

Retired Agents Don't Fit the Image

'Old Grads' Gather to Defend CIA

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The ghostly Oliphant CIA skullmasks with the beady eyes simply were not there. These spooks might have looked the role during their active role-playing days, but it's hard to flash a sinister cover when retired and attending a mini-spy convention-reunion at a local motel.

Maybe at the Hilton-Bosphorus, but not at the Ramada Alexandria. Coffee urns, styrofoam cups and beehive hairdos a spook do not make. These faces were IBM, Federal Triangle GS.

The two-day convention was the first of the Association of Retired Intelligence Officers (ARIO), who came in out of the rainy cold yesterday to come out publicly in a kind of evangelical "Fairness to the CIA" policy.

Some of the old, spook spark was still crackling, however, in the cover of someone who looked like a bowling lady. The visitor

reached for a paper, and she stopped him, asking the proper authority if it was okay to hand out the stuff.

IT WAS extremely difficult for these retired intelligence people, most of them ex-CIA types, to admit openly that this was how they spent most of their lives.

The paper concerned was entitled "Periscope," and it handed out the official ARIO line:

"It is the belief of ARIO that neither the Central Intelligence Agency nor any other intelligence organization of our government needs defending or justifying. However, recent events have made it clear that a great deal of patient explaining is called for. People just do not understand what intelligence is and how important it is to their survival. Unfortunate as it is, they really do believe the wild-eyed cowboy tales they read in the press and get the impression that intelligence officers are a

lot of maniac-poisoners, burglars and assassins."

The spirit behind this offensive defense is a youthful-looking David Phillips — ex-actor, playwright, ex-editor of "The South Pacific Mail" and now, ex-CIA intelligence officer.

During a tape-recorded interview yesterday with Phillips and a Westinghouse newsman, a suspicious bystander got to the point where he didn't trust anyone.

WAS THE GUY with the tape recorder a plant? Was the ashtray bugged? Was the retired Phillips a newly hired tool of his alma mater? Why did that curtain just move? What was in those sugar cubes? Why is my head spinning?

The convention's workshops were closed.

Okay, Phillips. What did The Director (Colby) say about this move on your part to blow your cover and talk? "He said he preferred that I stayed in the agen-

cy," said Phillips. "But he didn't object. In fact, he wished me luck." Of course, Colby also knew that it was Phillips' intention to defend, not to attack.

How do we know the CIA isn't paying you to do this, Phillips was asked? "You don't," he said. "Obviously I can't prove I'm not under cover, except that I testified under oath before the Senate Church committee that I no longer have any connection with the CIA."

Do you think this convention is being spied upon by the CIA? "

"IT WOULD be impossible" said Phillips. "They would be crazy to pull off any domestic, covert spying at this stage of the game."

Some 150 attended the convention (including 31 from Maryland, 53 from Virginia and 41 from Washington), assembled mainly to develop some kind of pro-CIA statement to be announced tonight.

Phillips, of 8224 Stone Trail Drive, Bethesda, said he retired early four months ago to fight for the CIA cause when it appeared it needed fighting for.

"I started getting people together through my Christmas card list," he said, "and went on from there. Now we are in the process of establishing chapters and scheduling volunteer speakers."

Phillips, who spent most of 25 CIA years in Latin America, is now on a pro-CIA lecture tour. He refused to quote his lecture fee, saying that was a question for his agent.

"LET'S SAY this, though," he added. "My agent told me I could make between \$5,000 and \$10,000 a year speaking for the CIA, but could make from \$50,000 to \$100,000 speaking against it."

He described himself as

"not an assassin, a burglar, or a purloiner of documents, but a manager of spies. Mostly, I attended meetings. I had managerial responsibilities. But I can't go into detail about my duties."

However, he added, "if there was even one political CIA assassination I would be surprised."

The "tragedy" of the whole intelligence controversy, he said, is that an agency such as the CIA cannot defend itself by quoting "the good things it has done. Because of its very nature, it cannot give out such information."

JUST BEFORE leaving for the picnic last night that rain forced indoors at Stone Ridge School in Rockville, the boyish Phillips was asked once more about any double-agent status.

"No," he said, quietly. "I've told you the truth."

But there was one more question.

During your early years as a playwright, what was the name of the one successful play you wrote?

"The Snow Job," he said, trying not to laugh.