

When electronic warfare specialists consort with Pentagon brass at the annual Old Crows' gathering, all rules go out the window.

THE COLD WAR COMES TO LAS VEGAS

BY CHRISTOPHER PAINE & JOHN MARKOFF

IT IS WELL PAST MIDNIGHT ON THE FIFTEENTH floor of the Las Vegas Hilton Hotel. Package-plan tourists and leisure-suited conventioners wander in and out of the casinos, mingling for a time with the real denizens of Vegas, that seemingly sleepless army of professional gamblers, croupiers, musicians, showgirls, cocktail waitresses, cashiers, chefs, and chambermaids who keep the windowless palaces of chance churning twenty-four hours a day.

Up here it's a different world. From somewhere along the plush carpeted corridor, distant sounds of late night partying echo softly above the gentle hum of the air conditioning. Air Force Colonel Tony Brees is sharing one last drink with a friend before turning in for the night. We have met the colonel before and he smiles a warm greeting.

"Westinghouse is just down the hall," he says, pointing us in the right direction. "You'll find a bunch of drunken folks in there saying a lot of BS to each other. Enjoy yourselves, it's a good show!"

Colonel Brees is right. It turns out to be a very good show. Down that hall a small army of military brass and civilian electronic warfare company executives and specialists are mixing business with pleasure. Pleasure is clearly winning out for the time being, but their business—how to win the next war—is serious indeed.

Here are gathered engineers and fighter pilots, military men and marketing men, university professors and spies; all members of an obscure but powerful fraternity known as the Association of Old Crows. The Crows' common purpose in life is the advancement of electronic warfare (EW), an arcane but increasingly important facet of modern warfare aimed at "jamming" enemy radars and communication systems. Officially sanctioned by the Department of Defense, the Crows' annual convention in Las Vegas breathes fresh new meaning into Dwight Eisenhower's old saw about the military-industrial complex.

There are Moose and Lions and Elks, so why not Crows?

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Indeed, by fraternal standards the name is not exceptional, except, perhaps for its origins. Dan Graves, a cigar-chomping air force civilian who is the Crows' biggest booster, explains, "The British officer engaged in jamming the enemy during World War II was called the Raven [after the wartime code name for the project]. We Americans not only improve on everything we do, we give it a better name; so when we started dropping chaff [strips of aluminum used to confuse enemy radar] and jamming, we didn't call our guy the Raven; he became a Crow, right? Well, the guys who used to drop chaff out of windows got older and older, didn't they?" Hence, the Old Crows.

"During the Korean War, we got back into the Crow business," recalls Mel Marcus, a founding member and current director of the association who markets EW devices for an obscure company called Frequency Sources, Inc. It wasn't easy being a Crow in those days, says Marcus. "Crows were the type of people who would say, 'Hey, Mr. Pilot, would you leave a five-hundred-pound bomb home so we can put a piece of electronic gear in there.' We'd talk our way on to that airplane. And it got to the point where, if you were a Crow, and people knew it, they wouldn't even stand at a bar and drink with you. Since we couldn't associate with anybody else, we had to associate with each other."

Reaching into his pocket, Marcus digs out his founding member's medallion, a gold coin about the size of a fifty-cent piece embossed on one side with the association's logo—a manic, Hekyll-and-Jekyll-like Crow with thunderbolts shooting from his talons. "In those days," he recalls, "the Crows were a very loose-jointed federation of people in the electronic warfare field."

Willie Crawford, a folksy southerner who is the Old Crows' man on Capitol Hill, joins the conversation to explain how this informal network of specialists grew into a full-blown military-industrial lobby. "There were fourteen guys who founded the Association of Old Crows. I was one of them. We used to have lunch around town [Washington, D.C.] and we decided that we would have a get-together. In the fall of 1964 we made reservations at the Shoreham Hotel for seventy-five people, and five hundred showed up. That was the first meeting that the Crows had,

and it went on from there."

