

Fiers Gets Probation in Iran-Contra

Former CIA Official Who Withheld Information Now Aids Prosecutors

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Alan D. Fiers Jr., a former high-ranking CIA official convicted for taking part in a coverup of the Iran-contra scandal, was sentenced yesterday to one year of probation and 100 hours of community service for unlawfully withholding information from Congress.

In an unusually expressive courtroom statement, Fiers told U.S. District Chief Judge Aubrey Robinson that he took full responsibility for his actions and was ready to be held fully accountable for them. He said he had always tried to do what he thought was in the best interests of his country, even when he made the "tough, controversial decisions" that resulted in his prosecution.

Openly impressed, Robinson said he saw no need to instruct Fiers on his obligations as a citizen. The judge took note of Fiers's intense desire to win, instilled in him as a football player at Ohio State more than 30 years ago under coach Woody Hayes.

"It's the same way at the other end of the spectrum—as a nation," Robinson told him. "We want to win everything we get involved in. But what would a win mean if, in winning, we destroy the very funda-

mental beliefs, convictions and everything else that made us what we are?"

Formerly chief of the CIA's Central American Task Force, Fiers, 52, admitted last July to testifying untruthfully at two congressional hearings in the fall of 1986 as the Iran-contra scandal was beginning to unravel. After negotiations with independent counsel Lawrence E. Walsh's office, Fiers pleaded guilty to two misdemeanor counts of withholding information from Congress and agreed to cooperate with the special prosecutors in their investigation, now in its sixth year.

Fiers admitted making false statements at one hearing about the secret resupply operation for the contra rebels in Nicaragua that was being run out of the Reagan White House and, at another hearing, about the diversion to the contras of profits from covert arms sales to Iran.

In court yesterday, deputy independent counsel Craig E. Gillen said Fiers has been "extremely cooperative" and helped prosecutors review hundreds of documents "in excruciating detail."

"We negotiated for his cooperation, but you cannot negotiate an attitude or a demeanor," Gillen said. "He has dealt with us as a professional in what surely must be the

most painful period of his professional life. We were impressed."

Robinson said he, too, was impressed, not only by a letter from Walsh's office giving details of Fiers's cooperation, but by letters of support from Capitol Hill and elsewhere. Fiers's lawyer, Stanley Arkin, told reporters that one of the endorsements came from Defense Secretary Richard B. Cheney.

Fiers, who retired from the CIA in early 1988, told the judge that he looked on his work as part of the 45-year Cold War against communism and that he "firmly believed it was my duty to participate in the defense of democracy and its values." At Ohio State, he pointed out, "I developed a keen competitive drive, an urge to win and an abject hate of defeat."

Now an executive with W.R. Grace and Co., Fiers said later that he knew some former colleagues have criticized him for breaking ranks, but he said he was only doing "what my conscience tells me is correct. Judge Robinson hit it on the head when he said you can't do violence to the system," Fiers said.

Asked if he missed working at the CIA, he paused and said: "In all honesty, I enjoyed it, but I don't miss it. Let me tell you something: The private sector is, in many ways, tougher."