

Christopher Catherwood Trip to the USA Summer 2010: WCMT

Report

It is with great pleasure that I now describe my fascinating trip to the USA in the summer of 2010, entirely thanks to my wonderful *Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Travelling Fellowship*, without which my research in the USA would have been impossible.

I am especially thankful to Randolph Churchill for suggesting during the course of the interview that I visit the Evelyn Waugh Papers at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, first because that part of the trip proved to be particularly fruitful, and secondly because it was an act of considerable forgiveness on the part of the Churchill family in the light of Evelyn Waugh's feelings about some of his travel companions to Yugoslavia during the war!

My research in the USA is an invaluable part of the archival work for my commissioned book for Boydell and Brewer in the UK (and for the Boydell Press imprint in the USA of the University of Rochester Press) on the subject of SOE in Yugoslavia in World War II. One of Winston Churchill's most controversial decisions in that conflict was to decide, on the basis of a report by former diplomat, and at the time Conservative MP and soldier Fitzroy Maclean, to back the Communist Partisan guerrillas in Yugoslavia, as opposed to continuing support for the Royalist Cetnik movement under General Mihailovic.

The reasons Churchill took this decision were simple. As he explained to Maclean, the Partisans were killing more Germans, and the Cetniks, in order to avoid Nazi reprisals, were either collaborating with Axis forces or

keeping out of conflict as much as possible. What mattered was who would help defeat the Germans, and on the basis both of Maclean's report and that of the sigint intelligence through ULTRA, there was no doubt at all that the Partisans were doing the bulk of the fighting against Axis forces.

The Special Operations Executive (SOE), Churchill's creation to "set Europe ablaze", therefore backed the Partisans throughout the rest of the war, and one of the SOE groups sent to help them contained both Randolph Churchill, the Prime Minister's son, and the novelist Evelyn Waugh, sent, among other things, by Maclean to keep an eye on Randolph!

The Americans, however, took a different view. Many of the diplomats backed the royalist Cetniks. *But what my research in the very recently classified OSS Papers revealed is that the OSS – the wartime equivalent of SOE and also the precursor organization to today's CIA – had their own game in Yugoslavia, which in fact, had he but known it, also ties in with the wishes of Evelyn Waugh...* (So four cheers again for the current Randolph Churchill in sending me to Austin as well as my pre-planned trip to the OSS Archives in DC...)

And thanks to my contacts with the existing intelligence community in DC, and to the open sesame my WCMT Travelling Fellowship gave me in government circles in that city, I was able to find that the OSS candidate for post-war leadership of Yugoslavia – Subasic of the Croat Peasant Party – was also one of the Soviet NKVD's main assets as well, as revealed by the CIA and NSA's Venona decrypts during the Cold War.

So thanks to my research, I have what I hope will be a scoop, to be used either for my book for Boydell and Brewer, or, IF a trade publisher is interested, for a second book for a wider audience as well.

We therefore need the details of my trip:

Week 1: The Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin *The Evelyn Waugh Papers and Diaries*

Week 2: The Alderman Library Special Collections, University of Virginia Charlottesville *The Fitzroy Maclean Papers*

Weeks 3-6: The National Archive (Archives II: College Park, Maryland) *The OSS Papers (including the Private Office Papers of "Wild Bill" Donovan)*

Week 1: Austin TX

Many thanks indeed to the WCMT for providing the extra funds for the air fare from DC to Austin and back. Here my WCMT Fellowship was a wonderful opener, and I received excellent service throughout the trip from the world famous Harry Ransom Center – they probably have the archives of more British novelists there than anywhere in the UK! Their main Waugh specialist was away, but as word got out that I was there, I was able to meet Professor Robert Murray Davis, who is the leading scholarly Waugh expert in the USA, and a friend of the current Waugh family (including Alexander Waugh, with whom he put me in touch).

Waugh's papers and diaries of his time in Yugoslavia with SOE, as part of Randolph Churchill's mission, are fascinating, and, I hope, worth a book in itself. [*Commissioning Editors at major London and New York publishing houses who might read this: **please note...***] In particular he realized the

ethnic complexity of Yugoslavia and that the Croats could play a major role in any post-war reconstruction of the country. He was also very brave, and so one gets a very different picture of Waugh from this period of his life than one would normally guess from the rather epicene image one has thanks to the book he was finishing while there – *Brideshead Revisited*. So I hope that *Waugh's War*, my idea for a book, that I have now discussed with Alexander Waugh, *might* emerge from my very profitable week in Austin and from meeting Robert Murray Davis: networking and making new friends is surely as important a part of a Travelling Fellowship as is the original research and goals...

Week 2: Charlottesville VA

Here again my WCMT Fellowship was a wonderful door opener... The photograph of me shows my holding the key memorandum from the war sent by Fitzroy Maclean, Churchill's personal emissary to Tito, that argues that Britain should switch allegiance in Yugoslavia from the Cetninks to the Partisans – possibly Churchill's most controversial decision of the war. Also in the photograph is a young man also using the archives and who is clearly falling asleep!

Maclean's Papers were all I had hoped for and far more besides! Not only were there contemporary archives, from wartime, explaining his actions in Yugoslavia – these I had expected – *but because of the controversy in the fall of Yugoslavia in the 1990s Maclean kept up to date with Yugoslav issues right up until his death.*

This was therefore a goldmine, since he and his SOE friends all kept in touch with each other and many of them, like him, lived to see the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and were therefore involved in television documentaries, arguments in newspapers, and in a very vigorous correspondence with those who felt that Maclean and others had made the wrong recommendation to Churchill fifty years and more before.

This was therefore even more fascinating than I had expected and made the pre-planned trip to Charlottesville all the more worthwhile.

