

The Intelligence Gathering

Bush Speaks Up for Gates At the OSS Reunion

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This was one emotional George Bush, his voice rising, his anger barely checked, who Wednesday night went to the defense of his own kind: the intelligence community in general and Robert Gates, his nominee as director of the CIA, in particular.

Speaking at a reunion of members of the Office of Strategic Services, the World War II intelligence agency, Bush pitched Gates, awaiting Senate confirmation, as a "vigorous new leader," a "tough-minded innovator" and "an independent thinker" who had stood with him through some of his toughest crises since becoming president.

"He has served by my side," Bush said, his voice stern and loud, "through the Panama crisis, through Desert Storm and the drama of August in Moscow. And I have the fullest trust in his integrity and ability."

At another point, Bush said, "We've heard too much, and much unfair and untrue, of failure [to foresee the upheaval in the Soviet Union] in recent weeks, and too little of the CIA's crucial part in this victory for freedom. We've heard too little of the sacrifice you and those you trained made to advance democracy."

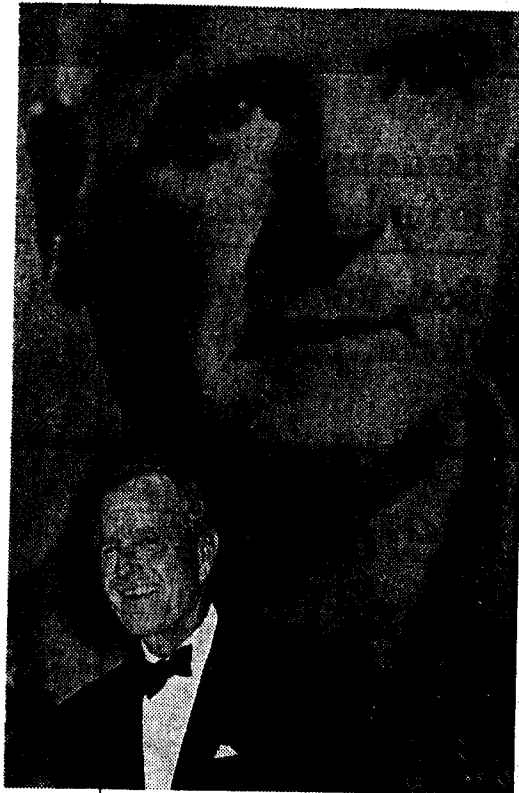
Bush, who was director of the Central Intelligence Agency when Gerald Ford was president, said he was "sick and tired of those in the political arena and, yes, in the media, who do nothing but carp, criticize and second-guess. Measuring intentions is a difficult task, and no one can expect every estimate to turn out 100 percent correct."

The black-tie crowd of 600 guests at the Washington Hilton ate it up. Among them were Gates, who at 48 was one of the younger members of the intelligence community present, and two former CIA directors, William Colby and Richard Helms, who had started out in the OSS. Noted Geoffrey M.T. Jones, president of the OSS veterans, in his remarks to his peers: "Our new computer tells us that the average age of the OSS veterans is deceased."

Bush was at the dinner as recipient of an award named for OSS founder Gen. William "Wild Bill" Donovan. He praised "the vision" of Donovan, who 30 years ago predicted that the Iron Curtain would one day be lifted and "captive nations of Eastern Europe will become part of a united Europe. Even Russia, purged by future events of its desire to bully and subdue its neighbors, will be a member."

"How's that for your vision thing?" Bush asked.

Bush and his wife, Barbara, shared the dais with more than a dozen OSS heroes—and one heroine, Evangeline Bruce, widow of David Bruce, ambassador



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President Bush in front of a portrait of William Donovan.

to Great Britain. She had created false identification papers for Americans being parachuted into France.

Her presence reminded Bush of a story about how Donovan told David Bruce that he had arranged to be buried at Arlington, and had asked if Bruce had done the same. When Bruce said no and wondered why he asked, Donovan replied, "You should get a plot near mine. Then we could start an underground together."

Well, more people laughed than didn't.

Some, like Howard Chappell of Paso Robles, Calif., had their own stories about the legendary Donovan. Chappell was commander of a German-speaking unit specializing in sabotage. When the war in Europe ended, Donovan made him commander of a unit headed for Japan.

"The bomb saved us," said Chappell. "The ironic thing was that [Gen. Douglas] MacArthur wouldn't allow Donovan to operate in his Pacific theater. He didn't want Donovan taking any credit for anything."

In spite of that, Chappell said that "Donovan was sending me in and I've often fantasized how much fun it would have been if the atom bomb hadn't been dropped and our group had gone in and done a lot of sabotage and espionage and when MacArthur had stepped off the landing craft we could have said, 'General, we'd like to deliver Japan to you by courtesy of Wild Bill Donovan.'"

On a more sober note, Bush hit an especially responsive chord when he said, "We will show no tolerance for those that leak secrets that protect our intelligence professionals' lives."

He recalled meeting the son of Richard Welch, the CIA station chief in Athens who was assassinated in 1975 by a terrorist group after his name and position had been disclosed to the press. Bush said he hadn't yet become CIA director, but "what was I to say to this young man? Why had his father died? So a reckless ideologue could sell more books.

"I don't care how long I live," Bush went on, "I will never forgive Philip Agee [author of "Counterspy"] and those like him who wantonly sacrificed the lives of intelligence officers who loyally served their country."

"Damn right!" one guest muttered. "They ought to shoot every one of them!"