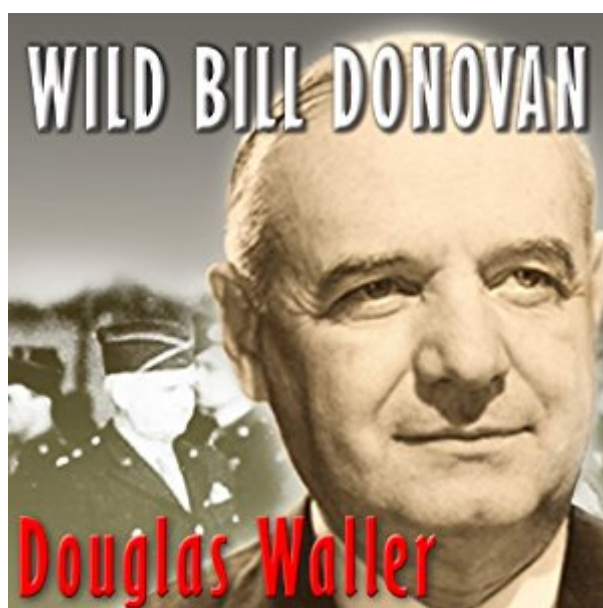


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Wild Bill Donovan: The Spymaster Who Created The OSS And Modern American Espionage



Synopsis

He was one of America's most exciting and secretive generals - the man Franklin Roosevelt made his top spy in World War II. A mythic figure whose legacy is still intensely debated, "Wild Bill" Donovan was director of the Office of Strategic Services (the country's first national intelligence agency) and the father of today's CIA. Donovan introduced the nation to the dark arts of covert warfare on a scale it had never seen before. Now, veteran journalist Douglas Waller has mined government documents and private archives throughout the United States and England, drawn on thousands of pages of recently declassified documents, and interviewed scores of Donovan's relatives, friends, and associates to produce a riveting biography of one of the most powerful men in modern espionage. The son of poor Irish Catholic parents, William Joseph Donovan married into Protestant wealth and fought heroically in World War I, where he earned the nickname "Wild Bill" for his intense leadership. After the war he made millions as a lawyer on Wall Street until FDR tapped him to be his strategic intelligence chief. A charismatic leader, Donovan was revered by his secret agents. Yet at times he was reckless, risking his life unnecessarily in war zones and engaging in extramarital affairs that became fodder for his political enemies. Wild Bill Donovan reads like an action-packed spy thriller, with stories of daring young men and women in Donovan's OSS sneaking behind enemy lines for sabotage, breaking into Washington embassies to steal secrets, plotting to topple Adolf Hitler, and suffering brutal torture or death when they were captured by the Gestapo. It is also a tale of political intrigue, of infighting at the highest levels of government, and of powerful men pitted against one another.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 14 hours and 43 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Tantor Audio

Audible.com Release Date: March 30, 2011

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B004UFOIIG

Best Sellers Rank: #259 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Politics & Current Events >

Freedom & Security #523 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government >

Customer Reviews

Bill Donovan was an American original! His lifetime was one significant accomplishment after another; a war hero; super successful attorney; dedicated patriot; created OSS from nothing. He designed what worldwide intelligence and counterintelligence should be - gather facts, explore rumors, perform detailed analysis and then take decisive action. Where in the United States are men like Bill Donovan. Certainly not in Washington, DC. This is a great book about an extraordinary American.

