



V. PROFESSIONAL READING

REVIEWS BY
PETER C. OLESON

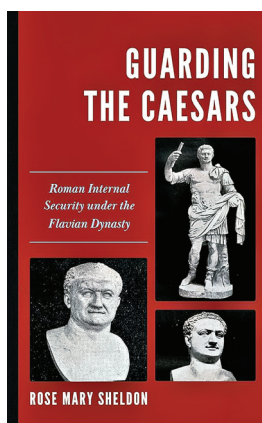


Guarding the Caesars: Roman Internal Security under the Flavian Dynasty

Rose Mary Sheldon

Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2023. 413 pp, Notes, Bibliography, Index

The Flavian dynasty of Roman emperors began with the assassination of Nero in AD sixty-eight. The subsequent 27-year history of the dynasty is one of constant power struggles, conspiracies, and executions or forced suicides of imperial opponents or suspected conspirators. All but one of the Flavian emperors died by assassination. Much of the author's book is an inquiry of "who done it."



There was no formal method of succession in the Roman Empire. Emperors were autocrats and death was the only way a successor, often termed a "pretender," could rise to the *Principate*, i.e., the rule of one person. This meant that there was a systemic instability in the empire. Sheldon notes that 75% of Roman emperors throughout history ended up dead by other than natural causes. She writes

Roman emperors all had a dangerous job and were in peril for their lives much of the time... Threats never went away, and a wise emperor paid close attention to his security detail if he wished to die of natural causes in office. [xiii]

Sheldon examines in detail the personalities of the Flavian emperors; the persons they employed in important positions, such as governors of provinces from Britain to Germany, to the Danubian territories,

to Syria and Palestine, to North Africa; generals of various legions throughout the empire; and the commanders of the Praetorian Guard; and others. Most came from aristocratic families and were members of the extensive Roman senate, who competed with one another for position and prestige. She dissects many of the rumors of the time that have been passed down over history, often questioning their veracity, noting that Roman histories were written by those associated with a usurper who had just assassinated his predecessor.

"Pretenders" (usurpers) always emerged from the aristocracy, and generally from the Senate. From the period of when Octavian defeated Marc Anthony (31 BC) and ruled under the name of Augustus (27 BC – AD 14) Roman politics was a constant competition between the Senate and the emperor, as senators, who were once powerful, tried to maintain their positions and privileges in an increasingly autocratic environment. Emperors faced difficult challenges in choosing an heir. It was critical for emperors to maintain the support of the Praetorian Guard, a force of up to 9,000 guarding the city of Rome and the emperor; the Army, which was spread throughout the empire; and as much of the Senate as possible. This was done by placing supporters (often fellow conspirators) in important positions and granting donatives (a financial gift) to the men of the Praetorian Guard and the Army.

Emperors also used *delatores* (spies) to uncover conspiracies against them. There was no Roman intelligence service, although the Praetorian Guard had security responsibilities. Sheldon writes

From a modern perspective... the Roman security apparatus was always thin, spotty, badly coordinated, and its leaders could, from time to time, be suborned. [251]

More than once the Praetorian Guard was subverted by plotters and involved in a change in emperor. One senator demanded of Domitian "access to the imperial archives, so that all informers might be unmasked"... he proposed "to place the imperial archives at the Senate's disposal so they could publish a list of the Neroian *delatores*." As many of the *delatores* were senators Domitian refused. "Informers never go out of style." [74] No one was safe if suspected of disloyalty to the emperor, even family members. "[C]onfidants at the slightest hint of disloyalty" were eliminated and their properties confiscated. [81, 149]

The author examines the qualities, successes and failures of each of the emperors of the Flavian dynasty

SHORT HISTORY OF ROMAN EMPERORS

Augustus (27 BC–AD 14). First Roman Emperor (replacing the earlier Roman Republic). Adopted son of Julius Caesar. Died of natural causes at age 75.

JULIO-CLAUDAN DYNASTY (AD 14–68)

Tiberius (AD 14–37). Adopted son of Augustus. May have been assassinated at the instigation of Caligula.

Caligula (AD 37–41). Adopted heir of Tiberius. Assassinated.

Claudius (AD 41–54). Uncle of Caligula. named emperor by Praetorian Guard. Possibly poisoned by his wife.

Nero (AD 54–68). Adopted son of Claudius; son of Claudius' fourth wife. Committed suicide when sentenced to death by the Senate.

