

Operation Atlantis and the Radical Libertarian Alliance: Observations of a Fly on the Wall

We are not to expect to be translated from despotism to liberty in a featherbed.—Thomas Jefferson

In the late 1960s and early 1970s I simultaneously participated in the movement to establish a libertarian nation outside the USA and the campaign to stand and fight against the tyranny of the Nixon administration. Like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, I was on the leading edge in more than one field. Unlike Jefferson and Franklin, who were great men who accomplished great things, I was an unimportant, part-time member of the choir—too timid to stick my neck out and possessed of talents better suited to be an aficionado than a star performer.

How I Became the Second “Immigrant” to Atlantis

In 1968, I was a young libertarian (of the Rothbardian-anarcho-capitalist persuasion) working for IBM as a technical writer and trying hard to stay out of the army and Vietnam. I was paying \$85 per month for a small, roach-infested apartment attached to a liquor store next the railroad tracks on Albany Avenue in Kingston, NY. (A few years later the building was condemned, razed, hauled away, and not replaced.) Somehow, probably because I subscribed to every libertarian magazine or newsletter in existence at that time, I came across a notice about an organization called Operation Atlantis that was working to create a libertarian country. The address for more information was in Saugerties, NY, which is the next town north of Kingston. I was intrigued.

I contacted Operation Atlantis and arranged to meet Werner Stiefel, who was the man in charge. Mr. Stiefel turned out to be a respectable businessman in his late 40s who was an admirer of Ayn Rand, but who had discovered her cult too late in life to lose the habits of thinking for himself and being tolerant of people with different opinions. He lived with his wife and family in a big house near one of the labs of the international pharmaceutical company that he and his brother owned. The lab was about 25 minutes by car from Saugerties, NY.

Mr. Stiefel explained to me that the first stage of Operation Atlantis was to recruit libertarians to work with him on the project. As part of this stage, he bought the Sawyerkill Motel in Saugerties and renamed it the Atlantis-Sawyerkill Motel (or “Atlantis I” in the parlance of Operation Atlantis). His idea was to use the motel and the few acres of land with it as a staging ground and as a place where recruits could live near each other in a proprietary community and work on the project in their free time. He chose this location because it was easy to commute from it north to the Stiefel lab or west to the Rotron facility in Woodstock or south to the large IBM plants in Kingston and Poughkeepsie. He already had one recruit living in the motel—a full-blooded Randian named Phil Coates, whom Stiefel had recently hired to work for his pharmaceutical company. Stiefel also had a long-time employee who was interested in Operation Atlantis. I met the man one day when Mr. Stiefel took me on a tour of his lab. I think his name was Paul Rehm. He was a LeFevreian-pacifist libertarian.

Mr. Stiefel showed me one of the rooms in the motel and offered to install a small refrigerator and electric range and rent it (the room) to me for \$90 per month. My sheets and towels would be changed every week. The room was clean, air-conditioned, and only a 15-minute drive on a scenic, country road to my job at the IBM plant in Kingston. So I accepted the offer and became the second “immigrant” to Atlantis.

As part of the recruitment program, Mr. Stiefel published a semi-monthly newsletter called *The Atlantis News*. Stories in the *News* were often full of “hype” designed to make Operation Atlantis seem larger and more exciting than it actually was. Mr. Stiefel formed one corporation after another and announced in the newsletter that these companies had joined Operation Atlantis. Mr. Stiefel supplied all the funding and most of the energy that went into Operation Atlantis. As far as I could tell it was basically a one-man show made to look like a movement. The Atlantis Trading Company, the Atlantis Publishing Company, the Atlantis Development Corporation, and the Atlantis Commodity Purchasing Service, were all Werner Stiefel. So too was Warren Stevens, the author of *The Story of Operation Atlantis* and editor of *The Atlantis News*. I believe he preferred to do most of the work himself so that he could maintain control and make sure things got done.

The first issue of *The Atlantis News*, which announced the launching of “Atlantis I” (the motel), was published on September 6, 1968. That issue also announced the creation of the Atlantis Development Corporation, which owned the motel, and the Atlantis Publishing Company, which published the newsletter and soon would publish *The Story of Operation Atlantis*.

The story of my immigration to “Atlantis I” was published in the November 1, 1968, issue. It accurately reports facts about my history from high school through college, my job at IBM, and the influence of Jack Schwartzman and Murray Rothbard on my thinking. However, the article greatly inflated my interest (which was close to zero) in the newly formed Atlantis Trading Company, which was going to sell sterling silver Deca coins (the basic monetary unit of Atlantis), ship-wheel lapel buttons (the “Atlantis Freedom Symbol” to serve an identification role like the dollar-sign emblem worn by Randians in those days), freedom bumper stickers, bars of soap, and other items.

