

Nov 04, 2016 by *Alvin Snyder*

USIA's Top Guns ^[1]

Karen Hughes is America's Top Gun communicator. But how will her job performance be rated 25 or even 50 years from now by her team in the State Department, elsewhere around the world and in the many politico-history books that will be written about her?

Of course it's too early to tell, as she is just finding her way as the new undersecretary of state for public diplomacy. But does she have the qualities that helped raise some former directors of the defunct U.S. Information Agency to legendary status?

There were more than a dozen USIA directors during the agency's almost half-century existence before it disbanded in 1999. Worldcasting asked professionals who served under some of them who was their favorite and why.

This is not a run at nostalgia, but rather an attempt to focus on the very real problem of communicating America's story abroad and to examine what type of person it will take to fix the problems. More than six years have passed since the effort has had a powerful figure that was not only himself great, but also inspired others to greatness. The common thread among employees' memories of their directors is that the most revered leaders had an uncanny ability to make young and low-ranking USIA officials feel like integral cogs in the public diplomacy mission.

Ambassador Jock Shirley, a veteran counselor to USIA directors, told Worldcasting the director he knew best was Jim Keogh, who is "no longer a young man now, but as spry as ever."

Director Keogh had previously been the chief White House speechwriter for President Nixon and the executive editor of *Time* magazine.

Jock Shirley, a USIA icon himself, believes "Jim Keogh's successes lay in his clear understanding of [three things]: USIA's role in the Cold War as it was being contested during his tenure, how best to use our skills in the struggle to contain and weaken the Soviet Union, and the strengths and weaknesses of the men and women of USIA and how to put those strengths to efficient use."

Shirley continued, "Jim Keogh knew that a smoothly functioning Washington bureaucracy was the *sine qua non* for success in the field, but he knew also that it was the men and women scattered around the world on whom our usefulness ultimately depended. To them he devoted his greatest focus, traveling to every corner of the globe, visiting every major post in the world, and getting to know hundreds of our colleagues, from senior public affairs officers to junior trainees." Shirley observed after hundreds of hours with Keogh that the director's "insights into our operations were incisive, and his memory for people and judgment on where and how to assign them, phenomenal."

But what Shirley remembers best was the warmth and affection Jim Keogh and his wife,

Verna, showed to the USIA support staff. "Wherever they went morale soared. After long days of meetings, inspections, not-always-easy conversations with this or that ambassador or PAO [Public Affairs Officer], Jim and Verna Keogh loved nothing better than an evening of laughter and easy companionship surrounded by the men and women of the post."

Others give former USIA director and ambassador Frank Shakespeare high marks.

When Bob Wozniak was Public Affairs Officer in Cyprus in the early 1970s, Shakespeare planned a three-day trip there.

"What does one do with the Agency director for so long a time on so small an island?" Wozniak asked himself. "More to the point, unlike what came to be practice with his successors traveling with support staff, area directors, security types...Frank came alone."

Wozniak recalls that Shakespeare performed well in an hour-long interview on Cyprus state television, "an unprecedented opportunity for projecting the U.S. and its policies on neutral Cyprus' airwaves."

But what most impressed Wozniak was the USIA director's graciousness to "an essential non-entity in the USIA hierarchy. My small staff and I were on razor's edge wondering if what we had arranged and were doing would meet expectations and requirements. Evidently they did." A promotion to Foreign Service Officer-3 came for Wozniak the following year.

Public Affairs Officer Paul Blackburn also gave Shakespeare the highest marks, especially for his interest in getting the best from young people.

"I had great respect for the leadership skills and personal sensitivity of Frank Shakespeare, a man whose political views were considerably to the right of my own," Blackburn told Worldcasting.

"As Director during the traumatic Vietnam War years, Shakespeare gave unequalled attention to the morale of younger Foreign Service Officers [FSOs] and Civil Service personnel throughout the Agency...On one memorable occasion he met with us shortly after the U.S. 'incursion' into Cambodia...During that session he candidly shared our collective deep pain over both that legally and morally dubious action and also its effect on USIA's efforts to sustain America's standing in the world. Later Shakespeare paid this 34-year-old [Foreign Service Information Officer] the extraordinary compliment by taking a direct interest in my 1972 assignment" as Director of the Tokyo American Center.

Professor Nancy Snow at California State University, Fullerton ranks Joseph Duffey, who presided over the demise of the USIA in the Clinton administration, at the head of the class. "Duffey was tasked with a no-winner," said Snow. A Cultural Affairs and Academic Exchange Specialist in the "E" Bureau, Snow said that while it was "clear to me that although [Duffey] had a strong commitment to cultural diplomacy and international exchange, the writing was on the wall that the USIA was going to lose its independent status. I appreciated the personal affability that Duffey displayed to his staff, including this lowly Presidential Management Fellow."

It would be a pity if Karen Hughes is summoned back to the White House, where it is suspected she may wind up, to help calm the communication waters over there.

She is desperately needed where she is - at the center of a broken U.S. public diplomacy effort - so she can jump start future generations of public diplomacy officers who need someone to admire.

Archived Comments

Guy Farmer on November 30, 2005 @ 8:45 am:

Al: Joe Duffey "at the head of the class" among former USIA directors? Give me a break! Nothing could be further from the truth. Surely, Prof. Snow must be joking. As she notes, Duffey "presided over the demise of the USIA," and when the going got tough during the Clinton years, he bailed out.

