

Jack Davis (1930–2016)

CIA Analyst (1956–1979), National Intelligence Officer (1979–1982), Intelligence Educator (Office of Training and Education (1983–1990), Independent Contractor (1990–2015)

By Andres Vaart

Students of the profession of intelligence, especially loyal readers of *Studies in Intelligence* will immediately recognize the name Jack Davis, CIA analyst and Trailblazer Award recipient in 2013 for his work in shaping and refining CIA's analytical practices.

Jack died on 13 February, ending a long trial with Parkinson's and amyloidosis (protein deposits [amyloids]) in his heart. He passed away quietly, in his bed at home, the night after having had a nice dinner and conversation with his son and daughter in law.

Jack began learning his trade as an analyst on Latin America in 1953 in CIA's Directorate of Intelligence (DI). His journey through analysis continued through a multitude of assignments and CIA offices, including the Office of National Estimates and the National Intelligence Council, where he served as the National Intelligence Officer for Latin America.

In 1969, in the midst of a flourishing analytical career, Jack offered a portent of his future as a "grandmaster of analysis" publishing in *Studies in Intelligence* an article entitled "Distant Events Shape the Craft of Intelligence: The *Bogotazo*." The article spoke of CIA analysis of Colombia in early 1948, when communist rioting in Bogota surprised many in Washington and noted that the seven-month old CIA appeared to have suffered its first intelligence failure for not warning of that "South American Pearl Harbor." In describing the events that led to bloodshed and destruc-



DCIA John Brennan presenting the Trailblazer medallion to Jack Davis in September 2013.

tion and the early "Cold War jitters" of the day, Jack addressed for the first time the burden of expectation with which the CIA was born and which it would carry to this day.

After 30 years as a practitioner, Jack was asked to become a teacher and mentor of analysts and their managers in CIA's Office of Training and Education (OT&E). The record doesn't make clear whose idea it was to send Jack to OT&E, but almost certainly playing a role was the newly installed Deputy Director for Intelligence

Bob Gates, who was intent on launching a concerted effort to upgrade the quality of CIA analysis. Whether Jack was Gates's choice or someone else's, the decision was inspired.

Jack's first assignment was to create a course for analysts and managers of analysis called "Intelligence Successes and Failures." It was, and continues to be, a most serious effort to reflect on analytical tradecraft and the relationship of analysts and their analysis with the policymakers. Jack taught the course from its inception in 1983 into retirement—frequently delivering it to other Intelligence Community components. During this same period, Jack also managed a difficult negotiation with Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government to establish a pioneering joint seminar in Cambridge on the relationship of intelligence to policy.

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Once into retirement, Jack was asked to record the analytical tradecraft experiences of a lifetime. He did so through a series of “DI Tradecraft Notes” and “occasional papers” published by the Kent School during 2002 and 2003. Jack’s papers came in such a “goodly number” that the papers could hardly be called “occasional.” Jack also became one of the most prolific contributors ever to *Studies in Intelligence*. Jack’s name appears on eight articles—all but “The Bogotazo” published after his retirement.^a

During his teaching career, Jack became an unexpected pioneer in the digital revolution that was building in the 1980s. Although he was a self-confessed extreme introvert, Jack realized the interpersonal communication potential of systems then coming on line and established a digital network he called “Friends of Analysis.” “Friends” began as a fairly basic texting system that eventually evolved into blog capabilities common today. “Friends of Analysis” allowed Jack and a multitude of analysts to explore tradecraft methods and to share analytic and writing experiences.

In 2013, Jack’s ascendance to “grandmaster” was acknowledged with his recognition as a CIA Trailblazer. The *What’s News* account of the award reads:

Jack Davis is a key reason the DI’s analytical tradecraft has become the gold standard for US intelligence. In a career stretching back to 1956, Davis has provided groundbreaking leadership in the development, documentation, and teaching of this tradecraft. His writing and teaching has provided generations of analysts with fresh and actionable insights. His online discussion boards have enhanced collaboration in CIA and the Intelligence Community. Because

much of his writing and teaching has been unclassified, Davis has played a leading role in building appreciation in the US and abroad for the profession of intelligence.

