

James Forrestal And Joe McCarthy



By David Martin

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IN THE MIDDLE OF THE 20TH CENTURY the two most important anti-Communists in the United States government were Secretary of the Navy and later Secretary of Defence, James V. Forrestal, and Wisconsin Senator Joseph R. McCarthy. But they had a great deal more in common than that. The following passage is from pages 147-148 of the 1966 book, *The Death of James Forrestal*, written anonymously by someone using the pen name, Cornell Simpson:*

There were extraordinary parallels in the lives and deaths of McCarthy and Forrestal—two Irish-Catholic Americans who both rose by their bootstraps to high office in Washington, D.C., and who successively spearheaded the fight against the worldwide Communist conspiracy. Each man was the victim of smear attacks that rose to a pitch of vituperation and vileness previously unmatched in this century. Each man was pathologically hated by every left-winger and subversive in America. Each man died at a most “convenient” and strategic time. And each death beyond doubt altered the course of history.

Appropriately, it was Forrestal who personally alerted freshman Senator McCarthy to the Communist menace and “named names” to him of key persons in our federal government who were consistently shaping our policies and programs to benefit Soviet Russia. It was Forrestal who thus directly inspired McCarthy’s subsequent exposés of Communist influence and subversion in the federal government.

After Forrestal met his violent end, McCarthy moved up to the front lines. And when McCarthy began publicly exposing Communists in the State Department, the Communist party at once openly proclaimed in the *Daily Worker* and elsewhere that McCarthy was now the Communists’ main enemy. The *Daily Worker* also called on all Communists and left-wing elements to unite in and give top priority to the fight against “McCarthyism.”

For years, McCarthy continued his important work of investigating and unmasking individual Communists infiltrated into department after department of our federal government—and of exposing and opposing many of the executive department’s foreign and domestic policies. He also wrote two well-documented anti-Communist books. He had two more such books in the works when he died.

Meanwhile, the Communists and their legions of left-wing camp followers (in government, in all the nation’s propaganda media, and also in the big foundations, on college campuses, in pulpits, in labor unions, etc.)—with the eager cooperation of the White House itself, under both President Truman and President Eisenhower—conducted a merciless campaign to smear McCarthy; to attack his techniques; to protect and “whitewash” the Communists he exposed; to conceal his true achievements from the public; to impede his vital investigations; then to totally halt his exposures of Communism, oust him from office and destroy him personally.

The smear campaign against McCarthy closely resembled the one conducted against Forrestal—but the campaign against McCarthy was even more vicious and was far more prolonged. In addition, the Communists and their left-wing cohorts spent many millions of dollars in unsuccessful attempts to defeat McCarthy at the polls, to have him recalled, to have him removed as chairman of the Senate Permanent Investigations Committee,



and to discredit him by staging the rigged “Army-McCarthy hearings” and the loaded “censure movement” in the Senate.

Nevertheless, despite all the heavy-handed left-wing pressure and all the poisonous anti-McCarthy propaganda carried in the nation’s press—and although McCarthy had no organized following at all—in a single week *thirteen million Americans* all over the nation signed petitions to the U.S. Senate in support of McCarthy! No other public figure ever has received such a spontaneous demonstration of approval from the American people.

The Communists and their camp followers succeeded in impeding McCarthy’s crucial investigations of Communist subversion of the U.S. government—but they were totally unable to defeat him in spirit, or at the

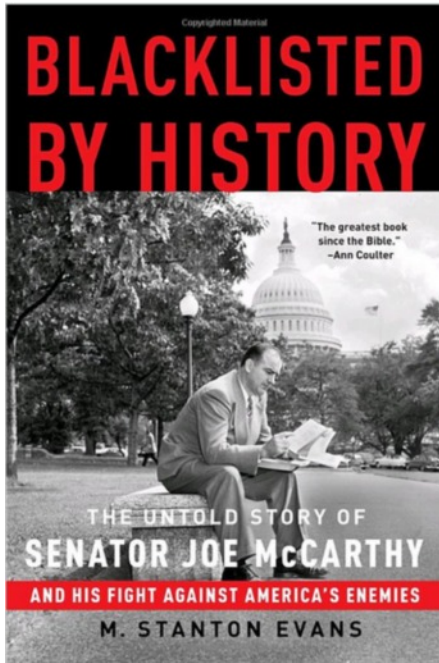
polls.

Senator McCarthy died May 2, 1957, at the age of forty-seven [Sic], ostensibly of natural causes. He had been hospitalised with hepatitis, a disease that normally has a low fatality rate. His death was unexpected and sudden, occurring about an hour after he had taken a turn for the worse on the fourth day after he entered the hospital.

Like Jim Forrestal, Joe McCarthy walked into the Bethesda Naval Hospital (above) as its most controversial patient and as the one man in America most hated by the Communists. And, like Forrestal, he left in a hearse, as a man whose valiant fight against Communism was ended forever.

