named DUCK HOOK—that he had threatened to unleash against North Vietnam unless Hanoi yielded to Washington’s terms by November 1. Nixon may have wanted the Soviets and North Vietnamese to think the alert was a lead-up to DUCK HOOK before Moscow and Hanoi discovered that the operation had been scratched. Perhaps he was hoping that the alert itself would jar Hanoi into concessions or send a signal to Moscow about the risks of its support for Hanoi, thus leveraging the Soviets into putting pressure on
the North Vietnamese to soften their diplomatic position. But even if the bluff failed, Nixon thought, it might salvage his reputation for
toughness and irrationality despite his having backed down from launching DUCK HOOK.(4) We still believe this analysis of purpose is
correct, but the transcript of a conversation between Kissinger and Laird on the morning of October 6 indicates that the planning process for
the alert had begun earlier than the evening of the sixth and that it was Kissinger, acting for Nixon, who first brought the matter up with Laird.

On instructions from Nixon, Kissinger was primed that morning to urge Laird to prepare an operation that had nuclear implications; namely
to put U.S. strategic forces on a higher DEFCON(5) alert status. Kissinger initially brought up the subject by remarking that he had noticed
that a “SAC [Strategic Air Command] exercise” was scheduled to take place in October. “I’m all for it,” he said, “but I just want to know
what it is. Has it been announced?” When Laird answered that it had not been announced, Kissinger asked: “Will the other side pick this up?
We want them to.” Laird responded: “They will pick it up. The fact that we are exercising our bombers.” But Kissinger was not satisfied that
the exercise was of sufficient magnitude: “Could you exercise the DEFCONS for a day or so in October? I’ll give you a brief as to why.”
Laird said, “we can,” to which Kissinger replied, “the president will appreciate it very much.”(6)

In the days following October 6, the Pentagon prepared recommendations for military measures designed to get the attention of Moscow and
Hanoi. According to an October 10 telcon between Kissinger and Laird, Nixon had approved on the night of October 9 “the exercises that are
to be laid on for October 13 and 14 and running through that week.” Laird, however, was “concerned” about two issues. The first had to do
with the requirement that allies were supposed to be notified about DEFCONS. Laird asked: “We will not be contacting our allies (Canada or
NATO) on any of these?” Kissinger confirmed that the United States would not contact allies, because “we were worried about getting the
allies involved.” The next part of the discussion is murky. Kissinger remarked that “all of these activities will get some sort of signal—they
will get the word, but there will be no DEFCON. There is no military significance to this.” “They” could refer to the allies or the Soviets.

Laird’s other concern was whether the alert was connected with or “contingent in any way on the other operation that is going to be discussed
on Saturday [October 11].” As written down by the transcriber, Laird’s reference to the “other operation” is vague, but he may have been
referring to a previously scheduled exercise involving nuclear missile submarines. In any event, Kissinger “affirmed it has nothing to do with
that,” and “he told L to go ahead and execute this—he has a signed paper from the president that he wants it.”(7)

What Kissinger was saying was that he wanted nuclear signals for political rather than military purposes, and, in order to preserve the
operation’s secrecy, the signals could not be called a DEFCON. Appreciating Laird’s concern, as well as his reluctance to sign on, Kissinger
referred to “a signed paper” from Nixon, which may or may not have existed (at least it has not yet surfaced in White House papers).

The exercise that got under way on October 13 included a “stand down” of SAC’s nuclear bomber force, which had the effect of increasing
the number of bombers on ground alert and signaling that steps were being taken to improve force readiness. The telcons reveal that even at
this late date no one had yet informed the Department of State about the operation. When Kissinger asked about it, Laird said he had not told
Secretary Rogers but that his military aide would soon report to State’s executive secretary, Theodore Eliot, that a “routine SAC exercise”
was under way and that Nixon was aware of it. In a telcon the next day, Kissinger learned from Laird that Eliot had been told and he had also briefed Elliot Richardson, Rogers’ deputy. Still, no one at State had been informed about the purpose of the alert. Even after Eliot and Richardson had asked “what it was all about,” they were advised that “they would have to ask the highest authority about it.” The telcons yield no answers, however, to the question of whether Rogers or Richardson ever learned about the purpose of the alert.

In any event, the press and others took notice of the stand down. On the fourteenth, Laird told Kissinger that reporters near a SAC base were asking “why there were no planes flying” and that SAC headquarters was also receiving press inquiries about the matter. When Laird requested guidance for the Defense Department’s response, Kissinger asked him to hold off until the next day, October 15. The first Moratorium against the Vietnam War was to occur that day, and Kissinger told Laird that he “would hate to see the peaceniks worked up about this.”(8)

Kissinger, of course, wanted the Soviets to notice and react to the operation, and by October 17 he thought he had reason to believe they had. Late in the afternoon of that day, Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin had phoned Kissinger to say that he had a message on the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks that he wanted to deliver to President Nixon and “that there may also be some further discussion on Soviet/American relations.” (Dobrynin’s request would soon result in the scheduling of a meeting between Nixon, Kissinger, and Dobrynin on October 20.) Apparently persuaded that Dobrynin’s phone call was a response to the nuclear alert, Kissinger told Laird the next day that “the game plan seems to be working” and that there might be a “little payoff.”(9)

A cryptic record of an October 14 Kissinger conversation with New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, one of his most important patrons, suggests that Kissinger had brought the governor into the secret shortly after the alert got underway. When he spoke with Rockefeller again on the morning of October 20, just hours before the Nixon-Kissinger-Dobrynin meeting, he told him that “the thing they had discussed the other day—it’s gotten down to producing little twitches.” In addition, he said that “there’s now a 30 percent chance—it would be sheer gold if we could get away with it.” An hour or so later, in a conversation with Pentagon planner Fritz Kraemer, an early mentor who had a formative influence on his career, Kissinger was far more cautious. Now he saw only a “10 percent chance” of success and admitted that “it has no business succeeding, but it may.” Perhaps Kissinger was more careful when speaking with Kraemer because he recognized that the chances of the Soviet’s falling for the administration’s bluff were remote.(10)