Weeks 3-6: Washington DC: The National Archive in Maryland

Here I was accidentally very lucky and was able to save money on my grant that I was able to use instead for photocopying. I was staying with friends of friends in DC – even a youth hostel would have blown my budget – and found that there was a *free* shuttle bus from Archives I (the original National Archive building) in downtown DC all the way to College Park in Maryland where Archives II (all the modern archives) is situated, including all the documents I was seeing.

So after the first few days, when I had used public transport, I was able to go completely free every day to the OSS Archives, and meet lots of fascinating people on the bus every trip: researchers from across the world use the National Archives, as one can imagine, and I was able to make lots of fascinating and useful academic contacts that will long outlast the trip simply by virtue of spending 45 minutes each way from Archives I to Archives II. This proved a considerable boon! Both the shuttle bus and the cafeteria at

Archives II proved to be ideal places for networking and meeting fellow historians in overlapping fields.

The main OSS expert at the National Archive was away my first few days. But when she arrived, she turned out to be the perfect person to meet, since only she understood the labyrinth that is the declassified OSS Archive. The reason is that the OSS Archive is in order of declassification, and not really in subject order at all: while they might have OSS Station lists, for example, nothing is in order of importance, so finding anything at all is like looking for the famous needle in a haystack.

Thankfully for me the OSS specialist had delved into the Archive as it came out, piecemeal, and so was able to put me onto some of the key nuggets straight away. I needed all the month that I was in DC to find them – it was not an easy task even when she was there a day or so a week – but at least I knew what I was seeking.

*And thanks to her I found the gold mine – the **Shepherd File**...*

This proved totally unexpected – and as with *Waugh's War* I hope that there might be a separate book on this for a wider audience, not to mention a splendid chapter in my commissioned book for Boydell and Brewer. Subasic, a leading light in the Croat Peasant Party, was in exile in the USA. The OSS, like the British, understood that whoever led Yugoslavia post-war had to be *Yugoslav*, rather than, for example, the Cetnik Royalists, who were overwhelmingly Serb. A Croat who had genuine national credentials was therefore ideal. As it happened, the British were adopting that view, since Tito, the leader of the Partisan resistance movement, was also of Croat ancestry and unquestionably Yugoslav in his loyalties – the big (and thus controversial)

difference being that Tito was also a Communist, and therefore suspicious to many people.

(This is why the Maclean Papers in Charlottesville are so interesting – both Maclean and Churchill felt that the key thing to do was to win the war and let the country sort itself out afterwards. Short-term they were exactly right, since in a military sense the Partisans delivered the goods. And since Maclean kept his involvement in all these historical controversies, historians using his material have a fascinating insight into how the decision makers of the 1940s took the views that they did *at the time*).

To the OSS the advantage of Subasic is that he was a Croat whom the Serbs trusted, and that he was also a Croat who might persuade many in the quisling regime in Zagreb to come over to the Allies. All this is in the *Shepherd File*, with just a few (frustratingly!) unclassified documents not included – we go from recruitment, to Donovan's correspondence with Roosevelt, to Subasic's trips to the UK and then on to wartime Yugoslavia itself.

(And so unknown to Waugh, who also realized the vital importance of the Croats, the SOE, the OSS and Waugh himself were all backing one Croat or another to lead the country after the war...)

Only one obscure article, let alone a book, has been published on any of this, so as to use another of Waugh's titles, I have, in what I discovered in the OSS files in Washington DC, a *scoop*. In this I was exceptionally fortunate, and it will therefore make a very considerable difference to my book, to possible articles in suitable learned journals, and maybe to potential trade books for wider audiences, should the literary marketplace in 2011 prove amenable...

And all this will be thanks to my Travelling Fellowship...

I was also able to meet people in different but not unconnected fields – for example, one day I read a fascinating article in the American opinion-forming magazine *The National Interest* by the leading Israeli historian Benny Morris, whose revisionist works on Israel-Palestine in 1948 have received global attention – and then just a few days later I was sharing a desk at the National Archive with.... *Benny Morris*. On return from DC I had to finish my *A Brief History of the Middle East* (new edition) for Constable and Robinson, so the lunchtime conversations Professor Morris and I were able to have in the National Archive Canteen were professionally more than invaluable. A coincidence that we were both there, of course, but without my Travelling Fellowship it would never have happened at all.

Thanks to my links with a special seminar in Cambridge I was able to have links with the successor organization to the OSS still active globally, and through that and through the considerable social/intellectual cachet of my Travelling Fellowship, I had the kudos to be able to meet current practitioners. Nowadays it is a memory stick one is given at discreet locations rather than papers in a brown envelope, but I was through this means able to get fascinating and even more recently declassified OSS material, including the memorandum sent from British Naval Intelligence by a certain Royal Naval Lieutenant Commander Ian Fleming to “Wild Bill Donovan”, Roosevelt’s choice as founder and consequent Director of the OSS, on how to set up a secret wartime intelligence organization! And what is better still – the memorandum is dated *June* 1941, when the USA was still neutral – as we all

know, the US did not enter the war until Pearl Harbor, in *December* of that year. So a fascinating and unexpected gem of wartime intelligence history!

I was inundated with teaching upon my return to Cambridge, so I have yet to delve in the SOE, War Office and Foreign Office archives at the (British) National Archive in Kew. But without my funding to get to the USA at a critical time I would never have been able to see the American archives at all – getting someone else to look at things for you is certainly never as good as actually looking at them yourself, especially since so much archival research success relies upon being the right person at the right place at the right time, all of which I was thanks to my Travelling Fellowship.

So although the book has not yet been written the research and the time there in the USA and the contacts made have all been transformative. My gratitude to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust could not possibly be more profound.

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Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Travelling Fellow in the USA 2010

Churchill Archives Centre Archives By-Fellow Lent Term 2008