

Obituary

John A. McCone, 89; Helped Establish CIA

By MYRNA OLIVER
TIMES STAFF WRITER

John A. McCone, who helped form the Central Intelligence Agency and served as its director during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, has died at his home in Pebble Beach. He was 89.

McCone died Thursday night of cardiac arrest.

CIA Director William H. Webster said Friday that McCone made an enormous contribution to the security of this nation . . . [and] guided the intelligence community during a particularly trying time."

Although McCone was considered an unswerving Republican, the native California engineer and businessman served several presidential administrations of both parties. In California, he also accepted Democrat Gov. Edmund G. (Pat) Brown Sr.'s appointment to head what became known as the McCone Commission investigating the causes of the 1965 Watts Riots.

McCone's first national appointment came in 1947 when President Harry S. Truman named him to the Air Policy Commission.

In 1948, as a special deputy to Secretary of Defense James V. Forrestal, McCone helped Forrestal create the CIA, which he headed from 1961 to 1965 under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. McCone became undersecretary of the Air Force in 1950.

Long a friend of President Dwight D. Eisenhower because of his defense activities, McCone was named by Eisenhower to head the Atomic Energy Commission in 1958. He advocated expansion of international research on peaceful uses of atomic energy and was a signer of a treaty with the six-nation European Atomic Energy Community to provide money and

material for European development of nuclear power.

When McCone took the job, he vowed to follow a priest's advice, "When your knees begin to buckle, just kneel."

After six months in office, McCone said characteristically: "The problems have been perplexing and difficult, but they haven't caused my knees to shake."

A devout Catholic, he frequently represented the United States by presidential appointment at Vatican ceremonies. He served as an adviser on Soviet operations in Cuba to many leaders, including President Jimmy Carter.

In 1987, President Ronald Reagan awarded him the nation's highest civilian award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Reagan noted that McCone "guided our nation's intelligence community through some of its most difficult hours" and "maintained the intelligence community's reputation for unbiased analysis."

McCone replaced Allen W. Dulles as head of the CIA after the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion, which had placed a serious cloud over the intelligence agency.

McCone worked diligently, and most observers believe, successfully, to rebuild agency morale and improve relations with the State

Department and Congress.

"Mr. McCone was sharp, tough and demanding," Webster said. "[He] strengthened the intelligence community's capabilities and maintained its reputation for unbiased analysis."

In August, 1962, McCone had reports that Soviet anti-aircraft missiles were being placed in Cuba, and ordered increased intelligence flights over the island. When he warned Kennedy, the President dismissed McCone's alarm as that of an overzealous anti-Communist.

Two months later, U-2 spy plane flights produced clear evidence of the presence of offensive missiles in Cuba. As a member of Excom, Kennedy's special group of advisers, McCone recommended air strikes to remove the missiles. Kennedy rejected the idea and quarantined Cuba, forcing the Soviet Union to take the missiles out.

In the mid 1970s, a Senate investigation showed that the CIA during McCone's tenure had carried on the illegal surveillance of more than 10,000 U.S. citizens and had tried to assassinate foreign leaders, including Cuban President Fidel Castro and Patrice Lumumba in Africa.

McCone testified before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in 1975 that he never authorized assassination plots and was unaware of any.

Born into a wealthy manufactur-

ing family in San Francisco Jan. 4, 1902, John Alex McCone moved south as a child and was graduated from Los Angeles High School. He earned his engineering degree from UC Berkeley in 1922.

McCone began his career as a riveter and boilermaker for the Llewellyn Iron Works in Los Angeles, and rose to superintendent and construction manager before becoming executive vice president and director of the merged Consolidated Steel Corp.

He left in 1937 to found his own company with Stephen Bechtel, Bechtel-McCone Corp., which built oil refineries and power plants throughout the United States, South America and Middle East. During World War II, the firm modified B-24 and B-29 bombers at its aircraft modification center in Alabama.

During the war, McCone also became president of California Shipbuilding Corp., producing 467 ships for the war effort.

As he built planes and ships, he heightened his reputation as an executive who "got things done."

After the war ended, McCone took over Joshua Hendy Iron Works as president and sole owner, operating tankers and cargo ships in the Pacific. He sold what had become Hendy International Co. in 1969.

McCone is survived by a sister, Mary Louise Shelby of El Toro and five stepchildren. His second wife, Theiline, died a few months ago.

The family has asked that memorial contributions be sent to the Monterey Institute of International Studies in Monterey or the Virginia Mason Medical Foundation in Seattle.