

CIA and the Press:

By Bill Richards

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After three days of testimony before a House Intelligence subcommittee concerning the intricate relationship between the Central Intelligence Agency and the press, Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wis.) concluded with some resignation yesterday that there seemed to be only one area where all sides agreed.

The CIA officials, reporters and former U.S. ambassadors who testified all seemed unanimous, Aspin noted, in the view that no amount of legislative or regulatory action is likely to separate the traditional adversaries, news gatherers and their U.S. intelligence-gathering counterparts, while working abroad.

However complex that relationship may be, William Porter, U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam from 1965 to 1967 explained, it is a "natural" one.

Both CIA officials and veteran foreign correspondents for U.S. publications told the Overnight Subcommittee of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence this week that many U.S. reporters abroad seek information from local CIA station chiefs and, in some cases, offer their own impressions or information in return.

"There is a natural affinity between journalists and spies," Ward Just, a former Washington Post correspondent, told the subcommittee Wednesday. Just, who said he reported from Vietnam and Cyprus without seeking out CIA help, nevertheless added, "I don't think there is a journalist who is not fascinated by the intelligence community."

Porter, a 41-year Foreign Service veteran, told the subcommittee yesterday. "I have a feeling that no matter what you do this relationship will maintain itself."

Porter said that his belief was that a U.S. journalist working abroad has his first obligation to his government rather than to his newspaper, even if it means planting false stories in the press or accepting pay for work done for the CIA.

"If in certain cases a poor hard-working journalist needs some help, why not?" Porter said after his testimony.

Inseparable

Relationship

Two other former U.S. ambassadors, William C. Trueheart and L. Dean Brown, said they disagreed with Porter.

"The sound policy," said Trueheart, "is that there should be no relationship with CIA or other intelligence organizations except insofar as the American newsman like any citizen wishes to volunteer information."

Trueheart is a former U.S. ambassador to Nigeria and served as a consultant two years ago to the Senate Intelligence Committee, which also looked into the CIA's relations with the press.

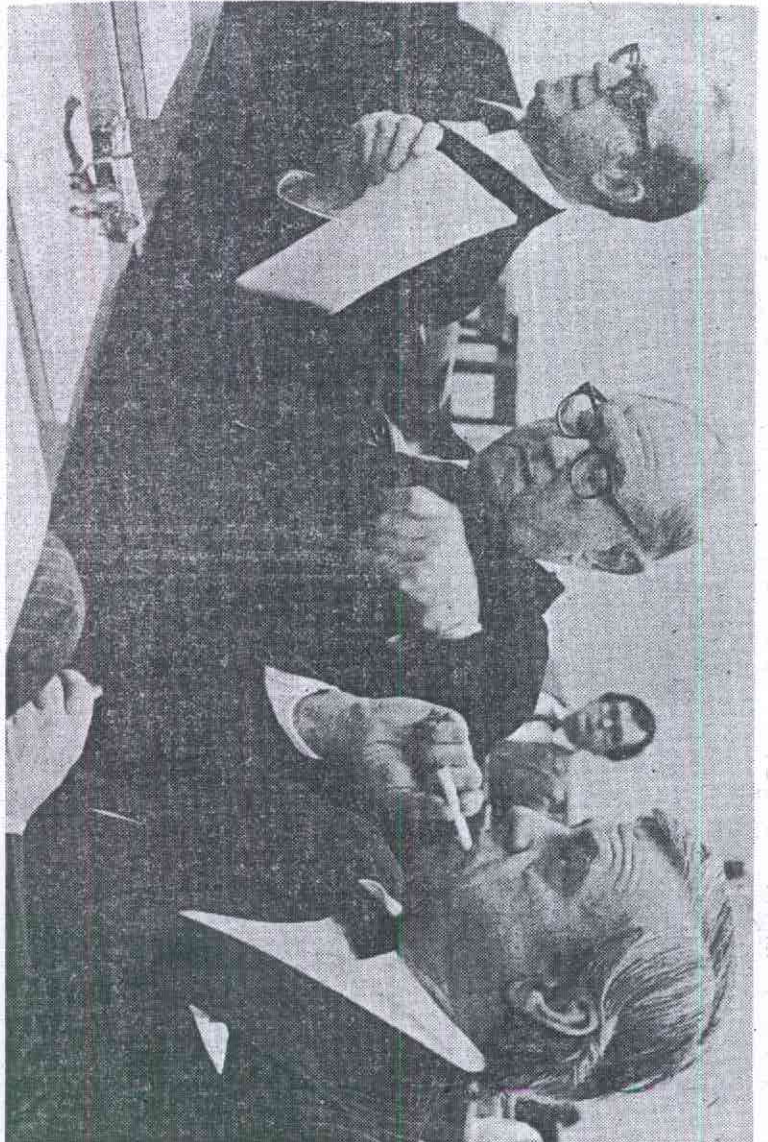
Keeping the overseas intelligence operatives and the press apart is necessary, Trueheart said, in order to preserve the adversary role of the