The much anticipated meeting with Dobrynin turned out to be a disappointment for Nixon and Kissinger. The nuclear alert did not come up for discussion. Dobrynin offered nothing new on the Vietnam question, and he countered Nixon’s pre-meeting big stick diplomacy by offering carrots of negotiation on arms control and European security issues.(11) In a telephone conversation after the meeting, Nixon suggested that Kissinger meet again with Dobrynin in the morning of the twenty-first and engage in madman playacting: “If the Vietnam thing is raised (try to get it raised),” the transcriber wrote, “the P wants K to shake his head and say ‘I am sorry Mr. Ambassador, but he is out of control. . . . He’s made up his mind and unless there’s some movement,’ just shake your head and walk out.”(12)

Perhaps when Dobrynin’s side of the back channel is published, a better understanding will emerge of what motivated his October 17 phone call and whether it was a reaction to the U.S. alert, as Kissinger had originally believed. In any event, U.S. intelligence continued looking and
listening for signs of Soviet responses. The telcons give us a few clues on what was picked up. They suggest, for example, that at least as early as October 14 U.S. intelligence had detected Soviet reactions or countermeasures to the alert, one day after it began.(13)

The alert also had an unintended consequence. On October 21 Laird informed Kissinger that Beijing had reacted: “they have gone on alert.” The next day, the two men discussed the memo on the Chinese alert that Laird had forwarded. Kissinger said that he “didn’t know whether it was a reaction to us or what the Soviets did in reaction to us.” Laird said that “he didn’t know either.”(14) Alarming the Chinese was not part of the game plan. The American alert came at the end of a tense period in Sino-Soviet relations, and Beijing was in all likelihood more nervous than before about the intent of the Soviets’ actions. The Chinese reaction indicates that Nixon’s nuclear alert may have been more dangerous than we first thought.

Notes


(3)For background information on the telcons and their declassification, see the Web sites of the National Archives and Records Administration, “Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts (Telcons),” http://nixon.archives.gov/find/textual/presidential/nsc/


(5) This acronym refers to a graduated scale of Defense Readiness Conditions or military alert postures from DEFCON 4 or 5 (normal peacetime posture) to DEFCON 1 (deployed for attack).


(7) Telcon, Laird, 12:40 P.M., October 10, 1969, HAK Telcons, NPMP. Regarding the submarine exercise, see Burr and Kimball, “Nixon’s Secret Nuclear Alert,” 133.

(8) Telcons, Laird, 12:05 P.M., October 13,1969, and 5:35 P.M., October 14, 1969, HAK Telcons, NPMP.

(9) Telcons, Dobrynin, 4:40 P.M., October 17, 1969; and Laird, 5:15 P.M., October 18, 1969, ibid.

(10) Telcons, Rockefeller, 4:50 P.M., October 14, 1969, and 11:10 A.M., October 20, 1969; and Kraemer, 12:30 P.M., October 20, 1969, ibid.


(12) Telcon, Nixon, 8:20 P.M., October 20, 1969, HAK Telcons, NPMP.

(13) Telcon, Rockefeller, 4:50 P.M., October 14, 1969, ibid.

April 2005 Newsletter

History through Documents and Memory:
A CWIHP Critical Oral History Conference of the Congo Crisis, 1960-1961

By Lise Namikas

On 23-24 September 2004, scholars and former U.S. and Congolese officials gathered at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars to discuss the Congo crisis of 1960-61. The conference was one of a series of critical oral history workshops sponsored by the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) under the direction of Christian F. Ostermann and co-sponsored by the Africa Program. The other workshops sponsored by the CWIHP, including the July 2004 conference on the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s, have dealt with relatively recent events. This conference delved farther back in time and was the first to put the spotlight on the Cold War in Africa.

To help guide the conference discussion former CWIHP scholar Sergey Mazov and I compiled a reader. It included documents gathered specifically for the conference from Russian, European, and U.S. archives, along with material recently declassified from U.S. and Belgian archives, several key articles on the crisis, and a comprehensive chronology. Conference participants also heard eyewitness testimony from veterans of the crisis, including Lawrence Devlin, former CIA station chief in the Congo; Thomas Kanza, former Lumumba confidante and ambassador to the United Nations; and Cleophas Kamitatu, the provincial president of a political party, Parti Solidaire Africain (PSA). With few people left to share personal accounts of events, their testimony added meaningfully to the historical record. Also attending were scholars from around the globe, including Sergey Mazov, Institute of World History, Russian Academy of Sciences scholar; Herbert Weiss, Wilson Center senior scholar and eyewitness to the events; Jean Omasombo, Congolese scholar and consultant on the Belgian Parliamentary Commission inquiry into Lumumba’s assassination; Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, Congolese expert and current director of the U.N. Development Programme’s Oslo Governance Center; Stephen Weissman; and Tatiana Carayannis. Representatives from the National Security Archive at George Washington University also attended.

There were several important revelations at the conference, some of the most significant related to the events of September 1960. Lumumba’s dismissal on 5 September has long been controversial. From the memoirs of Belgian ambassador Jean van den Bosch, published in 1986, we know that the Congolese president, Joseph Kasavubu, began talking with Belgian advisors about revoking Patrice Lumumba’s premiership as early as July 1960. It is also known that Kasavubu talked with the UN’s temporary representative in the Congo, Andrew Cordier, who
suggested that he was not averse to Kasavubu’s proposed action. Cleophas Kamitatu explained that Lumumba was told of Kasavubu’s impending move at least a week before his actual dismissal. Lumumba then met with Kasavubu and tried to work things out, but on 5 September he was suddenly dismissed. Cordier immediately closed the airport at Leopoldville and shut off access to the radio, abruptly stymying Lumumba’s attempts to rally support.