As it happened, "on from there" meant the war in Indochina and the initiation of bombing strikes against North Vietnam. "In Vietnam we had to learn our story all over again," says Dr. Tom Curry, a longtime Crow from the Office of Defense Research and Engineering at the Pentagon. "We went into 'Nam without any special boxes on our aircraft, or very few. Our losses began to mount, because the North Vietnamese were equipped with surface-to-air radar-guided missiles. . . . Immediately they came to the Crows and said, 'fix this.' In industry we call this a blood sale."

Eventually, Curry claims, the Crows were able to bring the air force losses in Vietnam down to about one percent, low enough so that America could continue carrying on the air war.

Vietnam has taught the military a lesson: Modern warfare is electronic warfare, and as a result, electronic warfare has become big business. "Right now," says Mel Marcus, "the identifiable portion of the ew market in the non budget is probably about \$2 billion. There's probably another \$2 billion which is unidentifiable because it's part of other weapons systems." Older Crows are "primarily radar or radio communications oriented," he explains, "but electronic warfare has grown and encompasses optical countermeasures [devices to deceive tv-guided missiles], infrared countermeasures [against heat-seeking missiles], lasers, and communications at the low end of the frequency spectrum."

The Crows contend they owe their current prosperity to the Soviet Union. "The Russians write our requirements," says Colonel Brees, the affable president of the Crows. "When they field a new defensive system on the

ground or in the air or on a ship, if we're going to operate in that environment we have got to either neutralize it or deny them some access to their information. We did it over North Vietnam against Russian airplanes and missile sites, head to head, and then we forgot about it for a while. Now we're back into the business with our NATO allies—how to kill that defensive environment in the Warsaw Pact."

The Korat Crows Club in Thailand and the Tan Son Nhut "O" Club in Saigon are gone now, but the Crow is a notoriously adaptable species. A sudden resurgence of The Threat in Europe has brought them flocking to the "Red Baron's Roost" in Bonn and the "De Ooievaar Club" in The Hague. Their "theater of operations" may have changed, and their organization is certainly larger than it was a decade ago, but everything else about the Crows remains familiar.

Appropriately enough, at their latest top-secret technical symposium—the heart of any Old Crows' convention—the hottest topic is "The Soviet/Warsaw Pact Threat to NATO," the title of the opening-day address given by Lieutenant General Eugene Tighe, director of the Pentagon's super-sleuth Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA).

Inside the Hilton Convention Center General Tighe, a somber and impeccably dressed man, walks by after his speech and refuses to give an interview, saying only, "I'd have to clear everything I said." Following Tighe out of

the briefing, an air force engineer shakes his head and says that he's just heard things about what the Soviets are doing "that would make your hair curl."

The specter of the Soviet Menace is everywhere in the Las Vegas Hilton, yet the Soviets seem to be oddly incorporeal. For the record, the Crows, who are obviously frustrated and somewhat baffled by the circumspection required by détente, won't even mention the Russians by name, referring instead to an unseen "enemy" or other "major power."

When asked to compare American and Soviet electronic warfare capabilities, Colonel Brees says in a soft southern drawl, "I'm sorry, I can't answer that directly. You've heard of General Singlaub, haven't you? Well, he got kicked in the ass for criticizing the President's policy. I'm not ready to fall on my sword." After a moment, he adds, calmly, "at least not yet."

EVERY CROW CONVENTION IS PART SECRET meeting and part military-industrial trade show. Out on the sprawling exhibit floor official caution is thrown to the wind. As visitors enter the hotel pavilion they are greeted by the *Electronic Warfare/Defense Electronics Magazine* booth. In front stands a videotape machine that continuously plays a program purporting to document the existence of a network of fifty Soviet spies

"The Cordivæ are probably the most intelligent birds in the world. Someone has predicted that when man, through his ingenuity, has finally destroyed his neighbors and himself too, there will still be Crows. No birds are more persecuted than they, yet there are more Crows today than ever. These big black birds have the wits needed to survive."

