

OBITUARIES

8/17/95

L.R. Houston Dies; CIA's First General Counsel

By Bart Barnes
Washington Post Staff Writer

Lawrence R. Houston, 82, the former general counsel of the Central Intelligence Agency who in the late 1940s played a key role in the drafting of the legislation that created and shaped the agency, died Aug. 15 of a heart attack while vacationing at his summer home in Westport, Mass.

Mr. Houston was the CIA's general counsel from the founding of the agency in 1947 until he retired in 1973. In those years, he was the primary legal adviser to nine CIA directors on matters ranging from the establishment and operation of the CIA's own air line, Civil Air Transport, to questions about how covert agents on foreign assignments should report agency payments on their income tax returns.

He supervised the legal work for the exchange of Soviet intelligence officer Rudolph Abel for Francis Gary Powers, the U.S. pilot whose U-2 surveillance aircraft was shot down over the Soviet Union in 1960, and the exchange of medical supplies for prisoners of the ill-fated 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba.

In 1953, he accompanied then-Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles to a meeting with Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy (R-Wis.) after McCarthy demanded that CIA officials appear before his committee during one of the senator's searches for communists within the government. The witnesses would not be available, the senator was informed.

In the early years of the CIA, Mr. Houston wrote a memorandum to the effect that the agency could legally engage in covert activities, provided the president issued a proper directive and Congress appropriated the funds.

In a formal press statement yesterday, Director of Central Intelligence John M. Deutch described Mr. Houston as "one of the CIA's founding fathers and enduring legends. . . . Larry Houston was a key architect in the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency, and during his long and remarkable career, he played a central role in virtually every significant Agency undertaking."

Shy, reserved and retiring, Mr. Houston operated out of the public spotlight for most of his CIA career. "He was a can-do lawyer. He'd always try to find a legal way that you COULD do something," said Walter Pforzheimer, a former colleague of Mr. Houston's on the CIA legal staff.

Mr. Houston, a resident of Washington, was born in St. Louis. He moved to Washington as a child when his father, David Houston, was appointed secretary of agriculture in the Cabinet of Woodrow Wilson. Later, he moved to New York.

He graduated from Harvard University and received a law degree from the University of Virginia. He practiced law in New York before World War II.

During the war, he served in the Office of Strategic Services, a forerunner of the CIA. He served in Italy and later Egypt, where he became deputy chief of OSS operations in the Mediterranean theater.

In September 1945, the OSS was abolished, and Mr. Houston became counsel to its successor agency, the Army's Strategic Services Unit, which later became the Central Intelligence Group. In 1946, Mr. Houston and others met with Clark Clifford, then a top adviser to President Harry S. Truman, to argue the need for the creation of a single and separate intelligence agency. He later drafted the language of the 1947 National Security Act that established the CIA.

In 1949, Mr. Houston was the key figure in drafting the legislation that enabled the CIA to operate. The legislation included a confidential funds authority for the director of central intelligence and a provision permitting the agency to admit defectors and political refugees from other countries to the United States "in the interest of national security or in the furtherance of the national intelligence mission."

After retiring from the CIA, Mr. Houston received the National Security Medal and the Distinguished Intelligence Medal.

He had been a member of the boards of Woodrow Wilson House, Family and Child Services of Washington and the Hospice of Washington.

He was an enthusiastic sailor.

Survivors include his wife, Jeanne Randolph Houston of Washington; two children, Deborah Tanzi of Darnestown and David Houston of Berkeley, Calif.; and a sister, Helen Book of Long Beach, Calif.