In places, Simpson paints with too broad a brush. McCarthy might well have been “pathologically hated” by virtually every “left-winger and subversive in America,” but Simpson is simply wrong when he says that about Forrestal. Forrestal was never a controversial figure with the general public. He worked very effectively behind the scenes to stop the spread of world Communism when, among other things, as Navy Secretary he gave currency to the “long term” of State Department Soviet specialist, George Kennen and promoted Kennan’s career. His efforts were so effective that biographers Townsend Hoopes and Douglas Brinkley (*Driven Patriot: The Life and Times of James Forrestal*) have dubbed him the “godfather of [Communist] containment.” He was certainly recognized as perhaps their leading enemy by the Soviet leaders and informed Communists within the United States, but that was never translated into hatred from rank and file U.S. leftists. He *was* the subject of a vituperative and vile smear campaign similar to what McCarthy faced—and continues to face posthumously—but it did not arise from his anti-Communism. The impetus for it was entirely his principled position in opposition to the creation of the new state of Israel, that is to say, his anti-Zionism.

The smear campaign against Forrestal was not and has not been widespread, as it was and has been against McCarthy. It was the work, primarily, of popular syndicated columnists Drew Pearson and Walter Winchell. Another leader in the assault on Forrestal, whom he painted as a mere tool of U.S. oil interests, was the California lawyer, Catholic, and Zionist, Bartley Crum. Hoopes and Brinkley describe a speech Crum gave about Forrestal in March of 1948 as “emotional and demagogic” and “a thing of gross distortions and falsehoods, readily recognized as such by participants and observers on the Washington scene, but far more plausible to the partisan audience in the Cleveland auditorium where it was delivered and to the readers of *The Jewish Outlook* in which it was later printed.” Though Crum was a leftist and his anti-Forrestal themes were picked up by leftist Progressive Party candidate for president, Henry Wallace, the attacks were based mainly upon Forrestal’s anti-Zionism, not his anti-Communism. Winchell’s



participation in the scurrilous campaign is most telling. Winchell was an ardent anti-Communist, but an even more ardent Zionist.

Bringing things up to the current day, the differences in Forrestal's and McCarthy's reputations have probably increased. Forrestal has an aircraft carrier, a federal building, and a college campus named for him; McCarthy is memorialised primarily by the scurrilous term of opprobrium, "McCarthyism." The 1992 biography by Hoopes and Brinkley, previously referred to, paints a well nigh heroic portrait of the man, and it was widely acclaimed by mainstream press and academia, alike. The 2005 movie, *Good Night and Good Luck*, on the other hand, very well encapsulates the complete villainy with which McCarthy continues to be painted by mainstream opinion molders.

What little vilification of Forrestal persists is decidedly on the fringes, from the modern-day version of Bartley Crum, defrocked and excommunicated priest and dubious leftist writer, James Carroll, and the most hard-core Zionists led by the authors of *The Secret War Against The Jews* - Mark Aarons and John Loftus. Carroll is practically alone in depicting Forrestal as the father of the modern American warfare state while the latter writers are fairly isolated in their attempt to characterize Forrestal's position against the creation of the state of Israel as being motivated by his personal anti-Semitism, whatever that term might mean.

McCarthy, Forrestal, and the Jews

The "anti-Semitism" charge against both men goes Simpson one better and suggests another point of convergence between them. They have both been treated as almost mortal enemies by organized Jewry. Medford Evans, in his 1970 book, *The Assassination of Joe McCarthy*, addresses the issue directly (pp. 261-265):

Fanatical Zionists would begin with a no doubt insuperable hostility toward McCarthy, if for no other reason than that he was in some sense a protégé of and successor to the late James Forrestal, whose position on Palestine in the late 1940's was anything but satisfactory to the Zionists. It is doubtful, however, whether McCarthy even knew what Forrestal's position on Palestine was, though he was perfectly clear as to the position of the first Secretary of Defense on Communism and Soviet Russia. The main reason for widespread Jewish hostility toward McCarthy was the misplaced respect for the professional intelligentsia which is all too common among Jews, and which culminates in acceptance of the canonicity of the *New York Times*. [See why this is dangerous by reading "The New York Times and Joseph Starlin" - ed.]

McCarthy, for his part, was never in the slightest degree anti-Semitic. When hack writers for the Anti-Defamation League joined in the denunciation of McCarthy and his Jewish staff members, the Senator took it for granted that no matter how much the ADL might wish to make the Jewish community an indivisible and segregated intellectual monolith (perfectly controlled by the ADL), yet guilt is *not* collective, and other Jews are not to blame for the aberrations of an [Israel? Benjamin?] Epstein, a Arnold Foster, or other literary demagogues. Insofar as McCarthy did think of Jews as a class, he was clearly sympathetic toward them for the same reason that other Christians

are—because they were persecuted and reviled and decimated by the Hitler regime—and *by the Stalin regime* [emphasis in original].

McCarthy was completely apart from the anti-Semitic movement in this country. He might have become a member of The John Birch Society had he lived longer (the Jew Alfred Kohlberg did), for he agreed with the Birch position that the conspiracy threatening the world in our time is Communism. He did not agree with the anti-Semitic position that the conspiracy is basically Jewish and only uses Communism as a front. Since Joe McCarthy, though highly intelligent, was not a professional intellectual, it is likely that he never considered whether through the centuries there has been a tradition of destructive conspiracy of which Communism is a contemporary manifestation. He did become thoroughly aware that there is in our time a Communist conspiracy, that it is operationally inseparable from the Soviet Union and the various Communist parties throughout the world, and that it proposes the destruction of the United States of America, Western civilization, and the Christian religion. The Jewish religion, too, for that matter, which is why McCarthy would never have identified Communism with Jewry, why he would have assumed that Jews and Christians—certainly American Jews and American Christians—should be united in opposition to the Communist threat.

