

The Langley Files: CIA's Podcast
FILE 014
A Conversation with CIA's Spymaster in Chief

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Walter: At CIA, we work around the clock and across the globe to help keep Americans and others around the world safe. Secrecy is often vital to our work.

Dee: But we're committed to sharing what we can when we can. So let us be your guides around the halls of Langley as we open our files and speak with those who have dedicated themselves to this mission.

Walter: These are their stories.

Walter and Dee: This is The Langley Files.

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Dee: As you listen to this, somewhere in the world, a CIA officer is on their way to a meeting, not a team meeting, not an all hands, but a meeting whose very existence must be kept secret. A meeting that's high stakes for everyone involved; a meeting with someone who has access to secret information that can help protect American lives, and very often, the lives of others around the world.

Walter: A meeting between a CIA case officer and someone overseas who has agreed, often at great personal risk, to clandestinely provide that information to the Agency. That is to say, a CIA source or asset. It might be information on illicit weapons shipments, or terrorist plans, or international criminal activity. But that person is making a bold decision, a brave decision, and CIA has a solemn duty to keep them safe.

Dee: So extensive measures, honed over more than 75 years of tradecraft, and continuously updated, are taken to keep this meeting secret and to ensure both parties arrive safely from watching eyes. And finally, at the end of it all, the CIA officer and the source meet.

Walter: And it's not the only such meeting taking place. All across the globe, officers in CIA's Directorate of Operations are carrying out such activities, identifying and collecting secret information on threats and other critical national security issues around the world. Learning what's afoot before it becomes a crisis or helping American decision makers and war fighters stay ahead of it if one develops.

Dee: And these CIA officers all answer to CIA's Deputy Director for Operations, head of human intelligence operations at the world's premier human intelligence Agency and the lead coordinator on human intelligence operations across the entirety of the US government.

Walter: The CIA officer leading it all.

Dee: As you might expect, it's rare to hear directly from a sitting Deputy Director for Operations, or DDO, in CIA parlance. These are individuals who are usually themselves long time career intelligence operatives and have often worked for decades in the shadows.

Walter: But today, here on The Langley Files, you're going to meet the person who has recently assumed this mantle, in his first ever public remarks. So stay tuned because you're going to hear a discussion on everything from recent groundbreaking CIA initiatives to the role of human intelligence in a digital era from an expert you won't find anywhere else. The spymaster at the center of it all.

Dee: Welcome back to The Langley Files.

Walter: It's time for Season Three.

(music ends)

Walter: Hi, everyone. Welcome back to The Langley Files. I'm Walter.

Dee: And I'm Dee.

Walter: So Dee, we're a few seasons in here. Why don't we set the scene for our listeners and describe what this moment looks like as we're recording?

Dee: I think it's an excellent idea.

Walter: So Dee and I are seated in a small recording studio tucked away deep in the halls of CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. We're joined as always by our audio experts, and three seasons in, we are still acutely aware of how uncommon a situation this is - a CIA podcast. But what is even more uncommon is the fact that Dee and I are currently seated directly across from none other than CIA's Deputy Director for Operations, Tom, who has graciously agreed to shed some light not only on himself, but also on the roles and mission of our DO officers. So for that, we say thank you, sir, and welcome to The Langley Files.

DDO: Well, thank you very much. It's an honor and a privilege to be here.

Walter: We're excited you're here.

Dee: Thank you so much for being here today. We really appreciate it.

Walter: So maybe it would make sense to zoom out and and talk about what a human intelligence operation looks like. And what a case officer does. You know, you oversee CIA's human intelligence operations, or, HUMINT, in the parlance here. So what is a case officer? And what does a case officer do? How does this look on a kind of granular level?

DDO: We need to draw a clear distinction between the actual duties and responsibilities of a case officer, or, as we use the term, operations officer, which I think is a probably a more accurate term. I have to draw a clear distinction between the roles that we see portrayed on the silver screen versus what happens in reality. They're two, frankly, very separate things. But if you, as you said, step back a little bit and look at the roles of a case officer. The human beings with whom we are in contact, what type of information does this human have? How is the best means that we are able to meet with this person? Sometimes in some very difficult areas from a counterintelligence uh, perspective. And three, making sure that we're evaluating the risks of whether or not we should be meeting with this person or not. We need to be experts in terms of benefiting from those privileged insights that they can provide to us. So I, I think that's the sort of basics of what an operations officer does. And once again I wanted to draw this great contrast between, you know, the officers in in shiny suits and fast cars and machine guns and everything, which, of course, is probably not us.