ROGER TORY PETERSON

on the San Francisco peninsula in what is known as Silicon Valley, the heart of the American microelectronics industry. The Soviets, according to the tape, are using elaborate microwave eavesdropping equipment, hooked to computers, to systematically listen in on key industrial phone conversations.

Elsewhere, the Soviet presence is just as strong. The electronics and space division of Emerson Electric Company, the venerable radio manufacturer, has rolled a "tactical radar threat emitter" out onto the floor. The threat emitter, which looks like a cross between a tank and a Star Wars laser cannon, is designed to imitate a variety of Russian antiaircraft radars and is used to train American air crews.

Across the hall the Fairchild Camera and Instrument booth is holding a "jam session" (jamming is the electronic warfare term for disrupting enemy communications and radar). The sound track that accompanies the slide presentation begins with rhythmic bongos and then glides smoothly into a jazz ensemble. The announcer says, "When the enemy goes on the air, you want to foul 'em up." Then suddenly, there they are again, low voices murmuring in Russian. "If he can't communicate," the announcer intones, "he can't win. You can do it all with the TLQ-17A, anytime, anywhere. . . ."

The exhibit floor itself is a giant arms bazaar. More than fifty corporations have set up display booths. They range from the giants like IBM, ITT, and Westinghouse to more esoteric, smaller companies like Antekna, Cubic Corporation, and Omni Spectra. The booths themselves combine a bit of the con artist with complicated technical discussions of the latest electronic gadgetry. Gimmicks and eye-catchers are everywhere, humorous sidelights to the deadly serious business of drumming up new orders. The woman who

spins the Varian Wheel-of-Fortune wears a large button on her hip that says "I am a scientific device." IRT gives everyone a chance to win a Texas-size cowboy hat by piloting a ball into a hole with a joystick. And United Technologies outdoes everyone, getting into the Vegas spirit with a giant slot machine that pays off in prizes like CB radios and pocket calculators.

Electronic warfare is high technology and there is no shortage of hands-on computerized displays. Some measure your biorhythms while others allow you to interactively diagnose the ills of your EW "pod." Motorola attracts the best attendance on the floor with its space-war game, Electronic Warfare in the Twenty-first Century.

Every evening after five, when the secret symposium lets out, Crows flock to the exhibition floor to make the rounds and take advantage of the open bars on each side of the giant hall. The estimates are that thirty-five hundred Crows are here in Las Vegas, a record turnout.

In the Crown Room, high atop the Las Vegas Hilton, the mood is festive. A dance trio plays loudly in one corner of the room while waiters stack two huge tables with trays of hors d'oeuvres. Twenty-five stories below, the casino marquees begin to glow as evening settles on the Strip. Defense industry VIPs and military brass jam the Crown Room for a reception in honor of the Crows' best friend in Washington, Senator Howard Cannon of Nevada. Unfortunately, the senator is

still back in the capital trying to salvage a piece of legislation he has introduced to subsidize the aerospace industry. Even though Cannon lets the Crows down for cocktails—he makes it just in time to deliver the keynote address at the banquet the following night—he is obviously regarded as the foremost electronic warrior in the U.S. Senate. "Give Cannon a good plug," the Crows' publicity director tells a local TV reporter off camera. "He was personally responsible for allowing us to have this classified symposium in Las Vegas."

Meet Ron, a nondescript man in his late thirties with thinning brown hair combed straight across his forehead. Polishing off what must be his tenth drink of the evening, Ron smiles and sways slightly as he moves toward the impromptu bar in the bathroom for a refill. He drifts into talking about himself, slurring his words together as his story tumbles out. A Westinghouse engineer eavesdrops on our conversation long enough to ask, "Is he telling you he went out of control in his car 'cause he was hit by camel shit, is that what he's telling you?"