From what we know of Forrestal, everything that Evans says about McCarthy's attitude toward Jews and Communism would have applied equally well to him. Nevertheless, among certain powerful circles within American Jewry, both Forrestal's and McCarthy's sympathy and respect was completely unrequited. One reason in McCarthy's case might be that a disproportionate number of Communists and subversives in his crosshairs—and in the Communist party—just happened to be Jews. But here Evans continues:

I have a Jewish friend (which, I suppose, means to the ADL that I am anti-Semitic) in an Eastern city, whose acquaintance I made in the spring of 1954 when he flew from the East Coast to Abilene, Texas, for no other purpose than to have a conversation with the author of *The Secret War for the A-Bomb*. I met him at the airport, we talked for three hours, and he caught a plane back East. He was greatly interested in what I had written about Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer and others in the atomic energy project, but the main thing that was on his mind was the lemming-like proclivity of his own people toward anti-McCarthyism. I am sure he did everything he could to reverse it. I trust him, and I believe he trusted me—which is why I shall not give his name.

There is more irony in the implacable enmity of American self-appointed Jewish leadership toward McCarthy and Forrestal when one considers some of their closest associates and shapers of their thought. If anyone influenced McCarthy more than Forrestal in making him aware of ongoing Communist subversion within the U.S. government, and particularly its influence on U.S. policy that led to the takeover of China by the Communists in 1949, it was the Jewish New York businessman, the aforementioned Alfred Kohlberg. Again, quoting Evans:

McCarthy was not the first person to attack the Institute of Pacific Relations, not the first person to attack Owen Lattimore, Both had been attacked years earlier by Alfred Kohlberg, the Asia expert who was McCarthy's mentor in this whole matter. Professor Kenneth Colegrove wrote early in 1952 that the Hearings of the McCarran Committee regarding the Institute of Pacific Relations, which were then still in process, had already vindicated McCarthy. Of course, those Hearings, and the report based on them, also vindicated Kohlberg. It was Kohlberg who had been McCarthy's mentor in the matter of Lattimore. [pp. 142-143]

As can hardly be overemphasized, one of the key figures in the career of Joe McCarthy was Alfred Kohlberg, the New York importer of Irish-linen handkerchiefs from China (where the ornamental work was done). Kohlberg was one of the most intensely patriotic Americans—without being fanatical about patriotism or any other subject—of whom I know. [p. 265]

Alfred Kohlberg and his wife Ida were among the last close personal friends to see McCarthy alive and in good spirits. It was just a week before he was to make his last trip to Bethesda that the Kohlbergs called on him at his Washington home. Mrs. Kohlberg (as we noted in Chapter One) thought the Senator looked well. And he might have been. If all his friends had been as loyal as Kohlberg, he might have stayed that way. [p. 267]

It is also a well-known fact that McCarthy's chosen chief counsel for his Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations was the aggressive Jewish New York attorney, Roy Cohn, and the latter's top assistant was G. David Schine, the son of a wealthy Jewish hotelier. (Also on that staff initially was the young lawyer, Robert F. Kennedy, another prominent Irish Catholic whose life would be cut short mysteriously. Robert chose McCarthy to be godfather to his daughter, Kathleen. McCarthy was close to the entire Kennedy family, including the father, Joe, which might be a reason for Jewish enmity toward him that Medford Evans did not consider. Joe Kennedy was often blunt in his expressions of distaste for Jews.)

For his part, Forrestal made his fortune and his professional reputation working for the Jewish-owned New York investment banking house, Dillon, Read & Co. After he went to work in the Roosevelt government he became quite close to the powerful financier and adviser to presidents, Bernard Baruch. In one of his most intrepid actions as Secretary of the Navy he worked closely with the Jewish Rear Admiral Ellis M. Zacharias in an attempt, contrary to the wishes of his superiors, to obtain the surrender of the Japanese before the Soviet Union could get into the Pacific War. They were motivated, among other reasons, by their mutual anti-Communism. As Secretary of Defence, his closest associate was his chosen executive assistant, Marx Leva. In the interview alluded to here, at which the author was present, Forrestal's Navy driver, John Spalding, noted that one of the people he called upon when he visited New York was a prominent rabbi. Unfortunately, Spalding, who was 87 years old at the time of the interview, was unable to recall the rabbi's name. Even the generally unfriendly Jewish writer, Arnold Rogow, in *James Forrestal, A Study of Personality, Politics and Policy*, has the following passage:

In the spring of 1949 Forrestal also had evidence that he was not *persona non grata* to all Jews and Jewish organizations. Although he declined to be present, he was invited in February to attend a celebration at one of Washington's Reformed Jewish Temples. When his resignation was announced in March, he received a letter commending him for his past services and expressing regret from Myer Dorfman, National Commander of the Jewish War Veterans. Many persons of Jewish extraction, during his stay at Bethesda, wired or wrote him expressing their hopes for an early recovery, and several added that his anti-Zionist position had by no means concealed or confused his great service to the country as our first Secretary of Defence.