Historians suspect U.S. complicity in these events, but there has been little conclusive evidence. It has long been known that U.S. ambassador Clare Timberlake and Cordier were cooperating, but Timberlake’s actions in the days before the coup are a mystery. Lawrence Devlin recalled that Timberlake met with Kasavubu shortly before the dismissal. Timberlake told Kasavubu that he too favored revoking Lumumba, but he felt that Kasavubu had ignored him. Timberlake also met with Cordier before the coup, but the contents of their discussion remain unknown. Pushed by the Belgians and assured of indirect U.S. and UN support, Kasavubu acted. Documents translated by the CWIHP revealed that the Soviet Union was also working behind the scenes to urge other African states, including Ghana, to put their troops serving under the UN operation in the Congo at the disposition of the government of the Congo or create a joint command to aid Lumumba. But before the leaders of these states could meet to discuss either option, dramatic events intervened.

On 14 September 1960 Congolese Army Chief of Staff Joseph Mobutu launched his first coup (the second would take place in late 1965). Again, current documentary evidence does not shed much light on the U.S. role. But in a blow-by-blow account of the decisive hours before and after the coup, Devlin recalled how, under pressure, he agreed that the U.S. government would recognize Mobutu’s government. The relationship between Devlin and Mobutu has long raised suspicions, but Devlin confirmed that he met with Mobutu only twice before 14 September 1960. These meetings nevertheless convinced him that Mobutu had leadership qualities. On the night of his first coup, Mobutu told Devlin that if the United States would guarantee recognition of his new government then the coup would go forward. Not unaware of the risks involved, Devlin demurred. Impatiently, Mobutu asked again what the U.S. position would be. Devlin recounted how he went out on a limb and guaranteed U.S. government support.

Kamitatu surmised that the guarantee of U.S. support might explain why Mobutu felt confident enough to dismiss both Lumumba and Kasavubu. He said that he and others had been aware only of plans to remove Lumumba. Had the coup failed (and Timberlake thought it might because he believed that Mobutu was yielding to pressure to allow Lumumba to return), the U.S. position in the Congo could have been jeopardized. As it was, the coup did not fail, but it was not an overwhelming success. Washington in effect undermined Mobutu by insisting on the “de-neutralization” of Kasavubu to safeguard both the UN and the U.S. position in the Congo. The conference discussion also provided new details about the money that Mobutu used to pay his soldiers at the end of September, thereby sealing their loyalty and ensuring that the coup would not fail for lack of military support.

There were other revelations at the conference, particularly about Lumumba’s relations with Kasavubu and the West, which had begun to deteriorate long before September. The circumstances surrounding the granting of Congolese independence generated much discussion, as did the relationship between Lumumba and Kasavubu. The two leaders were longtime rivals, and Thomas Kanza recalled that after a secret agreement with Abako, the powerful political organization led by Kasavubu, Lumumba had little choice but to support Kasavubu as
The discussions also corrected the long-held belief that Lumumba was furiously writing his inflammatory independence-day speech during Kasavubu’s speech. In fact, Kanza explained, Lumumba wrote the speech (with the assistance of his European advisors, as Jean Omasombo noted) in the days before independence. It reflected his growing anger with Belgian attempts to deny him the position of prime minister. Along with the many other revelations from the Belgian Parliamentary Commission inquiry, this disclosure suggests that the relationship between Belgium and Lumumba was more strained than previously assumed and should be reassessed.

The Congolese participants in the conference also explained the significance of the misunderstandings that colored Congolese foreign relations. Thomas Kanza shed light on the importance of the fiasco involving Edgar Detwiler, a shady American businessman who proposed to develop and manage Congolese mineral resources. Detwiler was introduced to Lumumba by the son of Belgian Minister without Portfolio W.J. Ganshof van der Meersch. In Lumumba’s mind Detwiler’s connection to Van der Meersch confirmed his credibility, and a contract was signed. The Congolese Parliament confirmed the deal, although they later revoked their approval. Even though he had been warned about Detwiler by Ambassador Timberlake, Guinean and Ghanaian representatives at the United Nations Diallo Telli and Alex Quaison-Sackey, and even concerned U.S. citizens in the Congo like the young Herbert Weiss, Lumumba was still surprised when he discovered that he had not signed a legitimate contract.

In light of the Belgian Parliamentary Commission’s extensive investigation into Lumumba’s death, the conference did not spend a lot of time on the assassination. But it became clear that Lumumba’s supporters feared the worst as the deposed prime minister remained under house arrest and then became a prisoner. Kanza revealed that in September he had fruitless discussions with Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev, whom he called a “showman,” and more serious discussions with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko on the general topic of how to save Lumumba. Kanza learned, with disappointment, that the Soviet Union was apparently in no position to help directly. So he appealed to President-elect John F. Kennedy through Eleanor Roosevelt. It was Kanza’s recollection that an informal deal was struck with UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold and President-elect Kennedy guaranteeing that Lumumba should remain in Leopoldville at least until Kennedy took office and then be brought to Parliament. Kanza also recalled that he asked Kennedy (again via Roosevelt) to intervene to protect Lumumba after he became a prisoner, but Kennedy responded that the handling of prisoners was the UN’s responsibility. Lumumba was transferred out of Thysville prison on the night of 16 January 1961 by Mobutu’s men, who carefully skirted UN guards, and assassinated the next day in Katanga.

