

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

13 March 1981

Prof. Donald Coers
Department of English
Sam Houston State University
Huntsville, TX 77341

Dear Prof. Coers,

Your recent letter to Mr. William Casey, Director of Central Intelligence, has been referred to the CIA Historical Staff for response.

A CIA official conversant with the Donovan papers indicates that he has no memory of references to a meeting with John Steinbeck. The period in question--summer and early fall of 1941--was, however, a time of intensive organizational and recruitment activity as the Coordinator of Information (the forerunner of OSS) got underway and there would be a certain logic to some contact at that time.

The bulk of the Donovan papers--about 110 boxes--is currently deposited at the US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, 17013. Mr. Anthony Cade Brown, Donovan's biographer, reportedly has exclusive access to them through 1982.

I hope the above information may be of some value to you in your Steinbeck research.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

(b)(3)

Roberta S. Knapp
Acting Chief
Historical Staff

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REMARKS

*Can you help on this or
bring it into some kind
of focus if we must ask
Mr. Casey.*

(b)(3)

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SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY

HUNTSVILLE, TEXAS 77341

March 3, 1981

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Mr. William J. Casey
Director
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C. 20505

Dear Sir:

After reading Joseph Persico's Piercing the Reich recently, I am convinced that you are likelier than anyone to know where I might look for some information I need to complete a research project I have been working on for several years now. Here, briefly, is the problem:

John Steinbeck was bitterly attacked in the spring of 1942 for a novel he published in March of that year entitled The Moon is Down. His detractors, a coterie of liberal critics headed by James Thurber and Clifton Fadiman, accused Steinbeck of being, among other things, "soft" on certain of his characters who are obvious Nazi types (the novel, you may remember, is built around a thinly-disguised version of the German invasion of Norway). Actually, Steinbeck was merely eschewing the overblown Nazi brute stereotype in favor of more realistic--and today, infinitely more damning--depiction.

One critic who defended Steinbeck at the time was Lewis Gannett, who wrote mainly for the New York Herald Tribune. Later, Gannett wrote that The Moon is Down grew out of a serious discussion Steinbeck had with Colonel William Donovan of the OSS. Mr. Gannett gave no source for his information, and he died in 1966. Mrs. Steinbeck has been very kind in furnishing me other information relating to my project, but she does not remember hearing her husband talk about the meeting with Colonel Donovan. (The lady Steinbeck was married to when the conversation apparently took place died a few years ago.)

Do you remember such a meeting between Colonel Donovan and Mr. Steinbeck, do you know who might know something about it, or can you tell me how I might find records of the meeting in the OSS files, which I understand are now largely open records in the CIA files? Incidentally, the meeting must have taken place sometime in the summer or early fall of 1941.

I know your hands are far too full right now for you to give much attention to faded scholarly problems, but as you can see, I've tried a number of other possibilities without success. I have just



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received a travel grant to go to Europe this May to find clandestine copies of The Moon is Down (I've already uncovered a few in this country) and to interview former members of the resistance in Holland, France, Norway, Denmark, and Italy. The novel was greatly appreciated in those countries, where crudely-printed translations of it were distributed, often at great risk, by the underground. It would be enormously helpful if I could learn how the idea for the novel was born and whether it was the result of a plan conceived by Colonel Donovan and Steinbeck.

I hope it goes without saying that I will be inordinately grateful for any advice or information you might be able to give me.

Sincerely,

Donald Coers
Associate Professor

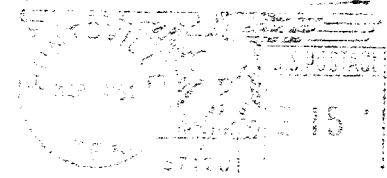
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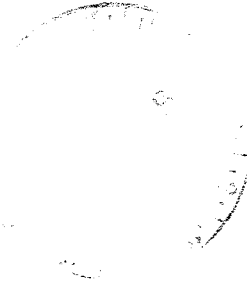
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Mr. William J. Casey
Director
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