Had Rogow been honest about Forrestal throughout his book, it really would have gone without saying that Forrestal "was not *persona non grata* to all Jews and Jewish organizations." **

Forrestal's Influence on McCarthy in Life and in Death

In the popular histories, McCarthy is often described as a particularly cynical fellow, even for a politician, who didn't really know or care that much about Communist infiltration of the government and its resulting distortion of U.S. foreign policy. Rather, it is said, he was just looking around for an issue that would help him get re-elected in 1952, and he stumbled upon "red-baiting." This notion is given the lie by the respect and admiration that he elicited from the undeniably sincere and knowledgeable anti-Communist crusader, Kohlberg. And before Kohlberg, there was the Forrestal connection. The following is from page 7 of McCarthy's book, *The Fight for America*:

Upon my return to the United States [from serving in the Marines in the Pacific in WW II - ed.] I discovered that our wise long-time foreign policy was being scuttled—scuttled

without the approval of either of America's two great political parties. At that time, I frankly had no idea that traitors were responsible. In my campaign for the United States Senate in 1946, I referred to the State Department planners as "starry eyed planners, drifting from crisis to crisis, like a group of blind men leading blind men through a labyrinth of their own creation." I then thought that we were losing to international Communism merely because of abysmal incompetence. At that time I had not even heard the names of many of those whom I was to later expose and force out of policy-making jobs.

Many of them I heard discussed for the first time by a man who was later to be hounded to his death by the Communists. I arrived in Washington in December, 1946, about two weeks before being sworn in as senator. Three days later my administrative assistant and I received an invitation to have lunch with Jim Forrestal.

I have often wondered how the extremely busy Secretary of the Navy discovered that a freshman Senator had arrived in town and why he took so much time out to discuss the problems which were so deeply disturbing him. More than an equal number of times I have thanked God that he did.

Before meeting Jim Forrestal I thought we were losing to international Communism because of incompetence and stupidity on the part of our planners. I mentioned that to Forrestal. I shall forever remember his answer. He said, "McCarthy, consistency has never been a mark of stupidity. If they were merely stupid they would occasionally make a mistake in our favour." This phrase stuck me so forcefully that I have often used it since.

When he spoke of "our planners," it is unlikely that Forrestal confined himself to the now known Communist agents within the government. Here's Cornell Simpson again, on pp. 53-54 and p. 86:

Forrestal was under no illusion, either, about the Soviet's former powerful friend in the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt—the man who had originally unlocked America's door to swarms of Soviet secret agents. On September 18, 1947, when James F. Byrnes had mentioned Stalin's liking for FDR, Forrestal entered in his diary (p. 318) his reply:

... he [Stalin] had good reason for liking FDR because he got out of him the Yalta Agreement, anything he asked for during the war, and finally an opportunity to push Communist propaganda in the United States and throughout the world.

When asked by this writer if those individuals Forrestal had named as Communists or pro-Communists had included [General George C.] Marshall, and if so whether this had inspired his own devastating, thoroughly documented attack on Marshall from the Senate floor (published as the book *America's Retreat from Victory*, Devin-Adair, 1952), Senator McCarthy replied, "The answer to both questions is yes. Forrestal told me he was convinced that General Marshall was one of the key figures in the United States in advancing Communist objectives."

Forrestal might well have affected McCarthy more in death than he did in life. The following passage is from the previously cited Evans book, pp. 113-114. In the first sentence he is referring to the early revelations Forrestal made to McCarthy:

These and other confidential disclosures greatly impressed McCarthy, but what eventually galvanized him into action was what happened to Forrestal. "The Communists hounded Forrestal to his death," McCarthy said. "They killed him just as definitely as if they had thrown him from that sixteenth-story window in Bethesda Naval

Hospital. On May 22, 1949 word flashed around the world that the smashed and broken body of Jim Forrestal was found beside Bethesda Naval Hospital. We know there was a celebration in the Communist headquarters in New York that night.”

There are men who go away from danger and men who go toward it. McCarthy continued: “While I am not a sentimental man, I was touched deeply and left numb by the news of Forrestal’s murder. *But I was affected much more deeply when I heard of the Communist celebration when they heard of Forrestal’s murder.* [Italics added by Evans] On that night, I dedicated part of this fight to Jim Forrestal. That night I said, ‘Jim Forrestal, wherever you are, I promise their victory will turn to ashes and dust.’ I hope I can keep that promise.

“Thus I started the public phase of my fight against Communists, knowing full well exactly how they operate....”

Unfortunately, Evans uncharacteristically lacks a citation for his McCarthy quote. I say “unfortunately” because, virtually in one breath, McCarthy says that the Communists hounded Forrestal to his death and that Forrestal was murdered. Perhaps Evans is quoting something he said, rather than something he wrote, in which case he might not have been using the word “murder” in a literal sense, and it should have been enclosed in quotes. In *The Fight for America* (pp. 185-186) McCarthy writes, “They [the Communists] killed him just as surely as though they had physically thrown him out of that 16th-story window at Bethesda Naval Hospital from which he hurdled to a death that was such a victory for Communism.”

It does appear then that, like virtually everyone else in public life, McCarthy believed the early official story—amplified by the press—that Forrestal had committed suicide. That he would not have believed (unlike Evans) that Forrestal could actually have been murdered right there in Bethesda Naval Hospital is completely consistent with what Evans wrote about him early in his book (page ix of the conspectus):

The media impressed upon the public mind the image of a man overly suspicious; the fact was that Joe McCarthy was not suspicious enough. He had an ineradicable streak of buoyant optimism and an inexhaustible fund of indiscriminate geniality that made it impossible for him to realize the intensity with which his enemies hated him. And the other face of this coin was that he was too modest to realize how seriously he was endangering the program of those whose determined ambition was total and universal power.

