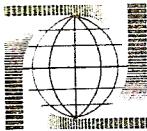


MASSACHUSETTS  
INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
CENTER FOR  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES



16 March 1982

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Mr. John Lansdale  
Squire, Sanders & Dempsey  
1201 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Mr. Lansdale:

Please excuse the hawdness of my letter; the  
typing queue is presently very long. Here is  
your original copy of the memorandum concerning  
our conversation. Once I have copyrighted my  
dissertation and made arrangements for  
publication, I will send a copy of my original,  
along with other oral history materials I have  
collected during this project, to the archives  
at the U.S. Military Academy.

Thank you very much for having been  
such a great help to me. If there is anything  
I can do to reciprocate, please do not  
hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,  
Montgomery Cluey  
May 1982

1 March 1982

Memorandum for Record

Subject: Conversation with Dr. Mr. John Lansdale, 1 March 1982,  
Washington, D.C.

1. Mr. Lansdale started off by telling me how he had originally become involved in the Manhattan Project. Before Pearl Harbor, he was called to active duty from the Reserves at the instance of a VMI classmate. After several months at G-2, he was summoned to see the head of Counter Intelligence Division, a Colonel Forney. Unbeknownst to Lansdale, James B. Conant, the Chairman of the National Defense Research Committee, had requested the Army's help in establishing a security program for the research on nuclear fission. Colonel Forney and the G-2, Gen. Strong seemed only interested in Lansdale's having attended Harvard Law School as a qualification for the job. When they verified this fact, they sent him off to see Dr. Conant.

Conant briefed Lansdale about the general nature of the research on nuclear energy. The grapevine of scientists reported that the German physicists had begun work on nuclear fission before the U.S. work started. Conant was concerned Germany would be the first to obtain a nuclear weapon and in so doing put herself in a position to win the war quickly. If the Germans found out about the American program, surely, "they would redouble their own efforts and they had the talent and industrial capacity to succeed." Worried about lax security and "loose talk" at Berkeley, Conant wanted the help of Lansdale, the representative of the Army's counterintelligence arm. Only four years out of law school and only on active duty for several months, Lansdale could scarcely call himself an expert on counterintelligence. However, using a "talent for fakery" acquired in the courtroom, he acted the part and suggested that he go to Berkeley to become familiar with the problem. Conant

quickly agreed and gave him a membership card to the faculty club at Berkeley and, to familiarize him with the importance of his new assignment, an article by Ernest O. Lawrence on the military potential of nuclear fission.

Lansdale arrived at the University of California and passed himself off as a researcher working in the Law Library. He admitted that this did not seem like much of a cover, but it had worked like a charm. He was given a tour of the laboratory and ate lunch every day with faculty involved in the S-1 work. When he returned to Washington, he briefed Conant from a diary he had kept of what he had heard over the lunch table. Conant's frequent "Oh dears" punctuated the session, as Lansdale related the various items of information he had picked up. After consulting with the NDRC Chairman, Lansdale returned to Berkeley in his uniform and confronted the scientists and read them the riot act in what he recalled as an "intense" session, "The administrative head of the laboratory told me that he became suspicious of me and thought about calling the FBI."

In late summer 1942 B.G. Leslie R. Groves appointed Lansdale head of security for the Manhattan Engineering District. The general came to his windowless office tucked away in the bowels of the Pentagon and offered him the job as head of security, allowing that he was doing this "...not because I was any good but because I knew all about the project." Lansdale then assumed double responsibilities. He already headed a secret "review division" responsible for preventing subversion by Nazi and Communist sympathizers within the Army. He now began forming a counterintelligence and security apparatus within the MED. Later in 1943, the dual responsibilities proved too

time-consuming and Lansdale turned over his duties in G-2 to another officer and concentrated full time on his work for General Groves.

2. I asked about the nature of the security threat to the S-1 work. Lansdale said that the major concern came from the Germans' gaining the knowledge that the United States had begun a program of research on nuclear energy. There was no doubt that the Germans were working on a similar project. Those in the know were "truly frightened" the Germans would be the first to build a nuclear weapon which would then give them victory. This motivated Bush, Conant, Groves, and Oppenheimer to force a grueling pace in an effort which he looks back on as an "ordeal." Lansdale mentioned specifically the necessity to shield the existence of the project as the primary consideration over and above protection of specific pieces of the technological puzzle.