THE YEAR OF FOUR EMPERORS

Galba (AD 68–69). Revolted against Nero resulting in civil war. Six months later assassinated by the Praetorian Guard in a coup led by Otho.

Otho (Jan–Apr AD 69). Committed suicide after losing a battle against Vitellus.

Aulus Vitellius (Jul–Dec AD 69). Governor of *Germania Inferior* proclaimed Emperor by the German legions. Assassinated by Vespasian's troops.

FLAVIAN DYNASTY (AD 69–96)

Vespasian (AD 69–79). First of the Flavian Dynasty. Proclaimed Emperor by the eastern legions. Died of dysentery.

Titus (AD 79–81). Vespasian's son. Died of natural causes at 41.

YEAR OF TROUBLES

**POMPEI DESTROYED BY MOUNT VESUVIUS (AD 79);
FIRE IN ROME (AD 80); PLAGUE**

Domitian (AD 81–96). Titus's younger brother and his enforcer. Assassinated by court officials. Last of the Flavian Dynasty.

NERVA-ANTONINE DYNASTY (AD 96–192)

Nerva (AD 96–98). First of the Nerva-Antonine Dynasty (AD 96–192). First of six subsequent Emperors to die of natural causes.

– their interminable wars and whether they had military success; their administrative capabilities; their laws; how they handled the Roman economy, taxation and finances; the monuments they built to themselves or their predecessors; their art and coinage; and their differing characters. Some began their reigns well, some established cults to their imperial reigns. Domitian deteriorated into a vicious tyrant. All were attendant to the masses and the need to keep them amused with games and out of politics.

Like Sheldon's other books, *Guarding the Caesars* is exceptionally well documented with original Roman sources that have survived and other scholarly works in many languages, as indicated by the book's 30-page bibliography. *Guarding the Caesars* is the follow-on to her earlier book *Kill Caesar!* The author is very sensitive to the holes in recorded Roman history. Many of the contemporary Roman writings have been lost over time, leaving historians to speculate about matters of state. Rose Mary Sheldon brings an intelligence analyst's skepticism to many others' hypotheses and conclusions, often examining events from various perspectives.

One of the most interesting aspects of her work is her examination of various conspiracies against all of the Flavian emperors – their causes, origins, participants, plans, and outcomes.

Guarding the Caesars is a challenge to read for anyone not knowledgeable of Roman history. The author, a scholar's scholar, who has written several books about Roman history, uses many Latin terms and place names of the period, which requires ready access to a dictionary. The Kindle version of the book may be easier to read with its instant "look up" capabilities. Nonetheless, it is an intriguing historical opus.

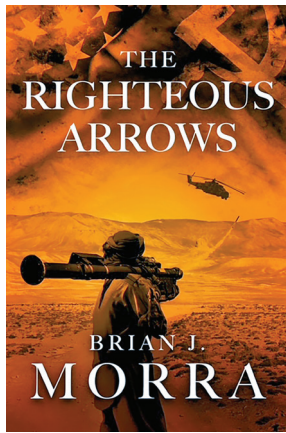


The Righteous Arrows

Brian J. Morra

Virginia Beach, VA: Koehlerbooks, 2024. Fiction, 310 pp, list and biographies of characters, a non-fictional chronology of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, glossary.

In my review of Brian Morra's first novel, *The Able Archers*, I wrote that the book was well worth reading. (*The Intelligencer*, Vol. 27, No.2 [Summer/Fall 2022]) His second novel, *The Righteous Arrows*, is also well worth reading. Morra again has taken real world events and crafted a riveting tale that takes the reader into often little-known events that were central to US-Soviet relations that in the 1980s and is instructive



of what often transpires behind the scenes

The Righteous Arrows picks up where *The Able Archer* leaves off in the spring of 1984. The central characters are the same – Captain Kevin Cattani, a US Air Force intelligence officers and Ivan Levchenko, Soviet Air Defense and GRU intelligence officer. The action

starts in East Germany in the wake of the NATO Able Archer 83 nuclear exercise (Fall of 1983) with a Military Liaison Mission (MLM) that goes wrong. It later shifts to Afghanistan in 1986 when the CIA is providing weapons to the Afghan Mujahideen (holy warriors) fighting the Soviet 40th Army that invaded the country in 1979. No spoiler alert in this review, but the story gets tense.

One of the enhancing aspects of Morra's two novels that is that he portrays in depth the personalities of his characters. A reader comes to know the personal histories of both main participants, their professional challenges, problems and interpersonal relationships with girlfriends and wives. This gives the stories a human-interest aspect as well as insight into geopolitical affairs. Some relationships are warm and endearing; others not so. This approach adds a real-life element that is both understandable to a lay reader and sympathetic.