Documents obtained for the conference from both Russian and German archives offered new details about the Soviet role in the crisis. Evidence from the former East German archives suggests that the Soviet Union supported giving aid to rebel leader Antoine Gizenga, formerly Lumumba’s deputy prime minister, who had established a rival government in Stanleyville in December 1960. However, the Soviets did not want to take the international risks involved in delivering him that aid. A memorandum of a meeting between Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Semenov and President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt confirmed that the Soviet Union wanted to send diplomats and military advisors to Stanleyville, but Nasser suggested rather dramatically that the only way to get them into the Congo was to parachute them in. On another occasion, Soviet Defense Minister Rodion Malinovsky told Pierre Mulele, Gizenga’s representative in Cairo, that Soviet planes were ready to fly to the Congo, but he feared that UN forces would shoot them down. Documents also established that early in 1961
Moscow decided to send $500,000 to Gizenga in Stanleyville, but Lawrence Devlin said that when he heard that the first $250,000 was to be shipped via courier through Sudan, he sent a U.S. operative to distract the courier and snatch his suitcase.

The discussions revealed important details about the Lovanium conference of September 1961, called to form a new government for the Congo. The United States and the UN feared that Gizenga would be elected prime minister. As Kamitatu related, the nationalist bloc wanted Gizenga to take the job, but Gizenga refused, fearing a trap. The nationalists then agreed that the “moderate” Cyrille Adoula would be the “least evil” choice. Although they disliked him, they believed he could help re-unify the Congo. Adoula agreed to work with the bloc and, escorted by UN representative Robert Gardiner to Kamitatu’s residence, worked through the night with other nationalists to form a new government. At the last minute Gizenga surprised everyone by accepting the post of vice prime minister. However, after a short visit to Leopoldville he returned to Stanleyville, leaving his intentions open to suspicion. Gizenga’s mistrust of Adoula ran deep, in part because he was aware of Adoula’s secret connections, brought to light by the CWIHP conference, with the Binza group, a pro-Western band of Mobutu supporters. Adoula’s ties with this group were not widely known, but in light of them, his former relations with the AFL-CIO appear less significant. In the end Adoula’s premiership would depend heavily on the nationalist bloc. By December of 1962 Adoula, under great pressure from the nationalists, had called on the UN to use force to end the secession of Katanga province. U Thant felt he had few options and, tired of the whole affair, obliged, giving Kennedy little choice but to go along or see the UN withdraw from the Congo altogether.

If there was a single message to take away from the conference it is that the course of events in the Congo was at least as strongly influenced by events on the ground as by decisions emanating from Washington or Moscow. The conference confirmed that Lumumba had little Western support and that many people had a share in plans first to depose him and then to assassinate him, although how those plans were coordinated remains unclear. Washington seemed to keep its distance from unfolding events, with the result that its hand was sometimes forced at the last minute, while Khrushchev tended to be very cautious and was reluctant to act without the Afro-Asian states. The conference also highlighted the role the Congolese people played in the crisis but did not exaggerate their influence. Clearly, a general misunderstanding among the Congolese, Americans, Soviets and Belgians underlay the tragic events of 1960 and 1961—events that still haunt the civil-war-wracked Congo today.

*Thanks to Herbert Weiss and Sergey Mazov for their observations and comments on this draft.
The Cold War International History Project plans to post documents and a transcription of its conference on their website, along with several interpretive articles relating to the documents. An earlier version of this paper appeared on the CWIHP website at

http://wwics.si.edu/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=topics.item&news_id=102105.
April 2005 Newsletter

CWIHP and Its Partners Seek Greater Access to Albanian Cold War Files

Christian F. Ostermann, Director, Cold War International History Project

Albania was isolated from the rest of the world throughout much of the Cold War. It is a mere footnote in most Cold War accounts, and the role it played during that period has remained shrouded in mystery to its citizens and the outside world alike. Yet this tiny and remote Balkan country found itself at or near center stage during crucial Cold War confrontations. In 1948, Albania emerged as a central issue in the politics of the Stalin-Tito split that shook the Communist world. A little over five years later, the regime of Communist dictator Enver Hoxha became the target of a major attempt at rollback by British and U.S. intelligence agencies, which tried in vain to topple the regime by infiltrating agents into the country by sea and air. After its break with Moscow in the late 1950s, Albania entered into a close alliance with China. Hoxha also maintained unusually warm relations with North Korea in succeeding decades. For Cold War historians, Albania thus offers an important archival vantage point from which to examine areas well beyond the Balkans. Albanian archives promise significant insights for the study of the Sino-Soviet relationship and the evolution of the foreign policy of North Korea and other nations.

Established in 2001, the Albanian Cold War Studies Center (ACWSC) has been at the forefront of efforts to promote access to records in the Central State Archive and Foreign Ministry Archive in Tirana. Under the direction of Dr. Ana Lalaj, the center has been cooperating closely with the CWIHP to further the declassification, translation and publication of documents on three subjects: (1) Albanian-Yugoslav relations; (2) Albania and the Warsaw Pact; and (3) Albanian relations with China and North Korea. Working under difficult conditions, Lalaj and other scholars have made significant inroads into the archives. Visiting Washington on a Fulbright fellowship earlier this year, Lalaj presented first findings on "Albania and the Warsaw Pact" at a meeting held at the Library of Congress. Dr. Hamit Kaba, another member of the center, helped advance the close relationship between the CWIHP and like-minded scholars at the ACWSC by serving as the most recent CWIHP Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center. The ACWSC and the CWIHP are also planning a series of publications of translated documents from the archives.

