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Flawed Patriot: The Rise And Fall Of CIA Legend Bill Harvey

FLAWED PATRIOT

THE RISE AND FALL OF
CIA LEGEND BILL HARVEY

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Synopsis

William K. Harvey was the CIA's most daring and successful field operator during the tense, early days of the Cold War. Extremely intelligent, a dedicated martini drinker, coarse in manner and appearance, both loved and hated, he was larger than life. But just as Harvey reached his zenith, fate and personal flaws caused his swift, dramatic downfall. Bayard Stockton provides a rich portrait of the man, including accounts from Harvey's family, friends, and former CIA colleagues who have never spoken publicly before. Harvey's intelligence career began at the FBI, where he hunted Nazi spies. After running afoul of J. Edgar Hoover, Harvey went to the fledgling CIA in 1947. Harvey's CIA successes included the unmasking of Soviet spy Kim Philby and masterminding the famous Berlin Tunnel that tapped Russian communications. The pinnacle of Harvey's career came as chief of both ZR/RIFLE, the agency's political assassination operation, and Task Force W, the group targeted on Cuba. But Harvey was in constant conflict with Bobby Kennedy, who micromanaged operations against Fidel Castro. Harvey profanely insulted the president's brother during a tense meeting, which led to Harvey's reassignment to Rome. His alcoholism worsened in Italian exile, and he was forced to retire. He became a nonperson. However, Harvey resurfaced during Senate hearings in the 1970s. When his supervision of the plots to assassinate Castro was revealed, many labeled Harvey the epitome of CIA excess. Harvey's continuing friendship with Johnny Rosselli, a Mafia figure who had helped the CIA with Cuban operations, opened further questions as some "most notably Robert Blakey, former chief counsel to the House Subcommittee on Assassinations" linked Rosselli to JFK's assassination. Flawed Patriot cuts through the rumors and inaccuracies surrounding Harvey to show a brilliant but flawed man who was undoubtedly one of the most talented and imaginative officers in the agency's storied history.

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Customer Reviews

This book features a poorly chosen title and many flaws in composition. However, it provides the reader with a reasonable introduction to an unsung (buried) American hero of the Cold War. More importantly, if the reader reads carefully and between the lines, there is much to learn about the CIA, large bureaucracies (ala Niskanen), what it takes to gather human intelligence, imperial politics, and the future of the American intelligence establishment. First, to Bill Harvey. Sure, he had flaws ("Show me a hero and I'll show you a bum.") He was irascible, blunt, opinionated, contemptuous of those that hadn't paid their dues, and a three-martini lunch drinker. Leave off the drinking and you have Billy Mitchell, Dick Pick or Henry Ford. Harvey was the first CIA giant in positive intelligence collection, initially as an agent handler (case officer), then holding a series of supervisory positions. His output was prodigious, often working twenty hours a day, and he thought others should work as hard as he. He is remembered best for the Berlin tunnel tap on Soviet phone lines, but that was only the tip of the iceberg. On the negative side, he simply didn't "fit in." He was a Midwesterner from a non-elite university (Indiana University), different in manners, speech, social connections and attitude from the effete (as he called them) Eastern Ivy-Leaguers then as now populating the CIA (and indeed, all Federal bureaucracies.) If one thinks this is no longer the case, allow me to say that the situation is much, much worse today. The enemy (red) states cannot provide leaders in government unless they have been vetted fully through attendance in the Ivy League or Seven Sisters (like Bush, Obama, Clinton, etc.

Bill Harvey was a larger-than-life secret agent who bull-dogged his way through the corridors of power in WW-11 FBI (where his sin of not being instantly available to take Herbert Hoover's telephone call cost him Napoleon's blessings), the OSS and eventually the CIA. The apotheosis of Harvey's career was conceiving of and managing the digging of the Berlin Tunnel in 1953--an

audacious wire-tap of 172 telephone cables just over the border in East Berlin. Before the author gets to telling us this story, he foreshadows it many times as if he's already told it. When he does tell it, the tale is vague and incomplete. Little of the extreme tension is conveyed that this major espionage coup created among the band of agents who carried it out, and none of the exultation. Harvey was an anomaly in the rising intelligence community. Just like those other genius mavericks--General Billy Mitchell, General George Patton, Col. Charlie Beckwith--he bucked his superiors to get things done, and like them, he was undone by the iron law of all bureaucracies--that fealty is much more important than results. His resentment at Bobbie Kennedy's ultra micro-managing of the Bay of Pigs fiasco certainly contributed to its failure. It certainly scuttled Harvey's career. Yet what politician has ever learned the harsh lesson that others' are better at their jobs than they are--so let them do their jobs? A serious 3-martini luncheon schmoozer, Harvey was adroit in finding and attracting talented cohorts. He built up highly loyal groups in spite of the usual internecine infighting that is the hallmark of all operational organizations. In the end his drinking got the better of him, and he was cast off like all such "failures."

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