

Terror in a Place of Doves

One of Our H-Bombs Is Missing, by Flora Lewis (McGraw-Hill. 225 pp. \$5.95), and ***The Day They Lost the H-Bomb***, by Christopher Morris (Coward-McCann. 192 pp. \$5), tell what happened last year when one of our B-52s collided with an aerial tanker over Palomares. Ogden R. Reid, who is former United States Ambassador to Israel, is a member of the House of Representatives.

By OGDEN R. REID

FLORA LEWIS, one of America's ablest reporters, and until recently correspondent of the *Washington Post* in Bonn, London, and New York, has written a thoughtful, poignant, and engrossing account of the Palomares affair.

Here, on January 17, 1966, a small Spanish town reflecting "the innocence of one age" collided with "the shared despair and hopes of another" when a Strategic Air Command B-52 ran into an aerial tanker, releasing four unarmed H-bombs.

One of Our H-Bombs Is Missing (to be published March 6) deals with the "eighty overwhelming days of fear and strain and ingenuity and effort" that followed. For the village of Palomares—the place of the doves—"the legacy of the bomb was not anger, not disease or damage, but the insidious, consuming plague of uncertainty that had already swept much of the world and had reached out to infect a handful of people whose poverty had been a shield."

The graphic and highly readable account covers the take-off and crash of SAC Bomber 256; the prompt and vast actions taken by the U.S. government's "Broken Arrow" or nuclear accident procedures; the arrival within hours of doctors and disaster control teams; the recovery of the first three bombs within twenty-four hours, and the agonizing and skillful underwater probe by small research submarines, culminating in the recovery of H-bomb number four, eighty days later on April 7—after it had been lost two additional times at 2,500 and 2,800 feet depths, where darkness prevailed and visibility was often limited to six feet.

Miss Lewis describes the fear that came to the villagers of Palomares from abroad—the foreign broadcasts that

spoke of "possible tragic consequences of nuclear contamination"—while the Spanish and U.S. governments were virtually immobilized over what the "public should be told" and as a result said nothing "to settle the rumors" for weeks.

Fear, fed on rumor and lack of official word, spread further than the actual radiation when plutonium was scattered by the detonation of conventional explosives in two of the bombs. In spite of efforts by U.S. Ambassador Angier Biddle Duke, it was not until some forty-three days had elapsed that official comment came from Madrid and Washington and the fact of radiation was admitted. By then—even though some guarded assurances were made to the villagers that every precaution was being taken, including medical tests, advice to townspeople, and substantial decontamination measures (plowing under of fields, destruction of tomato plants)—bewilderment was followed by a "growing sense of helplessness."

"Radioactividad" was on everyone's lips. The destruction of crops led to fears that all fresh food was dangerous; for the fishermen of nearby towns the price of shrimp plummeted; and people would not eat what came "fresh from the sea."

The Spanish government felt silence was the best policy lest tourism and exports be hurt. The U.S. was convinced that it could say little until the Spanish agreed. To help reassure public opinion, Ambassador Duke, along with the Minister of Tourism, Señor Manuel Fraga Iribarne, took a diplomatic swim at Palomares March 7.

Predictably, the USSR made the most of a propaganda advantage. Radio Moscow broadcast that "weeks have gone by and the bomb is still in the sea, irradiating the water and the fish."

On February 16 the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs handed U.S. Ambassador Foy Kohler a note claiming the U.S. had broken its commitments under the 1963 Test Ban Treaty and stating, "It is common knowledge that . . . the southern coast of Spain and also the sea expanses washing it are now subjected to radioactive contamination from U.S. nuclear weapons." The note "demanded an immediate end to all such flights 'beyond the boundaries of national frontiers.'"

The following day Soviet Ambassador Semyon Tsarapkin read from the note at the Geneva Disarmament Conference

and added that "a densely populated Mediterranean area is now in grave danger."

He was promptly and forthrightly told by American delegate William C. Foster that the "charges were false" and that the Soviets, by not even waiting for a U.S. answer to their note, were indulging in a propaganda ploy.