Dee: Fair point and speaking again with the use of the word granularly. In terms of the skills, how do they assess or spot somebody that they think could be a good source or asset for us?

DDO: Yea. One of the things that I continually talk about is the importance for our officers to be really experts at human beings - to understand how it is that we can persuade or work with somebody who wants to volunteer their services to the CIA. What is that type of information that they can provide to us? What's valuable? What questions should we be asking? What should we be asking as follow up? In terms of the qualities that we expect from our officers, really, in terms of their ability to think critically, have incredible curiosity about situations, be able to operate autonomously because many times we're placing them in difficult situations in which they have to react very quickly and have the mental agility to figure out, ok, how do we react under different situations? If you add that all together, that makes it a very exciting, very intriguing, and quite frankly, a just a fantastic career path.

Walter: Would it an easy definition of an operations officer be a CIA officer who travels sometimes to dangerous locations. You spoke of counterintelligence, that would be either a hostile government or hostile group trying to, uh, surveil and essentially identify and catch our people. And in that environment, sometimes a really challenging one, makes contact with those who have vital national security information and securely relays it back to decision makers here.

DDO: I think that's absolutely right, especially if you in terms if you think about how is it that we are going to communicate with this person, ensuring that our officers have the command of a foreign language. That's number one. Number two, to find out the manner in which we can go to a secure venue. How do we ensure that we are meeting with a volunteer or a recruited agent in a manner in which it keeps him safe? How is it that we can make sure that we're aware of the right questions to ask? I think it's a great sort of wrap up the way you mentioned that.

Dee: You just got a kudos from DDO.

Walter: That's going in my performance summary review or whatever.

DDO: You do realize that Walter, very soon after they come, you'll be you'll be joining our our our training.

Dee: You'll be in the ranks.

DDO: You've shown all of the attributes and skills that are necessary for a DO operations officer.

(laughter)

Dee: He also has the face that the DS&T officers likes as well.

Walter: Oh, I forgot all about that. That was a creepy comment.

Dee: So you're the Deputy Director of CIA for Operations. So what does that job entail? What are the responsibilities of that role?

DDO: It is kind of a fancy title, right? But I think at its core, it is my responsibility to ensure that the operations that we're running in the Directorate of Operations are thoughtful, disciplined, and with a clear purpose. So let me just expand on that a little bit, that the operations that we need to run need to be legal, number one. And I think it would be surprising to many people to know just how much oversight that we

receive, in terms of ensuring that the operational activities that are conducted by the Directorate of Operations are in full compliance with US law. Number two, an apolitical organization, it is essential that our operations and the operational activities in which we are involved support policy. How do they advance the interests of the United States? Number three - from a clear sense of, does an operation make sense? What are the risks? And the last perspective on this, in terms of the conduct of our operations is what about from a counterintelligence perspective? What is that risk versus gain calculus that's involved in terms of ensuring whether or not we should even be involved in these operations?

Dee: I think you touched on this a little bit. Is there anything else you want to share with the worldly audience out there about what you deem the big differences are between something that's in the fictional world, the movies, the books, versus what it is that our officers here actually do?

DDO: I think that's such a great question is because movies or books, they often focus on things that we do not do. You know, the CIA is involved in extortion or blackmailing or pressuring people to volunteer their service to the CIA. And I cannot tell you how wrong that is, what a terrible misconception that is. Because the manner in which people volunteer to the CIA is through ideology. They believe they're doing something above and greater than themselves, and that they are willing to provide us the information that is so crucial in helping policymakers in making the right decisions in the world. So I think if, you know, that is a really great opportunity to draw a distinction between what you see in the movies or in TV and what really happens here in the real world.

Walter: And as you said, sir, CIA has to follow US law in all circumstances. There's not some carve out for CIA that we get to not follow the Constitution and US legal code.

DDO: That's exactly right.

Dee: How about we switch a little bit and talk a little bit about yourself.

