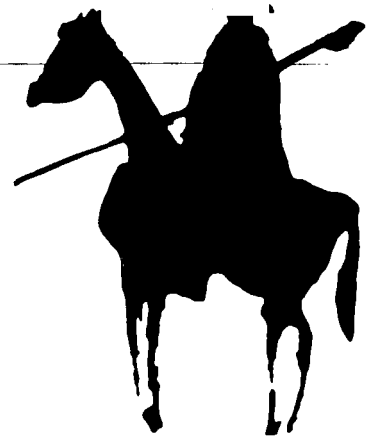


TILTING AT WINDMILLS



Will the South Koreans hit Winston-Salem? Why not? If we are justified in sending helicopters to attack the cocaine cartel in Colombia, why shouldn't other countries dispatch military forces to destroy our cigarette factories? As the major exporter of cigarettes, we are the leading international dope peddler.

If you say cigarettes are not as addictive as cocaine, consider a recent study that found that nine out of ten people who try cigarettes became addicted, while only one in six who tried crack did.

Then ponder another recent study of 392,000 students that found cigarette smoking was increasing among both high school and junior high school students. In the past year, the rate has jumped from 33 to 39 percent for the former and from 20 to 28 percent for the latter.

This is why *The Washington Monthly* has been concerned about the relationship between sports and tobacco advertising, a relationship that has become so accepted that the first person quoted in a recent *Washington Post* article about Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova was a vice president of Phillip Morris, the maker of Virginia Slims. The ultimate irony was last summer when, as the Boston Red Sox played an exhibition game for the benefit of young cancer victims,

there was a billboard in center field advertising Marlboros. New victims were being solicited at a benefit for those already afflicted. . . .

"Crime pays" seems to be the message of much of what we read in the papers these days. So I was delighted to see a report from Reuters that says "Mafia gangsters suffer worse stress than top business executives." According to Professor Granceso Aragona, a Sicilian pathologist who has spent 40 years studying mafiosi remains, the gangsters are likely to have "thickened arteries, kidney failure, stomach ulcers," and livers that are "yellowish, fatty, and chronically short of glucose." . . .

"No one reads my cables." If you've visited many American diplomatic missions abroad, these are likely to be familiar words. The problem is that the cable labored over long and lovingly by the foreign service officer in the field is rarely read by the secretary of state, to whom it is addressed. Indeed, it is often not read by anyone other than the State Department desk officer for the country concerned and a few minor officials who need something to do to pass the time but have no power to do anything in response to the cable.

The result is that many field

officers become as desperate as the one my friend, Stanley Meisler, a veteran foreign correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*, encountered in his travels. The officer was so frustrated by the lack of reaction from Washington to his carefully crafted cables that he asked Meisler if he would mind reading them. What the FSO obviously craved was the knowledge that *someone* had read his work and valued it. The words he yearned to hear: "This is a masterpiece of concise reporting. Thanks to you I understand the situation in Botswana perfectly."

Why, if you haven't visited our missions abroad, are you unaware of this problem? Probably because when the diplomat returns to this country, he wants Mom and Dad and his friends back home to think he was performing tasks of the gravest importance while he was overseas. So why would he go around advertising the fact that his work was largely ignored by his superiors? . . .

If the civil service is so underpaid, why do so few bureaucrats leave? The number who actually resign each year—as distinguished from those who choose to take advantage of the government's generous retirement program—is about 5 percent. This

may have something to do with the fact that although some government employees—engineers and accountants for example—are underpaid, the average civil servant makes about 40 percent more than the average American. And the civil servant has job security and that generous retirement plan to boot.

Yet the *Washington Post* continues to run headlines like: “Federal Workers Underpaid by 28.6 Percent Panel Says, Gap Between Public, Private Salaries Called a ‘Canyon.’” In the accompanying article, as in almost everything else on this subject that appears in the *Post*—and indeed most other newspapers and magazines—there is absolutely no indication that the gap is not between the pay for real jobs but between the pay for a real job in the private sector and a job *description* in the federal government. As we have repeatedly tried to explain to our fellow journalists, these descriptions are often written by the job holders themselves and usually make the job sound considerably grander than it really is. Elevator operators become “vertical vehicle controllers” and in the immortal words of our contributing editor, Leonard Reed, “file clerks are endowed with responsibilities before which a Harvard MBA would quail.” . . .

