

**The Langley Files: A CIA Podcast**  
**Episode 1**  
*CIA Director Bill Burns Brings the Agency Out from the Shadows*

**Host #1 – Dee**

**Host #2 – Walter**

**Guest #1 – Director Burns**

**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.

**Dee:** Welcome to everyone out there who was intrigued enough to press play and listen in on this very first episode of the Langley Files: A CIA Podcast. My name is Dee, and I'm joined by my partner, Walter, and together we're really excited to have you come along with us on this adventure as we explore different topics related to CIA and chat with a wide variety of interesting and entertaining guests. We'll be your guides around the corridors here at Langley, separating fact from fiction, and learning what it takes to work at the world's premier foreign intelligence agency.

**Walter:** Hey everyone, as Dee mentioned, I'm Walter, and if you're tuning in, the odds are you've heard a fair bit about the CIA. Some of what you've heard is true. Some of it is not. A lot, after all, has been broadcast about the Central Intelligence Agency. But no unclassified podcast has ever been produced by the Central Intelligence Agency .. until now.

**Dee:** And, you know, we're going to do our best to bring you unique stories and insights into what this agency is all about.

**Walter:** And we know many of you might be wondering why is CIA unveiling a podcast? Isn't the whole point to be secret? Didn't you guys invent “neither confirm nor deny”?

**Dee:** And I can confirm that yes, we did invent that saying.

**Walter:** Well, you know, our very first guest might have some thoughts on the subject. Dee and I couldn't be more excited and honored to sit down on this debut episode with CIA Director Bill Burns. Hello, sir. Thank you so much for joining us today.

**Director Burns:** It's great to be with you guys and you're right. Intelligence agencies are supposed to collect secrets and keep them and not talk too much about them. We do usually operate in the shadows, out of sight and out of mind. Our successes are often obscured, our failures are often painfully visible, and our sacrifices are often unknown. But a certain amount of discretion certainly comes with the territory. We have a profound obligation to protect agents and officers who risk their lives in support of our mission, which is to help protect Americans. But I'm convinced, as I know you are, that in our democracy, where trust in institutions is in such short supply, that it's important to try to explain ourselves as best we can and to demystify a little bit of what we do. So that's why I'm glad you're launching this podcast and glad to be with you.

**Dee:** And that's a, that's a great word to use, the “demystify” word. And what we are trying to do is just, that is, we think that by engaging a little bit more with the public, we can kind of help to lessen some of those misconceptions that many do have of us. So thank you for that.

**Walter:** Agreed. And actually, sir, we wanted to ask you, what do you think are some of the biggest misconceptions that people have about the CIA?

**Director Burns:** I should start by saying that I love spy movies. But one big misconception that a lot of those really entertaining movies feed is that intelligence in real life is just a glamorous world of solo operators in the world of James Bond and Jason Bourne and Jack Ryan. A world of heroic individuals who drive fast cars and defuse bombs and solve world crises all on their own every day. That, I have to tell you, is a constant source of amusement for my wife and daughters. They never cease to remind me that I don't exactly fit that image --since I'm most comfortable driving our 2013 Subaru Outback at posted speed limits and that, for me at least, the height of technological daring is when I can finally get the Roku remote to work at home.

The truth is that intelligence is very much a team sport. It's a profession of hard collective work and shared risks and remarkable common dedication. Every day our officers are doing hard jobs in hard places around the world. Every day we're recruiting agents and collecting information on the plans and the intentions and the capabilities of our adversaries. Every day, our scientists and technologists and digital specialists are developing new tools to help us compete with those adversaries. And every day our analysts are sifting through all that information and studying the global landscape to try to produce the best insights that we can to help the President make the best policy choices that he can.

While that doesn't always involve fast cars and solo heroics, there's no shortage of courage and skill and ingenuity among our officers, and I'd just cite two recent examples. The first is Russia's war in Ukraine. Working with our partners across the US Intelligence Community, we were able to paint a pretty clear picture of Putin's plans to mount a major new invasion of Ukraine last fall, months before he actually launched that invasion on the 24th of February. That enabled us to help Ukrainians defend themselves. It helped us to build allied unity. It helped to expose the fact that what Putin was about was a naked, unprovoked aggression, and we reinforced that by the President's decision to declassify some of our secrets as well.

And then the second example is the successful strike against Ayman al-Zawahiri, the co-founder, along with Osama bin Laden of Al Qaeda, responsible along with Bin Laden, for the deaths of thousands of innocent people on 9/11 and other horrific Al Qaeda terrorist attacks over the years. That was a product, that successful strike was a product of many months of painstaking work to track and locate Zawahiri. And then, a month ago, it enabled the United States to conduct a successful strike against him in the middle of downtown Kabul without causing any other casualties.