DDO: Deeply uncomfortable.

(laughter)

Walter: This will be novel for you.

Dee: So what is it about the CIA that made you want to join, and why the DO?

DDO: I grew up as the son of a State Department foreign service officer and had the experience of going to junior high school in north Norway, hundreds of miles north of the Arctic Circle. Landing in Beijing the week Mao Zedong died in 1976, to transitioning to see all the splendors of uh, Bordeaux, France. It was a real sort of interesting insights and really prepared me, uh, in some ways to give me the curiosity and inquisitiveness of what's happening around me that's been such a part of who I am now. I had the incredible privilege to serve in Navy seal teams, and it was a great experience for me. It was the sense of having a very, very clear mission and a sense of impact, which was just intriguing, and as I sought ways to continue my sort of personal and professional growth, I was deeply intrigued by the possibilities of serving in CIA. I had several foreign languages. I'd grown up overseas. I sought to have sort of a, you know, impact in in international arena. I saw that as just a really exciting and a welcome opportunity. And then the years I've been with the CIA, serving in many, many different locations you know, across the Middle East, where I had the opportunity to learn Arabic and serve with some incredibly talented officers, to increasingly positions of greater seniority into finally arriving here. So it's been in in, in some ways, an amazing journey.

I think ultimately all of us are seeking to have meaning in our life, seeking to have impact. And I have been truly blessed from that perspective of being able to be involved in some of the most impactful and historic events in the last three decades. I have had a catbird seat. I've been in a position to be able to collect the intelligence that has been pivotal, allowing policymakers to arrive at decisions. I had the privilege of being deeply involved in coordinating, planning, overseeing our reaction to Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine and being in a position to be able to figure out how do we help our partners? How do we make a difference? You can see how intoxicating that would be to a person that has always grown up thinking about mission, and how do I make a difference?

Walter: Sir, one of the things you are particularly well known for in this building is the central role you played in CIA's efforts to help Ukraine defend itself as Russia's full-scale invasion was commencing. What did that mean to you? Do you have any thoughts or reflections on that period?

DDO: I've thought about this question for quite some time. I was always so incredibly proud of what we were able to accomplish. And you know, most of our work takes place in the shadows. And you don't really have that opportunity to be able to broadcast just how much we were able to accomplish as an Agency to provide our Ukrainian partners with the right information to be part of an incredible intelligence community that prepared our partners across the world from what may be coming. If you look at that from the perspective of what we were able to accomplish, the information sharing, the training we provided, the insights, the organizational skills to ensure that Ukraine did not completely fall under Russian domination. I think it's it really is an incredible story.

Walter: Well, and it's an effort that continues.

DDO: Yea. And one that is a great testimony to the incredible workforce we have here.

Dee: I think it's also really important to note here that there are other occupations within the Directorate of Operations that's not just operations officer work.

DDO: One of the things that I continue to try and emphasize is that espionage, that's a team sport. And we have this idea from the movies that it's all just about one person, one asset, and everything happens as a result of an individual. And I have to tell you that that's very, very far from the truth, and that the manner in which operations are conducted is through teamwork. It's conducted through the targeters, who are experts in today's world in understanding large data pools - what's important? Second, are collection management officers who are experts, in terms of understanding what information should we be seeking and how to deal with the information that we actually collect, to make sure that it meets the standards, and disseminated to the right people. And also to understand what questions should we be asking. Before we meet with somebody, after all, understanding that that individual is going through great risk to meet with us. What are those questions? To our staff operations officers, and once again, from an operational program management side. How do we run these cases securely? And the language officers, once again, the cultural experts who have this deep seeded native understanding of how is it that we deal with a person from a different culture and a different sort of linguistic background.

Walter: So if you're someone with access to really vital information and you find yourself in a position where you're able to meet with a CIA officer, you might be meeting with that one officer, but there's a whole team behind them making sure that you're safe, making sure that the right questions are headed your way, and the information goes to the right people.

DDO: That's exactly right, and especially in a world in which the conduct of espionage is becoming more and more difficult, it is essential that we inculcate into our workforce a sense of team work, not just within the CIA, but within all of the other partnerships that we have from different government agencies.

Dee: And I think that's a good tee up to the next set of questions that we have for you. Human intelligence, HUMINT, in our parlance here, still relevant in the 21st century?