The Story of Operation Atlantis

The November 15, 1968 issue of *The Atlantis News* announced that the Atlantis Development Corporation was about to expand the “Atlantis I” site by purchasing a two-bedroom brick house on an acre of land adjacent to the motel. This would allow a family with children to join the first stage of Operation Atlantis. That same issue also announced that page proofs of *The Story of Operation Atlantis* had been received from the printer and printed copies of the booklet would be available within a few days. Werner gave me the type-written manuscript to keep as a souvenir. I still have it in my files.

The Story of Operation Atlantis is a clear and logical plea to libertarians to create a new country for ourselves and let the socialists keep the USA. It’s like John Galt’s speech in *Atlas Shrugged* after a good editor got hold of it and deleted the preachy mumbo-jumbo and redundancy and translated most of the rest from Rand-speak into standard American-English. It shows that Werner Stiefel considered all the moral issues, financial issues, and pitfalls involved in such a radical project and that he is good at analyzing problems and coming up with reasonable solutions.

The original plan for Operation Atlantis consisted of three stages: (1) gather libertarians in a single location (the motel) “where they can work together to build an integrated community” and prepare the way for the next stage, (2) acquire an ocean vessel and declare it to be an independent nation while in international waters, and (3) create “an artificial island as close to the shores of the U.S. as international law will permit and Uncle Sam will tolerate.” Each of these stages was designed to make a profit for the initial investors and to ultimately be self-supporting. By establishing Atlantis as a proprietary community inhabited only by individuals who voluntarily agree to the terms of their lease contracts, Stiefel endowed it with a limited government that does not violate the non-aggression principle, thereby making Atlantis acceptable to both limited-government libertarians and anarcho-libertarians.

Atlantis Freedom Forums

As part of the recruitment program, Stiefel advertised that Operation Atlantis held Freedom Forums in the lobby of the motel every Sunday. I missed the January 19, 1969, meeting when Erwin Strauss, who later wrote the book *How to Start Your Own Country*, described his idea for ocean-worthy floating platforms. I may have missed some of the other Sunday visitors because I often went away on weekends to visit friends in New York City and relatives in Connecticut, New Jersey, and Long Island. It is my impression that on most Sundays nobody showed up. I only remember meeting two groups of visitors during the two years I lived at “Atlantis I.”

Mario Rizzo and Jerry O’Driscoll Jr. drove up from New York City one weekend to visit me and to check out the place. (They were undergraduate students at Fordham University at the time, and I knew them already from get-togethers at Rothbard’s apartment in Manhattan. They both went on to get PhDs and to become prominent scholars in the field of Austrian economics.) I think I took them to my favorite watering hole, the Cafe Espresso on Tinker Street in Woodstock, for a few drinks.

The other group that I recall meeting was a contingent of ten members of the Society for Rational Individualism who drove up from Maryland. They were led by Jarret Wollstein who published *The Rational Individualist* magazine, wrote one of the first booklets (*Society without Coercion*) to explain anarcho-capitalism, and helped to found the Society for Individual Liberty. Phil Coates got along well with them, but they were too reverential to Ayn Rand for my taste.

“The Animal” Becomes the Third “Immigrant”

Another visitor who came the same weekend (December 21-22, 1968) as the contingent from Maryland was Myles Lieberman, who flew in from Los Angeles. Stiefel offered Myles a job as a management trainee at Stiefel Laboratories. A few weeks later Myles became the third immigrant to Atlantis.

Myles was reported to be a follower of Andrew Galambos rather than Ayn Rand. The good thing about the Galambosians is that they respect his ownership of his ideas so much that they don’t talk about them lest they infringe on his rights. You have to pay to find out what Galambos’ philosophy is, which few people are willing to do, so it is destined to always be marginal at best. As far as I could tell from his behavior, Myles had an eclectic philosophy that embraced as many cutting-edge, radical, anarchistic, science-fictional, California ideas as possible. He was a close friend of Durk Pearson and Sandy Shaw, who later wrote best selling books on life extension. He believed LSD would bring about love and world peace. He was full of enthusiasms, which caused him to come in conflict with the forbidding Randians involved in Operation Atlantis. So he hung out with me because I was more tolerant, even though I was socially conservative. I nicknamed him “The Animal,” and soon everybody in the Rothbard circle was calling him that. Rather than fight it, he started referring to himself as “The Animal.”

Operation Atlantis Seeks a Caribbean Island

On January 4, 1969, *The New York Times* published a story about a court ruling by a judge in Florida that prohibited Louis M. Ray, Acme General Contractors, and the Atlantis Development Corporation (not Stiefel’s company of the same name) from building a new country on top of coral reefs off the coast of Florida. Stiefel reprinted the story in the January 17, 1969 issue of *The Atlantis News* along with a revision of the Operation Atlantis work plan. Stiefel wrote:

From Judge Fulton’s decision it is logical to infer that Uncle Sam will tolerate no new offshore nation which utilizes existing reefs or other natural structures. Furthermore, it is reasonable to project that the Feds would use the “security of our nation” doctrine as an excuse to move against any off-shore nation that they felt was “too close”—international law and the “open seas” principle notwithstanding.