In inviting its work force to the 2013 Trailblazer ceremony, the Director of Intelligence described Jack in this way:

As a staff officer from 1956 to 1990 and as a consultant since then, Jack has transformed the way we think about, prepare, and deliver all-source analysis. Through his teaching and his example, he has enhanced the DI’s tradecraft and the utility of its insights. Having served with Sherman Kent, Jack has promoted, extended, and advanced the principles Kent laid out for our profession, starting with rigor and relevance. A superb scholar and writer, Jack understands the business of analysis as few others do, and has conveyed its theory and practice as few others can.

In 2006 Jack received a Directorate of Intelligence Certificate of Appreciation, the first ever extended to a retiree, which read,

Your colleagues and your country are better for your wisdom and insights. Your work will enrich and inform future generations of intelligence analysts.

If evidence of that statement were needed, it is worth noting that in 2014, the most read *Studies in Intelligence* article posted to cia.gov was Jack’s first, “The Bogotazo.” In working decades to help his colleagues and juniors bear the burden of expectation he described in that article, Jack carried more than his own fair share. For Jack, improving intelligence was the work of a lifetime, and he must certainly rest in peace now, having achieved so much for so many.

a. A bibliography of Jack’s work appears at the end of this tribute.



Selected Bibliography of Jack Davis Work

"The Bogotazo", *Studies in Intelligence* Volume 13, No. 4 (1969) PDF [617.1KB]

"The Kent-Kendall Debate of 1949", *Studies in Intelligence* Volume 36, No. 5 (1992) PDF [1.9MB]

"Combating Mindset", *Studies in Intelligence* Volume 36, No. 5 (1992) PDF [780.0KB]

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"A Policymaker's Perspective on Intelligence Analysis", *Studies in Intelligence* Volume 38, No. 5 (1994) PDF [611 KB]

"The Views of Ambassador Herman J. Cohen", *Studies in Intelligence* Volume 39, No. 2 (1995) PDF [140 KB]*

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"Paul Wolfowitz on Intelligence-Policy Relations", *Studies in Intelligence* Volume 39, No. 5 (1996) PDF [561.6KB]

"Improving CIA Analytic Performance: Strategic Warning", Sherman Kent Center for Intelligence Analysis, Occasional Papers: Volume 1, Number 1 (2002) PDF [29.4KB]

"Improving CIA Analytic Performance: Analysts and the Policymaking Process", Sherman Kent Center for Intelligence Analysis, Occasional Papers: Volume 1, Number 2 (September 2002) PDF [28.6KB]

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"Sherman Kent and the Profession of Intelligence Analysis", Sherman Kent Center for Intelligence Analysis, Occasional Papers: Volume 1, Number 5 (2002) PDF [49.0KB]

"If Surprise is Inevitable, What Role for Analysis?", Sherman Kent Center for Intelligence Analysis, Occasional Papers: Volume 2, Number 1 (January 2003) PDF [48.4KB]

"Tensions in Analyst-Policymaker Relations: Opinions, Facts, and Evidence", Sherman Kent Center for Intelligence Analysis, Occasional Papers: Volume 2, Number 2 (2003) PDF [46.7KB]

"Sherman Kent's Final Thoughts on Analyst-Policymaker Relations", Sherman Kent Center for Intelligence Analysis, Occasional Papers: Volume 2, Number 3 (2003) PDF [108.1KB]

"Analytic Professionalism and the Policymaking Process: Q&A on a Challenging Relationship", Sherman Kent Center for Intelligence Analysis, Occasional Papers: Volume 2, Number 4 (October 2003) PDF [29.6KB]

* Unclassified but not released to the public.