DDO: I keep saying that's a great question. Believing that, Dee, boy, you're an expert at asking questions.

Dee: Thanks. Thanks so much.

(laughter)

DDO: Yeah, more kudos for you, Dee. With great candor, it is a question that many people are asking, especially given the proliferation of the capabilities that we have via cyber intelligence, through SIGINT, or what we refer to as signals intelligence. But ultimately the importance of what HUMINT is. The understanding of the plans and intentions of our adversaries, who are, after all, human beings. And I think we too often forget about the fact that it is fine to overhear a conversation, but without understanding the context for that conversation, or what's resulting, or what is the manner in which decisions fall out of that, that we're in a position of having to make analytic assessments of that that might be actually devoid of the context in which it's being conducted. We can have the greatest technical overwatch capabilities. We can see, you know, our adversaries from, you know, our satellites. But ultimately, without understanding what it is that's making them tick, that is extremely important. Our core responsibility is preventing strategic surprise, and strategic surprise often comes from a few individuals.

Walter: So even with all the technological advances of the 21st century, essentially there are still some secrets that exist only in people's minds.

DDO: That's absolutely correct. The secrets often lie in plans and intentions, the mood, the context with which someone is making a decision because after all, if we listen to a conversation between two people without understanding and then only having the words on the page. I think if you have 10 different people listening to the same conversation, they're gonna come to 10 different analytic assessments on what happened versus if you actually talk to somebody who was in a room. When we talk about human intelligence, it really is the collection of everything that goes into how our adversaries are thinking, acting, and the context in which those decisions are being made.

Walter: We often hear human intelligence referred to as the collection of last resort because you are working with a human being. There is a degree of human risk there. Do you wanna speak quickly about protecting those who work with us around the world? Our sources?

DDO: That's absolutely right. And the reason we are a collector of last resort is to make sure that the clandestine relationships that we have with another human being, we do not conduct them without taking into full consideration what those risks are. We do not send a human being on the street without making that evaluation of how important is that information? Is it worth risking a human's life for this? And quite frankly, as the ethos we follow, the solemn responsibility that we have to protect the lives of those who volunteer and work for us, that underlies everything.

Walter: You spoke about the solemn responsibility that CIA has to keep those who work with us around the world safe, and as an operations officer, that responsibility falls first and foremost to you in that moment. You're going out and connecting with someone who's, in many cases, putting their life on the line to pass you, to pass CIA, to pass senior US officials, critical information. You are a veteran officer. You've had these kinds of meetings many times. How do you handle that kind of pressure?

DDO: I think it is a great question because the manner in which this is portrayed on movies can never convey that sense of responsibility, that sense of why you're there in some dark alley or in a dark car meeting with a terrified human being who is just beside themselves with fear that they're going to get caught and the responsibility of you to remember that first and foremost you're not an operations officer. You're not a CIA officer. You know what you are? You're a human being. You're there to reassure them. You're there to understand why and how we can allay those concerns. This person's putting their life on the line. Well, then we absolutely need to be sure that the reasons why we're asking him or her to do so makes sense so that really does get to that responsibility from our perspective. They're not case numbers. They are not numbers on a file. They're human beings who've decided to make some incredibly bold and courageous things to try and change the world around them. And we have to remember that.

Dee: As Walter had asked, even with all of the technological advances in the world today, can you maybe speak about the tradecraft evolution of what espionage is in terms of what we have with ubiquitous technology? How it impacts what we do.

DDO: Ultimately what you are, addressing is that in the challenges of ubiquitous technical surveillance and sort of the fancy term, but really, that's the manner in which our adversaries have the capability to track the activities of their citizens. Whether or not that's through the mobile handsets they carry or the communications that they have, it has made it increasingly difficult to conduct espionage in the manner in which it used to be done. Does that mean that those are not surmountable challenges? I would say with incredible confidence that the skill, the expertise, the innovation, the creativity of our officers is breathtaking to watch. I wish for all of my fellow citizens to hear is that the young officers that are joining the CIA are blessed with incredible intellectual curiosity, the technical acumen that's going to be able to allow us to prevail into the future. The question that came from you, Dee, is are we really talking about the end of the world's second oldest profession? I think that it has always been a continued effort to refine the tradecraft, going back thousands of years, in in terms of ensuring that we're in a position to understand the threats.