press. "It's not a question of dirtying of the hands," he said. "It's a question of working for two masters."

The hearings, which will resume next week and conclude in mid-January with testimony from CIA Director Stansfield Turner, have taken on an unusually loose form with intelligence officials and reporters offering widely varying viewpoints on the nature of their relationship.

A subcommittee staff member yesterday called the hearings "exploratory" and said they could lead to recommendations for tighter control over the CIA's attempts at press manipulation.

So far the hearings have raised as many questions as they have answered. For example:



Former ambassadors testifying at hearing are, from left, William Trucheart, William Porter and L. Dean Brown.

By James K. W. Aberton—The Washington Post

relationships also be banned. However, CIA officials said such contacts are considered essential by them.

Aspin noted yesterday, however, that the entire question of the CIA's relations with foreign journalists may already be an academic one.

There is little likelihood of planting CIA propaganda in openly hostile news organizations such as Tass and little need to penetrate the press in countries friendly to the United States, said Aspin. The remaining uncommitted press is so open to subversion, he said, that politically slanted stories carry little weight. "Everybody knows the press there is up for grabs," Aspin said.

The problem of "feedback" from false stories planted in foreign publications by the CIA is also one yet to be solved, according to a number of witnesses appearing before the subcommittee. Porter said that when the CIA planted a false story in Vietnam it usually tipped off "responsible" U.S. reporters and reporters from a few close U.S. allies.

Other foreign reporters working in Vietnam were usually not told, Porter said. There was little way to tell if the bogus news stories eventually made their way back into U.S. publications, he admitted.

The three former ambassadors acknowledged that mistakes were made in U.S. propaganda efforts abroad. "The CIA, for example, spent large amounts of time and money planting false or commissioned stories in English-language newspapers abroad and even purchased several of the papers.

"They were okay to reach American tourists traveling abroad," said Brown, a former U.S. ambassador to Senegal, Gambia and Jordan. As an effective propaganda tool, however, he called them "a joke."

On another occasion U.S. intelligence specialists built an airborne television studio with a long dangling antenna to beam propaganda into Cambodia. The project, said former ambassador Porter, was code-named "Blue Eagle."

"It was very expensive," Porter said, "and then we learned there were only three receivers in the country. And they were all in the chief of state's palace."

• In October, Turner issued a strongly worded directive prohibiting the CIA from conducting paid relationships with accredited U.S. journalists. Subcommittee members and witnesses have pointed out, however, that the directive does not deal with U.S. free-lance journalists working abroad. Free lancers often carry no specific credentials from any news organization and write for a wide variety of publications. The CIA has used such journalists extensively in the past, according to numerous reports.

• The problem of whether the CIA should be barred from hiring or recruiting foreign journalists has also been left open by Turner's directive. Several witnesses before the subcommittee this week urged that these re-