

If Forrestal's choice of departing poetry conjures up no immediate flying saucer imagery, neither does it necessarily evoke his supposedly guilt-laden Catholic background. Why not, after all, simply quote one of the saints, with whom he must have been at least semi-familiar, or, for that matter, Christ Himself, as in "*My Father, why hast Thou forsaken me?*"

"A SUDDEN FIT OF DESPONDENCE"

In fact, Forrestal finished but the night of nightingale, before he was seized by what Raines would later refer to as a "sudden fit of despondence." Here Hoopes and Brinkley remind the reader that Forrestal had been instrumental in supporting *Operation Nightingale*, "an anti-Communist guerilla army made up of Ukrainian refugees, recruited and trained by the CIA to carry on a secret war against the Soviet Union from behind the Iron Curtain. Many of the recruits were Nazi collaborators who had carried out mass executions of their fellow countrymen, including thousands of Jews, behind the German lines during the war." (p. 465). Was this what Forrestal meant by having betrayed his country? Perhaps. But again, the episode — of which there must have been several in the course of Forrestal's multi-varied career — fails to match up in any symbolic or other sense with Forrestal's final choice of words. Clifford described the handwritten copy Forrestal was working on as a suicide note, whereas Hoopes and Brinkley leave no such impression at all. Certainly it appears to have been addressed to no individual in particular.

THE END

What happened next is subject to dispute, as is much else about Forrestal's suicide. Some accounts say that the inexperienced corpsman "went on a brief errand;" Nenko, however, said that Raines told him that Forrestal "pulled rank" on the obedient servant, sending him off on some inconsequential mission designed to remove him from the immediate premises. In his absence Forrestal

crossed the corridor into the unsecured pantry. He tied one end of his dressing-gown sash around his neck, the other to a radiator, removed the screen and climbed out the window. Whether the sash held for a moment or broke straight away is not known; at any rate, Forrestal plummeted 13 storeys to his death, landing atop the roof of a third-floor passageway.

This scenario, too, is somewhat curious. Forrestal had earlier confessed to his psychiatrist that he could never jump out a window, although he admitted that he might be able to hang himself. Why, assuming he might have been afraid of heights, then, did he not simply hang himself in his room, or at least try to? And why hang oneself out of an open window, sixteen floors above ground; why not simply jump and be done with it?

SOME QUESTIONS

Psychoanalyzing a suicide after the fact is admittedly risky business at best; still, there is much to Forrestal's fateful fall that doesn't quite add up. Why, for example, did Raines take a week's leave of absence during what he himself admitted was a particularly crucial period in the potential recovery — or suicide — of one of his most prominent patients? Why wasn't Forrestal permitted to see a priest, while Sydney Souers was allowed to sweep his room for suspected bugging devices? Why was the former Secretary of Defence confined to a tower suite instead of one of the existing ground-level psychiatric facilities? How did it happen — coincidentally during Raines' extended absence — that one of his regular watchers would get drunk and go AWOL, and then be replaced by a complete novice, unaware of the gravity of the situation?

THREE INTERPRETATIONS

There are at least three ways to read Forrestal's fall. The first is simply as a tragic sequence of unavoidable and unforeseeable events, in which

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A recent gathering of most of the FSR 'team', with families and friends.

Left to right: Joan Wilder, Leonard Wilder, Judy Stickney, Howard Raimbach, Gordon Creighton, Dr. Bernard Finch, Joan Creighton, George Wingfield, Wendy Kaye, Philip Creighton, Michelle Raimbach, Paul Whitehead.

Photo by Bobbie Finch