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Keep

An 'admiral's boy'

LONDON — On a long journey, the mind cannot aid reflection, and I find that mine goes back to E. Howard Hunt. He tells us something important about our recent past.

"Whatever I did, I did for my country," he said when he pleaded guilty to conducting a spy-and-sabotage operation against his country's election processes. Is he a reverse Alger Hiss? What is it that makes a man of every advantage in education, wealth and upbringing decide that he alone knows that his country's interests are and can violate the law in order to further them?

Some of Hiss' contemporaries in government considered him brilliant. He was generally regarded as able; nobody ever used those words about Hunt. In 25 years in the Central Intelligence Agency, he never reached a high post, going from one grade to another without any of his superiors ever thinking enough of him to put him in charge.

Once assigned to diplomatic cover in Spain, his reputation for mediocrity came to the ears of an ambassador who protested directly to Allen Dulles, the CIA's director, and saved the job for a more able man.

HE WAS, MOREOVER, always being lent to crash programs such as the Bay of Pigs. One marks the type. A bureau chief says he needs manpower. The others lend what they are willing to lend. It occurs to me that Hunt must have been one of those whom the cold warriors around Allen Dulles referred to as "one of the admiral's boys." The phrase deserves explanation because it has a bearing on the history of the cold war.

In the early days of the CIA, its directors were chosen by turn from the Army, Navy and Air Force. Thus it came about that, for a short time, the agency was run by an admiral named

the slightest idea how to run an intelligence agency; worse, he thought he did.

Hillenkotter conceived of the CIA as a weapon against communism, domestic or foreign. He lent his name and power to the persecution of old China hands in the State Department; he spent much of his time compiling lists of known left-wingers; he was once reminded by J. Edgar Hoover that he was treading on FBI ground; he left a legacy in the CIA which Dulles never quite rooted out.

Dulles, who had helped to plan the agency from his law office and who eventually moved in as first civilian director, knew that the mission of the agency, in addition to the gathering of intelligence, was not to fight communism but to oppose Soviet expansionism, which was then rampant, particularly in Western Europe. But when Dulles moved in, the admiral's boys were already there.

"ONE OF THE admiral's boys" didn't necessarily mean that a man had been hired by Hillenkotter. It was more of a type. It meant a man didn't understand the mission of the agency; it meant a man was simplistic: confused about the difference between Socialists and Communists, liberals and Communists, intellectuals and Communists, couldn't distinguish between the opponent and the opponent's ideological weapon.

The admiral's boys were anathema to Dulles who was an extremely intelligent, nonideological and thoroughly democratic man. He ignored them, but he never got rid of them. In the heyday of Sen. Joseph McCarthy, perhaps he couldn't get rid of them.

That one of those should have come to employ against his country the means he learned in his country's employ shows how serious were the wounds inflicted on the American mentality by the combination of the