I'd add only that I was in New York City a few days ago, and I had a chance to make a quiet visit to the 9/11 Memorial at ground zero, which is always a powerful experience, as many of your listeners know. But it was especially powerful this time because it gave me a chance to reflect a little bit on how that successful strike by the United States brought at least a measure of justice for the victims and their families.

**Dee:** And thank you very much for taking the time to share your thoughts and your insights on that. And actually, it was great because you mentioned two of the words we wanted to highlight here about our workforce. We have an opening narration listeners will hear before the start of this episode. And in that narration we mentioned the words such as dedication and ingenuity to describe our workforce--what it is that we do here. Um, and like you just mentioned those two words exactly. So why do you think words such as dedication and ingenuity speak to who we are as an agency?

**Director Burns:** I think "ingenuity" is very much a reflection of how we at CIA see ourselves. We're a pretty agile organization. We don't just admire problems. We work to help policymakers understand practical ways of solving them, or at least managing them better. I think "dedication" is another powerful word, which describes, I think, the really remarkable sense of mission that I see every day on the part of our colleagues here at CIA. I've made something like 21 trips overseas in the year and a half that I've been Director of CIA, and I've seen firsthand the risks that our officers take and the

sacrifices that they and their families make as well. And then every day when I walk through the main entrance to CIA headquarters and walk past the Memorial Wall, where on a simple marble wall there are 139 stars, each one honoring one of our colleagues who over the years was killed in the line of duty. Each of those stars is a reminder of our obligation to honor their memory by how we conduct ourselves and by how we take care of our officers and their families. I guess I would just add one other word to ingenuity and dedication. And that's "apolitical" because our job is not to bend intelligence to suit political or policy preferences or agendas. It's to deliver the best intelligence that we can gather, the best analysis that we can put together, with honesty and integrity. Our job is to tell policymakers what they need to hear, not what they want to hear, and I've seen the importance of that over many decades of public service, first as a career diplomat now as Director of CIA. Working for six presidents and administrations of both parties, I've seen that we only get ourselves in trouble as a nation, and we make bad policy choices, when we forget those very basic truths.

**Dee:** Thank you for highlighting that word as well. Appreciate it.

**Walter:** Well, and Director Burns, you spoke of dedication. We should say we certainly appreciate your own dedication to public service over the years. Um, and we want to take a moment to highlight the importance of this year for the agency. As many listeners will know, this is the CIA 75th anniversary, and CIA has gone through a lot of change over its history, from the Cold War to the post 9/11 era to this era of Great Power Competition. And so we want to ask you, what are the big challenges in this landscape and what are your priorities?

**Director Burns:** Well, you're right, Walter, I mean the 75th anniversary is a pretty exciting moment for the agency. It's a moment to reflect on the contributions the generations of CIA officers have made. The President, President Biden spoke very eloquently about that when he came to visit us at CIA headquarters over the course of this past summer to help celebrate the 75th. So the 75th, I think, is an opportunity to reflect on what we got right and what we got wrong over those years through the Cold War and then the war on terror in the two decades since 9/11. And it's also a time to reflect on how we need to organize ourselves to navigate successfully what is an incredibly complicated international terrain featuring as you mentioned, major power competition with rising powers like China and we've created a new center at CIA focused on China, we're trying to put more resources, recruit more Mandarin speakers to help address that central geopolitical challenge. But it also means we have to deal with declining powers - not just rising ones - like Russia. And Putin demonstrates every day that declining powers can be at least as disruptive as rising ones. It means dealing effectively with the revolution and technology, which is transforming the way in which we operate overseas and which makes it all the more important for us to organize ourselves in a way both at headquarters and in the field and to build stronger partnerships with the private sector as well, so we can better understand trends in technology and help the American people compete better with adversaries and rivals around the world too. And so I think all of those things are what marks this landscape. And of course, as the Zawahiri strike reminds us, we still have the continuing challenge of terrorism. It may take different forms today than it did over most of the last 20 years, but it's still a significant challenge. We still have significant capabilities at this agency working with partners across the U.S. Government, and that's going to be another of our most important priorities. It's a balancing act, is what it's going to continue to be.

**Dee:** And you, you kind of strike at the heart of needing to learn from our history to kind of grow and progress, to understand the current landscape and how to move forward with our mission on that end. And for those of you, when we were mentioning that it is our 75th anniversary, um, we just wanted to mention to our listeners that we're going to be sitting down in a future episode to kind of discuss a little bit more about our backstory as an agency, some of the events that we've held to celebrate, and to kind of highlight our Agency's work over the 75 years. So stay tuned for that.