Another fact about the civil service that might interest you is the number of people who are fired for bad performance. The figure was supposed to increase dramatically as a result of Jimmy Carter’s Civil Service Reform Act. And in percentage terms, it has increased—now standing at 47 percent above the level before the reform bill. The only catch is that that still only means 755 people were fired last year for poor performance—less than one-tenth

of 1 percent of the total number of government employees. Does anyone really think the true percentage of losers is anywhere near that low? . . .

I know you’ve been waiting to hear where those Columbus, Ohio lawyers voted to hold their 1990 Interdiscipline Conference with Columbus physicians. It’s going to be in Vail, Colorado. And I know that you absolutely refuse to even suspect that the prospect of tax-deductible skiing had anything to do with the site chosen by these dedicated professionals. . . .

Speaking of lawyers, the world’s championship in fee-charging has to be awarded to a Towson, Maryland attorney, who represented two firefighters in a suit against a company for injuries they sustained while putting out a fire on its property. He charged one \$188,000 out of an award of \$250,000 and the other \$283,000 out of \$377,000. That’s 75 percent, where the usual fee in this kind of case is 33 1/3 percent. . . .

Recently I was speaking to a group of officials of the Rural Electric Association. I decided to risk criticizing them for imitating the elderly by acting like all their members need government help when only some really do. To my surprise, no one became angry and some even agreed with me. They said the problem was the adversarialists in their organization who felt you could never concede any defect in your position to the opposition or the opposition would jump on it and use your concession as a weapon in taking away the legitimate benefits you enjoy. This is another legacy of the adversary system bequeathed us by the lawyers in our society. It means that each organization has to insist its cause

is totally right, which is why we have a country dominated by self-righteous special-interest groups.

Even when the motivation is not selfish but idealistic, as in the case of the abortion debate, the prolife and prochoice groups refuse to concede any merit to the other’s position, which is a tragedy, because humane common sense should tell anyone that there is merit to both sides.

In the case of the affluent elderly, their self-righteous refusal to understand the point I make in the “Letters” section of this issue is likely to produce a revolt by the young. And if that revolt is conducted in the adversarialist spirit that dominates our society today, isn’t it likely that the young will deny there is *any* merit in the cause of the elderly? In a sense, the elderly will get the comeuppance they deserve, but wouldn’t it be far better for us all to try to concede the chinks in our armor and end our enslavement to this insane adversarialism? . . .

A family of four with an income of \$25,000 pays \$2,514 in taxes to the District of Columbia. The average tax for the same family in 51 other large cities is almost 25 percent less.

What this means is that those of us who live in the District are paying the most for the worst. (See “The Worst City Government,” Jason DeParle, January 1989 and the regular feature in subsequent issues.) The local school system is so bad that a cab driver named James Caviness now spends \$8,000 a year—more than a third of his total earnings—to send his child to Georgetown Day, a private school. . . .

As we are going to press with this issue it appears that the forces of organized greed are on their way to another victory in the form of a reduction of the capital gains

tax. In case final action has not been taken by Congress by the time you read these words, please let your representatives know how outraged you are by any reduction that is not specifically geared to encouraging long-term or productive investment. There is no social utility to giving anyone a tax break for the sale of a share of General Motors or AT&T that he bought yesterday and sold today. In-and-out Wall Street trading is not productive investment. It's just another way of making a living, and the income it produces should be taxed as ordinary income. . .

My newest heroes are a California couple who have opened casket stores in Santa Ana and Loma Linda. These are the only stores of their kind in the

country. Every place else you have to buy a casket from a funeral home that specializes in sky-high markups. Customers of the new stores save around a thousand dollars on the average casket. The mortuary industry will no doubt find some way to defeat these entrepreneurs, probably by threatening to withhold business from casket manufacturers who sell to the stores.

It's stories like this that make you realize how much we need a strong Federal Trade Commission to protect desirable new ventures from being destroyed by monopoly power. But the FTC we have is staffed by a mixture of spineless bureaucrats who won't stand up to anybody and by Republican ideologues who refuse to acknowledge that the free market doesn't work when monopolies are permitted. . .