Dee: We've talked a lot about technology in terms of the tradecraft itself. There's also the other side of it when it comes to talking about what we as a workforce call digital dust, right? There's this intangible dust that we leave behind in our everyday life. Cell phones, computers. How has that changed how we recruit people when it comes to what a person can do outside of the walls of CIA?

DDO: Look, there is no doubt that adversary's capability against us is much higher now as a result of being able to operate the camera systems that are present, taking advantage of artificial intelligence to do facial recognition. One of the most important things that we need to understand is how do we navigate our way through that to make sure that we are making smart decisions? And also understand that all systems are fallible. And what we've seen in the dictatorships that we need to work against is their continued effort to starve off their citizens from access to the Internet, access to information. Well, often that backfires and offers us the position and opportunity to strike up those relationships. So this is a long way of saying, yes, the list of challenges that you've articulated is long, but it's certainly one that's surmountable.

Walter: You spoke just now about accessing the Internet, sir, CIA recently released the latest of now three videos in Russian to Telegram, a social media platform that's still available in Russia, providing instructions on how those who feel compelled to contact CIA can do so securely via the dark web.

Dee: And, actually, let's go ahead and play a clip from that recent video.

((VIDEO Audio playing))

Walter: Would you like to speak a bit about that? And what has what has prompted this push to reach out via social media?

DDO: I would emphasize just how proud I think our Agency should be of the innovation and creativity that went into those videos. At our core, we are a HUMINT organization, as we've talked about, and it is therefore our responsibility to find a way to ensure that those patriots worldwide who wish to volunteer to talk to us have that opportunity. If we go back and think about what has been one of the bedrocks to understanding the motivations of our adversaries - has always been through volunteers, and what we have seen is the ability of our adversaries to use their technical prowess to prevent their citizens from volunteering. The tyranny of autocrats to be able to control everything is placed at such that we need to be creative and we need to be very deliberate in creating the opportunities for people to volunteer for us. I think that's why I'm so incredibly proud that we have found and devised a manner in which we could reach out to all of those disaffected Russians who are still inside Russia and not been able to leave or who might be so disconsolate about the direction of their country and wondering how they can help, wondering what they can do about it, that they should not feel helpless, that they have a source of inspiration and a way to volunteer. That brutal invasion of Ukraine and the hundreds of thousands of casualties have horrified many of the individuals in Russia with whom we wish to be in contact. I think it's therefore so important to put that into context is that the composition of those videos that we did was to ensure that we are reaching out to the right communities to let them know that we have incredible binding interest to talk to them, but also provide the instructions on how to do so, so they don't get caught.

Dee: We're talking about the evolution of the tradecraft itself. What about the evolution of our workforce? Those that are doing the tradecraft. How have we evolved in terms of the diversity within the ranks here in the DO?

DDO: And the importance as you have so articulated is importance that we, as a service, are in a position to truly harness the diversity of our country, to ensure that we have the officers who can blend into their operational environment. I have to tell you how critical that is to ensure that, in a point in time, when it is crucial and critical, to ensure that as we meet the technical challenges in the future, that we have the ethnic diversity we need, the diversity of background. Because that's what differentiates us from our adversaries. Differentiates us that we have such an ability, and such a rich cultural heritage to take advantage of, it is essential that we do so.

Dee: Also in terms of diversity, I know that some of the known stereotypes of what we deem as a case officer or operations officer is male. What would you say in terms of current makeup of the workforce in that regards? Is it still heavily male dominated space? Or are women taking more of an active role in this?

DDO: In terms of the officers who first start, the demographics are much more evenly split between our female officers and our male officers. Our responsibility is to ensure we're in a position to collect intelligence, to strike up relationships, to benefit from the volunteers who wanna work for us, and understand their psyche, and how to go about that. It takes all sorts of different officers to do so.

Dee: Sir you've had a very long, noteworthy career, both prior to the Agency and your time here. Here at the Agency, you're in a very hard job, as as we recognize sitting across the table from you. Can you speak maybe a little bit about the hardest part of your job? And conversely, what's the best part of your job?