At the invitation of the Albanian Cold War Studies Center (ACWSC), I visited Tirana for discussions with Albanian scholars, archivists, and government officials in early November 2004. Sponsored by Dr. Lalaj, the trip was designed to foster cooperation between the CWIHP and Albanian archivists and scholars. I was joined in Tirana by Jim Hershberg, associate professor of history at George Washington University and a member of the George Washington University Cold War Group, a CWIHP partner. In the course of a few intense days, we met with Albanian Deputy Prime Minister Namik Dokle; Roland Bimo, secretary general of the Albanian Foreign Ministry; Shyqyri Dekavelli, director of the National Security Authority at the Albanian Council of Ministers; Prof. Shaban Sinani, director general of the Central State Archive of Albania, as well as Albanian archivists, scholars and university students interested in Cold War research and archival openness.
With the help of our partners, we were able to look at tantalizing samples of records on the Soviet Union and China, including memoranda of conversations, many of which remain formally classified. We were also able to review finding aids for the Albanian Labor party's relations with the Chinese and Soviet Communist parties from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s and request more than a thousand pages of materials (including copies of records of conversation with such figures as Mao Zedong, Nikita Khrushchev, and Zhou Enlai) to be submitted for declassification review.

Since 1991, an increasing number of documents from the Communist party and foreign ministry files have become available. A succession of archival laws, the most recent of which was the 2003 archival law (Law No. 9154, 11 June 2003), established a general directorate of archives, strengthened the authority of individual archive directors, and reinforced certain aspects of the right of access. Under the energetic leadership of Pranvera Dibra, the director of the Foreign Ministry Archive, foreign policy records have been catalogued and declassified through 1951, and a team of archivists and former diplomats is working hard to make available the next tranche of documents through 1955. Under the direction of Prof. Sinani, who has written an article on archival access entitled "Open Archives for an Open Society" (2003), the Central State Archive (address: Rruga "Jordan Misja", Tirana, phone number: ++355-42-279 59; fax number: ++355-42-279 59; email: dpa@sanx.net or dpa@albarchive.gov.al), has also begun to provide access to its riches, including the records of the Albanian Labor (Communist) party. This move was at least in part a response to the considerable and continuing media interest in the communist period, claims to the contrary by some archivists notwithstanding. The archive has addressed critical preservation problems, which is no small feat, given the constant problems with electricity and other basic infrastructure that continue to beset this country, and we were impressed with the expertise of the archivists, who went out of their way to allow glimpses at the archive's most secret vaults and make our time in Tirana as productive as possible. All the senior officials we spoke to--including the vice premier, the foreign ministry director general and the head of the declassification commission--seemed supportive of a faster opening of archives on the communist period and of cooperation with Cold War scholars.

Such support is vital given the difficulties Albanian (and international) Cold War researchers continue to face in this country. Historians have complained that implementation of the postcommunist archival laws has been undercut by a 1999 law on state secrets (Law No. 8457, 11 February 1999). Archivists and researchers alike are uncertain about the status of documents. We were told by an archivist at the Central State Archive that in some cases the same material could be opened according to one law (on archives) yet kept classified according to another (on state secrets), and the stricter law usually prevailed. The declassification of important records is progressing slowly, hampered in part by shortages of staff and other resources, but also by the practice of reviewing files item-by-item, even those fifty years old and older. Unlike other former communist countries, Albania does not yet differentiate between Communist party records (declassified up to the end of the Communist party in most other countries) and government/state records (often declassified in bulk under a 25- to 30-year rule). Even the finding aids for the Communist party files (including Enver Hoxha's records) at the Central State Archive are still classified. Unless they have special clearances, scholars interested in researching the documents are dependent on the advice of the archivists. Officially, decisions on declassification are made by a declassification commission that meets a few times a year, but it is not completely clear what the actual role and influence of this commission is. Compounding the challenge for researchers and archivists is the declassification system itself. Documents are not marked declassified even after they have been released; instead, the status of each document is captured in a bibliography.
that is not publicly available. Albanian researchers also voiced concerns over the high price of Xerox copies and the prohibition on copying entire files, with decisions on the number of photocopies from each file left to the archival authorities on a case-by-case basis.

To promote archival openness, encourage further research in the largely untapped Albanian archives, and highlight the Albanian dimension to the larger Cold War narrative, the Albanian Cold War Studies Center and CWIHP plan to sponsor an international conference on Albania and the Cold War within the next twelve to fourteen months. We are eager to hear from interested researchers and experts who would like to become involved in the project and in turn might be willing to contribute items on Albania's role in the Cold War from Albanian and other sources and archives. For further information, visit the CWIHP website at http://cwihp.si.edu or contact Dr. Ana Lalaj (alalaj@albmail.com) or the CWIHP at coldwar1@si.edu.
April 2005 Newsletter

When Irish Archivists are Smiling: Doing Research in Ireland

Nicholas Evan Sarantakes

We all know Ireland, the Emerald Isle, as the home of St. Patrick and the leprechauns, point of origin for the refugees that thronged to the United States, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand in the nineteenth century. But the nation has also played a significant role in world affairs that is sometimes overlooked. Ireland initiated the unraveling of the British Empire, since it was the first nation to establish its political independence from the United Kingdom in the twentieth century. As a result, Dublin is the site of several archives that might prove pertinent to the research agendas of individuals that belong to the Society for the Historians of American Foreign Relations.

