

Remembering Gerry Haines

by Frank O'Leary

My best friend, Gerry Haines, died in April of duodenal cancer. He passed peacefully in his sleep, a little more than a month shy of his 79th birthday. Gerry was unique in many ways. He was: gregarious, fun-loving, fiercely loyal to his friends and his beliefs, the life of every party, and a “fellow of infinite jest.” He will be missed and mourned by many.

My wife Linda and I first met Gerry and his wife Joanne, in 1976, shortly after they moved into their North Highland Street home, a block from our house. I was attempting to rouse the neighborhood in opposition to a scheduled widening by Arlington County of North Highland to four lanes with a connector to South Walter Reed and a new designation as a bus route. Eighteen months later, we won the battle and had become fast friends.

The Haines hailed from Detroit and had moved to the Washington area so that Gerry, more properly Dr. Gerald K. Haines (armed with his PhD. in history from the University of Wisconsin) could pursue a career as an archivist at the National Archives. Or so it seemed for nearly a decade. Then, in 1984, he suddenly announced that he was now employed by the National Security Agency (NSA) at Fort Meade. Some years later, he moved on to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) at Langley, followed by the National Reconnaissance Office, and an eventual return to the CIA. All this prompted me to ask, “Can’t you keep a job?” The answer became apparent when, in 1997, Dr. Gerald K. Haines was appointed the Chief Historian for the Central Intelligence Agency. Apparently, his game of “musical jobs” had been in preparation for this honor.

His tenure in that office was marked early on when he became the Agency’s official spokesperson for explaining the CIA’s unintended role during the late 1940’s and early 1950’s in the creation of the UFO phenomenon. In his role as a TV personality, Gerry explained that the so-called governmental “weather balloons” explanation of UFO’s was only partially true. The balloons were actually reconnaissance precursors to the U-2 project intended to float at high altitudes over areas of interest to the CIA in order to photographically collect military intelligence data. The alien markings found on certain plastic parts reflected their origin as whimsical components of children’s toys, cannibalized by the CIA to lend light-weight structure to the balloon assembly.

I am not certain to what degree this educational effort succeeded in convincing the American public that all was well, but Gerry reveled in it. About this time, a meteorite was discovered in Antarctica which some scientists concluded was a fragment of the planet Mars and may have borne life to Earth. Gerry opined, “We may be from Mars.” Linda and I responded, “You may be, but we’re from Ireland.”

Given the nature of military intelligence, there was very little that Gerry could share about his work. One exception occurred when he was teaching a class at NSA and appeared at our door one day after work. He was carrying a beautifully finished cubical box which he asked me to open. When I did, I found it contained a sort of typewriter

with an unusual keyboard. It took me a few moments to realize that sitting on our coffee table was a cryptological dream machine - the fabled Enigma encoding machine of World War II - employed extensively by the Germans. I experimentally keyed a few phrases and found that the device was immediately encrypting the text as its makers intended. Gerry also showed me the mechanism of a Japanese encoding device from the same period. This was, indeed, a treasured and very special experience.

An even more profound event occurred in September 1998, when Dr. Haines under the aegis of CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence (CSI) hosted a public symposium at the National Defense University at Fort McNair – to which I was privileged to be invited, despite my lack of credentials. This all-day event—entitled “*The U-2: A Revolution in Intelligence*”—was attended by several hundred persons from the intelligence community, the Department of Defense, academia, the aeronautical industry (including engineers from the Lockheed “Skunk Works” who had labored under the legendary Kelly Johnson to create the U-2 prototype in a mere eighty-eight days) and a number of pilots who had flown this amazing craft on dangerous missions. The complexity of the undertaking - the solutions that had been developed in the face of daunting challenges - the excellence of the technology - and the calm courage of those who flew - were breath-taking.