DDO: I cannot overemphasize how blessed I feel to have this opportunity at this point in time to be leading such a talented workforce in, quite frankly, some of the most difficult events that we're seeing in world history. All you have to do is read the editorials that continue to stress the perils and instability that's happening right now and understand how important it is to have a strong, effective intelligence

service right now. So that's the high point. I will tell you the joy I have that every day I come in knowing that I can make a difference, sometimes in just a small way, sometimes in a large way, and helping chart the course for something I find is such an incredible part of our national security machinery. What's the hardest part? I often think about this, and I think about it from this perspective. As I mentioned earlier, I've had this catbird seat in watching, you know over the past decades, what has happened in world history and what continues to horrify me, shock me, is the fact that single individuals have within their power the ability to wreak pain and suffering. All I need to think about is the whims of one person deciding that Ukraine had to be part of Russia, and making that decision has once again unleashed upon so many innocent people such pain, such destruction, such suffering that's so avoidable. And I think that's the hardest part for me. I think we're doing everything we can. But once again it is to me a reminder of how important it is that you have an intelligence agency that can thrive, that can provide the right information, that can have the right impact in trying to prevent avoidable crises like we see now.

Walter: You're also, I have to imagine, in a privileged position to see the entire chain of events from someone, somewhere in the world, who has information in their mind, the importance of which they might not even realize, from there to the CIA officer they work with, to headquarters, all the way through analysis, in some cases to the President of the United States. You get to see that whole chain of events from someone doesn't realize the impact they could have in the world all the way to the President of the United States.

DDO: And I think that's such a great point. I think people feel powerless to change events, and I have to say how wrong that is, because often the provision of a key series of facts about a crisis can completely change the course of what's gonna happen. Only it can happen, though, when it's delivered at the right period of time, in a manner in which those decisions can change. And that's been the key, right, is in terms of understanding, how is it that we're going to ensure that that happens. And if we talk about strategic surprise or impacting events, it doesn't help if we provide that information three weeks after the crisis is over. We have to find a way to ensure that we collect it, that we disseminate it. We can get the hands of people who can make a difference in the right time. The opportunity for the United States to go to our partners across the world and provide them the credible intelligence that spoke to the Russians' determination to invade Ukraine was so important in terms of developing, reinforcing the partnerships that we had, and also reinforcing what the role of intelligence need to be in today's world. And you can see the continued evolution of that in terms of how intelligence is used in a manner to deepen relationships, deepen partnerships, and deepen trust.

Dee: You've talked about being in this catbird seat or bird's eye view seat, knowing what's going on worldwide. Can you, from your vantage point, tell us about the current national security landscape and maybe going outbound a few months? What that might look like?

DDO: The world is getting increasingly complex and increasingly dangerous. Across the globe our adversaries are doing everything they can reaching from down all the way from South and Central America, up all the way through the United States and into Canada. And you could just go around the globe looking at each and every country in terms of it is a playground right now in which our adversaries are trying to supplant us. As an intelligence agency, balancing the incredible demands that have been placed upon us about understanding what is the real threat from the People's Republic of China? What is the real threat that we still face from counterterrorism? Because, after all, we have to realize it is a no fail sport. We cannot be in a situation where we're not able to deter or disrupt a terrorism threat, or to understanding the motivations, the aspirations, and the goals of many of the groups in the Middle East now who are acting under the direction of Iran to destabilize the region against our core interests.

There's also one important point and that is to highlight the difference between us and the relationship we have with our partners that differentiates us from the Russians and the People's Republic of China. A

predecessor of mine once defined the fact that for Russia and for the People's Republic of China, they don't have partners. What they have are other countries that fear their Dominion, fear their tyranny, and only co-operate from a sense of in either intimidation or that it's business or they're bought off. That differentiates us from a partnership with like-minded nations that have the same goals, the same aspirations, a sense of doing something for the whole of a country that results in willing partners who are doing this not because they're being paid off, not because they're being scared, not because they're being intimidated, but because they identify with us and what we wanna do in this globe.

Walter: We're sitting across from maybe the top spy in the whole world. Do you have a favorite spy character in fiction, movies, or television, or books maybe?