To accommodate the court ruling without giving up on the objective of obtaining an off-shore location close enough to reach the U.S. mainland via a short hydrofoil ride, Stiefel amended the plan for Operation Atlantis by adding step IA, between steps I and II. Step IA would be the purchase of a remote island or sandbar, “with independent sovereignty as part of the contract, for the purpose of (1) establishing a subsidized colony, (2) running up the flag, and (3) gaining recognition.” The Stage II ship would then sail under the flag of this new country, and construction of the Stage III platform, as close as possible to the U.S., would be an undertaking of the new sovereign country. Stiefel, in this unsigned article, promised that the Atlantis Development Corporation would purchase a suitable island before the end of 1969.

In March 1969, Stiefel flew down to the Caribbean to look for a suitable island for Stage IA.

Meanwhile Back at the Revolution...

My contribution to Operation Atlantis, in addition to giving it moral support by living in the motel, consisted of writing a few articles for *The Atlantis News*. My first piece, published in the March 7, 1969 issue, was a letter to the editor in which I defended Murray Rothbard’s support for revolution in response to Werner Stiefel’s February 7, 1969 report on Rothbard’s speech at the first Libertarian Forum, which was held at the Great Shanghai Restaurant in New York on January 31. Stiefel was appalled by the idea of violence, even for a worthy goal such as liberty.

Revolutionary talk was common in those days because of the war in Vietnam, the draft, and the rise of the New Left. In the April 18, 1969 issue of the

News, I reported on the speech given by Karl Hess at the second Libertarian Forum (on April 11) in which he urged libertarians to ally with the New Left. In the May 16, 1969 issue (published about three weeks late), I reported on Leonard Liggio's speech at the third Libertarian Forum (on May 17) in which he outlined the history of the New Left. I concluded my summary of Liggio's talk this way:

Because the New Left lacks ideology it is not consistently against the State. Most of them are only situationally against the State and could be co-opted back into the establishment like the Old Left. Another basic flaw in the New Left is that the great majority of their scholars and theoreticians are Old Guard types who will try to bring them back into the mainstream. If this is to be prevented the New Left must be presented with a consistent anti-state ideology which can only be provided by libertarians.

My report made Mr. Stiefel uncomfortable, so he appended this caveat:

The Atlantis News occasionally publishes reports of events which shed light on the state of Liberty in the U.S. and other parts of the world. Such reporting does not necessarily imply our endorsement. For the record, we are diametrically opposed to "action without ideology" and to the initiation of force against innocent people.—Ed.

What I left out of my report was that the Radical Libertarian Alliance was born on May 17 right after the Libertarian Forum, and that I was one of its founding members. The purpose of the RLA was to put the ideas expressed in the Libertarian Forums into action by assembling groups of radical libertarians, on college campuses and elsewhere across the country, who would attempt to steer the New Left in a libertarian direction by joining forces with them in opposition to war, imperialism, conscription, and other areas where the New Left was already on our side.

Murray Rothbard lauded the creation of the RLA in the June 1, 1969 issue of *The Libertarian*. Jerry Tuccille depicted the RLA less propagandistically in his 1971 book *It Usually Begins with Ayn Rand*, where he described us as "a claue of porcine revolutionaries." I was not porcine then (as I am now), but the adjective fit Murray Rothbard, Roy Childs, Karl Hess, and some of the others, and I agree with Tuccille's assessment that, "A barroom full of inebriated wire lathers taking time out from a football game could have wiped them out in a single encounter."

Tuccille's realistic appraisal of our fighting prowess did not prevent him from joining the RLA. He became a contributor to and eventually editor-in-chief of our magazine *The Abolitionist* and of our follow-on magazine *Outlook*. It didn't matter that we couldn't hurt a fly. We were propagandists and theoreticians for a libertarian revolution rather than front-line troops. I supported the idea of revolution in theory just as I supported the free-haven idea of Operation Atlantis and as I still support the Libertarian Nation Foundation—which is not the same thing as believing that the conditions are right for these ideas to prevail.

The Preform Movement

In March of 1969, Stiefel reported on his trip to Los Angeles where he learned about the rise and fall of the Preform movement, which, he thought, was remarkably similar to Operation Atlantis, was well organized, made highly professional presentations to much larger audiences than Operation Atlantis, and yet failed.

