



The Crimes of Patriots

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In THE CRIMES OF PATRIOTS, well-respected WALL STREET JOURNAL reporter Jonathan Kwitny attempts to piece together the rise and fall of the Australian-based international Nugan Hand Bank. In the course of investigating the collapse of a multibillion dollar operation (precipitated by the suicide of half-owner Frank Nugan in 1980), Kwitny and Australian authorities discovered disturbing links between Nugan Hand, drug smugglers, arms dealers, and the CIA.

Kwitny meticulously separates documented fact from speculation, resisting the temptation to oversensationalize an already lurid tale. Nevertheless, the evidence is damning. It is difficult to believe that Nugan Hand's connections with the CIA were coincidental: Half-owner Michael Hand was (and is?) employed by the CIA; retired CIA director William Colby worked as a lawyer for Nugan Hand; and Theodore Shackley, best known for his work with the CIA during the Vietnam War, had several dealings with top Nugan Hand officials, including Hand himself.

Kwitny does not prove that Nugan Hand was directly run by the CIA (his research in the United States has been hindered by lack of federal government cooperation), but, as he points out, the connection may never have been official. In order to maintain secrecy (and possibly to evade congressional restrictions), the CIA often attempts to carry out its aims by indirectly supporting independent operators with similar interests. For example, the CIA would use its influence to bring Nugan Hand business, and Nugan Hand would perform extralegal services, such as laundering money.

In the light of the recent Iran-Contra scandal, some of Kwitny's most interesting material is on CIA-supported drug smuggling and the American government's reliance on organized crime bosses to execute foreign policy. Unfortunately, the questions presented by Kwitny were never answered, at least publicly, during the congressional hearings.

Although one wishes that the information had been better organized so as to avoid excessive repetition, overall Kwitny's work is well written, absorbing, and clearly presented.

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