DDO: You know there is such a multitude of movies and books out there, I often think that sometimes it is through watching movies like Pink Panther and watching the bumbling antics of Inspector Clouseau that remind us that in the end, we're all humans. We need to be grounded and not to think that we are some are superhuman and have the arrogance and hubris that we sometimes, frankly, often need to avoid to keep us grounded in reality.

Dee: Well stated.

Walter: Great point.

Dee: Excellent character too. Good choice.

Walter: Yea. Yea. Grew up with that.

Dee: Well, I think that's it for our conversation with you today. Walter and I greatly appreciate the opportunity that you've allowed us to sit down and have a full conversation with you about yourself and all the important work that our officers do here at the Agency.

DDO: May I make the final point?

Dee: Absolutely.

Walter: Yea.

DDO: We have, in an intervening time, we have secured a training billet for Walter in our next class.

Dee: Brilliant. He's done that in 60 minutes.

DDO: We need to be effective here.

Dee: Done and done. I'll smooth talk him later, sir.

Walter: Well, sir, as as Dee said, it's been a real honor. Thank you for being a part of this.

DDO: Thank you very much.

Walter: Well, Dee, we we just sat across from a former Navy Seal turned top spy at CIA. Um, that wasn't a bucket list item when I was a kid, but, uh, it might as well have been.

Dee: It was just really incredible for him to be willing to share a little bit about his personal life, which most would never expect for somebody that's been primarily working in the shadows for most of his career. Um, but also to really hone in on what it is that our DO officers do here at the Agency. Um, kind of lifting that curtain that we always say that we're trying to do here with the podcast.

Walter: Yea. 100%.

Dee: And, you know, uh, Walter, I have no other segue to just take us right into trivia.

Walter: So you know what? At this point, I don't think trivia needs a segue.

Dee: Let's do it.

(music plays)

Walter: So on the two-part Season Two finale of The Langley Files last year, we shared a part of the Argo mission that had never previously been disclosed, which was that Tony Mendez, CIA's master of disguise, was joined by another CIA officer, Ed Johnson, in their daring operation to rescue six American diplomats hiding in Iran after the 1979 Iranian revolution. We ended the episode by asking you all this question. While Tony and Hollywood makeup artist John Chambers worked to set up a fake Hollywood film studio to really sell the idea that Tony and Ed were filmmakers going into Iran to scout for locations, they came upon a script that seemed perfect for the mission at hand. It would eventually come to be known as Argo, and our question was, why?

Dee: So for all of you lovers of mythological trivia, Argo was actually a reference to the story of Jason and the Argonauts as they sailed on a ship named Argo to retrieve the Golden Fleece. Now the underlying fictional plot of what is a hero's quest seemed to resonate with the concept behind the Argo mission itself. While the story of Jason was ill fated and ended in tragedy, one could say that this daring Argo mission to rescue those hostages was actually a success in numerous ways.

Walter: Uh, wasn't there a movie about Jason and the Argonauts?

Dee: You know, there actually was. I think it was, um, back in the sixties, I think. I also think there was a song about Jason and the Argonauts.

Walter: Nice. So plenty of pop culture references to the story if people want to watch or listen, or they can go read the myth directly themselves.

Dee: Highly recommend. So on to our next trivia question. As noted in this episode, pride of country runs deep throughout CIA and numerous other facets of the United States government and military. And taking on patriotic acts on behalf of your country can be both fulfilling but also incredibly dangerous. At CIA, we have a wall that's etched with stars, reminding us of that every day. But another reminder of sacrifice to our country sits on the grounds here at CIA headquarters, the statue of a young man stands watch over the compound here; a young man bound at his hands and feet and looking resolute as he prepares to face death, a sentence brought upon him for spying for his country. Our question to you is, who is this young man? A hint. Statues of this young man are also standing in New York City and at Yale University.

Walter: Tune in to our next episode to get the answer or head on over to cia.gov to find out for yourself right now.

(music begins)

Dee: That's it for this episode. Thanks everyone for listening and, as always, our thanks to our in-house audio experts Corey and Grif. Until next time ...

Walter: We'll be seeing you.

(music begins)

Walter: Wow. Corey and Grif do such a good job disguising our voices.

Dee: It's a marvel to me every time.

Walter: I know it sounds so lifelike. People have no idea that we sound like this.

Dee: What?

(music ends)