

The Langley Files: A CIA Podcast
Episode 2
CIA: 75 Years and Counting

Host #1 – Dee
Host #2 – Walter
Guest #1 – Kathleen
Guest #2 – Bonnie

Narrator: Decades ago, a quote was carved into a marble wall at headquarters. “And ye shall know the truth,” it reads, “and the truth shall make you free.” At CIA, there are truths we can share and stories we can tell. Stories of duty and dedication. Stories of ingenuity and mission. Stories beyond those of Hollywood scripts and shadowed whispers. Today we're taking a step out from behind those shadows, sharing what we can, and offering a glimpse into the world of the Central Intelligence Agency. This is The Langley Files.

(music begin)

Walter: That inscription that's chiseled into the marble wall of CIA's entryway

Dee: ... “And you shall know the truth. And the truth shall make you free.”

Walter: Yes, well, right next to those iconic words is a statue of a determined looking gentleman in World War II era military dress with one hand on his cap and the other looped around his belt, over the words Major General William J. Donovan, Director, Office of Strategic Services, forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Dee: That tribute to CIA lore gives you a sense of the dawn of this Agency, a sense of the era out of which it was born, and the national security challenges it was created to address.

(music end)

Dee: Welcome back to another episode of the Langley Files: A CIA Podcast. I'm Dee.

Walter: And I'm Walter. And in our last episode, CIA Director Bill Burns mentioned that this year marks 75 since the CIA was created.

Dee: And so for this, our second episode, we're actually going to sit down with the Agency officials responsible for marking the CIA's 75th anniversary to hear just a little bit about what they've learned about the CIA's evolution over the years.

Walter: How they're marking the past to help CIA usher in the future.

Dee: And along the way we'll actually learn that had this podcast been recorded during that first chapter of the CIA's history, calling it the Langley Files would have made no sense.

Walter: Indeed it would not have.

Dee: So let's do this. Let's share with our audience, you and I, a little bit about how the CIA was founded 75 years ago.

Walter: Sure. So the quick version is that before World War II, our country's foreign intelligence activities were not coordinated government wide. Even just before the war, US intelligence was collected by multiple entities with no direction or coordination. So, frustrated with this piecemeal stove-piped approach, in 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the office of the Coordinator of Information, or COI. And then the following year he transformed that organization into a new entity, the Office of Strategic Services, the first centralized intelligence agency in American history.

Dee: And under the leadership of World War I hero General William "Wild" Bill Donovan, the OSS collected and analyzed strategic information and conducted paramilitary operations, and it existed for just three years but made a lasting contribution to our country, the world and the future of American intelligence.

Walter: After World War II ended however, the OSS was disbanded along with many of the other war agencies, and so, by 1947 to create a new, fully functional postwar intelligence organization, President Truman signed the National Security Act, establishing, among other things, the Central Intelligence Agency. Its mission would become collecting foreign intelligence, analyzing it and conducting covert action as directed by the president. The National Security Act, was signed by President Truman on July 26th, and CIA officially came into existence on September 18th, 1947, 75 years ago this month.

Dee: We've evolved in many ways over the years. We've changed locations from DC to Langley, Virginia. We've grown significantly and shifted structurally over the years, adapting as mission changes. But the foundational notion behind why we were needed and still are needed is important to note.

Walter: And now that we've all heard that mini history lesson, let's talk about the significance of this year, the 75th year, with two folks who have been coordinating events for this celebration. Kathleen, Bonnie, welcome to The Langley Files.

Kathleen: Thank you for having us. This is certainly never something I thought I would see here at the Agency. I've been here for over 30 years, I retired in December. I was in the Director of Digital Innovation and just so happy to be here today. But when I was leaving, um, I was honored and asked if I would return and help with planning some of our CIA 75th anniversary events. It's been such a great opportunity to be part of the celebration. And Bonnie and I are really excited to talk to you about what we're doing.

Bonnie: Absolutely. I'll echo Kathleen's appreciation. It's a pleasure to be here with you guys today. And although I haven't yet reached that 30 plus mark in my career, I've enjoyed my time over my decade plus here, as an analyst and public affairs officer. Um, I'm equally pleased to be part of the CIA 75 team and everything it involves.

Walter: Well, and now you're working to commemorate those 75 years of CIA history. Um so obviously, generations of CIA officers have walked these halls during that time. Um, have you both had the chance

to meet with any of them and hear about their experiences and their reflections from all those different eras?

Bonnie: Oh, absolutely. One of the things we've been doing has been meeting with current and former CIA officers, hearing their anecdotes and stories and discovering how we can translate those to lessons and make them relevant to generations of officers moving forward.