Ron's story does involve camels, but he wasn't in his car:

I worked for the shah of Iran. Flew RF-4s over Iraq dodging SA-6s. We used to chase camels at 200 feet. Iranian guys we flew with were chicken to go that low. . . . My counterpart was a SAVAK guy . . . I could have had a guard in my house . . . I went to work every day with a pistol in my car, half-cocked, came back the same way. . . . In my case I was staff level, a staff guy—I got to watch what I say to you—the day I reported—I'm going to hide my name tag—the Iranian general said, "You work for me, and don't worry about money. You tell me what you think we should do, and we'll do it. If you think we can't get something out of the Pentagon, tell me, and I'll go to the shah and he'll get it from the President." Those were my reporting instructions. That was day one, honest to God.

As his story unfolds, it becomes clear that Ron has only recently returned from a tour of duty as a military adviser in Iran. Congress has passed laws prohibiting such advisers from performing combat missions, advising internal security forces, and serving directly in the host government's military chain of command. But Ron says he has done all these things.

THERE ARE REGULATIONS AGAINST PEOPLE like Ron, employed by the Pentagon, enjoying the "hospitality" of defense contractors like Westinghouse, but here in Las Vegas, the rules are irrelevant. The "conflict of interest" posed by military and industry representatives drinking together is overshadowed by the *common* interest shared by everyone in the suite. When Old Crows get together, the rule book goes out the window.

The scene is a vivid reminder that the conflict of interest scandals that beset the military-industrial complex in the early seventies are already fading from public concern. This year the Old Crows have renewed their annual golf tournament, which was canceled in 1976 after the Defense Department ruled that "it would be inappropriate for defense personnel to take part in a golf tournament or similar events as guests of a private association." Things have changed so dramatically that this year an active duty

air force colonel has organized the event. So much for the famous "arms-length relationship" between the military and industry.

As if to illustrate the point, a southern California corporation executive stops by to make small talk. With a little bit of prompting, the executive launches into a series of revelations about the Crows and his company.

"Five corporations are picking up the tab for this reception," he says, and reels off chapter and verse of the Defense Department regulation being violated: "Section Six. B. One. Participation of DOD personnel is appropriate when the host is the association and not an individual contractor. Acceptance of gratuities or hospitality from private companies in connection with such association's activities is prohibited." The engraved invitation mentions only the Crows as host for the gala event.

But there's more. Our friend rattles off the names of some of the companies—IRT, Motorola, Litton, Westinghouse, Northrop, Kuras-Alterman—which have hospitality suites, prohibited under the regulation, at the hotel. Motorola has gone so far as to camouflage their suite as a "communications center."

Talking rapidly, he carries on about his own problem of hiding portions of his company's budget so that they can be billed to the Pentagon rather than included in company overhead. Take community relations, he says. The regulations state that the costs of community relations can be charged off to the government, so his company stuffs everything possible into that budget category. He mentions as an example their classified employment advertising, which is brought under the rubric of community relations by placing the words, "An Equal Opportunity Employer" at the bottom of each advertisement.



Before we have a chance to digest this information, a voice asks, "Am I interrupting anything?" It is Willie Crawford, founding member, past president, national director, and Washington lobbyist for the Association of Old Crows. A short, rotund man with large jowls and a double chin, he has come a long way since his boyhood in the backwoods of Tennessee, where he plowed behind a mule until he was eighteen. "The biggest thing that ever happened to me," he confides, "was when I joined the Army. Christ! That was the easiest thing in the world. Twenty-one dollars a month to shoot some dumb ass. I could already shoot, and there were a whole lot of folks to sit around and talk to. I was an officer a year later."

Today, Willie is self-employed as a Washington lobbyist for General Electric and a number of other defense contractors. "I got the highest rank there is," he says proudly. "I'm a self-supporting private citizen." Everything he does for the Old Crows comes out of his own pocket, Willie tells us, adding that lobbying for the Crows "is just one of the responsibilities I got stuck with." To illustrate his point he whips out his checkbook and hurriedly leafs through the stubs, reading the amounts of recent contributions to Senators Barry Goldwater, John Tower, and Sam Nunn, three conservative senators who strongly support electronic warfare.

