

The Master Of the ^{11/27/94} Prying Game

GENTLEMAN SPY
The Life of Allen Dulles
By Peter Grose
Houghton Mifflin. 641 pp. \$30

By David Corn

"IF ONE were to ask who was generally considered the incarnation of intelligence—the answer would inevitably be [Allen] Dulles." So wrote one CIA officer years ago about the third director of Central Intelligence. For decades Dulles stood as the symbol of the Agency: a tweedy, pipe-smoking, blue-blooded diplomat-turned-Wall-Street-lawyer-turned-intelligence officer or, as Peter Grose dubs him in his engaging biography, a "gentleman spy." These days, the posterboy for the CIA is Aldridge Ames, the drunk incompetent who rose through the old-boy bureaucracy to a sensitive post where he could do great damage as a Soviet mole. Sprinkled throughout Grose's book are hints that, sadly, this evolution in icons is not so radical.

Dulles was almost bred, it seems, with the CIA in mind. His grandfather, John Watson Foster, was secretary of state in the late 19th century. (Foster engineered the annexation of Hawaii and then as a corporate lawyer pocketed fees for participating in the actual annexation.) Dulles's father was a Presbyterian pastor. From a practitioner of realpolitik and a missionary came the Company's number one man.

Naturally, Dulles went to Princeton. He joined the Foreign Service in 1916 and served in several overseas posts. In 1926 he left the government, whirled through what is now called the revolving door and entered the toney firm of Sullivan and Cromwell, where older brother (and future secretary of state and airport namesake) John Foster Dulles was already ensconced. Allen Dulles handled international lending activity and represented German business interests (while his brother ran a pyramid investment scheme and moonlighted as an apologist for the Nazis). Always keeping a hand in foreign policy, Dulles helped start the Council on Foreign Relations.

He returned to the government payroll at the start of World War II with the Office of Strategic Services. As the OSS's man in Switzerland, he singlehandedly pulled together networks of agents and gathered information on German plots to assassinate Adolf Hitler, on the resistance in France and Austria, on the Holocaust. His best agent—a low-level German officer who delivered 1,600 documents from the Nazi Foreign Office—was a walk-in. Analysts back in Washington often questioned Dulles's reports. And he made mistakes; he predicted that Hitler would not attack Russia. Still, a legend formed: Dulles the spymaster.

In 1950, Dulles, at the age of 57, was appointed deputy director of plans for the young CIA. Three years later, he ascended to the post of CIA director. In these positions, he de-

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fined the intelligence system of the United States. He fancied political warfare—coup-making, propaganda, political fronts—and this activity, despite the objections of others in the CIA and the government, became a priority for the service. Intelligence collection—Dulles's strong suit as an OSS man—received less attention in his CIA than the fun and games. A large and insular bureaucracy grew under him, even though he himself hated such structures. And within this culture a clubby atmosphere developed, one that protected malfeasant and less-than-stellar officers. (See Ames.) After CIA officers slipped LSD to an unsuspecting American physician, probably causing his suicide, Dulles issued the slightest of reprimands to those responsible. No one in the club would suffer. (See Ames again.)

Much of the second half of *Gentleman Spy* covers turf already well-traveled in the literature of intelligence: the CIA-choreographed coups in Iran and Guatemala (dubbed successes, they left terrible legacies); the development of the U-2 plane (a tremendous feat that produced an intelligence bonanza of high-altitude photos); the procurement of Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 anti-Stalin speech (Dulles later called this "one of the major coups of my tour of duty," but the CIA was handed the speech by the Israeli intelligence service); the anti-Castro Bay of Pigs debacle of 1961 (Dulles's CIA, Grose concludes, had an informal hidden agenda: to persuade President Kennedy to go further in supporting the doomed raiders than Kennedy desired); and the now all-too-familiar assassination operations against pesky socialist leaders of the developing world.

In CIA lore, Grose writes, the Dulles years were the

"halcyon days" of the Agency. But this comprehensive biography—with its often elegant prose—shows that much that the CIA did in these glory years did not work or held dire, unintended consequences and that Dulles established institutional prejudices that helped seed future failures. Though it does not say so in such bold terms, Grose's work tells us that the Agency achieved few accomplishments—the U-2 being an exception—that were true contributions to U.S. national security.

A BIT frustrating is the reluctance of Grose, a former New York Times reporter, Foreign Affairs editor and State Department official, to confront fully the sense of elitism and self-righteousness that imbued Dulles and his comrades. The "Park Avenue cowboys," he writes, "were highly intelligent and deeply motivated to do the public good." (The book does detail what a louse of a husband the philandering Dulles was.) Grose notes that when Dulles was asked about an old adage—"Gentlemen do not read each other's mail"—he retorted with a line he had heard elsewhere: "Only gentlemen can be trusted to read each other's mail." (It is appropriate that the wit Dulles relied on in this case belonged to a German general who served the Nazi regime and then became a top asset for the CIA.) Dulles and his like-minded colleagues were blinded by their own hubris. They believed that because they were gentlemen they could do dirty deeds for causes they deemed just, that the world was theirs to fiddle with—and in secrecy. *Gentleman Spy* does not rewrite the history of this set, but it does remind us that the distance between a self-proclaimed gentleman and a deceitful plotter is not always that far.