Dee: That's excellent. So what would you say are some of the more striking stories you heard about the changes those officers saw during their time here?

Kathleen: Well of course, in this yearlong celebration, we've heard their stories of those earlier eras in CIA history. Um, certainly talked about typewriters, pneumatic tubes that sent messages around the building. I actually was here when they were still in place by one or two offices before they were replaced. Um, and back then though, the campus was actually half the size it is today. So pneumatic tubes were a little bit easier to get around than they would have been with us sprawled all over. But beyond that, um, you pick up on these themes of how much has changed in this organization. You know I mentioned typewriters just now. Obviously, the technology we use is so different now. It's evolved. And what's constant, though, is that the CIA always needs to be involved in technology, always needs to use technology to meet our mission. It's also clear how much the diversity of CIA's workforce has grown. You know, there was once that stereotype that CIA was "pale, male and Yale," and yet today we work in an environment in which diversity and inclusivity are emphasized. They're actual mission imperatives. We couldn't do our job if we weren't the diverse organization that we are today. It's just a necessary perspective and you see it. It's not just something that we give lip service to here at the Agency. It is something that we actually believe in and live every day.

Dee: And thank you for mentioning that. So what hasn't changed? I mean, what have you heard from some of these officers that they say have remained the same?

Kathleen: Well, you know, um, we chose "Duty. Commitment. Mission. Since 1947." as our slogan for this year's, uh, anniversary. And we chose that because it does say it all. That's the thing that hasn't changed. That's why we are here. It's why people join the Agency. It gives us that sense of something bigger than ourselves. Those sentiments haven't changed in the 75 years. Certainly hasn't changed in my, my 30 plus year tenure here. The operations we run, the technology we employ, the buildings we work in, the secrets we keep, those change over time. The specifics. But our sense of duty, commitment and mission do not.

Bonnie: Exactly. And I'd also add that it, it really represents our Agencies ethos. I think a lot has changed since we began as an organization back in 1947, certainly in terms of the advances we've made. But that ethos as reflected in those three words has remained constant.

Walter: And have there been efforts to bring in any of those officers? Many of them, I understand, legends of CIA, to speak with today's cadre of CIA officers and impart lessons learned?

Kathleen: Absolutely. Um, in August we had a remarkable "Generations Panel" where some of those former officers from past decades came and shared their stories. These are people through the decades who had actually worked at the CIA over different operations, different elements of the Agency, and the Director has also held fireside chats with the Director of National Intelligence, Avril Haines, our former

Deputy, our former Directors, Tenet and Panetta. These are all workforce engagements where people could go out and hear the stories of how it was to either work in or run the Agency during those times.

Dee: And, you know, we understand here that most of our work is classified, so we don't really normally get to interact with a lot of general public, at least not in an official capacity. Some of the events this year included some of the government officials. We've invited some authors and others to participate. Can you maybe share a little bit about why we wanted to invite these folks here and how difficult or easy it was to coordinate those events?

Kathleen: So it's been a goal since the beginning, um, to share some of our celebration with the general public to showcase some of what we've done here, provide a glimpse of our accomplishments and our mission. We work closely with the Office of Public Affairs, as you know, um, on a daily basis, where they have internal communication experts, media spokespeople, social media experts. They're all helping us to share our story via our public social media sites and the press. We were thrilled to welcome back alumni. Many who haven't been able to, haven't been to headquarters in years to showcase the growth and how this campus has changed. We have protocols and standards in place for allowing visitors, as we always have. They've changed over the years, and they've changed certainly because of COVID, um in the recent, um, time. But great teams of people applying their expertise are making this a smooth process. So I wouldn't necessarily say coordinating any of these events is difficult, certainly not compared to the to the mission work being done every day by our dedicated officers. But there are a lot of moving pieces to coordinate and keep track of, and it changes daily. So it takes communication and an abundance of organizational skills as well as, um, commitment from our leaders, which we have, and an army of volunteers.

Bonnie: And to add to that I think it's, it's always good to demystify this Agency given that there are still different public perceptions of this place that are shaped by film, books, and a ton of preconceived notions of what a quote unquote spy does. I think that celebrating our Agency's rich history through historic stories of lesser known figures who made a difference has been a fascinating thing. And I think we learned a lot about this in CIA's origins, particularly when we look at the OSS, the Office of Strategic Services, CIA's predecessor. Uh, there's this great story on CIA's public website called "Glorious Amateurs" that covers the range of individuals who comprised the OSS. We see that Donovan brought in anyone and everyone whom he thought he could make a difference to advance OSS' mission. Whether it was graphic designers, Japanese American soldiers from the 442nd Nisei Regiment, as well as actors like Sterling Hayden, wrestlers, um, even a Supreme Court justice. And this eclectic group came together and made a difference in advancing OSS' mission. And that's that's a pretty astonishing thing.