Stiefel sought to learn from the failure of Preform and to avoid making their mistakes. In his analysis there were three reasons why Preform failed: (1) there was too much disagreement among the members as to nature and size of government the new country should have (we have the same problem within the Libertarian Nation Foundation), (2) they overestimated the number of libertarians who would be willing to actively work for a new country, and (3) they didn't have enough capital to finance the project. To avoid these pitfalls, Stiefel advocated a policy of starting out on a small scale, which doesn't require a meeting of many minds, the work of many hands, or the raising of much capital. The existing Atlantis Development Corporation (Stiefel) had enough money to buy a small island. Initially, the company would own the island and would make land "available to newcomers only on a long-term lease basis, the terms of the contract being the only 'law' the lessee will have to obey. As far as the outside world is concerned, the officers and board of directors of the Corporation will be the 'government.' Anyone who at that point wishes equity participation in Atlantis IA can do so by buying stock in the Company. This device avoids all the altercation about the proper way to 'govern' a country, yet presents to the world the 'duly constituted authority' which it requires for recognition."

On April 4, 1969, *The Atlantis News* printed a letter from Tom Marshall, which corrected some of the statements that Stiefel made about Preform. It never tried to create a new country or to raise capital for such a project, so it is not correct to say that it failed. Preform was more like Stage I of Operation Atlantis (or like FNF or LNF) in that it "was essentially a study group to examine the feasibility and do advance planning of a laissez-faire freeport ... At accomplishing this it was generally successful. After two years most participants concluded that such a 'Free Isle' was probably not feasible. ... The single most important reason for not proceeding with implementation—not mentioned in your article—was the increasing harassment and threats of the U.S. and other major governments against international movements of capital, people and goods, on which 'Free Isles' (as conceived) would depend. ... present-day activities under the name 'Preform' concern self-liberation through neo-nomadic living, not the freeport development."

Land Ho!

In the March 21, 1969 issue of *The Atlantis News*, Stiefel reported that he had found a possible site for Atlantis IA: Two uninhabited cays in the Caribbean Sea that are easily accessible from the U.S. and that are part of the territory of a weak and impoverished nation which places little value on them. Stiefel met the governor and most of the legislators and came back with the opinion that they might lease the cays but would not sell them. Then he reported that leasing might be better anyway because "Their [the bureaucrats] sense of contractual responsibility is limited, and they might very well accept our purchase money and then repudiate the sale a few years later—conveniently forgetting to refund the purchase price. With a lease, the regular annual payments make their benefits highly visible and continuing." One undesirable aspect of this arrangement is that we would have to settle for dependency status rather than outright sovereignty.

In the May 16, 1969 issue Stiefel announced that he had made a formal proposal to the government of whose territory his prospective Stage IA site is a

part. In the June 6 issue he announced that he is in the process of establishing residency in the Bahamas. In the July 18, 1969 issue, Stiefel announced the name and location of the islands he is trying to lease for Stage IA. They are the Prickly Pear cays located six miles northwest of Anguilla in the British West Indies.¹

The August 1, 1969 issue (published about four weeks late) announced that plans for the first building on Atlantis IA have been completed. Such plans, though admittedly premature, are required by local law before foreigners can purchase land. In the September 19 issue, Stiefel announced plans to rent a house on Anguilla as a base camp.

At some point during my stay at "Atlantis I," Werner offered to pay me to write a prospectus for the Atlantis Development Corporation. He showed me a prospectus for another company that I could use as a model. It was a thick document full of legal and financial terminology. I declined the offer on the grounds of incompetence. Eventually, he got Spencer MacCallum to write the part of the prospectus that would be the lease contract between the Atlantis Development Corporation and residents of Atlantis III.

Report from the Home Front

In the same issue in which Stiefel reported about the base camp in Anguilla, I reported on the two-day libertarian conference at the Hotel Diplomat in Manhattan. Karl Hess praised the Black Panthers in his address on Saturday night. Murray Rothbard was critical of them on Sunday afternoon, which provoked student activist Wilson Clark Jr. to stir up emotions by saying that only the Left confronts the state, and while they are heroically risking life and limb, the right-wing libertarians fret about the theoretical purity of those who protest oppression. Tempers and voices rose and the assemblage splintered into several factions, each denouncing the others. The leftists complained that the right-wing libertarians are not really radicals: they don't regard the state as the enemy, and, in fact, are more concerned with fighting alien ideologies than with abolishing the state. I reported that:

The reason for this impotence, they claim, is that many of them got their libertarianism via Ayn Rand who refuses to give her moral sanction to any person or group that disagrees with any of her opinions. Accordingly, the people must first be made disciples before they can be condoned.