Lansdale related that later on he received intelligence that the German work on nuclear energy, "was not going anywhere." They had decided early on that a bomb was not feasible, and they concentrated on nuclear energy as a source of electrical power. However the Alsos Mission uncovered the fact that their pile never reached a self-sustaining chain reaction.

I asked Mr. Lansdale why the top people in the S-1 organization never believed the intelligence reports that the Germans had neglected the military potential of fission. He gave two reasons. All of the indications had an "indirect" nature. For instance, early in the war the Germans had confiscated large quantities of uranium from Belgian sites and shipped it to Germany. But the ore had dropped out of sight indicating the Germans were storing and not

using it. While important, this gave only an indirect indication. And by this point in the development of the work, "it was so clear to us it was practical," that he, Conant, and Groves, "could not believe that brilliant people like Hahn and Heisenberg could not reach the same conclusions." In fact, he found out after the war that the German General Staff, in accordance with Hitler's emphasis on devoting technological resources to developments in weaponry available in the short term, intentionally denied the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute the support it needed for a coherent program of research on fission.

3. I asked Mr. Lansdale about his relationship with James B. Conant. He described both Vannevar Bush and Conant as brilliant scientists with a practical bent who were motivated by the idea that nuclear technology meant victory for the country that first harnessed it in a bomb. He saw Conant relatively frequently, though he cautioned me that he was not in any way a close adviser to him. Rather, when he had problems with scientists, he would go to Conant who worked with his own contacts behind the scenes to alleviate them. Berkeley, Chicago, and Columbia proved the most difficult areas for Lansdale. Los Alamos he allowed was the place, "where the beans were spilled."

4. We discussed several times during the interview the problem posed by the Soviet Union. Lansdale stated that from the outset they posed the "principle security problem" and figured as a "long term enemy." He was certain that after 1941 there was no compromise of the security of the American program caused by leaks to the Germans. (As an aside, he told me the story of placing Hahn and Heisenberg in a bugged room with accounts of the

American project's success. Heisenberg thought it was a hoax. Hahn remarked that the Manhattan Project was, "something the Americans did that we never could have."

Mr. Lansdale explained that there was not much question that the Soviets had penetrated Berkeley and Los Alamos. In the early 40's the Russians had an espionage apparatus built around the Communist Party and various associated undercover operatives. Some people at Berkeley were in some way associated with the Communist Party. As a result, one collection measure utilized by his office consisted of telephone taps wired to act as a room microphone for the whole room in which the phone was located as well as a telephone tap. In this way, they picked up information on the activities of Soviet agents at Berkeley. In one incident they monitored a \$500 payoff by a Steve Nelson, Communist Party "director" on the West Coast to a member of the Berkeley organization for unspecified information on the work on atomic energy. Lansdale stated that payments like this were rare. Normally the people who provided information to the Soviets' agents did so for ideological reasons. At one point J.R. Oppenheimer wanted to hire at Los Alamos people thought suspect by Lansdale's organization. Lansdale merely briefed Oppenheimer on the reasons for excluding these individuals, and the California scientist never raised the issue again. Lansdale stated emphatically that he never questioned Oppenheimer's loyalty.

Lansdale said there was, "no question that very early on Soviets were advised." His agents had followed various Berkeley people into the Soviet consulate. He compared providing security for the program at Berkeley to, "trying to catch water in a seive." He and his colleagues never kidded

themselves about the nature of the Soviet effort to obtain information about the Manhattan Project and their ability eventually to "get most of the story." As a result, they followed a general policy of putting this off as long as possible. They relied on compartmentalization to delay Soviet acquisition of S-1 data. Lansdale also strongly supported to Groves the idea of publishing the Smyth Report, which had as its objective the definition of the permissible level of disclosure. Their rationale in authorizing the release of data through this document had been:

- Information should be released if the bare fact that a bomb had been exploded would lead to the discovery of this information within five years.
- If information would take more than five years to uncover once foreign scientists found out a bomb had been successfully demonstrated, it remained under wraps.

Groves originally wanted to keep the security lid on the Smyth Report but later accepted the idea of "permissible level of disclosure." Lansdale also discussed with Gen. Groves the problem of Soviet penetration of the Manhattan District. Groves in turn briefed the Military Policy Committee.

