

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 10-14

TIME
12 November 1979

American Scene

In Washington: A Pride of Former Spooks

The black ties and bald heads could belong to old college classmates at a 40th reunion. The *Suprême de Volaille Eugénie* on the menu is standard hotel chicken with yellow gravy, and the platitudes served up by the speakers might be heard at any nostalgic or vaguely patriotic gathering. But the memories are not of the promise of youth or of bright college years. Mostly, they are of spying.

In the ballroom of the Hilton in Washington, D.C., former spooks are reliving the fears and joys of parachuting behind enemy lines, breaking codes, forging documents and blowing up bridges. The gray-ing, mostly prosperous-looking men and women are veterans of the Office of Strategic Services, the World War II predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency. The occasion is their annual bash, the William J. Donovan Award Dinner.

General "Wild Bill" Donovan, who died 20 years ago, was the Wall Street lawyer whom President Franklin Roosevelt commissioned to set up an intelligence service in 1941, five months before Pearl Harbor. At the time, the U.S. had no formal espionage arm. Snooping had been in disrepute; a decade earlier, Secretary

clides not only OSS veterans and friends and family members but eight Senators, FBI Director William Webster and two wartime spymasters who went on to head the CIA, Richard Helms and William Colby. The old espionage hands come partly out of nostalgia for a simpler age of spying, before cold wars and dirty tricks scandals and congressional oversight committees. There is also a perceptible closing of the ranks behind the nation's now-beset intelligence establishment.

Earlier in the day, a group of 100 or so OSS veterans listened grimly to a series of gloomy speeches. Wyoming Republican Senator Malcolm Wallop scoffed that CIA agents have become not spies but "bureaucrats." Frank Barnett of the National Strategy Information Center, a hawkish think tank, warned of a "Soviet window of opportunity" in the 1980s. Ray Cline, a former top CIA officer who now directs strategic and international studies at Georgetown University, offered a dismal report card on his old outfit: D— in covert activities, C— in counterintelligence, C— in information gathering. It is all very depressing to the OSS alumni. Laments Carl Eifler, who ran OSS operations in Asia and later got a doctor of divinity degree: "Their team's got 50 well-protected big fellas. Then there is our team: four guys in tennis shoes and shorts."

By the time pre-dinner cocktails are served, the mood is cheerier. "We were marvelous amateurs," sighs Margaret Sherman, a Norwalk, Conn., housewife who served in a counterintelligence unit in London and Paris. Donovan ignored the advice of the creator of James Bond, Author Ian Fleming, who as a British naval intelligence officer in 1941 described the ideal spy as middle-aged, sober, discreet and experienced. Instead, Wild Bill sought out impatient young people who did not mind being bold or even "calculatingly reckless."

One of these was Frederick Mayer, now a retired radio engineer who lives in West Virginia. A Jewish refugee from Germany who arrived in Brooklyn in 1938, Mayer was an Army corporal in training in Arizona when one of Donovan's recruiters persuaded him to volunteer for something "more exciting." It was. In 1944 he parachuted into Nazi-held Austria, stole a German uniform and posed as a Wehrmacht officer while he monitored enemy troop movements. Laughs Mayer: "I was even promoted." Later, after getting a job in a Messerschmitt factory to spy on the development of German jet fighters, he was caught and

tortured by the Gestapo. He managed to escape in a German staff car.

Donovan was an eclectic recruiter; among the people he brought into the OSS were Conservative Columnist Stewart Alsop, Marxist Political Philosopher Herbert Marcuse, and Chef Julia Child, who tended intelligence files at the OSS office in Chongqing (Chungking). So many OSS people were listed in the *Social Register* that critics complained that the initials stood for "Oh So Social."

Donovan's love of ingenuity was infectious. William Duff, a retired book publisher who was sent to Algiers to recruit agents for spying in France, recalls one example: "We had a chap in Cairo who designed a land mine that looked remarkably like a camel turd. He put it in the diplomatic pouch and sent it to London. I'm not sure they knew quite what to make of it." Thibaut de Saint Phalle, now a director of the Export-Import Bank, discovered that Chinese pirates were very adept at blowing up Japanese ships, and he went to the offshore island of Quemoy to recruit them for the Allied cause. On the island, he remembers, he found himself living "in 12th century splendor. The pirates had stolen some very fine old furniture."