Subsequently, on February 25, the U.S. was to answer formally the Soviet note, pointing out that "no violation" of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty had occurred; that "no radioactive pollution of the sea was involved," and that it was a matter of "deep regret that the Soviet Union should be willing to distort the meaning of international treaties to suit the purpose of a propaganda campaign."

The whole matter of nuclear overflights beyond national boundaries was to be raised again last fall in the United Nations' Committee I—by Poland and the Ukraine—but the NATO countries, as well as certain Latin American and African nations, rallied to the United States' defense, and the resolution was withdrawn without a vote.

Earlier Spain had asked that the overflights be ended, and on January 22 the U.S. had agreed. They have not been resumed.

Eight weeks after the accident some 604 acres of topsoil had been scraped in Palomares, and an agreement was reached to ship the "mildly radioactive soil" to the U.S. for burial near the Savannah River, at Aiken, South Carolina.

With the recovery of the fourth bomb the Americans were to leave. A legacy of uncertainty remained. "Maybe it is all right," the villagers said, "and maybe it isn't. Who knows? You just don't feel so quiet any more." It has been "calculated that fifty years after a person absorbed a dose of plutonium (which is a bone-seeker) 80 per cent of the dose would still be in his body."

Dr. Wright Langham, the Los Alamos plutonium expert who supervised the decontamination efforts in concert with the Spanish atomic energy officials, will return in February to Palomares to conduct extensive tests once again. Dr.



Langham is "extremely confident" that these tests will show "no real problem," but he, along with others in the government, recognizes the clear and continued responsibility of the U.S.—in concert with Spanish authorities—to make sure. The fine plutonium particles were carried by the wind over an area of about "one square mile," and a "few people," it is believed, "inhaled or ingested" very small amounts. Further careful tests of the effect on tomatoes of plutonium in the soil transported from Palomares are being carried on in New Mexico, but the tomatoes as yet "are not growing well." This, according to Dr. Langham, may be a question of whether the sample is good agricultural soil; and in Palomares the plowing to depths could have upset the soil balance and raised the salt level.

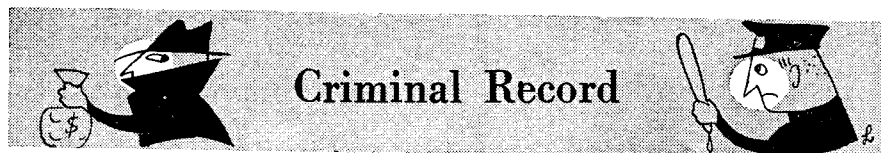
In *The Day They Lost the H-Bomb*, Christopher Morris, a correspondent of the London *Daily Express*, has written from firsthand observation a straight news report of the events following the crash over Palomares. It is a crisp account—but in a few technical instances differs with U.S. Defense Department estimates of what occurred. The Pentagon states that the B-52 and the aerial tanker "never hooked up"; Morris reports that pumping began. The refinding of the fourth H-bomb on April 2 was accomplished, according to the Pentagon, by the manned submersible *Alvin*; Morris reports it was located by a remote controlled underwater platform called CURV.

In the main, however, *The Day They Lost the H-Bomb* is a worthwhile account of what happened, and particularly valuable as it highlights the problems official censorship somewhat needlessly imposed on reporters and the villagers directly involved.

Flora Lewis's book, on the other hand, is an intensely human story. More than that, it focuses clearly on our atomic age and "the ultimate dilemma of maintaining ultimate power."

Today the United States stands at the threshold of an agreement on nuclear nonproliferation with the Soviets (which, if it is to mean much, must be signed before too long by the Red Chinese); the U.S. and the USSR also have a chance in the next few months—perhaps their last—to draw back from a new nuclear arms race of a much higher order of magnitude, involving a new generation of ICBMs and an extraordinarily costly anti-ballistic missile system.

The true legacy of Palomares should be to remind the world of how close to the precipice we have come and the imperatives now of establishing a nuclear freeze to be followed, under strict international inspection, by a mutual reduction in weapons and delivery vehicles.



