

# Keeping a Curious Bush Secret

**Exclusive:** One of the strange mysteries from the Reagan-Bush era is where did George H.W. Bush go on one Sunday in October 1980 when some witnesses placed him meeting with Iranians in Paris. More than three decades later, Bush's supposed alibi remains a state secret, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

More than three decades ago, on Oct. 19, 1980, then-Republican vice presidential candidate George H.W. Bush supposedly took an afternoon trip to visit a family friend in Washington, an alibi that could prove he could not have traveled secretly to Paris for treacherous meetings with Iranians.

But Bush's White House in 1992 and his presidential library now have refused to release the name of this alibi witness or even the address where Bush allegedly went. The insistence on keeping this secret has just been reaffirmed by Debra Steidel Wall, deputy archivist of the United States.

So, rather than release what theoretically should be a fact the Bush Family would want out proof that the elder George Bush did not engage in secret talks with Iranians behind President Jimmy Carter's back regarding 52 Americans then being held hostage in Iran the U.S. government is saying that only a costly federal court lawsuit can dislodge this historical detail.

Or, perhaps the reason that this secret has been so zealously guarded for so long is that Bush never took the afternoon trip, that it was just part of a cover story to conceal his mission to Paris, and that the host – if questioned – would discredit Bush's alibi .

Whatever the truth, as long as the Bushes and the government prevent the corroboration of his purported afternoon visit, it remains impossible to disprove contrary evidence that Bush did sneak off for the alleged Paris meeting and simply arranged with friends in the Secret Service to concoct an alibi.

Another part of Bush's alibi for Oct. 19 a morning trip to the Chevy Chase Country Club previously collapsed when no one at the club recalled the visit and the account from Secret Service supervisor Leonard Tanis, who described a brunch also involving Barbara Bush and Justice and Mrs. Potter Stewart, turned out to be false.

Disproving Tanis's account, Mrs. Bush's Secret Service records showed her taking a morning jog along the C&O Canal, and Mrs. Stewart told me that she and her late husband never had brunch with the Bushes at the Chevy Chase club. When

questioned by congressional investigators, none of the other Secret Service agents on the detail recalled going to the Chevy Chase club at all.

After his Chevy Chase story was debunked, Tanis a Secret Service official who was known to be personally close to Bush withdrew it

### **A Mysterious Alibi**

That left Bush's supposed afternoon trip on Oct. 19 as his key alibi. But there were problems with that story as well.

In 1992, when allegations of Bush's secret trip to Paris in 1980 were being investigated, Republicans suggested that Democrats were simply trying to embarrass the then-President because the afternoon trip might have involved a rendezvous with a woman.

Since Bush's reelection campaign was matching up against Democrat Bill Clinton, who was under fire for his own womanizing, the GOP complaint boiled down to that the Democrats were looking for dirt against Bush to counter the dirt against Clinton.

However, that Republican argument also fell apart when Mrs. Bush's Secret Service records showed her participating in the afternoon trip. Given Barbara Bush's presence, the idea of a romantic tryst certainly didn't make much sense.

So, either Mrs. Bush had gone together with her husband or a sympathetic Secret Service official had used Mrs. Bush's visit to a family friend to create another false cover story for George H.W. Bush.

Yet, two decades ago, with Bush in the White House and the Democrats almost as timid as they are today, it proved relatively easy for the President to quash requests from federal prosecutors, congressional investigators and journalists for release of the details about his whereabouts on Oct. 19, 1980.

While keeping these details from the public, Bush angrily insisted that he be cleared of the Paris allegations. Congressional investigators looking into the 1980 suspicions were eager to comply, but there remained this peculiar refusal of the Bush administration to supply a confirmable alibi.

In June 1992, a compromise of sorts was struck. A few senior congressional investigators were given the identity of Bush's mysterious host but only under the condition that they would never interview the alibi witness nor disclose publicly who it was.

The deal may have represented the first time in investigative history that a suspect provided authorities an alibi witness with the proviso that the alibi

not be checked out and the investigators agreed. Maybe only a member of the Bush Family could pull that off.