5. Mr. Lansdale briefly mentioned the decision to use the bomb. During the process, Arthur H. Compton became the object of a "well thought out campaign" to foster a decision not to use the bomb. This fell on deaf ears. Lansdale gave the opinion that no one at the top level doubted the weapon would be used, "the to do they went through was window dressing."

and through the courtesy of Anderson, Perrin, and Hambro, he had isolated at least one Soviet agent in the team of British scientists.

We discussed the background of the crisis over the French patents, and Mr. Lansdale explained that the British objected to American dominance of the combined effort. They wanted to insure their own nuclear independence after the war and looked to the French scientists as a way of enhancing the British wartime contribution. This and other reasons cited above plus the constant tension between the need for speed and the competing need for security made it impossible to sell the British the idea of compartmentalization. Lansdale could give no reason for the British position vis-à-vis the French other than a desire to avoid French animosity which might get in the way of Britain's obtaining an independent nuclear capability after the war. He claimed the leadership in the United Kingdom had begun to realize that they were becoming a "has-been" power. Sir John Anderson therefore wanted nothing to get in the way of a British nuclear capability.

Mr. Lansdale related a humorous anecdote of events occurring in late 1944 or early 1945. Lansdale and Hambro went to the area controlled by General Omar Bradley's Army Group in Germany to collect uranium. General Bradley's Chief-of-Staff was worried about sending an Anglo-American mission into the Soviet sector. However, Gen. Bradley, after listening to our story, said, "To hell with the Russians" and gave permission. They travelled to Leopold Hall to procure the Belgian uranium confiscated early in the war by the Germans and then stored in an old salt mine. Lansdale, with some difficulty got American trucks to transport the ore to port. He almost came to blows with Hambro who

6. We spent a good deal of time on the events surrounding the Anglo-American difficulties in 1944 over the French patents. He cited the concern in this country over Joliot's communism and a possible disclosure by him to the Soviet Union of information gained by the French scientists then working in Montreal under British auspices. Lansdale went over many aspects of his involvement in the Anglo-American negotiations about the French patents.

He admitted that at 32 he was too young to have been dealing with senior players like Sir John Anderson and his assistant Gorell-Barnes. Their goal had been to "pacify this rude and impolite young American." Lansdale throughout his mission had problems with Ambassador John G. Winant who was "mortally offended" that an unknown Army colonel and not the Ambassador played the central role in these ticklish Anglo-American negotiations. Mr. Lansdale briefly described the figures he dealt with in England. To Sir John Anderson he attributed great detailed knowledge of all aspects of the Tube Alloys program. M.L. "Mike" Perrin, he liked very much. With Sir Charles Hambro, his equivalent as security chief of the British program, he got along fine. He also pointed out that Britain had a different philosophy about security than did Americans. In England, an island country, policymakers were satisfied to isolate a project, "keeping everything on the island" as the basis for their security program unlike the Americans, who stressed compartmentalization and need to know. Lansdale cited lax British procedures for clearance of individuals. In fact he allowed that Groves had wanted to keep British scientists out of Los Alamos, and had give him the task of providing the rationale. In the process, with help from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police

demanded the uranium be shipped to Britain and who had the only shipping that could get the ore out of Germany. Needless to say, Hambro won the argument.

7. Mr. Lansdale also commented on his role in the Alsos Mission. He had originally brought the idea to Vannevar Bush in 1943 and had procured Bush's help and that of VMI classmate Frank McCarthy, then Secretary, General Staff, in gaining the support of the General Staff. The word came to Washington that the Germans had moved their facilities for research on nuclear energy to southern Germany which also fit into the idea then current about a German "Redoubt." Lansdale then went to SHAEF Headquarters to lay on a military operation to capture the German nuclear research lab. General Eisenhower agreed to plan for a parachute division to assault the area in question, Hechingen. But Col. Boris Pash, head of the Alsos Mission, became convinced the area was only lightly held by the Germans and took it with his own small force before the airborne operation could be conducted. Then Lansdale, Hambro, Perrin and others moved to Hechingen and began rounding up German scientists, their reports and equipment, and their uranium.

8. As we finished, Mr. Lansdale warned me of two things -- his concern for accuracy and his caution that I remember that these events occurred a long time ago and that memory very often fails with the passage of time.

*Montgomery C. Meigs*  
Montgomery C. Meigs

Major US Army