At times U.S. foreign policymakers have had good reason to focus on Ireland. There was, of course, the massive wave of immigrants in the nineteenth century. They changed the face of American cities and filled the ranks of Union regiments in the U.S. Civil War. In the twentieth century, Ireland drew even more attention with the Easter Rising of 1916, when nationalists, tired of decades of British reluctance to grant the Irish home rule, rebelled in effort to acquire independence. The Irish in America were a major source of funding for the Irish Volunteers, the uniformed rebels who seized various strategic sites in Dublin during the rebellion. In fact, the proclamation that rebel leaders read to the crowds gathered in front of the General Post Office made reference to Ireland’s “exiled children in America.” The rising failed, but public opinion in Irish America limited British reprisals: they executed the leaders of the rebellion but eventually granted amnesty to the rank and file. Afterwards the legendary Michael Collins had the Volunteers take off their uniforms and fight guerilla style in the Anglo-Irish War. Irish-Americans continued to be a major source of revenue for the rebels.

After twenty-six of the thirty-two counties became the new Irish Free State, the new government established diplomatic missions abroad. The first was in London; the second was in Washington, D.C. The Irish Free State was quite active in the League of Nations and in world affairs generally during the interwar period in an effort to establish an identity separate from that of the United Kingdom. During the Second World War Ireland remained neutral, much to the consternation of many officials in Washington and the Irish-American community. There was a good deal of effort in both London and Washington to get the Dublin government to change its mind, but Ireland stuck to this policy during the war and the Cold War that followed and as a result found itself isolated diplomatically during the middle of the twentieth century. The Irish did contribute troops to United Nations peacekeeping operations, but “the Troubles” that exploded in the six counties of Northern Ireland in the late 1960s showed that Ireland needed some help of its own. Americans were again involved in funding rebel activities. The
Irish Republican Army received a good deal of support from sources inside the United States. President Clinton helped broker a peace settlement in 1998, but the campaigns of violence in Ulster have continued into the twenty-first century.

There are a number of topics that a SHAFR member could pursue in Irish archives, as this brief account shows, and there are three major institutions that a historian studying world affairs will want to visit: the National Archives, the National Library of Ireland, and the papers of Eamon de Valera at University College, Dublin. The National Archives are located in a nondescript office building on Bishop Street in the city center south of the Liffey River. The archives are open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Researchers sign in at the front desk and then store their personal belongings in lockers on the first floor. First-time visitors must get a reader’s card, but it will take only about ten minutes to fill out the required forms. Once inside, researchers can take notes with pencil and/or laptop computers and can make five copies at a cost of twenty-five cents a page by buying a card for €1.25 that runs the photocopy machine. If more than five pages are needed, the staff will copy them at a cost of .19 per page and will mail the copied items to the researcher.

The website for the archives is at http://www.nationalarchives.ie, and it is a good idea to visit it before traveling to Dublin. The website lists the rules for usage, gives opening and closing hours, directions to the archives, and, most important of all, has online finding aids. Documents are released thirty years after the fact. Researchers will have to search each individual batch of releases. The computer searches for words in folder titles, which requires knowing how bureaucrats labeled items. There are also paper finding aids in the reading rooms that are organized by department and then by year of public release. Members of SHAFR will most likely be interested in the files of the Departments of Foreign Affairs and the Taoiseach (prime minister). (One indication of how much the United States mattered to Ireland is the separate sub-file for the Washington embassy in the Foreign Affairs Department records. No other embassy is listed in such a fashion.) Historians doing research at this institution should be forewarned that the finding aids are severely flawed tools. Often the filing numbers listed are incorrect, and sometimes the finding aids are misleading, since folder titles often do not correspond with those on the actual containers. There is no clear pattern of organization to collections, making it necessary to go slowly through the entire paper finding aid page by page.

In general, the National Archives building is a good place to work. Professional archivists are available to answer your questions. There are no fetch times, so individuals can submit requests at any time, and delivery usually entails a wait of no more than twenty minutes. There is no limit to the number of items that a researcher can request in a day. There is one major qualification to this good service. When it comes time for the staff to take their breaks, they take them, even if the result is that no one is available to process requests.

The National Library of Ireland has several component parts spread out over Dublin, but the main building is on Kildare Street near the city center. The website is at http://www.nli.ie. The main reading room is on Kildare Street near the city center, and its hours of operation are Monday through Wednesday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The library’s most important holdings in the realm of political and diplomatic history are its collection of parliamentary documents. In the last 250 years, Ireland has had three different legislative assemblies. Until 1801, Ireland had its own bicameral legislature, and the library has an impressive collection of the statutes and debate journals that this body produced. After 1801, Ireland sent its politicians to London to sit in the
Parliament of the United Kingdom. This library has an almost complete set of the records of its proceedings (Hansard). The third Irish Parliament was installed after the Anglo-Irish War. The library has a complete set of the papers and records of the debates of the Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireannm, which are also available online at http://www.oireachtas-debates.gov.ie. The library also has copies of the numerous reports and studies that the Irish government has published. Ireland is a member of the European Union and several other international organizations, and the National Library has good holdings on the publications of these various transnational governmental organizations. Many are stored off-site, however. As a result, researchers must make requests twenty-four hours in advance. Most documents, but not all, are listed in the online catalogue available through the website. Some documents will require the use of paper finding aids.

The Department of Manuscripts is in a separate facility located at 2-3 Kildare Street. The hours of operation are Monday through Wednesday, 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. SHAFR members will be interested in the political papers that document many of the Irish independence movements since the eighteenth century. Many of the individual nationalists leading these causes had strong ties to the United States. The holdings are particularly strong for the 1916-1923 period.

Doing photo research concurrently with manuscript collections investigations is a good way to save a lot of publication-related problems. The National Photographic Archive is part of the National Library but is located in Meeting House Square, Temple Bar. This archive is open Monday through Friday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., but access is by appointment. The online catalogue allows researchers to do a lot of work before arriving at the library. Copies of photos can be ordered in either black and white or color. Researchers can order slides or copies ranging from 8”x 10” to 24”x 20”. Prices range from 12.70 to 38.10 depending on size and color. A full price list is available on the library’s web site.

