



All the Best Podcast
Episode 59: “The Highest Form of Patriotism”
*Featuring Former CIA Deputy Director for Operations and Senior
Intelligence Advisor to President George H. W. Bush, Jim Pavitt*

Jim: March 14th, 1976. Intelligence is a demanding craft. I have not been in this business for very long, but I already can tell you a few things I've learned. One is that the quality of the people I have met at the Central Intelligence Agency, and in other parts of the intelligence community, gives me great confidence. I am impressed with the competence and dedication of the people in our intelligence community. They are professionals in the finest sense of the word. Let me tell you another thing I've learned about the CIA. Its employees have very deeply ingrained pride and loyalty. They also have an extraordinary sense of duty. It is my belief that the guidelines laid down by the President will be followed to the letter. I've made a personal commitment to see that this is so. There is no substitute for honesty. There is no substitute for conscience. And there is no substitute for common sense. George H.W. Bush.

George: In the first place, I believe that character is a part of being President.

Barbara: And life really must have joy.

Sam: This is "All the Best." The official podcast of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. I'm your host, Sam LeBlond, one of their many grandchildren. Here, we celebrate the legacy of these two incredible Americans through friends, family, and the foundation. This is "All the Best."

George: I remember something my dad taught me. He said, write your mother, serve your country, and he said, tell the truth. And I've tried to do that in public life. All through it.

Barbara: You are a human being first and those human connections with children, with friends are the most important investments you will ever make.

George: We stand tonight before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children. A world we could not have contemplated a few years ago.

Sam: On behalf of our family and the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. This is "All the Best."

Jim Pavitt is Co-Owner and President of JLP Associates LLC, a small consulting company that provides clients with strategic insight and analysis on international security and risk assessment issues. He has more than 30 years of experience in the U.S. intelligence community, 7 years of experience in the private sector as a principal of the Scowcroft Group, and currently serves on the board of directors of CACI International Inc. As Deputy Director for Operations at the Central Intelligence Agency from 1999 to 2004, he managed the CIA's global intelligence collection operations and nearly half of the CIA's multibillion dollar budget. As Head of the Central Intelligence Agency's Clandestine Service, he led the CIA's operational response to the attacks of September 11, 2001. Prior to the CIA, Mr. Pavitt was the senior intelligence adviser to my grandfather, President George H.W. Bush. And as a member of the National Security Council team, from 1990 to 1993, serving as Special Assistant to the President for intelligence programs. Jim, welcome to "All the Best."

Jim: Thank you very much. Good to be here.

Sam: Jim, I'd like to start with this. This podcast is dedicated to the concept of service to others. And you're the first person we've had, with us, who served at the CIA, which my Gampy loved and respected so much. Can you share your own path of how you ended up at the CIA?

Jim: I was working on a PhD in American colonial history, when I got a letter from Lyndon Johnson. And he invited me to join the United States Army. So, rather than be drafted, I enlisted and I enlisted to be a specialist in intelligence. And that's what I did. And for about three years, I was in the U.S. Army. I was overseas. I was in Berlin, Germany, West Berlin, Germany, and I was a case officer. My job was to do the work of espionage. I came out of that, left the army, my time was up. And I came back to Washington and I searched for a job. I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do, but I had interviewed with the CIA abroad, just a preliminary discussion.

I wound up working on Capitol Hill as a legislative assistant for some two years, working for a member who had so much seniority, that I had a member's office in the Longworth House. At that time, I decided I wanted to run for Congress, then I wanted to run for the Senate. And it took me about three or

four months of seeing how slow things worked there, how things didn't happen the way they used to happen in my old world as an intelligence officer. And despite all the perks, the office, people saying, "Oh my God, he's so young. It's a great job." I applied to and was hired by CIA. I applied to the clandestine side of the business. And I was trained as what's called a case officer.

As I've told many, I walked in there with a bounce in my step. I was so excited about being at that great place. And many, many years later, I walked out with that same bounce in my step, loving everything I did. There were hard times, there were hard times. I buried some of my officers. The agency came under great scrutiny, great legislative review, but there were many, many times where I woke up in the morning, or went to bed at night, knowing that I had done something to make the world a safer place.

Sam: Well, going back a couple 100 years, we know that General George Washington used spies and intelligence to advance, protect, and serve the young Republic's interest since before its inception. How have the methods changed since then?

Jim: The business that I was in is the human espionage business. What we do is we spot, assess, develop, and recruit spies to steal secrets for the United States government. That's the job of a case officer. That was the same job that George Washington's intelligence officers had. To get into somebody's head, to know what a decision maker, a military leader, is going to do, that poses harm or risk to the United States. Joshua, at the battle of Jericho, had spies. So it is a very, very old profession. The techniques are somewhat different, the tools certainly are different, but the basics are the same.

