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Spies of the past gather to honor one of their own

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They are called spooks today, somewhat disparagingly. But 30 years ago they were, quite simply, heroes.

As William Colby said — last night at a "Veterans of the O.S.S." dinner at the Washington Hilton — "in the days of the O.S.S. we relied only on spies. Now we have technology and spies combined. The really innovative thing that the O.S.S. under Bill Donovan did, was to create a collection of scholars evaluating intelligence."

The dinner, eaten under a giant sepia photograph of the founder and first head of the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the CIA, was, quite literally, a gathering of veterans. The occasion was the honoring of Jacques Chavan Delmas, the president of the French National Assembly and a World War II resistance hero who infiltrated into France in 1944 to represent Gen. Charles DeGaulle.

The award, previously bestowed on Dwight Eisenhower, Earl Mountbatten, David Bruce and Allen Dulles, among others, was for the majority of the 450 guests a trip down memory lane.

And so they came, some limping slightly, elegantly. Some using a cane. Many white haired, courteous, hiding well under stiff upper lips their old feat of courage. Or, perhaps, allowing a little to slip out discreetly — not braggingly — so that their period as well as their personal roles might be remembered.

Current CIA director Stansfield

Turner, who was invited, declined. But former director William Colby was willing to comment on the latest intelligence flap over the Soviet brigade in Cuba. "It's an intelligence triumph," Colby declared. "There are 3,000 men — who'd get lost in the Miami traffic if they invaded us! It's the nose of the camel. We should be pleased we could find such a small unit and be alerted in time to do something."

Sitting near Colby, former O.S.S. agent Douglas Bazata spoke of his still controversial claim that in 1944 he was assigned to kill Gen. George Patton. "Apparently quite a number of top-level people were jealous of Patton," Bazata said. "I know the guy who killed him. But I was the one who got paid for it — \$10,000." O.S.S. Director "Wild Bill" Donovan himself, Bazata added, was the man who gave him the order for the famous American general to be done in. "And if you get me killed, get someone to say a prayer over my grave..." Bazata told the reporter.

Whatever the truth of the matter, it was not an evening where everyone was anxious to spill secrets. Anthony Kloman, who set up two schools of psychological warfare in England and who wore a row of foreign decorations on his dinner jacket, admitted that he'd "recruited and trained the first Allied agent into Berlin in 1944." But he refused to disclose the name or nationality of the agent. "That sort of thing causes trouble with the Russians. Of course there are still mysteries," the white-haired, blue-eyed, mustachioed Kloman said.