When asked in a video interview by AFIO's president, Jim Hughes, why he chose to write a novel rather than an academic history, Morra said he wanted to reach a broader audience, one more likely to engage with a novel than a non-fiction book. He also revealed that he plans future books based on the two central characters and more recent history. (AFIO Now videos at <https://youtu.be/xq36NTg23H0> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbksULSVGX8>.)

Again, Morra's tale is enlightening, well written and grips the reader in suspense. As with his first novel, *The Righteous Arrows* is well worth reading and hard to put down once one starts it.



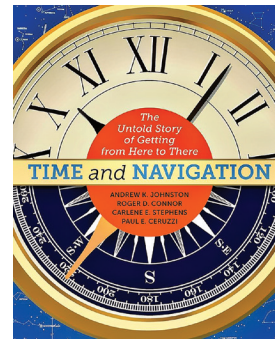
Time and Navigation: The Untold Story of Getting from Here to There

Andrew K. Johnson, Roger D. Connor, Carlene E. Stephens, and Paul E. Ceruzzi

The Smithsonian Institution, 2015. 224 pp, Further Readings, Index

Today's geospatial intelligence (GEOINT) combines location and time, as well as many other data. For change detection knowing time is a fundamental requirement. For getting from one place to another knowing time throughout history has been important. Time is essential for accurate navigation.

The Smithsonian's coffee table book is a fascinating history of the challenges, struggles, and



sometimes tragedies associated with timing and navigation. Since explorers took to the seas it was fairly easy to determine latitude. Knowing longitude, however, was extremely difficult. *Time and Navigation* recounts the history of learning to navigate the seas and the instruments

that were developed to help ship captains. Sextants allowed fair weather determination of position; otherwise captains were restricted to dead reckoning, sometimes with catastrophic results, as in 1707 when the British Fleet transiting from Gibraltar to England ran aground on the Isles of Scilly. Four ships sank with a thousand men.

The development of the sea clock solved the longitude problem. The challenge became making clocks that were increasingly accurate. The authors tell of the many innovators in Europe and America who contributed advances to the instruments and what those advances enabled.

Airplanes posed problems that were never encountered at sea. Their speed made using sextants impractical. Early aviation explorers faced challenges in long-range flights. Some were lucky, like Charles Lindbergh; others simply disappeared, such as Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan, her navigator. But as instrumentation and techniques improved, others, such as Wiley Post and his navigator, Harold Gatty, accomplished remarkable feats. In 1931 Post and Gatty circled the world.

It was World War II that brought new technologies, such as radar, radio and directional beams, to fruition. LORAN (Long Range Aid to Navigation) supported accurate navigation for both aircraft and

ships through a technique of time distance of arrival (TDOA) (which remained an important system until supplanted by the Global Positioning System (GPS) in 2010). In the post-war period continued improvements were made in electronic navigation systems, all of which required very accurate timing. Atomic clocks became essential for extremely precise location determination. High supersonic aircraft like the SR-71 posed special problems that were solved by development of an “autonomous astroinertial system.”

“[S]pace navigators had to invent a new science of space navigation using not just star sighting but also precise timing and radio navigation.” The authors explain the three-dimensional challenges and early innovations, including those used on the Apollo 13 mission to the moon. Early programs like Pioneer contributed to knowledge of how to navigate in space. Other early space efforts demonstrated the criticality of accurate computer programming. Mariner 1, which was the first attempt to send a spacecraft to Venus, failed due to a single character omitted from the guidance equations. Mariner 10 visited Venus and Mercury in 1974 employing a navigational trick of using a planet’s gravity to redirect a spacecraft to its future intended destination. A worldwide radio network was developed by NASA for space navigation.

The volume tells the navigational stories of other space missions, such as the mission to land the Curiosity rover on the moon and the NEAR-Shoemaker mission to the asteroid Eros. It also tells of the development of inertial navigation systems for use by submarines, such as when the USS *Nautilus* (SSN 571) in 1958 traversed the Arctic Ocean via the North Pole under ice.

Innovative thinking based on how we could determine the position of spacecraft from Earth led to the development of using satellites to determine positions on Earth. The authors detail the development of Transit, used by the Navy to determine accurate location of ballistic missile submarines, which was critical to their targeting of their missiles, if necessary. Transit’s signals fed a Ship’s Inertial Navigations System (SINS), allowing precise positioning and navigation. By 1983 the NAVSTAR system became an important satellite for aircraft navigation.

