

FAIRFAX JOURNAL (VA)  
20 February 1986

# After 6 years, CIA veteran wins retraction

STAT

By JALEH HAGIGH  
Journal staff writer

Six years ago, David Atlee Phillips of Bethesda learned from a friend that he had been implicated in the car-bombing death of Chilean Ambassador Orlando Letelier.

In a book "Death in Washington," the authors said Phillips and an intelligence organization he founded led a conspiracy to kill Letelier.

Friday, Phillips won a public retraction and an out-of-court settlement from the authors of the book.

"I believe it's a personal vindication," said Phillips, a retired 25-year veteran of the CIA. "It has proved that a former intelligence officer can defend himself in a public court."

"(It) will make it easier for me to answer questions from my kids, from scholars" and from audiences on the lecture circuit, he said.

Phillips was former chief of Latin American operations for the CIA and now tours the country lecturing on the importance of U.S. intelligence operations.

The retraction made Friday at the National Press Club in Washington marks the end of a five-year battle between Phillips and Donald Freed and Fred S. Landis, authors of "Death in Washington," a book about the Letelier case.

In the book and at a news conference in 1980, Freed and Landis charged that Phillips and the Association of Former Intelligence Officers, a group he founded, headed a conspiracy leading up to the Letelier murder and the later cover-up.

Letelier was killed when a bomb exploded under his car Sept. 21, 1976, in Washington.

The authors also charged that Phillips aided Lee Harvey Oswald, accused of assassinating President Kennedy. That charge has also been retracted.

Phillips said he never met Letelier and called Freed and Landis "anti-CIA, conspiracy buffs."

"These accusations seem to come from people who either have some bias toward the intelligence establishment, or they want to make money," Phillips said.

After he retired in 1975, Phillips wrote a book called "The Night Watch" describing eight of his years spent overseas with the CIA, including his two years in Chile. Letelier was not mentioned in his book, he said.

From that, Phillips said, Freed and Landis linked him with the Letelier killing, a link he said came from "out of the blue."

Phillips filed a \$120 million libel suit in April 1981. He said he could not divulge the amount of the settlement because of an agreement with Freed and Landis.

The retraction was signed by Freed, Landis, Lawrence C. Hill, the book's publisher, and journalist John Cummings, who participated in the 1980 news conference.

Phillips said he won the retraction because Freed and Landis lacked the money to do battle in court. The case was scheduled for May.

"I believe they decided that . . . they didn't have a case. That's the reason I think the lawyers involved said they would make a complete retraction and a financial settlement," he said.

Phillips said former intelligence officials are easy targets for such accusations because often they cannot defend themselves in court without divulging the nation's secrets and damaging national security.

Phillips said in his case vindication is sweet because he was able to defend himself without going to court.

"There are some anti-CIA people who believe a former intelligence officer would be afraid to go to court."

Now that the burden of a lawsuit is gone and his reputation is intact, Phillips said he will concentrate on his publishing firm, Stone Trail Press, that he runs from the basement of his home.

Phillips said he will donate the money from the settlement to Challenge Inc., an intelligence officer's legal action fund based in Maryland. Phillips said he received funds from Challenge for his libel suit.

"We think it's great," said Challenge President Ned Dolan of Garrett



David Atlee Phillips  
"A personal vindication"

Park. "It vindicates Phillips as being a criminal."

Phillips' quarter-century with the CIA sent him to posts in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico City and Beirut, Lebanon. He has written five books on the CIA.

Phillips is originally from Texas. He was recruited by the CIA in 1950 while in Chile working as an editor of an English publication.

When Phillips retired in 1975, public support for the CIA was waning, and so Phillips said he formed the Association of Former Intelligence Officers, a group of 3,500 men and women from all intelligence services.

The group is an information clearinghouse for intelligence queries made by the media.