

CIA Cables Set Stage for Face-Off at

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Prosecutors at the Iran-contra trial of former CIA spymaster Clair E. George yesterday introduced a stack of CIA cables and other once highly classified government records to set the stage for a crucial courtroom confrontation between George and his chief accuser, former top aide Alan Fiers.

One set of documents bears on the veracity of George's testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Oct. 10, 1986, an appearance that is the basis for two of the nine felony counts accusing George of lying and obstructing congressional and grand jury investigations of the Iran-contra affair.

George told that committee the CIA did not know "the individuals involved" in a flight that had been shot down over Nicaragua five days earlier while trying to bring supplies to the contra rebels. He testified that the agency was still checking the identity of a mysterious "Max Gomez" who had been named by the sole survivor of the C-123 cargo plane crash as one of the CIA operatives running the operation.

Yesterday, the prosecutors introduced a once-secret cable that had been received at CIA headquarters the evening before George's testimony. The cable identified Gomez as "the local alias of Felix Rodriguez, a retired CIA staff employee." The cable said that Rodriguez had told a CIA officer in Central America that he was participating in "efforts to assist the FDN," as the Nicaraguan Democratic Front, the contra rebel organization, was known by its Spanish initials.

The Oct. 9, 1986, cable added: "It certainly seems possible to us that in his involvement with the

robe Is 'Nearly Complete'

crew members of the downed C-123, Rodriguez may have led them to believe, erroneously, that CIA was somehow involved in this operation."

Rodriguez was a soldier of fortune who had gone to El Salvador with the approval of then Vice President Bush to aid the anti-communist counterinsurgency campaign in that country. He was recruited for the contra resupply effort by then-White House aide Oliver L. North.

The prosecution said public identification of Rodriguez at that moment would have been highly embarrassing for the CIA and the Reagan administration for two reasons: It would have put the spotlight on North and his resupply network, operating at a time when Congress had barred all U.S. military aid to the rebels; it also could have jeopardized the reestablishment of CIA funding for the contras, then awaiting final action by a Senate-House conference committee.

In addition to allegedly lying to the Senate committee at the Oct. 10 hearing, George has been charged with obstruction for allegedly ordering Fiers, who accompanied him to the hearing, not to disclose Rodriguez's true identity.

Fiers, who has already pleaded guilty to two misdemeanor counts for misleading Congress, is expected to testify today for the prosecution in what could be a dramatic high point of the trial.

George, as deputy director of operations (DDO) from 1984 to 1987, was the No. 3 man at the agency. Fiers was the fast-rising protege of then-CIA Director Wil-

liam J. Casey and had taken over a key post as chief of the Central American Task Force.

George's defense team suggested yesterday in cross-examination of government witnesses that one strategy it may follow will

be to contend that George was unaware of cables such as the one about Rodriguez because of the worldwide nature of his job and the dozens of covert actions he had to supervise.

A longtime operations officer in George's directorate, Katherine M. Stricker, said that hundreds of cables a day poured into George's office from around the globe. Although three copies of the Oct. 9 cable about Rodriguez were sent to the DDO, Stricker agreed under defense questioning that "there's no way we can tell from the document itself who read it."

George's chief attorney, Richard A. Hibey, has pointed an accusing finger at Fiers, denouncing

him as "an admitted liar" who "wove the web of deception" almost immediately after the Oct. 5 downing of the plane, without consulting George.

Among the other documents prosecutors introduced yesterday was a portion of the once top-secret transcript of George's and Fiers's testimony at the Oct. 10, 1986 Senate hearing. At one point in that session, when reminded by Sen. John F. Kerry (D-Mass.) that Congress had no real way to find out whether it was being told the truth by CIA about its activities, George assured him that the agency would never lie at a congressional hearing.

"There are a lot of things that

can happen overseas about people outside the continental United States where we do not tell the truth," George testified. "But I assure you, we are going to sit here and tell you the truth about these people. It does not mean that we would not have lied to someone somewhere else. But not in this [Senate hearing] room."

When first asked about his knowledge of Gomez, George replied, "We have an indication of a former CIA official using that name as an alias. . . . But before I sort of say he is Joe Doaks and he is involved in this. . . . I would like to make sure that I know what I am talking about."

The Oct. 9 cable arrived at CIA

headquarters at 5:50 p.m. According to CIA Director Casey's schedule for that day, he met at 6:25 p.m. with George, Fiers and then-deputy CIA director Robert M. Gates to discuss George's testimony for the next day.

The Oct. 9 cable was not the only one mentioning Rodriguez that was released yesterday showing CIA headquarters was told about him. A cable dated January 1986 said Rodriguez had involved himself in earlier "humanitarian" shipments for the contras from El Salvador. Still another cable to Langley reported that Rodriguez "apparently has been 'coordinating' all of this [contra humanitarian support] with Ollie North. . . ."