Walter: Well, I think a lot of people will find that a really interesting look into the earliest chapter of CIA history. So how can the general public learn more about and even take part in some of these 75th events?

Bonnie: Well, basically, CIA actually has a pretty strong presence on a lot of social media platforms. We have Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and we have a, we have a really cool YouTube channel as well. And as I just quoted before, cited for the amazing website that is worth checking out.

Walter: Excellent plug.

Dee: It was. Um, so obviously, this is an important milestone for CIA, the 75th, but why do you think it's important for the workforce, both past and present, to celebrate it together?

Kathleen: That's a great question, Dee, because you know, we are so focused on mission all the time, and this is, you know, something that we're doing that's a little bit different than what we normally do, but it's an opportunity. It's for us to look back at the courageous men and women who serve the nation in silence and then prepare the way for future generations of officers who are going to answer their call to serve our nation. We are often so mission focused here at the Agency. We see that immediate problem right in front of us. And that is, you know, all hands on deck, solve the immediate problem. Never really look up to see the Agency as a whole. But the mission drive is what defines us as an agency. And so we need to look at that and then also recognize that sometimes we have to just take a pause and look at our accomplishments. Look at what we've done over the last look at the heroes that we've had in the past. And I think in order to grow as an organization, we just need to take that time to honor our past, the good and the bad, so we can learn from it, and take a good look at all we've accomplished in safeguarding our nation.

Walter: And why would you say it's important to share some of those insights into CIA, these 75 years, and the way they we're marking it with the outside world, with those outside these walls, you know, why should the general public be interested in this?

Kathleen: Well, I for one, have come to see how the world has changed and how important it is that we change with it. Um, for example, a podcast like this never would have been considered for years when I first started the Agency, and not just because of technology. Obviously, we have the technology now that makes it easier. But we didn't talk to the public. We didn't talk to the press unless we absolutely had to. It was just a whole different culture, and I don't think it always served us well. But the world is changing. We need to increase our partnerships with both industry and academia. And in order to do this, they need to understand us as an organization. You know, of course, we can't talk about classified information with the general public, but we need them to understand the importance of our mission, and then they can better figure out how they can contribute to that mission, where they can plug in. And in order to attract and retain the workforce we need to succeed in the future to protect our nation, to stay one step ahead of our adversaries, we need to share a bit of what we do here, and the 75th anniversary, it was just a great opportunity for us to take a look at that and see how we could better do that.

Dee: Those are all excellent points. So what kind of events have we done this year to celebrate?

Kathleen: Well, this is the fun part. So the Director asked for this to be a yearlong series of events, a whole commemorative year. So in that vein, we started in December last year. Actually, they had done a little pre-work before I started to figure out what this year would look like, but I started um, in December. We formed an outstanding working group, all volunteers from across the Agency who have full-time mission important job but who want to contribute to this. And so we worked with every Directorate, every office, to plan, communicate, engage and pull off all the events we're doing. We had our new CIA 75th seal that we started using, and as I mentioned we came up with our motto, "Duty. Commitment. Mission. Since 1947." And with that seal, and with that, um, motto, we began branding the CIA 75th with visual reminders. So, as one of our goals was to make sure the entire Agency workforce knows it is our 75th anniversary, something I don't think was clearly recognized last December. In addition to the visual clues you see, you see, the President of the United States came for a workforce engagement. He provided remarks, congratulated us on our anniversary. And then we also had, um, the fireside chats that the Director has been doing with DNI, Avril Haines, with our former Directors, Tenet and Panetta, we had the workforce engagement. Each of the Directorates is coming up with their own ways to celebrate within

their workforce. Um, which they then share that with the whole Agency. And of course, we had our big events in September throughout the month. And then we have some other events then to close out the year.

Bonnie: And our big events took place in September, as Kathleen said, and we invited our alumni back to Langley for a full program of events, including VIP guests. We awarded CIA's newest Trailblazers, which is a prestigious award to recognize outstanding CIA officers from our founding to present day who've taken CIA in important new directions and help shape our Agency's history. The CIA's museum has also been undergoing a massive modernization project since last year. The museum offers historical context on the Agency's operational recruitment and training missions, and it helps visitors sort of better understand CIA's historic mission and the contributions that makes to national security. This museum will have interactive experiences that include digital touch screens with searchable CIA case studies, display cases with new artifacts, and I think it has like a really updated ceiling with very cool, updated ceiling with a hidden message to decode. It's, it's a really slick space. It's it's absolutely beautiful from what I've seen thus far.