Kay Halle, an elegant Cleveland department store heiress, was recruited for the OSS at a Washington cocktail party. What was her job? "Black propaganda," she replies sweetly. On her right at table 33, André Pacatte bursts into the *Marseillaise* as a U.S. Army band plays the French national anthem. Before and after the war, Pacatte ran the Berlitz school in Washington; during the war he used his language skills behind German lines in France and Italy. He recalls taking a 14-hour plane flight with Donovan and a group of shell-shocked American flyers returning home for psychiatric treatment. "The crazy flyers were babbling things like 'Me-109 at 2 o'clock high!' and going 'Ack-ack-ack-ack!' General Donovan was looking through my briefcase and reading everything in it, including letters to me from my wife." Why did he do that? Exclaims Pacatte: "Why? Because he was General Donovan!"



The spies' much prized award

of State Henry Stimson had declared that "gentlemen do not read each other's mail." But Donovan persuaded F.D.R. that such etiquette need not apply in dealings with Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, and thus the U.S.'s first independent intelligence agency was born.

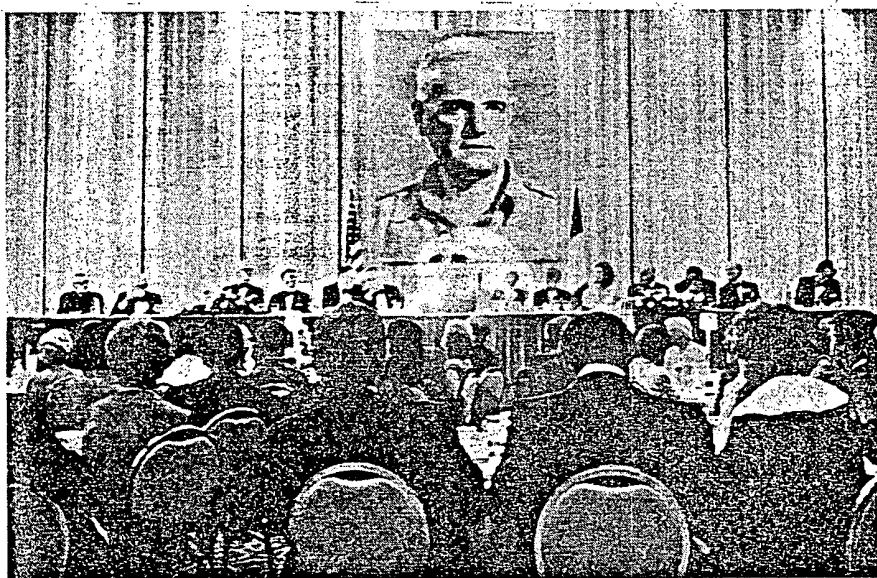
The attendance at this Donovan dinner, the twelfth since 1962, is unusually large. The crowd of more than 400 in-

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Beneath a huge sepia photograph of the general, the speakers are extolling his qualities as citizen-soldier-statesman-spy. The Donovan award is given by the Veterans of the OSS, the agency's alumni association, to people who exemplify Donovan's virtues, a category broad enough to include Earl Mountbatten of Burma, the Apollo 11 astronauts and Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois. This year's winner is Jacques Chaban-Delmas, a hero of the French Resistance who is now president of the French National Assembly. The first guest speaker, Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii, comes down squarely in favor of "duty, honor, country, courage." Then Ambassador Kenneth Rush returns to the Decline of Everything theme explored earlier in the day. Finally, Chaban-Delmas receives his award and praises liberty in charmingly broken English.

After dinner, the old spooks are still wondering what went wrong with the intelligence establishment. "Well," says Maryland Housewife Mary Furman, who interrogated prisoners during the war with the help of exiles from Poland and other Nazi-occupied countries, "we were civilians." She stops, hearing herself sounding holier than thou, and reflects quietly, "We never beat prisoners. Of course, the Poles were standing right there, and they were happy to oblige, and the prisoners knew it. But we never had any trouble. We never had to do anything." Bill Duff, the OSS man in Algiers, has another explanation. "It was World War II. The war was so..." He pauses. "Clear."

— Evan Thomas



Beneath Wild Bill's portrait, OSS veterans fondly recall spying in a simpler age

Today it is "50 well-protected big fellas vs. four guys in tennis shoes and shorts."