Sam: Well, Jim, when my Gampy accepted President Ford's offer to come home from China and lead the CIA in late 1975, many of my grandfather's friends thought running the CIA was a political dead end for him. The agency at the time was engulfed in some controversy, and plenty of Congressional scrutiny. And it certainly seemed like anything but a stepping stone to the presidency. In fact, my grandfather had to promise he would not join the Ford ticket in 1976, in order to gain Senate confirmation from the Democrats. What do you remember from that tumultuous time?

Jim: Your grandfather became head of CIA about three years into my tenure. I joined the agency in 1973. So for the first year and a half to two years, I was in some form of training, training as a case officer, foreign language training, etc. The issues that your grandfather experienced at that time, the concern about the Church Committee, the Pike Committee, they were very real, and they impacted young people like me joining. I said, do I really want to do this? And I was

convinced that I did. We did make mistakes. You know, what's done well can always be done better. There was a time when the agency had very, very little oversight. That's the way it was designed to be at the outset. And with that being the practice of the day, there were clearly mistakes made. I think some of what Church and Pike had to say, some of the publicity, some of the media coverage, some of the Congressional commentary, was unfair, but at the same time, we needed to do better.

So your grandfather walked into that environment. The thing I find so important, and the reason I believe he so meshed well with the agency, is because he wasn't about to be critical before he knew. He listened. He wanted to know. And once he started to understand what we did, how we did it, who we were, he came to respect what we were about. The job of intelligence is hard. Americans do not, by definition, understandably, like things that are secret, that are not known. Your grandfather worked to brief the Congress, understand what we did, where they were needs for reform. He did it. But he quickly grew into someone who fully understood our culture. And the culture is something that is of vital importance to U.S. national security, our military leaders, policy leaders, and to the President of the United States.

Our job is not to make policy. Our job is to enable policy. And your grandfather quickly understood that. And when he was president, he was one of the most avid consumers of our product. He knew its strengths and he knew its weaknesses. But he was a great consumer and a great supporter.

Sam: Jim, I live in D.C., and I get to drive by the CIA. And obviously, it's named for him now. And people always ask how long he was there and are pretty shocked to find out he was only there a year. It's amazing to see the impact that he made in such a short time.

Jim: I think it's a clear reflection of his understanding of what we were about and why we existed. Again, as I say, Americans do not like secrets. They don't like things that are not out in the open. But I cannot recruit a spy to steal a secret and tell the American people the name of that spy. That would be disastrous. We do have good and hard oversight now. Your grandfather spent an enormous amount of time with a new entity created post-Church, and that was the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. Once I got to the leadership role, my days as a case officer were over. What I enjoyed doing, what I loved doing, walking the back streets of some town overseas in the dead of night to meet an agent. Those days were gone for me. What I did was to get the briefing book and get ready to go up in Congress and answer their questions.

The oversight was intense. And that oversight was something that your grandfather helped build to the point where the members understood what we did. Everybody in Washington had constituents, the military has those in the Congress who support them with vigor, the police, veterans, etc. Intelligence, we took pride in the fact that we didn't talk to Congress, that we didn't have oversight. Well, that may have been fine at a certain point in our history, but it was not fine when I was the deputy. So I went up and told them what we did. We were not doing some of the hard things that the media portrayed us as doing, we were doing some remarkable things. We also learned and grew because of earlier oversight, Church, etc. So, your grandfather was a part of helping us get there. We instantly bonded. It was amazing.

When your grandfather launched a full blown military invasion of Kuwait, to throw the Iraqis out, he was known for wandering around the West Wing. He'd go down to the Situation Room, down to where the analysts were working, he'd come wandering over to where my office was in the OEOB. When he was out of office, and his son was president, and we were about to go again, this time into Iraq. I can't tell you how many times I would get a call from your grandfather, basically, knowing that we were providing support to the president and to the military, who were about to launch. But then asking me, "Jim, how do you think things are? Is it okay?" He would not intervene, he would not impose himself. He simply knew what intelligence could do and he wanted to see it done and hoped it was being done. And it was.

Sam: We touched on it earlier, but before Operation Desert Storm, my grandfather noted that the CIA was very good at measuring troop numbers and equipment, but not as accurate on measuring intent of the enemy. Can you explain what that means?

Jim: What human intelligence requires is getting somebody to commit espionage. So just think about that for a second. To get somebody to betray their country, betray the values of their country, always at great risk. Getting into the head of somebody was hard, hard work. We did recruit spies, we had remarkable intelligence on some things, and we had vacancies, emptiness on others. I can't tell you everything about this in detail, but I can tell you a little bit. I'm going to have to protect sources and methods. But at one point, the President, who was out of office, called me and said, "Jim, could you arrange for me to meet the person who provided such and such, which I found so remarkable?" And I said, "Yes, sir."