Forty-one years after Evans penned those lines about McCarthy, another writer who, like Cornell Simpson, uses a pen name, “Mark Hunter” wrote a striking echo of those observations. His subject is James Forrestal. The following quote is from his summary of the Nurse’s Notes that accompanied the witness testimony that made up the main body of the official investigation of Forrestal’s death at Bethesda, the so-called Willcutts Report:

Though a process of pernicious selective quotation from the Nurse’s Notes could make Forrestal look bad, a complete and honest reading shows a man concerned about his personal appearance, curious about his surroundings and the world outside, proud of his family, helpful to the corpsmen, interested in their careers and ambitions, at first patient – as in “enduring” – yet into the second month anxious to escape, by the seventh week apparently wondering what the hell was going on. In short he acted as any reasonable man would have acted finding himself in a similar situation.

Forrestal failed to realize what he was up against. Paranoid? He should have been more suspicious, much more.

Forrestal apparently had no choice in the matter, but if McCarthy had had any suspicion at all as to what really happened to Forrestal at Bethesda, surely he would never have allowed himself to be treated there.

McCarthy's Death at Bethesda

Senator McCarthy was admitted to Bethesda Naval Hospital on Sunday, April 28, 1957. His sudden illness apparently came as a surprise to his closest friends and colleagues. His wife reportedly said that he had gone to the hospital for treatment of a knee, but the newspapers on Monday said that he was being treated for "acute hepatitis" and had been placed in an oxygen tent. On Tuesday they reported that he had been taken out of the tent, that he had improved and was resting comfortably, but that his condition was still serious. At some point, though, his health took a dramatic turn for the worse and he died on Thursday, May 2. The official medical report—discussed in detail later—left serious questions as to the precise cause of death, but, incredibly, no autopsy was performed.

But here is all it says about his death, as of the date of this article, on his extensive Wikipedia page::

McCarthy died in Bethesda Naval Hospital on May 2, 1957, at the age of 48. The official cause of his death was listed as acute hepatitis, an inflammation of the liver. It was hinted in the press that he died of alcoholism, an estimation that is accepted by contemporary biographers.

The statement is completely accurate, as far as it goes. According to Evans, one prominent press organ doing the hinting was *Time* magazine, which paraphrased the death cause as "cirrhosis of the liver." In a parallel with the Forrestal death, another prominent member of the press who went the extra mile to convince us that McCarthy, in effect, killed himself was the very influential Drew Pearson. In the wake of Forrestal's death, Pearson falsely reported that Forrestal had made four previous suicide attempts. Here is what the medical doctor Emanuel M. Josephson has to say about the columnist's allegations about McCarthy on page 169 of his 1964 book, *The Truth about Rockefeller*:

Drew Pearson falsely alleged in his syndicated column that the hepatitis had been caused by alcoholism. In so doing, he cast a serious reflection on the reputations of the Bethesda Hospital physicians. For they would be poor specimens of the profession if they could not recognize cirrhosis resulting from the vitamin B deficiency caused by alcohol, and treat it accordingly. Sen. McCarthy's associates vouch for the fact that he had not been able to take liquor because of his illness for many months prior to his development of the hepatitis. Whatever poison precipitated his death, they attest that it was not alcohol. The obvious purpose of the Pearson column was to draw a "red herring" across the conspirators' trail.

Whatever one might feel about Josephson's conclusions or the reliability of his sources regarding McCarthy's drinking habits, or his writing of "prior to" when he apparently means to say "after," his medical science is apparently right on the money. "Cirrhosis is a consequence of chronic liver disease characterized by replacement of liver tissue by fibrosis, scar tissue and regenerative nodules (lumps that occur as a result of a process in which damaged tissue is regenerated), leading to loss of liver function," as it is described in Wikipedia.

The doctors at Bethesda said that McCarthy died of one thing; certain influential press organs said that he died from something else, and the historians have come down on the side of the press. We are reminded that in the case of the Forrestal death, a Bethesda Hospital review board convened to look into the case concluded simply that he had died from his fall from a 16th floor window of the hospital. It said nothing about what might have caused the fall. That did not stop the Forrestal biographers from concluding that he had committed suicide, which we now know is almost certainly not true.

We also now know from the Forrestal case that in such matters the press and popular biographers and historians are wholly unreliable. They cannot be depended upon to report the truth, even when it is put in front of their faces. See Part 5 of this writer's "Who Killed James Forrestal?"

subtitled “Press and historians close ranks, minds” if you have any doubt of this assertion. As for McCarthy, their veracity is likely to be even more suspect when one considers what they have written about him generally. If the two books on McCarthy by the Evanses, father and son, are true it is really no exaggeration to say that the others are nothing but a pack of liars. The book by the son, M. Stanton Evans, *Blacklisted by History, the Untold Story of Senator Joe McCarthy and His Fight against America’s Enemies* was published in 2007 and might well be regarded as the last word on McCarthy’s political career. (The younger Evans, unlike his father, appears not to doubt that McCarthy died of natural causes, but, also unlike his father, he doesn’t bother to address the question directly. For a sample of the book, see this writer’s “M. Stanton Evans on *Good Night and Good Luck*.” For a good summary of what he later published in the book, see his 2003 article, “McCarthyism: Waging the Cold War in America”)