Rothbard argued that we need to radicalize libertarians so they can work with left-wing activists, provide them with correct theoretical justifications for their opposition to government policies, and prevent them from engaging in "left-wing adventurism." But, as Rothbard reported in the November 1 issue of *The Libertarian Forum*, "Goaded beyond endurance by the right-wing's attack on the very concept and morality of revolution, not only the ultra-left but even the bulk of the center responded swiftly and emotionally to the cry of 'On to Ft. Dix!' It was as if, after defending the very concept of action against the State, the center and left felt that they had to rush out and seize the opportunity for any action whatever." Rothbard's Leninist plea for forethought, strategic insight, tactical timing, and sanity persuaded many centrists to remain at the conference, but did not stop Karl Hess and a score of left-wing anarchists from going to New Jersey to join the march on Ft. Dix. Several of them returned in tears a few hours later to scream at us for staying in New York instead of manning the barricades. In conclusion, I wrote:

Such things as "liberating" parks and public buildings may be justified by the homesteading principle, but they may still be foolhardy. This point seemed to have been validated Sunday when those libertarians who participated in the peaceful attempt to "liberate" Ft. Dix got tear-gassed. The important final panel discussion of the Libertarian Conference—"What is to be done?"—was aborted as a result of the Ft. Dix caper which led to rumors of an imminent FBI raid.

The Atlantis News Proves the New-Left's Point

In the March 6, 1970 issue of *The Atlantis News*, Werner Stiefel published a favorable review of Nathaniel Branden's book *The Psychology of Self-Esteem* in spite of the fact that Branden had by then been condemned by Ayn Rand. This provoked Phil Coates, the first immigrant to Atlantis, to write the following letter to the editor:

In your issue of March 6 you recommend Nathaniel Branden's book *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*.

Given the fact that Mr. Branden by his own admission maintained a policy of dishonesty toward Ayn Rand and others while advocating and teaching (in the essays which comprise the above book, among other places) that one should not fake reality in any manner whatsoever, my policy is that I will not give Mr. Branden the sanction and support of dealing with him and his knowing representatives.

Instead of shrugging off this pettiness and moving on, Stiefel published a long editorial in the April 17 issue to defend his reading of Branden's book. This is a good example of Randians showing their priorities. They spend more time and ink excommunicating one another from their sect than they do protesting war, imperialism, and oppression.²

Operation Atlantis Opens Two More Fronts

Stiefel found out that the cays he wanted to buy are owned jointly by about 36 individuals, divided into five family lines represented by elders. By November 1969, he had succeeded in getting agreement from all five spokesmen to sell the cays to the Atlantis Development Corporation for \$100,000. But the sale of land to a foreign company cannot be consummated until the government issues a purchase permit, and the bureaucrats involved were better at making excuses than decisions.

Rather than idly waiting a year or more for the bureaucracy to act, Stiefel began to investigate the possibility of starting a shoal landfill (also called a Texas-tower) and the possibility of building a floating platform as alternative ways to create a free nation. The December 5, 1969 issue of *The Atlantis News* (published three weeks late) reported on Dr. William Nierenberg's design for floating platforms, which "raises breathtaking possibilities for Operation Atlantis ... we could leap-frog all the intermediate stages and have freedom, sovereignty and independence immediately."

The January 16, 1970 issue announced that Operation Atlantis has retained “an outstanding professor of international law to advise us on avoiding trouble with Big Brother and other governments, if we should, for example, want to anchor a floating island 50 miles beyond the U.S. continental shelf.” Unfortunately, the professor’s work load made it necessary for him to resign on April 18.

The February 20, 1970 issue announced that several areas of shallow water have been located that would be suitable for a shoal-landfill project. That issue also included a solicitation by the Atlantis Development Corporation for a manager of the shoal-landfill project. On May 3, 1970, Werner Stiefel and six other men formed a new company to create an artificial island in the Caribbean. Also in May, Werner Stiefel and Thurlow Weed made a survey trip to two of the proposed sites for Atlantis III, took aerial photographs of the sites, and found a charter-boat captain “crazy enough to be willing to take his vessel into these dangerous shoal waters.”

Multitasking for Personal Freedom

In the summer of 1970, I was seriously considering fleeing to a more free country to escape slavery in the United States. But I wasn’t thinking of moving south to an island in the Caribbean. Instead, Canada was beginning to look very attractive to me. You see I had more reasons than Werner Stiefel did for seeking a safe haven. Uncle Sam had taken a personal interest in my future. He wanted to make a soldier out of me and ship me to South Vietnam to prevent America from being overrun by the communists, or to get our POWs and MIAs back, or whatever.

I had managed to get deferments from the draft up to this time (four years of student deferments while I was in college and two and a half years of occupational deferments for having a “critical” job as a technical writer for IBM—I believe I hold the record for the most months of occupational deferments at IBM, but that’s another story). Now the Nixon administration needed more young men for the Vietnam war. So they instituted a lottery to select inductees. This turned out to be a brilliant move. Not only did it simplify the selection process and give them all the soldiers they needed, it also drained energy from the anti-war movement.