The papers of Eamon de Valera are housed at University College, Dublin. De Valera was a major figure in Irish history during the twentieth century. The last of the battalion commanders to surrender during the Easter Rising, he was elected to a seat in Parliament after his release from prison, but the nationalist political party, Sinn Féin, which won a majority of Irish Parliament seats in 1919, boycotted Westminster, assembled in Dublin, and declared Ireland independent. De Valera was elected president of this new assembly during the Anglo-Irish War, yet he actually spent most of the war touring the United States to raise funds. Born in Manhattan, he was always mindful of public opinion in America.

De Valera appointed the delegation that negotiated the peace settlement bringing an end to the Anglo-Irish War and creating the Irish Free State. Although he was opposed to certain terms in the treaty—namely, its failure to create an Irish Republic and its division of Northern Ireland from the rest of the island—and he supported the losing side in the Irish Civil War that followed the ratification of the treaty, de Valera became Taoiseach in 1932, a position he would hold for sixteen consecutive years and then reclaim two more times before serving two terms as president of the Republic. During the interwar period, Ireland pursued an almost bipartisan foreign policy in the sense that all Irish officials, regardless of their domestic politics, supported efforts to establish a foreign policy for Ireland that was independent of that of the United Kingdom. During this period, de Valera served as president of both the League of Nations council and assembly.

Needless to say, the de Valera papers can be quite useful for studying certain periods in U.S.–Irish diplomatic history. The campus where they are located is a short driving distance from the city center. A number of buses terminate on campus or have stops in front of the main
entrance. The Archives Department of the university library is open Monday to Thursday, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. The reading room is quite small, so appointments are required, and it is best to contact the staff at least a week in advance of your trip. (While I was there a researcher who wanted to visit later that week was turned away). The Archives Department has two useful web pages for researchers. The first is on planning your visit and is at http://www.ucd.ie/archives/html/planningyourvisit.htm. This page contains all sorts of information, including the buses that reach campus, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and maps of campus. The second page of interest is on the de Valera papers, and is at http://www.ucd.ie/archives/html/collections/devalera-eamon.htm.

The de Valera papers are an exceptionally well organized collection. The three-volume finding aid is quite detailed and easy to use. Since de Valera played such a large role in Irish history, his papers are used quite regularly. To minimize the wear on the documents, the archives staff made microfilm copies of the collection, which is what a researcher will see rather than the originals. As a result, little time passes between placing a request and receiving the film. The staff did not make copies of certain items in this collection, like photographs. If researchers need to look at such material, they must put a request in at least a day in advance. Researchers can take notes in pencil or on a laptop computer. It is possible to make photocopies from the microfilm, but at 1 per page the document had better be exceptionally important.

**Transportation**

Dublin has become a major weekend destination for the rest of Europe. As a result, travel to Ireland is exceptionally cheap. Low-fare airlines are quite popular in Europe, which also helps. Travelers from the United Kingdom can get round-trip tickets for less than €20, if they are willing to fly at odd hours. Individuals traveling from North America are going to pay more, but they should still be able to find tickets for between 300 and 400.

Buses are the best form of transportation to Dublin from the airport and within the city itself. The Aircoach runs regularly from the city center to the airport and has a pickup point in front of University College, Dublin. The service is fast and more regular than the train. The Aircoach costs €6 and has a website at http://www.aircoach.ie/. Dublin has an adequate internal bus network that runs on a regular basis and goes to almost every part of the city. The only catch is that the buses take coins and give no change. The web site for Dublin Bus is at http://www.dublinbus.ie. The bus service becomes exceptionally expensive after midnight and much less frequent. Taxis are also quite plentiful.

**Currency Conversion**

Ireland uses the euro of the European Union. The Bureaus de Change at the airport basically offer the same rate as major outlets in Dublin itself, so one might as well convert cash at the airport. An ATM is a better bet, though, for people whose banks charge no fee for using a foreign machine.

**Travel Guides**
Anyone traveling to Ireland should have a travel guide for getting the most out of the country. The best guide to Dublin and Ireland is Lonely Planet; placing a close but clear second is Let’s Go. No other publishers come close to producing a volume as useful as these two. Each contains far more information than could be presented here.

**Housing**

While Dublin’s designation as a major party destination for the rest of Europe has made airline tickets quite cheap, it has made housing costs outrageous. Not only are prices high, but rooms are hard to come by during the travel season (March through October).

One of the better-located hostels in Dublin is Ashfield House at 19/20 D’Olier Street. This hostel offers dorm-style or en suite rooms and is located near a train station, bus stops for routes that go to University College, Dublin, an Airbus stop, and many of the more interesting parts of the city center. The lobby has computers with Internet access. The web site is at http://www.ashfieldhouse.ie/. Rates range from 13 to 57.

Another hostel worth considering is Kinlay House at 2-12 Lord Edward Street (telephone: +353 1 679 6644). Its website is at http://www.kinlayhouse.ie. Rates range from 19 to 50. The prices for rooms are modest by Dublin standards and include a small breakfast. The environment is lively. The only drawback is the communal showers.

If you are planning on doing a good deal of research at University College, Dublin, you should consider the Montrose Hotel, which is across the street from the campus on Stillorgan Road. The hotel is a full-service establishment with a bell staff, restaurant, and currency conversion service that offers a decent exchange rate. The hotel is also across the street from an Aircoach stop. Since it is away from the center of the city, it is less expensive than others.

A livelier lodge is the Arlington Hotel at 23-25 Bachelors Walk, O'Connell Bridge (telephone: +353 1 804 9100). Its website is at http://www.arlington.ie/. This 116-room hotel is on the northern banks of the Liffey and houses the Knightsbridge Bar, one of the biggest pubs in the city. Irish jig dancers are a regular evening feature and are worth seeing in and of themselves, and there is a good selection of traditional Irish meals. The website gives rates, which range from 129 to 246.

