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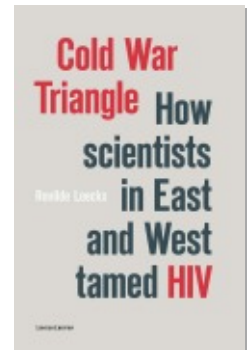
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Foreword

It was in a small town in the Czech Republic that I first met the scientists who moved the fight against viral disease a giant leap forward. As Ambassador of Belgium, I was invited to attend the ceremony at the University of South Bohemia conferring honorary doctorates to the late Antonín Holý and Erik De Clercq. Their cooperation with scientists of an American company, Gilead Sciences, was at the origin of a series of miracle drugs which are the most widely used drugs today, not only to combat AIDS but, to actually prevent HIV infection. It struck me how little the general public knows about the scientists who saved millions of lives and will safeguard millions more in the future. Although I am not a scientist but a retired diplomat, I felt compelled to tell their story.

In my former life, I was better skilled at observing the corridors of political power and organizing cocktail parties than probing the exact methodical world of science. Embarking on this venture, I felt I needed to bridge a gap between two totally different cultures, one way of thinking a mile wide but an inch deep, the other an inch wide but a mile deep.

How to overcome these obstacles in communication? Some of my previous encounters with scientists during my diplomatic career gave me confidence.¹ My meeting in Philadelphia with Renée Fox, Professor at the University of Pennsylvania emboldened me most. She had observed the many talented young European physicians at Harvard Medical School just after World War II preparing for research careers in academic medicine, and wondered what sort of conditions and problems they encountered in their home settings. Belgian medical research fascinated her, it became her favorite subject of study for over thirty years.² The fact that so many cultural influences were concentrated in a country no larger than the state of New Jersey had piqued her curiosity. Her writings and her words have inspired me throughout this journey.

Cold War Triangle looks beyond Belgian medical research, and covers academic institutions in other countries, particularly in former Czechoslovakia, and how their research was combined with the genius of

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American science and entrepreneurship. It not only straddles the workings of scientists across oceans and continents but also across deep political and ideological divides.

My main source of encouragement in the writing of this book was undoubtedly my American husband, William (Bill) Drozdiak. As a foreign correspondent and later as editor of *The Washington Post*, he taught me all along our parallel careers to look out for the so-called “nugget,” what people are really trying to say. The all-important story they bury under hints and insinuations or in messages that people cry out at the top of their lungs but that nobody hears. This book is dedicated to him.

Acknowledgements

I am immensely grateful to Erik De Clercq, Professor Emeritus at KU Leuven. His gift of friendship made this book possible. As one of the pioneers in antiviral drugs he patiently coached me through the universe of chemists and virologists. I greatly benefited from his knack of teaching and instinct of keeping co-workers and students alike focused on a common goal. His mantra “Keep your eyes on the prize, we get what we focus on” infected me with the “virus” to dig further and sharpen my questions.

His once closest collaborators, Professor Piet Herdewijn, Professor Johan Neyts, Professor Dominique Schols, Dr. Rudi Pauwels founder and CEO of Biocartis, and Professor Emeritus Jan Desmyter helped me understand the scope of the accomplishments they achieved as a team. Professor Emeritus Alfons Billiau imparted precious background knowledge on the origins and workings of the Rega Institute of Medical Research. My special thanks and warm appreciation also to Christiane Callebaut, she was my tireless go-between and precious contact at the Institute.

Travels to the Czech Republic, Warsaw, New York, Paris and California opened the doors of Erik De Clercq’s wide network of friends and colleagues. I felt very fortunate to witness the 100th birthday in Warsaw of the late Professor David Shugar. He was one of Erik De Clercq’s first co-workers who introduced him to the world of nucleosides.

I am deeply indebted to Professor Zdenek Havlas, former Director of the Institute of Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry in Prague and Professor Libor Grubhoffer, former President of the University of South Bohemia. They invited me to several key events in the Czech Republic honoring the late Antonín Holý and spared no effort to guide me through the Czech labyrinth. The reminiscences of Dr. Yvan Rosenberg and Dr. Radim Nencka gave me unique insights into Prof. Antonín Holý’s accomplishments. His widow, Ludmila Holá, and his daughter, Dr. Dana Holá, enlightened me on some of his most endearing habits. I very warmly thank both Professor Jan Vilcek and Professor Marc Van Montagu, who gave me lively accounts of the lives of scientists in the former Czechoslovakia.

I am particularly grateful to Dr. John Martin, Executive Chairman of Gilead Sciences. He was the person who held the key to leading this multi-national, multi-lingual team to success. His *band of brothers* who were his faithful companions from the very beginning of this venture in Foster City, California, put the pieces of the puzzle in place: Dr. William (Bill) Lee, Dr. Norbert Bischofberger, Dr. Mick Hitchcock, Dr. Swami Swaminathan generously gave me their perspective on how the miracle drugs came into being.

My special thanks go to Michael Riordan, the founder of Gilead Sciences and former CEO, who took me back in time to the early days of the company, and to Professor Richard Whitley, Director of the Gilead Board, who graciously recounted the quest to find drugs against viral diseases and the crusades they embarked on to convince the medical community and policymakers. I was very fortunate to meet Dr. Gregg Alton of Gilead Sciences, who made me understand the company's unique procedures and innovative ways of bringing their drugs to the people most in need, to Africa and beyond.

I greatly valued the guidance of Professor Emeritus Peter Piot, Dr. Lori Lehman and Ms. Amy Flood from Gilead sciences, Mrs. Marie-Anne De Somer, Dr. Robert Redfield from the University of Maryland in Baltimore, Dr. Richard Ennis, Frm. Secretary General of the NATO-Assembly Simon Lunn and Ms. Judith Miller. Each helped me find a path through the many angles of this story. A special appreciation is due to Dr. Vladimir Beroun who taught me how to master my electronic devices.

Among my cheerleaders, I would like to single out the enthusiastic support from Hugo and Lucie Van Geet as well as Jaroslav Kurfürst, the Ambassador of the Czech Republic in Brussels.

I owe a major debt of gratitude to my children, Karen Drozdiak and Nicholas Drozdiak, my line editors, who cheerfully reminded me that English is not my native language. My youngest daughter, Natalia Drozdiak, wrote the booklet *The Virus Hunters: Banishing the Scourge of AIDS*. It became a calling card for the virology department of the Rega Institute. It stimulated the interest and enthusiasm of the editors of Leuven University Press, Veerle De Laet and Viktor Edmonds, who patiently guided me throughout my effort to write on a subject beyond my previous scope of expertise.