The first draft lottery, which pertained to conscriptions for the year 1970, worked like this: All men between the ages of 19 and 26 who had not already served in the armed forces and did not have deferments were included in the lottery. (Subsequent lotteries would be held each year thereafter for those who had turned 19 or lost their deferments since the previous lottery.) Three-hundred and sixty-six capsules with a different day of the year printed on a piece of paper inside each one were put into a glass bowl, scrambled, and withdrawn one at a time. The order in which the days of the year were pulled out became the order in which young men with corresponding birthdays would be called by their local draft board to report for pre-induction physicals. All those who passed their physical examinations would be inducted into the army—no excuses. It was widely known that most local draft boards would be able to meet their quotas from the first 135 or so birthdays pulled out of the bowl.

The drawing was held on December 1, 1969. It was televised live across the USA and watched by most of the young men who were at risk. Those who were lucky enough to have their birthday pulled out after 150 or so others could breath a sigh of relief because they no longer had to worry about being drafted and sent to Vietnam. Most of these winners immediately stopped complaining about the injustice of the draft and the cruelty of war.³

As the dates were being pulled out of the bowl, I noticed a trend that made me realize it was a mistake on my part to have been born in December. Of the first 78 birthdays selected, 12 were December birthdays. My birthday (December 25) was the 84th out of the bowl, which mean I could expect to be called up for a pre-induction physical in the summer of 1970 unless I could get another deferment.

On May 1, 1970, I was classified 1-A, which meant I no longer had a deferment and I could be ordered to report at any time. I got IBM to send a letter to my local draft board. I followed this up on June 8 by sending a letter in which I wrote, “My employer, IBM, has submitted for your consideration a letter (June 2) confirming my present status as an Associate Writer-Programmer working on Advanced Programming Systems. Surely I can’t be less valuable with three years experience than two. I hereby appeal for renewal of my 2-A classification.”

Back in the winter of 1966-67 and the spring on 1967, when I was in my final semester of college, I exchanged correspondence with the personnel department of the Canadian Pacific Railroad and with the Canadian Department of Citizenship and Immigration. But my interest in Canada suddenly waned when I received employment and occupational-deferment offers from IBM. Now, three years later, my occupational deferments had run out and I experienced a renewed interest in our northern neighbor. So in addition to filing an appeal on the revocation of my occupational deferment, I studied the Canadian immigration laws, received an Application for Permanent Residence in Canada from the Department of Manpower and Immigration, and contacted the Toronto Anti-Draft Programme.

I didn’t stop there in defending my freedom. On June 16, I wrote a letter to my local draft board asking them to send me SSS Form 150 so I could apply for conscientious objector status. I filled out the application asking to be exempted from both combatant training and noncombatant training and service in the armed forces by reason of my religious training and belief. I included an 8-page explanation of my objections to military service and copies of anti-war articles that I had written for my college newspaper and the Radical Libertarian Alliance. I also included a copy of Murray Rothbard’s essay, “War, Peace and the State.” Here is a condensed version of the arguments I sent to my local draft board in my application for conscientious objector status:

It is the fundamental tenet of my religious training and belief that the basic, God-given, inalienable right possessed by each individual is the right to be free from aggression. By “aggression” I mean the use of force against an innocent person. An innocent person is one who is not threatening anyone. A crime then, is simply any act of aggression. ...

War consists of a furious succession of crimes, that is, war consists of aggressive acts of violence against innocent people on a gigantic scale.

...

I believe that wars are caused and sustained by the collectivist fallacy of mentally lumping people into groups called nations and then making judgments about the aggressiveness of the nations and overlooking justice for the individuals involved. ...

Modern war is the worst kind of war in history because the weapons used (bombs, artillery, chemical and biological weapons, etc.) kill indiscriminately and cannot be used without killing innocent people. ...

The very existence of weapons of mass destruction is a crime since these weapons can only be used to slaughter people indiscriminately. ...

War is not only wrong because it requires the slaughter of innocent people, it is also wrong because of its purpose. ...

Soldiers in war do not fight to protect their society, they fight for their State; either to defend it from losing control of its subjects to another State, or to help it expand. It is wrong to fight for such purposes even if it were possible to do it without killing innocent people. States are criminal organizations, and it is wrong to defend them or to help them expand their control. ... All States act aggressively against their innocent subjects. No government has ever ruled with the consent of the governed. ...

A government is an organization which claims a monopoly on violence and coercion in a certain geographic area and supports itself by demanding money from its subjects in the form of taxes. If a person is unable or unwilling to pay tribute to his rulers, the government's agents will initiate threats of violence against him, throw him in prison, and even kill him if he resists.

I am convinced that it is wrong to serve in the military in any capacity whether as a combatant or noncombatant. ... Even if the army did nothing but march in parades it would still be wrong to be a member of it because it is not composed of volunteers. ... The U.S. Army is not made up of volunteers, but rather of slaves compelled to do two years of involuntary servitude ... Since the army is a slave society, it is wrong for any soldier to give an order to any other soldier, even though the order might be something as trivial as "forward march." If a man sees no worthwhile purpose in marching, no one has the right to resort to threats of violence and punishment, which are implicit in orders, to make him march.