**Eating and Dining**

At University College, Dublin, there are several eating options on campus within a short walk of the Archives Department. Nine One One is a small sandwich shop in the library-student union complex. It offers blended fruit drinks and custom-made sandwiches, each for under 5. There is a counter where you can eat, but there are better places to eat outside.

The news kiosk in the student union is the cheapest option on campus. Sandwiches are roughly 3 and drinks go for between 1 and 3. The Café in the student union offers a limited fare of sandwiches and chips. The price range is slightly higher than that at the news kiosk.
Researchers at the National Archives have many more options when it comes to eating. There are no dining facilities at the Archives, but it is located in the center of the city and there are many options in a number of different price ranges all within a walk of less than 10 minutes on Kevin Street or Wexford Street. One of the best is Café Sora at 6-11 Lower Kevin Street. Its website is at http://www.cafesora.com. This café is a nice little coffee shop with pastries and custom-made sandwiches. Meals are roughly 5. Another restaurant worth visiting is Eddie Rockets on Wexford Street (telephone: +353 1 475 2324). Its website is at http://www.eddierockets.ie. This eatery is part of a national chain of 1950s-style U.S. hamburger joints. The burgers are tasty and cost between 5 and 6. A meal with fries and a soft drink will be about 11. The website lists the menu.

There are also a number of good places to eat that will give you a good feel for the city. Among them are:

Gallagher’s Boxy House at 20 Temple Bar (telephone: +353 1 677 9723, website http://www.boxtyhouse.ie). A boxty is a traditional Irish potato pancake that is wrapped around marinated lamb and beef. The desserts are exceptional, and main courses cost between 12 and 20. Live traditional Irish folk music adds ambiance without being overpowering. The menu even explains where to buy CDs of the music. The website provides a map and a menu and accepts online reservations, which is helpful, since the place fills up quickly during regular eating hours. Highly recommended.

Captain America’s at 44 Grafton St. (telephone: +353 1 671 5266; website http://www.captainamericas.com; hours: seven days a week, 12 p. m. to 12 a.m.). For slightly overpriced American food try this Marvel-comics-meets-Hard-Rock-Café eatery. Movie and film memorabilia signed by the likes of Mel Gibson, Eric Clapton, and U2 adorn the wall alongside Marvel comic book covers. Murals of a World War II-era Captain America doing battle with the Red Skull add to the atmosphere. The fare is burgers, chicken, and pasta of average quality, with main meals costing around 10. The website includes a map and a menu.

Thunder Road Café on Fleet Street in Temple Bar. (Telephone: 353 1 679 4057, website http://www.thunderroadcafe.com). Inspired by a Bruce Springsteen song and a Robert Mitchum film, this restaurant attempts to be the Hard Rock Café of biker bars. Menu items are roughly 15, but lack something in taste. The website includes a menu and hours of operation and accepts online reservations.

**Pubs**

Oliver St. John Gogarty at 58/59 Fleet Street (telephone: + 353 1 671 1822, website http://www.olivergogartys.com/). Many travel guides list this pub as one of the more plastic tourist traps in Temple Bar. That said, it is a venue for a good deal of entertaining music that draws large crowds of tourists and Dubliners during the weekends. It also serves pub and restaurant fare on its three floors.

O’Shea’s Merchant at 12 Lower Bridge Street (telephone: +353 1 679 3797). The only thing Irish about this pub is the name. The multinational staff offers up high-quality food in heaping portions, but it is not for the diner interested in the tradition of the Irish. The live music is good, but it just as likely to be John Denver-style country as Irish folk.
Attractions of Interest

The building at 2 College Green that once housed the Irish Parliament is now the home of the Bank of Ireland, but it still holds the chambers of the House of Lords. When the Act of Union of 1800 merged Ireland into the United Kingdom, the Irish Parliament Building became unnecessary. When the British government sold the structure to the bank, it included a stipulation that the building be altered to remove any indication that it had ever contained a national legislature. The financiers met only half of this requirement, and as a result the chambers of the House of Lords remain intact and open for tours. Telephone: +353 1 671 1488. Hours of operation: Wednesday through Monday. Tours at 10:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., and 1:45 p.m. Admission is free.

Three buildings that were important during the Irish fight for independence are worth visiting: the General Post Office, Fourcourts, and the Custom House. The General Post Office was the headquarters of the rebels during the Easter Rising of 1916. The building remains a working post office and still bears the scars of artillery and rifle fire from ninety years ago. Fourcourts was—and still is—a center that housed the judiciary, but the Irish Free State Army shelled it during the Irish Civil War when the rebels of the Irish Republican Army occupied the complex. Most of the damage has been repaired. The Custom House was the site of battles in both the Anglo-Irish War and the Irish Civil War. This building has also been repaired. All three are on the north side of the Liffey River and are within easy walking distance of each other.

Another worthwhile destination is Kilmainham Gaol Museum on Inchicore Road in Kilmainham (telephone: +353 1 453 5984). Built by the British to house Irish political prisoners, the jail is now a museum that uses penal practices to examine Irish social and political history. The tour goes into the cell areas and culminates in the courtyard where the British executed the leaders of the Easter Rising of 1916. Ticket prices start at €4.40. There are special discount packages for families. Hours of operation: 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., seven days a week.

Hopefully this information will help historians have a productive and enjoyable experience in Dublin. For more suggestions about what to see and do in the city, pick up a free copy of Events of the Week or visit its website at http://www.dublinevents.com. This weekly publication lists events, functions, and festivals, along with many other things worth seeing in the greater Dublin area.