

~~SECRET~~ Night Watch
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Former CIA operative recalls agency's good deeds

The Night Watch, by David Atlee Phillips. New York: Atheneum. \$9.95.

By James Nelson Goodsell

Speaking out in support of the Central Intelligence Agency these days is not very fashionable. In fact, bad-mouthing the agency is much more common. Whatever the reasons, this onslaught of criticism has been coming from both outside the agency — and within.

Books

Quite a few former operatives have made something of a name for themselves in the process. Philip Agee's name comes quickly to thought.

But the CIA does have its supporters and defenders, and David Atlee Phillips is one of the most ardent. Although he has now left the CIA with the purpose of launching a public defense of the agency, Phillips put in 25 post-World War II years as a top CIA operative, mainly in Latin America. His story, "The Night Watch,"

is an enthusiastic, well written look at how a CIA agent works, what he thinks, and with whom he deals.

Much of his book — dealing with operations in Chile, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Guatemala — goes over old ground. But a lot of what he has to say adds a perspective to events in those countries. As purposeful as all this is, however, the real value of Phillips' account lies elsewhere: in the very human portrayal of how the CIA operates, how its personnel think and differ on issues, and the qualms that go along with operations.

Not everyone will accept Phillips' account at face value. Even from within the agency there are some who would dispute him on fact. Take, for example, his claim that it is a "myth" that the CIA forecast a popular uprising in Cuba at the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Others within the agency say the CIA did in fact make the prediction — and that the agency was, of course, wrong.

Moreover, when Phillips gets around to admitting the CIA made mistakes, he can explain them away. He obviously wasn't happy about the United States' efforts to destabilize the government of Chilean President Salvador Allende Gossens in the early 1970s — not that he held any particular brief for Dr. Allende, but rather that the President had been freely elected in accordance with Chilean law and practice. But having said this, Phillips then puts a twist on the story: the effort to bring down the Allende government was lamentable, but the U.S. (read that, CIA) meant well in the effort.

Able propagandist that he is, Phillips always comes out in support of the agency. This thread runs throughout the book. One suspects that Phillips would want to invent the CIA if it did not already exist. He argues that, given all its imperfections and its mistakes, the CIA record is, on balance, good — and that the CIA is needed. But he also sees clearly that the

CIA's difficulties at home result not so much from any malicious attack by malcontents or know-nothings, but rather from the uniqueness of the U.S. system that likes things out in the open.

He writes; "While those of us who worked in American intelligence — especially the men and women of the Clandestine Service of CIA — must understand that our problems resulted from the sanctity of our country's values, other Americans must realize what intelligence people have been doing all this time. They have been in dark alleys working hard — with some mistakes and some success — to protect those values."

That is Phillips' essential message. The jury, however, is still out on the CIA — and Phillips' testimony notwithstanding, there remains major doubt about the whole question of clandestine activities by a free society.

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