I listed Murray Rothbard, Jack Schwartzman, and Werner Stiefel as references on my application for conscientious objector status. I am proud to say they all sent letters to my local board on my behalf.

What was my local draft board's response to my appeal for reinstatement of my occupational deferment and my application for conscientious objector status? Did they see the error of their ways and join the anti-war movement? No. Did they give my arguments due consideration and then reject them? No. They didn't consider them at all. They never even acknowledged receiving them. Instead they ordered me to report to Brooklyn, NY, for a pre-induction physical.

My future was looking grim. But suddenly my luck changed. Shortly before I had to report for my physical I met some young men at a cafe in Woodstock who told me about a doctor in Manhattan who was very proficient at discovering disabilities that disqualify men from military service. I drove down to the doctor's office on the next business day. His waiting room was filled with young men interested in their health. The doctor was so good at his job that he only had to spend a few minutes with each patient. Even though there were 20 boys in line ahead of me, it wasn't long before my turn came up. In less than five minutes he found that I had several disqualifying disabilities that might go unnoticed in a routine physical examination. There is more to this story, but suffice it to say that because of this heroic doctor, I failed my pre-induction physical and ultimately attained the status IV-F, which means I am forever disqualified from military servitude.

Operation Atlantis Gets Cited in *Esquire Magazine*

The September 1970 issue of *Esquire* magazine contained an article by Hugh Gardner called "Your Global Alternative: Communes, Experiments, Jails and Hidey-Holes," which included the following remarks related to Operation Atlantis:

There are at least three publications devoted to oceanic freedom: *The Atlantis News*, the *Atlantis Quarterly* and *Ocean Living*. One of the, the *News*, is involved in a project called Operation Atlantis. Operation Atlantis is a real mind-blower, for they're not just interested in a floating community, but an honest-to-god independent country. They are reportedly well-financed, well-managed, and very serious. How are they going to do it? They're going to build an island, baby, in the middle of the ocean.

Operation Atlantis Builds a Geodesic Dome and Becomes More Secretive

The August 7, 1970 issue of *The Atlantis News* (published in November 1970) announced a change in policy for the newsletter: "our policy here at the News is shifting away from the discussion of future plans, and in the direction of reporting the actual news after it has happened." The same story also reported that (1) the Atlantis Development Corporation obtained a license from Buckminster Fuller for the construction of a geodesic dome 50 feet in diameter and 23 feet high on the grounds of the motel, (2) construction of the dome was almost complete, and (3) the purpose of the dome would be made public some time in the future.

I don't remember whether I knew the purpose for the dome at this time. Although I was still living at the motel and I noticed the progress on the dome each evening when I returned from my job, I was paying less attention to Operation Atlantis than I had been before. Having gained my freedom from the draft, I was ready for the first time in my life to seriously pursue a woman, and I had found the one I wanted.

Operation Atlantis Decides to Build a Ferrocement Boat and I Leave

The September 4, 1970 issue of *The Atlantis News* (published in December 1970) announced that the Atlantis Development Corporation was in the process of building a 38-foot boat inside the geodesic dome and that the boat was being made of cement. (Maybe Stiefel wanted something concrete to show visitors.) I didn't have time to think about it. I was engaged to be married and was making plans to move out of Atlantis by the end of the month.

In January 1971, I moved from Atlantis to a little house a few miles away in West Saugerties, NY. On January 30, I got married, and after a brief honeymoon in Montreal, my bride moved down from Hudson Falls, NY to join me in West Saugerties. We lived there for about a year and a half before moving to Eddyville, NY. During that time I drove past "Atlantis I" every day on my way to and from my job in Kingston. I continued to receive *The Atlantis News* through the January, 1 1971 issue (published on May 21, 1971), when it seems my subscription expired and I neglected to renew. I never saw Werner Stiefel again, and I lost touch with the whole operation.

My association with the Radical Libertarian Alliance lasted only a little longer. We published a monthly magazine called *The Abolitionist* from March 1970 to March 1972. I was listed as a contributing editor because I contributed money to help subsidize the magazine and because I wrote a few articles for it. In March 1972 we changed the format of the magazine and changed its name to *Outlook*. I was listed as a contributing editor again for the same reasons. In a personal letter to me dated October 31, 1972, Walter Block wrote that the magazine has almost 2000 subscribers and is on the way to economic self-sufficiency. Yet, the last issue of *Outlook* that I have is dated December 1972. I don't remember what happened, but I think that was the end of the RLA or at least the end of my involvement with it.