A Pictorial History of Crime. By Julian Symons. Crown. \$10. This lavishly illustrated (700-plus photos), well-written, ably edited conspectus of felony (mainly murder) from Charles Peace (b. 1832) to the Great Train Robbery is an altogether fascinating production.

Imperial Agent: The Goleniewski-Romanov Case. By Guy Richards. Devin-Adair. \$5.95. To enjoy this well-handled narrative to the full, you must accept the premise that the Russian royal family was not, repeat not, wiped out by a Red firing squad in Siberia on July 16/17, 1918.

Jesse James Was His Name. By William A. Settle, Jr. University of Missouri Press. \$6. This compendium of "fact and fiction concerning the careers of the notorious James Brothers" describes just how they became "a significant part of American political and social history." Here's painstaking scholarship that packs a wallop.

Deadline. By Thomas B. Dewey. Simon & Schuster. \$3.95. Mac, Chi. eye (we almost learn his full name in this one), explores downstate Illinois for evidence that will save farm youth from chair. Nicely paced, as always.

The King of the Rainy Country. By Nicolas Freeling. Harper & Row. \$4.50. Inspector Van der Valk of Amsterdam police covers much ground (Netherlands, Germany, Austria, French-Spanish border) in search for trading company chief. Humor content high, even if star performer does get shot up a bit.

It Won't Get You Anywhere. By Desmond Skirrow. Lippincott. \$4.95. Weekend British secret agent unearths plot to black out most of U.K. Goons and boffins abound; Wales was never as wild as this; something doing every split second.

Midnight Hag. By Joan Fleming. Ives Washburn. \$3.95. English painter, acquitted of murder of first spouse, finds rural neighbors eyeing him for death of second. Delightful much of the way, but dénouement is superelaborate.

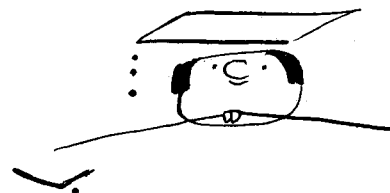
Ocean Road. By Jack Bennett. Little, Brown. \$4.95. British agent, fomenting revolution in new African republic, runs into gory opposition. Reads like a fast documentary, with fine flavor of authenticity.

Spanish Duet. By Francis Clifford.

Coward-McCann. \$4.95. Packaged here are two unrelated tales (*Time Is an Ambush* and *The Trembling Earth*), both based on the Iberian seacoast, both superbly managed.

The Magic Grandfather. By Doris Miles Disney. Crime Club. \$3.50. Broken-down old vaudevillean raises hob on visit to Connecticut community; there are violent deaths, old and new. A wee mite tricky, but told with the old zing.

When Eight Bells Toll. By Alistair MacLean. Doubleday. \$4.95. British Secret Service task force scouring west coast of Scotland in hunt for hijacking mob encounters wild weather, wild scenery, wild men. Action is fast, furious, feral.



Two After Malic. By Ludovic Peters. Walker. \$3.50. Who besides British want to nab Russian biochemist? Failure of first attempts only increases tension; later action is in U.S. Midwest.

The Episode at Toledo. By Ann Bridge. McGraw-Hill. \$5.95. When British diplomatist's Hungarian-born wife overhears plot to rub out U.S. admiral, she's headed for trouble on a collision course. Fine jane-in-jam job, with splendid views of Spain and Portugal.

Deathblow Hill. By Phoebe Atwood Taylor. **File for Record.** By same author writing as Alice Tilton. Norton. \$3.95 each. Two more reissues, one an Asey Mayo (1935) and the second a Leonidas Witherall (1943).

The 9th Directive. By Adam Hall. Simon & Schuster. \$4.95. This second rousing Quiller spy tale should go even better than first as result of launching of movie starring Sir Alec Guinness. The scene here is Bangkok.

—SERGEANT CUFF.

LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

1. Minister/Foxes. 2. Turtle/City. 3. Aspern/Biglow. 4. Innocence/Paradise. 5. Cannery/Kings. 6. Zhivago/Faustus. 7. Main/Back. 8. Dream/Tragedy. 9. Pastures/Hat.