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(BY DANIEL GILMORE)

WASHINGTON (UPI) -- CIA DIRECTOR GEORGE BUSH TODAY REVEALED HE HAS BEEN ON A RECENT SECRET MISSION TO THREE FOREIGN COUNTRIES ON A FACT-FINDING TOUR AND WAS ENCOURAGED BY WHAT HE FOUND.

SPEAKING WITHOUT NOTES AT A LUNCHEON OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF NEWSPAPER EDITORS, BUSH MENTIONED THE MATTER DURING AN ADDRESS DEFENDING THE CIA AND UNDERLINING THE NECESSITY FOR INTELLIGENCE TO MAINTAIN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY.

TALKING TO REPORTERS AFTER HIS SPEECH, BUSH DECLINED TO IDENTIFY THE COUNTRIES HE VISITED OR WHEN HE VISITED THEM.

"I SAID IT WAS SECRET AND THAT'S WHAT THAT MEANS," HE SAID.

BUSH WAS BELIEVED TO HAVE GONE TO WESTERN EUROPE, BUT CIA OFFICIALS WITH HIM SAID THEY COULD NOT SAY WHERE HE HAD BEEN OR WHEN HE HAD GONE.

BUSH VOLUNTEERED THE INFORMATION IN HIS IMPROMPTU ADDRESS TO THE ASNE EDITORS, TO THE APPARENT DISCOMFITURE OF AT LEAST ONE INTELLIGENCE AIDE WITH HIM.

BUSH WAS TALKING ABOUT THE MORALE OF THE CIA COMMUNITY FOLLOWING ALMOST TWO YEARS OF CONGRESSIONAL AND PRESS DISCLOSURES OF THE FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC ABUSES WITH WHICH THE AGENCY HAS BEEN CHARGED.

"IT IS A FANTASTIC RESERVOIR OF DISCIPLINE IN THE CIA," HE SAID. "OUR PERSONNEL PEOPLE SAY THAT THE QUANTITY OF APPLICATIONS IS UP. THIS IS AN EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE IN THE AGENCY...MORALE IS A-ONE...

"I'VE JUST COME BACK FROM A SECRET MISSION TO THREE COUNTRIES."

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