While I agree with your favorable assessments of USIA directors Jim Keogh and Frank Shakespeare, I'd add at least two more to that "good guy" list -- Henry Catto and Charlie Wick -- for very different reasons. Catto was dedicated to the Agency, its mission and its officers and defended us at every opportunity. And Wick, because of his close personal relationship with President Reagan, protected our Agency from the huge budget cuts that took place under Reagan. Charlie may have been weird, but he was effective.

As for Joe Duffey, Good riddance! His name should live in infamy in the annals of USIA. He was a terrible director who never understood public diplomacy, and couldn't have cared less. So there! Cordially,

Guy Farmer

p.s. I spent 28 years (1967-95) with USIA, the last ten as PAO in Australia, Peru and Venezuela.

Professor Nancy Snow on November 30, 2005 @ 11:22 am:

Hey Guy, I never told Al that Duffey was at the "top of the class." That's his rightful journalistic license, but I'd like to clarify. While working at USIA (1992-1994) it was clear that my colleagues waxed romantic over the Charles Wick days at the Agency when Wick's close friendship with Reagan helped to raise the Agency's profile and respectability. Here's what I told Al: "Dr. Duffey served as my university president and personally shook my hand when I was 'hooded' upon completion of my Ph.D. degree in international relations at American University. Within a few weeks of his confirmation, Duffey became my new boss at USIA, where I was a Cultural Affairs and Academic Exchange Specialist in the "E" Bureau. Duffey was tasked with a no-winner. It was clear to me that although he had a strong commitment to cultural diplomacy and international exchange, the writing was on the wall that USIA was going to lose its independent status. I appreciated the personal affability that Duffey displayed to his staff, including this lowly Presidential Management Fellow. I only wish that USIA were still around and that the academic-turned-public diplomacy director Duffey could have had an opportunity to enhance the agency's status, not put it to bed forever." So in fact, you and I share admiration for the Wick days. I just never knew Wick personally, only Duffey.

Yale Richmond on November 30, 2005 @ 4:30 pm:

I find it very strange that Frank Shakespeare should be considered as one of USIA's top directors. Shakespeare sought to destroy the merit system by introducing partisan politics into the promotion process. He ordered non-partisan promotion panels to submit their recommendations, not in the order recommended for promotion but in alphabetical order so that he would be free to select candidates he considered best qualified for promotion, or to pass over those whom he did not want to see promoted. In 1972, the American Foreign

Service Association, which represented most of USIA's Foreign Service personnel, protested Shakespeare's right to have final authority over key promotions.

On a more serious note, Shakespeare's policy differences with the State Department and even the White House led to a rebuke from Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Shakespeare's resignation a year later, in December 1972. after Congress had slashed the USIA budget request.

Carol Doerflein on December 2, 2005 @ 12:18 pm:

Former Director Duffey is a fine and decent man who would have been at home heading up an academic institution. He had the academicians's love of analyzing every side of an issue without necessarily coming to a conclusion, let alone taking vigorous action on that conclusion. Despite his many good qualities, he was the wrong person to head USIA at a time when we were clearly being shoved toward the exit in an era of post-Cold War triumphalism. When push came to shove, Director Duffey did not fight for our agency. Deputy Director Kemble--never a favorite of USIAers--fought like hell for us.

Barry Zorthian wrote on December 6, 2005 @ 2:07 pm:

Barry Zorthian has kindly granted Worldcasting permission to post his following comments. He notes that his remarks are "off the cuff" and "not fully developed."

Alvin:

This is a delayed reply to your Nov. 22 message about past USIA directors.

Point one: I urge you not to forget early directors and especially George Allen who I think was one of the most effective of the lot and who should be credited with establishing much of the early stature for USIA. He was a first rate leader. Part of his great strenght was his relation to the State Department. He has been an outstnading career foreign service officer(Greece, India) and was highly respected by his former colleagues and had considerable influence on their attitude towards and acceptance of USIA's role. I was Program Manager of VOA during Allen's tenure and he was a driving force in making VOA an acceptable respected radio network with great emphasis on Worldwide English broadcasts. He was a leading force on establishing the VOA Charter which came into existenvce during the Directorship of Henry Loomis.

And then there was Ed Murrow of course who was one of the few USIA directors to sit in on the National Security Council meetings. He was close to the Kennedy's. One of my proudest possessions is a personal letter from him assigning me in February 1964 as PAO to Vietnam in which he said Amb. Henry Cabot Lodge had accepted my appointment but wanted to make it clear that Lodge personally would handle the media and I would have nothing to do with media relations. And of course, with Lodge's approval, that changed in June 1964, to an NSC directive making me the primary public affairs advisor to both him and COMUSMACV and four years of the most intense media relations assignment in, I believe, in the history of USIA.

I retired in 1968 but had close relations through the sixties with two other notable USIA directors: Carl Rowan and Leonard Marks. About Carl, I could telll you incidents of his visit to Vietnam during which in the course of some air flights the concept of the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) was conceived and which Carl pushed through the NSC with Presidential endorsement. And Leonard, who was close to LBJ and a meeting we had in Manila during the Seven Nation Conference with the President and the non-American media reps in which LBJ literally stood up and acting like an old time pugillist punched with one arm as to what he would do to Ho Chi Minh and with the other arm on how he would punch back. Memories.

I had little to do with Directors after 1968.

Barry Z.