Untrustworthy though they may be, the standard biographers can be informative to one who reads critically and skeptically. One such writer is Thomas C. Reeves, whose 1982 book, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy*, runs to 819 pages. The following two paragraphs from page 671 would seem to nail it that McCarthy drank himself to death, whatever the medical report said. Here, as Reeves describes him, is the senator, on his home turf of Wisconsin a scant month before his final admission into the Bethesda Hospital:

The chief librarian of the *Milwaukee Journal* was shocked to observe McCarthy at a meeting of the Wauwatosa school board. A friend had brought the senator to the meeting unannounced to give a speech. Joe stumbled in a cloak room, became hopelessly entangled in coats, and had to be rescued. He was so drunk and sick he could barely speak. The librarian described the incident to *Journal* editors, who immediately assigned reporter Ed Bayley the task of writing McCarthy’s obituary.

Back in Washington, Joe ambled into the office of the Secretary of the Senate where two colleagues were having a drink. He filled a drinking glass to the brim with liquor and downed the contents in several uninterrupted gulps. He told his astonished observers that he had been to Bethesda Naval Hospital several times to “dry out” and that on the last occasion his doctor had said he would die if he had one more drop. He then proceeded to refill the glass and drink it dry.

Reeves’ sources are in end notes. The source for the first paragraph is given as “Bayley interview, July 7, 1977.” That is some 20 years after the supposed incident took place, and everyone involved is affiliated with the *Milwaukee Journal*. Concerning that newspaper, consider the following passage from p. 453 of the recent Evans biography of McCarthy:

On the anti-McCarthy side were ranged some of the most powerful media institutions, journalists, and broadcasters of the epoch. These included the Time-Life empire, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, provincial newspapers such as the *Milwaukee Journal* and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, elite broadcaster [Edward R.] Murrow of CBS and like-minded radio/TV personalities, columnists Joseph and Stewart Alsop, Drew Pearson, Marquis Childs, and Walter Lippmann—to name only the most famous.

Since the source is an interview and not a contemporary newspaper account, we are being asked to believe that this enemy newspaper protected McCarthy at the time and did not report the embarrassing episode. Had they reported it, Reeves surely would have used the newspaper account as his source.

And what about that extraordinary scene “Back in Washington?” For that one, the end note says simply, “Confidential source.”

Reeves is more believable when he reports facts that corroborate, even amplify upon, points made by critics Evans [père] and Dr. Josephson, also on page 671:

Hospital officials listed the cause of death as “acute hepatic failure,” and the death certificate read “hepatitis, acute, cause unknown.” The doctors acknowledged that

McCarthy had suffered from the illness for several weeks and declared that the inflammation of the liver was a “noninfectious type”—meaning that it was not caused by a viral infection. They would not elaborate further. *Time* magazine reported unequivocally that Joe died of cirrhosis of the liver.

The long end note in this case is particularly revealing:

Ibid. [*Milwaukee Journal*, May 3, 1957]; “The Passing of McCarthy,” *Time*, p. 28. The fatality rate of hepatitis was only about 5 to 10 percent. Moreover, Joe did not respond to the normal treatments for the ailment. *New York Times*, May 3, 1957. For undocumented and highly questionable allegations that Joe was violent while in the hospital, see Drew Pearson in *Wisconsin CIO News*, May 10, 1957, and Cook, *The Nightmare Decade*, pp. 539-40. Copies of the death certificate are on file at the county register of deeds office in Appleton. *McCarthy’s hospital records are unavailable to scholars*. Q.E. Crews, Jr., to the author, September 28, 1977.

I have added the emphasis at the end. What Reeves has described here is, on its face, a very puzzling medical mystery. He has gone beyond Wikipedia—even beyond Evans in his *Assassination* book—in telling us that the death certificate said that the cause of the acute hepatitis was unknown. He has also told us—as does Evans—that the doctors had said that it was not infectious. A look at the medical records may or may not help us solve the mystery, but that look, we are told without any reason given, is not to be permitted. In a poem I wrote out of frustration at not being able, initially, to get a copy of the long-secret inquiry into Forrestal’s death I concluded that “usually when someone keeps something hidden it’s because he has something to hide.”

Consider, if you will, what the doctors are telling us. “Hepatitis” is not so much a diagnosis of a fatal illness as it is a description of a symptom. It means simply that the liver has become inflamed. They don’t know what caused it to become so inflamed, but when they tell us that it was “not infectious” we know that it was not one of the A-E hepatitis viruses that was directly responsible for his death. When the *New York Times* says he “did not respond to the normal treatments for the ailment” they are talking nonsense. The doctors didn’t know what the ailment was, so there were no “normal treatments” indicated.

Medford Evans seems to be unaware of Emanuel Josephson’s earlier writing, but the two men have drawn the same inference from what the Bethesda doctors have told us, with Josephson more definite in his conclusion (pp. 167-168):

To understand the medical significance of these facts, one must bear in mind that hepatitis may develop as a manifestation of either an infection or of poisoning. Since the Hospital made it quite clear in its press release that the cause of the hepatitis and death was not infectious, the inference to be drawn from the death certificate is obvious. THE CAUSE OF McCARTHY’S DEATH WAS, IN EFFECT, CERTIFIED AS POISON, BY THE BETHESDA NAVAL HOSPITAL, WHERE HE HAD BEEN UNDER TREATMENT (See frontispiece) [all capitals in the original and in all subsequent Josephson quotes - ed.]

