

Sherman Kent

1903 – 1986

The Bunon pistols were bought in Paris in the 1920's by Sherman Kent, who at that time was living in France while studying for his dissertation. Mr. Kent began his career as a professor at Yale University; he later became one of the most significant and enduring personalities in the formative decades of the CIA.

Early life and education

Kent was the son of U.S. Congressman William Kent and women's rights activist Elizabeth Thacher Kent, brother of Roger Kent, a significant political figure in California, and sister of Adaline Kent, a well-known California sculptor. He was great-great grandson of American founding father Roger Sherman. He was a graduate of The Thacher School and Yale University where he studied European history with the intention of spending his career as an academic. After graduating, he spent several years teaching and doing research but joined the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) with the outbreak of World War II in Europe.

Career

Sherman Kent first served within the Research and Analysis Branch of the OSS as Chief of the Europe-Africa Division. In this capacity, he oversaw much of the process which would now be considered intelligence preparation of the battlespace in support of planning for Operation Torch, the 1942 Allied invasion of North Africa.

After a post-war stint at the National War College, he returned to Yale for three years, during which time he penned his classic work, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*. In November 1950, during the crisis that followed the Chinese Communist incursion in the Korean War, which then prompted a build-up and reorganization of the American Intelligence Community, he was called to Washington, DC, to assist Harvard historian William L. Langer, with whom he had worked in OSS, to form a new CIA Office of National Estimates (ONE). He succeeded Langer as chief of ONE in 1952, serving in that position for the next fifteen years under four Directors of Central Intelligence in four presidential administrations.

ONE was a small organization, consisting of a Board of National Estimates of between five and twelve senior experts, a professional staff of 25–30 regional and functional specialists, and a support staff. Until it was dissolved, six years after Kent's retirement, in a Watergate-era CIA reorganization, ONE prepared more than 1500 speculative National Intelligence Estimates for the President and top foreign policy-makers.

Kent led ONE through years of challenge and crisis, including McCarthy-era accusations against one of Kent's young aides, future presidential advisor William Bundy, and "predictive failures" during the Cuban Missile Crisis and other Cold War "flaps".

Kent's unique and enduring role within the US intelligence community was to formalize analytical "tradecraft" and methodologies, while encouraging creation of a "literature of intelligence" to provide a formal mechanism for the transfer of knowledge and experiences between generations of analysts.