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Wild Bill Donovan and His Company

THE LAST HERO: Wild Bill Donovan.

By Anthony Cave Brown. Times Books. 364 pp. \$24.95

DONOVAN: America's Master Spy.

By Richard Dunlop. Rand McNally. 562 pp. \$19.95

DONOVAN AND THE CIA: A History of the Establishment of the Central Intelligence Agency. By Thomas F. Troy. Aletheia Books/University Publications of America. 589 pp. \$29.50

By DAVID KAHN

NEW YEAR'S DAY is the 100th anniversary of the birth of America's first spymaster, William J. Donovan. He founded and led the Office of Strategic Services, the World War II intelligence organization from which is descended the Central Intelligence Agency, in whose entrance hall his portrait hangs. (January 1 is also, curiously enough, the birth anniversary of the 20th century's two other most famous spymasters: Admiral Wilhelm Canaris of Nazi Germany's Abwehr, born in 1887, and J. Edgar Hoover, who maintained a host of informers for his FBI, born in 1895.)

Perhaps to commemorate Donovan's birth, two new biographies of him are being published within a few months of one another. (Thomas F. Troy's book is not a biography but an indispensable organizational study.) Both biographies tower over Corey Ford's inadequate sketch of 1970, but Anthony Cave Brown's *The Last Hero* is markedly superior to Richard Dunlop's *Donovan*.

In part this is because Cave Brown is a more fluent, more colorful, and better organized writer; Dunlop's OSS section is a confused jumble of anecdote and quotation. In part it is because Cave Brown is more objective; Dunlop, a former OSS member, writes what often seems like a panegyric, with Donovan not merely at the focus of the story but apparently running the war. And in part it is because, while Dunlop has assiduously interviewed ex-OSSers and pored through documents at dozens of libraries and archives, Cave Brown was given, by a Donovan associate, the microfilm made by Donovan himself of his director's files.

The richness and volume of this documentation have more turned the World War II portion of the book into a narrative of OSS operations than kept it a biography of Wild

Bill Donovan. But this is not unwelcome. For not only is Cave Brown's account highly readable, not only does it replace such previous histories of the OSS as R. Harris Smith's, but it provides the best survey of America's first spy agency in action likely to be available for some time—and one enjoying the great advantage of the perspective of the director.

That man was not, despite the titles of these two books, either a spy or America's last hero. Rather, he was a brave soldier and failed politician who, even if he had never headed OSS, would probably have had a biography written about him—though by a Ph.D. candidate.

Born and raised in Buffalo, he went to Columbia Law, married an heiress, and began a successful legal career. During World War I, he rose to command the Fighting 69th Regiment and won the Congressional Medal of Honor. By the end of the war, he had become the nation's most decorated soldier, and as Cave Brown observes, "with General Pershing and Sergeant York, one of the three American war heroes."

His fame attracted wealthy clients. It contributed to his service in the Justice Department and to his being chosen as the Republican candidate for New York governor in 1932 (he lost to Herbert Lehman). But it was not enough to get him named attorney general or secretary of war in Herbert Hoover's cabinet. High political office was never again offered him. His destiny lay elsewhere.

In 1919, he had taken the first of many fact-finding trips for presidents and clients. He penetrated by rail halfway into Soviet Russia from the east at the time of the American intervention in Siberia, and Dunlop may be correct when he suggests that "the taproot [of the CIA] reached back to this train and this man." The next year he spent eight months in Europe for J.P. Morgan Jr., meeting key politicians and social leaders. This and subsequent trips gave him exceptionally wide acquaintanceship aboard, and was one of the reasons that President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent him in 1940 and 1941 to gather information in a Europe at war.

Donovan had wanted to command a division in the struggle in which he feared America would soon be enmeshed. But his success on these trips, together with his energy, his integrity, his insatiable curiosity, his intelligence, and the appearance of nonpartisanship afforded by his membership in the opposition party led Roosevelt to choose a highly visible personality to head a secret service. On July 11, 1941, Roosevelt appointed Donovan the first Coordinator of Information, "with authority to collect and analyze all information and data, which may bear upon national security . . . and to make such information and data available to the President . . ." The organization that