### **Evidence of a Paris Trip**

Contradicting the shaky Secret Service records were several accounts of a Bush trip to Paris on the night of Oct. 18, 1980, and into the day on Oct. 19.

For instance, I informed the congressional investigators in 1992 about contemporaneous knowledge of the Bush-to-Paris trip provided to me by Chicago Tribune reporter John Maclean, son of author Norman Maclean who wrote *A River Runs Through It*.

John Maclean said a well-placed Republican source told him in mid-October 1980 about Bush taking a secret trip to Paris to meet with Iranians on the U.S. hostage issue.

After hearing this news in 1980, Maclean passed on the information to David Henderson, a State Department Foreign Service officer. Henderson recalled the date as Oct. 18, 1980, when the two met at Henderson's Washington home to discuss another matter.

For his part, Maclean never wrote about the Bush-to-Paris leak because, he told me later, a Reagan campaign spokesman officially denied it. As the years passed, the memory of the leak faded for both Henderson and Maclean, until the so-called October Surprise story bubbled to the surface in the early 1990s.

Henderson mentioned the meeting in a 1991 letter to a U.S. senator that was forwarded to me. Though not eager to become part of the October Surprise story in 1991, Maclean confirmed that he had received the Republican leak. He also agreed with Henderson's recollection that their conversation occurred on or about Oct. 18, 1980.

The significance of the Maclean-Henderson conversation was that it was a piece of information locked in time untainted by later claims and counter-claims about the October Surprise dispute.

One could not accuse Maclean of concocting the Bush-to-Paris allegation for some ulterior motive, since he hadn't used it in 1980, nor had he volunteered it a decade later. He only confirmed it and did so reluctantly.

### **French Intelligence**

And, there was other support for the allegations of a Republican-Iranian meeting in Paris.

David Andelman, the biographer for Count Alexandre deMarenches, then head of France's Service de Documentation Exterieur et de Contre-Espionage (SDECE), testified to congressional investigators that deMarenches told him that he had helped the Reagan-Bush campaign arrange meetings with Iranians on the hostage issue in summer and fall of 1980, with one meeting in Paris in October.

Andelman said deMarenches insisted that the secret meetings be kept out of his memoir because the story could otherwise damage the reputations of his friends, William Casey and George H.W. Bush.

The allegations of a Paris meeting also received support from several other sources, including pilot Heinrich Rupp, who said he flew Casey (then Ronald Reagan's campaign chief and later CIA director) from Washington's National Airport to Paris on a flight that left very late on a rainy night in mid-October 1980.

Rupp said that after arriving at LeBourget airport outside Paris, he saw a man resembling Bush on the tarmac.

The night of Oct. 18 indeed was rainy in the Washington area. And, sign-in sheets at the Reagan-Bush headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, placed Casey within a five-minute drive of National Airport late that evening.

There were other bits and pieces of corroboration about the Paris meetings.

A French arms dealer, Nicholas Ignatiew, told me in 1990 that he had checked with his government contacts and was told that Republicans did meet with Iranians in Paris in mid-October 1980.

A well-connected French investigative reporter Claude Angeli said his sources inside the French secret service confirmed that the service provided "cover" for a meeting between Republicans and Iranians in France on the weekend of Oct. 18-19. German journalist Martin Kilian had received a similar account from a top aide to intelligence chief deMarenches.

As early as 1987, Iran's ex-President Bani-Sadr had made similar claims about a Paris meeting, and Israeli intelligence officer Ari Ben-Menashe claimed to have been present outside the meeting and saw Bush, Casey and other Americans in attendance.

### **A Russian Report**

Finally, the Russian government sent a report to the House Task Force, saying that Soviet-era intelligence files contained information about Republicans holding a series of meetings with Iranians in Europe, including one in Paris in

October 1980.

“William Casey, in 1980, met three times with representatives of the Iranian leadership,” the Russian report said. “The meetings took place in Madrid and Paris.”

At the Paris meeting in October 1980, “former CIA Director George Bush also took part,” the report said. “The representatives of Ronald Reagan and the Iranian leadership discussed the question of possibly delaying the release of 52 hostages from the staff of the U.S. Embassy in Teheran.”