And here is Evans on pp. 2-3:

McCarthy was not a heavy drinker. But given a history of infectious hepatitis, a man can damage his liver and ultimately endanger his life even by moderate social drinking. Apparently McCarthy did have infectious hepatitis at some time in the early 1950’s, and certainly he was a moderate social drinker. No question, this was an imprudent combination; but there is considerable question that a man as robust as McCarthy would have died of it as abruptly as he did die of whatever killed him.

Interestingly enough, a Bethesda spokesman was quoted as stating that McCarthy had *not* had the infectious type of hepatitis, but an acute form of the disease. What an “acute” form means is not perfectly clear, but it could mean toxic hepatitis. A man with a history of *infectious* hepatitis could indeed succumb abruptly to *toxic* hepatitis, a deadly affair in any case. Toxic hepatitis is caused, as the name indicates, by any one of several poisons, including chloroform, mercury, and snake venom, but most conveniently, perhaps, by carbon tetrachloride, the common dry-cleaning solvent. As little as a hundred parts of carbon tetrachloride in a million parts of air is said to be dangerous—for anybody. A scarcely noticeable or quickly dissipated concentration might well be fatal to a man already suffering from a liver complaint.

Evans goes on to describe how easy it would have been to expose McCarthy to the cleaning solvent and to cover one’s tracks. That is his obvious choice for the murder weapon, as it were, but that is only his speculation.

Perhaps his speculation is too lurid and is unwarranted. Googling “toxic hepatitis” we find that the very first toxin listed that could cause it is alcohol. But then there is that troubling, “cause unknown” following “hepatitis, acute” on the death certificate. In the case of a young fraternity pledge who has imbibed too much alcohol in a venue far from any medical assistance, identification of the fatal toxin is a simple matter. McCarthy, on the other hand, was in a very controlled medical environment and his condition was reported by the newspapers to have improved after the first day in the hospital and then taken a sudden, unexpected turn for the worse. What might have caused the fatal turn in these controlled circumstances?

Dr. Josephson [continuing on page 168] goes to the heart of the matter:

The obvious question raised by McCarthy’s death certificate is: “WHAT IS THE POISON THAT CAUSED THE DEATH?”

The laws of the land dictate that the deaths due to unknown causes must be investigated by postmortem examinations to eliminate the possibility of murder. Such postmortems are compulsory and routine. There may be no interference with them by anyone. And no consent is required of the surviving members of the family. Burial of the corpses without postmortems is a felony under both local and Federal laws.

No move was made by the conspirators to comply with the law and determine by postmortem what caused McCarthy’s death. A number of McCarthy’s associates and intimates, including his hometown friend, Mr. Engel who acted on behalf of his family, approached this author with the request that he attempt to induce the authorities involved to order that an autopsy be done on the corpse to determine the UNKNOWN CAUSE of his death and to eliminate the possibility of murder as the cause of death.

This author requested compliance with the law, by phone, of all the officials in the various parts of the country who were involved, including: officials of the Bethesda Naval Hospital; officials of Montgomery County, Maryland, where the hospital is located; officials of the District of Columbia; Federal officials; officials of the State of Wisconsin; and officials of Appleton, Wisconsin, McCarthy’s home town. These efforts to secure compliance with the law met with no success. Each official “passed the buck”. The excuse that they offered for their violation or disregard of the law was:

“MRS. MCCARTHY OBJECTS TO AN AUTOPSY.” None of them explained why it was that the wishes of any McCarthy, including his recently acquired wife, superseded the criminal laws of the land. It did not seem to matter to the responsible officials that their failure to comply with the law put them in the position of being accomplices after the fact in a felony, in a possible murder. Obviously extremely powerful influence bore on the matter.

Accomplices to a felony though they may ultimately be, the higher authorities at Bethesda Naval Hospital seem not to be the most eager participants in cover-ups. They told us that Forrestal had died from a fall of unknown cause and they told us that McCarthy had died, in effect, from some unknown toxin. It was the press and the court historians who told us that Forrestal caused his own fatal 13-floor plummet and that the unknown poison that killed McCarthy was just plain old self-administered alcohol.

Was McCarthy on His Last Legs?

If biographers like Reeves are to be believed, not only had McCarthy become, at 48 years old but still senator, a stumbling, mumbling drunk, but he also gave the clear appearance of a sickly, defeated man with one foot in the grave. This is his account from March 1957, continuing into that previously referred to April trip to Wisconsin. Reeves gives his source, in each case, as his interview of the person describing McCarthy (pp. 670-671):

The senator soon traveled alone to Milwaukee to appear on a television quiz program. He arrived at the airport without an overcoat—to face ten-degree weather. He seemed listless and detached, and at dinner he merely toyed with his food. At one point in the evening he looked wearily at the ceiling and said to his host, businessman Raymond Dittmore, “Raymond, I’ve lived a million years.” Later that night he made it clear to Dittmore that he was ready to die.

The next day Dittmore drove him to Racine, where he was to give a speech on behalf of Lowell McNeill, a friend and avid partisan. McNeill went to the senator’s hotel room at 4:00 P.M. to extend his greetings. Joe answered the door wearing nothing but jockey shorts. Throughout the 45-minute conversation that followed, he drank from a bottle of cheap brandy. At dinner he ate nothing. Afterward, he returned to the brandy.