And a month or two later, we had to make some arrangements, this person had been resettled in the United States safely, having done extraordinary work for the United States government. And I flew to Houston, and your grandfather and

I met. And the security detail brought in the individual, and sat down in a hotel suite and talked for about two and a half, three hours. Your grandfather wanting to pick his brain, and vice versa. And the give and take was remarkable. Your grandfather understood that kind of a person, we call an asset, an agent. I was a case officer, I'm not an agent. The media still calls me an agent. I'm a case officer. The person we were talking to was an agent, in place, reporting, made a huge difference. They're hard to find.

The great ones, Kukliński, the Polish Colonel who I presided at his funeral, and did his eulogy, one of the great, great patriots of the world for what's good in the world. They're hard to find, and we find them. But it's easier to take a picture from a satellite that shows where the tanks are, than it is to get into the head of Vladimir Putin and know what he's going to do or not to. I'm not saying we're in the head of Vladimir Putin, but we have had some magnificent intelligence based on human activities. And we've had some failures.

Sam: After hearing the story about the meeting between my grandfather and the operative in the hotel room, you know, from personal experience, that my Gampy's year as Director of Central Intelligence deeply affected him. Part of what moved him was the fact that the undercover agents who do so many dangerous things to help protect America, often at tremendous personal risk, never get awards, or really, any recognition of any kind. To him, serving in the CIA was one of the highest forms of patriotism. Jim, in your experience, why do people do it? Why are they so willing to lay it all out there on the line?

Jim: That's a great question. The way I would answer it, and I suspect virtually all of my colleagues would answer it, past and present, is that the work we do is calling. We are patriots. We care immensely about this country. We understand that human intelligence is critical to enabling policy. Not making it, enabling it. Providing good intelligence is going to save lives and protect our national security. And that's what we were about. So, none of us really expected recognition and none of us wanted publicity. We're a silent service. We're a secret service. We don't want people to know about us and know what we do.

When I was in my last job at CIA, I was asked to do an interview. And no one in my job had ever publicly done an interview. And I said, "I can't do that because I would be betraying my troops." My troops would think he's lost his mind. So they begged me and they came at me again, I said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I think it's important to help the American people and help people who want to know something about CIA to understand what it is we do." I said, "So, I will do it if you white out my face, put that black ball or whatever it is you do." And so I did this. And it was a good interview. I got the message across that I wanted to get across. Within hours, I got a call from my kids

saying, "Dad, dad, we just saw you on television. You are now known as the talking Q-tip."

Sam: That's funny. That's funny. Well, Jim, my grandfather often referred to you as head spook, because of your experience in the clandestine services. Without betraying any secrets, of course, what kind of work is done on the human intelligence side of the company?

Jim: We should never employ or recruit somebody and put them in harm's way, in danger, unless there's no really other good alternative. So, finding people who we can recruit is the task of the clandestine operator. It means doing this for the most part, undercover. We don't publicize that there is a CIA presence in country X or country Y. And we go after people that way. I don't want to overstate it because it could be considered a bit scary, but we look for people who are vulnerable. What motivates somebody to commit espionage is varied. The historic honey trap or money in the bank account, etc. There's some of that, I guess. But by and large, people like Colonel Kukliński did it as a patriot. He was a patriot to the Polish people, and he did not accept what was happening with Soviet domination of his country and all of Eastern Europe. So he acted out of patriotism.

We, in that world, look for people who will help us. There are risks to it, there are far more risks to it today than there were in 1973, when I joined. Most of our people today operating in places like Iraq or Afghanistan, in true genuine harm's way. And yet they do it because they think it's important. And as I said, it's a calling. We don't think about the risk. There's been a lot of chatter about the intelligence world being risk averse, afraid to take a chance to risk. That's nonsense, utter total nonsense. I mean, these people, I trained them, my predecessors trained them, those who are now running things, I think, do the same thing, to get right up to the line, right up to the line. And in doing so, get the opportunities that were necessary to get the mission done.

I cannot tell you the kind of respect I have for those who did it and are doing it. If you walk into the hall, into the front door of CIA, on your right, you'll see the stars. And sadly, there are four more today than there were when I left in 2004. If you look to the left, is a statue of Donovan and the names of OSS personnel who perished during World War Two. It's a place of enormous importance. And those of us who had the honor to serve there, I think all feel the same. It was an honor. We didn't want any recognition, we just wanted to go do our jobs.

Sam: Well, we talked about this a couple of times already today. But intelligence work is done outside of the public purview, and yet, even in the

course of such dangerous, unnecessary work, there must be humorous events that you have encountered. Can you share any of those stories with us?