At mid-day, we recessed for lunch on the parade grounds; turning our attention to fried chicken, watermelon, and iced tea. We were then asked to assemble before the reviewing stand to hear a solemn tribute to those brave pilots who had lost their lives flying this extremely complex and fragile creation at altitudes exceeding 70,000 feet. It was a long list; perhaps, consisting of as many as one hundred names. After a lengthy string of relatively conventional names, there followed a reading of seemingly Chinese (Nationalist?) names and a string of very German names. We learned that countries that cooperated with the U-2 program (including the United Kingdom) were allowed to conduct flights of their own. No matter the nationality or skill of the pilot, the risk of failure and death was extremely high.

Once the last name had been read, there was an eerie silence. Then, a dot appeared in the southeastern sky and slowly and silently grew in size; until the clear image of a U-2 could be seen only several hundred feet above us. Once it had glided by us, the pilot kicked in the engines at maximum thrust and the craft shot upward and quickly disappeared. We returned to the auditorium to hear a spirited discussion between Francis Gary Powers Jr. and the Soviet Colonel who commanded the surface-to-air missile that shot down Powers' father's plane over Sverdlovsk, Russia in May 1960. All of this was pure magic. The solemnity and wonder of that day and that luncheon will always be with me. Thank you, Dr. Haines, for including me.

In 2002, Gerry started transitioning into retirement with a two-year assignment to the University of Virginia to teach a course entitled, “US Intelligence in the Twentieth Century.” The course proved to be a roaring – “Standing Room Only” – success, and the learned Doctor Haines was acclaimed to be UVA's most popular professor. Once Gerry retired from the CIA in 2002, he formally joined the UVA faculty, teaching and

inspiring students for another twelve years. While at UVA, he helped found the “Haines Seminar” for history faculty. Gerry could not have been happier in his role as an educator.

Gerry Haines accomplished much in his life as a great friend to many, a loving husband, a dedicated teacher and lecturer, a noted historian and archivist, and a supporter of many good causes. My personal tribute fails to touch on the serious issues he took on and the values he espoused in the face of entrenched bureaucratic opposition at the National Archives. Nor can I expound on the reforms and structure that he brought to bear in the organization of clandestine history at our most prominent intelligence agencies. That task is left to his peers and colleagues, and I hope that they will come forward with their thoughts.

In his last few years, Gerry became very active in the Arlington Historical Society serving as both a member of the Board of Directors and Vice-President. In early April, just days before his death on April 8, he informed the nominating committee that he would like to continue as a Board member but that being Vice President would prove too difficult. I understand that AHS President Cathy Hix plans to keep that Board seat open in the year to come as a tribute to Gerry. How very appropriate.

There were many other aspects to Gerry. He was an extremely proficient athlete, with an athlete’s grace in movement. He had played quarterback in high school - was a star baseball /softball player (receiving a college scholarship) and a formidable tennis player. I played against him in both singles and doubles matches, over and over, and never won a match – not even once. Gerry also loved art, particularly sculpture and the depiction of exotic animals and he created an extensive collection in his home – a sort of menagerie.

He also wanted to live the life of a country squire, and purchased several hundred acres of land in Amherst County along the James River. He bestowed the name Winchcombe on the property in honor of his English family origins. As I write this, his herd of Angus cattle (with two new bulls) are contentedly grazing. Visitors arriving at the Haines’ lovely domicile on a bluff overlooking the James River may be surprised to be greeted by three life-size statues of giraffes (Mom, Dad, and Junior) at the top of the driveway.

Gerry loved dogs, as well. His favorite comic strip was “Red and Rover,” the story of a red-haired boy and his dog. Over the course of more than thirty-five years, he owned three wonderful Airedales – Chelsea, Cassie, and Calley – each more charming than its immediate predecessor. I am certain that they patiently awaited him on the other side of the Great Divide and that the four of them are happily treading heavenly walkways

I must close by noting that Gerry greatly enjoyed a “wee dram” or two of scotch whisky, particularly Johnny Walker Black. Thus, I propose a final toast to him. *“Now cracks a noble heart. Goodnight, sweet prince; and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.”*