The birth and growth of the Global Positioning System (GPS) was difficult and uncertain. Many organizations with positioning/navigation needs were pursuing their individual programs. This not only included the military service, but also many civilian agencies. Eventually a Joint Program Office under the Air Force, supported by the Aerospace Cor-

poration, became the developer of GPS. Originally envisioned only for the military, others wanted GPS positioning too. Over time the distinction between a high accuracy mode and a general-purpose mode was dropped, and GPS allowed “navigation for everyone” including farmers, mapmakers, ship’s navigators, merchants, logistics planners, and you and me using our cellphones.

Satellite navigation includes many international systems: GPS (US), GLONASS (Russia), Galileo (European Union), Beidou (China), IRNSS (India), and QZSS (Japan). There are limitations to satellite navigation. It rarely works indoors. It is susceptible to radio interference on its frequencies from both unintentional man-made and natural sources, including solar eruptions, and intentional actions, such as by warring parties.

Time and Navigation tells of the efforts to develop the perfect clock. One issue for an atomic clock was what material to use for its timing. Quartz frequencies could vary. The adoption of Cesium 133, which vibrated at nine billion times per second, meant that it was off by one second over tens of millions of years. Coordinating clocks around the world also posed a challenge. The US Naval Observatory, the US’s authority on time, developed a portable atomic clock that was flown around the world in Pan Am and TWA seats to help coordinate time in the US, Europe and Japan.

Time and Navigation is an easy book to read. The authors explain many scientific aspects in simple, understandable terms. The book is heavily illustrated with many charts and graphics that help detail how instruments work. While *Time and Navigation* was published in 2015 it remains an extremely educational and fun book to read.

Peter C. Oleson is senior editor of *Intelligencer* and Editor of *The Guide to the Study of Intelligence*. He is a former associate professor of intelligence studies, University of Maryland University College. He has taught about intelligence extensively on the faculties of CIA University and the National Defense Intelligence College. Prior to his time teaching, he was assistant director of DIA, involved in policy, resource, and acquisition matters. He served as senior intelligence policy advisor to Under SecDef for Policy. Was one of eight charter members of Defense Intelligence Senior Executive Service. After leaving government he worked in industry developing defense and intelligence systems.

— Quick List —

Other Items Worth Exploring

Peter Oleson

There are two shorter items well worth reading – one is the history of CIA’s airline in Asia, Air America, and the other is the first three sections of an interactive history of American counterintelligence by the National Counterintelligence and Security Center (NCSC). Both are online.

Air America: The History of the CIA’s Covert Airline

Alec Smith

Grey Dynamics. <https://greydynamics.com/air-america-the-history-of-cias-covert-airline/>

Air America was often cited in the press during the Vietnam period as CIA’s secret airline. It was. But as author Alec Smith states in his article about the airline the “history of the organization is murky” and there is a “sparse amount of publicly available information.” Nonetheless, using what sources that are available he has constructed an interesting history of Air America.

Its origins were in World War II in China when General Claire Chenault, the head of the American Volunteer Group, known as the Flying Tigers, needed an airline, not just fighter planes. Civil Air Transport supported the Flying Tigers, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA), and during the Chinese civil war, the Nationalist Chinese under Chiang Kai-shek. The Communist victory in 1949 bankrupted Civil Air Transport, which fled to Formosa along with the remnants of Chiang’s Kuomintang. Needing an air capability in Asia, the CIA purchased the company and its half-dozen C-47 aircraft (the military version of the twin engine DC-3).

During the Korean War Civil Air Transport ferried supplies to UN forces from Taiwan. It also flew missions in support of the French who were trying to reestablish their position in Indochina. It flew arms and rebels into Tibet when the Chinese invaded. In 1959 the



organization, which had grown significantly and now flew many different types of aircraft and helicopters, changed its name to Air America. Its subsidiary Air Asia provided maintenance to its owner and others.

In 1961 Air America was involved in the training of Cuban rebels and the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion. In Vietnam and Laos Air America began as a logistics airline, but expanded into training Royal Lao Air Force pilots fighting against the North Vietnamese-supported Pathet Lao communists. Air America pilots flew Lao T-28 fighters until they were replaced by trained Lao and Thai pilots. Air America flew logistics missions for the US Agency for International Development and the CIA, which was conducting a large-scale covert action in support of the non-communist elements of the Lao government and the Hmong hill tribes fighting the incursion of the North Vietnamese.