Requested by Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Indiana, who was in charge of the lackadaisical congressional inquiry into the October Surprise mystery, the Russian report arrived via the U.S. Embassy in Moscow in January 1993. But Hamilton’s task force had already decided to dismiss the October Surprise allegations as lacking solid evidence.

The Russian report was kept hidden until I discovered it after gaining access to the task force’s raw files. Though the report was addressed to Hamilton, he told me last year that he had not seen the report until I sent him a copy shortly before our interview.

Lawrence Barcella, the task force’s chief counsel, acknowledged to me that he might not have shown Hamilton the report and may have simply filed it away in boxes of task force records. [For more on Casey’s European travels, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“October Surprise Evidence Surfaces..”](#)]

## **A Cover-up**

Though the Bush library continues to withhold the details about Bush’s purported afternoon trip on Oct. 19, 1980, thousands of other records were released to me this summer under a Freedom of Information Act request.

The documents shed some additional light on how far the Republicans were prepared to go to protect Bush on the October Surprise issue. The records reveal that GOP members of the congressional task force were collaborating, behind the scenes, with Bush’s White House on a strategy for shielding Bush from the accusations.

For instance, Bush’s White House and Capitol Hill Republicans worked hand in glove to blackball from the task force one Democratic investigator who had the strongest doubts about Bush’s alibi. The suspicions of the investigator, House Foreign Affairs Committee chief counsel Spencer Oliver, had been piqued by the false account from Secret Service supervisor Tanis.

In a six-page memo, Oliver urged a closer look at Bush's whereabouts and questioned why the Secret Service was concealing the alibi witness' name.

"Why did the Secret Service refuse to cooperate on a matter which could have conclusively cleared George Bush of these serious allegations?" Oliver asked. "Was the White House involved in this refusal? Did they order it?"

Oliver also noted Bush's odd behavior in raising the October Surprise issue on his own at two news conferences.

"It can be fairly said that President Bush's recent outbursts about the October Surprise inquiries and [about] his whereabouts in mid-October of 1980 are disingenuous at best," wrote Oliver, "since the administration has refused to make available the documents and the witnesses that could finally and conclusively clear Mr. Bush."

From the newly released White House documents, it is clear that Oliver's suspicion was well-founded about the involvement of Bush's White House staff in the decision to conceal the name of the supposed host.

Keeping Oliver off the October Surprise investigation also became a high priority for the Republicans. At a midway point in the inquiry when some Democratic task force members asked the knowledgeable Oliver to represent them as a staff investigator, Republicans threatened a boycott unless Oliver was barred.

In a gesture of bipartisanship, Rep. Hamilton gave the Republicans the power to veto Oliver's participation. Denied one of the few Democratic investigators with both the savvy and courage to pursue a serious inquiry, the Democratic members of the task force retreated. [For more, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Inside the October Surprise Cover-up](#)."] ]

### **A Never-ending Cover-up**

Now, nearly two decades after the congressional investigation and three decades after the events in question this strange cover-up continues.

In June 2011, the archivists at the Bush library in College Station, Texas, denied release of these Secret Service files, citing an exception for law-enforcement procedures, such as the number of Secret Service agents assigned to a detail or routes they might use for transporting a protected person.

However, I didn't want that information. I only wanted the location of where Bush went on that Sunday afternoon three decades ago. So I appealed.

In a July 26 letter to me, deputy national archivist Wall rebuffed my appeal.

She wrote that the relevant U.S. Secret Service logs “contain the identities of USSS agents. Based on the numerous court decisions upholding the withholding of agents and third person names, I affirm our initial determination that releasing these names could endanger the life or physical safety of the agents of the USSS.”

My first reaction was to assume that Wall must not have understood what I was after. How on earth could an address supposedly visited by George H.W. and Barbara Bush on Oct. 19, 1980, endanger the lives of Secret Service agents today?

I tried to reach Wall by phone two weeks ago without success. I then sent an e-mail to Robert Holzweiss, chief archivist at the Bush library, and noted that “Ms. Wall did not seem to address the central point of my request.

“All I was after was the address where Mr. Bush purportedly went on the afternoon of Oct. 19, 1980. Ms. Wall does not specifically deal with that point and I fear she may have misunderstood the purpose of my appeal.

