

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME A POPE WAS SHIT-FACED DRUNK ON THE STREETS OF PARIS?



Just a month before parading drunkenly through the streets of Paris, McChrystal drew a fail whale to describe his COIN strategy. (detail from an ISAFMedia photo)

The answer to that question is actually early on the morning of April 17, 2010, at least if you read chapter 11 of Michael Hastings' "The Operators" (the chapter is titled "Totally Shit-faced").

Well, it was Stanley McChrystal and his entourage who were shit-faced drunk on the streets of Paris, but one of McChrystal's many nicknames is The Pope. It comes from Dalton Fury's fawning profile (pdf): "Later on, about the time he started to wear shiny silver stars, we started to refer to him as The Pope." To drive his point home, Fury's profile was also titled "The Pope".

A much different version of Stanley McChrystal is found in Hastings' book. He paints a vivid picture of McChrystal and his closest aides, where the group can be viewed as "operators" whose primary role was to manage public profiles while putting the best possible spin on what happened, rather than really achieving the objectives of the war which they commanded.

As part of the briefing that McChrystal is shown delivering in the photo on the left, from March of 2010, you can see his "protect the people" message. This was but one aspect of the overall strategy of his COIN (counterinsurgency) approach that was aimed at the proverbial battle for "hearts and minds".

Early in Hastings' book, we see Hastings visiting McChrystal and his aides in Paris. After Hastings sits in on a meeting in which McChrystal is preparing to deliver a speech at the Ecole Militaire later that evening, Hastings steps outside with an aide:

After the meeting, I waited outside the hotel for Duncan. I noticed an Arab guy, around five-feet-five, walking by in shorts and sneakers. I continued to smoke my cigarette. Duncan and I walked to the Metro to catch a train to the Ecole Militaire. At the top of the Metro steps, I saw the same Arab guy again.

"Hey, man, do people really spy on you guys?"

"Yes, they try," Duncan said.

"I think I just saw a guy I'd seen earlier walking by the hotel."

"He's not doing a very good job then, is he?"

So here we have the leader of NATO's military effort in Afghanistan visiting Paris to promote cooperation within the coalition. McChrystal is also using his operators to push the aspects of his "new" COIN strategy that will protect the

people of Afghanistan and to put the coalition into a better relationship with the people of Afghanistan who practice a conservative version of Islam. The group knows it is under scrutiny by Arab spies.

Despite all those important background points, and despite the fact that the entourage rented a significant portion of a large hotel and undoubtedly could have socialized in a reserved meeting room there, after the lecture and after dinner, the group went to Kitty O'Shea's Irish pub, which Hastings described as "right around the corner from the hotel". They weren't exactly discreet:

The team took over half the bar. They locked arms in a big circle and started giving toasts. They toasted to Afghanistan. They toasted to one another. They toasted to Big Stan. They toasted to *Rolling Stone*. They started singing songs.

The party in the bar finally broke up at two in the morning:

At two A.M., we exited the bar. Casey took care of the bill—about three hundred euros' worth of whiskey and beer, he said. Mike Flynn came out the door, still singing what sounded like "Suspicious Minds." McChrystal tripped over the curb, nearly face-planting in the street. The manager of the bar ran out behind us, telling us to be quiet and not to wake the neighbors. The boozy foot patrol continued down the street, back into the Westminster lobby.

That's really perfect, isn't it? Knowing that they are under watch by groups that ban alcohol and while on a mission to build bridges with allies, McChrystal's group goes the Ugly American route, getting shit-faced drunk and raising such a ruckus the owner of the bar has

to follow them into the street to get them to quiet down.

Driving home the extreme hypocrisy of McChrystal as a “leader”, in the very next chapter, Hastings jumps back in time to McChrystal’s arrival to take command in Kabul, with one his very first steps being to close the beer garden at the base.

Oh, and for all the operating McChrystal and his staff did to build the picture that his COIN strategy was so good and so successful, Hastings throws in this parenthetical:

(One stat reveals what a senior military official calls McChrystal’s “smoke and mirros”: After McChrystal takes over, there’s actually an overall jump in civilian casualties.)

Yup, McChrystal’s fail whale advocating “protect the people” was downright prescient.