McCarthy returned to Wisconsin in April. Steve Swedish encountered him in Milwaukee in a hallway at the Pfister Hotel. He appeared ill and seemed to stagger slightly. He soon told of being persecuted constantly by Communists over the telephone, “They’re murdering me,” he cried.

Mark Catlin of Appleton saw Joe at about the same time in Milwaukee. Joe’s skin had a yellowish hue, the obvious sign of jaundice and liver damage. “He looked horrible,” Catlin said later.

A page earlier Reeves gives us a contrary assessment of McCarthy’s health and habits from his wife, Jean, but he presents it as the words of a woman in denial, telling us something that we are not to believe:

She would not admit to anyone but a few intimates that Joe was in mortal peril. “Joe’s in marvelous shape,” Jean told reporters in Milwaukee, “except for his knee injury—lost 32 pounds since the beginning of Lent and feels wonderful.” (For the rest of her life—twenty-three years—she would staunchly deny that Joe ever had a drinking problem.)

Neither in the subsequent text nor in his note does Reeves tell us who those “intimates” were to whom we are to believe she told the “real truth.” Furthermore, looking at the matter from a coldly medical perspective, we must remind ourselves that none of this has a lot to do with a cause of death listed as “hepatitis, acute, cause unknown” which got better and then suddenly worse in the hospital.

Reeves may be contrasted with Medford Evans, who has the testimony, albeit from the book by Roy Cohn, of very nearly the last friends to see McCarthy before he went into the hospital, the Kohlbergs:

Alfred Kohlberg and his wife Ida were among the last to see Joe McCarthy alive and in good health. They visited the McCarthys in the redone row house on 3rd Street, N.E., the morning of Easter Sunday, April 21, 1957, just one week before the Senator “became violently ill” and was taken to Bethesda Naval Hospital. Mrs. Kohlberg (Alfred Kohlberg died in 1960, long before Roy Cohn decided to write a book about his famous former boss) is cited by Cohn to the effect that McCarthy was vigorous enough to insist on driving the whole party to a luncheon engagement at the home of Washington correspondent Constantine Brown, and in good enough spirits to entertain his company, “smiling and chatting amiably.” Cohn directly quotes Mrs. Kohlberg as saying of McCarthy: “I thought he looked well, except for some difficulty with his foot. He had trouble getting his shoe on.” In 1955 and ten years earlier, during World War II, McCarthy had suffered leg injuries. His entire career had been pursued with, but without reference to, certain difficulties with his feet. Thus, Mrs. Kohlberg’s impression that “he looked well” was not subject to material qualification. And this was just a week before the fatal trip to Bethesda. (pp. 6-7)

McCarthy’s illness seemed surprising and sudden to other people, as well. Conservative writer William A. Rusher, who had regularly been in personal touch with McCarthy through late January “but by May 2, he ‘had been out of touch for some weeks...and had no inkling of how seriously ill he was, so...was profoundly shocked.’ ”(Evans, p. 5) Upon his Sunday admission to the hospital the *New York Times* reported, “An aide in the Senator’s office said the Senator had not complained of being ill last week.” (Evans, p. 9) Then, when McCarthy died on Thursday, May 2, the *Times* wrote that “Washington was shocked by the Senator’s sudden death.” The *Times* in that article also pronounced it “mysterious” that “Mrs. McCarthy reportedly said the Senator was hospitalized for a knee injury, but then the hospital said ‘hepatitis’.” (Evans, p. 10)

Summing up, Medford Evans would no doubt agree with Thomas C. Reeves that McCarthy needed to be warned in the spring of 1957 that he was in “mortal peril,” but it was not because of his drinking habits. “It was charged,” wrote Evans, “that he smeared innocent people, but the wrath he incurred stemmed not from accusations he made against any who may have been innocent, but from his zeroing in on persons who were undoubtedly guilty ...” (p. viii). Evans believed that wrath to be easily homicidal, but the mortal peril didn’t really become acute until McCarthy entered Bethesda Naval Hospital:

A number of my Rightwing friends, hearing that I was going to write a book about Senator McCarthy asked me, somewhat eagerly I thought, “Are you going to prove that they murdered him?”

Now I cannot prove anything like that. Not at this late date, not so far from the scene. But even then, even on the scene, you don’t think a nice clean smell like carbon tetrachloride would have been very noticeable in a hospital, do you—whether or not it was mixed with oxygen?

I will say this. I believe *they would have murdered him if they could have*. And it does look as though they could have. The technical possibilities at which I have glanced in these pages are merely speculative shapes in a broad scene. The overview is, quite simply, that if they got Forrestal and covered up the facts about Kennedy, there at Bethesda, they could have got McCarthy too. (Emphasis in original)

We don’t have to endorse Evans’s conclusion, but from what we now know about the Forrestal death, and from all I have read about the JFK autopsy, there is really no “if” to it in either case.

David Martin
September 28, 2011

* See the latest information on the question of “Simpson’s” identity at “News from the Mail Bag”

** We are not aware of any connection they might have had to them, but two very important anti-Soviet Jews who might have influenced both Forrestal and McCarthy were Soviet defector Walter Krivitsky and journalist Isaac Don Levine. Read about Krivitsky in the previously cited “The New York Times and Joseph Stalin” and Levine in “FDR Winked at Soviet Espionage.”



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