Jim: Most of the humorous stories, and there are many, still involve too much classified for me to talk about. But there are a couple. First of all, it was critically important for us that when we did this work, that we always maintained the ability to laugh at ourselves. And we used to talk about it. And there would be things that were so bizarre that, you know, we'd stop, laugh, and then get back to the hard work. I can tell you one training incident that I was involved in, being trained to be a case officer, to recruit spies to steal secrets. I was sitting at a bar, here in the United States, somewhere in the southern part of the United States. And sitting next to me, this all was a training exercise, was another fellow young officer, and I was supposed to be recruiting him. So there was a lot of roleplay involved.

I was in modest, light disguise. In this instance, it was a mustache. And at the bar, I think I ordered a scotch and soda, he ordered or whatever. And as I was trying to recruit him, this is all part of the training scenario, the alcohol in my drink was undoing the glue that held my moustache in place. And my moustache kind of hung down, and I finally had to take it off, and both of us were cracking up. And, you know, there are people in the bar, instructors who were watching this, so a lesson learned. But humor, that kind of thing happens.

Sam: Well over your 30 year career at the CIA, did you have a favorite posting?

Jim: I think all people who served as case offices would say their favorite was when they were abroad doing their thing. As one got elevated, it became less fun from the perspective of what we do as a basic work form. We recruit people to steal secrets, and there's nothing better when you walk away from a successful recruitment and say, "Damn, look at that. I did it." There was not a position I held that I didn't enjoy. I was, as you know, detailed from CIA, first to be a director at the NSC, and then to be a special assistant to your grandfather. Tremendously rewarding, because it gave me a sense of how intelligence was viewed and how it was used by consumers. How it was used to make a policy decision. To sit in a National Security Council meeting with your grandfather, as we were deciding how to move forward on an issue of important national security, that was an extraordinarily rewarding job.

In my last job, I had the responsibility for thousands and thousands of people, and billions of dollars worth of budget. It wasn't my job to then be on the street recruiting a spy. That's what my colleagues were doing. My job was to do everything I possibly could to protect my people, and to give us the resources that we needed to do our jobs. And that was hard lifting big rock up a steep

mountain often. And what your grandfather accomplished, the Berlin Wall comes down, communism falls, Eastern Europe becomes a different place. There was a perception in Washington that perhaps we did not need intelligence like we had. So we took a huge hit budget wise, we had to close places overseas, etc. My job, as we saw terrorism coming, as we saw other issues like counter narcotics growing in importance, I went up to everybody on the SSCI, everybody on the HPSCI, and I all but begged them to help fund us. And on the 12th of September 2001, they couldn't give me enough money.

Sam: It's amazing how fast that can change.

Jim: Indeed, indeed.

Sam: Well, Jim, I'd like to thank you so much for your time and end with this question. This is, of course, a podcast honoring the legacy of both George and Barbara Bush. Surely, you have had one or two brushes with my Ganny. Do you have any stories you could share about her?

Jim: I was at my desk at the Scowcroft Group one morning. And the Secretary called me and said, "Jim..." Jean Becker, I think it was Jean who was on the phone and Jean said, "The President and Mrs. Bush would like to invite you and your wife to join them for dinner tonight." And you don't say no to an invitation like that. So we went to dinner. And of course it was at Peking Gourmet, his favorite place. And Jamie Gangel and her husband, Daniel Silva, the captain, the Navy captain, who was doing the final work, putting together the aircraft carrier named after your grandfather, Boyden Gray, and Jean Becker. That was dinner. We were in a back room.

And as we walked in, and everybody shaking hands and saying hi, and getting ready to sit down, and the President, he ordered what we were going to have. Your grandmother looked at me and said, "Jim, there will be no politics tonight. No political discussion." And I said, "Yes, ma'am." After that dinner, we got up and the head of his security detail came in and said, "The President and Mrs. Bush will leave first." And so they went out into, and you know the restaurant, into the restaurant, and the entire restaurant broke into applause. And that has happened to me with him so many times. Went to the Houston Club with him right as he was beginning to have some serious issues with walking. And we walked in, and when we walked in, there was kind of a gasp, and then we walked out, the applause.

Sam: Well, Jim, thank you so much, first, for your service, but also your time and your stories. Thank you for joining us on "All the Best."

Jim: Thank you very much. My pleasure, my honor.

Sam: I'm Sam LeBlond, reminding you to listen, share, and subscribe to "All the Best" on Apple podcasts, Spotify and everywhere great podcasts are found. Thank you for joining me as we celebrate All the Best.

Barbara: Both George and I believe that while the White House is important, the country's future is in your house. Every house, all over America.

George: Preparedness, strength, decency, and honor. Courage, sacrifice, the willingness to fight, even die for one's country. America, the land of the free and the brave. And God bless the United States of America. The greatest country on the face of the Earth.