

Book forum

Hunt's Bay of Pigs role

GIVE US THIS DAY, by E. Howard Hunt
(Arlington House, \$7.95)

Reviewed by Al Burt

E. Howard Hunt, who won the dubious distinction of being America's most widely recognized undercover specialist, wrote this book to "clarify" what went wrong at the Bay of Pigs.

He defends himself; the Central Intelligence Agency and selectively praises those Cuban exiles who won his favor.

As a "key organizer" of the invasion, there is no question that Hunt knew most of what was going on at the operational level.

Neither is there any question, following his Watergate involvement and national television exposure, that he was a veteran and trusted CIA official.

If there are questions on this book, they unfortunately must involve Hunt himself.

How badly did he want to justify his own role in the bungled invasion?

How strongly did he hope for history to indict those who contradicted his own plans and hopes for how the invasion should be conducted?

And, finally, how would these feelings affect the judgments rendered in a book about that invasion?

To keep the book in perspective, one must also keep in mind Hunt's record of almost fanatical devotion to what he per-

ceives to be good causes.

In this, he gives the appearance of being a sincere, highly motivated man willing to put those causes above all else.

At the end of the book, when he confesses to being heartsick over "political compromise and military defeat," he also notes, "I am sick of lying and deception . . ."

But apparently not enough to quit the field, for during his Watergate testimony, he confessed having fabricated official cables in an attempt to blame former President Kennedy for the assassination of former South Vietnam president Diem.

Kennedy, incidentally, emerges in the book as Hunt's least favorite politician.

Hunt concedes that even the CIA had some doubts about his control of personal political views. As the invasion was being organized, a CIA Project chief called "Jake" confronted him.

"The only question about you," Jake says, "is whether you're too conservative to handle guys like these. Some of them are to the left of you."

One must keep in mind that most of these exiles were not liberal at all, but on the contrary had been radicalized in conservative directions by their bitter experiences with Fidel Castro.

This very issue eventually led to Hunt's withdrawal from direct association with the exiles. President Kennedy insisted the exile leadership be broadened, and Hunt withdrew rather than carry out that order personally.