

Dan Schorr Calls the Helms Deal 'an Elegant Solution'

Daniel Schorr was at a corner table in the bar of the Pittsburgh Hilton the other night, carefully sipping a drink and talking with a kind of stud passion about Richard Helms and the CIA.

"The last time I saw him," the former CBS-TV reporter said, "was on the Fourth of July. There was a fireworks show at Mount Vernon College, and we went there and ran into Dick and Cynthia Helms. We exchanged the usual polite hellos, and then he said, 'I hope you're doing a book.' I said, 'Actually, it's done.'"

Helms stopped, as if wanting to know what Schorr had done to him in the book, "Clearing the Air," a superb account of Schorr's reporting activities during the Watergate period and its aftermath.

"I know you have your troubles right now, Dick," Schorr remembers saying. "But I've just recounted past events. There is more trouble in my book for people like Bill Paley than for people like you."

Helms smiled and said: "That's their best news I've had this week."

Helms got even better news a few days ago. In a deal approved by the White House, Helms was allowed to plead no contest to a misdemeanor instead of risking jail on a perjury rap for lying to a congressional committee about CIA activities in Chile. Jimmy Carter's acceptance speech pledge —

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That big-shot crooks would not go free while poor ones went to jail — lay in ruins. And the deal was made worse by Attorney General Griffin Bell's extrajudicial statement that "only the well-do-

Schorr was in Pittsburgh all day, promoting his book, and the Helms deal came up in a number of interviews. As a reporter, Schorr had broken the story of the CIA's involvement in assassinations — plots against foreign leaders — (based on an inadvertent leak by Pres-

ident Ford himself) that had forced Helms to return to Washington from Iran to testify before the Rockefeller commission in April, 1973. Schorr was one of the reporters waiting for Helms outside Rockefeller's office, and as the former CIA chief, and then ambassador to Iran, emerged, Schorr offered his hand in greeting.

"You son of a bitch!" Helms fumed. "You killed! You — I killed Schorr — that's what they ought to call you!"

The reporters were appalled, and Schorr was to another room where he said essentially the same things. In more moderate language, before the TV cameras. When he left, Schorr followed him down the hall. "Mr. Helms," he shouted, "there are things you just don't know." Helms stopped. A former UPI reporter and big-time spy does not like to think there are things he doesn't know.

Schorr then explained to Helms that Ford had been the source for the assassination story. Helms calmed down, apologized for the names he had called Schorr, and said he had always admired his work. Schorr said he had always admired his work, and that he had always admired the assassination broadcast had been

"too much" for him. They shook hands, the quarrel over. Now Helms is out of the government and Schorr is gone from CBS and there are only these little legal deals left to bring an end to that era.

"Actually, I thought it was an elegant solution," Schorr said of the Helms deal. "I was afraid they would let him go scot-free. That would have been inelegant. But this was one of those damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't problems. What they worked out was a perfect bureaucratic solution, and that's the kind of elegance I mean. They preserved the principle that these people are accountable for their actions. Justice is at least symbolically served. You really do have a feeling that it's unfair to hang a guy in 1977 for things that were perfectly alright in 1955 or 1963."

"Still, if you do something that's against the law, there has to be some way to deal with it. Secrets are secrets, and there is a need for national security. But there was no way that Helms benefited personally from the things he might have done. It was easy for him to lie. That was what he had always done, wasn't it?"

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In a way, his whole life had been lived as a kind of lie. So you do have to see it from his point of view."

Schorr's own troubles, which culminated in his suspension from CBS after he gave the Village Voice a copy of a congressional report, seem clearly behind him now.

A Swinging Pendulum

"In this country there is always a pendulum swinging between the need for disclosure and the need for national security," he said. "I was there and I stood there as the pendulum swung back from disclosure, and I got knocked down by the pendulum.

Helms also was hit by that pendulum, when it was swinging in the other direction. Helms was CIA at its most cloak-and-dagger, its most arrogant, its most dedicated, its most insane," Schorr said. "But almost everything he did had the approval of every President from Eisenhower to Nixon.

Schorr remembered what Helms had said after visiting Nixon and getting the orders to deal with Salvador Allende in Chile. "He said, 'I walked out of Nixon's office with a marshal's baton in my knapsack.' In that sense, Helms was very much a symbol of his times. And that time is dead.

There were probably grave dangers built into the CIA from its inception, Schorr said, when Bill Donovan was running the Office of Strategic Services and was forced to recruit academics for so many specialized tasks, including clandestine operations.

"Lacked Sense of Limitations"

"They were exhilarated by that kind of work," Schorr said. "But they lacked any sense of limitations. That's how the LSD tests happened. They heard that the Russians had bought up all supplies of LSD and they wanted to know why. This was at a time when they were puzzled by the defectors in Korea, the behavior of people at some show trials in Moscow. So their mission was to dis-

cover whether it was possible to alter behavior in any predictable way. The scientists, of course, said that if you were to have an accurate test, people could not know, because the power of suggestion might alter the results. And so they decided that whatever it takes, you do. And we know what happened."

Schorr sipped his drink. "There was an understanding that they could do anything they wanted to do. The congressional oversight committee was a joke. So they became people with a sense of mission but without a sense of limits."

He doesn't think that the CIA or the FBI will soon return to the freewheeling habits of the past, because they have come to understand that sooner or later, in this democracy, dark deeds will leak. And, despite the abuses, Schorr thinks that it's necessary to have an operation arm of the CIA, first to dispense money to various friendly groups, second to have the capability of intervention, "short of war."

"Always on the Wrong Side"

"The terrible thing is that most of those operations are always on the wrong side," he said. "Why always fascist? I think that it has something to do with the way the CIA perceives itself. It calls itself the Company. Friendly nations are 'accounts.' Spies are called 'assets.' It identifies with American business conglomerates. It opposes nationalization. Business is afraid of instability, so it supports military rulers. Left wing governments do unpredictable things."

The waiter brought the check. Schorr had to catch an early plane for Boston. "Remember when John McCone, former director of CIA, went to the CIA, and offered them \$1.2 million to use against Allende? That was typical. The CIA turned him down, but this was the same company (ITT) that was going to finance the Republican convention in San Diego for another million. It's part of the same attitude. A world where you buy your way. After all, if you can rent an agency, why can't you rent a President?"