**Walter:** Indeed.

**Director Burns:** That's great. I'll look forward to that as well.

**Walter:** And, sir, we obviously recognize how busy your schedule is. So we don't want to keep you, but we do have a couple of more personal type questions, if you don't mind.

**Director Burns:** Of course.

**Walter:** Uh, so I understand that there is a photo in your office that carries a great deal of significance for you. Would you be willing to share a little bit about that photo?

**Director Burns:** Sure. There's one photo in my office at CIA headquarters, a photo of a bare wall at Kabul airport, which I saw at the end of last August, a little more than a year ago, when the President sent me to Kabul to talk to the Taliban leadership in the final days before the US completed its withdrawal. And on that wall there are thousands of black check marks. It's a tally of the lives of stranded American citizens and Afghan partners, partners who had fought and bled with us over two decades in Afghanistan. A tally of lives that our officers, working very closely with partners in the US Military and the State Department helped to save. I saw our officers in those tumultuous, dangerous days at the end of last August take incredible risks going out beyond the wire at Kabul airport to help rescue stranded US citizens and Afghan partners. And so I think in a very real way, each of those check marks is a reminder amidst all the pain of that withdrawal that we did our duty in the most difficult circumstances, and that we honored our profound obligation to our fellow citizens and to our Afghan partners.

**Walter:** Thank you for sharing that, sir.

**Dee:** We do appreciate that. One more question before we say goodbye. Um, and this is more just a personal curiosity that Walter and I have. Did you ever think that you would be the Director of the CIA?

**Director Burns:** Nope. I honestly did not. But I, I am very fortunate and very proud to be in this role today. My whole life has been shaped by public service. I grew up as an Army brat. My dad was a career Army officer, and I remember when I was finishing school 40 years ago and trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life, my dad wrote me a letter which sounds kind of strange in this day and age, but I remember one line in it in particular. He wrote that nothing can make you prouder than to serve your country with honor. And I spent most of the last four decades as a career diplomat and now as Director of CIA learning the wisdom of my dad's advice. It's not always easy, but it's deeply rewarding. And that's because of the remarkable people I serve with and the mission that we share to help protect Americans. So sitting with you guys today, I could not be prouder, nor could I be any luckier to serve as Director of CIA.

**Dee:** And we recognize and thank you very much for your service as well, and honestly, thank you very much for coming on today, sharing your insights, your thoughts, your personal stories. We do appreciate it. We will hopefully have you back on a future episode of The Langley Files. But in the meantime, thank you very much for your time.

**Director Burns:** I'll look forward to it.

**Dee:** Appreciate it.

**Walter:** Thank you.

**Director Burns:** Thanks, guys.

**Dee:** Thank you.

**Walter:** Well, that was really something to hear Director Burns himself talk about the misconceptions he has encountered about CIA.

**Dee:** And it was certainly intriguing to listen to him share some personal insights on what it meant for him to work here too.

**Walter:** Oh definitely.

**Dee:** For those of you that have stuck around, we wanted to take just a few more minutes to share our thoughts on what it is that we're really trying to achieve here with this podcast.

**Walter:** And provide you with some insight on what you can expect to hear.

**Dee:** And the goal is really to have on guests that can both provide insights into important events that the agency took part in or lead and to also share some really cool stories about the officers who made them possible.

**Walter:** We'll also bring you stories from our museum and our historians.

**Dee:** And we're going to talk with some agency leaders who can share what it means to be a part of CIA's culture and perhaps share some stories about the incredible work we do here on a daily basis.

**Walter:** At the end of the day, we really want this podcast to serve three main functions. First, we want to give you a unique look behind the curtain. We also want to give you the chance to hear directly from the people that do this work every day. And finally, we want to educate the world on the history of the agency and its enduring mission. Sounds easy enough, right Dee?

**Dee:** Sure. So we're going to promise that we are going to do our best to make this both entertaining and informative enough where you're going to want to press play on every one of our future episodes. In fact, here's an idea Walter - how about at the end of every episode, we give everybody a trivia question?

**Walter:** Excellent idea, and the listeners can tune in to our next episode to get the answer.

**Dee:** Hey. I like it. Let's do it.

**Walter:** Okay, so here goes. Name the famous chef and author, who also worked with the CIA's precursor, the O.S.S., or Office of Strategic Services, where they were rumored falsely to have invented a shark repellent for downed fighter pilots.

**Dee:** That's a good one. You'll have to find out their identity on the next episode of The Langley Files.

**Walter:** Thank you listeners for joining us today. We look forward to having you join us again for our next episode.

**Dee:** And from all of us here at CIA. We'll be seeing you.

**Walter:** Hey, don't forget to hit stop on the recording.

**Dee:** Will do. Can you get the lights?

**Walter:** Got it. Let's go.