Wild Bill Donovan (1883-1959) is famous as the founder of America's first intelligence service the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) during World War II. His life is well told by Douglas Waller the author of this book. Waller is a former correspondent for Newsweek and Time. He is the author of five previous books on American foreign policy and military affairs. The Donovan book has become a bestseller deserving of a wide readership among general readers. Donovan was born in Buffalo to a middle class family. He was a star athlete in his Roman Catholic high school. Donovan later graduated from Columbia and Columbia Law School. He married a wealthy woman named Ruth Rumsey. She was criticized for marrying Donovan a Catholic lad who came from the tough First Ward. The couple had two children Patricia and David. Patricia Donovan became a wealthy Wall Street lawyer. He was also active in Republican politics running and losing a race for governor of New York in 1932. Donovan began the OSS as the war clouds in Europe darkened. He had a good relationship for FDR who saw the need for a cloak and dagger organization. During World War II Donovan and the OSS had agents in occupied Europe and Asia. Donovan had to deal with battles in Washington DC with John Edgar Hoover's FBI. Hoover kept the OSS out of Central and South America and wanted his agency to handle espionage. Donovan also had rivalries with the military who had their own intelligence personnel. At the end of the war, Truman refused to continue the OSS. HST did agree to the CIA in 1947 but refused to appoint Donovan as the agency's first director. Donovan became the Eisenhower administration's ambassador to Thailand but retired after a year. He developed dementia dying in Walter Reed hospital in D.C. in 1959. Donovan was an activist director of the OSS who demanded excellence in his agents. Wild Bill (the nickname his troops gave him during World War I) was a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient who took part in several Allied landings during the Second World War including: Salerno, Anzio, D-Day in Normandy

and actions in the South Pacific. He was a brave hero with an explosive temper. Donovan was not a good administrator. He traveled hundreds of thousands of miles on his OSS assignments across the globe. What kind of man was Donovan? Douglas Waller chronicles Donovan's penchant for travel; his intellectual acuity and his serial womanizing of rich and elegant women. His marriage with Ruth broke down; the couple were rarely together. Ruth spent most of her time at the family farm in Berryville, Virginia while Donovan lived in New York and DC in between his globe hopping jaunts. Donovan had close ties with the Vatican and at one time expressed interest in becoming a priest. His brother Vincent did become a priest. Following his deep chagrin at the shutting down of the OSS, Donovan ran and lost a bid for US Senator from New York losing in the Republican primary to a candidate selected by Thomas E. Dewey. Waller summarizes Donovan's achievement as the spymaster who created the OSS and modern American espionage: "Without Donovan's creativity, his charisma, his intelligence, his open-mindedness, his personal courage and his vision for the future, an unconventional organization like the OSS would likely not have been organized or sustained throughout the war. (p. 388). Donovan was a flawed individual but his contributions to national intelligence and his dedication and love for America make him shine forever in the pantheon of our nation's heroes. God bless Wild Bill. Thank you for your outstanding defense of freedom and liberty in a time of tyranny and evil. An excellent book highly recommended to general readers.

Disappointed. I stopped reading half way through and am looking for an alternative. Maybe I am off base, but no way a story about Donovan should be anything less than interesting. Because I had read a little about Donovan and the OSS in other books, I was looking forward to some exciting stories, anecdotes, insights. Instead, this biography seems to stop short of getting into interesting details. Given the footnotes, I expect it is well researched. While it chronicles seemingly everything in his life, it does not bring any specific events to life.

Drawing on newly available research, former TIME diplomatic correspondent Doug Waller has written an exciting, fast-paced biography that focuses on Medal of Honor recipient Bill Donovan and his remarkable exploits in forging the OSS during World War II into the most innovative and imaginative operation to defeat the Nazis and Japan. Donovan led from the front. He convinced Franklin Roosevelt that the country needed an operation like this. Roosevelt agreed and Donovan was off and running. He recruited from the Army and Wall Street. He was willing to try anything. I'm not going to give away the amazing exploits that Waller describes -- why spoil the fun? If you

submitted a script for a James Bond movie based on some of them, the producers would say, "hey, Bond does pretty wild things, but these are over the top." That was Donovan. Some of OSS's ideas worked brilliantly, others never got off the ground, but it's refreshing to see how the predecessor to the CIA got started and got things done. Waller is an experienced writer -- and a very good one. Others have written about Donovan, and I've read most of the other books. Helped by extensive research and access to previously classified information, this book combines two great strengths. The scholarship is superb. And it's a great read. Submitted by James Farwell

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