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HEADLINE: HOW THE **CIA** FAILED INTELLIGENCE TESTS

BYLINE: BY ERIC MINK

BODY:

CIA: AMERICA'S SECRET WARRIORS. Tonight, Tuesday and Wednesday, 10 p.m., **Discovery.** 3 1/2 Stars

THERE'S AN almost tragic quality to "**CIA: America's Secret Warriors**," a sense that the best intentions of a lot of very smart, skilled, courageous and dedicated Americans were undercut and often undone by the very things they did in the service of their country.

This superb new three-hour documentary, which coincides with the 50-year history of the **Central Intelligence Agency**, premieres tonight at 10 on cable's **Discovery** Channel and continues tomorrow and Wednesday night. Ambitious in scope and impressive in execution, the project traces the history of the agency, introduces some of its unique characters, conveys a sense of the danger, thrill and romance of its field operations, and documents its fleeting successes and all-too-dismal failures.

Hour one follows the roots of the **CIA** back to the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and the creation of the Office of Strategic Services to coordinate all U.S. intelligence efforts. It continues through the **CIA's** birth at the beginning of the Cold War with the Soviet Union and its anti-communist missions in Central America, South America, Southeast Asia and Afghanistan.

Hour two turns inward, showing how, after the rousing intelligence success of the Cuban missile crisis, the agency became crippled with paranoia over possible infiltration by the KGB. Later, it went the other way, becoming so lax that Aldrich Ames managed to leak lethal information for 10 years to the Soviets and then the Russians without detection.

The program's third hour may be the most troubling, revealing how

short-term perspectives often have unintended consequences that turn seeming successes into frightening failures.

Among the examples:

The brutal, **CIA**-backed reign of the Shah of Iran led to a takeover by radical fundamentalists, led by Ayatollah Khomeini.

CIA training of and support for a succession of Latin American dictators may have blocked the spread of Communism, but at the cost of thousands of innocent lives and the sacrifice of America's own principles.

The **CIA's** lavish support for certain rebel factions in Afghanistan helped defeat the Soviet army, but it also put deadly weapons and expertise in the hands of terrorists involved in, among other things, the bombing of the World Trade Center.

The **CIA's** numerous strategic alliances with drug dealers have so badly damaged the agency's credibility that many Americans actually seem willing to believe suggestions that the agency deliberately helped introduce crack cocaine to minority communities in this country.

The "**CIA**" production team, led by Marc **Levin**, tells its stories briskly and vividly, thanks to crisp editing, astounding archival research and some of the brightest writing to turn up in a large-scale documentary in some time.

Four former **CIA** directors and, even better, a fascinating assortment of former agents, add human dimension and detail to the stories. It's worth noting that some of these people are now openly hostile to the agency they once served, but that others are faithful and persuasive advocates for its work.

"**CIA**" loses a few points for an overabundance of visual gimmickry, and its vast scope leaves some areas crying for more in-depth treatment. The bottom line, though, is that this is excellent journalism and terrific television.

GRAPHIC: SECRET PATH: Allen Dulles, above, led **CIA** from 1953-61.

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