“Frankly, it stretches credulity that where a vice presidential candidate might have gone on an afternoon more than 30 years ago would somehow put Secret Service agents or those they protect in any jeopardy.

“This information also is something that a number of other interested parties have sought in the past. Twenty years ago, there were requests for this one fact from federal prosecutors, defense attorneys, congressional investigators and other journalists.

“The irony is that this information could put to rest, once and for all, suspicions that Mr. Bush took part in a scheme to contact Iranian officials behind President Carter’s back. So, this detail does have historic significance, which should be weighed against any countervailing concerns, especially given how far-fetched those concerns appear to be.”

In my e-mail, I requested that officials at the National Archives rethink their response. However, they have not gotten back to me.

So, where George H.W. Bush went on the afternoon of Oct. 19, 1980, remains a state secret.

**[For more on these topics, see Robert Parry’s *Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a two-book set for the discount price of only \$19. For details, [click here.](#)]**

**Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the**

Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at [neckdeepbook.com](http://neckdeepbook.com). His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.

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## Life in an Age of Looting

The ugly scenes of rioting and arson in Great Britain are a preview of the societal breakdown that can be expected from today's staggeringly inequitable economic/political system, where stock-market sharpies get away with plundering pension funds but the poor get nailed for looting consumer goods, observes Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

As the poor of Britain rise in a fury of inchoate rage and as stock exchanges worldwide experience manic upswings and panicked swoons the financial elite (and their political operatives) are arrayed in a defensive posture, even as they continue their global-wide, full-spectrum offensive vis-à-vis The Shock Doctrine.

Concurrently, corporate mass media types fret over the reversal of fortune and trumpet the triumphs of the self-serving agendas of Wall Street and corporate swindlers even as they term a feller, in ill-gotten possession of a flat-screen television, fleeing through the streets of North London, a mindless thug.

According to the through-the-looking-glass cosmology of mass media elitists, when a poor person commits a crime of opportunity, his actions are a threat to all we hold dear and sacred, but, when the hyper-wealthy of the entrenched looter class abscond with billions, those criminals are referred to as our financial leaders.

Regardless of the propaganda of "free market" fantasists, the great unspeakable in regard to capitalism is its wealth, by and large, is generated for a ruthless, privileged few by the creation of bubbles.

When those bubbles burst, the resultant economic catastrophe inflicts a vastly disproportionate amount of harm upon those – the laboring and middle classes – who generate grossly inequitable amounts of capital for the elitist of the fraudster class ... by having the life force drained from them by the vampiric



set-up of the gamed system.

Woody Guthrie summed up the situation in these two (unfortunately) ageless stanzas:

“Yes, as through this world I’ve wandered  
I’ve seen lots of funny men;  
Some will rob you with a sixgun,  
And some with a fountain pen.

“And as through your life you travel,  
Yes, as through your life you roam,  
You won’t never see an outlaw  
Drive a family from their home.”  
—excerpt from “Pretty Boy Floyd.”

Although, at present, U.S. bank vaults contain little tangible loot for a Pretty Boy Floyd-type outlaw to boost. How would it be possible for an old-school bank robber such as Floyd to make-off with a haul of funneling electrons?

Here’s the lowdown: The Wall Street fraudsters of the swindler class want to refill their coffers and line their pockets (that is, offshore accounts) with Social Security and Medicare funds. That’s the nature of the unfolding scam, folks. Oligarchic rule has always been a system defined by legalized looting that leaves a wasteland of want, deprivation and unfocused rage in its wake.

Consequently, in the U.K. (and beyond): When poor people’s hopes dry up, cities become a tinderbox of dead dreams, and we should not be stricken with shock and consternation when these degraded places are set aflame, nor should we be surprised when the bribed, debt-beholden and commercial media propaganda-bamboozled middle-class (who helped create the wasteland with their arid complicity) cry out (predictably) for police-state tactics to quell the fiery insurrection.

There have been incidents in which a fire has smoldered for years in an abandoned, sealed-off mineshaft, and then the fire, traveling through the tunnels of the mine, and up the roots of dead, dried trees have caused a dying forest to bloom into flames.

