

CIA Was Alerted in 1968 About Danger to Agents

Chicago Sun-Times

The transcript of a secret seminar in 1968 shows the Central Intelligence Agency was aware that the cover of its officials overseas was dangerously exposed, but nothing was done about it.

Richard M. Bissell, former head of the CIA's operations directorate—the so-called dirty tricks department—urged that CIA officials be removed from U.S. embassies and secreted in less conspicuous private organizations.

Nearly eight years later, on Dec. 23, 1975, the CIA station chief in Athens, Richard S. Welch, who had an office in the U.S. embassy, was assassinated outside his U.S. government-owned residence.

CIA Director William E. Colby blamed the death on the disclosure of Welch's identity as a CIA official by Counterspy, a magazine published here, and subsequently by an English-language Athens newspaper.

But Bissell's remarks indicated that the CIA has long been aware that its officials could easily be spotted while operating in U.S. embassies.

He noted that many of the

CIA's connections with foreign groups had been "blown" in the mid-'60s and that the time had come to do a better job in concealing agency operations and officials overseas.

Bissell made his observations at a secret New York meeting of former high-ranking intelligence officials on Jan. 8, 1968, under the auspices of the Council on Foreign Relations. A copy of the report, marked "confidential, not for publication," was obtained by The Chicago Sun-Times.

"We need to operate under deeper cover," he said. "CIA's interface with the rest of the world needs to be better protected."

He acknowledged that there were "powerful reasons" for maintaining some sort of CIA presence in U.S. embassies, but said it should be limited to "local 'command post' and communications requirements."

"It is possible and desirable," he said, "although difficult and time-consuming, to build overseas an apparatus of unofficial cover."

"This would require the use or creation of private organizations, many of the

personnel of which would be non-U.S. nationals with freer entry into the local society and less implication for the official U.S. posture."

Despite Bissell's warning, the CIA has continued to maintain large staffs in all major U.S. embassies abroad. CIA officials abroad are often easily detectable by their job descriptions in the Foreign Service List and the Biographical Register. CIA officials blame the State Department for insisting upon a separate and distinct identification of its officers.

Hanoi Introducing 3d Winter Crop

BELGRADE, Jan. 3 (AP)—The Hanoi government has announced plans to introduce a regular, third winter harvest in all of North Vietnam, the Yugoslav news agency Tanjug said today.

Reporting from the North Vietnamese capital, the agency said plans call for improved agricultural technology and introduction of special seeds that will produce in shorter than four months.