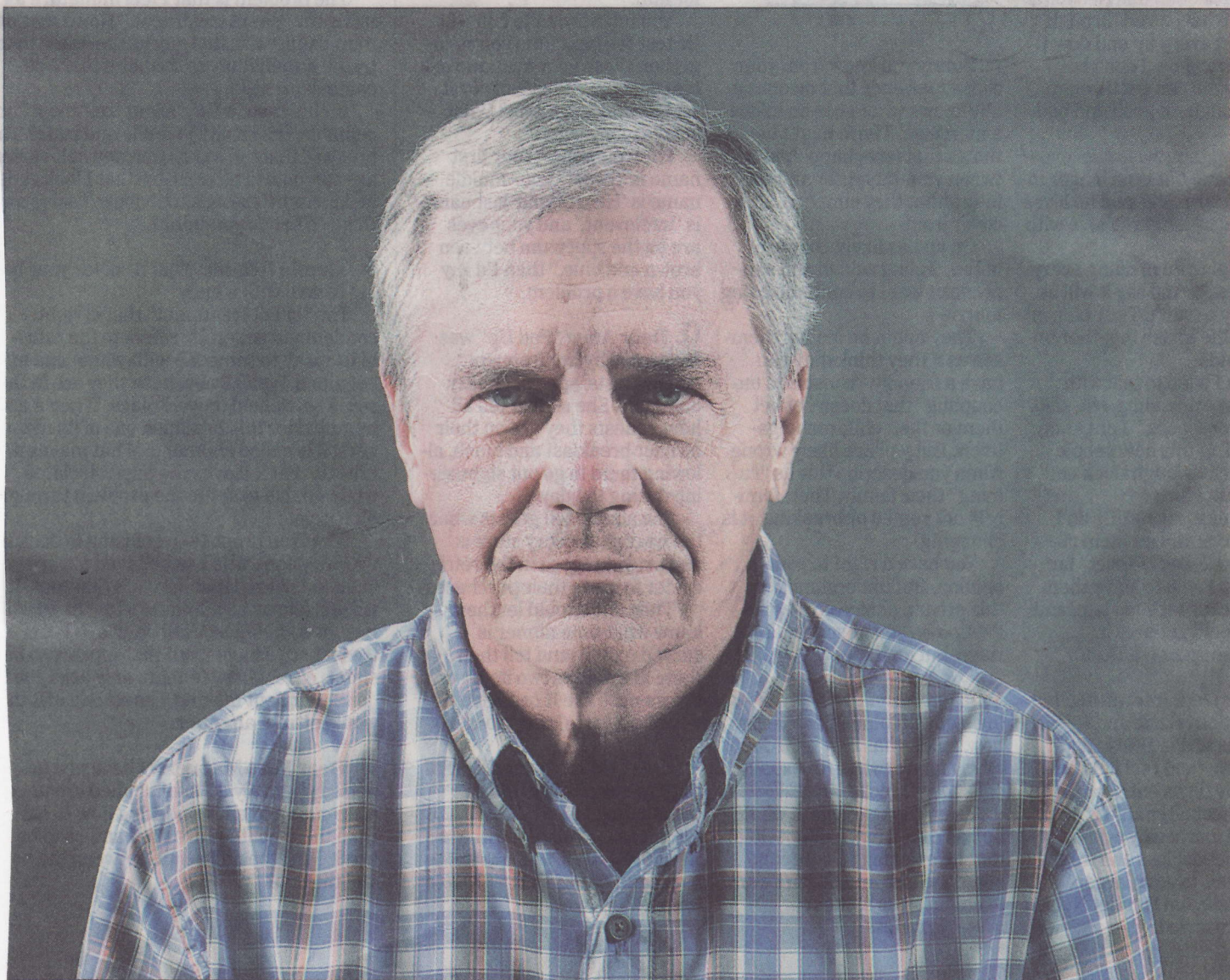


Former CIA tech director talks Cold War stratagems and secrets in the Last Frontier



ERIK HILL / Alaska Dispatch News

Robert Wallace, retired director of the CIA Office of Technical Service, will deliver the luncheon address at the Cold War Conference and Nike Veterans Reunion at noon on Friday, Sept. 5, at the Hotel Captain Cook. He has co-authored several books on spycraft.

COLD WAR: Former CIA official talks about Alaska's espionage years

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Cutthroats" in World War II, was approached to assist with the program, Wallace said, but died in 1949 before the Anchorage station became operational.

ALASKA TESTING GROUND

The plan appears not to have worked too well. "There was at least one attempt to put a person in Russia by way of Alaska," Wallace said. It was not successful. An inspector who came to evaluate the program wrote that whoever had come up with the idea "had neither visited Alaska or knew anything about it."

"They didn't understand the distances, the remoteness, the lack of roads or communication here," Wallace said.

But as on-the-ground spies became less practical, advances in technology opened new possibilities. "It was a very dynamic period for technology," he said. "The U-2 spy plane, then satellite photos, a variety of sensors and communications. The integrated circuit was patented in 1959 and once that was in

hand, the reliability and miniaturization and capacity of technology rapidly advanced."

Developments in spy technology went hand-in-hand with the very public detection and communication equipment that sprang up across Alaska, the DEW line and White Alice system.