Post Departum

The few issues of *The Atlantis News* that I received after leaving "Atlantis I" reported on the progress made on building the cement boat to be named Atlantis II (which it turns out was intended to shuttle people and supplies to Atlantis III), photographs of the first coins minted for Operation Atlantis, preliminary plans to issue Atlantis postage stamps, and a brief summary of the overall project. Erwin Strauss' book *How to Start Your Own Country* contains information about the subsequent activities of Operation Atlantis. He indicates that the cement boat was launched in December 1969, but he must have meant December 1971. The boat was launched into the Hudson River at high tide, but when the tide went out, the boat was left lying on its side in the mud. A kerosene lantern broke in the process and started a fire, but the damage was limited by the inflammable cement structure. The boat was righted and sent down river.

It appears that the Atlanteans took a few liberties with the ship's design to make it more suitable for their purposes. For example, a (concrete) deckhouse was added. This made the vessel extremely top-heavy. All gear was stripped from the ship except what was needed to make it operable, and replaced with ballast. It still almost capsized from superstructure icing while crossing the mouth of New York harbor. Then it broke a propeller shaft off South Carolina, and finally limped into the Bahamas. There it stayed until it sank in a hurricane.⁴

The site that Werner Stiefel chose for Atlantis III was the Silver Shoals area in the Caribbean Sea, which got its name from the large number of Spanish galleons loaded with treasure that ran into the reefs and sank there. Haiti and the Bahamas both claimed the area and the rights to its sunken treasure. Stiefel acquired land on Tortuga island in Haiti to use as a base. "But the Haitians soon learned about his designs on the Silver Shoals, which had been published in *The Atlantis News*, and this forced Operation Atlantis into a low-profile posture from which it has never emerged."⁵

Operation Atlantis began landfill operations on the Silver Shoals, using a vessel owned by Stiefel Laboratories, and they actually retrieved some silver from sunken galleons.

The most recent information I have seen regarding the fate of Operation Atlantis comes from our very own *Formulations*. Stiefel commissioned Spencer MacCallum to write the lease contract for residents of Atlantis III. A revised version of this lease was published in *Formulations* Vol. III, No. 3. The prefatory note written by Carl Watner and Spencer MacCallum indicates that the lease has outlived Operation Atlantis:

The following article began as a commission in exchange for equity in Atlantis. Unfortunately, Stiefel's efforts came to nought when he was chased off the site by Duvalier's gunboats. Although nothing remains of Atlantis, the master lease for this proprietary community has survived and been revised during the intervening years. Since Stiefel wanted to retain a low profile while he was building Atlantis, when the lease was published it was promoted as being for ORBIS, the name of a hypothetical proprietary community in outer space.

I don't know what became of Phil Coates and "The Animal." Spencer MacCallum is still in communication with Werner Stiefel, who is living in the Caribbean area (he must be 80 years old now) and still working to create a free country. I wish him well.

This anecdotal history probably does not provide enough evidence to warrant any particular conclusions about strategies for achieving freedom, but it does illustrate some points that might be worth keeping in mind. As Werner Stiefel learned from trying to create a free country and as I learned in trying to dodge the draft, when dealing with government bureaucrats who have power over your life-plans, an open and honest approach is not necessarily effective. Stiefel has switched to a less open but still honest approach, and he has yet to succeed. I succeeded in dodging the draft when I switched from the open and honest approach of my appeal for conscientious objector status, which the bureaucrats ignored, to a deceptive and dishonest approach that was certified by a corrupt and well connected doctor whose position in the power structure was superior to that of the doctors who gave me my pre-induction physical. [If they had deemed me fit for military service, I would have appealed, and the appeal would have been heard by the five-member board of physicians who handled all such appeals for the New York metropolitan area. My doctor was one of the five members on that board. That is why my letter from him, on his official stationery, was so effective.] This suggests to me that in planning the creation of a free nation, finding corrupt officials to bribe should be taken into consideration. Idealistic libertarians are trying to create a place where corruption and bribery will be obsolete because no one will have arbitrary power over other people's lives—but to create such a place it may be necessary to grease some palms.

My experience with the RLA left me ambivalent about allying with those who partially agree with us. One of the dangers is that some of us will be absorbed by our allies and start spending more resources on their agenda than ours. On the other hand, if we insist on working only with people who agree with us on all the major issues, we may find that each of us will have to work alone. There is so much work to be done to define the framework for a libertarian nation that I support LNF's willingness to work with all kinds of libertarians. In the future we may grow to the point where we have separate divisions for minarchists and anarchists and subdivision within each division. Eventually, if we continue to grow, one or more of our subdivisions may have enough support to implement its plan for liberty. The purpose of LNF is to hasten the day when one or more visions of a libertarian nation becomes a reality.

[Back to A Sketch of My Libertarian Life](#)

[Back to Libertarian Essays by Roy Halliday](#)

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