

OBITUARIES

CIA Operative, Defender David Phillips, 65, Dies

By Bart Barnes
Washington Post Staff Writer

David Atlee Phillips, 65, the Central Intelligence Agency's former chief of Latin American and Caribbean operations who in retirement became one of the agency's most vocal and public defenders, died of cancer July 7 at his home in Bethesda.

Mr. Phillips was in the CIA's clandestine service for 25 years before he retired in 1975. His career included assignments as the agency's station chief in Venezuela, Brazil and the Dominican Republic, operation of a radio station on an island off the coast of Cuba during the early months of Fidel Castro's rule, and undercover duty in Guatemala, Mexico City and Beirut.

He was the founder and past president of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers, a group he organized upon his retirement to promote the idea that the United States needs an intelligence service and the belief that the people who work in it are responsible men and women doing responsible jobs for their country.

This came at a time when the CIA was under fire for a variety of abuses, including charges of domestic spying, and morale in the agency was low.

In Mr. Phillips' case, the decision to retire early and undertake a public relations campaign on behalf of

the CIA originated in a talk he had with his 15-year-old daughter a few months earlier. He told her, as he had told four older children, that he was not a businessman or a State Department official, but, in fact, an undercover intelligence officer.

"But that's dirty," was her response.

Once he retired, Mr. Phillips went on the college lecture circuit and wrote a book about his CIA years, "The Nightwatch: 25 Years of Peculiar Service." He was highly critical of what he called "the kiss-and-tell boys," former CIA agents who wrote books exposing agency secrets after retiring.

A native of Fort Worth, Mr. Phillips attended the College of William and Mary. He was an actor in New York before World War II.

During the war, he served in the Army Air Forces as a nose gunner in a B24 that was shot down over Austria in 1944. He was held in a German prisoner-of-war camp, but escaped and made his way back to Allied lines. He was awarded a Purple Heart.

After the war, he went to Chile, where he purchased a debt-ridden English language newspaper. Soon afterward, he was recruited by the CIA.

"I was to be a 'dangle.' Word was to be leaked out in Chile that I was chief of American intelligence there. Sure enough, a KGB agent

soon began to cultivate me," Mr. Phillips recalled in a 1975 interview. At the time, the CIA paid him a \$50-a-month retainer.

Tall and lean, with a jutting chin, Mr. Phillips was said to have embodied all the elements of the popular conception of a spy. He was in Guatemala in 1954 when the leftist dictator Jacobo Arbenz was overthrown, and he assisted in the planning of the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961.

His last CIA assignment as director of Latin American and Caribbean operations covered a period when the agency was hotly criticized for its covert activities in Chile that preceded the overthrow and death of President Salvador Allende.

Mr. Phillips said after his retirement that he warned his agents in Chile four months before the Sept. 11, 1973, coup that it was likely to occur. He told them to break off contact with people and groups planning the coup.

Mr. Phillips had been a permanent resident of the Washington area since 1954.

His marriage to Helen Phillips ended in divorce.

Survivors include his wife, Virginia Phillips of Bethesda; three children by his first marriage, Christopher Phillips of Washington, Maria Phillips of Brazil and David A. Phillips Jr. of Santa Fe, N.M.; one son by his second marriage, Todd Phillips of Bethesda; three stepchildren, Deborah Ahern of Bethesda, Bryan Ahern of Virginia Beach and Wynne Ahern of San Francisco, and three grandchildren. A daughter by his first marriage, Atlee Phillips, died in 1968.