"Technology was really the driving factor in what the (Anchorage CIA station) did and ultimately did not do," he said. The station closed after 1956, but Alaska stayed on the espionage map for several reasons. One was the location. "The thinking was that if the Soviets were to decide to attack us, the most logical place would be from the direction of the Arctic," Wallace said. And when both the U.S. and Soviet Union developed submarines that could navigate under the ice, "that was of great interest to the intelligence community."

At one point an abandoned Russian ice station was found floating off Barrow and a tech crew was quickly dispatched to investigate the site, look at the equipment, collect any material left behind and general-

ly "figure out what they were doing," Wallace said.

Moreover, Alaska was a great proving ground. "With the harsh environment, Alaska became a place where we could test certain kinds of equipment."

As a CIA employee, Wallace made his first trip to Alaska shortly after the trans-Alaska pipeline was completed. He recalled visiting Prudhoe Bay when it was 30 degrees below zero with a 30-mile-an-hour wind and thinking, "Wow! Man actually conquered this environment." His first thought on boom-years Anchorage was "Where did all this glass and steel architecture come from?"

"Years later I visited Houston and it all made sense," he added.

NORTHERN SPY LORE

Alaskans might be surprised to learn that the state has a spy legacy going back long before the Cold War, Wallace said. "Charles Sheldon was a spy."

Sheldon, a naturalist who promoted the idea of making the area around Mt. McKinley a national park

— in fact, he personally delivered the bill creating the park to the president to sign — worked with Naval Intelligence in World War I. "He organized agents in Central America," Wallace said. "There was a fear those ports would be used by German submarines."

His voracious perusal of historical documents has turned up a wealth of curious details regarding Alaska. For example, during World War II, Lend-Lease aircraft being flown from Alaska to Russia were decorated with the Soviet red star emblem. The thinking was it would protect the pilots if they encountered Japanese planes; the USSR and Japan were at peace with each other for most of the war.

"But they ran out of decals," Walker reported. "They ran out of stars. The Russians didn't want to fly the planes with American emblems."

An American officer who would later join the CIA did some digging and found that there was a Texaco facility in Fairbanks. The oil company's logo looked a lot like the Red Army star, even if the color wasn't exactly the same.

"He got hold of a bunch of Texaco decals and persuaded the Russians that they were the same." The Lend-Lease planes continued to the Eastern Front adorned with the advertising symbol of the popular American gas station franchise.

During the interview on Sept. 2, an Associated Press article reporting a Cold War program to recruit Alaskans as "stay-behind" spies, code named "Washtub," became public. Wallace said he was trying to contact the source but didn't know anything more than what had been published. "It was news to me," he said.

"Spycraft," written with H. Keith Melton and Henry Robert Schlesinger, has a foreword by former CIA director Robert Tenet. Wallace said it is the biggest of the several books on spy history he's helped author.

"I'm very pleased with how it's been received. I'm a historian, not a technologist, but we haven't had many complaints from the people who do know technology. Either they didn't read it carefully or we did very well."

By **MIKE DUNHAM**
Alaska Dispatch News

A seismic shift in how spying is conducted took place in the 1950s, and Alaska, an acknowledged front in the Cold War between the U.S. and USSR, was right at the epicenter.

"Alaska represents a time in CIA history when human espionage and technological espionage met and crossed," said Robert Wallace, author of "Spycraft: The Secret History of the CIA's Spytechs from Communism to Al-Qaeda."

The former director of the CIA Office of Technical Service, who retired in 2003, will give the luncheon speech at noon on Friday, Sept. 5, during the Cold War Conference and Nike Veterans Reunion taking place at the Hotel Captain Cook.

Prior to the 1950s, intelligence work was done largely by agents in the field, observing sites with possible military applications and communicating with sources who had knowledge that one side or the other wanted to keep secret. The system had limitations when it came to the Soviet Union.

"The Soviet culture of secrecy was all-encompassing," Wallace said. "The Iron Curtain was very effective and the (U.S.) was blind to Soviet military capabilities. We knew they had bases in Siberia and the Russian Far East. But we didn't know what they looked like."

To find out more, the CIA established a station in Anchorage. Originally it was envisioned as an office from which spies would be deployed to the east coast of Russia. Col. Lawrence Castner, who formed the Alaska combat intelligence platoon known as "Castner's

COLD WAR CONFERENCE AND NIKE VETERANS REUNION

- Presentations by various historians, military officials and academics start at 9 a.m. Friday, Sept. 5, at the Hotel Captain Cook. Registration begins at 7:30 p.m. Free.

- Robert Wallace, a former CIA employee who served in Alaska during the Cold War, will deliver the luncheon address at noon, Friday, Sept. 5. \$35, which includes lunch.

- Free tours of Kincaid Park, a former Nike base now turned into one of the city's most popular recreation areas, 1:30-4 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 5. Coinciding with a reunion of Nike veterans, the "Swords to Plowshares" celebration will include the dedication of a plaque honoring soldiers who manned the battery during its active years, 1959-1979.

- "Dr. Strangelove" will be shown at 8 p.m. Friday, Sept. 5, at the Alaska Experience Theatre in the 4th Avenue Market Place.

- A plaque honoring veterans of Site Summit will be dedicated at Arctic Valley Ski Lodge on Sept. 6.

For more information, go to nikesitesummit.net.

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