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Dulles Had Superabundance Of Charm, Character, Courage

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My friend, the late Allen V. Dulles, was an individual with a superabundance of charm, character and courage.



There was not a touch of the sinister in his makeup. Seen and

heard at close range when he engaged in man-to-man conversation, he fairly radiated good will toward all people.

Among obit writers, when a monumental figure from the community of intelligence and espionage passes on, it is customary to make of his life a great mystery seen through a glass darkly.

Such a profile of Allen Dulles would have been a distortion beyond recognition. That the press almost invariably wrote of him in terms of affection does credit to its instinct.

Inevitably, his activities as a secret agent and as head man of the century's largest intelligence-gathering establishment made him seem remote and enigmatic to the millions who shudder when they read about characters such as Richard Sorge and Mata Hari. The Berias and Canarises of this life are not counted among the beautiful people.

In contrast, Allen Dulles seemed as a person the last man for his task. He detested subterfuge, double talk and play acting. Loving the friendly game of conversation, when relaxed he preferred to talk anything but shop. He agreed warmly and disagreed fairly, and he lived eagerly, as if determined to

One simply could not imagine him as the central figure, or even a bit player, in a James Bond movie. He placed too high a value on human life, and ruthlessness was counter to his nature. In that respect, his career was a continuing contradiction. The only plausible explanation of why he stayed with intelligence is that he was good at the game.

Few men ever to serve government have possessed a more imposing front. He had the size and the look of the big-time operator combined with the dress and manner of the gentle professor. Though he would speak vehemently when roused, he was not dogmatic or oracular. The mind was orderly and the memory was capacious. When satisfied as to a particular course, his mind seemed to look down on it and thereafter he would not look back.

Yet mixed with his sophistication were broad streaks of naivete. Despite his long association with military people, any of his ideas pertaining to that profession, its way of thinking and of operating were overlarge simplifications. One cannot imagine him comprehending the factors that were written into the plan for the Bay of Pigs. Though he was the top man in C.I.A. and hence the blame for the fiasco had to fall part way on him, he would have had to take someone else's word for the practicality and sufficiency of what was being undertaken.

The odd part of that episode is that nearly everyone who was identified with its management was no better qualified. Throughout, the blind led the blind.

Allen Dulles' zest and enthusiasm are best measured by the fact that after retirement and into his 70's he authored three books that sold well nationally, and are still selling. He went at writing gladly and truly enjoyed a new career. Had he lived, he would have continued to produce, for his talent was considerable, he had quickly mastered a style and he had many things to say. He kept perspective; recollection did not markedly magnify certain things while diminishing others.

Once, in reviewing one of his books, I alluded to him as "that avuncular figure." He promptly wrote me asking: "Tell me about the word. Is it good or bad?" He did have the way of a kindly and considerate uncle.

Several pictures of him remain indelible in my memory. We flew into Iwo Jima one time at 3:30 a.m. He insisted on taking a jeep ride at once to the top of Mount Surabachi where Old Glory flew in a spotlight. There he knelt and prayed.