Smith delves into the controversial topic of heroin politics in Laos and the allegations that Hmong leader, General Vang Pao, consolidated at his headquarters at Long Tieng, the transshipment of opium to smugglers throughout Southeast Asia, often using Air America aircraft. He posits that CIA turned a blind eye to the opium smuggling.

The author relies heavily on the academic papers of Dr. Joe Leeker of the University of Texas at Dallas and the Civil Air Transport Association histories. He also cites Alfred McCoy’s book, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, published by Harper Colophon Books in 1972. The online article provides easy links to much supporting material.

Air America is an interesting overview of the covert airline and its roles in many historical events. CIA sold the company in 1974 to Continental Air Services Incorporated.





“The Evolution of Espionage in America”

Wall of Spies Experience, National Counterintelligence and Security Center (NCSC). <https://www.intel.gov/evolution-of-espionage>.

“From the American Revolution to the cyber revolution, spies among us have caused lasting damage to the national security of the United States. This digital exhibit provides an account of America’s history with espionage and sabotage, from notorious traitors such as Benedict Arnold and Aldrich Ames, to lesser-known figures who aided our enemies at the most perilous of times.” – from the Introduction.

The NCSC has undertaken an interesting project about spies in America that allows the reader to explore the stories of many who were involved in espionage. The Wall of Spies is a museum exhibit at the Intelligence Community’s Bethesda Maryland campus, which is not accessible to uncleared people. “The Evolution of Espionage in America,” which is openly available online, is “helping to capture our history,” according to Patricia Larsen, the NCSC’s executive director. Michael David Thomas, the DNI’s deputy transparency officer opined “Our goal is to knock people’s socks off.” The project is off to a good start in this regard.

Only three periods of American history are yet online – the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and World War I. Later periods are under development, and this reviewer eagerly anticipates their completion and posting on the www.intel.gov website.

The Revolutionary War section has a brief introduction, and then by hitting the “explore >>” button the reader can learn about individual “Patriots, Loyalists, Traitors, and Spies.” Of particular interest are the sections on Thomas Hickey, who plotted to assassinate George Washington; John André, the British spymaster involved with Benedict Arnold, who was hanged after being captured with incriminating evidence; and on John Jay, one of the framers of the Constitution, now known as the father of American counterintelligence.

In the Civil War “espionage thrived, with many living on one side of the Mason-Dixon Line harboring sympathies for those on the other...” “Spies on both sides had a profound and lasting effect...” The Civil War section details many of the Union and Confederate spies, some of whom had significant impact on battles. This section traces how Union intelligence transformed from private investigators, such as the Pinkerton organization, to a more formal military organization – the Bureau of Military Information. The story of Kate Warne is not well known. She discovered the plot to assassinate Lincoln when he was traveling to his inauguration in 1861. Rose Greenhow, one of the most famous Confederate spies in Washington, DC, provided intelligence that was useful to General P. T. G. Beauregard in the first Battle of Bull Run (First Manassas) in defeating the Union army on 21 July 1861. The section also tells the tale of General Lee’s “Lost Order” before the Battle of Antietam in September 1862.¹ Women played a significant role

1. See Jack Dempsey’s article, “The Lost Order,” in *The Intelligencer*,

in intelligence, including Mary Jane Richards, who was a servant in Jefferson Davis's home in Richmond, and Harriett Tubman, famous for her role with the Underground Railroad, who also recruited scouts for the Union in South Carolina. Few spies were executed during the war. One, who was captured, survived to become the president of a university – the antecedent to today's Virginia Tech.

The section on World War I recounts Germany's undeclared war on the U.S. "German intelligence operatives... [were] determined to stem the flow [of armaments] to Britain, France, and Russia." The "explore >>" buttons tell of the sabotage of merchant ships, arms factories, and storage sites (particularly Tom Island in New York harbor). It also tells of the first biological warfare incident when a German agent used anthrax to kill horses being shipped to the allies. The Zimmerman Telegram, in which Germany promised Mexico the return of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona if it would join in war against America, is a fascinating tale involving British cryptanalysis that was provided the White House, which leaked it, hardening American attitudes against Germany. Last, the section tells of the evolution leading up to the Espionage Act of 1917.

Forthcoming are sections on World War II and later periods. This reviewer can't wait for them. "The Evolution of Espionage in America," which contains interesting graphics supplementing the stories, is well worth reading in its entirety.

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