The rage that sparks a riot can proceed in a similar manner – and the insular, sealed-off nature of a nation’s elite and the willful ignorance of its middle-class will only make the explosion of pent-up rage more powerful when it reaches the surface.

We exist in a culture that, day after day, inundates its have-nots with

consumerist propaganda, and then, when the social order breaks down, its wealthy and bourgeoisie alike express outrage when the poor steal consumer goods – as opposed to going out and looting an education and a good job.

Under Disaster Capitalism, the people in the underclass have had economic violence inflicted upon them since birth, yet the corporate-state mass media doesn't seem to notice the situation, until young men burn down the night. Then media elitists wax indignant, carrying on as if these desperate acts are devoid of cultural context.

A mindset has been instilled in these young men and boys that they are nothing *sans* the accoutrements of consumerism. Yet when they loot an i-Phone, as opposed to creating economy-shredding derivative scams, we're prompted by the corporate media to become indignant.

When the slow-motion, elitist-manipulated mob action known as our faux democratic/consumerist culture deprives people of their basic human rights and personal dignity – then, in turn, we should not be shocked when a mob of the underclass fails to bestow those virtues upon others.

The commercial mass media's narrative of narrowed context (emotional, anecdotal and unreflective in nature) serves as a form of corporate state propaganda, promulgated to ensure the general population continues to rage against the symptoms rather than the disease of neoliberalism.

The false framing of opposing opinions – of those who state the deprivations of neoliberalism factor into the causes of uprisings, insurrections and riots as being apologists for violence and destruction is as preposterous as claiming one is an apologist for dry rot when he points out structural damage to a house due to a leaking roof.

Because of the elements of inverted totalitarianism, inherent within the structure of corporate state capitalism, and internalized within the general population by constant, commercial media re-enforcement, one should not be surprised when a sizable portion of the general populace is inclined to support police-state tactics to quell social unrest among the disadvantaged of the population.

Keep in mind: When watching the BBC or the corporate media, one is receiving a limited narrative (tacitly) approved by the global power elite, created by informal arrangements among a careerist cartel comprised of business, governmental and media personality types who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, even if, in doing so, they serve as operatives of a burgeoning police state.

Accordingly, you can't debate fascist thinking with reason nor empathetic imagination, e.g., the self-righteous (and self-serving) pronouncements of mass media representatives nor the attendant outrage of the denizens of the corporate state in their audience – their umbrage engineered by the emotionally laden images with which they have been relentlessly pummeled and plied – because their responses will be borne of (conveniently) lazy generalizations, given impetus by fear-based animus.

Through it all, veiled by disorienting media distractions and political legerdemain, we find ourselves buffeted and bound by the predicament of paradigm lost that constitutes the onset of the unraveling of the present order.

"The kings of the world are growing old,  
and they shall have no inheritors.  
Their sons died while they were boys,  
and their neurasthenic daughters abandoned  
the sick crown to the mob."

–Rainer Maria Rilke, excerpt from "The Kings of the World"

Yet, while there is proliferate evidence that, even as people worldwide are rising up against inequity and exploitation, the economic elite have little inclination to do so much as glimpse the plight of those from whose life blood their immense riches have been wrung, nor hear the admonition of the downtrodden that they are weary of life on their knees and are awakening to the reality that the con of freedom of choice under corporate state oligarchy is, in fact, a life shackled to the consumerism-addicted/debt-indentured-servitude that comprises the structure of the neoliberal, global company store.

"The rotten masks that divide one man  
From another, one man from himself  
They crumble  
For one enormous moment and we glimpse  
The unity that we lost, the desolation  
...Of being man, and all its glories  
Sharing bread and sun and death  
The forgotten astonishment of being alive"

–Octavio Paz, excerpt from "Sunstone"

Accordingly, the most profound act of selfless devotion (commonly called love) in relationship to a society gripped by a sociopathic mode of being is creative resistance. Submission is madness. Sanity entails subversion. The heart insists on it; otherwise, life is only a slog to the graveyard; mouth, full of ashes; heart, a receptacle for dust.

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