Willie admits that the Carter administration is a problem for him, mainly because early in the election campaign he chose the wrong bandwagon. "I knew his brother Billy right well," he remembers, "but I never took Jimmy seriously."

An Atlanta hostess offered to introduce him to Carter, but he recalls telling her, "Naw, honey, I'm going back to meet Jerry Ford."

"Now I represent the Crows and I got a problem," Willie admits. "My problem is in the White House and I ain't got no entree except for Billy—and he's too dumb to understand what I'm talking about."

To hear Willie tell it, there is too much "naiveté" in Washington these days. "Guys come in there saying they're going to change everything; they get diabetes and cirrhosis of the liver runnin' around to all those parties, and they're impressed. But after you've been there awhile you know there's only about fifteen or twenty people in the whole city that really amount to something. The point is getting something to them. I remember when they came there as junior senators and junior members of the House, or sometimes just administrative aides."

But Willie says he keeps his philosophizing to himself when he represents the Crows. "I kiss the rings when it's necessary and make the deals when I have to. . . . I'm just a country high-school graduate," he says. "That's all I am, but I know politics."

The Crows have faced political challenges not only in Washington, however. Although they consider themselves peacemakers, the association felt the wrath of the antiwar movement during the Vietnam War. Activists first learned of the Crows in April 1969, when Stanford University students staged a nine-day occupation of the university's Applied Electronics Laboratory (AEL). "The sit-inners rifled the office and desk of the director of Stanford's electronics laboratories, a charter member of the Association of Old Crows," *Crow Caws*, the association's magazine, complained at the time. "An Old Crow membership card, certificate, and undoubtedly issues of *Crow Caws* were taken."

AEL's research boiled down to how to destroy North Vietnamese air defenses, and this point was not lost on the students. Along with a copy of lab director William Rambo's membership certificate they printed a description of the Crows that received mass circulation under the heading, "Worse than your wildest dreams."

Lenny Siegel, a leader of Stanford SDS at the time, remembers the students' reaction, "They were flabbergasted that Stanford professors, people whose interest in electronics was supposedly academic, were part of a fraternity of men dedicated to electronic warfare. Not only were these men helping to coordinate electronic warfare activity; more importantly, from the students' point of view, they were reveling in it."

TODAY, DESPITE THEIR UNDISGUISED enthusiasm for all the electronic gadgets that go into fighting a modern conventional war, Crows bitterly resent the public image their activities have created. "We're not a warmongering organization, as we're characterized by some—the *Berkeley Barb* to be specific," contends Mel Marcus. "Our mission is to emphasize preparedness. To be prepared is the best way, we feel, to avoid war."

In fact, many Crows exhibit a kind of conscience-salving double-think about their work. As Colonel Brees describes what electronic warfare can do in the way of "taking offense to the enemy," his enthusiasm and sincerity are obvious. "We provide the eyes and ears to fast-moving aircraft, or even slow-moving objects on the ground, to tell a crew member, who has to make a decision, where the enemy is, what kind of enemy he is, and when he becomes hostile. So you can take evasive action, or go to countermeasures, or you can go into the attack mode and go kill him."

An hour later, Brees tells a local TV reporter, with equal sincerity, "We're not out to kill anybody."

Other Crows are even more blunt. Grandfatherly Dan Graves, speaking as toastmaster at the annual Crow awards banquet before more than three thousand Crows and assorted Crowmates, warns, "You know, in between wars we've got to keep the enthusiasm up. When the next war starts—and it's going to start—the Senator Cannons of this world are going to send money down so fast you can't even spend it, and I know a number of you guys will be glad of that."