You may get a clue as to the current state of morality in Washington from the cover headline on the August 1989 issue of the *Washingtonian*, the local "city" magazine that relies heavily on newsstand sales and therefore wants its cover to appeal immediately to large numbers of potential readers:

"BIG TROUBLE—Out of the Blue You Get Hit for Back Taxes, or Your Lover Threatens to Sue. Here's How Big Trouble Can Ruin Your Life, and Who Can Get You Out of It." . .

The District of Columbia has one of the largest police forces in the country. We also have the National Park Police, the Uniformed Branch of the Secret Service, and the Capitol Police. Since they do not seem to be preventing the daily round of murders to which we have become accustomed, what do these fellows do all day? We can't speak for all of them but we can tell you how

40 members of the Capitol Police recently spent three days. They traveled to the Greenbriar Hotel in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, to serve as "a protective detail" for House Democrats who were holding a conference at the resort. . . .

A friend who is a Harvard alumnus recently received a questionnaire from his alma mater asking him to choose "the three most important issues facing Harvard" from a list of nine. None of the nine mentioned controlling the cost of tuition. . . .

In the condemnation of Samuel Pierce, Deborah Gore Dean, and other participants, which has been one of the themes of Washington conversation about the HUD scandal, I have been amazed by how often I have heard someone say, "Of course, Carla Hills is different. She was just a lawyer representing a client and there's nothing wrong with that."

I don't know what's right about it. Hills, as a former secretary of HUD, was peddling her influence. "She basically did traditional Washington legal work, which included some phone calls to HUD officials," Hills's assistant told the press. What does that say about traditional Washington legal work? It says that it means being a hired gun for the highest bidders, even when their cause is wrong or not in the best interests of the United States. . . .

There are many reasons to suspect that the affluent are not only wealthier than the rest of us, they're also more selfish. The latest evidence comes from the economist, James Henry, who has discovered that the richest 12 percent of individual taxpayers are responsible for 40 percent of tax underpayments. Of the returns

YOU CAN HELP

Sometimes it's easy to forget how much *The Washington Monthly* depends on its readers. Our Memos of the Month come almost entirely from you. Clippings from your local papers inspire many of the items in Tidbits and Outrages and Tilting at Windmills.

Readers help us in countless other ways, calling with tips for stories, giving their friends subscriptions, or just making sure we're on the shelves of their local newsstands, libraries, and bookstores.

actually audited by the IRS, more than 70 percent of those for incomes above \$200,000 conceal unreported income. . . .

Congressmen often tell voters that defense spending is good for their district. Most of them are lying. According to a recent study, in 321 of 435 districts, taxpayers pay more in taxes that support the Pentagon than they get back in military spending in their district. . . .

We have reported one sign of the graying of the baby boomers: They are spending less and saving more. Here are three others.

- * There has been a decline in the number of backpackers in the national parks as the BBs, no longer willing to lug heavy loads up mountain trails, choose instead a motel or campground accessible by car.

- * The BBs seem to be listening to radio stations that play only the golden oldies of 1965-75.

- * If the BBs are in their forties, that means their parents are in their sixties and seventies, which in turn means the coming cause for the BBs is "Elder Care." Companies such as AT&T and American Express are providing as part of their employee benefit packages some form of help in taking care of Mom and Dad. . . .

In case you thought our pro bono article in September ("The Pro Bono Hustle," Liza Mundy) was too harsh on the legal profession, consider what a study by the Texas State Bar revealed: Only 7 out of every 100 Texas lawyers were doing pro bono work. . . .

The television networks have a lesson to teach the State Department. ABC and NBC have closed their Paris bureaus on the

ground that Paris is no longer the news center it was in the past. It may be that the State Department can't close down its embassy. But certainly it could reduce the staff. London, Paris, and Rome staffing patterns are based not on the importance of the posts to modern diplomacy—Moscow, Tokyo, and Peking are far more crucial—but on their desirability as places for our diplomats to live and for Washington officials to visit. . . .

The Pentagon's Division of Civilian Marksmanship loans guns and sells ammunition at substantial discount to junior rifle clubs sponsored by the National Rifle Association. The justification for the program is that it provides the armed forces with potential recruits who are already skilled marksmen.

But only about 200 participants a year are now joining the armed forces. Since \$4.7 million is spent on the program, the government is paying more than \$23,000 per recruit. . . .

In her new book, *Just Enough Rope*, Joan Braden tells of a conversation in the 1960s when her husband, Tom, who was embarking on his career as a Washington reporter, asked Stewart Alsop, one of the leading journalistic luminaries of the day, for advice. Alsop told him, among other things, to be sure to talk to "three important people" each day.

