

Most Believe Their Profession Unfairly Maligned

# Ex-CIA Agents Fret Their Work Not Understood

One recent night, a half-dozen local members of David Phillips' new association of former spies gathered around the coffee table in his living room to "go over our by-laws, find out about our tax exempt status and chat."

They were of roughly similar ages as Phillips, and also lean and tan—except for Arthur Jacobs, a McLean attorney, who was older and had an Einstein-like shock of white hair and was charmingly self-deprecating ("I should be preserved in plastic in the Smithsonian") and Lewis Regenstein, who is younger and is the author of a book called "The Politics of Ex-tinction." "NOT about the CIA," he said. "It's about other endangered species."

Regenstein resigned from the CIA after 3½ years, he said, "to follow his interest in 'an equally frustrating' subject—environmental problems. "My friends, of course, ask me if I'm spying on the environmental movement."

One of the men asked not to be photographed or identified by name, because his current neighbors do not know he is a retired spy.

The Association of Retired Intelligence Officers (ARIO) had had its first official meeting a week or so earlier at the Summer Village sales center in Bethesda, with over 50 slightly edgy new members in attendance. The membership, totaling



By Margaret Thomas—The Washington Post

David Phillips is not one of the "kiss and tell" boys.

250 so far, is concentrated, not surprisingly, in the Washington area. It extends as far south as Florida, with a sprinkling across the Midwest and a few members in the far west. Each has paid at least \$10 dues, "but the average is closer to \$20,"

said Phillips, "and we got one donation for \$200."

The other members share Phillips' belief that their profession has been unfairly maligned and his determination to defend it as best they can without revealing what they consider vital secrets.

At Phillips' house that night, they spoke with flaring passion about the need for public understanding of the espionage business—but in their words was an undercurrent of meaning comprehensible only to them, through their bond of strange experience.

At the request of a visitor, they gamely traded a slew of spy jokes before they came up with a couple that could be appreciated by outsiders (or could be printed).

"One joke that used to go the rounds back when the agency's phone number was unlisted was that the only way you could get the number was to call the Russian embassy," said Dr. Lester Houck of Washington, who once taught Greek and Mediterranean archeology.

A couple of the men had stories about friends they had met socially, had routinely deceived about where they worked, and subsequently run into in the halls at CIA headquarters. "We'd both been working for the agency and lying to each other about it," recalled James Flannery, of Alexandria.

They each echoed Phillips' statements about the lack of status and recognition, and especially about the hardships on families. "That's why I took early retirement at 54," said Estey. "To give my wife 10 good years—maybe."

Despite these familiar laments, and despite what Phillips has called "the dis-

temper of the times," which throws a retroactive cloud over all their activities, the men agreed with Flannery when he said firmly: "If I had it all to do over—I wouldn't do it differently." Flannery spoke almost reverently of his plan to put up a cabin near Cape Hatteras, N.C. "I will report on domestic activities on the Outer Banks," he said softly, "and send back intelligence on when the blue fish are running."—KATHY SAWYER