Some Crows are less than certain about their "peace-keeping mission." Late one night in one of the hotel hospitality suites, a well-oiled engineer confesses, "We tell ourselves we're just working on electronics, but who are we kidding? We know what it's really for. All this technology, and look what we do with it. It's kind of pathetic really. We're all still animals, us and the Soviets." A fellow Crow agrees, but he faults the politicians: "Have you read Buckminster Fuller?" he asks suddenly. "He says that if you take all the politicians off the world, it won't change at all. But if you take all the scientists and engineers off the world, the world will die."

Among the ranks of the Crows, however, the doubters are few. The world view of the vast majority is captured perfectly by Colonel Brees. Searching for an appropriately upbeat note on which to end our interview, the colonel exudes the confidence of the true believer. "Electronic warfare is more than just a science," he says, "it's an art."

"More than that," he adds, groping for precisely the right word, "it's . . . it's a religion!"

DON'T MESS WITH BILL (CLEMENTS)

BY SAM ATTLESEY

NO LESS A POLITICAL observer than Richard Nixon termed it the most significant gubernatorial election of this generation; Henry Kissinger attached similar importance to the victory of his former colleague, a man who had "fought like a tiger" when they served together in the Nixon administration.

William Perry Clements, Jr., a multimillionaire Dallas oilman, had just scored a surprise victory over his Democratic challenger, popular state attorney general John Hill. Texas political observers called it one of the biggest upsets in Texas history. Clements pulled off his coup by spending \$7 million (his campaign debt is still \$4 million), by putting together one of the most professional campaign teams ever, and by coming across as the non-politician who alone could save Texas from the liberals.

But even Nixon and Kissinger probably did not suspect just what was in store for Texas—much less the United States of America—when they made their postelection comments. If they had joined 1980 Presidential hopefuls John Connally and George Bush and the thousands of other Texans jammed on the lawn of the state capitol in January for the inauguration of the state's first Republican governor in 105 years, they would have quickly realized that their superlatives were understatements. Clements, who had served as deputy secretary of defense under Pres-

Texas Governor William Clements began running for President the day he took office. But serious conflict-of-interest charges may curb his ambitions.

idents Nixon and Ford from 1973 until 1977, now had a platform for putting into action his business-is-the-best conservatism. Replete with swash-buckling, shoot-from-the-hip, don't-mess-with-Bill manner, Clements the politician was unveiled.

It was an almost unparalleled display of arrogance and swagger. While squinting through what can only be described as beady eyes, and with his hand resting on the Bible, Clements laughed out loud as he took the oath of office. Then, at the end of his "we'll persist and prevail" inaugural address, he roared, "Now we have sunshine." Had the sun broken through at that moment, his comment might have been appropriate. As it happened, the offhand remark was, perhaps, an omen that Clements did not intend to keep his brand of rhetoric within the borders

of Texas. For someone as ambitious as Clements, that is too much to expect. There are no limits, national or international, for a man driven by what he believes is the will of the people.

After only two months in office, Clements, who has the tact of the oil-field roughneck he once was, already has stunned supporters and enemies with his antics on the national as well as the state level. He had been in office less than four weeks when he announced during a Washington press conference that he might be a favorite son candidate for the GOP Presidential nomination next year. Indeed, he wrote to state party leaders urging them to remain neutral in what is expected to be a free-for-all Presidential primary.

That only added fuel to the speculation following Clements's victory that the new governor would not complete his four-year term if offered a Vice-Presidential or top cabinet position in a Republican administration. Some polls even speculate that Clements really has in the back of his mind a shot at his party's nomination. "He hasn't sold his house in Virginia yet," says one exponent of that possibility. And, after all, no one gave Clements a chance of getting elected governor either.

No one is more willing or seems more to enjoy giving hell to President Carter than Clements. During the campaign Clements even acknowledged that if elected, one of his objectives would be to make sure Carter did not carry Texas in 1980. One of his many jabs at Carter almost backfired during a

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