This was then and remains today the central fallacy of the stars of Washington media. They rely far too much on the big shots and spend far too little time with the people at the working level who actually know what's happening with government programs. If you want to find out what's wrong with a weapon, the person to ask is not the secretary of defense but the fellow who is firing it. . . .

There are certain classic anecdotes that the *Monthly* retells every few years for the benefit of our new readers. One of these is about the late Marvella Bayh, who was the wife of Birch Bayh.

When on the night of his first election to the Senate she learned that he had won, she exclaimed, "This means we'll get to go to Europe." The point this story illustrates is that this country is full of Marvella Bayhs for whom public office means the opportunity to travel. I was reminded of it by a recent story about a Texas legislator who said, "If you take away my outings, my hunting trips, then what's fun about the job any more?" . . .

This magazine has long advocated a liberal immigration policy on the basis that the infusion of new blood is good for the country, that we want people who want to become Americans.

I was troubled, however, by a recent story by Seth Mydans of *The New York Times* about an illegal alien, Mrs. Guadalupe Avila, who has enrolled in an amnesty program. She told Mydans: "I think if it is necessary to become a citizen for any reason, I will do it. I want to be in this country, but I do not want to stop being a Mexican, because that is my country."

Perhaps Mrs. Avila simply means that she wants to remain Mexican, as many Irish-Americans and Italian-Americans have remained Irish or Italian. But if she really means that in her heart she cannot give true allegiance to this country—of the kind so many Irish and Italian immigrants proved by dying in our wars—then she should not become a citizen. . . .

—Charles Peters

Paperback Fighter

Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and Dan Quayle—and a lot of generals and admirals—give Tom Clancy rave reviews. Here's why they shouldn't.

by Scott Shuger

Tom Clancy is lousy at writing sex scenes between a man and a woman. But he's great at writing sex scenes between a man and a weapons system. In Clancy's *Red Storm Rising*, it's boy meets plane, boy gets plane:

Colonel Douglas Ellington's fingertips caressed the control stick of his F-19A Ghost rider attack fighter. . . .

Lockheed called her the Ghost rider. The pilots called her the Frisbee, the F-19A, the secretly developed Stealth attack fighter. She had no corners, no box shapes to allow radar signals to bounce cleanly off her. Her high-bypass turbofans were designed to emit a blurry infrared signature at most. From above, her wings appeared to mimic the shape of a cathedral bell. From in front, they curved oddly toward the ground, earning her the affectionate nickname of Frisbee. Though she was a masterpiece of electronic technology inside, she usually didn't use her active systems. . . .

Or consider this episode from *The Cardinal of the Kremlin*:

Slowly, the Archer raised the launcher and trained its two-element sight on the approaching helicopter. His thumb went sideways and down on the activation switch, and he nestled his cheekbone on the conductance bar. He was instantly rewarded with the warbling screech of the launcher's seeker unit.

. . . The helicopter was sideslipping right at him now, expanding around the inner ring of the sight. It was now in range. The Archer punched the forward button with his left thumb, "uncaging" the missile and giving the infrared seeker-head on the Stinger its first look at the heat radiating from the Mi-24's turboshaft engines. The sound carried through his cheekbone into his ear changed. The missile was now tracking the target. . . .

The missile screamed its readiness at the Archer now, but still he was patient. He put his mind into that of his target, and judged that the pilot would come closer still before his helicopter had the shot he wanted at the hated Afghans. And so he did. When the Hind was only a thousand meters off, the Archer took a deep breath, super-elevated his sight, and whispered a brief prayer of vengeance. The trigger was pulled almost of its own accord.

. . . As always, it was almost a sexual release when the launcher tube bucked in his hands. . .

All this caressing! All this nestling! This warbling, whispering, and bucking! In Clancy's world, war takes on the romantic allure most of us find in something else. What was it that Clancy said after the Army let him drive a tank and fire its cannon? "Sixty tons, 1,500 horsepower, and a four-inch gun—that's sex!" And what was his comment after the Army staged mock battles for his viewing pleasure? "It was Disneyland with guns! It was better than sex!"

Well, so what? Clancy is, after all, great airport reading. What's the harm in having such a hoot on paper with wars that never happened? The harm is

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