Walter: Well we'll be having the Director and the Deputy Director of the museum on a future episode of The Langley Files to, uh, offer our listeners sort of a behind the scenes view, metaphorically speaking of the spaces. So stay tuned for that as well.

Kathleen: That's great, because I'm so impressed with our museum. I have to say, you know, it's been coming along for the past year. Um after they had done a big shift, I hadn't been on that side of the building in a while. I took the elevator down, it opened up. I had to take a step back. I didn't know where I was. I mean, it does not look like your typical government, um, museum at all. They've done a spectacular job.

Walter: Well, Kathleen, Bonnie, thank you so much for coming on. We really appreciate you making time. It's been excellent talking with you about the 75th anniversary. We hope folks appreciate the importance of this historic year. Um, folks of this Agency definitely do.

Dee: Absolutely. But before we go, we thought it might be fun for you guys, um, to take part in a little trivia with us, if you don't mind. Um, maybe doing some rapid-fire trivia questions where Walter and I just kind of ask you a bunch of questions about the CIA. We'll try to do maybe 75 questions as part of the 75th anniversary. If you guys are game?

Bonnie: Sure.

Kathleen: Yeah.

Bonnie: Absolutely.

Dee: So, number one: Where was CIA headquarters originally located?

Bonnie: I can do this. Washington, DC.

Walter: Two: When did CIA headquarters moved to Langley, Virginia?

Kathleen: I do know this. 1961. And that was before I started for the record, before I was born.

Dee: Alright, number three: What year was the New Headquarters building completed?

Bonnie: I'm gonna say 1991. Yes.

Walter: Four: What does CIA as forerunner, the OSS, stand for?

Kathleen: Office of Strategic Services.

Dee: Good. And number five: Which presidential act formally established the CIA?

Bonnie: The National Security Act of 1947. Final answer.

Walter: Six: What are the colors of the CIA logo?

Kathleen: Another easy one. Red, white, blue and yellow.

Dee: Alright number seven: Instead of an American bald eagle, which other type of bird was considered on our logo?

Bonnie: Someone told me an owl, I think. Was it an owl?

Walter: Yeah. Yeah. Number eight: What's the starburst in the middle of the logo called?

Kathleen: That's a compass rose.

Dee: Number nine: The CIA has a seal that has an eagle, a compass rose, and what's that third thing?

Bonnie: This one's easy. A shield?

Walter: Mm hmm. Ten: Does CIA have a mascot?

Kathleen: No. Any suggestions?

Dee: I think we should. I don't have any suggestions, but if you think of one let me know.

Walter: Did you really think we're going to ask you 75 questions?

Kathleen: Yes.

Dee: Well, we could keep going, but we want to be able to give you some time back into your day. Um, so again we really appreciate you guys being here today. It's been lovely talking to you. And thank you for coming on and talking about all things 75 with us.

Kathleen: Thank you very much. Both of you. Really our pleasure to be here.

Bonnie: Fantastic. Thanks, guys.

Dee: Thank you so much.

Walter: I'm glad we're able to talk all things 75.

Dee: And, you know, and I know that it's hard for folks outside to understand or even relate to the significance of the milestone. But I think they did a really good job of trying to highlight why it is important and showcasing that we're not always, you know, staying behind closed doors here.

Walter: And they passed our trivia challenge.

Dee: With flying colors.

Walter: Which reminds me, we need to provide the answer to our last episode's trivia question.

Dee: Oh, we certainly do.

(music interlude)

Dee: Actually do you want to remind them what that question was?

Walter: Happily. So, name the famous chef and author who also worked with the CIA's precursor, the OSS, where they were rumored, falsely to have invented a shark repellent for downed fighter pilots.

Dee: And the answer is ... Ms. Julia Child.

Walter: Although she did not, in fact, invent a shark repellent.

Dee: Though I'm pretty sure had somebody asked her, she could've probably whipped something up.

Walter: She was a master of tradecraft, kitchen and clandestine.

Dee: Okay, so how about we throw out another trivia question. What do you have for them, Walter?

Walter: Yeah. Okay. Which airport shares the last name of a former Director of Central Intelligence?

Dee: It's an excellent question. I know the answer, but folks are going to have to tune into our next episode to hear the answer. Where we can confirm their guesses...

Walter:...or deny them.

Dee: There it is. The old confirm or deny reference. I love it!

Walter: Mm hmm. I had to do it.

Dee: So thank you, everyone, for joining us here on The Langley Files. Please join us next time.

Walter: We'll be seeing you.

Dee: So, Walter, what else do you have going on today?

Walter: Just another day at CIA.

Dee: That it is.